

Ten Ton Truck

Part Two

Far more active than Fantasy in recording new music was Concord, owned by a used-car dealer named Carl Jefferson who protested too much his honesty. Concord's catalogue was limited to Jefferson's conventional tastes in jazz, which prompted one musician to say you were welcome on that label if you were born before the Civil War. Its catalogue includes records by Ray Brown, Charlie Byrd, Herb Ellis, Stan Getz, Gene Harris, Robben Ford, Tito Puente, and Mel Tormé. It also has a line of homogenized pop performers, (and one brilliant singer, Patti Austin).

At the end of 2004, Fantasy was sold at last to Concord, creating the Concord Music Group, which called itself "a new leader in independent, adult-focused music."

Concord had by then been purchased by Norman Lear and Hal Gaba, who entered a partnership with **Tailwind Capital Partners**. Tailwind defines itself as "a leading private equity firm focused on media and other growth sectors," saying it "provided new equity capital to the Concord Music Group." It owns companies, ranging from orthopedic devices — ankle braces and the like — to NextMedia, which, according to its own publicity, "has become a key player in the media business offering clients traditional outdoor ads in six of the top ten markets, indoor ads in 35 of the top 50 markets, and 60 radio stations in 15 mid-sized markets."

It is hard to see how and where Concord-Fantasy will fit among its priorities. One can imagine it sailing off into the mists of some California sunset, leaving a slight glow like that from a distant Viking funeral ship.

Whereas there were at one time quite a number of great jazz labels, the last two independents, Fantasy and Concord, have now gone the way of all things. To cement the case, the Concord Music Group will be distributed by **Universal**, lost among Geffen, Polydor, and Verve.

Thus it is with movies too. Most "independent" film labels are owned by major Hollywood studios: Focus Features, producer and distributor of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* by **NBC-Universal**, while Fox

Searchways, which produced *Sideways*, is part of Mudooh's **News Corporation**.

Did you ever wonder what happened to those grand old rivals Columbia Records and RCA Records?

According to the most recent update August 28, 2004, in *Columbia Journalism Review*, **Sony** owns Sony Pictures Entertainment, Columbia TriStar, Sony Pictures Classics, and Screen Gems. Its television holdings include Sony Pictures Television, AXN, Animax Japan, SoapCity, the Game Show Network (50 percent with Liberty Mutual), and Movielink (jointly with Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Universal Studios, and Warner Bros. Studios).

Its music holdings are Sony BMG Music Entertainment (50 percent with Bertelsmann), and the following labels: Arista Records, BMG Classics, BMG Heritage, BMG International Companies, Columbia Records, Epic Records, J Records, Jive Records, LaFace Records, Legacy Recordings, RCA Records, RCA Victor Group, RLG-Nashville, Sony Classical, Sony Music International, Sony Music Nashville, So So Def Records, and Verity Records. It owns Sony/ATV Music Publishing, a joint venture with Michael Jackson, and Music Choice, a joint venture with Time Warner, EMI, Motorola, Microsoft, and several cable companies: Cox, Comcast, Adelphia, and Time Warner Cable. And of course it has huge holdings in various electronics companies, probably including some of the equipment on which you hear your music. And as you can see these giants are often married to each other.

One of those to whom Sony is married is Bertelsmann.

Bertelsman AG (it's a German company) owns a considerable number of TV and radio stations and the following book publishing companies:

Ballantine (Ballantine Books, Ballantine Reader's Circle, Del Rey, Del Rey/Lucas Books, Fawcett, Ivy, One World, Wellspring), Bantam Dell Publishing Group (Bantam Hardcover, Bantam Mass Market, Bantam Trade Paperbacks, Crime Line, Delacorte Press, Dell, Delta, Domain, DTP, Island, Spectra, The Dial Press), Crown Publishing Group (Bell Tower, Clarkson Potter, Crown Business, Crown

Publishers Inc., Harmony Books, Prima, Shaye Areheart Books, Three Rivers Press), Knopf Publishing Group (Alfred A. Knopf, Anchor, Everyman's Library, Pantheon Books, Shocken Books, Vintage), Random House Audio Publishing Group (Villard Books, The Modern Library, RH Trade Paperbacks, Striver's Row Books), Random House Children's Books (Dell/Delacorte/Dell Young Reader's Group, Alfred A. Knopf, Bantam, Crown, David Fickling Books, Delacorte Press, Dell Dragonfly, Dell Laurel-Leaf, Dell Yearling Books, Doubleday, Wendy Lamb Books), and a number of others. It owns newspapers in Europe, and magazines in both the United States and Europe:

Family Circle, Fast Company, Inc., Parents, YM, Brigitte, Capital, Eltern, Geo, Stern, Focus, Muy Interesante, News, Art, Schöner Wohnen, Essent & Trinken, P.M, Sachsische Zeitung, Prima, Télé-Loisirs, Claudia, Naj,

And of course the aforementioned music labels in partnership with Sony.

Discovery Communications International is a media giant that owns 60 networks representing 19 entertainment brands, among them Animal Planet, Travel Channel, Discovery Health Channel, Discovery Kids, and, in partnership with *The New York Times*, the Discovery Times Channel. One of its more interesting broadcasts for the last six years has been Discovery Wings, which chronicled aviation. At the start of 2005, Discovery Wings was turned into the Military Channel, giving military interests a full-scale full-time propaganda channel of their own. The channel promised to bring its viewers "a broad focus on all aspects of the military with a wide array of programming about its people, strategy, technology and history."

The rise of one media conglomerate has a particular interest for me, since I was peripherally involved in its foundation. In 1959 or 1960, when I was editor of *Down Beat*, a young French man approached me in my office in Chicago to enquire whether he might be our stringer for France. He was likeable enough, and I said yes. His name was Daniel Fillipachi.

He went back to France. The association with *Down Beat* gave him a certain credence in the French jazz world. He took over, in partnership with a colleague named Franck Ténor, *Jazz Magazine*, which had been founded in 1954 by Eddie and Nicole Barclay, whose Barclay label made them important figures in the French jazz world. Fillipachi and Ténor also ran a radio broadcast called *Ceux qui aiment le jazz*, which means *those who like (or love) jazz*.

From *Jazz Magazine*, Fillipachi and Ténor launched

several other magazines, including a rock-pop magazine for adolescents. It was a success at first, but collapsed in the early 1970s. They also started *Lui*, one of the knock-offs of *Playboy* that emerged at that time. It lasted until the late '80s or early '90s. And they bought *Paris Match*, which derived its name from the fact that it was originally a boxing magazine, but by then had evolved to be a look-alike for *Life*. It still exists, though it has evolved into a gossip magazine not unlike *Hello!* in England. Ténor remained the more active champion of jazz, putting out another small jazz magazine and buying up a Paris radio station to play jazz twenty-four hours a day. Ténor died last year.

The Fillipachi organization kept growing. Today, under the name **Hachette Fillipachi**, it is the biggest publishing operation in the world. In the United States, it owns the magazines *Elle, Elle Decor, ElleGirl, Metropolitan Home, Home, Premiere, Travel Holiday, Car and Driver, Car Stereo Review's Mobile Entertainment, Boating, Flying, Showboats International, Cycle World, Sound and Vision, Popular Photography, Woman's Day*, and *Woman's Day Special Interest Publications*.

Its French newspaper and magazine holdings are even more extensive, but include *Elle, France Dimanche, Ici Paris, Le Journal du Dimanche, Paris Match*, and magazines devoted to Disney characters and images. Its daily newspapers in France include *La Provence, Nice-Matin, Var-Matin* (93.9 percent), *Corse Press*, and more. Its book publishing division is Editions Fillipachi, and it also owns part of the television network Teva.

In December, 1999, Hachette Fillipacchi notified the readers of *Audio* that the publication was no more. All subscriptions were being transferred to what the publication *Semanticcompositions* called "a wholly worthless advertising forum known as *Stereo Review*, later known as *Sound and Vision*."

A good description. All publications whose principle source of revenue is advertising are acolytes of their advertisers. And all magazines are to some degree specialized, in order to deliver to the advertiser the audience it wants. *Down Beat's* base is musical instruments, and school children buy more of them than professionals. So *Down Beat* seeks to please adolescents, which is the factor that dilutes and compromises its editorial content. *JazzTimes* has a base in the record companies, and therefore runs articles on performers that will please them. The old *High Fidelity* and *Stereo Review* had their base in stereo hardware manufacturers.

In the early 1970s, the recording and stereo industries tried to foist quadraphonic sound on the public. Walter Carlos, later Wendy Carlos, whose *Switched On Bach* had

been a smash for Columbia Records, wrote a letter to *Stereo Review* analyzing the three forms of quad that were being offered — one the property of Columbia, the other held by RCA, and the third a Japanese system. Walter denounced his own company's system as the worst of them. This caused the magazine's editor, Leonard Marcus, to ask me to do an interview with Walter.

Walter had a studio in the basement of his brownstone on West 97th Street in New York, bought with the proceeds of *Switched On Bach*. Walter was the first person to explain to Glenn Gould and me the nature of the synthesizer. He had set up a demonstrations of the three main quad processes, unimpressed by any of them, and with degrees in both music and physics he was more than qualified to hold an opinion.

I wrote the requested article, explaining the differences, arriving at this summation:

Our hearing is an early-warning system essential to survival. It classifies sounds, and the head will turn instantly at any unexpected noise to find out where it is coming from, from that of a rattlesnake to a sudden soft wind or the growl of a dog. Music is made out of this instant emotional reflex, the reason we jump if someone enters a room behind us when we are concentrating on some task. Our musical tradition, centuries of it, is designed to be heard from a single direction, the audience facing the orchestra or soloist. The record companies and stereo manufacturers were selling quad as surround sound, an unnatural way to hear music. This would discomfit the listener. Furthermore, I said, the placement of two stereo speakers (they were mostly big in those days) was difficult enough in any room, and certainly the average housewife would be resistant to putting four in a room. Therefore, I said, quadrophonic sound would die, and probably quite quickly.

The magazine's editors called me in for a meeting. They would not print my article, they said — the first time this had ever happened. And in a line I will never forget, the editor, Len Marcus, said, "We're committed to quad."

But of course. If it caught on, everyone would in time have to junk his stereo system for a quad system, and speaker manufacturers would sell four units in place of two. And *Stereo Review* was interested in nothing so much as pleasing its advertisers, who were eager to sell product. And of course the manufacturers would place ads for quad with them.

That's how it works.

Now, back to Viacom CBS Westinghouse / CBS Electric Company. Westinghouse is part of the Nuclear Utilities

Business Group of British Nuclear Fuels (BNF), which in turn has links to the Carlyle Group, of which probably most people have never heard for the good reason that it tries to be invisible. In an article published October 31, 2001, *The Guardian* called Carlyle "the ex-presidents' club." The paper continued:

"For 14 years now with almost no publicity the company has been signing up an impressive list of former politicians — including the first President Bush and his secretary of State, James Baker [former British prime minister] John Major, one-time World Bank treasurer Afsaneh Masheykhi, and several one-time south-east Asian power brokers — and using their influence to promote the group. Among the companies Carlyle owns are those which make equipment, vehicles, and munitions for the U.S. military, and its celebrity employees have long served an ingenious dual purpose, helping encourage investments from the very wealthy while also smoothing the path for Carlyle's defense firms.

"But since the start of the 'war on terror', the firm — unofficially valued at \$3.5 billion — has taken on an added significance. Carlyle has become the thread which indirectly links American military policy in Afghanistan to the personal financial fortunes of its celebrity employees, not least the current president's father. And, until earlier this month, Carlyle provided another curious link to the Afghan crisis: among the firm's multi-million dollar investors were members of the family of Osama bin Laden."

On March 27, 2003, *Washington Business Journal* reported that Charles Rossotti, former commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, would join the Carlyle group as an adviser. Former SEC chairman Arthur Levitt was already an adviser. Carlyle's chairman and managing director from 1993 to 2003 was Frank Carlucci, who is now its chairman emeritus. Carlucci was Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Defense from November 1987 through January 1989. Before that he was Assistant to the President for National Defense and Deputy Director of the CIA from 1978 through 1980.

In March, 2002, Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld paid more than \$70 million to United Defense — a Carlyle subsidiary — to continued development of the problem-plagued Crusader armored vehicle, which even George W. Bush had questioned during a 2000 campaign debate.

Given these links, do you really expect any objective reporting that might infringe on the interests of the Carlyle group? Are you surprised by *Newsweek's* pusillanimous backdown over the Koran-desecration story?

The broadcasting industry covers its bets by backing candidate of *both* major parties. According to the Center for Public Integrity, from 1998 to June 2004, the industry spent

\$222 million lobbying the federal government. According to the Federal Election Commission, from January 1998 to September 2004, it contributed \$523,000 to President George W. Bush, \$386,000 to Senator John F. Kerry, \$347,000 to Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, \$227,000 to Senator John McCain, and lesser sums to other political figures.

"Since 1998," the Center for Public Integrity reported, "lobbying expenditures by the broadcast industry have risen 74 percent It was during that last year of record lobbying that the FCC proposed significant relaxation of the ownership rules, which would have allowed corporations to own more media outlets than ever before and reach a greater percentage of the national audience."

In the 1950s, the Federal Communications Commission still limited how many radio stations any one company could own, since radio was supposed to operate — how quaint the notion seems these days — in "the public interest, service, and convenience." No company could own more than 10 AM and 10 FM radio stations, and in neither case in the same market. FM broadcasting was just beginning, and the broadcasting companies put out the snow-job that it would broadcast the crap on AM radio and devote FM to the cultural *haute cuisine*. That didn't last long.

The deregulation has continued and even accelerated with the current FCC. CBS owns nearly 170 radio stations in major markets throughout the country. ABC owns 24 stations. NBC owns 14, and supplies program to more 200 affiliated stations. The stations it owns and operates are in Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Washington DC, Dallas/Fort Worth, San Diego, Hartford, Connecticut; Raleigh, North Carolina; Columbus, Ohio; Birmingham, Alabama; and Providence, Rhode Island.

Clear Channel until recently owned 1200.

And do you still wonder how it is that you can drive across the country and hear only meretricious radio?

Radio and television stations depend on the FCC for the renewal of their licenses. And when George Bush got mad at the French for not joining his "coalition of the willing" in the invasion of Iraq, his obvious influence reached right down through the TV channels to produce reports of restaurateurs pouring French wines down sewers or the serving of "freedom fries" on Air Force One, and even the late-night comics, particularly Jay Leno, joined in a chorus of wisecracks about the French, of which the most vociferous were the self-admired great intellectual Jack Cafferty on CNN (who said he'd never been to France, never intends to go there) and "that twit," as Don Imus calls him, Tucker

Carlson on *Crossfire*. Do you think all this wasn't heard in other countries, including France? Do you think the French are going to soon forget it? Do you think the polite but chilly reception Bush got on his visit to Europe was a coincidence?

When Richard Nixon's presidency was coming under fire, his vice president, Spiro Agnew, ranted against liberals, students, opponents of the Viet Nam war, and, in one of the more idiotically cute phrases ever coined by a speech writer, the "nattering nabobs of negativity." Agnew of course was forced to resign in 1973 after information surfaced about his corruption in his period as governor of Maryland, along with reports that had continued to take bribes in the White House. He pleaded no contest to income tax evasion, was fined \$10,000 and placed on three years probation, and was disbarred in Maryland in 1974. It was this pillar of probity who was pressuring the networks. I asked a friend of mine, the late Tom Tomizawa, who was then a high-level news producer at NBC, if the network brass had issued orders to lay off Nixon. Tom said, "No, they don't have to. The message trickles down."

At the very start of his administration, in one of the most flagrant examples of political nepotism since John F. Kennedy named his brother Bobby as attorney general, George W. Bush nominated as head of the FCC Michael Powell, the son of his principal poodle, Colin Powell. Michael Powell got the job as easily as Halliburton got its contracts for Iran. He was the arm of the White House in controlling television news. And that the Bush administration had no scruples whatever about its efforts to control the news, we have the quickly-muted scandal of its buying Armstrong Williams. *USA Today* reported that, "Seeking to build support among black families for its education reform bill, the Bush administration paid a prominent black pundit \$240,000 to promote the law on his nationally syndicated television show and to urge other black journalists to do the same."

Williams defended himself saying, "I wanted to do it because it's something I believe in." But legitimate journalists constantly write and broadcast about things they believe in, including activities of the Red Cross and Tsunami relief, without getting paid for it.

The payout may well have been illegal, since Congress prohibits propaganda or lobbying for programs funded by the government. It was part of a \$1 million deal with the Ketchum public relations firm to produce "video news releases" designed to look like real news reports. The Bush administration used such releases last year to promote its Medicare prescription drug plan.

Michael Powell was designated chairman of the FCC on January 22, 2001. Ironically, this man who opened the way

for the huge trusts that have taken over American communications was at one time chief of staff of the antitrust division of the Department of Justice. And he was policy adviser to Richard B. Cheney, then secretary of defense. So we know where his loyalties lie.

When his father, Colin Powell, stepped down as Secretary of State, the younger Powell stepped down as head of the FCC, having done massive damage to it and having accomplished all that the Administration wanted. The FCC has been rendered so toothless as a defender of the public interest, so completely a tool in the collusion of government and media, that it should be abolished. It won't be, of course. It is too useful as that arm of government that controls and intimidates the owners of the "media." Meanwhile, George W. Bush has been lecturing Vladimir Putin on relinquishing control of Russia's media.

One of the areas in which Michael Powell's threatened penalties for "obscenity" in broadcasting has been most effective is National Public Radio. Many stations are terrified. Even if someone being interviewed uses an "obscenity," the station may be leveled a fine that would put it out of business. You need only *do* one of these interviews to see how frightened they are. They have been effectually muzzled. Nowhere do we see more clearly why any defense of free speech *must* include "obscenity" since this is the fulcrum by which the administration is moving the world to its purposes.

One of the first things a young reporter learns is that he can write nothing that contravenes the interests of the newspaper's or the television network's owners, or those of their friends. That means Sumner M. Redstone and Rupert Murdoch and all the rest. "Liberal media" is a bad joke. Do you expect objective journalism in the books or magazines or newspapers or broadcasts of any of the foregoing companies? Do you expect objective coverage of the health crisis in the United States when the pharmaceutical and insurance industries are such massive advertisers on television?

As the late A.J. Liebling of the *New Yorker* observed, freedom of the press belongs to him who owns a press, and only the very rich own major publications and media outlets.

Many of the older generation of journalists, some of them retired now, are dismayed at the condition of the profession. Frank Rich wrote March 6, 2005, in the *New York Times* of "the vacuum in that cultural category we stubbornly insist on calling News.

"What's missing from News is the news. On ABC, Peter Jennings devotes two hours of prime time to playing peek-

a-boo with U.F.O. fanatics, a whorish stunt crafted to deliver ratings, not information. On NBC, Brian Williams is busy as all get-out, as every promo reminds us, 'Reporting America's Story.' That story just happens to be the relentless branding of Brian Williams as America's anchorman — a guy just too in love with Folks Like Us to waste his time looking closely at, say, anything happening in Washington

"Hunter Thompson did not do investigative reporting, but he would have had a savage take on our news-free world — not least because it resembles his own during the Nixon era [His] diagnosis of journalistic dysfunction hasn't aged a day: 'The most consistent and ultimately damaging failure of political journalism in America has its roots in the clubby cocktail party relationships that inevitably develop between politicians and journalists.' He cites as a classic example the breathless but belated revelations of the mental history of George McGovern's putative running mate, the Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton — a story that had long been known by half of the political journalists in St. Louis and at least a dozen in the Washington press corps."

Rich writes that even Thompson "might have been shocked by what's going on now. 'The death of Thompson represents the passing from the Age of Gains to the age of Gannon,' wrote Russell Cobb in *The Daily Texan* at the university of Texas. As he argues, the White House press corps like a drug-addled reporter from a renegade start-up magazine than by a paid propagandist like Jeff Gannon, a fake reporter for a fake news organization (Talon News) run by a bona fide Texas Republican operative who was a delegate to the 2000 Bush convention.

The television "news" organizations have been abdicating their mandate for a long time. If you watched television late at night, as I am wont to do, and you search for information and news rather than the latest rerun of *The Sons of Katie Elder*, you are appalled at how little real stuff is presented. With a hundred-odd channels, but by the time you strip out the Mexican channels, where maidens invulnerable to Women's Lib flaunt their jugs, (you'll never sell inhibition to the Latinas), all the Infomercial, sports and jewelry channels, the Evangelicals (five channels at least) soliciting your money with various shades of hysteria, the children's cartoon channels (at 3 a.m.? yes), the Real Sex shows, which offer closeups of writhing parts of the Beast with Two Backs, as it is called in *Othello*, that grinning Australian idiot handling cobras, boomslangs and mambas, and the ads for *Girls Gone Wild*, there isn't much left. You've got the CBS, NBC, and ABC overnight news, looped every fifteen minutes. There's Rupert Murdoch's Fox News, envenomed by its owner's politics and the rantings of Bill O'Reilly,

MSNBC, which features such sterling fare as the adenoidal proclamations of Joe Scarborough, the often infuriating (for his interruptions) but informative *Hardball* show of Chris Matthews, and, in CNN and CNN *Headline News*, fragments of good reporting by Aaron Brown and Lou Dobbs. Both CNN and *Headline News* have been dumbed down of late. Giggly girl anchorthings, most with blonde hair so straight it looks ironed, have replaced news people.

There's one refuge: in the night, a commercials-free show on the PBS channel devoted to the arts, mostly classical music with a little jazz occasionally thrown in. Alas, all too often when I tune in, it is on some earnest soprano declaiming at a pitch to make a dog take notice some aria I hate (strings doubling the voice) from some opera I have avoided since my grandmother held me on her lap to listen on Saturday afternoons to the Metropolitan Opera. But sometimes it does good things.

So TV can't claim it doesn't have time to cover real events and significant trends in the world, such as conditions in the Sudan or the Congo or Rwanda (for that sort of thing, you have to look to the *Christian Science Monitor*). They began to devote more and more of their time to such riveting, to use one of their favorite adjectives, matters as the O.J. Simpson case and the death of Princess Di. At one point seven TV stations in L.A. were covering what was at base just another murder in a country that has 40,000 of them a year and in which homicide is the chief cause of death in pregnant women. That's all that Laci Peterson was: another statistic in a ghoulish list in a story given only slight levity by its Frey caught in Amber, who at the moment looks as if she's going to get a book deal about the killer who was shunning her. And when there is no current case of trivia for them to cover, the TV news people can always do a rerun of Princess Di's crash replete with new speculation on whether she was murdered, the death of Rock Hudson, shows on serial killers, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and more of the same.

I was talking with Larry Gelbart, the comedy writer whose credits go back to *Duffy's Tavern*, which he wrote when he was still in high school. He said, "We need a new TV channel with the motto 'All death all the time.'"

I reminded him of this a little later. He said, "Well we need yet another one: *Celebrity Criminals*." There's the O.J. Simpson case, always good for a laugh and a rerun, the murder case of Phil Spector, the repugnant adventures of Michael Jackson, the bare (and actually unattractive) boob of his sister, the murder trial of Robert Blake (whose coverage was shaved down by the immense amount of time allocated to Jacko), and the Martha Stewart case — as much

as my sympathies are with her, not her persecutors, I tired of her homecoming.

There was a time when jazz musicians wanted to sound like no one else. They developed highly individual approaches to tone, tempo, swing, inflection, and you could spot them instantly. You need hear only a bar of Miles Davis or Dizzy Gillespie (and in Clark Terry's case, maybe even one note) to know who it is. Now new young players sound, if not like someone from the past, incredibly like each other. And this of course is because they are turned out by schools, who have standardized the teaching methods, whereas — as Bill Evans once told me — "We had to figure it all out for ourselves." One prominent jazz musician now in his 70s said that one of the problems is that these young players are taught by a cadre of instructors who weren't quite good enough to make it as musicians. (Woody Herman said the same thing.) So these new players can all spray out a million notes a second, post-Coltrane, but have no idea of selection or taste or melody.

I was reminded of this on reading a Maureen Dowd column on the most recent soporific Academy Award broadcast. She wrote: "I used to worry that women were heading toward one face. Sometimes in affluent settings, like the Oscars or the shoe department at Bergdorf's, you see a bunch of eerily similar women with oddly off-track features — Botox-smoothed Formica foreheads, collagen-protruding lips, surgically narrowed noses, taut jaws — who look like sisters from another planet"

"In the future there will be only one face. And if the Oscars are predictive, there be only one body — big chest, skinny body — and one style. It was bizarre how actress after actress came out in the same mermaid silhouette: a strapless sheath with a trumpet-flared or ruffled skirt"

"In decades past, each top glamor girl aimed for a signature face and measurements, a trademark voice, a unique walk. You never saw Katherine Hepburn and Ava Gardner showing up in the same dress, or Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe looking like a pair of matching candles.

"In some wacky, self-defeating conspiracy, stylists have joined forces with surgeons to homogenize today's actresses so it's hard to tell one from another; the Oscars had a safe, boring generic look. Top female stars who have had a lot of work done start looking like one another on magazine covers, and being confused for one another at publicity events.

"Chris Rock was right: star power is in short supply in a town where women would rather be conventional than individual. It's the same problem Hollywood has making

movies: too much cloning, not enough originality.”

Like cloned jazz musicians, playing what a friend of mine calls “frothing-at-the-mouth twenty-minute tenor solos.”

It is generally stated by the RIAA and others that jazz accounts for 3 percent of all record sales. But how much of that is reissued material from the past? And of the new stuff how much of it is coming from cookie-cutter players in CDs where the “artist” is listed as the composer of all the tunes?

And then we get to the very definition of jazz. The term, in RIAA and other statements, is clearly meant to include Kenny Gee, the once-promising Diana Krall who of late seems to be singing her affectations with her knees, and the Novacaine voice and dishrag songs of Nora Jones. When you deduct all that, the current record industry doesn’t seem to be doing much to generate anything really new in jazz.

It sure isn’t the age of Dizzy and Miles, Bill Evans and Horace Silver, Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown, Benny Golson and Art Farmer, Zoot and Al, Jackie and Roy, Brubeck and Desmond, Shirley Scott, Gene Ammons, Nat and Cannonball Adderley, Jack Teagarden, Lockjaw Davis, and dozens (maybe scores) of others (including some superb singers from Sarah Vaughan to Terri Thornton) who could draw crowds in nightclubs for a week or more. All that creative individual brilliance, all in flower at once! In some cities, notably Chicago, there were dozens of clubs all open at the same time and doing business. In the mid-1940s, Los Angeles had something over 40 radio stations playing jazz.

Ben Sidran, whose Minneapolis-based quartet tours a lot in Europe, says that jazz is “alive and well on much of the Continent — Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Milan, Prague, Warsaw, etc. Here, well let’s say there’s one club per town, e.g. The Bakery in L.A., Yoshi’s in the East Bay, and the rest is pick-up gigs. In Europe, you can still play a club for a week, maybe two — the Sunset in Paris, the Café Central in Madrid, etc. But in the States you’re lucky to get a weekend. Jazz there is a culture, an evening’s destination, part of the human factor; here it’s a lot of pushing plastic and nostalgia for the old days. I saw Herbie Hancock and Mike Brecker the other night and they were on fire. Way over the heads of most of the audience, half of which split at intermission.”

Even if such corporations as Clear Channel and Viacom do break down and break up, the damage is done, and it is probably irreparable. For who is going to run the companies that remain?

I have become friends of late with a highly intelligent woman in her early fifties, but you get the feeling that for

her, history begins in the 1950s, when she was born. She not only had never heard of major jazz artists and singers, she’d never heard of Mickey Spillane. Love him or hate him, he is the best-selling author of the last hundred years. There is a cut-off time in her cultural mind, prior to which nothing exists. A fifteen-year-old fan of Elvis Presley in 1955 is now sixty years old. And these are the people who are manning the broadcasting companies (and advertising agencies), including the national operations such as BBC and CBC.

Clint Ward, a former trombone player and arranger recently wrote me from Toronto:

“If I could buy a radio with only one station on the dial, I would gladly do it providing that one station was CBC One. The national broadcaster is my refuge from the junk that other stations offer because it is radio of ideas and food for the mind. That is until recently. There is a change because now the young — by that I mean not of our generation — have taken over and are dumbing the programming down. The choice of music is increasingly pointed toward the sounds of today — of course culminating in that non music-form Rap. I find myself turning the radio off more frequently than I like. Last year a mainline morning program, *Sounds Like Canada*, featured a series called 50 Tracks. The aim was to pick the most important songs of the last century — five from each decade. Each week two or three experts brought their choices. Listeners were also allowed to send in their picks and eventually through on-line or write-in voting a list was compiled. Can you imagine that on a list of the most important music from 1900 to 2000, there was not one song by Cole Porter, by Duke Ellington, by George Gershwin, by Johnny Mercer? My anger on this one is very deep.

“The ignorance that begins to surround us is becoming intolerable for me. I know someone whose favourite musical of all time is *Les Miz*! and who is not the least bit open to any discussion on that point. I have a younger friend who has had formal musical training but when I referred to the ‘set-up’ leading into some songs as the ‘verse’ and the song itself as the chorus or refrain, it provoked the response that I was wrong. What can we do? I guess nothing but retreat to the tent and close the flaps. And read the *Jazzletter*.”

From Chicago, I received this letter from pianist Judy Roberts:

“On those rare occasions when I happen to hear a few precious bars of real music on the AM radio, I know that the artist I’m hearing has just died. That’s how I initially realized that Sarah, Ella, Ray Brown, etc., were gone. Today when I heard ten seconds of Jimmy Smith on news radio, I knew his time had come.”

But let me leave the final word on all this to Larry Gelbert, now eighty, who has worked in every branch of the entertainment "media," including the Broadway musical theater (*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*), movies (*Tootsie*, *Barbarians at the Gate*), and television. He adapted Robert Altman's *MASH* for television, and both wrote and produced it for its first four seasons. Larry recently wrote an essay titled, with a nod to Swift, *An Immodest Proposal*. He said:

"Media, plural for medium, increasingly presents us with a singular view of what is left of the world around us.

"Not for the media the conveyance of the corrupt and the catastrophic, unless the villains are discovered wearing one sports uniform or another, or wearing a pair of boy's pajamas (or getting in a boy's pajamas); not for the media the examination of two successive stolen presidencies; of bigotry by the ballot box.

"The media far prefers its role as a weapon of mass distraction, one that reveled in Laura Bush's Republican potty mouth, her jokes crowding out any news of fresh hostage taking, a veritable tsunami of suicide bombings, the faith-based initiatives to kill the filibuster, the appointment of the milk-lipped meshugina John Bolton, as well as Mr. Excitement's recent non-pressing press conference, estimated to have cost the network an irretrievable \$40 million in advertising revenues; those same networks who delighted us with replay after replay of Mrs. B.'s barnyard humor, which caused even the otherwise upright and uptight Mrs. Cheney to erupt in paroxysms of obedient laughter.

"Perhaps the time has come to show our displeasure with the handful of entities who have bought and merged and lobbied so successfully to have themselves legislated into the position of determining and disseminating what we are told and what it is that we are not told; time for the media to cease being a slew of compliant corporate correspondents, a collection of roving reporters.

"For one day, let's put away our clickers (why change channels any more, when each one carries the same story over and over and over and over again?), let's let our morning papers lie (turnabout is fair play) where they've fallen in our driveways or on our front porches.

"For one day, let us not buy a magazine or turn on our radios. For one day, let us not see what is on sale. For one day, let us not call for theater or game tickets at the numbers listed in the newspapers we will not open.

"For one day, let us not tune in to our favorite show, or our favorite wife, serial, or child killer.

"Let us not buy or order one single book (especially from Amazon.com, which consistently refuses to yank *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* off its shelves, despite the fact that it is a proven fraudulent work that's become the Gideon for crazed goyim). The publisher of any of today's best sellers will undoubtedly belong to a member of the corporate clique that has bowed so shamelessly to the censorship imposed by those guardians of decency in Washington that they helped get elected by contributing zillions and gillions of dollars of the profits earned from their hotel video displays of masturbatory material meant to relax their sales reps who assemble in the conference rooms below to find better ways to sell cars that get zero miles to the three-dollar gallon.

"For one day, let us not attend a movie. Let us not buy a DVD of that movie when it comes out two days after it opens. Let us not buy a pirated DVD either — even if it comes out two days before the movie opens. Suddenly it appears that movies are doing poorly. Corporate greed, with a generous helping of stupidity, has made a family trip to a Cineplex a three-figure deal. Why do the picture studios act surprised when it turns out that excessive bleeding ultimately causes death?

"For one day, let us not buy a CD. Same guys own the music as well as the devices that permit us to hear it. And, in some insane kind of cosmic justice whereby they become both the arsonist and the fire chiefs, they have made it possible for their software to be ripped off by the very same hardware that they have also created.

"Let's review:

"For one day:

"Watch no TV.

"Tune in no radio.

"Buy no newspapers . . .

"No magazines.

"No books.

"No CDs

"No DVDs.

"A country gets the media it deserves. We deserve far better than we have."

Now, what was the question again? What happened to jazz?

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