



James Maher

Location: N/A

Date: March 21, 1996

Why Goodman was great...?

Well, the thing about Benny that was so great was that it was kind of an explosion in a way. He showed up on the scene, completely unknown as far as we were concerned. We knew Ellington, we knew all the other big names and here was this kid nobody had ever heard of. And overnight, this guy walks into the American parlor with jazz by the scruff of its neck. And all of a sudden, jazz which was almost a cult music has become American popular music. And that's what Goodman did.

Where did you meet him?

Oh I met him accidentally in the late 1930s at Valley Dale Ballroom in Columbus. But then later on I met him personally and spent a wonderful evening with him over dinner at some friend's apartment.

Benny, he was a person, basically as I recall him who was kind of a reticent. Very friendly and lots of fun for me to be with but he had certain reservations, certain limitations beyond which no one ever went and no one was ever going to go, no doubt about that. And he, I found him very open, very friendly, we had an unusual connection because it was the clarinet and clarinet music. That's what bound us together.

Well there was a problem when Benny was first rehearsing and trying out different people and then finally he began to go a little bit with the Let's Dance Show and then got the Victor record contract. John Hammond, his brother-in-law by that time, I think, yes, John used to show up at rehearsals and John was a natural-born scout, he was always on the lookout. Wherever John showed up at rehearsals somebody would, "Oh my God, here comes the undertaker." Then you'd know that John, last night, somewhere found a guy

that Benny has to get. He's absolutely the greatest. He's on bass. There's nobody like him. Boom. And that was the way it was.

Goodman would continually fire people.

Well he was not continually firing people, it was gradually building a stronger and stronger orchestra. It was not firing individuals, it was finding, well Ellington did the same thing. You had to find the right men for your concept of what the music was going to be and who would fit in best.

Hiring and firing.

There was a problem on the hiring and firing and that was that Benny would make up his mind; he wanted you on guitar. I'm playing guitar, I've got a contract. Now I can remember one time at a theater in Chicago for example, he brought in a new guitar player. I had to sit in the wings for two weeks. I had to show up because that was in the contract, but he had to give me two weeks notice. And I'm just sitting there every day in the band, the guys are walking by me, you know, and that was it.

Charlie Christian.

Charlie was really snuck in by John Hammond. Just, it's a crazy story about, they had heard Charlie, in first of all in it was in Oklahoma. And there were a number of jazz people who had heard him, off and on including a marvelous guitar player, Murray Osborn and Ralph Ellison had heard him and other people. Well, John decided that Benny should have Charlie Christian in the band. He didn't care that it meant firing somebody. So one night at Ciro's in Los Angeles, Benny said, "No, no, no." Benny comes out on the stand and there's Charlie Christian sitting there and John has smuggled him in. Well from that moment on, you know, it just simply took off.

Teddy Wilson.

No, Teddy was a studied entry and the amazing thing about Teddy's coming into the band to me, looking back is that, course John Hammond got all the credit, you know, for bringing him in, not really accurate in that sense. I mean, after all, Benny knew Teddy's playing, they had played together at Red Norvo and Mildred Bailey's house out in Forest Hills but there was a hell of a problem when Teddy finally showed up in Chicago to play with Benny Goodman. Now, here's the hotel, here's a payroll of about fourteen, sixteen people every week. Benny's up against the wall. If the hotel management comes and says, "Look, no black people in this band." And he's hired them and he wants to use them, what's he gonna do about that payroll? Now Helen Oakley, who later married Stanley Dance and Helen was very knowledgeable about jazz and about jazz musicians and so on. It was actually Helen's idea to put Teddy in at intermission but not just as an intermission pianist but to have Gene Krupa come down on drums and Benny

come in with his clarinet and you had to, the beginning of the Benny Goodman trio at the Congress Hotel. And you can thank Helen for that very clever way of handling a problem.

First integrated jazz music.

Benny deserves a lot of credit for doing that because there were integrated bands as early as Jelly Roll Morton recording with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. You had integration. Of a sort, I mean it's in the studio. Nobody knows the difference, they can't see it. Now, the other thing was that by that time, black and white musicians were fraternizing and had been for a long time. They'd go into midnight jam sessions together and sit until two, three in the morning but what Goodman did, he put Teddy Wilson in show biz, right smack in the middle of the entertainment business and that was a risk.

Gene Krupa was somebody Goodman favored a lot.

Benny, until the day he died was fighting with everybody about Krupa because Krupa had been criticized again and again and again, unfairly, I think. Because, the question is, how well you play, not in your own room, not down at the corner, but in a given musical situation. Benny liked Krupa. There was one thing I can remember one time at lunch saying to Benny, "I know why you like Gene, I mean why you've always stuck up for him. Because no matter where you flew in a chorus, on one, Gene was right there every time," and I said, "he was your safety net." And Benny just looked at me and raised his eyebrows and said, "Hmm." But he loved Gene.

"Let's Dance" and how he started.

Pure chance. On the Let's Dance show, it was pure luck. Benny had a band in Billy Rose's music hall in the summer of 1934. It's a long story, I won't go into it about how he got the job. Because he had to rehearse a band and get it into Billy Rose Music Hall which was an extraordinary Broadway restaurant. It had been a theater and it was kind of an enormous vaudeville show, nightclub. So Benny comes in and the one of the dumb things they did was, Benny conducted the show. And I think one of the funniest lines I ever heard in my life was when they complained to him, the vaudevillians and the dancers and so on that he was really no support. Benny said, "Well, I thought they were supposed to follow me." And they brought in Lou Forman from the Palace who knew that what the conductor in the pit band did with dancers and vaudevillians, you went with them and you slowed down, you picked up, you fitted and so on. So anyway, Gerry Arland, Harry Arland's kid brother had the other band, so on from the second night on Gerry was the house band with Lou Forman conducting for the vaudeville show. Now this was a pretty piece of business because Benny had to put a band together and Benny didn't have a book, he didn't have any arrangements. He knew everybody. But I can remember Red Norvo telling about he and Mildred Bailey would go because they were all buddies, to hear the band. And then

afterwards they would walk down the street. And this could be in the middle of the night or the middle of the day, they're walking down Broadway and Benny runs into you and says, "Hey, you got any arrangements I can use? Can we trade some arrangements?" And so on. He was scuffling all the time for arrangements so it was not, it wasn't easy. And the band became really quite good in a in a couple of months. Then came the end, when Billy Rose went off to Europe to organize new acts out of European circuses and vaudeville and bring them into New York. While he's away, the people who owned the place, they were all syndicate people, all hoods, decided that it was all over for Goodman and ultimately it was all over for Rose. And Benny used to have a smartass little trick of he'd wave a pink slip in front of the band and say, "We're through. We're through." Then one night, he had the pink slip and nobody was really ready to believe him. But they had a lot of fun that summer. It was new. It was fresh. They were trying things and the thing that happened was the last night of the Billy Rose engagement, a man came in from an advertising agency and heard Benny and invited him to audition for an extraordinary thing that nobody had ever tried - a three hour radio show entirely made up of music. And when? On Saturday night. Boy, what a break, you know. Now, Benny was

Start with the final night.

Well the odd thing that I've known at final night which was pure luck is that two people came in from an advertising agency. The man in charge of a new program that they were talking about it. It was in the talking stage and his wife and a young woman who was an account executive named Dorothy Barstow. And they went in and listened to Benny and he had about 12 or 14 good arrangements and when he'd gotten through them he didn't know what the hell to do. So the set was over and he went down and started talking to them and they went home. He didn't have that many good arrangements. They get out on the street and Joe Boneim, who incidentally had been a classical pianist in charge of the music, they were walking down the street and he said to her, "Well, what can I invite Benny?" And she looked at him and she said, "Why not?" So they invited him to audition and he won the audition for the hot band on this Saturday night show.

The arrangements that Benny had. How did he come to have all those Fletcher Henderson ones?

Well, then what happened when he got on the Let's Dance Show was that there was a budget for arrangements which completely changed the whole picture. So there was a man named Lyle Murphy, Spud Murphy who became the staff arranger, more or less and Spud did about 52 arrangements for Benny and they were awfully good. He'd arranged for Casa Loma and Mal Allen. But one night, Mildred said to Red, I I mean Mildred said to Benny. Red was there and told me this story later that, she said, "Benny the band sounds just great. One problem -- it sounds like everybody else. Just sounds like a good band. You've got to have a personal identity." And she said to him out

of the blue, "Why don't you get a Harlem book?" Well John is standing there, John Hammond and he's in on this conversation. He had the access and he knew immediately what to do. He went and got Fletcher Henderson. And brought Fletcher in because he had recorded him and worked with him and knew him well. Well Fletcher coming in changed really the history of jazz in the sense that what Fletcher did that was so great, of course there were these marvelous arrangements, some of them originals that were, well, you know, they were part of the iconography of swing music and but the strange thing that happened was both Spud and Fletcher started writing arrangements of popular tunes of the day that we all knew, that we whistled, that we sang in the shower generally and had a lot of fun with. So that this was our language. It was not an esoteric language being played by six guys in a cellar somewhere. This was popular music. And I must insist on something if I may sneak it in here. As far as I'm concerned, song is the windchime of memory and these were our songs. They were part of the daily ordinary and this I think is what took Benny over the gap, out of jazz, into the American parlor. He arrived with "Blue Skies." Well we knew "Blue Skies." I mean everybody knew Irving Berlin so that we were home free. This is our guy.

You said there was a secret as to why Benny Goodman, the band was a success at the Palomar.

Well, I'll tell you what happened was by my own research, not talking to Benny or anybody else but I discovered in looking at West Coast record sales 'cause there were two or three recordings that Benny had made at the time he was at the Music Hall in the previous summer that were absolutely selling beautifully on the West Coast. Nobody knows why, to this day, but something was going on. Plus the fact that the the last half hour of the Let's Dance Program of course was on Pacific Time and you heard, I think Benny may have been the last band of the evening to play. The thing was structured so complicated way that I'm not going to go into it. It would take two days.

What happened at the Palomar?

Well apparently what happened at the Palomar -- Jack Glasey told me that, the trombone player, that it was Bunny Barigan who at one point when they'd run through like two sets of stock arrangements. Bunny more or less said, "Well Benny, what the hell? Let's go bro go for broke, more or less and do the Fletcher Henderson stuff and the best Spud Murphy." And they took off and I'll tell you those Los Angeles musicians went right through the roof.

Late Life concert that Benny Goodman held at Carnegie Hall with Louis Armstrong.

No, he didn't talk to me about the concert, but I was at the rehearsals and I was quite aware of the problems between Louis and Benny. Also, I wrote the

press book for the tours so I pretty well knew what was going on. Went to rehearsals and so on. There was a great deal of difficulty. I don't know how it got started, what the roots were. But certain people pushed it to the limit so that there was, when there was a little bit of anger, somebody was there, you know, throwing a little kerosene on the fire.

Let's look at it carefully.

I don't recall that there were fireworks at the rehearsals, but Benny had his way of doing things and Louis, he had his way of doing things. And the two of them, occasionally would conflict. And I can remember for example, Benny, you know, was very staid, really, despite the fact that this music is exploding all over the place. Like at Carnegie Hall, Louis comes on stage and he tells a story, it's an off-color story which I won't go into but all of a sudden, here's a Benny Goodman audience really filling Carnegie Hall and you can almost hear people going, "Aah." They're not that shocked but it's a matter of something's going on here that just doesn't fit. Well, Louis loved this story. He had a good time. Velma Middleton loved this story. Everybody in the band thought it was fun. Benny didn't like it one bit. And there were problems of that sort and also problems with the the, what do I want to say about the management problems? Well, Benny's getting all the play, Louis's not getting enough. They accused me in the press book about writing the best things about Goodman which was absolutely nonsense. The longest story was about Louis and so on.

John Hammond. Benny's wife, Madam Dufarge.

Well that was Alec Wilder's little bit of japerie, he's a very woody guy. Alice used to go down to the Stabler when Benny was there and she would come in and have a table off the corner of the band stand but right up close and sit there and knit. And Alec Wilder used to call Madam Dufarge and, because when Alice came in, Benny would get nervous and the whole band would get nervous. So, they didn't like to see her coming.

No, I don't think there were any other reasons other than, Alice was there and that was it.

John Hammond

John Hammond was the great great grandson, or son of Commodore Vanderbilt . His mother was a Sloan. A great grandchild of the Commodore. His father was a very successful, lawyer in New York, corporate law and so on. John came from a well-favored world. John introduced Benny into the beautiful house with the French furniture and the gorgeous decoration and so forth and so on. This is a new world, a new life. And Benny moved in very comfortably because this was upscale and Benny was ambitious. And Benny, the other things that he did, was you talk about protective coloration, of

fitting into a situation. Alice was rather famous, even in the family, for her what we used locust valley lockjaw, you know talking terribly WASP. Sort of locust valley lockjaw, well, first thing you knew, Benny who always talked black jazz lingo, so to speak, all of a sudden Benny's diction is changing, his whole manner is changing and so on. And Benny Benny fitted very well. I think he, happily so.

Well Benny was a tremendous influence on John's life, of course. He moved into the family and John was a tremendous influence on Benny. The strange thing that happened was from the moment that Benny and Alice got together and ultimately married, they never stopped fighting. Benny and John. It just went on and on and on. And I would have lunch with Benny, "How's John? How's he treating you these days? Well, has he said anything lately?" John, "What's Benny doing? Have you seen him lately? Is he still mad at me?" This just went on and on and on for years. They were friends at the time of Benny's death. They were in accord for a change.

Well, of course what happened with Benny, he became very successful and he moved into the big money. He sold a lot of records, he's on one radio show after another, making a lot of money and the story was when he was down at the New Yorker hotel, he became famous as the man who gave the Indian on the buffalo nickel a headache from squeezing nickels. That's all he would ever pass on to anybody, but he'd always wait. Well, he was pretty pretty tough about money. Very tight-fisted. He'd pay well when he had to but by and large he he squeezed it pretty tight.

Back to John Hammond.

John grew up in a very, what do I want to say? A family with deep conscience of social consciousness. His mother was quite religious and it carried over into John and he did some absolutely marvelous things. Let me start with one point. It was John who, when he came back from England and had arranged for some record contracts, the first thing that he did was to get ahold of Fletcher Henderson and give the band some recording dates and I'd say John more than any person in the white world at that time in music pushed the chances for the black musicians to get more and more work. Also, John went down and covered the Scottsboro trial for the nation. Well, I don't know what the Nation paid John. Maybe his gasoline, there's that. But I remember when Kenneth Clark spoke at his memorial service Kenneth went down, all of the wonderful things that he'd done including the fact that ultimately he was on the board of the NAACP and John was very devoted and worked very very hard to try to set aside the endless historical abuses on the black folks.

Well, there's a problem for me with John and jazz history because you had the things that happened and it seemed that John was always there. But then what you had was his interpretation, what we used to call the Gospel according to John. And you talked to the musician and you'd get a slightly different story. I think for example to cite go back to Let's Dance for

a minute. I think to this day most people think John Hammond got him on the Let's Dance Show. John had absolutely nothing to do with it. And I'll jump ahead to the very famous Bessie Smith album that Columbia records did. Chris Albertson did that album and to this day most people think it was John Hammond's product. Chris did the research, the programming and of course he wrote a great biography of Bessie.

How was Hammond involved with Billie Holiday?

Well what happened was when Billie got that job, Billie uh Hammond, I'd like to back up.....let me start over again.....John used to go up to Harlem and hang around and listen to the bands and he'd go into small places and listen to the jam sessions and to the larger bands and so on. At some point, John made a contact with a teenage kid named Billie Holiday. Now, John never gave Mildred Bailey credit for telling him, "John there's this kid up in Harlem you've gotta hear." To the day he died, John would never do that. He would never give Millie, Mildred, excuse me, any credit for the idea of getting a Harlem book. That was the Gospel according to John. It was what John did and other people got shunted to one side. When Billie finally got a job, a wonderful contract, she thought it was a break with Artie Shaw. I think she went up to Boston if I recall correctly. Well, she's going to get on the bus or train or whatever, she'd need some gowns. She didn't have any money so she goes to John and borrows a couple of hundred bucks and she got the gowns, got up there and so on. One night Mildred gets a call, it's from Billie and Billie's saying, "For God's sakes, Mildred, will you get John off my back? I'm going to pay him back but it's only been three weeks. I haven't saved that much yet." Well, it was that kind of thing that could happen to you. There was generosity but there was something else going on.

Swing bands.

The swing era did not start overnight despite the fact they like to take the Let's Dance program as the beginning of the swing era. I'd like to go back two winters earlier to the Chipso and Crisco shows that were on national networks. The Mills brothers had the show, granted it was their show, but Don Redman had the band. Now Don didn't have a band, but this contract came up and he took Horace Henderson's band over and went into the studios. Here you have Horace Henderson and Don Redman two excellent arrangers with probably a very good band coast to coast on a network program that's highly advertised and promoted. Next year you go to, finally, an even bigger breakthrough 'cause it focused entirely on the band was when Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra got to hear Camel Caravan. Now, why didn't they make that connection? Well, I think the reason for that is because the three hour show on Saturday night in all four time zones was really a freak. It opened up Saturday night radio and it was the depression. You weren't out on the town, you were sitting home. You didn't have any money and in comes three hours of music on Saturday night, so this is one

element of it that I think is terribly important historically is that set of conditions. It was free amongst other things.

The Casa Loma band was probably the first successful big white swing band. The reason for its success was an extraordinary arranger named Gene Gifford who was their guitar player. Gifford wrote arrangements that were later on there was a touch of what we came to call Flag waver in them. They were busy, they were driving, they were hard. Now, he was a very good orchestrator and the band was one of those bands that played with exceptional precision. And the tendency of the critics was to say that they're stiff. I went to hear the Casa Loma orchestra. They weren't stiff at all. They played their own kind of music brilliantly and they caught on very quickly with the young people. Some people like to say it was the college kids. I like to think it was us high school kids who really made the Casa Loma band because they were by the thousands, we were by the millions, you know. And we listened to Casa Loma all the time. But Gene Gifford is the guy who really created the sound of that band. And he could also write exceptionally beautiful ballads and ballad type of music. The them song, "Smoke Rings". There wasn't a prettier song in the whole swing era than "Smoke Rings."

One of the reasons that Goodman was so successful almost right from the beginning was he had a marvelous ear for the band. For the total sound. Now the band was famous for its precision in intonation and execution, in time values. If there, if Fletcher Henderson had written a triplet, you got an even triplet. Now Fletcher went absolutely nuts about this band. And he'd hang around while he con, you know, he would rehearse the band in the new arrangements and a little like an old fashioned school teacher dipping his knees, you know, one, two and so on and the guys loved but they loved him and they loved the orchestrations that he was writing and he'd write beautiful things like "Sometimes I'm Happy" which is a landmark of slow, even, and the saxophone section on that is historic. And then turn right around and write an up tempo thing. And frequently Horace would come in and do some of the brass parts for Fletcher. But it was that precision that gave Fletcher such a boost, such a kick. Now which is not to say that his own orchestra at Roseland was not a hell of a good orchestra, it was a different world of music.

Well what happened was that, a good example of Fletcher's happiness with that band was that Toots Mondelo, the lead alto, was a very busy studio player. He wanted to stay in New York. Benny wanted to go on the road. MCA wanted him to go on the road for the first time and it's Cuerrero with this big band. Fletcher chased Toots Mondelo all over the studio at a recording session one day, cornered him against the wall and pleaded with him not to go. Toots didn't go.

Contempt against dance music.

Basically for a long time as I recall it and as I look back to a fairly long distance, the attitude of the people.

You were starting to tell me how there were folks called jazz knicks who criticized and had a lot of contempt for the dance bands.

One of the very peculiar things about falling in love with jazz is that you accidentally joined a cult whether you liked it or not. And sooner or later you became acquainted with other zealots who I call jazznicks for want of a better word. And of course they are instantly telling you that all the people you don't that you like and admire, they all stink. They don't play jazz, see. So, you have this cult problem to deal with. And it went on and on and on and still goes on through the history of jazz that I know what jazz is. You don't know what jazz is. Frank Tishmarker played jazz, clarinet. Benny Goodman never played a note of jazz in his life. It's almost like Jelly Roll Morton saying about Duke Ellington at the, you know, at the Key Barn. He sounded like a lady piano teacher. Everybody had their own opinions. Very fragmented and jazz spread all over the horizon. If anything about jazz has remained historically true, it is the variety, the limitless variety of the types of music that come in under this big umbrella. Jazz.

Paul Whiteman.

Should I start with the beginning? In 1927? I think it was in the summer of 1927, I had an extraordinary experience. It was like a little epiphany for me. My mother and I went to visit a family that were friends of ours. This man who was a publisher and successful. So, before, I loved to listen to my mother talking to him about Joseph Hergersheimer and all the new novels of the writers and so on. But before the evening ended, he said, "Oh, I've got this recording I want you to hear." Well, what he did, he put on a Paul Whiteman twelve inch recording of *When Day is Done*. Well, I tell you, the ears went out, you know, because here you have Henry Bussies famous little cornet solo. I don't care whether you think it's jazz or not, at that moment, in 1927, let's see his fifteen year old kid is absolutely startled. But there was something mysterious going on and you know, it wasn't until about twenty years later I finally figured it out. In the background, Steve Brown is playing bass fiddle like no one has ever played it before in the Whiteman menage. In that world of quote Jazz unquote. Now, Whiteman, I think it was in the 1950s called me up one day. We had lunch and he invited me to write his biography. I thought, "Well, this is great." You know, Paul Whiteman and so on. We had lunch and talked. Well, I had my ideas and he had his ideas. One of the first things he told me was I said, "I'll need some money to go traveling." And, "Why you have to do that?" I I you know, he's willing to put up the money. I said, "Well, I have to go talk to Ferde Grofe." He said, "Why do you have to see Grofey for? I can tell you everything about Grofey that you want to know." He had these pronunciations like, Bussie was Buzzie, Grofe was Grofey. Well, next time we had lunch, I bring up Grofe again. "I'll tell you all about Grofey." And the third time we had lunch, he was sick of it

at that point and kind of cut it off. Now, I want to jump ahead a couple of years later.

I want to jump back.

Okay fine. Well what happened was that the first time that Paul Whiteman ever heard of what anybody would call jazz, was at a little dance joint on the Barbary Coast in San Francisco. Absolutely knocked him out. It was so raucous. It was so driving. It was so much fun. He got up that morning with the blues. He went home that night feeling floating, you know, and had a great time. Now, his way of thinking because of his training, his background, his father is a music educator, playing viola in a symphony orchestra. Immediately, he is thinking not about playing it that way but about converting it his way. Well did I think this is very natural for a trained musician to start thinking, "What can we do to take this and quote make it into a lady," so to speak. Well, this took Whiteman down a thorny path because he was enormously successful. Whiteman not only opened the world up for what was labeled, in a nasty way, symphonic jazz, or whatever you want to call it. He made a lot of money. He was extremely successful and he then became a target for the jazznicks. For one thing, it isn't jazz. It's crap; it stinks; it's awful. He never played a note of jazz in his on and on and on. He is attacked year after year after year. All through the years. Finally, say about fifteen years or so ago, Gunther Schuller got sick of the whole thing and began to point out, "Let's listen to what this man did." Now, at one of my lunches I remember talking to Whiteman about Beiderbeck. Well, all of a sudden, he's talking about Beiderbeck so knowledgeably about the man and his music and his feeling about music, I thought, "He's not supposed to know this according to all his jazz writers, he's an idiot. He doesn't know anything about Beiderbeck. When he hired Jack Teagarden and the other jazz guys, Frankie Trumbauer, he didn't know what the hell he was buying." Well, I tell you, in ten minutes, my he just absolutely changed everything. He told me a story, for example, about Beiderbeck that's never been told. He said, "Bix was a gentleman." I said, "A gentleman? Okay." He said, "Well, this is what I mean." He was talking about an arrangement probably by Bill Challis where when he's finished with what is an exceptional jazz solo, the big band comes back in, the strings and everything and it's very stiff." And Bix came to him one day and said to him, "You know, I don't like that, the way those fellas don't sound as good as they should sound." He brought in a little two bar interlude to be orchestrated to get from him back into the big orchestration again. And I thought, "This is terrific," you know. So, of course he knew what was going on. Well, meantime, jazz is being exgloriated from the pulpit, from editorials, from the police, from educators, it's filthy, it's corrupting the morals of the country. It's ruining the young. We gotta do something about it. Well, who's the target? Paul Whiteman, he's right in the middle of it. And and when he wrote the book Jazz it was published in 1925 actually Mary Margaret McBride a very good journalist wrote it but there's a sentence in it where he says, "It's such a relief to be able to say, 'I didn't invent jazz. All I did was to try to orchestrate it.'" And he said, "I wish that the people would

get out of the pulpit that the lady klans, spelled with a small k, klans, would stop tearing me to shreds." Now, the odd thing about it was that Gunther Schuller, and other people, Dick Sardonner and others, Maurice Perez were successful in making us relisten to Whiteman in concerts and in what he was doing. Now, about two years ago, there was a book published by a professional historian, a man experienced in writing American history. So what does he do? He goes back and he attacks Whiteman all over again for saying that in this book, Jazz, that was published in 1925, that Whiteman never once mentioned black people or black music. Now, I'm going to take a little chance here and just snitch a sentence in. The opening sentence of the book, Jazz, reads, "Jazz came to America three hundred years ago in chains. But this priceless freight destined three centuries later to set a whole nation dancing went unnoticed and unbilled by the stolid revenue hungry Dutchmen who were sailing the slaveship." I say, that's a pretty damn good declaration of where our American jazz came from.

But he was still accused of being racist, wasn't he?

He was accused in the middle, 1920s of being in a dance magazine where there was a guy who wrote a monthly column with an anonymous little name that he used, you see. S and so it's said that he was a, more or less, that Whiteman is a black racist. You know, bing, like that. Fifty years later, forty years later, you pick up Duke Ellington's memoirs, Music is my Mistress and Duke is telling you about how night after night down in this little joint, The Kentucky Club just off Times Square, he'd look up, in would come Paul Whiteman and three or four guys from the band from the Palais Royale. Now they'd just finished an evening with the carriage trade and they come down here and then, you know, the drinks start to flow and it would go 'til four o'clock in the morning and they had an absolute ball and he loved Ellington. So what would he do? Before he left according to Duke, he'd walk up and he'd put a fifty dollar bill down on the top of piano. 1927 fifty dollar bill. We're talking a thousand dollars maybe. Now, the other thing that tickled me was years later one time, asking Duke about this, he said, "One night it was a hundred." So that taught me a lesson about this guy's, "Anti-black racist," what the hell was that all about?

Two worlds of jazz.

There were two worlds of jazz in this sense: there was the world of the musician and there was the world of the writer, observer, critic. The writer, observer, critic frequently is defining jazz, telling the musician what he could play, what he couldn't play or should play, or shouldn't play. These were the people who established what is the canon of jazz. And the some, you've got to be careful here because a lot of the writers were very good writers, but by and large you had this kind of fan magazine mentality writing most of the jazz material and a lot of real good writers, I won't go into that, but anyway they were they were excellent but for the most part, you had a band of fan

magazine enthusiasts who are creating the canon of what jazz is, what it isn't, who's good, who's bad, who's a hero, who's a bum, so forth and so on. This always bothered me very deeply. I I'd loved the world of the musician. I'd loved to hang around with the musicians. Talk to them, listen to them. I mean if one of them invited me to come home, that'd be wonderful. But I wouldn't dare tell a jazznick that the reason Jimmy Archie invited me to come out to his house was to hear Andre Cassalana's records. You wouldn't absolutely dare to do that, you know.

What are we talking about when you say these critics established these two worlds?

It starts pretty much right at the beginning. It takes off really in the 1930s when the first books on jazz by American writers are being published and then it gets worse and worse as time goes by from my point of view, from a historical point of view.

Tell me what it is and what it is you're talking about.

My experience, listening to jazz is that there were essentially two worlds. The world of the writer and the world of the musician. Now, of course I come in through the world of the musician. And as time went by, I began to get acquainted with the writing of the jazznick types who were really fan magazine types of writers. The prose was pretty awful, most of it, but they had opinions and by gosh they laid those opinions on you like shackles. So you grew up with an already established canon. This guy's great, this guy's no good, here we go again. A splitting up. And I don't th, I often wondered, musicians going through the years reading this stuff must have felt they were absolutely lost in a wilderness.

White folks and King Oliver.

One of the great early centers of jazz was the south side of Chicago and that was the world of Black people and black musicians for the most part. Now, we've heard all these stories over the years of the white musicians, the young white musicians going down to the south side to listen to Joe Oliver with Louis Armstrong on second cornet. Well the thing of it was it was always so amusing was somebody telling you, well, when we would walk in, the man at the doorman would say to you, "What, you white kids are down here for your lessons?" But the peculiar part is there developed a kind of what I call a lonely pilgrim syndrome of the guy, the white man who's all by himself. They never told you that once you got inside there were a hundred and fifty white couples dancing every night. They never told you, for example, that Isham Jones who was the most popular dance orchestra in Chicago insisted that his musicians go down and listen to Joe Oliver and the kind of music he's playing and what he's doing. Art Landry brings his first band into the Majestic in Chicago, goes to hear Isham Jones at the Sherman, and said, says, introduces himself. Isham says, "Go down and listen to Joe Oliver, if you

want to listen to great dance music and where it's going." Now, one of the great shocks of my personal life was a man who's quite a bit older than me, he had a cardiac problem. I went to visit him in the hospital. All of a sudden he's telling me about he grew in Chicago and about dancing on the south side. And I said, "To whom?" And he said, "Joe Oliver." I said, "You were a white high school kid and you went, took your girl?" "Oh, absolutely, you never heard such beautiful music. He would play seven, eight, nine minutes of a gorgeous tune, a waltz, a ballad." I was absolutely breathtaken. This does not fit into the jazz canon. But it was true, Joe Oliver was just one hell of a dance band and that was it.

Racial politics in terms of writing and two worlds.

I think that the first American kids, just out of college most of them who began to write seriously about jazz had a sort of hidden agenda and don't we all, but anyway, the they were pretty much, it was depression era mind you and they were pretty much leftist in their feelings and their politics and so on so they approached jazz with this in mind and that the black musician who after three hundred years of maltreatment in America, it's time we open the doors and windows and recognize that they created a great art. But I think that they overbalanced and I can al shortly before it Fred Ramsey died and he wrote Jazzmen or coedited Jazzmen the first of our American books. And Fred began to get meaculpa but meaculpa about the political agenda. And I said, "Fred, wait a minute, wait a minute." This was compassion, it was feeling and so on. The distortion is a natural product of that. Then we had Marxist writers and of course the Marxist theory had been established that the black Americans were colonists is the country and that they were treated so and so on and so on. So there was a tendency to follow that line of thinking and we did have a few Marxist writers in the history of jazz. But the basic distortion that came with the writing of the history has not been undone to this day. This is where in the the people from World War I up to the swing era who happened to be white jazz men have gotten very short shrift in recent years particularly even in the early days. And made fun of and tossed to one side as not being the authentic thing. They weren't from New Orleans.

Marshal Stearns.

I was very fortunate in that, I think it was in the summer of 1949 or so, I met an extraordinary man named Marshal Stearns who was a Chaucer, a medieval English scholar. He'd come down from Cornell to New York, he's on a visit. Now Marshal had started a hot jazz club at Yale years earlier and he had stored in his closet at Yale, his enormous stack of records and magazines and so on and amongst other people who came out and thought it was just great was Louis Armstrong who was on tour. Marshal brought to jazz writing and thinking about jazz for the first time the disciplines of real first-rate scholarship and he created in his own living room in New York City the beginnings of the Institute of Jazz Studies which is now centered at Rutgers

over at Newark. Marshal had a broad thesis about jazz. One thing he'd say was, "You can ask me anything, but don't ask me what jazz is," after a lecture, you know. Now, his feeling came down to this, one word, and if he's looking over the edge of heaven I know he's still saying it to all of us, "Listen." That was his credo. It's breath it's all over the lot. All kinds of different music. Charlie Parker and Dizzy came along and he'd say, "Listen, you've got to listen." And that was his whole thesis. And boy he carried it out. He had a great disappointment in life in that after he did get the institute established in New York, he had hoped to go to the foundations and get some money to start programs of research and writings of dozens of monographs that he was dreaming up. Never happened. It was too soon, much too soon, about thirty years too soon. That part of what was sad.

What is jazz?

What is jazz? Marvelous question. I have the perfect answer. Jazz is exactly what you thought it was at the moment you first you became aware you were listening to something called jazz. Now, it's going to change over the years, isn't it. You're going to change and so on. But, at some point you focus on a music you haven't heard before and you think it's jazz. Course it is. Call it jazz all your life. That's my point.

So if somebody hears country music for the first time is that jazz too?

No. No.

I was just kidding you.

The End