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## Eight Bar Intro

About a year and a half ago in Toronto, producer Larry Jeffrey approached me about writing a screenplay based on two stories by the Czech novelist Josef Skvorecky, pronounced Sko-resky, one a short story called *Eine Kleine Jazzmusik*. I fell in love with Skvorecky's writing. The spirit of jazz infuses everything of his I have read so far. He is a former tenor player.

Skvorecky was born in 1924 in Nachod, Czechoslovakia. He worked as a laborer, teacher, and as editor of *Svetova literatura—World Literature*—before getting the sack for political reasons at his first novel, *The Cowards*, was banned in 1958. Skvorecky was very much a part of the famous Prague Spring of 1968, but after the Soviet invasion he emigrated to Canada, where he is now Professor of English at Erindale College of the University of Toronto. At the moment, he is teaching a seminar at Columbia University.

He is considered one of the most distinguished writers to come out of Eastern Europe in recent years. The best-known of his works in the West are the novels *The Cowards*, 1958, *Miss Silver's Past*, 1969, *The Tank Corps*, 1971, and *The Miracle Game*, 1973, but his writings—including a history of the Czech cinema—are much more extensive than that.

Skvorecky knows only too well why jazz is hated by authoritarian mentalities.

In one of his essays, *Red Music*, he wrote that "no matter what LeRoi Jones says to the contrary, the essence of this music, this 'way of making music', is not simply protest. Its essence is something far more elemental: an *elan vital*, a forceful vitality, an explosive creative energy as breathtaking as that of any true art, that may be felt even in the saddest blues. Its effect is cathartic."

Jazz is the very model of a functional democracy. Within an orderly system agreed upon almost casually by its participants—"Oh, let's play some blues in B-flat"—it permits an extraordinary freedom of individual expression. If the whole world could be made to function like jazz, we would know a happy peace. That's one reason it is hated.

And it doesn't matter what the political philosophies of the authoritarian minds may be. They are all alike. Tyranny never changes, only the excuse for it. A Czech composer and conductor I met a few years ago said, "I've had my nose broken twice, once by the Nazis and once by the Communists. It felt the same both times."

Skvorecky, in *Red Music*, says that "so many titles on Senator Joe McCarthy's index of books to be removed from the shelves of U.S. Information Libraries abroad are identical to many on the index issued in Prague by the Communist party early in the '70s."

He continues: "Totalitarian ideologists don't like real life (other people's) because it cannot be totally controlled; they loathe art, the product of a yearning for life, because that, too, evades control—if controlled and legislated, it perishes. But before it perishes—or when it finds refuge in some kind of *Samizdat* underground—art, willy-nilly, becomes protest. Popular mass art, like jazz, becomes mass protest. That's why the ideological guns and sometimes even the police guns of all dictatorships are aimed at the men with the horns."

The "deal" on the picture has not been set, but I wanted to introduce you now to the Skvorecky's haunting *Eine Kleine Jazzmusik*. I am particularly anxious for the musicians to read it.

You may not know Skvorecky's work, but he certainly knows yours. Skvorecky gets the feeling of jazz into prose—the sense of the joyously unexpected—like no writer I've read. The story, though "fiction" in structure, is firmly grounded on fact.

## Eine Kleine Jazzmusik

by Josef Skvorecky

It began when Paddy—at that time still called Pavel Nakonec—got his old man to buy him a trumpet. The fathers of us other boys soon had to follow suit.

At a meeting at the Nakonec villa, we assigned everyone's job, deciding that for a start we needed one of each jazz instrument. We did not dream that we were laying the foundation of a band that has lasted until today and bears the name of its first and finest trumpet player, our leader in undying memory—Paddy's Dixielanders.

But our fathers withstood the initial onslaught and so, for the first rehearsal in Paddy's room, there gathered an unlikely band composed of the instruments that lay at hand. There was Paddy's horn, a piano, and a bass. But around that solid jazz core was grouped a tambour-like outfit consisting of two violins, a mandolin, a Turkish drum—relic of a former castle band, which Franta Rozkosny, the caretaker's son, had discovered in the junk room—and, lastly, a brand new xylophone, which I tried to pass off to myself as a vibraphone.

My father, referring to my weak lungs, had come out flatly against a saxophone. But as my mother could not bear the thought of any of my wishes being denied, they bought me the xylophone.

Those, then, were our beginnings. The noise that floated from the Nakonec villa was a dreadful caterwauling xylophone music punctuated by artless kicks of Paddy's trumpet. The caterwauling was especially due to the distinctive violin duo which tried (unsuccessfully) to breathe the lightness of swing into the not-quite-mastered technique of the Malat school of violin playing. This drawn-out squealing was interspersed with thunderings from the Turkish drum, the stubborn plucking of the mandolin, and my helpless and chaotic rappings on the xylophone. The result was absolutely inimitable.

It goes without saying that all this was a far cry from any kind of music, let alone jazz. It was a monotonous mezzoforte jam of noise which enraptured us and drove the neighbors insane. But somewhere in that hot bed there germinated a seed that survived the atrocity of Paddy's xylophone band.

By late 1940, it had been transformed into the shining miracle of a big swing band, with five saxophones, three trumpets, a trio of trombones, a complete rhythm section, and vocalist Suzy Braun.

This last-named piece of the inventory had been acquired for the orchestra by Paddy Nakonec. Suzy was an orphan girl whose parents had disappeared in Oranienburg concentration camp early that year. Neither Jewish nor German, in spite of her name, she was a Czech. Mr. Nakonec had brought her to K—. Her father had been a foreman on construction jobs projected by the Nakonec design office. Until that time Suzy had lived in Prague. The minute she appeared in K—, she was a hit. A large number of characters from the grammar school and elsewhere began to grovel before her, but the one who grovelled closest was Paddy himself. He was of course at an advantage, because Suzy had

moved in with the Nakonec family and was now working as a junior draftsman in Paddy's father's office.

Now it must be pointed out that Paddy was not an Aryan—or at best he was only half a one. His late mother's maiden name had been Sommernitz, and her brother Harry, twenty years her junior, was at present active beyond the frontiers of the Thousand-Year Reich as a fighter pilot in the RAF. From his father Paddy had inherited the Czech name, from his mother his Mosaic facial features. After they kicked him out of the grammar school for just that reason, he worked as a draftsman in the office of his father's competitor, Mojmir Strobinger, and lived in that odd condition in which persons of problematical racial origin existed at that time.

The more he doted on his jazz trumpet, the closer he was drawn to Suzy. And Suzy, our sweet Suzy, was in turn drawn closer to the band and discovered within herself a pleasant, agreeably husky contralto voice, and a genius for rhythm and syncopation.

And so she sang, dressed in a black schoolgirl dress with a little white collar, swinging her hips, rotating her arms, while in her eyes sparkled the wicked, savage and sweet soul of jazz.

*My heart beats to a syncopated beat,  
must sing to feel I'm whole.*

*Thrills run from my head right down to my feet,  
swing, that devil, has taken my soul.*

The town, at least its younger and, in exceptional cases, even its older inhabitants, was gripped by the music fever. In the Victorian cafe in the square, one could hear names like Chick Webb, Andy Kirk, Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, Count Basie, Artie Shaw, Bob Crosby, Zuttie Singleton, along with patently non-Aryan names such as Benny Goodman and, first and foremost of course, Louis Satchmo Armstrong. Nights at the radio vibrated with syncopated gusts from Stockholm, where in those days of Aryan-pure melodies, they rendered singular service to the spread of that poison which to us, if I may say so, meant life.

To us, life. To them, death.

That is why our music got on their nerves, and why we persevered the harder in playing it. Paddy had become friends with the swing king of the Czech provinces, a man whose fame was based on the fact that even with a bandaged thumb he had served up "a machine gun-like piano at a monster concert in Prague's Lucerna Hall"—to quote an impressionistic jazz critic at the time—and whose name was Kamil Ludovit. The late Fritz Schwarz, Kamil's first alto saxophonist and arranger, had written us a chart on *St. Louis Blues*, which was to be the highlight of our first band concert at the Municipal Theater in K—.

But it seemed now that this concert might not take place.

All the powers of the old set conspired against us: the headmaster of the grammar school, and the chairman of the Parent-Teacher Association, *Regierungskommissar* Kuhl, and the district leader of the Vlastka, a fascist organization, as well as the correspondent of *The Aryan Struggle*, a certain Mr. Bronzoryp. Of all of them, the special scourge of our movement was Mr. Cermak, who later spelled it Czermack, headmaster of the State grammar school and an enthusiastic admirer of the apostolic education of Emanuel Moravec, the pro-German Minister of Education in the "Protectorate" government and a strict man of the New Order.

This energetic educator not only gave the Aryan raised-arm salute upon entering class, demanding fast-as-lightning response of all present—accentuated by heel clicking, if possible—but he even made the Reverend Mr. Melon give the salute before scripture lessons. The Reverend, who was not as stupid as his name might lead one to believe, deftly expanded the Aryan gesture into a wide-armed Papal cross, each time putting on such an unworldly mien that not even the militant spirit of the incisive Czecho-German could raise a protest.

Mr. Czermack's neo-European efforts did not meet with success in his institution of learning. Legendary in this respect was the collection of scrap iron and non-ferrous metals from which arms were to be forged against the Bolshevik hordes in the East, as the headmaster put it in a speech over the school's public-address system. The collectors optimistically appointed in each class turned up a balance of nil, a circumstance which obliged him to make the rounds of the classes in person, hand raised in the Aryan salute and accompanied by the school porter, who carried a bucket for the non-ferrous metals. And at that a disgraceful incident occurred in the Upper Sixth.

After an urgent appeal by the head educator—which was a mixture of blind fanaticism, Hieronymus Bosch-like fantasy, veiled threats and crystal-clear rubbish—Franta Jungwirth, our band pianist, got up and with loud sobs wrenched a thickly-encrusted nib from his penholder, dropping it into the porter's proffered bucket, presumably to contribute to the forging of arms against the Bolshevik cut-throats. Whereupon the headmaster was seized with a fit of rage which, luckily for Franta Jungwirth, led to nothing worse than a fortnight in the school lockup.

Headmaster Czermack took particular exception to the orchestra because he guessed vaguely—and accurately—that its members were at the bottom of the unpleasant surprises periodically put in his way. One morning, for instance, he had the fright of his life when, after a night wherein his Greater German dreams (in which his dearest wish came true: he was awarded the St. Wenceslas Eagle) alternated with collaborationist nightmares (in which he swung from a gibbet), he awoke to see against the cold autumn sky outside his window a shaggy gorilla, watching him with mean little eyes and apparently about to break the window and fling itself upon his bed. This outrage had indeed been committed by the orchestra: the gorilla, part of the inventory of the natural science class, had been lowered by clothes line from the window of the Fourth Form during the night.

Headmaster Czermack had a model son, an Aryan lad distinguished in German, Latin, and tuft-hunting. The son had an unpleasant experience of a different kind.

A promising functionary of the *Kurazatorium*—the fascist youth organization—he was strolling in the park one day, enjoying an illustrated account in the magazine *Signal* entitled *The End of a Bolshevick Tank*. In the midst of his enjoyment he was suddenly attacked by a band of masked men. A gag was thrust into his mouth and, in the bushes behind the statue of Karel Hynek Macha, he was deprived of all growth of body hair, in places visible and invisible. Afterwards he was bound to a tree and left to his fate; a large kitchen mirror had been affixed to an opposite tree. Two hours of looking at himself in this disfigured state filled the headmaster's son with such despair that as soon as he managed to cast off his bonds, he without hesitation used the rope that had bound him for an attempted suicide by hanging. But he had selected an insufficiently strong branch, which broke under his weight. The experience made him think better of it. He decided to live instead, and crept off to the grammar school under the cover of twilight. Soon after, the theater barber, Kavanek, could be seen hurrying into the schoolhouse with a bulky satchel under his arm.

The next day Adolf Czermack appeared in a curly wig. Christina Hubalkova, pretending to admire his curls, drove her inquisitive fingers into his wig and brought about his downfall. Adolf Czermack, leading light of the *Kurazatorium*, headmaster's son and model scholar, was forced to feign a month's illness until the state of his head allowed him to surface again among his classmates.

So it was not surprising that, shortly before our concert, a circular went around the classes prohibiting all pupils from taking part in any theatrical, concert, or other public performance after seven p.m., except on express permission from the headmaster.

Czermack Senior was closing in on us for the kill.

And storm clouds were gathering over the planned concert from other quarters as well. The journal *Reichszeitung für Volkstanzmusik* published an order by the *Reichsmusikführer* concerning popular and dance music.

"In recent months," the document said—I am quoting from memory and cannot guarantee the precise wording, but I do guarantee the authenticity of the unmistakably Aryan spirit of the piece—"in places of entertainment in some areas of the Reich, the spread of music pervaded by the Jewish Bolshevik plutocratic infection of nigger jazz has been noticeable."

The *Herr Reichsmusikführer* proceeded to list the names of several unfortunate Teutonic bandleaders (for whom this honor probably meant a free ticket to a concentration camp) whose anti-State cacaphonic musical activity he contrasted unfavorably with the exemplary, race-conscious, melodic efforts of Peter Kreuder. Finally, with utmost strictness, he decreed:

1) In the repertory of light orchestras and dance bands, pieces in foxtrot rhythm (so-called swing) are not to exceed twenty percent.

2) In the repertory of this so-called jazz type band, preference is to be given to compositions in major keys and to lyrics expressing joy in life (*Kraft durch Freude*) rather than Jewishly gloomy lyrics.

3) As to tempi, preference is to be given to brisk compositions as opposed to slow ones (so-called blues). However, the pace must not exceed a certain degree of allegro commensurate with the Aryan sense of discipline and moderation. On no account will Negroid excesses in tempi (so-called hot jazz) be permitted, or in solo performances (so-called breaks).

4) So-called jazz compositions may contain at the most ten percent syncopation. The remainder must form a natural legato movement devoid of hysterical rhythmic devices characteristic of the music of the barbarian races and conducive to dark instincts alien to the German people (so-called riffs).

5) Strictly forbidden is the use of instruments alien to the German spirit (e.g. so-called cowbells, flex-a-tone, brushes, etc.) as well as all mutes which turn the noble sound of brass instruments into a Jewish-Freemasonic yell (so-called wa-wa, in hat, etc.).

6) Prohibited are so-called drum breaks longer than half a measure in four-quarter time (except in stylized military marches).

7) The double bass must be played solely with the bow in so-called jazz compositions. Plucking of strings is prohibited, since it is damaging to the instrument and detrimental to Aryan musicality. If a so-called pizzicato effect is absolutely desirable for the character of the composition, let strict care be taken lest the string be allowed to patter on the neck, which is henceforth forbidden.

8) Provocative rising to one's feet during solo performances is forbidden.

9) Musicians are likewise forbidden to make vocal improvisations (so-called scat); and:

10) All light orchestras and dance bands are advised to restrict the use of saxophones of all keys and to substitute for them violoncelli, violas, or possibly a suitable folk instrument.

Signed: *Baldur von Boldheim*

*Reichsmusikführer und Oberscharführer SS*

In this situation, we turned for help to our patron, Kamil Ludovit. And in his Prague adobe, a plan was hatched.

Soon thereafter, playbills appeared in K——, announcing that that popular orchestra, the Masked Rhythm Bandits of Prague, would present for the local population a Program of Joyful Melodies from All Over the World. In answer to his inquiry, which was not slow in coming, Headmaster Czermack was informed that the Masked Rhythm Bandits was a group dispensing light music under contract to bandmaster Kamil

Ludovit of Prague-Zizkov, and he was therefore obliged to shut up.

But *Regierungskommissar* Kuhl now took a hand. The *Kapellmeister der Maskierten Banditen des Rhythmus* received a letter in German on the letterhead of the *Regierungskommissar* in K——, in which the signatory and representative of the Reich called on him to submit within five days a full list of compositions to be presented, including detailed information on tempi, keys, percentage of syncopation, and instrumentation, as well as the nationality and race of composers to be performed. In case of failure to comply, the drawing of unspecified but easily-imagined conclusions was intimated.

Another meeting in Ludovit's flat yielded a program which—at least as it looked on paper—would not offend the most Aryan feelings of even the Führer and Chancellor of the Greater German Reich himself.

The show was to open with a number entitled *Curtain Raiser Schottische*, followed by creations by a certain Josef Patocka, Frantisek Cechacek, and Gunther Furnwald, bearing such titles as *No Tears, My Darling*, slow tune; *Our Bull Took Fright*, quickstep; *In the Swimming Pool*, character piece; and *Evening Prayer*, song.

The program included one or two slow-foxes and two fox-trots by well-known tolerated music makers, as well as *The Song of Rzeshetova Lhota*, which was listed as a novelty of the Prague season. Josef Patocka, Frantisek Cechacek and Gunther Furnwald were described as Aryans, in the first two instances Czech, in the third a Greater German Aryan. According to the program, the instrumentation was as follows: three trombones (in C), and three horns (in B-flat) alternating in some of the mood compositions with five Sachs soundhorns. On what a Sachs soundhorn was supposed to be, we did not elaborate, judging accurately that the *Herr Regierungsrat* would not inquire for fear of appearing ignorant.

The submitted program was approved without changes. Only in the *Song of Joy in Life* Mr. Kuhl noted in his own hand, "Five percent *Synkopen auslassen*"—omit five percent syncopes!

\* However, Paddy Nakonec voiced apprehension as to the effectiveness of the disguises. He was afraid they would hardly protect us from the sleuthing capacity of Headmaster Czermack and insisted this intruder No. 1 be rendered harmless by more drastic methods.

The headmaster's blockade was eventually brought about by Suzy Braun. Her feminine cunning unearthed one important detail, namely that the day of our concert happened to be the day of an All-Protectorate session of the *Kuratorium* of the Education of Youth in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, at which the best organizational workers of all regions were to be decorated with the Shield of Honor of the St. Wenceslas Eagle! With the aid of her girlish charms, to which a certain Herbert Starecek—an official of the *Kuratorium* Secretariat—was by no means blind, she got hold of some rubber-stamped *Kuratorium* notepaper, and put it to good use in our cause.

And so it happened that the headmaster had to deny himself the pleasure of exposing the Masked Rhythm Bandits as pupils of his own school. For the letter that arrived from the Central Secretariat of the *Kuratorium* for the Education of Youth in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia informed him that in recognition of his services in fostering the Aryan Ideal and the New Order within the Greater German Reich, it had been decided by the leadership of the *Kuratorium* for the Education of Youth in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to bestow on him the Shield of Honor of the St. Wenceslas Eagle, which would be presented at the ceremonial session of the *Kuratorium* for the Education of Youth in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia on Friday, the ——, at the Smetana Hall of the Repräsentacni Palace in the Royal Capital Prague.

That Friday was the day of the Concert of Joyous Melodies by the Masked Rhythm Bandits in K—.

Headmaster Czermack obeyed the Aryan call of the all-Protectorate session and departed on the afternoon train for Prague.

And that evening the Masked Rhythm Bandits opened their program in the Municipal theater with the composition *Curtain Raiser Schottische*. Connoisseurs in attendance had no trouble recognizing the *Casa Loma Stomp*, which they rewarded with nerve-frazzling applause. The *Herr Regierungskommissar*, who in his box seat was trying to keep count of the percentage of synopes, began to scowl. He was beset by forebodings that the Aryan character of the joyous melodies might be compromised. But in the ground-floor circle, filled to the last seat with members of a local *Wehrmacht* unit, who had been able to buy up every ticket by virtue of their superior race, pleasant excitement reigned.

Just then, as if elevated by the caressing rhythm of the syncopated tune, Suzy Braun rose to her feet in her black dress with the little white collar and a black lace mask. Swinging her hips and moving her hands in gestures faithfully and naturally copied from every blues singer seen and unseen, she began in her sweet and provocatively husky little voice:

*Black Shadows are falling  
on the white man's city.  
Train whistles are calling.  
Life ain't got no pity.  
Oh—oooh—oh—oh.  
Give it everything you've got,  
C'mon boys, play it hot!*

At the last word, which was included in the *Reichsmusikfuhrer's* list of offensive musical nomenclature, *Herr Regierungskommissar* turned pale, and made up his mind to intervene. But a schizophrenic outburst from Paddy's horn which hit the eardrums of the breathless connoisseurs the next instant, cut the singer short and produced an enraptured sigh in the ranks of the German infantry regiment. The singer continued in her melodic voice:

*Manhattan glows  
in a glare of light.  
Nobody knows  
that you don't treat me right.*

The *Regierungsrat* rose but was so startled in the next moment that he sat down again. In a unison blast, the brass let forth a fortissimo bellow as if straight at his person. Everything went black before his eyes, and in that blackness there sprang up another terrible word from the *Reichsmusikfuhrer's* decree: riff!

And Suzy Braun, transported by the squeal of the clarinets and roused by the sharp barking of Paddy's horn (in so-called mute), raised her sweet husky voice in the triumphant last chorus:

*I'll shake off my sorrow  
and forget my grief.  
There may be no tomorrow.  
Life is so brief.  
Oh—oooh—oh—oh.  
Give it everything you've got.  
C'mon, boys, play it hot!*

There arose a storm of barbarous rapture, especially in the circle, where the sex-starved members of the superior race, led astray by the spirit of the Negroid music and the charm of the racially-inferior singer, forgot their sense of Aryan moderation and called for an encore with stomping of feet and lusty Teutonic shouts.

The *Regierungskommissar*, in view of the situation, decided not to intervene.

Meanwhile in Prague, thrilled with sweet anticipation, Headmaster Czermack sat in the half-empty Smetana Hall and listened attentively to a speech on the necessity and glory of the fight against Asiatic Bolshevism and on the historic destiny of the Czech nation in the Greater German Reich.

The speaker was a gentleman with a head like a well-polished billiard ball.

After the speech, the session passed on to the dispensation of distinctions to deserving Aryans.

And the concert of the Masked Rhythm Bandits progressed exactly according to the advance program. That the character piece *In the Swimming Pool*, by Josef Patocka, was in fact *Riverside Blues* by the nigger King Oliver and that the quickstep *Our Bull Took Fright* by Gunther Furnwald was practically indistinguishable from the Judeo-Negroid *Tiger Rag* was known only to the initiated in the audience, who were none the worse for it. But the overwhelming majority of the uninitiated were none the worse for it either, particularly those in the circle—with the exception of Councillor Prudivy who recognized on the feet of one of the Rhythm Bandits the new shoes of his son Horymir whom he was wont to press into playing excerpts from Smetana's operas on the piano and whom he had just imprudently sent to the local Sexton for a lesson in bagpipe playing.

And we went on playing. God Almighty, who created jazz and all the beauties of this world, only you know how we played!

It seemed to me that the theater in K— had disappeared, disappeared along with *Regierungskommissar* Kuhl and everything else, and that there was nothing but the music. It seemed that I had escaped the score paper and was playing something that had never been written down and might never be. The sobs of the saxophones were like the sobs of angels or of a man in anguish. The horns wailed like Olympian choirs singing a hymn for the persecuted. And when Paddy rose and started on the great improvised solo in *Matters of the Heart*, which was none other than Dippermouth's *Heartbreak Blues*, I all at once seemed to hear the imploring and anguished voice of Mr. Katz, the teacher, calling, crying out, and pleading...

Headmaster Czermack, meanwhile, was following with impatience and a rising nervousness as a gaunt middle-aged with in *Kuratorium* uniform called out the names of those about to be decorated on the podium with the Honor Shield of the St. Wenceslas Eagle.

He waited to hear his own name called.

He waited, but that evening he waited in vain.

At the moment when he ascertained this distressing fact, the concert of the Masked Rhythm Bandits was coming to its climax with the novelty of the Prague Season, *The Song of Rzeshetova Lhota*.

*Rzeshetova Lhota  
is my home.  
I'm on my way  
to see my Aryan folks...*

sang Suzy Braun to the music of the Negroid Jew or possibly Jewish Negroid W.C. Handy, known beyond the jurisdictional territory of the Greater German Reich but also known inside that territory, and even in the town of K—, under the title of *St. Louis Blues*.

The Aryans of the infantry did not understand the lyrics but applauded wildly all the same. The connoisseurs in the stalls, however, understood all right, and mingled knowing guffaws with the clapping and cheers.

And at that instant, somewhere in the darkened hall, the indignant Aryan Mr. Bronzoryp stood up. For he had perceived

that the race of which he was proud (though he had never asked himself whether his race was also proud of him) was being held up to ridicule. He pushed his way through to the wings. And we breezed into the last number until the eardrums burst, until words lost their meaning and it ceased to matter whether they were poetic and witty or lame and banal. Only the music had meaning, only the score, the heart, the immortal soul of the provocative soaring storm of music.

That brings me to the end of the happy part of the story.

In the rapture that enveloped us after the concert, we did not for a long time recognize among the shining faces of the connoisseurs pouring into the dressing room the fury-contorted Aryan features of Mr. Bronzoryp.

The no less fury-contorted Headmaster Czermack, whom the puzzled committee of the *Kuratorium* for the Education of Youth in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia had finally persuaded that there had not been a mistake but an inexplicable hoax, was getting into the night train from Prague to K—, blood and murder in his soul.

The consequences of both events were not long in coming.

Jenny Prema got a severe reprimand, and our guitarist, Zabrana, was suspended from the grammar school in K— but not barred from finishing his studies elsewhere. Franta Jungwirth, our pianist and the son of a railway official, and I were similarly afflicted, although in my case the verdict was later changed to debarment from all institutions of learning in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, because in the meantime they had sent my father off to Belsen. This and similar measures resulted in the decimation and ruin of the historic swing band of the grammar school in K—.

Paddy Nakonec, half Aryan, half Jew, paid for our little prank with his life. Mr. Bronzoryp, outraged in his Aryanmost feelings, denounced that half Jew—who carried on like ten pedigreed Jews, as the Aryan put it—as the instigator of the provocation.

Halfjew Nakonec was found guilty of violating the Aryan honor of the town of K—, just as he had feared.

He was treated accordingly.

But that is still not the end of the story. There was still Suzy, sweet Suzy Braun, the unofficial wife of the head trumpeter and shining light of our band, whom we all honored and secretly loved.

When the news came, in a note smuggled out of Pankrac Prison in Prague, that Paddy had been shot, Suzy broke down.

After a time, however, she suddenly seemed to get over it. She was seen in the company one would have expected least, the company of the Aryan Mr. Bronzoryp.

Word even had it that she was his mistress.

Naturally, the town condemned her.

On account of Paddy, the band condemned her too.

Nobody bothered to find out what was going on inside Suzy Braun, the sweet Suzy Braun who was now absolutely alone in the world.

What jackasses we sometimes are.

But that is still not the whole story. Like Paddy, Mr. Bronzoryp did not live to see the end of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. For one foggy morning he was found in his well-furnished divorced-man's quarters with a bullet in his skull. Beside the bed on which he had died lay Suzy Braun, her hand still holding a Browning, a weapon reliable Aryans were permitted to carry by special licence of the *Sicherheitsdienst*. She had shot herself through the mouth.

So she died, poor dear Suzy, and her lovely mouth will never sing again in her husky little voice. Swing, that devil, has taken my soul. Because her soul was taken away by the angels. And her sweet body was laid to rest in the eternal hospitable soil.

So she died. Died, like Paddy Nakonec and like her parents, like my father and Horst Husse and Mr. Katz, the teacher, like Dr.

Strauss, Mifinka, and Bob the Killer. So they are dead, and we are living on.

Poor sweet Suzy. When I sit behind the music stand under the neon-lit bandstand shell in the park and play my tenor saxophone part in compositions that Suzy never knew and never will, I remember her, dear lovely Suzy Braun, and all the others who are gone. Her sweetly husky voice seems to mingle with the song of the saxophone, and she sings again. And in tears, in sadness and joy over this life of ours, I sing with her:

*Rain or sunshine, come what may,  
I'll keep my word until my dying day...*

Sleep well, sweet Suzy.

## Apologia

Recently Cherry Lane Books published *The Modern Rhyming Dictionary: How to Write Lyrics*, which I can hardly review for the *Jazzletter*, since I wrote it.

The book grew out of what I felt was a need for (a) a professional treatise not on poetry but on the quite different craft of writing lyrics, and (b) a new and different rhyming dictionary. I had an idea that it should be possible to apply to English the principles of a French rhyming dictionary, thereby producing a radically new kind of work that is almost a computer-on-paper for rhyming. This book is the result. It took me two years.

Owen Cordle, who plays alto, tenor, and flute and writes on jazz for the *Raleigh News and Observer* and sometimes for *Jazz Times* and *Down Beat*, wanted to review it but ran into snags. I told him, "What the hell, review it for the *Jazzletter*."

Book distribution being almost as disastrous as record distribution, you may or may not find it in stores. If you want it and can't find it, I'll get it for you for \$13 in the United States, \$15.60 Canadian, and \$17 American in other countries, postage included.

It was my tacit agreement with Owen that I would not edit his review. Oh, I was tempted to move a comma or two, for as someone once said, "There is no stronger yearning in the human breast than the desire to take a pencil to another man's manuscript."

## Of Rhymes and Music

by Owen Cordle

I wanted to review Gene Lees' *The Modern Rhyming Dictionary: How to Write Lyrics* (Port Chester, NY: Cherry Lane Books, 360 pages, \$14.95) for the *Raleigh News and Observer*. The book editor wrestled it from me, exclaiming, "This is exactly what I've been looking for." (He is a pianist and closet lyricist.) His review called it "immensely useful" and "valuable to both practitioners and just listeners". It is, he lauded, "written with love".

I appealed to an editor of a contemporary music magazine to let me review it. "Not 'general interest' enough to warrant a review," he replied.

The book is full of words—rhyming words—and eloquent, thought-provoking prose. It leads you to echo Kerouac's beboppers in *On the Road*: "There ain't nothin' left after that." Nothing except writing your own lyrics and digging deeper into what Lees terms "the most exquisitely difficult literary form of them all." This is the exacting profession of Johnny Mercer (to whose memory the book is dedicated), Lorenz Hart, Cole Porter, E. Y. Harburg, Alec Wilder, Bob Dorough, Dave Frishberg, Mose Allison . . . and Lees.

In the first fifty pages, you get a guide to good lyric writing. This section, *How to Write Lyrics*, includes chapters on general

principles (the theatrical tradition is the key here), rhyming (two chapters), vowels and consonants and singing, fitting words to music (best to write the melody first), forms, ideas (don't generalize, particularize), and how to use the dictionary.

The author pauses for mellow reflection as he delivers heartfelt practical advice. His expression is joyous if not downright gleeful. There is humor. Such is the pleasure of good writing—lyric and prose.

Lees pierces icons in the chapter on vowels and consonants. The English alphabet is a mess but its aural consequences yield treasures and trash. Treasures from Mercer's pen are given as examples of mastery.

The chapter entitled *Making It Fit* examines tonal language, an intriguing subject that has been explored briefly in an earlier *Jazzletter*. The intervallic portents of speech subconsciously bend the ear of the skillful lyricist. Perhaps lyrics influence instrumentalists playing melodies. Tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon frequently quotes lyrics when introducing a performance. Lester Young once admonished another musician to "sing me a song". The instrumental-lyric nexus may be articulation of imagery or emotion. Possibly, knowing the lyrics to a song helps your phrasing and musical integrity.

Then there is rhythm—stressed repetition—and rhyme. It may be logically argued that rhythm is the strongest musical force of all. Melody is tonal rhythm. Harmony is the natural gravitational universe—via the overtone series—of melody. Lyrics, then, become verbal melody. Rhymes re-establish the link with rhythm and the circle is complete.

It would take of course considerable space to list the rhymes in Lees' book. There is even a list of words that do not rhyme—*nothing* is one of them. The dictionary is divided into one-syllable, two-syllable, and three-syllable rhymes. These sections are then divided by vowel sounds. (Vowel sounds beginning a last syllable or last-syllable group rhyme, only the beginning consonant or consonant cluster differs.) To locate a rhyme for say, *note*, look under the phonetic spelling **OT (OAT)** and find *bloat, boat, dote, rote*, et al. The lists also include proper nouns. The organization greatly facilitates finding rhymes and is unique.

Gene Lees is a generous writer. Not only does he consistently turn out substantive and sensitive prose and lyrics, he gives you the secrets of his craft. Of course, few writers possess his talent for spellbinding tales, or if they do, they rarely express it as clearly.

The book is "general interest" enough for anyone wanting to become a more informed listener or a better poet or lyric writer. It says that there is yet hope for literacy and sanity in a field that has been overrun lately by guttural (sic) elements.

## Five Fingers

The Duchess of Bedworthy changed Fingers Wombat's life.

In a week of whirlwind activity she engaged attorneys Art Schmartz and Shuster Scheisster to represent him and hired accountant Sawyer Cockoff as his business manager. Jess Fein became his public relations counsel, and the duchess contacted the British booking agency of Beau Bells and Ava Banana to arrange a tour of Guernsey, Jersey, Skye and the Outer Hebrides.

Since she circulated in the highest circles, she was able to arrange an introduction to Park Benchley, the socialite record executive and patron of the arts. Fingers had read his heralded autobiography, *The Importance of Being Me*, in which Benchley modestly admitted that he had personally invented jazz, with a little help from Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Louis Armstrong, Don Redman, and a few more.

Fingers was soon being invited to art gallery openings, and that great arbiter of American taste, Piggy Friggentime, personally showed him, at her apartment in Sutton Place, her celebrated

collection of paintings by her now-famous protege Jason Shure Condor. Privately, Fingers thought they looked like Technicolor bird droppings but, realizing that politics is the better part of valor, praised them as "interesting, different, and fragrant". Friggentime became one of his devotees.

Decreasing that Fingers must give more thought to his image, the duchess outfitted him in suits by Hard, Pecker, and Marx, shoes by Hucci-Cucci, shirts by Pierre Six, and cologne by Pute de Paris. For his gloves—Fingers had always had trouble getting gloves that would fit—she sent him to her personal *gantiste*, Hans Zup. She thought he should begin to use his real name, Joseph Wombat, but Fingers drew the line at this, saying he had grown attached to Fingers and vice versa.

By now items about Fingers were appearing in the gossip columns. *Trash Box* reviewed Fingers at the Semihemidemi-quaver, hardly mentioning Isabel Ringin at all. The trade paper's New York editor, Heidi Hoe, thought Fingers was "cute" and his music "challenging". But inevitably it was Pandit Mersey-Leslie who wrote the most perceptive review. He flew in from Baltimore and sat discreetly in a corner, sucking on Quaalude (he had given up smoking) and making notes. His review next afternoon in the *Aureole* said:

"Mr. Wombat's relentless throbbing beat and restless probing lines are among his most distinctive characteristics. His richly exploratory music has a certain *je ne sais quoi*, an indefinable *soupcion* of perversity that sets him not so much above his contemporaries as apart from them.

"What is most admirable is his maturely developed contempt for the audience. Some jazzmen go in for cheap and pleasing melodicism, or shallow dexterity and clean attack, or mere beauty of tone and voicings, or an obviously sensual swing. Mr. Wombat succumbs to none of these easy tricks. There is no trashy pandering to the listener's pleasure. He offers you absolutely nothing, being lost in his own profound thought. This renders his music extremely difficult to listen to—one might almost say unbearable. This clears the way for all puritans, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, to like it.

"And his music is rich in social significance. It more than meets the quota for inherent revolutionism that I have set for jazz musicians before I will even consider them important. Fingers Wombat expresses in his music his uncompromising opposition to bad things, like war, cruelty, exploitation, discrimination, poverty, and famine, which everyone is in favor of excepting a few of the more advanced and spiritual beings like me.

"No one listening to it need feel any of the haunting guilt that steals over Americans whenever they commit the nation's two most serious sins, wasting time and having fun. There is no fun in listening to Mr. Wombat. And one is not wasting time: one is being educated. One is having one's consciousness raised, so much so that there are reports that an evening with Fingers Wombat is a cure for baldness.

"His art has meaning. His art is relevant. Indeed, Fingers Wombat is the harbinger of western decline, and I alone had the insight, foresight, hindsight, scholarship, and direct connection with revealed truth to recognize it. Let Gnat Penthouse of the *Village Vice* and Ralph Seesaw of the San Fernando *Monocle* put that in their pipes and toke it."

Fingers, reading this over brunch at Toots Shor's was elated. He celebrated with a bottle of *Chateau du Pompe*. He had never thought of himself as Socially Significant before. But it was immediately obvious to him that everything Mersey-Leslie had written was true. Now that he thought back over his life, his time at Pot. High, the gig at the Slipit Inn, his years with Boucher de Cheval, his *Prix de Rome*, his invention of triskaidekaphonic composition, it seemed to him that he had always been destiny's tot.

(to be continued)