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## The Media

## Time, the Times, and Tipper Gore

The following letter, hand-written in pencil, is on file in the claims office of the A&Y Railroad in Greensboro:

Mr. Falkner?

D&Y R.R.

Greensboro, N.C.

Your railsrod rund over my bul at the 20 miles pass las wensy. He aint ded but mout as well be, and I wont yours sexion bost to report him ded and pade fur.

Hit mased out bote his seeds leaving him mity little of his bag. Hit teard out a place of skin a foot square twixt his pecker and nabel. He air totaly unqualified to be a bul and he air mased up to bad to be a ster and he air to damn tuf fer beef so I want you to report him ded, and pade fur.

Yours ensoforth.

Simon Green

P.S. He air a bad bul, but he stans aroun loking mity damn blew these days.

The most sinister trend in American corporate business for many years now has been the continuing conglomerization of communications. I refer not to the acquisition by Fantasy of Riverside, Milestone, Pablo, and other labels. I have the greatest respect for Fantasy; I'm glad that it's there. My worry is that in time it could fall into other corporate hands, and the huge legacy of music that it holds would not be so honorably treated. Other large companies, such as Polygram (which owns Verve) and Blue Note (a Capitol subsidiary that has reissued a great deal of material from Capitol and other labels), have been treating jazz well. Given all the small independent labels that have sprung up in jazz and classical music, we have far greater diversity of outlet than in the years when Decca, Columbia, and RCA dominated the record industry.

What is truly troubling, indeed it has reached the point of evil, is the horizontal integration of all communications, including the buying up of book companies by movie interests.

The most ominous merger was that of Time and Warner Bros. It was obvious that Time would never carry a story critical of Warner Bros., a company that has a few smelly chapters in its past, including some dubious behavior with royalties owed to actors and movie producers. Nor can anyone expect to have a book critical of the movie-record-TV industries (they are gradually becoming one) published by Warner Books.

Time was from its first days dedicated to the interests and political biases of Henry Luce, its founder and owner, a man who once told Gore Vidal that he considered it the historic mission of the United States to Christianize China, which alone

defines him as one of the truly serious crackpots of our century. Because he was chummy with Chiang Kai-Shek and Mrs. Chiang, Luce made his magazine a public-relations operation for the so-called Nationalists, suppressing the warnings of dedicated State Department people that there was every chance of a Communist victory. Some of those people were crucified for making realistic prediction, and China did indeed fall to Mao Tse-Tung. If anyone could be blamed for "losing" China, it was Henry Luce.

Time never was a good magazine, only a slick one. I have worked alongside Time reporters, some of them good and conscientious people. They would file long reports back to the head office, stories as long as 5,000 words, which would then be rewritten and condensed into Timestyle stories of 300 or 400 words. In the process, errors would be introduced. I used to say that Time rewrites and rewrites until it gets it wrong. An elder statesman of jazz criticism, who is high on Time's list of people to call when they have to write a story about jazz, told me once that in no instance had Time ever quoted him correctly.

In fact, Time's coverage of jazz has generally been appalling, when it covers jazz at all. Classic example: its 1954 cover story on Dave Brubeck began with this astounding pronouncement: "Jazz musicians say that Dave Brubeck is a 'wiggling cat with a far-out wail.'" Oog, as Pogo used to say. Find me the jazzman who ever said that.

Something over four years ago, Tipper Gore, wife of Senator Albert Gore, was a key figure in an eventually successful campaign to have warning labels affixed to records whose songs made explicit reference to sex and violence. It would not of course shield children from the explicit in New Jersey, at least one of whose cable companies runs a hard-core porn channel which allows any child to tune in and watch Seka doing her thing. But I thought Mrs. Gore (who has a master's degree in psychology) had made a mild enough request in view of the fact that the entire entertainment industry is on a collision course with the First Amendment. I could not believe the savagery with which she was treated by denizens of that industry, including Frank Zappa, who has managed the trick of passing himself off as an intellectual. He called her a "cultural terrorist."

I have long chronicled the sinister effects of the entertainment industry. The industry pleads First Amendment and says that anyway, it doesn't influence society, it only reflects it.

It is widely conceded that the Electoral College system of choosing the president is obsolete, having been devised in a time when there was no such thing as instantaneous communications. Sooner or later it will be abolished, replaced by direct election of the president. So too the First Amendment was written when the only "mass" medium of communications was print, and only an elite few Americans could read anyway. Its formulators did not foresee movies, television, videotape, radio, and records, nor Hugh Hefner, Bob Guccione, and Steven J. Ross. The amendment was designed to assure free political discourse, not to let

Ice-T rap about sodomizing a KKK leader's daughter, falling in love with Tipper Gore's two nieces, and killing of cops, all of which he did in the album *Body Count*. The founding fathers of the United States did not foresee, could not possibly foresee, the effects of mass electronic communications. And if the First Amendment is perceived to require revision to protect American society, then sooner or later it will be revised, which thought is troubling enough. A poll done in 1990 by the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression found that while 90 percent of Americans believed the government should not tell you what views to express or how to vote, 40 percent believed the First Amendment does not apply to the arts and entertainment, and more than 42 percent thought the government had the right to ban the sale of records with sexually explicit lyrics. Fifty-five percent of the 1,500 persons polled would support banning the broadcast of songs with sexually explicit lyrics.

As more people perceive the society to be endangered, those figures no doubt will shift further toward favoring some form of censorship. The excesses of the entertainment industry, always hiding behind the freedom-of-expression sophism, conceivably could bring about the First Amendment's emasculation.

If you had at one time predicted that we would see Henny Youngman, Benjamin Hooks, Charlton Heston, Stanley Crouch, and Steve Allen on the same side of an issue, I would have suggested you were losing it. But two years ago Henny Youngman, in an op-ed piece for the New York Times, deplored the obscenities and excesses of Andrew Dice Clay.

Clay's attacks on blacks and other groups, ethnic and otherwise, have shocked great numbers of people in show business. It is this issue Youngman addressed toward the end of his comment: "If you've got to go ethnic, take out the hate and bring us together." He might have said the same to Ice-T.

Steve Allen has been accumulating a file under the general heading *Is TV Courting Censorship?* It contains a particularly disturbing article, published in December 1990 in a newsletter called *The Freedom Writer*, which examines the retrenchment of the religious right. The term for this process is Reconstructionism. The article's writer, Skipp Porteous, says:

"Reconstructionists believe: God's law, as revealed in the Bible, should govern every area of life; local government, not Federal government, should rule; prisons could virtually be closed if serious offenders were executed; capital offenses, requiring the death penalty, should include unrepentant homosexuality, abortion, and adultery; pornography in any form should be eliminated; schools should be run by churches, and property taxes should be abolished; husbands should be the heads of the household, and women and children should be subservient."

Moving quietly to bring about this condition are organizations such as the Providence Church of Denver, the Orthodox Presbyterian sect, Chalcedon, Concerned Women for America, the Rutherford Institute, and the California-based Coalition on

Revival. The general plan is not to change America at the federal level. It is to subvert it at the local level.

Jay Grimstead, national director of the last-named group, says, "For example, in Santa Clara County, there are about 14 cities, including San Jose, the big city. We think it's very possible, by the year 2000, to have Christians -- mature, biblically literate -- gain the majority of seats in all the city councils in our county. Plus, the Board of County Supervisors."

And the entertainment industry, by its ceaseless sale of violence and pornography, is playing directly into their hands.

On November 16, 1990, Steve Allen sent a letter to Steve Ross, CEO of the newly-merged Time Warner conglomerate. The letter reads as follows:

"Dear Steven,

"Whatever else may be said about those of us who work in television -- particularly those in executive positions -- we certainly are busy.

"Consequently because of our understandable concentration on matters of immediate professional concern, it has occurred to me that we might not be picking up a certain type of critical message that I believe we ought to give sensitive attention to.

"I refer specifically to charges that the entire entertainment industry, across the board -- television, films, the theater, recordings, radio, etc. -- has come increasingly to *depend* on the marketing of vulgarity, obscenity, and sex.

"There would be no point in further describing the problem here -- we're all familiar with it. But the purpose of my sending you this note is that I have the feeling that many in our industry have not yet perceived the mounting degree to which millions of Americans -- I believe the majority -- are angry about this. The Los Angeles Times recently asked me to express myself on the issue, and I did.

"I expected a good deal of criticism, and was prepared to put up with it. To my great surprise I have as yet not heard a word of criticism but have received a good many phone calls and letters saying, in effect, 'Don't stop now; continue to give 'em hell!'

"Mort Sahl -- hardly to be equated with Jerry Falwell -- called and did about 20 minutes on the phone endorsing my stand. Jazz pianist Jimmy Rowles, certainly no militant social reformer, did the same. So did a television actress who works on a show that has been criticized for its shoddy language . . .

"In my comedy concerts I devote a good deal of time to answering questions from people in the audience. Lately an increasing number of questions have concerned the growing tawdriness of television.

"So I'm sending this letter to a number of my friends and associates in the industry, on the assumption that none of you would consider it a marvelous idea to take your seven-year-old to an Andrew Dice Clay concert.

"As the writer (of one of the articles I've enclosed) mentions, criticism of this sort is generally responded to, reflexively, by cries of censorship.

"Well, I'm concerned that we're going to *get* censorship unless we make some sort of a pass at cleaning up our own act.

"I take it that we all know the reason for the increasing resort to vulgarity and sleaze -- it sells. It's probable that there isn't a single executive in our industry who would make a conscious philosophical decision that the present avalanche of filth is any sense *good* for our society. No, the reasons for the growing ugliness boil down to ratings points and dollars.

"I suggest that the time has come to decide on which side of the crucial dividing line each of us wants to stand . . .

"Don't feel that you need to respond to me about this. I would only hope that you will discuss the issue with your associates and consider the possibility of resisting rather than accelerating the current trend.

"Cordially,

"Steve Allen."

Ross took Allen at his word: he didn't reply to the letter. Neither did more than 30 industry executives to whom Steve, a man I would describe as being of staunchly liberal persuasion, sent it. Two and a half years later, the company Ross heads continued to issue vast quantities of violence and vulgarity, reaching a nadir with Ice-T's *Cop Killer*.

On June 16, at a shareholders meeting, Time Warner announced a 4-for-1 stock split and a 12 percent increase in the quarterly cash dividend. Net income from filmed entertainment for the three months ended June 30 was \$101 million, buoyed by the violent film *Lethal Weapon III* and *Batman Returns*. But the highlight of the meeting was the denunciation of the Ice-T album by Charlton Heston, a Time Warner shareholder and a man of staunchly conservative persuasion, who, in the oddest performance of his career, recited some of the album's lyrics, including those referring to the nieces of Tipper Gore and the bugging of a guiltless young girl.

He wasted his time. Gerald M. Levin, the president of Time Warner, defended the album -- oh yawn -- as constitutionally defended free speech.

Outside the building, police officers and supporters from across the country picketed the meeting. One of them carried a sign listing the names of police officers killed in the line of duty. Another sign read: Time Warner Media Moguls of Murder.

**The concern for abuse of the First Amendment extends all the way across the political spectrum.**

Village Voice jazz critic Stanley Crouch -- who is black -- said, "It is such an injustice that black youth is being saddled with these imbecilic images that the record companies are exploiting.

What do these rappers have to say that we don't already know? They're not saying one thing that I didn't hear 30 years ago, when I was sixteen. All they are is just third-rate street thugs and would-be thugs, who have rhymed doggerel on a third-grade level with no literary content."

Crouch added: "The majority of black youth are trying to get away from these fools. They're studying and getting an education. They're not going around talking about shooting and killing police."

Some two years earlier, on June 16, 1990, Dr. Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP, issued a statement:

"In the current controversy surrounding the 2 Live Crew and its album, *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*, we find ourselves in the position of defending their right . . . to freedom of expression, while at the same time condemning the vicious, sadistic, and demeaning nature of some of their material.

"We are particularly offended by their efforts to wrap the mantle of the black cultural experience around their performances, by saying this is the way it is in the black community, and they are authentic purveyors of our heritage.

"Our cultural experience does not include debasing our women, the glorification of violence, the promotion of deviant sexual behavior, and the tearing into shreds of our cherished mores and standards of behavior.

"We take strong exception to the negative images projected by the 2 Live Crew and the harmful effects they have on our young people . . ."

A statement issued by the Council on Scientific Affairs of the American Medical Association said, "Over the past decade, the messages portrayed by certain types of rock music have deteriorated so that today they may present a real threat to the physical health and emotional well-being of especially vulnerable children and adolescents."

The report continues, "In some types of rock music, most frequently heavy metal, punk rock and rap, lyrics promoting drug and alcohol use, suicide, violence, satanic worship and demonology, sexual exploitation, bigotry, and racism are combined with rhythms and intensities that appeal to youth."

The statement said parents should monitor the concerts their children attend, look at the music videos they watch, and concern themselves with the albums they buy. Try telling that to a household where both parents work.

"Physicians," the report said, "should know about potentially destructive themes in some form of rock music, and should work to increase awareness of patients and communities about these themes."

Then the AMA report makes a full leap into utter naivete: "Members of the entertainment industry, including sponsors of concerts, agents, and entertainers, should exercise greater responsibility in presenting music to young people."

Well, uh, yeah, that would be nice, wouldn't it.

John Leo, in his column *On Society*, wrote in the May 28, 1990 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*:

"At St. John's University in Queens some horrific allegations of group rape are currently unfolding. Prosecutors say a group of St. John's students raped a young woman, passed her around, held her captive overnight, and called in other students to join the rape . . . I have been wondering about clean-cut college rapists in general and where they get their attitudes about women. Or to put it another way, wherever the attitudes come from, are they being validated by the take-her-she's-just-a-receptacle jokes of primitives like Andrew Dice Clay?"

In 1973, shortly after the Clint Eastwood film *Magnum Force* was released, I attended a small dinner party with Ted Post, who directed it. He had just returned from a publicity tour, where reporters had repeatedly asked him about what they considered an excess of violence in the picture. Ted said they had made him uncomfortable. "Why?" I said.

"Because it *is* violent," Ted said. "It bothers me." He then told me (I had not yet seen the picture) that in one scene, a pimp makes a prostitute drink a can of Drano, which kills her. "I never open the newspapers without being afraid I'll read that some nut has done it," Ted said.

"But Ted," I said, "it happened last week. In Utah." I told him that two men had entered a hi-fi shop, robbed it, then made five employees drink Drano. Three of them were dead.

Ted got tears in his eyes. Later, regaining his composure, he said, "We have got to stop pretending that what we do doesn't affect society."

I asked Ted if, should an occasion arise, I could tell the story and quote him. He said, "Yes."

There are many people within the industry who are concerned about its ethical malaise. Film producer and former jazz trumpeter Paul Maslansky (actually he still plays) produced the *Police Academy* series of pictures. He also produced *The Russia House*, a superb picture filled with a sense of danger. Yet there is not one violent scene in it. Maslansky said:

"A measure of morality should come with the greatness of a company like Time Warner. They should have some restraint. They're just not behaving in the correct manner, and it's very sad. I'm ashamed for them."

Television and movie writer and producer Gordon Mitchell -- remembered by jazz fans as bassist Whitey Mitchell, brother of Red Mitchell -- said, "I would never write an explicit how-to crime story, showing people how to do it. There are really sick people out there."

"I've heard that Rod Serling went to his grave regretting that he'd shown D.B. Cooper how to do it."

"But the people who really control this business are accountants, former agents, and other cowardly people who have seized control of the media. And they're only interested in numbers."

Not everyone has this kind of sensitive conscience. Recently Dennis Hopper, who directed *Easy Rider*, discussed it on a television talk show. He said it was responsible for the cocaine epidemic. He said that cocaine was used by few people in 1969, when the film came out. Two years later, the drug was ubiquitous. He was quite giggly about it. When the interviewer asked him if he had any sense of responsibility for the epidemic, he said, No, he couldn't burden himself with that. Clearly he didn't care how many people were dead because of him.

That the film was solely responsible for the cocaine problem is doubtful; but there is no question that the entertainment industry as a whole is largely responsible for America's drug problem, going back to the advocacy of drugs by rock bands both in songs and in their example, in the mid-1960s.

Not long after release of the film *A Clockwork Orange*, in which a gang of punks enters a home and just for fun kicks its residents half to death, a number of such crimes occurred.

That was before the chilling word "wilding" came into our cultural vocabulary.

It is difficult to trace killings directly to films, and the industry invariably denies responsibility. "We don't influence, we only reflect . . ." endlessly repeated.

An interesting case occurred in June in Los Angeles. A 14-year-old girl wrote in her diary, "We," meaning herself, a boyfriend and girl friend, "have a plan to kill Daniel." Daniel Allen Jr. was her father. "Were (sic) going to shoot him burn then bury him . . . We have everything planned really good." "I'm a little twichy (sic), were (sic) going to do it, a few days," she wrote in her diary on June 4.

She steeled herself by watching the movie *River's Edge*, derived from a true incident in which a teen-age boy murdered his girlfriend. His friends keep silent about it as the girl's body lies near a river. The girl wrote in her diary that she thought this was "pretty cool."

On June 10, the girl and her accomplices drugged her father, shot him, burned him, and abandoned his body by a railway track, where hikers found him. The three adolescents have been charged with his murder. The motive? He had objected to her seeing so much of the boy.

Thomas Radecki, research director for the National Coalition on Television violence, estimates that by the age of 18, the average American young person has witnessed 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 40,000 murders.

In 1984, two University of Illinois psychologists who had studied one set of children over a span of 20 years reported that children who had watched significant quantities of violence on television at the age of eight were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or abuse spouses at the age of 30. The two wrote, "We believe . . . that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all

ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and levels of intelligence . . . It cannot be denied or explained away."

But the entertainment industry and its apologists continue to do exactly that, interminably invoking its Declaration of Irresponsibility.

**One of those apologists is Time.** Time is in the record business. Heavily. You have no doubt seen the ads on television pitching Time Life records of everything from 1940s nostalgia to the worst offal produced by Nashville and the rock-and-roll industry. As I have noted before, in the past we left our cultural garbage behind. We kept only the good stuff. Now we are heading into the 21st Century carrying that cultural garbage with us, like that train full of New York City wastes that wandered the country like the vehicle of a land-borne flying Dutchman looking for a place to unload.

But Time is also in the movie business.

After the merger of Time Warner, there was much speculation in the profession that Time would veer further toward entertainment. Not that it was ever very good at objective journalism.

Six years ago, when I was researching my biography of Oscar Peterson, I assembled clippings of virtually everything ever written about him. One of the stories was the 1954 piece about Oscar that Time carried. It contained some minor glitches, and more than a trace of condescension toward jazz in general and black musicians in particular.

I traced back the process by which Time arrived at that story, reading all the memos and background reports from which it was developed. I was rather shocked by this material, first of all by its unprofessionalism, then by some not-so-subtle racism, including one researcher's expression of surprise that he spoke articulate English. (Had they done all their homework, they would have noted that he was a product of Montreal High School which, in the years he attended it, may well have been the best public high school in North America.)

In the biography, I wrote an entire chapter on Time's ignorant research and softly racist final story.

Two or three years later, when I was researching my biography of Lerner and Loewe, I came across the cover story Time did on the pre-Broadway travails of *Camelot* in Toronto and Boston. The story was freighted with misinformation, praising the harmony between Alan Jay Lerner and Fritz Loewe when there was so much tension that they were on the verge of ending the partnership, and glowingly describing Lerner's marriage to a French lawyer, when the two had reached the cat-fight stage. Again I carefully read the background memos.

I knew as I was writing the Peterson book that if I were critical of Time and its research processes, I would be assuring in advance that it would be ignored, or savaged, by Time. So too with the Lerner book. I compared this in my mind with my earlier book, *Singers and the Song*, in which I chided the

New York Times for some of its coverage of the arts. Not only was the book not ignored by the Times, it got a rave front-page review in the New York Times Book Review, and the paper asked me to write some articles for it. Knowing what I do about Time, however -- knowing it has always been dedicated not to news but the purposes of its owners -- I expected no such even-handed treatment in its pages.

I never for a moment considered hedging or avoiding the issue for my own tactical and ultimately financial advantage. I had the information, and I had to write it. Stupid, maybe. But I did it, well aware of the probable consequences.

The Lerner and Loewe biography was reviewed in the November 18, 1990, Los Angeles Times Book Review, by a man named Stefan Kanfer. After noting the opening of *My Fair Lady* on March 15, 1956, Kanfer wrote:

"Recalling the epochal moment, Lees writes, 'Lerner and Loewe were now the royalty of the theater.'

"That is a fair summary of the collaborators' professional status -- and the prose style of 'Inventing Champagne': Lees, author of books about Oscar Peterson and a number of jazz singers, seems far more comfortable with the ambiance of smoky nightclubs than in the autumnal atmosphere of Schubert (sic) Alley.

"Still, his subjects are so complex and contradictory that they might elude a gaggle of Pulitzer Prize authors. Loewe was the *ur*-Viennese composer whose forebears included Lehar and Romberg. Lerner was made in America, born to wealth, educated at Choate and Harvard, where he was a classmate of John F. Kennedy. [Wrong. I did not say they were classmates. I said they were co-editors of the school yearbook.]

"Loewe was married (and divorced) once, and had one main collaborator. Lerner was married eight times, and had eight creative partners. Loewe refused to get excited by adverse criticism or bad luck; disdain was his weapon. Lerner was born with sand under his skin; any slight, real or imagined, was enough to upset him for weeks. Out of these differences arose a creative tension that produced *Brigadoon* and the lesser *Love Life* before the team crested with *My Fair Lady*.

"They were never to find that form again. The rich score of *Camelot* brought them renewed attention, but the production was in fact a slovenly and hazardous affair. In the end, nobody seemed to know what it was trying to say. Especially Lees.

"The story,' Lees informs us, 'is about two men who love each other having an emotional and continuing relationship with the same woman, which after a time becomes obvious as a homosexual fantasy.' (This interpretation would come as a surprise to Lerner and Loewe to say nothing of Thomas Malory, who started the whole thing by writing *La Mort* (sic) d'Arthur in the 15th Century.)"

From there on Mr. Kanfer briefly recapitulates the Lerner and Loewe careers, passing off as his own scholarship material he

got from my book.

The snide and lofty reference to Thomas Malory, suggesting that Mr. Kanfer has great knowledge of that period and its literature, is actually embarrassing to read, revealing as it does Mr. Kanfer's literary and historical ignorance. The Arthurian legends, which are Welsh in origin, date from approximately the eighth century. Mr. Kanfer didn't do his homework. I did. I researched the legends at length and carefully under the guidance of Dr. Victoria Lees, a significant medieval scholar and expert on that period of literature. She is secretary of the Senate of McGill University. She's also my sister.

On December 3, 1990, I called Kenneth Turan, then interim book editor of the Los Angeles Times. I told him, quite politely, that there was internal evidence in the review that Kanfer hadn't read the book. Turan, with a curious snarl in his voice, said, "Well I think he read it."

"Well I don't," I said. "When I write reviews for the New York Times Book Review, I get a call from a fact checker, requiring careful citation of everything I say."

"Yeah, well," Turan said, "if we had the staff the New York Times does, we'd do it too." That's verbatim; I wrote it down.

Later I learned that the St. Louis Post-Dispatch follows the same book reviewing procedure as the New York Times -- and does it with a staff of only a book editor and a secretary.

Turan told me to write a letter to the editor. I did that. I also wrote to Shelby Coffey III, now editor and executive vice president of the Los Angeles Times, citing Turan's overtly stated indifference to accuracy. Coffey, I knew, had come to Los Angeles from the Washington Post. I later learned that Turan too came from the Post, where he had been a sports writer. Coffey wrote me a pat-on-the-head fluff-off letter which, alas, I failed to save.

The Times printed my letter, but only after editing the guts out of it. This is the letter in its original form:

There are two sets of limitations on any review: those of the work under consideration; and those of the writer reviewing it. Whatever the merits or lack of them of my biography of Lerner and Loewe, Stefan Kanfer in his review of it in the November 18 issue displays a remarkably full set of limitations, including arrogance, ignorance, inability to spell, and inability to read.

Mr. Kanfer writes that out of the differences of character between Lerner and Loewe "arose a creative tension that produced *Brigadoon* and the lesser *Love Life* before the team crested with *My Fair Lady*."

Fritz Loewe had nothing to do with *Love Life*. See page 57 of the book: "Lerner's next musical was written not with Fritz but with another composer born in Berlin: Kurt Weill." The collaboration with Weill on *Love Life* is then discussed in some detail. One is forced to wonder if Mr. Kanfer read that chapter. In any case the comment instantly establishes his

ignorance of the work of Lerner and Loewe, as well as Weill's.

Mr. Kanfer says with an airy affectation of scholarship that it would "come as a surprise to Lerner and Loewe, to say nothing of Thomas Malory, who started the whole thing by writing *La Mort d'Arthur* (sic) in the 15th Century," that the love affair of two men with the same woman in *Camelot* is perceived as a projected symbol of homosexuality.

The work has always been and still is known (due to a historical error) as *Le Morte d'Arthur*. And Malory assuredly did not start "the whole thing." His book is in part adapted from a 14th century poem, rooted in sources at least four hundred years older, and Books Seven to Twelve are largely translations from the French of *Tristan* made from a manuscript obtained from a nearby monastery while Malory was in prison. It is from this source that he got the story of Guinevere and Lancelot. All of this was extensively traced in the book's discussion of *Camelot*. One wonders if Mr. Kanfer read that chapter, either. He certainly does not seem to know much about Malory.

The point I made -- which Mr. Kanfer cutely fails to mention -- was that the theme of two men who are attracted to each other and share the same woman turns up not just in *Camelot* but often in Lerner's work, including *Paint Your Wagon* (the film version, which Lerner also produced), *An American in Paris* and *My Fair Lady* (in the callous spiritual rape on a bet of Eliza for their own academic amusement by the mutually admiring Pickering and Higgins.) The related but secondary theme of the Woman as Whore (or Peasant) Redeemed by the Love of a Noble Rich Man (or Academic or King) is in a great deal of what Lerner wrote, including *Gigi*, *My Fair Lady*, *Royal Wedding*, and *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (particularly the film version).

Mr. Kanfer describes -- perhaps "dismisses" is the better word -- me as "author of books about Oscar Peterson and a number of jazz singers" and says that I seem "far more comfortable with the ambiance of smoky nightclubs than in the autumnal atmosphere of Schubert Alley." Evidently Mr. Kanfer is not sufficiently comfortable in its autumnal atmosphere to spell it correctly. It is Shubert Alley. It wasn't named after Franz.

Mr. Kanfer comments with smug authority on my other books without apparently having read them, either. I was classical music and drama critic of the Louisville Times (for which work I was awarded a Reid Fellowship) before I ever wrote about jazz. *Singers and the Song* contained an essay on the evolution of the English language out of its forced marriage with French, a portrait of the film composer Hugo Friedhofer, an essay on the social conditions that led to the decline of the big bands, a study of Edith Piaf, who was hardly a jazz singer, and other subjects. That book was highly acclaimed, and is used in some American history courses. Apparently Mr. Kanfer never read beyond the title. The next book of my essays, *Meet Me at*

*Jim and Andy's*, was not about singers but instrumentalists. It received the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award -- the second time I've won it, by the way.

Finally, to those of subtle perception, the nuance of the tone of Mr. Kanfer's patronization of Oscar Peterson and jazz is hard to misinterpret. We get the point.

Yours truly,

My last paragraph I referred to racism. It is difficult to believe that jazz is still frowned on in certain quarters, but there it is, as it was in the patronizing tone of TV pundits in their comments about Bill Clinton's playing a couple of tenor solos on the Arsenio Hall show. They neglected to note that Clinton was all-state champion on his instrument in his adolescence. They particularly Barbara Walters -- made much of his wearing "shades," as she called them, while playing. Clinton was reading charts. Anyone who has ever had to read music under TV lights can tell you why he borrowed a pair of sunglasses.

The Book Review section of the Los Angeles Times is manifestly racist in its attitude toward jazz. It publishes few, if any, reviews of books on jazz. When such books do get mentioned, it is in the entertainment section in columns by Leonard Feather, who struggles manfully to compensate for this policy.

But a mystery remained. The sheer snide malice of Kanfer's review still puzzled me. What did he have against me that he should write so vindictive a piece? All that the L.A. Times said about him in the review was "Kanfer's latest book is 'A Summer World' . . . a history of the Jews in the Catskill Mountains."

And who does Mr. Kanfer turn out to be? A Time magazine editor of long standing. He was the magazine's book review editor from 1967 to 1975, and then in 1975 became a senior editor. He is now on the masthead as a contributor, and occasional pieces appear under his byline.

The New York Times Book Review follows a strict procedure. When it asks you to review a book, it gives you a questionnaire, asking whether you have any reason to be prejudiced for or against the author, or any direct dealings with the publisher. You are required to sign this document.

The Los Angeles Times, clearly, has no such procedure. In view of my book's comments on Time, it should never have been assigned to a Time editor for review. Further, a journalist of high ethical standards who had been asked to review it, would, in the circumstances, have said, "I can't review this book. I have a conflict of interests here." Mr. Kanfer didn't do that.

Given all his errors, from that reference to Malory through the misspellings of *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Shubert Alley to the statement that Fritz Loewe wrote *Love Life* to the condescending reference to books on jazz singers (I have never written even one book on jazz singers); given the indifference to both fact and fairness that all this bespeaks; and given that a man who demands no higher standards of accuracy in his own writing was a senior editor of Time, one gains a glimpse into the standards

that guide that publication -- and an insight into why it is so dubious a source of information, in short so bad a magazine.

Oh yes, one more detail. There were a few minor errors of fact in my book. Mr. Kanfer didn't catch one of them.

Time has been redesigned recently, slicing about an inch off the outside edges of the news pages, and further diluting the editorial content with lotsa photos.

The June 22 issue illustrated the Brave New World of journalism that conglomerization is bringing us. It carried a three-page paean to *Batman Returns* so rapturous that you'd have thought they were discussing the second coming of Aeschylus. *Battier and Better*, reads the headline. A subhead proclaims: *Batman Returns is a funny, gorgeous improvement on the original and a lesson on how pop entertainment can soar into the realm of poetry.* The same issue contains a three-page eulogy of Ice-T, making him sound like a major social philosopher and referring to his rap records as poetry. ("Poetry" again.) A full-page full-bleed full-color photo of Ice-T (born Tracy Marrow) accompanies the article, occasioned by the furor over his record *Cop Killer*.

" . . . what guardians of respectability find vile," wrote Sally P. Donnelly with contempt and a tone of smugness that echoes Stefan Kanfer's, "is considered compelling and clever by the hundreds of thousands of fans who have made Ice-T the world's most consistently successful hard-core rapper."

Although the article mentions that a group of law-enforcement people in Texas was calling for a boycott of Time Warner, Sally P. Donnelly does not mention that Time magazine *owns that record*, since it owns the Warner Bros, Elektra, and Atlantic labels, among others. (Besides Warner Bros. pictures, it has huge music-publishing holdings and owns HBO, 82 percent of another cable TV company, American Television and Telecommunications Corp, Telepictures Productions, Warner Books, Little Brown and Co., and 25 magazines, including Life, Sports Illustrated, and People.)

Time's exaltation of *Batman Returns* does not advise you that Time *owns that picture*. That issue of Time contains 39 actual editorial pages, many of them picture pages. Six of them in a row are devoted to praising products of entertainment companies Time Warner owns, one of them a socially sinister album. Never have the avarice and irresponsibility of the entertainment industry been so flagrantly flaunted as in that issue of a magazine that no longer can make any claim to practicing serious journalism.

In its July 20, 1992, issue, U.S. News and World Report carried this item in its *Washington Whispers* column:

**Out of Tune.** If Grammys were given for bad taste, Warner Bros. Records, a division of Time Warner Inc., would win this year's award going away. Not only did the company give a



major push to rapper Ice-T's vicious hit song *Cop Killer* about the pleasures of killing police officers; the company's promotion department compounded the obscenity by sending copies to disc jockeys in miniature black vinyl body bags. A spokesman explains the body bag as a "promotion gimmick." Some gimmick.

One of my sources is the Christian Science Monitor, whose reports are succinct, clear, and detached in the way that journalism is supposed to be. I read the New York Times. It may be gray, as they say, but it's good. I also read the Los Angeles Times, for in spite of its current self-congratulatory claims to be an improved newspaper, it actually is an improved newspaper under Coffey's leadership. Now if only he would do something about its arts and entertainment coverage. Instead of canning Kenneth Turan, Coffey made him movie critic, and he is doing a worse job in that chair than he did as interim book editor. Recently Oliver Stone brilliantly took Turan apart for his comments on Stone's movie *JFK*.

Newsweek is a much better magazine than Time. But far the best news magazine in America is U.S. News and World Report. It was the worst when it was owned by the late David Lawrence, another wheeeee crackpot of the far right, little more than a propaganda rag with distorted reporting and murky writing. Not so since Mortimer B. Zuckerman bought it and made himself editor in chief. (He writes a very good column at the back of the book.) Its editor at large is David Gergen, the most intelligent and thoughtful journalist of the political right. A friend of mine, of generally left convictions, said with a wry smile: "When it comes to conservatives, I hope they've reserved a cool spot in hell for David Gergen."

U.S. News and World Report is fair, thorough, by all evidence accurate, and well and tightly written. It has good layout and, as it tells us in its television ads, contains "news you can use" -- no nonsense about the love affairs of film stars, Madonna's underwear, and the like. It does not contain articles about rappers and rock stars, does not review movies or music or books or ballet or the theater. It contains authentic news articles, and it is often out in front of the pack in exposes.

In the end, Time and Stefan Kanfer fixed me -- and fixed me good -- for exposing their racism and shabby reporting. It was clever to do it in the L.A. Times rather than Time itself.

Kanfer's review was syndicated to newspapers throughout the country and printed even in the Herald-Tribune in Paris. My refutation of it, of course, appeared only in the L.A. Times. Kanfer succeeded in killing my Lerner and Loewe biography. It has been remaindered by the publisher, St. Martin's Press, and it's dead. Thus fiercely does Time protect its interests.

Imagine, then, my amusement at seeing in the Letters to the Editor of the Wall Street Journal a wail of anguished protest from Shelby Coffey III. He began, "Scott Shuger's June 16

editorial-page article, 'At the L.A. Times, a New Kind of Yellow Journalism', concerning the Los Angeles Times's coverage of the Los Angeles riots, overlooks a considerable body of high-quality journalism notable for its broad-gauged and tough-minded probing of a fast-moving set of events." Coffey says that Shuger's "amateur selectivity does not stand up to a critic's standards." He urges Mr. Shuger to 1. Understand the form, 2. play fair in giving context, 3. give a range of examples, 4. forget the political-correctness conspiracy, and 5, get it right.

Mr. Coffey concludes his long letter by announcing "the final rule of an able media critic -- read the paper." Or read the book. Which Stefan Kanfer clearly did not do before violating principles 1, 2, 3, and 5 of the Coffey manifesto.

One final point. Given the involvement of the entertainment industry in book and periodical publishing, and vice versa -- the Los Angeles Times has extensive TV interests -- do you expect honest reporting in these publications on the entertainment industry or anything else? Given Time's shameless touting of *Batman Returns* and Ice-T, given its involvement in the record and movie industries, the sycophancy of one Sally P. Donnelly, the malice and inaccuracy of Stefan Kanfer's review of my book, it will be interesting to see how Time treats Tipper Gore and her husband. Will it interfere in the political process -- as Henry Luce unhesitatingly did -- by overt or subtle derogation of Albert Gore, since he might become vice president and endow her with an influence that could interfere with its perceived right to make money on anything it chooses, including a record celebrating the murder of police officers?

Suddenly less ardent about the First Amendment when money became involved, Time Warner's directors considered a policy change to bar the company from distributing music deemed "inappropriate" -- whatever that means, and whoever determines it. Why? Among other pressures on the company, New York's Police Benevolent Association had threatened to sell off \$100 million worth of Time Warner shares to protest the Ice-T record, and the Law Enforcement Alliance of America was urging readers to drop subscriptions to Time.

Finally, Ice-T went on television to announce, with jut-jawed defiance, that he was pulling *Cop Killer* from the album, just to prove he had not done the song to make money. Cynics said it was a publicity stunt to boost the album's flagging sales.

Scarcely 24 hours after Ice-T's statement, William Andrews was executed in Utah for that murder-by-Drano of three record-store employees 18 years ago; the other man convicted of the crime was executed in 1987.

A.J. Liebling once wrote that freedom of the press belongs to him who owns a press. Time and the L.A. Times have given further proof that he was right.

I am of course just heart-broken that Shelby Coffey III got his feelings hurt. It does indeed, doesn't it, depend whose bull is balled, whose ox Tipper gores.