Gene Lees Ad Libitum

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PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

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The Anchorite

Part Two

He recorded *Begin the Beguine* on July 24, 1938. It immediately became the number one "platter" in the United States, held that position for six weeks, and went right on selling. Shaw's income went to $30,000 per week. One reason he could earn such money was the sheer number of pavilions and ballrooms in America. He told me that at the peak of the big band era, a band could play a month of one-nighters in Pennsylvania alone.

Begin the Beguine was an unconventional long-form tune and its success amazed Shaw. In a 2002 interview with the *Ventura Star* (Shaw lived, as I do, in Ventura County) Shaw said that Porter "shook hands with me and said he was happy to meet his collaborator." Shaw's response to this is revealing. For a man who affected to be uninterested in money, it is crassly materialistic, and certainly ungracious: "So I said, 'Does that go for the royalties, Mr. Porter?'" One wonders what opinion of him Porter carried thereafter. And, incidentally, Porter got only royalties from the song's publisher; Artie got *all* the royalties from record sales.

In addition to the RCA reissues of Shaw's 78 rpm recordings, there were five albums on the Hindsight label containing as many as nineteen tracks each, drawn from radio broadcasts. These are casual performances and some of the tracks stretch out to nearly six minutes.

I listened to test pressings of those recordings with Artie in the big, vaulted, second-floor room of his home, whose walls were covered in books. He said, "When you went into the recording studio in those days, there was no tape and you knew it was going to have to be perfect. You wouldn't take chances doing things that might go wrong. But on radio broadcasts, you could do anything. It didn't matter. You never thought of anybody recording it and forty years later releasing it! The recordings were done under better conditions. You had better balance. But you didn't get anything like the spontaneity you have here."

The Hindsight records reveal what the band played like in the late 1930s but cannot reveal what the band actually sounded like. Recording technique was too primitive. The bass lines are unclear and the guitar chords all but inaudible. What you get, really, is the upper part of the harmony, and you cannot follow the lines in the voicings. When a local Ventura bandleader borrowed some of the charts to perform them in a concert, I attended the rehearsals with Artie.

He said, "Well, what do you think?"

I said. "Now I could hear the bottom of the orchestra." I confessed that I was not all that excited about 1930s bands that contained only four saxes, two altos and two tenors. My taste for big bands grew warmer when baritone saxophone was added, as in the Goodman band with Mel Powell that recorded for Columbia. Furthermore, you couldn't hear the bass player *at all* on a lot of early big-band recordings, and without the bottom of the harmony, one doesn't fully feel or understand what is going on. (There is a 1992 Bluebird CD called *Artie Shaw: Personal Best*, in which Orrin Keepnews remastered the music so that you *can* hear the bass.)

In the first flush of success, Artie made about $55,000 in one week, equivalent to $550,000 today. The superlatives were flying, including the statement that he was the best clarinetist in the world. As he was leaving a theater in Chicago, aware that he was becoming rich at an early age, a thought crossed his mind. "So what if I am the best clarinetist in the world? Even if that's true, who's the second best? Some guy in some symphony orchestra? And is there all that much difference between us? And how much did he earn this week? A hundred and fifty bucks? There's something cockeyed here, something unfair."

John Lewis used to make the point — adamantly — that jazz evolved in symbiosis with the American popular song, although it did introduce a jaunty American rhythmic quality which evolved rapidly in the next ten years with George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, and, later, Cole Porter, Arthur Schwartz, and more, the best songs written for Broadway musicals. But even non-Broadway American song grew in beauty, as witness Hoagy Carmichael's *Stardust*. Jazz, John Lewis said, drew on this superior material for its repertoire, and the public in turn was able to follow the improvisations against the background of songs it knew. Jazz grew up on the American song; jazz in turn influenced it, as especially witness George Gershwin and Harold Arlen.

Popular legend has it that the craze for dancing began

with publication of Irving Berlin's *Alexander's Ragtime Band* in 1911. It's not true. The music publisher Edward B. Marks said, "The public of the nineties had asked for tunes to sing. The public of the turn of the [twentieth] century had been content to whistle. But the public from 1910 demanded tunes to dance to."

Puritan constraint kept dancing polite and stuffy in the nineteenth century. But with ragtime, that changed. Black dancers supplanted the cakewalk, two-step, waltzes, schottisches, and quadrilles with the Turkey Trot, Bunny Hug, Snake, Crab Step, and Possum Trot. Soon dancing was in vogue wherever it could be done, and social reformers, "religious leaders" and others condemned these dances as "sensuous", which they were, the beginning of the end of the Edwardian or Victorian era. There were even attempts to pass legislation outlawing ragtime.

Then along came a wholesome young couple, Vernon and Irene Castle, to tone down and tame some of these dances, and as the complainers grumbled their way into silence, the Castles became the major stars of their time, imitated in everything from dance steps named for them to their clothes. Irene shed her corsets for looser clothes, and women everywhere followed her example. When because she was in hospital for appendicitis, she cut her hair short. Millions of women followed her example. Dancing became a national and even international craze. The Castles, as big in France and England as they were here, became wealthy.

With the advent in 1914 of World War I, Vernon, who was English, went home to join the Royal Flying Corps. He flew more than 150 missions over the Western Front. Ironically, when he returned to the United States to train American pilots, he was killed when a student made a landing mistake. Irene's life and career were destroyed. But the Castles' influence went on.

Before the war, their chief collaborator had been James Reese Europe, the black bandleader who in 1910 founded the Clef Club orchestra made up entirely of black musicians. They provided much of the dance music for New York society. He was such a perfect dance conductor that Irene said Jim Europe's "was the only music that completely made me forget the effort of the dance." He became their music director in 1913, and soon was composing as well as conducting for them. She found him almost uncanny in choosing the right tempos for their dances. But with the coming of war, Jim Europe was asked by the military to form what would be the finest band in the U.S. Army. When the U.S. entered the war, he went to France with "The Harlem Hellfighters Band," as it was called, with a complement of forty-four men. They ended up attached to the French army.

With the war over, he returned to New York to resume his soaring civilian career, making a few records. On May 7, 1919, he was stabbed by his drummer, Herbert Wright, and died. He was twenty-eight.

The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz states that "it cannot be emphasized too much that jazz music was seen initially by the mass American audience as dance music." It was the arranger Ferde Grofé who (for the Art Hickman band in San Francisco) first wrote for "sections" of saxophones, trumpets, trombones, and rhythm. This permitted changes of coloration between one chorus of a song and the next. Paul Whiteman hired him and encouraged him to elaborate on what he had done for Hickman. This kind of scored dance music became known as "symphonic jazz", a term that later listeners found confusing, since it had little if anything to do with the symphony orchestra. Other bandleaders like Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, and Jean Goldkette followed his example. Whiteman has been patronized by "jazz writers" and historians for not playing jazz, which was never his intent in the first place, or for using the sobriquet "King of Jazz", coined by some press agent, and even on playing on the obvious pun of his surname. But his bands at one period had a strong jazz feeling, and had something in common with that of Jimmie Lunceford, namely very cohesive section work, tight and disciplined, which may be due to the fact that they had the same teacher in Denver, Colorado, Wilberforce Whiteman, Paul's father.

The "big bands" continued to evolve during the 1920s, settling eventually on an instrumentation of four saxophones (two altos, two tenors), trumpets, trombone, and rhythm, which instrumentation expanded in the early 1940s. A number of the early bands were part of the booking stable of Jean Goldkette, including his own band, McKinney's Cotton Pickers with Don Redman as its arranger and music director, and a band called the Orange Blossoms, which evolved into the Glen Gray Orchestra with arrangements by Gene Gifford.

The beginning of the swing era is usually dated to the sudden success of Benny Goodman in 1936, but musicians who lived through that era often give the credit to the Glen Gray band. Artie called it "the first swing band." It was the first white band to pursue a jazz policy and put its jazz instrumentals on record. Gil Evans was a fan of that band.

The fans, perhaps led by the "jazz writers" of *Down Beat,* liked to divide the bands into the swing and the sweet bands, showing a hipper-than-thou disdain for the latter. And there were both the "name bands" and regional bands, including the Jeter-Pillars band of St. Louis which had a high reputation in the profession though it was never nationally known. Many of the regional bands fell into the "sweet band"

category, among them Mal Hallett, Russ Morgan, Dick Jergens, Ted Fio Rito, Gus Arnheim, Will Osborne. A few of them rose to national prominence, including Freddie Martin, Blue Barron, Shep Fields, Sammy Kaye, and Kay Kyser. Guy Lombardo presented a special case. I was surprised to learn that Louis Armstrong admired that band, and so did Gerry Mulligan. Gerry gave me an insight: he said that the Guy Lombardo band was a musical museum piece, a 1920s tuba-bass dance band that had survived unchanged. Asked to do a radio interview with Lombardo I went to hear the band with an open mind, met Guy, and was impressed by both. What the band did, it did well.

The division between swing and sweet bands was never neat. All the bands, including those of Ellington and Count Basie, played ballads for dancers, no matter that the more rambunctious sidemen would have been delighted to play hot solos all night. And some of the sweet bands could play creditable jazz, including that of Kay Kyser. I liked that band — George Duning was one of its arrangers.

There were hundreds of places for dancers to hear the bands. They included hotel ballrooms, county and state fairs, amusement parks, and even roller- and ice-skating arenas. To those who listened to the late-night "remote" broadcasts from these places, their names became almost as famous as those of the bandleaders — Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook, for example. In the mid- to late-1960s, bands were presented in movie theater between showings of the feature film. The bands were heard constantly on network radio.

With the rise of bands playing "hot" numbers, the vigorous dances of the pre-Jim Europe period came back to American popular music. The dances — and dancers — of Harlem were deplored by some of the white society as lascivious, but they were more than that. They were balletic and acrobatic to the point of being dangerous, and at the highest level, incredibly skilled. A few evenings after seeing a documentary on the dancers of Harlem, I was with Gene Kelly. I was naive enough to say, "You know, Gene, some of those people could really dance!" And Gene chuckled and said, "Nooooo shit."

These dancers were the start of the jitterbugs, and even some of the white kids got very good at this kind of dancing. In the ballrooms and arenas where the bands appeared, those who just wanted to listen crowded close to the bandstand, taking in the solos, while those who wanted only to dance remained well back of them; and a few went back and forth.

The dancers, in their millions, supported a large industry.

What is not understood by younger people, and I'm afraid at this point I must include many of those under sixty, is how big these bandleaders were, and, like rock stars of a later generation, they were brought into the movies. Paul Whiteman's was one of the first to be seen in a film. Much later, Harry James appeared in *Swing Time in the Rockies* (1942), Tommy Dorsey in *Ship Ahoy* (also 1942), which featured Frank Sinatra and Jo Stafford and a spectacular drum solo by Buddy Rich, and Woody Herman in a number of forgettable films and small features. Glenn Miller made two features. *Sun Valley Serenade* was released in 1941. Somewhat better was *Orchestra Wives* in 1942, which had a backstage story to it. In both films, the Miller band was better heard than on records, because of the superior sound in films

Shaw and his band were in a forgotten film called *Dancing Coed*, then in the 1941*Second Chorus*, one of the sillier of its ilk. In most of these films, the bandleaders played themselves as guests in the picture. And thus too Artie. During the shooting of *Second Chorus* an exchange occurred between Artie and either the director or assistant director. I must interject for those under fifty or sixty that in those days to explain that to do a hot dance, one of those jitterbug performances, was called "cutting a rug." Artie had some lines to read in the picture. He was to say to the audience, "Okay, kids, now we're going to cut a rug."

Artie refused to do it, telling the director:

"Look, I'm playing a character named Artie Shaw, right? Well, I consider myself something of an authority on this guy, and I'm telling you, he wouldn't say it!"

The line was omitted.

The film starred Fred Astaire as a dancing musician. How many musicians, other than Dizzy Gillespie, have you ever encountered who could really dance? One imagines a studio meeting with assorted executives, one of whom, striding the room, says, "I've got this great idea! We'll put Fred Astaire together with Artie Shaw, who's one of the hottest things in the business. We'll have Fred play a dancing trumpet player! It's great, just great."

No it wasn't. Artie, by the way, said it was hard to play for Fred Astaire. He said that Astaire (who actually played pretty good piano and creditable drums) had lousy time. Astaire's sidekick among the musicians was Burgess Meredith. The love interest was Paulette Goddard. In real life, she married Burgess Meredith. But Artie picked her off. Or so he said. She was another of his unkept secrets, along with Betty Grable and, he intimated, every other beauty in the movie industry, aside from the ones he married.

Shaw got involved with Grable when, in 1939, she was appearing on Broadway in Cole Porter's musical *Dubarry Was a Lady*. Artie went to Hollywood to make his movie, constantly writing to her. Sammy Cahn recounted:

"Every night I'd go to the 46th Street Theater to talk with

Betty and listen to her read these letters from Artie, the most *marvelous* letters in the world. He'd met that one girl in the world, darling Betty, for whom he'd give up everything else. And so on . . . .

"One night I was in Betty's dressing room and she was reading another of those beautiful letters from Artie, so beautiful you couldn't stand it. When I walked out onto the street the newsboys were hawking the headline: *Read all about it! Artie Shaw marries Lana Turner!* Lana was in that same picture with Artie, *Dancing Coed*. She was a year out of high school. He married her on their first date.

"After that I couldn't go back to the 46th Street Theater to see Betty Grable."

No one suffered his disdain as much as Lana Turner. Everything I've ever heard about her from friends who knew her evokes an impression of a girl who was almost pathetically sweet, urgently anxious to please. If you happen to watch one of her movies some time, notice the voice. There is quality of heartbreak in it, no matter what the role. I can only imagine what she felt when she read his derogations of her in newspapers. His wives were all alive to read his descriptions of them, which ran to one theme: their intellectual inferiority to him.

Publisher Lyle Stuart once tried to persuade Shaw to write a book about Lana Turner. Shaw said, "Oh, I couldn't talk about Lana." Next Day Stuart showed up at his New York apartment with a tape recorder. Stuart said, "He talked about Lana for three hours. When I left, I said, 'See?' He said, 'Okay. But I could never talk about Ava.' The next day I came back and he talked about Ava for three hours."

Sammy Cahn, in his chapter on Artie, wrote: "I'm pretty much convinced that eventually what you are is what you come to look like. A miser gets to look like a miser, a cunning man like a cunning man, a saint like a saint. Artie Shaw was once one of the handsomest men who ever lived. Now he looks like what he is." At that point, Shaw was bearded and mustached.

Artie read that passage, because he mentioned it to me. "And what the hell does Sammy think *he* looks like?" Like Igor Stravinsky, actually. I told Sammy that at lunch one day and he said, laughing, "I *know*!"

Everyone got the treatment. Asked late in his life: "What are your thoughts on Benny Goodman?" Artie said:

"Benny was a superb technician, but he had a limited vocabulary. He never understood that there were more than a major, a minor and a diminished. He just couldn't get with altered chords. We worked together for years in radio, and Benny was pretty dumb. His brother Freddy managed one of my bands, and I once asked him what Benny was like as a kid. He said, 'Stupid.' I said, 'How do you account for his success?' He said, 'The clarinet was the only thing he knew.' And it's true. He was sort of an idiot savant — not quite an idiot, but on his way. He didn't quite make it to idiocy."

I hate to say it, but that seems to be just about everyone's assessment of Goodman.

Lyle Stuart was not the only victim of Shaw's prolixity. In a *JazzTimes* column for the April 2005 issue, the writer and music historian Nat Hentoff, who said it was Shaw's recording of *Nightmare* that made him a jazz lover, continued:

"Years later, when I was New York editor of *Down Beat*, Artie Shaw would call me from time to time to discuss not only my limitless deficiencies as a jazz critic but also all manner of things, from politics and literature to other things that came within his wide-ranging interests. As soon as he was on the line, I knew that for the next hour or so my role was to listen. It was hard to get a word or two in."

Artie would orate for hours to anyone on any subject that crossed his mind, whether he knew anything about it or not. He did not know as much about classical music as he pretended or perhaps believed he did. Once when we had just emerged from a Santa Barbara department store, I turned on the ignition and the car's radio, which I keep tuned to the classical station, came on. We heard some music that neither of us recognized. I said, "Wait a minute, Artie, I think I know what it is. I think it's Stravinsky. Most of us are familiar only with the *Firebird Suite*, but that's distilled from the full ballet, which you rarely hear." I could hear Stravinsky's harmonic fingerprints all over the piece, and his orchestration, and even concealed allusions to the *Firebird's* principal themes. "I think this is the full ballet score," said.

He scoffed. "Do you know how well I know Stravinsky? And I certainly know the *Firebird*." He was adamantine in his certainty that I was wrong.

Later on in the music the *Berceuse* theme emerged, and we were hearing indeed the full ballet score. It wasn't so much that he didn't initially recognize the music; I didn't either. It was his obstinacy in error that stays in my memory. And I saw other instances of his faking knowledge.

A day after Shaw died, one of the newspapers carried a headline on its coverage of the obituary: **Swing-era great grew tired of music business.** I think he enjoyed the attention he got from disdaining fame even more than he did the fame itself — and he did enjoy it, for all his denials. For his whole life, Artie Shaw guarded and treasured the prominence he thought he deserved even while affecting to deplore

it. It was in November, 1939, while *Begin the Beguine* was still a best-seller, that he made the first of his serial exits from the music business. A few cynics said the real reason for the move was that Glenn Miller had surpassed Artie's record sales.

Though he referred to Miller as a friend, he said of him, "He had what you call a Republican band, kind of strait-laced, middle-of-the-road. Miller was that kind of guy, he was a businessman. He was sort of a Lawrence Welk of jazz and that's one of the reasons he was so big, people could identify with what he did. But the biggest problem [was that] his band never made a mistake. And if you never make a mistake, you're not trying, you're not playing at the edge of your ability. You're playing safely within limits . . . and it sounds after a while extremely boring."

It was at that time that he organized his first Grammercy Five, which included Johnny Guarnieri not on piano but on harpsichord — a reflection, I always thought, of his aspirations to classical respectability — and Billy Butterfield on trumpet. It was a beautiful, hip, fresh group with which he recorded his composition *Summit Ridge Drive*, named for the street on which he lived in Los Angeles.

Shaw's theme song — every band had a theme song — seems in view of the century we have just been through and the one on which we are now embarked, quite appropriate. A composition of his own, and he was a very good composer when he bothered to do it, *Nightmare* was a stark piece consisting of a four-note chromatic ostinato over a pedal point and gloomy tom-tom figure, joined by a falling major third in which the clarinet plays lead to trumpets in straight mutes. It screams a kind of shrill terror, a Dostoevskian vision of the world, a clairvoyant look into imminent horrors. "*Guernica*," Artie said of it, and it did indeed have something of the Picasso mural of the German bombing of that Spanish town.

Nightmare, writer and cornetist Richard Sudhalter wrote in a liner note, "is a keening, almost cantorial melody in A minor, as different musically from the theme songs of his band-leading colleagues as Shaw was different from them personally and temperamentally."

Certainly it was no promise of romance, no *Moonlight Serenade* or *Getting Sentimental Over You*. "And no *Let's Dance*," Artie added in pointed reference to Goodman. Nat Hentoff thinks he recalls Shaw telling him that it was based on an actual cantorian theme.

If you listen to a lot of Shaw's records at one sitting, you find that a powerful general sadness suffuses them.

Artie told me, "My career as a serious dedicated player of a musical instrument really came to an end in 1941, when the war started. I was playing a theater in Providence, Rhode Island. The manager of the theater asked me to make an announcement. I went out and asked all servicemen in the crowd to return immediately to their bases. It seemed as if two thirds of the audience got up and walked out. We hadn't realized how many people had been going into service. With the whole world in flames, playing *Stardust* seemed pretty pointless. After the show I put out the word to the guys, two weeks notice."

He joined the Navy early in 1942 and formed a band. He was offered the rank of lieutenant commander but turned it down. "As soon as you took a commission," Artie said, "you got into another world."And he wanted to play for the enlisted men. Eventually Shaw was given the rank of chief petty officer, at first stationed at Newport, Rhode Island. He soon chafed under the easy assignment. He knew Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, and he pulled wires. An admiral said to him, "Son, you're the first man I've met who didn't want to stay here and hang onto the grass roots. Where do you want to go?"

"Where's the Navy?" Artie said.

"In the South Pacific," the admiral said.

"And that's where I want to go," Artie said.

Glenn Miller joined the Army Air Corps and became a captain, then major, and went to England, to broadcast to the troops on the BBC from somewhere outside London. Shaw spoke of that too with a certain disdain. Artie took his men, designated Band 501 by the Navy, to the Pacific. There were a few mementoes of those days in his house, including a bullet-torn Japanese battle flag inscribed to him by Admiral Halsey; a model of a P-38 fighter made from brass shell casings by Seabees, who gave it to him; and, on the wall of the landing of the stairs, a painting done by a wartime artist for *Life* magazine showing Artie playing his clarinet in front of the band for troops on Guadalcanal. The background is a wall of jungle. In the picture Artie is wearing a black Navy tie tucked into the front of his shirt. This detail bugged him. "Halsey had banned ties," he said. "No tie. That was the uniform of the day." But there is something else that is somehow off. Artists rarely portray musicians accurately, and the stance of the figure in the painting wasn't quite right.

The band was in the South Pacific from mid-1942 until late 1943. It played in forward areas, some still harboring snipers, at times being bombed almost nightly. Once, with all its members under ponchos, it played for thousands of young paratroopers, themselves under ponchos and stretched up the slope of a hill in a pounding tropical rain. When the band finally came home, the men were exhausted, depleted by

what they had seen and by disease. Several of its members were immediately given medical discharges. "Davey Tough was just a ghost," Artie said. An exploding shell or grenade had damaged one of Artie's ear drums, and he was forever after that deaf in one ear. And he had been having crippling migraine headaches. When the Navy learned of this, he too was discharged.

The Shaw navy band continued without him, however. Its direction was assumed by Sam Donahue, who led it through 1944 until the war ended in 1945. Donahue commanded enormous respect among musicians and the band became a big success throughout Britain because of its BBC broadcasts. That Shaw band was never recorded, alas, but the band under Donahue was, and you can judge it for yourself through records on the doughty little Scottish Hep label, owned and operated by Alastair Robertson. There are three CDs by that band. You can email him at alarob@hepjazz.co.uk.

After leaving the navy, Shaw formed a new and excellent civilian band. It had a "modern" rhythm section with Dodo Marmarosa on piano, reflected the influences of bebop, and had superb charts by Ray Conniff. It recorded *Lady Day, 'Swonderful,* and *Jumpin' on the Merry-Go-Round.* And then he abandoned that band too.

After that Shaw began working on classical pieces and played a concert with the National Symphony Orchestra in February 1949. The program included works by Ravel, Kabalesky, Debussy, Milhaud, Debussy, Granados, and Shostakovitch. They were recorded on the Columbia label with Walter Hendel conducting, and some of them are also available, along with some Grammercy Five tracks, on the Hep label, already mentioned, in a CD called *The Artistry of Artie Shaw.*

Shaw had one more important big band, the 1949 band that contained Herbie Steward, Frank Sokolow, Al Cohn, Zoot Sims, and Danny Bank, saxophones, Don Fagerquist in the trumpets, and Jimmy Raney, guitar, among others. Its writers included Johnny Mandel, Tadd Dameron, Gene Roland, Ray Conniff, George Russell, and Eddie Sauter. It was an advanced and adventurous band. Its only recordings were for Thesaurus Transcriptions, and it never found a large audience, but some of the material was released on CD by MusicMasters in 1990.

After that Artie put together — almost contemptuously, it would seem — a band that played the hits of the day. To his dismay, he claimed — then why did he do it, if he hadn't expected this? — it was a success. He folded that band in 1950. Senator Joseph McCarthy was running around like a rabid dog, causing heartache and heart attacks and leaving a trail of blighted lives. McCarthy told at least one journalist I know that he was going to be the first Catholic president of the United States. And he obviously didn't care whom he killed in pursuit of this ambition. This political performance contributed to Artie's disgust with the public and its manipulators. After playing some Gramercy Five gigs with Tal Farlow and Hank Jones and recording the group in 1954, he quit playing completely. He moved to Spain, there to finish his second book, *I Love You, I Hate You, Drop Dead,* short works of fiction whose acerbic title and content reflected his state of mind at the time. He admitted once to my wife that he went to Spain because he was frightened.

After he returned to the United States in 1960, he tried his hand at several things. He started, of all things, a rifle range and gun-manufacturing business. At one point he set out to become a marksman and got so good that he placed fourth in national competition. He established a film-distribution company. It was while he had this company that I first met him.

That would have been about 1966. When I encountered him again in California, in 1981, I found him changed — still a dominating talker, to be sure, but somehow more accessible. And witty. He was living alone in the house at Newbury Park with his books, a typewriter, a big friendly English sheepdog named Chester Chaucer, and a Hindsberg grand piano at which he would occasionally sit in solitary musing — "I've done some stupid things in my life," he said — playing Debussy or Scriabin. Now and then he would have friends in for dinner and, to judge by his protestations, he finally had his life in the rational control he had so assiduously sought to impose on it. But a certain loneliness, like a fine gray rain, seemed to have come over him. He never said so, and I never asked, but I could sense it.

He was teaching a course at Oxnard College not so much about music as esthetics in general. At the end of it, he asked the class if they had any questions. A young man stood up and said, "I play three instruments, piano, tenor, and bass."

"You've got a problem right there," Artie said. "What do you consider your primary instrument?"

"Bass, I guess."

"Because you can get away with more on bass, right? People can't hear pitch that well down in those registers. But what's your question?"

"I hate to practice," the young man said.

"Is that a question?"

"Well, yeah."

"Practicing goes with the territory, man. But I still don't know what the question is."

"What do I do about it?"

"Quit playing," Artie said.

I swung off California Highway 101 and wove through the winding streets to Artie's house, which, at the end of a short lane lined by oleanders, is hidden from the street.

I rang his bell, which had a small sign beside it: *This is a writer's home. Do not ring without good reason.* As he opened the door he said, "Hey, man, I got a book you should read."

"What's it called?"

"*The Aquarian Conspiracy.*"

"Just read it." Remembering it now, it seems filled with the cardinal sin of political optimism.

"Well, that takes care of that."

"What else have you been reading?" I said as we settled in chairs in the big book-lined room on the second floor of the house.

"I've been re-reading Hemingway," he said. "I was astonished to see what had shaped me in many respects. Hemingway shaped our whole generation, of course. He stood there like a block in the road. You couldn't ignore him. It interested me to find that the kinds of values he espouses in certain stories — *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber, The Snows of Kilimanjaro* — are essentially the stiff-upper-lip we-don't-speak-about-that upper-class British thing: like looking down on some poor bastard who runs from a charging lion. Not done, dear boy. Right? Man, if a charging lion comes at me, you're gonna see me under the nearest couch, and I don't care about anybody saying, 'That's just not done.'

"Which takes me right back to old Socrates, where he says in *The Apologia*, 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' When you go back to re-reading something that helped shape you, you can examine why you feel a certain way, why you think certain things that aren't logically sound. Why do we feel in our bones that to be afraid is a very bad thing? You're not necessarily a coward to bow to superior force, and a wounded charging lion is something I would definitely call superior force.

"And you're not necessarily foolish to examine what music is — music, not popular entertainment. There's a big difference between the artist and the entertainer. When we talk about Elvis Presley or John Denver or Fleetwood Mac, we're talking about entertainment. Now there's nothing wrong with entertainment. But we ought to make a distinction between that and art.

"Take Phil Woods — or anybody who's an artist. The man has a serious purpose, which is basically to do what he does to his utmost limits. If the audience doesn't like it, that's too bad. He naturally wishes they did. But he can't stop himself. Where the entertainer says, 'Give the people what they want,' the artist says, 'No, I'm gonna give the people what I want. And if they don't like it, *tant pis*, that's tough, but I gotta do it.' Isn't that the basic distinction? And don't we overlook it?

"I keep telling people, 'If you want to play your own kind of music, get yourself a livelihood. If you want to write your own kind of music, do something like what Charles Ives did — run an insurance company, or take up carpentry, whatever.' I read something somewhere recently. If you cheat on your own ability, for instance by writing less than your best, in order to make money, you're doing something that'll vitiate your abilities forever.

"It's too bad most people can't seem to see these distinctions. When you're a young man just getting out in the world, one or your biggest problems is, 'How am I going to make a living?' In order to do it, you must please a certain number of people so they'll pay you the money you need. When you get past that — that is, if you grow — you can then ask yourself, 'Now. What do I want to do?' Rather than, 'How do I make more money?' And the more they make, the more some like it, and they laugh, as they say, all the way to the bank. Man, what a phrase. But they've stopped growing. I prefer to invert the old phrase, 'If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?' and make it, 'If you're so wise, why ain't you poor?'

"A few weeks ago I was at a writers' conference in Santa Barbara. Joey Bushkin was playing piano, and he talked about Bing Crosby. When he was working with Bing, he played something and Bing liked it and the audience liked it. The next time Joey played it differently. Bing said to him — and Joey quoted this with some admiration — 'If you do it right and the audience likes it, why change it?' Joey looked at me and said, 'Don't you agree?' And I said, 'No. If you're an artist, you have to change it. How can you keep doing the same thing over and over without being bored to death?' And the boredom, if you're someone who's capable of growth, eventually communicates itself to an audience. Point is, the reason Lawrence Welk has been so successful is that he does what would bore me to tears and does it with great enthusiasm. Guy Lombardo did what he did very well. But it was Model T music, of course. He was a sweet guy, and the band played Model T music. We used to laugh at them when I was a kid. When I was seventeen, I worked right across the street from him in Cleveland. I was listening to Bix and Tram at the time, and the Goldkette band and, occasionally, even the Dixieland Five. Guy's was a perfectly okay sweet band, like

Jan Garber, Paul Specht. Paul Whiteman, mostly, was a sweet band.

"But it's a strange thing to look at the business forty years later and realize, 'It's going backwards.' That bothers me. It seems to be a mirror of what's happening to the entire world."

We talked some more about the nature of improvisation. "I'm reminded," I said, "of something a friend of mine, a symphony conductor, said about Mozart. He said Mozart would be developing his material logically and then suddenly he'd come up with something so unexpected and off the wall and yet so right that you wonder how he thought of it."

"The point is that he didn't think of it."

"Which clarifies something Bill Evans argued. He said that any kind of music that was not somehow in touch with the process of improvisation was likely to be sterile."

"Of course. If music is all left-brain, it comes out cold. If it's all right-brain, it comes out chaos. When I was playing, if I got into a good solo, my right brain was doing it. My left brain was translating it into fingers."

"There's a remark attributed to Charlie Parker," I said. "First you learn the instrument, then you learn the music, then you forget all that shit and just play."

"Right. Learn enough technique, develop enough ability that you can then ignore it. Use a boat to get to the other side of the river. Then you don't need the boat any more. You turn the switch that says, 'Improvise.' Technique is something you learn so you can throw it out. Charlie was dead right."

Shaw's first book, *The Trouble with Cinderella* was published in 1952. It was not so much an autobiography as a self-absorbed essay on the life of one troubled man living in a fame-addicted America. Probably no country on earth has ever placed as high a premium on conspicuous public success as the United States, and it's worse now when it seems the only thing worth being is a rock star, so much so that we have people playing what they call "air guitar" along with records of particular idols. (There is even an international air guitar championship.)

This preoccupation amounted, and to a large extent still amounts, to a national social disease, embodied in the misleading myth that anyone can grow up to be president, anyone can be discovered sipping a milkshake in a drugstore and become a movie star overnight.

The movie industry may have nurtured and magnified the myth but it did not invent it: it was embodied in the Nineteenth Century Horatio Alger novels. In the 1940s or '50s, Glenn Ford appeared in a movie in which he played a bus driver. You knew as the film unfolded that there was something amiss. Hollywood didn't make movies about bus drivers, bus drivers were not people with stories worth telling. Movies were made only about the rich and famous, or the likes of test pilots and soldiers of fortune and outlaws.

This is not to suggest that the aspiration to upward mobility did not exist in Europe: it is inherent in fairy tales such as *Snow White* and most notably *Cinderella*, which is of course the reason for the title of Artie's book

But Europe's was largely a stratified and inflexible society in which these sudden elevations into power and fortune were accomplished only by the intercession of improbable accident if not the supernatural. Europeans were sensible enough to let the dream repose in wistful stories for children. The trouble with the Cinderella myth in America was that, in a flexible and open culture, one that is alas now becoming stratified along economic lines, perhaps even more than in Europe, the dream came true just often enough to encourage the dreamers and lead them to heartaches and suicides.

It would be inconceivable that Artie, in his youth, did not aspire to making a lot of money. His Jewish childhood in New Haven was too impoverished for him to have been devoid of that ambition. He was a man of cultivation, who spoke Spanish well and some French, who collected and knew a great deal about art, was endlessly and penetratingly observant of politics and history, and who was in sum, and in the largest sense, a citizen of the world. There are, however, two things about him that I found to be quite Jewish, and particularly Russian Jewish. One was his passion for education. The other has to do with music, and requires a little explanation.

Under the czars there was a law that a Jew could not live in Moscow unless he or she was an artist, a ballerina or a fine musician — a wind-up toy to entertain the rich. And so in Jewish families in such cities as Odessa (the breeding ground of an astonishing number of great violinists and, coincidentally or not, the birthplace of Artie's father), there was emphasis on becoming a musician in order to live in the great city of the czars. It was a way up and a way out.

In America, among Russian Jewish families, the tradition lingered. And so in Arthur Arshawsky, a Lower East Side Jewish boy transplanted to WASPy New Haven and later abandoned by his father and always teased about his "peculiar" name, there must have been a tremendous drive to get out of that poverty whether through literature or music or whatever variant of the Cinderella Alger myth.

To be continued