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Jazzletter

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Mail Bag

I was dismayed, although certainly not surprised, to read that in the latest ten-year survey of the record industry, sales of jazz have slipped from 4.9 in 1989 to 1.9 percent in 1999.

This reinforces a long-held notion that the current crop of jazz proponents are not giving the audience a pleasing or, in many cases, an understandable product.

A great many causes come to mind, too numerous to essay, but the one that stands out to me is the way jazz is being learned, namely in schools. With the disappearance of little clubs where one could absorb, sit in occasionally, and develop a sense of what the idiom is really about, it has now been shifted to the classroom, where a far more intellectual approach prevails.

The ensuing product is very often a technical marvel, with so many harmonic extensions that the basic chordal structure is nowhere to be found. Chorus upon chorus is played on one chord, or in a single mode, as the case may be, resulting in boredom ad nauseam. Once again, the envelope has been stretched to the breaking point. What all these young lions fail to realize is that they're not pleasing anyone other than those who were sitting next to them in the classroom. To add to the ebbing record sales, one must remember that this figure of 1.9 percent includes so-called "smooth jazz," which probably decreases the figure of mainstream to less than one percent.

Until the intellectual elitism currently being put forth is understood and curtailed by jazz players, we can only look forward to jazz disappearing from the market. Record companies are not in business for fun.

Bob Alberti, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

Bob is a former studio arranger who, after many years in Hollywood, retired to Hilton Head to resume playing jazz piano, his first love. He finds he is busier than ever

Time Tunnel

Like musicians who don't like to listen to their own records—Paul Desmond said he could tolerate about three percent of what he had recorded—I don't like reading my old writings. From time to time, however, I am forced to do so.

I recall writing in the *Louisville Times* that the rise of Elvis Presley presaged, and in part would be the cause of, a profound decline in American art at all levels. This proved all too true, and the degradation of the American song spread throughout the rest of the culture, out to such appalling works of "art" as the movie *Leaving Las Vegas, Natural Born Killers,* and *The Basketball Diaries.* I love a slogan that has cropped up in the wake, if that's the term, of *Titanic.* "It was a ship. It sank. Get over it." Of course, when I listen to the music from the current Broadway theater, I would gladly go back to *Love Me Tender* and *Blue Suede Shoes*, let alone Jerome Kern.

I came across an article I wrote for the *Down Beat* yearbook, sometime around 1960. I took note of the corrupting of the record industry that was already under way. The article's dark predictions seem like paroxysms of optimism in the light of the actual history from then to now.

Recently, I had occasion to revisit a piece I wrote for the August 1975 issue of *High Fidelity*. It was on the president of RCA, Ken Glancy. As the twig is bent, so grows the tree, and as I saw immediately on reading the piece, the twig of the record industry was already well bent. What was to come was implicit in the piece. I'd like you to see it in its entirety. At the end of it, I'll tell you why. It appeared in my *High Fidelity* column under the title:

Ken Glancy, Record Man

Early in 1974, only a few weeks after Ken Glancy became president of RCA Records, vice president of public affairs Herb Helman entered Glancy's office overlooking upper Sixth Avenue. He asked, with some concern, whether Glancy had seen a *New York Times* review knocking some new Red Seal releases.

Glancy, a stocky, good-looking French-Irish New Englander, whose wife has been urging him lately to take off some of the weight he picked up while living the good life in London and Paris, took the cigar out of his mouth and said, "Of course those albums got rapped. If I'd been here, they wouldn't have been released. In fact, they wouldn't have been recorded."

To hear the head of a major record company admit that the release of any of its albums is anything less than an event of cosmic import (for record industry flackery makes the old-style Hollywood hyperbole look like the very model of decent reticence) is refreshing. But what Glancy said next is almost heretical:

"If we're going to record crap, it should be crap that's going to make money. If we're going to record something that isn't going to make money, then it should be something that deserves to be heard."

This balance between commerce and esthetics, the idea that the trash for which the public seems to have an unending appetite

should in part underwrite what is valuable in our culture, was common in the major record companies fifteen years ago. But with the coming into adolescence of the postwar babies in the 1960s, and the explosion of rock and other forms of popular music manufactured to the level of their limited perception and experience, record companies, distributors, and rack jobbers—the people who put records into drugstores and supermarkets—concentrated not on albums that would sell perhaps 100,000 (or even 300,000) in the next two years, but on those pop items that would "do" a million in the next two months, preferably two weeks.

Planned obsolescence came to music. The more substantial forms, including jazz and classical music, were pushed aside, if not altogether out, by the record companies. The cutback in classical production was only one sign of the narrowing focus and aesthetic constriction of the industry, and among people who care about it, there was increasing concern for the future of the best American music. More and more, available classical recordings bore a made-in-Europe imprimatur. And German and Japanese producers were flying to the U.S. to record (sometimes at great expense) American jazz musicians whom domestic labels dismiss airily on the grounds that they "don't sell."

That is why Glancy's appointment as head of RCA caused widespread elation among the straights of the industry. For he is a "record man."

The term needs elaboration: it defines a member of the industry whose understanding and love of it run deep. It is a term of respect for the veteran professional, as opposed to the *arriviste* lawyers and accountants who infiltrated the industry and came to dominate it, the men who thought that since they could see how the money had been made, they could tell you how it would be made, shuffling around in the chicken bones of last week's sales charts (questionable in the first place) with superstitious certitude that therein they would find the future.

Then came Glancy, record man. And to understand the significance of his appointment, it is necessary to know something about him.

Glancy came back from World War II a technical sergeant in the Army Corps of Engineers and enrolled at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor as an English major. He stayed to take a master's degree and was on his way to his doctorate. The influence of that time is still evident: Although he can speak the shallow argot of show biz with the best of them, when the conversation gets deep Glancy is discovered to be a literate, cultivated man.

"I wanted to be a teacher," he says. But by now he was married, with a family on the way. Needing money, he quit Ann Arbor and went to work "carrying a bag," as they say in the trade, for Columbia Records. He was Midwestern district manager, running around to stores and distributors to see that Columbia's records were being properly promoted. Thus he knows the industry literally from the sidewalk up.

But Glancy's love was music, and he managed to get into the artists and repertoire department. By the early 1960s, he was vice president in charge of all a&r—classical, pop, and jazz. It was a period when Columbia put out some of its finest recordings.

A power struggle began within the corporation, one that ultimately became bloody. Some executives quit. In 1965, Glancy was given what is known under the Peter Principle as the lateral Arabesque—sideways, to London, to head the company's faltering United Kingdom operation. When the dust settled, attorney Clive Davis was heir apparent to the Columbia presidency.

But Glancy did not flounder and fail in England. Having been divorced, he was joined there by his new wife, Maida Schwartz, former head of creative services at Columbia. They soon were among the most popular people in London show business. He set the operation there humming, bringing in several hits that spilled into the U.S. In 1970, RCA hired him to become managing director of its U.K. operations. Two and a half years later, with one success after another, RCA pushed CBS aside in sales.

Glancy loved London, partly, he says with a wry smile, "because it's so close to France." And London loved him. When his return to this country was announced, one of the columnists of the English trade paper *Music Week* wrote, under the almost touching headline, *D'ye ken Glancy's going?* "The British record industry will be the worse off for the departure."

And the columnist put his finger on Glancy's essential nature: "He [has made] an outstanding success of the two companies which he has run in this country. And it's probably the measure of the man that he has done so without ever seeming to try—or at least in public. For the boss of a record company, he is, in contrast to some of his opposite numbers, exceedingly diffident about publicity."

If, after his eight years among them, the English were sad about his leaving, the American staff of RCA was elated about his arrival. Morale was at a low ebb. The company was getting clobbered by the competition and losing money. Clumsy, bureaucratic, entrapped in its own past, it was a lumbering dinosaur able to survive by ruminating its considerable and valuable catalogue and on the strength of a few hot commercial properties like Elvis Presley. Perhaps its greatest asset was the Nashville-based country-and-western division, well run by Chet Atkins and never fully under the manipulative control of the New York office. The late Steve Sholes had struggled to make it that way.

About the nearest thing to negative reaction to Glancy's appointment came from a company staffer of known melancholy disposition who said, "I don't know if *anybody* can turn this company around. But if anybody can, it's Glancy."

Those who knew Glancy's working patterns thought there would be no sudden or sweeping changes: He is not the type to move precipitately and throw out babies with bath water. After a while, the changes began. He hired Mike Berniker, who had worked under him at Columbia as the young producer of the early and highly successful Barbra Streisand albums. Berniker is now head of RCA's nonclassical a&r. From Columbia's Masterworks division, Glancy hired Tom Shepard as vice president in charge of Red Seal a&r. And he began traveling—to Europe and the company's various divisions in the U.S.

It was obvious that Glancy's priority would have to be putting the company in the best competitive position. Thus commercial

popular music would require first attention. But within a year, which is to say by early this year, the signs of change were apparent. A gradual expansion of classical recording activities in the United States began. The company announced the revival of its Bluebird label to make available, in carefully annotated packages, old records by Benny Goodman, Jimmie Lunceford, Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, and more. RCA itself began recording jazz again—Cedar Walton, for one, and an album by Ruby Braff and George Barnes.

Then Glancy arranged, during a meeting in Cannes, to distribute Norman Granz's Pablo label. It has some excellent recordings in its catalogue, including albums by Count Basie, Oscar Peterson, and Ella Fitzgerald, as well as a thirteen-disc set of solos by the late Art Tatum. "But the company is almost a state secret," Glancy told Granz. "What good is it if the public can't get it?" And so Pablo joined the RCA roster.

Shortly after Glancy's arrival, the company announced that it would greatly increase its U.S. distribution of the Erato label. Erato, of course, is the exceptionally fine French label that was already respected and financially successful in Europe for its recording of lesser-known works. It has done important recordings with established artists such as flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal, and it has made minor classical stars out of trumpeter Maurice André and others. Its records previously have been available in this country mostly on the Musical Heritage label.

RCA's own activities in classical music have accelerated. The Recent *Thais* is an example: Though controversial, it is the first uncut recording of the opera ever made. And RCA is recording (or already has recorded) such little-known operas as Massenet's *La Navarraise* and Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*, the latter the smash of the New York Opera Company season.

The shock here is not only that RCA is so much more active in recording opera than it had been in recent years, but that it should be recording offbeat and seldom-heard works instead of the safe old warhorses.

Other signs of change are less tangible but nevertheless real. An independent producer who went to see Glancy recently was astounded to hear old Bill Harris records on the phonograph as they talked. "My God," the producer said afterward, "what an incredibly weird surprise—to be with the head of a major record company who actually knows about music."

By March 1975, Mike Berniker was able to say, "Well, we're having fun, we're recording some music, and we're even selling some records." It was an understatement. Sales had jumped in the last nine months of 1974. In the middle of a recession, and on the heels of one of the worst scandals to hit the record industry [High Fidelity, *Bad Days at the Black Rock*, September 1973], RCA had experienced the biggest sales in its history.

When I first knew Glancy, he was thirty-seven and vice president of Columbia. Intelligent, gentle of manner, quietly humorous, he had a kind of naive, open enthusiasm about life and music and people. Then he went to England, where I saw him once or twice. He had been exiled and, I think, hurt by Columbia. I did not see him again for seven years.

He is fifty now. The old love of life—and music—still are there. He remains affable, charming, and fun to be with. He still likes Scotch and soda, but he sips it now, carefully. And there is something circumspect about him. He has acquired a toughness—not a coarseness, a toughness.

He has grown into a major executive. There are stars in business, as in the arts, and Glancy is one of them.

He still assiduously avoids publicity. He deviously evaded an interview with me for months. Talk about music, talk about life, don't talk about Glancy.

But hints of this thinking keep coming through. "There is room for all kinds of music in the American record industry. I hope we find a few more like The Guess Who and David Bowie but there are other things too, things that deserve to be recorded. This is a rich culture."

Some of those who are close to him think he behaves as he does because other record company executives in recent years seem to have taken an almost obscene pleasure in seeing their names and pictures in print. "The artist should get the publicity," Glancy mutters.

His appointment as head of RCA Records was an event of high importance. Glancy just might be able to turn the direction of the American record industry, and thus of American music. Whether it can be turned is a moot point. There is the problem of the radio industry, of Top 40 and even Top 20 broadcasting. There is the problem of the rack jobbers. There are, in fact, a million problems. But at least RCA is now headed by a man who understands these problems.

And After

Several things struck me on re-reading this piece.

I was still pursuing the affectation of objectivity that was (and I suppose in some quarters still is) considered the ideal of journalism, the sleight-of-mind pose of detachment. Even when seeking this journalistic "ideal," one is doomed to failure. If, for example, you are covering a murder trial (and I covered quite a few of them), the lead you select for today's story is a subjective judgment, what *you* consider is the most important development. I remember during the Kennedy-Nixon presidential contest the choices of pictures that appeared in the Chicago newspapers. Newspapers are for the most part Republican owned, and the owners back that party's candidates. But even the owner of a newspaper cannot micromanage the day-to-day operations, and I noticed that the picture editors of those papers were getting their licks in: the photos of Jack Kennedy were usually flattering, those of Nixon the ugliest, most snarling they could find. Similarly the press made much, far too much, of Gerald Ford's bumping his head as he was getting off an airplane. They minimized an important policy speech (on agriculture, as I recall) he made later that day.

When I first was editor of *Down Beat*, I took the initials off the record reviews, hoping thereby to force the writers into some sort of objectivity; I was modeling this policy on *Time* magazine, which

never bylined its reviews. The *Down Beat* readers raised hell, and I restored the bylines. The readers were right: the bylines let them consider the prejudices of the critics. And soon I reached the point where I was caught up in this subjective process myself. I came to know the biases of the critics, and could stack whether an album would get a good review or bad by whom I assigned it to.

I have pointed out before that any journalist knows the trick of writing, "an informed source believes that," after which he inserts his own opinion. That gets it past the copy desk. The public would be better served if he or she wrote, "I think that . . . . "

Near the end of that piece, note the phrase, "Some of those who are close to him think he behaves . . . . "

Guess who was close to him: me. And the "other record company executives" to whom I referred included Clive Davis.

Then note the comment, "I don't know if *anybody* can turn this company around . . . " which I attributed to "a company staffer of known melancholy disposition." The man was the late Elliott Horne, who was in the p.r. department, and a friend of mine.

Of late, of course, this masking of sources has reached the level of the appalling. Without a trace of apology, TV reporters intone, "Sources say that . . . . " Not even "Usually well-informed sources." Just "sources," hanging there with no real attribution.

Beyond all that, what struck me on reading the piece was my emotional state in writing it. Clearly, I foresaw the direction in which the record industry was heading; I'd been seeing it since about 1955.

My prognoses are wrong only when I let them be tainted by that desperate human need, hope. The presidency of RCA Records had been a revolving door. The company would appoint a new president, allow him about twenty minutes to turn the company around, fire him, appoint someone else, allow him another twenty minutes, and then can him too. Glancy was the latest in that succession. And obviously I nurtured a hope, or maybe I should call it a yearning, that he, given the control of so massive a machine as RCA, might shift the direction of the record industry. When I am icy cold in evaluating situations, I simply don't make mistakes. With all the proliferation of nuclear technology, with the extent of corruption in Russia (not to mention the extent of corruption here), you can predict that some nut somewhere sooner or later is going to use The Bomb. Count on it. Consider what would have happened by now had Slobadan Milosevic had a nuclear bomb. Or Sadam Hussein. Well some day a Slobadan Milosevic *will* have it. There are lots of him around. Consider Rwanda.

In that article on Glancy, there is a reference to an earlier *High Fidelity* article titled *Bad Day at the Black Rock*. This piece, which I wrote, analyzed the corruption in Columbia Records that led up to the firing of Clive Davis as president of the company for alleged misuse of company funds. I had sources within Columbia records; I always had sources, one of the reasons for which is that I never betrayed them, just as I would not use the name of Elliott Horne. That's standard journalistic practice, and legitimate up to a point. "Sources say" is beyond that point.

How was Clive Davis punished? Backers promptly set him up in his own record label, Arista.

The most significant thing about the Glancy article, I think, is that it lays out all that was to come, all that I desperately wanted to believe would not come. But I knew that it would, just as I know that, probably soon, some egomaniac with a massive amount of money is going to have himself cloned. Donald Trump, maybe? Paul McCartney?

The only thing dishonest in the Glancy piece is my attempt to appear distant from the subject. The fact is that Ken and I were very close friends. I had originally been introduced to him by Woody Herman, and in general Woody's evaluations of people were astute. If Woody said somebody could be trusted, I took that as gospel, and Woody liked Ken. So I did too, although it wasn't hard: Glancy, I found, was the most delightful of men.

I lived through his love affair with Maida Schwartz, after Clive Davis got him promoted sideways to London and he and Maida lived on the telephone. After they married and she joined him in London, we remained in touch. I would stay with them when I was in London. I remember going one night to Ronnie Scott's club with Ken. I remember the near reverence with which the musicians and everyone else in the place treated him. I remember Ken and Maida nursing me when I came down with a bad case of 'flu. Ken liked good Scotch, and so did I, and we downed a lot of it in long and lovely conversations. Ken was enriching to be with.

Ken eventually got shafted by RCA. I saw it coming. I saw that some of the people he had appointed were doing their best to advance their careers at the expense of his. I wanted to tell him, but knew that if I did so, it might seem that I was myself maneuvering for position. For the first time, I understood the isolation of power. I watched impotently as certain people he trusted slowly and steadily screwed him, and eventually RCA let him go. I believe he got a substantial settlement on his contract. But it was small consolation. He was effectively removed from the reins of real power. He started his own little record company, Finesse, putting out albums by the Modern Jazz Quartet, Paul Desmond, Cleo Laine, and others, but even he was unable to solve the distribution and other problems of good music, and it went under.

I was in New York a few weeks ago. I called Ken, discomfited that I hadn't heard from him lately. Maida told me he was in hospital, gave me the number there, and urged me to call. I did. He sounded weak, but his sense of humor was unimpaired.

Not long after I got back to California, Maida called me. She said she needed my help. Ken was in Lenox Hill Hospital, in grave condition. He had had a series of strokes and now was on life support equipment. They had a written agreement, a living will, that neither would ever let the other suffer protracted "heroic" medical measures. She wasn't going to let him sit in a chair like a vegetable, staring at the wall. She said she was going to pull the plug. I encouraged her to do so. Ken was too vital a man to endure that kind of extended helplessness. And if inside his skull, that wonderful brain was still working, it would only make the anguish worse.

Maida asked me to prepare the information on Ken's life for an obituary in the *New York Times*. She didn't want them to get it

wrong. (They often do, you know, as witness the first *Times* obituary by Peter Watrous on Gerry Mulligan.) I didn't have the *High Fidelity* article I'd written. She did. She faxed it to me.

I wrote the piece that day. When I came to that line, a reference to a Nineteenth Century English song I learned in childhood, "D'ye ken Glancy's going?," and I knew that he was, I lost it. I really lost it. Sometime, for laughs, try writing an obituary on a friend who hasn't gone yet. I turned to jelly. But I finished the job, and faxed the piece to her. What appeared in the *New York Times* was largely what I had written for Maida. And for Ken.

Ken Glancy died early Sunday morning, May 23, 1999.

D'ye ken John Peel with his coat so gay?
D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day?
D'ye ken John Peel when he's far far away,
With his hounds and his horn in the morning?

Slaughterhouse '99

When President Clinton did yet another of his unembarrassed turnarounds and announced the launching of a federal inquiry into the entertainment industry's marketing of violent movies, music, and video games, the industry reacted with its reflexive, predictable, disingenuous, hypocritical, disgusting denial of responsibility for the effects of its "product."

Hilary Rosen, president of the Recording Industry Association of America, said, "The president is looking for headlines. He says he's not pointing fingers, but that is exactly what he is doing. In the music industry, we don't market violence. We simply don't."

And Gerald Levin, head of Time Warner, which owns *Time* magazine, HBO, the Warner Bros movie empire, and a panoply of record companies, expressed fear of "a new season of political opportunism and moral arrogance intended to scapegoat the media." (If you hope for a disinterested discussion of these issues in *Time*, forget it.)

John Leo, the perspicuous columnist for *U.S. News and World Report*, wrote in the May 10 issue:

"Every time a disaster like the Colorado massacre occurs, Democrats want to focus on guns and Republicans want to talk about popular culture. Much of this comes from actual conviction, but economic interest often disguises itself as principle. The Republicans can't say much about the gun lobby, because they accept too much of its money. The Democrats can't talk about Hollywood and the rest of the industry, because that's where so much of their funding comes from."

As far back as the 1960s, the record industry was denying that it had any effect on social behavior. At that, a few writers were predicting that the glorification of drug use by rock groups would within a few years produce a devastating epidemic of narcotics addiction in America.

They were called crackpots, or, worse, conservatives. But the proof of the prediction was in its fulfillment.

Of course, industry apologists like Ms Rosen would claim that the drug epidemic was the result of "social forces," not of rock propaganda. But rock propaganda *was* one of those social forces, and far the most powerful.

I wonder whether Ms Rosen thinks television advertising is effective. Would she deny that the combination of image and words and music can sell Volvos and Tide and Gallo and Pampers and Century 21 and L'Oreal? Is the industry telling us that the advertising agencies are defrauding sponsors of money since the ads they produce do *not* affect public behavior? Would Time Warner and Ted Turner tell us that TV can sell soaps and soups and shovels and shavers and Charmin and Miracle Grow but not mayhem and murder? After all, Turner began in advertising.

Or would they grant that image and music and words in combination have an inestimably seductive effect on recipients? The entire television industry is built on the premise that this is so, and has been so ever since the spectacular success of the experiment in television advertising by Toni Home Permanents in Chicago in 1949.

But let's excise visual images. Let's just look at jingles on radio, words and music alone. The ad agencies will tell you they can sell product, and they can prove it.

How is it that this effect is suspended when what is being advocated on records and radio is dope and cop-killing and suicide and breast-maiming and the degradation of women?

Back at least twenty-five years ago, when the record industry was going through yet another (yawn) of its payola scandals, about which the FCC went tch-tch and did nothing, a Columbia Records producer said, "If this industry found out that Hitler was alive and had a rock group in Argentina, the planes would be crowded with people trying to get down there to sign him to a contract."

Is Ms Rosen claiming that the entertainment industry has higher ethical standards than Colt, Smith & Wesson, and Davis, Phillip Morris and Lorillard and Dow Chemicals and the Cali cartel?

Clinton said, "We can no longer ignore the well-documented connection between violence in the media and the effects that it has on children's behavior." Clinton cited about 300 studies over the last 30 years showing "a link between sustained exposure—hour after hour, day after day, week after week, year after year—to violent entertainment and violent behavior."

Let his mangled grammar pass. What Clinton did was to authorize the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice to examine whether movie studios, record companies, and video game manufacturers (often owned by a single company) violate their voluntary rating systems for labeling products as unsuitable for children, and then marketing the stuff to children. But hypocrisy is the hallmark of the industry, isn't it?

The *Los Angeles Times* reported, "The president was careful not to affix the harsher term of "investigation" to what he termed a study. But for all intents that is what it is—an unprecedented federal inquiry by two agencies with the subpoena power to demand internal and other confidential correspondence."

And the Senate in May passed a bill, which is now before the House, calling for an investigation of marketing to the young by both the entertainment and gun industries. With Chuckles Heston,

as a lot of actors call him—not to mention that giant intellect Tom Selleck— stumping for weapons in the hands of anyone who wants them, why shouldn't the gun and entertainment industries be linked? Flick around the TV tube; see how many scenes show people with guns in their hands.

"We've got to quit fooling around with this," Clinton said. "I know this stuff sells, but that doesn't make it right."

Aside from the quaint diversion of having Bill Clinton elucidating what is right, the citation of 300 studies establishing the link between portrayed violence and real violence borders on the ludicrous. How many more studies will be turned in only to be tabled and forgotten? And why are such studies even necessary?

When my friend Don DeMicheal became my assistant at *Down Beat*, I used to chide him for having studied sociology at the University of Indiana. I said, "Sociology is the elaborate compilation of statistics to prove the perfectly obvious."

Recently, Jerry Springer faced a hearing of the Chicago city council, whose members wanted to know whether the violence on his show was faked or real and, if real, why those participating in it weren't arrested. The one part of his answer I found reasonable was his protestation that hockey players who participate in violence should by extension be arrested for assault. So they should, and the tolerance and even encouragement of punch-ups on the ice for the sake of box office is yet another example of the cynicism of the entertainment industry. But beyond that, his was a smarmy defence of his right to make money at any cost, essentially the rationalization of the whole entertainment industry.

Springer defended his show on the grounds that it made violence look ugly. Did he think that would impede it?

Some time ago, PBS ran a series on war. One interview in particular fascinated me, that with a young soldier in the Canadian army. He was asked what had induced him to become a professional soldier. He said he saw Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and was quite taken by the sequence of Robert Duvall's gunships flying over a Vietnamese village, after a napalm attack, machine-gunning the pathetic running civilians on the ground. Remember, that scene was supposed to be satiric. The young soldier saw none of that, only the machine-gunning and the killing. "I thought that would be really neat," he said.

When Norman Lear first aired *All in the Family* with Carroll O'Connor, its purpose supposedly was clear: to satirize bigotry in the person of Archie Bunker. First, I didn't find it funny: words like "kike" and "nigger" are never going to be funny to me, no matter the purpose of their use. Second, it struck me that all the people like Archie Bunker would see no satire in the series. On the contrary, they would view him as a hero, expressing their feelings. And that's exactly what happened.

Someone said that for every complicated question, there is a simple answer that is wrong. And so before we lay all responsibility for the mess we're in off on (a) the media, and (b) the preponderance of guns in the American society, I ask you to consider the experience of a social laboratory that is so close at hand that in some locations along the border, you can toss a rock into it. I refer to Canada. Why don't the television newscasters look into it? Because they don't know about it? Peter Jennings, Kevin Newman, Thalia Assouras, Ray Pizzey, Morley Safer, Robert MacNeill, and many more newscasters *are* Canadians. American television news is extensively dominated by Canadians.

Shall we blame the killings entirely on the media? But Canada gets all the American television channels, all the American movies, all the American popular music, including the rap songs. Could it be because Canada has a comparatively low rate of gun ownership?

I don't know. But consider this:

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold slaughtered their 13 victims and themselves at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20. Eight days later, on Wednesday, April 28, a fourteen-year-old boy, whose name has been withheld under Canada's Youthful Offenders Act, went to W.R. Myers High School in Taber, Alberta, population 8,000, and opened up with a sawed-off .22 semi-automatic rifle, killing one boy and wounding another. Curiously, one of his acquaintances in the school talked him into giving up his weapon and surrendering, thereby curtailing the violence. The RCMP—the Mounties—found a cache of twelve guns in the boy's home.

No one doubted that the crime was an imitation of the slaughter in Colorado. And it opened in Canada a new debate about the influence of the media and the prevalence of weapons. On November 14, 1997, near Victoria, British Columbia, a 17-year-old named Warren Glowatski and seven girls of about his age beat and kicked to death a girl of Indian ancestry named Reena Virk in the area of a reversible falls called the Gorge. They shoved her into the water and left her. Glowatski and one of the girls were charged with murder. The girls started the beating; Glowatski joined them, repeatedly kicking Reena Virk in the face. After their arrest, one of the girls said they were inspired by what they had seen on the news about girl gangs in Los Angeles.

(I daresay this case hit me particularly hard because when I was 15, my cousin and I used to canoe at the Gorge.)

The U.S. has a firearms death-rate eight times that of other high-income countries. Among children under 15, it is 12 times that of 25 other industrialized countries *combined.* In Canada, there are about seven million weapons in a population of a little over 30 million, which is roughly one gun for four Canadians. In the United States, there are 230 million weapons, which is almost one for every man, woman, and child in the country. In Texas, the ownership rate is four *per person.*

The United States has 5.2 murders with guns per 100,000 population, Canada 0.6. The murder rate by other means is 2.4 in the U.S. and 1.4 per 100,000 in Canada. That works out to a U.S. murder rate by firearms 8.7 times that of Canada. The murder rate by other means is much closer, 1.7 times that of Canada. I have encountered no set of statistics that so compelling argues for a high correlation of murder with the availability of guns.

Here's a laboratory statistic that I find arresting. Gun ownership in Alberta approaches the level of the United States. Alberta is very much a western province, with something of the American wild-west outlook. Twenty-six percent of Canadian homes contain

guns. In the U.S., about 42 percent of homes have guns. In Alberta, the figure is 39 percent, almost up to the American average. In Ontario, the most populous and prosperous of the provinces, the figure is 15 percent, the lowest of all the provinces. Are you going to go into shock to learn that it also has the lowest rate of deaths by firearms among children and youths? And that Alberta has the highest? In Alberta, between 1991 and 1995, the death rate of children under 15 by guns was twice the national average.

In the United States each year, guns kill 13.7 per 100,000 of population. In Canada the figure is 3.5.

Needless to say, the Canadian equivalent of Chuckles Heston, one Dave Tomlinson, president of the National Firearms Association, said quite predictably that the Taber shooting "has little or nothing to do with firearms." He promptly blamed "the media" for glorifying the Littleton killers. I didn't notice any glorification: I thought the coverage was pretty grim, if monomaniacal, like that of Bill's blow job, the O.J. Simpson trials, and the deaths of JonBenet Ramsey and Princess Di, with the usual gaggle of TV lawyers locked in cretinous post-mortems and prognostications.

In the May 3 issue of the Canadian news magazine *Macleans*, writer Bob Levin, who grew up in the U.S., wrote, "You can't shoot people without a gun and this is where the conservatives and the odious National Rifle Association go so unconscionably wrong, spouting their endless Second Amendment drivel about the right to bear arms, quoting Jefferson and Madison and Hamilton on the importance of a well-girded citizenry, as if the enemy were still a colonial power threatening American liberty at musket-point and not drive-by shooters and trigger-happy teens."

Britain adopted the toughest gun-control laws in the world after 16 schoolchildren were shot down in Dunblane, Scotland; and six months after 35 people were cut down by gunfire in Tasmania, Australia passed an unprecedented gun-control law. But in the United States, nothing is done, except recriminations, the usual fatuous ascription of all responsibility to parents, and the Pavlovian defence of their "product" by the gun and entertainment mongers. Incidentally, the "media" said that the toll in Littleton was the worst school death rate in American history. *Newsweek* went further. In its May 3 issue, it called Littleton "the most lethal school shooting in history." Whose history? If you take America to mean the whole continent, it wasn't even the worst in American history. The failure to note this is a classic example of a parochial American press not doing its homework. Two of the victims in Littleton were the killers themselves; they actually killed "only" 13 others, thus falling one short of the North American record. In 1989, Marc Lépine gunned down 14 young women at the University of Montreal. By the way, he did it alone; it took two killers in Colorado, if that's any point of Olympic-game pride for Canada.

In 1995, Canada passed a gun registration act whose implementation began in 1998. Under the new regulations, every law-abiding gun owner will have to be registered by the end of 2000, and every firearm must be registered by the end of 2002.

But the United States continues dicking around on effective national gun-control legislation.

By the way, before somebody calls me an anti-gun crank, I do own a gun, duly registered in the State of California. I find that infringement on my liberties no more onerous than the requirement that I carry a driver's licenses.

Always, of course, the entertainment industry (including the pornography branch of it) defends its actions waving the First Amendment to the Constitution. So do extreme religious groups. The various militia groups hide behind the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of religion, speech, the press, and assembly, and the Second, which states:

"A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to bear Arms shall not be infringed."

This has always been interpreted to mean that anyone can own a gun or guns, and this has been upheld by the courts.

To me, this only proves the dubious nature of juridical reasoning, particularly by judges, whom all good lawyers know to have inferior legal minds. (Most brainy lawyers, in my experience, despise judges, considering them the failures of the profession.) The Second Amendment specifies "a" well-regulated Militia, singular, not an *unregulated* multiplicity of militias.

Second, I am not convinced that a militia, even a well-regulated one, *is* necessary to the security of a free state. Mussolini and Hitler established private militias. We know what they accomplished, and what they ultimately cost all of us. A militia may in itself be a threat to the security of a free state.

But let's get back to the First Amendment. The Constitution of the United States is 210 years old. The Founding Fathers, as they are so reverently called, were not infallible seers, and one of the things they didn't foresee was an electronic age with awesome powers of communication. Indeed, the document was written in an age of print when most people couldn't read anyway. There were no movies, radio, television, videotape, and cell phones.

My friend Doug Ramsey said he is close to being a "First Amendment absolutist". I suggested it was time the entire Constitution be rewritten to suit the age we are living in. Doug said, "I would agree, except that I think the politicians we have now would only make it worse."

Argument over.

But we live, then, with the uneasy feeling that there is something wrong with those two amendments. And Doug's point is on the mark.

The other hand of Freedom is Responsibility, and this is just what the entertainment industry sedulously abdicates.

Marlene Deitrich wore slacks in a movie, and women started to wear pants. The Beatles grew their hair long, and boys all over the world followed their example. Jack Kennedy went hatless at his inauguration, and the hat industry suffered immediate decline. Clark Gable took off his shirt in a movie and was seen to be wearing no undershirt; the men's undergarment industry immediately felt the loss of sales. Currently, some women are asking hairdressers to shape their hair like some of the styles seen in the Star Wars movies. And, which is apposite to the present discussion, the

Smith & Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum was a comparatively obscure weapon until Clint Eastwood brandished one in the Dirty Harry movies. Then sales soared. Indeed gun manufacturers routinely make their weapons available to Hollywood prop men, knowing what exposure in movies will do for sales.

Let's remember this: Hitler could not have attained his power *without the microphone*, both to address massive rallies, as at Nuremberg, and over the radio. And Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill could not have rallied their peoples against him *without the microphone and radio.*

Would the entertainment moguls deny that the Vietnam war was brought to a halt by the recurrence of hideous images on television and by Walter Cronkite's famous summary, in which he expressed disillusion with the war? *Television could do that but it cannot spread violence among the young?*

And the entertainment industry still has the temerity to deny that it affects social mores? That the bisexual affectations (or actual actions) of rock stars have not inspired a wave of bisexuality in America? That the drug epidemic didn't start in and with rock-and-roll? That the gun craze has not been fostered by movies, television, and video games? That each of us is not a product of all that to which he is exposed?

Please! as they say nowadays. *Gimme a break!* as they say nowadays. *Get real*, as they say nowadays.

What are we to do about these depredations by the entertainment industry? Impose censorship? Hardly.

Napoleon said, and I am quoting from memory, but probably verbatim, "Each nation harbors its savior in its breast. But it is not enough that he be there. He must be known."

It also harbors its destroyer, all the more dangerous for being unknown, or at least unrecognized. And our destroyer is a criminally irresponsible entertainment industry.

All this was foreseen by a man whose name has faded from fashion, a Canadian professor named Marshall McLuhan.

McLuhan's views were hopelessly distorted by the hype that surrounded his first books. The distorter was a San Francisco publicist named Howard Gossage, who got, among other things, a spread on McLuhan in *Life* magazine. So effective was Gossage that I believed McLuhan was the champion of, nay the guru of, the new communications, the advocate of "non-linear" thinking.

I was very wrong. I have told this story before, but it bears repeating in the present context.

The late Roland Gelatt, around 1972, when he was editor of *The Saturday Review*, paid a visit to Toronto to see two friends, myself and Glenn Gould. He asked if I could arrange a meeting with Marshall McLuhan, who was a professor at the University of Toronto. I didn't know McLuhan but I did know a professor who was a close associate of his.

So I set it up. Roland and I took McLuhan to lunch in a restaurant on the top floor of a new hotel on Bay Street. Its broad windows gave a sweeping view of downtown Toronto and Lake Ontario, shimmering in the sun all the way to a far horizon.

McLuhan was almost ranting about the conditions and consequences of modern electronic communications.

I can't remember now whether it was Roland or I who asked, "Professor McLuhan, you mean to say you don't approve of it?"

"Approve?" he said. "I'm a professor of English literature. How could I approve? If I could throw a switch and turn it all off," and with a sweep of his hand he took in all that electrified world out there, "*I would!*"

Well we can't turn it off.

John Leo wrote in the May 3 *U.S. News and World Report*, "We are now a society in which the chief form of play for millions of youngsters is making large numbers of people die. Hurting and maiming others is the central fun activity in video games played so addictively by the young. A widely cited survey of 900 fourth-grade students found that almost half of the children said their favorite electronic games involve violence. Can it be that all this constant training in make-believe killing has no social effects?"

The Marine Corps is adopting a version of *Doom*, one of the most violent and gruesome of video games, as a training device, its purpose being to desensitize recruits and heighten their skills at killing. Klebold and Harris were fixated on it.

Senator Joseph Lieberman wants to address the entertainment industry. He said, "We want to appeal to their sense of responsibility and citizenship — " run that by me again, Joe? " — and ask them to look beyond the bottom line." He said he would even use "shame" to get the industry to mend its ways.

Shame, Senator? Shame? How well do you know the entertainment industry? Was Clive Davis shamed when he was fired from Columbia Records? Was David Begelman shamed when Cliff Robertson blew the whistle on him for embezzlement at Columbia pictures? Who became anathema in Hollywood? Begelman? Hardly. Cliff Robertson did, and his career was ruined. Well, that's show biz, as they say.

If Ken Glancy couldn't turn the record industry around, do you think, Senator, that you are going to inspire a sudden springtime of social responsibility in those worthies who run the entertainment industry? You seem to be a decent man. So is Jimmy Carter. And you seem to be just about as naive.

Ah yes, the entertainment industry has come a long way since Ken Glancy. And given voice by such people as Ms Rosen and Gerald Levin, with Chuckles Heston defending the gun industry for which the entertainment industry is a flack, it is *not* going to relent. Any more than the timber companies despoiling Oregon and Washington and British Columbia, any more than Big Petroleum and all the toxic waste dumpers.

Any more than the Mexican Mafia or the Russian Mafia or the drug cartels. Any more than Alfred Krupp.

What is death, when there is money to be made?

That is the morality of the entertainment industry.