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Dr. de Lerma, I Presume

Chicago

This past summer, the president of Chicago's Columbia College appointed Sam Floyd academic dean. Floyd wanted to retain his position as director of its Center for Black Music Research. To hold both jobs, he would have to select someone to work with him as assistant director.

Almost all the early writing on jazz -- and to this day, most of it -- is by whites. Sam Floyd is one of a growing group of black researchers in the field. Tall, bearded, handsome, Floyd at fifty-three has a reputation as a responsible scholar, and he was concerned for the integrity of his department.

"I wanted somebody with impeccable credentials whom I knew I could work with," he said. He chose Dr. Dominique Rene de Lerma. "Having known Dominique for years and years, and considering him one of my very best friends, I thought of him immediately."

Few people in the Chicago jazz community knew who de Lerma was. Too few in the jazz community of America, and for that matter the world, know much about this outstanding scholar. As it happened, I had spent time with him recently.

There are individuals we encounter along the way who have an especially serious influence on our thinking. Dominique Rene de Lerma had such an influence on mine.

I have become increasingly suspicious of the credo of jazz:

I believe in Jazz as America's only begotten Art Form. Jazz is a folk music of protest against inequity born in New Orleans to uneducated descendants of slaves. They made it up out of their own rhythmic tradition and the harmonic and melodic materials they found in Protestant hymns. It went up the river to Chicago, where Jelly Roll Morton was its Prophet, King Oliver its Baptist, and Louis Armstrong its Messiah, and a group of white boys called the Austin High Gang became its Apostles. They went among wolves. This religion was despised in the land of its birth until the Epistles of John the Hammond forewarned the Europeans, who became the first true Jazzians, and took up the burden of evangelizing the Philistine Americans to what had been wrought in their midst when their unrecognized saints went marching in.

There are several things amiss in that version of the genesis of jazz, not least among them that the first European music the African slaves would have encountered in New Orleans was Catholic, not Protestant, French and Spanish, not English. It also implies that the music's inventors were deaf to all the secular music that was part of the New Orleans culture in the nineteenth century, including opera, symphonies, and chamber music. It overlooks parallel developments in music under way in other American cities. And it ignores the crowded night-clubs, best-selling records, national network radio broadcasts, serious academic consideration in many quarters, and enthusiasm of college kids for this music during the years of its early evolution. Above all, it overlooks that most -- not some, most -- of the early makers of jazz were educated men, sometimes well educated.

I have never seen a study of the educational backgrounds of major jazz musicians. There is little useful information on the subject in the dictionaries and encyclopedias of jazz. If you look up Milt Hinton in Chilton, you'll read only that he "learnt brass and string bass whilst at high school in Chicago." That it was Wendell Phillips High School is not specified. Thus the inspiration of Captain Walter Dyett (which I mentioned in the June *Jazzletter*) goes unnoticed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* almost never gives such details. And so the influence of certain key high schools, Wendell Phillips in Chicago, Jefferson High in Los Angles (alma mater of Art Farmer and Addison Farmer, Edmund Thigpen, Dexter Gordon, Big Jay McNeeley, and Frank Morgan) Cass Tech in Detroit (Donald Byrd, Pepper Adams, Frank Rosolino), and the High School of Performing Arts (Thelonious Monk) in New York simply is ignored, contributing to an impression that jazzmen are autodidacts and that the music came about by a sort of parthenogenesis.

I often ask jazz musicians about their early musical education. And meanwhile, I have made note of the training of earlier jazz players, becoming increasingly aware of the place of European "classical" music in their studies. I was always uneasy with the simplistic myth of the music's origins. Dominique de Lerma made me actively skeptical of it.

I met Dominique in Toronto near the mid-1970s. I was asked to interview him on one of the educational television channels. The interview went pleasantly enough, but it was the conversation that followed it that had the impact on me. Dr. de Lerma was an ethnomusicologist (although he is not comfortable with the term) who made me more aware of black participation in non-jazz music in New Orleans and elsewhere. From then on, I kept an eye open for the education of black musicians, noting that Will Marion Cook, who was an influence on Duke Ellington, had studied at the National Conservatory under Anton Dvorak and later was a violin student of Josef Joachim in Berlin, and that his father was a law professor; I noted that Fletcher Henderson was trained in European classical piano and had a degree in chemistry and mathematics from Atlanta University, and that his brother Horace and Benny Carter both went to Wilberforce; that Jimmie Lunceford was a student in the Denver high school music system directed by Paul Whiteman's father, then went on to get a bachelor's in music at Fisk and study at the City College of New York; that Don Redman, son of a respected music teacher, graduated with a degree in music from Storer College and attended the Chicago and New England conservatories; that Claude Hopkins studied music (and medicine) at Howard University, where his parents were on the faculty. And on and on and on . . . The more I looked at it, as the years went on, the more jazz appeared to be distinctly a product of the middle class, not of the downtrodden poor.

Though quite fair-skinned, Dominique de Lerma looked as if he might have African antecedents. He spoke beautifully in round vowels and pensive cadence. I did not ask about his personal life; his name was Spanish. That day in Toronto passed and Dominique left, and I didn't see him again for

sixteen years.

Two or three years ago, Billy Taylor and I were discussing the influence of university training on jazz musicians. I asked Billy if he knew anything of a man named Dominique de Lerma. "Yes," Billy said, "I know him very well."

"Where in the world is he?"

"Teaching at Morgan State University and Peabody," Billy said.

A little after that, I was visiting my friend Hale Smith, composer, distinguished music educator, and closet scat singer, at his home in Long Island. Hale attended the Cleveland Institute of Music when Jim Hall was there. Later he taught composition, orchestration, "and life," as he put it, at the University of Connecticut, from which he is now retired. Because of his academic connections, I asked Hale if he too knew Dominique de Lerma. "Sure," Hale said. "Dominique is one of the three greatest scholars in black American music, the other two being Sam Floyd and Eileen Southern."

"Got a phone number?" I said.

Billy Taylor and Hale felt that people in the jazz world knew far too little about Dominique de Lerma. I phoned Dr. de Lerma. He was astounded that I remembered him. I was astounded that he remembered me. And I arranged to meet him in Baltimore. A few weeks later he booked a room for me at the Cross Keys, a pleasant hotel near Morgan State. Morgan State is a substantially black university. When I checked in I got into conversation with a black clerk, a very pretty girl who was studying voice there. She knew much about European music but little about jazz. She also knew Dominique. When I mentioned his name, she smiled broadly. I learned he was adored by his students.

Dominique arrived, sporting a pointed black Van Dyke beard and that dense black hair I remembered. The greeting was warm, and over dinner in the hotel's excellent restaurant, where he introduced me to Maryland crab cakes, we talked as if our conversation in Toronto had occurred yesterday. This time I asked him about his family.

"I was born in Miami, Florida, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1928," Dominique said. "My family background is black Spanish, integrated before coming to this country -- Afro-Spanish in Spain. I suspect this is very frequent. In the sixteenth century, in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, there were whole black populations, which probably accounts to some extent for the Italians. Think of Othello. The Moor of Venice. And there were groups from Africa in unexpected places like Mexico. Over a period of time, they became assimilated."

"Well," I said, "we in our modern arrogance think that travel began with Columbus. They found a Roman galley on the bottom of Guanabara Bay, at Rio de Janeiro, and Irish monks crossed the Atlantic in curraghs before the Vikings did. Where in Africa did your people come from, do you know?"

"I don't know specifically. It was somewhere in the vicinity of Benin or the Ivory Coast. There apparently was a large migration in the sixteenth century, which was not the first, to Europe. It was Moslem, no question about that. My family coat of arms has the cross and the moon together.

"My grandfather was ambassador to Mexico. I never knew him. At some point in his life, he moved to California. And that's how the family got to the United States."

"There was African migration to France, too," I said. "Alexander Dumas was black. The Mediterranean is not that big a pond."

"And Gibraltar is very close to Africa," Dominique said. "I'm certain that Africans with boats didn't sit there waiting for the great white father to come and discover the Dark Continent. Already, by the year one thousand, there was trade with the southeast Pacific, which is how the xylophone got to Africa -- along with elephantiasis. There was an African community actually living on Java by the year one thousand. There was a black community in China.

"There is an awful lot of supposition that can take place in music and you're not entirely sure whether some of the rhythms that you find, say, in late Renaissance music come about because of innovations in notation or African influence. You're encouraged to think African when you encounter something like the moresca, which was very popular in the late sixteenth century. It is that dance, in fact, that concludes Monteverdi's *Orfeo*. The moresca, as everybody knows, was an African dance that was taken to Naples at earlier times. It spread all over Europe, particularly Italy, and even to England, where it was known not as the moresca but as the Morris dance."

The moresca, a pantomimic dance that turned up in Europe at least as far back as 1530, was done in Moorish costumes with little bells attached to the legs. The dancers blackened their faces -- three centuries before the rise of minstrel shows in the United States. It was the most popular dance in Renaissance ballets and mummeries, and forms of it survive to this day in Spain, Corsica, and Guatemala, and of course in England as the Morris dance, which underwent a revival around 1900.

"The moresca," Dominique said, "originally had to do with fertility. The English decided to remove the element of fertility, but they forgot to take down the Maypole.

"One of the problems of African history is that it is based on oral history. And we can't speak about historical periods, or some kind of political unification. We can't say that during the reign of so-and-so, something happened. I guess the approach has got to be different. And there have to be an awful lot of assumptions, which could be a little dangerous, especially if you're working with the kind of fervor of Joel Augustus Rogers, the guy who in the 1930s wrote a number of books trying to prove that everybody important in history had an African background, including Beethoven.

"He was a fascinating person with a lot of wisdom, but his details are not always very accurate. There isn't any question about Beethoven. I checked the genealogy back to the fifteenth century, and the family line was not even Belgian or Dutch. It was all Flemish. When I first heard the story, I remembered the time when the area was called the Spanish Netherlands, and I thought there might have been some importation of darker skin. There very possibly was, but it didn't affect Beethoven's family."

"How did you get interested in these things?"

"My father spent his life as a dilettante," Dominique said. "That included music, but it included anything that might have appealed to him. There was a piano in the house and a record player. I grew up with whatever records happened to be around. Probably the first composer I was aware of was Schubert. When I went to take piano lessons -- I really wanted to play piano awfully much -- I arrived with the thirty-two Beethoven sonatas under my arm. And I had the feeling that the teacher never even knew Beethoven wrote any sonatas. That pretty well ended our relationship right there, which accounts for the fabulous piano technique I have today.

"If I was not going to make it as a pianist, somehow or other the violin attracted me, but it did not attract my father, so he suggested I look into the oboe, which I did.

"I feel that sometimes people who become musicians are built for certain instruments. I got an oboe in November. Within one month, I had a professional engagement, three concerts a week. I played the Miami Opera Guild. I didn't even have my first lesson until the following summer. But throughout all of this, I kept thinking the instrument I was built for was the cello. And I've never played it. The idea of string quartets excited me very much. I felt culturally deprived, because I had friends who played stringed instruments. I was very happy one time when they did not have a cellist around, and I played the cello part on the piano. That was not satisfactory, because my piano playing is not that good. So I decided the closest thing I could do was the bassoon. So I picked up the bassoon, and I was just fantastic with it. I played it for only a year. I really miss that instrument, much much more than the oboe or the English horn. It's such a fantastic instrument. It's not a bass, it's a baritone and a tenor and everything. I feel so funny to be at the bottom of the harmony, instead of the top.

"I was going to school at the University of Miami. I finished my music courses there and got disgusted and went to Curtis and got disgusted and went to Tanglewood. That's when I realized I really did not want a career as a performer. I wanted something that was more conceptual. So I went back to Miami as a history major. Then I majored in art history and French. I started Italian. I was thinking about anthropology and geology, and by this time I was on the faculty, teaching oboe and music history. I got a call from the dean, who said, 'You're teaching on the faculty?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'But you don't even have a bachelor's degree.' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Why?' I said, 'I don't want to stand in line.' He said, 'If you want a contract next year, get your degree. Stand in line.'

"So I did. But I knew that was not where I had to stop. I had a chance to go to Florence to play in an orchestra that a friend of mine had, Newell Jenkins, who is now in New York. Newell was doing early eighteenth century Italian music. I had done the world premier of the Vincenzo Bellini oboe concerto, a concerto Bellini wrote when he was fifteen or sixteen. Not very good. But since then lots of people have played it. Newell had conducted it and so he asked me if I would join him in Florence. I was all set to go when I began thinking what I really ought to do is go for a master's degree. I went to Indiana University, primarily to work with Paul Nettl, professor of music and father of Bruno Nettl, ethnomusicologist at the University of Illinois. He said, 'Don't settle for the master's degree, that's like a high school diploma, go for the doctorate.' So I got my doctorate without a master's.

"I got a call to join the faculty of Indiana, because the head of the music department was on leave for a year and a half, so I did that. Then I went to the University of Oklahoma for a year. I was called back to Indiana University, where I stayed thirteen years as music librarian, not knowing anything about music libraries. I went there in '63 and left in '75.

"With the death of Martin Luther King, I realized I could do one of two things. I could utilize whatever skills I had developed by this time, or I could get matches and bricks and join the folks in town. Not that there was that much of a town in Bloomington, and the waves always got there a year or two late. That's when I decided I had better give serious attention to black music research. I knew there was more to it than we were told. And I just sort of took off from that point.

"I was married during my student days at Indiana. My wife died of cancer. We had a son who died in the early 1980s. So it was a matter of my leading a rather monastic existence, which is fine because of what the field required of me and what the people really required of me -- responding, answering questions, and fulfilling needs that simply were not being addressed elsewhere. It's been a lot of pressure and a lot of responsibility, but I feel really as if I am in a religious order. I've taken vows, and one of the vows is that whatever happens, I've got to get my work done.

"I have an adopted son, Antonio, who is graduating as a voice major from Towson State University and plans to go for his PhD."

"What year was it that you came up to Toronto?" I asked.

"You and I met in 1974. That was about five years into the research."

We finished dinner and went up to my room, a pleasant one with a balcony overlooking an evening garden full of Maryland foliage, exuberant with springtime. In the elevator we had begun talking about the influence of popular music on "classical" music and of classical music in turn on popular music -- and on jazz.

Dominique said, "There was no distinction between popular music and non-popular music during Mozart's time. Do you

know how to tell the difference between a minuet that Mozart wrote to be danced and one of the minuets in the symphonies? The dance minuet doesn't have violas. Period. That's it."

I said, "In the nineteenth century, concert music moved farther away from dance forms, and dispensed with improvisation. Prior to the Romantic era, soloists in concertos were expected to improvise their cadenzas."

"Absolutely true," Dominique said. "Maybe it's not the nineteenth century that should be blamed but musicology. Some pianists never really lost the idea of improvisation in the nineteenth century. The concept of personal involvement encourages improvisation, some sort of elaboration, and that's a good Romantic thought. But we also had with the nineteenth century an awareness of earlier music, and a concern about being accurate, and sticking to the printed page. And you get these myths, people like Toscanini, who never did anything other than what the composer wrote. Which is absolute foolishness, because he *did*. It's just that his p.r. people said he didn't. And on the other side of the fence there is someone like Stokowski, who, however inaccurate he might have been historically, was never afraid to be a musician. This is something that has bothered me for a long, long time. I have not seen Toscanini as a musician.

"We're not talking about improvisation, but in Stokowski we're getting into the same kind of re-viewing, reliving, reworking something which already had happened with Gustav Mahler as a conductor, with Fritz Reiner as a conductor, with Bruno Walter as a conductor. It happens."

"Was there," I asked, "a point in your life when the traditional view of jazz history didn't add up?"

"Yes. Because of the kind of information people needed, my first attention was directed to the composers. As I got into this, I realized that it's impossible to understand black culture without understanding all of the idioms, as best you can. And certainly jazz cannot be eliminated, nor can blues, or gospel, or even non-American expressions. It's such a huge world that it's probably too much for one person to manage. And then it's all the more frightening when people refer to you as an ethnomusicologist, which means you should know this much about every other culture that exists on earth. And I'm not about to undertake that.

"But with the kind of orientation I had to questions that were being asked, I began to see patterns with regard to the composers that I could discuss and think about. Things did not make sense to me when I started to look at jazz through other people's words.

"One of the problems with black music is that it's entertaining and therefore that's where people stop. Once people are amused, they don't go any further, which is selling the culture very short. And there's a sociological reason for this also: the black musician performs, does not analyze, does not write the histories, does not do the reflection. Or if there is a reflection, it is done in so intuitive a manner that it's almost like an atavistic memory.

"I mean, nobody ever told Louis Armstrong how African it would be to use your instrument like a voice, or if you tried to develop a sonority in your voice that matched that of the trumpet. These things simply happened. It's not a matter of a philosophic stance.

"So as a result, there's an awful lot of writing that people are exposed to -- certainly that which is most accessible -- dealing with jazz that is not really very important. Things which are not really critical and don't relate to the culture. But one other thing: there's something you said in the elevator about the attitude people had to American history, to black music or any other aspect of American history."

"You mean, when I mentioned Harold Arlen."

"Exactly."

"I said he told me that he and Gershwin and the others were well aware that what they were creating was art music. But it was always treated as popular music and therefore taken lightly. For that matter, there's been a condescension even toward American classical composers."

"Sure," Dominique said. "When Dvorak came to the United States in 1893, the question thrown at this visiting celebrity from Europe -- whether he was a celebrity or not, it was enough that he was from Europe -- was, 'Maestro, do you think this country will ever produce any good music?'

"And his answer was in essence, 'Of course not. Not until you stop writing music that pretends that you're German and ignores the fact that you're American.'

"They replied in essence, 'Well, we all come from Europe, and we're thinking of our roots, and Germany is the intellectual center.'

"And he said, 'There are other roots. The spirituals, for example.' Well of course it had never even dawned on them to look at these ignorant people as being the source for American music. Dvorak said that as soon as you begin to write music like Americans, you will write American music.

"Which meant, the blacker you get the more American you will get. And he was absolutely right."

"He was," I said. "But when Gottschalk brought these African influences into serious composition, John Sullivan Dwight in one of the Boston papers castigated him for it."

"Right," Dominique said. "In 1981, I terminated my membership to the American Musicological Society, which I had joined thirty years earlier, not because I felt there was anything wrong with the society but there was something wrong with calling it the American Musicological Society when it had shown no interest up to this point in anything American. And please understand me: I am not an Americanist. I mean, the thing that really got all these musicologists excited would be the publication of a transcription of a Maltese manuscript from the Medieval period. But if you mentioned anything American, anything jazz, anything black, it was out of the question.

"Now, in about 1987 or '88, I joined Hale Smith for a meeting that the American Musicological Society had in New Hampshire, a committee for the publication of American music. And I was there specifically to be a watchdog to see that black interests were going to be included, if in fact AMS was going to publish a monumental edition of American musical history, very much like the *Denkmaler deutscher*

Tonkunst. I don't know how many volumes that is; it came out at the end of the nineteenth century, critical editions by German composers, not well known ones, but obscure people. There's also one for Austria and Bavaria.

"So when the American Musicological Society was going to do this, I thought, 'Sure, they're going to come out with some Elliot Carter string quartets.' But what they were talking about at last was bringing out for the first time the full orchestral score of *Porgy and Bess*. And on the agenda was one volume of boogie-woogie piano. When I mentioned Will Marion Cook's *In Dahomey*, which I think is a fabulous work from 1902, I was surprised to find that there were fifteen or twenty representatives -- academics -- who admitted they knew who Will Marion Cook was, they knew *In Dahomey*, and they knew that it had never been published in a full score. A full score did not exist. It was a piano vocal score. And they could start singing tunes from it.

"These people were coming out of the woodwork. They had been hiding before.

"Shortly before this, I had a surprise when Sam Floyd was at Fisk University. He had a conference. Someone read a paper on three Miles Davis versions of *My Funny Valentine*. And I knew the guy's name -- Howard Brofksy, an eighteenth century specialist from Brooklyn College. Afterwards we had a drink, and I said, 'How did you get out of the eighteenth century?"

"He said, 'I worked my way through college playing jazz. But it was not considered legitimate. So as soon as I got my degree, I put it out of my mind, and only got up enough courage in the past few years to go back to it.' He had never heard John Coltrane. But after having had the kinds of experience Howard had had in other music, he was ready to assimilate and evaluate things much, much faster than if he had grown up with it.

"You've objected in your writings to the story that the black jazz musician is born with it and doesn't have to practice. Coltrane is a good case in point of real, hard practice. People are surprised when they find out that one of the most worn volumes in Coltrane's library was Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Musical Scales*.

"But that message that you've complained about gets through to our kids, and they feel that they don't have to practice because they're black. Or it's: 'I'm black so I'm qualified to teach black music.'"

"Or," I suggested, "they get discouraged when it doesn't come easy. They think, 'I'm supposed to be able to play this trumpet in twenty minutes,' and when they can't, they quit."

"Exactly!" Dominique said emphatically. "You're not kidding. That, seriously, is the attitude. They don't have to practice, somehow it's going to work. They don't realize the biographical details behind figures who had to do the practice. They need to know what Miles Davis has to say about Ravel.

"There was a house of pleasure in St. Louis run by Babe Connors. She had, among other offerings, a rather rich musical life. The pianist who played there attracted Paderewski's attention. And he frequented the place just to hear the pianist.

"So when we speak about the contacts that Jelly Roll Morton might have had with opera in New Orleans -- and there's no question that he had, because he knew the material -- I wonder what contact performers and composers who visited this country had with black music. For example, when Ravel came, he wanted to go and hear Jimmy Noone in Chicago. Immediately. When Milhaud came to the United States in 1921, he wanted to go to a jazz club in Harlem. That was before he wrote *La Creation du Monde*. These were the kinds of contacts Europe had with black music."

"I think that's well verified," I said. "Gene Krupa was working in a club in Chicago and saw Ravel in the audience. Joe Venuti said Ravel came to visit him and Gershwin."

"Now," Dominique said, "I wonder if Ravel when he was in France took advantage of the chance to hear Jim Europe's band."

"I would think it's almost impossible that he didn't. Look at Debussy going to the Javanese exhibit at the Paris Exhibition of 1889. And the French were interested in the Russians, and anything they saw as exotic."

Dominique said, "Dvorak *seems* to have known the spirituals before he came to the United States."

"Will Marion Cook studied with Dvorak. And consider the case of Milton Hinton, who might not have been a jazz bassist had he been allowed into a symphony orchestra as a violinist."

"Not to denigrate jazz in any way," Dominique said, "but that kind of prejudiced exclusion created a lot of jazz musicians, and enriched jazz. In the case of Dvorak, the Fisk Jubilee Singers gave their first concert in the United States in 1871. Subsequently they toured Europe. Fisk University brought me in to look over in their special collections all the materials of the singers. They have the originals, programs, mementoes, a scrap book for example. At that time it was customary in Europe for the audience to give the singers little photographs of themselves, as well as autographs, all of which went into the book. On one page, I found autographs of Moody and Sanky, who were American white gospel writers. They attended the concert in Scotland, I think it was. And there were letters. There was a proposal from a guy in Nashville to his girlfriend who was touring Europe with the company. His letters are not there, but her responses are. She turned him down. There is this wonderful, elegant language of these liberal-arts educated black students in the nineteenth century: very very proper. There's a whole drama here that has not been told, despite the publications that came out very soon after the tour.

"I think that whole history has to be looked at very carefully, with day-by-day documentation. Where were the singers, in what city? And is there a point -- not just Fisk, but the Hampton Singers were there -- when the chronology overlaps, and we can find that Dvorak might have been, I don't know, in Leipzig or Dresden, when a black chorus was there and had first contact with the spirituals. That same kind of comparative relationship might pinpoint specifically what Debussy or Ravel or any of the other composers who were so strongly attracted to American music actually heard. *The Golliwog's Cakewalk* of Debussy is a charming, lovely, terribly French

piece, but it is really not ragtime, which the cakewalk is. Then if you look at the ragtime music Sousa's band had played in Paris just a few years before he wrote this, it is white ragtime. But it's not Scott Joplin. It's not this additive rhythm that really distinguishes ragtime. How much authentic black music did Debussy get a chance to meet before his death?

"As far as Ravel is concerned, you were speaking about Gottschalk absorbing all kinds of influences."

"All of them," I said. "European, Caribbean, Cuban, Brazilian. He traveled so much. I've always said, with all due respect to John Lewis, whom I admire immensely, if you're going to say who is the founder of a Third Stream in American music, I'd have to say it's Gottschalk. Putting habaneras in a symphony orchestra, and things of that kind . . . "

"And how is that tradition retained?"

"It isn't followed immediately."

"That's the problem," Dominique said.

"Bob Offergeld says the critics rejected him." (Bob Offergeld, the music editor of *Stereo Review* who hired me in 1962, a brilliant scholar who became one of my major mentors, had done years of research on Gottschalk, and published the first extensive catalogue of his work. As the Mozart music bears K. numbers, the Gottschalk music now carries R.O. numbers, for Robert Offergeld. Dominique said he wanted to meet Offergeld; I said I'd arrange it. Bob died in New York last month, and so Dominique never met him.) "Gottschalk's stuff was extremely difficult to play, very challenging. And even if you bothered to master it, all it would get you was bad reviews. From the time Gottschalk died in 1869, there is a long lag. By the way, the 1971 Britannica doesn't even mention him. But from the time he died until John Lewis and Gunther Schuller and their colleagues, there's about a hundred year gap. I think the movie composers enormously advanced the integration of European concert tradition and American influences, including jazz. Guys like Henry Mancini, Johnny Mandel, Oliver Nelson, Benny Carter. I was talking about you to Benny recently. How you'd made me more aware of the black classical participation. Benny said, 'It doesn't matter that it was black. The question is: Is it any good?'

"That," Dominique said, "is the complete reversal of the attitude of twenty years ago, when T.J. Anderson said, 'It doesn't matter whether it's good, what's important is that it was written by a black composer.'

"I ask my students: What is black? Do you know black when you see it? And they have all kinds of misconceptions."

"Are these students mostly black?"

Dominique chuckled. "If they're not at the beginning of the semester, they are by the time it's over. Just as if I were teaching a course on Mozart, by the time we got to the end of the semester they would all be eighteenth century Rationalists.

"Let's admit the fact that black is not really all that pure. When you think of Willie the Lion Smith, he was a cantor. The Jewish element is there. I know a lot of people who ignore the Indian background or the Jewish background or something else, and consider black is black and that's all there is to it. Consider somebody like Roque Cordero who is a fantastic twelve-tone composer born in 1917 in Panama. He was originally offended when we included him on the black composers series with Columbia. He said, 'Why do you call me a black composer? I'm Panamanian. Panamanian means black, Indian, and Spanish.'

"I said, 'Roque, William Grant still was born in Woodville, Mississippi, and he was black, Indian, and Spanish. But also Welsh and Irish. And he is not regarded as an American composer, but as a black composer.'

"And what do you know, one thing that my students eventually come up with is that as black nationalists, they have been co-operating with the white racists.

"It's been rare that I have found people who on their own are willing to acknowledge the diversification that exists within the black society. I went to dinner with a retired judge and his lawyer son in St. Louis, sat down at the table ready to eat my chicken, watermelon, and everything like that. The conversation at the table was already in progress. A lady said, 'Oh yes, honey, we've already traced down all the black folks in the family. Now we're gonna start on the white folks.' It was said without any shame.

"We have a choreographer here in Baltimore who is absolutely fabulous. In all contexts she is called black. But her great great grandfather was Jefferson Davis. Now the thing is, when you say black, what you really are saying -- and excuse me, I really don't mean to be a flag-waver, I'm not waving the flag for anything -- but what you're talking is American. Black is American. I think there's a great deal of shaking up of philosophies and attitudes that needs to be done. An awful lot of the militant viewpoint is exactly what the white racists want it to be. The separate attitudes. Only blacks can do this. Just keep it segregated and you don't have to worry about it.

"But it's a misconception, and it perpetuates the mythology that if you're black you automatically can do such-and-such in music. Which is not so."

"Some of the people who co-operated most passionately in this," I said, "have been white writers. It suggests that these black musicians were so bloody dumb that they were unaware of what else was going on in the culture. It implies a ghettoization of the intellect."

"There were restrictions, no question," Dominique said. "But the minute any barrier is opened, as in New York City and in New Orleans at a certain time, there's no doubt that the musicians took advantage of it. If they were able to get to the opera, get to this concert, get to talk with this person, to move in that society, they did it. The Harlem Renaissance was a flourishing of enormous black talent with white, Jewish, liberal support all the way down the line."

"Where and when does the black participation in America in what we imprecisely call classical music begin?" I asked.

"The earliest figure in the western hemisphere whose music I can get my hands on was a contemporary of Monteverdi. Her name -- and it was a lady -- was Teodora Gines. She was born within one generation after Columbus landed on the island of Hispaniola. She was very influential on the music of the Caribbean. How much earlier we can go, I don't know,

because we're dealing with a culture that's got to be acculturated. Because as soon as you put down notation, this is not an African thing to do. But we have it already by 1600.

"As far as the United States is concerned, I don't think it was ever really necessary in the past to go to a conservatory to get a degree before you could become a composer. The opportunity for gifted or interested blacks to associate with musicians, to come in contact with contemporary musical thought, really did not exist very strongly, certainly not in the south. We don't know the name of a single composer of the spirituals. I know of only one composer who was born into slavery, and that was Blind Tom, born in 1849, who stayed in slavery after the Emancipation. Here was this guy, who had an ear every bit as good as Mozart's or Mendelssohn's, who never really was properly exposed to the music of his time. I mean, maybe he played Beethoven or Bach or Chopin, I'm not sure, but the people he really was pushed on were the Fakers. Look at the music he wrote: *The Rainstorm, The Sewing Machine*, things of this sort, little descriptive pieces to cater to Confederate society, that was not awfully musically literate in the first place. The people who liked to listen to little tunes in the parlor that did not have any musical substance but reminded them of something non-musical, waterfalls or sunsets or something.

"And his owner had no interest in providing him with the kind of exposure and contact that Mozart had when Mozart was little. He died unhappy because he knew he'd been exploited. He got ten percent of his income, and never really developed his talent.

"There was not in this country any interest or need in developing serious, non-utilitarian composers in the nineteenth century. With the social limitations on black musicians, it's a matter of counting the doors that got opened and when they got opened and who opened them. For example, minstrelsy, after the Civil War, with somebody like James Bland. But minstrelsy is not going to produce normally, you would think, an art song that would make it to the recital hall today, if that is in fact what people in the past lived for. We do have Marilyn Horne singing *I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair* with harp. And we could also have James Bland -- for example, the state song of Virginia, *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny* by James Bland. But now some revisionists decide that it would probably be better not to use any of the Jim Bland tune because it refers to the darkies and magnolias and it's nostalgic for slavery. They made it the state song knowing that Jim Bland was black."

"Was he tomming when he wrote it?"

"He was being free when he wrote it. He could not have done this before. Now at last he could write songs about the darkies. We can't evaluate those times by looking backwards. We have to look forward as it was in their minds. Never had they known freedom, and then to be granted it. And if they had a good slave-owner, and had never known anything but slave-owning, they were appreciative of it. So maybe the magnolias really were rather nice on some plantations.

"With minstrelsy ending toward the end of the century, if you wanted to be a great composer, you had the opportunity of writing coon songs, like Ernest Hogan. The question comes up: What would have happened if Leontyne Price had been around a hundred years ago? Instead of one of the arias that she sings for encores, maybe at the end of minstrel show the audience would be clammering for her to sing Ernest Hogan's *All Coons Look Alike to Me*. And that would have been the high spot of the evening for Leontyne Price.

"But in the midst of this atmosphere came Will Marion Cook, who had very serious academic training at Oberlin, and in Germany with Josef Joachim. Cook regarded himself as being a pretty good violinist. He gave a recital. The critics said he was the best Negro violinist in the country. Cook went to a critic's desk and said, 'You wrote this review, saying I am the best Negro violinist in the country?' The critic said, 'Yes.' Cook said, 'I'm the best violinist in the country,' took out his violin, smashed it on the critic's desk, and never touched the instrument again. It's a true story. It was reported to me by Maurice Peress, who worked with Duke Ellington, was conductor of the orchestra in Kansas City, and now is teaching at New York University. He recreated the James Reese Europe concert at Carnegie Hall. He's done some very good research.

"But then Will Marion Cook opened the doors for musical theater in New York, which had not been open to blacks before. That was in the first decade of the century. But we still don't have the composer who wants to write a symphony. We don't have any black musicians who knew Charles Ives, who was writing symphonies at the time. Then in the teens, there were a variety of problems, with Jim Europe being the prime figure. But he spent part of his time in Europe and then died in 1919. And then in the 1920s, we got the Harlem Renaissance and suddenly here flourishes all this talent that had been in the wings, waiting for opportunities.

"William Grant Still might be symptomatic. Somebody who worked for W.C. Handy, who played in a Broadway show, *Shuffle Along*, who wrote music for the Old Gold show and Artie Shaw, and all this time was thinking that what he'd like to do was write a symphony. He had ambitions that went beyond the stereotype. So he opened a door.

"At the same time, there are some other people who did not break out of the stereotype, like James P. Johnson, one of the most enjoyable pianists I have heard in my life, an absolute genius, and an awfully good composer: sophisticated, urbane. And he wanted to follow a path very much like Still. I think a lot of Harlem Renaissance people might have had these ambitions. He wanted to write piano concertos. But he made his money in shows on Broadway, and playing piano, and things of that sort, and by the time he had leisure, he'd already had a stroke. He did try his hand at some works for piano and orchestra -- not awfully good. There needed to be some experience in working with extended forms, as Duke Ellington found out also.

"The same thing with writing an opera. I think Gershwin in *Porgy and Bess* became an American Puccini. *Porgy and Bess* is a very moving experience. It is awfully valid."

I said, "Todd Duncan, who created the role of Porgy, was

interviewed on television. He took exception with those black musicians who objected to it on grounds that it was written by white guys. He said it was not popular music, it was opera and should be judged by that. The logical extension of that is that Verdi shouldn't have written *Aida* because he wasn't Egyptian and Puccini shouldn't have written *Madama Butterfly* because he was neither American nor Japanese. And by further extension that no black American should ever write an opera about, say, Elizabeth and Essex."

Dominique said, "I am giving a talk next month at a university in northern Wisconsin. When I talked with the dean, he said, 'Now you have to understand that there are no blacks in our area.'

"I said, 'You're talking Scandinavian and German Lutherans.'

"He said, 'That's exactly it.'

"I said, 'I understand. So there won't be any blacks in the audience. Tell me, in your course work, do you deal with Bellini, Rossini, Verdi, and Puccini?'

"He said, 'Yes.'

"I said, 'Do you have any Italians there?'

"He said, 'No. Aha, I see what you mean.'

"When we're dealing with the subject of black, whether in music or not, there are two possibilities for approaching the subject, which need to be admitted right from the very beginning. One is political and one is parallel. And if it's political, you admit it's political and you fight the battle that way. If it's a matter that there are not enough black teachers in a school, that's a political thing. It certainly is not parallel. Just because your skin is black doesn't mean you know anything about jazz.

"I visited another school last year. The jazz teacher, who worked very very hard to get the course going and is doing an awfully good job, is not eligible for a position at another school because he's white.

"I said, 'I don't understand.'

"He said, 'Because jazz is black music.'

"I said, 'So? If you were a specialist in Bach, does that mean you have to be an eighteenth century musician who was born in Saxony? You can't find very many people who were born in the eighteenth century who have PhDs and are eligible to teach in a college today.' That's a parallel situation. If you know the material, you know the material, that's all.

"The Negro String Quartet, sometimes called the American String Quartet, was there in New York early in the century. One of the players is still alive in New York, Marion Cumbo. There was a string quartet in Atlanta around the same time."

I said, "How do you account for the bass player with Buddy Bolden in 1906 holding his hand on the neck of the bass in the correct symphony fingering position?"

Dominique said, "What needs to be done very badly is iconographic studies. If we admit that black musicians perform rather than write about their performance, that observers don't always see anything -- the camera sees more than gets written about. For example, the early pictures of Duke Ellington's band, when Sonny Greer is there with an enormous array of percussion instruments that you never hear on the recordings, cymbals and tympani and tam-tams. Maybe it was posed for Zildjian cymbals . . . "

"No, it was there on the bandstand. I saw that band when I was very young, and he really did have all those things."

"Did you ever see it get used?"

"Nope."

And both of us laughed.

"What are you doing now?" I asked at last.

And Dominique, with the wry self-deprecation I was rapidly getting used to, said:

"I'm teaching two courses that I'm not qualified to do. One is solfege. This is at the freshman and sophomore level. The students don't know how to listen to music, so how can they listen to music? They don't know what to listen for.

"I also have an undergraduate music history course. We have spent the entire semester on St. Georges, Haydn, and Mozart. And I have a seminar on the music of black composers at Peabody. It's designed as a practical course for people going into careers as performers. It's on Ulysses Kay, William Grant Still, Antonio Carlos Gomes, Jose Mauricio Nunes Garcia, T.J. Anderson, Hale Smith, Primus Fountain."

But he was thinking of making a change, he said. He'd had attractive offers from a couple of universities. As he left, I urged him to send me his new address, if he did move.

A few months later, I got a card from him, saying he had taken a new post as assistant director of the black music studies program at Columbia College in Chicago. "I hope we can get together again soon," he wrote on it. And I wrote back: "How about next Wednesday at the Blackstone?" The Blackstone Hotel is about four buildings down Michigan Avenue from Columbia College. The Blackstone and Columbia alike overlook the magnificent spread of Grant Park and, beyond it, Lake Michigan.

And so I saw him again. He was enthusiastic about his new post. He said the college had just hired an expert librarian to catalogue the materials it was acquiring. I asked him if he would like to have all my research materials for the *Jazzletter* as well as the taped interviews that went into the Oscar Peterson biography. "Yes!"

"And my computer disks?"

"Absolutely!"

"How about the materials on white musicians?"

"Absolutely. For one thing, how can you understand the career of Marian Anderson if you don't know Bach?"

I predicted that he would love Chicago. It is beautiful, it has excellent restaurants, art galleries, museums, and parks, and a strong tradition of jazz, with a particular emphasis on pianists. "But I must warn you, Dominique," I said, thinking that he's from Miami, "this town is really serious about *cold*."

A few weeks later he phoned me. He had a sort of excitement in his voice. He was getting the feel of the city. He said, with a little boy's sense of wonder, "If I look straight out of my apartment window, I can see the whole panorama of Chicago. But if I look *down*, I'm looking at the exact spot where King Oliver and Louis Armstrong got off the train!"