

## Exchanges

*The most powerful research asset of the Jazzletter is its own subscribers, who continue to amaze me. They are in so many fields that I can get expert guidance on almost anything. The letters recently have been so rich and varied that I feel it incumbent to present as many as possible and respond to them in the next issue.*

I hope all is well. Interesting to hear the bad news about Artie; fortunately, between his great playing and a brief communication with him, I didn't know that other part. We hope that our heroes are heroic, but who was, all the way?

Keep up the good insights.

— **Lee Konitz**, New York City

The last batch of *Jazzletters* was superb!

— **Phil Woods**, Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania

A friend sent me your Artie Shaw story. This was so interesting and personal. These things are rare. Thank you for the pleasure.

— **Rene Leeman** (Mrs. Cliff), Monroe Township, New Jersey

*Cliff Leeman was one of my all-time favorite drummers. I first became aware of him during his sojourn with Woody Herman, 1942-44, but he played with Artie Shaw 1936-39. I recall listening with Artie to air checks of the band when Leeman was its drummer. Wonderful player.*

Your articles on Artie Shaw were incisive and insightful. I too knew Artie, during the last seven or eight years of his life. I spent some time with him at the homestead in Agoura Hills, and had dinner with him on several occasions. He regaled me with some of the same stories you related.

Although he treated me reasonably well, I could see how generous he could be at one minute, and then cruel and unfeeling in the next. His entire life seemed to be one of approach, avoidance, highlighting those characteristics in the title of his book, *I Love You, I Hate You, Drop Dead*.

You mentioned how much Shaw admired Bix. When my dad, Irving Gilbert, was in his teens, he played a gig now and then with Bix and Tram and also subbed for Jess Stacy.

I truly enjoy your *Jazzletter*. Your discussions are illuminating, engaging, and beautifully written. *Song Lake Summer* is a work of literature. Thanks.

— **Arthur Gilbert**, Duarte, California

*Arthur Gilbert is the Presiding Judge of Division 6 of the California Court of Appeals.*

*Artie remains one of my heroes, in spite of the dark side of him. In the weeks I spent researching and writing that piece, I listened to an enormous number of his records, often over and over, more awed than ever by his inventiveness, his harmonic sophistication even in early records, the long lines, the exquisite legato lyricism, among other qualities.*

My wife Carol and I have enjoyed the *Jazzletter* since it was given to us as a gift by our friend Dave Frishberg several years back, and it saddened us to find our mailbox empty for so many long intervals. Being jazz musicians and educators as well as lifelong fans, we have always enjoyed your essays on music, and being longtime Democrats, usually find ourselves in agreement with your political-social observations. Having studied and taught sociology in my "other" life, it would be pretty hard to be anything but liberal.

When we received your package containing *Song Lake Summer*, we were both surprised and initially disappointed. I set these aside for several months, but when I began reading your novel, I could not put it down. Magnificent! Congratulations on this superb first effort.

Again, thanks for your illuminating and thought-provoking ideas, be they musical, social, political, or now fictional. We look forward to all of it.

— **Henry Ettman**, Sarasota, Florida

I'm a subscriber from back during the Peloponnesian Wars. I'm resubscribing now, and I hope till the end of my gig on this little spot of earth.

I'm sending you my co-authored book *Travels with Ernest* so you can see what it looks like when a novelist turns to non-fiction.

I found writing nonfiction for me no different in its essentials from writing fiction. Or, it's the difference between writing what you don't know that you know, and writing what you know about what you don't know — except that the issue keeps shifting around and you end up trying to write what's meaningful and true, using your imagination to discover the underlying patterns and design, whether you're writing fiction or nonfiction. Something especially nifty about nonfiction, though, is that you're more likely to piss off the right people.

My wife Laurel and I discuss such matters in *Travels with Ernest*. Our conversations riff on and under and through the melody. Nonfiction liberated me.

I wonder how or if fiction liberated you.

I've been playing jazz since junior high — clarinet and sax. Recently sold my wonderful Selmer tenor: somehow over time it had grown too hard to blow, hard to get the old fingers around. I keep playing the Selmer Mark VI alto, the Selmer soprano, the Selmer 10G clarinet. My little combo, the South Street band (trumpet, bass, guitar, piano, drums, diva vocalist sometimes, myself), played a wedding reception last month, so I'm still going, at sixty-six. So's the music. Lots of kids are growing sick of decades of dreck and swill. They seem open now to discover the bright "new" continent whose oxygen remains Gershwin, Porter, Arlen, Berlin, Mercer. There's a bejeweled piece of the human soul that's apparently capable of passing whole decades buried beneath the dung heap of rock and rap and still coming up for air. I see it when we play.

— Ernest Lockridge, Worthington, Ohio

*Song Lake Summer was anything but a first effort. My first short fiction was published in 1953 in Canada, my first science fiction the following year in England. By happenstance, I attended a science-fiction convention in Manchester in 1954, which is a story in itself, and I had the privilege of meeting and talking at length with Arthur C. Clarke, the souvenir of which is a fairly good understanding of orbital mechanics. I spent that year as a correspondent in England and France. In the 1960s in Chicago and New York, I wrote short stories and novellas, published in a wide variety of magazines, including pre-Helen Gurley Brown Cosmopolitan, and also wrote the first of my song lyrics. My first novel, And Sleep Until Noon, was published by Simon and Schuster in 1967. There were two previous novels whose manuscripts I lost in moving.*

*I do not consider myself a liberal or anything else. I grow weary of the yapping about the "liberal press." I entered the world of newspaper reporting at the age of twenty, an essentially apolitical person. But covering business and government soon shapes reporters into "liberals". Only they*

*are "liberals," the owners of the "media" are not, and all that gets into the papers or on television is what the Republican owners will permit, or at least cannot prevent, such as the appalling failure of the government during and after the New Orleans catastrophe.*

*There isn't a question that the Canadian medical system is superior to the American lack of system, despite the lies told about it by American politicians. Consider Canada's greater longevity, lower infant mortality, universal access to health care, and lower per capita costs. This isn't a "liberal opinion," this is a fact. Why has television never done a major exploration of the subject. Do the journalists not know about the difference? Peter Jennings was a Canadian. So too Morley Safer, Thalia Assuras, Jane Arraf, Sheila McVicker, Allan Pizzey, John Roberts, Daniel Seaburg, and many others. You can spot them not only through their "out" and "about," which I have never fully lost (neither did Glenn Ford, and Donald Sutherland still hasn't lost it) but by the way a lot of them say "dollar" to rhyme with "polar."*

*Kevin Newman, quite a good journalist on ABC News, moved back to Canada because he had a sick child and needed the Canadian medical coverage.*

*So why don't the television news people make these medical comparisons? Look who are two main sources of TV advertising revenues: the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, chief profiteers on the desperate and collapsing American medical non-system.*

*And that, too, is not a "liberal opinion." It is a fact you can research for yourself.*

I read your *Ten Ton Truck* article with particular interest. As a Nashville studio singer, I've been very active with the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. I've served on AFTRA's National Board of Directors since 1986, and I'm the current chair of the AFTRA National Singers Caucus, a post I've held for the last four years. In this capacity, and in an effort to do something positive for recording artists and background singers, I co-chaired the member committee that negotiated the AFTRA Sound Recordings Code with the major labels. There were five labels across the table during the last round in 2003. Next year, there'll be three, I am told. We used to routinely have 20-plus, but they've all been swallowed up by the same conglomerates you cited in your article. Unfortunately, with a decrease in the number of labels there is a corresponding decrease in the number of roster artists and loss of diversity in the music business. I know from your article that you're already well aware of what the corporations are doing to us.

I hold out some hope that artist-owned labels, independent

labels, satellite radio, and the Internet may eliminate the middle men who've shut out the creative risk takers among us. I had a recent conversation with a Los Angeles singer that might interest you. He knows several very young artists in the L.A. music community. He told me that many 15- and 16-year-olds don't want to deal with hard copies of their work. They don't want to do the photo shoot or pay for liner notes. Above all they don't want a label. They record in their living rooms with the inexpensive technology available today. Then they upload directly to the Internet. Within seconds their tracks are available on 30-plus download web sites where they're sold for 99 cents per track, minus a service charge of 11 cents. They have their money very quickly, unlike most label artists who routinely have a difficult time getting timely royalty statements, or get statements that are very flawed. The business is certainly changing very quickly. I wonder who'll be left standing in a few years.

As an adjunct music instructor at Middle Tennessee State University, I'm also concerned about the devaluation of culture and education. A career in higher education is no longer considered honorable, much less valuable. How many Red State parents were angry that their children were challenged to think critically during the last election? Will we have to start watching what we say in the very classrooms that are supposed to foster critical thinking? I refuse. I'd rather teach music in a music store or at my home where I can say what's on my mind. Music doesn't exist in a vacuum. I have to at least be able to say what I believe about what's going on with our country and how it affects the viability of a career in the arts or higher education.

Why choose a career in higher education when it's being financially devalued by the very institutions that are supposed to shelter and defend it? Perhaps this is due in part to the current state of health care and its burden on employers. It's my understanding that the current ratio of adjuncts to full-time instructors is roughly two to one, across the country, with the higher ratios in urban areas where a supply of part-time teachers in most academic areas is more available. State education budgets have been greatly affected by cuts from the federal government. Hiring adjuncts saves millions in employee benefits.

In the state of Tennessee, there are two groups which oversee public institutions of higher learning, the University of Tennessee system and the Tennessee Board of Regents. My school, Middle Tennessee State University, is under the TBR. As an adjunct instructor in jazz string bass and jazz voice, I'm limited to a maximum load of nine contact hours per semester. Thus far, regardless of qualifications, the maximum compensation for any adjunct music professor is \$700 per load hour.

The department chair wants to pay more but he can't by TBR law. So, the maximum pay adjuncts can receive per 15-week semester is \$6,300. MTSU also follows the much too common private music-lesson formula that allots only 2/3 hour load credit for each full hour of private instruction. This practice is rationalized by pointing out that only one student is paying tuition for that hour. Since it's not unusual for a full load to consist entirely of private lessons, nine hours per week on paper can easily turn into a load of 13.5 hours per week. This translates to about \$31 per hour for a part-time job with no benefits. The kicker is that the job still requires a Master's degree.

I'm sure our situation is not unique. I think it's another bad sign of the cultural times.

Though I've functioned fairly well for a number of years as a freelance jazz musician in Nashville, the home of country music, it's getting harder partly because the recording accounts I used to have are mostly gone, partly to my increased age — fifty-four, an old man in the studio singing biz — and partly due to the depressed record business.

I really enjoy your writing, no matter the subject matter. I find I agree with most everything you write on politics, culture, and the state of affairs we're in. If I disagree, I'm still challenged to define why I feel differently. Thanks for that.

— Jim Ferguson, Nashville, Tennessee

*I am advised that Jim is an excellent educator, one of the best singers around, and a fine bassist.*

*A question suggests itself. Is America's musical culture to be defined by fifteen-year-olds with living-room recording equipment? It's yet another chilling thought.*

As usual, I read the latest batch of *Jazzletters* with considerable interest, and was rewarded with much to think about. Of special interest to me were a few paragraphs about the state of jazz — particularly jazz education. These deserve a closer look.

Gene: "There was a time when jazz musicians wanted to sound like no one else."

Actually, that's still the goal — or should be — of every young musician I know.

Gene: "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."

I hear that complaint often, usually from folks over the age of sixty who complain that all young tenor players sound like Coltrane. Strangely, I never hear these people mention

the era when hundreds of tenor players emulated Lester Young, or myriad alto players who absorbed Charlie Parker as best they could. In fact, the number of musicians with instantly identifiable sounds has never been large. But as always, the truly superior players stand out: saxophonists like Michael Brecker, Dave Liebman, and Joe Lovano are as distinctive as were Gray, Getz, Sims, and Cohn, or Adderley, Woods, and McLean (Phil and Jackie thankfully are still active).

Also, you overestimate the standardization factor in jazz education. There are all sorts of approaches that vary with each institution. Some emphasize big bands, others small groups. Some stress the traditional repertoire of standards and jazz tunes, others focus more on contemporary trends, including pop and world musics. You pay your money and take your choice.

Gene: "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."

There are thousands of school jazz programs, from elementary to college levels, all over the world, so inevitably the quality of instruction varies. And it's true that in some of the smaller colleges (including ones that, as a friend of mine quipped, can't be located on satellite surveillance photos), the hope is for one Director of Jazz Studies (with a doctorate, preferably) who can teach improvisation, composing and arranging, jazz history, an instrument, and, oh yes, conduct the pep band. My favorite job listing was a recent one by a Midwestern evangelical college that wanted all that plus a profession of faith.

Happily, in the major jazz schools world wide, things are much hipper. The faculties mostly comprise first-class musicians (the names of many of them are familiar to *Jazzletter* readers) who have major-league performing credentials and are serious educators. This is vitally important in an era when the apprenticeship system that served jazz for so long has virtually disappeared. With the Miles Davises, Woody Hermans, Art Blakeys, Buddy Riches, and others gone, the quality schools — whatever their imperfections — are the best means we have to sustain a mentoring process that nurtures young musicians.

Gene: "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."

It's true that the technical standards of execution in jazz have probably never been higher; things that Coltrane did 45 years ago that were technically astounding at that time are now done routinely by the best players. That isn't to say that

all of them, or even many of them, have Coltrane's profundity. Young musicians have always needed time to grow and mature. Schools can teach craft skills and give esthetic guidance as best they can; the rest is up to the individuals. As in the New Testament, many are called but few are chosen.

Gene: "It is generally stated by the RIAA and others that jazz accounts for three percent of all record sales. But how much of that is reissued material from the past?"

As Dan Morgenstern has pointed out, that oft-cited 2-3 percent figure applies only to major labels. It doesn't include independent labels, or imports, or bootlegs, or sales of used records. Actually, no one seems to know exactly how large a percentage of U.S. record sales jazz comprises. But it's a good bet that major record stores wouldn't devote as much floor space as they do for a mere 2-3 percent of the market. My contacts at the major labels have given me figures of 50 to 75 percent of their current jazz releases being reissues. Most newly-recorded CDs come from small independent labels.

Gene: "It sure isn't the age of Dizzy and Miles."

No, it isn't. And as an aging baby-boomer who was fortunate to hear many of the greats in person, I miss them too. It's neither the best nor the worst of times for jazz, but when I get to hear many serious young (and not-so-young) musicians all over the world devoting themselves to this music, I do feel cause for at least cautious optimism.

The music is there. What it needs most is an audience.

— Bill Kirchner, South Orange, New Jersey

*Aside from Miles Davis, you will find if you look through any jazz encyclopedia an awesome number of highly individual players active in 1960 — not only Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, and Al Cohn, all derived from Lester Young but each instantly recognizable for his individual style: John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Lockjaw Davis, Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, Buddy Tate, Flip Phillips, Dexter Gordon, Illinois Jacquet, Don Byas, Jerome Richardson, Paul Quinichette, Junior Cook, Warne Marsh, Brew Moore, Stanley Turrentine, Gene Ammons, Paul Gonsalves, Wardell Gray, Eddie Harris, Sal Nistico, Sonny Stitt, Paul Desmond, Phil Woods, Herb Geller, Lee Konitz, Julian Adderley, Johnny Hodges, just to mention some of the saxophonists. I perceive nothing like that range and number of great individual voices in jazz today.*

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*If you're not familiar with it, haiku is a strict and pithy Japanese poetic form consisting of five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. In my New*

*York years, I used to write haiku and sonnets as a discipline, similar perhaps to playing scales and arpeggios (I did a lot of that too) to build chops.*

*My old friend Jules Chaikin, who played trumpet with Stan Kenton among other jobs, and has been an enormously respected Los Angeles music contractor, sent me the following in a letter:*

### Music Biz Haiku

Money's everything  
playing any gig that comes  
whores, we are all whores

One beat to change from  
harmon to cup to bucket  
hey, who wrote this shit?

The jam session starts  
somebody calls Giant Steps  
cold fear grips my brain

Here comes the high note  
the lead trumpet puckers  
clam, clam, crap! clam, shit!

Here's the girl singer  
stepping to the microphone  
pitch, time, all gone now

Gig is going well  
asshole requests In the Mood  
I look at my watch

I once had a dream,  
big house, new car, big money  
now I play bass

Gorgeous chick tells me  
"You sound just like Kenny G"  
my ego shatters

The woodwind doubler  
practicing the piccolo  
frustration defined

Pit orchestra gig  
days and nights become as one  
I have no damned life

Bad intonation  
strings are sharp and reeds are flat  
brass too loud again

Great changes great groove  
a one-in-a-million gig  
no singer. Yippee!

An oxymoron:  
he played the accordion  
with delicacy

Bassoons forever  
try in vain not to sound like  
a farting bedpost

The strings slowly tune  
when they've done the unisons  
are anything but

I can't find my note  
bemoans the confused singer  
quit now, we all pray

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You know, Gene, this is all true. So many careers have diminuendoed to a triple piano. It has been a good run, but the writing, as you well know, has been on the wall for quite a long time.

The Biz, as we once knew it, is over. The end of a most wonderful era. I don't care how stellar some of the young students are, they will have to scuffle to make a living, or become music teachers, a profession that is already overpopulated.

There are very few venues remaining in this world for jazz musicians. They have all been sold as meat markets for rock, rap, and other ear-shattering noises blasphemously called music. Your *Ten Ton Truck* article tells it all. Why is it that I can't go shopping anywhere for anything in any kind of store without being deafened by what they play as background music? I just walk out; my music allergies cannot tolerate it. I just wonder how the salespeople in those stores can take that kind of abuse eight hours a day.

Gene, you deserve all the awards you receive. What you write hits home every time. I wish you were still living in Toronto so I could see more of you. I hope you are still doing gigs as a singer. That is a good way to enlighten people who do not know about the contents of the Jazzletter. I can't

believe all the research you must have done to get those details about those big companies and their assets. Moltivo impressivo. You are dead right.

What has happened to jazz?

All the best to you and Janet.

Love,

— **Guido Basso**, Toronto, Ontario

*Guido is one of the great trumpet players of our time, solo or ensemble, and he and Clark Terry are among my favorite flugelhorn players. A distinction he shares with Clark Terry is that I can hear him, even in a television commercial, and know within two or three notes that it is he. Any listener to Rob McConnell's Boss Brass knows who he is. Guido was on my first album, done with what was essentially the Boss Brass plus strings.*

*I did some one-week gigs at the Senator in Toronto with Guido and Don Thompson and a great rhythm section, and had the joy of recording with them. The Senator is no more. The word is that it will reopen as a strip joint.*

*I informed Guido that I haven't sung in a couple of years. After my several happy holidays in hospital, I'm not at all sure that I can sing. Roger Kellaway and I keep scheduling a rehearsal to find out if I can and I keep putting it off. And I think I'm too old anyway. I no longer write songs. The jazz education movement has turned so many of the young singers into hideous warped warblers, melismatic monsters, slayers of songs, skidding all over the place, out of tune, inserting banal extra words of their own inept invention. Anyone who messes with a Mercer lyric, or the work of any of the masters, is an idiot. Of those younger singers I do like, few have record contracts, and those who do (with small labels with poor distribution) don't sell enough to justify the care that goes into serious lyric writing. So I can't be bothered.*

*Guido's reference to awards came after ASCAP announced that I have its Timothy White Award for Excellence in Biography for my Johnny Mercer study, my fifth ASCAP award. A few months ago I received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Jazz Journalists Association along with one I am especially proud of, from the International Society of Bassists. It is a lovely brown wooden plaque inscribed Friend of the Bass. And tht I think I am.*

*The research on Ten Ton Truck took three months.*

All Dixieland players are not Republicans. When people ask what kind of music I play, I say jazz music. Not Dixieland and not bebop. I play jazz music. I've been playing it for sixty years, and with all kinds of players, and I can't think of one who was a Republican.

I will be 79 in October and I still play jazz music.

Thanks for the Jazzletter. It makes me feel I'm not alone.

— **Robin Hodes**, San Francisco, California

Sorry but I can't afford you any more. And; I'm a conservative Republican who loves bebop and Frank Sinatra.

— **Andy Randazzo**, Howard Beach, New York

*There had to be one somewhere. I did not suggest that Dixieland players are Republican. But much of their audience is, with the Mr. Magoo mentality that will not see or hear what it does not want to and therefore never grows.*

*The following was delivered on July 24, 2005, as an address to the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters by pianist and songwriter Ben Sidran. Ben has an MA and PhD in American studies from Sussex University in England. His book Black Talk is one of the really illuminating works on jazz.*

Man walks into a bar.

Actually a boy. It's the story of my life. First time I walked into a bar, I was thirteen, I wore white socks, and I got paid three dollars to play four hours. Sometimes it feels like I never left.

I loved it. It was magic.

So my life is a "straight line," a premise for a story, a set-up for a payoff. Something is always just about to happen.

I have practiced my craft in public for four and a half decades. My mother, after watching me perform once, said, "It's like you're trying to write a novel in the window of Macy's." But doing art in public, in real time, is a privilege because you do get feedback and the public will let you know what's happening.

Now I don't necessarily subscribe to Irving Berlin's dictum that the mob is always right, but I do agree with drummer Art Blakey, that the public does not come to get educated. The public comes to "wash away the dust of everyday life."

It's a beautiful phrase, and it points to the healing power of this music and the circumstances in which we play it. There is something about the act of community, when people come together, where they come together, that is at the heart of our mission as artists. You know, we hang together or we hang separately.

So our job in part as musicians of the moment is to provide this respite from the trials and tribulations of everyday life, to create a venue for community. At the same time, we have the opportunity to raise the level of the dialogue a bit. It's not just a party; it's a party with a pur-

pose.

Every time you leave the club or the concert hall, whatever the venue, you should be changed somewhat by the experience. The truth of the moment, of real people taking real chances in real time, should make your blood flow just a little quicker.

They say you never really learn anything unless there's an element of surprise involved. Well, they call jazz the sound of surprise. [The phrase was coined by Whitney Balliett — ed.] Because we really don't know what we're going to hear next.

The purpose of this exercise is to achieve our potential, as a society and as individuals, and to do that, we must not fear the unknown. We must not be driven by fear. Fear is the enemy. Joy, pleasure, fun is the antidote.

Many great musicians have said that when you go on the bandstand, you are supposed to leave all your worldly problems behind. You are all here for the same purpose, to throw a little kindling on the fire of inspiration. To warm yourself by the glow of this music.

To court the unknown, the unexpected. This is what causes the combustion to happen. There is always the possibility that just around the next tick of the clock, there is a solution to a problem, perhaps a problem you haven't even thought of yet.

Miles Davis once said to a sideman, "Don't be practicing on the bandstand; I don't pay you to play what you know, I pay you to play what you don't know."

Charlie Parker said, "You want me to act like a doctor, I'm going to play like a doctor." (No offense to the doctors in the house.) When you go on the stand you have to be a little silly.

Or, my favorite, the words of Johnny Griffin: "Jazz is music made by and for people who have chosen to feel good in spite of conditions."

What these great philosopher/musicians are getting at is that the unknown is the only thing we know and to go forward into the unknown with eyes and ears open, ready for whatever happens, is the charge of the artist and the reward of the art. And you can't do that if you are motivated by fear. Fear of failure or fear of success. Either one is just as bad.

It's been said that jazz is America's only native art form. Its roots in Black America, Jewish America, Italian America, Hispanic America, and many other Americas, make this almost a tautology: jazz is America. Democracy in action. Live on our stage nightly.

Jazz is the spirit of exploration. Music that constantly expands to allow new voices; it never contracts, never says, "Don't go there." It requires that you find your own voice, make your own statement, and have some fun in the process. Jazz without joy is just a bunch of numbers.

Jazz is America. You all know our inalienable rights: life,

liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Where did that last one come from? Not an earned reward, not a political payoff; an inalienable right: the pursuit of happiness. Can not be taken away. Inalienable.

You can bet that that one won't be inserted into the new Iraqi constitution. How did it get into ours?

It's almost as if the founding fathers understood that there is some aspect of happiness that can provide an antidote to tyranny, and if we keep our eyes on that particular prize, we will be more likely to survive as a community. Why? Perhaps because pleasure is a social lubricant, among other things. A lot can happen when people enjoy themselves together. It is the opposite of fear.

And today, it's clear, we are being torn apart. By fear. We are being alienated from one another — and from one of our inalienable rights. By fear. We are being manipulated, in my opinion, virtually 24 hours a day, by fear. Just turn on the television and there it is. It's there in every commercial. Fear of not having what we need; fear of not needing what we have.

Fear of failure. Fear of the unknown. Fear of the known.

Could it be because fear keeps us off balance, and when we're not centered, we're more likely, say, to go out and buy something to give us the illusion of having control over our out-of-control worlds?

Really. Does the programming get any better if we have five TVs instead of two?

What are the rules and who are these guys who sell religion as show business and show business as religion? And don't get me started on politics.

OK, I'm started. Is it possible that some politicians in this country want to keep us fearful in order to keep us in order? Is it possible? Have you noticed how at key moments, the warning light suddenly goes to amber?

Fear has been with us since the beginning, of course. As Mel Brooks once said, in the beginning it was the main means of transportation. You see a lion, you go 100 miles an hour.

Today, fear still drives our wheels. The real danger of being driven by fear is not that we will be frightened, however, but that we will feel nothing. We will shut down to the obvious truths of our situation.

My friend meteorologist Reid Bryson once looked me dead in the eye and said, "Ben, don't believe what they're telling you about the climate. If you want to know about the weather, look out the window." This from a leading scientist on the subject.

Look out the window. Use your own eyes and ears.

Yes, there are problems in the world. Yes there are

dangers, but while we are on this fragile bubble we don't need to add to our trouble.

Have you noticed? We walk around trying to keep our heads down and chins up at the same time. That's the position we're in these days; don't shoot — and things will get better.

It reminds me of the joke about the man who goes to Puci's tailor shop.

The best tailor shop in town. He says, "I hear you're the best. I want a suit." Puci the tailor says no problem, picks out some elegant material, measures the man and tells him to come back in a week. A week later the man comes back, puts on the suit. It's beautiful all right, butter soft and all. But the left sleeve is too long. The tailor says, "No, the problem is the way you stand." Sure enough, the man changes his posture and the sleeve is perfect. Except now the jacket gaps at the neck. Puci tells him, "Actually it's not the suit. You're leaning a bit to the left. Move your shoulder," which he does, and now the jacket fits perfectly. Only the right cuff is hiking up. Puci tells him the problem isn't the suit, it's his posture.

Eventually, the man walks out the door totally contorted, but the suit fits perfectly. He passes two guys going in. One points to him and says, "See, I told you Puci is good. Look at the way he was able to fit that cripple."

There are a lot of lessons we can take from this little joke. One of them is:

Don't let the interested party pick the terms of the transaction. It is our responsibility, as artists and scientists, to use our own eyes and ears. Tell the truth and let the people decide.

The antidote to fear is happiness. It's our inalienable right. Today it's also a radical alternative. It's a way to take your life in your own hands. To be your own psychological tailor.

Jazz is music made by and for people who have chosen to feel good in spite of conditions.

If you're not having fun, you're doing it wrong. This is one of the things that we learn from the arts and sciences.

And now Professor Richard Davis [the great bassist, now a teacher — ed.] will do our little part by playing a Mose Allison song called *I Don't Worry about a Thing 'Cause I Know Nothing's Going to Be All Right*.

— **Ben Sidran**, Madison, Wisconsin

*Coincidentally or no, the following note from Herb Harris arrived on the same day as Ben Sidran's piece. Herb is a New York drummer and percussionist now "retired" from New York and living in Florida.*

I just received your latest and am delighted to have it. Your thoughts, knowledge, insights, and beliefs are most important to me, especially trying to cope and live in a believable way

when so very many values that surrounded us and had us be part of them have been brushed aside. Culture, emotional truth, caring, taste in art (including music) and many other attributes that were much more widely prevalent are snowed under and eradicated in a large part of our public, with corporate mentality and money quest invading souls, producing a Bush and his idiots, with the tremendous harm they've inflicted upon the world. During this time I've had my reading time vastly curtailed, so the *Jazzletter* and other important reading awaits attention. Having "gone back" to the wonderful world of jazz, I managed to find work for a trio I formed in Florida, allowing me to record a couple of CDs.

I attended a week-long percussion festival in Vermont a few weeks ago. Over a hundred percussionists, around thirty instructors, and the experience was riveting. Nothing but involvement, love, spirit, belief in their chosen path, on and on. The human interconnection and civilized behavior during the week were in complete contradiction to the current lifestyle. I feel privileged to communicate with you.

— **Herb Harris**, Holmes Beach, Florida

My husband, Walter W. Parker, died last September 24. He was 86 years old.

When your most recent *Jazzletter* arrived, I recalled the pleasure on his face when he came home from the St. Louis Weather Service (he was a meteorologist) to find such an item in the mail.

During his college years (late 1930s), Walter played bass and sometimes trumpet in a dance band, the Blue Rhythm Boys, which earned something of a reputation throughout Southeast Missouri. Of course, those were the days before air conditioning, and he often spoke of the salt lines perspiration left on his tuxedo trousers.

After his retirement, he hosted *Jazzstream* on KWMU, a public radio station located on the campus of University of Missouri, St. Louis. It eventually grew to be a three-hour show on Sunday evenings. For him, for twelve years, it was a labor of love.

Thank you for the years of pleasure your writing gave my husband.

— **Mary Parker**, Chesterfield, Missouri

I hope they have jazz in heaven.

— **Ruth Coleman**, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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