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The Times and Henry Pleasants

Part Six

One difference between the Serious music composer and the jazz musician is that instead of exploring the harmonic resources on their own, the latter, rather than reinventing the wheel, looked to those who had already invented it, and borrowed from Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, and others, while a marginal few looked to Cage, Boulez, and the like. Not that all of them were consciously imitative, although anyone who has known jazz musicians is aware of their usually well-cultivated knowledge of the European repertoire, past and contemporary (Miles Davis in libraries, studying concert scores; Charlie Parker, Gerry Mulligan, and Allen Eager in love with Prokofiev). Some, however, were largely autodidactic. Hale Smith has suggested that Thelonious Monk discovered the half-diminished chord for himself; but, Hale pointed out, it dates back to Mozart, at least. Even when the jazz musicians were not borrowing from classical music, they were trudging along in its tracks.

Where I parted company with Henry, and what caused our painful (for me, at least) temporary estrangement was what I considered his gullibility in the face of the New Pops, if I may coin a phrase. He becomes, as I saw it in 1970 and see it still, a champion of amateurism in the pejorative sense of that word. He says of jazz, "in order to be made effective, its performance will require an improvisatory sophistication far beyond even the exceptionally gifted amateur. In the early days of jazz, in the 1920s and 1930s, every school and college youngster with talent enough to achieve rudimentary facility on piano, drums, trumpet, clarinet or saxophone, could learn to play the new tunes tolerably in a jazz style."

Oh no they couldn't. Not even then. And they certainly could not aspire to the level of Louis Armstrong or Bix Beiderbecke or Earl Hines. These men were admired not because they were average but because they were spectacularly exceptional. Since when is the measure of music in jazz or any other art been that any amateur must be able to do it? Henry's earlier writings is full of admiration for the technical prowess of the great jazz musicians Whatever esthetic dimension jazz may have had, there was an element of the athletic about it, as in the counting of how many high C's in a row Armstrong could play. There are millions of amateur tennis players, but you will not hear earnest duffers assert, "I'm as good as John McEnroe!" On the contrary, either they like to attend the championship matches or, in most cases, watch them on television, their own limited abilities only enhancing their appreciation of what the masters can do. Henry, by page 182 of *Serious Music — and All That Jazz*, is on quicksand, for he embraces, for all practical purposes, the ethos of commercial amateurism, as promulgated by the record-company flacks subtly denouncing master musicianship and its admirers with the new term "elitism". It was a clever sleight-of-mind trick comparable to the way Ronald and his owners made "liberal" a dirty word. Orega y Gasset wrote:

> Liberalism — it is well to recall this today — is the supreme form of generosity; it is the right which the majority concedes to minorities and hence it is the noblest cry that has ever resounded on this planet. It announces the determination to share existence with the enemy; more than that, with an enemy that is weak. It was incredible that the human species should have arrived at so noble an attitude, so paradoxical, so refined, so acrobatic, so anti-natural. Hence, it is not to be wondered at that this same humanity should so soon appear anxious to get rid of it. It is a discipline too difficult and complex to take firm root on earth.

Henry says:

> The youngsters wanted a music closer to the facts of life; and they found it, initially, in folk music, an area already explored not only in Nashville and in the field of country blues, but also by such minstrel-researchers as John Jacob Niles, Richard Dyer Bennett, Burl Ives and Alan Lomax. This music was not only more mature in its textural substance; it was also easier to play and easier to sing. It was also easy to compose. A guitar, a few rudimentary chords, a simple tune and a bit of literary invention addressed to a topical theme, and our young man or woman was making his own music.
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> It may well have been the healthiest thing that had happened in music in several hundred years.

It *what*? Bob Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel were "healthier" than Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, Chopin, and all the rest of those who created that incredible library of European concert music? Than everyone in jazz from Louis Armstrong to Bill Evans and John Coltrane? Than Frank Sinatra (for whom Henry justly expressed such admiration elsewhere in his writings)? He says:

> Jazz will have to come to terms with rock, and some of the younger jazz musicians, both white and black — Gary Burton, Larry Coryell, Gabor Szabo, John Handy, Jeremy Steig, and Charles Lloyd, for example — are already showing the way. There are no insuperable problems, for the styles are idiomatically, if not yet intellectually, compatible. The rock musician can use the jazz musician's superior instrumental sophistication, while the jazz musician can find salvation from both excessive intellectuality and anarchy in the rhythmic, melodic and textural vitality of rock.

But there *were* insuperable problems. And, before we leave this point, none of the musicians he cites in this paragraph have made substantial contributions to jazz. I hesitate to say they are peripheral figures — Burton is more than that — but they are not central to what has happened in jazz in the thirty years since Henry wrote the book. They showed the way to nothing. And Gerry Mulligan made an interesting point to me: he said, "I resent fusion, because it is giving the kids a false idea of what jazz is."

The chief problem was the harmonic poverty of rock music. For most of its life, popular music was the *lingua franca* of jazz. John Lewis has pointed out that jazz evolved in a kind of symbiosis with the great American popular songs in their classic period, written by such sophisticated (and for the most part well-schooled) musicians as Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Arthur Schwartz, and more. The best but not all of them wrote mostly for the Broadway stage. Ellington wrote for his band, Harry Warren wrote mostly for the movies. There was, in rock music, nothing for the jazz musician to chew on. Henry elsewhere in the book points out that jazz worked in a sort of *chaconne* or *passacaglia* form. The differences between the two are disputed, but essentially you're talking about a set of chord changes. And jazz musicians indeed worked that way. They didn't *need* to have a tune to improvise on, saying on the bandstand something as simple as *"Rhythm* changes, B-flat." Meaning the chords to *I Got Rhythm.* No one knows how many jazz "originals" were written on those changes, or those of *Sweet Georgia Brown, Indiana*, among others.

In the waning days of the great Broadway musicals, jazz albums of the scores were a staple. One of the oddest was the Cannonball Adderley recording of the music from *Fiddler on the Roof.* As good as that score is in its context, it doesn't have appropriate harmonic (or for that matter melodic) content for jazz. How are you going to blow on *Sunrise, Sunset* or *Tradition*? And as the scores to Broadway musicals — the watershed work was *Hair*, after which came *Grease* and others — became more simplistic, indeed primitive, to appeal to an audience that had grown up on rock, there was less and less material for the jazz musician to draw on.

Meanwhile, as the drive for profits altered the nature of radio broadcasting, the "old" material — Kern, et al — was heard less and less on the air. Whereas earlier audiences knew the songs on which the jazz musicians were blowing, which gave them a certain security in following the improvisations, a new generation was growing up a-historical. They were cut off from this knowledge by the censorious character of broadcasting. Even today, when you meet someone young who has an awareness of jazz and music other than current pop and rock, and ask why, you will usually hear some variant on "Well my mother and father had this record collection, and . . . ."

And rock itself grew only negligibly. I hear this complaint not from jazz lovers but from members of the Woodstock generation now in middle age. One of these is the man who prints the *Jazzletter,* John Landa, an extremely well-read man trained as a graphic artist, who said, and it startled me, "In rock music, it's still 1965." John and some others his age are, ironically, exploring jazz, making excited discoveres..

Ortega y Gassett wrote "Not that the vulgar believes itself super-excellent and not vulgar, but that the vulgar proclaims and imposes the rights of vulgarity, or vulgarity as a right." Take a look at any record store-cum-head shop.

At the same time there came to be less and less point in the jazz musician's playing "the standards." Why bother? A younger audience didn't know them anyway. So younger jazz musicians on the rise began playing more and more "originals," thinking that they might as well garner the royalties, if any. It became quite common to glance at the credits of an album and find that every tune on it was written by the bandleader. Few if any of these leaders had the compositional talent and skills of a Benny Golson, Horace Silver, Gerry Mulligan, or Dave Brubeck, and such albums had a sort of predictable impenetrability. In sheer will power and a need to be fair, I would listen to these albums, hoping to find something worthwhile; I was rarely rewarded. Being able to run the changes does not a composer make, no matter the college degrees some of these musicians have.

Another factor is militating against growth in jazz, even assuming that such is technically still possible. That is the quantity (and quality) of reissue programs. Yet another of the middle aged former fans of rock, who had discovered jazz and couldn't turn back, would, when I encountered him, ask for listening lists so that he might school himself. I ran into him after about a year, and again he asked what he should listen to. I named several young players. "Yes, I've heard of them," he said. "But I have to tell you, I'm still catching up on Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz, and Miles Davis."

And I saw in that moment a dilemma that is facing *all* music, not just jazz. I count just under a hundred recordings of the Beethoven Fifth Symphony in the 1996 Schwann Catalogue, with performances directed by everybody from Furtwangler and Walter to Giulani and Previn. Will you give me one good reason why any record company should rush into the studio to make a new recording of it, in competition to these? There were reasons to do so during the transition from 78 rpm records to the LP, and then from the LP to stereo, and a certain amount with the transition to digital recording and CD. But from the advent of stereo in the late 1950s — just over forty years ago — until the present, the improvement in sound has been incremental, not sudden and startling, as in the conversion to stereo. A lot of those stereo recordings still sound very good indeed. Furthermore, even assuming you *like* all-digital recording (and many recording engineers have settled on doing the original recording in analog and the transfers in digital, claiming the sound is warmer), most persons don't have equipment that will display the difference, and if they do, the ears to detect it. As a recording engineer told me many years ago, "Your ear has a built-in scratch filter, and it gets better as you get older."

Thus too even with rock. BMG, the successor to RCA, has a huge vested interest in keeping the catalogue of Elvis Presley active. So too EMI with the Beatles records, endlessly reissued and rehyped.Television ads selling music of the 1940s and '50s *never* market the best of it but the most banal. Even Frank Sinatra is represented in many reissues by the crap he recorded, such as *The French Foreign Legion* and *Strangers in the Night*.

For long periods in the history of western music, a sort of selective filter was in effect. Any age produces its share of musical (and literary) vulgarity, but with time it was forgotten; the best survived, nurtured by the appreciation of musicians. Thus the "rediscovery" of Bach and Mozart by Mendelssohn. But with the advent of recording, particularly from the 1940s on (by then even mono recording was getting pretty good; the sound on the Ellington and Tommy Dorsey Victors isn't half bad), we began dragging our most meretricious "art" with us into the future. In other words, the survival of good art through the ongoing encomium of the informed was suspended. Now the ordure was even more likely to survive than the good stuff, because it was more profitable. If *Rum and Coca Cola* would sell in 1945 and *Hot Diggity (Dog Diggity)* in 1956, why wouldn't they sell now? The answer is that they would, and we are awash in the garbage of the last fifty years.

Henry is at his best when he is evaluating the present state of music and how we got to it. It is when he seeks a good future that I find myself demurring.

Iin the western world at least we were taught that culture and democracy and its works were on an course of irreversible amelerioration. One can remember when Cornelius Warmerdam broke the 15-foot mark in pole vaulting, or when the four-minute mile was considered probably impossible. But there is *not* going to be a fifty-foot pole vault or two-minute mile. I do not expect that we will pull back from polluting the seas and the air, or cease to cut down the trees that are our source of oxygen, or warming the globe, not so long as the "bottom line" is the profit margin. There are two kinds of economics, and they are not communist and capitalist. They are the real and the ideal, the latter being what I have heard termed heroic economics — what one wishes were so. As the paper and lumber companies would not cease cutting down the trees, so too the entertainment would not indulge in heroic economics, doing what ought to be done.

One difference between Henry and me was that I was a working professional songwriter, and I understood the nature of the music *business*, which is profoundly corrupt. Howie Richmond, one of the few (and perhaps only) publishers Johnny Mercer ever trusted, publisher of my songs and the music of Bill Evans, and one of my dearest friends, said to me once, "If we get forty percent of what we are owed, I think we're lucky." He meant songwriters and publishers. The other sixty percent of mechanical royalties disappeared in the journey from the record-store counter through its owner to the distributor to the record label and its payment to the Harry Fox office and thence to the publisher. Since the thefts are in pennies, nickels, and dimes, the larceny is little noticed; but it accrues into untold millions of dollars.

Henry's hopes for the "lyric theater" in producing great songs were doomed. First came the record sound-track. The quality of film songs continued to decline until it reached the incredible abysmal depths of the songs of Diane Warren, who writes both words and music. They are awful. Everything about them is awful. The music is dumb and redundant, harmonically banal. The words and music don't match properly. She has no ear for the rhythms or sonority of language. She got, I am told, eight film-song assignments last

year. She is one of the hottest things in the business, and the industrial strength electronic all-the-same songs she writes — *The Rhythm of the Night, If I Could Turn Back Time, If You Asked Me To* — have been hits for Celine Dionne, Roberta Flack, and Toni Braxton, among others.

Henry wrote:

> Serious-music critics — but only, of course, the few who listen — have detected qualities in the music of the Beatles and some of their imitators, both British and American, that escaped them in even the most sophisticated achievements of jazz.

The clue to this anomaly is in Henry's foreword to the book:

> All my schooling has been in (the European) tradition; and . . . the music of the European masters, is still the only music that I can play or sing. I listen to Sinatra and Fitzgerald, themselves airborne on the buoyant pulse of our own American music, with admiration and envy. I too would like to fly; but my wings were clipped long ago by a conventional musical pedagogy, concentrated vocally on the German *Lied*. Although American by birth and upbringing, I am, musically speaking — and above all rhythmically speaking — an earthbound German.

Classical music critics have square time, stiff eighth-note European time —which the best European jazz musicians, such as Francy Boland, do not — and so do the Beatles. (Asked what he thought about Ringo Starr as a drummer, Buddy Rich said, "I don't think about him.") Thus classical-music critics were not discomfitted by their records. *These critics cannot hear what swings*. Nor what doesn't.

In the Beatles, Henry says, "were assembled, for the first time, all the various and diverse elements of American music in the midcentury except jazz . . . . "

Because Paul McCartney despises jazz. He said so in my presence, many years ago, and according to those in his circle, he still does. He has square time.

Henry says there was "something irresistibly appealing about these four boys from the poorer sections of such an unlikely place as Liverpool."

At this point, Henry's book falls into confusion. He cites a London *Times* critic who praised *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* as foreseeing a new kind of integrated LP. The critic had apparently never heard Mel Tormé's *County Fair* and *California Suite*, not to mention the various suites for singers derived from *Porgy and Bess*, certainly as deserving of the redoubtable term "suite" as the *Nutcracker, Arlesienne*, and *Peer Gynt* suites. The *Times* critic saw the album as portending "a popsong cycle, a Tin Pan Alley *Dichterliebe*." Oh wow, man, heavy. But a critic in New York went further: he compared the album to the Beethoven Ninth Symphony.

Henry notes that "Pop . . . is being enriched, particularly on records, by the imaginative and sophisticated guidance of a new type of creative musician, an unadvertised *deus ex machina* in the form of a musical director, most familiarly represented by the Beatles' George Martin. It is also being enriched by the participation in the studios of older professional musicians, frequently jazz musicians."

This apparently didn't bother Henry. It bothers me mightily, for it sets up a destructive standard for the young. It says essentially: You don't have to study, you don't have to learn anything, you can write your dumb songs and there will always be some anonymous servant who (if paid enough) will prop you up and surround you with an aura of talent.

Ghost writers have always bothered me, including the man for whom Nelson Riddle wrote anonymously until Nat Cole discovered whose charts he had really been recording. It bothers me because of the unsung genius of the late Billy Byers, one of the great ghost writers in the sky, who seemed content to hide in a bottle and let a notorious self-seeker take the credit for his own brilliance.

In reply to the imprecation "elitist" as leveled by the record companies against any demand for excellence or superiority, I used to reply (merely rhetorically, I thought): "Would you like compromised standards applied in medicine or airline maintenance?" But when the profit is high enough such things come to pass, as witness any number of plane crashes in which sloppy maintenance (the Alaska Airlines crash off the California coast, caused by a worn-out tail-assembly screw, for example) or aging wiring blowing a plane out of the sky, or the hopelessly obsolete equipment and systems in use by air traffic controllers, this proved to be exactly true. For profit, airline executives can become as indurated against loss of life as the record company executives complicit in launching, through rock music, the present drug pandemic — as hardened, in fact, as the Colombian cartels, the Russian gangsters of Brooklyn, munitions designers and manufacturers, and all those companies that have polluted the aquifers and used our waters and our air as garbage dumps. The first reports linking cigarette smoking to lung cancer were published in the early 1950s. The tobacco companies have gone on killing people for profit for a half century since then. Do you expect a higher morality from the viziers of the entertainment industry? In denying that their "product"does devastating social damage, do you think they

are lying any less than the tobacco executives who for years said that cigarette smoking was not addictive?

If the CEO of some corporation decided tomorrow to tell the truth, suspend any policy or action that polluted the air, soiled the seas, or corrupted our culture, thereby lowering profits, *he would be replaced immediately to please the stockholders*. The weakness of the film *The China Syndrome* is not that evil men are running the electrical-power company, but that *nobody* is running it, only a set of profit principles to which anyone wanting to survive must accede.

We have the triumph of the hummers, in Henry Mancini's apt phrase for those who would hum a tune, have someone else write it down, harmonize it and orchestrate it, and pass it off as a film score. Unimpeded by modesty, Paul McCartney "wrote" a "symphony" titled *Standing Stone*. Terry Teachout reviewed it in *Time* magazine:

> How legit can an aging rocker get? Sir Paul McCartney seems determined to find out. *Standing Stone*, his second voyage into the deep waters of classical music, is a four-movement symphonic poem in which McCartney endeavors to suggest "the way Celtic man might have wondered about the origins of life and the mystery of human existence." The CD version, recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, shot right to the top of *Billboard's* classical chart.
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> The former Beatle isn't the only rock musician currently trying his hand at classical composition — Billy Joel announced in September that his plans include not only working on Broadway but also composing Rachmaninoff-like solo piano pieces — but Sir Paul sweeps the table when it comes to sheer audaciousness.
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> McCartney, who cannot read music and readily confesses to having attended only a handful of classical concerts, has been no less forthright in acknowledging the extensive role played by four "musical associates." Jazz musician Steve Lodder and classical composer David Matthews transcribed and edited his original computerized noodlings; classical saxophonist John Harle "advised me on the structure of the piece"; film composer Richard Rodney Bennett (*Murder on the Orient Express*) served as overall supervisor of orchestration." The results may well go down in musical history as the world's first as-told-to symphony, through McCartney's associates loyal insist that the final product is all Paul.
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> If so, it's a vanity production. *Standing Stone*'s themes are nondescript, its harmonies blandly predictable, its structure maddeningly repetitious, and its scoring bloated and slick, with bits and pieces of popular classical works occasionally bobbing to the surface (Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe* and Orff's *Carmina Burana* both make cameo appearances). Alas, the 75-minute work contains no trace whatsoever of the indelible tunes and crisp discipline that marked McCartney's collaboration with John Lennon. But then McCartney's post-*Abbey Road* pop output has also been notable mainly for its vacuity.
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> The cash flow produced by such perennials as *Yesterday* (recorded to date by more than 2,200 artists) ensures that Sir Paul's great-grandchildren will never wonder where their next BMW is coming from, but it has also relieved him of the need to make new music vital enough to seize and hold the attention of contemporary listeners. Perhaps that is why, 30 years after *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* changed the face of rock, the wild rumor that once rippled throughout the world appears at last to have come true: creatively speaking, Paul is dead.

The "composition" reveals nothing so clearly as McCartney's undistinguished melodic sense. The inspid material raises afresh questions about how the best Beatles songs, and the best of them attain pinnacles of adequacy, were written. There seems to be no length of self-admiration McCartney will not go to When the English pop-music magazine *Mojo* polled "legendary" songwriters to compile a list, published in its July 2000 issue, of the hundred best songs ever written (about which more in a moment), McCartney voted for four by the Beatles, three of which were his own, written in collaboration with John Lennon: *Help, A Day in the Life,* and *Here There and Everywhere.* (He also voted for George Harrison's *Something.*) Asked if he were conceited, he said, "I hate to be, but you've got to be . . . . The truth is that looking back on the Lennon and McCartney stuff, I think we were great. No doubt about it." McCartney, with his Rudy Vallee eyes, Donald Trump mouth, and Al Jolson ego, keeps on keeping on like the Energizer rabbit, indefatiguably beating his little drum.

The *Mojo* poll of "legendary" (this is one of the new adjectives, along with the prefix super; I recently heard Emeril Lagasse referred to on television as "superchef") songwriters is interesting. It surveyed McCartney, Andrew Lloyd Weber, Mick Jagger, and Carole King among others, and the results were something of a flattery fest in which they voted for each other. The full list of 100 is too long to print here, but the top ten were:

In My Life (Lennon and McCartney), *Satisfaction* (Mick

Jagger and Keith Richards), *Over the Rainbow* (Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg; the Garland recording); *Here There and Everywhere* (Lennon and McCartney); *Tracks of My Tears* (Smokey Robinson, Warren Moore, and Marvin Taplin); *The Times They are a-Changing* (Bob Dylan); *Strange Fruit* (Lewis Allan; the Billie Holiday recording; and for all its mystique, it's really a lousy song); *I Can't Make You Love Me* (Mike Reid and Allen Shamblin); *People Get Ready* (Curtis Mayfield); *You've Lost that Loving Feeling* (Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, and Phil Spector). Ella Fitzgerald's recording of Cole Porter's *Every Time We Say Goodbye* and the Henry Mancini-Johnny Mercer *Moon River* mysteriously made it into the next ten.

The premise of the poll is preposterous in the first place. It assumes that all the participants, regardless of competence or lack of it in music, have heard all the songs in history and in all languages. Thus there is no mention of the songs of Charles Trenet. Gone are the songs of Schubert, Hugo Wolfe, Ravel, Debussy, and more. Gone is almost the entire cannon of great American songs, and gone for that matter are *Londonderry Air* and such folk masterpieces as *Shenandoah*. The *Mojo* poll offers no guide to the great songs of history, but it does offer a guide to the mentalities of the "legendary" songwriters it surveyed. The trouble with people who do not know is that they do not know that they do not know.

McCartney's earlier "classical" ventures are found in a CD that includes his *Liverpool Oratorio Suite*. He is not the only one to aspire to classical status — the very phenomenon that Henry feared — with an "oratorio." There is Wynton Marsalis's peculiar *Blood on the Fields*. (See John Heard's review in the December, 1997, *Jazzletter*.)

Bob Brookmeyer, one of the finest composers in jazz, was asked for his opinion of the writing. He replied:

> On a basic skill level, Marsalis's arranging (from what I have heard — not by any means all) is not sufficient to allow him to make even a poor living as a writer in New York. A page of his opera was so amateurish that it was faxed around NYC by copyists and arrangers.
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> We always used to say, "Can you make it in the *real* world?" and that's still what I drill into students.
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> It's very, very tough out there without a record company, a publicist, Lincoln Center, and a few million bucks a year to allow one to stay in reverse with the foot on the pedal.
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> The arrogance is biting and I, as a long-time associate of "historical figures," am finding fraudulent activity (Have I got a list!!!) irritating *and* destructive, because — regardless of what the opinions are, the bar is being lowered for what is an acceptable standard of greatness. I was never blessed with greatness or afflicted by fame. I am just good at what I do — most of the time.

Blood on the Fields won a Pulitzer Prize. Knighthoods have been bestowed on Paul McCartney, Keith Richards, and Elton John, and Andrew Lloyd Weber has become Lord Andrew Lloyd-Weber. As Al Capone, John D. Rockefeller, and Jay Gould, among others, proved, make enough money and all deference will come to you. (See *Dishonored Honors* in the December, 1997, *Jazzletter*.)

Henry wrote:

> It seems inevitable that jazz musicians will be drawn more and more into pop, if only because the two styles need each other . . . . Pop needs the jazz musician's instrumental skills and experience if it is to grow, while jazz needs the vocal and melodic innocence of pop . . . . The jazz musician will find his way back to the mainstream or perish in the more or less benign lunacy of the avant-garde; and the pop musician can use him in achieving musical maturity.

Well, McCartney did indeed "use him," but he did not achieve musical maturity. And Billy Joel used Phil Woods, to no discernible change in the character of Pops.

Henry says, "The public is a capricious and fallible arbiter; but it is the least fallible of any and, in the long run, the only one that matters." Henry distrusts "the largesse of the gullible foundations," and I do too. A musician has a right to create anything he wants, which right of course he shares with all other asrtists. That is an extension of freedom of speech The audience has a right to listen to it or ignore it. That is an extension of freedom of association. It is possible, at least to some extent, to coerce a certain number of persons to pretend to like a work by disseminating the idea that an admission of boredom would amount to seeming uncultured.

If a composer is content to write a work and play it for an audience of three or four, that is his and their business. But if his work is reasonably elaborate, requiring, say, a large orchestra and a concert hall, somebody has to pay for it. And it is always the public who pays, whether by buying tickets or through grants from a foundation or some government body such as the National Endowment for the Arts. Even if a work is written on commission with funds from such organizations as the Guggenheim, MacArthur, and Rockefeller foundations, the public still is paying, because these are non-profit tax-exempt institutions. The money going to the "artist" would otherwise be paid as taxes or, alternatively, might be spent on

medical research or building hospitals and libraries and schools. But in the end, one way or another, hey, folks, it's your money. The artist either gets money by attracting an audience or gets it by a form of extortion from the public with the NEA and the MacArthur, Rockefeller, Guggenheim, and other foundations acting as the highwayman.

But here are the horns of our dilemma. If Henrywas unable to find a logical resolution of the conflict, I can't either. I deeply distrust the grant programs of such organizations as the National Endowment for the Arts (though I support its continuation), the Canada Council (though I support its continuation too), and the foundations, for the triviality of so many of their grants — and the inescapable fact that whoever controls any of them always seems to favor dispensations to those of their own ethnic, political, or sexual persuasion. This is hothouse culture.

The best art seems to happen when men and women of really deep talent and extensive training (whether formal or autodidactic makes no difference) strive to achieve excellence in a commercial marketplace. The great orchestral jazz-classical writing of Claus Ogerman did not come from grant moneys; Claus made his own money and devoted some of it to his own musical self-extension. Thus too the fantastically successful, from a musical standpoint, *An American Concerto*, by Patrick Williams. Both composers, along with Roger Kellaway and a few others, have proved that a "third stream" of music drawing in elements of both "jazz" and "classical" music, is attainable.

I have no resolution to the dilemma, distrusting both the NEA and WEA, now absorbed into Time-Warner. The one will feed us artsy-fartsy irrelevant art; the other will drag music down to the level of rap, the advocacy of murder, and the likes of Emanem.

When I was giving a talk a few years ago to the Duke Ellington Society, meeting that year in Toronto, I urged its members to make common cause with the symphony orchestras, since our entire musical culture, our glorious past, including so much that Henry Pleasants loved, from Palestrina to Porter, is in danger of being tossed into an *oubliette*. I drastically disagree with Henry's belief that the public is the best and ultimate arbiter. The entertainment conglomerates can sell anything they set their minds too. I get tired of the claims that entertainment does not influence public behavior, preposterous on the face of it, as witness the length of young men's hair after the advent of the Beatles or the adoption of pants by women when Marlene Dietrich wore them in a movie or the damage to the men's underwear industry when Clark Gable took off his shirt to reveal that he was wearing no undershirt. The simplest, neatest proof of the point crops up in the fact that in the small French town that makes most of that country's berets, production jumped from 1,500 to 20,000 a week when Faye Dunaway wore one in *Bonnie and Clyde*.

A woman at the Ellington Society meeting asked me, with some aggression in her voice, what was the solution to the cultural decay we were now facing. The implication was obvious: If I couldn't offer an answer, then there must be no problem. This is demonstrably not so. If I doctor tells you he has no cure for your cancer, that doesn't mean you don't have cancer.

The books of Henry Pleasants on jazz and classical music are, collectively, an extremely valuable documentation of musical evolution up to their time. They fail when Henry succumbs to two things. One of them is a faith in the public not shared by Ortega y Gasset or de Tocqueville or for that matter a number of the "founding fathers," as they are called with an almost religious reverence, of the United States. And *both* men believed in democracy; they just didn't trust it. We are confronted with Voltaire's irrefutable dictum: "Doubt is an uncomfortable condition, but certainty is ridiculous."

My father once said, "You cannot have political democracy without economic democracy." He was right of course. And we are losing what little democracy we had. The likes of Time-Warner are surreptitiously stealing our freedom and giving us Emanem in its place.

The other reason for the failure of Henry's cultural prognoses lay in one of his most enchanting attributes: the optimism implicit in his essentially sunny disposition. I think there may be a clue to Henry's failure to see what was going to happen to music in a passage in my late friend Morley Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris*, his memoir of his time there with Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Morley wrote:

> For the sake of the peace of their own souls most men live by pretending to believe in something they secretly know isn't so. It seems to be a dreadful necessity. It keeps life going on. We agree especially to pretend to believe in things that can never be known. Each civilizations seems to have derived some creative energy from an agreement upon the necessity of a general pretending.

Morley was one of the first influences on my writing. Henry was a later influence, equally powerful, I realize on re-reading him. I can hear both men in my work.

The *Times* of London carried an obituary that captured Henry better than the strange valediction of the *New York Times*, though it too had its moments of myopia:

> Henry Pleasants had been a familiar figure on the London musical scene for more than thirty years, since he settled there in 1967. A man somewhat at odds with his own era, he fought hard and wrote trenchantly in favor of the values of another age, and frequently took up the cudgels against those who followed fashion.

Wellll, that's somewhat correct. He thought that music should be, indeed, must be of its own time, and argued that the past Romantic music he admired was *not* the music of *our* time.

> An inveterate smoker, bon viveur and, above all, conversationalist, he delighted in nothing more than comparing notes with friends and colleagues during the interval of some operatic event, making comparisons with famous names of the past, almost always at the expense of the performance and performers under review. His typical New England wit, pithy and nicely timed [Henry was not from New England, but then the British have always been a little vague on American geography, which in fact cost them an enormous amount of territory at the time of Jay's Treaty], took the measure of friends and foes (and he had a few of those in the profession). At heart, however, he was a kindly soul, who enjoyed entertaining at his London apartment. He was also an energetic support to his wife, the harpsichordist Virginia Pleasants.

The obit recapitulated the familiar facts, and like that other *Times,* waxed misterioso in saying "it was alleged that for a period of time he may have worked for the CIA." *May* have? It noted that "from 1945 for ten years he was music correspondent in Europe for the *New York Times*." It said:

"His editions of the writings of Spohr, Schumann and Hugo Wolf provide further evidence of his predilection for the nineteenth century."

On the contrary, he lamented trends of the nineteenth century, including the elevation of the composer and conductor to heroic or even godlike stature, the reduction of the player to the status of a serf, the loss of improvisation and spontaneity, and the movement of music away from its origins in dance and song. This supposed predilection, the newspaper continued, "was confirmed in a different area by what was his most significant and popular volume, *The Great Singers*, which covered the whole of operatic performance. Both in its history and in its judgments it remains authoritative and a good read. A revised edition, taking the book into the era of Sutherland, Pavarotti and Domingo, appeared in 1981. In singing Pleasants believed lyrical grace was of the essence and deplored volume for its own sake." The paper overlooked the fact this book had a companion volume, *The Great American Popular Singers*, published in 1974 by Simon and Schuster, in which Henry celebrated the importance and talent of such performers as Nat Cole and Peggy Lee. And the newspaper is wrong in asserting that his book on opera singers was "his most significant and popular volume." Far more significant, and certainly more influential, were the books in which he evaluated jazz, including the three I have so closely examined during the past eleven months.

The obituary ended: "Pleasants was incapable of penning a dull sentence or one that did not evince his empathy with both music and its meaning."

On assiduously studying the books in which he deals with jazz and twentieth century "classical" music, it occurred to me that some publisher should bring out a *Henry Pleasants Reader*, assembling in one volume the best material from those three books. Two publishers have expressed interest. I wrote to his wife Virginia suggesting this project and recalling a lovely evening I spent with them in their London apartment. She replied:

> I like the idea of a Henry Pleasants Reader and gladly give my approval and any assistance I can, as long as you are the editor and annotator. You understand what Henry was saying. It is not easy being a pioneer.
>
> I too remember when you were here and I also recall an evening at your place when you sang certain phrases to illustrate something or other. You may not know that all Henry's papers — anything and everything pertaining to him as a writer — go to the archives at Boston University. If you have anything you don't want, don't destroy it but send it to me.
>
> And lastly thank you for your kind words about him and to me. He died very suddenly of an abdominal ruptured aneurism. No long illness, and the mind as sharp as ever, for which I am devoutly grateful. Do keep in touch. Virginia.

In the foreword of *Serious Music -- and All that Jazz,* Henry wrote that European music is "the music in which I am most at home as listener and critic. Among jazz musicians, jazz critics and jazz fans I shall forever be a visitor from another realm — although I have always been made to feel welcome as a friend and fellow enthusiast."

A good and guiding friend indeed, to all of us, and especially to me.