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Reviewer Reviewed

by GROVER SALES

Stanley Dance's qualifications as a research specialist are beyond question. For four decades his meticulous and affectionate books, interviews, articles, and liner notes on Ellington, Hines, Basie, Henderson and the Swing Era made an essential contribution to the literature of jazz.

But the skills and virtues of a research specialist are not necessarily those of a critic. As book editor of the otherwise commendable *JazzTimes* Stanley Dance's savage reviews of serious and reflective books are irresponsible, flippant, vengeful, mean-spirited and dishonest.

The dishonesty stems from an elaborate hidden agenda. Foremost is his conviction that bebop and most of "modern" jazz that followed are abominable heresies that pollute the mainstream of jazz. This quaint notion passed for conventional wisdom nearly half a century ago when Parker and Gillespie were carving out the frontiers of an avant-garde art music whose importance was seen by a few among the (then) exclusively white brotherhood of jazz critics: Leonard Feather, Barry Ulanov, Charles Delaunay. Slowly, surreptitiously, most of the bebop-hating New Orleans revivalists, like the late Ralph J. Gleason, came around, but Dance remains adamant. Occasionally he forgets to conceal the agenda, as in pronouncing Johnny Hodges "the greatest alto saxist in jazz, no bebop spoken here." Polled by *Cash Box* to select the ten best records since 1960, he picked ten Ellington records. Trashing an article in *Rutgers' Annual Review of Jazz Studies*, one of his sociological whipping boys, Dance concludes "the piece . . . may help boppers understand the mess they got into."

When reviewing writers who regard bebop and its offshoot modern jazz with favor, that is, the majority of jazz critics published today, Dance usually conceals this bias, shifting his attack to spurious and trifling ground.

Dance's second hidden agenda is the hagiography of Ellington. As the Duke's Boswell, he assumes a sacerdotal interest in the man and his work that is both proprietary and protective. He becomes choleric when writers suggest that the Ellington symbiotic workshop reached its exalted peak with the Blanton-Webster band of the early 1940s (hardly a minority view) or that Ellington's latter-day hankering for "respectability" in the form of extended works and sacred concerts led him down an artistic garden path. Nor can Dance abide the slightest inference that Ellington's public concerts toward the end tended to be as tedious and predictable as Armstrong's, often verging on embarrassment, with dreary reruns of *Pretty and the Wolf*, Carney holding the endless note on *Sophisticated Lady*, Gonsalves cranked up in the vain hope of repeating his Newport '56 triumph on *Crescendo and Diminuendo in Blue*, and Ellington's perennial bid for a piece of the Rock action, *One More Time* bellowed by the most degraded singers he could find. This is something everyone knows, but none of Ellington's numerous hagiographers will admit. It's considered bad form, even irreverent.

A third hidden agenda is a persistent philistinism that sets him against writers like Ted Gioia, Edward Berger, Dan Morgenstern, Gene Lees, and myself, who attempt to relate the development of jazz to other art forms and to concurrent political-social-racial movements. Dance has never troubled himself with such matters, which he views with suspicion and overt hostility.

His two-hundred-word dismissal of James Lincoln Collier's ground-breaking monograph *The Reception of Jazz in America: A New View* never addressed the author's painstaking "researches" (the quotation marks are Dance's) but was restricted to an *ad hominem* jeremiad: "another nasty piece of work by a writer rapidly painting himself into a corner."

Dance was not alone among established critics in reacting to Collier's careful documentation in much the same way that Old Testament scholars recoiled from the revisionist discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Collier casts doubt on the long-cherished myth that jazz was only appreciated in England and Europe, and rarely in the United States. I have done my share, I confess, to perpetuate this in print and in the classroom. Collier made me rethink it. The Collier monograph is invaluable, among other reasons, for paying homage to three forgotten American commentators writing perceptively about jazz as early as the 1920's: Carl Engle, R.D. Darrell, and Abbe Niles. When *JazzTimes* reader Bernie Denham admonished Dance to "criticize the work and not the worker," Dance called him a "Palo Alto wiseacre (who) can take heart by reading the back cover of Collier's *Duke Ellington . . .* Despite the fact that practically every jazz critic of repute dumped on the book" (not true), "there he will see that the *lay press* adored it. Given the ethics of the Reagan years and the rise to power of the Woodstock generation, I don't find that at all hard to understand."

As one who despises the Reagans and deplores the aesthetics of Woodstock, if not its politics, I can make no sense of this eye-popping *non sequitur* unless Dance means to imply that Collier is a right-winger, an inference that, as Collier's friend and colleague, I know to be untrue. Gene Lees has often observed that a right-wing bebopper, unlike the exclusively dixieland fan, seems as rare as a one-armed shortstop.

Dance's bias against those who write about jazz from the vantage point of interdisciplinary studies in art, literature, classical music, and philosophy was flaunted in a hundred-word dismissal of Ted Gioia's *The Imperfect Art* as "a thesis designed to impress a tutor by showing how widely . . . the student has read. So there are references to Wagner, Goethe, Keats, Nietzsche, Byron, Spengler, Cellini, Homer, Satie, Plato, Spencer, Sontag, Kant, Proust, on-and-on till the gagging point is reached. But Gioia, at 31, is already teaching jazz at Stanford(!)"

Gioia, who initiated Stanford's program of jazz studies not at thirty-one but at age twenty, is also an accomplished pianist-composer in the Bill Evans vein, and the producer of Quartet Records devoted to state-of-the-art recordings of contemporary jazz by young artists like himself deserving of wider recognition. You do not have to agree with every

statement in Gioia's *The Imperfect Art* to see it as an important and ambitious attempt to come to grips with the uniqueness of jazz that demands far more than Dance's back of the hand, and the ASCAP selection committee that gave Gioia's book a coveted Deems Taylor Award apparently concur.

A further hidden agenda is Dance's animosity toward that rarity in jazz writing -- a genuine literary style, hardly surprising in one given to pedestrian prose. He attacked the late Otis Ferguson "who appears to have acquired something of a cult following among the literati since his death at Salerno in World War II."

The Ferguson "cult" comprises people who treasure clean, perceptive, and lively prose. In their thorough writers' manual, *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, lamenting the stylistic imperfections and ambiguities of Stephen Spender, J.B. Priestly, Cecil Day Lewis, H.G. Wells, J.M. Keynes, and Hemingway, among many others, heaped praise upon Ferguson's 1941 review of the *Spirits of Rhythm* as "good English in its unconventional way." It must be said that the *Spirits of Rhythm* were black, since Dance accused -- the apt word in his context -- Ferguson of being "white-oriented" because "he kept returning to Bix, whose playing seems to have had a stunning effect on his critical faculties . . . he also idolized Benny Goodman and his band."

Dance's assault on *The Essential Jazz Records: Vol. I -- Ragtime to Swing* by his fellow Brits Max Harrison, Charles Fox and Eric Thacker was a flagrant piece of irresponsibility for which *JazzTimes* publisher Ira Sabin must share the blame. In the circumscribed world of jazz writing, it is common knowledge that Dance and Max Harrison have carried on a corrosive personal vendetta for decades, and that neither overlooks the chance to shaft the other in print. Ira Sabin might have suggested that Dance as book editor assign the review to someone more disinterested. Alerting us to Harrison's "notorious eccentricities," Dance nitpicks and ridicules this monumental and well-organized review of hundreds of recordings, famous and obscure. Harrison's chapter on *The Influence of Jazz on European Composers*, a phenomena that rarely engages Dance, is alone worth the considerable price of the book. Harrison retaliated by omitting all of Dance's essential research works from the otherwise exhaustive bibliography in the *New Grove Gospel, Jazz and Blues*.

In reviewing my book *Jazz: America's Classical Music*, a title Dance calls "unfortunate" with no further explanation, he violates Goethe's first rule of book reviewing: "Find out what the author set out to do, and how well he set about doing it." Acknowledging in his opening paragraph my book as a brief introduction to jazz, and a linked reading-listening experience, he proceeds to attack it for not being a comprehensive history, for not including a chapter on Jimmy Lunceford for giving "scant consideration" to trombonist Jimmy Harrison, for suggesting that Jelly Roll Morton in his declining years may have been mad. "Sales' account of Ellington's collaboration with John Coltrane is described -- are you ready? -- as 'one of the loveliest records in all jazz.' Oh, no!" A curious response from one who wrote the praise-ridden liner notes for this same

album! I was faulted for omitting from my bibliography Dance's lifetime guru, the doctrinaire moldy-fig crowd-jim enthusiast Hugues Panassie, who, asserts Dance, "the greatest jazz musicians of his generation liked and respected." As Dance would say, "oh, no!"

Dance at his most characteristically underhanded is revealed in the following:

"And if Ellington had 'little luck' in urging Tricky Sam's successors to recapture Tricky's sound, one wonders whether Sales really listened to what Lawrence Brown, Tyree Glenn, Quentin Jackson and Booty Wood did with *their* plunger mutes?"

Aside from the questionable judgment of assigning so much space to such quibbling esoterica in a brief review of an admittedly brief introduction to jazz, Dance neglected to say that I chose Tricky Sam as an example of a unique instrumental sound. Could Dance be suggesting that anyone conversant with Ellingtonia could *not* distinguish Tricky Sam from his many imitators at Ellington's behest?

The aside "one wonders whether Sales really listened" -- a recurrent motif in Danceland -- is peculiar since we were hardly strangers when he wrote this review. We had corresponded and talked frequently when I produced solo concerts in the Bay Area for Earl Hines when Dance served as his manager-booker. Dance knew that my continuous involvement with Ellington began with the Blanton-Webster band of the early forties. He knew I had produced in the early 1960s a weekly radio show devoted to Ellington. He made reference to my longtime involvement with jazz in the following passage, which also exposed his antipathy to bebop, replete with the implication that I, as a pre-bopper, am guilty of heresy: "To those who have lived through the recorded life of jazz, it is difficult to see and hear the music as those in their late teens and early twenties must now do. In addressing them I would guess that Grover Sales has *adjusted* (italics mine) his own perspective . . . Parker and Gillespie, whom he mentions most often" [again, untrue] "appear to be the artists to whom he is most attached. His criteria are in general those now held by what might be called the American critical establishment . . ."

Finally, Dance violated another inflexible law of reviewing by closing with his bleak views on the future of jazz, none of which had the slightest bearing on my book.

In perpetuating Stanley Dance as book editor, *JazzTimes* commits a disservice to the beleaguered community of jazz scholars who need all the enlightened help they can get.

-- GS

Two Sketches

1. Cincinnatus Afternoon

He wore a woodsman's shirt. His hair was full, thick, and silver-white. He stood in front of a huge picture window, which framed an idyllic tableau: a perfect round lake, frozen over now, and surrounded by forest: the grey-brown of deciduous trunks and branches relieved by tall green cones of

the conifers. A heavy wet snow fell steadily into this picture.

"Do you want to hear me play?" he said.

"Sure."

He burred his lips a few times, then put the trombone to his mouth and ran up some arpeggios, and then scales, topping it all off with a strong accurate note. "That was a high D," he said with a grin, and put the horn aside.

It was a marvelous room in a marvelous house, with a big stove throwing the penetrating kind of dry heat that only wood seems to produce. My mother used to say nothing matched a wood stove for baking pies. The room was a strange combination of lazy living-room and kitchen, and the big beams in the ceiling were hand-hewn, the marks of the adze on them. They'd come from some old barn somewhere; the house itself was not all that old.

He sat down by the table.

"High D, was it?" I said.

"Yeah," he said. "You'll notice I didn't hold it very long!"

"Spiegle," I said, "you're lucky you've still got all your teeth."

"Well," he said, baring them and tapping them with a forefinger, "I just spent seven thousand bucks on them."

It's more than luck, of course. Longevity runs in his family. These are hardy people from old New England stock, and they have been in these hills for generations. Nonetheless, it is quite remarkable that at eighty-seven Spiegle Willcox can not only play his trombone but is again very active in music. For years a great many people assumed that he was dead, as they had assumed it of Joe Venuti, his buddy of more than six decades.

Spiegle Willcox was born May 2, 1903, not far from where he lives now. And where he lives now is a few miles outside Cincinnatus, New York. They pronounce it Sinsin-ay-tus in these parts, and they'll correct you if you try to pronounce it like Cincinnati. It is a small town east south-east of Cortland, New York, the seat of Cortland County, and home of an excellent branch of the State University of New York, on Interstate 81, between Binghamton and Syracuse. The house, which he built, is huge. It lies at the end of a winding single-lane road through the woods, which is marked by signs, one of which says Elephant Crossing. Another says Greystone Ballroom. That was the dancehall in Detroit where he played in the Jean Goldkette band, seated between Bix and Tram.

"My dad lived to be ninety-two, my mother was eighty-four," Spiegle said.

The country around here is unbelievably beautiful, compromising rolling wooded hills and long ridges, flat alluvial valleys, and small pretty lakes. On the backroads, it is like a land time forgot, its wise old barns and silos at peace in the earth. Only the cars tell you that we're nearing the end of a century that Spiegle almost began. His name is really Newell Wilcox; Newell was his mother's maiden name. A member of the Newell family was a principle in launching the famous Cardiff Giant Hoax in the mid-nineteenth century twenty-five or so miles from here, just south of Syracuse.

This house is huge. It has all sorts of bedrooms, and, upstairs, an enormous living room with another huge window

overlooking the lake. It contains a grand piano and posters from his Goldkette days. His wife died a few years ago.

This isn't the way the mythology holds that jazz musicians end up, in a paid-for rustic mansion in seclusion by a lake, still in demand and still playing music.

"You didn't end up dead at thirty-five of dope," I said, laughing at the incongruity. He is such a vital man, his voice so strong that it almost shouts. He's also a funny man, with a sly sense of humor.

"I don't remember any dope," he said. "Booze was the thing. Oh they used to smoke, what did they call them, reefers. There was very little of that. It was booze."

What caused him to come back to the business?

"Joe Venuti's the guy who pulled me out from under the rug," Spiegle said. "In 1975, in Carnegie Hall, George Wein promoted it. What we did was we re-created the Goldkette stuff. They did two concerts. The first one was with Paul Mertz, who played sometimes with Goldkette. He played piano that night. He's alive. Bill Challis is alive. He lives about a hundred miles from here. He was up here a few weeks ago. The bass player on the first gig was Milt Hinton. Bobby Rosengarten on drums, Bucky Pizzarelli on guitar. Johnny Mince, Kenny Davern, Bob Wilbur, Pee Wee Irwin, Bernie Privin, and somebody else on cornet. And there was Bill Rank and myself again on trombones.

"It wasn't recorded. Three months later we opened the Newport Jazz Festival with the Goldkette stuff. We had a little different personnel. Marian McPartland was on piano. We had Dave Hudson from Detroit. He's the guy who kind of copied the Goldkette stuff. Bill Challis is not a pusher. He's very quiet, just a gentleman. He's not the New York City type. Panama Francis played drums.

"At the end of that first concert, Joe Venuti said, 'Hey, Spiegle, why don't you get your trombone to where I'm playing these nightclubs and things, we can have a lot of laughs, a lot of fun, it won't cost you anything. And I was seventy-two.'

"Well," I said, "that's not as old as it once was. A lot of guys are playing well at that age. Look at Dizzy."

"I know, but they played all their lives, they were on the scene. I lived up in Cortland. Mind you, I didn't put the horn away.

"When I first came home from Goldkette, that was in 1927. I broke away and I went home to the family business, the coal business. I had my first born, Newell Jr."

"Where did the nick-name come from?"

"I don't know. I got the name Spiegle up in Manlius Military School, up near Syracuse. That was a mini-West Point. That was about 1918. I never graduated. I said, 'This isn't for me. I want to play.' My mother was broken-hearted.

"I'd give so much to know how I got Spiegle. Let me tell you something, people forget Willcox, they forget Newell. Lots of timea they just say, 'Spiegle's playing.' Dizzy is another name like that. There's a pure example. There are not to many of those, not too many people called Dizzy. Or Spiegle."

"How did you get to play trombone in a little town like Cortland?"

"My dad. He played valve trombone. He was born in a little town called Smyrna, that's about four miles from Sherbourne, way up on the top of a hill. He and his brother, and his father, my grandfather. He must have died early, I never did see him. My dad and his brother; he played clarinet.

"The only times they'd play were Sunday afternoons in a parlor or sitting room. They'd have a few people come in, and we'd play orchestrations or play out of a hymn book. And we'd pull taffy. You ever heard o' that? That's the kind o' sport we did."

I said, "I was browsing in the Cortland library last night, and I found out they had quite a music school in Cortland before the turn out of the century."

"Yeah, they had the Cortland Conservatory. Prof. Bentley was the head of it."

"I read that they had a chorale amounting to three hundred voices. In a little town like that. They even had an opera house."

"Oh, the Cortland Opera House! Sure! The Dillon Brothers ran it."

"So your father started you on trombone."

"That was a valve. When I went to Manlius, I played baritone, see. And of course there's the three valves. All you've got to do is figure out which ones to press at the right time. If your ear is bad, then you don't know and you'd better quit. We were all kids. And what a brass band! It was a super military school. Wealthy people sent their kids up there to keep them out of their hair. And the band, we were the inspiration with those drills and marches and parades.

"One of the trombone players showed me the slide positions, and I'm still trying to figure the damn things out. Seven positions. And I hear some guys play and I think they've got a hundred. Jesus, how some guys can play.

"Jack Teagarden was something else. He was super. Anybody who didn't like him . . . So many trombone players, even today, do little things that he did, or try to. There were some awful good players."

"Bill Crow, the bassist, told me that some of the older players had told him that rhythm sections didn't sound the same on records as they did in person because drummers had to hold back in order not to jump the cutter out of the track."

"I don't remember that we had drums on those 78s with Goldkette. I think all Chauncey Morehouse did was hold a cymbal and come in on the end. At the Greystone, he had a great mass of props. He was a great guy to have chimes, tympanis. He was a great showman. He was from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania."

"How did you jump from Cortland to Detroit?" Like most people of our time, I underestimate how much people traveled in those days. Because we live with the automobile, we forget how efficiently the country was served by the railways.

"That's a story," Spiegle said. "In 1922-23, I played in New York. It started out as a Cornell band, a jazz band. Most of them went to Cornell University. Bob Causer's Cornellians. He was the only son of the man and wife who owned the Ithaca hotel, which was the heart of Cornell in downtown Ithaca. All the college functions! It was a gold mine.

"Bob Causer was a half-assed drummer, but he was a good promoter. He got into the Whiteman office, and we worked through them. We were booked as Paul Whiteman's Col-

legians.

"That was right at the time, 1923, when Paul Whiteman was playing at the Palais Royale in New York. He only had one trombone, Sammy Lewis played trombone. Henry Busse played trumpet. I don't remember who played the other trumpet. Ross Gorman was in the saxophone section. Busse would come over to the Rendezvous, where I played with the Collegians. Our main attraction there was Gilda Grey, a shimmy queen out of the Ziegfeld Follies. Busse's girlfriend was in the little floor-show with Gilda.

"Busse would rehearse us a little bit. He was hot-lips Busse. Beiderbecke hadn't got in there in the Whiteman band yet to knock him down.

"What happened was that our piano player stole Busse's girl. I remember she was a cute little thing. After the Ziegfeld Follies, Gilda would bring about five or six girls in grass skirts, and that was the floor show. I remember Will Rogers coming in. William S. Hart, who was in silent movies, a two-gun man, he used to come sit beside me.

"That band made in the Victor recording studio, we made three records under the name The Collegians. One of the tunes was *Papa, Better Watch Your Step*, a real corny tune typical of the time. Another tune was *That Redhead Gal*. A good tune, too. Another tune that I still play once in a while was *I Cried for You*. I had a whole chorus on the damn thing.

"In 1924, I went with the Collegians down to the Chase hotel in New York for six months. I dropped out after six months. I came home in January or so to Cortland. I stayed around Cortland, because in that summer of 1925, I took a job over at Auburn, where Auburn Prison is. There is a lake there called Owasco Lake. And there was a big dance pavillion -- I'm sure it's still there.

"We had jitney dancing, with turnstiles. Dime a dance. Put in your dime. Just like in the New York subway. Same damn thing. Everybody comes in and we'd play ten or twelve minutes, stop, everybody gets off the floor. Put their dime in, start right up again.

"Well, it came Labor Day of 1925, and Fuzzy Farrar, the first trumpet player in the Goldkette band, from Freeland, Pennsylvania, came by. The Dorsey brothers and Itzy Riskin, they were all from the Scranton area. Fuzzy Farrar happened to be in Auburn. He was on a vacation from Detroit. He came up to Auburn Park to be with his buddies from around Freeland, Pennsylvania, in their National Guard band. They parked on the park, and they'd play concerts. He came over to the pavillion one day. We were on a break. We were outside the pavillion, right close to the band door, and we got talking.

"I said, 'Where you from?'"

"He said, 'Detroit. I play in a band out there -- Jean Goldkette.' I'd heard enough about Goldkette. I figured he must be pretty good.

"I said, 'Why don't you come over and sit in with us tonight?' So he did just that. You could tell. Right away.

"We hadn't played very long when he said to me, 'Hey, how would like to join the Goldkette band?' He said, 'Tommy Dorsey's in the band and he's leaving.' Only musicians knew Tommy Dorsey then. Bill Rank was the other trombone player in the band.

"I said, 'I have a commitment. I've got to go down to New

York for two weeks at least and play with the California Ramblers.' I went down there. All of a sudden I began to realize how I didn't like New York City. Too busy, even at that time. And I'm just too corny. I'm a home-town guy. In those two weeks I had three wires from the Goldkette band.

"I heard later that he had the authority to fill Tommy's chair. So, I said, 'I'm going.' I left the California Ramblers, and that's how I got with the Goldkette band.

"I went out to the Greystone Ballroom and joined the band in October, 1925.

"Venuti had been in the band but he'd left by then. Goldkette had recorded a tune that caught my attention back in Cortland, called *It's the Blues*. And Joe was playing that four-string stuff.

"Every time we recorded in New York, Joe and Eddie Lang would be in the studio to visit.

"When I joined the band, the only guy I knew just a little was Fuzzy Farrar. And who was leading the band by stick? Russ Morgan. Bill Rank was my side-kick. I don't remember who was on piano. Maybe Paul Mertz, maybe Itzy Riskin. In the trumpets were Ray Ludwig and Fuzzy Farrar. Steve Brown on bass, Chauncey on drums, Howdy Quicksell on banjo. The immediate sax section was Don Murray, and Fud Livingston, and Doc Ryker. And in two weeks, Fud Livingston left the band and in came Jimmy Dorsey. Jimmy stayed six months.

"In December 14 they gave me one day to come back to marry my wife, Helen, in Binghamton. Early in January, I think, with Jimmy Dorsey still in the band, we made some records. On *Lonesome and Sorry* I had a whole chorus.

"Somewhere around in March of 1926 Jimmy left, and in came Frank Trumbauer with -- who? -- Bix.

"Frank played different. But Beiderbecke! Oh we liked him. He played so good. I sat over on the end in the second row. Bill Rank next to me, Beiderbecke next, Ray Ludwig, Fuzzy. I just can't describe him. He had a marvelous tone, attack, ease. He was a kind guy. The damn booze."

"He remains a bit of a mystery, kind of evasive."

"Kind of, yes. Kind of quiet. He was born March 10, 1903, and I was May 2. He was just a little bit older than I. He went to military school too. And his father was in the coal business, like mine.

"The summer of 1926, the Goldkette band left the Greystone and split. Once in a while during the time I was with Goldkette, I'd go down to a place not too far away called the Silver Slipper. There was a band called Henry Theiss. He must have had a trombone player. I know he had a trumpet and cornet and maybe three saxes. I played with him enough that he asked me to join him down at Castle Farms in Cincinnati. I worked seven days and I got a hundred and twenty-five bucks, and I worked my ass off. I was getting a hundred with Goldkette. Newell, my son, was born September 12, 1926. We came back from Cincinnati to have the baby in Binghamton. I hung around three weeks or so. I got maybe two wires about joining the Goldkette band again. I said I'd come back for a hundred and quarter.

"Charlie Horvath, the band manager, said Okay. I joined the band on a famous two-week tour from Detroit up to the Boston area. Bix was still in the band. I stayed through till about June 1, and I said, 'I'm going to quit. I'm going home

and join my daddy in the coal business.' By September they were running out of steam, no bookings. They were appearing down at Atlantic City. Helen and I went down just to see them. They were kind of close to us. We drove down. That's when the band split up, though.

"I think Jimmy Dorsey must have told Whiteman. Whiteman went down. He didn't want to steal Goldkette men, but if the band was splitting up, he'd take some of them.

"Immediately after they broke up, Adrian Rollini had a band for six, eight weeks at the most in a place called the New York. The piano player was Frank Signorelli. Drums, Chauncey. Bill Rank. Beiderbecke.

"For a while I was kind of a big shot. They'd invite me as a guest at Cornell, or Syracuse. About two years after I got home, I said, 'I'm gonna start a little Friday-Saturday night band of my own. For years and years I played in my own band.

"As I got older, rock-and-roll came in. I got to be fifty-five, sixty. It was that re-creation of the Goldkette band that got me back into it. Joe got me back in the music game, big.

"Joe finally broke away from booze. And I lived with him there on and off for three years, as he went around to these clubs. I didn't make 'em all, but I made a lot of 'em. It was cute the way he'd use me. I never got any money. That was something else. He was a loner. To tolerate me, I must have been doing something right.

"Spiegle the Beagle, he used to call me. He'd say, 'Here's Spiegle the Beagle, from ten miles from nowhere.' I played his last job with him, in Rochester."

In all those years when he was forgotten, Spiegle ran the family coal business and played weekends with his group for local organizations and dances. He still does that. The Finger Lakes region is close by, and for many of those years he played engagements in or near them. He raised a family, two sons and a daughter. He never really missed the music business. Friends from the bands knew perfectly well where he was, and they'd drop by on their way from Binghamton to Syracuse, or Syracuse to Binghamton. His office at the coal company was decorated with the same posters he now has in his living room.

I was surprised by Spiegle's ebullience. I have resented the incursions of time all my life, and have never understood how people face its inexorable arithmetic. Often, you'll find, such people find their consolation in religious.

"Are you religious, Spiegle?" I asked.

"Nope," he said cheerfully.

So much for that thought.

It came time to go. Spiegle was getting ready to go out on a jazz cruise aboard the S.S. Norway, and he had to pack. I had not brought my car to the house: there was ice on his road. He'd met me there with his four-wheel drive vehicle. Now he drove me back to my car.

We shook hands. He waited solicitously until my car was back on the wet pavement, then headed back to his house in the woods.

2. Weekend at Dante Park

A small table stands by the window, which faces north. Lying on a sheet of score paper is a Scripto pencil, and near it a

slim little blue carton of IBM Electrographic leads. Some composer or arranger in Los Angeles long ago discovered the smooth fluid quality of those leads, designed to be used on the early computer cards. They're magnetic. It was also discovered that these leads would fit not only IBM mechanical pencils but Scriptos as well. Scriptos are cheaper than IBMs and easier to find. This unknown explorer further found that Scriptos with IBM leads are near-perfect implements for writing music. Some of his friends tried out his pencils, and became instantly addicted to them, and the use of them spread like a benign epidemic on the coast. Now, it seems, every composer and arranger in Southern California uses them, while in New York they are still using Blackwings and electric pencil sharpeners. I haven't seen a Blackwing in Los Angeles in years. The only place I've ever been able to find those IBM leads is Joe Valle's music shop in the San Fernando Valley, where composers take their work for photocopying. When I was living in New York, I had a friend send me a box of them because I couldn't get them here.

The evidence then is in that still life by the window: a golden alto saxophone lying with its neck on the arm of a sofa, some score paper, a Scripto, and a box of IBM leads. You can deduce that the occupant of this room is a working saxophonist, since he has the horn out to practice, and an arranger and probably composer, and he lives in California. He has pulled the table to the window because it gives him a north light, which will not cast a shadow of his hand and pencil on the paper. He has efficiently re-arranged the room to suit his needs, which suggests that he is habituated to writing on the road. He is in the middle of writing an arrangement, and somewhere a copyist is standing by awaiting it. But what is he writing? What is the assignment?

Look out the window. It faces north over that X-shape intersection of Columbus Avenue and Broadway, which at the south end forms a small equilateral triangle on which stand eight or nine large bare plane trees and a statue. It bears the high-flown name Dante Park, since the statue is of Dante. He stands tall, wearing a cap around which is a laurel wreath, and in his right hand, held high and close to his shoulder, is a copy of his latest best-seller, on the cover of which is engraved Divine Comedy. He looks as if he's displaying it on a television show. Over to the left, that is to say to the west, in the gathering evening, is Lincoln Center, its travertine surfaces and broad steps off-white in the lights.

So the arrangement that is being written in this hotel sitting room probably has something to do with a concert at Avery Fisher Hall, whose floors are visible through its tall windows. And you might have noticed on your way here the name of Ella Fitzgerald on one of those small billboards in front of the place. There is to be a concert for the American Heart Foundation in tribute to her, and Mayor Dinkins has declared the date of it, February 12, Ella Fitzgerald Day in New York.

Think of a composer from the west coast who travels constantly, plays alto saxophone, and is in some way associated with Ella Fitzgerald.

Bennett L. Carter of Beverly Hills. Elementary, my dear Watson.

"Is that mine?" Benny Carter said of the music we were hearing. "I probably haven't heard it since it was made." He referred to the Fletcher Henderson recording of *Wang Wang*

Blues, waxed, as they used to say, May 6, 1929. The music was coming from one of the remarkable restorations made by engineer Robert Parker in Australia, this one devoted to the late years of the Henderson band. I could reply only that Parker's annotation said it was Benny's arrangement. Benny didn't recognize it. He listened to it through, but it remained unknown to him. Next I played him, from the same CD album, the Henderson band's performance of his chart on *Happy as the Day Is Long*, a Harold Arlen tune the band recorded in September, 1934.

"But *that* one I remember," he said when he heard the opening phrase. The tune is taken at a fast tempo. The guitar-player, Lawrence Lucie, is in four, but the bassist, Elmer James, remains in two. The thing that still startles me more than anything else about Parker's loving re-recordings is their clarity. Johnny Mandel remarked a while ago that listening through the surface hiss and scratches of the older recordings was like trying to see something through a dirty window. Parker's computerized re-recordings give you the impression that someone washed the window. Aside from their reasonably persuasive stereo effect, they are notable for the clarity of detail. And you can hear all the intricacy of Benny's tight arrangement on this reissue, on the BBC's label.

The trombone solo came up. "Claude Jones," Benny said instantly, with a smile.

Then came the Ben Webster tenor solo. "Now where does he come from?" Benny said. "What's the source of that?" It was a terse allusion to the tendency in writings about jazz to make it all seem little more than a Mendelian exercise in bean genetics: so-and-so begat so-and-so who begat so-and-so. It is a vision of jazz that precludes individuality, the very thing (or one of the things) the music is about. Influences there are, to be sure. "Jazz is a synthesis," Benny said, although he remarked at one point that he has trouble with the very term *jazz* because of the impossibility of defining it.

And he was right, of course. I don't know the precedent for Ben Webster. He seems to burst into the music fully original with his big sound and slurs and push and bluff determination. The conventional theory is that he came out of Coleman Hawkins, but I can't see it. Coleman Hawkins was a man of considerable and complex intellect, very conscious of what he was doing. Ben Webster was another thing entirely. Great-hearted Ben with the big shoulders and big chest and sharp face and fierce concentrated mien, always going bluntly to the subject, musically and otherwise. God help you if you caught him when he was drunk and in a bad mood. And the rest of the time he was wonderful. But he was far more direct than Hawkins, and I don't think their sounds were really similar.

I was looking at the arranging credits on the Fletcher Henderson album. Some of the arrangements were by Bill Challis, who had gone from the Jean Goldkette band to that of Paul Whiteman and is considered one of the pioneering arrangers. Some others were by Russ Morgan, who also had written for Goldkette. I had, years ago, known Morgan only through the polite and somewhat corny society band he led. I had had no idea of his credits in jazz. "He was a good trombone player, too," Benny said. I noted that while I had been aware almost from my earliest interest in jazz of the black arrangers who wrote for white bands, as in the cases of Henderson with Goodman and Sy Oliver with Tommy Dorsey,

I had not realized that white arrangers had written for black bands, including Challis and Morgan for Henderson. "Oh yes," Benny said. "Bill Challis was one of my heroes."

Then came a solo by Henry (Red) Allen, fierce and hot, the man's control of the horn absolute and authoritative. I ventured to suggest that he was one of the under-appreciated players in jazz history, and Benny nodded agreement. "I'll tell you another one who's under-appreciated," he said. "Paul Desmond. And do you know a trombone player named Willie Dennis?"

"I knew him very well."

"Is he dead?" Benny said.

"Back in the '60s. He was killed in a car crash in Central Park. I was thinking about Willie an hour or two ago, because I helped arrange his funeral with Father O'Connor and my mom faces onto Columbus Avenue and I can see just to the south the church where we held the service. The Church of St. Paul. I remember that Joe Williams sang." Joe was scheduled on the concert for which Benny was writing the arrangement lying there on the table, this tribute to Ella Fitzgerald with an orchestra to be led by Benny.

"I heard a Phil Woods record and looked to see who the trombone player was," Benny said. "Willie Dennis. How did he get by me?"

"I can never pass that church without thinking of Willie and Joe Williams and Morgana King. Willie was Morgana's husband. Both Italian, of course."

"He was some trombone player," Benny said.

I was a little over a year old when Fletcher Henderson made that record of Benny's chart on *Wang Wang Blues*, if indeed the annotation was correct. Since Benny has twenty years on me, that means he was twenty-one when he wrote that chart he doesn't remember. And when he wrote that 1934 chart, he still was only twenty-six. I don't approve of hero-worship, but I must confess that I idolized Benny Carter when I was a kid, he was one of my early heroes, and I still feel a trace of a sense of honor, which I hide from him, to be in his presence. I first heard him not on alto saxophone but on trumpet.

"Somebody told me you're playing trumpet again."

"A little. I don't have time to practice. If I could give equal time to both instruments . . ." He made a vague gesture of resignation at the impossibility. And he didn't even mention the time he spends over a hot Scripto.

Earlier that day, a Jamaican housekeeper who was taking care of both Benny's room and mine asked me who he was: with the clump of gray hair that surrounds his bald head and his impeccable dress, he is obviously someone of great distinction. I told her his name, but she had never heard it, and I told her his was the longest continuous career in the history of jazz, running all the way from the 1920s to the present, more than sixty years. She asked how old he was, and I told her: Eighty-two.

"My goodness, darling!" she said in astonishment. "He looks in his fifties." And he does. And he moves as if he were no more than that. A couple of years ago he had a dizzy spell and went to a doctor, something he has never had much reason to do. The doctor asked his age. Benny told him. The doctor just shook his head, said there was nothing wrong with him, and sent him home.

But it is not just longevity that distinguishes Benny Carter.

Oscar Peterson calls him "the true gentleman of jazz." His is an astonishing career. "My influences," Phil Woods once said pointedly, in comment on the comparisons of his playing to Bird's, "were Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges, and Charlie Parker, in that order." Benny is one of the major soloists on his instrument, spinning out airy, elegant, understated contours of sound. It is logical that he would like Desmond. We talked about Desmond for a while. I told him I'd made a discovery recently -- what I suspect is the true headwaiter of Desmond's inspiration. Not Lester Young's saxophone playing, but his clarinet: Desmond's alto sounds a lot like Prez's clarinet. Prez in turn had said that his early idol was Frank Trumbauer.

How important was Trumbauer's influence?

"That's how I started," Benny said. "With Frank Trumbauer. Do you know a saxophone player I liked? Wayne King. Not jazz of course. But the sound and the way he played melody. He played beautifully." That one, I must admit, took me by total surprise. I thought about it. Wayne King played very well indeed; not my kind of music, but . . .

Benny Carter's career has been nothing less than protean. He wasn't the first black film composer: by all evidence, Will Vodery was. Vodery was an arranger and orchestrator of Broadway musicals in the 1910s, and '20s, who then went to Hollywood and broke in. But Benny was almost certainly the first jazz musician to break in as a film composer. At that, there was discrimination. In his early film days, the discrimination ran so deep that he would be assigned to write arrangements for black singers making guest appearances in films. But in time he -- along with another jazz musician, Shorty Rogers -- orchestrated for Dmitri Tiomkin. He wrote a good deal of music for television series, including *M Squad*. Benny opened the way for J.J. Johnson, Oliver Nelson, Benny Golson, and others. For a long time, Benny Carter was absent from the jazz scene. And then he turned up again on the festival and concert circuit and recording a great deal for Pablo and other labels. He was playing as well as or better than ever.

After we'd listened to some more of the Fletcher Henderson album, we went out into the early night, Benny wearing an exquisite blue-gray suede overcoat. We ate at The Ginger Man. Benny ordered an excellent wine. I once asked him how he survives on the road. "Always go first class," he said. He is firm about it: he will not tolerate shabby lodgings.

Benny had been in the audience of the Apollo Theater on that semi-legendary occasion when Ella Fitzgerald appeared on one of the theater's amateur contests as a dancer. It is part of the legend of jazz -- but it's true -- that she was immobilized by stage fright. The stage manager told her she had better do something, so she sang instead: *The Object of My Affections*. She was fifteen at the time; some accounts say thirteen. Benny went straight to Fletcher Henderson about her. Henderson had her audition, but wasn't interested. Neither, apparently, was John Hammond, to whom Benny also recommended her. Nor even Chick Webb. So she went on singing in amateur contests, winning one after another, until finally Webb tried her out at on a college date at Yale, and then hired her, and then adopted her as his daughter.

Benny mentioned in passing that he was a New Yorker. I'd never thought of him that way. He'd been born in the Bronx

and grew up not three blocks from where we were sitting.

We somehow got onto the writing of William Styron. I said I enormously admired his book *Nat Turner*.

Benny frowned thoughtfully for a second. "*The Confessions of Nat Turner*. That's the name of it," he said.

I told him the reasons I liked it. "It's a chilling book," I said.

"I must re-read it," he said. "How is Styron? He used to be a neighbor of my wife's."

"As far as I know, fine," I said. "I saw him on a television show, discussing how depression had immobilized him. But he's over it."

Benny paused, and then said something startling, significant, indicative of his whole life. "I do not know the meaning of depression," he said.

How I envied him that.

We parted early that evening. Benny planned to write most of the night.

And he did, though you'd never have known it from the manner of the man as the orchestra gathered in a big room on the mezzanine of the hotel the next morning at eleven. It was a formidable orchestra, with a trumpet section that included Jon Faddis, Clark Terry, Red Rodney, and, substituting for Sweets Edison, who couldn't make it, one John Birks Gillespie. The saxophones were Phil Woods, David Sanborn, Stan Getz, Jimmy Heath, and Nick Brignola. The trombones were Al Grey, Urbie Green, Slide Hampton, and Jack Jeffers. The bass player was Ray Brown, the pianist Hank Jones. The drummer, Louis Bellson, hadn't arrived yet and so for a time Bobby Durham substituted.

Benny sat on a stool, conducting, relaxed and concentrated.

That night he sat up until six a.m., writing arrangements. When he appeared for rehearsal the next day, he was as relaxed as ever. The concert was that night. I spent most of it backstage, writing fragments of script for the performers, among them Lena Horne, who was mistress of ceremonies, Itzhak Perlman, and the mayor of New York who arrived with a coterie of tough-looking cookies and read the tribute to Ella I'd prepared for him. I'd come into New York for this. The show was being produced by Edith Kiggen, who'd asked me to help. It didn't take much writing: just bits of continuity here and there. I remembered that Oscar Peterson had written a poem to Ella. He sent it by fax from Toronto, and Lena Horne read it.

The unexpected guest arrived: Oscar himself. Itzhak Perlman had said it was the dream of his life to play with Oscar, and Oscar was delighted by the idea. I went with the two of them up to the so-called Green Room -- why do they always call it the Green Room? it's never green -- and they chose a couple of tunes, *Summertime* leading into *Stormy Weather*. The biggest problem was settling on keys, not because either of them had preferences but because both were utterly indifferent. They talked about Art Tatum. Perlman probably startled Oscar -- he certainly startled me -- by playing a couple of Tatum runs on his fiddle, a Guarnerius.

Sitting somewhat behind him during that rehearsal, I noticed Perlman's unorthodox left-hand position. One of the first rules of violin technique is that you do not let the neck of the instrument slip down into the crook between the thumb and index finger. You're supposed to hold it up out of the crook,

usually with the neck supported between the knuckle of the thumb and the top joint of the index finger, where it meets the palm. This is supposed to give you flexibility. The same rule applies to classical guitar. If you let it slip down into the crook, the conventional wisdom holds, you lose flexibility and tone. You can't get over the axe that way. Try telling that to Perlman, because that's exactly what he does. He uses the left-hand position of a country-and-western fiddler.

I commented on this to him, noting that Horowitz too did something forbidden: he curled the pinky of his right hand. It would strike out to hit a note at the top of a phrase or a chord, like a snake, and then retreat, curled tight into the palm. That's an absolute non-no.

Perlman said, "Rules in teaching are designed to cover the greatest number of people. You have to adapt them to your own needs."

I mentioned that when Eddie Harris long ago asked Lester Young a question about embouchure, Prez said, "I can only tell you about my mouthpiece in my mouth. I can't tell you about your mouthpiece in your mouth."

"Exactly," Perlman said.

The band played. Dizzy Gillespie performed, brilliantly, with his old sidekick James Moody. Manhattan Transfer sang. Joe Williams sang a song for Ella. Benny Carter directed the orchestra in an instrumental he'd written called *First Lady*. I suppose that's what he'd stayed up so late writing. I went over the lines she was to read, with Lena Horne. I could not believe the condition of her skin. She remains an incredible beauty in her seventies, looking twenty-five years or more younger than she is. She was gentle and gracious and self-effacing.

Oscar Peterson walked onstage. He had not been billed; the audience levitated. Itzhak joined him, and they did their part, with Bobby Durham, Ray Brown and Herb Ellis joining them in the second tune.

Ella sat through all this in a front-row seat. She wasn't supposed to perform at all, but she did: at the very end she got up and sang *Honeysuckle Rose*, and tore the house down, and then it was over.

Always I was conscious of Benny Carter, onstage without interruption, cuing the orchestra, holding it all together. The master. The absolute master. I listened to his charts, new and modern, of our time, and thought back to the *Wang Wang Blues* chart for Henderson. What a career.

But they don't make movies about this kind of triumph over life. They don't make movies about happy musicians. The myth grows that all jazz musicians die young, and in poverty and in misery, and it overlooks Benny Carter, and for that matter Dizzy Gillespie. It overlooks Spigle Willcox.

Benny out there with his alto case under his arm, making the festivals and concert circuit, Spigle with his trombone, enjoying life.

What do these two men have?

Spigle retired into the coal business, but never stopped playing. Benny faded into the anonymity of movie-studio orchestrating. Then both re-emerged.

Are you religious, Spigle? Nope.

I don't know the meaning of depression.

Benny checked out of the hotel next morning. He said -- no kidding! -- he was tired. He was on his way to a gig.