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# Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

August 2000

Vol. 19 No. 8

## The Times and Henry Pleasants

### Part Two

Bullshit baffles brains.

— Ancient Canadian Aphorism

In due course I was introduced to William Ronald, a big, flamboyant, gregarious, loquacious man skilled at charming the public on TV and radio talk shows. He wore capes and funny clothes and had an indisputable flare for drawing if not pictures, at least attention. He vaguely reminded me of the poster by Toulouse-Lautrec of the songwriter Aristide Bruant.

In 1975, twenty years after *The Agony of Modern Music*, Tom Wolfe's book *The Painted Word* examined a parallel phenomenon in graphic art. Wolfe wrote:

People don't read the morning newspaper, Marshall McLuhan once said, they slip into it like a warm bath. Too true, Marshall! Imagine being in New York City on the morning of Sunday, April 28, 1974, like I was, slipping into that great public bath, that vat, that spa, that regional physiotherapy tank, that White Sulphur Springs, that Marienbad, that Ganges, that River Jordan for a million souls which is the Sunday *New York Times*. Soon I was submerged, weightless, suspended in the tepid depths of the thing, in Arts & Leisure, Section 2, Page 19, in a state of perfect sensory deprivation, when all at once an extraordinary thing happened:

*I noticed something!*

Yet another clam-broth-colored current had begun to roll over me, as warm and predictable as the Gulf Stream . . . A review, it was, by the *Times*'s dean of the arts, Hilton Kramer, of an exhibition at Yale University of "Seven Realists," seven realistic painters . . . when I was *jerked alert* by the following:

"Realism does not lack its partisans, but it does rather conspicuously lack a persuasive theory. And given the nature of our intellectual commerce with works of art, to lack a persuasive theory is to lack

something crucial — the means by which our experience of individual works is joined to our understanding of the values they signify."

Now, you may say, My God, man! You woke up over *that*? You forsook your blissful coma over a mere swell in the sea of words?

But I knew what I was looking at. I realized that without making the slightest effort I had come upon one of those utterances in search of which psychoanalysts and State Department monitors of the Moscow or Belgrade press are willing to endure a lifetime of tedium: namely, the seemingly innocuous *obiter dicta*, the words in passing, that give the game away.

What I saw before me was the critic-in-chief of the *New York Times* saying: In looking at a painting today, "to lack a persuasive theory is to lack something crucial." I read it again. It didn't say "something helpful" or "enriching" or even "extremely valuable." No, the word was *crucial*.

In short: frankly, these days, without a theory to go with it, I can't *see* a painting.

Then and there I experienced a flash known as the *Aha!* phenomenon, and the buried life of contemporary art was revealed to me for the first time. The fogs lifted! The clouds passed! The motes, scales, conjunctival bloodshots, and Murine agonies fell away!

All these years, along with countless kindred souls, I am certain, I had made my way into the galleries of Upper Madison and Lower Soho and the Art Gildo Midway of Fifty-seventh Street, and into the museums, into the Modern, the Whitney, and Guggenheim, the Bastard Bauhaus, the New Brutalist, and the Fountainhead Baroque, into the lowliest storefront churches and grandest Robber Baronial temples of Modernism. All these years I, like so many others, had stood in front of a thousand, two thousand, God-knows-how-many thousand Pollocks, de Koonings, Newmans, Nolands, Rothkos, Rauschenbergs, Juds, Johnses, Olitskis, Louises, Stills, Franz Klines,

Frankenthalers, Kellys, and Frank Stells, now squinting, now popping the eye sockets open, now drawing back, now moving closer — waiting, waiting, forever waiting for . . . *it* . . . for *it* to come into focus, namely, the visual reward (for so much effort) which must be there, which everyone (*tout le monde*) knew to be there — waiting for something to radiate directly from the paintings on these invariably pure white walls, in this room, in this moment, into my own optic chiasma. All these years, in short, I had assumed that in art, if nowhere else, seeing is believing. Well — how very shortsighted! Now, at last, on April 28, 1974, I could see. I had gotten it backward all along. Not “seeing is believing,” you ninny, but “believing is seeing,” for *Modern Art has become literary: the paintings and other works exist only to illustrate the text.*

In other words, the work of art doesn't matter: it's what is said about it that counts. Wolfe goes on to substantiate his case for just over a hundred pages. The book is, like all his work, brilliant with his peculiar impetuous imagery, witty, and fun, which is why it is perhaps not taken as seriously as it should be. Speaking specifically of jazz, Monty Alexander recently put it perfectly in a conversation with a friend: “They've talked all the soul out of the music.”

Some years ago, someone made a wordless short movie called *The Day of the Painter*. In some sort of seashore barn, a man lays a big panel, presumably plywood, on the floor. He walks around it on a balcony, splattering globs of paint on it. When it is well covered, he cuts it into small panels. Then we see him exhibiting them on easels on a wooden boat dock. A seaplane lands. A man gets out, studies the panels with the knowing air of the connoisseur, then nods approvingly at one of them, takes out his checkbook, and writes a check. He gives the check to the painter, takes his panel into the airplane, and leaves. The painter looks at the check with a smile and throws the rest of the panels into the sea. The film was an obvious put-on of Jackson Pollock.

Bill Ronald died a few years ago. His brother, John Meredith, is still alive. Meredith is a gifted artist. He has never been recognized.

It's worth taking note of the condescension so often visited upon the work of a man who is probably America's most popular painter, Andrew Wyeth. Like the music of Rachmaninoff, his work is dismissed as sentimental. Yet there has never, perhaps, been a painter less sentimental than Wyeth. There is an acidic quality about all his works, no matter the medium (and even his drawings are, to me, thrill-

ing). Wyeth proves that the camera can *not* do what a painting can. Sadakichi Hartman, of course, was right. Photography at its best is an art form. But it is not the same art as painting. Wyeth doesn't only make you see more of reality, he draws you deeper *into* it. I wish someone had told me in my art school days that both Dégas and Toulouse-Lautrec used photography in their painting.

Henry Pleasants makes it clear that the great composers prior to the twentieth century were successful and popular, some of them rich. The myth of their languishing impoverished in garrets is demonstrable nonsense. Mozart died broke but Beethoven did very well. So too the opera composers, as well as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, and Brahms, Wagner, and, later, Strauss, Ravel, and Stravinsky.

“We are . . . faced,” Henry writes, “with the paradox of contemporary society deferring to composers not worth the deference in an effort to make up for the assumed former failure of society to defer to composers who were. In attempting to correct the alleged previous mistake of under-evaluating the greatly gifted, contemporary society compounds the error by over-evaluating composers who have yet to demonstrate that they are gifted at all.”

By the time Henry wrote *The Agony of Modern Music*, Pierre Boulez had come along to serialize everything, not just tones. And it seemed to me that serialism in its strict form, which proscribed the repetition of any tone until the rest of the twelve have been sounded, amounted to a far more restricting system than the one it aspired to displace.

The shadow of Schoenberg was on some of the Louisville commissions. And the symphony society was in a polite conspiracy to sell this soporific stuff to the public: Mayor Farnsworth for reasons already described, the orchestra and its conductor and manager and others because it gave them jobs, and Norman Isaacs because his position as president of the orchestra advanced his social and professional aspirations. He played the game well among the kind of moneyed people who funded such things as the Louisville Orchestra.

Then Rolf Liebermann wrote an opera, to be performed by the orchestra and the Louisville Opera Society, based on Molière's *The School for Wives*. If you know Liebermann only for his misbegotten *Concerto for Jazz Band and Orchestra*, which RCA some years ago issued on the back of an LP bearing the superb stuff of the Sauter-Finegan orchestra, you don't know how bad his music can *really* be.

Liebermann came to Louisville and slathered his continental charm over the blue-haired ladies of the orchestra society, impressed Isaacs, and smoothed the way for himself. Smoothed it? He paved it. I attended rehearsals of the work, a joint project of the orchestra and the opera society, and

afterwards commiserated with the musicians groaning about having to perform it.

Came the day, or rather night, of the premiere. I would have written a one-word headline on my review, in large black type, **Nonsense!!** But alas, I did what I could, writing a cautious review in which every bit of praise I was able to extract from myself was modified by words like *somewhat, rather, possibly*. I left my review in the hopper that night, hoping it would get past Isaacs, and went home.

The piece, when the paper came out next day, had been altered. Isaacs had personally re-edited my copy, taking out all my compromising qualifications, and making the review look like praise. That incident was the beginning of the end of my period at that paper. I did, however, have the satisfaction of seeing the critics of New York eviscerate that "opera" when it opened there some weeks later; I hoped Isaacs had read those reviews. But I learned something from that incident: it added to my understanding of the political machinations and imposed conformity in the "classical" music world.

When I started writing a little about jazz in the *Louisville Times*, I sensed that Norman Isaacs let me get away with it as an indulgence. I wanted to write about some of the local jazz musicians, such as a drummer and vibes player named Don DeMicheal (who later became my assistant editor at *Down Beat* and, after I left, its editor) and about a good local trio comprising a very good pianist named Don Murray, a bassist named Gene Klingman, and his brother Dave Klingman, a fine young clarinetist who became a lawyer. Isaacs wouldn't let me do it, because they worked in bars, and bars were money-making operations. That the Louisville Orchestra was too, and the various symphony orchestras had to raise money if necessary from foundations, never crossed his mind. But perhaps the degree of separation can be seen in the way Hollywood treated the two musics. As a quaint novelty, MGM had Jose Iturbi play boogie-woogie in pictures, smiling to show he was a regular feller and not afraid to go slumming in this lower form of music. He did it badly (I never did like his highly vertical piano technique in anything, come to that) but Hollywood thought it was cute, and the public was assumed not to know the difference.

Don Murray had a little joke that was a pithy comment on musical trends of our time. He said he was going to write a folio to be titled *Twelve-Tone Tunes We All Love to Sing*.

Little did I know that jazz musicians more or less my own age, like Phil Woods, Miles Davis, Red Mitchell, Ralph Burns, Art Farmer, and Bill Evans were attending conservatories or studying with symphony players. The fact that musicians like Teddy Wilson, Earl Hines, and James P. Johnson had solid classical-music training and interests was quite

unknown. Thus, the fact that "classical" music critics such as Henry Pleasants and Constant Lambert should think that jazz was important music, and more valid in our age than what was going on in classical composition, truly gave me courage to explore my convictions, even if I could not get away with writing them.

I read *The Agony of Modern Music* at the perfect time in my life.

Not long after that I was awarded a Reid Fellowship, on which I went to Europe for a year to study the financing of the arts in various countries. I visited most of the music, drama, opera, and film festivals, but I made my home in Paris, a city I still love *à folie*. And there I encountered the work of an Artiste of unusual persuasion. He would put little piles of dung on panels of plywood. Into these he would insert blasting caps or firecrackers or something, which he would then set off. He would let these panels dry.

Needless to say, given the limitation of his palette, his "pictures" were resolutely monochromatic.

But somebody, apparently, bought them.

I returned to Louisville early in 1959 and a few weeks later was hired as editor of *Down Beat*. In 1962 I moved to New York. Norman Isaacs too moved to New York. The Columbia University Record of March 27, 1998, reported:

"Norman E. Isaacs, considered dean of American newspaper editors . . . and teacher in Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, died March 7 in an Alzheimer's clinic in Santa Barbara, Calif. He was 89 . . . (He) was a mentor to scores of students at Columbia as a lecturer and editor-in-residence from 1970 to 1980 . . . .

"Isaacs was a highly regarded authority on journalism practice and ethics."

Looking into that bespectacled face in the accompanying photo, I found myself saddened. He was, I think, a decent man. He had quit a job because of a sports editor who was on the arm? It would be interesting to know how many sports writers and editors in America are practitioners of this nether art. But the Louisville Orchestra had surpassed any mere bribing of a sports editor. It captured a managing editor, and cheap, and a whole newspaper to go with him. Norman Isacacs was no match for Rolf Lieberman.

One of the first musicians I interviewed after becoming editor of *Down Beat* in 1959 was Don Redman, who to me was until then a legend, as instrumentalist, composer, and influential arranger for Fletcher Henderson, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, and, later, Count Basie and Jimmy Dorsey. He had been a child prodigy who learned to play almost all

the conventional instruments and graduated at the age of twenty with a degree in music from Storer's College. He was hardly the archetype of the naive but talented autodidact so central to the jazz legend, and over the years I began to file away in my mind the educational backgrounds of jazz musicians, both those who pioneered the music and those who came later. For example, Claude Hopkins, who led one of the most popular black bands of the 1930s, started learning piano at six, and studied medicine and music at Howard University, where his parents were on the faculty. He was graduated with a B.A. in music. One of his earliest piano influences was Chopin. Lou Hooper, a Canadian pianist prominent in Harlem in the 1920s, was graduated from the Detroit Conservatory in 1916. He was one of Oscar Peterson's teachers; he ended his career on the faculty of the University of Prince Edward Island. Peterson in turn was first trained by his sister, for many years a prominent Montreal piano teacher, then by Paul de Markey, a member of the faculty of McGill University, who had studied piano in his native Hungary with Istvan Thoman, who in turn had studied with Liszt. The influence of Liszt on Peterson is direct, and you can hear it in his playing. Jimmie Lunceford studied music with Wilberforce Whiteman, Paul Whiteman's father, and was graduated from Fisk University with a Bachelor's degree in music. He studied music at City College of New York, and when he formed his first band, he drew heavily on Fisk alumni, including the magnificent alto saxophonist Willie Smith. William Grant Still, the composer and arranger — Artie Shaw's *Frenesi* is his chart — studied with Edgard Varèse.

The myth that classically-trained musicians couldn't get the "feel" and phrasing of jazz doesn't hold up to scrutiny, not even in violinists. A number of black musicians were trained on classical violin, including Eddie South. Since the world of classical music was closed to black musicians (and to a large extent still is), many of them changed instruments to make a living at jazz. Bassist Milt Hinton played the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in high school. George Duvivier studied violin in New York at the Conservatory of Music and Art and was concertmaster of the Central Manhattan Symphony Orchestra at sixteen. Arranger and tenor saxophonist Jimmy Mundy was trained as a classical violinist.

The extent to which the Harlem stride pianists had studied classical music is evident in their allusions to classical themes in their compositions and playing. James P. Johnson aspired to a career as a classical composer. In the forthcoming *Oxford Companion to Jazz*, Terry Teachout writes in a chapter on classical music and jazz:

Willie the Lion Smith's original piano pieces,

including *Echoes of Spring* and *Passionette*, suggest a fusion of late ragtime and the light classics. Such black players as Coleman Hawkins, Earl Hines, Teddy Wilson, and Fats Waller (who played Bach's organ music privately and is thought to have studied with the classical piano virtuoso Leopold Godowski) might have pursued classical music under other circumstances, but racial segregation made this impossible, so they went into jazz instead, at the same time remaining conversant with classical music and being influenced by it.

Meanwhile, Bix Beiderbecke, Red Nichols, and many of the other white musicians associated with the Jean Goldkette and Paul Whiteman bands, particularly Eddie Lang, Joe Venuti, the arranger Bill Challis, and the saxophonist-arranger Fud Livingston, were listening to the works of Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, and other early modernists (as well as the harmonically sophisticated piano solos of such "novelty pianists" of the early twenties as Zez Confrey) and incorporating harmonic devices gleaned from these sources in their own playing and writing. Beiderbecke, who played both cornet and piano, codified this influence in four "written" miniatures for solo piano transcribed by Challis from his playing, the best-known of which is *In a Mist*, containing whole-tone progressions based on those heard in the music of Debussy. The harmonic vocabulary of the French impressionists entered the basic language of jazz improvisation, in part because of the early example of Beiderbecke and his colleagues.

Sarah Vaughan remembered Charlie Parker reading Stravinsky scores on the band bus, often incorporating bits and pieces of this music in his solos. His list of favorites included Prokofiev, Hindemith, Ravel, Debussy, Wagner, Bach, and Bartok. Stravinsky was a powerful influence on the Woody Herman so-called First Herd. Ralph Burns, the band's justly celebrated arranger, said of the band, "We used to get high and listen to Stravinsky records." His own great loves were Debussy, Stravinsky, Ravel, and Ellington. Ralph, who attended the New England Conservatory, though he left before graduation, said that his composition for Herman, *Bijou*, is shot through with Stravinsky influence.

The bandleader Fred Culley told writer and music historian James T. Maher that in the 1930s, whenever Debussy or Ravel was being performed at Carnegie Hall, every young arranger in town would be in the audience.

Les Brown recorded a theme from *Carmen* as *Bizet Has*

*His Day*, and Arnett Cobb begins his solo in Lionel Hampton's *Flying Home* with a quote from the sextet from *Lucia*. That was in the early 1940s.

Hank Jones told me that had the world been different, he might have become a concert pianist, and to hear Hank warming up his chops on Chopin at a record date is a revelation. Mel Powell was originally trained as a classical pianist, but soon found his way into jazz as an arranger for Earl Hines — he was eighteen at the time — and later Benny Goodman. After World War II, he studied with Hindemith and turned to a career as a classical composer and teacher. Herbie Hancock played the first movement of a Mozart piano concerto in a young people's concert with the Chicago Symphony at the age of eleven. He was graduated from Grinnell College in 1960.

Gene Krupa was a staunch admirer of Ravel and Delius. Shelly Manne told me that he rarely listened to anything but classical music at home.

How far back do the classical influences on jazz actually go? Terry Teachout writes: "Sidney Bechet and Louis Armstrong in particular were influenced by the expansive solo styles heard on the recordings of such opera singers as Enrico Caruso and John McCormick."

There is a photo of the Buddy Bolden band taken, probably, in 1906. The left hand of the bass player rests on the instrument's neck. His fingers are in the correct classical positions with the ring and middle fingers close together. Show that picture to a bass player and he will tell you that somebody with classical background taught that man to play.

And so it became evident to me that the jazz musicians on the whole were richly familiar with classical repertoire and often classical techniques. It was equally evident that the jazz critics weren't.

Had this not been so the writers would not have declared as revolutionary the practices of bebop, including the flatted fifth and what Monk called the half-diminished chord. Composer and teacher Hale Smith said of the half-diminished chord, "There's an example of it in the very first string quartet that Mozart wrote when he was a child." Jazz was fifty years behind classical music in harmonic practices, and indeed it was well behind those of many of the "popular" composers, particularly Jerome Kern. Ralph J. Gleason was so ignorant of classical music that when reviewing a Gerry Mulligan recording, he referred to *La Plus que lente* as a pretty ballad, obviously unaware that it was a piece by Debussy. Leonard Feather, who became my friend, knew little if anything about classical music and therefore of the constant borrowings from it of the jazz musicians.

Otis Ferguson, celebrated for his writings on jazz in *The New Republic* in the late 1930s and at the start of the '40s, wrote four rhapsodic essays on Bix Beiderbecke in which he took the measure of the man. But he gets it wrong when he writes, "He (Bix) had a sense of harmonic structure that none can learn and few are born with." Bix *did* learn it, in part by diligent listening to Ravel, Debussy, Paul Dukas, and Stravinsky, of whom Ferguson apparently knew little if anything. Indeed the only one of them he mentions is Debussy. He notes that Bix liked Debussy and adds "Debussy is for some strange reason a great favorite of good jazzmen" *For some strange reason?* He obviously didn't know enough about Debussy to answer the question. More to the point, he was too ignorant of the subject to know that even posing the question betrayed his limitations.

The jazz critics, by and large, seemed to think that jazz musicians had *invented* improvisation, quite unaware that it was a commonplace in composer-performers such as Bach and Mozart, and that, indeed, great classical virtuoso instrumentalists of the nineteenth century were left spaces for improvised passages, just as in a big-band jazz chart. Improvisation was (and still is) a required skill in church organists. Bach could improvise four-part fugues; show me a jazz pianist who can do that.

Re-reading the books of Henry Pleasants now, it occurs to me that to some extent he was misled by jazz history written by critics and enthusiasts, such as Ralph J. Gleason and George Hoeffler, who were completely ignorant of classical music and the extent to which jazz musicians were influenced by it.

In New York, in the early 1960s, as much as I disliked writing criticism, I became the popular-music critic of *Stereo Review*, telling its music editor, Roger Offergeld, that I couldn't review jazz anyway: many of its people were now among my friends. It was a way to make a little money, and, hey, if Debussy and George Bernard Shaw could put up with writing criticism, so for a while could I. I endured writing reviews for a year or so, and when my songs were recorded to the extent that I could afford to quit that too, I did.

But not before I had become close friends with the editor for whom I worked at that magazine, the late Robert Offergeld, a great scholar who became another of the mentors in my life — yet another iconoclast in my secret pantheon of heroes. A pianist by training (he had studied with Paderewsky) he believed in the value of jazz, although he didn't know much about it. He introduced me to Glenn Gould, who became a friend and a treasured and terribly funny companion-on-the-telephone. And Bob said there was

someone who liked my writing and wanted to meet me: Henry Pleasants. I was thrilled.

Bob arranged a meeting, and I told Henry that he was one of two men who had reinforced my intuitive perception that the conformity of any esthetic establishment requires strong skeptical questioning. The other, I said, was Constant Lambert. Henry seemed amazed that I had read Lambert; seemingly no one else had.

I was of course as fascinated by Henry's history with the CIA as I was by his knowledge of music history. This was during the most dangerous years of the Cold War. I asked him which country had the best intelligence service. He said, "At one time I would have said the British, but they have had some serious breaches of security. Now, I would say, the CIA is the best." I wonder what he thought in later years, when the CIA had its own breaches of security, including Aldritch Ames, but he was in London then and I seldom saw him and so never asked.

When I first met him, probably in 1962 or '63, shortly after his retirement from the CIA (*if* one ever truly retires from that organization), he and Virginia were living in a New York City apartment sublet from his friend Charles (Chip) Bohlen, the former U.S. ambassador to Moscow. In 1967 Henry and Virginia took an apartment in London. The cost of living in London was low in those days, and Henry said he and Virginia could survive graciously there on his pension — or pensions; I imagine he had one from the Army and another from the Foreign Service. From the time he went into the Army, and excepting those few months in Bohlen's apartment, Henry lived almost all his life after the age of thirty-two outside the country of his birth, a classic American expatriate.

We met whenever he was in New York, or whenever I was in London. I was very, very fond of him. He was not only a great scholar, he was a great gentleman, tall, bald, bespectacled, with patrician good looks and laughter lines around the eyes. His wife, now widow, is a gifted and gracious woman, a harpsichordist far better known in England and on the continent than in her native country.

Henry and I had many a dinner together, and wonderful conversations. Most of those dinners took place in a modest but excellent (and now vanished) French restaurant called La Grillade on Tenth Avenue — somewhere around 60th or 70th Street, as I recall. It had red table-cloths, a good wine list, a reliable menu, and cordial owners, whom he knew well. He introduced me to the place, and it became one of my favorites. In that restaurant, I learned a lot about Henry, and why he became an apostate in the classical-music establishment when he discovered jazz. He was not the first, to be sure; there was Lambert, and before that Robertson Darrell, a "classical"

composer by training who discovered and praised Ellington and Armstrong in the late 1920s. Darrell probably should be accounted the first real jazz critic.

After studying voice, piano, *solfège* and theory at the Philadelphia Music Academy and then Curtis, Henry studied privately with several teachers both in the United States and Europe. During his period as music critic at the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, he was largely concerned with contemporary music and covered the first American performances of *Wozzek*. He heard Stokowski's productions of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* and *Oedipus Rex*, Carlos Chavez's *HP*, and Prokofiev's *Le Pas d'Acier*. He attended the Metropolitan Opera premières of Louis Bruenberg's *Emperor Jones*, Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount*, Deems Taylor's *The King's Henchman* and *Peter Ibbetson*, and heard excerpts from Alban Berg's *Lulu*. He heard the violin concerti of Berg and Arnold Schoenberg, and Webern's *Symphony for Small Orchestra*. With Tibor Serly he wrote for *Modern Music* one of the earliest extensive articles in America on Béla Bartok. Then, after the war, he wrote, "I observed the sudden propagation of serial music, sponsored primarily by the German and Austrian radio institutions and music publishers."

Whether he ever wrote this (I can't find it in his books), Henry told me the reason for this proliferation, which he had observed first-hand. He said that because Schoenberg was Jewish, to pledge adherence to him was a way for German composers and others involved in the musical culture to proclaim, "I was never a Nazi!"

At various festivals and concerts he covered — often for the *New York Times*, ironically — works by Pierre Boulez, John Cage, Luigi Dallapiccola, Luigi Nono, and others, premières of various operas: Gottfried von Einem's *Danton Tod* and *Der Prozess*, Carl Orff's *Antigone*, Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, Rolf Liebermann's *Penelope*, Werner Egk's *Die Irische Legende*, Boris Blacher's *Abstrakt Oper No. 1* (which, you have to admit, sounds like a lot of laughs), and Ernst Krenek's *Pallas Athene Weint*.

And he was as disillusioned with it all as I was, ten years later in Louisville.

In his Introduction to *Classical Music — and All That Jazz*, Henry wrote:

It was during this postwar period that I began to have misgivings about the validity of the new music, and of the new serial music particularly. It gave me no pleasure, no sense of any salutary esthetic reward. Nor did it seem to give pleasure to anyone else. Indeed, there seemed to be no pleasurable objective. Compos-

ers were concerned with progress, or at least with sustaining a façade of modernity. This produced, curiously, a stifling uniformity. What was trumpeted as progress was, it seemed to me, an exclusive fashion, its immunity from plebeian emulation guaranteed by adherence to the dogma that pleasure, which all great music of the past had given, was no longer admirable or even pertinent . . . .

Henry told me that the greatest part of intelligence work, in those days before ubiquitous spy satellites, consisted in the assimilation and comprehension of accessible public information, even that published in the newspapers. Crop projections, for example, could help you anticipate moves by a government in the coming autumn. Railway timetables and movements were particularly significant. It was the reorganization of railway schedules in Germany and the occupied countries that in part alerted Allied intelligence to the transportation of the Jews to the death camps.

There was a great frustration in intelligence work, however, he said. The CIA and the other gatherers of information, such as the ONI, Office of Naval Intelligence, would do excellent work in the assimilation and explanation of information, and send it to the appropriate authorities in Washington only to find out later that no one had bothered to read it. The work thus became useless.

The cloak-and-dagger stuff, he said, was the lesser part of intelligence work. But, obviously, it did exist.

He said that the recruiting of a foreign national as a spy was a delicate and sensitive matter. The agent must make friends with his target. And since emotion cannot be finally faked, a point chillingly made near the end of Orwell's *1984*, the friendship thus established had to be real. The agent was in a position like that of a man attempting to seduce a woman; this of course was before rock-and-roll and the lie-down-bitch (or kneel-down) niceties of contemporary courtship. He said that at some point, the agent would have to reveal to the object of this seduction the real intent of it, namely to recruit him or her as a spy. If this phase of it was mishandled, the quarry was lost; if it was successful, the spy would be successfully recruited.

As the espionage progressed, the friendship would usually (I think he said always, but I'm not sure) deepen. And if the Russians uncovered a spy, his or her fate was certain and swift. At such times, he said, the Western agent had lost not only his information source but a close friend. The effect could be devastating. Usually, after such an incident, the CIA would transfer the agent to another theater of operations. Thus, he said, there was a great psychological drama in this

process. And he several times urged me to undertake writing a novel on it.

"But, Henry," I protested, "I don't know enough about all this to write such a book."

"But I do," he said, "and I'll be your guide."

I guess we all lament lost opportunities, but I regret little in my life (other than giving up painting) as much as the fact that I didn't write that book under Henry's tutelage.

For a time, Henry and I were both writing for *Stereo Review*. At one point, out of his vast knowledge of the history of singing, he wrote for the magazine an article on the castrati, discoursing on the purity of very young voices and the barbaric practice in the Catholic church of castrating boys so that they would retain such voices into adult years. Some of them became rich and famous. The practice continued into comparatively modern times: the last of the great castrati lived long enough to record.

Sometimes, he wrote, poor Italian families would have boys castrated in the hope that they would have great voices and through them achieve wealth and celebrity. They rarely, if ever, did.

But there were certain compensations for the sterile state, he wrote. Famous castrati became great favorites as lovers among the aristocratic married ladies of Rome, because their clandestine pleasure carried no risk of pregnancy.

A reader of the magazine wrote a letter saying Henry clearly did not know what he was talking about, because a castrated man was incapable of bestowing sexual pleasure.

Henry wrote a calculatedly scholarly-toned reply, citing medical experts to the effect that while castration assured sterility, it did not necessarily bring impotence. He brought me the letter at La Grillade, and I was helpless with laughter on reading its end. In it he said that even in cases where there was indeed what a later generation would call by the quaintly fastidious euphemism "erectile dysfunction," there were other ways to impart pleasure to a lady. He ended this discourse:

"In other words, if you can't join em, lick 'em."

The magazine decline to print the letter.

It was in La Grillade that I said something to him to the effect that I didn't know much about the baroque period in music.

He said, "Gene, none of us knows anything. We're all just ignorant about different things."

What strikes me as I think about Henry is his clarity. Perhaps it was inborn, perhaps it was the product of newspaper discipline, which at its best inculcates an awareness of the difference between fact and opinion, your own and

anyone else's. It would be valuable in intelligence work, where an accurate evaluation of yours and the enemy's strengths and weaknesses is a consummation devoutly to be wished. Intelligence work would (again, ideally) enhance the development of that ultimate intellectual discipline: the ability to reach conclusions one does not like. It is vital to science, rare in esthetics, and all but unheard of in politics, whose practitioners seek the comfortable rationalization of positions already held. Henry was without this intellectual flaw. He could excise the false like few persons I have known.

During one of our dinners at La Grillade, I got into an argument with him about the war in Viet Nam. For all the mumblings about the CIA's role in it, he told me, elements of the CIA had warned the Kennedy government against getting further involved in such a swamp. Once again, I suppose, an example of intelligence information ignored.

My views on the war derived as much from practical considerations as from moral horror at the American depredations there. I had in Paris covered some of the French diplomatic struggle to extricate France from Viet Nam after the disaster of Dien Bien Phu. When I recited some of the reasons why the war could only be a disaster for the United States, he said, exasperated:

"I know, I know. You're like a man telling somebody trapped in a wrecked automobile that he shouldn't have got into this mess in the first place. You're right. We never should have. But we're *in*. Now how the hell do we get out?"

He was right, of course; I had no answer.

I learned so much from Henry. He said that the greatest military action in history was not a victory, but the withdrawal of German forces from Russia. Never once, as they pulled back across those trackless miles of snow, were the Russians able to break their line. Henry found that incredible.

The *New York Times* quoted the authors of *The Invisible Government* as saying that Mr. Pleasants "probably had the distinction of being the only top U.S. spy to become the center of a literary storm." Wrong on both counts; Henry was never, as he made clear, a spy; and the storm was not a literary one at all, it was a musical one.

The *Times* said: "CIA employees in embassies are often listed in the State Department Biographic Register as 'attachés.' Mr. Pleasants was an 'attaché' with 'S-1' ranking, meaning the highest category of Foreign Service officer.

"It is not clear," the *Times* said, "when Mr. Pleasants began his service with the CIA"

As soon as it was formed after the war, as a matter of fact. I seem to recall that Henry told me Wild Bill Donovan had approached him personally. When the CIA was being organized, some of the best military intelligence people were

recruited.

Prior to World War II, the U.S. had never had a professional intelligence service. The British had maintained such an operation at least as far back as Marlowe. And Donovan, though American, was a product of British intelligence. (Eisenhower had appointed a British officer to head his own intelligence forces during the war.)

*The Invisible Government* said that after the war, Henry lived with Reinhard Gehlen, a former Nazi general who was being evaluated for possible use as a West German intelligence officer. Gehlen's organization was, according to the *Times*, the forerunner of the German Federal Intelligence Service. Had that not been true, I think Henry might have mentioned it to me in his dissent with that book. The *Times* also said that Henry was involved, in the years right after the war, with the so-called deNazification of certain German musicians prominent during Hitler's Reich.

The most famous case was that of Wilhelm Furtwangler, considered by many persons the major conductor of the twentieth century, a towering cultural icon in Germany. Formerly conductor of both the Vienna and Berlin philharmonic orchestras, and of the Berlin State Opera, Furtwangler was offered the New York Philharmonic in 1936 but such was the outcry about his Nazi associations that he turned it down. His refusal to leave Germany when the Nazis took power would dog his days until the end of them in 1954, when he was sixty-eight. He still has his accusers and his apologists. There is ample testimony to his efforts and subterfuges, at personal risk, to aid Jewish musicians trapped in Hitler's Reich. Other supporters argue the case for his heroism in a struggle to prevent Josef Goebbels and Hermann Goring from destroying Germany's cultural life.

I cannot but believe that Henry was extensively involved in exonerating Wilhelm Furtwangler. But in any event, there were those who would not forgive Furtwangler for remaining in Germany, and such was the outcry, even after the war, that Furtwangler had to decline a proffered appointment as conductor of the Chicago Symphony in 1949.

The irony is that Furtwangler who, as Claus Ogerman recently reminded me, was a champion of Mahler (who was Jewish) in the 1920s should have so suffered while Herbert Von Karajan, who was an actual member of the Nazi party, should have been lionized in America and around the world

**To be continued**

The Jazzletter is published 12 times a year at PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240. Subscriptions are \$70 a year U.S. for the U.S. and Canada, \$80 for other countries.