Gene Lees
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Other Voices

I just got back from Switzerland and the Bern Jazz Festival.

I am writing regarding the accessibility of independently produced recordings. Ten years ago it seemed as though, through Tower Records, jazz recordings would finally be available in a mainstream environment. For a while that was true. But all that has changed since the major labels have flooded the market with their multiple compilations of old recordings and the new artists they've invested big bucks in. The result is that shelf space is now totally controlled by the majors, in the same way supermarket shelves only carry the biggest suppliers' products. The same scenario is being played out in book stores. Just try to buy one of the jazz books published by university presses in these slick new mega-stores.

Three major chains have all but eliminated the old stores. Probably only Chicago's Jazz Record Mart is a major player now that Philadelphia's Third Street Records has closed. I haven't been to Poo-Bah in Pasadena for several years but they are an alternative store with jazz, not a specialty. The same scenario is true for much of Europe. Just try to find CDs in France and England and most of Germany these days. There used to be three jazz stores in Amsterdam. Now there is none.

More and more jazz CDs are being sold by mail. In the U.S. True Blue (Mosaic) has a great selection of historically important major-label issues (again sparsely available in stores) and Cadence (all the independents) caters to all styles of jazz. Most mail-order houses specialize, mainly in older jazz — like Mail Order Jazz (Gus Statiras) and Joe Boughton in Meadville, Pennsylvania. I too am offering other people's CDs through the mail to support what I do with Sackville. In some cases these other labels sell my CDs in their areas.

It's really the only way to survive. I now sell 50 percent of my CDs myself and hope to increase that further as in most cases, even when distributors do move them, shelf space is usually very short.

The exception shows what can happen. The Classical Record in Hazelton Lanes in Toronto (who also sell jazz) has sold more than 1000 copies of my Albert Nicholas record by playing it. People passing by the store can hear the music.

— John Norris, Toronto, Canada

You can write to John Norris for his mail-order catalogue at: Sackville Recordings, Box 1002, Station O, Toronto ON Canada M4A 2N4.

Your strategy on renewals hit the mark. Here's my check, 'cause sure as hell if I put it off, it will drown in the Sea of Good Intentions. This is for myself and my gift subscriptions.

I agree. Copy machines are the enemy. Common law knowledge concerning intellectual property is scarce, and the present murky copyright law is of little help. As the result, copies are made willnilly. Hard-earned and well-deserved royalty income is lost. Yet for a situation I've frequently encountered, may I suggest an imperfect solution?

During a recent spirited conversation re Marsalis and Crouch, I referred to Jazzletter opinions. I wanted my dinner companions — an intelligent yet jazz-*un*knowledgeable attorney couple — to have the benefit of your thoughtful insights and scholarship. Yet it was not practical for me to buy a year-long subscription for them, as well as for any other similar dinner-table encounter.

So I made a copy of the *Dishonored Honors* issue and sent it to them. And in recognition of your legal ownership of that writing, I'm enclosing a small check for the copy I made. I plan to do the same for any copy I make. And I suggest this as an honor system approach for anyone who makes a copy of the Jazzletter.

This may not be a good solution to the issue of copyright ownership vs copy machines, but it's a thought.

— Larry Orenstein, Sherman Oaks, California

Larry once played trumpet and sang in the Shep Fields, Paul Whiteman, and Ray Noble bands. He has worked as a composer, lyricist, and actor: he was understudy to David Wayne in Finian's Rainbow. *He was copy chief at Kenyon and Eckhart and headed his own advertising agency for many years.*

The photocopy machine is no longer the only danger to copyright. More on copyright later in this issue.

The story about André Previn was just marvelous. I still have the *My Fair Lady* album, purchased in 1957, despite forty-plus years of moves, raising a family (one youngster upchucked on it) and being played (literally) thousands of times.

The best point of the Jazzletter is the fact that I never know when it will arrive. Even after being retired for eleven years, my life is too often too predictable. And the *un*predictable nature of the Jazzletter's arrival in my mailbox is just what I need. Don't change a thing, it's great!

— Ted Sullivan, Wheaton, Illinois

Your excellent take on André Previn and the problems he perennially encountered with critics, jazz and classical, whose

hostility was matched by their ignorance, prodded memories of his ghastly experience in San Francisco when he played a unique concert in the early 1960s.

As a freelance theatrical publicist, I was hired to promote his concert in the 3600-seat Masonic Auditorium. In the first half of the concert, if memory serves, Previn played solo Ravel, Hindemith, and Bartók. Following intermission, his trio played jazz. So unusual was this format, if not unprecedented, that I approached the San Francisco *Chronicle*'s venerable music critic Alfred Frankenstein with the suggestion that he review the classical portion and the paper's jazz critic, Ralph J. Gleason, cover the jazz segment. Frankenstein warmed to the idea.

Back at my office, I got a waspish phone call from Gleason with unmistakable hostility toward Previn, upbraiding me for suggesting this to Frankenstein. With his notorious penchant for crafty manipulation, Gleason engineered a jokey inversion of my original concept: he would review the classical portion while the jazz segment would be covered by Frankenstein's assistant, Dean Wallace, who knew less about jazz than Gleason knew about classical music, which was nothing. The resultant reviews trashed Previn's approach to both the jazz and classical repertoire as "technical, cold and unfeeling." Previn flew into a justifiable rage, excoriating Gleason publicly coast to coast. For years after, Gleason blamed me for the brouhaha. As your article made clear, André Previn's genius endures, while his critics kept their rendezvous with oblivion.

— Grover Sales, Belvedere, California

In Reply

John Norris founded *Coda* magazine in Toronto as well as Sackville records. His letter explores some of the problems facing music today, despite all the Polyanna talk of a jazz renaissance. Another problem arises from the crumbling of copyright protection.

The corrupt men and women who pass our laws are only too willing to weaken copyright protection in broadcasting, for they are dependent on broadcasters for the exposure they need to get re-elected. One of the things that destroyed Joseph McCarthy — probably completely unnoticed by historians — was a seemingly small event that occurred one year at the Associated Press Managing Editors conference. The president that year was the late Norman Isaacs, managing editor of the *Louisville Times* when I was its classical music critic. Norman told me that he said roughly as follows to the conference:

"Do you think we've been giving McCarthy too much space? Do you think we should be cutting back on it?" And the conference agreed. And McCarthy's publicity dried up. Since he was completely a creature of publicity, he soon found himself standing in corridors offering press releases that no one would take from his outstretched hand.

Edward R. Murrow, of course, helped with one of his broadcasts, though I consider Murrow the most over-admired over-praised over-revered journalist in history. But he did some good in that instance. (Those *At Home* broadcasts, interviews with celebrities, unctuously servile, are embarrassing.)

Since contemporary politicians are even more dependent on "the media", particularly television, than McCarthy — and Kenneth Starr's "investigation", with its "leaks" and trial-by-media techniques, is nothing if not a revival of McCarthyism to the end of destroying American democracy — does it come as a shock to you that the National Association of Broadcasters is perhaps *the* most powerful lobby in Washington?

And since broadcasters would rather not pay anything at all for the use of music, would it surprise you if your noble legislators, well, like, y'know, were kind of like acquiescent on this? I mean, what do composers and singers and songwriters and jazz musicians do for my political career anyway, when you get right down to it? And Charlie Money with his 82 radio stations and leventy-twelve TV stations is, you know, important to me. If I don't get my face on that tube a couple of times a week . . . .

And what happens to the integrity of *Time* magazine when it has been combined with CNN and owns HBO and television is regulated by the FCC? Do you *really* expect anything remotely resembling the truth from *Time*, or for that matter CNN?

It was evident to me from the first days of the Jazzletter that what could destroy it was the photocopy machine.

Furthermore, copies are stolen from subscribing libraries, particularly university and college libraries. You can fold it in three and stick it into the inside pocket of a sports jacket or into a purse and leave with it. That's harder to do with a book or a magazine. All libraries subscribe through subscription services. Finding an issue missing, the library reports me to the subscription service, which in turn sends an indignant formal notice to me saying that these issues were never received. I have cancelled the subscription of the San Francisco Public Library because it became an infernal bloody nuisance. One of the worst offenders was the library of York University in Toronto. I am seriously considering accepting no subscriptions from libraries.

The Internet is a more serious threat to copyright than the photocopy machine ever was. You can, if you own a decent scanner, costing no more than $150, put any document into your computer and then send it on to all your friends; or for that matter to the whole world.

Something called the Guttenberg Project already permits you to download classic public-domain books into your computer and print your own copies. Free, except for the cost of your paper and the toner cartridge. If you did that with newer books from powerful book houses, still under copyright, you would of course sooner or later be caught and charged with infringement. But with a small publication, who's to know?

And with DAT recording, you can make a tape from a CD and then endless copies of it. Since the information is digital, the hundredth generation is as good as the first. And already we have recordable CDs.

I am only scratching the surface of the problem here. I have been accumulating material on its nature for some time, for an

obvious reason:

No one can reach the highest levels of any kind of work without pursuing it fulltime, and even fanatically. To do this, he or she must be able to derive sufficient income to support himself and, in most cases, a family. When you make this impossible for an artist, he must resort to doing it as an amateur or turn to another profession. The long-range effect of this can only be a lowering of the standards of the art or craft in question, with a single exception: the art of painting. For in that instance, the work is sold on a one-on-one basis. All art that requires mass distribution will suffer to some extent, but particularly literature and music. Not only is the younger jazz musician in competition with old masters, even the older surviving musicians may find themselves in rivalry with their own earlier records.

For example, there is a Pacific Jazz reissue by Bud Shank and Bob Cooper called *Blowing Country*. It was made forty years ago. Inevitably it is competitive to any new recording Bud might make. And this vitiates the motivation of labels to make new recordings by him or anybody else. The senior vice president of a major label estimated to me that 70 percent of jazz record sales today are reissues; a few weeks later he told me that orders had come from on high to stop making *any* new recordings.

The situation holds in classical music as well. How many high-quality recordings of the Sibelius Seventh Symphony, say, does the world need? And since the record industry is not exactly a charitable organization, why should it record yet another Beethoven Fifth by some living breathing organism in Minneapolis or San Francisco? Thus a source of income for the symphony orchestras is drying up — along, in many cases, with the donations of the rich. The middle-aged wealthy have grown up on rock-and-roll radio, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Elvis Presley, as surely as anyone else. The cultural ignorance of the middle-aged well-to-do is awesome (and frightening) to behold. And it was from their "class" that support for the true arts traditionally has been drawn, including the great Broadway musicals of the past.

With all thanks to Ted Sullivan, the "unpredictability" of the Jazzletter is inseparable from its extended examination of larger issues ignored by the "jazz magazines". The three-part piece on Clark Terry was in research and preparation for over a year. So too the piece on Marion Evans that begins later in this issue. The original interview with Marion was done last October, which fact by the way brings into focus the precision of his perception of the market.

It bothered me a lot, when I worked for magazines, to be asked to sum up a career like that of Woody Herman in perhaps 2500 words. No wonder that the pieces were superficial; no wonder that those in the traditional jazz magazines still are.

I am reminded, by Ted Sullivan's letter, of a printed sign you encounter in some shops and other small enterprises: *This is a non-profit organization. It wasn't meant to be, it just turned out that way.* You might say that of the Jazzletter; and you might add that it isn't meant to be irregular, it just turns out that way, because when I get on a subject, I will not let it go until it feels right.

And so I appreciate the patience all of you extend to me in this.

Having once been skillfully manipulated by Ralph Gleason, I know whereof Grover Sales speaks.

When I became editor of *Down Beat* in May of 1959, I found the magazine in total disarray (as did Dave Dexter twenty years before). Don Gold, the previous editor, not only had quit, he'd been gone two weeks when I arrived, and the next issue was already past deadline. I slapped something together out of whatever was available, including left-over stuff that is called in journalistic parlance "overset" — material already in type but unused, often for good reason. That issue was a mess, ugly to look at and not very good in content. Furthermore, the magazine had alienated just about every important writer in jazz, including John S. Wilson, who now wrote for the *New York Times*; Nat Hentoff, who had been fired on the orders of the magazine's owner, John Maher, and who had a relentless and justified hostility to the magazine (I investigated his firing; Hentoff was in the right), and Ralph J. Gleason.

I wanted to bring some peace to the situation and contacted Wilson, whom I had always admired, and gradually cajoled him into writing for me. To this day I have not forgotten the kindness of Wilson and of Leonard Feather in helping me through those difficult days. Don Gold and Jack Tracy, both former editors — Don by now on staff at *Playboy*, Jack a producer for Mercury Records — were also helpful to me. I soon discovered what a superb journalist John A. Tynan, the west coast editor, was, and I leaned heavily on him. He became one of my best friends, and still is. He recently retired from writing news for ABC-TV in Los Angeles. Many musicians remember him with respect.

Then I made a mistake. I contacted Gleason, and induced him to write for the magazine. From that moment on, he tried to control its policies and direction.

The San Francisco contributor at that time was Richard Hadlock. Gleason somehow (I still don't know how), convinced me that with his Vast and Superior Knowledge, he should replace Hadlock, and at last, on a trip to San Francisco, I fired Hadlock. I had to get drunk to do it. Some years later, I apologized to Hadlock — a man superior in every way to Gleason — for this, one of the few actions of my career of which I am ashamed.

The scope of Gleason's ego gradually became clear to me. He was afflicted with that attitude so common among jazz critics (and more than a few of the fans, and even some of the musicians), the only-I-really-understand-this-music syndrome. This malady was more febrile in Gleason than in any writer I have encountered. Gleason harbored a particular hostility to Nat Hentoff, in part apparently because of Hentoff's political positions and stand on civil rights and related matters. Not that Gleason disagreed with them; but this too was an area in which he seemed to think himself the World's Only Leading Authority. It is significant that none of Gleason's writing has turned out to have any enduring value.

Gleason eventually was fired from *Down Beat*. He had to rationalize this, of course, his vanity being what it was, and so he circulated a story that he was fired for being pro-Castro, a canard the leftist critic Frank Kofsky gratefully reiterated. It is nonsense.

A lot of us were pro-Castro at the time. Ralph simply wasn't very good at his work, and his ignorance was appalling. His copy was constantly late, and always sloppy, necessitating sedulous editing; and he objected to being edited. Egregiously unprofessional, he was an endless irritation to the people who had to put that magazine together.

Some time after I left *Down Beat*, Don DeMicheal, whom I had hired as my assistant and who became my successor, was in New York. We had dinner together. I made the mistake of saying something about when I fired Gleason.

Don said, "What do you mean, you fired Gleason? I fired Gleason!"

I said, "You did?"

"Yeah," Don said. "Don't you remember? On your last day there, just before you walked out the door, I said, 'Do you have any parting words of wisdom?' and you said, 'Yeah, fire Gleason.' And a few months later, I did"

The career of Ralph J. Gleason in jazz journalism makes that of John Hammond look like a paragon of responsible objectivity, the more so when you consider how through *Rolling Stone* Gleason promoted the rise of rock and roll. The way Gleason could shift position in order to be always on top of the trend was interesting. For example, when Bob Dylan played the first Monterey pop festival in the early 1960s, Gleason in a review called him "a refugee from a Henry Wallace picnic and a stone bore." But when he had Seen the Light and become a champion of rock, he wrote, in one of the most cretinous comparisons in the history of social comment, that Dylan was "the greatest voice for freedom since Tom Paine."

Leonard Feather felt that Gleason, in his writings praising rock, had done American music terrible damage. Leonard no doubt remembered that Gleason had at one time viciously attacked Art Tatum, Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Red Norvo, and anyone else he deemed modernist. But then, yet again, Gleason Saw the Light.

Nat Hentoff, in *Jazz Review*, for which he wrote a column called *Jazz in Print*, never ceased to excoriate *Down Beat*, and I resented it, since I was trying to lift the level of the magazine under trying conditions. I nurtured this animus for years, which made me uncomfortable, because I so admired his social reporting, penetrating commentary, and unflagging struggle for civil rights. In the early days of the present administration in Washington, Bill Clinton held a sort of mini-jazz festival on the tented lawn of the White House. Much of the music was terrible, and the glutinous buffet food was worse.

I saw Nat at the next table. I thought, 'You've carried this too long. It's over.' I approached and shook hands with him and said hello. We've talked since then. We may even be friends.

A Little Story

I've got a little story you ought to know, to quote Johnny Mercer's *One for My Baby*. A couple of stories, actually. And they illustrate why I think it is incumbent on anyone who achieves a position of public visibility to be gracious to anyone who expresses admiration for you and your work. Especially if that person is in the formative and very sensitive years. You don't know the hurt you can cause by impatient rejection; you do not know the good you may do with a kindness.

When I was a kid, I wrote a fan letter to Alex Raymond, the cartoonist who wrote and drew the great strip *Flash Gordon*, asking for an autograph. He was a wonderful draftsman, and I noticed how Sheldon Moldoff, in his *Hawkman* comic, not only imitated Raymond's work but at times seemed to have taken direct tracings from it, altering only the costumes. I knew the *Flash Gordon* strip that well; I could remember every one of its panels going back years. I aspired to be an artist. I waited for a reply to my letter to Alex Raymond. It never came. And gradually hope gave way to disappointment and disappointment to embarrassment. I felt silly for ever having written the letter.

Some years later, when I was, I guess, nineteen, I went to hear one of the big bands. I was, as usual, standing close to the bandstand. To my surprise, I realized that next to me was the band's chief arranger, whom I recognized from *Down Beat* photographs. I did not ask for an autograph; Alex Raymond had cured me of that. But I spoke to him. I remember how kind he was, how interested in *my* interest in the band and in his writing. He suggested we go up to the balcony to listen. I spent the whole evening with him, incredulous that he could find anything I had to say of even the slightest interest. I went home at the end of the evening walking on air.

Long afterwards, I was at a party at Henry Mancini's house. It was liberally scattered with other composers and arrangers, including Pete Rugolo, one of Hank's closest friends. Pete, whom by now I had known for many years, and I were talking about the big-band era, and I told him about that evening spent in the balcony in conversation. "Do you know who that guy was, Pete?" I said.

"Who?"

"You. And I never forgot your kindness."

That's the first story. Here's the second.

One day about six or seven years ago, I got a call from a man who, later in the conversation, said he wanted to compliment me for something that I'd written. But the conversation began this way:

"Mr. Lees, we've never met. My name's Red Norvo."

"Oh yes we've met," I said.

"We have? Where?"

"In Toronto. A long time ago."

This would have been about three years after listening to the Stan Kenton band in the balcony with Pete Rugolo. I was a reporter at the old *Toronto Telegram*. I shared a small and very modest flat with my sister, who was working at that time as a long-distance telephone operator. She was four and a half years younger than I, and a great jazz lover. I guess she was eighteen.

One night I took her to see a group I was nuts about, the Red Norvo Trio with Tal Farlow and Charles Mingus, one of the

greatest groups in jazz history. At the end of the first set, I expressed to Mr. Norvo the utter joy that group's records had given me. To my surprise, he came to our table and sat with us. And at the end of the next set, he came back. We stayed all evening, chatting with him and listening. At the end, my sister blurted, "Would you like to come home with us and have a sandwich?"

He said, and it still amazes me, "I'd love to."

He had a big and very impressive Cadillac. I seem to recall that it was light-colored. He drove us home, and chatted with us till, I guess, dawn.

When I told Red this story, he said, with amazement, "I remember that night! I even remember where you and your sister were sitting. So that was you?" Red has that kind of memory.

The curious part of it is that until that phone call, our paths had never crossed again, in all my years in the music business, although my admiration for him remained enormous. Well, after that phone call, Red and I got to be good friends. He had suffered a stroke and was no longer able to play, and he wore a hearing aid. But his vitality never flagged and he maintained an incredible number of friendships, one in particular with bassist Red Kelly, with whom he would talk on the phone maybe once a week. And his sense of humor remained buoyant, even after the loss of his wife, who was Shorty Rogers' sister, and even after Shorty's death. Sometimes I'd go in to Santa Monica to see him, or we'd talk at length on the phone.

When one becomes well-known and starts to receive compliments from strangers, one has to learn how to handle it. I can remember when I didn't know how to do it. I learned how from Ray Brown, and I learned it at the old Blackhawk in San Francisco when Ray and Ed Thigpen (a close friend of mine to this day) were two-thirds of the Oscar Peterson Trio.

I was, I must admit, a little high, and seeing (or hearing) vast cosmic significance in the rhythmic power of that trio. It was a matinee performance, and standing in front of the Blackhawk in bright sunlight, I was telling Ray with intemperate enthusiasm how much the last set had gassed me, and Ray said very sweetly and simply, "I'm glad you dug it."

That's the trick. Some variant on that will cover the situation.

I have reflected on why young people approach their famous idols. And it is in such encounters that one can do great harm or great good. *They want you to acknowledge that they exist, even if only for the little time it takes to sign an autograph.*

When I was working in Paris with Charles Aznavour, translating his songs for his one-man show on Broadway, he was doing a *tour de chant* at the Olympia theater. At the end of each evening, he set a table at the door of his dressing room, barring entrance but letting fans approach him for a brief moment of conversation — for contact. He sat at a chair behind the table, patiently signing autographs, and we didn't leave until the last admirer had gone. That happened every night. I've always respected him for it.

The autograph probably doesn't mean much in itself. But it is visible evidence that for a moment, your idol noticed you. If he saw me, I must be. That small kindness may well encourage the pursuit of shy and secret goals. An awed Jo Stafford got Johnny Mercer's autograph when she was very young. She still has it.

Some years ago I was introduced to the actress Susan St. James.

She said, "Gene, you wouldn't remember me, but we've met before."

"We have?" I said.

"Yes. It was in Paris. At the Olympia theater. You were working with Charles Aznavour. I was just a young groupie, wanting to be in show business. And you and Charles were very nice to me."

I'm glad we were. She turned out to be a very talented lady, and the attention Charles gave her was not for nothing.

I wonder what would have happened had Pete Rugolo or Red Norvo simply kissed me off. Would my interest in this music have developed to the extent it did? Would I have written the books I have? It took me years to get over a little inward cringe when I remembered the unanswered letter to Alex Raymond. Pete and Red gave me what Alex Raymond did not: my self.

About a month ago, I was talking with Johnny Mandel. He told me that Red Norvo was in a convalescent hospital in Santa Monica. We decided to go to see him.

Mandel and I spent most of a day together, cruising around in the car, listening to music on the CD player, shmoozing, and a lovely hour with Red at the hospital. His sense of humor remains, his memory is undimmed. We heard some history.

One lovely little story Red told us. During the time of the Norvo-Farlow-Mingus trio, they were booked, for some unknown reason, opposite a rock group. A guitar player in that group became fascinated by Tal. He asked Tal if he would tune his guitar for him. Tal obliged. The rocker made a couple of exploratory strums, and was ecstatic.

Tal said, "Would you like me to solder it for you?"

It would be nice if some of those who admire Red as I do would send him a card. I won't give out personal addresses, but if you were to send it to Red care of the Jazzletter, I'll see that he gets it.

Red turned ninety in March. He remains one of my heroes.

The Man that Got Away

Part I

Once upon a time in Baghdad-on-the-Hudson, as O. Henry called it, on 49th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, there was an apartment with at least eight rooms, including an enormous living room, and in Midtown that was a lot of space.

Among its distinctions, it was Polly Adler's whilom whorehouse. That era of its history ended during World War II when the Authorities, with that sudden moral fervor in minor matters that apocalyptic horror always seems to induce in Those in Charge, closed it down in a predictably fruitless effort to discourage in servicemen that activity for which our species has long shown an impetuous proclivity. They had done something similar in World

War I when they effectively closed down Storyville in New Orleans, thereby casting to the winds the spores of jazz, which took vigorous hold in other cities.

Eventually this capacious pad came to the attention of a lady who was engaged to the superb arranger Don Costa, and he rented it. When they married, Costa turned it over to another arranger, his close friend and sometime business partner Marion Evans. Marion set up his bachelor abode there in 1957, and the place became legendary because of all the arrangers who studied there with him, among them J.J. Johnson, Jimmy Jones, Torrie Zito, and Patrick Williams.

Patrick Williams — he was known as Pat in those days, but then his record company presented him with a bouquet of flowers and he retired the name — turned up at Jim and Andy's bar when he was twenty-three, seeking to establish himself as an arranger. He did this remarkably quickly, then moved to Los Angeles and became one of the most respected of film composers, a position he holds today. He still returns to arranging. He wrote the Sinatra *Duets* album and, recently, an album of Henry Mancini's music for Hank's daughter, Monica (an excellent singer), as well as an instrumental album of tunes associated with Sinatra.

"I had many late nights in Marion's infamous apartment," Pat said. "He introduced me to the music of David Raksin, Alfred Newman, Hugo Friedhofer, and of course Robert Farnon. I think it was not so much about the technique of writing music that Marion taught me.

Evans Photo 1998 by John Reeves

"Actually, I think I was a lousy student. For me he was an arrow to what was quality in music and what was not. He will always be very special to me."

Marion never charged for his seminars on arranging — the pain of which was often soothed by substantial nocturnal libation — but he had two strict rules for his students: they had to listen diligently and analytically to all the orchestral albums of Robert Farnon; and they had to do the exercises in the several books on composition by Percy Goetschius. Marion even turned me onto the Goetschius books, and I dove into *The Homophonic Forms of Musical Composition.* It requires intense, patient dedication.

I said, "That's dry, tough stuff."

"Well," Marion said, "the only person I ever knew, except myself, who went through all of the Goetschius books and really did the work was Torrie Zito."

In part because of Marion's work, Robert Farnon has had an inestimable influence on the art of arranging and orchestration in America, and for that matter around the world. Johnny Mandel says that whatever he knows about the art he got from stealing — or trying to steal — everything he could from Farnon. The statement is, to say the least, hyperbolic, but there is doubtless a germ of truth in it.

Marion said, "Don Costa and Jerry Bruno had that apartment. Jerry was the bass player with Vaughan Monroe — Vomit Roe, we used to say. He and Bucky Pizzarelli and Don Costa were all on Vaughan Monroe's band. I took it over because I was doing a summer television show with Helen O'Connell at NBC, which was right up the street at Sixth Avenue. She was on Dave Garroway in the morning and three days a week we did the TV show. It was a great place because I could play the piano all night and the hi-fi as loud as I wanted to, and stay up until the sun came up. And besides that, it wasn't far from Jim and Andy's, so I could go and eat.

"It had lots of room and everybody could fall over and rehearse.

"And of course you know what happens at three or four o'clock in the morning: the bars close. The doorbell would ring, and here comes whoever, hadn't had the last drink yet.

"One night Sarah Vaughan came by with her accompanist, Jimmy Jones. He was a long-time student, and an old friend. That's when I discovered she could really play the piano. She and Jimmy would come by at four in the morning, and there'd be some stride piano going on. Both of them loved stride piano. She could sure play.

"Jim and Andy's closed at four, and I was one block north. In fact you could walk right through the parking lot. So we'd get a lot of musicians between three and six in the morning."

I said, "Remember how Jimmy Koulouvaris used to clap his hands and yell, 'All right, everybody out!'"

"Oh yeah."

For the benefit of the newer readers, and with the indulgence of the older ones, I should insert at this point that Jim and Andy's was one of four taverns in Midtown that catered to musicians; and it was far the favorite. Owned by a Greek former Seabee named

Jim Koulavaris, it was home to a lot of us.

The 1960s were heady days in the music world of New York. The big-band era was ended, but there was an enormous amount of recording going on that employed the musicians left over from that era plus all kinds of symphony musicians. Famous jazz musicians worked studio jobs, recording excellent arrangements for singers by such gifted writers as Peter Matz, Claus Ogerman, Patrick Williams, Marty Manning, Don Costa and, high on that totem pole, Marion Evans. The singers included such excellent people as Marilyn Maye, Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé, Ethel Ennis, Marge Dodson, Fran Jeffries, Vic Damone, Lena Horne, Billy Eckstine, Tommy Leonetti, David Allyn, Johnny Hartman, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, and more. The roster of singers and musicians and arrangers in Los Angeles was equally awesome. Further, the big television variety shows had their own orchestras. I was in the midst of it all, working as a songwriter. The level of the musicianship was incredible.

Marion wrote all or parts of albums by Tony Bennett, Jane Froman, Judy Garland, Urbie Green, Merv Griffin, Dick Haymes, Lurlean Hunter, Howard Keel, Julius LaRosa, Felicia Sanders, Steve Lawrence, Burt Bacharach, Gordon McRae, Helen O'Connell, Jaye P. Morgan, Lillian Roth, Doc Severinsen, Julie Wilson, and a lot more.

"I've written well in excess of a hundred albums," Marion said. "However, I refuse to admit to any association with the vast majority of them. If there is a deaf singer, dead or alive, I've worked with them. How about six albums for Kate Smith? Wow! As someone once said, 'It's amazing how Kate Smith retained her figure all those years.'"

The bands and orchestras he wrote for include Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Vaughan Monroe, Percy Faith, and the Boston Pops. In television he worked on the shows of Steve Allen, Red Buttons, Perry Como, Johnny Carson, Arthur Godfrey, Jackie Gleason, Jack Parr, Ed Sullivan, and more.

Marion said, "I remember when I was going to the conservatory in Birmingham, Alabama, having great conversations about: 'Be careful you don't write this sort of thing.' I remember specifically a whole thing about the cello, things you don't want to do. I come to New York and I was doing a session with Costa. I saw this almost perfect example of what you're not supposed to do for the cello. I watched this cello player as we went through the record date. He could hardly take time from reading the *Wall Street Journal* to play the part, and it was, like, nothing. Sure, if you're in Birmingham, Alabama, don't write that for the cello. If you're in New York and you've got any number of people I could name, they don't even know that that's hard to play. In fact, many of the hard things, they've spent more time practicing than they did anything else, and it becomes easy. Especially the clarinet. You tell Walt Levinsky, 'Hey, Walt, I'm sorry I wrote this,' and you get 'Oh no, that's great, that's the easiest part to play.'"

The cavalier attitude of string players on sessions was notorious. Charles Munch, in his book *I Am a Conductor*, offered a piece of advice to younger conductors. He cautioned them to remember that members of the other sections knew in their student days that they would play in orchestras, but violinists aspired to be famous virtuosi, and, remaindered into orchestras, were all disappointed men. He counseled conductors to be kind to them.

On recording dates with singers, or jazz musicians, they seemed to feel they had sunk to the lowest levels of their careers, and their indifference, even hostility, was conspicuous, the excellent money they were making notwithstanding. And I have seen them doing just what Marion said: reading the *Wall Street Journal*, cigar in mouth, between takes. (Their behavior on the *Bill Evans with Symphony Orchestra* dates appalled me.)

There were certain key string contractors, the most important being David Nadien, Harry Lookofsky, and Gene Orloff. And if one of these was on the date, you could be sure the others were not.

Marion said, "When I could put together the string section I wanted, I'd sit the ones who hated each other side by side."

"Why?" I said.

"Because they wouldn't talk," he said. "It really worked."

One of Marion's friends was (and still is) the phenomenal pianist Dave McKenna. I cannot tell you how many pianists I know, Roger Kellaway and Michael Renzi among them, are Dave McKenna freaks. "André Previn, too," Marion said. At some point McKenna was bunking in with Marion in that big old pad on 49th Street.

Now, you must know that Dave in his past has been a serious drinker; he doesn't drink at all now. Gentle when sober, he could be sullen when loaded. Dave is held in immense affection by everyone who has ever known him. The stories about him are simply funny, that's all.

"Dave was staying with me," Marion said. "He came home late. I was studying Farnon's arrangement of *Two Cigarettes in the Dark*. In the middle, I heard something and said, 'Isn't that beautiful? I've got to take that off the record and see what he's doing there.' About that time, McKenna comes floating in. He listened to it, and said, 'There's an F-sharp or whatever it was in there.' And of course he was right, as it turned out. He went to bed. Next afternoon, when he was able to pull himself up and everything, he went over to the piano and played the whole arrangement. By memory. Everybody has had experiences with Dave doing things like that. He's incredible. I would put him, as a musician, on a level with Bob in terms of just raw talent.

"One Halloween the doorbell rang and I opened the door. There were two characters there with masks on. It was Bob Farnon and Red Ginzler." (Ginzler, another arranger, was a close friend of Farnon's.) "I started to play a Dave McKenna album, one of his first, maybe the first. I didn't get past eight bars and Bob said, 'Who is he and where is he?' I said he was working down in the village. Bob said, 'Let's go see him.' We went out looking for him, but I don't think we ever found him that night. Bob immediately recognized what he was listening to.

"When Dave had his sixtieth birthday, I was living temporarily in an apartment hotel in White Plains. There was a very nice

Italian restaurant downstairs. On the weekend they had a guy who played really very nice piano. He was a professor at Pace University. I invited Dave and his wife, Frankie, to come for the weekend. We had a birthday party for him. The weekend before they came I was talking to the guy who played the piano and I said, 'I have a very close friend who's a wonderful piano player. He's coming next weekend.' He said, 'That's great.' I said, 'I'd like for you to meet him. We'll have a drink.' The guy said, 'What's his name?'

"I said, 'His name is Dave McKenna.'

"He stopped playing the piano in the middle of the chorus. He said, 'Dave McKenna's gonna be here next Friday night?'

"I said, 'Yeah. Come and join us.'

"He said, 'I won't be here.'

"And he wasn't. The guy quit. I never saw him again."

Marion was as noted among musicians for his dry southern wit as he was the quality of his writing. I used to delight in his company in Jim and Andy's. I remember one occasion when, as we were having lunch, a strange woman — and a stranger to Jim and Andy's; you could always spot the strangers, they just *looked* as if they didn't belong there — wearing a large floppy sun hat and a white dress with huge black polka dots, came over to our table. She said, "Are you fellows musicians?"

Marion looked up at her and said, "Well you might say that."

She showed us a piece of sheet music. She pointed to a note in the second space up in the bass clef, and said, "What's this note?"

Marion said, "Do you know All Cows Eat Grass?"

She said, "Yes, but what's this note?"

Without a flicker of expression, Marion repeated: "All Cows Eat Grass."

"I know that," she said, "but what's this note?"

I said, "It's a cow," and Marion almost strangled on his drink.

We finally told her it was a C and she left. As she walked back to her booth, Marion crossed his arms at the wrists, flapped his hands like the wings of a bird, and whistled a rising tremolo. I put my face on my forearms on the table and laughed till I wept. I have ever since then used this for the odd people one encounters as one trudges one's road through this vale of tears.

Marion's evaluations of singers are always interesting. Of Frank Sinatra he said, "He has the best intonation relative to the musical surroundings of any singer I've ever heard.

"Steve Lawrence has a fantastic voice. He's an excellent singer. I remember once we did one take, and it was excellent, and I said, 'Play it back.' Then I said, 'Let's go to the next number.' Steve looked at me and said, 'Why aren't we going to do another take?'

"I said, 'If you stay here till Christmas, it won't get any better or worse. You did it just as good the first time as you would the fiftieth.'

"Tony Bennett is completely different. He blows the first few takes, and you're going along and all of a sudden it's like magic in the room. Even the musicians know it. Tony has risen to the occasion. I listened for one thing. As soon as you got through with a take that was really great, there would be five seconds or so of silence, and the whole band would get up and go to hear the playback. They knew that was the take. When he's cooking on all cylinders, he's got incredible instinct."

Of Dick Haymes: "The story went around for years that Dick never paid people to write music. It just wasn't something he believed in." There's one of those Marion Evans understatements; you have to watch for them.

"I was doing a session for him. George Green, who used to copy for me, told me, 'Are you sure we're gonna get paid?' I said, 'Well at least we'll get paid from the record company.'"

It should be explained that when charts are used both on a record date and then as road charts, the arrangers and copyists by union rule are supposed to be paid a second fee.

"After the session," Marion said, "I noticed that while everybody was hearing the playback in the booth, Dick was picking up the music and putting it into his briefcase. He was gonna take it to Las Vegas with him. And I knew we'd never get paid.

"As we left, we were standing on the corner, waiting for a cab. He was living at that time on York Avenue. I suddenly said, 'Dick, you're going to Vegas tomorrow, and you're gonna be rehearsing. I don't know how to tell you this, but you're taking this music with you, and some of the people who copy the music have had bad experiences with singers who never paid them for it. The only reason I mention this to you — I don't really care — is that all this music has been copied in twenty-four-hour ink. You're probably going to be right in the middle of rehearsal tomorrow, because this was copied this afternoon, and the notes are just going to disappear off the page.'

"He said, 'How could that happen?'

"I said, 'It's copied in twenty-four hour ink.'

"He said, 'What can I do about it?'

"I said, 'Well fortunately the copyists had this chemist develop this, and they've got a spray that can fix it. If they get to it before the notes disappear, and they spray the parts, it'll never disappear.'

"He said, 'Well, can you get that done?'

"I said, 'Yeah, sure.'

"We got a cab and he said, 'Come on up to my house, I'll give you a check.'

"I said, 'They won't take a check, Dick. You're gonna have to get the cash.'

"He said, 'Where am I going to get cash tonight?'

"I said, 'I don't know, but if you don't, you're gonna have blank manuscript paper tomorrow. I'll tell you what. Why don't you give me all the parts, and I'll take them over and get them sprayed, 'cause it's gonna take some time for them to dry. And I'll call you up, and if you've found the money I'll come by and we'll exchange downstairs, I won't even bother to come up.'

"So I went over to George Green's, and we watched a TV show, and then I called Dick up and said, 'Okay, we've sprayed the parts, and they're all dried.'

"He said, 'Well I've got the money.'

"I said, 'I'll meet you downstairs.'

"He came out with a brown bag and I gave him the music and that was the end of it."

(To be continued)