Gene Lees
Jazzletter

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Mail Bag

The mail has been so substantial and thoughtful that I thought it incumbent on me to reply at some length. To say that I am honored by it is to understate the matter badly.

I've been reading the Jazzletter since the beginning, and I always enjoy it. After finishing your series on Jobim, I became aware of the next level of communication that occurs when I read it: not only have I learned of Jobim, and whatever else you write about, I have also spent some time with Gene Lees. Perhaps it's an obvious truth, and equally true that millions of Americans spend their allotted hours with Oprah and Roseanne, but I've never experienced such a level of familiarity with a writer who was otherwise not a personal acquaintance. I'm sure at least on a subconscious level you're aware that your spirit/personality/talent/ego/opinions are reaching people, entering their lives, influencing them, entertaining, informing, inspiring, occasionally offending (just a sign that you're doing your job).

Thanks again for your mind and your work. Even when I disagree with what you say (or the peremptory manner in which you dismiss music which falls outside your approved arena, like Bob Dylan and the Beatles) I am still stimulated. You are enriching the universe. No one else can do what you do.

Subscriber, fan,

Bryan Cumming, Nashville, Tennessee

Bryan Cumming is a musician.

Once again sincere congratulations are due, this time for the stunning feature *Um Abraço No Tom*. We saw on local TV what must have been one of Jobim's last public concerts and found it very moving. Like many, if not most, jazz enthusiasts, I have been captivated by South American (particularly Brazilian) music and musicians for years. Pre-eminent among the latter: the incomparable Jobim. I have admired him from afar since I first heard his music. Your informative and sensitive essay brought Tom into my living room. Since reading it, I now feel I have met him which, in some strange osmotic process, I have! Thank you for that.

Rod Willis, Berowra Heights, Australia

Once again I find myself writing a letter of appreciation, this time for the magnificent three-part piece on Jobim.

As I have probably told you before, in 1985 I flew from Miami to Rio at my own expense (not a gig!) in the same spirit that Catholics make a pilgrimage to Rome or Moslems to Mecca. I wanted to meet my musical hero in person and if possible get to know him. When I had checked into my hotel (a small one in the area between Copacabaña and Ipanema beaches), I called my friend Luiz Eça, announced my arrival, and at the end of our brief conversation, asked about my chances of meeting Jobim. There was a long silence, and then the wry words, "Eddie, if you had asked to meet the president of Brazil, I could have arranged it. Forget about Jobim." And so my trip to Rio, although thrilling and memorable in so many ways, was frustrating in the primary sense.

When I heard the news of Jobim's death, I had the feeling that part of my life would be forever unresolved. Then came your latest Jazzletters and now I feel satisfied at last that I have met the man who has had such a significant and lasting effect on my musical life. Thank you for yet another great piece of writing, which as usual was moving, informative, funny, and immensely satisfying.

Eddie Higgins, Mashpee, Massachusetts

Eddie and I have been friends since he led the house trio at the London House in Chicago. Eddie's a magnificent pianist, and under-rated.

Enclosed is a check for my subscription and a gift subscription for Steve Stech, my room-mate with the Thornhill band in 1942. Steve was a trumpet player and I was one of the Snowflakes, the vocal group consisting of Lillian Lane, Martha Stewart, and Buddy Stewart.

I can still remember auditioning for Gil Evans on a Friday night in late spring of 1942 at the Glen Island Casino. Since I didn't really sight-read too well, Gil played my harmony parts for a record date that was to take place the following Monday and Tuesday. I can still sing my parts!

One of the tunes was Claude's first big hit, *I Don't Know Why*, featuring the Snowflakes — or as Conrad Gozzo, the incomparable lead trumpet, referred to us, the Cornflakes. We were in truth a very good group — in tune and beautifully blended. And I was twenty years old! *Ou sont les neiges d'antin?*

I truly loved the Gil Evans articles, which honestly recaptured the man as I knew him. A true original.

Artie Malvin, Beverly Hills, California

Like Claude Thornhill and Gil Evans, Artie soon got the call of the military. Glenn Miller was putting together his great wartime band. He had the pick of the best musicians in the service. One of those chosen was Artie. He became a member of the vocal group with the Miller band, the Crew Chiefs, and after the war, the group went with the Miller band led by Tex Beneke.

Another outstanding series, this time on Gil Evans. I received the latest Jazzletter this morning and couldn't put it down.

I think Count Basie once said that he trusted listeners more than the educated musical elite. They had so much less to forget and filter; they were freer.

I think in later years Gil Evans became an even more astute listener than early on. He began to cherish those long solos of the jazz people in his band. Working it out, so to speak, the essence of creative music. And he trusted the players who had to find a way.

David Sanborn never sounded so good as when he was to force himself to work and resolve his story when he worked with Gil.

I loved your beautiful song of Gil Evans, and listen with awe to the marvels he brought to our music.

If you keep on writing, I'll keep on reading. Sweet love,

Oscar Treadwell, Cincinnati, Ohio

Oscar, one of the most respected jazz disc jockeys, has been a subscriber to the Jazzletter since it began in 1981.

It really saddened me to think that Gil Evans' music will not be included in the Lincoln Center programs under the current regime. I never realized how perceptive some critics are that they are able to detect the quality of a jazz musician's art through his skin color. Lucky Louis Armstrong did not let that affect his relations with Bix or Bunny Berigan (I did not know that connection — thanks for the tip). Perhaps this same line of reasoning (convoluted, that is) keeps me asking why Mr. Marsalis' music usually moves me not.

Your writing about most subjects makes me pause and reflect in ways that are a welcome luxury to me. Usually I have time only to listen to the music, but I seldom allow myself to think about why or how it affects me. Your writing offers me a window to my own passions, where I am free to consider the differences in the soul (?) of a casual admirer of whatever is the musical craze today. I can make no real connection between my passion for jazz and theirs for whatever, nor can I explain why jazz moves me in a way other musics do not.

In case I did not tell you before, I really enjoyed your night singing and reminiscing at the Fairmont Hotel in Dallas several years ago. Your personality and presentation are so much like your writing that I feel that I know you from that one event.

Finally, I know you recommend cruises, but do Jazzletter subscribers get together anywhere else? While a good number probably are musicians, I assume an equal or greater number are like me. Maybe this is a group that deserves to know each other better via a yearly venue (a festival?) or perhaps through the Internet. Just a thought.

It's a pleasure to receive the Jazzletter and to know another who shares this unqualified passion for the music and its creators that, for me at least, is on the border somewhere between fanaticism and lunacy. I now know I am not alone.

Warmest wishes from Dallas,

David Leonnig, Dallas, Texas

There has been talk from time to time of organizing a Jazzletter party or cruise. The problem is getting backing. Not easy.

It's Sunday, and the rain, badly needed, is coming down hard at last. I'm trying to pack for an extended German tour, but took time to read your Gil Evans piece. It demands that I write, to say that I believe it to be the best — and potentially most important — thing you've done.

Several reasons for that, and for my belief that it is the core of a book. Please heed what I'm about to say: when such passions come over me I tend to pay close attention to them, and they're usually right.

The Evans piece works on several levels. Superficially, of course, it's a memoir, affectionate and revealing, telling us much about Gil and the blessedly inclusive nature of what he did. It also reminds me (as if I needed reminding) of the wisdom and unerring insight of Jim Maxwell, who has affected my life in ways he still hardly suspects.

Were that all, the piece would have established its value. But no: beyond its function as biography lies a vista of meaning deeper and broader, infinitely more important. In both general and specific terms it addresses the reality of how musicians, no matter what their style, race, age, or world view, interact. That, of course, is the true life-force of all American music, jazz in particular.

As we both know, that interaction is now imperilled by an alliance of tribalism and political opportunism which seems determined to dismantle the monuments of the past, grinding even their component building blocks to dust. You and Terry Teachout and a handful of others have dealt concisely and eloquently with that destructive process.

But Gil Evans's life and music, the beauty of the Thornhill orchestra, the sheer humanity of the collaboration with Miles and, in general, the easy camaraderie that pervades it all — these have the sonority of greater truth. Any musician who has been around an inner circle of top professionals, regardless of their stylistic persuasion, will know the dynamic at once. It's what *really* happens, and what has produced great music, whatever its period and conventions. Musicians recognizing, giving, learning from one another, combining their skills, perceptions, characters, for the greater good.

In the context you've established, Gil Evans is both man and metaphor, incarnating a truth that exposes the sophism of the new jazz orthodoxy by simply transcending it. You could do us all — and posterity — immeasurable service by making him the centerpiece of a study that spreads out and down, examining in depth the ways black and white, young and old, radical and conservative, coalesced during that extraordinary period, from the late '40s to the early '60s, when it was still possible to do so.

The idea of Dick Cary, for example, applying the *Birth of the Cool* approach to a collection of "dixieland" standards is far from a quirky anomaly. He lived in that amazing apartment building on Sixth Avenue where Hall Overton, Jimmy Raney, John Lewis and so many others talked, played together, endlessly cross-fertilized ideas. I went to a couple of sessions there (once as part of a front line with Roswell Rudd and the excellent, now almost forgotten, saxophonist Leroy Parkins) and remember them as ecumenical astonishments. Until then I'd assumed that musicians of different styles, ages, races, lived in hermetically sealed compartments.

Quite the contrary, I discovered. It changed my life.

How it *really* was, can be, must be again. That, for me, is the key subject of your three-part Evans invention, and it's a glorious one. Run with it: think deeply into it, develop it.

As you know, my *magnum opus* also treats this subject, but only in the context of earlier history. With a few exceptions, it doesn't take things beyond World War II. You're dealing with far more recent events, and in a way that has enormous relevance to the adversity of the moment.

And, parenthetically, let me add that this is one of the first major Gene Lees pieces I've read in which your first-person presence in the frame is minimal and, where it occurs, wholly functional. To me that's a sign that you understand the implications what you've introduced here. I salute you for it.

So please accept these hortatory words, and my sincere congratulations.

Richard Sudhalter, Southold, New York

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Anita, Noah, and Miles Evans, New York City

Grover Sales is absolutely right and refreshingly blunt about what our youth culture truly is. A majority within all age classes today, not just the young, buy products, music, and ideas that are originally manufactured and promoted supposedly by and for the youngsters.

But of course, today anybody under sixty has grown up in a system that is reinforcing infantile behavior, so that adults do not just behave like their kids because they refuse to age but because the values they acquired as young adults were infantile to begin with. Why did this happen, and why did it start in America?

For generations of Europeans who were told to obey and conform, America was the place where individuals had a chance to make it on their own terms. This culminated between the two World Wars, when an efficient economy gave people access to new technologies — film, radio, recording — at all levels of society, and at the same time an explosion of creativity occurred in jazz and cinema, where an incredible number of highly individual artists had the opportunity to develop and, through those technologies, to meet a huge audience. Certainly the myth of the "land of opportunity" had a lot of substance then, and the American Dream seemed to have a chance to come true. European film directors, for instance, were going to Hollywood not only to escape from a very sick Europe, or for money, but also because California was where their very craft was being constantly reinvented.

And then, quite suddenly, things got out of hand. Material freedom, for many, increased beyond expectations, and television, like a high-tech mirror, filled the void and reflected our confusion. For the first time in history (in America after World War II), an economy was efficient enough to free a large number of people from poverty and give them a choice through political and economic democracy (the market economy), making all sorts of things instantly available and developing technologies (television) geared toward that goal. And the overwhelming majority's choices have been indeed the ones children make when given no guidance: anything that is immediate, requires no effort, and entails no responsibility.

Once it was established by the late '50s that those were "popular" choices, products that were comforting them increasingly became the only ones made available, since they were more profitable. Previously, only those individuals sufficiently armed to gain power (including artistically) would influence the values of a society; that produced historical tragedies and good art. Now the produce of no concept and no education is given a vehicle that broadcasts it cheaply everywhere. Through radio and especially television it lays itself over the culture of the world. And its vehicle is so powerful economically and psychologically (we naturally tend to accept images as truth) that it is much more competitive than the established cultures.

It is so much easier, requires no effort, and we are not supposed to be responsible for what it shows. It is also so "democratic" that we can all understand it. Likewise, rock is more "democratic" than jazz: we could all potentially play rock; to play jazz you need to be a musician to begin with. And that's elitist!

Before this loop was closed (people are given the financial means of choice as well as the easiest alternatives and choose them; then no other choice is available) it was still possible to have a functioning market for the tastes of minorities. In the '50s jazz was not anywhere near the popular music that it was in the '30s. As such it was already being replaced by rock, and still the '50s were an incredibly creative period for jazz, and it was finding its market with dedicated fans. But those fans grew up in the previous decades. After that, almost everybody who could buy a record was given an opportunity to indulge in a natural penchant for laziness when he was forming his taste as an adolescent, so that every incremental investment to record the umpteenth version of some rock trash was finding a bigger, more profitable market than the recording of jazz.

The same economic system that gave individuals a choice made sure that they would make the same choice as everybody else — and choose the lowest common denominator — and would not form their own values but buy the same ready-made values as all the others. Not surprisingly, there grew at the same time a sense of estrangement from the world around us, and while we destroy our planet, we are absorbed in creating "virtual reality". Psychiatrists tell us that nothing is so dangerous as a child's mind in an adult's body, where the sublimation process (the expression of impulses in constructive forms) has not happened. That is not a bad definition of our society.

It is irresponsible to give children all choices without giving them the tools to make them.

Therefore your constant insistence in your books on the importance of parental guidance and education (which, as Grover

points out, have crucially weakened at the same time television became a travesty of both) in the personal background of many accomplished jazzmen, also shows one of the few lines of resistance available, if we want to have more people who think and choose as individuals instead of buying what they are told they all want.

God bless the child that's got its own.

Best regards,

Claude Neuman, Wezembeek-Oppem, Belgium

I became so fascinated by this letter's English that I faxed Claude a number of questions. His reply offers further outside insights into the North American culture and the effect jazz has had around the world. Here it is:

My mother tongue is French. I also lived twelve years in France. My wife is French. We have an eleven-year-old daughter whom we adopted when she was a baby in an orphanage in Sri-Lanka.

I speak just enough German to get by in business, and a little bit of Flemish.

I'll soon be forty-two. If you go by my academic background, I am supposed to be an economist. I'm managing one of the chemical companies belonging to Neste, a Finnish oil and petrochemical multinational corporation whose chemical division is headquartered in Brussels. Before Neste I worked eleven years, mostly in Switzerland, in European operations of a Canadian chemical company, Polysar, of Sarnia (so I know Ontario fairly well).

English has always been, and still is, the language I use at work.

I've been attracted toward Anglo-Saxon and especially American culture since my teens: Jazz, musicals, cinema, and literature. Aside from the professional reasons, I always liked the language and reading books in the original text has also been a motivation to become, and a way to remain, fluent in English.

I am not a musician and, much to my regret, had no musical education; it was not in the family.

So I am in the situation of organized schizophrenia whereby I have no gift for what I really like and I don't really like what I had to become reasonably good at, business management of all things. My daughter recently had one of those classic children's insights. I was coming home foaming at the mouth after some frustrating meeting at the office. She looked at me and said, "Does your boss like jazz?" Right on!

You must realize that, aside from admiration for your work and the way you managed your life, your recounting of your innumerable friendships and experiences with musicians we worship also elicits a feeling of envy in your readers who, like me, are completely outsiders to that world.

In my case especially so, when you describe those propitious watering holes that keep cropping up in your recollections, so many enchanted places where one finds at last the right people, the right music, the right atmosphere, and the right beverages, all together for once — Jim and Andy's, Junior's, Charlie's Tavern, that place on the beach in Rio with the bossa nova gang. That made me pale with envy.

Claude

I am a dedicated subscriber who awaits each issue of the Jazzletter with anticipatory delight, knowing I will be exposed to the best writing and most inspired thinking on the musical scene today.

However, I must admit that I am disappointed when precious space is devoted to political messages and the several fans I introduced to the Jazzletter feel the same way.

I read quite a few political journals regularly and certainly have my fill of political thought on all parts of the spectrum. But I turn to you for that special niche which no other writer can fill — and politics doesn't fit that niche.

Lawrence Elow, Bedford, New York

I love the Jazzletter. Please keep it up. I'm not a musician or a trained technician but I catch most of the technical stuff and all the rest. I love the political stuff. Don't change a thing.

Arthur Leist, Pine Brook, New Jersey

Your writing is solid and stirring. Many of us enjoy it for our *de facto*, but latent, interest and ability in musical things. Your forum is a fine one for rekindling interest and intellect, and educating in the arcanum of music, especially jazz.

Do some political reflections. I do not care if we agree. We can always argue. Best wishes for a continuing successful adventure.

Albert MacDade MD, Fort Smith, Arkansas

Al MacDade is a neurosurgeon.

All the others write of music and musicians like they are fish in an aquarium. You, my friend, are always in there swimming with them.

With utmost admiration,

Johnny Mandel, Malibu, California

Thanks for another year of superior writing about wonderful topics.

John R. McCandless, Chandler, Oklahoma

You enrich my jazz life.

John Brophy, La Jolla, California

I wish you'd write an autobiography. No other musician has had a more interesting life.

Ruth Coleman, Apple Valley, California

The Man in the Mirror

O, what a world of unseen visions and heard silences, this insubstantial country of the mind! What ineffable essences, these touchless rememberings and unshowable reveries! And the privacy of it all! A secret theater of speechless monologue and prevenient counsel, an invisible mansion of all moods, musings, and mysteries, an infinite resort of disappointments and discoveries. A whole kingdom where each of us reigns reclusively alone, questioning what we will, commanding what we can. A hidden hermitage where we may study out the troubled book of what we have done and yet may do. An introcosm that is more myself than anything I can find a mirror. This consciousness that is myself of selves, that is everything, and yet nothing at all — what is it?

And where did it come from?

And why?

Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Houghton-Mifflin, New York 1976).

Begin with an individual, and before you know it you find that you have created a type; begin with a type and you find that you have created — nothing. That is because we are all queer fish, queerer behind our faces and voices than we want any one to know or than we know ourselves.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Rich Boy.*

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see. *That — and no more, and it is everything.*

Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus.*

The identity of content and form is the first axiom of all sound criticism.

Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry.*

Kinky Friedman, whose flair for the outrageous has always delighted me — his group, Kinky Friedman and his Texas Jew Boys, had a song called *They Don't Make Jews Like Jesus Any More* — now writes mystery novels. And the character who solves the mysteries is named, well, Kinky Friedman.

And Steve Allen has written a series of mysteries, the latest of which is *Murder on the Atlantic* (Kensington Publishing, New York, $19.95). In these books, the sleuths are two characters named Steve Allen and his wife, Jayne Meadows.

This is intriguing. All writers, like actors, to some extent project in their fiction adventures they would like to have. The writing permits one to live safely in the imagination lives other than one's own. In my case, that extends to non-fiction as well. In the 1960s, I wrote and sold a lot of fiction, but eventually fiction wore out for me. I no longer write it and rarely read it, finding myself increasingly unable to suspend disbelief.

Thus, when from time to time I am asked when I am going to write a jazz novel, the answer is: Never. Why? I have just written *Leader of the Band: The Life of Woody Herman*, which Oxford is bringing out in another month or so. The *life* of Woody Herman. And I lived it, for just about seven years. Woody's life has been absorbed into my own. It is now part of my own memories. I structured that book like a novel. A friend pointed out that it contains thirty-two chapters, parallel to the thirty-two bars of a standard song. I had not noticed.

Of my most recent writing, Terry Teachout said, "You used to write songs. Now you're writing symphonies." And only then did it strike me that several of the more recent pieces — those on Gerry Mulligan, Antonio Carlos Jobim, and Gil Evans — are all in what one might call three "movements".

When I was young and learning to write, I was always baffled by references by academics to literary "form". I did not then and do not now have the slightest idea what these people were talking about. But I did understand a little about musical form, and I began to model my experiments in writing on it, including a failed novel in sonata form. Thus I was intrigued when Oscar Treadwell referred in his letter to my "song of Gil Evans" and Dick Sudhalter to my "three-part Evans invention". Good heavens. Teachout, Treadwell, and Sudhalter have found me out!

I was trained originally as a commercial artist, but found myself more fascinated by literature. So I left the Ontario College of Art in my second year and within a matter of months was a green young newspaper reporter, learning fast about murder, inquests, trials, suicide, fires (when the lake cruise ship Noronic burned in Toronto harbor, killing I can't remember how many persons, I worked on the story), politicians, and sundry other horrors.

Though I left it behind, that training in painting lingers with me (I long to go back to it and never will), affecting everything I do. My lyrics, I am well aware, are very visual.

What intrigues me about these works by Kinky Friedman and Steve Allen is that they turn an old literary tradition inside out, that of the autobiographical novel. Much of Hemingway's writing, particularly the early short stories, is autobiographical. He is the Nick Adams of the stories. *A Farewell to Arms* is more or less autobiographical, though he was an ambulance driver, not a combatant. The classic case of autobiographical writing is that of Thomas Wolfe, by whom I was influenced when I started to write, though later I found his writing somewhat sophomoric, certainly navel-gazing; novels about novelists are limited. Malcolm Lowery is the disguised protagonist of *Under the Volcano*, the single most influential novel of my life — I've probably read it twenty times.

But in the Kinky Friedman and Steve Allen books, real persons, the authors, are projected into fictional situations.

Ruth Coleman's letter poses a question that again has the answer: Never. I am not going to write an autobiography any more than I am going to write a novel about jazz. I haven't found my

life very interesting and I certainly don't think I've managed it well, Claude Neuman's impression notwithstanding. I've just known some very interesting people. As for my love life, I have no intention of discussing it. I leave that to Ben Bradlee, who apparently recounts his in his newly-published autobiography. I for one have no great interest in the romantic reveries of newspaper editors. And incidentally, why not go after Bradlee for writing "I" in descriptions of his conversations with Jacqueline Kennedy or the late president? How about the incident when Jack Kennedy told him at a reception that Gary Powers had just been exchanged for a Russian agent? Can you imagine, "The president summoned this reporter and said, 'We have just . . . . "

The problem with Dick Sudhalter is that he doesn't use "I" enough, and being the musician and the superb writer that he is, he has much to tell us about the inside of the experience and doesn't.

Whereas I sympathize with Lawrence Elow's frustration with much writing about jazz, I cannot accept his request. If he has friends who agree with him, this is understandable, for (1) If you pose a question saying, "Don't you think that . . ?" you'll probably get an affirmative answer, and (2) Since we tend to choose as friends persons of like mind, it is probable that they will agree with us on many matters. It is the result of pre-selection.

I have immense respect for this publication's readership (there are some incredible people on the list) and often consult members of it as an astounding research resource. But I have to make my own calls. I long ago I decided that if some persons were alienated and dropped their subscriptions, so be it. Better that than wimpy work that in an effort please everybody pleases nobody.

For all too many people, the concept of freedom of speech and the press is that you have the right to say or write anything they agree with. Observe the viciousness of current Republican politics, and that party's mounting campaign to destroy the arts and education and all questioning thought in America to the long-range purpose of creating an obedient and unquestioning servant class for those who are its masters. If you think this isn't so, I suggest you examine bills they have quietly put before Congress to destroy copyright for composers, along with other programs to dismantle public broadcasting — our only redoubt against rock-and-roll ignorance — and the National Endowment for the Arts. The process began when under Reagan a systematic campaign to discredit the word *liberal*, almost to equate it with treason, was set in motion, comparable to the campaign of the record industry to discredit the discriminating appreciation of true art as *elitist*. Coupled with the pending deregulation of broadcasting, which opens the way for one corporation to own all radio and television dissemination in America, the Disney takeover of ABC, and the Time Warner takeover of Turner Broadcasting, all moving to concentrate the means of communications in ever fewer hands, the American culture is in grave danger from the political process. Indeed I am going to talk about politics in the next few months, for if its banes are not at least mitigated you can forget about all future foot-tapping and swizzle-stick dinging.

In ten years as a newspaper reporter and editor, I was disciplined in the difference between fact, which is what reporters are supposed to stick to although what is fact is a discussable point, and opinion, which is the interpretive stuff supposedly confined to the editorial and op-ed pages.

This distinction became part of my psyche before I was far into my twenties. When I was music, drama, and film critic of The *Louisville Times*, knowing this difference I felt a discomfort in expressing my opinions. I knew that they were merely personal reactions; informed ones, I hoped, and tried to make them more so: I resumed the study of piano and harmony, working with Don Murray, one of those excellent jazz pianists you find all over America that the outside world has never heard of; joined a drama group, working as an assistant director and even doing a little acting; not only reviewed the concerts of the Louisville Orchestra but attended its rehearsals and hung out with its musicians, learning. I had the chance to meet an incredible range of people, from Gregor Piatagorsky to Nat Cole, from Alan Ladd to Billy Gilbert to Ronald Reagan, the most cretinous public figure I ever interviewed. (The most intelligent? George Meaney. And maybe I.F. Stone.) That was my university, the newspaper business.

The distinction between fact and opinion led me to some writing habits. I would say, "I think that . . . . " rather than state that my reaction to a composition or a movie was a fact rather than a reaction. Given a column of my own, I departed from conventional journalism. Completely.

And one day someone on the paper, someone who apparently didn't like me, circled every I in my column with a red pencil and put it on the bulletin board. It didn't change my thinking one bit.

I had four especial friends on that paper, and the closest was a young man of my age named John Walsh, a Rhodes scholar and outstanding writer, who later became the news editor of Science, the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. When I have editorial doubts, which is most of the time, John still is one of those confidants I consult.

In the early days of the Jazzletter, John said, "Doesn't it read more like a Geneletter?" I said, "Yes, and it's meant to." About the first-person use, James Lincoln Collier said a few months ago, "You walk close to the edge with that. So far you haven't slipped."

But that's what lyric writing is all about: the trick is to go to the brink of pathos and *not go over*. If you want to see that trick pulled off beautifully, listen to Mozart.

One of the most important mentors of my life was Robert Offergeld, the music editor of *Hifi/Stereo Review* when I met him in New York in the summer of 1962. He took me to lunch. Later a friend asked, "How did your lunch go?"

I said, "The guy's a fag. I guess I won't be writing for that magazine."

The next day Bob called to ask me to write for the magazine. He would be one of the dearest friends of my life. He was an

astounding scholar in almost every field, and he taught me more about more things, from Alexander the Great to Bach to Gottschalk to you-name-it, than anyone I ever knew. He had studied piano with Paderewski. When I was playing something of Debussy, at his insistence, he said with prissy impatience, "No, no, no! You're playing it as if it were German music, with each chord supposed to move to the next. You have to understand that in Debussy, the chord has a life and meaning of its own."

Four or five years ago, I flew to New York to be with him as he lay dying of emphysema in Lenox Hill Hospital. With a tube in his throat after a tracheotomy, he couldn't talk, this most articulate of men. All I could do was hold his hand and sometimes brush his thinning hair from his forehead and look into his frightened eyes, and once, thank God, I got up the grit to tell him I loved him.

His art treasures and exquisite Steinway piano had to be sold to pay his debts, but his doctor called to ask if there were any of the smaller things I wanted. I said, "Yeah, those photos of Paderewski and Horowitz." Horowitz was one of Bob's friends. The photos were autographed to Bob. They're on my wall now.

After my lyrics began to be widely recorded, I was having dinner with Bob in a German restaurant. He said, in his lofty professorial way, "You're going to have to do something about your dichotomy, you know."

"What are you talking about?"

"The two sides of your writing. The clear journalistic side and the lyrical."

"It can't be done, Bob," I said. "They are separate things."

"Listen to what your old teacher is telling you," he said. "You will *have* to do it some day, and you will find a way."

I persisted in thinking it was impossible until the Jazzletter gave me the freedom to experiment with what Bob foresaw: the song as essay, the essay as song. The song is the only literary form that is almost always in first and second person singular.

Richard Halliburton was born in Brownsville, Tennessee, in 1900. After his sophomore year at Princeton, he took off on travels around the world and wrote about them. He followed the route of Ulysses in the Mediterranean, swam the Hellespont in emulation of Lord Byron, swam the length of the Panama Canal (if memory serves he was charged something like thirty-two cents to go through one of the locks as a ship), and jumped into the sacrificial well at Chichen Itza. When I stared down into that well, I thought of him. He was lost in a 1939 typhoon as he attempted to sail from Honk Kong to San Francisco in a Chinese junk.

Halliburton wrote of his adventures in books such as *The Glorious Adventure, New Worlds to Conquer*, and *Seven League Boots*. Never once did he write "this writer" or "this observer" or "your reporter". It was always I, and he took me on his journeys with him the way a usually reliable source could never have done. Halliburton wanted his readers to be there with him. So do I.

Richard Sudhalter has a double background. He is a fine cornetist. But he also had a career as a journalist, a correspondent for UPI in Europe. Dick thus has two disciplines. And he seems to think the nature of the task is to be objective, detached from the subject. I don't want to be detached from it.

And I deplore the posturing of objectivity of much journalism. It was, I believe, Oscar Wilde who said that being natural was after all only a pose. So is objectivity in journalism, and detachment the most deceitful of all the profession's affectations. I much prefer the intelligent prejudice of George Will, even when I disagree with him. One of the reasons I always liked *Le Monde* in Paris is that they engaged specialists in each field and then cut them loose. It made for highly informative, if subjective, writing.

Journalism changed with the rise of radio broadcasting. A significant moment in its accelerating evolution was, I think, the crash of the Hindenburg at Lakehurst, New Jersey, on May 6, 1937. The radio announcer assigned to do an "objective" report loses it completely when the zeppelin bursts into flames, weeping and crying things like, "Oh this is awful!" Where was his journalistic cool? But his voice is still heard, filled with his anguish, every time the newsreel image of that crash is shown in a documentary.

Journalism changed further in World War II when we would hear things like, "This is Edward R. Murrow, broadcasting from London. From where I am sitting, I can hear the bombs falling." It changed with Ernie Pyle, writing his impressions of the GIs trudging up Italy, so involved with his own stories that it got him killed. It changed with movie newsreels: "This is Lowell Thomas." It changed more with the rise of television news. It changed with Ed Bradley rushing into the surf to help one of the boat people, an old woman, to shore. It changed with Walter Cronkite almost caving in (the French verb *crever* says it better) with emotion as he reported the assassination of John F. Kennedy. It changed with someone looking into the camera and saying, "This is Sam Donaldson, reporting from the White House."

Sure, I know the newspaper tricks. You learn them early.

In Paris, covering the French attempt to get out of Viet Nam, or maybe it was at the time of the colonels' abortive revolution, I would write (and you've seen it many times), "An informed source believes that . . . . " The informed source was me.

And there was this one: "A well-placed figure at the Quai d'Orsai reported last night that. . . ." The well-placed figure was my father-in-law (my wife was French). He was in charge of the motor pool or something, and he'd hear the politicians talking as they awaited their cars, and he'd tell me at dinner that night, and it would be in the *Louisville Times* within a day or two. I was beating the Alsop brothers, the *New York Times*, the *Herald-Tribune*, and nobody knew how I was doing it. The reason is that members of the "ruling class" tend to look on the servant class as self-propelled furniture and don't hesitate to talk in front of "it". My father-in-law listened. So did I.

When a journalist selects a lead for a story, he makes a judgment. There is no such thing as objective journalism. My

closest friend at the *Montreal Star* was a young man named Irwin Shulman, who had a deliciously cynical sense of humor. The *Star*'s city editor was fixated on traffic problems, always looking for a traffic angles on stories. Shulman wrote, and put on the bulletin board, what he said was the perfect *Montreal Star* lead: "Traffic was held up on Park Avenue for four hours yesterday when a flying saucer crashed into the side of Mount Royal."

My Woody Herman biography has lots of first person in it. I could have done that dreary trick of saying that he or Ralph Burns "told this writer" or "told this interviewer". That's bullshit. He told *me*. And I don't want the reader stopping to look up a footnote at the back of the book: "24. Interview with the author. 25. Ibid."

Footnotes are intrusive impedimenta. So in my book, and in the Jazzletter, it's "told Nat Hentoff in 1957," not the quote with a footnote that you can then find in the back of the book and learn that Hentoff reported it in *Down Beat*. Flow is everything.

There's another thing. I have found that whereas those trained in journalism find the use of the first person objectionable, the average lay reader does not. What baffles me more is that in the field of jazz, a personal voice is *expected* and Sudhalter has one on cornet. And, by the way, Jim Collier is a pretty personal trombone player. But somehow, when it comes to writing, this is deemed dangerous if not reprehensible.

I try to avoid direct questions. They make the subject self-conscious. Long ago I trained myself to do interviews without notes. So long as I transcribed them immediately, I could do it with dead accuracy. I was never accused of a misquotation, and only one person ever saw through my methods. I would sometimes slightly clarify what the person said, and after a piece I did on Dave Brubeck, Dave said, "You didn't quote what I said. You quoted what I *meant*." Very shrewd. I took it as a compliment.

In the age of the tape recorder, I engage my subjects in conversation and, if I can get away with it, make them forget the machine is running. This establishes a mood of ease. Later, I prune away almost everything I said. If, however, some observation I made, or some joke that passed between us, is of some value, and above all, necessary to continuity and clarity, it stays in. Dialogue, one on one, is interesting. "This reporter" is not, and "a usually reliable source" is a usually reliable deception, journalistic leger-de-main.

This approach brings readers close to the subject in ways that affectations of detachment cannot and do not. I want them to feel that they are *there*, as Richard Halliburton made me feel. I *want* Eddie Higgins and Rod Willis to feel that now they know Jobim. I want you to feel, laugh with, smile at, occasionally ache for, and above all *see* those to whom I am trying to introduce you. To the extent that I am able, I want to take you with me, including into Johnny Mandel's fish tank. This isn't journalism. It is a letter.

Structurally, many of these pieces draw on the novella. Except that they're about real people. They also draw on movie techniques. For example, British film editors developed a trick of direct cutting, eschewing the dissolves and wipes previously in use. A pastoral scene might give way to a screaming train, jolting you in your seat. I make very sharp cuts at times. Some friend, reading manuscript, will usually write something like: "Needs smoother transition." I don't want a smooth transition; I want shock.

The biggest influence on my writing is probably jazz itself. I want it to sound improvised, which of course it isn't. Jack Kerouac thought he could capture the effect of jazz by putting spools of teletype paper into a typewriter and writing without interruption or revision. He didn't really understand how jazz is made. But if you work at it, you can make writing *feel* improvised.

There is so much in jazz that needs researching and recording, so few people to do it, so many sources who are being lost every year, so few left now who knew the principals of this mu[illegible] Secondary sources are those that are written, books and articles that may or may not be accurate. Primary sources are those who were there, the people who actually lived through it, who heard the conversations and saw the situations. Leonard Feather knew everybody, and he's gone. When my generation is gone, there will be nobody left who actually knew Ben Webster. When Ben said, in his gruff way, "If I never have to play another blues, it's all right with me," he said it to me. When Paul McCartney said, "I despise jazz," he didn't say it to a usually reliable source or "this writer." He said it to *me*.

What should I have done? Quoted the remark in thin air, then appended a footnote saying, "2. Comment to the author, London cocktail party with Johnny Dankworth and Cleo Lane."? Uh-unh. He said it to me. I'm the source. Incidentally, the circumstance was this: Bill Evans had recorded a Beatles tunes. I mentioned to McCartney that jazz musicians had begun to perform some of their material. That's when, from the imperial grandeur of his radiant self-admiration, he intoned, "I *despise* jazz."

File that under approved arenas.

Fifteen or so minutes later, I was thinking, "What am I doing here, listening to the pontifications of bores and eating lousy food when I could be enjoying my mother-in-law's cooking in Paris?" I went to my hotel, packed, caught a midnight flight back to France, and haven't set foot in the land of my ancestors since.

I get fearful about the loss of sources, and so I try to get as many important musical figures on paper as possible in mini-biographies. *JazzTimes, Jazziz*, and *Down Beat* certainly are not gathering in this material while we still have so many magnificent witnesses to history but so little time left to hear them.

That's where your money goes: into research. My royalties from my songs give me a living. *You* make the Jazzletter possible.

There is for me one more reward.

It is mail and phone calls like this month's that lead me to the recurring suspicion that my time on this earth hasn't been a waste.

Thank you for many things, but above all, for that.