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Jazzletter

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Other Voices

As usual, the November Jazzletter was well-written, instructive, and a pleasure. I'd just finished writing the liners notes for the reissue of the Jimmy Smith-Oliver Nelson *Bashin'* and I was happy to find myself in agreement with Phil Woods about Nelson's genius.

I can amplify your comments on "nigger", since I've been researching the word for years, particularly in connection with *Porgy and Bess* and *Show Boat*. Some of what I've found is supposition rather than definitive, but it makes sense.

When Europeans and Africans met, both groups needed a term to distinguish the races. Apparently the West Africans modified the Poruguese Negro to "niggah" and brought it to America. It survives in Sea Island Gullah, the unique mixture of West African and English. Gullah may have been spoken throughout the South but only preserved in a few coastal communities because of their isolation after the rice and indigo economy failed.

Up to the end of the nineteenth century, "niggah" and "nigger" was used in speech by both races without pejorative connotations, until "Negro" became the accepted term. Like Nigger Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, it was correctly used in the original opening of *Show Boat*, where "Niggers all work on the Mississippi" would have been appropriate for the scene in the 1800s. Since it had passed into impolite use by 1927, though, Hammerstein took it out.

"Niggers all work while the white folk play" is powerful social comment even today, and it's too bad it had to be softened.

The Gullah word for white people was "bukrah", which became "buckaroo". Herb Jeffries was known in cowboy films as "The Bronze Buckaroo". How about that?

Art Hilgart, Kalamazoo, Michigan

When Doc Cheatham died, Jane and I lost the best friend we've ever had. We met him five months before we met each other, in 1972, and at our twenty-third wedding anniversary dinner last night, we kept seeing the sadness behind our smiles.

Except for Jane and my parents and brother, I've never had a longer, closer association with anyone than with Doc. From the time we started playing regularly together in 1975 to my last gig with him — on May 25 at Sweet Basil — it was rare that two weeks would pass without our doing at least one gig together.

Virtually everything I called remarkable about Doc when he was 82 (in my July 1987 piece about him for the Jazzletter) still held when he was almost 92. His only progressive physical problem was arthritis, chiefly in his knees. Just listen to anything he plays on his last record, the Verve CD *Doc Cheatham and Nicholas Payton*, and tell me that anyone in his nineties could possibly play the trumpet with that much vigor and grace. He defied all odds, and we will *never* see the likes of him again.

There was so much to him. I've never known a person with a finer sense of humanity. No matter how much he was praised, he always regarded himself as no better than the next guy. I've never known anyone more honest with both himself and his fellow man — and I mean unswerving 100-percent honesty. There was not a *hint* of anything devious about him. His ethics were not situational; he cast no aspersions.

Doc looked at life straight on, with eyes open. He had no illusions, and no bad habits for a wounded psyche to escape to. He was always open to suggestion — perhaps one of the secrets to his longevity — and he faced difficulties with a strong and buoyant spirit.

Doc's daughter, Alicia, is setting up a music scholarship fund in his name. St. Peter's Church is dedicating this year's *All Night Soul* (October 12) to Doc. Alicia asked that friends send her mother a personal note, and any photos, cassettes, videos, write-ups, or other memorabilia. The address is: Mrs. Amanda Cheatham, Apartment 5-C, 1539 Lexington Ave., New York NY 10029.

James Browne, Sweet Basil's co-manager, has announced that the Sunday jazz brunch Doc started there nearly 17 years ago will continue, in his honor and spirit, with his rhythm section (me on piano, Earl May on bass, and Jackie Williams on drums) and a guest horn player, under the brand name Chuck Folds and Friends. For the first several Sundays these guest players will be, more or less alternating, trumpeters Irvin Stokes and Spanky Davis and trombonist Benny Powell. There will be others. These guys were Doc's favorites and most frequent subs.

From my long experience of playing with dozens of Doc's contemporaries, I'm convinced that the incredible influence of Louis Armstrong on those guys, especially trumpeters, was at least as strong, if not stronger, than the influence of any later dominant figure — Prez, Bird, Miles, whoever. And we should remember that after Doc's generation there were several models to choose from. In Doc's time there was only one. There was Bix, too, a brilliant shining star, but not of Louis's magnitude. Isn't it interesting that, though inescapably influenced by one man, Louis, every fine swing-era trumpeter found his own immediately-recognizable identity? Red Allen sounded like no one but Red Allen; the same for Buck Clayton and Rex Stewart and Shorty Baker. And today, with all the choices and accessible information about this music, I think the main message got lost. Somebody who can pull the right strings should get a search party together and go looking for it and tell the kids about it — before it's too late. Which, by now, it might be. But hope springs eternal.

At his memorial service at St. Peter's, I made these observations:

Doc was the best listener I've ever known. And that quiet charm of his. How does such a gentle, unassuming, serene man light up a room when he walks into it? He did, every time. Maybe it was that serenity, reaching out like a subtle magnet.

Whenever I was with Doc, be it on a gig or in an airport, I felt that somehow everything had a kind of sparkle to it. The day was

special because he was there. I agree with William, his son-in-law, who says that no matter what was happening, Doc always seemed to have a certain understanding of everything that was going on.

There was something very spiritual about Doc. I often had the feeling that someone from up above was watching over him — for us . . . .

I revered Doc, and I loved him — and I just plain liked him.

He loved life, and he prevailed.

As sad as Doc's death has left me, in whatever trail of thoughts I follow, I always end up seeing him with that characteristic sparkle in his eye and that gentle smile. Nearly a quarter of a century of lucky memories.

Chuck Folds, New York City

I discovered the following letter in my files, where it has lain for nearly seven years.

29 October 1990

Dear Mr. Lees:

I feel that I should advise you that there is only one reason for my not wishing to renew my subscription to the Jazzletter. This is the racial prejudice you have displayed within its pages.

It is totally abhorrent to me that such sentiments should surface, of all places, in a magazine concerning jazz, a music which normally carries with it connotations of humanity and respect for people regardless of their backgrounds. You will understand that as an Englishman I have no wish to pay to be villified (sic).

Steve Voce, Liverpool, England

Serge's Miracle

Space precluded mention of one detail in my recent discussion of Donald L. Maggin's biography of Stan Getz.

Maggin repeats a story about Serge Chaloff told by Steve Voce in his 1986 monograph, published in London by Apollo Press, titled *Woody Herman*. According to the story, Woody tried to fire Serge while the band was playing a Boston dance hall overlooking the Charles River. Serge pointed out a window at the water and said, "What do you see out there, Woody?"

"A lot of water."

"Look more closely."

"Well, there's some litter floating around," Woody supposedly said.

"That litter," Serge said, "that's the baritone sax parts of the arrangements. Now you can't fire me; I'm the only person in the world who knows them by heart."

And Serge thereby saved his job.

When I encountered this fabulous tale, I thought I should treat it with caution, for the sake of future history.

I had previously written that some of the worst jazz journalism in the world has come out of England, rivalled only by some of that written in France, and that, furthermore, the English have contributed almost nothing to the evolution of music in Europe or America.

At the present juncture, to obviate misunderstanding, let me point out that my parents and grandparents and a long line of ancestors — the Lees tracing back through Lancashire to the Clan McLeod, the Guys family probably going back to the Norman conquest, the Gillards on my mother's side with a long lineage in Bristol, the Flatmans probably to the time of William and Mary with whom they apparently came from Holland — were all born in England. By blood I'm about as Limey as you can get. I remember my father getting drunk with me once in New York and expressing at last what I had always really known about him: "With every fiber of my being, I'm proud of being an Englishman." Okay. ("Where did you *find* him?" Buddy Rich, who adored my father, said to me once.)

Anyway, in an article a little over seven years ago, I raised the subject of English jazz journalism, noting as I recall the placid confidence the English always seem to manifest in discussing a country they do not know, such as France and particularly the United States. I think I remarked the drought in English composition between the time of Purcell and the rise of some pretty good people in the twentieth century, possibly observing too that most of the good English jazz musicians are Jews or Scots and for that matter a lot of their greatest actors, novelists, poets, and playwrights have been Irish or Scottish. Stanley Dance took umbrage and wrote me one of those letters that begins "I know you won't dare print this," which I did, although most editors make it a policy not to print letters that use this ploy. Then Steve Voce, in high dudgeon, wrote the letter you see above. *Mea culpa*, I had never realized that the English were a "race", although my paternal grandmother certainly thought so: I remember her saying in her thick Lancashire accent, "The's no doubt about it, the English a SOO-perior race!"

Apparently one can delineate the foibles of the Americans or the Canadians or the French with impunity, but God help you if you suggest the English are anything short of Olympian divinity, for you stir a lofty wrath. What ever happened to the spirit of the great self-mocking English film comedies like *Kind Hearts and Coronets, Passport to Pimlico, The Lavender Hill Mob, The Chiltern Hundreds?*

So rather than analyzing that story about Chaloff, as I did some of the other myths that encrusted Woody, not wanting to make poor old vulnerable and sensitive Steve Voce think I was out to get him and all the Brits, I just let it slide by unremarked. But Maggin picked it up from Voce and repeated it and sent it on its way again. It therefore needs to be examined.

Before I dismissed the story, I asked Terry Gibbs, who was close to Serge, and who was in that band, if to his knowledge it was true. He said, "Oh no! That wasn't Serge's style at all!" And

he had never heard the story, which would be unlikely if it were true, for the alumni of that band relish reminiscence and anecdote.

Next point. Serge was *not* the only one who knew the baritone parts in that book. Much of the book still comprised material from the *Apple Honey* and *Caldonia* days, and both Skippy DeSair and Sam Rubinowitch had played the baritone parts. Woody probably could have called one or the other in as replacement: his musicians always seemed willing to go back with him. And for the new material written for the Four Brothers band, the original scores presumably existed somewhere, excepting the head arrangements. They could have been sent immediately to a copyist; someone like Emil Charlap would have had no trouble writing out the baritone parts in the next day or two, including take-downs from arrangements that had originated as heads. It might have created a problem that first evening, but it would have been resolved. Woody faced far more difficult situations than that and got through them with a laugh.

And if the story doesn't sound like Serge, it doesn't sound like Woody either. It didn't happen often, but when Woody went into a rage, it was volcanic, and I think he would have finished the firing of Serge Chaloff on the spot. He fired Zoot Sims for spitting at him.

Another problem with the story:

I asked members of the band if they could recall such a dance hall, overlooking the Charles, in Boston. None could, although someone mentioned a place a little out of town.

And the Charles River, believe it or not, does not stand still. So this must be what happened:

Serge takes the baritone parts, goes out of the hall, throws them on the river. He speaks an incantation, holding his open palms over the flood, and says, "O waters, be still, I command you!" And the river mysteriously ceases to flow, seriously disconcerting the Harvard scullers out practicing in the twilight.

Then Serge goes inside, immediately finds Woody, breaks him away from whatever he is doing, escorts him to a window, shows him the floating paper (paper normally sinks fairly quickly, but this is another element in Serge's miracle), and delivers his ultimatum to a hot-tempered bandleader who is suddenly as tranquil as the evening waters before him.

No researcher should believe everything he reads, and not always everything he hears, even from purported eye-witnesses. Every trial lawyer knows this. Honest cops even know it.

If someone told Voce that story, he should have asked some extra questions.

As it is, he launched a story that wanders onward in the mythology, given more yardage by Donald Maggin.

A wondrous tale, but I don't believe it for a moment.

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The Arrangers

Beginning in the 1940s, jazz and dance-band arrangers went on to composing television and film scores. These men included Benny Carter, Johnny Mandel, Billy Byers, Eddie Sauter, George Duning, Billy May, Patrick Williams, Robert Farnon, Michel Legrand, John Dankworth, Dudley Moore, Johnny Keating, Pete Rugolo, Oliver Nelson, Roger Kellaway, Lennie Niehaus, Shorty Rogers, Lalo Schifrin, Tom McIntosh, Quincy Jones, J.J. Johnson, Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, Mundell Lowe, and Henry Mancini who, with his *Peter Gunn* scores, did more to make jazz acceptable in televison and movie music than anyone else in the industry's history. That is a consensus among composers.

These people profoundly affected film scoring, introducing into it elements of non-classical music that had been rigorously excluded, excepting little touches in the scores of Hugo Friedhofer and the occasional use of an alto saxophone to let you know that the lady in the scene was not all she should be. The medium had been dominated by European concert-music influences. Early scores pilfered the styles and techniques of Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn, Brahms — and sometimes their actual music. Later the twentieth-century Europeans had an influence, up to and including Bartok and Schoenberg, though probably no one was ripped off as much as Stravinsky. In his scores for the TV series *Mission: Impossible*, Lalo Schifrin used scale exercises he had written for his teacher Olivier Messaien at the Paris Conservatory.

The appeal of film scoring to "jazz" composers and arrangers is obvious. Most of them had extensive classical training, and strong tastes for twentieth-century European composers, especially Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky, and Bartok. (William Grant Still, essentially a classical composer but also an arranger who scored *Frenesi* for Artie Shaw, studied with Edgard Varèse as far back as 1927.) This familiarity with the full orchestra inevitably led to a sense of restriction with the brass-and-saxes configuration of dance bands. Despite a general hostility of many jazz fans toward string sections as somehow effete, many of the leaders wanted to use them, and some tried to do so, among them Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, and Harry James.

These experiments were doomed for two reasons. The first was a matter of orchestral balance. A 100-member symphony orchestra will have a complement of as many as 60 string players. This is due to complex mathematical relationships in acoustics. Putting two instruments on a part does not double the volume of the sound. Far from it. To balance the other sections, a symphony orchestra *needs* 60 string players. But the instruments of a standard dance-jazz band, four or five trumpets, three or four trombones, five saxes, and three or four in the rhythm section, can drown even the 60 strings of a symphony orchestra, as appearances of jazz bands with symphony orchestras have relentlessly demonstrated. (In the recording studio, of course, a turn of the knobs will raise the volume of the string section to any level desired.)

As far back as the 1940s, such arrangers as Paul Weston, Axel Stordahl and, in England, Robert Farnon used their work with singers as a means to explore string writing. Indeed, strings had been used in the 1930s and early '40s by singers such as Bing Crosby. But the uses of strings behind singers became much more subtle and sophisticated in the '40s, '50s, and '60s with the writing of such arrangers as Nelson Riddle, Marion Evans, Don Costa, Marty Manning, and Patrick Williams. Some jazz fans may have abhorred the string section, but musicians know there is no more subtle and transparent texture against which to set a solo, whether vocal or instrumental.

No bandleader could afford the large string section needed to hold its own with dance-band brass-and-saxes. And so those bands who embraced them in the 1940s tried to get by with string sections of 12 players or fewer — and on the Harry James record *The Mole*, there are only five — and there was something incongruous about watching these poor souls sawing away on the band platform, completely unheard.

During World War II, with his U.S. Army Air Force band — when money was no object, because all his players were servicemen — Glenn Miller was able to deploy 14 violins, four violas, and two celli, a total of 20 strings. But this was still hopelessly inadequate against the power of the rest of the band.

It was in film that former band arrangers were able to experiment with the uses of jazz and classical orchestral techniques, for the money they needed was there, along with a pool of spectacularly versatile master musicians who had been drawn to settle in Los Angeles for its movie and other studio work. To this day, some of the most successful fusions of jazz and classical influences have been in the movies, including such scores as Eddie Sauter's *Mickey One* and Johnny Mandel's *The Sandpiper*.

Some years ago, I went with Henry Mancini to a Hollywood party at which we encountered Pete Rugolo, his close friend, one of the original architects of the Stan Kenton band and career, and himself an enormous if unsung influence on American music. As unfashionable as it has become to give any credit whatever to Kenton, his band's innovations and style have been cannibalized endlessly by composers who would never admit its effect on them. It isn't politically correct.

I hardly knew Pete Rugolo, but when I found myself in conversation with him at that party I decided to tell him a story:

When I was a young newspaper reporter in Hamilton, Ontario, in which city I was born, I went to hear one of the bands I liked at the Hamilton Armory, a regular station in their tours. I fell into conversation with the band's arranger, whom I recognized from his photo in magazines. He suggested we go upstairs and sit in the balcony that, as I recall, surrounded the big main assembly room. That way we got out of the crowds of listeners who pressed close to the bandstand. I found him a most pleasant man, and I was in awe that he would even talk to me. At that age — I was nineteen or, at the most, twenty — one is full of uncertainty and sensitivity; rejection, above all rejection from hero figures, can be devastating. But he was most gracious to me, and I suspect the memory of his kindness, talking to me as if I actually knew something, probably influenced me to go deeper into this music and write about it.

So, after telling him this story, I said to Rugolo, "Do you know who that arranger was, Pete?"

"No," he said, keenly interested.

"You."

I cannot recall when the work of arrangers first caught my interest. In the big-band era, the serious fans, as opposed to the dancers, knew the names of all the soloists, Ray Nance and Lawrence Brown and Milt Bernhart and Maynard Ferguson and Pete Candoli and Flip Phillips and Jack Jenny and Sy Oliver and Ted Nash and many more. Indeed, in common with friends who shared my interest, I could name the personnel of any major band, and kept up on the changes in that personnel. It was not that great an accomplishment. Young baseball fans can do something similar, and all it proves is the ease with which one assimilates information about anything in which one has a genuine interest, as opposed to some requisite high-school subject.

But I was always interested in the "arrangers", the men (for the most part; Mary Lou Williams was always there, and, later, Melba Liston) who wrote the arrangements in which the great solos were framed. And if I reveal a certain discomfiture with the term "arrangers" it is because the work of the best of them, even when dealing with pop songs, amounted to recomposition.

I suspect this interest began very early in my life, inspired by the influence of my Uncle Harry, Henry Charles Flatman, born in London, England — a trombone player and an arranger. He played in dance-bands in the 1920s and '30s, and I would hear their "remote" broadcasts on the radio. Once one of these bandleaders even dedicated a song to me on the air. I am told that I could identify any instrument in the orchestra by its sound by the time I was three, but that may be exaggerated family lore. I can only say that I can't recall a time when I couldn't identify instruments by their sound — and only became a little confused when such as Lester Young and Stan Getz pushed the tenor saxophone into the tessitura and sound of the alto.

But what held these instruments together in ensemble passages? I even knew that: people like my Uncle Harry. I remember him sitting at an upright piano with some sort of big board, like a drawing board, propped above the keyboard. He always had a cigarette dangling from his mouth, and one eye would squint to protect itself from the rising tendrils of smoke, while his pencil made small marks on a big paper mounted on that board: score paper, I realized within a few years. He was, I was told, writing "arrangements" for the band he played in. I seem to recall that he was the first person to tell me the difference between a major and minor chord.

Because of him I was always aware that the musicians in a band weren't just making it up, except in the solos. Somebody wrote the passages they played together.

And so from my the earliest days I looked on the record labels to see who wrote a given piece. If the title were not that of some popular song, and if the record in question was an instrumental, then chances were that the name was that of the man who composed *and* arranged it. Whether I learned their names from the record labels or some *Down Beat*, I followed with keen interest the work of the arrangers. I became aware of Eddie Durham, whose name was on Glenn Miller's *Sliphorn Jive*, which I just loved; Sy Oliver, whose name was on Tommy Dorsey's *Well, Git It* and *Yes Indeed*; Paul Weston and Axel Stordahl, both of whom wrote for that band; Jerry Gray, who wrote *A String of Pearls,* and Bill Finegan, who arranged *Little Brown Jug*, both for Glenn Miller; and above all Fletcher Henderson, who wrote much of the book (as I would later learn to call it) of the Benny Goodman band. Later, I became aware of Mel Powell's contributions to the Goodman library, such as *Mission to Moscow* and *The Earl*, as well as those of Eddie Sauter, including *Benny Rides Again* and *Clarinet a la King*. Jimmy Mundy's contributions to that band included *Swingtime in the Rockies* and *Solo Flight*, which introduced many listeners to the brilliance of guitarist Charlie Christian; and Gene Gifford, who wrote *Smoke Rings* and *Casa Loma Stomp* for the Casa Loma Orchestra led by Glen Gray. The better bandleaders always gave credit to their arrangers, whether of "originals" or standards such as *I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm*, and I became aware of Ben Homer and Frank Comstock with Les Brown — himself an experienced arranger — Ralph Burns and Neal Hefti with Woody Herman and, later, Bill Holman with various bands. Some of the arrangers became bandleaders themselves, including Russ Morgan (whose commercial band gave none of us a hint that he had been an important jazz arranger), Larry Clinton, and Les Brown. And of course, there was Duke Ellington, though he was not an arranger who became a bandleader but a bandleader who evolved into an arranger — and one of the most important composers in jazz, some would say *the* most important. One error: I assumed that Duke Ellington wrote everything his band played, only later perceiving the enormous role of Billy Strayhorn, who was kept more or less in the background. Strayhorn of course, not Ellington, wrote the band's latter-year theme, *Take the A Train*. I was aware very early that someone named Gerry Mulligan — scarcely older than I, although I did not know that — wrote *Disc Jockey Jump* for Gene Krupa, and someone named Gil Evans did some gorgeous writing for the Claude Thornhill band.

But I never heard of Bill Challis, and did not know the critical role he had played in the development of writing for big bands with the new instrumentation of trumpet, trombone, saxophone, and rhythm section. Challis was not, I suppose, politically correct; indeed he still isn't, and so his work and his role have been largely overlooked.

In the various attempts to define jazz, emphasis is usually put on improvisation. Bill Evans once went so far as to say to me that if he heard an Eskimo improvising within his musical system, assuming there was one, he would define that as jazz. It is an answer that will not do.

There are many kinds of music that are based on, or at least rely heavily on, improvisation, including American bluegrass, Spanish flamenco, Greek dance music, Polish polkas, Gypsy string ensembles, Paraguayan harp bands, and Russian balalaika music. They are not jazz. In the early days of the concerto form, the soloist was expected to improvise his *cadenzas*; and well-trained church organists were expected, indeed required, to be skilled improvisers, up to and including large forms. Gabriel Fauré was organist at La Madeleine. Chopin and Liszt were master improvisers, and the former's Impromptus are what the name implies: improvisations that he later set down on paper, there being no tape recorders then. Doubtless he revised them, but equally doubtless they originated in spontaneous inventions. Beethoven was a magnificent improviser.

Those who like to go into awed rapture at the single-line improvisation of a Stan Getz might well consider the curious career of Alexander Borodin. First of all he was one of the leading Russian scientists of his time, a practicing surgeon *and* chemist, a professor at the St. Petersburg Medico-Surgical Academy. (He took his doctorate on his thesis on the analogy of arsenic acid with phosphoric acid.) Music was never more than a relaxing hobby for him, and his double career raises some interesting questions about our modern theories on left-brain logical thought and right-brain imaging and spatial information processing. Borodin *improvised* his symphonies before writing them down. And if that seems impressive musicianship, consider Glazunov's. Borodin never wrote his Third Symphony down at all: he improvised the first two movements and his friend Glazunov wrote out the first two movements *from memory* in the summer of 1887, a few months after Borodin's death. (He constructed a third movement out of materials left over from other Borodin works, including the opera *Prince Igor*.)

Most of the Borodin Third Symphony, then, is improvised music. I can't imagine that anyone, even Bill Evans (if he were here) would try to call it jazz.

How then are we to define jazz?

The remark "if you have to ask, you ain't never gonna know," attributed to both Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller, is clearly unsatisfactory, though a certain kind of jazz lover likes to quote it to establish how hip he is. You could say that about many kinds of music. It is an evasion of the difficulty of definition.

A simple definition won't cover all the contingencies, and a complex one will prove ponderous and even meaningless. Even if you offer one of those clumsy (and not fully accurate) definitions such as "an American musical form emphasizing improvisation and a characteristic swing and based on African rhythmic and European

harmonic and melodic influences," you have come up with something that conveys nothing to a person who has never heard it. Furthermore, the emphasis on improvisation has always been disproportionate. Many outstanding jazz musicians, including Art Tatum and Louis Armstrong, played solos they had worked out and played the same way night after night. Nat Cole's piano in the heads of such hits as *Embraceable You* were carefully worked out and played the same way repeatedly. Bandleaders of the era would tell you their players *had to* play solos exactly as they had on the records. Otherwise, some of the audience to a *live* performance would consider itself cheated or, worse, argue that the player wasn't the same one who had performed on the record.

If improvisation will not do as the sole defining characteristic of jazz, and if non-improvisation, as in solos by Louis Armstrong and Art Tatum does not make it *not* jazz, then what does define it?

If it does not cease to be jazz because the soloist sometimes is not improvising, neither does it cease to be jazz because it is written. It would be difficult to argue that what McKinney's Cotton Pickers played wasn't jazz. The multi-instrumentalist and composer Don Redman — who wrote for Fletcher Henderson's band before Henderson did — became music director of the Cotton Pickers in 1927 and transformed it in a short time from a novelty group into one of the major jazz orchestras. And its emphasis was not so much on soloists as on the writing: Redman's tightly controlled and precise ensemble writing, beautifully played.

McKinney's Cotton Pickers was based in Detroit, part of the stable of bands operated by the French-born pianist Jean Goldkette: his National Amusement Corporation fielded more than 20 of them, including one under his own name whose personnel included Frank Trumbauer, Bix Beiderbecke, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Joe Venuti, and Spiegle Willcox (who is still playing). One of Goldkette's bands, the Orange Blossoms, became the Casa Loma Orchestra, with pioneering writing by Gene Gifford. Artie Shaw has argued that the "swing era" began as a popular musical movement not with Benny Goodman but with the Casa Loma. Also in Detroit, Redman was writing for the Cotton Pickers and Bill Challis for the Goldkette band, both bands influencing musicians all over America who listened to them on the radio. Musicians, including Gil Evans in Stockton, California, were listening to Gene Gifford's writing on radio "remotes" by the Casa Loma. Even the Isham Jones band of the 1930s was born in Detroit; it was actually organized by Red Norvo. Given all these factors, there is good reason to consider Detroit — awash in money from both the illegal liquor importation from Canada and the expanding automobile industry and willing to spend it freely on entertainment — the birthplace of the big-band swing era.

But the structural form of the "big band" must be considered the invention of Ferde Grofé, who wrote for the Art Hickman band that was working in San Francisco and almost certainly was influenced by black musicians who had come there from New Orleans. Hickman hired two saxophone players from vaudeville to function as a "choir" in his dance band. The band caused a sensation, and Paul Whiteman was quick to hire Grofé to write for his band, as he was later to hire Bill Challis and various soloists who had been with Goldkette. The band of Paul Specht was also influential, and through the new medium of radio broadcasting: its first broadcasts were made as early as 1920. Don Redman for a time worked in the Specht office, and it may well have been the value of his experience there that influenced Fletcher Henderson to hire him. Henderson also hired Bill Challis. Once Henderson got past his classical background and got the hang of this new instrumentation, he became one of the most influential — perhaps, in the larger scale, *the* most influential — writers of the era.

These explorers had no choice but to experiment with the evolving new instrumentation. There was no academic source from which to derive guidance, there were no treatises on the subj[illegible] Classical orchestration texts made little if any reference to the use of saxophones, particularly saxophones in groups. And these "arrangers" solved the problem, each making his own significant contribution. While Duke Ellington was making far-reaching experiments by mixing colors from the instruments of the dance-band format, the Grofé-Challis-Redman-Henderson-Carter axis had the widest influence around the world in the antiphonal use of the "choirs" of the dance-band for high artistic purpose.

This instrumentation may vary, and of late years its range of colors has been extended by the doubling of the saxophone players on flutes and other woodwinds, the occasional addition of French horn (Glenn Miller used a French horn in his Air Force band) and tuba, but structurally the "big band" has remained a superb instrument of expression to the many brilliant writers who have mastered its uses.

The big-band era may be over, but the big-band format is far from moribund. The "ghost" bands go on, though the revel now is ended, and their greatest actors are vanished into air, into thin air: Tommy Dorsey, Woody Herman, Duke Ellington, Count Ba[illegible] and more. The Artie Shaw band goes on, though Shaw does not lead it. It is the only ghost band that has a live ghost.

Two bands continue under their original leaders, those of Lionel Hampton and Les Brown.

Curiously, none of the ghost bands has the spirit, the feel, of the original bands. In ways I have never understood, the leaders of these bands somehow infused them with their own anima. Terry Gibbs has attested that sometimes, when the crowd was thin, Woody Herman would skip the last set and let the band continue on its own; and it never sounded the same as when he was there, Terry said. The current Count Basie band does not have the "feel" of the original. There are of course two things without which a Basie band is not a Basie band: Basie and Freddie Green. But those conspicuous omissions aside, Basie was able to get a groove from that band that eludes his successors.

Far more interesting than the ghost bands are those regional "rehearsal bands" that spring up all over the country, and indeed

all over the world, or the recording bands assembled to make albums and, afterwards, dissolved — at least until the next project.

As we near the end of the twentieth century, the evolution of jazz *as the art of the soloist* has slowed and, in the example of many young artists imitating past masters, ceased completely. There is an attempt to institutionalize it in concert halls through the use of repertory orchestras, and a brisk concomitant interest in finding and performing, when possible, the scores of such "arrangers" as George Handy.

There is an inchoate awareness that it somehow isn't quite kosher to imitate the great soloists of the past, though that hasn't deterred some of the younger crop of players from swiping a little Bubber Miley here, a little Dizzy Gillespie there, but it is all right to play music by jazz composers of the past, because written music is *meant to be* re-created by groups of musicians. And so the emphasis in the current classical-ization of jazz is to a large extent on the writers for past jazz orchestras. In this jazz is being institutionalized as "classical" music has been, the latter for the good reason that Beethoven couldn't leave us his improvisations, he could leave only *written* music to be *re*-created by subsequent players.

Much of this re-creative work is rather sterile. It lacks the immediacy, and certainly there is no exploratory zeal, that this music had when the "arrangers" first put it on paper. The new stuff being composed and/or arranged is much more interesting.

Here are some things I have heard lately:

● **Melton Mustafa**: *St. Louis Blues*. Contemporary CCD-14085-2.

This is a big band that producer Bob Weinstock, the former owner of Prestige Records, discovered at a Hollywood, Florida, jazz festival. It is also an excellent proof of the vitality of regional jazz in this country.

Melton Mustafa played in both the Basie and Ellington ghost bands before settling in South Florida. He is an outstanding trumpeter with a fat, strong tone, and considerable facility.

More to the immediate point, he is an interesting composer and arranger. The only one of the CD's 10 tracks I don't like is the title track. *St. Louis Blues Overture* is Melton's extended version of the Handy composition, with tempo changes and various stylistic effects. I skip past it, preferring his own compositions.

There is a wide range of colors and flavors, effectively drawn from the big-band instrumentation. The opening track, *Soul of Soul*, is a funky bugaloo kind of piece, and very effective, at least for my taste. *Conquest* uses various Caribbean percussion effects. The Cuban influx into Southern Florida may annoy some people, but it certainly has swept away the cultural blandness of that region's past, improving both is music and its cuisine. Gloria Estafan is not the only thing happening there. The Cuban musical coloration is everywhere, and the record stores have entire sections devoted to this music. I am deeply stimulated by it when I'm in Miami. Others of Mustafa's compositions, which at times lapse into straight four-four jazz, are equally fresh. Not for everybody, but I like it.

The still-incredible multi-instrumentalist Ira Sullivan is guest soloist on two trucks. On one he plays alto flute, on the other trumpet. I had never heard him play alto flute, or any flute, but I am not surprised at his fluency or by his emotional depth. I expect them from him, no matter what the axe.

● **Phil Woods**: *Celebration!* Concord CCD-4770-2. But this album did surprise me. It shouldn't have, but it did. It presents Phil Woods in the role of big-band composer and arranger. I should have anticipated from the sheer brilliance of his playing — he is the pre-eminent jazz alto player in the world, and widely recognized as such — that he could do nothing badly, and his writing is everything one could hope for.

Again, the album suggests the extent and excellence of regional jazz in America. Phil lives in Delaware Water Gap, a stone's throw west of the Pennsylvania-New Jersey border in the low Pocono mountains. He and some of his friends each year, just after Labor Day, hold a festival called Celebration of the Arts. All the musicians get paid $100 each, no matter their reputation. This band was assembled mostly of musicians who live in the region, and it's very good. One of the trombonists is Hal Crook.

The rhythm section is that of Phil's regular group, Steve Gilmore, bass, and Bill Goodwin, drums; and the deft, fluent, lyrical — and one could even say insouciant except that that would sound *too* much like Dizzy — Bill Charlap on piano.

● **Bill Holman**. *Brilliant Corners: The Music of Thelonious Monk*. JVC-2066-2.

First of all, the liner notes by Doug Ramsey. They should receive a Grammy award, and would, if the voting were based as much on merit as on popularity.

Ramsey points out that "Monk the composer is all but absent from the repertoires of big bands."

Holman is musically surprising, as befits an album devoted to Monk. The CD is made up of ten well-known Monk pieces, such as *Bemsha Swing, Misterioso, Rhythm-a-Ning,* and *Brilliant Corners*, but Holman approaches them in ways you have never heard before, applying to his writing much of what he has learned from 20th Century classical composers.

Performing this music is one of those regional (if you can call polyglot Los Angeles regional) part-time big bands, in this case a very hot band indeed, made up of such outstanding players as Lanny Morgan, Bill Perkins, Pete Christlieb, and Bob Enevoldsen, veterans all, but showing no signs of diminution of powers. (Perkins is 72.) This band actually plays gigs.

I think Hugo Friedhofer would have loved this album — he certainly admired Holman — but I can just hear what the old

phony misanthrope would in his gloomy voice have muttered: "Cluster's last stand."

Fresh. Startling. Challenging. Incredibly original. And it swings.

It was recorded (by Allen Sides) straight to two-track and the sound is transparent, detailed, balanced, and full.

● **Claus Ogerman**. *Lyrical Works*. EMI Classics 7243 5 56392 2 6.

This album will probably be found in the classical section. Claus, like Mel Powell, has ceased writing jazz altogether. He is a composer I once dismissed, and all too lightly, deceived by some of the commercial writing he did for Quincy Jones when the latter was head of a&r at Mercury. It was crap, but that's what Quincy wanted.

This album reminds me of what I suppose I should always have known, that the magnificent writing Claus later did for albums by Antonio Carlos Jobim, Bill Evans, and Oscar Peterson was not the consequence of some sudden epiphany and concomitant blossoming. The four-part *Lyric Suite* is the most significant part of this album, since some of the other pieces have been previously recorded, though they have lost none of their shimmer.

Claus studied piano and conducting in Nuremberg and played with the Kurt Edelhagen band before he wrote the *Lyric Suite* in 1952. He hurt himself with the German classical establishment, having eschewed the writing of impenetrable intellectual music in the long hegemony of serialism, in favor of warmly emotional, indeed very moving and sensitive, music. As familiar as I am with much of his work, this *Lyric Suite* came as a revelation. He had achieved mastery so early. He was 22 when he wrote it; this CD is its premiere recording. I find unfathomable that an artist of this stature could, for the sake of money — and in our conversations he has always been disconcertingly candid about that — lower himself to writing shallow albums for now-forgotten singers. Strangely, I wish I had been as smart as Claus (not to mention as gifted). Lutoslawski and others have managed to live such compartmented lives; I just don't know how it's done. For the most part, those who have set aside their standards in order to make money usually become irretrievably lost, for they convince themselves that the ordure they are manufacturing with cold commercial cunning has merit; or worse, that there is no such thing as merit. I think that this process destroyed Quincy Jones as a musician, while making him many times a millionaire.

But Claus, with a ferrous — possibly Germanic — discipline was able to stay true to some inner compass, and, when he had shaped a landscape of security stretching far before him, to find his north and return to his true self. *Lyric Suite* shows me what that self was, even at 22.

Other works in the album include *Elegia*, originally written for Bill Evans, the *Preludio and Chant* (1979), and the three-part *Symphonic Dances* (1971). This last has been retitled; it was once called *Time Present and Time Past*, a reference to T.S. Eliot. One of its movements contains jazz touches, but otherwise these are modern "classical" pieces.

The orchestra is the London Symphony Orchestra. I think the performance of the *Symphonic Dances* is the best this work has yet received. Gidon Kremer, the solo violinist, is magnificent.

And oh! How Claus can write for strings!

All these albums should be obtainable through stores. You might have to pound on the counter and get someone to place a special order for you. Even rock-and-roll record stores can do that for you if they want to; indeed, I have made friends in such a store, and they do me great favors like that.

If you have trouble finding the Ogerman album, EMI has an 800 number: 800 525-5880.

Useful Tip

Are you fed up with the piles of fliers that clog your mail box? Do you not care to collect discount coupons for dog food, baby food, kitty litter, cookies, Dawn, Draino, and Special K? Are you lifted to new heights of indifference by summer sales at your local hardware store of garden hoses and insecticides and fence posts and hedge trimmers and screen doors and jumper cables and lacquer thinner and two-by-fours and ceiling fans and five-gallon cans of paint? If you have a postal box, are you irked on returning from a trip to find it so jammed with junk that you skin your knuckles trying to pull it out? Do you occasionally reflect morosely on how many trees it takes to thus inconvenience you year after year, not to mention the landfill in which the stuff ends up?

The Postal Service is required to deliver any kind of trash that someone is willing to spend the money to mail to you. But there is respite. Not even all postal employes are aware of it, although it was one of them who tipped me off. She didn't quite look around suspiciously like someone selling feelthy postcards, and she didn't say Psst. But she came close to that when she handed me a sheet of paper on which (hand-written) were two addresses. So:

Write two letters, saying you no longer wish to receive advertising mail which is wasted on you anyway since you throw it out unread, to:

Mail Pref Service
Direct Mail Association
PO Box 9008
Farmingdale NY 11735-9008

Direct List Maintenance
239 W. Service Road
Hartford CT 06120-1280

It works.