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Media
The Man in Canoe Lake

The Dallas arranger Dave Zoller sent me The Music Page of the Dallas Morning News edition of August 20, 1992. Under a seven-column head was an article by Michael Corcoran, the "Country Music Critic" of the paper. There are in Dallas -- in Texas generally -- excellent jazz players who double in country music. They must have been rolling with laughter at Corcoran.

In an article titled *Death Becomes Them*, he asserts that this person or that is over-rated (Jim Morrison, Otis Redding) or under-rated (Hank Williams, Roy Orbison). How Hank Williams, an icon in country music, can be considered under-rated is beyond me. Toward the end of the article, Mr. Corcoran delivers himself of this pontification:

"**Charlie Parker.** I just spent an hour listening to this legendary sax player, and it sounded like he was just making that stuff up as he went along. Some talent."

It is the most egregious example of ignorance in a music critic I have seen in many a year, but, alas, not without precedent. For a Village Voice article, the arranger and musicologist Andrew Homzy recently exhumed this comment from a 1943 issue of the British magazine Jazz Music:

"(Billy) Strayhorn is an example of today's youth in jazz. He throws tradition overboard. He will have originality at the expense of beauty. His work is entirely to be deplored . . . . Playing *Rain Check*, one finds an illogical and complex hodge-podge. There is no swing inherent in the arrangement. There is no simple lilting melody, such as Duke can write and upon which the jazz musician will happily improvise. The whole thing is like a canvas covered with sprawling splodges of paint lobbed by a painter from the other side of his studio. Listen to Strayhorn's *Chloe*. It contains two rich and revolting passages by straight trumpets which are as out of place as ham at a Jewish picnic. Listen to all his stereotyped, effeminate little swing-band arrangements for the small Ellington unit . . . . Listen to *Chelsea Bridge*, an example of an obsession with tone color and voicing, which excludes everything else that matters. But enough of Mr. Strayhorn. He is a bore."

The author was Stanley Dance.

Newspapers assign the task of criticism pretty much to anyone who stumps hard enough for the job and knows more about the subject than the managing editor, which doesn't have to be much. Since journalists tend to pride themselves on tough-mindedness, and since that requires a certain detached insensitivity, they've never been much on the arts: you can almost depend on the aesthetic callousness of city editors and managing editors, although I have known a few exceptions. To them, the arts are sissy stuff: Tennessee Williams and William Inge and Sibelius and Stravinsky, of whom they may have heard, and Lester Young and John Clayton, of whom they indubitably haven't.

So some kid from city desk who claims to know something about music, and whose covert motive is to get free records and passes to concerts, pushes for the job and, by default, gets it. The arts don't matter. Not like the sports page. Nelson Algren said of such people that they had "parlayed an urge to punish into a press pass." John Wasserman, the arrogant and ignorant music critic of the San Francisco Chronicle who ended his dedicated drinking career by plowing his car head-on into another one and taking two innocent people out of this world with him, used to boast that he had never read a book. Claudia Cassidy, the infamously vicious music critic of the Chicago Tribune, caused immense gratuitous pain during her reign there.

Thomson · The Jack Pine

Someone at the Dallas Morning News should make a few inquiries, and if Mr. Corcoran cannot be restrained from such weird assertions as that Hank Williams is under-rated, he should at least be abjured to stay out of areas of music he knows even less about than he does about country. If my friend Thumbs Carllile, one of the greatest of all country-and-western guitarists, were alive, he'd be laughing with the rest of us at that comment on Charlie Parker. Thumbs assuredly was just making all that stuff up as he went along -- he couldn't read a note. So was Hank Garland, a great country guitarist who crossed the line into jazz, as Lenny Breau did. And so, when he was playing seriously, was Jerry Reed. The country players, too, are just making that stuff up as they go along.

At minimum, how abjectly stupid it is to admit publicly that

you have drawn a conclusion about a major historical figure in the arts after only an hour's consideration. One shudders to think what Mr. Corcoran might make of, say, Ligeti or Berio. One shudders even more to think the Dallas Morning News might let his opinions on such topics leak into print.

Some years ago, Tom Wolfe published a book called *The Painted Word,* in which he pilloried art criticism and critics. Its thesis was that what was said about paintings and painters was given more importance than the work itself. The book was excoriated by some critics, for of course critics have to justify their existence, pretend there is a need for them.

The only possible function of criticism is to teach. It is not about whether the writer likes or dislikes this record or that.

Whenever I have written that anyone who does not have a technical knowledge of music has no business writing jazz criticism, members of the uneducated press rise to the defense of unschooled opinion. Why they don't sign up, say, for the Berklee correspondence course in harmony and composition and acquire the tools that would enable them to be of real value to the art they profess to love, is mystifying.

When I was a student at the Ontario College of Art right after World War II -- going to school with all the returned airmen and sailors and soldiers in their flight boots and fly-boy gold-rimmed sunglasses and faded battle dress -- the overwhelming giant of Canadian art was Tom Thomson, who drowned in one of the northern Ontario lakes whose brooding beauty he had memorialized in his work. Thomson inspired a group of painters known as the Group of Seven, whose members -- among them Lawren Harris, whose work I adore, and A.Y. Jackson, whom I met once or twice -- collectively shaped the Canadian visual consciousness. Including mine.

For reasons I have never been able to fathom, Canada has led the world in graphics. Visual design has always been at a higher level there than in the United States, even in postage stamps. Considering how Canada has lagged behind the U.S. in other arts -- you can spot Canadian films by bad lighting; most, such as the Vancouver-made TV series *Street Justice*, are technically dreadful -- this is a mystery. The logos for CNN and NASA are plagiarisms of the CN logo, designed by a typographical genius named Allan Fleming for Canadian National Railways.

The strangest trait of Canadians is a destructive intolerance of their own, a Canadian skepticism of Canadians. It is one reason so many of the interesting, from Mack Sennett, the Warner Brothers, and Louis B. Mayer to Donald Sutherland, Leslie Nielsen, and Michael J. Fox, from Bat Masterson to John Kenneth Galbraith, pack up and head south. Or to England.

The Toronto Star used to nurture a venomous traditionalist jazz critic named Patrick Scott who hated Oscar Peterson with a manic ferocity. As one of Oscar's friends put it, "Pat Scott would fly to Frozen Lung, Saskatchewan, for a one-nighter as an excuse to put Oscar down."

When I proposed to a Canadian magazine an article about Rob McConnell and the Boss Brass, the editor said, "Do you really think they're that good? We think of them as just a pretty good local band."

David Steinberg, the comedian, who is from Winnipeg, said, "Canadians devour their young." Christopher Plummer, who is from Toronto and Montreal, said to me, "It's a wonder any of us got out of there with our talent intact." The late Lorne Green, who was from Ottawa, and I discussed this odd quality of the Canadians. Bobby Scott was aware of it said, "What makes them that way?" I said, "If you figure it out, let me know."

Thomson The West Wi

This leads to the name of Harold Towne, with which you are if you're American undoubtedly unfamiliar, and maybe unfamiliar even if you're Canadian. Harold Towne must have been attending the Ontario College of Art at the same time I did, although a couple of years ahead of me. I never met him during those student years; indeed I never met him at all. But he knew my work and I knew his.

Harold Towne became one of the finest graphic artists of the latter half of the twentieth century, with work hung in galleries around the world. Two years ago he died -- according to mutual friends -- an angry man, because Canadian art critics had treated him more or less the way Pat Scott treated Oscar Peterson.

Harold Towne had another problem: he wrote better -- far, far better! -- than the art critics. As a master of prose, he hadn't a rival in sight among the critics of anything, anywhere. To read Harold Towne is to gain an instant insight not only into

painting but into the artistic process itself. The man was a genius, a great artist and a great writer.

It seems there was no medium that Towne hadn't mastered, oils, pen, watercolors. He could be startlingly realistic, a sort of more precise David Stone Martin. His drawings have a steely quality. And he could paint brilliant abstractions. I have never encountered an artist of Towne's versatility.

In 1977, Towne and art historian David P. Silcox collaborated on a book called *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*, which is now back in print. (McClelland and Stewart, Toronto.) Silcox wrote the historical material, Towne the analyses. It consists of 220 pages of text and superb color reproductions, including the most famous Thomson pictures such as *The Jack Pine* and *The West Wind*. Towne opens with prose as clean and cutting as his drawings.

"Above Picasso's protean achievements flies a banner cut from the lives of women who punctuated his career and received in the popular press as much attention as his work. Jackson Pollock's death, in a tangle of girls and crumpled steel, when inflated by the huge prices currently paid for his paintings, is more interesting to the public than the fact that academic abstractionists have circled back to his breakthrough style, making his art central again to the problems of modern painting. Van Gogh's torment, his struggle with private demons and public contempt, has been trivialized in mass entertainment by his ear, a bloody present for a strumpet who wouldn't hear his cry. The painter's ear, though an inept symbol for his extraordinary life, is an appropriate one for the dilemma of contemporary art, which is covered by a slick guano of words disguised as criticism while in fact being nothing more than advertising copy, press-agentry and an easy game for tenth-rate sensibilities.

"People prefer to read about painters, to hear about painting, to speculate in the art market -- anything rather than look at painting, anything but make art a re-creative part of their lives. Painting is a pariah waiting to be told by art authorities where to stand and beg, so as not to interfere with the flow of commerce in the marketplace."

No wonder the critics didn't like him.

"In Canada the canvases of Tom Thomson are seen through a scrim of printed supposition on which is projected his death in the waters of Canoe Lake -- waters that since that time have been continually muddied by the club-footed wading of art ghouls and plain fools who have turned his creative Odyssey into the pedestrian plot for a drug-rack paperback. Unquestionably, Tom Thomson is Canada's most famous artist, yet only a few of his works are well known and those are mainly his studio machines, the heavy efforts near to his talent but far from his heart."

Towne says: "Traditionally Canadians have accepted foreign domination in the arts as naturally as medieval peasants the power of the barons, and without a whimper we have delivered up our bounty for everything from doctored French wine to doctored economic theory. Recently, with the growth of Canadian nationalism, we have given the mantle of fame to a few of our own, but grudgingly (a certain segment of Canada academia seems determined to reduce the experimental brilliance of Marshall McLuhan to the level of provincial eccentricity). However, the deification of Tom Thomson is complete, solidified in sales that have broken Canadian records. His works are no longer paintings but stock in an investment portfolio, or a neat tax write-off -- pictures that are distanced from simple understanding with every price rise. Thomson's life rather than his art is searched by the national consciousness for hints, portents, and even criminal reasons for his premature death at the height of his powers. Though artificially inflated, the tragedy of Thomson's death fulfills the Canadian love of defeat and annihilation, a national tick that may be explained by our tiny seasons of pleasure. Harried by cold, we jerk about to a rigid rhythm of slow growth and expeditious dying. Our short, nearly non-existent summers, in which flowers wither and fall before we know their names, as birds nest and vanish leaving a random feather blowing in brief sun, entice us into another cycle of life. But they do not satisfy. Thomson's slow development and sudden departure precisely duplicated the severity of our climate. Bloated in the water, dead before the leaves of fall, (he) spelled out a symbolic end to the Canadian art we colonials had no right to expect. Tragedy could be substituted for promise; we would mourn Thomson and forget Canadian art . . . .

"In an eerie manner the Group of Seven, formed after Thomson's death, unconsciously promoted a sense of loss. Summer, that joy at the center of most schools of landscape painting with its quietus of green, appears rarely in their work. Absent are Corot's quick-silver fugues of leaf, Constable's pulsating shadows aching with life, the cartwheeling exuberance of Marin's sky-crazed inscapes, Monet's golden muffins of hay or his waterlilies capable of persuading Ophelia to live. Instead, our painters gave us spring, that glimpse of a season, or the garishness of fall and the embalming death of snow, but rarely hedonistic summer. It became the illegitimate season of Canadian art. Green was on the proscribed list . . . . Summer was for foreigners; we preferred to suffer."

I need only examine my own lyrics to see it; and see again how profoundly Thomson influenced my very thought processes.

And then Towne digs in. He tells us how the work was made. "The latent violence of (Thomson's) character inclined him to face down the storm and bash and thump the canvas into plasticized diminutions of form and fugitive light. His color, aided by a stiff-armed brush, had a natural roughness. Thomson was not a wrist painter; he jabbed a picture into submission and consequently did not have to strain for roughness . . . .

"In the making of significant art, there is no middle ground, no safe pasture for the meandering stream of quiet talent.

Really bad art is close at any given moment to high art, for high art is the art of failure, a constantly interrupted journey to some impossible reality at the center of the brain . . . .

"Thomson, however, did not fail. His death saw to that. He was moving forward and there was no wall yet in front of his ambition . . . . His skill was greater than generally conceded and he knew it. The silence and woodsy simplicity was possibly a disguise, even a defense against the revelation of a masterly technique, for open ability has never been admired in Canada.

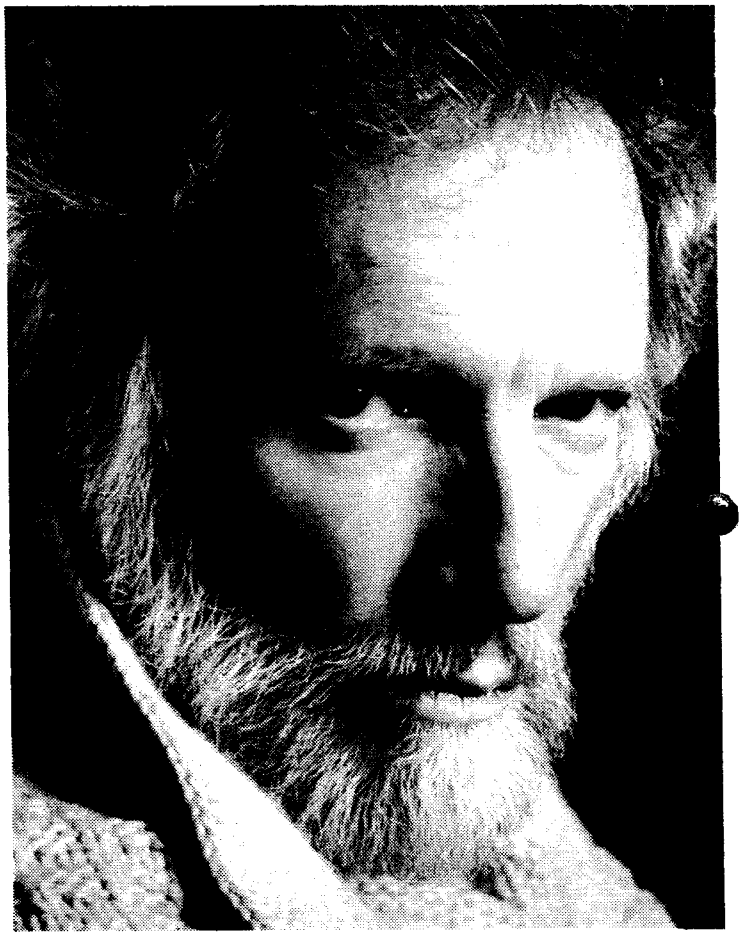
"Thomson could manipulate a brush with easy virtuosity, hesitating in the middle of a stroke, turning abruptly during sweep, flattening and extending the width, contracting, rolling the hair to its edge without, like a great baseball pitcher, losing his rhythm. The brush caught just enough of the wet underpainting to adhere and mark the pigment without muddying the individual hues. When necessary Thomson pressed down and produced a neutralized squash of color that saved him from interrupting a stabbing arm movement by mixing on the palette those indeterminate shadows of oil that referee the struggle between brilliant colors. He mastered a trick common to hacks who paint flowers on trays, in which the brush is loaded with local color, then a judicious amount of pure color is picked up by the edge of the brush so that the major tone of the stroke is delivered to the canvas with a streaking of pure color. It is a minor though useful aid to a painter's cunning and requires a refined sensibility to avoid the look of midway kitsch."

If you have no interest in painting, then I have indulged your patience too long. But the foregoing is central to some points I wish to make, one of which is that the articulate artist produces far better and certainly infinitely more informative writing about art than then even the most fervent lay critic. Martin Williams and Ralph Gleason had little technical knowledge of music, which did not deter them from intemperate opinion. George Hoefer, a pioneer writer about jazz, neither knew music nor had the disciplined respect for fact that marks a good reporter.

When Bobby Scott wrote about Gene Krupa or Lester Young, he did not venture into the technical, but underlying every word Bobby put on paper was the fact that he knew. He knew what he was talking about, writing about. One prominent jazz critic in America who has a real technical knowledge of music (I consider James Lincoln Collier a historian; he doesn't write criticism) is Leonard Feather. It rarely shows because Leonard is always writing for a lay audience. I once showed Leonard the score to a piece of music to which I had to write lyrics. This was a full two-stave piano score, a blizzard of black. Leonard put his finger on a chord in the middle of that page and said, "What's this B-natural doing against a B-flat diminished chord?" As it happens, the nature of the melodic motion worked, but I too had paused over that chord. The point is that Leonard saw it instantly.

There are others. Don Asher is a fine writer and a fine pianist. The self-effacing Richard Hadlock, who studied soprano saxophone with Sidney Bechet, is a writer and musician. Richard Sudhalter, Burt Korall, Chuck Berg, Owen Cordle, Don Heckman, and Benny Green have pursued parallel careers as musicians and writers. The late Don DeMicheal was a very good musician, and I learned from him. Max Harrison has a substantial classical piano background. His reviews can be quite destructively vicious, seething with hate: there seems to no love in the man. But he is not ignorant, except about the American culture. Dick Sudhalter is a cornetist in a traditional style and a very fine writer. Like Harrison, he offers proof that knowledge does not bestow fairness. When Sudhalter says that bebop is nervous music, he, like Harrison and so many others, falls into the trap of the unexamined belief that his reaction to a piece of art is a fact about the work when it is only a fact about himself.

Being a musician may not make you fair, but at least musician's writing about the music will be informed, and all the aforementioned people are worth reading for insights.



Harold Towne Photo by John Reeves

James Lincoln Collier's biography of Duke Ellington infuriated the more dedicated Ellington acolytes, in part because he thinks the Ellington later "large" works aren't very good. Judged

by the standard of classical music, in fact, most of them aren't. They're a mish-mash of tunes, for Ellington never understood larger forms. A friend defended those pieces to me, saying, "But they have nice moments." I could only reply, "Sibelius has some nice half hours." I consider the Collier book very good, because of its detailed analysis of Ellington's work, which is not unlike Towne's writing about Thomson. Indeed, that book is not for laymen at all: like Alec Wilder's *American Popular Song*, another brilliant example of the artist writing about the art he knows, it can't really be "read" -- it has to be pondered at a piano, can be digested fully only by someone who is capable of following Collier's harmonic analysis.

Other excellent examples of the musician writing about music are found in the books of Gunther Schuller who, while slapdash in dealing with historical fact and unreliable in that regard, is a peerless analyst of music.

I have not reached the point of saying that laymen should not be allowed to write about art. Anyone has a right to write anything about anything. That is the foundation of our political system, the least bad we have yet been able to invent. But if these "ghouls and plain fools", in Towne's scathing phrase, have the right to write anything, I have the right not to read it, and I don't. I'd rather pore over the superb courses in harmony written by Gordon Delamont -- another late and by all accounts somewhat embittered Canadian -- whose legacy includes Rob McConnell and Rick Wilkins, both of whom he trained.

At least half the readership of this publication is made up of musicians. The rest are of high academic attainment, including doctors (as far as I can tell, the second largest group in the readership), a psychologist or two, a couple of psychiatrists, a number of attorneys, a physicist, and several writers. I am always conscious of the limitations of those who do not have a technical knowledge of music, and realize that some passages will bewilder them. Nonetheless, when something comes up of a technical nature, I do not cut it out. Red Mitchell's dissertation on tuning would be meaningless to some readers. But to a great many others, it would not, and a number of musicians have told me they found it fascinating, as I did. I would have committed a disservice to the subject -- in this case Red -- had I omitted it. For the rest, I can only hope they'll pass over that passage to the point where Red's message again becomes clear.

Last April, Henry Pleasants, who lives now in London, sent me a clipping from the Musical Times, noting that this publication rarely publishes writing about anything but classical music. The one-page essay, by Peter Pettinger, was about Bill Evans. Pettinger is an English classical pianist who, the magazine noted, had recorded all the piano music of Elgar. I wrote to Pettinger, and we have since become pen pals. With my encouragement, and the offer of any assistance I can give him, Peter is now writing a book analyzing Bill's recorded work in chronological order. I fully expect that book to be unprecedented in jazz history. When I read the short essay on Bill, I realized that it was akin to Harold Towne'a writing about art. I asked Pettinger and Musical Times for permission to reprint the piece, and you will encounter it later in this issue.

Bill Kirchner drew my attention to a new book on harmony by Dave Liebman. Bill, an arranger and saxophonist from Youngstown, Ohio, is now a fixture of the New York jazz world. He has two nonet albums on the Sea Breeze label. He has been too little recorded, but his writing drew a letter from Gerry Mulligan, who had earlier used that format, praising Bill for the freshness with which he had used the instrumentation.

Bill could be a great critic. Indeed at one time he wrote for the Washington Post. He is reluctant to do it, fearing, rightly, that it might put him in conflict with his fellow musicians. I have been urging Bill to start writing again, and he is beginning to unbend.

Somebody out there is thinking.

Two Important Studies

by Bill Kirchner

A dozen years ago, Alvin Toffler wrote an insightful and, in a number of ways, remarkably prophetic book called *The Third Wave*. In it he documented the rises and falls of the so-called First and Second Waves, the agricultural and industrial revolutions. The Second Wave, according to Toffler, has been in sharp decline since the mid-1950s, and the Third Wave, the techno-informational revolution, has been correspondingly on the rise. As Toffler documents in detail, many of our society's problems are due to the fact that societal institutions still mostly date from the Second Wave and are thus creaking at the foundations. The innovations of the Third Wave have been so numerous, swift, and far-reaching that our outmoded institutions can't keep up.

Jazz has certainly not been exempt from the Third Wave, as anyone even casually familiar with the music knows. A number of far-reaching innovations occurred during the 1960s that are still being absorbed by contemporary musicians. To pick one example, the second great Miles Davis Quintet -- the one with saxophonist Wayne Shorter and the rhythm sections of Herbie Hancock-Ron Carter-Tony Williams (1963-1968), and Chick Corea-Dave Holland-Jack DeJohnette (1969) -- set performing and compositional standards that many players still aspire to, with varying degrees of success. Interestingly, some of the most daring performances of Davis's 1960s quintets have just recently surfaced -- alas, often as bootleg concert recordings.

These thoughts and others come to mind in reviewing two invaluable books, David Liebman's *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody* and the late Rayburn Wright's *Inside the Score*. The former is newly released; the

latter has been available for a decade but is still being discovered. Together, these books give an enlightened and enlightening overview of a rapidly evolving subject, jazz harmony.

So, who should read them? Well, musicians first and foremost. Both books have been written by professionals for professionals and are highly detailed and technical. On the other hand, there is nothing in them that any reader endowed with curiosity, a moderately analytical mind, and a rudimentary knowledge of the keyboard can't follow. So I would recommend them to any non-musician with the foregoing attributes who wants to understand what has happened in jazz over the past three decades.

Liebman has some cogent observations about the dizzying developments in harmony that jazz has experienced -- formidable even by Toffleresque standards. First, he defines chromaticism as "the construction of melodies and harmonies which can coexist with, or replace, given key centers. It implies setting up contrary tonalities, thus creating a heightened degree of tension and release in order to expand one's expressive palette."

And then, fasten your seat belts:

"In its short history, the harmonic evolution of jazz has paralleled the preceding four hundred years of classical music. Early jazz up until bebop treated chromatic tones as passing notes. For example, the placement of the minor third in the blues scale, accompanied by the dominant seventh chord with its included major third, presented a chromatic clash. The same holds true for the flatted fifth of the blues scale. Later on, the bebop players conceptualized these same tones as part of an upper structure chord. The flatted third became the sharp nine while the flatted fifth became the sharp eleven. With the addition of other altered tones and scales incorporating them, a heightened sense of dissonance was achieved."

And after that: "In the late 1950s, the harmonic foundation of jazz began to reflect the trends of the twentieth century classical composers. Modal playing and free-bop necessitated the increased use of superimposed and dissonant tones. As the music of the 1960s demonstrates, the need for resolution of these tones and chords became weaker, depending upon the specific style and artist. These developments are well-documented, but suffice to say, the music of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Eric Dolphy, Paul Bley, John Coltrane, Miles Davis and others all reflected the increased use of superimposed dissonances as well as techniques such as intervallic cell development, use of tone rows, chord voicings built on intervals other than the usual thirds, and numerous devices. It was a tumultuous period of development, even more dramatic when noted that these things took place within the rhythmic milieu of jazz, and were executed in a spontaneous, improvised context."

This was all well and good (though some listeners might disagree), but as Liebman discovered, jazz pedagogy had some catching up to do:

"As I began to teach a new generation of musicians, it was clear that this type of playing was in their ears as a result of the major musical advances of the 1960s. Chromaticism was more natural to these younger musicians, but as is true in learning from purely aural circumstances, there were great gaps in the musical results. Many of these striving younger players were just hearing the surface of what they thought *playing outside* was. If I could organize some kind of systematic way of presenting the material in order that an interested musician could, by following my reasoning, attain good musical results, then the ear and mind would eventually take over and individualize this type of playing for each artist's purpose."

One of the most respected and influential post-Coltrane saxophonists, Liebman first achieved widespread recognition as a member of the Elvin Jones and Miles Davis groups in the early seventies. Since then, he has become an internationally respected leader or co-leader of his own bands, including Lookout Farm and the more recent Quest. He also has recorded in other settings, including duo, with his most frequent associate, pianist Richard Beirach.

That in his book he has accomplished his objective so well is an important step for jazz education, not only for musicians but for all serious observers. Unlike classical music people, among whom a consensus has evolved about what basic technical knowledge its practitioners need to have, jazz professionals (be they musicians, critics, concert producers, teachers, etc.) have a wide disparity of understanding. Some have enormous knowledge; others, relatively little. As a result, we see instances where musicians acclaimed as "cutting edge" innovators lack, to educated ears, even basic harmonic skills in playing or writing. Often this acclaim comes from observers and commentators who, whatever their verbal facility, intelligence, good intentions, and seasoned aesthetic instincts, know even less about technical matters than the "innovators" they applaud. If jazz is to continue to develop and mature in this era of consolidation (to put the best possible face on the situation), then it is more important than ever that we distinguish the truly innovative from the pretenders. An organized, widely absorbed body of knowledge about contemporary techniques is a must, and books such as Liebman's are thus essential.

It is difficult to do justice to the contents of Liebman's book in a short discussion. Suffice it to say that he systematically and in detail explores jazz harmony in four different genres: diatonic (pre-bebop), extended diatonic (bop-era "upper structures"), tonal chromaticism ("slash chords" and other post-bop harmonic techniques), and non-tonal chromaticism (harmonies without any orientation toward keys or roots). There are dozens of musical examples of scalar and voicing possibilities, excerpts from the jazz and classical repertoires, analyses of original compositions and recordings of Liebman and Richard Beirach, reharmonizations of standard tunes, compendiums of scales and voicings for

practice and study, and much more. The objective is not to lock the performer into becoming a "pattern player". Rather, it is on the development of a flexible, unique artistic sensibility. As Liebman puts it:

"An artist must truly want to discover other means of expression, so that one's vocabulary is so wide and varied that the only limitations to musical content are self-imposed and due to aesthetic choices rather than lack of knowledge. Ignorance is the enemy of truth and artistic freedom. True freedom to create comes from full cognizance of as many variables as possible."

Though Liebman touches on it only briefly, one of the most important -- and, ironically, least-discussed -- matters in contemporary jazz is the concept of rhythmic feel. A book could, and should, be done on this alone, but what Liebman says on the matter is crucial and should be further explored:

"As jazz has evolved harmonically, the eighth-note feel has become less syncopated. The dotted (eighth note followed by a sixteenth) or shuffle-type feel (derived from 12/8) has become smoother, accompanied by the more legato articulation . . . . One can hear this change in musicians whose careers span several decades, like Wayne Shorter and Miles Davis. As styles have changed, their time feel has evened out. This doesn't preclude using a dotted feel at times for contrast. But overuse of this kind of feel in conjunction with chromatic lines and harmonies can be a bit of a mismatch."

If Liebman's primary concern is with the improvising instrumentalist, the late Rayburn Wright's was with the composer/orchestrator. Yet their methods are surprisingly similar, and in Wright's *Inside the Score*, he exhibits a kinship to Liebman both in thoroughness and in a presentation that begins with diatonicism and works through increasingly chromatic idioms.

Until shortly before his death in 1990, Wright was the head of the Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media Program at the Eastman School of Music. An extraordinary teacher by any standard, he produced a considerable body of composer-arrangers, some of them now quite prominent, including Jeff Beal, David Berger, John Fedchock, Sy Johnson, Bevan Manson, Dave Matthews, Manny Mendelson, John Oddo, Mike Patterson, Lance Rubin, Maria Schneider, Dave Slonaker, and, I suppose I should mention, myself.

Wright was highly analytical but at the same time totally practical. His dissection of eight big-band scores here -- two by Sammy Nestico, three by Thad Jones, and three by Bob Brookmeyer -- is masterful. The scores are reprinted in their entirety -- transposed, but analyzed in concert directly underneath on the same pages, with detailed bar-by-bar comments, and framed with prologues that highlight the trademarks of each composer and by occasionally revealing interviews with the three writers. A helpful glossary of terms is also included. A shortcoming: the original recordings of these pieces -- Nestico's by Count Basie, Jones's by the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis band, and Brookmeyer's by Jones-Lewis and the later Mel Lewis band -- were not available, for reasons unknown. A recording of the charts is available with the book, but it is by a college band.

The Nestico scores included are *Basie -- Straight Ahead* and *Hay Burner*. Nestico's techniques are updated Swing Era diatonicism. He uses mostly four-tone chords and little reharmonization, and his most interesting details tend to be in form and development. While not the most adventurous writer Basie ever had -- consider Frank Foster, Thad Jones, and Billy Byers, for example -- Nestico is an accomplished, melodically attractive craftsman with a complete grasp of the style. The voicings he uses successfully here are meat-and-potatoes sounds we hear daily, ones that must be understood by any aspiring composer-arranger.

The late Thad Jones's contribution to jazz composition was an important and unique one. A nine-year-veteran of the Basie band, he was even more influenced by Ellington and by the innovations of the bop era. His writing could be described as a synthesis of Ellington's exotic cluster harmonies and the rhythmic and harmonic advances of bebop. Plus, he was an inventive melodist with a subtle, pixie-ish sense of humor.

The three Jones pieces examined here -- the medium-tempo swinger *Three and One*, a highly rhythmic ballad *Kids Are Pretty People*, and the jazz/rock *Us* -- contain all these elements. Thad Jones's writing revitalized conventional big-band jazz in the mid-1960s, and these examples give us insights as to why that happened. (Gil Evans's work, great and influential as it was, was conventional neither in instrumentation nor approach.)

Bob Brookmeyer has been a unique, unclassifiable musical thinker -- as valve trombonist, pianist, composer, and arranger -- for four decades. As might be expected, his three pieces (the swingingly complex *Hello and Goodbye*, a Thornhill-like *First Love Song*, and the quasi-atonal *ABC Blues* -- are the most harmonically advanced in Wright's book, though they are anything but commonplace in other areas either. Brookmeyer's scores are full of what Wright calls "synthetic harmonies" -- i.e., not identifiable as idiomatic jazz chords -- or what Liebman calls non-tonal chromaticism. What is perhaps most impressive is how well and often Brookmeyer breaks the rules of orthodox harmonic voicing; because of his first-rate knowledge and instincts, he succeeds where lesser writers would stumble.

In the past decade Brookmeyer's playing has changed dramatically. Often his pieces can no longer be called jazz but rather contemporary concert music a la Berio, Stockhausen, Boulez, etc. His grasp of this idiom has become increasingly personal. My own favorite of his most recent works is *One Man Show # 2*, recorded in Sweden in 1988, wherein Brookmeyer plays overdubbed pianos, synthesizers, and valve trombones.

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Bill Evans Observed

by Peter Pettinger

Without question, Bill Evans, a poet of the piano, was one of the greatest musicians ever to inhabit this planet. Well-known, loved and revered for more than three decades in jazz circles, his work surely speaks for us all. Categories are irrelevant when sheer quality is under consideration. Classically trained on flute, violin, and piano, Evans nevertheless made jazz, and most specifically the jazz piano trio, the medium of his life's achievement. This is a plea for his wider recognition.

Aside from the considerable legacy of recordings, I cherish memories of "live" sessions, obsessively attended into the small hours at the Village Vanguard, New York, and Ronnie Scott's, London. One might plead insanity in this regard, potentially invoking as I did not only the bank manager's wrath (I counted not the cumulative cost of a two-week engagement), but also invitations to a mugging on nightly tramps home at 3 a.m. from Greenwich Village to my midtown hotel. For two years or so, the stark New York streets proffered no assistant in the event of an encounter. What kind of musician could inspire this fanaticism, this devotion? Only one possessing such engrossing beauty of purpose and fulfillment as Bill Evans.

The first time the Bill Evans sound hit me was on a 1958 Miles Davis album known as *Jazz Track*, and I've been hooked ever since. Here, in the illustrious company of his own sextet, Miles squeezes out his spare, muted lines exquisitely. Bill, beautifully poised, complements with limpid tone. His touch here is immaculate, and the voicings of the chords superb. In this and the subsequent album *Kind of Blue,* the music is haunting and ageless.

Connoisseurs of Evans' playing have a way of jealously guarding it, imagining they are the only ones to have experienced an undiscovered treasure: and I claim no exception in this curious regard. It is a strange trait, and must have something to do with his seeming to communicate at a very personal level. Perhaps it also stems from his character, which was quiet, introverted and modest. He was not a glamorous person. He didn't seem to be playing for the masses, but rather for himself. As an eavesdropper one seemed to commune at a privileged one-to-one level.

But how to define the magic of this playing? Well, the amalgam encompasses, for a start, the ability to sing on the piano, one of the greatest challenges to any sensitive pianist. Classical musicians are (usually, we hope) well known for this. Sadly, however, many a jazz pianist is more inclined to a kind of indiscriminate digital hit approach. Then there is Evans's peerless harmonic sense. On a purely technical level, he totally re-organized jazz harmony into sophisticated realms it had never known before. Exploratory top lines are shadowed by lock-handed harmonies within which the choice and tone of each composite note are judged to perfection, the whole block of sound suspended from and carried by the singing, leading voice. On the rhythmic side he developed a technique of displacement away from the beat. One could say that in these areas lay his most important theoretical contributions to jazz, but the motivation for such procedures was always purely emotional, instinctive poetry the name of the game.

Bill's choice of repertoire could be refreshingly off-be[illegible] Now, some musicians like to sleep before a performance, others enjoy a good tea, whilst a particular colleague of mine is partial to losing himself with Cilla on *Blind Date*. Bill, whenever possible, liked to catch his favorite TV show M*A*S*H backstage before his first set, and featured its theme tune in his later sessions. On similar lines, Burt Bacharach's *Alfie* provided perfect material for his subtle concentrated ballad treatment (try *Montreux II* on CTI). At the other end of the repertoire scale, he chose intriguing and adventurous chord sequences, and featured regularly, for instance, a composition of his own entitled *T.T.T.* This catchy twelve-tone tune first appeared on *The Bill Evans Album* in 1971. His best-known composition, *Waltz for Debby*, has become a jazz classic.

He was a generous musician, and thoroughly professional in adversity. I remember catching him at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon. The trio had just flown in very delayed from Italy. There was no time to test for balance, and the sound system sabotaged the carefully judged piano opening. So far, it was evidently not a good day. In typical American fashion [illegible] shrugged, "Well, that's killed that one," and proceeded without hassle to the second number. Once at Ronnie's, the tuning of the (I think, at the time) Petrov piano was quite frightful. Ronnie was observed attempting a desperate touch-up himself, but eventually Bill settled for "I'll get along with it." Like the heckled sportsman, the artist must get on with the job.

This he did consistently throughout his creative life, concentrating on the chamber art of the jazz piano trio, a format he made very specially his own. Towards the end (1980), he played his heart out in a new surge of creativity. Witness, for example, the remarkable heights attained on *Live in Buenos Aires*, 1979 and *Live at the Balboa Jazz Club*, Madrid. The choice of notes was there, ever-searching in a kind of joyful defiance.

At Bill's penultimate engagement at Keystone Korner, San Francisco, the MC was both sincere and exact when he introduced him simply as "the very beautiful Mr. Bill Evans."