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Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

June 2004 *Vol. 23 No. 6*

The Anchorite

Part One

Whenever a major public figure dies, someone is bound to write, "An era ended today when . . . ." Sometimes it's true, sometimes it isn't.

When Artie Shaw died on December 30, 2004, it was. Of the major big band leaders of the so-called swing era, the "jazz" bands with good arrangements and soloists, he was the last one left. Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Glen Gray, Count Basie, Harry James, Benny Goodman, Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, Jimmie Lunceford, Charlie Barnet, Alvino Rey, Les Brown, Lionel Hampton, Gene Krupa were gone, along with the leaders of the "sweet" bands, such as Kay Kyser, Sammy Kaye, Shep Fields, Freddie Martin, Tommy Tucker, Guy Lombardo, and, somewhere between the two, Glenn Miller. Try a survey: ask around among your friends, those who are not musicians, and see how many of them recognize these names. They "were all spirits and are melted into air, into thin air."

When you are young, in any generation, major public names surround you like great trees. When you grow older, and start losing friends, one day you realize that you don't have many left. And then there is another dark revelation: even those famous figures are going, and one day it comes to you: They're clear-cutting the landscape of your life.

Artie Shaw was as famous for quitting the music business and he was for the number of his wives. He did it repeatedly, breaking up and dispersing fine and successful bands. He loathed the music business, in which of course he was hardly alone. A woman wrote that he had had his clarinet made into a lamp. This was an indication of his contempt for her, or for the press in general, because he had too much respect for good instruments (and good musicians) to commit such a desecration. He showed me a couple of his clarinets at his home in Newbury Park, California, where he had lived since 1978. One day he told me on the phone that he'd sent them out for cleaning and maintenance. I hoped that he was thinking of playing again. No. Then why send them out? "Good instruments shouldn't be neglected," he said. In fact, he donated his clarinets, including the Selmer on which he recorded *Begin the Beguine* to the Smithsonian Institute. That tells us more of what he considered to be his place in history more than anything he ever said.

"I never really considered myself part of the entertainment business," he told me. "I recognized that people had put me in that business. That's where I worked. That is, the ambience I played in had to do with entertainment. So I had to make the concession of having a singer with my band. But that's the only concession I ever made — aside from occasionally playing so-called popular tunes. Mostly I was doing this to meet some inner standard of what I thought a band or I should sound like."

His faith in his own judgment was at least part of the cause of his reputation for arrogance. Arrogance is requisite to the creation of any kind of art. The fact of assuming that what you have to say will be of interest to enough people that you will be able to make a living from it is implicitly arrogant. "As a matter of fact," Artie said, "the arrogance goes so far that you don't care whether it's of interest."

"The only thing," I said, "that humbles the real artist is the art itself."

"That," Artie said, "and his own fallibility."

His favorite singer was Helen Forrest. When she came to him to audition, he asked her, "Are you any good?"

She hesitated. He said, "Well if you don't think you're good, why should I?" She said she was, he listened to her, and he hired her.

Despite his "concession" of having a singer with the band (at one time Billie Holiday), all his hits were instrumentals — *Begin the Beguine, Stardust, Frenesi*. By 1965 his top five records had sold 65,000,000. For years, RCA paid him *not* to re-record any of those hits. *Beguine*, recorded in 1938, was intended as the B side of *Indian Love Call*.

But his success was not just a commercial success. He was an artist, and after his death, the superlatives flowed. Buddy de Franco said that Shaw's solo on *Stardust* was the greatest clarinet solo ever recorded. Another clarinetist, Dick Johnson, who fronted an Artie Shaw ghost band in the late years, said at Shaw's funeral service, "I believe he was the greatest jazz clarinetist of all time and one of the very few geniuses I've rubbed elbows with." I've heard one saxophonist and clarinetist after another say that it was Shaw who

drew them into becoming a musician.

The late Jerome Richardson, himself a fine saxophonist, clarinetist, and flutist, said, "I was a Benny Goodman fan until I heard Artie Shaw, and that was it. He went to places on the clarinet that no one had ever been before. He would get up to B's and C's and make not notes but music, melodies. He must have worked out his own fingerings for the high notes, because they weren't in the books. To draw a rough analogy, Artie Shaw was at that time to clarinetists what Art Tatum was to pianists. It was another view of clarinet playing. A lot of people loved Benny Goodman because it was within the scope of what most clarinet players could play and therefore could copy. But Artie Shaw took the instrument further."

The late Barney Bigard said, "To me the greatest player that ever lived was Artie Shaw. Benny Goodman played pop songs; he didn't produce new things like Shaw did." Saxophonist Billy Mitchell said, "I'll bet I can still play his clarinet solo on *Stardust*. I ought to. I spent weeks learning it when I was a kid." For most jazz musicians, and countless layman, that solo is part of the collective memory.

Writer Jon McAuliffe said, "Shaw's shading, tone, and phrasing were singular, and unlike any other, before or since. Listening to Shaw, one can imagine that one is hearing not an instrument so much as an alien human voice. No clarinet player has ever created such an aura of command on the instrument."

Shaw's elegant smooth glissandi always amazed me. One day I asked him how he'd done them.

"I don't know," he replied.

"You must know," I said. "You did them. Is it a matter of squeezing the reed or what?"

"I truly don't know. You think it, and if you know what you're doing, the instrument does it."

Early in 1983, Yoel Levi, conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, decided to perform Shaw's *Concerto for Clarinet* with Franklin Cohen, the orchestra's principal clarinetist, performing Shaw's part. Shaw's improvised solo had been transcribed from the record. "When I got the music," Cohen said during rehearsals, "I thought it looked easy. After I heard the tape, I told Yoel he was crazy."

"Shaw was unbelievable," Yoel Levi added. "He was an amazing talent. Shaw's the greatest clarinet player I ever heard. It's hard to play the way he plays. It's not an overblown orchestral style. He makes so many incredible shadings."

The obituaries noted that he had been married eight times, three of them to movie stars. He was married to Lana Turner, Betty Kern (daughter of Jerome Kern), Ava Gardner, novelist Kathleen Winsor, Doris Dowling, and Evelyn Keyes. He had contempt for movie women, referring to them as "those brass-titted Hollywood broads," but he never tired of telling which among them he had picked off, aside from those he had married. Winsor, who was born in 1919 and died in 2003, wrote *Forever Amber*, a novel set in England in the court of Charles II. Like the Grace Metalious book *Peyton Place*, it caused an uproar for being "dirty" and was banned in Boston back when that distinction made success a certainty: it was one of the best-sellers of its time.

Asked by the newspaper *LA Weekly* why he married so many times, he said, "Because I was famous. That attracts women like flies, and you couldn't just shack up in those days. I was nineteen the first time I married, to a girl named Jane Carns. Her mother came and got her, and the marriage was never consummated. Then, when I was twenty-three, I met a nurse named Margaret Allen at a party, and she moved in with me two days later. We were together three years, and the last year was hopeless. She was Catholic and we didn't want children, but she had a problem with the idea of contraception. She had tremendous guilt. You know that Catholic shit people go through? She knew better, but she couldn't deal with the emotion."

Because he was famous? Not at nineteen and twenty-three respectively.

Artie Shaw was what the British call a cad and Americans call a heel, one of only four men I've ever known to recount their sexual conquests. He was solipsistic and cruel, a man who could never maintain a friendship for very long. His was a dispassionate destructiveness, and he could destroy a friend with no more feeling than a shark taking off a leg. He told me once that when he was young, his mother said she would leap out the apartment window if he left home, and he told her to go ahead and do it. "And," he said, "when I got down on the street, her body wasn't lying there."

Artie must have been proud of that story, for he told it to lyricist Sammy Cahn as far back as the late 1930s. Sammy recounted it in his autobiography *I Should Care* in these words:

"Artie said, 'You must never worry about your mother.' 'What do you mean?' He said that many times he'd tried to leave his own mother, on which occasions she'd scream at him, 'By the time you get downstairs my body will be in the street!' Finally he upped and left her anyway. I said, 'What happened?' He said: 'When I got downstairs she wasn't there.'"

The story is vivid, but it has a problem: it's not true. *The Trouble with Cinderella*, his "autobiography" (I use the word

tentatively, because it's not that), relates that when at seventeen he left for Cleveland to join a band, he sent for her, she came out to "take care of him", and they lived together there for three years. When Artie encountered his father in California, the latter pleaded with him to intercede with the mother to take him back. Artie did. She refused. When Artie moved to New York and had to wait out his union card for six months, she worked to support him in an apartment in the Bronx. And, after the war, and his discharge from the Navy, he writes, "My mother still had to be supported."

So what's the point of the story he told Sammy and me?

Despite his affectations of reclusiveness, he never tired of talking about himself, as countless long interviews reveal. I do not recall an anecdote he ever told me that was not in some way intended to convey a sense of his own superiority to everyone. He told me a story about speeding in his car on Broadway in New York and killing a pedestrian who stepped into the street. Peter Levinson, the publicist, who once worked for him, said, "He told me that story too." It's also in the autobiography. I can believe it happened.

For among his aberrant qualities was his lunatic driving. He was the most dangerous driver I ever encountered. He thought the road was all his, or should be, and no one could be allowed to be in front of him. If any car was, he would try to pass it, and once he passed a bus as we were approaching a curve in the road! We made it, I'm happy to say, but I was left shaken. In her first autobiography, actress Evelyn Keyes said that he once tried to pass on a highway when he was driving a big recreation vehicle. Once he and I were on our way from Ojai to Santa Barbara on a winding road through the mountains. It's a road I know well. At one point there was a one-lane bridge. Everyone slowed up to peer to see if anyone else was approaching, and local people did this with courtesy, drivers yielding the right of way for mutual safety. Immediately at the end of this bridge, the road dropped in a steep incline; it was such a horror that it has been replaced. As we approached, I said, "Artie, you'd better cool it. This is a dangerous bridge coming up." He didn't even slow down. Fortunately, no car was approaching us, but after leaving the bridge we were airborne for a couple of seconds.

After that, wherever we went, I always made sure I did the driving. Once we went to a concert in Los Angeles. On the way home, we were talking about Charlie Parker, and I mentioned how disconcerted I had been when I first heard him and Dizzy Gillespie.

There was something new in the air when Shaw formed his first band. There had always been more influence of classical music on jazz than many of its fans and critics realized. The bebop era was seen as having its harbingers in Charlie Christian and Lester Young. But there were earlier signs of the music that was to come. If Bix Beiderbecke was interested in the French Impressionist composers and in Stravinsky, so was Artie, who told me he roomed for a while with Bix when he first arrived back in the city of his birth, New York. And Artie says he was deeply influenced by Bix, trying to play like him, but on saxophone.

Artie said, "You are too young to know the impact Louis had in the 1920s," he said. "By the time you were old enough to appreciate Louis, you had been hearing those who derived from him. You cannot imagine how radical he was to all of us. Revolutionary. He defined not only how you play a trumpet solo but how you play a solo on any instrument. Had Louis Armstrong never lived, I suppose there would be a jazz, but it would be very different."

He described how, when he was nineteen, he drove from Cleveland, where he was working with the Austin Wylie band, to Chicago to hear Armstrong. Oddly, he doesn't mention this pilgrimage in *The Trouble with Cinderella.*

The chromaticism in jazz increased as musicians absorbed the harmonic and melodic material of Twentieth Century classical music. Artie said, "I was listening to the same things that Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were listening to a little later on — the dissonances, as we thought of them then, of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Bartok. Another factor was that I was not thinking in two-bar and four-bar units. The lines would flow over bar lines. That's simply being musical, of course. In the Mozart A-major quintet, I can show you a phrase that's eleven bars long followed by one that's nine, and they're completely organic. We have been so trained to think of music in even numbers. Have you ever noticed that the things of nature — the number of kernels in a corn row, the number of peas in a pod — occur in odd numbers?

"Incidentally, while we're on the subject of Dizzy and Charlie, can you answer a question for me? Why hasn't Dizzy, one of the greatest trumpet players we've ever had, been given the recognition Charlie has?"

"Because," I answered, "he isn't a junkie who died young and tragically. Haven't you ever noticed that America immortalizes those who live screwed-up lives and die young? America makes legends of such people. Lenny Bruce, Hank Williams, Bix."

"Billie Holiday, Bunny Berrigan, Lester Young," Artie added.

I said, "It's a corollary of puritanism. Dizzy has been successful, he's gregarious, he likes laughter, he was the great teacher, and for that reason full approval is withheld. If

Bill Evans hadn't lived a tortured life, he might never have been given the recognition he's received. There is a kind of condescension in the phenomenon. So long as you can look down on someone with pity, it's okay to praise him."

"I think you're right," Artie said.

We had so many such conversations in cars. He said something once that still comes to mind when I find some road sign confusing. He said, "California road signs are designed to tell you how to get some place if you already know how to get there."

I ran into Sammy Cahn at a luncheon not long after I read his scathing chapter about Artie in his autobiography. I said, "My God, Sam, you certainly took Artie Shaw apart."

Sam said, "That's only the half of it. My lawyer made me take out most of what I wrote." His book contains this passage: "I've told about some of the warm good memories of my life among the greats. To play it straight before the finale, I think I should balance things out with my private saga of Artie Shaw — which started out sweet and went sour. Artie Shaw, head man in the can't-win-them-all department . . .

"Shaw and I immediately took to each other — at least I thought he took to me and I know I took to him. Why not? I was a young kid in my twenties, struggling like hell to stay alive and get going in the business. I had yet to have a hit — it was even before *Bei Mir Bist Du Shön*. Artie Shaw had more than arrived. He was beautiful. He stood tall. He had his hair. He and his magic clarinet were Sir Galahad with a lance."

One story that he did not put into the book, Sammy said, was this one:

At the peak of his band's success, Artie hired a young musician, a saxophone player as I recall, who had just been married. His young wife was beautiful, and when the musician brought her to a rehearsal, Artie immediately cast his eye on her. Somebody said to him, "Artie, please! Leave her alone. She's his whole life, he lives for her."

So Artie went after her and destroyed a marriage.

One story Artie he told me was about Frank Sinatra. Sinatra had gone through his terrible travails at Columbia Records, with a&r chief Mitch Miller forcing him to sing things like *Mama Will Bark*. Then Columbia dropped him from the label, no matter how much money he'd made for the company in the immediate past. Sinatra's anxiety was terrible, probably the reason for his voice problems, including a bleeding throat.

Sinatra, by his own admission, was then at the lowest ebb of his life He came to Artie in his hotel room, to beg for money. "He'd have done anything to get back on top," Artie said. "He'd have sucked your cock, he'd have done *anything*." I was disturbed by this contempt for a colleague's anguish, Artie's sense of superiority even in that situation.

As it happened, I saw Sinatra perform during that dark period of his life. He played the Chez Paree in Montreal. I knew some of the musicians in the band, including the bassist Hal Gaylor, still one of my friends. The drummer was Bobby Malloy. They were apparently the only two members of the band Sinatra liked.

Sinatra was then married to Ava Gardner. She was in Africa making *Mogambo* with Clark Gable while Sinatra was playing that Chez Paree engagement. Hal told me Frank would retreat to the manager's office and try to reach her on the phone. He was told that she'd been flown back to London where she was in hospital. Sinatra called the hospital, to be told she had gone out for the evening.

"He was beside himself," Hal said.

Sinatra didn't like what the brass section was doing, and told them so. They were instantly hostile. Sinatra told them, "Okay. Out in the alley. One at a time." But he did like Hal and Bobby Malloy, and made that plain to everybody too. Years later, Sinatra came to see Tony Bennett when Hal was Tony's bassist. He said to Hal, "But where did they get the rest of those guys? Out of the yellow pages?"

He came out on stage the night I saw him looking as if he were ready for a fight. None of the loose, humorous grace of his later Las Vegas and TV performances. He seemed to be saying to the audience, in his body language, "Just one of you bastards laugh at me . . . ."

He hadn't sung more than half a chorus when I *knew* and said, "They'd better never ever try to write this guy off again." Not long after that, he signed with Capitol Records, and began the second soaring period of his career.

"He was very good to Bobby and me," Hal said. "He took us out to some other gigs around Quebec, mostly at hospitals." That's a side of Sinatra that most people don't know, and within the profession, stories of his kindness and generosity are legend. Hal admired a pair of shoes Sinatra was wearing. "What size are you? "Sinatra said. "Eleven," Hal said. "Too bad," Sinatra said, "these are nines." At the end of the engagement, Sinatra told Hal and Bobby Malloy to go to a renowned maker of tailored shirts. Sinatra had paid for a batch of shirts for each of them. "They were beautiful shirts," Hal said. "I wore them for years." That, along with Sinatra's dark side, was the sort of detail for which Frank is always remembered.

I never heard of a thing that Artie Shaw ever did *for* anybody.

Howie Richmond, the respected music publisher who was Sinatra's press agent at that dark period after Columbia Records, in later years lived right across the Tamarisk golf course from Sinatra in Rancho Mirage, California. Howie told me once, "Frank never had a friend he doesn't still have."

Artie hardly ever retained one.

And he never tired of denigrating Sinatra. *LA Weekly* in its November 12-18 1999 issue ran a long interview with him, written by Kristine McKenna. He told her:

"Sex can create tremendous chaos, but it can also be the source of great joy. My relationship with Ava Gardner was absolutely glorious that way." [Every one who ever spent a night with her said it was glorious.]

Shaw continued: "Ava came to see me one time after she'd been married to Sinatra for a while. She was having trouble with him, and she said to me, 'When we were doing it' — that was her way of saying it — 'was it good?' I said, 'If everything else had been anywhere near as good, we'd have been together forever and I'd never let you out of my sight.' She gave a sigh of relief. I asked why. She said, 'With him it's impossible.' I said I thought he was a big stud. She said, 'No, it's like being in bed with a woman.'"

I don't believe it. Gardner was famous for an uncensored vocabulary. In his memoir *No Minor Chords*, André Previn recounted meeting her at a party when he was seventeen. She would have been about twenty-three. She made a pass at him, and he, being very experienced, fumbled the opportunity. A year or so later he ran into her at another party. This time he made a pass at her. She said, "Fuck off, kid."

Once she was asked what Sinatra was like in bed. She replied, "A hundred and thirty-five pounds of hot fuck." So I can't imagine her saying "doing it."

Sinatra really seems to have bothered Artie. The woman interviewing him asked:

"Do you think Sinatra was talented?"

To those of us who write and sing songs, he was more than that: a genius. Both Placido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti say that Sinatra was the greatest singer they ever heard. Many other opera singers will tell you the same.

Artie told McKenna:

"He was very good at what he did, if you care about that. Personally I find it hard to believe that a man can walk around with his head filled with those lyrics, 'I get a kick out of you . . . .' That shit he did. He wanted it very badly, though, and he's the only guy who could've come along and put Bing Crosby away, because Bing was a hell of a singer at his best. After Louis Armstrong, he was the first great jazz singer. Sure, he did *White Christmas* — he had to. It's part of the lexicon. But he was a long way from square. He was a terrible person, but so was Frank. I don't care about Sinatra. He bores the shit out of me."

A footnote: I know all the lyrics to all the classic 1920s, '30s, and '40s songs, and the way Shaw breathes and phrases the ballads tells me that, like Lester Young, he too knew them, for all his affected condescension. That's why his playing sounds vocal: he is singing in his head.

At some point after World War II, he recorded an album of Cole Porter with his band and the Meltones, Mel Tormé's vocal group. One of the singers was Virginia O'Connor, called Ginny, who would later sing with a vocal group in the Tex Beneke-led Glenn Miller ghost band and marry its pianist and arranger, Henry Mancini. Long after that, when Mancini had become inestimably wealthy — he admitted to me that his royalties exceeded those of Jerome Kern — Ginny became the key figure in organizing the Society of Singers, whose purpose was to help older singers who had fallen on hard times, such as Betty Hutton, living in poverty, and Helen Forrest, poor and crippled with arthritis. She had recorded with Artie, but band singers did not share in the boss's royalties. In Forrest's case, Artie got them all.

Ginny threw a huge party at the lavish Mancini home to publicize the society and begin collecting money for the organization. She has done this sort of thing repeatedly, forming the Mancini Institute, devoted to the summer training of gifted young musicians. (Mancini left a very big scholarship for young composers at the University of California in Los Angeles.)

After one of Ginny's charity parties, limousines were lined up to take home the millionaire guests.

"The Mancinis live like oil sheiks," Artie said. "Musicians shouldn't live like oil sheiks." Who, then, should? Oil sheiks? Ken Lay? The underlying reality, of course, is that the Mancinis could buy and sell Artie, even though he had never had to work a day since *Begin the Beguine*.

And of course, Ava Gardner was always high on his list of people to trash.

I met Gardner once. It was at Birdland in New York. She had come in to hear the Woody Herman band, and between sets Woody introduced me to her, saying I was a songwriter. She asked what songs I had written, then asked who had recorded them. I said, "Tony Bennett." She said, "I *hate* Tony Bennett!" And since Tony had been good to me, the first major singer to record my work, and excepting Sarah Vaughan, the most supportive, I said with heavy sarcasm, "Who would you like to hear record them, Miss Gardner?"

She said, "Frank Sinatra."

At the end of the evening, I said to Woody, "So. I guess she's not over Frank Sinatra."

Woody said, "No, the one she's not over is Artie Shaw."

Many of the obituaries on Artie, including that in the *New York Times*, quoted me, because it was known that we were friends. Well, at one time, we were, or at least, like Sammy Cahn at an earlier time, I thought we were.

Artie lived fairly near me in California — Newbury Park is about a half hour drive from Ojai. At one period we were almost inseparable, talking constantly on the telephone, and he was often at our house. One Halloween we had just finished dinner when the doorbell rang. Artie answered it. There stood several kids in costume, looking up, eyes alight, one little girl dressed as a fairy, and my wife gave Artie candies and other things to give to them. Behind the children were their young parents, who asked if they could take a picture. Artie said, "Of course," and the father took it. Afterwards my wife said, "Those kids will grow up never knowing the identity of the man in the picture."

Woody Herman disliked both Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman. And it was not a matter of jealousy. If Goodman and Shaw were the pre-eminent clarinetist bandleaders of the 1930s and early forties, Woody was the third, often underestimated even by himself. The first night I knew him, he said, "I never was much of a clarinetist." That endeared him to me instantly; and he was better than he knew.

Once when Woody was playing Basin Street East, I was sitting at a table with him during intermission when Benny Goodman approached. Woody introduced us; it would be the only time I ever met Goodman. Goodman made some disparaging remark about Woody's clarinet playing. Wood said, "Well, that's the way it always was, Benny. You could always play that clarinet and I could always organize a band." And that's the truth: Goodman would no sooner assemble a great band than he would begin to demoralize it, with contemptuous treatment of his musicians. But in his case, it was often a kind of insensitive absent-mindedness, not a willful cruelty, like Artie's. Singer Helen Ward was rehearsing with Benny and a trio at Benny's studio in Connecticut. The trio was led by André Previn, who assured me that the story is true; and so did Red Mitchell, who was the bassist. Helen Ward said, "Benny, it's getting a little cold in here." Benny said, "You're right," left the room, and returned wearing a sweater. The late Mel Powell, perhaps the most important pianist who ever played in the Goodman band and certainly one of its finest arrangers, and his wife, the actress Martha Scott, had a theory about Benny. They said there must be an electric cord in his back, and sometimes he was plugged in and sometimes he wasn't. He called everyone Pops because he never could remember anyone's name, and some of the musicians speculated that he probably called his daughter and his wife Pops.

I got into trouble with Woody over Artie Shaw. We were talking about the big-band era. Artie and Benny inevitably came up, and I said that I thought Shaw was the better clarinetist. Woody answered with a frosty Milwaukee tone of which he was a master. The a's are very flat, as they are in Chicago, and when he called you "Pal," you knew you were in trouble. "Listen, Paaal, you don't play that instrument, and I do, and I'm telling you, Benny's the better clarinetist."

When it came to playing with swing at rapid tempos, I think that's true. The day after Artie's death, a Manchester *Guardian* obituary said, "Shaw's bands can seem rhythmically stodgy compared with those of Goodman," which is true. But the Shaw solos are their finest moments. It was the wonderfully lyrical and romantic quality of Shaw's playing that entranced me at an early age, and still does. One wonders how a person of his character could produce such beauty.

Shaw's clarinet work is known mostly — and in many persons, entirely — from his big-band records, in which his solos were restricted, perhaps eight bars or even four, of a chorus, excepting a few extended excursions such as those in *Stardust* or *Concerto for Clarinet*. He was able to stretch out in some of the records he made by small groups drawn from the personnel of the band. Benny Goodman did that: made recordings in a small format such as his sextet. Other bandleaders emulated this, as for example Tommy Dorsey's Clambake Seven, essentially a Dixieland group, and Woody Herman's Woodchoppers, which varied in size. Shaw had several such groups, notably the Gramercy Five, named for the prefixes to New York City telephone numbers. In the Gramercy five, and as if to show his allegiance to classical music, Shaw had John Guarnieri play harpsichord

But even these small-group recordings did not let us hear what Shaw could do in an expanded context. The early records, even the Gramercy Five discs, were made in the age of the 78 rpm records, which were for the most part limited to a three-minute format. And by the time tape came into general use, Shaw was not recording. In 1954, however, he had a septet with the incomparable Hank Jones on piano, Tal Farlow on guitar, Irv Kluger on drums, Tommy Potter on bass, and Joe Roland on vibes. "We had been working together and the group sounded so good," Artie said, "that I thought it should be recorded. So I just took it into the studio and recorded it myself." The tracks were eventually made available on a double-CD package on the MusicMasters label. They suffer from the fact that there are four chordal instruments in the ensemble, and they somewhat get in each other's way, particularly in sonority. But they offer us Shaw the astonishing jazz clarinetist at the top of his form, the

pinnacle of his powers, in circumstances that permit extended solos. It is Shaw, pure lyrical, endlessly inventive, Shaw, with elements of bebop assimilated into his playing.

More than one clarinetist, Phil Woods among them, has explained to me the problem of playing bebop on the clarinet as opposed to the saxophone. It has to do with the nature of the fingering. The saxophone, as they put it, overblows at the octave, which means that if you press the octave key the music jumps up an octave. The fingering in the higher octave is the same as that in the octave below. But the clarinet overblows at the fifth, which means that the fingering in the higher register is different. This explains why a lot of musicians play a different style on clarinet than on saxophone, although a number of them have overcome the problem by utter mastery of the instrument.

When the innovations of bebop — including the chromaticism and angular lines and shifting rhythms — came into jazz, Benny Goodman loathed them. Woody Herman never attempted to incorporate them into his playing, choosing to let the younger musicians around him explore what Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker had brought to the music. He reveled in bebop, in fact, and was always delighted to have Parker sit in with the band. Indeed, he was one of the first to commission arrangements (*The Good Earth, Down Under*) from Dizzy. Shaw fell into a different place. Such was his approach to the clarinet that even in the pre-bebop days, there is — as there is in the piano of Mel Powell and the tenor solos of Coleman Hawkins — portent of what is to come. I once told Mel Powell that I thought what he was doing in the Goodman Columbia recordings was proto-bop. Mel loved that term, and I think that's what it was. Shaw loved Parker and Gillespie, and told me once, "We were all listening to the same things," meaning in classical music. Dizzy used to refer to attending a symphony concert as "going to church."

Those 1954 tracks show us what a great and inventive jazz musician Shaw really was. They are spectacular records, and alas little known by most jazz fans. And Shaw perversely gave it all up after making them.

He broke up his first band at an engagement at the Pennsylvania Hotel in New York around Christmas of 1939.

"His income at this Depression time was about a quarter of a million dollars a year," Sammy Cahn wrote, "but he'd been writing articles attacking jitterbug dancing and had been making noises about quitting . . . .

"I went upstairs to Artie's room and I talked to him, 'Artie, it's not just quitting a band. It's quitting sixteen people and their wives, children, mothers, fathers, lovers, friends. You just can't do this. Artie Shaw is a million dollar industry.'"

"'I can do it.'

"'Please don't do this.'

"'I'm doing it.'

"'Don't you owe anything to these guys?'

"'I owe them nothing.'

"Which could be his epitaph: 'I owe them nothing.'"

And Shaw did indeed disband. He moved to Mexico and lived near Acapulco when it was still a sleepy little fishing town. During this sojourn, he heard a song called *Frenesi*. He returned to the United States and recorded it with a thirty-two-piece studio orchestra. It became his second major hit.

During one of these periods of flight-from-fame, Count Basie urged him to return, saying that the business needed him. "Why don't you come back?" Basie said.

Artie said, "Why don't *you* quit?"

Basie got the best of it. He said, "To be what? A janitor?"

But after those 1954 recordings, Shaw meant it. He left music as a profession forever, which, on the promise of those recordings, is to our eternal loss. For a time he said he was a movie producer; I know of no film he ever produced. But mostly he said he was a writer. There was a sign by the doorbell of his house in Newbury Park. It said, "This is a writer's house. Do not ring this bell." I suppose he could have had the bell disconnected, but that little note had just the right tone of aggression and contempt.

It is one thing to say you are a writer, it is another to be one. Artie gave up a brilliant career as a first-rate musician to become a third-rate writer. His first book, which received a good deal of attention, was *The Trouble with Cinderella*. It was probably easy for him to write: it was about his favorite and perhaps only subject, himself. More about it later.

Born Arthur Arshawsky on the Lower East Side of Manhattan on May 23, 1910, he grew up from the age of six in New Haven, Connecticut, with his mother. His father had at some point deserted them, and Artie told me that in childhood he felt like a double outcast: outcast as a Jew, and outcast within the Jewish community because Jewish men just didn't abandon their families.

At fourteen Arthur got his hands on a C-melody saxophone and won a five-dollar prize for playing *Charley My Boy*. He was amazed that money could be earned so easily and decided to make music a career. But he couldn't read music. Nor did he know anything about keys and transposition, and when he acquired an alto saxophone, which is tuned in E-flat, the notes came out all wrong. He quickly learned the craft, however, and a year later he was a working road musician By the time he was seventeen he was working in Cleveland with the Austin Wylie band. He lived there for

three years. He was with the band of Irving Aronson 1929-1931. By the age of nineteen he was back in the city of his birth, and only a few weeks later he was the top lead alto player in the New York radio and recording studios. He freelanced on record dates and at CBS, sharing some sessions with Jerry Colonna, the bemustached trombonist who later became a comedian on the Bob Hope Radio Show. He used to let out a crescendo howl that would turn into the first line of a song. Hope featured this gimmick on his show.

Another seat-mate on those studio dates was Benny Goodman, of whom Shaw spoke with condescension.

At that time Shaw was immersed in Thorstein Veblen. The Wisconsin-born political economist, who taught at the University of Chicago and Stanford, enjoyed a vogue in the first decades of the twentieth century, although his writings were difficult to penetrate. He spoke twenty-five languages and had a gargantuan grasp of history, art, literature, science, technology, agriculture, and industrial development. He has fallen from fashion in our epoch but his was one of the finest minds of his time, and much of what he wrote appears urgently pertinent today. His 1899 book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* made him instantly famous. He wrote a total of nine books, dividing society into a parasitic "predator" or "leisure" class, which owned business enterprises, and an "industrious" class, which produced goods, and he was highly critical of business owners for their narrow "pecuniary" values. He was unacceptable to the Marxists, who said he was "not one of us," and anathema to the capitalist class. And, while not writing of it directly, he had a visionary foresight of what would become of the planet's environment. Indeed, he coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption."

When he was on record or radio dates, Shaw read between takes. This, he said, disconcerted Goodman, who asked one day what he was reading. Shaw showed him *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Goodman walked away without comment. But from then on he addressed Artie as G.B. Finally, it wore on Artie's nerves and he said, "Okay, I give up. What does it stand for?" Goodman said, "George Bernard." Artie told the story with a mixture of mockery and fathomless contempt.

His career as a bandleader began by accident. Joe Helbock, owner of the Onyx Club, a former speakeasy frequented by musicians, was planning the first New York "swing" concert at the Imperial Theater. He asked Artie to put together a small group to play in front of the curtain while the setup was being changed. Artie did, but as usual he did it in his own way. He assembled a group comprising a string quartet (reflecting his yearning for classical respectability)and a small rhythm section without piano (which he thought would be too strong for the texture of such a group) and himself on clarinet. He wrote a piece that he didn't bother to name, calling it what it was, *Interlude in B-flat*. He and his colleagues went onstage the evening of April 7, 1936, and played it to an astonished murmur from the audience, which included musicians. When the piece ended, the audience roared its approval. But Shaw hadn't written any more music for the group, and all he could do for an encore was to play the piece again.

Somebody made an acetate recording of this performance. Many years later a fan sent Artie a tape of an Australian radio broadcast containing, to Artie's bafflement, the *Interlude in B-flat*. He telephoned the broadcaster in Australia. The man said he had obtained the recording from someone in Seattle, who turned out to be a collector. Artie tried calling him; the man didn't return his calls. We can imagine how apprehensive the man was — he could presume the recording had been made illegally. Finally, Artie left a message: "Look, I'm not trying to make trouble for you, I just want that recording. And if you don't answer my call, I'm sending the police." The man returned the call and told Artie he had found the recording in a stack of old acetates he'd bought. He was a long-time Shaw fan, recognized the style, knew this piece was not among the known Shaw recordings and, having read *The Trouble with Cinderella*, realized what he had. And of course he was only too happy to send Artie a copy of the record. It was very worn, but Artie ran it through digital recording equipment with an engineer and cleaned up the sound considerably.

Shaw claimed that he did not set out to be a public figure, did not even want to form a band. He wanted to become a writer, and studio work was financing his studies. But nature had given him a superb ear, infallible taste, and a steely will about developing musical technique. After the *Interlude in B-flat* performance, a booking agency approached him about forming a band. He said he was interested only in finishing his education at Columbia University. He was asked how much money that would take. He took a deep breath and blurted the largest figure he could think of, $25,000.

He was told he could earn $25,000 in a few months if he organized his own band. And so he formed a band, but hardly the one the agency had in mind. Following the pattern he'd set for the *Interlude*, the group contained a small jazz front line, a rhythm section, and a string quartet. It failed. So he broke it up and organized a big band with conventional saxes-and-brass instrumentation. "If the public wanted loud bands," as he put it, "I was going to give them the loudest goddamn band they'd ever heard."

To be continued

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