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Can Jazz Be Saved?

Warning: The Audience for America's Great Art Form Is Withering Away

by Terry Teachout

In 1987 the U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution declaring jazz to be a "rare and valuable national treasure." Nowadays the music of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis is taught in public schools, heard on TV commercials and performed at prestigious venues like New York's Lincoln Center, which even runs its own nightclub, Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola.

Here's the catch: Nobody's listening.

No, it's not quite that bad — but it's no longer possible for head-in-the-sand types to pretend that the great American art form is economically healthy, or that its future looks anything but bleak.

The bad news came in the form of the National Endowment for the Arts latest survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the fourth to be conducted by the NEA (in participation with the U.S. Census Bureau) since 1982. These are the findings that made jazz musicians sit up and take notice:

● In 2002, the year of the last survey, 10.8 percent of adult Americans attended at least one jazz performance. In 2008, that fell to 7.8 percent.

● Not only is the audience for jazz shrinking, but it's growing older — fast. The median age of adults in America who attended a live jazz performance was 29. In 2008, it was 46.

● Older people are also much less likely to attend jazz performances today than they were a few years ago. The percentage of Americans between the ages of 45 and 54 who attended a live jazz performance in 2002 was 13.9 percent. In 2008, it was 9.8 percent. That's a 30 percent drop in attendance.

● Even among college-educated adults, the audience for live jazz has shrunk significantly, from 19.4 percent in 1982 to 14.9 in 2008.

These numbers indicate that the audience for jazz in America is shrinking at an alarming rate. What I find no less revealing, though, is that the median age of the jazz audience is now comparable to the ages for attendees of live performances of classical music (40 in 1982, 49 in 2008), opera (43 versus 48), non-musical plays (39 versus 47) and ballet (37 versus 46). In 1982, by contrast, jazz fans were much younger than their high-culture counterparts.

What does this tell us? I suspect it means, among other things, that the average American now sees jazz as a form of high art. Nor should this have come as a surprise to anyone, since most of the jazz musicians that I know feel pretty much the same way. They regard themselves as artists, not entertainers, masters of a musical language that is comparable in seriousness to classical music — and just as off-putting to pop-loving listeners who have no more use for Wynton Marsalis than they do for Felix Mendelssohn.

Jazz has changed greatly since the '30s, when Louis Armstrong, one of the supreme musical geniuses of the 20th century, was also a pop star, a gravel-voiced crooner who made movies with Bing Crosby and Mae West and whose records sold by the truckload to fans who knew nothing about jazz except that Satchmo played and sang it. As late as the early '50s, jazz was still for the most part a genuinely popular music, a utilitarian, song-based idiom to which ordinary people could dance if they felt like it. But by the '60s, it had evolved into a challenging concert music whose complexities repelled many of the same youngsters who were falling hard for rock and roll. Yes, John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* sold very well for a jazz album in 1965 — but most kids preferred *California Girls* and *The Track of My Tears*, and still do now that they have kids of their own.

Even if I could, I wouldn't want to undo the transformation of jazz into a sophisticated art music. But there's no sense in pretending that it didn't happen, or that contemporary jazz is capable of appealing to the same kind of mass audience that thrilled to the big bands of the swing

era. And it is precisely because jazz is now widely viewed as a high-culture art form that its makers must start to grapple with the same problems as do symphony orchestras, drama companies and art museums — a task that will be made all the more daunting by the fact that jazz is made for the most part by individuals, not established institutions with deep pockets.

No, I don't know how to get young people to start listening to jazz again. But I do know this: Any symphony orchestra that thinks it can appeal to under-thirty listeners by suggesting that they *should* like Schubert and Stravinsky has already lost the battle. If you're marketing Schubert and Stravinsky to those listeners, you have no choice but to start from scratch and make the case for the beauty of their music to otherwise intelligent people who simply don't take it for granted. By the same token, jazz musicians who want to keep their own equally beautiful music alive and well have got to start thinking hard about how to pitch it to young listeners — not next month, not next week, but right now.

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Judith Schlesinger is a clinical psychologist who writes for All About Jazz. *She added this comment.*

by Judith Schlesinger

After being tipped off to the existence of TT's article in the WSJ, I went over and read it. It's well done, as always, but the reality described is pretty dismal. Terry says he has no suggestions for making jazz more appealing to young people, so I thought I'd offer a few.

1. Male jazz musicians should immediately adopt the wardrobe of prison inmates — pants pooling on the floor, underwear waistband showing — and perfect the art of gratuitous crotch grabbing;

2. Female musicians should take style tips from Britney Spears and/or Irma La Douce and undergo whatever cosmetic enhancement may be necessary to turn back and stop time at the age of twenty-five;

3. Jazz should respect the fact that many multitasking young people have the attention span of a gnat, and stop expecting them to listen to anything for more than, say, two and a half minutes;

4. Every jazz artist should be Twittering and Tweeting and Booking Face, thereby acquiring close personal friends who might support the music, and finally:

5. Composition titles and lyrics should reflect concerns and values. For example, the outdated notion of romance should be replaced by references to "hooking up" (see above reference to attention span).

— JS

A Whiff of History

I have occasionally wondered what my late friend Paul Weston, who founded the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), would think of what the organization has become — not a vehicle to honor excellence through the Grammy Awards but one to reward and abet venality and corruption. The Academy Awards are no better.

A few years ago, the Grammy Awards TV broadcast managed to tick off a great many people in the profession by its dismissive treatment of jazz, including a brief, dutiful, and all too perfunctory showing of Dizzy Gillespie. The outrage on the West Coast led to a call to establish a new organization, alternative to NARAS, and a meeting was called to advance this cause, led, if memory serves, by Mel Tormé and Leonard Feather. There was much high-flown rhetoric about the nobility and importance of jazz. But one thing made me especially uncomfortable, and I stood up and said so. "Do you know what's wrong with this group?" I said. "Too much gray hair."

I said that if an alternative organization were to be established, it had better make common cause with all forms of excellent music, including both classical and the higher levels of "pop", including Gershwin, Kern, Porter, et al, because they were all suffering from the same form of audience attrition. I had no idea what it should be called. National Academy of Real Music (or good music) would be instantly contentious, not to mention pompous, but it would be more accurate and certainly not as feckless as the National Academy of Jazz, which would get you about as far as the nearest convenience store. I even mused that the practitioners of rock should be barred from such a group, but at a practical level, you could not do that: you'd be barring such people as Sting, a formidable musician. It would make things easier if we could prejudge music by its category, but you can't, and I suppose what bothers me is the very word *jazz*, which was objectionable to Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Gil Evans, Bill Evans, and many others.

My comments sailed over the congregation like a winged brick, inspiring not an objection but only silence. Nothing came of that meeting, and no such organization was ever

formed.

The insularity of jazz fans dates at least to the 1940s and probably further, when it was thought that jazz and classical music were mutually exclusive, which was stupid from the foundation, since so many of the early jazz musicians had superior classical training, including Teddy Wilson, Benny Carter, and Earl Hines. And those who didn't quickly acquired a taste for and indeed passion for this "other" kind of music, including Bix Beiderbecke and Artie Shaw. Back in the 1930s, Mel Powell was a well-schooled classical pianist before he ever took up "jazz" (Mel was another of those who didn't care for the term). As one who grew up with both, I was never comfortable with it, and such *Down Beat* affectations as "long hair" music.

The term "jazz" *is* restricting, and *Down Beat* once ran a contest to find another term for it. The winning entry, as I recall, was "crew cut." Good God.

But the term continued to be vexing to the point that Artie Shaw once assembled a panel at Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California, to seek to *define* jazz. The group included Lalo Schifrin, *Los Angeles Times* movie critic Charles Champlin, Mel Powell, Artie, and me. As a matter of fact, that's where I met Mel Powell, an idol of mine since my adolescence. We didn't succeed in drafting a definition.

About that time, I was invited to address the annual meeting of the Duke Ellington Society, held that year in Toronto. I remember especially an incident that occurred just before I was to make my address. My biography of Woody Herman had come out a few weeks before. A little man came up to me with a furtive mien and said, "I enjoyed your Woody Herman biography, but . . . ."

I said, "But you found an error in it."

He said, "Well, yes I did."

I said, "I found seven."

They're always there, what I call the Gotcha people. I daresay they exist in most fields, but they seem to be particularly common in jazz, among them the I-Alone-Understand-Bill Evans necrophiliacs. Whoever they read, Leonard Feather, Nat Hentoff, Gunther Schuller, Terry Teachout, they seek that Eureka! moment when they can glow in their I-know-more-than-you self-admiration. It is the height of their achievement.

Whether this is still true, I don't know, but at one time many jazz fans used their love of the music as the measure of their distinction, what Leonard Feather called the hipper-than-thou syndrome. It manifests itself in the my-favorite-tenor-player-is-better-than-your-favorite-tenor-player disputes, as in the Olden Days arguments about Artie Shaw vs. Benny Goodman, Woody Herman vs. Stan Kenton, Count Basie vs. Duke Ellington..

The Ellington gathering was amazing, dismaying in its parochialism. For the most part they were interested only in Ellington, and in accord with the my-favorite-tenor-player rule of thumb, indifferent to Count Basie, Woody Herman, and most assuredly Dizzy Gillespie. I pointed out that classical music too was experiencing a diminishing audience, and that jazz should make common cause with it. Blank stares. I said that the most critical problem was radio, which was dedicated more and more to the garbage of our culture. I noted that you could drive from the Atlantic to the Pacific with the radio on and almost never hear Miles Davis, Jerome Kern, or Debussy. A woman from California said that there was a good radio station in the Los Angeles area. She referred to KLON, which isn't even in Los Angeles. It's in Long Beach, and you can't pick it up in much of Southern California. Granting that there was this one station, I noted that in the mid-1940s — when the population was much smaller — there were something like twenty-seven stations in that city that played jazz at least part of each day.

That leads us to another problem. Jazz today is heard, when it is heard at all, only on radio stations that play *nothing but* jazz. It is segregated, ghettoized, as is all radio. Rock stations play only rock, and rock fans are exposed *only* to rock. They cannot stumble on jazz or Jerome Kern.

In the 1930s, dancing was an enormously popular activity, with pavilions and dance-halls all over this country and Canada. Artie Shaw told me it was possible to play a month of one-nighters in Pennsylvania alone. With the rise in the 1920s of a prototypical jazz, and its infusion of the bands — almost every man wanted to take solos, to show off his prowess — that indefinable something, that way of playing (Bill Evans said jazz was a how, not a what) the tempos that defined swing crept into the music: a ballad followed by an "up-tempo" number being the usual format. Those who had become more interested in listening than dancing crowded close to the bandstand, while farther back the dancers did their thing. Some remarkable terpsichory originated in the black community, particularly Harlem, and spread out to the white kids, incredibly acrobatic and dangerous stuff.

One night on TV I saw a documentary on those dancers, amazed anew by their strength, grace, equilibrium, and acrobatic prowess. For me, a clumsy dancer at best even in my youth, the very idea of talking about it with one of the great masters of the age we (some of us) have just lived through, namely Gene Kelly, is implicitly ludicrous, and when I said,"Gene, some of those people were wonderful

dancers," he gave me a look of pity and said, "Nooooo shit!"

Artie Shaw's hatred of the jitterbugs was the expression of an impossible ingratitude, for they had made him the two things valued above all else in the United States and especially by him — rich and famous. The big-band or swing rested solidly on dancing and the edifices that housed it, and so did the life he led.

The pattern shifted. As has often been noted, the boys who helped win World War II came home and began what the sociologists quaintly call family formation — which leaves few free evenings for the dance pavilions. The audiences withered, and by the end of the 1940s the major bands were gone. A few who scaled back to leading small combos, among them Benny Goodman and Woody Herman.

When Count Basie, who had disbanded, encountered Artie Shaw, he told Artie, "You should come back to the business. We need you."

Artie said, "No, Bill – *you* should quit."

Basie said, "To be what? A janitor?"

A good many of the brilliant soloists who had become famous in one or another of the bands, now made their homes in small groups in small jazz clubs, and there were a lot of these clubs in the major cities, including the Blue Note, the Half Note, the Village Vanguard, the Village Gate, and Birdland in New York; the London House, Mister Kelly's, the Sutherland Lounge, and many more in Chicago. Miles Davis could play a week or two at the Cloister, and the Oscar Peterson Trio a month at London House. Oscar could do it *three times a year.* Gerry Mulligan took his big band into the Sutherland for a week, and I think two, and J.J. Johnson played two weeks at a place called Birdhouse.

A good many of the big-band audience followed the soloists into the clubs. One would think that the gang who went to listen, not to dance in the crowds immediately in front of the stage, formed the core of that audience, but some of the dancers must have come along with them.

A problem was that young people could not get into places that sold liquor, although some clubs tried to get around this by setting up separate bleachers areas for them — Birdland, for one. But in the long run, these efforts were doomed: and a future audience could not be built among the young as it had been by the big bands and their dances.

And all the while the audience for rock-and-roll was growing.

There had always been crap movies, novels, and music. Man's appetite for the meretricious seems fathomless. The trivial music (*The Boogie-Woogie Bugle Boy, The Hut-Sut Song, Three Little Fishes, O Mein Papa*) coexisted with the good stuff (*This Will Be My Shining Hour*). But something happened with the rise of FM radio in the mid-1950s. By then network radio was increasingly irrelevant as television sopped up most of the advertising money, and music was heard mostly through local broadcasting. FM came to pass and provided clear and superior sound.

And so in a smooth and sleazy deception, the radio industry in the mid-1950s promised that it would present the "good" music on FM and leave the meretricious to AM, where sound didn't matter and/or the audience didn't know the difference. That was the implicit contract with the Federal Communications Commission and the American public. But of course the industry "honored" the agreement for only a short time, and as the need for stations grew, the quality of broadcasting on FM declined. Most societies, one must presume, harbor more ignorant than educated people, and especially the United States, whose educational system has never been as good as that in most western European countries. Ronald Reagan, an ignorant man himself, saw no more need for education than for Redwood trees, and began his assault on it when he was governor of California. Under his aegis, California began its decline from the best education system in the country to its present distinction of being close to the lowest among the states.

In the 1930s and even '40s, network radio offered anyone who wanted to turn one of its stations on and leave it on a broad cultural education, from the Metropolitan Opera — which, as a child, I heard with my grandmother every week — to Grand Ol' Opry, from Bruno Walter and Arturo Toscanini to Duke Ellington and Woody Herman, Spade Cooley and his Western Swing to Dick Kuhn and his polka band. The quiz shows were of a high order, and *Information Please* asked tough intellectual questions of its panelists, who included Clifton Fadiman, Oscar Levant, Franklin P. Adams, and John Kiernan, and guests such as Dorothy Parker, Orson Welles, Deems Taylor, Alexander Woollcott, and Boris Karloff. Anyone who stumped them got the prize. — five dollars and a set of Encyclopedia Brittanica. The show, which ran on radio from 1938 to 1948, was immensely popular — and educational.

Even the ordinary popular music — without considering the theatrical masterpieces by Rodgers, Porter, Schwartz, Loesser — seem marvels of intelligent contour when weighed against what increasingly became the norm after the early 1950s, such songs as *To Each His Own, As Time Goes By, Oh Look at Me Now*, and *Moonlight Cocktail.* And the better lyrics were masterpieces of literacy. Cole Porter's *In the Still of the Night* and Mitchell Parrish's *Star Dust* are

two of the finest pieces of writing in the English language, for imagery, sonority, clarity, condensation, and emotional power. Johnny Mercer's *Old Black Magic* is another, one of the most erotic songs ever written. Not to mention the perpetually unsung Tom Adair, who graced Matt Dennis melodies with lyrics such as *Violets for Your Furs.*

At least two generations grew up on such songs acquired an osmotic literacy, and in their dedication to one-love-for-a-lifetime, whether realistic or not, these songs almost certainly served as an instrument of cultural cohesion, encouraging a stabilizing monogamy and solid homes for children to grow up in: *My Blue Heaven*. The pop and rap music of our time — considerably abetted by former musician Quincy Jones — hardly serves such a social value.

I noticed the aging of the audience on the jazz cruises of the Norway, which my wife and I took every year for about ten years. The quality of the cruises declined, including the cuisine, and eventually we stopped going on them. But the most conspicuous change evolved in the audience. Each year one saw more bent postures, gray hair, canes, arthritic movement, and electric scooters. And there were few younger people to replace those who turned up missing each year.

The decline of popular music was well under way by the time of Johnnie Ray's *Cry* in 1951, although from today's perspective the record seems like a marvel of musicality. Actually Ray sang well, and Elvis Presley could, when given a piece of good material, sing *very* well. The decline accelerated with the spectacular rise of Presley and the success of Bill Halley and his Comets in the mid-1950s.

John Lewis once remarked to me that jazz evolved in a symbiotic relationship with the development of a magnificent American popular music: Kern, Gershwin, Porter, Carmichael, Rodgers, Loesser, Schwartz et al. This becomes obvious on only a moment's reflection.

From its earliest days, jazz was a theme-and-variations form, and the themes comprised materials with which the audience was familiar. There were those of course who wanted only to hear the melody, and they could find satisfaction in such bands as those of Freddy Martin, Blue Barron, Wayne King, Tommy Tucker, Rudy Vallee, and others that were disdained by the "hip" listeners who relished the departures from melody practiced by Johnny Hodges, Coleman Hawkins, J.C. Higginbotham, Teddy Wilson, Benny Goodman, Mel Powell, Zoot Sims, and all the others in a remarkable flowering of great improvising musicians, some of whom attained (Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Bill Evans among them) the level of genius. That *was* the art, although Donald Byrd once said to me that after many years of playing he had concluded that the hardest thing was to play melody as written and get feeling into it.

It was important, if not essential, that listeners know the songs on which the variations were played.

As jazz evolved, musicians began explorations not on the melodies but on the harmonies of the songs, especially Coleman Hawkins, whose recording of *Body and Soul* is as much a landmark in the evolution of the music as Louis Armstrong's *West End Blues*. And it is mutual knowledge of these songs, including their harmonies — the "chord changes" — that made possible the collective playing of musicians who might never have met before. Some of the songs became part of the primary vocabulary of jazz, none more so than Gershwin's *I Got Rhythm*. You'd hear musicians on a bandstand, calling the next tune, say "*Rhythm* changes," and this laconic instruction was all that was needed.

The harmony at first was pretty simplistic but it absorbed some principles from the likes of Jerome Kern, whose practices were exquisitely sophisticated, as in such instances as *The Song Is You* and *The Folks Who Live on the Hill.* And *Show Boat* premiered in 1927. Jazz gradually absorbed a richer harmonic language, led by such as Hoagy Carmichael and Matt Dennis. And then came bebop, evolving in the early 1940s, bringing to the music an extended harmonic vocabulary involving major sevenths and extensions up the scale to include ninths, flat ninths, sharp ninths, raised elevenths, thirteenths, and both raised and flatted fifths. It also incorporated sudden rhythmic shifts, with melodic phrases starting and stopping at unexpected places, a practice not totally disconcerting to devotees of Bach but completely so to those immovably planted in and devoted to the past, such as Benny Goodman and others who denounced it as "Chinese music."

For a while, the aged among us will recall, there was an ardently stupid quarrel, abetted by the jazz magazines, between the beboppers and what their enemies called the "moldy figs," eventually condensed to "figs". But bebop prevailed and jazz became generally more complex, and the young audience turned increasingly to simplistic music such as that of Bill Haley and Elvis Presley, and the jazz audience, almost imperceptibly at first, grew smaller.

I had shuddered for the future of American popular music — not just jazz — since the rise of Elvis, but that worry grew darker and deeper with the arrival of the Beatles. It was not so much the Beatles themselves that bothered me. I gave them what may have been their first good review in North

America, focusing on a kind of charming youthful irreverence in their first albums. But when the record-industry flacks began elevating their stuff to the status of high art I began to worry. It was one of those shifts in definition so brilliantly pulled off by Reagan when he demonized the world "liberal."

I had been writing in *High Fidelity* for some time that if the record industry persisted in issuing records in praise of drugs, we would eventually be overwhelmed by a national epidemic. And lo and behold, here we are, soaked in substance and an unwinnable war against it. I was called a right-wing crackpot by the record publicists at the time.

Then came Woodstock. You may have noticed that this is the 40th anniversary of that extravaganza: it has been all but impossible to avoid. Pat Buchanan, who was at that time (1969) a speech writer and adviser to Richard Nixon, said on a TV show that they were both amused by the event, an indication of the limited perception of both. They simply didn't see what its lengthened shadow would be, this celebration of bad music and fornicating in the mud. Dimly, I did. I remember seeing the movie about it with my friend the late Roland Gelatt, then editor of Saturday Review. He found it all charming. Not I. It scared me.

Other forces were at work in conjunction with rock music, including the assertions of sexual equality from the feminist movement in tandem with Hugh Heffner's exploitation of women in the guise of celebrating them. My late mother said that women's lib would not liberate women, it would liberate men, and she was right, as one sees in all the unwed mothers and single-parent homes. There is one essential difference between men and women: men don't get pregnant. And you have seen what has happened to the American family in the confluence of these forces. But I think the main force for broken families and drug use has to be popular "music" since it is the most effective and (now) pervasive form of propaganda. It has descended to the rappers' celebrations of the abuse and even murder of woman. I know of no statistics on the subject, but it seems to me, judging from the news, that never have we had so many disappearances and murders of women and young girls.

This is not, by the way, an assault on the feminist movement, which I support, but on what I see as a misguided claim to the licence long and silently assumed to be the right of the male.

Music is inevitably of its time and circumstances. Bach's crisp and separate lines did not turn to mushy echoes amid the Gothic columns and stone walls where his music was usually performed. Counterpoint has been in practice for about a thousand years: the management of simultaneous melodies, music conceived horizontally. Bach did not "invent" counterpoint, he summarized, codified and essentially perfected it, and if you want to study the subject, you start with him rather than try to reinvent the wheel. Samuel Barber did exactly that and studied him intensely, as one senses in his *Adagio for Strings,* a breath-taking high-wire walk between the vertical and horizontal.

The emphasis on verticality, the chord, comes in the time of his son Carl Philip Emanuel, usually called C.P.E., whom I sometimes think is under-rated due to the towering stature of his father. From this time on, music develops in that direction — harmonically — through Mozart, Beethoven (who in his last years expressed a regret that he did not know counterpoint better), Liszt, Chopin, Brahms, Wagner, Richard Strauss, Debussy and Ravel. Other exemplars, including Dvorak (an enormous influence on American music, particularly jazz), can be cited.

This evolution utilized elaborate modulations that led in due course to Arnold Schoenberg's turn away from tonality and a fanatical devotion by some composers, particularly Pierre Boulez, to his music and it became one of the predominant influences of the twentieth century. Its "rules" of composition are more extended by far and certainly more rigid than what it aspired to replace.

Jazz was long seen to be following the harmonic developments in European concert music with a lag of about thirty years. In its early days it was strictly diatonic and triadic, but Bix Beiderbecke embraced the chromaticism and free melodicism of the French "Impressionists", including Debussy, Ravel, and Paul Dukas. Bix shared some of his short lifetime with Debussy, who was born in 1862 and died in 1918; Bix was born in 1903 and died in 1928, ten years after Debussy. You can hear the French influence in his cornet solos, but especially in his too few piano compositions.

The gap between jazz and classical music was never what the magazines such as *Down Beat* would have had you believe, not at least among the musicians. Maybe among the fans. I knew Leonard Feather very well, enough to consider him a friend, and Leonard never betrayed the least knowledge of classical music. I don't think George Simon knew much about it either, although he came from a cultivated family, nor did Ralph J. Gleason. And so some of the shoddy criticism of jazz was based on this lack, and what was merely adapted from European music was acclaimed or derogated as new. All this has changed and Terry Teachout, for example — a former bass player — knows as much about classical music, especially opera, as he does about jazz.

With the arrival of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker and later the team of Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond and the several Gerry Mulligan groups, there was a renewal of interest in counterpoint. The late Jimmy Raney was especially devoted to Bach. How much Dizzy and Bird actually knew of the European tradition, I don't know, but Dizzy referred to attending a symphony concert as "going to church."

The proliferation of the "big bands" in the 1930s and '40's brought with it an increasingly rich harmonic usage, as in Dizzy's wildly exuberant band — it is to our perpetual loss that it wasn't recorded more and that he was not able to sustain it longer — and the Woody Herman and Stan Kenton bands, along with the excesses of Boyd Raeburn. Since the arrangers and composers were all schooled in European developments, why did the bands not incorporate more of them? That is a question I once put to Mel Powell, who did some of the best writing the Benny Goodman band ever knew (*Mission to Moscow*). Was it because the public wouldn't accept them? (Although a public that could accept Kern's *The Song Is You* — 1932 — could hardly be seen as backward.)

"I think I'll surprise you," Mel said. "It wasn't the public who couldn't accept it. It was the bandleaders."

And he told me that Goodman broke Eddie Sauter's heart by cutting his charts up, simplifying them. Bill Finegan too had to restrict his charts to Glenn Miller's formulae and we never knew of what they were capable until they formed the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra which revealed, among other things, an admiration for Prokofiev. In Sauter's case, deeper dimensions of his work were revealed in the *Focus* album he wrote for Stan Getz.

But there was a problem implicit in jazz: the repeated structural use of theme-and-variations, or variations-on-a-theme. Sauter and Getz escaped this to an extent in *Focus*. The idea was that he would write the backgrounds for strings and rhythm section, and let Stan play what he felt like, without reference to any specified melody. If you're not familiar with the legend of that album, Stan had a death in the family while they were recording and he couldn't continue. So Sauter tracked the orchestra, and later Stan went into the studio, put on a set of head phones, and played the brilliant stuff that is in that album.

A jazz musician must know, is *expected* to know, hundreds of tunes and be facile with them in different keys, ideally all keys, in practice the flat keys, since jazz is oriented to horns, with trumpets and saxophones being transposing instruments tuned in flat keys. (Brazilian music, because its core is the guitar, has a leaning to sharp keys.)

The basic building block of the harmonic system is the triad, obviously a three-note chord, which is constructed by playing a tone, then skipping the tone above it and playing the tone above that, skipping the next tone above, and then playing the tone above *that*. There are four kinds of triad, major, minor, diminished, and augmented. Some jazz musicians have a prejudice against diminished chords, finding them "weak". I have a taste for them, and so did Chopin.

Diminished and augmented triads are implicitly non-diatonic, since they entail tones from outside the do-re-mi scale. Bobby Hackett did lovely things with triads.

Almost universally, however, jazz uses not triads but four-note chords, adding the seventh above the root, as in D-minor, D-F-A-C. You can build a four-note chord on any note in the scale, and these chords are referred to by Roman numerals, as they were in Bach's time. In major the I chord is major, II is minor, III is minor, IV is major, V (the dominant) is major, VI is minor, VII is diminished. Marion Evans once defined the VII to me as a defective dominant: the root is missing. Monk referred to this chord, rather appropriately, as half-diminished.

Jazz musicians use a letter shorthand in lead sheets that give only the melody line and the chord symbol, for example C, Am, Dm7, G7, C, a common sequence. Competent jazz musicians must know a great many of the "standards" in all the common keys. Otherwise they could not play together *impromptu*.

But they grew bored with this endless exercise, and to escape its strictures they did two things, extended the harmony into more chromatic registers; and superimposed new tunes on the changes of familiar standards. Dizzy Gillespie, for instance, wrote *Groovin' High* on top of *Whispering*. The number of tunes based on *I Got Rhythm* are probably beyond counting, among them *Moose the Mooch* and *Cheers*, by Parker, *Anthropology* and *Ow* by Dizzy, *Oleo* by Sonny Rollins, *52nd Street Theme* and *Rhythm-a-ning* by Monk. Bird's *Scrapple from the Apple* is based on *Honeysuckle Rose*. *Donna Lee*, by Miles Davis, is based on *Back Home Again in Indiana*.

Dizzy was a harmonic master, and could wend his way through complex changes seemingly without effort. Yet when I asked him what he looked for in a tune, he said, "Simple changes." Sensing my surprise, he said, "If they're too complicated, it won't swing." Paul Desmond held the same view.

Trailing behind the classical composers, jazz musicians came to feel more and more restricted in the theme-and-variations form that was the legacy of Louis Armstrong.

They looked around for a freer way to make the music. Some of them began exploring bitonalty, among them Roger Kellaway and Dave Brubeck, not to mention John Coltrane's "sheets of sound". Beyond that there was only escape from tonality I couldn't see how they could accomplish this — not if you're going to play together.

All my life I have had the habit of going, from time to time, back to school, or at least to the books, in the yearning to push back the walls of my ignorance. Some years ago I took a course at the Dick Grove School, now vanished, with composer and arranger Jack Smalley, whom I had known since he was the bassist with the Page Cavanaugh Trio. One day we had lunch with another student — *very* much younger than Jack and I — during which the kid asked what I hoped to get out of these studies. I said, "Freedom from harmony." The boy was astonished. Jack said, "I know what Gene means." He continued: "Most of us who grew up on jazz suffer from a disease I call Chord Symbolitis." Which is the tendency to build tunes out of the chord symbols.

Or, as arranger Marion Evans put it, "Do you harmonize the melody or melodize the harmony?"

That is the cross jazz has never been able to get off. If, on a horn, you play up and down the chord, you're playing "vertically." That's unimaginative.

Not all musicians can stomach playing the same material over and over. Johnny Mandel was a trombone player before turning to arranging and composition, as did Gerry Mulligan, although Gerry was always a composer. Gerry said, "I write to support my baritone habit." When I asked him if he needed to grasp the intellectual content of the solos he was playing, he said, "Not when I'm playing well."

As for the musicians who could play a tune endlessly, perfecting it, Mandel mentioned Zoot Sims' playing Lester Young's *Twinkle Toes* over a period of twenty or thirty ears, saying, "I couldn't do it. But God bless him for it."

One of the pleasures for the jazz audience was following the improvisations on tunes they knew, great tunes by Porter, Ellington, Rodgers, et al. But from about the time (1967-68) of *Hair*, Broadway ceased to provide worthy material. Gerry told me that as he and John Lewis were walking down the street from Gil Evans' apartment, John said, "When we're gone, it's over." Oscar Peterson said the same thing to me.

Eric Dolphy pushed the music farther into "freedom" and the late avant-garde clarinetist John Carter still farther. And there was Ornette Coleman, the principle figure of the "free jazz" movement.

It is possible to break the tyranny of tonality, assuming you think that is a desirable end. You apply the principles of Schoenberg. You must play or write all twelve tones of the chromatic scale before repeating any of them. You may play the entire row again in mirror inversion or retrograde. And there are other "rules" that I cannot after many years recall, never having been attracted by the result.

Academically I can defend either side of the argument, but my intuitions favor tonality. I do not think it is all a matter of conditioning — despite Sergei Koussevitsky's statement that the ear of man is like the back of a mule; beaten long enough it can get used to anything — and I *do* believe there are inherent qualities of emotion in scales and chord forms. But the other view favors free jazz. And a substantial audience for it has never developed. To me music is about feeling. It is not an academic challenge, puzzles for the audience to solve, and that is what much of the "serious"music after Schoenberg has been.

The act of art is an arc, complete only in its reception by an audience, whether small or large. Without an audience, it doesn't exist. There is only silence.

The jazz education programs have been successful. The colleges and universities have produced an enormous body of skillful musicians. Chops galore. But in the process they have homogenized the music.

In time the younger musicians began to abandon the "standards" on which the music had evolved. At first I thought they were mistaken. Then it occurred to me that the "younger" audience, now getting into its sixties and seventies, didn't know the standards either. So why shouldn't the kids write their own material and pocket the royalties? Alas there apparently hasn't been a Horace Silver, Dave Brubeck, Bill Evans, or Gerry Mulligan among them.

An attempted clairvoyance has been a part of jazz from the beginning. But it is vain to try to foresee where the music is "going." In the days when Jim and Andy's was the inn of preference to jazz musicians in New York, where they could stash their instruments or cash their checks, Bob Brookmeyer answered that question with a tart "down 48th Street to Jim and Andy's."

Stan Kenton's purported dry response to the question was: "We're on our way to Kansas City."

Someone, it seems, has always been proclaiming the death of jazz, right back to the rise of "swing." This time, however, the music's golden days may indeed be over.

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