

1 | Who Owns Jazz?

Clark Terry, a vital presence for so much of jazz history, is one of the most unswervingly honest and truly democratic persons I've ever had the privilege of knowing—in and outside of jazz. There is a story he tells that illuminates his continuous involvement as an educator, in and out of the classroom, in helping to form new generations of jazz musicians.

For Clark's story, I am indebted to Hank O'Neal—another multiple influence on the jazz scene as record producer at Chiaroscuro, photographer, educator and historian. In 1997, the French publisher Editions Filipacchi released O'Neal's book *The Ghosts of Harlem*. An English edition will eventually be available, but O'Neal was kind enough to give me the following quotes from Clark.

In the 1970s, Terry worked in Harlem with his own seventeen-piece band at the Club Baron. "It just so happens that it was about half and half, blacks and whites," Clark said. "One night, three black Mafia guys, Black Muslims with guns, come into the club, corner me and said, 'What are you doing playing with all these whities in Harlem?' I'm a little bit frightened, but I know I've got to be stern, so I say, 'I think you're aware of the fact that Harlem has always been responsible for great jazz, big-band jazz, individual jazz, and that's been missing from the scene for a number of years. I feel it's my duty to bring big bands back to Harlem. I just choose the best musicians I can find and I don't listen with my eyes.'"

The Black Muslims seemed to be getting the message. One of them said, "Well, we got a kid here, a little black kid, and he wants to play and we want to hear him play."

Clark nodded and said, "That's OK. I've spent half my life making it possible for young musicians to be heard, so we'll bring him up at the beginning of the set and turn him loose." Lew Soloff had the trumpet chair and Clark asked him to let the kid sit in. "I kicked it off with a medium-tempo tune by Chris Woods," Clark continued. "A very simple tune, very easy to play on, nice changes."

Immediately, the kid started to solo, but Clark stopped the music. "It's when we get down to letter D is when you solo," he told the kid. "Before that, you play with the rest of us. At letter D, you can play along."

"I just wanted to express myself," the youngster said. Terry kicked the music off again, and the kid came in wrong again. "Express your ass off my stage," Clark told him.

"When we came off," Terry said, "I went straight up to the cats with the three guns and said, 'Now you see what you've done! You brought a dude up here and you stuck your necks out to represent this dude to do something that he's not

qualified to do. He's not prepared. He didn't do his homework. He can't read music!" One of the Black Muslims, in what Clark remembers as "a low grumbly voice," said: "Well, the son of a bitch didn't tell us that."

Terry didn't swear off working with kids, however. "Before the Jazzmobile started uptown, I gathered a lot of little kids out of Harlem and took them to a rehearsal studio on 125th Street," Clark said. "I bought some of these kids instruments and we rehearsed all the time. Then we got to use the facilities at Manhattan College, a real university atmosphere. When I couldn't be there, Ernie Wilkins or Kenny Dorham would take my place. We'd hire whoever was competent, black or white, to teach the kids.

"One time when I'd been away for a while, I came back and the attendance was down to almost nothing. One of the students had persuaded all the others not to respond to help from Caucasians. I confronted the kids, and finally one of them said: 'We don't want whitey trying to teach us about our music.'

"I said, 'You've got all the facilities of a college student here, and all the possibilities of learning anything you could learn in college—and you'd let bigotry come before that? OK, if that's what you cats are about, you got it. See you later.'

"And that was the end of that. I just walked away from all of it. We'd had to teach a lot of those kids how to read music, but attitude, bigotry, killed it."

But later Billy Taylor encouraged Terry to do clinics, and Clark obliged: "I became more and more involved, imparting knowledge, sometimes just relating my experiences."

Once, in Seattle, playing with Count Basie's small group, Clark was approached by a "little kid who came in, said he was learning to play trumpet and also wrote music, and asked if he could take some lessons from me. We worked it out so he could come in for a couple of hours—like 6 o'clock or so in the morning before he went to school—and before I went to bed.

"I couldn't dare to say no to this kid. I shudder to think what would have happened if I had said no. I never would have forgiven myself. I gave him all kinds of lessons I knew how to give him. I worked with him on his writing, theory and harmony. The kid stayed involved. Look at him now."

The kid was Quincy Jones. On the new Chiaroscuro CD *Clark Terry and the Young Titans of Jazz*, recorded at the Twenty-ninth International Jazz Festival Bern in Switzerland, the band is composed of musicians (aged seventeen to forty-four) from around the world, all of whom have been Clark's students. The drummer, Marcus Gilmore, is Roy Haynes's grandson. In the notes, Quincy Jones says: "Keep on keepin' on, Cee Tee. There will never, ever be another you."

2 | My Debt to Artie Shaw

If it hadn't been for Artie Shaw, I might not be writing about jazz here (or any other place). When I was eleven years old, walking down a street in Boston, I heard music coming out of a record store that made me shout aloud in excited pleasure. I rushed in, demanding, "What is that?" Artie Shaw's "Nightmare," I was told. Before then, the only music that had affected me so viscerally was the passionate, mesmerizing, often improvisatory singing of the hazan, the cantor in Orthodox synagogues on the High Holiday days. The hazan sounded at times as if he were arguing with God, and the depth of his witnessing to the human condition later connected me with black blues.

In the definitive Artie Shaw collection, *Self Portrait* (RCA Victor/Bluebird), Richard Sudhalter says that "Nightmare" is "a keening, almost cantorial melody in A minor, as different musically from the theme songs of his bandleading colleagues as Shaw was different from them personally and temperamentally." I think I remember Shaw himself saying that he based the piece on an actual cantorial theme. As he said in the *Self Portrait* set, "Certainly I can't deny the influence of my Russian-Jewish-Austrian ancestry."

Orrin Keepnews, the master orchestrator of reissues, is responsible for *Self Portrait*, for which Shaw made the selections from every band he ever led. He included airchecks, which he felt were truer to what he had in mind than studio recordings. Keepnews writes that when Shaw and Benny Goodman were rivals, "You had to make a choice. . . . You were either for Artie Shaw or [for] Benny Goodman." Back then, and even now, I get into arguments when I claim that while Goodman surely could swing and was a superb technician, Artie Shaw surpassed him in the range of his imagination and the exhilaration he conveyed of continually expecting more of himself and his horn.

As Matt Snyder once wrote of the clarinetist, "Shaw's playing was on a consistently higher level linearly and harmonically [than Goodman's]. . . . Of all the big band leaders, Shaw may have been the most musically gifted." I was pleased to see in the *New York Times* obituary, written and archived long ago by the late John S. Wilson, that clarinetist Barney Bigard, who brought a New Orleans sound to the Duke Ellington Orchestra, regarded Shaw as the greatest clarinetist ever, and that alto saxophonist Phil Woods models his clarinet playing on Shaw's.

At eleven, I was taking clarinet lessons assiduously from an alumnus of the Boston Symphony, but hearing what Shaw could say and sing on that instrument led me into the liberating sounds and rhythms of jazz. It was during the Depression, and working as an errand boy on a horse-drawn fruit wagon, I was able to buy 78s of Basie, Duke, Bessie Smith and Shaw at a cost of three for a dollar. Years later, when I was New York editor of *Down Beat*, Artie Shaw would call me from time to time to discuss not only my limitless deficiencies as a jazz

critic but also all manner of things, from politics and literature to other things that came within his wide-ranging interests. As soon as he was on the line, I knew that for the next hour or so my role was to listen. It was hard to get a word or two in. (Interviewing Benny Goodman was different. Cautious, he would often deflect a question by asking, “What do you think?”)

What I admired about Shaw was that he exemplified what Ben Webster once told me when I was still in Boston: “If the rhythm section isn’t making it, go for yourself.” Artie Shaw refused to let himself be limited, even by success. After he first quit the music scene in 1939, walking off the bandstand at the Café Rouge of the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York, he said: “I wanted to resign from the planet, not just music. It stopped being fun with success. Money got in the way. Everybody got greedy—including me. Fear set in. I got miserable when I became a commodity.” In 1954, at forty-three, he left for good and never again performed.

He turned to writing and an array of other interests because his curiosity about how much one could learn about learning never flagged. As he said in the notes to *Self Portrait*, “I’m not comfortable with categories, and I distrust most definitions. The word definition is based on the word finite, which would seem to indicate that once we’ve defined something, we don’t need to think about it anymore.”

On January 7, 2005, the National Endowment for the Arts declared Artie Shaw a Jazz Master. I sure would have liked to hear his acceptance speech. It wouldn’t have been humble. He knew his worth, and then some. In a 1978 *Washington Post* interview, he said: “I don’t care if I’m forgotten. I became a specialist in nonspecialization a long time ago. For instance, I’m an expert fly fisherman. And in 1962, I ranked fourth nationally in precision riflery. My music? Well, no point in false modesty about that. I was the best.”

Shaw died, at the age of ninety-four, on December 30, 2004, but his music will continue to reverberate. I can’t forget him because he brought me into the music that has given me ceaseless reason to shout aloud in pleasure.

3 | The Family of Jazz

Years ago, I took my daughter, Miranda, to a rehearsal of Count Basie alumni the morning of a Carnegie Hall tribute to their former leader. Some of the musicians were in their sixties and seventies. As is usual in the jazz life, most had not seen each other for some time and greeted each other warmly, jocularly, and started riffing on the times, good and bad, they’d had together.

Among the musicians was drummer Gus Johnson, whose crisply elegant riding of “the rhythm wave,” as Basie’s guitarist Freddie Green used to call it, has never gotten the fullness of recognition he deserved. And Harry “Sweets”

Edison, who captured Miranda's attention when—as the band ran down one of the arrangements for the evening—he stopped the music and turned his score back to the arranger. “Too many notes,” Sweets said. I later told Miranda what Dizzy Gillespie had said to me not long before: “It’s taken me all my life to know what not to play.”

My daughter, though young, was already working gigs as a pianist and singer of her own songs. But she'd never been in the company of some of jazz's vintage creators. After several hours we left, and Miranda said to me, “I’ve never seen such love among musicians before.”

The family-like love happened again in January in New York at the International Association for Jazz Education's Annual Conference when Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), hosted an NEA Jazz Masters Luncheon. Around the table were musicians I hadn't seen for a long time: Benny Golson, Chico Hamilton, George Russell, Dave Brubeck, Randy Weston and Roy Haynes. And some I'd only talked to briefly during the years: Clark Terry and Jimmy Heath.

It was reunion for most of them too. They swapped stories of illusory royalties from record dates and, more glowingly, shared vivid memories of their idols. Randy Weston spoke of being a young man in the imperial presence of Willie “The Lion” Smith. Dave Brubeck and I traded stories about Paul Desmond, who was one of the most lyrical, witty, ironic and luminous melodic improvisers in the history of the music.

I told Dave of the crush Paul and I had on Audrey Hepburn and how we once waited, without success, just to look at her at a stage door. I never met her, nor did Paul, but he wrote the song “Audrey” for her. After she died, someone close to her said she played that recording very often. Paul never knew that.

At that NEA luncheon Roy Haynes told me, “When I was a kid, I used to listen to your jazz program on the radio.” Roy is three months older than I am, but I started in radio when I was in my teens.

I returned the favor and told him and the others at our table about the first time I heard Roy. At one of the Sunday jam sessions at the Savoy, a jazz room in Boston, this kid, who couldn't have been more than seventeen or eighteen, asked to sit in on drums. He was going to Roxbury Memorial High School, near where I lived. As I remember, clarinetist Edmond Hall as well as other jazz pros were on the stand, and this was the first time I'd seen a high school student dare to be in such company. The young Roy Haynes, with crackling confidence, riveted everyone's attention and finished to a roar of applause.

As a reporter, I've gotten to know political figures, criminal defense lawyers, some of their clients, judges, even a Supreme Court justice. But I'd rather be in the company of jazz musicians, especially at reunions when the past comes alive again. Toward the end of his book *Myself Among Others: My Life in Music*, George

Wein speaks of “the humanity” of jazz players, whose “feeling for communication transcends the music and becomes part of their personal life.”

The strangest story I know about how jazz makes the most different people into a sort of family was told to me long ago in Paris by Charles Delaunay, the standard-setter for jazz discographers and the creator of *Jazz Hot* magazine (many of whose stories and interviews ought to be anthologized). During World War II, working under cover in Paris for the Free French, Charles was picked up by the Gestapo and taken in for interrogation. As the questioning was about to start, an SS officer looked hard at Delaunay and referred accusingly to a Fletcher Henderson record from the 1920s. “You didn’t have all the right personnel on that date,” he said to Charles. Delaunay was not held for long.

However, if any jazz person ends up in a tough spot with the secret police in Zimbabwe, China or Cuba, he or she oughtn’t count on the jazz family ties being that helpful again. But those ties can be powerful. Jo Jones told me of a legendary Kansas City drummer, Baby Lovett, who, when his wife died, grieved so hard that he stayed home and stopped functioning. Jo canceled all of his gigs for a month, flew back to Kansas City, moved in with Baby Lovett and brought him back to life.

The music becomes a deep, regenerating part of the lives of all of us who can’t stop listening to this family.

4 | Beyond the Process

The only negative review I’ve seen so far of my book *American Music Is* (Da Capo, 2004) was by Don Heckman in the July 4, 2004, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. He titled it “Grabbing Music by the Tale.” I’m grateful because Heckman got exactly right why I have presumed, all of these years, to write about this music that never ceases to be a large part of my life.

“More often,” Heckman wrote, summing up the book, “Hentoff’s worthy perceptions are swallowed up in his emphasis on the personality of the artist rather than on the process. . . . Lost along the way are the musically knowledgeable insights that gave such credibility to his early influential writing about jazz.”

Actually, from the beginning, my emphasis has been on the person rather than the process. I began a 1961 book, *The Jazz Life* (reprinted in 1975 by Da Capo), with what W. H. Auden said of music in “In Praise of Limestone”: “It can be made anywhere, is invisible, and does not smell.”

But, I wrote under that epigraph: “Music is made by men who are insistently visible, especially as in jazz, when the players are their music. . . . Through telling something of where they came from and how they live, I hope their music, too, has become less disembodied.”

In truth, although I studied harmony briefly and clarinet much longer before I began writing about the music, I'm not at all qualified to analyze "the process" as, for example, Gunther Schuller does so impressively. Yet as Gunther reminded me recently, when Thelonious Monk first began to record, a number of critics very knowledgeable about "the process" largely regarded him as exotic, hard to label and difficult. But in *Down Beat*, where I wrote many of the record reviews, I kept trying to indicate how joyously and challengingly original he was as a pianist and composer.

I heard Monk in clubs but also got to know him—as well as his wife, Nellie, so essential to his life, and therefore his music—in his apartment. Monk, usually known for his silences, would speak to me at length about where he came from and where he wanted to go in his life and music. In writing about what he said, I think I may have helped listeners go more deeply into the music. And, as Gunther noted, I helped Monk's record sales.

Still, I sometimes felt fraudulent because I couldn't describe what chords or inversions someone was playing. This disquiet intensified one day when my younger daughter, beginning a professional career as a pianist and composer, said accusingly: "How can you dare affect the income of a musician when you give him bad reviews since you can't say technically what you think he's doing wrong?"

Brooding about this while walking on the street one day, I saw Gil Evans coming toward me. I'd known him since interviewing him when he was arranging for Claude Thornhill. I decided to make Gil my rabbi, and told him what my daughter had said.

"I've been reading you for years," Gil began, "so I know what you listen to and how you listen. I also know musicians who can tell technically everything that's going on in a performance, but they don't get into where this music is coming from inside the musician—the story he wants to tell. You can do that some of the time. Stop worrying."

I didn't stop worrying, but I felt better. And I remembered when I was not yet 20 and plunged into Beethoven's late quartets, I was also reading about the discords in his life. I couldn't tell you then, or now, about the "process" of that galvanizing music, but knowing something of the life that Beethoven was impelled to put into his music deepened what I got out of it for my life.

As I've written before, John Coltrane would ask me not to write the liner notes for his albums because, he'd say, "If the music can't speak for itself, what's the use?" But since he was a kind man and knew I had this gig, he'd talk at length with me for the notes. He never got into "the process." Instead, he spoke of his constant search for meaning, for connections between his life and the cosmos. And about how widely he listened to all kinds of music of other cultures to expand his horizons.

That's what I wrote about Coltrane—not about "the process."

Also, as a writer on this music, I'm indebted to Don Ayler for what he told me long ago: "Become part of the whole. Don't fix on the parts: the chords, the rhythms, the timbres." And Duke Ellington: "I don't want people listening to how my music is made. I want them to open themselves as they hear it."

I've written about Duke a lot, including what he told me about being a black man in America. All he'd tell me about "the process" was how he wrote the parts for each person in the orchestra. "I know their strengths," he'd say. I do not in the least undervalue those who write about "the process." Within my limited capacity in that regard, I learn from them. But if my work is to have any value, it comes from what Charlie Parker said: "Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn."

What I keep trying to do is learn and write about those lives because they're in the music. Gary Giddins once accurately and generously characterized what I do. He said I'm "a chronicler." Critics who can authentically describe the structure of the music know more about "the process" than I do. I want to know the musicians, and my life is fuller for having known so many. Duke said in one of his songs, "What am I here for?" I can answer that.

5 | Playing Changes on Jazz Interviews

I expect that if anything I've written about this music lasts, it will be the interviews I've done with the musicians for more than fifty years. My books on jazz consist mainly of interviews, as do the liner notes I've written. My hope is that some of them become part of jazz histories. And I learn a great deal from interviews done by others—particularly by the actual makers of this music.

For example, the late Art Taylor, an extraordinary drummer, wrote a book, *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (Da Capo, 2004). The late tenor saxophonist Don Byas (much underestimated, these days) told Taylor of advice from his friend Art Tatum. Tatum said to Byas: "Just remember there is no such thing as a wrong note; what makes it wrong is when you don't know where to go after that one."

I was reminded of that after a recording session I'd made with Coleman Hawkins and Pee Wee Russell. Hawkins, pointing to Pee Wee, said to me: "Way back, musicians used to say he played weird, funny notes. They weren't funny or weird then, and they're not now. He makes them the right notes."

And Dizzy Gillespie told Art Taylor that he once rebuked drummer Teddy Stewart, telling him: "You're supposed to inspire the soloist." Unintimidated, Stewart told Dizzy: "Have you ever thought that the soloist is supposed to inspire me?"

"It's true," Dizzy told interviewer Taylor.

Currently, some of the most extensive and durably illuminating interviews are by Eric Nemeyer, a vibist, marimba player, drummer, pianist and composer who has worked with Sonny Stitt, Jon Faddis, Jimmy Heath and many more. He also publishes the quarterly *Jazz Improv Magazine* and its valuable monthly, *Jazz Improv's New York Jazz Guide*. Among his interviews in both magazines was one with Wynton Marsalis in which Marsalis defined the rare essence of enduring teaching—not only teaching jazz. (I wish I'd had it in mind when I used to teach journalism.)

Marsalis, who has had private students and is a veteran of many clinics, told Nemeyer: “The most important thing you can do is to empower another person to be themselves—even if what they're going to do is going to be the opposite of what you do . . . you don't want to teach them a dogma . . . you're a part of their story. A lot of times you [as a teacher] look at them as if they're a part of your story. You [should] try to empower them with tools to do what they want to do.”

And in *Jazz Improv Magazine*, there was a very long, absorbing interview with bassist Buster Williams, about whom Richard Cook says in his *Jazz Encyclopedia* (Penguin, 2007) that he tends to make every performance a matchless master class. Said Williams: “A piece of music is alive. It's a misnomer to limit yourself by saying it has a beginning and an end. . . .

“Benny Golson has rewritten ‘I Remember Clifford’ many times. I've played it with him over the years in all its different forms. And Wayne Shorter says a piece of music never ends.”

Or, as Clark Terry told me about Duke Ellington: “He wants life and music to be always in a state of becoming. He doesn't even like definitive song endings to a piece. He'd often ask us to come up with the ideas for closings, but when he'd settled on one of them, he'd keep fooling with it. He always likes to make the end of a song sound as if it's still going somewhere.”

The late Whitney Balliett, a writer on jazz, was known internationally for his ability to transmute seamlessly the sounds of music into words. (It's inexplicable that *New Yorker* editor David Remnick, a superior journalist, effectively banished Whitney from the magazine. The publication's legendary editor William Shawn knew better, but he played jazz piano.)

Balliett was an attentively skillful interviewer, as in his profile of Pee Wee Russell. There were nights when Russell was the most original improviser in jazz, so much so that his colleagues on the stand would wonder how he could possibly come up with anything like a logical ending to one of his solos. I knew Russell, but in our conversations I never found out what was in his mind during those perilous journeys. Whitney was able to do so.

“You take each solo,” Russell told him, “like it was the last one you were going to play in your life. Sometimes I jump the right chord and use what seems wrong to the next guy, but I know is right for me. I usually think about four bars ahead

what I'm going to play. Sometimes things go wrong and I have to scramble, but if I can make it to the bridge of the tune, I know everything will be all right." Then the clarinetist made a statement that was, for me, very illuminating: "In lots of cases, your solo depends on who you're following. The guy played a great chorus . . . [and you think,] how am I going to follow that? Not jealousy, mind you. A kind of competition. . . . What the hell? I'll try something new. All this goes through your mind in a split second. You start and if it sounds good to you, you keep it up and write a little tune of your own."

Of all the interviews with musicians that I've done, there is one with Duke Ellington that has been a guide for me, not only in writing about music but in everything else I write and do. Ellington taught me to avoid categorizing anything:

"The other night I heard a cat on the radio, and he was talking about 'modern' jazz. So he played a record to illustrate his point, and there were devices in that music I heard cats using in the 1920s. These large words like 'modern' don't mean anything. Everybody who's had anything to say in this music—all the way back—has been an individualist . . . I listen for those individualists. Like Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins and like Charlie Parker was."

As I've told my children, who are now no longer children, I've learned a lot from talking to jazz musicians about life, which is where their music came from.