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Jazzletter

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Other Voices

My thanks for the three years of enjoyment you've given me. Enclosed is a money order for the coming year's subscription. I've included something extra as a gesture of gratitude and help. I don't know how many subscriptions you give away to those who find themselves in (hopefully temporary) difficulty. I feel it is not out of place for those of us who can help, even a little, to do so.

— Alan Popow, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada

Alan is one of a number of persons who included extra money for gift subscriptions to be given at my discretion. One of them is going to the writer of the following letter.

I just finished your book *Meet Me at Jim and Andy's* and I wanted to tell you how much I loved it. I am seventeen years old and have been involved with music since I was four, playing the violin, and more recently, the oboe. Now, I almost play guitar and am fascinated with absorbing anything I hear (or read) about jazz. The reason I say "almost" is because even though I have put an amazing amount of time into it already, I have been playing guitar for only six months.

The book has so much information on the people who made and played it that I am going to read it again before I return it to the library. You made the people come alive through your stories, and even though I am a musician and would understand the terms better than the average public, you took no assumptions about things or people. You talked about everyone like you knew them, and it's magical.

Karen Pogorelski, North Tonawanda, New York

Hopefully, you'll be backing off with the "inside" writing as with Getz and Glenn Miller. Reads like tabloid to me. We all know personal items in regards to musicians and band leaders, but we wouldn't pass them on if we were in the position you're in. 'Nuff said.

Enjoyed the George Handy piece.

— Randy Taylor, Fort Myers, Florida

I didn't tell the Glenn Miller story. Die Bild in *Germany, the* Times *of London, the* New York Daily News, *and other newspapers plastered the story around the world. I refuted it.*

'Nuff said.

In the late 1970s Stan Getz was booked to play for two weeks at Ronnie Scott's club in London. A crowd of us booked seats to see him. When we arrived Getz had walked out of the engagement, following a row with Ronnie Scott and Pete King, the club's manager. Two days into the engagement Getz demanded the same fee for performing that the Buddy Rich band was receiving. This was refused. Getz walked out. Ronnie Scott — a noted wit — blamed his slipped disc on his attempts to lean over backwards to please Stan Getz.

Brian Perren, Herts, England

I probably shouldn't get myself exercised when you decide to use your most eloquent writing skills, not to share some fascinating piece of jazz lore or to introduce your readers to something new and wonderful, but to take off on something which you dislike but I happen to like. This doesn't happen too often — and since your pieces are quite often critical rather than laudatory, I guess that means most of the time when you're being critical, I tend to agree with you.

When we part company is when you get so carried away with your distaste with a subject that you insult many of your readers by the unmistakable implication that anyone who likes or respects the object of your scorn obviously has no taste whatever.

The latest example is your diatribe on Andrew Lloyd Webber. It is no surprise that you were to find ample support for your view. One would have to be deprived of all contact with the outside world not to be aware of the contumely which has been heaped upon him over the years, especially by his own countrymen and women.

The sadness — not surprise, because you do it quite often — is that you elect to take up *Jazzletter* space with these diatribes against sitting targets, instead of doing what you do even better, namely making all of us even happier in our enjoyment of the jazz we know, and making us aware of things we might otherwise have missed.

I appreciate that it is a major challenge to produce such word-packed *Jazzletters*, especially when your other work pressures make it necessary for you to write half a dozen at one go but surely there are many other subjects worth your attention.

On a personal note, you know that you and I share common (and good) tastes in a vast majority of the jazz spectrum. I would hate to think that the fact that I also enjoy much of the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber would put me beyond the pale.

Unlike some of your readers, I would not let something like this make me even think of canceling my subscription. I just hope that this revelation of my apparent bad taste does not prompt you to cancel it for me.

— Pip Wedge, Toronto, Canada

Retired now as head of the Canadian television network CTV, Pip Wedge began his career in England, where he wrote about jazz and produced jazz programs for TV.

Congratulations on *Dishonored Honors*. A great piece!

— Sam Levene, Toronto, Canada

Sam Levene retired recently as a television music producer for

the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Your article *Dishonored Honors* was fantastic. It needed to be said.

Ralph Enriques, Las Vegas, Nevada

Sir Wynton and His Majesty Andrew L. Webber! As always you clearly evaluate the situation.

— Leon Breeden, Denton, Texas

Leon Breeden succeeded Dr. Eugene Hall as head of the famous North Texas State University jazz program. One of the most significant figures in the history of jazz education, he is now retired and playing his clarinet again.

The *Jazzletter* Vol 16 No. 8 about Wynton Marsalis etc. was one of the best things I've read in a long time. I was wondering if you'd consent to my publishing it on our web page. I think it deserves to be read by as many persons as possible.

—Kieran Stafford, Sidney, Australia

Kieran Stafford is a record distributor.

I wondered when you were going to train guns on the subterrestrials: copyist, Andrew Lloyd Webber; egoist, Wynton Marsalis; genius, Stanley Crouch, and the whole warped Lincoln Center ethos. It's time to reload: their kind are not killed easily. Even if you cut off their heads, they won't die until sundown.

— Allen Hall, South Haven, Minnesota

You are my hero. In *Dishonored Honors*, you and John Heard articulated what everyone in New York is saying privately.

— Jim Czak, New York City

Jim is the chief recording engineer and one of the owners of Nola, one of the important recording studios in New York. As such he experiences a daily flow of musicians of all kinds.

Please tell John Heard that I agree with every word of his piece on *Blood on the Fields* and on the unholy trinity of Wynton Marsalis, Stanley Crouch, and Albert Murray. The "oratorio," so-called, is pompous, childish, mushy, long-winded, insulting (to the audience and to the slaves), and wholly derivative — Ellington spattered with Mingus. Crouch should be ashamed of the oozing, fulsome liner notes he writes for Marsalis (imagine! the "Prince of Jazz," he calls him), and Marsalis should study Joe Thomas, Emmett Berry, Frankie Newton, and Bill Coleman, not that they could ever be of much help to him. I'm glad the Duke wasn't here when Marsalis got the Pulitzer; even he would have been speechless.

— Whitney Balliett, New York City

Every piano man will love Harold Danko's list (even though I like *More*) and I would add my all-time least favorite tune when a chick singer sits in: *Summertime*. I usually ask them if they know the whole show, why they don't do *I Loves You, Porgy*, or *My Man's Gone Now*, and they ask, "What show?"

I am sending one of my favorite Ring Lardner stories, about a song writer who steals from Italian opera and admits it, and then because a pompous critic "discovers" him, tries to write symphonies and starts mixing with the upper-class crowd (the equivalent of Marsalis sycophants, I should imagine). The story could be a metaphor for Lloyd Webber as well. I don't agree that all his songs are crap, but don't tell me he's any better than Fred Coots or, more recently, Jim Webb, or any of the Disney tunesmiths who keep grinding out Oscar-nominated tunes year after year.

— Frank Frost, Santa Barbara, California

Frank is a working pianist. Until his retirement recently, he was a professor of Greek classics at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

The Ring Lardner story is called Rhythm, *which I strongly recommend, if you can find it. Lardner wrote about song-writing and song-writers with keen insight. Indeed, he is the author of one of the most famous quips about lyrics. Of Oscar Hammerstein II's* Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise, *Lardner said, "Is that as opposed to an evening sunrise?*

I am certainly not a prime candidate to defend Wynton Marsalis (not that he needs it). After all, his ascent and all it has meant in the jazz business has certainly affected myself and many of my peers negatively and dramatically as far as so-called career development is concerned. (Happily, no effect on the musical part.) And he has made some insulting, arrogant, and ridiculous statements over the years, probably some with a clear head and others out of immaturity. Yet I have read some insightful comments he has made about music in several interviews and have to admit that he is serious about the art form.

In spite of all the ruckus Wynton seems to cause consistently, I have to give him due on one large account and that is his educational activity. Taking into consideration the video series on Sony, appearances on Sesame Street, and from what I can gather his numerous visits to schools at all levels, I have to give the guy credit for exerting a seemingly positive influence in this regard. True, I haven't witnessed his school appearances (in fact I have never seen him play) but I doubt they are "political" in nature or content. I think that his image to young Afro-Americans in particular has to be positive in some way and does at least some good. Whether his music is derivative, non-melodic or whatever, or that some opportunistic critics adore him, doesn't matter when he is face to face with kids. Also the fact that so many young black musicians are coming through the Wynton school, so to say, is also positive at least in some part. I remember, especially in the

70s, all the brothers were into Earth, Wind and Fire, Kool and the Gang, etc.

As far as the music goes, he is not the only one to whom the comments you and others have made could be applicable. Conformity and homogeneity are rampant all around us. His generation was culturally deprived during the '70s and '70s — these guys don't know better!!

About Crouch, I remember some of us hanging in the bathroom at Bradley's in New York doing you know what. I once read an article by him about the city of Houston in the Village Voice that I thought was good. But it's obvious that he is an opportunist, and most of what he says has to be considered posturing.

I have written to you before lauding the *Jazzletter*. You are certainly aware that the service you provide is important to some of us. But I'm not sure going after a guy like Marsalis is worth the trouble. If the society we live in goes for such lack of depth and superficiality, then they deserve what they get.

— David Liebman

I'm still here, after the anticlimax of what was known as the "handover." All remains calm, except for the stock market.

I just got a batch of *Jazzletter*s and have been spending the evenings catching up.There are some wonderful pieces, particularly your slant on Lloyd Webber, a most over-rated and over-feted musician.

As I say each year, keep this good work up. I don't know whether the writing comes easier or is more difficult these days, but it does bring so much enjoyment and fosters a culture of wonderful musicians' anecdotes.

As usual, my invitation to you to come here still stands. There is a small but active jazz scene, as Charles Martin will tell you.

Geoff Blower, Hong Kong

Geoff Blower, PhD, AFBPsS, FHKPS, is senior lecturer in the department of psychology at the University of Hong Kong. Charles Martin, a writer living there, is also a Jazzletter *subscriber.*

The *Jazzletter* is something I look forward to more than any other jazz publication. I love all the articles, letters, and remembrances. I have almost all of your books, which I have read and reread. Thanks again, for making my year.

— Dean Hirschfeldt, Kamloops BC, Canada

I am resubscribing to your phenomenal publication. It just keeps getting better. The story of Bill Rubenstein's kitten produced an enormous lump in my throat.

— Ron Goldberg, Toronto, Canada

Ron Goldberg is a mathematician now working for the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce.

I was surprised to learn in the April issue that Bill Evans had kicked heroin to later succumb to cocaine. I wonder if this was in addition to alcohol, which is apparently a particularly lethal combination. I am no teetotaller, but I have no doubt that alcohol has been the most ubiquitous destructive force in the profession we both love. Jazz was born in pain, and it is the best art that I know of with which to combat life's frustrations and injustices. What is a night club, if not a social, relatively regenerate, place of escape?

It would be fascinating to me to read more in the *Jazzletter* about the drugs that have played such a formative role in our music. The drug war is a severely divisive force in American society. Mainstream media report bare facts and seldom risk opinion. The average person here in the midwest is less gullible on the subject than is apparent but remains silent in our climate of fear. Who among us is without some kind of addiction? I think we need more open discussion about drugs, both illegal and legal.

One writer I find bracingly open and objective on this subject is Andrew Weil. His books *The Natural Mind, From Chocolate to Morphine*, and *The Marriage of the Sun and Moon* are to be recommended.

Many thanks for introducing me to Harry Allen, the best young player I have heard in a long time.

— Ogden Plumb, Streator, Illinois

Bill didn't drink.

Every issue brings memories of happy years in our business. I laugh, I smile, and sometimes almost cry. Keep it up. You hit all the chords.

— Bob MacDonald, Corona Del Mar, California

The way I heard the Alan Jay Lerner story, he was mocking himself. Moss Hart asked him why so many people took an instant dislike to him (Lerner) and Lerner said, "To save time."

Lloyd Webber's success has nothing to do with music. His shows are middlebrow staged movies with sappy underscoring and recitatif, an evening out for those unexposed to anything better. And the Tony Award isn't totally hopeless. *Sunset Boulevard* was unopposed that year. They should have just skipped the category, but that would have bothered people too. An F would be top of the class if there were only one pupil in it. (And the Queen gets enough "deserved" blame. John Major made Andy a Lord.)

I have high regard for Marsalis's Haydn trumpet concerto (a favorite piece of which I have several recordings) but his jazz sounds exactly like the failed attempts of a concert musician to swing. I heard his "New Orleans" septet for a couple of hours in a club, and he was the weakest member of the group. You could almost hear him think about the next note. I wouldn't blame politics for the Lincoln Center celebrity — arts benefactors are not generally know for taste in any field, including the clothes they

wear. (There are exceptions, of course.)

I wish you wouldn't identify the general race-gender ideologues with liberals. Their thinking is no different than that of white supremacists, the Christian right, Stalinists, the Heritage Foundation, and others to the right of center.

— Art Hilgart, Kalamazoo, Michigan

I don't so identify them. Stanley Crouch is a Republican.

The Lerner story is false. In researching my book, I met only one person — Burton Lane — who disliked Alan Lerner. Even his ex-wives liked him. He was a man people liked immediately. By the time I got through researching the book, though I never met him, I had become fond of him. I did not print the anecdote, even though Bud Widney told me it was true, for there were no witnesses to it but Webber and Lerner.

Finally, Larry Gelbart told me that he used the line, or one close to it, in the second broadcast of M.A.S.H. *in 1972. Lerner probably got it from there. And it is highly unlikely that Webber would ask why people disliked him — not with his ego.*

I was glad you decided to print Steve Voce's letter and write something about him. He really is an arch pain in the butt. He's the guy who wrote the obit for a very-much-alive Dodo Marmarosa several years back, and it was printed.

I was also great of you to print John Heard's review of Master Marsalis' *Blood on the Fields*. I was at John Birks' memorial service in New York City and the only white guy that got to play there was Dave Amram, because of the boy wonder being self-appointed musical director. John would not have been happy about that.

— Peter Bould, London, England

Peter is a producer who has made records by Bud Shank, Spike Robinson, and many other American jazz musicians.

I totally agree that some of the worst jazz journalism comes out of England, and Steve Voce is the prime example. His writing in Jazz Journal is a constant pain.

American Patrol was arranged by Jerry Gray, not Finegan, and Artie Shaw had not joined the navy when Gray came to Miller (1939).

— Jurgen Wolfer, Gutersloh, Germany

Thank you for the information on Einar Swan. *When Your Lover Has Gone* is a wonderful song. It has the same sort of operetta quality as *Lover Come Back to Me*. I thought for years it must come from the pen of somebody like Sigmund Romberg or Rudolf Friml.

My favorite recording of it is Louis Armstrong's, made in 1931. It was on Okeh and I was lucky to buy it used back in 1949 at the old Jazz Record Center. Curiously, all through the era of LP reissues, it was never included in the Armstrong collections. My feeling for its value was confirmed some years back when Whitney Balliett called attention to it in one of his columns. Fortunately, it is now available on Classics 547. Of all the Armstrong recordings, I would rate it near the top.

Another recording your readers might want to check out is Claire Austin's version, recorded in 1955 with Bob Scobey on trumpet (Contemporary OJCCD-1711-2). Claire is what I call a real kitchen singer. She sings from her heart and to herself.

The only other Einar Swan song I've come across is *A Room with a View*, which Helen Forrest recorded with Artie Shaw in 1938. It was included in Bluebird's LP set, *The Complete Artie Shaw*, Volume 1. A pretty tune which, with better lyrics, might have made a more lasting impression.

As a radio programmer who has spent more than thirty years listening to contemporary popular music, trying to distinguish the good from the bad, or, if you prefer, the less bad from the bad, I must plea for some understanding of each generation's music. The point was best made by Lincoln Kirstein who was quoted in a New Yorker profile to the effect: "You can't expect young people today to write songs like Cole Porter because their lives are not like Cole Porter's."

To be sure, I will always prefer Ellington and Einar Swan, but the war against commercialism is still being carried on, albeit under some strange banners.

Always look forward to the *Jazzletter*.

— Skip Sherman, WMWV, Conway, New Hampshire

Musings

Two readers made the point that the Queen's Honors are awarded on the advice of her ministers. Thus John Major was responsible for the elevation of Andrew Lloyd Webber. The point is correct but minor.

I heard a television commentator say that the Queen's lineage goes back to William the Conqueror. Such ignorance. It goes back to George I, who was Elector of Hanover when he was called on to take over the English throne. As for the divorce issue among the royals, George was divorced. Indeed, he not only divorced his first wife, he then imprisoned her for thirty years. It is also believed that he had her lover murdered, but it has never been proved. It should always be kept in mind that conspiracies are designed not to be uncovered. The successful ones aren't.

Artie Shaw told me he recommended Jerry Gray to Glenn Miller when he broke up his first band; a slip of memory reassigned that to the later date. But then, who knows if it's true?

In fairness, it must be said that some of the worst jazz criticism comes out of the United States as well. There is, however, a difference between European and American jazz criticism, good or bad. It lies in the assumption of many Europeans that they know America and Americans. After all, they've seen *On the Waterfront,*

Rambo, Dirty Harry, Gone with the Wind, et al, read Hemingway, and love Frank Sinatra and Spencer Tracy.

The odd feeling I get from much European commentary is that the writers are looking at America through binoculars, sometimes through the wrong end. Europeans do not know the scope of jazz embedded in towns all over America. They know only the famous, those who get to make records and/or tour in Europe.

And there is another subtle nuance about the difference in visions. We on this side of the Atlantic grow out of the European cultures and are familiar with them. Henry Mancini was intimately familiar with Italian customs and character, as are most American Italians. When Clare Fischer recorded for Hans Georg Brunner-Schwer and the MPS label in Germany, he already spoke German. Most Canadian and American (and for that matter Argentinean and Brazilian) Jews can tell you much about their family histories in the Old Country; they carry the lore with them.

The persistence of national tradition — among the Swedes of Minnesota, for example — is a little-noted and amazing phenomenon. Excepting those whose forefathers came to North America very early, most of us are the children of quite recent immigrants, and most of us, on going to Europe, have a feeling of going home. I have long been intrigued by the persistence of national influences in white American jazz musicians.

This is the essential difference between European and North American writing about jazz. When I read André Hodeir's *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, and, later, when I translated some of his writing for *Down Beat*, I felt that difference strongly. To me, he just did not know what its essence is, and his vapid remark about getting the notes in the right places — often and admiringly quoted, because *a European said it!* — doesn't tell us a thing.

As for the English, they are by no means all like Steve Voce who, as Peter Bould's letter indicates, is disliked by many in the jazz community in England. The late Peter Clayton, for example, approached the subject of the American culture with simplicity, an open mind, and an utter lack of presumption.

The comment on popular music by Lincoln Kirstein — hardly a great scholar of the subject, a man whose wealth lent his pronouncements a weight they didn't deserve — is disingenuous at worst, naive at best. *Nobody* lived like Cole Porter. He was born to millions and married millions more. He was married to a woman he loved, yet was homosexual. He lived in Paris and Venice, among other places. Hardly the all-American boy.

The fact is that most of the best songwriters of that "classic" period came from privileged backgrounds. Journalists writing about Alan Jay Lerner almost always remarked that he was born wealthy, as if he were an exotic aberration in American musical theater. Richard Rodgers was the son of a physician father and a rich mother. Lorenz Hart, who grew up in a house with servants, was educated in private schools: Weingart's Institute and then the Columbia Grammar School, which Alan Jay Lerner later attended. In 1913, after a summer vacation in Europe, Hart entered Columbia College, where he met Richard Rodgers. Arthur Schwartz, the son of a lawyer, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from New York University, where he took a BA and LLD, after which he earned a master's at Columbia and became a lawyer. Howard Dietz graduated from the Columbia College school of journalism. Jerome Kern was the son of a businessman who held a contract to water the streets of New York City, and he was educated at the New York College of Music and in Germany at the Heidelberg Conservatory. Oscar Hammerstein II was the scion of a wealthy theatrical family. Vernon Duke was born Vladimir Dukelsky in northern Russia, a direct descendant of the kings of Georgia. He was educated at the Naval Academy in Kiev and then at the Kiev Conservatory. Lyricist John La Touche was educated at the Richmond Academy of Arts and Sciences and Columbia College. Lyricist and composer Harold Rome attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, took a Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale, then was graduated from the Yale school of architecture. Vincent Youmans' father was a famous, fashionable, and well-to-do hatter, with stores on upper and lower Broadway. Youmans grew up in Westchester, and was educated at private schools, Trinity in Mamaroneck and Heathcotte Hall in Rye, then at the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale University. Hoagy Carmichael held a law degree from Indiana University. Johnny Mercer was born wealthy, though his father lost his money in the 1929 crash. Burton Lane's father was a successful New York real estate operator. Lyricist Harold Adamson attended the University of Kansas and Harvard. Harold Arlen was an exception: he was the son of a cantor, and went to work as a musician at fifteen. The only true example of the Broadway composer risen from dire poverty is Irving Berlin. Possibly E.Y. "Yip" Harburg also could lay claim to a poor childhood. Harburg once told me that even the Gershwins were not poor. "At least the family could afford a piano," he said.

So the Broadway musical theater, despite notable exceptions in Berlin, Arlen, Harburg, and perhaps a few more, has almost from the beginning been the plaything of rich boys, and one rich girl: Dorothy Fields, the daughter of Lew Fields of the vaudeville team of Weber and Fields. I assumed that like Oscar Hammerstein II she had all the doors open for her, but her son, pianist and composer David Lahm, tells me that to the contrary, her father did not want her in show business and tried to *close* all the doors on her. She succeeded anyway, but the point is that she had that background.

These people went to university, and frequently the most prestigious universities, at a time when almost no one did.

No matter its usual designation as "popular" or "vernacular" music, the music of Broadway is music by the educated well-to-do. And it was this level of music that network radio presented to a huge public that took to it and thereby had its standards raised.

Outside the theater, many of the best writers were educated men. Mitchell Parish, who gave us the lyrics to *Stardust* (one of the most exquisite in the English language), *Deep Purple, Stars*

Fell on Alabama, Sweet Lorraine, Hands Across the Table, Take Me in Your Arms, and *Moonlight Serenade*, had a BA (Phi Betta Kappa), from New York University, a DLit from Trusculum College, and a DHL from the University of Charleston.

Even the writer of a trivial novelty song called *One Meat Ball*, my late friend Lou Singer — one of my mentors when I was first breaking in as a songwriter — was an educated musician, trained at Juilliard, Columbia, and New York University; he studied privately with Bernard Wagenaar and Wallingford Riegger. Lou was a fine orchestral composer. (He also wrote *Sleepy Serenade.*)

All this changed in the 1950s and '60s with the rise of Bill Haley and his Comets, Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and the rest.

And the record companies, discovering how much money there was in lowering the standards, put their press agents to work to declare the "new" music was art. They fostered an idea that anyone who applied high critical standards was an elitist and made it a dirty word, just as Ronald Reagan and his handlers made the word *liberal* dirty, a shade or two short of *traitor*.

It was an ingeniously clever ploy, encouraging millions of young people to conclude that in lieu of the effort it takes to understand great art, they could congratulate themselves for serious taste by the simple device of calling the crap they did like art. The damage done to the American culture could be seen in the recent turn-out of 50,000 fifty-something fans for a Rolling Stones concert in Chicago, and the group's sellout tour.

I certainly expect elitist standards in a doctor, a carpenter, in aircraft maintenance and airline pilots: I expect everyone in the world to practice his profession as close as possible to its own highest standards, including music.

Billy Joel recently made a cogent comment. Explaining why he has turned his attention to classical music, he expressed his "disgust" with the state of rock-and-roll. He said:

"Pop is going through a phase of not being very musical. It isn't cool to be good at your instrument. Not wanting to brag, but I fund a Billy Joel Keyboard Scholarship for young pianists at Tanglewood music school. And I see these fantastic kids from Eastern Europe, millions of them, all playing the same repertoire, who can't get work. Which is kind of bizarre — kids who can't play, can't write, can't sing are being signed by record companies, and kids who really can play and write and sing can't get arrested.

"People ask me, why am I successful? Well, I'm competent, and so many people are incompetent that that makes you appear really extraordinary. I'm not really all that good, I just know how to do what I'm supposed to do."

That's the difference. The composers of the "classic" American song *were* competent and more. Cy Coleman graduated from the High School of Music and Art in new York, attended the New York College of Music, studied with Rudolph Gruen and Adele Marcus, and gave his first recitals at six. He played recitals at Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, and Steinway Hall — when he was a kid.

Popular music and television have done much to ruin the English language, and one gets a little *frisson* of pleasant surprise when a seventeen-year-old girl writes a letter like that above that is fully literate. The surprise lies in the fact that one *expects* young people to be semi-literate or worse. And this young lady has found her way through the murk to the good stuff. How, I don't know, but imagine what our culture would be like had our whole communications system maintained "elitist" standards in the arts. The standards of George Gershwin and Cy Coleman, not the incompetents of whom Billy Joel spoke.

Having for years been subject to the subtle control of advertisers over the magazines for which I once wrote, I realized early in the history of the *Jazzletter* — it started in the fall of 1981, and I expected it to last only one year — that I was suddenly free from such controls. To understand any magazine, you must first look at the advertising pages. The whole editorial policy is designed to attract those readers that those advertisers wish to reach. If they are trying to reach student musicians, the editorial policy will reflect the need to flatter them. If the magazine is primarily funded by the makers of stereo equipment, the editorial policy will reflect it.

There is nothing evil about this. It's just the way it is. The Christian Science Monitor is the nearest thing we have in America to an objective newspaper; it isn't dependent on advertising.

Early in the *Jazzletter*'s history, I brooded about the nature of its mandate. When I asked how wide its subject range might be, Mundell Lowe gave me an answer: "Anything that *we* are interested in." Meaning those in the profession. Health care was important to musicians, since they have trouble getting insurance. And since the largest group of subscribers after musicians are doctors, I went ahead with it. It was not an "opinion" piece. It was a thorough, scrupulous, factual report — the kind television should have done and didn't. I am still asked for extra copies of that issue. And I still see it referred to as my "opinion."

As for Stan Getz, the dark side of personality is an inextricable part of history, and as Emerson said, "There is properly no history; only biography." If you don't want to know about Wagner's anti-Semitism, you will never understand the roots of World War II. His anti-Semitism, and glorification of the Aryan gods, contributed directly to the deaths of 80,000,000 human beings. Hitler revered *Parsifal* as a religious ceremony.

Another aspect of World War II is pertinent to the present discussion. After the Great War, there was in England a profound longing for peace. Winston Churchill early warned of Hitler's threat. Young journalists took it upon themselves to suppress his "war-mongering" speeches by failing to report them. They did not want to face the reality of what he was saying. France, England, and the United States could have stopped Hitler early, but so misled was the public that by the time they took alarm, it was too late. Churchill had been right all along.

Had the *New York Times* reported what it knew about planning for the Bay of Pigs, that disaster might have been avoided.

This sort of thing often happens, when troubling information is suppressed. Unquestioning hero-worship — remember the fuss about Bill Crow's completely objective report in the *Jazzletter* on the Benny Goodman tour of the Soviet Union? — is the soil in which demagoguery grows, and demagoguery is the chrysalis of tyranny. Imagine how far Jesse Helms would go if he could.

Accretions of power into fewer and fewer hands are always dangerous. We have the examples of Ted Turner, who has affected world politics with a gift (over a ten-year-period) of a billion dollars to United Nations humanitarian causes; American Irving I. Moskowitz, who has disrupted the peace process in Israel by moving Jewish settlers into an Arab neighborhood on the Mount of Olives and irritated many Israelis for his foreigner's manipulation of their affairs; George Soros, who is using some of his money (he has given away a billion dollars) in the struggle to legalize marijuana; and H. Ross Perot, who came closer than apparently even he could see to buying himself the presidency. I happen to respect these actions by Turner and Soros, but that individuals with great power can so affect our world is troubling, if not new: consider the roles of Cecil Rhodes in Africa and William Randolph Hearst in Cuba. As governments grow weaker, men with immense wealth — and corporations — accountable to no one are gradually usurping them.

In case you haven't noticed, since the publication of *Dishonored Honors*, Wynton Marsalis has replaced composer Hale Smith on the New York State Council of the Arts. He has accumulated serious power — more than anyone in the history of jazz.

Dave Liebman's letter is particularly troubling. As John Heard said of Marsalis as teacher, "Until I've heard what he teaches, I'll wait. If it's like the rest of what he says, I don't think I'd like it." In any case, my first piece on the subject several years ago was about his biased tyranny as an administrator; the second was about his inferiority as a jazz musician and above all as a composer. His activities as a teacher would require yet another article. All disciplined writing on any subject requires parameters, and his activities in teaching did not fall within its purview — the lowering of standards in all the arts. Elton John is a Knight Commander of the British Empire (itself an anachronistic term), and Sir Paul McCartney is "writing" a symphony. Is he going to whistle it?

But the most disturbing thing about Dave's letter is its resignation in saying that a society that accepts superficiality deserves what it gets. This is a denial of personal responsibility in the struggle to make the world better, or at least impede its deterioration. "For I am involved in Mankind," as Donne said. Did Anne Frank deserve what she got in part because British journalists did not wish to disseminate Churchill's "war-mongering"? Did we all deserve Reinhardt Heidrich? Auschwitz? Omaha Beach?

If you asked Randy Taylor, Pip Wedge, and Steve Voce, for whom Pip bought the subscription Voce indignantly canceled, if they believe in democracy and freedom of expression, you would receive a resounding "Yes!" But they don't, and they do not subscribe to Voltaire's famous "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." On the contrary, they manifest what I find is a common credo across the political spectrum: "You have the inalienable right to say or write anything I agree with."

Otherwise there are ominous rumblings of cancelling, and Steve Voce exercised his prerogative to do so. A cancellation, or threat thereof, is meant to accomplish two things: punish the writer and put the publication out of business. It is my normal practice, on even the hint of this ultimatum — for it betrays the thinking — to throw the person off the subscription list.

But Pip Wedge's letter troubles me for yet another reason: its assumption that he speaks for the readership — "us". This is not so, as witness the letters (and an even larger number of phone calls, some from musicians as far away as England, to both John Heard and me) in congratulation for that issue.

Finally, his letter is insulting. He clearly does not want to read about the depredations in the arts of Time-Warner. He doesn't want to know about the perils facing all serious art. He twice refers to the piece on Webber et al as a "diatribe," dismissing a thorough job of reportorial research in which, by the way, I had a great deal of help, including that of such colleagues as Clive Davis of the *Times* of London and Terry Teachout of the *New York Daily News*. Wedge insults us all. He attempts to dictate policy to the *Jazzletter*, demanding that I write things that will make "us" "happier". It is not my purpose to make the readers "happy." Indeed I really don't want readers with such proscribed expectations.

One's perception of art grows, or should. As it is said in France, taste is the result of a thousand distastes, which is to say: it grows by what one abandons, in the process of refining one's capacity to appreciate.

From one perspective, one might say there are two kinds of information: the kind you want to read; and the kind you ought to read, whether you like it or not. If you don't want to know how the international conglomerates are affecting all the arts, including jazz, you should be reading another publication.

"This," said Doug Ramsey, "is precisely the dilemma faced by newspapers today." If you know Doug only for his liner notes and writing for *Jazz Times* (see page 8), you are perhaps unaware of his formidable background as a journalist: a newspaper reporter, then a television reporter, anchorman, news director and in recent years senior vice president of the Foundation for American Communications. His is a major scholar of journalism.

"They and their publishers," he continued, "have caved in to the MBA mentality that dictates content by reader survey. For years they have ignored what their journalist guts tell them. Some in fact no longer have guts. The result is that although readers have been given 'what they want,' they are going away in droves (and huffs).

Now the news business is having collective apoplexy over its shrinking audience and revenue base, examining itself to try to find out why newspapers have a credibility crisis. They are scared to death that if they go back to giving readers what they need to know, it won't work. They are just as frightened about continuing to program their news columns by survey and consultant. It's a mess."

If you want to know why the *New York Times* has become so flabby, re-read that paragraph.

I am well aware that there are those for whom the taste for jazz is linked to toe-tapping and swizzle-stick dinging. They have a right to that pleasure; but they should be reading another publication. A few persons say the *Jazzletter* should not be about anything but jazz, nice little stories about nice little people making nice little music. It should not be about "other" subjects. Always there is the assumption that the person speaks for all the readership. But what about Bud Plumb's request for an examination of the narcotics problem? I have been researching the subject for months; indeed since I first wrote about it in *Down Beat* thirty-seven years ago. I plan an issue on the subject in the next few months. It will be depressing to me to write; it will be depressing to read.

You don't have to read it. You have an alternative: *Jazziz*.

To Vote or Not to Vote

By Doug Ramsey

With reluctance, maybe even against my better judgment, I recently took part in an exercise in which *Jazz Times* asked thirteen people who write about jazz to choose five musicians who are overrated and five who are underrated. The results (in the September, 1997, issue) were interesting, entertaining, infuriating, perhaps amusing, but ultimately meaningless. I hope no one, including the editors of the magazine, took them seriously. I am troubled by the premise that art and artists can be rated. I was disturbed by it many years ago as a reviewer for *Down Beat*, which persists in its star system. *Jazz Times* rejected the idea more than twenty years ago when, as *Radio Free Jazz*, the magazine decided not to attach stars, numbers or other quantitative symbols to reviews. It was the right decision.

The listener's subjectivity in receiving an improvised performance is linked to the human variables of the musician who produces it. There is no sliding scale to measure artistic success. Still, over many years a listener's experience, knowledge and sensitivity construct a standard by which he evaluates individual performances and the accumulated worth of a musician's work.

Gene Lees tells me that during the holidays he heard from the next room a ravishingly beautiful rendition of a Christmas song. He walked in to see who was playing and was astonished to see that the tenor saxophonist on television was Kenny G., a musician held in almost universal contempt by serious jazz musicians and critics. Do we conclude that Kenny G. is underrated? No, we conclude that one discerning listener was impressed by one Kenny G. performance. Nonetheless, considering Mr. G.'s body of recorded work, Gene and most other reputable jazz experts might find that, in relation to the recordings of, say, Phil Woods, it is lacking.

Factors of culture, sociology, commercialism, geography, timing, and individual taste influence whether a musician gets enough exposure to allow his work to be fairly evaluated. Columbia Records promotes Wynton Marsalis to a fare-thee-well but drops Ryan Kisor like a hot potato. Columbia "underrated" Kisor. Did it "overrate" Marsalis? Were perceptions of these two musicians' worth affected by the results? Clearly, they were.

It would not be judicious or politically correct to say it in public, but in private more than a few top-flight musicians will tell you that they don't understand the fuss over Billie Holiday. Others, on the same musical evidence, consider her a major singer. Is she "overrated?" Yes and no.

If general exposure figures into the overrated-underrated formula, there are undervalued musicians in every corner of the country, Brad Goode in Chicago, Marchel Ivery in Dallas, Jack Brownlow and Floyd Standifer in Seattle, Harry Allen in New Jersey, Ellyn Rucker in Denver. That's just the beginning of a long list, and every jazz listener could add to it.

I offer a more or less random list of ten musicians. You may judge for yourself whether each is overrated or underrated. My guess is that a survey of knowledgeable people would show that on at least eight of the ten, there is little agreement.

Chet Baker
Shorty Baker
Charlie Barnet
Sid Catlett
Dorothy Donegan
Allen Eager
Harry James
Les McCann
Billy Taylor
Grover Washington Jr.

What is overrated is the idea that those who make music, the most abstract of the arts, can be evaluated in the way that *Consumer Reports* judges refrigerators. What is underrated is the listener's assimilation of and reaction to music, which in complexity and variety is as abstract as music itself. — **DR**

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