

Gene Lees *Ad Libitum* &  
**Jazzletter**

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

June 2005

Vol. 23 No. 6

## Mail Bag

You will never think of *haiku* again in the same way when I tell you that every single *haiku* ever written can be sung to the tune of *Moonlight in Vermont*.

— Frank Frost, Santa Barbara, California

*Five syllables, seven syllables, and five. And that song has a haiku quality in that the lyric doesn't rhyme and contains no verbs except in the release. It's all images. Frank is a former classics professor, a novelist, and a jazz pianist.*

About Darwin. In science, a guess is a "hypothesis". A "theory" is a testable hypothesis that is supported by a large body of empirical evidence and contradicted by none. It would be a shame if the bewildered forced an end to this terminology. A theory is not held to be a "fact" because no one would deny the possibility of new evidence requiring revision, and over the years the validation of evolution has been enriched as the theory has been expanded and modified to accommodate it.

That the press and politicians are deferential to all those people who expect to live in bliss for trillions and trillions of years in the company of Yahweh is no small part of our national deterioration. The superstition is especially puzzling in those who have actually read the Bible, where the deity appears to be a capricious destructive megalomaniac very much like the super-villains in comic books.

— Art Hilgart, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Your piece *Darwin in Kansas* made my heart leap with joy! There is no contradiction between religion and science, but people who can't see beyond their noses certainly cannot contemplate a hundred billion years, let alone infinity.

And while I'm at it, why does no one ever point out that the right-wing nuts who want to get rid of the federal government are no different from the orthodox Communists, who look for the "withering away of the state"? Is there a difference between left-wing crackpots and right-wing crackpots?

Why is there less and less music teaching in the schools?

Because the same people who would tell you how wonderful the USA is also want to live here for nothing. God, I miss Europe.

— Donald Clarke, West Des Moines, Iowa

I take no other publication which gives me more pleasure. I have *every* issue of the *Jazzletter*. I initially subscribed because of my love of the music. I would remain a subscriber regardless of the topic. I live in a "red state" so I particularly enjoy your comments about this corrupt administration. Can we ever recover from the acts and omissions of these morons?

Though we have never met, I consider you a dear friend.

— John R. McCandless, Oklahoma City

*John is an attorney.*

What a thrill to receive so many catch-up *Jazzletters*, and all fabulous as usual. I have no doubt that they are now and will be in the years ahead of great historical importance. And the incisiveness and general acumen of your readership is perhaps unprecedented, certainly in this field.

— Jeri Coates, Los Angeles, California

*And that readership amazes me too.*

I'd like to donate a gift subscription to someone who needs it, at your discretion. My life is so enriched because of you.

— Martha McAndrews MD, Fortville, Indiana

*Next to musicians, the largest group of subscribers is doctors.*

I think you know you are appreciated. I for one consider you a national treasure and I suspect I am not alone.

— Roderick W. Pettis, San Rafael, California

*Yeah, but that doesn't mean I don't like hearing it, and the letters keep me going, like that little stupid drum-*

*beating bunny.*

In your story about Zoot 'n' Al, you mentioned Zoot's brothers Gene and, of course, Ray. There was another brother, younger I think, whose name was Bobby. Bobby was a trumpet player who also sang (like Ray), as occasionally did Zoot. He and I worked together in a nondescript band around L.A. Lucky Thompson was also with the band for a while, probably during the late '40s. The band had one trumpet and three saxes and three rhythm. Obviously Bobby never got the attention that Ray and Zoot received. I have no idea whatever happened to him.

Let me add another Zoot story to the collection. Some time in 1954 or 1955 I did a concert on a Sunday afternoon with Zoot. Guess I took a very worthwhile afternoon off from the Lighthouse that day. The concert was part of a series that Dick Bock of Pacific Records had been doing at a small but delightful little theater on Hollywood Boulevard near LaBrea. Besides me, Chet was there and a rhythm section all of whom I have forgotten. Zoot arrived half ripped. How he got there I don't know, as he had no car. As the afternoon proceeded, he got the other half ripped. The last piece we did was a blues. The three horn players all had chairs to sit on, for obvious reasons, when not soloing. When it came time for Zoot's solo he stood up (barely) and did lovely Zoot things for about ten minutes. Then his tenor began pointing more and more skyward. His body started forming a shape like the letter *s*. Then the top of the *s* opened up and up went his tenor and back he fell into his chair, still playing. The chair went over backwards and he ended up flat on his back, his tenor still pointing to the skies with Zoot still playing the shit out of it. That was one of the few times that I ever saw Chet Baker laugh.

This clearly concluded our concert. Where could we go from there? After he put his horn away Zoot hobbled over to me and said, "Hey Shank, take me home." So I loaded him into my Hillman Minx (one of my better automotive investments) and off we went to Inglewood to the Sims' family home. To say that it was a very modest home would be a very modest statement. For so much marvelous music to come from such an environment is really remarkable.

Thanks for all your great words and lyrics, and especially for your friendship.

— Bud Shank, Tucson, Arizona

WABC did a regular Friday night radio broadcast in stereo from the Half Note from 1963-1966. It was an hour show called *Portraits in Jazz with Alan Grant*. I've got a bunch of

tapes of these airshots myself: my wife would often tape them off the radio when I was playing. My collection includes several hours of Al and Zoot and Rushing, and nights with Phil Woods, Bobby Hackett, Richie Kamuca et al. There are already bootlegs out on much of this stuff. I've found a couple at the record store, including one on the Naked City label of Tijuana, Mexico, called *Zoot Sims at the Half Note*, in which the accompanists are listed as Bill Crow, Roger Kellaway, and Mel Lewis. When I brought it home I found it was one of the tapes in my collection. I was pissed off because they got the credits wrong. It was John Beal, Mousey Alexander and me. Naked City screwed up the song titles, too, putting their own titles on two Al Cohn originals. Is there, at last, no justice?

In the New Year's Eve broadcast, December 31, 1964, Zoot plays the wrong song at midnight. There was an audience count-down, "Three, two, one!" and then Zoot played *Happy Birthday*. When Alan Grant corrected him — on the air! — Zoot said amiably, "I knew it was something festive."

— Dave Frishberg, Portland, Oregon

*These two letters summoned up two memories of Zoot.*

*When I became editor of Down Beat, I wanted to get more interesting covers, which I think I did with the formidable help of photographer Ted Williams and a young art director named Bob Billings.*

*I wanted to put Zoot on the cover, and — I was a very active photographer in those days — planned to get a shot of him on a visit to New York. I had noticed a house in Greenwich Village that had an interesting front balcony with a white cast-iron railing that evoked New Orleans. I arranged to take the picture of Zoot on that balcony.*

*But then New York was hit by a blizzard, which forced me to wait a day or two. The plows did their work and there were great long ridges of snow along the streets, particularly those as narrow as one finds in the Village. Zoot and I went down there with a friend — I can't remember who it was. He took a position on the balcony and I climbed up on that snow ridge to get a good position for the picture. I set it up carefully, looking down into the image on the glass atop my Rolleiflex. I asked Zoot, "Are you ready?" He said he was.*

*And at that moment the snow gave way under me and I sank instantly to my waist or maybe the armpits.*

*You never saw Zoot laugh harder than he did that day. He and our friend hauled me out of the snow, I got my*

picture, and I ran it on the cover.

I shot another cover involving Zoot, this one at the second Monterey Jazz Festival. I wanted a photo that said "California" and so I got some of the guys, including Zoot, Urbie Green, and Conte Candoli, took them out by a rather famous wind-bent Monterey pine, lined them up with their instruments against the sunset, and took my shot. It was a black-and-white photo, but Bob Billings ran the cover with a sky-blue overlay, and it was quite striking.

On our way back in a station wagon, Zoot said he liked the Dukes of Dixieland. That group was anathema in "hip" jazz circles, and one of the musicians climbed all over him. How could he possibly like them? Zoot said in his imperturbable way, "Well, you know me, man, I've got no taste."

I do not plan to renew my subscription, not because I don't enjoy the insightful, intelligent manner in which you present your jazz opinions. I'm cancelling because of your strong anti-United States bias and your juvenile views of politics in general, which I feel are uncalled for in a publication of this type.

— Anthony Gagliardi

*And what type of publication is that?*

*Before I ever wrote about music, I was a political reporter and foreign correspondent. I covered the French entanglement in Algeria, from which they had to withdraw, and their defeat in and withdrawal from Viet Nam. And so when John F. Kennedy permitted American "advisers" to start shooting back, I knew that the Americans were going to follow the same road to disaster as the French. And based on the British experience in Malaya, I knew that fighting against guerillas who are on their own terrain, you must have an overwhelming force of ten to one. That meant, in terms of the number of guerillas and North Viet Nameese forces McNamara and the Pentagon claimed they faced, the U.S. could not possibly win the war unless it put five million men on the ground! As for the bombing, I said at the time that the U.S. was sending heavy bombers at God knows what cost over the jungles to bomb a bridge that the North Viet Nameese would rebuild tomorrow morning for eighty cents. As for the Chinese coming in to help them, and the domino theory, not a chance: not with the intense hatred Ho Chi Minh had for the Chinese. Incidentally, he made a comment to his senior commanders that is pertinent today: "Democracy is something that no nation exports."*

*When the Bush administration invaded Iraq for the sake of Dick Cheney's Haliburton company (and does anyone really*

*believe that he and Bush are "former" oilmen?), I predicted every event that has come to pass. When they invaded, I said they would have to put 500,000 troops on the ground, drawing on the French and American experiences in Viet Nam and that of the British in Malaya. And given the number of National Guard units that have been deployed, the country doesn't have enough troops at home to assure domestic security. It's insane. The U.S. needs to learn what the British and French learned to their chagrin: colonialism is expensive.*

*The United States made a promise to the world, one of every man's freedom. It inspired the French Revolution and so influenced Britain that the monarchy is now purely ceremonial (and should be abolished). I expect the U.S. to live up to that promise; I demand the highest standards of it.*

*Lincoln called it "the last best hope of man." And he was right. And Senator Daniel Webster (1782-1852) saw this even earlier. He said: "Hold on, my friends, to the Constitution and to the Republic for which it stands. Miracles do not cluster and what has happened once in 6,000 years may not happen again. Hold on to the Constitution, for if the American Constitution should fall, there will be anarchy throughout the world."*

*The Constitution is under attack. The anarchy has already begun in the Middle East.*

*In his farewell address on March 4, 1837, Andrew Jackson said, "But you must remember, my fellow citizens, that eternal vigilance by the people is the price of liberty, that you must pay the price if you wish to secure the blessing. It behooves you, therefore, to be watchful in your States as well as in the Federal Government."*

*Finally, let us consider a few paragraphs from Dwight D. Eisenhower's final speech, in 1961, as president:*

*"Crises there will continue to be. In meeting them, whether foreign or domestic, great or small, there is a recurring temptation to feel that some spectacular and costly action could become the miraculous solution to all current difficulties. A huge increase in newer elements of our defense; development of unrealistic programs to cure every ill in agriculture; a dramatic expanse in basic and applied research — these and many other possibilities, each possibly promising in itself, may be suggested as the only way to the road we wish to travel.*

*"But each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs — balance between our essential*

*requirements as a nation and the duties imposed by the nation upon the individual; balance between actions of the moment and the national welfare of the future. Good judgment seeks balance and progress; lack of it eventually finds imbalance and frustration . . . .*

*"Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peacetime, or indeed by the fighting men of World War II or Korea.*

*"Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry . . . .*

*"We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations. This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.*

*"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."*

*Jazz is the model of democracy, a group of musicians each with an individual improvised voice, none of them getting in each other's way, each of them supporting and accompanying the other's statement.*

*I see nothing incongruous in discussing democracy and jazz in the same publication.*

## On Profanity

There is a close relationship between profanity and humor, for the good reason that both require shock and surprise. Profanity, of course, doesn't exist. It is an illusion, even a delusion. And both profanity and humor depend on surrounding social attitudes. What is forbidden causes shock, and laughter, so what is kept hidden in a society is the inevitable pool on which one draws for both insult and laughter. I noticed years ago in Catholic Latin America, where sex as a subject was not as sequestered as in our essentially Protestant society but religion was a sensitive matter, that jokes were often on religious subjects. We can hardly even conceive of such jokes here,

where shock and humor have traditionally depended on sexual subjects.

Once upon a time in French Canada, the expression "Sacré bleu," which means only "holy blue" meaning in turn "holy heaven", was considered quite strong. On the other hand, in France the expression "Fous le camp," pronounced *foolcohn*, has no strength at all. It means literally *fuck the field*, used as we use *fuck off*, and neither makes any sense whatever upon examination. But "fous le camp" isn't strong at all; it used more or less as we would say "buzz off." Indeed, there is a French word *conneries* which can only be translated as cunteries, but is used to mean nonsense or foolishness. I have heard a most respectable French grandmother say to a grandson who was acting up, "Arrêt tes conneries," which could only be translated as "Stop your nonsense."

All this is changing in America, thanks to movies and television, where vulgarities of language are now so universal that you'll even hear "pissed off" in news broadcasts. There is or was an HBO show called *Tombstone*, and since I like westerns, I started to watch its first episode. But having heard the word "fuck" about ten times in the first seven or eight minutes, I turned it off. Such language, used in excess, simply clogs the story. And more significantly, the language in use by the cowboys at that time was probably fairly fastidious. Larry McMurtry, in one of his essays about his native Texas, makes clear that we don't really know what kind of language those earlier people used in courtship. But there were two books commonly read in the Old West: Shakespeare and the King James version of the Bible. Frank James, I recall reading, carried Shakespeare plays in his saddlebags. Thus the use of That Word (as my mother called it) in a western seemed completely anachronistic and shattered the illusion. Then there was a movie about the suffragette movement, which interests me, so I started watching it. The women said "fuck" so many times in the early minutes of the picture that, again, I turned it off: the story just wasn't credible, since the women who founded that movement in America were deeply religious.

Contrary to legend, "that word" is not an acronym for an ancient British navy charge, "for unlawful carnal knowledge." It is far older than that, with cognates in French (*foutre*) and German and no doubt other languages. One of the criteria for moving "slang" into the dictionary is how long it has been in use, and by that one alone it belongs in general dictionaries. For another thing, it is the only transitive verb we have for the act without which none of us

would be here to be embarrassed by it. It was driven into hiding under Cromwell's Roundheads.

I do not use profanity in the body text of my writing, not because I am a puritan but because it breaks the flow of the writing by drawing attention to itself. When, in the editing of my Johnny Mercer biographer, a New York copy editor wrote in "pissed off" for "annoyed," I threw out all his work and had him removed from the job.

On the other hand, if someone uses "profanity" in an interview, I will not remove it, considering that to be censorship. In my school years, I worked in the summers as a longshoreman and later lab technician among some really rough, tough guys, and *never* heard that kind of "bad" language among them.

When I was a young newspaper reporter, you were not allowed to use the word "rape" in a story. The euphemism was "assault." That was in Canada, but I think it was pretty much the same in the States. Sexual stories simply were not covered, except in the few weekly sleaze journals, forerunners of the *National Inquirer*. In Toronto, the two afternoon newspapers, the *Star* and the *Telegram* had a pool service for magistrates court coverage: you filed to both papers. As I recall there were four magistrates courts, designated A, B, C, and D. Sexual cases, which meant for the most part prostitution arrests, were assigned to C Court, and we all liked to catch the C Court assignment for the day. You couldn't write the stories, which meant you did no work; you just sat there and heard (I assure you) all sorts of really interesting tales. I was still of sufficient naivete that I found it hard to believe that such things as electric chairs and prostitutes existed.

One story I covered was the attempted rape of Patti Page. Some clown found out the number of her hotel room and took her flowers, pretending to be a messenger boy, and then tried to rape her. She fought him off. I think the news stories referred to "attempted assault." Years later, when I got to know Patti, I reminded her of the incident; she was amazed that anyone remembered it. A nice lady, by the way, and a good singer, despite the songs she recorded such as *The Tennessee Waltz* and *How Much Is That Doggy in the Window*. (I sublet an apartment in New York from her pianist Rocky Cole, born Coluccio, who had been in the Artie Shaw Navy band in the South Pacific. He was always away on the road with her.)

In the olden days, you will recall, the restraints on the movie industry forbade the use of the word "pregnant". Otto Preminger's movie *The Moon Is Blue* couldn't get a seal of approval because the girl in the story, played by Maggie McNamara, uses the word "virgin." In the movies, husbands

and wives slept in twin beds, though I never saw a set of twin beds in any home I knew as a child. And when it became necessary for a wife in a movie to tell her husband she was in a family way, the direct statement was always avoided. She'd say something like, "Darling, I have to tell you, I'm . . ." To which the poor dolt of a husband would say something like, "You mean, you're . . . you're . . ." "Yes." And pregnant women in the movies never got big, even though most kids in America had seen their mothers or their mothers' friends looking like, as my mother used to put it, "a ship in full sail." In recent years we have seen a nude and pregnant Demi Moore on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, her abdomen in ugly profile protrusion. (I have never felt anything but compassion for pregnant women. There should be an easier way to get into this life, not to say easier ways to get out of it.) French films had no such restrictions on them, which made them seem racy to American audiences. And to me, the Gershwin song *Aren't You Kinda Glad We Did?* in its recording by Gene Krupa with Buddy Stewart seemed pretty wild. The song *She Had to Go and Lose It at the Astor* was equally far-out. And does anybody but me remember Gertrude Niessen's record *I Wanna Get Married* with its daring line, "I want to sleep in pajama tops"?

There were of course a lot of racy lines in Broadway musicals, including Cole Porter's "I want to laze in a daisy chain," but they never escaped into the general cultural atmosphere. And Larry Hart's "I couldn't sleep and wouldn't sleep until I could sleep where I shouldn't sleep" was bowdlerized in its release on recordings. Cole Porter's *Love for Sale* was barred from network radio even in instrumental versions. Rebellng against all this, Alec Wilder wrote a song called *If You See Kay (tell her I love her)*, and managed to get performances on network radio until some executive figured out what it spelled.

How did we get from there to here? That could make the subject of a very substantial book. But to consider it briefly:

When I was a kid, the raciest visual materials were the stylized *Esquire* paintings of leggy girls by George Petty and Alberto Vargas. Then there several magazines such as *Sunbathing and Health* that pronounced itself as favoring a wholesome approach to nudism. But every little boy who got his hands on a copy knew what that stuff really was for. Everything was rather demure, even the pictures of Betty Paige that became popular in the 1950s. Pornography progresses by increments, by the gradual increase in shock value. This is also true of horror movies. All those nude ladies, gamboling on tennis courts, were airbrushed to

remove all pubic hair. They looked like statues. This was even true when Hugh Hefner started *Playboy*, whose women (though photographed) were as artificial as the Vargas paintings. Hefner began his series of incredibly pretentious essays on his "Playboy philosophy" which was nothing more than his puerile call for irresponsible libertarian sex, in which women were reduced to objects of amusement and enjoyment, blowup dolls to be used and abandoned. Then came Bob Guccione and *Penthouse*, in which the ban on pubic hair disappeared. Still later, Guccione proceeded to the glorification of the vertical smile. *Penthouse* ran letters in which people recounted wild sexual adventures in twosomes and threesomes. All of them were suspect: they were so alike in style that they seemed to me to be house written.

Between Hefner, Guccione, Gloria Steinem, and rock music — with its on-your-knees-baby ethos — things proceeded rapidly downhill, and the monogamous glue that held this society together, exemplified in the love-for-a-lifetime songs of the earlier era as opposed to sex-for-a-minute songs of the present, gradually dissolved. Steinem's stake in the matter was that she wanted equal sexual rights with men. She got them, and as my mother predicted, "Women's lib will liberate men." I consider Gloria Steinem one of the evils of American civilization, perhaps not in a class with the Mitchell Brothers, but bad enough.

Ingrid Bergman was drummed out of Hollywood and the United States for having an affair with Italian director Roberto Rossellini. Today Hollywood stars, male and female, commonly have babies out of wedlock, and it makes no difference whatever to their careers. And the sexuality of the cookie-cutter blondes is light years from Lana Turner and her sweater, as exemplified by people such as Britney Spears, whom Don Imus calls a "pop tart." Turner had a taste for jazz musicians, having done the deed with Tommy Dorsey, Buddy Rich, and Gene Krupa, along with being married to Artie Shaw. Ava Gardner too liked jazz musicians. We can guess why. But the movie studios kept all of the affairs of Hollywood carefully hushed up, gay and straight alike.

And then came Bill Clinton to put fellatio on the front page of the *New York Times*, leaving many a mother to explain to her children what was meant by this term that they were hearing even on television. A young mother in Ojai was asked by her little daughter what it meant, and, uncomfortably, the mother explained. The little girl said, "You mean like my brother? Oh yeuch." Everybody in show business knew about John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe and others of his toys, but their affair didn't make the newspapers. Clinton and the

creepy-crawly, pietistic, vindictive, psalm-singing Kenneth Starr did. By the way, have you ever noticed how much Starr and Karl Rove resemble each other — and Rush Limbaugh? Fat-faced little Mama's boys who probably never in life got it on their merits, each of them illuminating H.L. Mencken's observation that puritanism is "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." And the Kenneth Starr example exquisitely illustrates Northrop Frye's statement that "morality is the rationalization of jealousy." If I can't have it, nobody else should have it either.

Not that I am apologizing for Clinton. I cannot look at him without thinking of his taking advantage of pathetic, ambitious Monica Lewinsky on her knees under his desk. He not only disgraced his office, but by making a gift of such a weapon to his enemies he reduced the Democratic party to quadriplegic impotence, leaving America to be ruled and exploited by the multi-national corporations, its unions broken, its jobs exported, and its educational systems in such ruin that more foreign students now attend university in China than here.

You may know that CBS, NBC, and ABC are jointly petitioning the Federal Communications Commission to give them the freedom to do raunchy and violent television like that you see on cable TV. I don't know why they are bothering. They're just about there.

I never watch sitcoms, and I certainly don't watch *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives*. But while channel surfing the other day, I paused on a scene in the latter in which the ladies are sitting around a dinner table and one of them says, "I spent the afternoon masturbating."

So what more do the networks want of the FCC?

All this is prefatory to a couple of things I'd like you to see; if you're on the jazz email circuit you may already have seen them, for certainly they whizzed swiftly around. The first speaks for itself. Of the second I would say that, like his father before him, Kenny Drew Jr. is a superb pianist. As for his use of profanity, I wouldn't for a moment think of censoring it. For profanity has one other useful function. Expressing anger.

## Academy Awards

The Academy Award winning song of 1936 was *The Way You Look Tonight* from the film *Swing Time*, music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by Dorothy Fields.

Some day, when I'm awfully low,  
when the world is cold,  
I will feel a glow  
just thinking of you  
and the way you look tonight.

Oh but you're lovely,  
with your smile so warm,  
and your cheek so soft.  
There is nothing for me  
but to love you,  
just the way you look tonight.

With each word,  
your tenderness grows,  
tearing my fear apart,  
and that laugh  
that wrinkles your nose  
touches my foolish heart.

Lovely, never never change.  
Keep that breathless charm.  
Won't you please arrange it,  
'cause I love you  
just the way you look tonight.

The Academy Award winning song of 2006 is *It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp*, from the film *Hustle and Flow*, music and lyrics by Jordan Houston, Cedric Coleman, and Paul Beauregard.

You know it's hard out here for a pimp (you ain't knowin)  
When he trying to get this money for the rent (you ain't knowin)  
For the Cadillacs and gas money spent (you ain't knowin)  
Will have a whole lot of witches jumpin ship!

In my eyes I done seen some crazy things in the streets  
Gotta couple hos working on the changes for me  
But I gotta keep my game tight like Kobe on game night  
Like takin from a ho don't know no better, I know that ain't right  
Done seen people, done seen people deal  
Done seen some people live in poverty with no meals  
It's fucked up where I live, but that's just how it is  
It might be new to you, but it's been like this for years  
It's blood sweat and tears when it comes down to this shit

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I'm trying to get rich 'fore I leave up out of this bitch  
I'm trying to have things but it's hard fo a pimp  
But I'm prayin and I'm hopin to God I don't slip, yeah

(Chorus)

Man it seems like I'm duckin dodgin bullets everyday  
Niggaz hatin on me cause I got hos on the tray  
But I gotta stay paid, gotta stay above water  
Couldn't keep up with my hos, that's when shit got harder  
North Memphis where I'm from, I'm 7<sup>th</sup> Street bound  
Where niggaz all the time end up lost and never found  
Man these girls think we prove thangs, leave a big head  
They come hopin every night, they don't end up being dead  
Wait I got a snow bunny, and a black girl too  
You pay the right price and they'll do both to you  
That's the way the game goes, gotta keep it strictly pimpin  
Gotta have my hustle tight, making change off these women,  
yeah.

## What the Fuck Happened to Black Popular Music?

By Kenny Drew, Jr.

I've decided to add this section to my web site as a vehicle to express my views on various topics, musical and otherwise, that have been on my mind lately.

You may wonder why I'm talking about popular music in this first installment, since I am generally thought of as a "jazz" musician. However, anyone who knows me knows that my tastes in music are very eclectic (as are those of most jazz musicians, quiet as it's kept). In fact when I started my career as a professional musician, I was not playing jazz. I started out playing in R&B groups and Top 40 bands. We only played jazz if the club was almost empty! The '60s-'80s was such an incredible time for all styles of popular music, but for the sake of this discussion I will concentrate specifically on black music (or rhythm-and-blues, or funk, or whatever the hell you want to call it).

Recently I've been listening to a lot of my favorite music from that time, and to be honest, I am disgusted and sickened at how far our music has declined in the quality of the music and its message. How the hell did we get from Motown to Death Row; From Earth Wind and Fire to Ludacris; from Luther Vandross to 50Cent?

I remember a time in our music when songs had great melodies and chord changes, you actually had to be able to sing or play an instrument to become a musician, and Michael Jackson was black. It's a sad commentary on our culture and society when the biggest thing in popular music is an ex-crack dealer whose claim to fame is being shot nine times, and one of the greatest entertainers in the world was on trial for child molestation. If that's not a sign of the coming Apocalypse, I don't know what is. And if 50Cent was really shot nine times, why couldn't one of those bullets have hit a vital organ? Who the fuck was shooting at him — Stevie Wonder? And as far as all these black rappers getting shot, how about a little equal opportunity violence here? Can't somebody pop a cap in Eminem's white ass?

Another issue in the decline of music today is the stupidity and negativity in the lyrics and the video images that accompany this so-called "music". I recently discovered that there is now a form of rap called "coke rap" in which the lyrics deal mainly with the sale, distribution, and use of coke and crack. I find it offensive that any record company would try to make a profit from glorifying something that has decimated the black community the way that crack has. I hope that one day while 50Cent is lounging by the pool in his humongous mansion surrounded by beautiful groupies, he might consider how many lives were ruined by the poison he used to sell, and how many more lives will be potentially damaged by the musical poison he's selling now.

There's a video by Ludacris that I've seen of a song called *Act a Fool*. All I can remember is that there a lot of shots of him and his boys running from the cops. Don't we have enough young black men running around acting like fools without some idiot rapper encouraging it? But then again, Ludacris probably makes more money in one month than I'll make in my entire life as a jazz musician. So who's the idiot here? Maybe it's me.

Remember when the lyrics in our music spoke of love and the loss of love? Who can forget the uplifting message of peace, hope, and spirituality in the lyrics of Earth Wind & Fire? Or the social consciousness and protest messages in the lyrics of Gil Scott-Heron and Marvin Gaye? How the hell did we get from *Just to Be Close to You Girl* to *Back that Ass Up Bitch*? How the hell did we get from *What's Goin' On?* and *You Haven't Done Nothin to Me So Horny* and *My Hump*?

Last, but not least, it's time to address the musical quality of this bullshit, or more accurately, the lack of it. Way back when, when I first started studying music, I was told that music had to consist of three elements: melody, harmony, and rhythm.

Rap music (an oxymoron similar to "military intelligence" and "jumbo shrimp") has discarded the first two elements and is left with nothing but rhythm.

Since only one element of music is present in most of this crap, it doesn't even justify being called music. Our culture has been dumbed down to the point where it doesn't even justify being called music. Americans can't tell the difference between a truly great musician and somebody who's been studying their instrument for a week. Playing a musical instrument at a high level is no longer a well-respected skill in our society. (I'm not sure that it ever really was.) To be honest, I think that most of the students in music schools today who are studying jazz and classical music are wasting their and their parents' money. (Boy, am I going to get in trouble for saying this!) Why spend all that time mastering an instrument when you can just get a drum machine and a microphone, write some asinine lyrics about bitches, ho's and pimps, and make a ton of money? Sometimes I wonder whether I'm wasting my time in this cesspool called the music industry. These days it seems like the only way to make any serious money in music is to produce some bullshit that doesn't even sound like music!

So what's the solution here? Damned if I know! But I did see an encouraging story in the news recently. A billboard advertising 50Cent's new movie was put up in a black neighborhood not far from a school. In the billboard 50Cent is seen with his heavily tattooed back to the camera with his arms outstretched in a crucifix pose with a microphone in one hand and a gun in the other. Understandably, the community was outraged. They held protests, got some media coverage, and eventually succeeded in getting the movie company to remove the billboard. I say that we use this as a model nationwide.

I propose a nationwide boycott of rap music; perhaps by picketing in front of record company offices and major record store chains. Anybody remember the "Disco Sucks" movement in the '70s? Maybe it's time for a "Rap Sucks" movement. Who's with me here?

(Actually, looking back on the disco era, that music sounds like Beethoven in comparison to the rap garbage that's poisoning our airwaves now.)

Maybe we should have a big "Rap Sucks" rally somewhere — as long as it doesn't escalate into a riot like the "Disco Sucks" one did.

— KD Jr