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If at first you don't succeed, why try again?

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1929 Was A Long Time Ago

ALIF--I found your detailed reactions to "Dracula" extremely interesting, even though my own couldn't have been more different (when I saw it, four years ago, I reported in FAPA that it was the worst movie I ever sat through....and I probably wouldn't have sat through it if I hadn't been waiting to see "Frankenstein".). ///John Carradine, Jr. certainly seems to cultivate science-fiction fans, or vice-versa. I believe this is the third time one or another of them has brought him casually into a discussion.

CELEPHAIS--As you can see from "The Art of Improvisation", reprinted elsewhere in this issue, I wasn't attempting to rule improvisation out of classical music completely. However, true improvisation is very close to being a lost art in that field. You mention the Bach music designed for improvisation. But only a rarely daring performer such as Landowska will actually improvise today, when playing the music. Most performers stick to the bare skeleton, a remarkably futile procedure to my mind. Incidentally, regarding this article, it is one I've been wanting to publish for quite some time. Most of the facts stated in the article I was aware of, but my knowledge in this field wasn't solid enough to give me the necessary authority and assurance to write the article myself, so I kept putting it off. I was delighted, last spring, when I came across this article which says it all far better than I could.///Admittedly, records and radio aided in the immense success of Armstrong and Ellington but I fail to see what this has to do with the date of jazz's birth. This came a quarter century later. Jazz's roots go back much further, of course, but in everything I've read I've come across nothing to indicate that true jazz existed prior to the time of Buddy Bolden and his contemporaries.///I can't tell you how I took a train through San Francisco....I can't positively swear that I did...as I said I was asleep so I don't know what happened or how. All I know is that the train schedule showed us arriving in San Francisco at a certain time, and leaving a few minutes after. This was back in 1946, when I joined the Navy. We took a train from Portland and followed the usual route as far as Sacramento where we had a layover....long enough that I recall we got off the train and went to the local YMCA for a swim. Then back on the train and on South. At the time the only large cities I'd seen were Salt Lake and Portland (and those only within the past six months) so I was rather excited about going through San Fran-

cisco and anxious to stay awake and see what I could. But we went through sometime after two A.M. and I dropped off to sleep about 12:30. We arrived in Los Angeles late the next morning and as in Sacramento we had a lengthy layover which allowed us some time to explore, but we arrived in L.A. in the same pullman car we left Portland in. At no time in the journey did we have to switch stations. The only other time I've travelled the length of California was in the summer of 1956 when I went North from Bakersfield to Seattle. That time we changed trains in some dinky mid-California village and bypassed San Francisco entirely. Could the routes have changed in the intervening decade?///I don't know my reading speed...I know it is much faster than the average person's but may be slower than the average steady reader. I've tried this speed-scanning type reading and I can do it but find it removes most of the enjoyment in reading. So I went back to the old method. I don't vocalize when I read but I do sound each word mentally. Most of my reading is not solely for information. I take at least 2½ hours of steady reading for the average novel. I have my doubts about these claims that fast readers retain more of what they read. The only one of these I've ever known intimately was a man of vast reading and of vast, if unorganized, knowledge. He could read an issue of Astounding in an hour...but if you tried to discuss it with him later you would find a surprising number of things he had missed completely, even though he had 'read' them.///Naturally I scan on material which is neither too interesting nor too desperately important but I find I frequently miss vital points when I do. Ultra-fast reading seems to me a parallel to the old idea of replacing food with tiny pills. Although it might be possible, why should anyone want to sacrifice all the pleasure involved in the process, just for speed.///An old Ellington admirer such as yourself must have surely been thinking of something or someone else when you typed that sentence "For years Ellington carried only two trumpets and two trombones, and five saxes." Although the Duke frequently added or subtracted instruments for a particular session or disc I can't recall a single record featuring that particular instrumentation and certainly the band didn't exist in that proportion 'for years'. The first record session to produce the Ellington 'sound' in Nov. 1926 featured three reeds and three brass, two trumpets and a trombone. He maintained this setup for two years, until he added a third trumpet and, about that time, Toby Hardwick started popping in and out of the reed section, so it varied between three and four men. Juan Tizol was added on valve trombone a year later swelling the brass section to five. In 1932 Lawrence Brown joined the trombone section, making it six brass to only four reeds, Hardwick, Hodges, Bigard, and Carney. And that is the way the lineup stood throughout the thirties. It wasn't until late '39 or early '40 that Ben Webster swelled the sax section to five (though he had been present at one 1935 record date) and the sax section has never gotten bigger, although the Duke now carries four trumpets and has, in the past, had five or a combination of eight brass, balanced by only five reeds. Personally I liked the six/five ratio best myself.///I had personal experience with this hearings variation business recently. My tape recorder was acting up and developed a maddening intermittent whistle. I was bowled over when the radio repairman had to put his ear a half-inch away to hear it at

all. He says his hearing cuts out at around 8000 cps. I hadn't known anyone's cut off below 10,000 cps. Later it developed a much higher and fainter constant squeal. This was even more of a problem since neither he nor his assistant could hear it. But his wife also works with him and when she returned from her vacation she was able to listen to it for him. He never did get rid of that and finally decided it was caused by the tape rubbing across the recording head. He figured I was listening for squeals and had become hyper-conscious of the sound so was, for the first time, noticing a sound which had been there all the time and which most men wouldn't be able to hear at all. True enough, now that I've had my recorder back in working order for a week I no longer hear it. Now this makes me wonder whether my hearing is at all exceptional for a man. I'd always thought my hearing to be sub-standard before and have never really tested it. But it is a peculiar situation to listen to a maddeningly loud and obtrusive noise and have someone else present listening in vain in an attempt to hear it. Incidentally, Bill, I read a few weeks ago about one of the modernist jazz musicians (Teddy Charles? I'm too lazy to look it up) who does indeed find tv viewing intolerable because of the noise of that 17,000 cycle carrier wave which he hears clearly. And I've heard there are a few whose hearing goes right up to 20,000 cps. This leads me to wonder what relationship, if any, there is between musical appreciation and ability and the width of the musical spectrum. Is a person with wide-range hearing more apt to become a musician? Does constricted hearing lead to less enjoyment when listening to it? The hi-fi craze would seem to indicate that many people got comparatively little enjoyment from the old restricted range recordings of the 78 era.

CHOOG--It's my understanding that CONFIDENTIAL outsells SatEvePost (and all other magazines) on the newsstands, not that it has a larger circulation. I understand their subscription list is practically non-existent, whereas the big slicks sell a fairly small percentage of their copies via the newsstand route. Also, although this is my own idea, it would seem likely that there are fewer readers per copy. People frequently lend or pass on their old magazines, especially if they're of the popular prestige type but I suspect a lot of people do not like to admit they read a magazine such as CONFIDENTIAL, so do not offer their old copies to others or perhaps fear to evince interest in other people's copies.///By what rule or law does anyone have to have a 'work permit' in the U.S. (as differentiated from a license to do a particular type of work, that is). Foreigners have to have a proper passport before they are allowed to accept a job, (I believe you cannot work on either a visitor's passport or a student's, though I may be wrong about the latter) but this isn't the same thing as a work permit, as that term is used in most of the Old World and South American countries. Charlie Chaplin lived in this country for over thirty years and made a fortune and the government had to wait until he voluntarily left the country before they could find any way to strike back at him, although in any country where he'd needed a 'work permit' it would have been a simple matter to cancel it (although, being a multimillionaire by then, this wouldn't have prevented his remaining in the country).

FANALYSIS--Having almost reached my 30th birthday and having never had any extractions, cavities, or tooth trouble of any sort whatsoever, due to having been raised in an area in which fluorine is present naturally in the water, I have little patience with the sort of 'logic' designed to condemn thousands or millions of children to needless pain and loss of teeth. Certainly anyone who opposes putting fluorine in a water supply must also oppose dosing it with chlorine, an even more dangerous poison. Yet in one city the fluorine opponents became quite incensed, after ramming through a bill making it illegal to place any foreign substances in the water supply, when the city officials quit placing chlorine therein. Apparently each fluorine opponent thinks the whole thing was thought up a year or so ago....for the past decade I've been reading these pseudo-reasonable arguments about how insufficient time has elapsed for proper testing...for god's sake, mass-fluorinization has been going on ever since the end of World War II, it was planned in detail a number of years earlier and examination of areas containing it naturally in the water extends much further back. As to the idea that there is something dangerous in artificially fluoridating water, as differentiated from natural fluorine, the chief difference is that you can control the artificial fluorine and prevent side-effects found in the natural state. My teeth were fairly badly discolored until a few years ago (a price I was more than willing to pay in exchange for perfect teeth) and I grew a bit nervous several years ago when the stains went away, fearing my protection might be wearing off, also, having been in soft-water areas for many years. Luckily, no trouble has developed. I should think that anyone who reads science-fiction would be aware that an atom is an atom, a molecule is a molecule, and their end-product, a chemical, is precisely the same no matter what its source and that human or other organisms are completely unaware how a chemical came into their food or drink as long as it is there... they will react the same way in any case. Certainly you could poison a city with fluorine; you could also poison it with chlorine or arsenic or any other poison you choose to dump into the water in sufficiently large supply. As for the so-called authorities all the fluorine foes quote their professional backgrounds all seem to be either shaky or fictional. Certainly their tactics have demonstrated that their ethics are non-existent; those who are not near-hysterics apparently have latched onto fluorine as an easy ticket to a steady income and prestige/notoriety as Joe McCarthy did with communism. Naturally, you cannot blame those who haven't investigated the question and accept the word of the first noisy 'authority' to come along, but I can and do blame them for not investigating further and finding out the actual facts; as for those who've investigated and still fight fluoridation I can only conclude that they are victims of sheer medieval superstition. Certainly there cannot be the slightest ethical justification for enlisting in the hysterical anti-fluoridation forces whose victims, may I remind you, are those people not old enough to vote in any city elections regarding fluoridation.///I don't ordinarily get this incensed over questions but this is one thing I do feel strongly on. Being a beneficiary myself, I feel it dreadful that others are being deliberately deprived, through ignorance. On two different occasions I've had dentists peer in my mouth, in routine dental checks, and ask "What are you doing here?" It's a wonderful feeling.

GASP--You and several others all seem to have made the same misinterpretation of my discussion of a method to disallow unsatisfactory submissions. You say it isn't necessary and justify the statement by going into detail about how Wansborough could be evicted without it.....but I never mentioned Wansborough! Of course there are constitutional safeguards which can be used here and, after an initial (and perhaps unjustified) policy of lenience towards Wansborough he has been denied credit on his recent unmailable items. The two members whose work had been questioned and whose names I mentioned were Coslet and Meyers and there is nothing in the constitution or in precedent to allow disallowance of their material. So it is a completely different problem and the fact that the Constitution allows ouster of Wansborough has no affect upon the case of either Meyers or Coslet and is completely immaterial.

GEMZINE--I acknowledge one slight, but unimportant, error in this jazz discussion.....your use of the word 'since' in the phrase "but since the Jazz Band discarded the written music in favor of hot licks and jam sessions" I interpreted to mean'more recently than,'whereas I now see you meant it to mean 'inasmuch', but this has no particular bearing on the main part of the argument. As I understand you, now, your thesis is that since you were alive, active, and attending dances during the 20's you are an authority on jazz whose bona fides cannot be questioned by those of a more recent generation. Or in your own words, "I was there, Charley!!!" I could reply, with equal accuracy, so was I! Of course I was only two years and two months old when the 20's ended but I suspect I heard almost as much jazz in that period as Mrs. Carr did, judgine from the examples she cites. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band was an authentic, though peripheral, jazz group which observed a freak public success during World War I in New York and cut a large number of records, long before any other jazz was recorded. It is quite probable that there success brought the word 'jazz' into general prominence and popularity and led to its being tacked, as a title, onto the whole decade of the 20's. But the Coon Saunders Orchestra could not be remotely termed a jazz unit. And Ferde Grofe was not the first arranger of jazz....he never wrote nor arranged a note of jazz in his life. (The first important jazz arranger was either Don Redman or Fletcher Henderson). By Mrs. Carr's logic she would not be entitled to argue with a nonagenerian illiterate Siberian villager regarding the facts about the Spanish-American war because he'd lived through it as an adult and therefor knew all about it! .From Mrs. Carr's own writings we have evidence that she had little reason to know jazz in the 20's. By her own confession she is of Scandinavian descent and lived in a small town. But in the 20's jazz was still the province of a comparatively small minority. Jazz flourished madly in Chicago....but mostly in disreputable dives unpatronized by respectable white people. It could be heard, in similar circumstances, to a lesser extent in other large cities such as New York, New Orleans, Memphis, and Kansas City. It even made brief penetrations once or twice during that decade into California. But the one-nighter tour by the large successful orchestra was a phenomenon more of the thirties

than of the twenties. For that matter there were no large orchestras to speak of in the jazz field in the twenties. Fletcher Henderson had one in New York. The Ellington group swelled to respectable proportions around the xend of the decade. And there were a number of medium sized units like King Oliver's. But road tours weren't common even for them. When Oliver insisted on taking his group on one in the mid-twenties all his high-powered names refused to accompany him and Oliver never recovered the ground he lost thereby. Jazzmen such as Beiderbecke or Goodman sometimes were on tours but it usually was in some non-jazz group. There were records of course, but save for the aforementioned Original Dixieland Jazz Band no records in the jazz field save for a few blues vocals and piano records were made until the spring of 1923 when jazz recording, for all practical purposes starts. And these records would not normally have been available to a white female in a small town. During most of the twenties jazz music was almost exclusively the property of negroes. Up to the time of Louis Armstrong's first big commercial success, around 1928, almost all records made by negores, jazz or otherwise, were confined to special 'race' labels which were available for sale only in shops located in Negro districts. This was even true of many records made by white jazz artists, who were still very much in the minority at this time. Most of the early white musicians got that way by becoming intrigued by the sounds coming from the less reputable sections of their towns, which they pursued against strenuous parental resistance. To embrace jazz frequently meant completely forsaking the respectable middle-class white world. It was not until the thirties that jazz developed a regular sizeable white audience, when during the depths of the depression many young white boys discovered the old records in Salvation Army and secondhand stores and became interested in the field and a trifle later Benny Goodman pioneered in the presentation of large-band streamlined slicked-up jazz directed toward the tastes of the general public. I have no doubt that Mrs. Carr heard and danced to a tremendous amount of musicx called jazz during the 20's but that she ever heard more than half a dozen or so genuine jazz performances in that period I seriously doubt. The term jazz had been adopted as an all-embracing term to describe any noisy, fast, modern syncopated music....and it didn't always have to be syncopated. Words do change their meanings of course but in this case we can safely say that such music was not'jazz' because the term was abandoned as a synonym for popular music at the end of the twenties and the word 'jazz' was once more reserved to refer to the music it had originally meant and that musicas direct lineal descendants, a meaning it still has today, 25 years later. Certainly a certain amount of influence filtered over into popular music from jazz... but diluted so much as to have little real importance....probably no more than the influence felt by folk music at the same time... and that was long before folk music became 'smart' or an unending source of jukebox material. Certainly popular music differed markedly in the twenties from anything previous but jazz did not make the difference. Probably the single most important reason for the change was the presence of a small handful of remarkably talented popular tunesmiths, of a rather revolutionary turn, who

starting their careers about the same time, were able to turn popular music completely upside down, forever abandoning the "Bird in a Gilded Cage" sort of sentimentality which had been dominant for several decades. I doubt if any time before or since, in recorded history, has there been such a collection of gifted men workingin the field of popular music. Most important of these was undoubtedly George Gershwin, with Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern abetting him (by himself Kern would probably have stayed within the previous school, but with the examples of Gershwin, Youmans, and others he was able to do some of the best writing in the new fashion). Richard Rodgers also was one of the most extraordinarily talented, but he did not come along until after the others had the music firmly founded. I should have mentioned Cole Porter, too, probably inferior only to Gershwin and Berlin as a revolutionary influence. The music they produced has an admirable vitality (and I'm speaking of the entire genre, not just these men's compositions) and has perhaps proved an even more exportable American commodity than jazz. But it is not jazz and occupies a somewhat lower position in the pantheon of Arts, if art it is at all. This is obviously the field Mrs. Carr is talking about (the two fields did merge between 1935-1945, by the way, to about a percentage of 85%, but they have diverged again since). However, even here Mrs. Carr shows ignorance of her subject. She speaks about the period when "Movies developed sound and Paul Whitemen swung into fame as The King of Jazz. Actually, he was the beginning of the end as far as Jazz -- the real stuff -- was concerned." She gives no dates but sound did not become widespread in the movies until the very tailend of the 20's and since that is the decade she is speaking of ((odd coincidence....just as I am typing these words Paul Whiteman was introduced on a tv program in the next room)) she appears to think Whiteman was a latter 20's phenomenon which just isn't true. His band was organized around the period of World War I and he himself was immensely successful throughout the twenties. He'd achieved sufficient prestige that, as early as Feb. 12, 1924, he was able to put on a so-called 'jazz concert' at Aeolian Hall which was immensely successful both financially and in critical reception. It was at this Concert that "Rhapsody in Blue", long thought to be the first jazz concert work, was introduced (actually jazz didn't produce concert works until Ellington turned his hand to the task in the early 30's and it is still a very shaky field. In my personal opinion the only two completely successful extended concert works ever written in the jazz idiom are Ellington's "Reminiscing in Tempo" and Ralph Burns "Summer Sequence"). ((Whiteman is now doing a supposed recreation of 1924, now, and included, in a medley Ellington's "Mood Indigo", not written till 1930. I expect this from the movies but Whiteman should know better.)) ~~xxxix~~ ///"Christian slans in slandom reading slanzines" (or some words to that effect) is a quote from an Eva Firestone letter printed in FAN-VARIETY during that long drawn-out hassle when a number of fans were raising a ruckus whose storm-center, as I recall, was an article about the human navel, which they apparently considered dreadfully indecent. The firestone quote has become immortal through having been the ultimate ridiculous touch to what was basically a ridiculous dispute in the first place.///I've never said a word about Welk in FAPA but you were correct in your assumptions regarding my opinions.

I can't get very excited about him one way or another but naturally I have no particular respect for him as a musician. Any time, in any field, when someone sets out to give the people exactly what they want you are going to find both retrogression and pandering to the lowest common denominator. This can be (though isn't always) good business practice, and viewed commercially is quite admirable. From the aesthetic standard it naturally falls into that vast amount of daily minutiae which makes up our lives but is unworthy of sustained attention and which will be forgotten completely a century from now. The Welks play for today; we've always had them and we always will. But time assesses the worth of such individuals far better than their contemporaries. As a record collector I constantly see the evidence of this winnowing. A King Oliver record from the twenties can bring as high as $100. This is partly because of rarity but the demand must be there first before the price can go up. Ellington, who made far more records and whose records sold more widely, can bring as high as $15 . for a disc from the twenties in good condition, or as low as $2.50. A Ted Lewis record will probably bring 50¢, but only if you can find a buyer. Lewis was a 'personality' and he's still around so there are a few Lewis collectors and a slight but persistent demand. Some Whiteman records bring high prices, but only because they are among the handful which featured Bix, or some other of the jazzmen featured in the early thirties or late twenties by Whiteman, buried among strings and banjos, etc. (Note to GMC: these records are not jazz performances though some of them contain improvised jazz solos by one musician.) But most Whiteman records sell for about the Lewis price or less. Who are the contemporaries of Whiteman and Lewis? I've heard their names but none of them pop into my mind, at the moment. Quite successful at the time their records are now a drug on the market. They'd probably sell for 15 or 20 cents apiece except, at that price, it doesn't pay you to go to the trouble of wrapping and shipping them. The records that are in demand today are those containing authentic jazz performances and those by opera singers; there is also a much smaller demand for symphonic works from that period. Twenty or thirty years from now what prices will be paid for Lawrence Welk records. But hold onto your first editions of Miles Davis, Maria Callas, and Ansermet.

HORIZONS--I've never heard it before, so assume it must have been Elizabeth Barrett who complained she fainted whenever she fell asleep but it is a lovely notion.///"And Pare Her Nails" was fascinating. Again it ties down the best-article-writer of the year vote for you. Am curious as to the source of much of your basic information. Much you present as a matter of course I'd never encountered in any of my over-voluminous reading before and, so far as I know, you don't have a medical background. I had no idea, for instance, that merely being knocked unconscious always had such drastic after-effects. I did read once that the type of systematic beating-up which the Sam Spade-Mickey Spillane type detective must submit to at least once in each story, which stops him for perhaps half an hour, in real life when used by gangsters requires a minimum of five or six weeks hospitalization if a permanent handicap or death do not result. This business of bopping someone unconscious to get them conveniently inactive has

always seemed ludicrously unrealistic to me (though I accept it as part of my suspended disbelief in the same way I accept lack of a fourth wall in stage sets, or being able to follow the protagonists mental processes in a novel) but for a completely different reason than the ones you cite. Have you ever been around anyone in real life who'd actually been forcibly knocked unconscious? I haven't. It's far rarer than movies, tv, and magazines would have you believe. Yet dozens of times I have seen people take blows on the head and have taken a good many myself. Some of them seemed potentially disastrous, and the circumstances which led to them criminal negligence. But no matter how hard the blow, the worst that happened was extreme pain, temporary dizziness, perhaps a cut which bled somewhat. The human head is a pretty tough thing and to produce unconsciousness takes far greater force than the average person normally encounters and I doubt whether large percentages of the populace have the physical resources to produce unconsciousness in another adult through a blow. Yet in dramatizations almost any blow to the head produces unconsciousness and frequently blows which quite obviously have no force behind them. Naturally actors must pull their punches but to actually produce unconsciousness would require such force that it should be reflected in every muscle in the actor's body. And only in a very tiny percentage of such dramatizations is the victim only stunned, much less being basically unaffected, which is what happens in real life, usually. Even in prizefights a genuine knockout isn't too common even though the blows are repeated, and originated by experts. Usually the result is by a decision or by a technical K.O. Even a genuine knockout frequently doesn't induce unconsciousness. Many a prizefighter too weak to regain his feet by the count of ten never actually loses consciousness. This, to me, has always been the unrealistic thing about knocking someone out in fiction. Closest I ever came to such an incident in real life occurred when I was in the Navy. I wasn't actually present but later talked to the victim, who'd sustained the damage during a gym workout of some sort, a basketball game, I believe. I don't recall whether he was actually unconscious but don't believe so. However it did produce that extreme rarity,a genuine case of amnesia. It was temporary, of course; within a few hours he was all right again. His account was disappointing to an old addict of amnesia stories like myself....no clearcut mental processes accompanied by a complete blank as to his former life. He said he was merely confused. He wandered off the floor and asked for his sweater but he was confused about everything, unsure who or where he was and what he was doing there. I know less about choking and its consequences since it is far rarer in real life. Lack of adequate anesthetics is better publicized than the weaknesses of the other two methods. Belts may be inadequate for binding purposes but criminals are taken in by the fiction, like everyone else. I knew a girl who was involved in a Western Union holdup who was tied up with a man's belt; she foolishly demonstrated to them immediately that it wouldn't hold her but she was lucky in that they did not take more drastic methods but merely left her unharmed with the threat that a member of the gang was watching her from across the street and that if she tried to get help within half an hour she would be shot. However, one omission from fiction you fail to mention is the psychic damage which results to such victims. This

girl was still close to a nervous wreck several years later when I knew her; she was afraid of the dark, of strangers, of empty streets, of almost anything which might be threatening, all as a result of that holdup. I used to take over the office from her at midnight and she usually had had to park her car two or three blocks away. She sometimes would stay around for a half hour or more before she could muster enough nerve to leave the office and she would always make me promise to call the police if she failed to drive by the office and honk to me to show she was all right within fifteen minutes.
One point you bring out substantiates another fictional point I've always doubted, when you explain the case of escaping from bonds. I've always been skeptical on this point since, in fiction, it seems that the hero or heroine never remains tied up after the villain leaves (although tied-up villains stay put better), any more than anyone can stay conscious after a blow on the head and I'd always felt that escapes from a good binding were fairly rare; apparently I was wrong. (A good real-life illustration of this occurred last week when the little Edmonds,Wash. boy who was kidnapped undid his bonds with his teeth as he'd seen Wild Bill Hickock do on television. And he also memorized his captor's license number, another trick I suspect he picked up from crime programs. This youngster has certainly provided some effective arguments against those who believe all crime stories for children dreadful influences.) I read a Saint story once in which biological functions of a bound person were not ignored; in this one at one point it mentioned that he experienced a discomfort which fiction writers chose to ignore in such a predicament. However, as I recall he was bound only eight hours or so until he escaped or was released so no disaster was necessary to add realism.
An ingenious solution to keeping someone captive popped up on an old British movie starring Robert Newton I saw on tv last summer. Newton, as protagonist, wished to murder the latest in the long series of men who were cuckolding him so he took his rival, at gunpoint to an underground room off a long-abandoned railway tunnel to which he had surreptitiously run power lines (there was also a water-supply inside though how he arranged for running water was never explained). Precisely how the initial step was accomplished was not show, though there would be many methods of achieving it, but when you next saw the victime he was secured to a bed, in the room, by a leg-iron. He had a lengthy chain which allowed him freedom of most of the room. There was a bathroom available, complete with a bathtub (which he obviously couldn't use, since there would be no possible way to completely remove his pants....a woman wouldn't have had that difficulty....or perhaps she would, depending upon her undergarments) and his captor regularly brought him meals and reading material. The Newton character did not wish to hang so deliberately kept his victim alive until the hunt for him had completely died and all hope for finding him evaporated so that, if the police should trace him, the husband could produce his live victim and thus would not be guilty of murder. One interesting developement of the idea was that at some time a white line had been painted on the floor showing the exact distance the captive could reach, stretching to his utmost, with his fingertips and Newton stolidly walked within half-an-inch of that line, placidly unnoticing of the most violent attempts to assault him although unwilling, under any circumstances, to ever enter the out-

lined space where his captive might have a chance to overpower him. This made for good dramatic conflict and action, of course, but x seemed to me a remarkably shortsighted evaluation of an otherwise well-thought-out plan. Under the circumstances postulated it would have been a relatively simple matter for the captor to go where he wished with impunity. All that would have been necessary would be for him to leave the only key to the leg-iron off his person and let his captive know he did not have it whenever he came within reach. (A nice dramatic touch would have been to hang it on the wall outside the white line area.) Under such circumstances the captive, being intelligent, would not have dared to attack. Had he killed his captor he would have destroyed his only contact with the outside world and, tied-up and helpless, would have faced the unenviable prospect of starving to death instead of the uncertainty of possibly being murdered in some other less painful fashion at some indeterminate time in the future. There would have been more danger of assaulting his captor, not with deadly intent, but simply to let off pent-up anger due to his victimization but here, again, as long as he was captive it would have been self-defeating. Sooner or later, now matter how effectively he overpowered the other, he would have to release him to go and get food and, once released, the other would be in full command and be able to exact almost any punishment or discipline reasonable or unreasonable, the simplest being merely forcing his attacker to forego a certain number of meals as punishment for daring to attack. Another nice touch in this film which many an American producer would have overlooked, was that the captive did not shave (although shaving equipment could have been provided if desired) so, whereas clean-shaved at the start, he gradually grew a beard which grew lengthier in direct relationship to whatever time had elapsed, running over a period of five or six months. I suspect this picture took quite a while to shoot as I doubt if false beards would have worked. It seems to me the victim overlooked just one thing here. With all those months to work in (especially with his captor afraid to get within 12 feet of him so unable to make close examinations) he should have been able to find some reasonably abrasive substance in the room (the leg of the bed, if nothing else) and gone to work on one of the links of the chain. Sooner or later it would wear away and our hero would be free to wander wherever he willed.

IBIDEM--I can think of no more horrible artist to be a completist on, in the jazz field, than Oscar Peterson. And I'm not criticizing his music, though I have never been one of his admirers (I'd rather have the original, Art Tatum, than an emotionless unoriginal copy). But has any jazz musician, anywhere, anytime, ever made as many records? Or even half as many? One consolation....few if any of them are very difficult to obtain (I've exhausted almost every likely source I can think of and I'm still lacking four rare 1926 Ellington recordings); the difficulty with Peterson would be in keeping abreast of every Granz issue that has Peterson on it (of course I must admit right now I'm having similar troubles without being a Peterson collector. Is there a record producer anywhere this year who hasn't come out with a new LP featuring either Red Norvo or Coleman Hawkins?). I too bypassed that Astaire five-volume set, but for different reas-

ons. You didn't want the Astaire vocals whereas I didn't want that particular accompaniment for Astaire. Astaire probably rates ahead of Mary Martin as the most attractive (vocally) non-jazz vocalist I know but I feel a jazz background (or at least one such as Granz supplied him) is singularly ill-suited as support for his voice. (The records he made with Benny Goodman around 1940 probably were more successful...I've never heard them.) I may amass an Astaire collection someday (right now I have only a couple of singles and an LP or so) but if I do the last items on my list of acquisition will be the set for Granz.///I was a Miller fan when he was alive and have over twenty lp's of his music (which I rarely play) around for nostalgia's sake, but I'm damned if I can hear any jazz in the group....jazz influence, of course, after all it was a swing band, but despite the presence of a top-notch jazz trumpeter Bobby Hackett (usually playing guitar!) and several second-string jazz personalities like Billy May I can't, at the moment, recall a single moment of authentic jazz in the lot. Even Whiteman did better than that. He at least allowed Bix, Big Tea, and some of the others to blow once in a while. I'll admit neither McKinley nor Beneke ever moved me but I already said the Miller band's value to me lies in nostalgia. And there's nothing very nostalgic in voicing some current hit with a clarinet lead over saxophones.//The three jazz clubs I mentioned were Jazztone (of which I am a member and which is now quite a good club), American Recording Society (never joined....I'm allergic to Granz), and the Columbia Record Club which is divided into four sections, one of which is jazz. This last is a real dog; with a number of disadvantages and not a single advantage you'd normally expect to accrue from any such club. Shun it like the plague. I have three Jazztone LP's taken from Victor masters, one each by Hampton and Waller and a big-band collection featuring Goodman, Shaw, Basie, etc. There are others in which I'm not interested.

Lee Hoffman was a good man.

LARK--Unfortunately you never had the opportunity to encounter Steve Allen at his best. I originally became an Allen fan in 1948. At that time he had two local shows over KNX in L.A. The one I heard was an hour-long supposed-disc-jockey show from midnight to 1 A.M. (KNX blankets the entire West at night). Allen does many things well but the thing he does best of all is ad lib and this was probably the greatest ad lib show ever aired. Nothing was rehearsed or written and comparatively little planned. Allen would play a maximum of three or four records during his hour. He occasionally played the piano or sang. Whenever he could lure showbusiness names in for free interviews (which was fairly frequently) he had guest stars. In between times he chattered. It was supposed to be a studio show...no audience, but Allen always had between six and twenty cronies, show-business hangers-on, small-time songwriters, etc. in the studio to give him a small responsive audience. Anything Allen took a notion to do he did. One night, for instance, four of them were in a card game and didn't feel like breaking it up so they played no records but continued the game right through

entire hour, relaying a running account of what was happening to the microphone. To show the informal unplanned atmosphere, one time they'd run some sort of contest for 'favorite record' or one of those typical radio gimmicks popular at that time. They'd built it up for weeks, announcing far in advance that the winner would be announced and the record played on such and such a night's program. Came the night and it turned out everyone had forgotten to bring the record along. Allen never particularly went in for the insult routine but when he had the sort of guest who would start something of the sort he could top them more quickly and more completely than anyone I've heard before or since. He was at his best when he had a guest who could think as fast as he could. I remember Kay Starr and Dorothy Shay as being particularly good partners for him. When they were on his show the dialogue was all ad lib but quicker and wittier than on most scripted radio and tv shows and not too far below the level of the repartee in a highly-polished Broadway comedy. During 1949 my schedule did not allow me to listen to the Allen show and it was during that year that several columnists discovered him and he developed a large following for the show. When I re-encountered him in 1950 the show was much poorer....from the very first note. Instead of the hip jazz-oriented atmosphere established by his old theme, Boyd Raeburn's "Tonsillectomy", he was introduced by the lugubrious sentimentality of Hoagy Carmichael singing "An Old Piano Plays the Blues" (a dog tune written by Allen); in line with his new popularity KNX had moved him from his small disc jockey setup into a large theatre-studio with a good-sized audience. Much of the program was now devoted to interviewing the audience....specially planned interviews that went on whether there was any reason for them or not (rather than the spur-of-the-moment exchanges that Allen had formerly tossed off with whoever was around). And the questions and other material were now obviously all thought up in advance. Even so it was superior to much of the work Allen has done on TV. (I can't speak for "Tonight", never having seen it.) Allen is still a prime ad libber, though, as his appearance on the Mike Wallace show proved. About the only things I've seen Ernie Kovacs do that struck me as guffawingly funny were his occasional wild queries as to the identities of guests on "What's My Line" (as the time when he inquired whether the 19-year-old teenage idol Sal Mineo was Mme. Schumann-Heink). Some of the things he does strike me as rather questionable in taste. I might think that he antagonized me with that omnipresent cigar, were it not that the cigar-smoking George Burns I think one of the three or four funniest people on tv.///I have seen color tv once...almost two-years ago.... it was "Howdy Doody", unfortunately. But the colors are quite vivid. Perhaps moreso than they should be, as was the case with Technicolor in its first decade of use. The program I saw had poorer separation of colors than you would see in a color-movie but otherwise there wasn't too much difference. Incidentally, when touting this system, before adoption, it was claimed color cameras actually delivered a clearer picture on black-and-white sets than monochrome camers did, but it certainly isn't true. Color programs annoy me because the picture is always so blurry and it is next to impossible to prevent too much contrast with great sections of the picture being an unrelieved mass of black.

NULL-F--What do you mean, I missed Ellington's point? Your explanation is merely putting into words the meaning I'd left implied. Agreed that Ellington meant that his more competent musicians can play anything so the challenge in writing for them is gone. But it was precisely this challenge which inspired Duke's best work, if you accept his views. So my solution still stands....hire poorer musicians. (Of course, that is tongue-in-cheek. I think a great many more factors than just improving musicianship brought about the Ellington decline.)///George Shearing was the subject of that Fran Kelley article from which I quoted.///Bill Simon I know only from his extremely terse album reviews in BILLBOARD, which being a trade magazine, naturally concentrates on the commercial side. So I wouldn't venture to assess Bill Simon. His reputation is quite good, however. Odd co-incidence that the two former critics now running the only two decent jazz record clubs are both named Simon. I believe George Simon said some years ago that they were not related in any way.

PAMPHREY--There is no universally-accepted authoritative version of what was going on in Japan prior to the surrender but there is considerable evidence to indicate that there was a peace feeler and that through deliberate misinterpretation of one word (a word with two meanings) the peace-party was thrown on the defensive by the war-party to the point where they were forced to publicly renounce any thoughts of compromise and cut off all possible avenues for negotiation. I've never been in Japan but I rather doubt your statement that "there were plenty of uninhabited places near Tokio where the bomb could have been dropped". Are there many spots near London so deserted as to allow room for a harmless atomic explosion? I understand Japan is crowded a good deal more tightly than the British Isles. ((Incidentally, both TIME and NEWSWEEK report that Tokyo is now the world's largest city and that New York has not only slipped to third place...it is actually losing population. I had more arguments with sailors when I was in the Navy who were positive New York was the largest city in the world, and couldn't be told otherwise. I even had a few with fellows who announced that they came from the world's second-largest city.....Chicago!)) Also what would you have done if the Japanese had sat tight and refused to dicker after you dropped your 'show' bomb. Except for a few tentative moves, for appearnce sake, that was what they did after Hiroshima was bombed. It took the Nagasaki bomb to make them surrender. If they'd still stuck to their guns and refused to budge after Nagasaki we'd have looked rather foolish.....because at that time we had no more bombs. There were only three completed and one of them had been tested in New Mexico. Truman's decision was whether to throw one or both of the bombs away on a test which might or might not impress the Japanese sufficiently, or whether to prove their deadliness. The choice was between Japanese lives and a possibly greater number of American lives which might be lost in the invasion. I think he made the proper choice. After all, the Japanese hadn't obligingly put on a demonstration, in advance, out in the ocean before they bombed Pearl Harbor. And I cannot see that a weapon which kills five thousand at a time is more evil than fifty duplicates of a weapon which only kills one hundred at a time. The destruction of Hiroshima was more sudden, but I doubt if it was any more thorough than the

destruction of Berlin by a long series of block-buster bombs.

PHOSPHOR--'Why do they use video tape instead of Mr. Eastman's invention?' Do you have a tv set, Jack? If so, may I suggest you buy a copy of TV GUIDE and pick out a couple of the more interesting programs marked (Tape) and a couple marked (Kine) and watch them. Here in Washington, because of the time-difference, about 80% of our programs are repeated by one mechanical means or another. If you follow my suggestion no further explanations should be necessary as to why tape is displacing the kinescope. Actually an even bigger reason than improved reproduction, for the networks, is being able to eliminate the time-consuming function of having to madly rush a kinescope through the developing and printing process in order to rebroadcast it a few hours later (tape can be used instantaneously). I suspect the money-saving factor involved in being able to reuse tapes is too insignificant to influence the networks. Films made in advance for television are not shot through with that horrible fuzziness but, from my subjective viewpoint, I think the taped programs are superior even to these in clarity and only a very small fraction below live broadcasts in quality. And from the quality standpoint (in program material, that is) these shows filmed just for tv (as differing from old Hollywood movies which were not made for tv and thus cannot be broadcast as clearly) represent the sweepings. With one or two exceptions they are made strictly for morons; the intelligence-level on live tv is far higher.///Orson Welles has been active in the production of relatively few films. Under his contract with RKO he completed only three films. The first was the celebrated and suppressed "Citizen Kane" in which he also starred. The next two were both released in the Winter of 1942-1943, after his contract was cancelled by Charles Koerner when he took over administration of RKO and, as his first act, stopped Welles' fourth production in the middle of the shooting (it was never completed). The first of these was Tarkington's "Magnificent Ambersons" and the second Eric Ambler's "Journey into Fear". Welles did not appear in the former at all and played only a small role in the other. In 1947 he co-starred with his then wife Rita Hayworth and directed, for Columbia, a picture whose title I forget. Unlike his former pictures it attracted no critical praise and lost a good deal of money, probably the only Rita Hayworth picture to do so since she became a star. Immediately after he brought in a low-budget version of "Macbeth" for Republic. Although this did good initial business, and might conceivably have been Welles' first money-maker, it received such blistering reviews that Republic withdrew it from general release, with plans to edit and re-release it, which never came to fruition. Like "Citizen Kane" it never saw general release though I saw it on television last summer; it wasn't top-drawer Shakespear but I failed to find anything particularly monstrous in it. Within the past five years, during his stay in Europe he's apparently decided to make himself the poor man's Laurence Olivier, and has produced and starred in two more Shakespearean films. The first was "Othello" and, in typical Welles tradition I believe it has never been released in the U.S. If so it's distribution was highly limited. I'm not sure what the most recent production was though I think it was "King Lear" and so far as I know it hasn't been released either. So far as I know none of his pictures have ever shown a profit and I

believe those seven were the only ones in which he functioned as more than an actor, unless my memory has slipped a cog somewhere. He's acted in a great many other films, of course. Welles seems to me the perpetual promising young man. He always seems to produce interesting failures. I don't recall whether it was Boggs or Bloch who disagreed with me when I said that it seemed the only completely successful major enterprise of his entire career had been his "War of the Worlds" broadcast, but that is still my view.///Speak for your own part of Washington (and Oregon). Admittedly (and happily) we don't compete with Minnesota or Montana when it comes to snow but this section (in fact the majority of the state, geographically speaking) has its fair share of snow. That Japan Current is of use only to those of you who live between the coast and the Cascades. Once you get over the mountain range you have regular winters again. Some of the most unpleasant winter country I know is in mid-Oregon in the long desolate section between Burns and Bend. Just because a much larger population lives in that narrow stretch of coastland between the Cascades and the ocean where it is perpetually balmy doesn't mean the bulk of the states have such a climate. This is like the science-fiction writers who assume that on other planets you can find only one race, only one climate, only one set of natural adversaries. I always get annoyed when I read a story which populates an entire planet with imitation Chinese or imitation Hawaiians or imitation Germans.///Are you aware this is the first time you've reviewed Birdsmith in almost three years?///I was beginning to wonder whether someone was removing my magazines from your mailings. Incidentally, on three different occasions in the past nine months thin FAPAzines or other fannish minutiae have turned up in my mailbox, with a copy stamped and addressed to Jack Speer clinging to my copy, through having been pressed together and folded, sometime after they were mailed. I believe I reforwarded all of them so if the Wenatchee postmarks puzzled you, that was the reason. Most recent was the bulletin of plans for the '58 con in South Gate. It seems odd that I should consistently get your mail. Our names don't come together in the alphabet. Admittedly, you live closer to me than any other FAPAn but it would seem to me that in separating the fanzines, first by areas, later by states, and finally by areas within states, the individual copies of any zine would get scattered among the other general mail. It would seem just as likely for me to get G.M.Carr's mail, but I never do.

RAMBLING FAPA--I think you must have a sense of wonder. How else explain your ability to paint such wonderful word pictures of the daily events in the lives of two kittens which most people would dismiss with a chuckle or an annoyed snarl and no further thought. Are you still interested in a career as a writer, Gregg? If so, all you need to do is learn to plot. With your ability to make others view things from unusual (and delightful) viewpoints, you should have it made.///The story you were thinking of, I believe, was "Hangover Square" a psychological suspense story, not in the sf field (altho the protagonist goes around forgetting murders he's committed). I found the book unreadable, but recently saw the movie on tv (it was the last picture made by Laird Cregar before his death) and he did burn Linda Darnell's body on a Guy Fawkes pyre, all right.///If I

encountered a stubborn child who insisted it was millions of miles to the moon I'd reach for my copy of "Conquest of Space" and show him the actual figure, or perhaps suggest he look it up himself, if I didn't have proof handy, or I might just grin and refuse to argue with him about it, if that seemed best. I certainly wouldn't tell him that he would know better when he grew up (lots of adults don't). There would be no surer way of antagonizing him, which would make my task that much more difficult if we ever had another argument. And, as I mentioned before, it would be a cheap way of 'winning' the argument, for me. When you indulge in such tactics you just aren't playing by the rules....as a matter of fact, anyone who feels it necessary to retreat to such an impregnable stand I feel automatically is confessing a feeling of inadequacy. If you cannot win an argument against a child using either facts or reason (and I'm speaking of arguments, not tantrums) then the edifice of your own argument is a very shaky one and I'd adjudge the child the winner.

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THE ART OF IMPROVISATION

by Burnett James

We all know that improvisation lies at the heart of the music we call jazz--we say it and write it at all hours of the day and far into the night; and justifiably. No new theorist or experimenter arises who does not proclaim boldly that of course what really matters is improvisation; that over and above all jazz cannot exist at all without a fertile and pre-eminent element of improvisation. Of course. The jazz musician did not invent improvisation; but he did in a very real sense re-discover it. It is the life-blood of his art, and is responsible for much of the individuality and particular expressiveness of that art. All the same, it is doubtful whether the average jazz musician, any more than the average jazz lover, really understands the historical provenance of improvisation in the art of music as such. Some brief enquiry in the practice and principles of the past, therefore, may not be out of place in these pages.

Although it hardly exists today outside jazz, at least in western music (in oriental music it is still of primary importance), the art of improvisation was for centuries an integral part of musical creation and execution. Every instrumentalist, and especially every keyboard player, was not only expected to display considerable tal-

ents in the direction of extemporisation, but his standing in the eyes of the musical world was frequently determined by those talents. Indeed, much of the earlier music can hardly be played at all by musicians unable to improvise fluently and imaginatively. This certainly holds true of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and continues with some modification well into the nineteenth. That the practice declined sharply during the late nineteenth century and disappeared altogether in the twentieth in so-called "straight" or "serious" music is something that has had perhaps wider repercussions than is generally realised.

Historically speaking, there are several different sorts of improvisation--or rather, there are several different musical activities containing strong improvisatory elements. Probably the beginnings of improvisation in European "composed" music is to be found in the art of descant which was universally practised and developed between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. Descant is a difficult word to bring into a particular argument because it has more than one meaning and so declines to submit itself to precise definition. However, the form which concerns us here is what may be called "free descant" in vocal music--that is, an impromptu line, usually in the treble register, interwoven with the fixed line of traditional plainsong. A descant of this sort was certainly a true improvisation--the descant singers had before them strict music and extemporised freely and spontaneously as they went along. The technical definition of this practice was discantus supra librum or contrappunto alla mente, which is both accurate and self-descriptive.

The custom of improvised descant lasted, with current modifications following the evolution of harmonic structure, until well into the seventeenth century, and in fact became so universal that it was a popular pastime among musical amateurs. It has left its legacy even up to the present day; although what we now call the descant is usually written out, and does not therefore come within the scope of improvisation.

With the swift developement of instrumental music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the art of improvisation took on a wider and different aspect. The early Toccatas, Fantasias and Preludes for the keyboard were invariably improvised, and what has come down to us fully written out and playable"at sight" represents only a fraction of the vast amount of musical activity that went on during at least two centuries. Even the music that has come down in score can only be realised by either a player who comprehensively understands the musical style and practice of the time, or in editions which have been skilfully "filled in" by some scholarly editor. The violin sonatas of Corelli (1653-1713), one of the pioneers of instrumental music, originally showed little more than a bare melodic outline and harmonic indication by way of the Figured Bass, or Basso Continuo, on which both the violinist and the keyboard accompanist were expected to extemporise freely. This is particularly so in the slow movements, where it was customary for the player to use the printed linex as little more than a skeleton around which to build florid, expressive and essentially virtuoso passages designed consciously to display his talents as an improviser. And what is true of Corelli is no less true of all the leading instrumental composers for at least a century, especially the Italians.

Obviously then, improvisation was in the fullest sense an essential part of every musician's technical and imaginative equipment. A string or keyboard player of the period under discussion was quite literally as little likely to command respect and admiration if he could not improvise as would a jazz musician today who revealed a similar lack in the vitals of his art. And what was true of the instrumentalists was also true of the composers, who were nearly xkw always themselves leading virtuosi of one sort or another. Indeed, musical history proves quite conclusively that the greatest improvisers have invariably been the great composers. Take some of the most illustrious names in the whole of music--take, for example, Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven, and what was the quality about them that most forcibly struck their contemporaries?--why, their genius for improvisation.

Bach was a tremendous improviser on the organ. Let Johann Sebastian Bach loose in an organ loft with a hymn-tune in his pocket, and there he would stay, hour after hour almost, unrolling a ceaseless flow of inspired extempore creation. There hardly seems on the face of it much connection between the art of improvisation as we are nowadays accustomed to think of it and the complex polyphony and monumental counterpoint of Bach's published music. And yet it is pretty certain that Bach's improvisations were closely allied to his composed works for organ. Since the musical faculty works as a unity and seldom splits itself up into water-tight compartments, it is inevitable that it should have been so. Indeed, incredible though it may seem, Bach's son, Karl Philip Emmanuel, roundly asserted that his father's published organ music gave little idea of the grandeur of his improvisations.

Handel, too, was a regular and splendid improviser. And Handel's improvisations, if historical report is to be believed, seem to have borne much the same relation to his published works and his innermost musical nature as Bach's improvisations did to his. Bach's counterpoint is always carried through to its inevitable and inexorable conclusions; while Handel, who was more eighteenth century man of the world and society, kept his eye severely on his assembled listener's contrapuntal satiation point. The mark of a man's true personality is printed large on his creations, whether they arise spontaneously or are born in heavy labour.

Mozart, music's unique prodigy, was needless to say remarkable at improvisation, even as a child. At 14 he improvised publicly, not only at the keyboard, but also a song to words he had never before seen, and complete with accompaniment. And so on through his short but musically wonderful life. Beethoven was a supreme improviser. x It was his power of improvising that caused Mozart, listening politely if not altogether patiently, to yet another young hopeful when Beethoven presented himself in the Master's presence in Vienna, to turn suddenly to his friends with the words--"Mark that boy, one day the world will hear of him!" Throughout his life Beethoven's powers of improvisation remained exceptional. Anywhere he played, in any fashionable drawing room, he could hold his hearers spellbound and on the verge of tears, or beyond. He needed the scantiest material as stimulus--practically anything would do, any old scrap of a theme picked up from a music desk or painstakingly picked out on the piano with one finger and two thumbs. And then he would improvise, wonder-

fully and with an extraordinary depth of emotion and inner sense of form, and "for a full hour by the clock". Well into the nineteenth century the practice continued among composers, if with some lessening of effect that is probably because the composers themselves were not quite of the same metal, even though they included Liszt, Mendelssohn, Cesar Franck and Saint-Saens.

The latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries was also the great period of the virtuoso pianist as improviser. These men were also minor composers; but their fame rested almost entirely on their phenomenal executant skill, not least in improvisation. Such as Hummel, Moscheles, Wolff, Thalberg, Czerny were artists of this kind. Mendelssohn, although brilliant at in, on the whole disliked improvising in public; Hummel, on the other hand, stated openly that he "always felt less embarrassment in extemporizing before an audience of 2,000 or 3,000 persons than in executing any written composition to which he was slavishly tied down--" (Art of Playing the Pianoforte). What is not in doubt, however any individual may have felt about it, is that for at least two hundred years of European musical history the art of improvisation held the highest place in the estimation of the worlds greatest musicians.

Precisely when improvisation began to lose its hold is difficult to say. It seems to have been in decline from about the middle of the nineteenth century, and by the end of it to have become something very like a circus trick; at least public improvisation. True, Franklin Taylor, in the appropriate article in the first edition of Grove's Dictionary (1889), wrote, "The power of playing extempore evinces a very high degree of musical cultivation, as well as the possession of great musical gifts." That would seem to indicate that even at that late date the art was highly respected still, if less widely practised than heretofore. On the other hand, there were unquestionably many worthy, solid, orthodox academic musicians, Frederick Corder among them, who took a very different view; and apparently it was this latter view which prevailed. Nowadays, and for the whole of the present century at least, the average serious musician has tended to regard improvisation as a more or less lowly and scatter-brained occupation. It certainly plays no part in modern composition or execution. We do not ask our contemporary virtuosi to engage in extended improvisations on themes of our or their own choice--not even a Horowitz, a Rachmaninoff or a Rubinstein. This could well be one reason why so many current musicians are able to make big reputations on the strength of technique alone--something which could never have happened in the days when a man was obliged to reveal the scope and quality of his <u>musical</u> as opposed to his purely technical capabilities by way of extensive improvisation. The great public contests of improvisation that took place in those rigorous old days were especially searching tests of the players' musical faculties--indeed, they were often accepted as conclusive evidence of worth and used to reach a decision between two contestants for some official appointment or other. That is unquestionably why, in such contests, the likes of Bach and Beethoven were unconquerable--their innate musicality enabled them quite literally to wipe the floor with those who might well have been their superiors as sheer technicians.

The art of improvisation has been variously defined; but because it assumes various forms it tends to be to some extent elusive. Perhaps it might best answer to some such definition as, "The art of playing without premeditation, the conception of the music and its rendering being simultaneous".(Franklin Taylor, OP. cit.). That, of course, applies to "pure" improvisation, in which the theme is previously unknown to the performer and the resultant creation therefore entirely spontaneous. It was generally conceded in the days of the battles royal that to improvise on a theme already known and familiar was a species of cheating, because it enabled the improvisation to be worked out to some extent beforehand, at least in broad outline. In practice, however, much improvisation was built around, if not familiar themes, then at least themes of a particular type and structure. On the other hand, it might well be argued that to the deeply musical mind few themes or combinations of notes are altogether unfamiliar, and that therefore the practical difference between a randomly given and a deliberately selected subject is thinner than at the first sight it may appear.

I have shown that the origin of improvisation is to be found in the art of descant. Between descant, however, and fully developed improvisation there are several musical practices which if not true improvisation are at least authentic aspects of it. Such were 'divisions'--the extempore breaking up of the melodic line in instrumental and vocal music into sequences of short notes to create variations. Sometimes, as in the vocal music of Bach and Handel, the divisions are written out and therefore have no relation to improvisation. But extempore divisions come clearly into that category. Then there is the 'Figured Bass'--the practice of improvising accompaniments to vocal, instrumental and orchestral music from a skeleton bass line with figures beneath the notes to indicate the harmony required. Thirdly, there is ornamentation--a vast subject which occupies the bulk of Arnold Dolmetsch's famous book, The Interpretation of the Music of the XVII & XVIII Centuries. The early composers did not expect or intend their music to be played "straight" and unornamented. To omit the ornaments, Dolmetsch wrote, "is just as barbarous as taking [illegible] off the exuberant decoration of flamboyant Gothic architecture under the pretext that one prefers a simpler style." Again, the ornaments might be indicated and later on they were, of course, written out in full. Extempore ornamentation, however, was for long a living tradition: it is often an important element in the slow movements of Mozart's piano concertos; which is perhaps one reason why a really satisfying performance of Mozart's concertos is nowadays quite a rarity--most of our modern virtuosi are all at sea when confronted with the necessity of departing from what stares them in the face in black and white. It is also necessary to mention the cadenza to the classical concerto. Although the cadenza was not infrequently written down, either by the composer or by someone else, and after Beethoven was generally an integral part of the composition, its original function was to give the soloist an opportunity for displaying his talents ad lib.

Germane to our present enquiry there is also the practice of duet improvisation--an art that was widely cultivated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among famous piano duetists of whom history has left a record are Mozart and Clementi, Beethoven and Wolfl, and Mos-

cheles and Mendelssohn; while Beethoven and his pupil Ries were celebrated for improvised ducts for piano and violin.

The above outline of the historical importance of improvisation in music, brief and summary though it necessarily is, shows quite clearly the extent and nature of extempore playing and singing for nearly three hundred years. We should not however, over-play the hand. Improvisation, valuable and essential though it was, was never the whole, or even the major part, of the art of music. Fully developed written composition was always the final test and the ultimate achievement--and for obvious reasons. On the other hand, if we accept Stravinsky's definition of composition as "selective improvisation", then it seems that the difference between the two may not be so wide as we today are disposed to think it. A good deal of composed music, especially piano music, has an unmistakable improvisatory sound to it. Certain pieces of Mozart and Chopin produce this effect; but perhaps the supreme examples are the last sonatas and quartets of Beethoven, where although we know that the actual business of composing, of getting his ideas down on paper, often cost Beethoven the direst labour, the final result, notwithstanding the enormous intellectual powers latent in the music, seems almost to have emanated from a sort of spontaneous combustion on the part of the creative spirit itself. The key to the phenomenon probably lies in the accounts we have of Beethoven's quite exceptional power and fertility as an improviser.

How much all this is relevant to a discussion of jazz is hardly good ground for bitter disputation. The more one looks back into the past and studies the style and execution of the older music, the more does it become clear that the genuinely gifted jazz musician has simply re-discovered, unconsciously for the most part, the essentials of a musical practice that was of foremost importance during the greater part of western musical history. (To insist that it is still of paramount importance in oriental music would really be to drag in a red-herring, because very few western musicians and scholars, let alone jazzmen, really understand the music of the east; therefore it is a subject best left alone.)

Had it not been for the historical evolution which brought about the decline and virtual extinction of the art of improvisation, it is likely that jazz would have been far more easily accepted into the canons of musical respectability. Or, to put it the other way round, if jazz had been born into the seventeenth instead of the twentieth century, it would almost certainly have been assimilated without the smallest difficulty. The average seventeenth century musician would have found it based on fundamental musical principles with which he was entirely familiar. Although harmonically and colouristically jazz derives in the main from musical impressionism, in style and execution it stands nearer to the seventeenth century. Later infusions from Bartok, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and even Schonberg, do not alter the basic argument. Perhaps John Lewis sub-consciously understood this when he wrote Fontessa. By going back for his basic framework to the Commedia dell'arte, Lewis re-established a very significant and fundamental contact. The Commedia dell'arte consisted of a written plot around set characters with improvised dialogue--something which is obviously directly related to jazz composition and execution.

It is hardly necessary to show in detail the ways in which the jazz musician uses or adapts to his own purposes the traditional arts of improvisation. A particular artistic method or practice retains its innate character and purpose while adapting itself continuously to the needs of those who use it. We can see, perhaps not too fancifully, a legacy of the art of descant in certain familiar aspects of jazz playing. A band playing a written line with a soloist weaving a free pattern over it is an obvious example. In the compositions of Duke Ellington do not Bigard or Hodges--and sometimes others--weave a form of freely adapted descant against the ensemble playing from score? And ornamentation, of course, is even more a case in point. Seldom does a jazz musician present a theme straight and unadorned. We can often judge the sensitivity to melody of a jazz player by the way he decorates a tune before actually evolving independent improvisations on it. Ornamentation, freely extemporised, is an essential part of the presentation of a tune in jazz, as in a different sense it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Divisions and Figured Bass do not really come into the present discussion of jazz techniques, even though a thorough investigation might show that, enormously modified and re-orientated, they too have played their part not in jazz itself, but in the evolution that has led to jazz techniques. What does seem pertinent, however, is the way in which the Preludes to keyboard suites of the Bach/Handel period were usually left as a mere succession of chords on which the performer was expected to improvise an introductory movement of his own. Does not this sound a far-off echo of the way the Minton pioneers and their successors looked to subject matter with an interesting chord-sequence on which to improvise, to the annoyance of those narrow-minded and unregenerate critics who imagine in their musical ignorance that melodic improvisation is the only righteous occupation for an honest man? Improvisation if it is to mean anything, to be more than mere doodling, has to take due account of melody, harmony, and rhythm; and all great improvisers known to history, jazz or other, have done exactly that; however the interested parties may try to argue themselves out of it.

Improvisation has, of course, certain inherent and far-reaching limitations. In plain truth, the only completely free improvisation is that created and executed by one player alone. It is no coincidence that all the great improvisers have been keyboard players. Collective improvisation imposes severe restraints on individual exploration if complete chaos is to be avoided. Only by voluntarily accepting a basic and fairly simple harmonic basis can a group of individuals improvise coherently. That, evidently, is why many straight musicians complain of the harmonic tameness of much jazz. The solo jazz pianist, any more than the old concert virtuoso, has not this restriction. A Garner, Hines, Tatum, or Monk can indulge such fancy and inventiveness as he may chance to be gifted with without let or hindrance; although he is inevitably influenced by the general limitations of his art as a whole.

The dilemma of collective improvisation is a very real one. Often, as in the case of the "jam session", where qualities other than harmonic and tonal exploration are required, a fairly strict and uncomplicated harmonic framework, so long as it is fully understood and agreed by the players, is satisfactory. But the matter

cannot rest there. Although it is not necessary all the time, and should not become, as so often, a fetish, the possibility at least of harmonic and tonal expansion is a vital matter to any musical idiom. This is obviously best achieved through jazz composition closely lined with executant improvisation. But in order to release to the full the essential improvisatory element, it is of some importance that a body of musicians should be in the habit of continually playing together. When this is so freedom of improvisation can be greatly extended because of the natural rapport between the minds of the individual members of the group. In this connection the orchestra of Duke Ellington and the Modern Jazz Quartet come immediately to mind. In both cases the leaders are outstanding composers, able to create consistently new frameworks which have value in themselves and which at the same time fertilise the talents for improvisation of the group members. This is really another subject, requiring separate elucidation; and as such cannot be dealt with satisfactorily here. But I do not think there will be much misunderstanding of the basic position.

The limitations imposed on the jazz idiom by its dependance on improvisation are extensive but not lethal. Jazz is not a technically advanced music; and there is no imperative reason why it should be. By its very nature it will never challenge "straight" composition in the matter of technical exploration and theoretical speculation, although that does not mean it need or will stagnate. But because at heart jazz is more concerned with spontaneous expression than with technical experiment it will only absorb as much of the latter as at a given time it needs. However, since history shows that the most technically advanced music is not always and inevitably the best music, we need not get too agitated about it. Every art form works within certain limitations and conventions; and although a continual expanding of the frontiers is entirely essential, much of the greatest music in the world has been composed without in any way issuing noisy challenges to established custom.

I had intended to conclude this article with some remarks on the baroque element in jazz; but I have already trespassed outrageously on the space of the Editor and on the patience of my readers. I will therefore content myself with assuring anyone and everyone that in this article I have set out to "prove" exactly nothing. I propound no theory and erect no system. I simply offer some elementary observations on an art which today is practised only by the jazz musician and is in fact the very basis of his art, but which is historically speaking one of the oldest and most esteemed of all musical activities. The study, I need hardly say, is not exhaustive: indeed, it barely touches on the essentials. But it may do something to help clear a particular perspective. A hundred and fifty years ago our ancestors went to hear Beethoven and Hummel and Thalberg and Clementi improvise richly and splendidly; and before that to the great organists--to Bach, Buxtehude, Bohm, Pachelbel, not forgetting Samuel Wesley, though he came later. Today we have to go for the same sort of musical performance to Lionel Hampton, Erroll Garner, Milt Jackson, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. I will leave you to digest the implications to be drawn from that curious circumstance.

Burnett James

MORSEls

Never let it be said for a moment that life can be dull. I had just begun to settle down to a life of marital bliss and the daily trip to the Works for the wherewithal to buy my daily bread, and now look what happens - since our last meeting I have added one more mouth to feed, and decided to change not only my place of work, but even the job itself.

First things first: boy, weight 8 lbs 9¼ oz, length 20½ inches, name of Geoffrey Douglas. He arrived at 6:40 pm on the 12th of July, being a few days early, to the great relief of Maria and me. For those of you with calendar minds, we married on the 6th October last.

Second point: in view of the impending move elsewhere, my address for correspondence should revert to 10 Sunnyside, EDENBRIDGE, Kent. Not for long, I hope, but there will be a short period when I shall have to go househunting in earnest. The result of our new rent act has been a skyrocketting tendency of the cost of leasing or renting a home of any sort other than a trailer and neither Maria nor I fancy raising an infant in one of them, though we were comfortable enough by ourselves. It might be very fine in the Californian or Floridian climate, but not over here. We want a house or flat, anywhere within ten miles of the new place of work, and we prefer to rent it, since we do not expect to stay longer than is necessary this side of the Atlantic and the purchase of a house over here is a guaranteed financial loss. Ever meet a bankrupt Estate Agent?

Maria, by the way, was born in Czechoslovakia, and then moved to Austria after WW2; she is a born Socialist, and none of my efforts to convert her have any effect. This adds to her antipathy towards the outright purchase of a house in this or any other country. When she settles down to read the political news in the paper each evening, it does my heart good to hear her comments on both Left and Right, for they are as sulphurous as any I have ever produced myself, which is quite an admission. The height of the arguments over the rent act brought some of her best denunciations, and has only added to her dislike of that mob up there in Westminster, regardless of party.

To be fair to the Socialists, they do not stand a ghost of a chance of defeating any bill the Government cares to bring forward, which must be quite frustrating for them, especially as the Conservatives both know and take full advantage of that fact. They, in turn, have given up all hope of defeating our gaily spiralling curve of inflation, as has been evidenced by their own decision to raise the pay of an MP by roughly a minimum of 75%. They make great play with the solemn reminder to us that it is all taxable, but the fact remains that after allowances for the usual expenses the tax rate is quite gentle. The other fact arises that they are making us pay them extra to live in a manner which costs so much only because they can do nothint to stop prices from rising. At least, we trust they are unable, rather than unwilling. Mr. Butler was almost holy about the raise, trusting that all members regardless of party would treat their new rate as a sacred trust and play the game, keep a straight bat, never lose sight of the fact that they were elected to improve the welfare of all, be sure their strength is as the strength of ten by keeping their hearts pure, etc etc etc.....snores from all sides.

I have my own opinion about the matter of payment of our lords and masters. I suggest that their pay should be tied inversely to the cost of living. As the index rises, their pay should fall: as it

falls, their pay should rise. In industry this is known as piece-work, where you get paid to produce more, rather than to be on the job for longer hours. Over to the Chancellor, who seems to be overcome by everything, too overcome to do more than murmur/gently that all this is just too too prostrating, except when he asks: "What inflation?"

Here, in my view, is the real drawback to the two-party system. Once you are as limited in choice as that it really is just a matter of choosing between the lesser of two evils. In the days of three parties of sufficiently even strength, it was necessary to take some account of the ordinary type of low-life who put his X on the ballot form, and given any sort of close numbers elected, the major winner had to cooperate with one or other of the other parties in order to get anything done. This led almost always to some sort of moderation when anything drastic had been originally planned. The three-party system in this country was killed off by the two extremes, each of whom tried to make a case for the fact that a vote for the centre party was a vote wasted, and ended up making the plea stick. (After all, it was said by 66 and something percent of the candidates, so it had to be true.) As a result, the free-traders were out altogether, and have been out ever since the thirties. There has been some slight increase in the tendency to vote Liberal in the last few bye-elections, but it is not enough to produce as a definite trend. It may be that by next General Election time there will be enough dissatisfaction with left and right for the centre to stage a small come-back and have to be wooed by the party elected to power, but I rather doubt it. Liberal, in England, does not mean quite the same as it means your side, by the way.

The end of gas-rationing brought cheers from us all. It has also brought a fall in the price of the stuff, too, which brought even more cheering. I now pay a fraction under 60¢ for a gallon, and thank my Maker that I am not a Frenchman, for he, the poor slob, pays more than we ever did even when Suez was at its height.

I seem to have overestimated the expensive effect which Dr Charles Hill has had on the Post Office. His successor has gone even farther, by putting up the cost of ordinary mail by 20% and lowering the weight at which he will charge us extra. Up, too, goes the cost of the telephone, and on goes a charge for even local calls made by a subscriber. This followed a raise in the cost of coal and a probable increase again come winter. Now here is a nice little spiral for an observer to watch. Coal goes up in price, which means that the railways have to pay more for it, so they put up their prices, which means that it costs more to deliver coal, so coal goes up in price. That brought the bakers into the news. "If coal goes up in price by 50¢ per ton, then the cost of a loaf of bread must inevitably rise". Now tell me, by what piece of calculation does that much of an increase mean that one single loaf must cost enough more to force the price up? How many loaves can one make with the aid of a ton of coal? What does that come to when you divide it into 50¢?

It makes the Conservative Central Office look a little ridiculous when they put out statements to the effect that the cost of living "has again fallen" on a day when the Ministry of Labour announces that the cost of living has gone up by one point," mainly due to increases in the price of potatoes, sugar, tomatoes, and eggs", and within a week of the MP's own raise.

There was a slight mis-timing in the May Meanderings, when I mentioned the Proms. For some odd reason I was under the impression that the issue in question would be appearing in late August, probably due to the fact that I would normally be getting the mailing myself in that month. (I can't even claim that any more, because it reached me in mid-July, a few days before the start of the Prom season). Opening Night carried a goodly helping of Elgar, who apparently is becoming respectable once more. This must be partly due to the organisers (BBC mostly) of the concerts, because the Enigma Variations and the Pomp and Circumstance Marches have been regular items of the agenda ever since I can remember. Every year the closing concert is identical - or 90% so - and includes such things as Sea-shanties played on a cello, the best known of the Pomp and Circumstance group("Land of Hope and Glory"), and Jerusalem. Being no longer in a position to fight my way into the downstairs fleapit, I try to arrange myself an invitation to watch it on TV, and feel all emotional and British at the sight and sound of it all. It is strongly reminiscent of the Depression days when Tory MPs would come around and exhort us all to remember that everything they did up there in Westminster was done with the purest of intentions and for our own good and that we should all be glad to make sacrifices and endure privations for the greater glory of the Flag and the Empah. All the old cliches, and we were young and naive enough to believe it and get a lump in the throat and tears in the eyes as we, too, sang Jerusalem and stood around as the Union Jack was hoisted on the mast to the sound of a bugle blowing something rather wailing. Nowadays I still get a kick out of singing it, but only for the same reason that I get a kick out of any song I can bellow at fff rate. It is a grand bit of music for fullthroated singing. You could add to it such hymns as Oh God Our Help in Ages Past, which we bellowed in Oxford Street during the Coronation service in 1953 (it is also known as the Old Hundredth); and there was another entitled God Bless the Prince of Wales but that didn't seemto be quite so successful. Finally, there is a piece, not for singing, which was quite popular recently, and is a combination of a military band playing Abide With Me while a bugler sounds Last Post ('Taps',if you prefer). There's a thing to bring tears to the eyes of the most hard-bitten old long-service type going, because the more hard-bitten the character may be, the more vulnerable he usually becomes to such emotional stuff as that. It conjures up memories, I know. Maybe it shouldn't, but it does.

Come to think of it, there is almost a year gone since I mustered out, and I had not really noticed it, because there has been so much to do all the time. So much that I have fallen way behind on my correspondence and reading. Last book I bought was on the subject of railroad engines, and the one before that on guided weapons, that being my line of work till now. That one is now so much waste, but still looks good on the over-loaded bookshelf between Principles of Radar and Locomotive Maintenance. We have a greater volume of books than of personally-owned furniture at the moment, which makes moving anyplace something of a problem, because we are always left with the worry of where to put them all in order to keep them from the prying claws of our kitten and (in future) from the exploring of the offspring. We shall obviously have to settle for furnished rooms for a while, until we save up the pennies necessary to buy our own chattels.

But getting back to living a life of a breadwinner, you might safely say that I am really enjoying it. First thing to notice is that everyone is so willing to help when compared with his normal opposite number in uniform. If you try to draw a spare or an item of clothing from the RAF or Army store, you have to beat down a good deal of resistance to the idea of actually Making An Issue, which means filling in forms and possibly having to order some more of whatever it may be in the event that this issue drops the stock below the minimum permitted total. If you have to go get a photograph taken for the identity card or whatever, you have to find out what time they will condescend to have someone standing in front of the camera and willing to pose you for the operation, and then you have to wait for them to remember that they agreed to do so. Outside, where some semblance of working is necessary in order to hold the job down, everyone is willing to do all they can to help. When I needed a couple of oddments from the stationery store I went down first in the hope of finding out what time they were open for issues and was agreeably surprised to find that they never closed throughout the working day. When I had to get my likeness recorded for the Security branch of the Works I just strolled down and had it taken with a great deal of friendly chatter and requests to be sure the light in my eyes was not too bright. Eeeeeegad, thought I, is it always like this? And it seems to be just so. I have had reason to visit other Works and the same has always applied, and the firm I hope to be joining appears to be no exception whatever.

The only thing I actively miss is the Service humor. In this office we have four ex-regular servicemen, and our own brand of humor does not seem to go at all well with the older members of the staff. The standard attitude at present is that we are too inclined to take liberties with them, despite the fact that we outrank them in actual position. One of them was relating the terrible time he had as a member of the Home Guard during the last year of WW2, at a time when it was fairly clear that they would never be needed, and seemed highly hurt that we did not concede that he had had a harder war than we (a conclusion he had reached from the fact that none of us ever went into details of our service in those days, whereas they were a large part of his conversation, twelve years later). Cream of the joke came when he was giving a demonstration to the young females of the staff, all about rifle drill, using a broom. One of the ex-army types grinned at him, and got a demand that, if he were so damned amused he should show how it was done in the army if it were so much better. So, not wishing to back down, he did a parody of all the party imitations of a raw recruit and kept a perfectly straight face. This was viewed by the rest of us equally solemnly and deeply shocked our Home Guard, who to this day cannot believe that his leg was being pulled. Some of the others realised it but have not told him, nor have they forgiven the demonstrator, taking it as a deliberate affront to their combined seniority. Perhaps our ideas of humor have a lower level, but at least we have other subjects than the two regular ones of "How I showed HIM" and the muttered obscenity. There's no denying that the services do alter the outlook on life, giving a derisive attitude to the gods of the civilian. It is only when the life is perpetuated that the mind narrows more than is desirable. I think that the chief trouble with the timeserving office types is that they have pushed themselves to

dignity and hate having it punctured. Sure, none of us enjoy being lowered in our own or others' esteem, but when one only has one's own dignity one is over-vulnerable, as well as pompous.

The same old (middle-aged actually, but he behaves old) character also had us going when someone started a discussion on planchettes and spiritualism. He told us that he had gone into the subject deeply and had discovered that he had healing hands. So strong was the healing power that if he held his hands about eight inches apart it was possible to see a blue light glowing between the finger tips of either hand. This was too good a chance to be missed, and we asked for a deomonstration, but he backed hastily out of it by saying that it was a long time since he had done that sort of thing and that he had no desire to reopen activities. But "we spiritualists believe that....." etc....There is no God, but there are souls or personalities which go through various lives at various periods in order to achieve Nirvana. Not reincarnation, said he, though perhaps it might sound something like that. No, there was no Authority to say when and in to what foetus the personality would be reborn....he didn't know anything about that and was only telling us what "they" said. He was beginning to show some signs of strain by now, so we changed the subject and went back to blue lights and auras, but he was warned, and merely quoted some book he had heard of in which some famous surgeon of some famous London hospital had related his own experiments in the matter of using the aura to diagnose the ailment. Apparently he had made some sort of screen through which he looked at his patients and the discoloring of the aura had told him exactly where the ailment was and what he had to do to cure it. Why did he not perpetuate this method of treatment? Well.....for one thing it hurt his eyes too much, for another thing, the fact that it has gone out of practice is no proof that it didn't work. No, he couldn't recall the book or the author, but he had definitely heard of it from one of the members of his spiritualist circle. Once again he was showing strain, so we dropped the subject.

Now, I don't have much idea of the truth of these allegations, though I intend to find out some more if it can be done without a crippling expenditure. But I do have strong recollections of Houdini's exposures of the fake medium, fake seance, fake miracle. I also recall a book called The Road to EnDor, which relates how a couple of British army officers escaped from P.O.W. camp in WW 1, by use of the planchette and other occultry. I'm open to proof, but at the moment I'm doubtful. That's much the same as my attitude to the flying saucer. My childhood was coloured with country superstition, much of which I believed implicitly as only a child can. It is the great disillusionment of all those early ideas which keeps me from accepting any sort of claim without at least some semblance of proof either before my eyes or from the mouth of one of those few whom I will trust to tell the truth. More to come on this point.

I was saying, in the May mailing, that Sylvester is a great favorite of mine. He still is, but I don't like what has happened to the staff who keep him on the go. Up to this year, the last name on the credit titles has been that of I. Freleng - an odd enough name. It has now changed to Friz Freleng, even odder. Friz, whoever he may be, has had a bad effect on the series, having changed the background to the type used by UPA-- stylised to the nth degree-and changed the plot to an appalling extent. Where once we had the entertaining sight

of a Simon Legree type cat trying a logical sequence of methods of getting a mouthful of Tweety Pie, we now get a monotonous run of ways in which TweetyPie gets Sylvester banged on the head or otherwise beaten up. It's a pity, because it was a masterly comic, but once it descends to the Barney Bear level it is lost.

For the benefit of you unfortunate characters who don't have Cartoon Theatres (I could have sworn they were American in origin) I'll explain that Barney Bear is a Joe Doakes who patiently undergoes two dozen variations of the hotfoot from his villainous nephew and then upends the brat for a paddling. Nothing more. Sylvester, on the other hand, used to get incredibly complicated in his villainy, each time overlooking one vital point (we overlook it too) which lets him down finally. Witness the occasion when Tweety was snatched by a mobster and Sylvester went through uncountable dangers, overcoming them all in the end, only to be grabbed (as he made his getaway) by a committee offering him a medal for bravery. True, he lost it when he made a last grab at Tweety, but oh what fun he had. Sylvester remains the epitome of all alley cats in my heart, regardless of what Friz Freleng may do to him.

A fewmonths ago, I was asking V.L.M. what he knew about Skiffle. I had just heard some over the BBC and was struck by a couple of numbers. He wasn't over-enthusiastic and I have since realised why. The two turns which caught my ear were never repeated and -to my opionionnothing since has come up to within streets of their quality. Skiffle now seems to be second rate hill-billy with an English overtone to the accent. Generally speaking, the music is just so much background noise, subordinate to a shouted refrain, shouted in vague Anglo-American tones with a nasal holler. (Freburg's Skiffle Group is much more enjoyable.) There is a young Scots girl with the improbable name of Nancy Whiskey who is making herself a name over the song "Freight Train". This is a monotonous thing, with lyrics (!hah!) which do not stand scrutiny, sung in a dreary monotonous voice with strumming and percussion just beating in the background. They tell me it sells like hot cakes. I'd rather have Eartha Kitt, who (in reply to V.L.M.) makes ownership of a TV set somewhat worth while and even gives some sort of legitimacy to the British Independent T.V. Authority. Yes indeed. I dig that "Old-Fashioned Girl" the most.

I would like to correct one spelling in the May column. It refers to Makarios as the holy honor. Don't blame McCain, because he was cutting stencil from handwritten stuff, and it so happens that a double-r, the way I write it, looks just like an "n". The word intended was horror.

There have been complaints that this column doesn't give rise to any sort of argument. To which I reply that it was never intended for anything but a description of life this side the Atlantic seen from my ever-loving blue eyes. All the same, I think there may be a little more opportunity this time.

We should be moving to the West of England in August. No, friend. Much farther than Trowbridge, (shudder) Wilts.

Bill Morse

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