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A Cheer for Roseanne Barr

Occasionally something happens in public affairs so funny that it offers consolation for the time we spend in this vale of tears. One of these is the recent dust-up over Roseanne Barr's performance of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. George Bush delivered a typical performance of his own when he described it as a "disgrace."

Is it a disgrace to mangle *The Star Spangled Banner*? No. It's inevitable. Everybody mangles it. It takes the prowess of a Jo Stafford or Leontyne Price to sing that melody. It is the only national anthem I know that puts everyone who attempts it at risk of strangulation, or at minimum hyper-ventilation.

One might wish to give Mr. Bush a history lesson, and explain the origins of the song, except that he has shown a novocained indifference to history, and to all forms of fact.

For the rest of us, however, in order to put Roseanne Barr's performance in perspective -- if you missed it on television, you missed one of the great moments -- it is meet to re-examine the nature and genealogy of the song. It isn't American at all, it's English. There's nothing American about it. It is unAmerican in its melodic character and in the affectations of its lyric. It isn't a great and sacred hymn. It's a drinking-and-whoring song, and before Francis Scott Key wrote the bad poem now affixed to it, it had any number of lyrics. At least eighty are known. Some were quite ribald.

The music was written by John Stafford Smith, the lyrics by Ralph Tomlinson, president of the Anacreontic Society of London. It was titled *To Anacreon in Heaven*. It praised the society's patron saint, the Greek poet Anacreon, celebrator of wine and women. Each stanza ended with an exhortation to the society's members to "entwine the myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine." In other words, get laid and get drunk, although it is usual to do them in the reverse order.

Francis Scott Key was a lawyer. He was sent to negotiate with the British for the release of a doctor whom they'd picked up for irregularly arresting British army stragglers. Key was aboard a British ship, unable to return to shore, during the attack on Fort McHenry, and from its deck watched "THE bombs" (as artillery shells were called) bursting in air. It is disputed that Lincoln wrote his rich and eloquent Gettysburg address on the back of an envelope, but it is generally accepted that Key did write his poem on one. All four stanzas of it. He had either very small handwriting or a very large envelope. He started it on the ship, continued working on it in a small boat going ashore, and finished it in a Baltimore hotel room, which may explain its jerky rhythms.

An actor named Ferdinand Durang claimed to be the first person to sing the song, whose title then was *The Defence of Fort McHenry,* in public. He further claimed that he did the retrofit of the lyric to the melody of *To Anacreon in Heaven*, but, the Encyclopedia Britannica's 1972 edition confidently asserts, "little fitting was required because Key clearly had this song in mind when he wrote the words." Clearly? Little fitting was required? The Britannica's expert clearly knew little about song-writing. The words conspicuously do not fit, and I have used the song from time to time in lectures as a classic example of how to do everything wrong in putting a lyric to a melody.

It is loaded with clumsy melismas, single syllables sprawled across two or more notes, and the stresses are all wrong. "Oh-oh say," as it sinks instantly to the very bottom of the song, and then climbs a major triad, "can you see" -- giving you an octave in the first six notes. Next note: "by . . . " Well, there's a tenth, folks, and we're only in bar two. That's all the range Ethel Merman ever had, and Cole Porter was able to produce superb melodies for her within it. Then: "in the twilight's last glea-MING." The phrase comes clunking down those dull quarter notes like a drunk descending a staircase, landing back in the basement of the song. Doesn't fit. Stress on the wrong syl-LAB-le. Now jump -- just jump, like a cat making a leap to the top of a refrigerator -- a tenth to: "And the rock-" and push on to "-et's red glare." "Red glare" gets it up to an octave and a fifth, and disqualifies quite a number of competent professional singers. Actually, that range is manageable if the melody is well-written, with the top of the song prepared and approached properly. But that one isn't.

"Difficult it undoubtedly is," the Britannica concedes, "but in the key of B-flat, A, or A-flat, it is by no means unsingable." What has the key got to do with it? Different singers have different tessituras. And do you like that dispirited defense, "by no means unsingable"? Range isn't the only factor. It is the lay of the thing, not to mention the lyrics that don't fit.

"THE-bombs" is a very awkward match. Finally we arrive at "ba-a-nur-ur ye-eht way-ayve o'er the la-and of the free . . . " there he goes again, as Ronnie used to say; you're once more up to an octave and a fifth, and this time stuck on a fermata " . . . and the home of the brave." The last phrase lies badly.

Nowhere in the song is there an appropriate match of melodic contour to that of natural speech inflection, which is the very essence of good lyric writing.

It was not the national anthem, as you may know, until an act of Congress made it so in 1931, in preference to the exquisite and moving *America the Beautiful*, which manages to express love of country without hatred of anyone else's. And also, by the way, do it in a range of a ninth, with all the notes beautifully approached.

I have never been much on national anthems or flags. Both are implicitly jingoistic and aggressive. Nationalism, after all, is what you call the other man's patriotism. When I was a kid in school in Canada, which was then still a semi-colony of England, our classes were required to sing every morning the abysmal *God Save the King*. I vaguely resented it, without ever having heard of separation of church and state. Why should I ask God to save him? I didn't even know the man.

In any case, our exhortations to the Almighty clearly didn't do much good: the song had been sung about a goodly number of monarchs who had gone to their reward in spite of this intercession by the peasants. The opening words were: "God save our gracious king." What made him gracious? George the First, the first in the line of Hanover (later renamed

Windsor) in England, hated the English, who returned the favor. He was probably responsible for the assassination of his wife's suspected lover, and he imprisoned her for thirty-two years. His hobby was cutting out paper dolls. George the Third was as mad as a March hare. He once addressed a tree, mistaking it for the king of Prussia. His greatest achievement in statecraft was the loss of the American colonies. Edward the Seventh had a penchant for the bordellos of Paris, as any man who had Victoria for a mother well might. And for a minute or two the song had been sung about that feckless boob Edward the Eighth, erstwhile Prince of Wales. God didn't save him either. He had to abdicate.

The song entreats God to "send him victorious, happy and glorious, long to reign over us . . . " I wasn't all that interested in whether he was victorious, or for that matter, even happy and glorious, but as a little boy I wanted to know why we should ask that he "rain over us." Later, I thought that would make a good name for a society bandleader with a long contract at the Royal York hotel in Toronto: Ray Noverus.

We had another, or secondary, national anthem, which since then has become the official one: *O Canada*. It's another turkey. Dumb song. A third one, *The Maple Leaf Forever*, has a good melody: "In days of yore," it begins, "from Britain's shore, Wolfe the dauntless hero came, and planted firm Britannia's flag on Canada's fair domain." In English Canada, that seemed unremarkable enough. The French Canadians didn't see it that way. After DeGaulle set the province aflame with one simple phrase -- "Vive Quebec libre!" -- they made an issue of it, unreconciled as they still were to Wolfe's defeat of Montcalm at Quebec.

The song ends: "the maple, shamrock, rose entwined -- the maple leaf forever!" The rose is England. The shamrock is Ireland. Gene Kelly, whose father was an Irish Canadian from Sarnia, Ontario, tells me his father had little use for the English. And the fleur de lys isn't mentioned in the song. Ancient enmities died no more readily in Canada than in the United States, or for that matter the Soviet Union or the Balkan states or any other region of the world. Ask a basque.

Religion and nationalism, which is a form of the same thing, are still the chief potential causes of man's end. And national anthems are the chief emotional expression of nationalism. If *The Star Spangled Banner* is bellicose, try *La Marseillaise*, calling the battalions to arms and urging that we march on, march on. That thing is blood-curdling, effective in that it is one of the few national anthems that is actually a good song, well-made and singable. You can march to it, and it swings. The same can be said of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, a very, very good melody with a powerful and well-written lyric. *Dixie* too is a good song. So is *The Marine Hymn*.

If you missed the Roseanne Barr performance, I'll recapitulate. She sang *The Defence of Fort McHenry*, to restore the poem's original title, at the opening of a San Diego Padres ball game. She's a comedienne, not a singer. She can't sing to save her life; much less negotiate a song that calls for Yma Sumac. As she climbed into that upper register, her voice grew more and more desperately shrill, until it was apparently hurting even her ears. She winced. She grimaced -- at herself, as I saw it, not at the song. Finally, at the peak, she stuck her index fingers into her ears, as if to spare herself the pain of the performance. It was funny beyond belief.

And when it was over, she spat, ptooey, on the ground. I didn't know this was in imitation of baseball players. I thought she was mocking herself. At that point I started to fall apart, rolling helplessly around in front of the TV.

The media immediately made the whole thing into the greatest non-event since George Bush turned flag-burning into a political issue, or perhaps even since Gerald Ford bumped his head.

The more the anchorthings on television fussed and re-ran the tape of Barr's performance, the funnier it got. Then Bush said her performance was a disgrace. He said it pompously. He said it with gravity. He said it with fervency. He said it with patriotism. He has proved facile at waving false issues like a torero's cape, and he has reasons aplenty these days to divert public attention.

I thought the story couldn't get any funnier. But then Barr, informed in a press conference of Bush's reaction, said in effect, Well, let him try it. Right.

Let George do it. Let's see if he can sing it. And we'll read his lips. No new taxes.

Somebody should sign Roseanne Barr to do an album of all the major national anthems. Can you imagine what she could do to *Deutschland Uber Alles*?

In the meantime, we have that immortal bit of videotape showing her with her fingers in her ears.

To Anacreon in Heaven finally got the performance it deserves.

Silva and Son

"My father used to tell people that when Horace was coming up, there were only two things a black guy could be successful in and make money and be something: sports or music. He said, 'Horace wasn't interested in sports, so I really pushed him with the music.'"

"I gather your father was very, very important in your life," I said to Horace Silver. We were sitting in his living room, whose wide window overlooked the bright afternoon slab of the Pacific Ocean. The traveler zips up the coast through Malibu on Highway 1, aware only of the crushed-together and vaguely shabby houses on postage-stamp seaside properties costing millions, in which movie people and coke-merchants live in symbiosis. But above the bluffs, unseen as you go by, is a large middle-class and even modest colony of homes. It is in one of these that Horace lives with his son, who is eighteen.

I was thinking of that 1964 Blue Note album, *Song for My Father*, whose cover showed a man sitting on a rock or log or something in front of an autumnal wooded pond, hands clasped around his knees, a straw hat with a wide band on his head, a stub of cigar in his mouth, a smile on his face, and some sort of unfathomable happiness in his heart.

What brilliant groups Horace led, with the classic trumpet-and-tenor front line, groups through which passed Bob Berg, Donald Bird, the Brecker Brothers, Roy Brooks, Billy Cobham, Junior Cook, Bob Cranshaw, Art Farmer, Blue Mitchell, Tom Harrell, Joe Henderson, Roger Humphries, Carmel Jones, Benny Maupin, Larry Ridley, Woody Shaw, Clifford Jordan, Gene Taylor, Stanley Turrentine, Mickey Roker, and John Williams, among others -- an extraordinary alumni, comparable to that of the big bands of Woody Herman and Count Basie. Many of them were discovered by Silver. Although Dave Brubeck and John Lewis have written extensively and beautifully for their quartets, probably no other leader of a small jazz group ever wrote so much material for his. Horace recorded little that he didn't write, and many of his tunes have become jazz standards, among them *Doodlin', Strollin', The Preacher, Sister Sadie,* and *Nica's Dream*. In 1959, three years before the samba made its incursion into jazz, he recorded *Swingin' the Samba*. Others of his tunes hint further of his heritage: *Senor Blues* and *The Cape Verdean Blues*, for example.

Horace Ward Martin Tavares Silver was born September 9, 1928, in Norwalk, Connecticut. The name originally was Silva.

Horace and I used to be friends, back in the early 1960s. I say "used to be" because I hadn't seen him in years. I have always remembered him with affection, and a soft series of images of an evening we spent floating around clubs in San Francisco, visiting friends, lingers pleasantly in my mind. It was one of those nights of your youth when you are exploring, learning, and you talk until dawn. He had an enthusiasm for life and one sensed a certain spirituality. His speech had a plunging, energetic quality, like his piano work, and it was outgoing and devoid of evasion. That was probably the autumn of 1959, after the Monterey Festival. I trusted Horace Silver.

The years do slip by.

Yet from the moment I walked in his door, we were talking as easily as if the intervening years had never occurred.

The first subject that came up was his father. "Both my parents were important to me, but my mother died when I was nine years old," Horace said. "So I didn't have much time to spend with her. But I love her dearly, and I think about her a lot.

"My father raised me, with a little help from my mother's aunt, my great aunt, my Aunt Maude. I went to Catholic grammar school, and I used to get my lunches at my Aunt Maude's. Her house was about two blocks from the school.

"She was kind of a stout lady, and she was sickly, and she couldn't get around too much. So I used to do a lot of her shopping for her. She'd give me her grocery list and she would cook all the nice things that I liked. She was a great cook. She used to be chef in restaurants when she was younger. She kind of helped my father bring me up.

"Me and Dad lived together in our own apartment, and she lived with my uncle. I spent a lot of time visiting her, and she spent a lot of time telling me about my family history, and who my relatives were on my mother's side. My mother was born in New Canaan. Almost all those people were born in that area. Later on some of them lived in Bridgeport."

Horace's father was born in the Cape Verde Islands; "verde" is green in Portuguese. They lie just off the bulge of western Africa. They are dry and hot. When they were discovered by Europeans in the mid-fifteenth century, they were uninhabited, but the Portuguese, who took them over, established plantations and imported African labor to work them, and after the discovery of America made the islands a staging area for the export of slaves.

The Portuguese settlers on these islands mixed with the African population, and Horace's father is one of the consequences. The islands have a song and dance called the *morna*. With the decline and eventual abolition -- as late as 1876 -- of slavery, with deepening drought and administrative corruption, the economy of the islands deteriorated rapidly. By the start of the twentieth century, a flow of emigrants to the United States was under way, and it continued until the U.S. government imposed a quota. Those who got in before the cut-off sent money home to help their families, as many Mexicans do today.

"Your father spoke Portuguese, then," I said.

"Oh yeah."

"Do you?"

"No, just a few phrases."

"So the mixture, then," I said, "occurred both there and here."

"Both. Dad was a brown-skinned man. My mother was very fair, very light. You'd think she was a Caucasian woman. Her father was Caucasian. My grandmother was black. My family's very mixed on my mother's side. I never knew my mother's father.

"And there was some American Indian. My Aunt Maude would sit me down and tell me that background. Her mother was American Indian. My mother's family was intermingled with the Blade clan, which had a lot of Indian blood in them. I come out of those two clans, plus my father's people, Silva, from Cape Verde.

"At home, in Norwalk, my Dad and his brothers would have kitchen parties, and they'd play the Cape Verde folk music. Violin, Spanish guitar, sometimes mandolin. I was a little boy. The women would make fried chicken and potato salad and they'd have drinks. People would come on a Friday or Saturday night, and they'd pull the furniture back and they'd dance in the kitchen. Some were family, some were neighbors.

"I had a brother and a sister, but I never knew them. My sister was a miscarriage. My brother was born, but he caught pneumonia and died when he was about six months old. I think about what it would be like if they had lived. Growing up as an only child, I always thought how nice it would be to have a brother, an older brother especially, to hang with and

protect you when the kids come around to pick on you.

"I know I've got a brother. He ain't in this world. He's in another world. I've got him, and he's there, and I think about him, and I say a little prayer for him now and then, or talk to him in my head. And my sister too. When I pass over into that other dimension, I'll meet him."

I asked how hard had his father pressed him to pursue music.

"After I started taking lessons, he had to force me to practice, because I thought I was going to play in two weeks. When I found out I had to do all these boring scales and exercises, I wanted to quit. But he wouldn't let me quit. He stayed on my back and made me practice. He said, 'You're gonna thank me for this some day.' And I do thank him for it today.

"But what really made me decide that I wanted to become a musician was Jimmie Lunceford and his band. First band I ever saw live. I must have been around ten when I saw that band. There was an amusement park. After my mother died, me and my Dad used to go down there every Sunday and we'd ride the roller coaster or the merry-go-round or throw darts at the balloons and eat cotton candy and hot dogs, and just have a nice Sunday afternoon, me and Dad.

"They had a dance pavilion down there and they had dances every Sunday night. Some of the big bands would come in. It was getting toward sundown. We were on our way to the parking lot to get into the car. And I saw this Greyhound bus come in with all these black guys on it, and I saw 'Jimmie Lunceford Band' on the side of the bus. And I said, 'Hey, Dad, can we stay to hear just one song? Please? Just one song?' He said, 'You have to go to school tomorrow. All right, just one song.'

"We had to wait maybe an hour or so for them to get set up. Blacks weren't allowed into the pavilion. But it was an open-air pavilion. It overlooked the ocean. It had slats on it. Blacks and whites who didn't want to pay to go in were on the outside, peeping through the slats and listening to the music. I edged my way up to where I could peek right in through the slats. And they started. And oh man! That was it!" He laughed aloud at the memory. "First of all, they were dressed nice. Immaculate. I think they had white suits, and ties, and shiny shoes. They played out of this world. The band was so well rehearsed, so tight, and they had their little choreography, y'know, the trumpets doing this and that. They had Dan Grissom singing, and a trio singing, a glee club. Some numbers the whole band would sing, like Johnny Long used to.

"I was *fascinated* by that band. And that was when I said to myself, 'I know what I want to be! I'm gonna be *a musician*.'

"I used to pester the record-store man to death for the next Jimmie Lunceford release. I'd go in and say, 'Anything new coming out by Jimmie Lunceford?' 'Well let me look in the catalogue. Oh yeah, he's got a new one.' 'Do you have it?' 'No.' 'Well order it, I wanna get it!' And I'd go in every two or three days. 'Has it come in yet?'

"Then I'd take the record home, and put it on my Victrola in the living room. I had me a big stick, like the baton Lunceford used to have. He didn't hold the baton the usual way. 'Member how he used to hold it? Paul Whiteman used to hold it the regular way, but Lunceford held it backwards. I used to get me a big stick and stand in front of the mirror and put his records on and make believe I was him!"

The laughter moderated. "I had a big thing with Jimmie Lunceford," he said. "I remember one time his band was playing a dance at a ballroom over in Bridgeport, Connecticut, long since gone. I was in high school at the time, sixteen or seventeen. And I dressed up in my zoot suit and everything. I tried to look older. And I got in. I stood near the band all night. I stood right in back of the pianist, Edwin Wilcox." Wilcox was also one of the band's arrangers, and later, he led that band, at first with Joe Thomas and then on his own. He had a degree in music from Fisk University. Lunceford too had a bachelor's from Fisk. Indeed, when he formed his first professional orchestra, in 1929, its members included Wilcox, alto saxophonist Willie Smith, and trombonist Henry Wells, all three of whom he had known at Fisk.

"During the intermission," Horace said, "I got a chance to talk to Wilcox. He was telling me Art Tatum stories. I told him I was a piano student. It was a thrill to stand there and listen to that band and talk to the piano player. The next day, I think it was, Jimmie Lunceford was due to do an interview on the local Bridgeport radio station. I read about in the newspaper, so I took the bus from Norwalk over to Bridgeport and stood outside till he got there to get his autograph.

"I was ga-ga on Jimmie Lunceford.

"A few years back I was in Hawaii and I ran into a Chinese lady who was a disc jockey. I did an interview on her show. After the show, I said, 'Doesn't Trummy Young live here in Hawaii?' She said, 'Yes. I know him very well. Incidentally today is his birthday. Let's call him up.'

"I got on the phone with him and wished him a happy birthday and told him what a big Lunceford fan I was.

"He said, 'Yes, I can dig that. I'm familiar with your music, and I can tell by listening that you dig Lunceford.'

"I didn't get a chance to meet Trummy in person, but on the phone we had a long conversation. I asked him about Lunceford. And he said that when they got to New York, Lunceford would take three weeks off, and the band would rehearse every day. They'd rehearse in sections. The saxophone section would be in one studio, the trumpets over here, the trombones over there, the rhythm somewhere else. They'd rehearse separately and then he'd put them together.

"So when I was a kid, I was a big Lunceford fan. I studied with Professor William Scofield, the organist at one of the leading white churches. He was a nice guy, and a hell of a piano player, classical. He was very strict. He scared me to death sometimes. He'd get on my ass and take the ruler and crack my knuckles, or curse at me, 'God damn it, you didn't practice this week!' I'd jump." Again he laughed. "But he was a great guy. He really saw some potential in me, I think.

"I'm a firm believer in the legit foundation. I'm sorry, really, that I didn't go further with it. I took classical for a couple of years with Professor Scofield, and then I quit. I was so into

the jazz thing. I was playing boogie-woogie at that time.

"I liked classical music then, I still love classical music. What turned me off as to playing it was that I used to get all these tunes for lessons, *Clair de Lune, Fantasie Impromptu,* Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. When I'd get through the piece, he'd say, 'Now I want you to memorize it. Memorize the first two pages for next week's lesson.' But, you know, I knew nothing about harmony, I knew nothing about the chord structure of the piece, and I would be playing the tune by rote. If I made a mistake, I'd have to stop and start from the beginning. I couldn't fake it and keep going.

"But if I was playing my boogie-woogie -- I had a certain arranged boogie-woogie that I had rehearsed -- and I made a mistake, I could cover it up and keep going. But if I made a mistake in *Fantasie Impromptu*, I couldn't carry on.

"That bugged me. I got into learning some basic harmony. I got a fake book. The very first tune I learned the harmony on, and learned to improvise a little on the chord structure, was *What Is This Thing Called Love?* With the first chord C-seventh. I would play it in root position, C E G B-flat. Finally I got I could play some tenths, you know. I kind of copied Teddy Wilson. Tatum and Teddy Wilson were my idols before Bud Powell and Monk.

"When I first started my band, I played the Newport Jazz Festival for George Wein. We were playing *Filthy McNasty*. George was backstage. I'm playing my solo. I'm playing some octaves 'way up on the high part of the piano, maybe rolling some octaves. And I hear him yell out, 'Earl Fatha Hines, Earl Fatha Hines.' And I'm saying to myself while I'm playing, 'What the hell is he talking about? I don't know nothin' about no Earl Fatha Hines, I ain't trying to copy him, I'm not aware of what his style is like.'

"After that I began to realize that I used to copy Nat King Cole, and Nat King Cole copied Earl Fatha Hines, so I got it second-hand through Nat. I didn't realize it was Earl. I was invited to his home for Thanksgiving dinner one time when I San Francisco. He asked me to play something, and he played something, and he was fantastic.

"One time in Italy, I had a day off, and there was a festival going. He was on as a solo pianist. Now he came out on that stage by himself, and just took over, played forty-five minutes or an hour by himself. It sounded fantastic, and he had the audience spellbound. It really made me stand in awe of him."

"After you quit formal study, what were the influences?"

"Well, the first was the boogie-woogie and the blues. I just knew the boogie-woogie and blues changes. But then when I started to learn harmony, I started to get into records of Coleman Hawkins and Prez, and the swing era guys, Buck Clayton and Tatum and Teddy Wilson and Ben Webster. And then I heard my fist bebop record, which was *Groovin' High*, with Dizzy and Bird, and I said, 'Wow! What is *that*?' That floored me. I started copying a lot of bebop records."

"Where were you getting the harmony?"

"I learnt my harmony from Frank Skinner's *Modern Arranging*. I went over to Bridgeport, Connecticut, to take a harmony course. I took it for several weeks, and I didn't learn a damn thing, it was so complex. I learnt my harmony by myself, from the fake book and the Frank Skinner book, which showed you the intervals, a third, a major fifth, a major seventh, a minor seventh, and the minor third, and the diminished. Just the very basics, but it was what I needed to start. I got into thirteenths and all that later on. Once I got that basic stuff, the rest of it came from stealing stuff off the records. I'd take it down into my basement and put it on the old-fashioned wind-up machine. My piano was in the basement. I'd slow the turn-table down. It would change the key, of course. You'd hear the notes in the chord and go to the piano and try to figure them out. I was playing a lot of chords that I couldn't name.

"I'd go to an older pianist I knew and say, 'What do you call this chord?' He would look at it and tell me."

In 1950, Stan Getz played a gig in Hartford, Connecticut, accompanied by the trio Horace then led. Getz took the group on the road with him. In 1951, Horace settled in New York City, and soon had a freelance recording career. Word of the strong, bluesy pianist spread quickly, and he worked with Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, and, most significantly, Art Blakey. In 1953, he, Blakey, Kenny Dorham, Hank Mobley, and Doug Watkins formed a group they called The Jazz Messengers.

"It was a co-operative group in the beginning," Horace said. "We didn't go to a lawyer and have papers drawn up. It was a gentleman's agreement that the group was to be a co-operative. So nobody was the leader. We got the idea from the Modern Jazz Quartet. They did it, and they did it successfully. We did it, and we didn't do it successfully. People in the group weren't taking care of the business, and so it fell apart on a business level.

"Several times I was very dissatisfied with the business aspect of it, because the guys were goofing off. Sometimes the guys would show up late for the gig and we'd get docked money. Several times, I told myself I'm gonna quit. But I *couldn't* quit! Every time we'd hit a gig, the band would be cookin' so tough, I said, 'Oh shit. I can't go nowhere. Where'm I gonna find guys like this to play with?'

"The thing that made me leave was the drug problem. Art and myself and Nica's daughter, we got arrested in Philadelphia." He referred to the Baroness Nica de Koenigswater, for whom he named the tune *Nica's Dream*.

"We were on our way back to New York in Art's car, Art and myself and this guy who used to hang out with art, setting up his drums, and the baroness's daughter. I didn't use drugs. I didn't even drink. But on the way out of town, I guess the cop saw a white girl in the car. Automatically, to him that's a pimp and a whore. He stopped the car. He made us get out and he searched the car. He found a gun in the glove compartment and some shells, and in the baroness's daughter's bag, a box of benzedrine tablets. So bam! We're down to the station. They book us.

"I had to stay in the precinct station over the weekend until

my father came and got me out. I had to go to a hearing. They released me, because I didn't have any drugs. The only thing I had on me was an ordinary pocket knife.

"I wouldn't want to go through that experience again. First they had us in the little precinct jail. That was overnight. Then they took us to the local penitentiary, the tier thing like you see in the movies. And I was in there for two and a half or three days, until my father could get down. That was a nightmare. I'd seen this in movies, but to experience it! I was in a cell with two other black guys, and all they did was talk about all the different jails they'd spent the early part of their lives in, and where they're going to send them next. At three or four o'clock in the morning, there are guys flippin' out down on the lower tier, hollerin' and screamin' -- they had to run in and put a strait-jacket on this guy.

"The FBI questioned us. At three o'clock in the morning, they'd wake you up and bring you down to the office, and question you, and try to scare you."

"And no doubt succeed."

"Well *yeah*! But I couldn't tell them nothing but the same story. They couldn't trap me in a lie, because I was telling the truth. I was just working with these guys. The rest of them had gone back to New York."

And once more, his irrepressible chuckle: "I was so glad to get out of there, man!

"Some of the guys in the group were into drugs. I said to myself, 'I love these guys, they're all beautiful guys, and they're great musicians, and where else can I go to play with guys of this calibre? Long as I'm clean, if they bust them, they're gonna let me go. I got no track marks on my arms, I'm not in possession, they'll let me go.

"But when I got busted, and I had to spend three days in the jail, and had to go to a hearing, and hire a lawyer to defend me to make sure they didn't send me up for nothing! My father had to pay this money, and then I had to pay him back. It cost several hundred dollars. I said, 'I gotta leave these guys now, because as much as I love them, they're just too hot.

"Doug Watkins is dead, Kenny Dorham is dead, Hank Mobley's dead. They're all gone except Art and myself.

"I left with the idea of cooling it for a month or two and trying to get a job with another group. I did a couple of record dates with other groups. It wasn't my intention to start a band, be a bandleader, that was the farthest thing from my mind. I guess it was fate that had it to be so.

"I had recorded *Senor Blues*. That record came out shortly after that period when I left the Messengers, and it was successful. Jack Whittemore had booked me for years."

Jack Whittemore was a small, stocky, feisty Irishman who at one time was head of the Shaw booking agency, then went on his own. He was probably the best, the most decent, and certainly he was the most respected booking agent jazz ever knew, with on outstanding client list of artists. His death of a heart attack a few years ago was a major loss.

"Jack called me one day," Horace said. "He was booking the Messengers, too. He said, 'Horace, they're playing the hell out of your record in Philadelphia and the guy who owns the Show Boat wants you to go down with your band.'

"I said, 'I don't have a band. That was just a put-together session. We rehearsed and made a record.'

"Jack said, 'Well why don't you put some guys together and go down and play a week? He wants you.'

"I said, 'Well, okay.' So I got together Arthur Taylor on drums, Doug Watkins on bass, Hank Mobley on tenor, and Art Farmer on trumpet. We went on down there and we played and we did good -- we packed the joint. The guy said, 'Look, I want you back. I can't bring you back too soon, but I want you in a couple of months.'

"We had a week off, and after that Jack got us another week someplace else. And that's how it started. Jack gave me a push. I hadn't thought about being a bandleader.

"Oh, he was a good agent. I liked him."

"So. You were never a side man from that day on."

"No."

"Have you ever recorded standards?"

"A few in the beginning, in the formative years. The few standards I did on Blue Note were things that I liked. One thing I can happily say is that Alfred Lyon or Frank Wolf never came to me and said, 'Look, we want you to record standards.'

"When I left the Jazz Messengers, I wanted to be with Alfred. But we were signed to Columbia. I went to George Avakian and he said, 'We'll let you go to Blue Note, but we want you to do one album for us first.' So I did *Silver's Blue* for Epic, which has been released many times.

"I wanted to do an album of originals, but they wanted three standards, so I picked standards I liked and did arrangements on them. They came out quite nice.

"But Alfred never once said to me, 'We want a few standards.' There was only one exception. When we rehearsed *The Preacher* with the Messengers, he said, 'What is that tune?' I said, 'It's just a little tune I wrote on the chord changes of *Show Me the Way to Go Home*.' He said, 'Oh no, that's Dixieland. No, we don't want that. Why don't you just ja a blues, and we'll take that one out?' I was kind of crushed. I'm grateful to Art Blakey. He pulled me over in a corner and said, 'Man, ain't nothin' wrong with that tune. Tell him you want to do it. They'll do it if you insist.' I went to Alfred and said, 'Look, Alfred, if you don't want to do that tune, why don't we cancel the session until I can write another tune? Because I don't want to jam no blues.' He said, 'Okay, go ahead and do it.' And it became a big hit."

I mentioned to Horace, not that he needed to be reminded, that the roster of the players in his group constituted an astonishing alumni association. At one point he had Donald Bird alternating with Art Farmer on trumpet.

Horace said, "Donald worked with us on and off. Art Farmer was our regular trumpet player. He was working with Gerry Mulligan too. He'd come to me from time to time and say, 'Look, Horace, I've got a chance to go out for a couple of weeks on the road with Gerry, and it's paying some good money, man. Can you get somebody to take my place?' So

then I'd say, 'Let me call Bird.' Donald was going to Manhattan School of Music. If he could make arrangements, I'd get Donald to come and substitute. Because we weren't working every week anyway. Farmer would go off with Mulligan for a few weeks and Bird would take his place.

"That's how Bird is on that record, *Six Pieces of Silver*. Farmer should have been on that record, but he was under contract to Bob Weinstock at Prestige, and Weinstock and Alfred Lyon were feuding, and he wouldn't let Farmer out of his contract to record with me. So I got Bird."

"You've never had a color line in your band," I said.

"I don't know any black bands that have a color line."

I said that one friend of his and mine had been criticized for hiring a certain white drummer when he played Los Angeles.

"Nobody has said anything to my face," Horace said. "But I have heard from my fans that some cats say, 'Why does Horace hire white guys?' I just want the best musicians I can get, I don't give a damn if they're pink. Polka dot.

"If I could get the calibre of musicians I want all black, I would hire them. How can I put this? I want to give the black guys an opportunity -- if they're capable musicians. But if I hear a white guy that plays better and suits my band, I'm going to hire him. I want the best musicians. And I know Miles does and a lot of other guys feel that way."

"Dizzy certainly has never observed a color line," I said.

Horace nodded, and said, "When I first started the band, there were a lot of capable black musicians around to hire. Young guys that could really play. I'm talking about good soloists, who know harmony, who can play chord changes, who can read, who can improvise. There was no problem hiring black guys who could do that in those formative years.

"After a while, it was harder to find black guys who could play chord changes and improvise well. I started to find some white guys who could. That's when Randy Brecker came into the band, and his brother, Michael Brecker, and Tom Harrell. They can play their ass off. And I found a lot of the young black guys at that were getting more involved in playing more commercial music, rock and roll bands and these tunes that have one chord or two chords. That's all they can do and they figure they're wailing. When they come into a group like mine, and I put a piece of music in front of them that has a series of chord changes, they get all hung up in it, they can't play it.

"You know, jazz is ninety percent improvisation. I write the arrangements, but after the arrangement, there's got to be something happening. When the guys come up to solo, they've got to be good, they've got know harmony, and solo well. And I had a lot of difficulty at one period of time there finding black guys who could satisfy me as soloists.

"Even before the Brecker brothers, I hired Teddy Kotick on bass. He was the first white musician I hired. And he's a hell of a fine bassist, he can swing his butt off. So I'm just looking for the best musicianship, to make my music sound right. That's what I'm about. If I can find that from black guys, I'll hire them first, because I want to give them an opportunity. There aren't many opportunities out here for black people, or black musicians, so if I can find a black guy who can play my music to my satisfaction, I'll probably hire him first. But if a white guy comes along and he plays better than that guy, I'll get him. I'm not going to hire somebody just 'cause they're black. Or 'cause they're my uncle or my cousin. Or my mother. I'm going to hire somebody because they're doing the job musically.

"My current band has Michael Mossman on trumpet and Ralph Bowen on tenor -- both white guys. Young. Ralph Bowen's from Toronto, Michael's from New York. I've got a new drummer, Horan Israel from Brooklyn, and a bass player from Virginia named Clarence Seay.

"I was invited a couple of years ago down to Orange County, along with Gerald Wilson and Shorty Rogers, to be a judge at a big band competition, high school and college bands. I'll tell you, man, the bands were fantastic. One thing bothered the hell out of me. They played the section work, they were in tune, they had the phrasing, they sounded like old pros. They'd get up to take a solo, there wasn't shit happening. They didn't know their changes. I went back and had a talk with some of them. I said, 'Get yourself some Jamie Abersol play-along records, get to the piano, learn your harmonies, and apply them to your horn.'"

Horace has not recorded for a major jazz label in several years. This has tended to lower his visibility. Indeed, for a while I had the impression that he had more or less dropped from sight. The reason is that he started his own record label, which is always a hard way to go. But he had his reasons, and the idea of doing so has crossed the minds of many musicians. Why we have never started a collective is beyond me.

Horace travels now only in the summer. One reason is that his son -- he has been divorced for a number of years -- is still in high school. And he devotes the time at home in California to composition and running his record company, which now has two labels, Silveto and Emerald.

He said, "I'm trying to operate my record company here in my house. We do mail order. We try to get into the stores, but our distribution is not what I'd like it to be. I had no intention of having two labels. I had no intention of even having a record company.

"In 1969, '70, '72, I did a series of records called *The United States of Mind*. Andy Bey and his sister Salome sang on them. They had a spiritual connotation to them, kind of a metaphysical connotation. Some of my fans maybe were not into them. Jazz fans are kind of narrow-minded, and some of them are die-hard instrumentalists. If you're recording with Sarah Vaughan or Ella Fitzgerald, they'll accept it. But if you record with some of the lesser-name singers -- some very fine singers, like Andy Bey -- some of my fans didn't dig it because they figured I should be playing only instrumental music.

"I was very proud of the records, and lot of people dug them, but they didn't do as well as my other records. I'm a student of metaphysics and have been for years. Naturally, when something becomes a part of your life, it becomes a part of every part of your life, so it crept into my music too.

"When I did the first of those *United States of Mind* albums on Blue Note, they called me into the office. Alfred had sold the company by then. Frank Wolf was still there. Frank didn't want to call me in. Maybe he felt a little embarrassed to talk to me, because we were kind of friendly. But another guy, an English guy who worked for United Artists, who bought Blue Note, he said, 'Horace, this *United States of Mind* project that you're involved in, I understand you've got two more albums you want to do on it. It's not selling like your usual stuff. Why don't you go back and do your regular thing, and then finish this?'

"I said, 'My contract says I have free rein here. It's like a three-act play. You can't tell what it's going to do until you finish the third act. This is only the first act. I want to finish it. If it's not successful, you can me.' So they let me finish it. The albums weren't that successful, but they didn't can me. I went back to making regular, straight-ahead instrumental records. But every now and then I'd try to throw in some of my metaphysical thing. I tried not to throw in too much of it, because I didn't want to alienate my fans or the company.

"I could see the handwriting on the wall. They were phasing out jazz at Blue Note. When the contracts expired, they never picked up the options. I was the last one there. I had two years to go on my contract. I knew they weren't going to pick up the option, and I thought I might as well be looking someplace else.

"I was playing the Keystone Korner in San Francisco, and got the newspaper to read a review on our performance. On the other side of the page there was a review on this book *How to Make and Sell Your Own Record.* I sent for the book and that's what turned me on to saying maybe I should put my money where my mouth is.

"I had a couple of offers from labels. I said to myself, 'If I'm gonna do straight-ahead, it's okay, but if I want to do this metaphysical thing, they're gonna fight me on it, knock me down, I won't be able to do it. So why don't I just go ahead and start my own label, so I can do my spiritual thing?'

"That's why I started the Silveto label. About eight years ago. I wasn't thinking about another label. I was just thinking about doing what I wanted to do without fighting anybody. After I had made at least three albums for the Silveto label, I thought, 'Why not start another label, the Emerald label, for straight-ahead?' Instead of losing the fans who didn't want to go this way, with what I'm doing they can have both.

"What I'm trying to do now is catch up on my Emerald label. The Silveto label is slow-moving. The Emerald label is selling better. The straight-ahead thing. I came into possession of a tape that was done at the Cork and Bib back in 1964, with Joe Henderson, Carmel Jones, Teddy Smith, Roger Humphries, and myself. It had *Filthy McNasty* on it, and *Senor Blues* and *Tokyo Blues* and all those tunes. I made arrangements to bring it out on an album. It's on the Emerald label. It's called *Horace Silver Live 1964.* So far that's my best seller."

He's put out an album by Clark Terry, and now has moved on into CD production, the first album being derived from two high-quality stereo radio broadcasts of his group made at the Half Note in New York in 1965 and '66. It's called *The Natives Are Restless Tonight.* You can write to Horace, if you'd like a copy of his catalogue, c/o Silveto Productions, PO Box 1852, Santa Monica, California, 90406.

Meanwhile, all those marvelous Blue Note albums have been reissued in the CD format, causing a sudden rise of awareness of how much he has contributed to jazz.

"I don't want to be on the road fifty-two weeks a year," he said. "I do a lot of writing while I'm home. In recent years, I've been getting into extended pieces. A couple of years back I was commissioned to write a piece of music for a concert in New York honoring Duke. I wrote a three-part piece for string orchestra, flutes, piano, bass and drums, and a mini-chorus of singers. It was called *Message from the Maestro.*

"I came home and wrote another piece for string orchestra. I have written three or four more extended pieces. I hope someday to do something with full symphony. I have things involving choreography, things I want to put on eventually."

When the day was over, it seemed to me that Horace had changed little with the years, except that he has a mustache and his hair is a little long. He still is a gentle man, and I have always thought him to be eminently sane. And I still trust him.

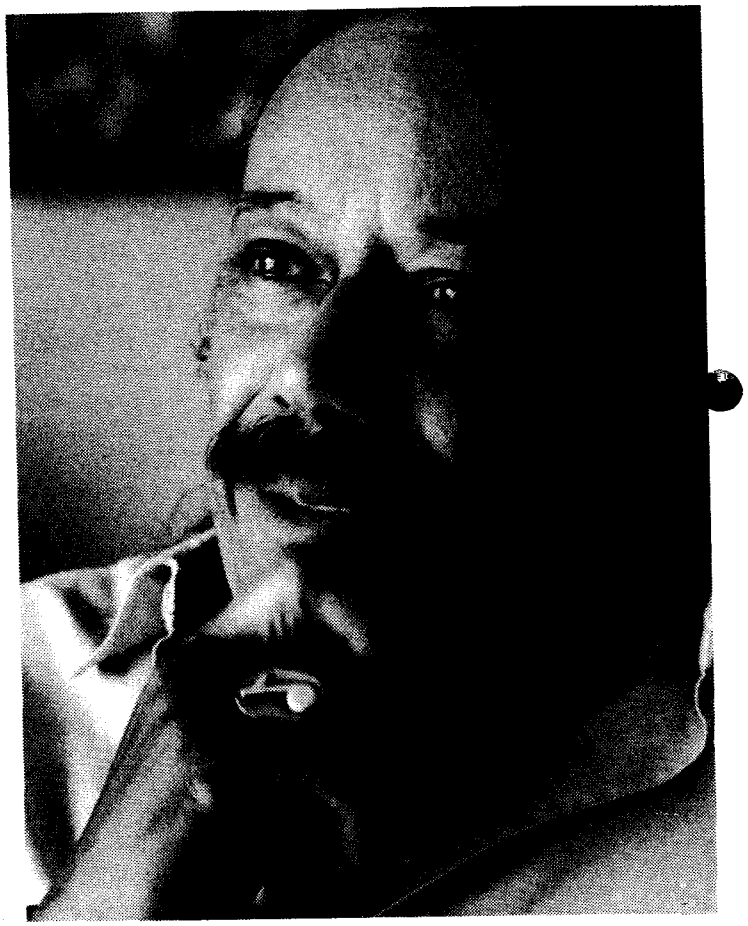

Photo by John Reeves