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One More Time

These are tough times for a lot of people. A number of persons have written to say that they have been having financial problems because of illness, loss of a business, loss of a job, and are unable to renew. All seem hesitant to take up my offer to continue their subscriptions for free. Our society has made it shameful to have financial problems. It isn't.

A number of persons have also oversubscribed, asking that the extra money be used for those who can't afford to resubscribe. Therefore anyone who can't afford to resubscribe need only let me know. I don't want to send the Jazzletter to anyone who doesn't wish to continue it. I remain astonished by the generosity of spirit of the readers of this publication.

If you haven't resubscribed and intend to, I'd appreciate it if you'd do it without waiting for further reminders. They entail extra work, time, and money, and this publication continues to exist only because costs are kept to the minimum. If you have lost the original yellow sheet, it's $60 U.S. for the United States and Canada, $70 for overseas.

And again, thank you all for keeping the Jazzletter going.

Jazz Black and White Part I

On April 12, 1991, a remarkable interview with Sonny Rollins appeared in the New York Times — remarkable because it was a highly visible public admission by a major black artist that there exists a substantial anti-white racism in jazz.

The occasion for the interview, with Peter Watrous, was a Carnegie Hall reunion concert with guitarist Jim Hall. Thirty years earlier, Rollins had made the album *The Bridge* with Hall.

Rollins told Watrous, "In 1961 I had been off the music scene for a while, so in contemplating my return . . . I thought it would be good to have a band without a piano to make an impression, get a little different sound. Jim had an incredible harmonic sense; he's such a sensitive player. So to me, he was the perfect guy to play with."

Rollins continued: "As I recall, we got very good response, it was a big story and the group was great. But there was some controversy about the fact that Jim was white. After *Freedom Suite* — " (an album Rollins recorded in 1958) " — some people expected me to behave in a certain way and wondered why I would hire a white musician. I took some heat for that. I thought it was a healing symbol, and I didn't have any qualms about doing it. Social issues didn't have anything to do with hiring white musicians who were qualified; it was that simple. And it was a great group."

The job had a salutary effect on the career of Jim Hall. He had been patronized as a mere white west-coast player, when that style of music was denigrated in New York as effete. Since Rollins was seen as a black militant, a perception that may or may not have been accurate, his approval opened doors for Hall, who was forthwith accepted as a major guitarist. The association with Rollins validated Hall, as the period with Miles Davis gave a sort of Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval to Bill Evans, as it did to other white musicians Miles hired, including Chick Corea, Dave Holland, Dave Liebman, John Scofield, John McLaughlin, and the saxophonist Bill Evans.

Quiet as it's kept, anti-white bias has existed in jazz for a long time, among musicians — though by no means all black musicians — and among critics. Many European jazz critics use it as an entree in courting black musicians (not all of whom are taken in by it) and in venting a strong if muted anti-Americanism. I find it common in the French and the English. Since I read German only slightly, I cannot comment on German jazz criticism, but I am told that this quality is virulent in it.

It has long been manifest in the myth that the first serious appreciation of jazz occurred in Europe in a time when jazz was held in contempt in the land of its birth, which overlooks the immense popularity of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington by the end of the 1920s and the substantial body of intelligent American critical writing on the subject by that time. The legend persists despite extensive research by James Lincoln Collier, and to a lesser extent by me, that shatters it. When anyone questions it, some British writer is certain to fly into fulminations bordering on apoplexy.

The politics of it are as follows:

The United States is a backward and uneducated nation that never could have appreciated the great art form it spawned. We Europeans had the aesthetic sensitivity, cultivation, and intelligence to write "seriously" about jazz before you ever understood its worth. You are a land of racists; your failure to appreciate jazz is proof of it.

My father, an Englishman born in Lancashire who began life as a coal miner and learned to be a musician by practicing violin fingerings on the handle of a shovel, was a man of unassuming character and outstanding (self) education and intelligence. Many of his observations still amaze me. He said when I was very young that you did not encounter racism where there were no racial minorities. Even small minorities did not inspire racism, since a small group was seen as a faint threat, if that. Only when the minority had reached a goodly size, a sort of critical mass, did racism begin to show itself. He said there was little racism in England because it had no large visible ethnic minorities. If there ever should be, he said, you would see racism in England. He lived to see the influx of population from the West Indies, India and Pakistan — and the rise of a vicious English racism. A survey done some years ago found that something over 60 percent of the white English population

admitted to being racist. At least the general run of white American racists have the grace to be hypocritical about it.

My sister married a Chinese physician born in Hong Kong and educated in Canada. When they went to London to work on advanced degrees, landlords took one look at her husband's Chinese face and slammed the door. His fellow medical students from India and Africa encountered similar receptions. Once when she was riding the tube, carrying her infant daughter in her arms, a man stood close to her and chanted with a Cockney accent, "American bitch, Japanese bastard." He kept this up, and then my sister, who is capable of an icy sarcasm, said calmly, "Wrong on all four counts."

She told me that England was the most racist place she had ever been. She and her husband settled in Montreal, which, she said, was the least racist. My niece and her two brothers tell me that in Montreal they never encountered bigotry because of their half-Chinese blood lines, but they have encountered it because their primary language is English, not French. Linguistic racism has been legally installed in Quebec, which forbids teaching in English and signs and billboards in English, all of it the work of manipulative self-seeking politicians, many of whom send their own children off to be educated in (surprise?) English.

The French version of the anti-American malady is manifest in the film *'Round Midnight*, although you may not detect it unless you have lived in France.

'Round Midnight is insulting to white Americans and patronizing to black. Its essential message is: We French are able appreciate the great art of your noble savages, your naive but talented singing-and-dancing darkies. You do not appreciate them; you kill them.

I have been told that there were lines in the script that Dexter Gordon, as the protagonist saxophone player, declined to read, but the lines that stayed in were bad enough. There's a moment when his character tells the girl that she is going to have to go out and buy him "a" reed. Have you ever seen how saxophone players buy, test, and abandon reeds? By the box.

I resented the parody implicit in the main character, a compound of Lester Young (his idiosyncratic argot) and Bud Powell (his voluntary exile in France, where of course he is loved and appreciated). The protagonist supposedly is a great and innovative musician. Dexter Gordon was not playing well by the time the picture was made, and thus the film misrepresented what greatness in jazz really is. Ironically, in view of the movie's essential thesis, it was during his sojourn in Europe that Gordon's playing declined.

A clear example of the French attitude to jazz came in a conversation I had in a sidewalk cafe in Paris with Andre Hodeir, the French composer and jazz critic. He said, "No white man ever contributed anything to the development of jazz." And the late Ralph J. Gleason wrote, "It is possible to speculate that all the white musicians could be eliminated from the history of the music without significantly altering its development." This is in spite of Lester Young's openly acknowledged debt to Frank Trumbauer and Bix Beiderbecke.

This is not a debatable point. These influences on Young are well documented, both in his own statements and those of his friends. In a biography titled *Lester Young: Profesion President* by Luc Delannoy, published in French in 1987 by Editions Denoel and in English in 1993 by the University of Arkansas Press, the author notes:

"Two recordings fascinated Lester: *I'll Never Miss the Sunshine*, containing a breathtaking chorus by Tram and recorded in Camden, New Jersey, on June 14, 1923, by the Benson orchestra of Chicago, and the first recording made Tram and Bix with the Sioux City Six on October 10, 1924 . . .

"At the beginning of 1927, Trumbauer signed a contract with the Okeh company for a group formed around the nucleus of the Jean Goldkette Orchestra, with whom he had been performing for three years. A first record was cut in New York on February 4 . . . . That recording and the many that followed it formed the basis of Lester's record collection."

Another saxophonist who attracted Young was Jimmy Dorsey.

Young repeatedly attested to the influence of Trumbauer and Beiderbecke, though he was initially interested in Red Nichols. In 1959, not long before his death, Pres was interviewed by Francois Postif in Paris. The interview is on tape. Young told Postif:

"I had to make a choice between Frankie Trumbauer and Jimmy Dorsey. I wasn't sure which direction I'd be taking, you know. I had those damn records; I'd play one by Jimmy, then one by Trumbauer, and so on. At the time, I didn't know who Hawkins was, dig it? But I could plainly see there were other guys who were telling stories I liked to hear. I would play record by the first man, one by the second, so I could understand both of them in depth.

"Finally, I found I liked Trumbauer best . . . . I imagine I can still play all the solos of his recordings . . . . "

The influence of Lester Young in turn on Charlie Parker is also well-documented. On November 3, 1993, the International Herald Tribune published an interview by Michael Zwerin with photographer William Claxton, famous for his brilliant visual documentation of jazz. Claxton recalled a weekend Charlie Parker spent with him at Claxton's mother's home in Pasadena at a time when Parker was appearing at the Tiffany Club. Chet Baker was playing trumpet in Parker's group. Claxton asked Parker why he had hired Baker. "He plays pure and simple," Parker said. "I like that. That little white cat reminds me of those Bix Beiderbecke records my mother used to play."

The statements of both Lester Young and Charlie Parker make mockery of an Engish writer's assertion that Bix Beiderbecke "made history but didn't influence it."

Statements by Benny Carter of his debt to Trumbauer, and

any number of other examples of white influence in jazz, not the least of which was Jack Teagarden's expansion of trombone technique. Indeed, at the very time Hodeir made that statement — it was in 1958 — Bill Evans was revolutionizing jazz piano in New York, bringing into it voicings and an approach to touch and time that would influence hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pianists, black and white alike. Hodeir's statement was made, of course, with the complacent confidence with which so many Europeans express their insights into a country they do not know and, in many instances, such as that of the British critic Max Harrison, have never even visited.

"You'll be backstage at a jazz festival," Paul Desmond said to me, "and you'll say something about 'we' and all these faces will turn toward you and someone will say, 'Whaddya mean,' we'?"

In Paris in the early 1980s, while Wynton Marsalis was with Art Blakey, an incident occurred involving friends of mine. I do not normally reveal information that comes privately through friendships. The principals in this incident requested that I not recount it, but it has now spread so far that it must be considered public information.

Down Beat had just made awards to Scott LaFaro and Phil Woods. Wynton Marsalis, then twenty or twenty-one, launched a diatribe about awards being given to these white boys.

Phil Woods is one of the great soloists in the history of jazz, and Scott LaFaro's case is especially interesting.

The great advances in bass proceed through Walter Page to Jimmy Blanton to Oscar Pettiford and Ray Brown (and, in a different direction, Charles Mingus) to Red Mitchell to Scott LaFaro. The high-speed technique currently in wide use among jazz bassists comes not from Mingus but from Red Mitchell.

Up until Red Mitchell, most bassists played — plucked — the instrument with the index finger or with the index and middle finger locked into single motion. Red developed a technique involving alternating the index and middle finger of the right hand. But to finger the notes with the left hand entailed a complex reco-ordination of the two hands. Red had to restructure his reflexes, making the hands more independent of each other. If the note required it, he had to pull the string with the index finger of the right hand but finger it with the middle finger of the left, and vice versa. This is akin to rubbing your head and patting your belly simultaneously, but at a far more complex level. Red was the man who developed that technique. And he taught it to Scott LaFaro who, in my opinion, took it beyond what Red achieved. Red was the source, but Scott LaFaro changed jazz bass forever, influencing countless players, black and white. When you hear Marc Johnson and Eddie Gomez, you are hearing the influence of Scott LaFaro.

This is one of the two men Marsalis, a fledgling who had contributed nothing to jazz, was attacking.

But what made the incident almost bizarre was the group of witnesses to it. Backstage to talk to Blakey were Chan Parker and her daughter Kim, whom Charlie Parker had in part raised. After Parker's death, Chan married Phil Woods, and Phil completed Kim's rearing. She is now an outstanding singer. Hearing Phil derogated put her in tears. As I understand it, Blakey reprimanded Marsalis and made him play ballads to Kim for the rest of the evening.

"Why bring up something that happened so long ago?" Chan asked me.

Because Marsalis as artistic director of the "Classical Jazz" program at Lincoln Center is coming under growing public criticism for bias, and he has done more to undo the aesthetic and social ecumenism of jazz in five years than the music had achieved in the previous 60.

Phil told me that his and the Marsalis groups were assigned the same dressing room. They remained aloof from each other. Finally Marsalis crossed over and said, "Phil, I guess you've heard about an incident in Paris."

"Yeah, I heard about it," Phil said.

"I just want to apologize," Marsalis said, extending his hand.

Phil said to me later, "I have to give him some skin for being man enough to do that."

Since 1959, I have known most of the major writers about jazz in America. I have never known a white jazz critic who was racist, excepting in the sense that some, such as the late Ralph J. Gleason, have been anti-white. I have read perhaps three black ones who aren't.

Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), who described Benny Goodman as "a rich Jewish clarinetist," distorts jazz history in his 1963 book *Blues People* with such comments as "The spectacle of Benny Goodman hiring Teddy Wilson and later Lionel Hampton, Charlie Christian, and Cootie Williams into his outrageously popular bands and thereby making them 'big names' in the swing world seems to me as fantastically amusing as the fact that in the jazz polls during the late thirties and early forties run by popular jazz magazines, almost no Negro musicians won. Swing music, which was the result of arranged big-band jazz, as it developed to a music that had almost nothing to do with blues, had very little to do with black America, though that is certainly where it had come from."

Baraka insisted that jazz is not merely black music but is the music of rebellion. He defined jazz as "Negro music", saying it "drew its strength and beauty out of the depths of the black man's soul . . . . "

One of the most interesting examples of black bias in writing about jazz occurred in an article by Herb Boyd, published in the February, 1991, issues of *Crisis*, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The general import of the article was that jazz has survived despite the white society and the dilution of it by white players.

Boyd writes that "Wynton and Branford Marsalis were given the red carpet and Miles popped up in ads and a sound bite or two, but these affairs have leveled off and much of the media clamor over jazz is now focused on Harry Connick, Jr., Geoff Keezer, Benny Green, Joey de Francesco, and a gaggle of other young white hopefuls. Rushing them to center stage while hundreds of black musicians hover in the shadows is not a new development; the pattern for this is as old as American greed and was evident at the very dawn of the jazz age.

"Jazz was hardly baptized when it was expropriated by white musicians. The first jazz group to make a name for itself through recordings was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB), a white band from New Orleans. After several black bands refused to record, fearing their ideas would be stolen, the ODJB leaped at the opportunity, cut a disc and sold a million copies in 1917. As they gained fame and fortune, such stellar performers as trumpeter Freddie Keppard, Papa Celestin and Doc Cook labored in comparative obscurity.

"During the next decade when Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong had no peer on trumpet or cornet, Bix Beiderbecke, a white cornetist from Iowa, was heralded and feted as if he were the second coming of Buddy Bolden. A quiet, unassuming artist, Bix was nevertheless the darling of the flappers and his acclaim soon rivaled, and among many listeners, eclipsed Satch's . . . .

"Even more so than during the so-called Jazz Age, white musicians ruled the roost, commanding the spotlight, and went to the rank; for every Tex Beneke and Charlie Barnet that was featured in the movies and on radio or headlined a show at a major ballroom, there were dozens of black bands, even including such illustrious royalty as Duke Ellington and Count Basie, dodging the nightriders on the 'chitlin circuit.'"

The theme that "the white man stole the black man's music" is reiterated by Spike Lee, who said in an interview with Los Angeles Times Magazine published June 2, 1991, when he was planning his film *Malcolm X*, "There is definitely a black aesthetic in music, art and dance . . . . For me, black culture is a lot more interesting. I know whites think that, too, because they try to steal everything they can and make money off it, and then have the audacity to call it their own . . . . "

Saxophonist Archie Shepp said, "We are not angry men. We are enraged . . . . I can't see any separation between my music and my life. I play pretty much race music; it's about what happened to my father, to me, and what can happen to my kids."

Nor have all the proponents of this viewpoint been black. Nat Hentoff and the late Martin Williams contributed to it, and Ralph J. Gleason leaned heavily toward it. The Marxist (by his own avowal) critic Frank Kofsky wrote that jazz "is first and foremost a black art — an art created and nurtured by black people in this country out of the wealth of their historical experience."

Let us begin with Baraka's statement that whites won all the jazz polls in the 1930s and '40s. Ellington had one of the most popular bands of the swing era and for some time after 1940 won more polls than any other bandleader. Anyone who has copies of the Metronome All-Star Band records made in the 1940s knows that the personnel of those records were quite mixed. Dizzy Gillespie won the Metronome poll in 1946, when bebop still was new. In June 1946, after an Ella Fitzgerald performance at the Apollo, Metronome called her "the greatest singer of them all." By the end of the 1950s, the balance had shifted even further toward black players. As Stuart Nicholson points out in his biography *Ella*, she had an almost unbroken run of winning the Down Beat poll from 1937 until 1971 when she was displaced by five votes not by a white singer but by Roberta Flack. When I was editor of Down Beat — from May of 1959 to September of 1961 — part of my job was to conduct those polls. In the 1959 Readers Poll, 32 of the 62 winners were black, and as for press opinion, in the 1960 international jazz critics poll, the discrepancy was larger: of 61 winners, only 12 were white. It is true that John Maher, the owner of the magazine, tried to keep black musicians off the covers, but my colleague Chuck Suber, the publisher, and I fought him with every weapon up to and including threats to resign, and won. But the battle grew exhausting and Maher's bias was one of the reasons I quit. Thus I know from bitter personal experience that bias existed at the business level but not among the musicians and not among the writers, all of whom were passionately liberal and pro-black on social, political, economic, and aesthetic issues.

Any statement that jazz is "black music" and only black music is racist on the face of it. In the first place, the description of jazz as something invented in a cultural vacuum solely by blacks is simplistic at the least. New Orleans, where jazz emerged, was a complex society of many peoples. The term Creole originally meant anyone of French ancestry born in the New World, including those who were white. In New Orleans there were white Creoles, black Creoles descended from Haitian immigrants, and Creoles of mixed blood. By a stroke of the legislative pen, the mixed-blood Creoles were classified as black, despite their French ancestry, French language, and European culture. This was a boon to jazz in that they brought to the black community a great deal of musical knowledge and European musicianship.

It is of course insane to classify someone who is seven-eighths white as black. It was a fiction by which white racists kept light Creoles in their place. It is a fiction by which black racists maintain the definition of jazz as "Negro music."

Herb Boyd resorts to the kind of slanted language that intends to destroy by innuendo: phrases such as "a gaggle of young white hopefuls." The language itself is contemptuous.

"Rushing them to center stage while hundreds of black musicians hover in the shadows" is another such phrase. It is a

willful, deliberate lie. On February 24, 1992, Newsweek magazine carried a two-page story on a generation of musicians caught in the middle. Of saxophonist Bobby Watson, it said, that "just as he struck out on his own, the rules changed. He suddenly was too old to be promoted as a 'young lion' in the mold of Wynton Marsalis . . . . Yet he was too young to be marketed as the kind of 'living legend' the industry soon began to champion." (The record industry's emphasis reflected its usual venality; about half of its jazz output comprised reissues which cost virtually nothing.) Besides Watson, the magazine cited Mulgrew Miller, Victor Lewis, Kenny Barron, Tony Williams, Sonny Fortune, and Ray Drummond. The article prompted saxophonist and composer Bill Kirchner to write the magazine a letter, saying, "One could conclude from Tom Masland's otherwise creditable article that 'jazz's lost generation' consists entirely of black males. As I'm sure that profilees Bobby Watson, Ray Drummond, et al, would readily confirm, there are dozens of seasoned white jazz artists (male *and* female) who likewise deserve wider recognition, and black females as well. Masland does not mention that any such people even exist. What's his problem?"

The magazine didn't print the letter.

As for Geoff Keezer, his career was pushed forward not by a white establishment but by Art Blakey, Benny Golson, and Art Farmer, all of whom hired him when he was unknown. At the time Boyd wrote that, Keezer had yet to play in a white group, and he still records with such colleagues as Christian McBride. As for Benny Green, he is a member of the Ray Brown Trio, a role in which he succeeds Monty Alexander and Gene Harris. Oscar Peterson recently was asked by the Glenn Gould Foundation to chose a promising young pianist as a protegee. He selected Benny Green. Oscar, for the record, has been a staunch activist for minority rights in Canada.

If the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was the first to be recorded, it was not because of white exclusion. By Herb Boyd's own statement, it was a matter of default. He says that several black bands refused to record. Then it was their fault, not that of an "establishment," that they were not the first on record. Again, the language is slanted: the sneering "the ODJB leaped at the opportunity . . . . " Could it be that they were smarter than their black colleagues? Mr. Boyd would be enraged by the very suggestion; but the thought is implicit in his accusation. But again, Mr. Boyd is ignorant or willfully dishonest. Black entertainers were being recorded before, during and after the ODJB. As James Lincoln Collier put it, "The record industry, venal as always, would record anybody they could make money with."

How "stellar" a performer Keppard was is problematical. Some musicians did not think that highly of him, and many of his recordings indicate he was not all that good, though in fairness it must be noted that they were made when he was past his prime.

Whether Boyd's next paragraph about Beiderbecke and Armstrong is the consequence of ignorance or willful mendacity is impossible to say. Armstrong was the most powerful influence in jazz, the man who defined its future as the art of the soloist. Armstrong became rich and famous, one of the best-known Americans in the world. At the time of Beiderbecke's death in 1931, Armstrong was appearing in a Broadway show and starring at Connie's, one of New York's leading cabarets. Bix, by contrast, was an obscure figure, unknown to most Americans and admired mostly by a small cadre of musicians — including, incidentally, Armstrong, who is on record as bitter about Bix's so-called friends who kept tempting him to drink. He received almost no press exposure in his lifetime, and it was not until 1936 that Otis Ferguson took an accurate measure of his music in The New Republic. Sales of his recordings were small, whereas many of Armstrong's were hits.

As for the mocking "second coming of Buddy Bolden," nobody knows how Bolden really played. The testimony that survives holds that he played loud and stayed close to the melody, inserting at most small embellishments. He was not a great improviser, perhaps not an improviser at all. Bix was a great improviser.

"Almost every jazz buff," Boyd wrote, "knows that Fletcher Henderson, Sy Oliver and Edgar Sampson scored the hits made famous by the likes of — " note the choice of words again; "by the likes of" " — Benny Goodman, 'the King of Swing,' Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey."

None of those writers wrote for Glenn Miller. But Boyd is apparently ignorant of one black arranger who did write for Miller: Eddie Durham. The more significant point is that white arrangers were writing for black bands before black arrangers wrote for Dorsey and Goodman. Bill Challis wrote for the Fletcher Henderson band when Henderson himself was still struggling to find his voice as an arranger. They were, furthermore, close friends. It is likely that Henderson learned much from Challis. Benny Carter, one of the important figures in developing big-band writing, was emphatic in telling me, "Bill Challis was my idol."

Another white writer for the Henderson band was Will Hudson, who also contributed to the books of McKinney's Cotton Pickers and Erskine Tate around 1931, Cab Calloway in 1932, Henderson and Jimmie Lunceford in 1933 and '34, and the Mills Blue Rhythm Band in 1935. Two of Lunceford's big hits, *White Heat* and *Jazznocracy*, were Hudson compositions.

"Hudson," Gunther Schuller wrote in *The Swing Era*, "had a particular flair for the fast riff instrumentals popularized by the Casa Loma band, especially in their first hit, *Casa Loma Stomp*. Mills, a shrewd businessman — " he refers to publisher Irving Mills, Duke Ellington's partner — "felt that what Lunceford needed was a couple of 'hot' instrumentals a la Casa Loma in his

repertory. Indeed, the Casa Loma's success in the early thirties had a widespread effect to which no band was impervious." In other words, the Lunceford hits echoed the style of the Casa Loma orchestra which, incidentally, Artie Shaw has always insisted was the first swing band. Les Brown concurs.

Russ Morgan, a white trombonist, also wrote for Fletcher Henderson, and the arrangement of *Body and Soul* that Louis Armstrong recorded in 1930 is his. Van Alexander wrote extensively for Chick Webb.

Taken in sum, Fletcher Henderson probably played more charts by white arrangers than Benny Goodman played charts by Fletcher Henderson.

Part of the mythology holds that Tommy Dorsey "stole" him from Lunceford in order to get some soul into his band. Recently I had a number of conversations with Lillian Oliver, his widow, whom he met when she was singing with one of the Dorsey vocal groups, the Sentimentalists.

Sy Oliver was 23 when he joined Lunceford in 1933, playing trumpet, singing, and writing. The Lunceford band had been built around a core of Fisk University alumni. Oliver told Dempsey J. Travis, who quotes him in *An Autobiography of Black Jazz* (Urban Research Institute, Chicago 1983), "I loved Jimmie, but at the same time I resented him. I had a love-hate relationship with him that until this day I have never fully understood, and yet he's one of the few guys that I can recall that I always respected. Of course I recognized that he was the world's greatest square."

According to Lillian Oliver, Lunceford paid Oliver $2.50 for his arrangement of *Margie*, and he had to do his own copying. Nor was the salary good. "Sy wanted to go to university," Lillian said. "He had already given Jimmie Lunceford his notice when Tommy Dorsey's manager told him Tommy wanted to talk to him. Tommy told Sy, 'Whatever Jimmie Lunceford is paying you, I'll pay you $5,000 a year more. And if you'll give me a year, I'll rebuild the band any way you want it." This was in 1939, and Dorsey was as good as his promise.

Furthermore, Lillian said, Dorsey was the first bandleader to give his writers full credit for their compositions. And he set up a publishing company to protect their copyrights and incomes. Thus Lillian still receives royalties from such Oliver compositions as *Well Git It, Yes Indeed*, and *Opus No. 1*.

Oliver got along well with Dorsey, Lillian said. "And he just loved Buddy Rich."

Finally, the Herb Boyd article's special pleading that Duke Ellington had to work "the chitlin' circuit" is ludicrous. Boyd apparently doesn't know much about Ellington. Duke was a national celebrity before the '20s were ended, was invited to the White House in 1931, and traveled by private railway car. By 1937, Chick Webb had eight radio broadcasts a week, more than any big band, black or white. His fan letters numbered 5,000 a week.

We can only guess at the excellence of the Jean Goldkette band out of Detroit, for its record company insisted on recording its more commercial pieces. The only way we can judge the Bill Challis charts is by some recent reconstructions of them.

What we do have is the testimony of Rex Stewart, who was playing cornet in the Henderson band when the encounter by the two bands at Roseland occurred. In *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, the invaluable 1955 compilation by Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff of interviews with jazzmen, Stewart is quoted as follows:

"About that time Fletcher inaugurated one-night stands . . . and each year we went further afield . . . . (We) opened at the Greystone Ballroom in Detroit. Charlie Horvath and Charley Stanton were in charge and they said there were only two great bands in the country, Jean Goldkette's Victor band and us. Well, we scoffed and took it very lightly. After all, men like Buster Bailey, Don Redman, Hawk (Coleman Hawkins), Big Green, Russell Smith had been everywhere, and if this was such a hell of a band, they would have known about it. As I recall it, we closed the Greystone on a Sunday and had a few days off until Friday to open at Roseland in New York. Most of the guys came right back to Harlem, but Redman went to West Virginia to see his people and didn't make it back to New York.

"Opening night and no sign of Don, but Smack" — Smack was Henderson's nickname, widely used — "had a boy from Harlem, Benny Carter, to sit in until Don returned. We thought it strange (that) we were to open because we always were the featured band and played last. We had no idea of who was to be our relief. We finished our set and went outside for some air, but I was wondering who the other band was, how did it sound, and could I learn plenty with a Capital P. It was that Victor band with all those never-to-be-forgotten names, but my special kick was Bix, whose work I have always admired . . . .

"We were supposed to be the kings, the greatest thing in New York. We had the best men, the best arrangements. Then suddenly up pops this band of Johnny-come-latelies out of the sticks — white boys on top of it — and they just *creamed* us. It was pretty humiliating. And Bix — that *tone* he got! Knocked us all out."

The influence of Bix would soon show up in Stewart's own playing. In the mid-1930s Duke Ellington recorded *Kissin' My Baby Goodnight* the Stewart solo is a direct and obvious imitation of Beiderbecke's.

Another witness to the Goldkette band and the admiration it generated was Cuba Austin, who played drums with McKinney's Cotton Pickers. The Cotton Pickers and the Casa Loma Orchestra (at first known as the Orange Blossoms) were managed by Goldkette, whose base of operations was the Greystone Ballroom. In *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, Austin recalled his first encounter with the Goldkette group. The McKinney group arrived in Detroit to play the Arcadia Ballroom.

"Detroit was a wide open town in those days and the great

Goldkette band and the Orange Blossoms were also in Detroit," Austin said.

"We played a season at the Arcadia and moved to the Greystone . . . . All the boys around Detroit at that time loved to jam and it wasn't a surprising sight to see Bix Beiderbecke, Don Murray, Hank Biagni, Joe Venuti, and others all on our bandstand jamming.

"Goldkette used to have a sort of music school in a locker room at the Greystone, and he and Don Redman would take turns at the blackboard, explaining arrangements and teaching us to read better."

The headwater of the style of orchestration that became a river in the swing era goes back not to Fletcher Henderson or even Don Redman and Challis, although they all were major contributors to its evolution. The structural format of the big swing bands is the invention of Ferde Grofe.

Grofe had excellent credentials in "classical" music, and as James Lincoln Collier notes in his new book *Jazz: The American Theme Song* (Oxford University Press) around 1915 "was probably the only man in the world versed in jazz and classical music." Working in dance bands, Grofe developed a system for coaching musicians who couldn't read or at least read well. He would play on the piano the line assigned to each one "and bit by bit put together a complete arrangement, a scheme Duke Ellington would use to great effect ten years later."

Leading a small dance band in San Francisco in 1913 was drummer and sometime pianist Art Hickman. A newspaperman who wrote a little story about the group referred to its "pep" and "enthusiasm", calling it a "jazz" band — the first known use of the word in print. Hickman was asked to bring a band into the St. Francis Hotel's Rose Room; Hickman wrote the tune *Rose Room*, later a jazz standard, for the occasion. By then, Collier points out, New Orleans black musicians had been playing in San Francisco for at least five years: jazz didn't just go "up the river to Chicago" with King Oliver. Collier thinks Hickman was probably playing some sort of raggy version of New Orleans jazz.

Hickman engaged Ferde Grofe to write for the band. At that time, the saxophone was an instrument that no one took seriously, although it had been developed by the Belgian Adolphe Sax more than seventy years before. Excepting the use of an alto by Bizet in the *Arlesienne Suite* and occasional employment by Ravel and Debussy, the classical-music world had almost totally ignored it, and to a large extent still does. Probably the first musician to record on saxophone was Rudy Wiedoeft, a vaudeville performer who did so on C-melody sax in 1916.

"The critical moment," Collier writes, "came in 1918 when somebody heard a vaudeville saxophone team, Bert Ralton and Clyde Doerr . . . . Hickman no doubt was aware of the novelty value of the saxophone, but Grofe saw that saxophones could be used as a small 'choir' in the dance band. Doerr and Ralton were hired. This was the beginning of the saxophone section, which would become the heart of the modern dance orchestra."

The band was a sensation in San Francisco, and, in 1919, at the Biltmore Hotel in New York. Interest in the saxophone exploded. Collier writes, "According to Abel Green, dance band correspondent for the New York Clipper, Hickman, with his New York exposure, was the start of the new dance band. Joe Laurie, in his memoir of vaudeville, said, 'The guy who started all the dance bands' was Hickman. The jazz writer Charles Edward Smith, said, 'Contrary to the widespread misconception, inspiration in swing bands was inspired not by jazz, but by popular dance bands, such as that of Art Hickman.' And James T. Maher, an authority on early dance bands, said that Bob Haring, Jr., whose father arranged for Hickman for a time, said, 'Everybody — all the players, and the arrangers, and even the band leaders — the saxophone playing (of) Bert Ralton and Clyde Doerr . . . completely changed the way the New York musicians thought about the saxophone."

The New Orleans clarinetist Sidney Bechet heard the instrument about this time, and began playing soprano saxophone. The soprano would remain his principal instrument for the rest of his life.

The spread of the idea of the saxophone section must have been rapid. In Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, the young Bill Challis took up the instrument and began arranging for bands. I have examined early Challis arrangements in Wilkes-Barre, where they are kept by his brother Evan in what years ago was their father's barbershop. Aside from noting that Challis had been using the trumpet-trombone-saxophone choirs in 1920, I was startled to see that the charts were written on commercial score paper set up for that instrumentation and rhythm section. (The paper provided for three saxophones.) I realized instantly that the gospel of the evolution of the swing bands that I had read and never questioned was false.

One of the first bandleaders to take note of what Hickman and Grofe were doing in San Francisco was Paul Whiteman, who hired Grofe to play piano in his band and write for it. He took the band to New York, becoming such a success that he had to set up farm-team bands; he sold records in the millions. He hired Challis out of the Goldkette band to further expand his book, which at some points contained parts for six saxophones.

Another significant figure, according to Artie Shaw and others who survive from that era, was Paul Specht, who claimed to have made dance-band broadcasts as early as 1920. This is credible. We have no date for that Specht broadcast, but on May 20, 1920, station CFCF in Montreal, which had gone on the air in early 1919 to become the first regularly operating radio station in the world, originated a broadcast with full orchestra.

"What is important about all of this is the fact that Don

Redman, later to be Fletcher Henderson's musical director, was for a period a factotum in the Specht office," Collier writes.

"Jazz writers have for decades been claiming, on the basis of little evidence, that Henderson and Redman together invented the formula for the swing band. It is clear, however, that the bigger dance band playing arranged jazz had been around for several years before the Henderson band began to make its mark. Henderson presumably brought Don Redman in as musical director precisely because of the dance band experience he had gotten with the Specht office. The Henderson band, of course, went on to become one of the pre-eminent hot dance bands of the time, while the Specht band is today forgotten — although it could play surprisingly hot when it wanted, as the records attest . . . .

"The point is that the great success of Hickman, and especially Whiteman, drew all the other bands in after them. The dixieland group playing unwritten music began to fade away. As we have seen, after 1923, the Henderson, Ellington, Armstrong, Oliver, and Nichols groups were reshaped to conform to the new 'symphonic' style of jazz . . . . "

(In the early 1940s, Benny Goodman donated his record collection to the Widener Library at Harvard. It was collated and catalogued by Grover Sales. "I found a lot of very well-worn Art Hickman records," Grover said.)

Paul Whiteman has been subject to decades of opprobrium by jazz critics. He hired fine writers and let them do their job, and he employed some of the best jazz soloists he could find, including Frank Trumbauer and Bix Beiderbecke who, as we have noted, exerted far wider influences than they are given credit for.

There is a curious inner contradiction, in our age of affirmative action, in these complaints by black writers about Goodman, Dorsey, and Shaw hiring black players and writers for their bands. They are accused of stealing the music because they hired these men. The would be accused of racism if they had not. To anyone whose purpose is to make a case, not to uncover truth, this kind of circular reasoning is useful, if dishonest.

Supposedly these white musicians hired blacks to give "soul" and swing to their bands. Is that why Count Basie hired Buddy Rich, and said later that Buddy was the best drummer the band ever had? And why Duke Ellington hired Louie Bellson and Dave Black?

The influence of Bix shows up in the exquisite, spare, spaced, selective choice of notes in the work of Miles Davis, the almost sculptured character of their lines. As I have previously written, I told Miles it seemed as if there were a link and asked whether he had listened a lot to Bix. He said, "No, but I listened a lot to Bobby Hackett, and *he* listened to Bix."

That my memory does not play me false is attested to by Miles' autobiography.

On Page 8, he writes that Dizzy Gillespie was his idol. "But I liked Clark Terry, Buck Clayton, Harold Baker, Harry James, Bobby Hackett, and Roy Eldridge." On Page 28, he recalls listening to a radio show called *Harlem Rhythms*, saying, "Most of the time they played black bands, but sometimes when they had a white band I would cut it off, unless the musician was Harry James or Bobby Hackett."

Miles is often cited as the archetype of the black racist. At one time he was widely quoted for the statement, "I want to kill just one white man before I die." When I heard it, I laughed, knowing that Miles loved saying things for shock value, and I mused, "I wonder who was the white idiot he said it to." For one of the unpublished stories about Miles concerns a jive bl[illegible] record producer who made the mistake of assuming a chummy intimacy on grounds of color. Miles gave him the glare and said, "You're the right color but you're still a stupid motherfucker."

Miles was aware of the mythology that had grown up around him, and in a strange sort of way, I think, hurt by it. He once said to me, almost poignantly, during a period when we used to hang out a lot, "Gene, why do they call me a racist when my best friend is Gil Evans and my manager is Jack Whittemore?"

Another of his friends was Bill Evans. Miles also remained on good terms with Gerry Mulligan and was planning to go on the road with Gerry in the band the latter put together to play the Birth of the Cool music. His failing health precluded it.

Miles' relationships with such people seems to bother the writer Stanley Crouch. I do not think Crouch sees himself as a racist. I even think he tries to be fair and believes that he is. His inner character, his life experience, make this impossible, as one sees on reading *Sketches of Pain,* a piece he wrote attacking Miles in the February 12, 1990, issue of the New Republic.

Not that Crouch's evaluation of the late-life rock-and-r[illegible] affectations of Miles Davis are without justification. I too thought the music Miles played in the latter years was a travesty. But when Crouch says that at the end he had "a sound so decadent that it can no longer disguise the shriveling of its maker's soul," he is off the mark. The contexts in which Miles played may have been garish and ghastly, but that sound, that glorious sound, the lines he produced and the tones in which he clothed them never deteriorated, except at the very end, when he played that hideous reconstruction at Montreux of the music he had made with Gil Evans.

Crouch says that Miles "was never of the order of Armstrong, Young, Parker, or Monk". Miles, like Bill and Gil Evans, was of exactly that stature, though Armstrong should not be on that list. Like Tatum, his accomplishment put him in a class of his own. As Roger Kellaway said, "We don't even discuss Tatum. There's Tatum and then all the other pianists." So too Armstrong. But Miles was a major figure.

The first hint of Crouch's racial bias in the piece comes in his reference to the Birth of the Cool as "the highly celebrated but essentially lightweight nonet session that Davis steered . . . . "

But of course: those sessions were built out of an experiment, led by Gil Evans, in getting the sound of the Claude Thornhill band with the smallest possible number of players. To grant its importance would be to admit that a major movement in jazz came from Thornhill and Evans, both white. Crouch simply can't handle this, and thus dismisses it with an adjective.

Crouch says that the group inspired what became known as "cool" or "west coast" jazz, "a light-sounding music, low-keyed and smooth, that disavowed the Afro-American approach to sound and rhythm." Jazz, then, is a black music and a black music only; we have heard this before and will hear it again.,

"Heard now," Crouch writes, "the nonet recordings seem little more than primers for television writing. What the recordings show us, though, is that Davis, like many other jazzmen, was not above the academic temptation of western music. Davis turns out to have been overly impressed by the lessons he received at Juilliard when he arrived in New York in 1944."

The western musical tradition, then, is to be rejected. Out with that bath water go the scale and harmonic systems, the arpeggios, the notation, the left-hand patterns from Beethoven and Chopin in which stride piano is rooted, the instruments themselves, Czerny, Arbens, even the I IV V I chords of the blues, not to mention all the material John Coltrane drew from Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*.

Later in the piece, Crouch praises Monk's piano work on a Davis album as being "as far away from European convention as bottleneck guitar work."

Of *Miles Ahead, Porgy and Bess*, and *Sketches of Spain*, three brilliant albums to come out of the friendship and collaboration between Miles and Gil Evans, Crouch says that "those albums . . . reveal that Davis could be taken in by pastel versions of European colors (they are given what value they have in these sessions by the Afro-American dimensions that were never far from Davis's embouchure, breath, fingering); if Davis's trumpet voice is removed, in fact, a good number of Evans's arrangements sound like high-level television music."

That is a little like someone saying Louis Armstrong descends from Roy Eldridge or that Eldridge descends from Dizzy or Charlie Parker is derived from Sonny Stitt. And the passage reveals that Crouch cannot hear moving lines and the tensions they create.

Crouch then goes on to denigrate the other Evans, Bill, in the *Kind of Blue* album, saying, "On the one piece where straightout swing was called for, Davis used Wynton Kelly instead of Evans; but on the softer pieces the things that Evans had learned from Debussy, George Russell, and Mingus issued in voicings of simple materials and intricate details."

Ah yes, there's the point: whatever small ability Bill had came from two black musicians. Although George Russell did much for Bill's career, there is little if anything of Mingus or Russell in Bill's work. There is, however, much of Ravel, Chopin, Poulenc, and Scriabin. And if Crouch wanted to cite the real black models in Bill's work, he should have mentioned Red Garland, and by Bill's own statement to me, Sonny Clark. (Bill's composition *NYC's No Lark* is an anagram on Clark's name.)

As for Bill's relationship to Miles and Wynton Kelly, he left Miles in November, 1958, to develop his own trio. Miles hired Wynton Kelly to replace him. Kind of Blue was not recorded until March and April of 1959. Miles asked Bill to come back to the group to work on the album. Jack DeJohnette, who is a superb pianist as well as a drummer, came into the group later on drums. And Jack told me, "(Bill) affected me on piano. Especially the voicings. If you listen to how Wynton Kelly played after Bill left Miles, he's playing those voicings like Bill. Because Miles wanted those voicings. Those pastel, transparent chords brought light into the music. Everybody — Keith Jarrett, for one — was influenced by the spirit of the way Bill would voice things."

But this fact, and it is a fact, that a white musician could have a major influence on jazz, on black musicians as well as white, simply does not fit the political agenda of writers like Herb Boyd and Stanley Crouch. Neither, of course, does the image of Jean Goldkette, who was not only white but a European, born in France, coaching the Cotton Pickers, or the fact that Ferde Grofe and Art Hickman developed the sax section and the antiphonal groupings of the dance band. So all of it is ignored.

Miles wanted Bill to come back to his group. His love of Bill's work may have been one reason he hired Herbie Hancock, although Hancock had validity of his own. Crouch does admit that "Hancock (was) developing his own version of the impressionism that Evans was making popular."

It is a grudging and small concession.

(To be continued)

American Theme Song

Throughout history, challenges to orthodoxy have been treated ruthlessly. New ideas, in religion, philosophy, physics, medicine, and the arts, have stirred the furies of those who have invested lifetimes in ideas that some upstart says are wrong. In the Middle Ages, questioning authority and established belief could and did result in an embrace by the Iron Maiden, ingenious forms of dismemberment, or incineration at the stake. For asserting that the earth revolves around the sun, Galileo was brought up before the Inquisition, forced to recant, and sentenced to house arrest. Thus he spent the last eight years of his life.

This attachment to orthodoxy has never changed. In the early eighteenth century, scientists scoffed at the very idea that rocks could fall out of the sky.

A certain body of belief has grown up about the evolution of

jazz. Much of what we know, or think we know, about jazz derives from enthusiastic early writers who had training neither as historians, journalists, musicologists, nor musicians. They were incapable of separating their own subjective responses to music from fact. An encrustation of belief has grown up about the art, and God help anyone who questions it.

Which is exactly what James Lincoln Collier has done for several years now. It has earned him the enmity of a great many writers — and others — whose attacks on him often suggest they have not actually read the work they are deploring.

If Collier's new book, titled *Jazz:The American Theme Song* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1993), has stirred the furies again, his detractors do not intend apparently to express them, seeming to prefer to punish, and if possible destroy, him with silence. I haven't read a single published mention of the book. But it will find its place in history, for it is one of the most important theoretical books ever written about jazz.

Collier is a historian, not a jazz critic. He has published fifty books, including this one, on all manner of subjects, including human sexuality. One of them, written with his brother Christopher Collier, also a historian, is on the Constitutional Convention. Collier is also a musician.

There used to be a sophistic expression in defense of the writing of laymen on the arts: "You don't have to be a cow to know if the steak is tough." But cows don't eat steaks, and you do have to be a chef if you want to tell someone else how to make a better souffle. A good many of the writers about jazz have little if any training in music, yet fiercely defend their "right" to render judgments. They are going to loathe Chapter Nine of this ten-chapter book, in which he traces the evolution of jazz criticism from the early days, when some good stuff was written about it (legend to the contrary notwithstanding) to the generation of John Hammond and Rudi Blesh, of whom he says, "They do not appear to have had any interest in the philosophy or sociology of art in general, or in the relationship of jazz to American culture, except to regularly announce that it was the only art form produced by that country, and that it was despised at home and only recognized for its merits in Europe, neither of which was true. They were, first, last, and always, jazz fans, and they brought to their writing passion, but not objectivity; intensity, but not scholarship. They were, concluded Ron Welburn in his thorough examination of jazz criticism, 'arrogant and opinionated, impatient with musicians and critic peers alike. Their image . . . gave the impression of amateurism and immaturity as they argued in record stores or at a performance over their favored musicians' merits . . . . The esoteric nature of jazz coupled with their pomposity shrouded their enthusiasm in pretense." Collier analyzes the work of the younger jazz critics, none of whom is going to give this book a good review, if they give it any review at all.

Collier plays trombone. Though he takes a self-deprecatory attitude toward his own playing, I've heard him, and he's pretty good. More to the point, he has a solid theoretical understanding of music. I was fascinated by the assaults on his Ellington biography. Its most valuable feature was the harmonic analysis of Ellington's work, which most of the book's deprecators were incapable of understanding.

This new book is really an examination not of jazz history but of the world around it. It does not trace the river, something Collier did in his earlier The Making of Jazz. It examines the land around it, including the death of Victorianism and the causes and nature of the social revolution that created a climate of receptivity to the new music as it sprouted. He traces what he calls "The Rise of Individualism and the Jazz Solo", the involvement of jazz with show business, and the movement of jazz -- like other arts before it -- into academia. He also has a chapter on a subject rather dear to me, local jazz: the enormous number of devoted musicians of professional stature but amateur status in cities and towns all over America. I am amazed at their number, dedication, and talent, and so is he. This is the first book on jazz that even takes note of their existence.

One of the most valuable chapters in the book is the fourth, titled "Hot Rhythm". Andre Hodeir once wrote that swing was a matter of getting the notes in the right place. He didn't tell us what the right place is. Collier does. His son, psychologist Geoffrey L. Collier, ran a series of tests, several thousand trials, on jazz and classical musicians, that revealed that people routinely divide beats by a ratio of about 1.8 to 1. "Therefore," he writes, "it appears likely that the tendency to subdivide the beat in this fashion has little to do with swing in particular, and might be related to the brain processes that generate time." There are a good many psychiatrists and psychologists in the Jazzletter readership; they will particularly find this chapter fascinating. There is not room here to trace further the research the two Colliers have done in this area. I can only tell you that it is pioneering work.

Collier is a diligent researcher. He spends endless hours poring over microfiche files of old newspapers, doing primary-source research rather than the secondary-source work that satisfies so many writers in the field. The consequence dispersal of myth makes him an iconoclast. Such folk are never popular; but progress in scholarship would not exist without them.

I cannot recommend his new book too highly.

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