Gene Lees
# Jazzletter

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## Other Voices

What drummer of substance did not and does not consider Buddy's genius absolutely unique? What sideman who was privileged to work with Buddy was not aware of his taste, as well as his incomparable technique? And Buddy's demand: make it swing!

And Peggy Lee, simply an extraordinary artist, wife, mother. Your story told so many of us who have not had the pleasure of knowing her what a very special person *she* was and is!

Bob Litwak, New York City

*Many Jazzletter subscribers double as physicians and musicians. I noticed that Bob wears gloves when he breaks down his drum kit. He is senior cardiac surgeon at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.*

The Floating Jazz Festival of 1986, aboard the SS Norway, was a magical celebration of Dizzy's birthday which featured (among others) Ruby Braff, Al Cohn, Milt Jackson, Flip Phillips, Mel Powell, and Joe Williams.

Two things endeared Buddy to everyone. First, at Dizzy's urging, he reconciled with Flip. Neither a submission nor a subjugation, this was the real thing, an embrace on stage between two strong men, and we all felt it. The second, an act of kindness and respect, was an uncompensated and unpublicized performance of the Buddy Rich band at 2 a.m. in the Saga Theater for the crew. To Buddy, the crew was not just the above-deck staff and officers but, importantly, included those whose work and lives are mostly below deck in the engine rooms, laundry, and galleys of the ship. These were the people who cheered and loved Buddy that morning. They didn't know him before, but they knew him through his performance, and it was a great moment.

Such a man comes infrequently and never for long enough to be fully understood and appreciated. These memories help.

Andrew J. Sordoni III, Forty Fort, Pennsylvania

*Andy is one of the producers of the Floating Jazz Festival.*

I can't tell you how much I appreciate your taking the time to respond to the infamous Buddy Rich bus tape. This tape is a disgrace and does not represent the man I knew, worked with, and was lucky enough to call my friend. I was with Buddy's band, a band full of musicians who loved and respected Buddy, from 1976-1978 — an incredible and rewarding musical experience. I could fill an entire news letter with stories about Buddy's kindness and good things he has done. I don't imagine we'll see any cartoons about those events.

To respond to the ridiculous text of this cartoon:

Buddy and I talked often about his favorite drummers. And Gene Krupa was the top of the list. Anyone close to Buddy knew how deep his friendship was with Gene. How dare this musical illiterate defame that friendship by writing such garbage? As for Buddy thinking of himself as the world's greatest drummer, this could not be farther from the truth. Did he think he could play faster than anyone else? You bet, and there was little debate about that. But I have hours of interviews with Buddy on radio stations all around the country where he was asked this question many times. His answer was always the same: "I don't think anyone can call themselves the greatest anything. To some the way Gene plays is the greatest. To others Philly or Max is their man, and so on. It's a matter of taste. So if some people think I'm the greatest, that's their preference."

I am saddened that this tape and its offshoots have become so well known. And so again I applaud your article. It means so much to those of us who cared so deeply for Buddy.

Bob Belden and I have just finished producing Buddy's first two Pacific Jazz recordings for Capitol EMI, both recorded live at "the Chez" in Hollywood, California. *Swinging Big Band* is already in the stores and *Big Swing Face* should be out in a couple of months. Each CD has nine additional tracks issued for the first time and the sound is far superior to the original recordings. The first is selling well and Bob and I are hopeful that Capitol will continue its Buddy Rich Big Band reissue program.

As you know, the talent and genius of artists like Buddy grace our lives once in a lifetime. It is indeed a shame when idiots like Mr. Friedman and those circulating this tape attempt to dishonor the memory of the great gift Buddy left us.

Dean Pratt, Jazz Composers Service, New York City

I met Buddy Rich once when I was the local booker/contact for Jazz at the Philharmonic in Salt Lake City. I think spring of '49. I'd made all the hotel reservations at Salt Lake City's second best hotel, the Newhouse. We arrived with some of the players, racially mixed. Buddy berated the desk clerk when it became clear they didn't accept blacks. The bottom lines was, "If my friends can't stay here, I don't stay here." They went to a non-segregated hotel on the West Side of town. A true stand-up guy.

John S. Brophy, La Jolla, California

Diane and I always enjoy the Jazzletter, but these last issues touched me in a more personal way. I have played with a lot of the great musicians and singers you wrote about.

Ed Cox's letter was very moving. He and I played together a lot in Indianapolis. We were with some of "Barton's Boys" — John Van Ohlen and Lee Katzman, among others. Barton Rogers (real name: Bob Phillips) was a chemical engineer at Eli Lilly Co. He devoted his life to teaching us youngsters music. Ed also mentions Wes Montgomery, who I played and recorded with along with brothers Buddy and Monk — the Mastersounds. The years I spent playing with Wes, Buddy, and Monk in Indianapolis and San Francisco really helped me become a musical drummer. I played with Gerry Mulligan, Red Norvo, Teddy Wilson, Joe Williams, Irene Kral, Mel Tormé, and Helen Humes, among others. I learned

a lot from these people and loved them very much. At the last of a two-week gig with Jeru at El Matador in San Francisco in the '70s, he took the rhythm section and our wives out to dinner. He also let us make copies of any of his songs that we played. I always play *Sandy at the Beach* with my group whenever I can.

During one conversation, I told Gerry that every July 4, I played in the John Philip Sousa Memorial Marching Band in Redwood City. He said "the Thunderer" was one of his favorites, and if we ever needed an extra clarinet player to call him.

In the early '50s on a trip to San Francisco and Los Angeles from Indianapolis with pianist Al Plank, we stopped in Vegas to see John Bunch (another Indiana boy who had worked in Indianapolis — Ed.), who was playing with Woody Herman, an eight-piece group with Bill Harris, in the lounge at the Riviera. John introduced me to Woody, who asked if I'd like to sit in and play for a set. I shook hands with the bass player, Monty Budwig, who I would play a lot with later on when I moved to San Francisco with the Vince Guaraldi Trio.

During Bill Harris's feature, *Everywhere*, John Bunch would look over at me and whisper, "Hold back," then, "Hold back some more." Of course I felt like I was turning a page of the calendar between every beat. After the set, Woody sat me down at a table and bought me a drink and we talked music. He was getting ready to re-form the big band and was listening to young drummers and bass players. He said he had pretty much made up his mind to hire Gus Gastofson, a fine drummer from San Francisco who had played with him before. He said I just needed a little more seasoning and hoped I would keep at it (which I did).

When I told him I had seen and heard the band with Dave Tough when I was in high school in '46 or '47, his eyes lit up. He asked me what it was that turned me on about Davey's drumming. Being seventeen or eighteen at the time, I wasn't quite sure. I told Wood that Davey never looked like he was doing a whole lot, but that the band would be *boiling*. Woody really dug that. I told him I really loved Al and Zoot and Stan and Don Lamond and of course Jimmy Rowles.

He mentioned the Circle Theater in Indianapolis. I told him my all-time favorite "herd" was the one I heard at the Circle around '49 or '50. The wonderful drummer Shadow Wilson was there as were Oscar Pettiford on bass, Ernie Royal and Red Rodney in the trumpet section, and Gene Ammons on tenor. This was the *More Moon* band. Woody said that Serge put that band together, and was sorry they had not got to record with Shadow.

When I was a member of the Mastersounds, '57 to '60, we played opposite Jackie and Roy several times and I much admire them. In the '70s I got to play and record with Irene several times. In fact, a few months before she passed we did the Concord Festival. What a great lady and fine natural singer.

Through the years playing gigs with Red Norvo, he loved playing Bix's *In a Mist*. Red told me a lot about Bix, so I went out and got some of his records. You know, Gene, I think Bix was the first bebop musician.

Benny Barth, Guerneville, California

*So do I.*

I picked up your book *Oscar Peterson: The Will to Swing* yesterday at a Toronto bookstore. I want to thank you for introducing me to the life of one of Canada's great musicians. Throughout the book you indicate that Mr. Peterson has devoted his life to expanding the audience for jazz and to introducing jazz to greater numbers of people. You also mentioned that at times Mr. Peterson has expressed concern that with the passing of the great jazz musicians, jazz may also die.

I read how Mr. Peterson learned a great deal about playing the piano from his father and his sister. That this education supplemented early in his life by private lessons, which were a certain financial burden on his family. Many children do not learn to appreciate music by chance of birth into a musical family. Our public schools here work hard to expose all children to music.

Unfortunately, the Ontario provincial government has cut education funding by over $800 million. My children, ages four and six, attend one of the schools run by the Metropolitan School Board. This school board is the largest in Canada with more than 100,000 students. The provincial government has cut $40 million in funding from this school board alone. Consequently, the trustees will be voting shortly to eliminate instrumental music from the curriculum. It has taken over 25 years of lobbying to make sure all students of the MSSB get some instrumental music instruction before they leave elementary school. Now, with a single vote, trustees are preparing to eliminate instrumental music for almost 11,000 children.

Mr. Peterson can help save instrumental music for our children. I am hoping you can encourage him to speak out publicly here in Ontario against cuts to education. I, along with fellow parents young musicians, plan to have a press conference at the Ontario Legislature. We would be honored to have Mr. Peterson also attend the press conference and lend his considerable influence with the Canadian public to this struggle against education cutbacks. If he is unable to attend, possibly he could send a letter or telegram that we could read at the press conference.

Don Byng, Toronto, Ontario

*This letter came over the Internet — if you want it, the address is jazzlet@ix.netcom.com — and I forwarded it to Oscar.*

*The same sort of assault on education is going on in the United States as well. Normally, Canada follows American precedents on a monkey-see monkey-do basis. And that's in all fields. In the political, when the U.S. votes conservative, Canada follows. But in this instance Ontario is far ahead of the United States. With his assaults on health care, education, and working people, its new premier, Mike Harris, is leading the way in the march to know-*

*nothingism, inequality, cruelty, and Fascism. What is happening on the northern border of the United States remains almost completely unreported in the American press (excepting the Christian Science Monitor, which offers its usual excellent coverage) and television, which is the more baffling in that such a high proportion of "American" television journalists, such as Peter Jennings, Morley Safer, Kevin Newman, Thalia Assuras, Arthur Kent, and many more, are Canadians, some of them (Assuras, Kent, Newman) quite recent immigrants. Only deliberate suppression of such coverage by their employers would seem to explain their strange silence.*

*Harris has* eliminated entirely *provincial funding for the excellent public-radio station CJRT, whose virtues include the jazz broadcasts of Ted O'Reilly, some of the finest in North America. You cannot separate "culture" from politics, whether under the Borgias, Josef Stalin, Adolph Hitler, or Mike Harris, up to and including the present Republican assaults on public broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Arts, which Pat Buchanan wants totally eliminated. The arts frighten tyrrants, covertly in most cases but sometimes flagrantly as in Buchanan's. And the arts sway in the winds of politics.*

In a concert I played (on tour with more or less the band from the last Eddie Condon's), each of us had a feature number which we would introduce with a few words, humorous in some cases, in others more plainly informative. I was in the habit of playing some pretty favorite standard in my spot, and I had evolved a little introductory spiel the gist of which was to remind the audience that the treasure trove of American popular song was an essential ingredient of the jazz we were playing for them — one of the principal sources of raw material, along with the blues, on which we base our improvisations.

One day it occurred to me that this relationship between jazz and the American popular song was far from a casual one. I started saying, in introducing my number, that the real genius of American music lay in the *encounter* between the jazz musician and the American popular song. I meant that a synergism has been at work fashioning a whole greater than the sum of the parts. As lovely as the melodies of the best songs are, they do not, in and of themselves, achieve the level of great art. They assume a transcendental character through a transformation by the jazz musician — a transformation which leaves them mystically intact. By the same token, jazz, had it never reached beyond the blues, street marches, hymns and so on, would have remained essentially a folk music instead of the broad and profound art we know it to be.

In *Cats of Any Color*, a wonderful and important book, I was struck by your statement that, "It is not coincidence that jazz evolved in tandem with the creation in the United States . . . of an unprecedented body of popular music that was also high art. This body of magnificent songs provided jazz players with an extraordinary pool of familiar material to play on. Had that repertoire not been developed, jazz would not be the art form that it is."

Yes, and you see that my phrase *the genius of American music* is meant to suggest that jazz and the American popular song are actually inseparable — that the song-writers and the jazz musicians have been engaged (unconsciously to be sure) in a single joint enterprise, American music. The song-writer may consciously have been just cranking out songs for Broadway or Hollywood or Tin Pan Alley; the jazz musician may have been playing to keep the dancers on the floor, or patrons ordering drinks. What they achieved is nevertheless something greater and more lasting than those immediate practical ends, greater even than beautiful melodies or toe-tapping rhythms. To appreciate the nature of the achievement, one need only consider that Louis Armstrong is the most influential American musician of any category.

You rightly take Wynton Marsalis to task for pontificating that "Bird improved *I'll Remember April*." I would say that the relationship is rather one of mutual transformation. The song is transmuted in the alembic of jazz performance; Bird's interpretation is in turn haunted by the melody, even when the melody is abandoned. Similarly, *Warming up a Riff* is informed by the song *Cherokee*, even though the melody is nowhere overtly stated in the performance. One might draw an analogy between jazz performance and the human body in which the chord structure — the changes — corresponds to the skeleton, invisibly holding the body upright. The melody, stated or not, might by the same token be likened to the circulatory (or for that matter the nervous) system.

The converse is also instructive: a jazz performance of just the melody of a song. A glorious example among many is Louis Armstrong's performance of *When You're Smiling* from the *Musical Autobiography*. Though he hews to the composer's notes, delivering the melody unadorned, his playing of it transforms the song just as surely as if he had improvised an entirely new configuration of notes on its chord structure. In fact, his performance conveys "the feeling of jazz" more powerfully perhaps precisely for its purity of expression. Has Louis Armstrong improved *When You're Smiling*? No, but he has adored and caressed it. He has let himself be filled up with this melody like an afflatus, as he in turn has forever infused the melody with his playing of it. Is it possible to conjure up *Body or Soul* without summoning as well the aura of Coleman Hawkins' 1939 record?

It's interesting that people like Albert Murray and Wynton Marsalis write so condescendingly about the song-writers as though they were exclusively white. The fact is, of course, that many pop standards were composed by African Americans — Eubie Blake, Fats Waller, Spencer Williams, Shelton Brooks, Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, to name a few. Like the American population as a whole, the make-up of the group of men and women writing popular songs was mixed, not to say miscegenated (to borrow Stanley Crouch's term). So was the make-up of the audience (a neglected element in the historiography of the jazz scene).

The ground-breaking jazz artists, the Pantheon so to speak, have certainly been *primarily* black. The major popular song-writers

have no doubt been *primarily* white. (They have been primarily Jewish. Ed.) There's an intriguing parallel here. To argue that real jazz is the exclusive purview of black Americans is, as you brilliantly, movingly show in your book, blatant revisionism — downright silly, when you stop to think of it. Must we pretend, Queen of Hearts-like, that history as we *know* it happened somehow *didn't* happen? That jazz *didn't* quickly spread from the pockets of its African-American origins into the broader American culture as a whole? That its African-American origins *weren't* the result of cross fertilization from the cultural diversity of the American melting pot? Jazz, as has been pointed out repeatedly in the debate, did not evolve on the African continent. Albert Murray's gambit (*Stompin' the Blues*) of separating black from white jazz players — the sheep from the goats, as it were — by code-naming them "blues musicians" is merely a less forthright version of this racialist revisionism.

By way of corollary to this relationship between jazz and the popular standard, I have to confess that I suspect that the great flowering of jazz as an evolving art form is probably over. As a jazz musician myself, I come to this conclusion reluctantly. This is arguably a matter of personal taste, but I doubt it. As far as I can tell the original music (I don't mean just tunes built on standard changes) composed by jazz musicians mostly for themselves has failed to prove substantial enough to replace the American standard as general repertoire.

Sadly, jazz seems to have lost its functional relation to society, without which it is questionable whether any art can survive except as a museum exhibit. Witness the plethora of so-called "tributes" to various jazz greats of the past, in truth merely a hook to entice otherwise reluctant audiences into the theater. It never fails to astound me, for example, to hear people inquire whether a jazz band they're considering for some function can play "music for dancing" — code for rock-and-roll — as though jazz were not in its soul dance music. It's sadly the case, however, that most young people, even those who find jazz pleasant to listen to, are not moved to dance to it. And although of course jazz transcends the category of dance music, its function as dance music has been historically both anchor and life-line to its audience.

The flowering of song-writing has obviously been over for some decades now, popular music having more or less abandoned melody altogether, and the musical theater having been delivered over to the likes of Hamlisch, Sondheim, and Lloyd-Weber. Jobim was, of course, a passing light in the otherwise Stygian darkness. But, aside from new original material which is rarely of interest beyond its initial performance, the raw material of the jazz musician remains the blues and the standards written between the 1920s and '50s. There is no continuing source of repertoire to be held in common and exploited by the jazz community.

As unthinkable as the demise of jazz may seem to those of us vitally concerned with its well-being, compared to other flowerings in the history of art — the troubadours in France, Italian Renaissance painting, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, English Romantic poetry, French painting in the latter 19th century, fin-de-siècle Vienna — the hundred-year life span of jazz seems comparatively generous. There is, after all, a life cycle in art as in everything else. I'd love to be wrong in this, but I hear new jazz becoming ever more arcane and esoteric, on the one hand, more vapid and easy-listening-oriented on the other, or just dull.

In the meantime, musical Nero though I may seem, I'll go on happily fiddling (figuratively; I'm a trombone player) the blues and standards by Gershwin, Porter, Blake, Kern, Berlin, Ellington, Waller, Brooks, Van Heusen, Youmans, et al, while Rome burns, hoping there may be a few "cats of any color" left to play them with, and others senile enough to want to listen. Thanks for the book.

Tom Artin, Sparkill, New York

I must thank you for publishing *Jackie and Roy*. It was such a pleasure to read. It made me happy and sad. Happy to have lived in those wonderful times, sad to think how much has changed.

Fran Landesman, London, England

*Fran's lyrics include* Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most, Ballad of the Sad Young Men, *and* Small Day Tomorrow.

Having just finished *Cats of Any Color*, I felt compelled to offer some comments as well as my sincere gratitude for your courage and eloquence in bringing these long-concealed issues out into the open.

As a 48-year-old white baritone player and composer-arranger, I find myself and most of my close friends and colleagues caught in the squeeze produced by the current jazz scene. I wish every musician and jazz educator could read your view of the Marsalis-Crouch situation and begin to understand that their agenda contains ugly sociological implications that reach far beyond the issue of who gets hired at Lincoln Center.

To the many dubious precedents you pointed out, I would add:

1. Wynton Marsalis represents the first time that the most influential musician of his generation is *not the person producing the best music* but rather the one doing the most talking about it.

2. His and his disciples' unearned instant success has begun to produce the first generation of *externally* motivated jazz musicians, oxymoronic as it sounds. The most ironic aspect of the Marsalis situation is touched on briefly by John McNeal in *The Art of Jazz Trumpet Vol. 1*, in which he states that the hook that got Columbia Records' machine behind Marsalis in the first place is the fact that he also plays classical music. John refers to the cross-promotional attractiveness of Wynton's versatility. However, knowing corporate "suits" as we do, I sense another, more cynical, aspect to it, namely the "noble savage" aspects of Wynton in tails performing Haydn, Hummel, and Tomasi, and the belief that playing classical music somehow validates his musicianship. Thus I believe the

Marsalis phenomenon to have been indirectly caused by the same old racism that all of us deplore.

With regard to the Lincoln Center commissions, there is one aspect of this that nobody has mentioned and which, being an experienced composer and arranger, sticks in my craw. That is the fact that none of the commissions you mentioned went to anyone who knows how to write for any ensemble larger than a quintet or in forms larger than the "tune".

As for Marsalis' own pieces, I am sure you must have seen the hilarious score pages from *Blood on the Fields* that have been circulating (like O.J. jokes) among arrangers. Sinister aspects of this include a cavalier attitude toward composition and how *hard* it is and the attempt to impose the same narrow parameters on jazz composition that Marsalis and Crouch impose on improvisation. The latter tactic also aids in their revisionist effort to expunge the importance of Gil Evans from the music and life of Miles Davis. In addition, several of the "composers" used politically correct titles and thematic material as cover to protect them from any unexpected attacks of objectivity on the part of critics. As usual, this tactic worked with younger critics, though it failed to sneak past at least one of the older ones.

The idea of giving people huge, coveted commissions to write their first works for large ensembles is consistent with the start-at-the-top mentality of the Marsalis generation. Incidentally, among the young lions currently *not* cutting the parts at Lincoln Center is a young white tenor player. This lad, who can't be a day over twenty, was a freshman member of a student ensemble that I directed at William Pemberton College in 1993-94. Though a promising soloist with hints of eventual originality, he was by far the weakest reader and section player in the group and possessed a tiny sound that was virtually inaudible without a mike. So of course, a year later, here he is on the highest-profile and best-paying big-band gig in town.

You are also right on the money when you write of European condescension toward Americans in racial matters. I would like to relate a couple of true stories that occurred when I toured Europe in 1977 with the Duke Ellington band under Mercer's direction.

Our first stop was Warsaw. No sooner had we landed than the Polish guides began bragging about the lack of racial strife in Poland. The musicians, who were all black except for tenor saxophonist Lenny Spivack and me, saw through this right away, and began a barrage of asides on the order of, "Yeah, well, try having more than one race and then get back to me."

Later in the week I mentioned to some other players that my mother was born in a small farm town outside Warsaw that probably no longer exists. One of the guides heard this and asked why I hadn't mentioned this to them, and said that maybe they could help me find out some things about the family and the town. When I replied that the family was Jewish, it was suddenly: "My Gosh, look at the time! Nice talking to you."

From then on, whenever our Polish hosts boasted of their enlightened racial attitudes, I would shoot back, "Oh yeah? How many Jews do you have left?" It shut them right up.

Later in the tour, we played at the North Sea Festival. As I was packing up after the set, Mercer Ellington came over to me simultaneously laughing, fuming with rage, and shaking his head in disbelief. He said that some Dutch musicians had come up to him and told him that he had no right to call what we played black music because there were two white guys in the band. Mercer pointed one of them out to me. Suffice it to say that this cat would have had to spend a week on Zuma Beach, naked and without sunscreen, to work his way up to albino.

This past November, I traveled to an avant-garde jazz festival in Tampere, Finland, as a member of Ned Rothenberg's Powerlines Ensemble. Ned spent the better part of the weekend avoiding a Finnish journalist's requests for an interview on the subject of being a Jewish jazz musician. When the group members discussed it, we decided that there would be no way to convince this guy that in America, secular members of society are just Americans and that American Jews don't play Jewish jazz. This point would be totally lost on a resident of a country (actually an entire continent) where a Jewish citizen is forever considered to be a Jew, period, and never a Finn of Jewish extraction. Ned suggested that I, being a major-league put-on artist, do the interview and just take it to outer space. But then we decided there was too much danger of the cat taking everything I said seriously and printing it.

Once again, thank you for bringing these issues to light. Things of this nature are seldom sincerely dealt with in the jazz press due to the desire to paint a rosy picture of the jazz life in order to maintain sales of the musical and educational equipment that constitute most of their ad revenues.

Kenny Berger, Brooklyn, New York

*Kenny Berger has played with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis band, Chuck Israels' National Jazz Ensemble, and the Lee Konitz Nonet, as well as Mercer Ellington. He is a highly-regarded composer.*

I have just finished reading and enjoying thoroughly your book *Cats of Any Color*. My jazz library contains three of your earlier works: *Oscar Peterson: The Will to Swing, Waiting for Dizzy*, and *Jazz Lives*.

Although my interest in jazz has endured for 45 years, regretfully it is strictly as a listener. I have no music training and virtually no understanding of music theory. However, I can claim to have a good ear for quality jazz and am very familiar with the history of the art. I think the fact that I have 78s of several of the *Birth of the Cool* records qualifies me as an aficionado.

I find it difficult to appreciate free jazz, i.e. the music of folks like Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, as well as much of the post-'60s rock-fusion phase. I sat through a Miles Davis concert in Toronto's Massey Hall in about 1973, and it took a couple of years to restore my faith in the man. I guess my tastes haven't moved

much beyond 1970. It has been quite dismaying in the past 15 years to witness the passing of so many of my favorite musicians.

*Cats of Any Color* reinforced or enhanced my image of many fine people, including Horace Silver, whose piano and compositions I always liked; Red Rodney, always a great player; Benny Golson, not well known to me; Red Mitchell, obviously not only a wonderful bass player but an outstanding musical mind. Your *Three Sketches* reinforced my impressions of Cedar Walton and Jack DeJohnette and acquainted me with Kenny Washington. We saw Kenny here in Calgary a few years ago when he was with Johnny Griffin. At the time, I thought he played too loud.

Just prior to reading your final chapter; *Jazz Black and White*, I was listening to a tape of a concert while working on some fairly mundane project. The Jazz Messengers were playing and this was the band featuring the Marsalis brothers. I suddenly realized that my teeth were clenched. The cause was the tiresome and mindless meanderings of young Wynton. Next on the tape was a Tokyo concert of the Phil Woods Quartet. Instantly I began to relax and noted the vast improvement in musical quality in the trumpet and fluegelhorn playing of Tom Harrell. It went through my mind what a pretentious and overbearing individual Wynton Marsalis really is. I've heard several interviews by Marsalis and he always alludes to his roots in the music of Armstrong and Ellington. A legacy, he endlessly claims, that is safe in his hands. That evening I began reading your final chapter of *Cats*.

I don't know where jazz is going in the hands of folks like Marsalis. However, I guess it has survived many other challenges in the past. There are a couple of problems (at least) facing the music today.

Firstly, most of the masters are either old or have already passed away. Many of the young guys have learned their music via the academic process and, although they are very good technically, are, as I think Conte Candoli put it, "all chops — no soul." Will new and legitimate giants develop in this environment? The other problem, most likely prevalent with the likes of WM, is that young musicians tend to discount heritage and tradition or, perhaps worse, translate these to fit their own purposes. Your analysis of the situation in *Cats* is very well stated and timely. No doubt you have enshrined your name on the black list of those arbiters of musical direction, Stanley Crouch and Wynton Marsalis. Let's hope that cooler heads soon prevail and these impostors "get tossed".

To close this rambling dissertation, I do have one point of contention with your book. I thought you were unjustly severe with the movie *'Round Midnight*. Although I can't speak to the political aspects you refer to regarding the views of French music writers towards America's treatment of its jazz musicians, I do feel that this is the best portrayal of the art form yet committed to the screen. I also thought that Dexter Gordon was outstanding in the lead role. I'm speaking of his acting, not his playing. Dexter's health was very poor and his playing, naturally, much below peak form. However, I thought it was a touching story and that Dexter, obviously with considerable input to the script, brought out the qualities that personify a jazzman like himself, dedication, humor, reconciliation, and the undependability of the addict. I also disagree with your observation that Dexter's playing had declined during his sojourn in Europe. His homecoming album recorded at the Village Vanguard in late 1976, along with many concert performances prior to 1980, show his playing to be peak form. I think Dexter Gordon was one of our greatest jazz musicians and that *'Round Midnight* was the must deserved icing on the cake.

Once more, I have greatly enjoyed your books. Keep up the great writing and the fight.

Fred Bagley, Calgary, Alberta

*The picture was so unauthentic that at one point the protagonist tells the girl she's going to have to go out and buy him a reed. Artie Shaw walked out on the film at that point. As for European writers' attitudes to jazz, see Kenny Berger's letter above.*

I am writing to thank and congratulate you for the courageous, thorough, and much-needed article *Jazz Black and White* in your book *Cats of Any Color*. I had heard about the disgraceful conditions of Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center jazz program, but it was not until I met with snide and condescending resistance from publishers regarding my book on Red Nichols (which, thankfully, will be published this month by Scarecrow Press) that I realized how deep the new racism is, and not until reading your article that I fully understood its horrible implications.

It seems to me that the problem is not just Wynton's and New York's. If it were, the rest of the country could just sit back and laugh at the foolishness of it all. By gaining control of both Lincoln Center and the major American jazz labels, Marsalis and his cronies are sending a message to the rest of politically-correct America that it had better (goose) step in line with them or risk being ostracized as pseudo-jazz. Both commercial ventures (nightclubs, radio stations, record labels) and privatized programs (libraries, colleges, scholarships, commissions) throughout America are having their strings pulled, directly or indirectly, by Marsalis-Crouch-Lincoln Center. Moreover, those critics who either cower or refuse to criticize this new Black Mafia are, by their example, complicit in the crime. Adding to this attitude, prevalent among the many blacks nowadays, whether or not they have even heard of Marsalis, that all "black music" is "jazz" and anything else — including Marsalis' own retro-bebop style — is not really "jazz" at all because it isn't a "contemporary" sound.

I feel that what Marsalis and his gang are trying to accomplish is not merely the exclusion of white jazz but a "hostile takeover" of jazz education in America. It not only rankles them that most of jazz's audience in this country is white, but more, that the Halls of Academe are "over-run" with white faces teaching "their" music. What happened at Clark Terry's school typifies the new attitude growing across this country. It also angers them that Stan Kenton,

a white man who was somewhat bigoted himself (That's not so certain. — Ed.) essentially sparked jazz workshops and courses during the 1950s and '60s.

There is great irony in that, while professional jazz musicians of both races tend to ignore these prejudices, the politically-correct world of Academia fawns over them and strokes their egoes. This has created the greatest racial polarization of an art music since the era when black classical performers were barred from major careers. There is also irony in that Marsalis himself has been popular, if not artistically distinguished, playing Haydn and Hummel. His records of this music conspicuously lack the fire of his jazz performances, and in some instances his technique is simply not up to the highest professional standards. This has not stopped people from enjoying them, but in a sense it is the novelty of a jazzman playing classical that attracts them rather than the illusion of perfection that he represents.

I am sure that many persons would assume that I take this attitude only because I am white. As a "grossly obese" man in a weight-conscious society, I have lived with more pain and rejection than most white men encounter in three or four lifetimes. To this day I cannot walk down a city street without having people stare at me and having kids, both black and white, laugh at me as I pass by. I have been as rejected from jobs, barred from promotions, and prejudiced against in public places as any black person could possibly be. Only when I have contacted people through the mail, via my writing, have I been taken seriously as an intelligent, sensitive human being. In my view, this is exactly the same as the black man or woman who only gains acceptance when they hide behind a white-sounding name or telephone voice.

What hurts me most about the Marsalis gang is the fact that in their cruelty they are making the older surviving black musicians, those who were known for being racially tolerant, suffer the most. The rejection of commissions to George Russell is proof enough of this; I also notice that they do their best to ignore people like Sonny Rollins and Ornette Coleman. Miles Davis was savaged by Marsalis when he was still alive; now that he is dead they spit on his memory. Basie and Ellington are, apparently, "safe" because the former never crossed Wynton's path and the latter died before he rose to power. But in singing their praises they are rewriting history and eliminating the past "white" associations — or maybe they think Ellington hired Bellson and Basie recorded with Goodman because they were pressured into doing so by a white and/or Jewish "elite".

The ultimate question, of course, is whether jazz will survive Marsalis and his Black Mafia. I cannot answer that; no one really can. Thirty years ago people thought opera was still a viable art form because Benjamin Britten was alive and there was a new "Golden Age" of glorious voices going on. Today, opera is dying, despite vigorous injections of enthusiasm from the aging, pot-bellied Three Tenors. In the early 1950s, jazz reached an important crossroad as bebop alienated audiences, "trad jazz" began to sound like college marching bands *in reductio*, and the "cool school" was derided (mostly by blacks) as an effete form of pseudo-jazz. What saved it was the emergence of three geniuses who fused all these elements in their own music, Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman, and Bill Evans.

The second watershed came in the late 1960s through 1970s, when funk and fusion muddied the waters. This time, sadly, Davis was largely to blame. What saved it, at least in part, was the emergence of the Marsalis brothers with their good manners, well-dressed appearance, powerful publicity machine, and enthusiasm for reviving acoustic jazz.

Now we want a Redeemer to save us from Wynton Marsalis and his amanuensis, Stanley Crouch. I do not think that the combined weight of yourself, Whitney Balliett, Gene Santoro, and James Lincoln Collier will be enough — in fact, I am *sure* it will not be enough, because we are all white. We need some powerful black allies in the press and in Academia; but more than that, we need a new genius to give jazz a push in a direction that will be admired and acclaimed by musicians and critics alike. Only then will Wynton's Black Mafia sink deservedly in the morass of neo-bop conservatism that is its only cloak of respectability.

Stephen M. Stroff, Cincinnati, Ohio

*Stroff's book is* Red Head: A Chronological Survey of Red Nichols and his Five Pennies, *210 pages. It can be ordered direct from Scarecrow Press, 4720 Boston Way, Lanham MD 20706. It is $32.50 plus $3 postage and handling for the first book, 75 cents extra postage for each additional book. You can also phone 1-800 462-6420. Maryland residents add 5 percent sales tax.*

# Police Story

Back in the 1960s, when I was living in New York, I studied with a certain well-known jazz pianist, veteran of several of the major bands, who had given up the road to teach. I had always admired him, both for the solos I had heard on records and on the few occasions when I had seen him in person with bands. I shan't tell you his name, because to do so would identify someone else who might be made uncomfortable by the story. I shall only tell you that his background was Italian, and I'll call him Nick, which assuredly was not his name.

Nick's assigned studies were conventional in some ways, not so conventional in others. I had to learn some of the Bach two-part inventions, some Chopin, practice the McFarren scale and arpeggio exercises, run two-handed arpeggios on diminished chords in minor thirds, flat fifths, and sixths, then when you got the hang of that run the diminished arpeggio in the left hand in parallel to the one a half-step above it in the right, that sort of thing. It's all learnable; Nadia Boulanger used to require her students to read symphony scores in concert at sight, which of course means transposing the parts of the trumpets and other transposed instruments. Then she

required students to read the scores in transposition, which means double transpositions for the transposing instruments. I daresay to someone like André Previn (although I am not sure there *is* anyone like André Previn) that's child's play. It's not to me. But with Nick, I got the hang of at least a few things.

Nick emphasized voicings and he had a chart of chord substitutions, which one was expected to learn in all keys. Looking over my study materials, Bill Evans said, "This is very interesting, man. We had to work all this stuff out for ourselves."

Nick told me something interesting one day. He said he'd had a student who had from the beginning excellent classical chops. Nick had little to teach him about technique. But the young man wanted to play jazz, and so Nick taught him the materials pertinent to composition and general musical theory, about which the young man knew almost nothing. After about a year with Nick, and having made tremendous progress, the young man shyly confessed that he had a degree in piano from Juilliard; he simply had never been taught any of this other material.

One day told me I'd have to skip my next lesson. He couldn't be there that coming day. "I'll tell you why," he said.

A few years earlier, Nick had received a call from a police officer, a desk sergeant or something, at one of the New York City precincts. He asked Nick if he had a nephew named So-and-So. Nick said. "He's my sister's boy. But I haven't seen him for a while."

The policeman said, "Would you come down to the precinct? We have this boy under arrest."

Nick went. The cop asked him what the boy's story was.

Nick said he hadn't seen his sister in a long time. He said that two or three years ago, when the boy was about thirteen, she'd abandoned him, giving him ten dollars or some such amount, and left for Florida with a new boyfriend.

The cop said, "Mr. So-and-So, when you've been on this job as long as I have, you get a feeling about who belongs here and who doesn't. And I don't think this boy belongs here."

The boy, who was only sixteen, had been picked up for possession of heroin in a quantity sufficient for trafficking. He had been living with another boy in some sort of shabby boarding house. They had been unable to pay their rent. The landlord went after them with a baseball bat. One of them slipped out and called the police who, when they arrived, found the heroin in their room.

"I'll tell you what I think," the cop said. "I think they were going to sell it but hadn't done it yet. The other kid probably belongs here. But your nephew has no priors. Would you consider taking him if we had him released to your custody? We can make a recommendation to the district attorney's office if you're willing to do this."

Nick gave the matter some serious, if rapid, thought, since he was raising children of his own. But in the end he agreed. The boy was released on probation, and Nick took him home.

The kid was sullen, suspicious, and silent. He spent most of his time in the room Nick assigned him, staring at the walls or ceiling, and ate at peculiar hours. He hardly spoke at all.

Then one evening he turned up for dinner at the seemly hour, and ate with Nick and Nick's wife and children. After that he ate with them regularly, still speaking very little.

Gradually, however, the reserve began to dissolve and one day he said, "Uncle Nick, could I talk to you?"

Of course Nick said. And the boy said, "Do you think I could maybe go back and finish high school?"

Concealing his excitement, I imagine, Nick told him there was no reason why not. The boy enrolled, and immediately did well. Then he came to Nick and said, "Uncle Nick, do you think I could learn to play the piano, like you?"

"Yes."

"Would you teach me?"

"Yes. But on this condition: you do exactly what I tell you, and remember that if you stop practicing, I'll stop teaching you."

And so the lessons started. Nick said the boy had an amazing aptitude for music. By the time he graduated high school, he was playing professionally. Nick thought he would make it his career. But the boy came to Nick again and said, "I want to go to college."

"What do you want to take?"

"I think I want to be a doctor."

And so the boy applied for medical school — Columbia University, as I recall. Such were his high school marks that he was accepted. And, Nick said, he worked his way through college playing piano, not needing a penny from Nick or anyone else, although Nick did give him a place to live. He concluded:

"So that's why I can't be here for your lesson next week."

"How's that?"

"I have to be there. He's graduating from medical school."

Now you know why I won't give the real names. Somewhere, presumably in New York City, there is a doctor, nephew of an outstanding jazz musician, who might not want it known that he once had a heroin bust. Nick is dead. I imagine the cop is too. But that doctor owes that cop a lot.

Maybe we all do.

# If You're in New York

On the evening of Sunday, June 23, a Woody Herman celebration will be held at Carnegie Hall, featuring the current band led by Frank Tiberi, and various of the alumni, including Terry Gibbs and Alan Broadbent. I'll be host and emcee of the event.

The next two nights, Monday and Tuesday, I'll be singing at Knickerbocker, University Place and Ninth Street, telephone 212 228-8490.

The pianist is, I am delighted to say, my old friend Mike Renzi. We do not yet know who the bassist will be. If you're in New York, I hope you'll come by.