

Jazzletter

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Leonard Maltin's Newsletter

Leonard Maltin, the film critic and historian, has been a subscriber to the *Jazzletter* since its inception. In the past couple of years, he's paid it the ultimate compliment of (he told me) imitating it. He puts out a quarterly called *Leonard Maltin's Movie Crazy*, with the subtitle A Newsletter for People Who Love Movies.

Since people with a serious interest in jazz usually are interested in all the arts, particularly film, I would think that if you are a movie buff you might want to subscribe to Len's publication. I find it a delightful and fascinating read, for Len has incredible archives on film history, including the tapes of countless interviews he has done.

Recent issues contained an extended two-part interview with Robert Young. Given Young's amiable and gentlemanly on-screen persona, one would not expect him to be a vital and interesting subject, but he was. All of Len's interviews have a particular coloration: one of intimacy. The subjects know that he knows the mechanics and history of the industry. They trust him and they open up to him in ways you rarely see in movie interviews.

The current issue contains a piece on the history and nature of silent movies, opening with something Dustin Hoffman said to Len: "You know, we in the movie business should be ashamed of ourselves, because we've always made fun of silent movies. The cliché is that the acting is broad and exaggerated, but the truth is that it's incredibly subtle."

And Len, of course, makes the point that more often than not we see silent movies at the wrong speed, which gives them that jerky accelerated motion. In the present age of digital tape, this is easily corrected. And, Len points out, "All things considered, this is a golden age for silent-film lovers. There are more 35 mm showings with live music (ranging from piano to pipe organ to full orchestral accompaniment) than ever before. Pristine copies of silents both famous and obscure are being released on DVD, with scholarly background material and essays. Now, even enthusiasts who don't live near museums and archives have access to rare films of this period.

"It's just a shame that it took so long to undo the damage done to the era's reputation by Hollywood for so many, many years."

The same issue of *Movie Crazy* contains a very good extended interview Len did with the late film composer and orchestrator Alexander Courage, whose name commands immense respect among fellow composers.

Movie Crazy carries pictures, including, for example, reproductions of the formal replies from studios to the fan letters that flooded them, and photos of the subjects of the discussions.

The current issue contains a poignant comment that echoes my own sentiments. Len writes: "I'm sorry this issue is late in coming; believe me, if I could avoid watching some of the [ghastly] new movies I see for a living and devote all my time to this newsletter, I would. Nevertheless, I appreciate your patience."

Movie Crazy runs sixteen pages per issue. Its subscription rate is \$25 U.S. for the United States, \$36 for Canada, \$40 for other countries. You can send a check or money order to *Movie Crazy*, PO Box 2747, Toluca Lake CA 91610.

Teachers

Phil Woods wrote an email to Marvin Stamm that has whizzed around the circuit of musicians:

Down Beat is running a piece on influences on saxophone players (it may have other instrumentalists, I am not sure). When they called me for an interview a few weeks ago, I told them that my first teacher, Mr. Harvey LaRose, was of profound influence on everything I have ever accomplished. [He was an] outstanding teacher and friend.

Ted Panken called me yesterday and told me that the editor would not run my interview because nobody ever heard of Mr. LaRose. They want me to do another one, using a famous sax man, like Rudy Wiedoft or Ozzie Nelson. I told them to stick their tacky mag where the sun don't shine. How dare they!! The unsung heroes of our music are the local teachers who help us discover ourselves through their toil. I would like the IAJE to know about this cavalier approach

to jazz education and let Deadbeat know how they feel. Could you pass this on to the members at large and tell them of this woeful neglect by a magazine that profits from the work of teachers like Mr. Harvey Larose? He turned me on to Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges, and Charlie Parker, plus taught me the American songbook and gave me advanced lessons when I was thirteen years old! I am really upset about this. Please help spread the news to other jazz educators of this travesty. Thank you.

Phil Woods.

In the scores — hundreds, I suppose — of musicians I have interviewed over the years, most and perhaps all of them have mentioned teachers who shaped their lives.

When I was working with him on his autobiography, Henry Mancini said he had a piano teacher named Homer Ochsenhardt: "He was as German as you could imagine. A strict taskmaster who put me through all the piano books, he was very good to me."

And then Hank mentioned an arranging teacher named Max Adkins, "who was to be the most important influence of my life." Adkins was leader of the pit band at the Stanley Theater in Pittsburgh. He taught Hank and Billy Strayhorn, and in these two men alone his influence on American music is inestimable. His name is still legendary in Pittsburgh, and when I visited the city with Hank, one of the first things he wanted to do was go backstage at the Stanley and stand in the wings from which he used to watch the big bands.

Stanley Turrentine was from Pittsburgh. He told me, "I used to take lessons off Carl Arter. He was a great teacher." Ahmad Jamal too was born in Pittsburgh. Stanley said, "Ahmad talks about Mr. James Miller. He was a piano teacher."

Junior Mance said, "My first teacher, who I still think was the best one, was just a cocktail-lounge pianist. But his heroes were Earl Hines, Fats Waller, Teddy Wilson, and Art Tatum. He had a way of getting across to me what they were really doing."

Milt Bernhart said, "I was very lucky to go to Lane Tech. It was the best. It was open to every kid in Chicago . . . I got lucky with a teacher, a good one, named Forest Nicola. Among his students were players who went in every direction. Some of his students were Ray Linn and Graham Young, and a lot of Chicago players who never left town but stayed and played in the studios. Some of them went into the Chicago Symphony . . .

"Cass Tech in Detroit was our big competitor. And also

Cleveland Heights. The concert band at the high school in Joliet, Illinois, was so good they were eliminated from competition."

Milt Hinton, Lionel Hampton, Hayes Alvis, Scoops Carry, and Nat Cole were in a band at Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School led by Major N. Clarke Smith. Milt said, "Major Smith was a marvelous conductor. He left Wendell Phillips to teach at Sumner High School in St. Louis. And Captain Walter Dyett replaced him. (He) went on to DuSable. He was the one who had Johnny Griffin and Richard Davis and Johnny Hartman. I left Nat Cole in high school. I left Ray Nance in school. John Levy was also at Wendell Phillips."

Dorothy Donegan said, "The DuSable piano field was crowded with talent but I managed to share that piano seat with John Young and others . . . Nat Cole dropped out of DuSable two months after I arrived to take his first band on the road."

Gene Ammons was another DuSable alumnus.

Kenny Washington said, "I must have been five or six years old when I started playing drums. I studied with Rudy Collins, who used to play with Dizzy Gillespie in the mid-sixties . . . I had a teacher named Dennis Kinney. I went to the High School of Music and Art . . ." (It would be fascinating to read a list of that school's famous alumni.) When Kenny was older, his mentor and friend was Mel Lewis.

The late Art Farmer and his twin brother Addison went to Jefferson High School in Los Angeles, and played in a band led by Samuel Browne, another teacher who has become legend. That high school also produced Dexter Gordon, Edmund Thigpen, Frank Morgan, and Big Jay McNeely.

Many pianists remember with affection and respect Margaret Chaloff, Serge Chaloff's mother, who taught piano in Boston. In addition to various classical pianists, she taught quite a few who went into jazz, among them Dave Mackay, Steve Kuhn, and Mike Renzi. Stylistically, they're all individual, but one thing they have in common: a beautiful golden tone. This resulted from an approach to touch that Mike Renzi taught me: a way of drawing the finger toward you, caressing the key. This is in contrast to the vertical hammer-stroke approach once taught in classical music and exemplified in the work of Jose Iturbi, which I never liked. It produces a brittle sound. If you watched him closely, you noticed that Bill Evans had a fairly flat-fingered technique. Margaret Chaloff had a profound influence on a lot of pianists.

Two of the finest arrangers Canada has produced, Rob McConnell and Rick Wilkins, were trained by Gordon Delamont, author of several treatises on harmony, counter-

point, and related subjects. Oscar Peterson has never ceased talking about his great teacher, Paul DeMarkey, who studied with Istvan Thoman, who in turn studied with Franz Liszt. After one of Oscar's performances, DeMarkey told Oscar, "Liszt would be proud of you." And you can hear Liszt in Oscar's playing. Incidentally, DeMarkey taught Oscar's sister, Daisy Peterson Sweeney, who became a prominent teacher in Montreal, training Oliver Jones, among others, and so the DeMarkey influence was further extended.

Claus Ogerman grew up in a town called Ratibor in what was then Germany but later became part of Poland. He said, "My first piano teacher was Richard Ottinger." Claus dedicated his piano concerto to Ottinger, who was executed by Polish troops immediately after the war when the area was turned over to Poland. After the war, in Bavaria, Claus said, "I went to a hard-hitting teacher named Karl Demmer. He was very good at counterpoint and conducting. And I studied with Ernst Grochel. The guy was a world-class piano player."

(It isn't only in music that one encounters this well-remembered influence of teachers. It's certainly true in drama. Actors and writers, asked in interviews what set them in their courses in life, will often cite a specific teacher who detected and encouraged their abilities.)

And yet these influences go completely uncelebrated in the jazz world. Over the years I have had occasion to look up various musicians in the standard dictionaries and encyclopedias. Their teachers are never named. There are no entries on Walter Dyett or Samuel Browne, nor are their high schools mentioned.

It's shameful, and Phil Woods is absolutely right.

To a Cop Unknown

Wherever I have lived, I have studied, formally or informally, some subject — usually music — with somebody, and often I remember specific things they showed me. Playing a suspended fourth, I sometimes think of Stan Kenton, the first person who ever explained the nature of that chord to me. And sometimes I remember something Johnny Carisi said: "The third is always moveable." I often think of Robert Share, who developed the Berklee harmony system and who taught it to me by correspondence. I'd do my lesson and mail it to him in Boston and he'd phone me about it. It was a wonderful experience, and God only knows how many musicians have been influenced by that dear, kind, brilliant, and strikingly handsome man. Clark Terry told me that, as an adult, he too studied with Bob. It didn't affect Clark's playing but did give

him an academic understanding of what he had been doing for years by ear and intuition. Anyone who ever came out of Berklee was influenced by the text Bob wrote. Bob, who died all too young of cancer, was one of the most influential figures in the history of jazz. But there is no entry on him in the jazz encyclopedias. I just looked.

In New York in the 1960s, I studied piano with a certain musician whom I had admired since his days with prominent bands. He got tired of the road and took up teaching, and he was good at it. I'll call him Teddy Alexander. The reason I don't use his name is that his nephew, if he ever by some remote chance read this, might be made uncomfortable by the following story.

One day Teddy told me he had to cancel our next lesson. Was there anything wrong? I asked.

He had a sister, he said, who was a real bitch, and a tart as well. Divorced, she took up with some guy and left with him for Florida, abandoning to fend for himself in Manhattan a son who was then about fifteen years old.

Teddy said that one day he got a phone call. A man identified himself as a desk sergeant at some NYPD precinct. He said, "Mr. Alexander, do you have a nephew?"

Teddy said, "Yes, but I haven't seen him in some time."

Well, the cop said, the kid was under arrest. And he asked Teddy if he could come down to the precinct. Teddy went, and sat down with the sergeant who said (and I think this is close to verbatim):

"Mr. Alexander, when you've been in this job as long as I have, you develop a feeling about people. And I think this kid doesn't belong here."

The cop told him that the nephew had shared a room in a boarding house with another boy. They couldn't make their rent, and their landlord took a baseball bat to them. In the noise that ensued, someone called the police who, when they arrived, found a quantity of heroin in the room, enough to sell. The boys were charged with trafficking. The sergeant told Teddy there was no evidence that they had sold anything; it appeared they were getting ready to do so. But actual trafficking had not yet occurred.

The cop said that he understood the boy had been abandoned by his mother, who was nowhere to be found, and the only relative he could turn to was Teddy. The man said that if Teddy would take responsibility for the boy, he would put in a word with the district attorney's office and the kid might get off with a suspended sentence.

Teddy agreed. He paid the bail and took him home, where the boy simply didn't fit in with Teddy's own kids. He was

given a room, but he showed the family nothing but sullen silence. In fact he refused to eat.

After a few days, however, hunger took over, and he came to the table and ate, still in silence. Then he began to talk a little.

After living with the family for some months, the boy opened up enough to say that he thought he would like to finish high school. After about a year back in high school, he said, "Uncle Teddy, do you think I could learn to play the piano?"

Teddy said he saw no reason why not.

"Would you teach me?"

"Yes, on the condition that you do exactly what I tell you." I know how Teddy taught, including Bach two-part inventions, for independence of the hands, and he had a chart of chord substitutions and voicings — in fact, I still have it — arranged in a circle. It somewhat resembled the cycle of fifths, but it wasn't; it emphasized substitutions a tritone away. You had to learn them all in all keys. Bill Evans asked if he could look over my lessons. Bill said, "Man, this stuff is amazing. We had to figure all this out for ourselves."

The boy continued to study. By the time he finished high school, he was playing well enough to get gigs. And then he told Teddy he thought he would like to go to university. To become what?

A doctor.

The boy enrolled in medical school at Columbia University. He never cost Teddy a nickel: he worked his way through playing gigs.

And that was the reason, Teddy said, that he would not be available for my next lesson: "I have to go to his graduation."

I have now and then wondered what would have become of that kid had he encountered another kind of cop, someone other than that desk sergeant, and had he had another kind of uncle. I don't know the doctor's name, but I hope that whoever he is and wherever he is, he still plays piano.

Teddy was a fine teacher. He has been gone for some years, and so, I would think, is that unknown cop. But I send them both a smile.

Mosaic's Mulligan

Early in the life of the *Jazzletter* — midway through its third year — I wrote a piece called *Life Among the Cartons*. It was about the attempt of Charlie Lourie and Michael Cuscuna to launch a jazz label devoted to the highest quality of reissues of recordings by then out of print. They put the records out

for sale by mail-order only. The pressings were in limited editions, from 5000 to 7500 copies, and when they ran out, there would be no more. Cartons of these albums were stacked up in Charlie's living room.

Charlie Lourie graduated from the New England conservatory on woodwinds, played with the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops, the Herb Pomeroy band, and various small jazz and classical groups. For a time he was director of marketing for Epic Records, then Blue Note Records, and then director of the jazz department at Warner Bros. Michael Cuscuna was a broadcaster in Philadelphia and New York, then a writer, researcher and record producer. He and Charlie started the Blue Note reissue series.

And then: the Mosaic reissue series, boxed sets with extensive annotation and photography. The records themselves were superbly done. Their first packages included the complete Pacific Jazz small group recordings of Art Pepper, the complete Blue Note and Pacific Jazz records of Clifford Brown, the Complete Blue Note Thelonious Monk, the complete Blue Note Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis, and the Complete Pacific Jazz and Capitol recordings of the original Gerry Mulligan Quartet with Chet Baker and Mulligan's tentet recordings.

Charlie was then forty-five. "If there's a god," he said, "and I have been put on this earth for a purpose, this is it. I am doing what I want to do. I am not even making ends meet, but I'm being helped by family."

Then he added: "I think that Michael and I are out of our minds to be doing what we're doing."

I laughed and agree with him. In the face of a ruthlessly commercial record industry, and the gradual (and later rapid) transition to a suffocating national commercial broadcasting, Mosaic's future seemed rather hopeless. And, I added, I too was out of my mind to start the *Jazzletter*, which I predicted would not last another year.

That was twenty years ago. Charlie died on December 31, 1990, of a heart condition. But Mosaic is alive and thriving. It now has seven employees working in a warehouse of 3000 square feet at 35 Melrose Place, Stamford, Connecticut 06902. You can write for a copy of the catalogue, or you can reach the company at www.mosaicrecords.com.

It continues to do remarkable work. One of its finest collections is the complete Nat Cole jazz recordings, a large boxed set of CDs that is among the treasures of my record collection. It took Michael Cuscuna nine years to get the rights from Capitol. The collection sold out completely, and Michael tells me that he has only copy of it in his own library.

Now Mosaic is about to bring out a Tal Farlow collection, which will be its 124th issue.

One of Mosaic's most significant collections, issued a few months ago, is a four-CD boxed set of the Gerry Mulligan Concert Jazz Band, priced very reasonably at \$65. Its accompanying brochure contains an account of the band's too-brief history, written by Bill Kirchner, that is one of the best pieces of jazz musicology you're likely to come across. Since Bill is himself a saxophonist and arranger, he explores the subject with keen insight. He also had the advantage of knowing Mulligan.

Gerry was a presence in my life long before I knew him. I first became — consciously, in any case — an admirer in 1947 with his composition for the Gene Krupa band, *Disc Jockey Jump*, but it's possible I also knew pieces he contributed to the books of Elliott Lawrence and Claude Thornhill. I was crazy about the Thornhill band, which I saw only once, probably in 1948. As good as its records are, anyone who never saw that band in person can have no idea what kind of sound it could generate, using instruments normally associated with "classical" music, including horn, tuba, and bass clarinet. The chief arrangers were Gil Evans and Bill Borden, and Mulligan always gave considerable credit to Borden. Gerry and I once figured out that he was probably playing in the band when I heard it, along with Lee Konitz.

It has occurred to me of late that excepting vocal music, including opera, and ballet, music from roughly Hayden's time on, and all through the nineteenth century, was extensively dominated by sonata form. In its present use, it has a specific structural meaning. A sonata, generally, consists of three or four independent movements. The first movement contains sections marked Allegro, Adagio, Scherzo, (or Minuet), Allegro. The other movements too have defined structural forms.

The term sonata denotes an instrumental composition. But what is often forgotten in our time is that it may be for any instrument or group of instruments, ranging from solo piano (or violin) up to a full symphony orchestra. String quartets are for the most part in sonata form, which is why Ravel and Debussy — in rebellion against the form — each wrote only one, and did so only to meet conservatory demands. And Debussy wrote a handful of sonatas. Most concerti are in sonata form, along with almost all symphonies, though some composers broke with the rigid structure, notably Sibelius in his magnificent one-movement *Seventh Symphony*. Debussy never wrote a symphony or a concerto. Ravel wrote two concerti, but how strictly they conform to sonata allegro form

I have never bothered to find out; I simply love them both. So too Gershwin's *Concerto in F*, which I consider to be a towering masterpiece, though the classical establishment has often treated it with condescension. Bill Evans loved it too, and once when I mentioned to him that purists argued that it was not in true sonata form, he said, "It has its own form." And that was that.

One of the amazing things about Debussy's music is the continuing modernity of it. The exquisite *Sonata in G*, for violin and piano, written in 1917, a little over a year before he died, sounds more "modern" than a lot of supposedly radical music composed in the nearly hundred years since then.

In essence, the prevalence of the form throughout the nineteenth century represented a German hegemony over music. If you wanted to establish yourself as an "important" composer, you had to write a symphony or a concerto. Chopin wrote two concerti for piano, three piano sonatas, and one sonata for cello, but his true genius lay in non-sonata piano music, including mazurkas, études, préludes, and nocturnes. Bizet wrote one symphony (he was seventeen) in his too-short life, his genius manifesting itself best in opera.

To escape the rigors of sonata form, composers resorted to increasingly complex use of modulations, and it was against these devices that Arnold Schoenberg eventually rebelled. The nineteenth century is designated the Romantic period in music, but the term has nothing to do with sentimental yearnings and amorous affairs. It refers instead to a kind of emotional self-expression, not infrequently lapsing into ghastly self-indulgence, as in the Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*. A number of composer friends of mine have argued that it is a great masterpiece, and, being perpetually self-doubting, I got it out again recently and gave it a couple of listens. I still think it is a piece of utter crap, and I loathe it. Recently I was browsing in Debussy's book of essays, *Monsieur Croche Antidilettante*, and I was reassured about my lack of taste by the fact that he didn't much like Berlioz either.

Much of nineteenth century Romanticism, in literature as well as music, is morbid, as in Mary Shelly's novel *Frankenstein* and the over-rated writings of the whining, self-pitying Edgar Allen Poe. If the French had not acquired a perverted taste for Poe, and had the Americans in those years not been desperate for French or English approval of their art, I wonder if we would have taken his silly stories and Stygian poetry so very seriously on our side of the Atlantic. But then the French are very big on the grotesqueries of Jerry Lewis, too, which baffles me when they have had among them comedic geniuses like Louis de Funes and Jacques Tati, who,

late in his life, made a pilgrimage to meet the Canadian movie-maker Mack Sennett, then in his own final days in a Los Angeles hospital. (I don't mean to denigrate *Frankenstein*. It is a great piece of invention.)

The nineteenth century in music begins in the thunderings of Beethoven. It ends in the shimmering stillnesses of Debussy, like the curtains of light in the aurora borealis on a clear winter night in the north. Even the titles he gave his pieces tend to be indicative of this quality: *Gardens under the Rain*, *The Snow Is Dancing*, *The Wind in the Plain*, *Sounds and Perfumes Turn in the Evening Air*, *Sails*, *Steps on the Snow*, *The Sunken Cathedral* (in which he violates the prohibition of parallel fifths and octaves). And if you want to send chills up your spine, await a bright full moon and go out into its silver light and black shadows and listen to *Claire de Lune*. Years ago, in New York, my mentor Robert Offergeld was over at my apartment. Bob had, in a remarkably rich past, studied piano with Paderewski and was in addition a friend of Horowitz. He asked me to play something, which I did reluctantly. It was some Debussy. "No, no, no," he said impatiently. "It's not German music! You're assuming the chords have to go somewhere. In Debussy, they don't have to go anywhere! They float there, and color is everything."

And that's the way it was in the Thornhill band, with its serene vibratoless sound, which of course came from Debussy, not only through the writing of Gil Evans but the preference of Thornhill himself. Nothing illustrates this more than its theme song, *Snowfall*, which Thornhill wrote. It doesn't go anywhere. It was that band's lack of excitement, paradoxically, that made it so exciting.

Many jazz musicians have been captivated by Debussy, going back to Bix Beiderbecke. Debussy was influenced not by the symphonists but by Chopin and, to my ear, the later piano music of Franz Liszt. Through his patroness Nadezhda von Meck — the patroness of Tchaikovsky as well — he went to Russia, where he became absorbed in the country's music. The Russians were the great masters of orchestral color, including Mussorgsky, Borodin, Cui, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and, contemporary with Debussy, Stravinsky. And their influence extends through Debussy into jazz.

I have written this before, and it is quoted by Bill Kirchner in his liner notes for the Mulligan band reissue. But I can never, ever forget my first encounter with the thirteen-piece Mulligan Concert Jazz Band. It was at the Newport Jazz Festival of 1960 in a pouring rain. I was backstage with Dizzy Gillespie in the tent that served as a dressing room for the musicians. A voice on the sound system announced the

Gerry Mulligan band. Dizzy said, "This is important. We should go and listen."

The Voice of America was filming the festival. Their crew let me stand under their canvas canopy at stage left. I could see the camera images on TV monitors while, chin a little above stage height, I watched the band itself. One camera panned slowly across a sea of umbrellas in the audience and then came to rest on a huge puddle onstage in which, in inversion, Mulligan began a baritone obligato in Bob Brookmeyer's exquisite arrangement of Django Reinhardt's *Manoir de Mes Rêves*. There is such serenity in the Brookmeyer writing. Later, when I was listening to some of the recordings of the Thornhill band, I noticed the similarity of the quality in that piece to Thornhill's *Snowfall*. In view of Debussy's titles, I think we can accept the lineage.

Later, when Mulligan and I had become close friends, I told him of my first encounter with the band and that Brookmeyer chart. He said just hearing about it made the hair stand up on his arms.

There is some marvelous writing, not to mention playing, on these four CDs, with contributions by Bill Holman, Johnny Mandel, Johnny Carisi, and a fresh-out-of-Berklee Gary McFarland (and thus one of Bob Share's people), not to mention the band's concertmaster, Brookmeyer. Some of it is very funny, particularly an exchange between Mulligan and Clark Terry on Art Farmer's *Blueport*. Gerry told me once that he wanted the band in order to have an instrument to write for and then had become so busy with the business of the band that he had no time to write. But his colleagues served him magnificently. Gerry also said that whereas the ideal in small-group writing was to make the band sound bigger, he wanted a big band that sounded like a small group. And it had exactly that kind of light-footed quality. The rhythm section of drummer Mel Lewis and bassist Bill Crow was remarkable, and Bill later said, "It was the hottest band I ever played on."

It lasted less than two years. It was thrilling, one of the best big bands there ever was.

One day in January, 1996, I got a call from Mulligan, who seemed only to want to chat. I later learned that Johnny Mandel, Bill Holman, and others of his friends got similar calls. I guess we all knew why he called. In the sweetest, gentlest way, he was saying goodbye. He died later that month, on January 20, of cancer. And I still miss him.

I am grateful for the Mosaic reissues of the band, and cannot recommend the collection too highly.

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