

Gene Lees Ad Libitum

Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

September 2004

Vd. 23 No. 9

Mail Bag

What happened to jazz?? If I want a novel written by you I will get it through our local book store. I happen to like the books you write about jazz and the musicians but certainly not about upstate New York.

You may remove my name from your computer file as I am not paying for 2004.

I am returning your book and we are square now.

— Frank Kirkman, Cedar Mountain, North Carolina

PS Aren't you happy to be living in the USA?? It doesn't sound that way with your combined vitriolic diatribe about our political system and yes this is another reason I am dropping your publication. BUT you sure know the music business! I have been in it as an amateur and a professional (Local 802) since 1945.

If you were serious about "What happened to jazz?" stick around for two more issues and I'll explain it. Then I'll be happy to remove your name from the computer file.

Bravo *Song Lake Summer*.

— Gary Alexander, Lopez, Washington

Can't tell you how much I've missed the *Jazzletter*. Also I enjoy your discourses on politics and what a dangerous and disastrous course this administration has set for the country. Keep up the good work.

— John R. McCandless, Edmond, Oklahoma

Song Lake Summer is a wonder. The writing is magnificent, the character portraits so vivid. You feel that you know these people and the countryside and the local language. I read it in bits, very slowly, because I wanted it never to end.

— Oscar Castro-Neves, Los Angeles, California

Oscar Castro-Neves is the outstanding Brazilian guitarist, pianist, composer, arranger, and record producer.

Song Lake Summer is a marvel. Surely this will be re-read many times.

Please use the extra money enclosed for postage, or for someone who needs help on the subscription price. Keep the *Jazzletter* going!

— Tracy Borst, Lopez, Washington

I thoroughly enjoyed *Song Lake Summer*.

— Bob Wilson, Barrington, Rhode Island

I read a lot of fiction and found *Song Lake Summer* a refreshing and moving story from a kinder and simpler time. Thank you for sharing.

— Dick Busey, Henderson, Nevada

I have not had a moment to sit down quietly and tell you my reaction to *Song Lake Summer*. It is simply this. I picked it up and couldn't put it down. And then when I read the last page, I was so sorry I had to leave this wonderful world. I think I felt the same way years ago when I read Jane Austen. How rare to be allowed into a universe that becomes totally real in which the boundaries are so clear, and heroism is possible, a respite from the chaos which engulfs our planet and which has become part of my consciousness. *Song Lake Summer* reminded me of a point of view that I accepted as a child, and in this regard allowed me to know myself better. And isn't that what real literature does for us — leads us to a greater understanding of the world and our own psychology? Gene, thank you!

— Joyce Hendler, La Jolla, California

Dr. Hendler is a clinical psychologist. Her husband is Dr. Sheldon Hendler, an outstanding biochemist and physician, author of many books, international lecturer, and teacher at the University of California at San Diego. He is also a fine trumpet player.

I'll admit that when I first opened this last envelope of *Jazzletters*, my first reaction was, "Come on, Gene, you're pulling a fast one on just to get caught up!"

But I gave you the benefit of the doubt and started to read,

other talents, a fabulous spinner of yarns. Your powers of observation, your constant sense of historical context, your obvious affection for human idiosyncrasies and manner of speech — let's face it, Gene, you're doing what you were born to do and doing it as well as anyone on the planet has ever done it. Just the first paragraph in Chapter 12 is worth the price of admission.

And while I'm at it, please don't let the Allen Halls of the world dissuade you from the political end of your observations: the fact that I (and, I would guess, the majority of your subscribers) thoroughly agree with your views is just another instance of the aphorism "Great minds think alike." Keep up the great work.

— Eddie and Meredith

Eddie is the pianist Eddie Higgins, and Meredith is his wife, the singer, pianist, and painter Meredith d'Ambrosio. I have sung many times with Eddie (including duets with Meredith) and can attest that he is one of the most sensitive accompanists on earth.

As for the readership, let me cite Stan Getz who once told the New York Times that he doubted you could find a jazz fan who was a Republican. That overstates the case — I've known a couple of Republicans, usually of the moderate kind, who were — but it is a general truth, and I have observed over the years that Dixieland jazz fans tend to be arch-conservatives, for the obvious reason that they want every phrase to be predictable, to be what they have already heard, and fear change. It is implicit in the so-called "liberal" mind to accept the discomfiture that goes with uncertainty and the unexpected, which is the truth behind Stan's remark, and the reason the lovers of bebop and post-bebop tend to be "liberal."

We love the *Jazzletter*!

— Jens and Ellen Harboe, Orcas, Washington

Song Lake Summer is a tremendous achievement. A setting of a formidable goal, a reaching for a new personal creative horizon and the courage to hold to it and say, "Here it is, like it or not. I did it."

Isn't it logical that a truly creative person chafes at his own self-imposed, yet satisfying, activities? Gene, your auditory, visual, and intellectual acuity have been driven always by an intense intellectual curiosity and an endless, probing sense of history. The evidence is in every issue of *Jazzletter* and in each of your lyrics. Certainly in your conversation.

I've no doubt you will be receiving a poison-tip missile

or two from the I-saw-Buddy-Golden-spit-blood school of jazz appreciation, who fail to understand the motivation, the energy, and the beauty of *Song Lake Summer*, just as they failed to understand your thoughtful observations on the Canadian and U.S. health systems and their relevance to the lives of musicians.

But I, for one, thank you for your constant insights and stimulus and for showing us again that, as artists and as human beings, we needn't be confined by boundaries.

— Larry Orenstein, Sherman Oaks, California.

The scope of Larry's work is dizzying, beginning with his days playing trumpet with Paul Whiteman through his period as an aide to Yip Harburg (Larry was understudy to David Wayne in Finian's Rainbow) through a highly successful career in advertising.

I just finished reading. I wept. Lovingly,

— Sara Frooman, Raleigh, North Carolina

You turned out a world-class bio in *Portrait of Johnny*, so personal, so sensitive, so in tune with the unusual world Johnny lived in and moved and had his being. Brilliant, complicated, unpredictable gentleman. You caught all that masterfully. It is a sweetheart of a book, deserving the highest accolades, the best book I've ever read about someone in the field of American popular song.

— Hugh Martin, Encinitas, California

With his lyricist partner Ralph Blane, Hugh wrote the stunning score to Meet Me In St. Louis, from which we have The Trolley Song, The Girl Next Door, and one of the most touching of all Christmas songs, Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.

I have just finished reading *Portrait of Johnny*. Not since many years ago, when I read several William Saroyan books, have I experienced reading a book that I did not want to end. There was no "page turner" or "I could not put it down" stuff here. I just did not want it to end. I had been an admirer of Johnny Mercer's for many, many years. You made me feel quite close to him, and I was able to feel your love for him all through it. I knew you would, out of respect for him, do it right. And you did.

— Janet Polin, Shadow Hills, California

Janet Polin is first cousin to my late and much-missed friend Grover Sales.

You have written one of those books I hoped would never end. John Mercer is presented so beautifully by your choice of material that I feel as though I knew him. A complex, supremely talented and yet flawed man — so vulnerable and loving. Everything I hear by him, particularly his vocals, takes on new meaning. Will we ever see another record producer of a major label, such as Mercer, who only records talent he or she believes in?

— David Klingman, Louisville, Kentucky

David Klingman is a prominent Louisville lawyer and a fine clarinetist. Earlier in his career, he served in the Air Force in the Judge Advocate's Office.

I can't describe sufficiently how much I enjoyed *Song Lake Summer*. It is a delightful piece of semi-historical fiction that simply leads to having good feelings about people — at least, some people. I hope that it will be published as a book, so as to find a wider audience.

I intend to get your book about Johnny Mercer. Your earlier writings about him in the *Jazzletter* were poignant and edifying. I also enjoyed the Woody Herman book, which was very well researched as well as written with uncommon sensitivity and understanding. The details of Woody and Tony Martin (Al Morris) both playing and singing with Tom Gerun, and Tom and Frank Martinelli "giving" Ginny Sims to Kay Kyser, are not known by many, along with the continuing relationships.

In June 2003, Vol. 22 No. 6, you stated that as far as you know the Artie Shaw Navy Band was never recorded. The best I know, that is correct. However, when Sam Donahue assumed leadership and took the band to England, it was extensively recorded. The band was different in many respects, starting with not having Artie. They did continue to play some of his arrangements, with the solos played by a "Shavian" Ralph LaPollo or Sam's "dead tone" tenor, at the time.

Max Kaminsky, Dave Tough, and Claude Thornhill were replaced, Sam dropped the accordion, and added a sixth saxophone. The Donahue version was a swinging, romping, stomping band that had a Lunceford/Basie flavor and played great jazz in what was still a dance-band era. Sam played spirited tenor with a more "Lesterish" tone than he later employed; but the distinguishing thing about the band was the brilliance of the six-saxophone voicings. Few other bands have ever done this — Hal McIntyre, briefly Kenton, and occasionally Glenn Miller in England, influenced by Sam and taking advantage of his sixth, spare, saxophone. In Sam's scoring, and that of other staff and outside arrangers,

including Benny Carter, there is no doubling. The intervals are close (some seconds), drawing on 9ths and 11ths to get all the notes, but producing an extremely rich sound. Sometimes there is a tenor lead. The band sometimes played side by side with that of Miller, played frequently on Armed Forces Radio, and was extensively recorded with reasonable quality, as much of it was live. It also made numerous V discs.

For years Wally Heider had most of the material, and there are two CDs on the HEP label. They provide *some* indication of how good the Shaw Navy Band was. There are pictures of the Shaw band playing on a carrier deck. They did have a rough war in the Pacific, having been close to the fighting, including Guadalcanal. That's why Artie, Max, and Dave got out when they came back. Claude Thornhill stayed at Pearl Harbor and formed a band there. But the bottom line is that there is something that reflects the quality of the Shaw Navy Band.

I am anxiously looking forward to Doug Ramsey's book on Paul Desmond. I want to thank you for referring me to him. I would have felt terrible if the book had suddenly emerged without my having had an input. Thank you again, continue to get your health under control, and try not to get too riled up over the state of political affairs. It's beyond the control of either of us, and we have other, worthwhile, things to do.

Best regards and cheers,

— Hal Strack, Incline Village, Nevada

Hal Strack is a retired Air Force brigadier general who was deeply involved in developing the U.S. nuclear defense system. He is also a former tenor player and lifelong friend of Paul Desmond's. He refers to Doug Ramsey's book Take Five. Paul had a strange way of keeping his life compartmentalized, never introducing his close friends to each other and indeed never even mentioning them. Doug tells me that Hal, whom we discovered when he wrote me a letter, turned out to be one of his most valuable sources of information.

The things I admired most about the United States (aside from its music!) was its capacity for self-criticism and, through that criticism, growth, and a common suspicion and often downright contempt for authority. These are being destroyed by the cry for a subservient conformity. When I said that the country doesn't have a prayer of developing a third party, because this is possible in a parliamentary system

but not in the structure of the American electoral system — whose obsolescence is being decried by many Americans — that isn't an opinion or a diatribe, it's a fact. When I said that the separation of legislative, executive, and judiciary was destroyed when the Supreme Court interfered with the electoral process and *appointed* a president, that isn't an opinion, that is a fact. When one says that the Constitution is being violated at every turn, that isn't an opinion, it's a fact. Consider the assaults on separation of church and state from the Supreme Court and Bill Frist and his minions.

In his 1941 Book *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm clarified the reason why many people are conformists, submissive to authority. They don't want freedom, they want someone to tell them what to do, for freedom requires thinking, and thinking brings indecision, at least for a time, and it is an uncomfortable process, as it should be. Some people just can't handle it, for, as I have said before, the fatal weakness of the liberal mind is that it questions itself, and the lethal strength of the conservative mind is that it doesn't. These psychological phenomena explain everything from Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, not to mention Jewish fundamentalism, to the white supremacist groups that have sprung up in the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada.

It is the duty of the journalist to tell the readers not just what they want to hear but more, what they do not want to hear — even what *he* doesn't want to hear. Today's journalists are failing miserably, having become to a large extent extensions of corporate and government p.r. handouts.

The tradition of social satire and commentary is long. Jonathan Swift's mordant wit reached a mordant power in his 1749 essay *A Modest Proposal*, which proposed that since the Irish could produce babies aplenty and the Irish poor were a burden on England, the babies should be sold as food to the English wealthy. I daresay no one asked him if he was happy to be living in England. He was Irish.

That tradition of satire is long. It goes back at least to Aristophanes and his play *Lysistrata*, a witty attack on war that is still performed. It continues through Plautus in Rome, where satire was by definition for the purpose of correcting social weaknesses and vice, and through Horace. In the first century A.D. Marcus Valerius Martial murderously mocked Roman society. It is not recorded whether anyone asked Martial if he was happy living in Rome. He was born in Spain.

The tradition continues in Molière and Voltaire in France, Samuel Johnson in England, Cervantes in Spain (I understand from persons whose native language is Spanish that *Don Quixote* is laugh-out-loud funny on every page;

but humor alas cannot usually be translated), and more. Gilbert and Sullivan are part of that lineage. Although their operettas are heard today as quaintly amusing, they were in their time ruthlessly satirical, prompting a complaint from the Japanese government over *The Mikado*. In *The Pirates of Penzance*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Yeomen of the Guard* and others, they sliced up all sorts of public figures, including a First Lord of the Admiralty who had "never been to sea." Far from being punished, Arthur Sullivan was knighted. Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill continued the tradition in Germany in their *Three Penny Opera*, based on an English play by John Gay.

The tradition continues in Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, who were not asked if they were happy living in England. They were born in Ireland. Nicholas Nabikov, who mocked American society in *Lolita* and other works, was not asked if he was happy living in the U.S.A. He was born in Russia. And of course we have the wonderful mockeries dispensed by Mort Sahl. He was born in Montreal. And one might go after Lorne Michaels, the producer and often writer of *Saturday Night Live*, and past cast members Dan Aykroyd, Michael Myers, and Norm MacDonald, Canadians all. One might try a retrofit and condemn Mack Sennett, whose contempt for American cops is manifest in so many of his silent-movie comedies, and you could go after Marie Dressler, another Canadian, who had a large hand in advancing his career. And what about Jerzy Kozinski? Should he be sent back to Poland for writing *Being There*?

America: Love It or Leave It is a phrase that remained for the guys in pick-up trucks with Winchesters slung behind the drivers' seats to invent. And they *don't* love it.

The statement that he who will not learn from history is doomed to repeat it is attributed to Santayana, but I suspect the observation goes well back in time. Its significance is seen in Viet Nam, where American officers had never read General Giap's book on how he took Dien Bien Phu from the French and defeated them completely. It is seen every day in those reporting or commenting on Iraq who simply have never read the history of Viet Nam and the French humiliation there. And the French troops, by the way, were led by the Foreign Legion, than which there has probably never on earth been a tougher military force since the Roman army; it was filled with World War II Wehrmacht veterans.

Whoever will not remember the past and project it into the future in all its dark possibilities is walking into it blindfolded. Or put it another way, he is leaving headprints in the sands of time. I want to know what is being done to us and why and by whom. Not everybody does.

In 1964 Marshall McLuhan published *Understanding*

Media: The Extensions of Man. But the book that made him famous was *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, co-written with Quentin Fire. The books, particularly the second, had a great vogue. An ingenious San Francisco advertising man named Howard Gossage got hold of McLuhan and by diligent pursuit, including placing an article about McLuhan and his prognoses in *Life* magazine, made him a household word.

I read the book at that time. I was unimpressed. For one thing, either McLuhan or Fire wrote badly. McLuhan had a taste for puns, including the very title of the book. I do not: puns by their very nature are ambiguous and to me the purpose of writing is clarity of communication. There are those for whom language is a means of obfuscation, and those for whom it is a means of revelation. And the book reminded me of something Debussy is reported to have said to a young composer who importuned the master to look at some of his scores. Debussy relented, and having examined the music, told the young man, "Some of your music is original and some of it is good. Unfortunately, what is good is not original and what is original is not good." Thus too *The Medium Is the Massage*. McLuhan's concept of the global village, in the age of electronic communication, reflects Teilhard de Chardin's idea of the noosphere, the idea that all the minds on earth together make up a consciousness that surrounds the globe. McLuhan's thought, one might say, is *almost* true. Since he died in 1980, he never saw the development of the Internet, which is, far more radically than he ever knew, altering our way of thought.

There are other aspects of McLuhan's supposedly pioneering thought that are unoriginal. Some it sounds like diluted variant on the work of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who foresaw the coming of modern mass man back in the 1920s and 1930, when his *The Revolt of the Masses* was published:

"The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and selective. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated

"The simple process of preserving our present civilization is supremely complex, and demands incalculably subtle powers. Ill-fitted to direct it is this average man who has learned to use much of the machinery of civilization, but who is characterized by root-ignorance of the very principles of that civilization.

"The command over the public life exercised today by the intellectually vulgar is perhaps the factor of the present situation which is most novel, least assimilable to anything in the past. At least in European history up to the present, the vulgar had never believed itself to have 'ideas' on things. It had beliefs, traditions, experiences, proverbs, mental habits, but it never imagined itself in possession of theoretical opinions on what things are or ought to be. Today, in the other hand, the average man has the most mathematical 'ideas' on all that happens or ought to happen in the universe. Hence he has lost the use of his hearing. Why should he listen if he has within him all that is necessary? There is no reason now for listening, but rather for judging, pronouncing, deciding. There is no question concerning public life, in which he does not intervene, blind and deaf as he is, imposing his 'opinions.'"

It is an unease shared by Alexis de Tocqueville and Thomas Jefferson. As Dorothy Parker put it, You can lead a whore to knowledge but you can't make her think.

The fact that all "modern" communication was changing our way of perception is something that had crossed the mind of anyone with any brains well before McLuhan. From the development of photography through the emergence of silent movies, and newsreels showing the real Woodrow Wilson and even battles in France, through the development of motion pictures and radio and television to the ever-present family video cameras such as those that recorded the tsunami in Southeast Asia, we can actually *see* past events. Joseph Conrad in his introduction to his novel *Nostramo* said, "My duty is to make you understand. It is above all to make you see." And Conrad took us by words to far-off exotic places. Well that's no longer necessary. We have all been to the moon and even the surface of Mars. I once told Gene Kelly: "We can only read about Nijinsky. Future generations are going to be able to *see* you. And Baryshnikov and Fred Astaire and Donald O'Connor and all the rest." Some book on writing that I read when I was very young said that the novel, as a literary form, was essentially finished. Movies had taken over the narrative form. Writers throughout history had always sought the widest possible circulation of their work, and when most of the population was illiterate, the main narrative form was drama. With the coming of the printed word, and eventually a widespread literacy, the novel and short story became the preeminent narrative forms. And movies, that book said, had now supplanted them. To be sure, successful commercial novels still appear, such as *The Da Vinci Code*, a good story in which the writing is perhaps even worse than that of John Grisham, another good teller of tales. But the real purpose of such books is to be made into

movies: they are merely the foetuses of screenplays.

McLuhan came up with the idea of non-linear thinking for this kind of modern perception by all the senses. But that was perfectly bloody obvious. Writing is merely a way of setting down speech; it is not the actual act any more than a symphony score is the music itself. After Johannes Gutenberg printed his bible, using moveable type, some time around 1450, writing gradually became the primary means of mass communication, eventually making heroes as big as movie stars of Rudyard Kipling and Charles Dickens and Ernest Hemingway. But the video tape or DVD is one of the most effective teaching tools we have ever known, and documentaries are a far more effective way of teaching history. The *Nova* series on PBS has probably given more people a conception of the cosmos than any series of books could do.

But McLuhan became the guru of non-linear thinking, even if much of what he wrote was claptrap. A young writer in Switzerland once told me that McLuhan was his god and he worshiped him.

Then, one day in Toronto in the early 1970s, I was a guest on a talk show with a man who was a colleague of McLuhan's at the University of Toronto. He said that McLuhan was in the position of a man warning you that you were about to be hit by a ten-ton truck. Why blame the man for your imminent disaster?

Soon after that my late friend Roland Gelatt, then editor of the *Saturday Review*, called me from New York to say he wanted to come up to Toronto to visit me, and while he was there, he wanted to see our mutual friend Glenn Gould. And, he said, he wanted to meet Marshall McLuhan. I said that while I did not know him, I thought I could arrange an introduction. Roland came, and an incident occurred that I have previously recounted, which keeps coming back to me. We went to lunch with McLuhan in a very good restaurant high atop one of the better hotels. As we listened, Roland and I both got the impression that McLuhan was denouncing all that electronic "non-linear" communication of which he was supposed to be the zealous champion. I didn't know whether he had changed his thinking since the appearances of those books or whether he had been grossly misunderstood because of all the giddy fun-and-games atmosphere that Howard Gossage had set up around them. And at last I said something like, "Dr. McLuhan, do I understand you that you don't like it?"

"Like it?" he said. "Like it? I'm a professor of literature. If I could with a swing of my arm . . . " and he did so at the city of Toronto below us, ". . . sweep it all away, *I would!*"

Now, we have been hit by that truck. It has swept away

most of our finest musical and literary art and our history, and if you talk to some fifty-five-year-old baby boomer who has grown up on rock music and has never heard of Sarah Vaughan, and is enthralled when he or she does hear her, it behooves us all to consider the size and shape of that truck:

General Electric owns NBC, which includes 13 television stations reaching 28 percent of American households; *NBC Network News*; *The Today Show*; *Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*; *Meet the Press*; *Dateline NBC*; *NBC News at Sunrise*; CBS business television; MSNBC 24-hour cable and Internet news service (co-owned with Microsoft); Court TV (co-owned with Time Warner); 50 percent of Bravo, 25 percent of A&E and 25 percent of the History Channel.

It also owns GE Consumer Electronics; GE Power Systems, which produces turbines for nuclear reactors and power plants; GE Plastics, which produces military hardware and nuclear power equipment; and GE Transportation Systems, which runs diesel and electric trains.

Viacom International Inc. The status of this behemoth is undergoing change, but let us begin with its condition a few months ago:

With the purchase of CBS Westinghouse / CBS Inc., the power of Viacom became awesome. CBS owned Westinghouse Electric Company, part of the Nuclear Utilities Business Group of British Nuclear Fuels (BNF). CBS owned 24 TV stations and 200 affiliates across the U.S.A., as well as CBS Network News; *60 minutes*; *48 Hours*; *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather*, who has now left the show; *CBS Morning News*; *Up to the Minute*; Country Music Television; the Nashville Network; two regional sports networks, and Group W Satellite Communications. It also owned Westinghouse Electric Company, which provides services to the nuclear power industry, Westinghouse Government Environmental Services Company, which disposes of nuclear and hazardous wastes and also operates four government-owned nuclear power plants; and Energy Systems, which provides nuclear power plant design and maintenance.

With this acquisition, the *Columbia Journalism Review* reported, "Viacom has a financial interest in broadcast and cable television, radio, Internet, book publishing, and film production and distribution. Some of this vertically integrated conglomerate's highly recognizable properties include the CBS network, MTV, Infinity Broadcasting, Simon & Schuster, Blockbuster, and Paramount Pictures. With such a diverse portfolio of properties, Viacom is one of the most profitable media giants as CBS is a top draw for older viewers while MTV remains the most popular teen oriented media

outlet.”

Its publishing holdings included Simon & Schuster Adult publishing group, Atria Books, Kaplan, Pocket Books, Scribner, Simone & Schuster, the *Free Press*, the Touchstone, and Fireside Group, as well as Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, which includes Aladdin Paperbacks, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, Little Simon, Margaret K. Elderly Books, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Simon Pulse, and Simon Spotlight, as well as Simon & Schuster New Media, Simon & Schuster Online, Simon & Schuster UK, Simon & Schuster Australia, and MTV books.

Viacom owned Paramount Television, Spelling Television, MTV, VH-1, The Movie Channel, UPN (as a joint owner), Nickelodeon, Comedy Central, Sundance Channel (as joint owner), and Flix. Its media holdings included Paramount Pictures, Paramount Home Video, Famous Players Theaters, and Paramount Parks.

Sumner Redstone owns and is chairman of the board and CEO of Viacom. He is an ardent supporter of George W. Bush.

But big can get *too* big, and its stock has fallen 35 percent in the last five years. On March 16, 2005, Redstone, now eighty-one and newly married to a woman half his age and living in Beverly Hills next door to Sylvester Stallone, announced that Viacom was to be broken into two companies.

Fortune reported:

“One will consist of cable networks, including MTV, Nickelodeon, VH-1, Comedy Central, Spike, Showtime, Country Music Television, Black Entertainment Television and the Paramount movie studio.

“The remaining assets, including the CBS and UPN broadcast networks, the Paramount television studio, TV and radio stations, a billboard company, Simon & Schuster publishing, and Paramount theme parks, will form a company that should throw off lots of cash.”

Clear Channel Communications is going down a similar path of deconstruction. On May 3, 2005, the *Wall Street Journal*, under the byline of Sarah McBride, reported, “The moves are an acknowledgment of the difficulties Clear Channel . . . faced in trying to build an entertainment juggernaut whose radio and concert operations fed off each other. Clear Channel thought its combination of assets would create a powerful, across-the board platform for advertising sales on its billboards, at concert and sports venues and on its 1,200 radio stations.”

In other words, as in the policies of Bill Gates and

Microsoft, screw everybody and rule the world.

“Instead,” McBride wrote, “the combination irked music fans, record labels and artists, who complained that Clear Channel used its might to punish artists who didn't play by its rules and contributed to the sharp rise in ticket prices at venues it controls. Clear Channel has denied such allegations, but it has never been able to shoo away the notion that it had too much leverage in too many corners of the music world.”

The report said this comes “at a time when the company's core radio business, like the rest of the industry, faces big challenges. In February, Viacom and Clear Channel both took multibillion-dollar write-downs related to their radio operations”

Disney / ABC / CAP owns ABC, which included 10 stations reaching 24 percent of U.S. households; *ABC Network News*; *Prime Time Live*; *Nightline*; *20/20*; *Good Morning America*; ESPN, Lifetime Television (50 percent owner) as well as minority holdings in A&E, History Channel, and E!; Disney Channel / Disney Television, and Touchstone Television. Its other holdings include Miramax, Touchstone pictures, and the magazines *Jane*, *Los Angeles*, *W*, and *Discover*. It has three music labels and 11 major local newspapers, Hyperion book publishing, and 43 percent of the Infoseek Internet search engine. Other holdings include major shares of Sid R. Bass crude oil and gas, all the Disney theme parks, and Walt Disney Cruise lines.

Time Warner TBS - AOL owns America Online, which acquired Time Warner in the largest merger in corporate history. Its television holdings include CNN, HBO, Cinemax, TBS Superstation, Turner Network Television, Turner Classic Movies, Warner Brothers Television, the Cartoon Network, Sega Channel, TNT, 50 percent of Comedy Central, 49 percent of E! and 50 percent of Court TV. It is the largest owner of cable systems in the country with an estimated 13 million subscribers. Its media holdings include HBO Independent Productions, Warner Home Video, New Line Cinema, Castle Rock, Looney Tunes, and Hanna-Barbera. It is the world's largest music company, owning the Atlantic, Elektra, Rhino, Sire, Warner Bros., EMI, and WEA labels, and Sub Pop Distribution. Its 33 magazines include *Time*, *Life*, *Sports Illustrated*, *People*, *In Style*, *Fortune*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Mad*, 50 percent of DC Comics, and the Book of the Month Club. It also owns the Atlanta Braves, the Atlanta Hawks, and World Championship Wrestling.

Movies made by Warner Bros. always get good coverage in *Time*, no matter how bad they are, and sometimes they get

cover stories.

However, Time Warner, like Viacom, appears to have grown *too* big. On May 20, 2005, Richard Parsons, chairman and CEO, announced it is shedding itself of the Warner Music Group, which has vast music publishing (Chappall, for one) and record company holdings. "We're not going back into the music business," Parsons said. We'll see.

News Corporation Ltd. / Fox Networks, owned by the Australian magnate Rupert Murdoch. It owns Fox television, which has 22 stations reaching 50 percent of U.S. households. Murdoch cynically became an American citizen so that he could own TV stations. His company also owns Fox International, with extensive worldwide cable and satellite networks that include British Sky Tel (50 percent); Vox, Germany (49.9 percent); Canal Fox, Latin America; Foxtel, Australia (50 percent); Star TV, Asia; SkyB, India; Bahasa Programming Ltd., Indonesia (50 percent); and News Broadcasting, Japan (80 percent). It owns the Golf Channel (33 percent), Twentieth Century Fox, and Fox Searchlight, along with 132 newspapers (113 of them in Australia) including the *New York Post*, the *Times of London*, and *The Australian*. It owns 25 magazines, including *TV Guide* and *The Weekly Standard*, and Harper Collins Books. It also owns the Los Angeles Dodgers, the LA Kings, the LA Lakers, and the National Rugby League, and Ansett Australian airlines and Ansett New Zealand airlines. Finally, it owns Phillip Morris, which sells among other things, cigarettes, and warns against their use in television ads. If those ads are run on any of the Murdoch stations, he is paying the money back to himself.

In the 1987 James Bond movie *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) Pierce Brosnan as Bond comes to grips with a media mogul whose control of satellites and newspaper and other information outlets makes it possible for him, unless stopped, to rule the world. Rupert Murdoch surely was the model for that character. Murdoch, through his Phillip Morris company, donated \$2.9 million to George W. Bush in 2000. (Time-Warner AOL gave \$1.6 million. GE donated \$1.1 million to the campaign. Its partner in MSNBC, Microsoft, was even more generous, donating \$2.4 million to the Bush campaign.)

Murdoch's right-hand man, operating head of Fox News, is the notorious Roger Ailes, a media consultant to George H.B.W. Bush. He was once arrested for carrying an unlicensed gun in Central Park.

The motto of Fox News is "fair and balanced."

Columnist Maureen Dowd in the *New York Times* said, "It was remarkable to see President Bush lecture Vladimir

Putin on the importance of checks and balances in a democratic society.

"Remarkably brazen, given that the only checks Mr. Bush seems to believe in are those written to the 'journalists' Armstrong Williams, Maggie Gallagher and Karen Ryan, the fake TV anchor, to help promote his policies. The Administration has given a whole new meaning to checkbook journalism, paying a stupendous \$97 million to an outside P.R. firm to buy columnists and produce propaganda, including faux video news.

"The only balance W. Likes is the slaver, Pravda-like 'Fair and Balanced' coverage of [Murdoch's] Fox News."

Compared with these aforementioned giants, **Universal S.A.** (the French abbreviation for Society Anonyme; the headquarters are in Paris), is a piker. But it has extensive TV holdings in France and the United States. Its Universal Music Group's companies include Island Def Jam Music Group, Interscope A&M Records, Geffen Records, DreamWorks Records, Lost Highway Records, MCA Nashville, DreamWorks Nashville, Mercury Records, Polydor, Universal Motown Records Group, Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, and the Verve Music Group.

You will recall those days when, aside from all the jazz and high-quality pop recording being done at Columbia, RCA, Decca, and Capitol, there were a number of small independent labels doing excellent work, such as Dick Bock's Pacific Jazz, Dial, Savoy, Prestige, Commodore, Riverside, and an upstart in San Francisco called Fantasy, whose first artist was Dave Brubeck. *Jazz Goes to College*, by the Dave Brubeck Quartet, was a huge breakout LP. Fantasy followed up with recordings by Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker, Vince Guaraldi, and Cal Tjader.

In later years, Fantasy dwindled as a source of new music to become a buyer of catalogues, acquiring Contemporary, Debut, Milestone (the old Riverside Records catalogue), Prestige, Pablo, and various labels devoted to rhythm and blues, rock, and pops. Creedence Clearwater, one of the most successful rock bands, had nine consecutive top ten singles in an eighteen-month period, and made Fantasy a major force. If Fantasy now does little to generate new music, it was an invaluable resource in keeping available classic records from the past, including those of Oscar Peterson on Pablo and Bill Evans on Riverside. And it did indeed record Bill afresh in albums now available as boxed sets. The Fantasy catalogue is a national treasure.

To be continued

Copyright © 2004 by Gene Lees