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ARTIE SHAW
NEA Jazz Master (2005)

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Note: Expletives have been deleted from this Web version of the transcript, and are marked thus: [expletive deleted]. An unaltered transcript is available for use by researchers at the Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Talbot: This is October the 7th [1992], and this is day . . . the first of two days' interviews with Artie Shaw.

Shaw: Are we o.k.?

[**recording engineer:**] Yeah, we got a great level.

Shaw: Before we get into this, or maybe as a way of getting into it, I showed you this material on the book I've been working on on-and-off since about 1978. What is it now? This is . . . It's been 12 years. I've published another book in between. I've done some CDs. I've done a lot of other stuff. But this one . . . I'll tell you the point of it. I wanted to do a trilogy. I had at one time . . . I don't know. You're a reader, so you may know the book. Most people don't even know of it. Romain Rolland wrote a book called *Jean-Christophe*. Did you ever read it or hear of it?

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Talbot: Heard of it.

Shaw: It was ten French novels, short French novels, dealing with the life of a composer, a German-born composer who gets himself in trouble, comes to France, gets involved in the intellectual and artistic and political and every other kind of life. Has a roommate, a friend named Oliver, who gets killed. He has love affairs and whatever. He finally meets an Italian countess and goes to Italy and then comes back to France and dies. When you're through with that you know a great deal about what makes a composer, what the ingredients are that make what they call a serious composer.

It occurred to me when I was . . . when I finished the third book I published, that no-one knows what a jazz musician is about. There's an enormous confusion in the nomenclature. The word "jazz" in itself is a ridiculous word. Every critic has his own one inch on a spectrum from here to New York, and that's the only "le vrai jazz." Well, that's not it. And no-one has yet come up with an acceptable definition, so if a man says he's a jazz critic, he might as well say, "I'm a growl critic," or a bark critic. It doesn't make any sense. An ugh critic. But people use the word, and they all have their own idea what it means. Just as the word "democracy" in Russia and America and Arabia have totally different meanings. So I decided that since most people don't know what a jazz musician's about and have some vague idea that a guy wakes up one day and starts playing jazz, and that any classical guy can play jazz, as the movies show. In a movie called *The Competition*—otherwise not a bad movie—you see these two classical so-called—I hate that word too—players suddenly having some fun, and they go [Shaw sings "um-pah dum-pah" syllables] and they start playing what they call "jazz." Well, that isn't the way it works. No classical player worth his salt, that I know of, can play jazz. Itzhak Perlmann tries to fool around with it, but doesn't come close.

So the point is, I thought I would write what it's about. How does . . . I wrote a . . . I'm writing a bildungsroman, a novel of education. How does a jazz musician . . . what are his antecedents? Where does he come from? Especially we're talking about in the early days when the word "jazz" was not even really what it is now. We used to call it "dance music." And then we would play a hot chorus on it. I'm convinced a large part of it was the boredom on the part of the whites. You keep playing a tune called [Shaw sings] "Mary Lou, Mary Lou," and finally you say, "I'm so sick of this bloody thing." It doesn't take finally. You say, "Let's see what I can do with the chord structure," and you start doing something.

In any case . . . so I wrote this book. I've got 90 chapters with him being Al Snow. His original name was Al Wisnowski, and he becomes Al Snow. At the end he become Albie. Somebody puts him in front of a band, and he doesn't know what he's doing, and they don't know what they want him to do. It's [a] shocking book. When it's all done, this

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guy's explored everything. It's a sort of *Siddhartha*, a musical *Siddhartha*. He explores science, painting, literature, sex. Name it. He's curious. When it's all done, everything adds up to what he's doing. You know, as a reader, by the time the first book is finished—which will be subtitled *Sideman*—that those years are over, and now he thinks for the first time he's free of the tyranny of radio—which is the same as television today. That kind of constriction, that you got to play this awful crap. Now for the first time he realizes he's going to be able to do what he wants. But the reader will know, if I'm successful, that he's not going to be able to do what he wants, because he then going to have a worse tyrant for an audience, meaning the public. And so we're back to that old dictum, that the worst tyranny is the majority. You can kill a king. You can kill a despot. How do you kill a majority? Fifty-one percent of the people want Perot, and forty-nine don't. We're stuck with him, if that's what happens. Of course it won't, but still.

So that's what the book is about. Really it will not be so much about jazz, as jazz is how he makes his living. A lot of it is taken for granted, and I'm writing it through the mind of a 15-year-old kid when I start. Pick him up in 1927 in a lake I made up named [??] Lake, Wisconsin, which is not unlike the lakes that Bix [Beiderbecke] played at or I played at, everybody played at in summer. You take him right on up through his career until you leave him at the age . . . one decade later.

So that's what the book is about. A little of the material we're going to be doing here. All right. You lead the way. What do you want to talk about?

Talbot: Let's talk about your earliest days, how you got into music in the first place.

Shaw: Oh, boy. I hate doing that. The material's all written, scrupulously, in *Cinderella* [his autobiography, *The Trouble with Cinderella*].

Talbot: Just go over it very quickly.

Shaw: Well, quickly, I got hold of a saxophone and learned to play saxophone. I'm the only world-class clarinet player who started on saxophone.

Talbot: Why did you want to play music?

Shaw: Again, I wrote about that. I used to go to vaudeville shows. I was born in . . . to a couple of immigrant parents. We lived in New Haven, Connecticut. I was born in New York. I was a victim of anti-Semitism in a terrible, to a terrible degree, and I had to get out of that environment and get into something that made sense. Otherwise I'd have ended up like a friend of mine I grew up with, who got killed . . . he died in the electric chair. I'd have been a criminal. I wasn't going to go on the way I was. I have great sympathy for rebels, because I was one. Fortunately, my implement was a . . . instead of a

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machine gun, or a jimmed open windows and be a burglar, break and enter artist, I became a saxophonist. I saw this guy get up and play a saxophone. I thought, “Boy, that sounds nice. That’s a good way to live. Look at the pretty girls and the lights. That’s nice. Vaudeville.” So I got a saxophone.

Talbot: So from the vaudeville days, that gave you the impetus to play the saxophone.

Shaw: Yeah it was 1914 . . . 1924 when I began.

Talbot: What kind of bands did you play in? How quickly did you . . .

Shaw: Whatever was there. It’s a joke when you look back. Whatever was there. Any regional or local or whatever band would have me.

Talbot: Did anybody teach you?

Shaw: No. I keep telling people I learned from the guy next to me. When I got to know more than he did, I moved on. I had a rule early on. Don’t stay where you can’t learn anything. So I kept jumping from band to band. Until finally you get to a place it’s hard to learn, because there aren’t too many people you can learn from. But people say, “Who was your influence?” I say, “Most influential were Bix and Louis” [Armstrong]. “They were trumpet players,” the guys say. Well, I was learning music. I’m not interested in the instrument. The instrument is a means. I had a discussion with Goodman one time. We had lunch, and he kept asking me about clarinet players. What do I think of this guy, that, the . . . I said, “Benny, you’re too hung up on the clarinet.” He said, “That’s what we play, isn’t it?” I said, “Benny, I’ve been trying to play music.” He had a little glimmer in his eye. It didn’t take. He went right back playing clarinet.

It’s a limited thing. It’s like falling in love with a scalpel, if you’re a surgeon. It has nothing to do with what the scalpel is for.

Talbot: What was the first major band you played with? Was that Irving Aaronson?

Shaw: Irving Aaronson was the first so-called “name band,” national band. Up ’til then I played with much better bands. They weren’t good, but some guys around Cleveland had a pretty good band. I would go wherever the band was good, wherever the book [“book”: in jazz parlance, the collection of musical arrangements played by a big band] was pretty good. I wasn’t interested in money. I wasn’t going to make . . . I was making enough money anyway. My God. At the age of 16 I was making the equivalent today of \$1,750, close to \$2,000 a week. At that time, \$100 would take you to where \$1,000 won’t take you today. I was making anywhere from \$175 on up a week around Cleveland during Prohibition, 1926 to about 1929, when I left there.

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Talbot: Around that time you left Cleveland to go with Aaronson?

Shaw: Went to the [West] Coast. I had gone out to the Coast. I had won an essay-writing contest. Don't ask me how and why? It's in my book, again. It's in *Cinderella*, the particulars. It was like doing a crossword puzzle. I was up one night. I'd been making some arrangements. That was what I was doing. Arranging and playing. I was in charge of the Wiley band. He put me in charge. He didn't . . .

Talbot: Which band was this?

Shaw: Austin Wiley. He was not a musician. He stood in front of a band with a violin.

Talbot: A lot of guys did that, didn't they?

Shaw: That's what it was in those days. Largely today too. [laughter] When Sammy Kaye died, I got an awful lot of calls, "What do . . . I said, "I have nothing to say. He wasn't in the same business I'm in." They said, "Well, he had a band." I said, "So did Sousa. It's nothing to do with what I do, or did. So if you want a comment, well, there he is. I can't talk about his music. I don't consider it music." But it's dance music. It's a functional form that people can dance and jump up and down to. *Daddy, I want a diamond ring*. What's that got to do with me? What has Dylan got to do with music? What does Madonna got to . . . What does Ice T? Rap music? Talk about an oxymoron. Moron is good, right there. [laughter]

Talbot: Was Aaronson a good musician?

Shaw: No.

Talbot: Was he just another . . .

Shaw: He later became a contractor for MGM. One of the requirements is not to be a good musician. Aaronson had a band. It was a show band. I wanted to get out of Cleveland about that time. Besides, I was told I was . . . they were going to improve the band musically. A couple of friends of mine from New Haven were in it. Tony Pestritto, who later became Tony Pastor in my band, and Charlie Troutner, both of whom I knew from New Haven. They said, "Come on in the band."

There was one guy in the band I could learn from. He was an arranger. That's what I wanted. I wanted to learn more.

Talbot: Who was he?

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Shaw: Chummy MacGregor.

Talbot: Oh right? He was arranging for Aaronson?

Shaw: He became . . .

Talbot: Glenn Miller's arranger.

Shaw: He was with Aaronson. He was the only musician in the band, really. He knew all the guys. Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, and Glenn. Glenn was nothing in those days. He was just a fair arranger. But he knew all the guys. Arthur Schutt and Manny Klein. He knew everybody. That was impressive to me. He was the guy I attached myself to. I have him in my book, only I call him something else. Chuck McTaig.

Talbot: So you go out to the Coast. You went out to the Coast.

Shaw: Went out to the Coast. Took a . . . my 19th birthday, which is around May. I got out there, joined the band—I stayed with them too—June. Then we went from Los Angeles, Hollywood, to Chicago. There I ran into an awful lot of the Chicago crowd and heard Louis Armstrong and couldn't believe what I was hearing. And Earl Hines. I used to go and sit in. After we finished our work at 3:00 or 4:00 I'd go down to the South Side and sit in with all the bands. I heard Jimmie Noone, everybody. And we would have jam sessions, sometimes where there would be a marathon dance going on. They didn't care what we played as long as the people could stagger on. They're half drunk and half intoxicated . . . half zombies. So that's what we did. I learned a lot about that, and then I went to New York.

Talbot: Did you meet Bix Beiderbecke at any time?

Shaw: Yeah, sure. As a matter of fact I knew Bix from New York. But he was difficult [laughs] to deal with, because he was in the grip of the bottle by then. He was a very nice guy. Affable, a very pleasant man, but he couldn't say no.

Talbot: What was your opinion of his playing at that time?

Shaw: At that time he was losing it. But earlier he was my god. He and Louis. Totally different ends of a spectrum.

Talbot: Yin and yang, if you like.

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Shaw: But both of them jazz. Both of them playing unmistakable jazz. Louis's was black, and his was white. When I first heard Louis, after having been indoctrinated by Bix—Bix and [Frankie] Trumbauer . . . Interesting, because I read something Whitney Balliett wrote in a piece on Lester Young. Les was my idea of a consummate jazz musician. A “musician,” is the word. He said that when he asked Lester—and I knew this—who were his influences, he said Tram [Frankie Trumbauer] and Jimmy Dorsey. And Whitney says both of whom . . . neither of whom were good jazz players. Well they were the only jazz players there were at that instrument at that time. I don't know what he's talking about. I get so bored with these didactic olympian sayings . . . statements these guys make. Whitney's a good writer, but it's an enormous prejudice to say these guys weren't good jazz players. In their day, they were the only jazz players on those instruments.

Talbot: And you were there and he wasn't.

Shaw: Huh?

Talbot: You were there and he wasn't.

Shaw: I was there listening. Of course. I wrote that to the Smithsonian, by the way, on that album they put out, *Big Band Jazz*, from the beginning. Good God. They start out with Paul Whiteman. I wrote, where was Jean Goldkette? He was the only American jazz band worth talking about in that, in the '27s. They keep talking about Fletcher [Henderson]. Jean Goldkette had one hell of a band. I said, what about listening . . . why didn't you guys listen to *Clementine*? One of the great records of that period.

Talbot: *My Pretty Girl*.

Shaw: Yeah, but *Clementine*, wow. That chorus Bix played.

Talbot: Fantastic.

Shaw: Tremendous, the first 8 [bars] and last 8. Remarkable. Well, what are you going to say? You have geniuses like Gunther Schuller there, who never played a note of jazz in their lives, and they're telling us what jazz is about. Pretty sad. He gets in there and talks a lot. I wrote a letter to them, and I had copies to Whitney, copies to every jazz critic in America. No-one acknowledged the letter.

Talbot: That's amazing.

Shaw: It's astounding. I said I was dumbfounded, flabbergasted, thunderstruck by what they had done.

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Talbot: No, I think you're right too.

Shaw: Who did that? How could you leave out . . . from the beginnings? Good God. I don't know of a band . . . I travelled to hear Jean Goldkette, and the first time I heard that band—I have it in my book—my kid says, “He stood in front of the band and listened to Bix and Tram. The *sound* they got out of the horns.” He's not talking about the notes. The sound. That's ignored today. People make unpleasant sounds, and they call that jazz. I don't know what they're talking about. There's a certain school of thought today that if it isn't . . . doesn't sound like broken crockery, it isn't jazz. God help you if you play melodically. Good help you if it's good to the ears.

Talbot: You were at a place and a time when you got to New York, I would think, when you were surrounded by an incredible number, a large number of musicians who . . . their ability to play melody and also to play . . .

Shaw: We had a pool of some of the finest musicians in America playing radio. That was a sought-after job. Bix couldn't get into it. Jack Teagarden. They couldn't read well enough. They weren't what we called at that time disciplined musicians. They were fine at what they did, but they couldn't fit into the Lux-Palmolive-Chevrolet-Studebaker-Fire Chief type of requirement, which was dreadful, but we had to play it. We're back to that same old thing, the lowest common denominator, and the public buys it in large quantities. They had this old dictum about—now I have this in my book—about somebody saying nobody ever went broke—quoting [H. L.] Mencken—no-one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public, and my guy says, “I got a better one than that,” in this particular . . . He's talking to the program head, the programming boss of CBS Records back then, 1929, '30. He says, “Mine is no matter how carefully you bury [expletive deleted], the American public will find it, dig it up, and buy it in huge quantities.” That's the truth. It still is true.

Talbot: But you were recording a lot of good music at that time, as well.

Shaw: Pardon me?

Talbot: You were also recording a lot of good music at that time.

Shaw: Not much. Very little. There were a few decent jazz records being made, where at least you could try. But see I had a problem when I got to New York. Jimmy Dorsey had been there and had established himself. Now Benny came along and unseated him. I had to come along and unseat both of them or at least elbow them aside. I was the new kid on the block.

Talbot: Was there only room for one?

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Shaw: In those days people . . . That just is today. We say the best. What do we mean by the best? It's not a pole vault, where you can measure. Who's better? I don't know who's better. Who do you like better? And what causes your likes and prejudices? Why do some people like Coltrane and others like, like I do, Lester? I think Lester was the prototypical tenor player. I don't think anybody's gone past him. I think he invented the tenor, he and Coleman [Hawkins]. Just as Benny and I invented the clarinet, the jazz clarinet. I don't care who they talk about that came ahead of that. It's not significant. There it is.

Talbot: You had a circle of musicians who were all . . . all became bandleaders in their own right later on.

Shaw: A lot of them did. Charlie Spivak came from New Haven. He became a bandleader.

Talbot: The Dorseys.

Shaw: Then Glenn came along. I came along before Glenn. Benny came first. No, Tommy came first. Tommy and Jimmy. Then they split up, and Tommy was the successful one. Then Benny came along with that terrible word, "swing," as a noun or an adjective. It's a verb. Swing music. If it doesn't swing, it's not jazz. Jazz music must swing. What do they mean by swing? I don't know. I've come up with what I think is a reasonable formulation for it. When the tempo and the feeling of the music oversee . . . goes past anybody's control, when you're not thinking about it any more, and it's all in shape, and it goes, and it's comfortable, and everybody's grooved, that's swing. That's when it's swinging. You don't get that much. Now and then . . . in a year, you'll get five or six nights where man, there it is. And generally no-one's there at the time. You're in someplace called Pottstown, Pennsylvania. But that happens. Now and then you look . . . the band looks at each other. It's a magical . . . amazing thing. That's worth the whole thing. It's better than sex. Better than a good bowel movement.

Talbot: Had you always wanted to have your own band?

Shaw: Had I always what?

Talbot: Had you always wanted to have your own band?

Shaw: No. I didn't want to have my own band at all. I wanted to write. I decided music was not a way for a sane man to make a living, because the only choices you had were to go out on the road with bands like who? Vincent Lopez? Kay Kaiser? Fred Waring? Guy Lombardo? Who the hell were they? There wasn't a good . . . George Olson? There wasn't a good band in sight. Not after Jean Goldkette's band had to disband. That was the

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last white good band. Then there were small groups, like the California Ramblers who did a little work, but no way to make a living. You're also living out of buses and staying in cheap motels. It was a miserable life. I'd had enough of that. So when I came to New York, and with radio, I started going to school. I knew that my education had been severely curtailed. I quit school when I was 15. Left home and went out with a band. So, that's what I'm writing about. I read, read, read, read, and finally I got a . . . I decided maybe writing, but then that would be years before I could hope to make a living at that. Meanwhile, music was a way to support yourself. Then along came that jazz . . . that swing concert, and I got a lot of attention on that. Next thing I knew, agents were asking, "You have a band?" I said, "No, I don't want to do that. I want to . . ."

I had bought a farm and quit the music business when I was 23. Tried to write. Found I didn't know enough yet. I didn't even know what writing was. I thought it was putting sentences together. I had no idea it had nothing to do with that. Finally I said I want to make enough money so that I can buy a dairy farm. How much would that cost you? I said, \$25,000. In those days you could buy a damn nice [inaudible] for that.

Talbot: What year was this, Artie?

Shaw: '35, I believe. You could buy a Cadillac for \$900. A Bentley was about [\$]7,000. A Rolls was seven or eight. So 25,000 was a lot of money. Multiply it by at least 10 or 12. So I said, I need to . . . I wanted to make about 25. He said, if you got a bandleader . . . got a band together, and you got lucky and you got successful, you could make 25,000 in six months. I thought, well, it's worth a shot. So I got the band together. Then my troubles began.

Talbot: Just before we get into the band starting, there's one record session that you made which has always intrigued me. It's just a small group, which had . . .

Shaw: The one with Wingy Manone?

Talbot: Wingy Manone, with Jelly Roll Morton on piano.

Shaw: Yeah, and Chick I think was on drums? [No. Kaiser Marshall was on drums]

Talbot: Yeah.

Shaw: I'm not sure. I know he was on one session. And Bud [Freeman] and I.

Talbot: And Frank Victor.

Shaw: I don't remember. It was never released until much later.

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Talbot: Right. It's recently released.

Shaw: Wingy went up to Harlem the night before, sat down with some arranger, and sang the themes to him. Then we got to the date. He couldn't read, so he didn't remember what he'd written. It was a mess of a date.

Talbot: It's quite amusing, though. How did Jelly Roll Morton happen to be on it?

Shaw: Wingy was Wingy. He was weird. Wingy would find people. He dug up people.

Talbot: It was one of the most extraordinary . . .

Shaw: It was a strange date.

Talbot: . . . extraordinary lineups in the history of jazz.

Shaw: Yeah. Jelly didn't fit in with that.

Talbot: No.

Shaw: He's an individual.

Talbot: [laughs] He did his own thing on it.

Shaw: I know. It's a strange record date. Nobody released it, because it was deemed, and probably correctly so, commercially unfeasible. But somebody to my amusement sent me a tape of it many years later. "I got Artie Shaw. I got Bud Freeman."

Talbot: That's right.

Shaw: He's talking on the record, talking about who's on the band. Yeah, Wingy was a character.

Talbot: That's right. Look at all the boys I've got with me today.

Shaw: Joe Venuti once sent him a Christmas present: one cufflink. [laughter (Wingy had only one arm.)] And then the following year he sent him another cufflink, the same link. The other.

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We'd do these. I did a few records. As a matter of fact, on Bunny—very . . . nobody knows this—on Bunny Berigan's *I Can't Get Started*, I played lead alto [saxophone] on that.

Talbot: That's right. The first recording of that.

Shaw: Most people don't know that. Bunny and I were great friends. If I had a date, I would ask Bunny to play.

Talbot: Yeah, you made some nice records with Bunny.

Shaw: We both knew each other very well. When I was in Cleveland, he'd come through when he was with Hal Kemp, and I would take him down to Central Avenue. We'd jam all night. He was drinking then, though. He was already starting. I wondered about that. In my book I talk about it too, in the book I'm doing.

Talbot: I guess it was an ever-present problem for a lot of guys.

Shaw: It's an addiction, like any other addiction.

Talbot: So the first band that you put together, that was the band with the . . .

Shaw: It was based on that appearance at the Imperial Theater, that Swing Concert, so-called. I decided . . . We're supposed to play a three-minute piece while the big bands were being changed behind the scenes. The setups were being changed. I decided, instead of appearing with a rhythm section, as Bunny was going to do and as everybody else was going to do, I decided I would try something for kicks, for myself. No idea that anybody'd even listen to it. I wrote for a string quartet and clarinet and a very small rhythm section, leaving out piano. To my knowledge, that's the first time there was a dance band or so-called jazz piece without piano, but I didn't see the need for it. A guitar and brushes [on the drum set] and a bass player were enough for that light combination. String quartet, you know, quiet. So we wrote the piece, and I tried it with some of the men I was working with in radio. Had some very fine string players. I tried the piece, and they liked it. So I asked them if they'd appear with me. They did.

To our astonishment, it busted up the show. Long before *Casablanca*, they were yelling, "Play it again." I said I didn't have another piece. I didn't know what to play. "Play that one." So we played it again. Second time, it got recorded. I don't know how. I never knew that anybody had it anymore. A friend . . . not a friend, but a guy I knew in Australia, who sent me a series of tapes he'd done on me . . . Using my music as milestones of a career discussion. Then he talked about "and Artie did this," "and Artie got together this string orches" . . . and he played part of the piece, and I thought, "Where

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the hell did that come from?” Of course, very noisy. And he said, “The surface noise is very bad, so we won’t play it all.” But he played enough of it so I . . . “My God, that’s *Interlude in B-flat*.” I had written about that in a book called *The Trouble with Cinderella*, my first published book. I must have had 10,000 letters over the years. “Where . . . Whatever happened to that? Did you ever record it?” And the answer was, I didn’t know. It fell between two . . . into a crack somewhere. It disappeared. Here it was.

So I got hold of the guy. Don’t ask me how. It was murderous. There’s a day and a half difference. Finally when I did get him, he didn’t believe it was me. So I read him quotes from his own letter. He said, “My goodness, it is Artie Shaw.” I said, “Yes, it is.” I said, “Where did you get that bloody record?” Well, long story. He told me there’s a man in Washington. I said, “Which? There’s two Washingtons. D.C. or Washington state?” “I don’t know your geography.” So I tried both. You know, these pirates hide behind telephone answering machines. Finally got hold of the guy and his answering machine. He wouldn’t call back. I guess he thought that the cops would be after him. I called one night, and I said, “Look, if you don’t get back to me, I’m going to come up there personally or get the cops to come and get you. So you better call me. It’s not going to harm you any.” He did. I said, “Where’d you get that?” He told me he had come back from the war, World War II. He was in Europe. Came through Europe. There was a place . . . a little recording studio where you paid for demos and things like that. He said, “There were a bunch of tapes” . . . not tapes, not tape . . . “a bunch of acetates, and I bought a whole stack of them, maybe 50 or more, for about \$10. Among them was this, and I recognized your playing.” So he put out a record that was terribly noisy. . . full of surface noise, scratchy.

I got hold of a copy. He gave me a first generation copy of the one he had. I took it to a studio down here where I do this work, DAT [digital audio tape], the digital thing, and we erased some of the noise. Only so far, because finally you take the meat off with the . . . right down to the bones. Anyway, we erased some of the noise and then enhanced a little bit digitally. The result was on that *Legacy* album I put out.

So that’s how that came about. That was the piece. Needless to say, at the time, it was unheard of. Jazz was ricky-ticky-ticky in those days. Here we were playing something Ravelian, Debussy, and whatever you want to call it, and there was some jazz against it. It just threw the audience. Gershwin I remember came back and said it was the first new thing he heard in jazz in . . . since he’d been in the business.

Talbot: George Gershwin?

Shaw: Yeah. People just raved about that. So the agents started calling me. That’s when I got my first band, to get that 25,000 bucks, to get that dairy farm.

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Talbot: And you got a record contract at the same time, right?

Shaw: Yeah, Brunswick.

Talbot: With Brunswick.

Shaw: But I'm still working in the studios and trying to build a book. I couldn't get arrangers to write for that band, because string quartet was not what you'd call the average jazz arranger's meat. They didn't know what you were doing. So I had to do the arranging myself, and I trained Jerry Gray, who played lead fiddle in that. I brought him down from Boston. I trained him to work with me. I would give him sketches, or I would write the arrangement and show him what to do with a fast, slow, medium, et cetera. Jerry was a good pupil. He learned, and then we got to be symbiotic.

Talbot: Can we just go back for a moment? Where did you learn what you taught Jerry?

Shaw: Oh, boy. Trial and error. I'm one of those guys that believes in jumping in and doing it.

Talbot: You picked it up . . .

Shaw: I learned fly fishing doing it.

Talbot: You picked it up from wherever.

Shaw: I got a book with some diagrams. I got a book called *Orchestration*, by Cecil Forsyth, which I still have, and read it. It told you how to transpose for the instruments. I didn't know about a score sheet. The first one, I think I described it, sitting around and going around the floor. I couldn't remember what I wrote for the first trumpet player when I got to the second alto. Et cetera. But it finally . . . the first time was such a mess, because I made boo boos all over the place. But in straightening it out . . . I remember the arrangement was a thing called *Wabash Blues*. [Shaw sings: "Oh, those Wabash Blues."] Et cetera. Anyway, it was not a bad arrangement, when it was done.

Talbot: Was that for Aaronson?

Shaw: No, that was in Cleveland. Joe Cantor and the Far Easter. So that was that. From there on in, just kept arranging, learning more and more each time.

Talbot: So you got Jerry Gray, and he's picking it up from you.

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Shaw: Yeah, between Jerry and me we got most of the book written, up to a point. Joe Lippman I think played piano in the band. I think he wrote a couple too. In any case, that was how that band started. Again, needless to say, it was anything but a commercial success. I have a great knack for non-commercial. I can do a lot of non-commercial things. This last album, last CD I put out is called *Artie Shaw: Personal Best*. I chose pieces that no-one has heard in 45, 50 years. Orrin Keepnews and I picked them out. The point being that you do what you want to do musically, and it isn't always what the public expects or wants or will buy. You do the best you can.

Talbot: You got an agent, and you got a contract with Brunswick, and you made those recordings that we know.

Shaw: Yeah. With varying degrees of non-success.

Talbot: What were Brunswick like to work with?

Shaw: Pardon me?

Talbot: What was Brunswick like as a record company, to work with?

Shaw: Like any other record company. There was somebody there, and they'd give you some input on what they thought you should record, and the other was you'd fight for what you wanted to do. You did the best you could. You had to work in that form called three-and-a-quarter minutes. It was a form of music. You get all said in three or four . . . A solo consisted generally of eight bars, sometimes 16, very . . . not like today, where guys'll play 17 choruses, all of them saying the same damn thing. Sometimes there's a curse to being able to do that. A little discipline isn't bad.

In any case, that was what happened. We made a series of records. Then the band flopped. It was a miserable flop, as far as the audience was concerned. Musicians loved it. It was something different from all those riff things that were going on.

Talbot: You took it on the road, did you?

Shaw: Huh?

Talbot: You took it on the road.

Shaw: Yeah, we went . . . First we opened in the Lexington Hotel in New York. From there we went to a place, a barn called the French Casino. Here we were, with a string quartet. It was a girlie show. Nothing to do with what we were doing. The audience didn't know what the hell we were doing. They came there. They wanted oom-pah oom-

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pah and dance. Here I was, trying to play music, and totally at loggerheads with the whole business. But I didn't know any better. I got a chapter which lays that out in my book. In any case, we flopped. It fell apart. We had to come back from Texas. Once we got through in New York we were going on a tour. We were going to Texas. We were going to New Orleans. We were going wherever. The Hits hotel chain, which is like the Hyatt one today. Different scale. We went to the first hotel, the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas, and you could shoot deer, as they said, in the ballroom. You'd go snow blind from the tablecloths. So they cancelled us out. We didn't do any more. We had to drive all the way back to New York. I figured this is a waste of time. What am I doing? Some quixotic endeavor to make music, when they want to hear . . . So I got together what I've since called the loudest [expletive deleted] band in the world. That's what they wanted. Noise. So I got them a noisy band. But still, I tried to play music.

Talbot: Well, you did.

Shaw: Some of it was, and some of it . . . I had a big fight. It was always a fight.

Talbot: When you changed, when you got the new band, how did you go about picking the guys, selecting the musicians?

Shaw: I listened to people. I went around and listened to people. I couldn't afford to get the ones I wanted. I would have grabbed Harry James. I'd heard him with Benny Pollack. I knew Benny. But I couldn't. I couldn't afford him. Benny Goodman got him. So I had to train guys. I had to find guys who could play. I could hear them trying to do something. Les Robinson has called me and said, "You changed my whole life." He said, "I don't know what you heard in me." I heard him trying. He had no sound, but he could . . . he had a good conception. Then there was Johnny Best, also. And George Arus. Harry Rogers I heard because he could write nice, decent swing arrangements, swinging arrangements. That was what it was. Tony (Pastor) was in there, because he'd been in the first band, and a guy named Ronnie Perry, Les Robinson, and a guy named Hank Freeman, from New Haven. In the first band I had Moe Zudecoff for a while.

Talbot: Buddy Morrow.

Shaw: He was Buddy Morrow; he'd become Buddy Morrow. He was immediately a talent, like Billy Butterfield. First time you heard him, you knew, there's a guy that could do it. Buddy had that same thing. Buddy Morrow, as we say now. There's certain guys, you can hear and say, "That guy's got it. He's going somewhere." Where, we don't know, but he's going somewhere.

We went along with that band for a while, scuffling. Finally, it was dissolution time. Drop the band, because you couldn't go anywhere. Nobody would come to hear Art

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Shaw and his new music. Who the hell was Art Shaw? You said the name fast, people would give you “Gesundheit.” Art Shaw. Sounds like a sneeze.

Anyway, we came from Boston . . . went up to Boston. My . . . somebody made a deal with Cy Sherman [? (surname unclear)] He bought the band for a thousand a week. And sold it wherever he sold it. Proms. I went on the basis that we would get a wire [a connection to a radio broadcast] from one of his ballrooms out of Boston twice a week. So wherever we went on Wednesdays and Saturdays, or Tuesdays, whatever it was, twice a week we were on the air.

But for a while, you see, I stopped recording. The band hadn't yet arrived at an identity that I thought would make sense. So we stopped recording, and meanwhile, I worked with Jerry, and we produced a book . . . part of a book. We found things like *Softly As In A Morning Sunrise* and I wrote things like *It Had To Be You*, whatever it was, *My Heart Stood Still*. I decided we would play the best music written by the best American composers, which ran anywhere from Sigmund Romberg on up through Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, and whatever. We picked good tunes. I figured that was going to be the identity of the band. When we got it right and then we found *Beguine* [*Begin the Beguine*], that did it. One record, and we were off and running. I didn't know it. We made the record and went out. We finished that summer. We had to go back into New York now. The band was already a smash, but I didn't know that. We were losing money every week. Hotels don't pay much. You went there so you got the wire, the radio. Then you'd go out on the road and make up the deficit. But somebody's got to pay the deficit in the meanwhile. I didn't have any money. Nobody else did. So we made this deal with Cy Sherman, that he would pick it up. Well, he didn't.

Talbot: He didn't?

Shaw: No. Then he came around to collect his part of the contract when the band went out and started making the equivalent of today's \$300,000 a week. Cy came to see me, and my lawyer said, “He doesn't have any rights any more.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “He didn't live up to his contract.” My lawyer was smart. He sent him letters every week, asking for the money. Never got it. So when Cy came to see me—and I like him. We got along. He's an affable old pirate—I said, “Cy, you know.” He said, “How are we going to arrange for this payment?” I said, “Cy, there is no payment.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Look at contract . . .” paragraph so-and so. “And here are these letters.” I had them all . . . the copies of the letters to him. I said, “You didn't . . . You never answered one. You never gave us the money.” We were losing five or six hundred dollars per week, which today is nothing, but then . . . five or six thousand a week is equivalent. Between what we got at the hotel and what it cost, because I put together a good band. The men were getting [union] scale, but scale . . . no, over scale. They couldn't live for scale in New York City. A hotel date would be about 50 or 60

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bucks a week. So we went out on the road and . . . By the way, during that time I had Billie in the band. Billie Holiday. We were all getting 60 bucks a week, and I was lucky if I cleared 60. Anyway, I showed Cy that, and he said, "You mean this contract's no good?" I said, "Cy, you know that." Anyway, I gave him a big chunk of money, just out of my own, because I liked him, and I figured he had rescued me by allowing us to subsist. A thousand a week. Nobody was going to get rich. 14 men, a bus, arranging, copying, all that. It's expensive.

Talbot: 'Round about there, you changed record companies as well, didn't you?

Shaw: Yeah. RCA was *the* record company. It was the major.

Talbot: Where . . . at what point did you . . . did your contract with Brunswick run out?

Shaw: I can't remember. The Brunswick thing . . . when I changed over to Art Shaw and his new music, with the loudest [expletive deleted] band in the world, we made a series of records that were not successful. Some of them were not too bad. *Sweet Adeline*, things like that.

Talbot: *All Alone* and *Free For All*.

Shaw: I was looking for something that would get some attention, but it didn't work, so I decided to stop recording. When I stopped recording, the contract with Brunswick ran out. Then when I hit *Begin the Beguine* and all that, every record company . . . there were only a few record companies at that time . . .

Talbot: *Begin the Beguine* wasn't the first thing you recorded for . . .

Shaw: It was the first record date for RCA.

Talbot: Was it?

Shaw: I believe so. 1936, I believe. [July 24, 1938]. I think it . . . as a matter of fact, I have a replica of the . . . it was Art Shaw and his music at that time. Everybody says that it was the first of Artie Shaw. No, that was the last of Art Shaw. After *Beguine* became the smash hit that it did, they changed it to Artie Shaw. It's easier to say.

Talbot: How did . . . It would be good to know about how the record company worked with you at the time. Did you . . . did they dictate to you what you recorded?

Shaw: No. I had a contract that says no-one could dictate. The contract stated that I had total autonomy over what I recorded. They didn't have to release it, but they had to pay

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me the advance. I didn't know that they didn't have to release it, or I'd have insisted on that too, because they wouldn't release the Billie Holiday record of *Any Old Time*. But then I found out much later why that was. The real reason was that she had signed contracts with Brunswick and kept on signing them while she was with my band. I don't know. So weird. Anyway, Brunswick raised hell when they heard the Victor record of *Any Old Time*. It had to be withdrawn. So then I let Helen Forrest sing it. Later, of course, it's all come out in the wash now, and Billie's is the record that they hear now, because she become a piece of mythology today.

Talbot: When you were recording with Victor, with RCA Victor . . .

Shaw: There was a guy named Eli Oberstein. A horror.

Talbot: Was he the producer? Or was he the head of the . . .

Shaw: Whatever you want to call it. He was their A-and-R man [artists and repertory], or the equivalent of what today we call A-and-R.

Talbot: Did he always come . . .

Shaw: He was a busybody.

Talbot: Did he come to the studio every time you recorded?

Shaw: He was a pain in the ass. He would say, "Why don't you try . . .," saying the band do this, and you do that, and I would say, "Eli, for Christ's sake, go sell your records and leave me alone." I never listened to . . . but we tangled a lot. We fought quite a bit. But I said, "Look at my contract." The contract said I could do what I wanted, and I did what I wanted. So largely . . . I look back at this every once in a while, and I think, how lucky that was, that I didn't listen to anybody, because I'm living on the proceeds of those records today. I did them . . . I did something that has lasted 50 years, which in jazz . . . dance-band music, that's a long time. People are buying records that were made 50 years ago. These new CDs that are out . . . this *Last Vinyl Recordings*, the last recordings, made in 1953, so they're almost 40 years ago. Nobody wanted them. I paid for them and put them together, put them in a vault somewhere. I put them out finally with Book of the Month, some of them. But a lot of them were never recorded . . . never released. Well, they jumped up on the charts, above Natalie Cole's *Unforgettable*, when they started. I couldn't believe my eyes. It's not that kind of music. But there they are. They're still selling like crazy. I don't know what that proves. Not that people know better. But sometimes by accident you do something people will buy anyway.

Talbot: You seem to have a high proportion of good tunes recorded at that time.

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Shaw: I figured if you're going to waste the time on an arrangement, you might as well do it on something. People say, "What were your regrets? Do you have any regrets?" Yeah, all those pop tunes I did, that I got talked into doing. The same effort goes into a piece called *Your Sweet Little Headache* as into a song called . . . whatever . . . *Softly As In A Morning Sunrise*, which lasts. You can keep playing that. Who wants to hear *Your Sweet Little Headache* today? Some of those tunes are dreadful. But you were pressured. There was a lot of pressure.

Talbot: Where did that come from? The publishers?

Shaw: Publishers. The song pluggers, as they called them. They'd come around. It was very difficult. They kept on and on. As a matter of fact one of them—this is later, five, six years later, which is . . . four, five years was a generation—there was a guy out here named Doc Weston. Very nice guy. Publisher. A plugger. They had a tune called *When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano*. "Would you please put it on the air, Artie? It means so much to me." Blah blah blah. Jeez, I hate that piece of sentimental crap. He said, "Please, do it as a favor." So, I got up to San Francisco and I got pucky one night. I got the group together—the small group—and we made a piece called *When the Quails Come Back to San Quentin*. I called him, and I said, "It's on the air tonight." I didn't say what. I said, "It's on the air. Tune in. We're on the air from 10 to 11" or whatever it is. 10:30. [laughter] He listened to it. He wouldn't talk to me. He was so . . . He had his boss listening, to know the thing was on, and I was a big plug in those days. I was an important broadcast. People listened, and then we did this. It really got him angry. But you got to . . . you had to laugh sometimes. Once . . . You had to get a laugh now and then. That was it.

Talbot: Was there a combination of publisher and record company trying to pressure you to record . . .

Shaw: The record company wanted hits, so they wanted you to play a hit song. I remember they kept asking me to do a thing called *Third Man Theme*. [Shaw sings two phrases of the melody.] Where the hell you going from there? So I just resisted it. I put tunes on . . . things like *Begin the Beguine*, which they didn't want. It was a flop show. It lasted a few performances, but the song was no hit. When I met Cole Porter later, he shook hands with me and he said he was happy to meet his collaborator. I remember asking him slyly whether that included royalties? [laughter] Shook his head, "no." Smiled charmingly, but "no."

Talbot: He must have done well out of that.

Shaw: Oh, he did well. I did too, though.

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Talbot: Just one or two other details, at the time. When you recorded, did the record company pay the musicians or did you pay the musicians?

Shaw: No, it was my band. The record company gave me in those days a \$1,000 advance per selection. If we'd go into a record session, three-hour session, union scale, the band got 25 bucks and we recorded four tunes. I got 4,000 bucks and the band got 17 times 25 or 18 times 25, whatever it was. That was the money. The rest was, of course, against royalties. When they made their money back, you got into royalties. You rarely saw royalties. But when a thing like *Beguine* came along, my goodness. A lot of money came in. As I said to somebody not too long ago on the Cole Porter centennial, when they played that piece, I said, "I'm pretty tired of it by now, but it paid for a lot of houses and quite a few divorces." It's true.

Talbot: You had to play it often. It's a record I've never gotten tired of listening to.

Shaw: Oh my God. It got to be . . . that got to be an albatross around my neck. It was a good tune, and if you're going to be identified with a tune, that isn't a bad one. That and *Stardust*. I can't say *Frenesi*, although that was one of the biggest hits I ever made. But that was an experiment. *Frenesi* was not my own band. I got a studio band together, and I sat down with Bill Still, and I wrote part of the arrangement—William Grant Still—and he wrote the other part. The only point of that was to see whether so-called symphonic instruments would work in a jazz-band context. I found out it would work, although I didn't think that studio band was a swinging band. It was o.k. They were all capable players. But it was not what I would call a jazz band.

Talbot: When did you start working with William Grant Still?

Shaw: On that particular piece. I had known Bill from when he was in this so-called . . . on that hour with Willard Robeson back there in the late '20s, early '30s. That *Deep River Hour*. He did all that writing. He was a . . . he aspired to be a so-called symphony musician. He became, as he says, the first black to lead a symphony orchestra. His daughter, Judy, is still around, pushing his music, pushing him. But anyway, that's when I met him. But I didn't . . . never had any idea that I would do anything with him. When I got the strings together, I thought I would try to do a combination of so-called symphonic approach. The verse in *Frenesi* is not . . . nothing to do with jazz. Bill wrote that. The lead in to the verse [Shaw sings a phrase of melody], that was mine. The introduction he wrote. The modulation . . . It was a collaboration. It's hard to tell you right now who did which. We worked very well together. He did *Adios, Mariquita Linda*. Then he wrote a piece . . . he did a piece, but I edited it on the arranging, on the recording. *Chantais-les bas* and *Marinela* and *Danza Lucumi* and so on. So we had a nice little collaboration.

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Talbot: Did he do *The Deserted Farm* [*sic: A Deserted Farm*] as well?

Shaw: Pardon me?

Talbot: *The Deserted Farm*?

Shaw: No. That was done by . . . I don't remember who wrote that. But that was a direct transcription of the piano music.

Talbot: Really.

Shaw: Oh yeah. Not a note changed. Except where [Shaw sings a five-note melodic phrase] I played it [Shaw sings the same phrase, but with a jazz swing rhythm]. Give it a groove. Mistakes stopped it. They didn't want it.

Talbot: They didn't release it at the time.

Shaw: I didn't want to fight with Mrs. MacDowell.

Talbot: Oh, the estate stopped it?

Shaw: Yeah.

Talbot: Oh, I see.

Shaw: They didn't like the idea of it treated as a popular record, because it had a rhythm section. He wrote it free form.

Talbot: Just for the record, we better say who wrote the song. This is *The Deserted* . . .

Shaw: [Edward] MacDowell, [*A Deserted Farm*].

Talbot: MacDowell.

Shaw: He was one of the American composers. Oddly enough. It was strange, because I had a lot of respect for that stuff. I didn't want to bowdlerize it, and yet here comes Tommy Dorsey with *Once Upon A Midnight* and *The Moon And My* . . . what? . . . [Shaw sings a melodic phrase] . . . beautiful Rachmaninoff. They never consulted Rach . . . Everybody knew those pieces. I wouldn't have dreamt of doing that, like taking Ravel's *La Valse* and making a jazz piece out of it. Terrible. You could do it. The notes were there. But I thought, gee, you've got to have some respect for these guys. When I did *Deserted Farm*, oddly enough that was the only one that stayed with the original piece,

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and that was not released. Whereas the others, which were total bowdlerizations of the intent of the composers, went out and became hits. Strange anomaly. We're back to the public. What they'll buy.

Talbot: We're getting just a little bit ahead, but staying on that recording session, that is actually a very intriguing recording session to a lot of people. *Frenesi, Adios, Mariquita Linda* [both March 3, 1940].

Shaw: Yeah it was. As I say, in '40 I was just trying something. I had broken up my band, quit the music business, and gone to Mexico to try to figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I did not want to stand up there and be an entertainment personality. I'm not suited to that. It doesn't belong . . . I don't . . . It embarrasses me. I'm not cut out to do that kind of stuff. So I was constantly quitting and then going back, because by then I was hung up on my overhead. I was stuck. I was living in big houses and spending more money than I could make in any ordinary way.

Talbot: Just going back to a little bit before that, when . . . around about the time of *Begin the Beguine* and so on. Just for the record, how did the band function? Who looked after what? Who took care of various aspects? Did you have . . .

Shaw: Took care of what?

Talbot: How did the band function?

Shaw: I heard that. Who took care of what?

Talbot: Who took care of the various aspects of running a band, like the management?

Shaw: We had a road manager. Had a lawyer. Had a PR man [public relations]. Had all that stuff.

Talbot: What size organization did you have?

Shaw: The band? It was about . . . let's see . . . 3 brass, I mean 6 brass, 4 reeds. 10 and rhythm. 14 men and two . . . and a singer. 15 and myself. Besides that, there was a lawyer who handled the finances and the contracts. There was a band manager who came on the road and handled the reservations and the transportation. And a bus driver when we were doing that. That was it. Occasional go-fers. Somebody would set up the bandstand.

Talbot: How often did you add new arrangements?

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Shaw: As many as we could do. I would get . . . My threshold for boredom is very high . . . very low, rather. I get bored very quickly. So we'd play a piece, and play it and play it, and I'd want to get a change. We ended up with a book of about—what we travelled with—a book of around 150, 175 pieces, out of which 16 to 20 were hits, where the audience would know that was this band. It was like you went into a gallery, and you look across the room and see Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Monet. You'll know them. You don't have to go and read them, if you know anything about . . . Anybody who knew anything about jazz would know what those pieces were. They would know it was the Artie Shaw Orchestra. So that was that.

Talbot: What about rehearsals? How often did you rehearse?

Shaw: As often as we could.

Talbot: Every day?

Shaw: Whenever we got a new piece, or whenever a piece began to sag, or something I didn't like. I was absolutely meticulous about what we did. Sometimes we'd fall into a bad habit or a trumpet player would do something. Sometimes good. Then I'd have a rehearsal and say, "Let's everybody do that." Or sometimes bad, and I'd say, "Look, you're falling into this and don't do it. I don't want it. I want this. Cut that note short. Don't hold it longer." Et cetera. I'd call a rehearsal for that. While you had the rehearsal, you'd have a new piece, so you'd run over three or four pieces. I would have notes in my mind. Fortunately I have an almost eidetic memory, so I would have in my mind what was wrong. I'd make little notes of the names of them, so I'd remember which pieces. We'd call a rehearsal now and then and just straighten that out. And sometimes improve something that had been played one way . . . For example, *Back Bay Shuffle*, which was [Shaw sings a staccato 4-note phrase]. I wanted it to go [Shaw sings the phrase twice, with a smoother articulation] and do a more modern type of phrasing. So we'd rehearse that. That sort of thing. We rehearsed quite often.

I was looking at what we played. I was interested in the music, and it was always at loggerheads with the public and the arrangers . . . I mean, and the bookers and the owners of the theaters and the . . . I never could get together with those people. You'd play a theater. You have to understand that in those days we'd do as many as eight shows a day. They'd cut the movie to have more band shows, so that the audience would stay over. The manager would come screaming backstage if you changed a note. He'd say, "Those kids are going to stay here all day." You couldn't change a tune. So seven, eight times a day, seven times a week, for months at a time, you were playing the same bloody pieces. You could change to the next time . . . next show. . . next theater you'd go to. You could change one or two pieces. But boy, at the end of a week, that gets pretty old. That would drive me nuts. It would today. I don't know how I did it. I hear these kids go up there and

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do one or two concerts a night, and they say, “Wow!” We were doing seven to eight shows a day, starting at 10 am and the last show going on as late as 11:30 to 12:30 at night. That’s a bit much. You need strong chops.

Talbot: Did you like . . . when the guys had individual solos, did you like them to play basically the same solo each time?

Shaw: No, only unless it was like *Stardust*. That got frozen. More or less you had to play that, because that’s what the audience expected. Everything else, I would encourage them to do what they want. Just as my band that’s out on the road right now. I said, “Don’t play the same arrangement. Get some new stuff now and then.” And they do. Of course the public still wants to hear the same damn stuff, which is why I can’t do it, why Dick Johnson [leader of the Artie Shaw Orchestra from 1983] can.

Talbot: You were young men. What were the discipline problems like? Did you . . .

Shaw: Huh?

Talbot: You were all young me in the band.

Shaw: You couldn’t do that if you weren’t. An old man couldn’t make that.

Talbot: I say, what were . . . Did you have any problems with discipline?

Shaw: Discipline? Always.

Talbot: How did you handle that? The threat of firing?

Shaw: If a guy didn’t do what he was supposed to do, I would ask him when he wanted to leave? I’d say, “Do you want to wait two weeks? That’s your union notice. Or do you want to leave tonight?” I remember having this discussion with many people. And they’d say, “Well, I wasn’t going to leave.” I’d say, “You just quit. You just gave me your notice.” “You mean when I . . .” “Yeah, when you . . . You know what you did. You either sit and do what you’re supposed to do, or get the hell out. I don’t want you here if you don’t want to do this. If you do what I don’t want, you’re stealing from me. I don’t like crooks. I’m paying you what we agreed to, and I want from you what I’m buying. And it’s not personal. I’m talking to a horn. I don’t care what you do. I care what your trumpet does.”

On the other hand, I remember the first time Billy [Butterfield] joined the band. We were at the Palomar out here [in Los Angeles]. He splashed a clinker all over the walls on one note. And he went like this [?]. After the set, he came down and he said, “Sorry, man.” I

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said, “Billy, it’s all right. If you don’t do that once in a while, I’ll know you’re not trying.” He said, “Really!” He said, “Nobody’s ever said that to me.” I said, “If you reach out, sometimes you’re going to do that.” I liked it. I didn’t mind it at all. On a record date of course we would go back and do it again.

You must understand too that in records at that time, when you got to the last four or five bars, things got very tight. If you had a good record behind you, you didn’t want to take a chance on that last riff you were playing.

Talbot: You lived dangerously yourself, because you did some amazing things . . .

Shaw: Sometimes.

Talbot: . . . on clarinet at the ends of records.

Shaw: Sometimes. [laughter] But I tell you something. You were taking a chance. You were leaping out into the unknown, hoping you’d find a tree out there.

Talbot: Some of those high notes or those glissandos that you played at the end . . .

Shaw: Yeah. I remember somebody asking me once, a clarinetist asked me, “Do you do that every show?”, ending with the *Concerto For Clarinet*. I said, “Yeah, that’s the show.” So he says, “You end on the top C every show?” I said, “Well, yeah.” He said, “Jesus, don’t you get scared?” So I said, “Put your hand on the table,” and he . . . I said, “Raise your index finger.” So he did that. I said, “Are you scared?” He said, “You mean it’s like that?” I said, “It’s either like that or don’t do it.” It was like Louis [Armstrong]. I remember somebody . . . Earl Hines I said . . . I think, said, when Louis played his introduction on *West End Blues*, “You don’t want to do that, Pops, on a record, because you might not be able to do it one night.” Louis said, “I can do it or I can’t do it. If I can’t do it I shouldn’t do it.” And he did it. That’s how it is. You do things that some people think are impossible, and that’s what separates the men from the boys . . . You do what’s . . . ordinarily. There’s a record of *At Sundown* on the *Air Checks* record. A guy I knew heard that. He said, “Jesus! How did you do that?” I said, “I don’t know. It just came out.” I got to a point where you’d think something would come out of the horn. You don’t ask yourself what nerves are actuating that finger when you do it, and it got so you could play what you thought, and that’s what it’s about.

Talbot: You had, I think, fewer personnel changes in your band than some of the others had.

Shaw: I didn’t like making personnel changes, because we had rehearsed these pieces scrupulously. I didn’t want new guys coming in and having to learn that. When a new

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trumpet player came into my band, the first few nights, or week or two, his upper lip would be . . . his embouchure would be terrible. It would swell up, because I had him bending notes that trumpet players didn't do much. And I had him doing things that would . . . the saxes and brass blended. When they played an ensemble . . . it was I think the best ensemble band that ever lived. I don't think anybody ever [had a] better ensemble band. What's his name? Jimmie Lunceford sometimes came close. But I think musically and on an ensemble basis, you could not beat . . . There's a record of mine called *Just Kiddin' Around*. You can't beat that for ensemble. The last part of *El Rancho Grande*, which was a ridiculous tune, but what the band did after the vocal. Whew. I listen to that and I think, that was absolutely impeccable. The time, which is what we meant, not by tempo, but the time was utterly perfect.

Talbot: I always liked the 1939 recording of *I Surrender, Dear* for the sax section. It is extraordinary.

Shaw: Yeah. That's a hell of a recording. That was a sort of sonata form. I didn't know where that was going, that last cadenza I did. It came out perfectly, because you . . . you had . . . you jumped out and you said, "I'm gonna go there. I don't know how I'm going to get there, but I'll get there. That's where I'm going to end." You'd know the last three or four notes. So what you did to lead up to it, you got lucky. It came out. I don't know if it's lucky or a combination of skill and luck.

Playing jazz is a very strange business. No-one has really . . . In my book I talk about it at some length, in this book I'm writing. How this kid learns, if you hit a clinker, what do you do? And, how do you use it? It makes you reach out to do things, to make it fit in, that you wouldn't have done otherwise and sometimes better than you've ever thought of. Et cetera. It's an interesting idea. He makes up rules. Don't look back. Keep looking straight ahead. Because if you look back, you're going to screw up.

Talbot: Thinking about the bandleader and the audience aspect . . .

Shaw: That's a big problem.

Talbot: . . . how do you think your contemporaries at the time, like, say, Tommy Dorsey or Benny Goodman, people like that, how did they . . . did they handle it differently from you?

Shaw: I don't know. I can't say. I know that Tommy liked the audience. He liked success. I thought the audience was a necessary evil. They paid the freight. You needed them. My lectures are called "Three Chords for Beauty and One to Pay the Rent." One for the rent is o.k. So I would play *Beguine* if they wanted. I didn't want to play it anymore. Or *Frenesi* or whatever the case may be. I don't think Benny ever thought

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about that. I had luncheon talks. I knew Benny very well. We worked together in radio, in the radio studios. Benny had a very limited view of life. It was very easy for him to do. He ended up playing *Stealing Apples*. *Stealing Apples* and *Don't Be That Way*. He didn't mind that. His idea of playing modern was to play [Shaw sings:] "Something 'bout the way he loves me," but that's got nothing to do with how you play. That's a tune. He never really got with it. He tried that boppish band at one point, but God, he sounded like an anachronism in it. He was. In my 1949 band, we're playing pretty creditable modern music. In the last records, I was playing whatever the contemporary idea of jazz was about. My way. I wasn't aping Charlie [Parker] or [John] Coltrane or anybody else that I know of. But I still was doing things that would not have been permissible, chord changes that would not have been permissible in my day. So-called "dissonances." They weren't dissonances, as long as they resolved. I said to Les Robinson one time . . . They were doing a rehearsal of . . . Somebody had put together a band of mine, and they were doing *Back Bay Shuffle*. Les called me. He said, "You know that place where we go" [Shaw sings a rapidly descending repeated four-note motive followed by an upward phrase]. I said, "Yeah." He said, "That's a diminished. It's a B diminished, but it's a B-flat bass." I said, "Yeah." He said, "It's a dissonance." I said, "I don't know what you're talking about, Les. You mean that B against the B-flat? Sure, it's a clash, but it resolves." He said, "I know, but it's a dissonance." I said, "Come on over here sometime, and I'll play you a few bars in Bach's Prelude 1. The worst dissonance you ever heard. A diminished against a major, but the next bar . . ."

Music isn't . . . It's not rote. You don't plan it out. What you think about is psychology. Get the audience's nerves jangling, and then smooth it out. It's psychology through the medium of notes. A lot of people don't understand that. Benny never really understood that. Tommy was a better actual musician than Benny. Benny swung more. But Tommy knew more. Had a better musical taste. Lunceford had better . . . really very good musical taste. I thought he had the best black band of them all. I don't think anybody's ever going to change my mind about that. I've listen to them all. I think Lunceford was one of the great bands, at its peak, but that's not what the Smithsonian seems to think. Or, you know, I'm not talking about the Smithsonian, but Mr. Schuller again, may his name be blessed. He better be blessed. He's going to be in serious trouble, that guy.

Talbot: Still on this little bit here . . . Did you talk to the audience much? Did you have to . . .

Shaw: No. Now and then I would explain what we were doing. Sometimes I would walk off the stand if the audience wasn't listening. In the Embers, for example—that was later, when I had a small group—the audience would get pretty noisy. So I'd stop the band, and I'd say, "Look, it's axiomatic that music is notes against silence. If you guys want to keep making so much noise, we can't hear ourselves, I'll come back when you've finished your conversation. See you later."

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Talbot: What about when you played in places like . . . say you were at the Lincoln or something like that, and people were dining. Did you have to accomodate the fact that they were . . .

Shaw: You had to try to play a little softer during dinner. Jangle their nerves. So you had to try to keep from waking them up. It was a stupid idea to play dinner with a band like mine. People would do the damndest things. They'd sit right in front of the band, right in front of the drummer, say, and say, "It's too loud." I'd say, "Why don't you sit back there?" I'd say, "We play barns all day." All winter, I mean, all summer, we're in barns, and we have to fill them. Those days, the state of the art amplification was not what we have today. People ask me, why I developed that high register. I said, "So you could hear me." Because you didn't have a microphone, and if you're playing against six loud brass, forget it. Clarinet's a soft instrument. So I had to develop that.

Talbot: Did you have any amplification on, say, the bass or the guitar at that time.

Shaw: No. We didn't have it in the early days. There wasn't any. In 19 . . . around 1940, when I got the Gramercy Five thing together out of that string band, yeah, then we began to have at least amplification on guitar. But not on bass. It took many years. 1949 and '48 was when they began doing that. My 1949 band, I remember the bass player showed up. He had a speaker.

Talbot: So you were doing something which tends not to be done anymore, which was, the band balanced itself internally.

Shaw: That too. When you made records, you put the band . . . the brass on risers, trombones on one level, trumpets on the other, so they'd blow over each other instead of each other's backs, and when the guy had a mute solo, he have to run down. Some of our records were made with one mic. When you had to play, or the singer had to get into the mic . . . You had to get close if you wanted to do something with the singer. If it's a muted section thing, you had to be very careful to make sure the band played very softly, so the mutes could be heard. Yeah, there was a constant . . . but you were aware of that, that you were doing that, because that was part of the recording process, learning how to make a record.

Talbot: When you made a recording, did they cut some acetates first to see what the balance was like, or anything like that? Or did you . . .

Shaw: I'm sorry. I'm not hearing you.

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Talbot: You're in the studio, and you're going to record *Begin the Beguine*, or whatever. Did they used to cut a trial acetate before they cut the wax.

Shaw: We would make a test. Run it down for a test. Then I would listen to it. Then I'd say, all right. Now when we get back to letter C or letter B or number, bar so and so, you do this, you stand up, or you come down here, or brass do this, so and so. Another thing I did that was very different from most of the bandleaders—every studio technician I ever worked with told me that was altogether different—I would ask to hear the playback with a bunch of high . . . I mean high on the bass. Boomy. Make it boomy and turn it down and make it sound rotten. He'd say, "Why?" I'd say, "That's how most people are going to hear the record. They don't have this kind of equipment. If it sounds good that way, then I know I've got a good record." Whereas the other guys would turn everything on and listen to it. Then, if you turned it down, it wasn't very good.

Talbot: Smart thinking.

Shaw: Funny. A lot of people would ask me, "How did that happen, that your records have this good sound?" That '49 band. I don't know whether you heard the album, the CD that was put out by Musicmasters. It sounds as good as today. The state of the art is there. Of course I put that through on a digital processor. But it had to be there or you couldn't do it. The music had to be in the tape.

One other point. That is: like film, if you know anything about photography, you know that you can either . . . early film, you can take the highs or the lows. You could do the shadows, and lose the sun. The sun would be too bright. Or you get the sun and you lose the darkness. Then they developed what they call latitude. Sound, the same. Now we have much more latitude. You can get more treble and bass in at the same time. But you needed a special kind of speaker, special kind of amplification. We didn't have that back then. But unconsciously I think I was looking for that. I didn't know that, but I wanted to hear it at its worst, so that when you heard it well, on good speakers, you knew it was there.

Talbot: A real basic technical question, because we weren't around then: when they recorded on . . . when they cut the wax, did they also run an acetate for you to listen to as a playback?

Shaw: They didn't have acetate at first.

Talbot: What did they play back? What did they actually play back to you?

Shaw: I really don't know. Might have been . . .

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Talbot: They couldn't play the wax.

Shaw: Maybe there was some other thing that they had, or maybe a double . . . Yes, I think they had two turntables. One that you'd hear back, of the one you had just made. I'm pretty sure it was something like that. They put it on something, whatever it was. They didn't have acetate. Whatever they had. It's hard to remember, because they didn't have tape. I remember, for example, we talked earlier about *Interlude in B-flat*. They didn't even have . . . they had wire recorders at that time, and they weren't very good. Somebody must have put that thing . . . see, it was on a microphone in the theater. Somebody must have taken it off the air, because I don't know how that second version . . . the one that came out, there was no applause. The one that we did first, every time there's a change of tempo, the audience would scream. So, when they said, "Play it again," second time we played it, that was recorded. Somebody must have thought, "Hey, this is a good piece. We better get it on."

Talbot: Yeah, they might have had a wire down to a local recording studio.

Shaw: Who knows? I have no idea.

Talbot: When you recorded, did you shake things down first? Did you play things on gigs?

Shaw: On the job?

Talbot: On the job, before you recorded.

Shaw: Yeah. I tried to do that. I almost never did an arrangement in a studio the first time around. That was *Frenesi*. Studio musicians. We didn't have the time . . . we didn't get out on the road and play that piece enough. If we had, it would have loosened up and been a different record, but you couldn't afford to take all those men on the road. That was about a 48-piece orchestra, 45-piece orchestra. Big string section and all that. Later, or anytime I did that, we would go out and season a piece, play it on the road, play it, play it, play it, until I felt it's ready to record that now. Instead of going in and rehearsing it, we used it. And then we recorded it. It was part of the book, you see.

Talbot: So the sessions would go quite quickly, I imagine.

Shaw: We did four tunes in one session, one three-hour session. Finished records, and they were pretty damn good. On the other hand, of course, a lot of the things that I made records of, later got better, as we played them six or eight months. Things would happen. But even this last recording thing. Some of the things we played, and I hear them now, I think, "Jesus, we did better than that." Much later we did quite a few things we didn't do

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there. But, that's the way it is. There's tiny little things, for example like in the *Sad Sack*, where we go [Shaw sings two melodic phrases, with an ornamental turn at the end]. We would do that [Shaw sings further such phrases]. That was later. First was [Shaw sings the phrases without the ornament]. It was straight. As we played a while, things would loosen up and things would happen. Somebody would do something that sounded kind of cute, and you'd say, "Hey, let's do that." Or I would do something, and the band would fall in. That's the way it is.

Talbot: Going back to William Grant Still. I think somewhere I read that when he wrote the arrangement of *Chantais-las bas*, there was . . . you had to do quite a lot of editing.

Shaw: I did.

Talbot: Why was that? Was it too long? Or did it . . .

Shaw: No. It was too stiff. A little too "square." And the same thing with the blues, the *Lenox Avenue Blues*. We did a lot of ad libbing in that. That was a two-sided record. He wrote enough for about, oh, maybe four minutes, and I was going to do two sides. I had enough for three . . . almost seven minutes. So we added a lot of stuff that he didn't write. He loved it. He thought it was great. If he'd thought of it, he would have written it. And the recording of, say, *St. James Infirmary*. That was a piece that, if we did it right, it would last . . . it was too big for a three-minute record. We'd have had to put in on 12-inch [a 12-inch disc rather than the normal 10-inch 78 r.p.m. disc], which I did with *Summertime*. And it dropped dead. Where're you gonna go? There were no jukeboxes for 12-inch records. I just wanted it done that way. Wouldn't you know too? Very strange. We finished the recording session. I think we did 22 takes on that one. It was a very difficult thing to do.

Talbot: That was *Summertime*.

Shaw: At least 22. Finally, I chose one. Then the tapes came in . . . at that time, whatever they were. I had it home, and I played it and played it. I wasn't happy with it. So at my own expense I took the band in and re-recorded it at what I considered the proper tempo and all that. Which one do you think they put out? The one I didn't want. I marked "o.k.," the other one "n.g." Well now, the other one has been destroyed.

Talbot: That's a tragedy.

Shaw: The one that they used to put out.

Talbot: Oh, not the one . . .

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Shaw: The good one is the only one left now. I asked Orrin Keepnews to destroy the metal one. Scratch it up. He did. That happened all the time.

To your question of what did you do, did you rehearse them? Yeah. You played the pieces over and over, and when you were satisfied that they were done well, you go into the studio and record it. As I say, eventually, since jazz is basically an improvisational business, eventually they would improve. They would change over a period of time. Too late. You see, you're talking about solos. Every time I would play *Beguine* . . . I mean, not *Beguine* . . . *Stardust*, for example, I'd have to play that chorus. So did the trombone player. So did the trumpet player. Tried to play Billy's solo. It's very funny. When I put a band together after the war, there was a trombone player. I think he was 14 or 15. Ollie something or other [Ollie Wilson]. When we started rehearsing *Stardust*, I said, "Look, you've got a solo in this. You know the Jack Jenney solo. You've got to do that. Can you do it?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Are you kidding?" [Shaw sings a passage from the solo, with a difficult leap upward.] He said, "Yeah, I can do it." I said, "All right. Let me hear it." He went dah-dah-dah and he played it. It's like the four-minute mile. Once it's done, everybody's got to do it. You don't run . . . you can't run a four-minute mile, you got no business in the mile run anymore. But there was a time when that was impossible. It's like the Bob Beamon jump. 29-feet-something. He beat the record by about a foot and a half. No-one does that. That record stood for over 20 years. Finally it got beaten. You've got something to shoot at, human beings are amazing. They can do almost anything, if they think about it. I've never met anybody who can touch his right elbow with his right hand, yet. Somebody'll come around to that one day.

Talbot: It's 1939 you broke up the *Begin the Beguine* band.

Shaw: Yeah. I'd had a belly full of that.

Talbot: How did the guys take it in the band?

Shaw: Hmmm?

Talbot: How did the guys in the band take it?

Shaw: [laughs] Oh, God. There was a shock wave. Nobody could believe it. I just had got to a place where I could not handle it any more. I'd been sick. I was in California, and I was given up for dead. When I came back to life again, and I went out with a band, I thought, "Jesus. I've never really done what I wanted to do." Here I am spending all my life doing something I don't particularly want to do, which is keep repeating myself. I don't mind playing a new piece. But over and over and over. So I thought . . . at a certain point, something triggered it. It's an incident I'd just as soon not recall. In any case, I thought, "To hell with this." I went upstairs, and I thought, "I've had this." I called Ben

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Cole, my band manager, and I said, “Tell the guys I want to see them after the gig.” They all came up to my suite, and I said, “Fellas, the band’s breaking up. You want to take the book, go take it. I’m leaving.” “What!” They couldn’t believe it. Neither could the agents, because I was their trigger, general . . . It was Rockwell-O’Keefe. My lawyer. Jeez. They wanted to get a faith healer to come in. It was just . . . They thought I was crazy. I might have been. I don’t know what I was. But I knew I didn’t want to do that any more. So I quit and left. I didn’t know where I was going. I had no idea what I was going to do.

I went to Mexico. I didn’t set out to go to Mexico. But I got there. I remember going to . . . stopping at Little Rock, Arkansas, which is about halfway to the Coast [inaudible], and I called Judy Garland, who was my close friend out here—she was like a little sister—and I said, “Hey, hi’ya.” She said, “How’ya doing? Where are you? You know, everybody . . .” I said, “I don’t know. I’m in Little Rock.” [laughs] “What the hell are you doing?” I told her. She said, “Don’t come out here.” I said, “What is it like if I come out? Would I . . .” “Oh,” she said, “They’ll drive you crazy.” So I didn’t. I went to Mexico. I stayed there about two or three months, and then . . . That’s where I heard *Frenesi*. I broke a leg, and I came back. I had no idea. I was really a lost soul. I didn’t know what was going on. It was all too much too soon, and I wasn’t equipped to handle it.

So there was that. And then I hung around L.A., and I wanted to do . . . just stay there. I had a nice little house up on a hill. I wanted to make . . . instead of making, 10-, 20-, 30-thousand a week, one thousand. I could get along fine.

Talbot: Did you do any playing at that time? Did you go out and jam or anything like that?

Shaw: No. Stopped. I had such a bellyfull of it. The agents of course wouldn’t do it, because obviously they could make a lot of money on me on one-night stands, 15%, and selling other bands on me, et cetera, and so they wouldn’t . . . I couldn’t get me a job for a thousand a week. Finally I got the Burns and Allen program. In order to do that, I had to get this big band together, so that we went and played with the band up in the Palace Theater. That was when we’d come down and make some records like *Stardust* and *Moonglow*, *I Cover The Waterfront*, those.

Talbot: How did you get that band together? What was the actual process? Did you pull some of the guys . . .

Shaw: I picked the strings first. Strings you can get anywhere. I got a good string section. Then I knew Billy [Butterfield] would play lead [trumpet]. Bobby Hackett was going to be [lead trumpet], but see we made that movie, and Bobby did Scott . . . Burgess Meredith, and . . .

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Talbot: Which film was this? *Second Ending*?

Shaw: *Second Chorus*. And Billy played Fred Astaire. Bobby for one reason or other didn't want to go out with a band. Billy did. I paid him a lot. And then I wanted good bands, so I got Jack Jenney, who was on the loose. I got Lennie Hayton, who was . . . I used to work for him, in the Ipana program. The rest of the band were all good solid players. It's like a football team. You get three or four stars and build the team around them. I had three or four stars. I had Georgie Auld. I got Les Robinson back. Who was on drums? Nick Fatool on drums. Johnny Guarnieri on piano. It was a good band. The soloists were marvelous. There was Ray . . . Ray Conniff was very good on gutbucket trombone. Hard to believe today. [Conniff later played easy-listening music.] Jack Jenney was very . . . one of the most underrated trombone players in the world. Billy I thought was remarkable. I had Jack Cathcart and a guy named George Wendt playing . . . a marvelous lead trumpet player. It's a good band.

Talbot: Did you . . . did the same feelings come back, that you had in '39?

Shaw: After a certain amount of time, yeah. As I say, I have a low threshold, and I go out and play the pieces so many times. At a certain point, it becomes rote. I had an interesting story told me by Helen Hayes. She was doing *Victoria Regina* in New York. It was one of the long-running shows. And after about 180, 250, whatever number of performances, she left. Just closed it down. She said the reason, the thing that triggered it, was one night when she finished and got dressed and started to leave the theater, Pop, the guy at the dressing room, at the stage door, said, "Where are you going, Miss Hayes?" She said, "I'm leaving. I'll be back tomorrow." He said, "But you just finished the first act." She realized, she better get out. There's only so much you can do. You play the same piece over and over. You got to give yourself breathing space to develop, go to your next level. Then you can come back and do it. So I put that band together again later, only I couldn't get Billy any more, and I could get . . . whatever it was. I got a different group of guys. That was the band that did the '49 records, and I was back, with a new feeling, a different kind of feeling. We were playing a sort of boppish thing. And then before that was the band with [Hot] Lips Page. There was a hell of a good band. It wasn't the same band as did *I Cover The Waterfront*, but we did *St. James Infirmary* and a few very good records with that.

So, there it is. You can't win 'em all. I go back to the fact that when Hemingway wrote *Across The River Into The Trees*, everybody said, "Boy, he's finished." A long way from finished. That just happened to be a boo-boo on his way to *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, which was no boo-boo, although a little oversentimentalized too. Anyway, another story.

Talbot: Then the war broke out.

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Shaw: Huh?

Talbot: Then there was the war.

Shaw: Well, in that one he had a war.

Talbot: No, no, you. I mean, we're talking about . . .

Shaw: Oh, with me!

Talbot: Yeah, you. You re-formed the band and then . . .

Shaw: Oh yeah. When the war broke out, that was . . . I was in Providence when that happened. We were playing on a stage, and I forget what happened. Oh, I went backstage. I went off into the wings after announcing a dance act. You'd have acts with you. The band was playing for the dance act, and I went off stage for a minute.

Talbot: Was this the *Stardust* band?

Shaw: Yeah . . . No! This was the . . .

Talbot: Or just after that.

Shaw: Lips Page was in this band. Not the *Stardust* band.

Talbot: The next one.

Shaw: I went off stage to grab a smoke, and the radio was playing. The announcer was hysterical: "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor." Blah blah blah Japanese. Everybody . . . "What the hell's Pearl Harbor?" A sleepy lagoon. All of a sudden the phone crackled and the . . . it rang and a stage hand picked it up and said, "It's for you." Handed it to me, and he said, "The manager's on the phone." He says, "Go out and make an announcement. I've just been called by the war department. 'All military personnel to report to the base immediately'." I went back out on stage after the dance act was over. "Ladies and gentlemen, our next dance number is . . . but before I do that, I must make an announcement that the manager . . ." And I made the announcement. Then after that, when I suddenly realized how many servicemen there were out there . . . The draft had already been initiated. Two-thirds of the theater got up and left. And I . . . now I've got to say, "Now we're going to play our recording, arrangement of . . ." Jesus. *Stardust* sounds so fatuous after that that I just . . . We started it and let the band get going into it. I walked up to Les Robinson right in the front line, and I said, "Pass the word. Two week's

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notice.” Totally impulse. I knew I was . . . didn’t want to go on with this any more. So, two week’s notice and I went down to the Navy, 90 Church Street, and enlisted.

Talbot: Was it your intention to form a band in the service?

Shaw: In the Navy? Hell, no. I was out on minesweepers. They decided I should do that. They put me in charge of a band. It was awful. They put me in charge of a Navy band. Worst experience I’ve had in my life. Terrible band. Half of them were Navy men, and some had some dance band training. So here you had two different wars going on in the Navy, in the band, and they put me in charge of it. The first thing I did . . .

Talbot: Whereabouts was this?

Shaw: Newport. That’s after they took me off minesweepers.

Talbot: You’re on minesweepers in . . .

Shaw: In New York. Staten Island.

Talbot: Then did they suddenly figure out, hey, you’re a musician?

Shaw: Take this guy and send him to Newport. My job was to form little groups that could go out and play on battleships or cruisers or whatever the hell.

Talbot: Where do you think this decision got made? And how?

Shaw: Who knows who makes decisions? In the Navy? My God.

Talbot: It was because you were Artie Shaw, though, was it?

Shaw: They knew who I was. I was extremely well known. Anyway, so they put me in charge of this awful band and asked me to play officers’ dances. And I . . . “This isn’t what I came in here for. Christ, if I were a civilian, I could make you enough money to buy a battleship. What am I doing? This is stupid. Either let me get out on a minesweeper, which I was doing, or let me do something that makes sense musically.” Finally I couldn’t get permission to leave. We had what they call a Red Mike, in charge of the . . .

Talbot: What’s that?

Shaw: Red Mike [Shaw imitates a growling voice] is a guy who’s face gets red when he says this: “Stand up and salute, sailor.” I went to see him. I had no idea. I just asked if I

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could see the Captain, the head of the base. [laughs] I walked in there. “Take your hat off. Who the f . . . hell you think . . .” Jesus. He barked at me. I’d gone through two boot trainings. I was in boot training the second time. I said, “What am I doing here? I’ve been through this.” He said, “We can’t let you go in without boot training. The rest of the personnel here are gonna think we waived it for you.” So I had to go through it twice. Boot training once is enough. Hell’s enough, once. Anyway, I finally found I couldn’t get out of there. There was no way I could talk to anybody. No-one cared.

By then I was indoctrinated enough to know you better do what you’re told. So I went a.w.o.l. Put on civilian clothes. I was a seaman. The lowest you can get. I put on civilian clothes, went down to Washington, and saw Admiral . . . I saw Forrestal, whom I’d known in civilian life. He had said to me, when I joined the Navy, “You’re going to be in some trouble. When you get in real trouble, come see me.” So I went down there, and his man at . . . his receptionist, rather, at the outer office, was an admiral named Gingrich. I said, “I’d like to see Mr. Forrestal.” I was in civilian clothes. He said, “What do you want to see him about?” I said, “I’m in the Navy and I want . . .” “If you’re in the Navy, why aren’t you in uniform?” I said, “Well, sir, it’s a long story.” He said, “Were you given . . .” I said, “No, I wasn’t given permission. I’m here a.w.o.l.” He said, “Yeah, everybody wants to come in and see him and get favors.” I said, “I don’t want any favors. I’m already in the Navy.” “You mean you’ve joined?” I said, “Yes. I’m already in the Navy.” “What are you?” I said, “A seaman.” He shook his head. He said, “Wait a minute. What’s your name?” I told him. He’d heard my name. So he went in, came out, “Mr. Forrestal will see you.” I went in, and Forrestal looked at me, shook his head. He said, “Jesus. I knew you would be in trouble. You’re a.w.o.l. You know what that means?” I said, “Sure, but you’re the boss man here.” “What do you want?” he said. I said, “I just want to know what the hell I can do. I can’t . . . this is ridiculous. They got me leading the stupidest band in the world. I could be doing . . .” “What do you want to do?” I said, “I want to get a good band together. Get me a . . . give me the right to get some men together. Give me permission to go and pick men.”

O.k. He called up a man named Bledsoe who was in charge of enlisted personnel for the entire Navy. So I went to see him. Old Forrestal had said, “Pay attention,” so he paid attention to me. “What do you want to do?” I said, “Where’s the Navy?” He said, “In the Pacific.” I said, “I want to go to the Pacific.” He said, “Everybody’s fighting, hanging to the grassroots.” I said, “No, I want to go where that is.” He said, “What do you want to do there.” I said, “Mr. Forrestal says I should get a big band together. Can you give me some kind of orders that allow me to do that?” He said, “How long do you need?” I said, “Two or three months. I’m going to get a bunch of 1-A or A-1,” whatever the hell it was. Classified guys who were not in the service yet, and I’ll talk them into joining my band. That’s what he did.

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I went around and saw a lot of trumpet players and trombone players and saxophone players and got them together. There was . . . Claude Thornhill came down. Sam Donahue. Conrad Gozzo. Maxie Kaminsky. It was a hell of a band. That's what we did. We put that band together, and we got it ready. Oh, that's a saga. A ridiculous saga.

Talbot: Tell us. Tell us.

Shaw: I can't. I really can't. I can't tell you about that. It was the worst experience I've ever had in my life. I was in the Navy in a totally anomalous position. Nobody knew what to do with that band. Nobody knew what to do with me. I didn't know what to do. In effect I had my own little platoon in the Navy, going around, and our orders were as loose as, "Go to Pearl Harbor. Report to Pearl Harbor." Nobody knew what to do with us. There was nothing like it in the Navy ever before. We were Band 501. Their bands were from 1 to 40 or 60 or 70. This was a whole new category. They'd never had that. The Navy was one of the most conservative organizations in the world. Still are. Look what's happening with Skyhook and this feminist bit. Anyway, we got to Pearl Harbor, and oh, it was shocking. Just shocking. Finally, we got out of there and went into war zones.

Davey Tough wasn't supposed to be there. I got Davey in there by telling the examining doctor, "Look, this guy's one of the greatest drummers in the world. He weighs 90 pounds soaking wet. He's got absolutely . . . if you looked into one ear, you'd see the guy looking through the other ear. He's in terrible shape, but he can do what he does." So they blinked an eye. They asked him to squat. He fell right down.

But I got the band together, somehow. We rehearsed it and used my book. Fortunately we used my book and our instruments, because it saved our lives a few times. They were going to send us places where I wouldn't go. They were going to get 30,000 men together. One Jap bomb. That's all it would take. I refused. I refused an admiral's order. I said, "Sir, I have no way to stop you from ordering this. We'll go. But I'm not taking our instruments or my music. That's my property." "Why aren't you using . . ." I said, "You can't have that property, the Navy. There's no point in sending us. You want to send us, we'll go, but what can we do?" That worked.

I had a run-in. I'll tell you one little story about me and Admiral Nimitz. It's hard to believe. I find it hard to believe to this minute. When I was in San Francisco at Treasure Island . . . We'd gone all the way across the country in troop trains. Got to San Francisco, assigned to Treasure Island. Remember, I was a chief. By then, they'd made me a chief. Well, that's nothing in the Navy. So I had no . . . I wasn't Glenn Miller. I had no . . . major. I wasn't a major. He had a pretty cushy scene.

Talbot: Chief what? Chief petty officer or something?

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Shaw: Chief petty officer. Equivalent of a sergeant. I didn't want to be an officer, because I was playing for enlisted men. I refused officers' dances. I wouldn't do that. I played for large numbers of enlisted men. Whenever anyone asked me, ordered me to do something, I'd ask them to put it in writing, and they wouldn't do that. A dance for just officers and nurses who were officers. I said, "I'm not out here for that. The U.S. taxpayers are paying us, and we're supposed to play for the most men we can. This is a morale-building effort." Well, they had to go with it. I'd become a sea-lawyer by then.

Anyway, I played this recruiting drive for Mrs. Admiral [Chester W.] Nimitz. She asked me, as a personal favor, would I appear at the San Francisco Auditorium? She was running a drive to recruit WAVES, the Women's Auxiliary whatever it was. I said, "Of course." So we played it. It was highly successful. Huge crowd. She came over and thanked me effusively afterwards. Said, "Mr. Shaw, I just want to tell you I'm eternally grateful for what you did. You did a great job for us. When you get to Pearl Harbor, you must tell my husband what I said and give him my love." Fine.

We get to Pearl Harbor. I said, I probably won't get within a hundred miles of him. He's the Commander in Chief, SYNCPCAC [?spelling]. Commander in Chief, Pacific. Anyway, we get to Pearl Harbor. We play at a place called The Breakers, for enlisted men, where they could dance and jitterbug and do all that. One day . . . I was staying at the Hali Kalani Hotel. I wasn't in barracks, because I had a station wagon that [Vice] Admiral [William Lowndes] Calhoun gave me that I could drive around the island, see the different bases, and decide where we should play. We were playing all kinds of gigs around the island. We would play The Breakers in the afternoon. In the evening we'd play at some way-the-hell-and-gone-out-in . . . outskirts of Oahu.

We were having lunch. I used to have a guy in the band come in every week and have lunch with me. A break from where they were. Rocky Collucio was the piano player. Rocky Cole, he's become since. Rocky and I were having lunch in the Hali Kalani. All officers. Nothing under commander. Senior officers. We're sitting there, having lunch, and all of everybody in the place stands up to attention. So we got up, and here comes Nimitz, surrounded by his, flanked by his braid officers, everybody in glitter and white, and they go to the end of the dining room, where there's a big table, the mayor of Honolulu and apparently some confab about Navy versus civilian business, and Rocky said, "Tell him what Mrs. Nimitz told you." I said, "Rocky, I can't go over and interrupt the admiral in charge of the Navy." He said, "Send him a note." So I said, "Yeah, maybe. Why not?" So I called the head waiter over, and I said, "Would you give me a pad?" He did. So I wrote a little note:

Dear Admiral Nimitz,

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While I was in San Francisco I had the pleasure of being of service to your wife in a recruiting drive for the WAVES, and she asked me to be sure and give you her love when I saw you. I told her there was little chance that I would, but as usual, the lady is right.

Yours truly,
Artie Shaw, Chief Bandmaster, USNR.

The head waiter took it and gave it to Nimitz. Nimitz took it, looked at it. Turned to the guy next to him, handed it to him. That guy turned around, looked around. Nothing else. A little crestfallen. I thought maybe I shouldn't have done that. The next day, two marines come to me, picked me up at the hotel, with a marine . . . a navy car. These guys with sidearms. "Mr. Shaw . . ." no. "Are you Artie Shaw?" "Yes, sir." "Chief Shaw." I said, "Yeah, I am." "Come with us." I followed them, got in the car. They took me up the hill to the headquarters. I thought, "Jeez, are they going to take me to Nimitz?" Took me up. Said "go here," past another guard. He took me down a hallway, and there was the guy who had been sitting next to Nimitz, sitting behind a desk, and I walked in. He said, "Attention!" And I stood to attention. He handed me this note. "Did you write this?" I said, "Yes, I did." "Sir!," he said. "Yes sir, I did." I realized it was now Navy. I mean I knew what that was supposed to be. He said, "You've been in the Navy how long?" I said, "Almost a year, sir." He said, "Well, you do know that if you're going to approach a superior officer, you do it through channels." I said, "Yes, sir, but this wasn't Navy business." He said, "Precisely." I said, "What did I do? What was so awful?" He said, "You do not violate . . . anyway, back you go." It was a real severe reprimand. I went back. Next day we were shipped aboard the North Carolina, embarked for the Marianas. Ended up in Guadalcanal, where we were being bombed. I lost my left ear there. That was Mr. Nimitz and me. Never heard another peep out of him. Orders to report to Admiral [William "Bull"] Halsey, who couldn't have been more affable. Halsey was . . . put his arms around me, "Called me Bull. Call me Bill," you know, Jesus. This was the problem. You never knew where you were. One place to the other. One place, they'd say, "What do you need? Artie Shaw. My God." Another place, "Who do you think you are?" "I know who I am. Who do you think I am?" Endless. Shocking experience. I had a complete breakdown at one point, and some guy pulled me out of it.

Talbot: It must have been . . . the reactions of the guys you were playing for must have been rewarding.

Shaw: Oh, Jesus. The men in the band fell to pieces.

Talbot: No, I mean the reactions of the troops that you were playing for. That must have been rewarding.

Shaw: Oh, the audiences were just bloody remarkable. Never saw anything like it. Never. You'd hit two notes of a piece and there would be a roar. That music meant tremendous

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amounts to them out there. See, we could go where there were no U.S.O. allowed. We could go right into war zones. Guadalcanal, the Bob Hope troupe could never go there. They were bombing. Every night was a bombing raid. Until we got the P-38s—which is that plane, right there. See it?—’til we got those, the Japs had carte blanche. They could bomb the hell out of us, because our planes couldn’t cope with those Zeros, which were faster and could outmaneuver ours.

Anyway, that’s one incident. Finally we got to Pearl Harbor . . . to Australia. Went to New Zealand. It was in winter. Cold down there. Went all the way down to Wellington. Down to Christ Church. Played every kind of gig there was.

Very strange incident, by the way, happened in a New Zealand hospital. You’ll probably understand this. It was very strange to us. We played a concert, and it was greeted with total silence. We were so used to audiences whistling and cheering and hollering, that we took it for granted. We’d finish a piece and [Shaw claps gently] polite applause. At the end of the concert I went to the commanding general in charge of the hospital and said, “Sir, I’m sorry. It was a real flop.” He looked at me in astonishment. He said, “The men were *mad* about it.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Didn’t you hear how they listened? They didn’t make a sound.” He said, “Usually they’re very noisy.” I said, “Oh, I see. I’m used to the American audience.” He said, “That’s right. Exactly.” He said, “You people are much more demonstrative.”

Talbot: I think also it might have been an element of the fact that it was the first time I think any American band had ever come to either Australia or New Zealand.

Shaw: Yes, but aside from that, you see, it’s something I’ve been . . .

Talbot: I think people were probably overwhelmed, you know?

Shaw: They were trained to listen to music. We have audiences that go into concert halls. They’re trained to listen to music. They don’t applaud until the piece is over. I argued with many bandleaders. I used to say to Woody [Herman], “Why do you say, ‘Joe Yivta on trombone, ladies and gentlemen,’ while so-and-so is playing, taking the lead and doing something. You’re wasting his whole . . .” “Well, the audience likes it.” I said, “But what do you like, Woody? Don’t you think it’s time you told them, ‘Wait until after the pieces and then applaud, and then I’ll have the men stand up, and you can . . .’” No. He wouldn’t do it.

Bandleaders are very responsible for what’s happened to American music. The jazz musician has to blame himself. I used to preach to my men, when we’d go on a program. This is the new band. The trumpet player would be out, down front, playing the first chorus, and I’d look up, and two of the trumpet players would be talking to each other.

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I'd say, "For Christ's sake, if you guys aren't listening to him, what do you expect the audience to do? They're listening with their eyes. Show some respect for this guy." They got that. "I can dig it. I can dig it." From there on in, they understood that music is also watched. You're playing for an audience. It's very hard to make the average musician understand that if you want any dignity for the music, you've got to give it some. It's one of the things I liked about Miles [Davis]. He was a crazy son of a bitch, but he insisted on doing what he did musically, whereas Dizzy keeps making fun of it. It's o.k. Dizzy's a marvelous trumpet player, but Miles is a poet. I think Miles will have more lasting influence, musically. Some of the Gil Evans music is remarkable music. I don't know whether it's jazz or what it is. The *Sketches of Spain*. It's hard to call that jazz. But certainly it isn't classical. It's not what you . . . It's jazz-inflected. Anyway. Long story. That's philosophical. That's what I'm writing about.

Talbot: Did the Navy band record anywhere?

Shaw: Never. We were never where we could record. We were playing in jungle clearings.

Talbot: Even before you went away? Before you left . . .

Shaw: Before we went away the band was nothing. We rehearsed it in Pearl Harbor. I mean, not in Pearl Harbor, but in Treasure Island. That's where I really got it in shape. Or in Pier 92 in New York, which was a hellhole. By the time we were through with that, we were embarked on a train, and it took us two weeks to cross the country. We'd have to practice by ourselves in order to keep our chops up. Then we got to Treasure Island, and we could rehearse. I had to requisition a place to rehearse. Then you'd have sailors wandering in and out. It was a pain in the ass.

Talbot: It was a real all-star band in many ways.

Shaw: Well, yeah. I didn't think of it that way. I just got good guys that could play. We had a good book.

Talbot: How do you think it measured up in comparison to your other bands, the bands that had come before it?

Shaw: If I'd had time to take that band and whip it into the kind of shape I did, it could have made some good records. It would have been comparable to . . . not quite as good as the Musicraft band with Roy Eldridge. That kind of band. That kind of book.

By the way, I'm going to release those records. I finally got the rights to them. I sued Musicraft. I got all the . . . the copyrights have reverted to me. I'm putting out an album

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called *A Mixed Bag*. Did you ever hear the Kitty Kallen record of *My Heart Belongs To Daddy*? I'll play it for you, if you want to hear it.

Talbot: Yeah, I'd like to.

Shaw: We don't want to put it on this, because . . . But it's an amazing record. A vocal record. And Mel Tormé and the Meltones. Did you ever hear some of the records we did?

Talbot: Yes.

Shaw: Like *What Is This Thing Called Love*. Nobody's ever used a quartet like that, or a singing group. They were part of the band. Mel still remembers that with great fondness.

[A sudden change of topic; perhaps a change of tape?]

Is that where we were, the war?

Talbot: Yeah. Yes, the war.

Shaw: It's hard for me to do that. As I say, for me it was such a . . . You know Charlie Parker . . . not Charlie Parker. Lester [Young] never got over his Army experience. It killed him. Finished him. When he got through with that, he was done. There are people who don't belong in that, and I didn't. I did what I had, because I'm a fairly disciplined guy. But I had no use for it. It's like standing before Congress. You can get cited for contempt of Congress. I had nothing but contempt for that hearings, the un-American Activities.

Talbot [to recording engineer]: Rolling?

[recording engineer:] Yes, I'm rolling.

Talbot: Fine. How did . . . You went to New Zealand. You went to Australia.

Shaw: Yeah. By that time the band was so beat. Have you seen a book of mine called *The Best Of Intentions*?

Talbot: No.

Shaw: There's a story in it called, "A Nice Little Postwar Business." That's the book up there. It deals with that. Coming back, we were all pretty beat up. The band was washed up. When we came back to the States, I was surveyed, dropped out. Maxie Kaminsky was

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dropped out. Davey Tough was dropped out. A lot of people. The band continued, but Sam Johnson . . . Sam Donald kept . . .

Talbot: Donahue.

Shaw: Sam Donahue kept the band, and they went on. But it was a different band. He had a different view of music from what I did. There it is.

Talbot: He carried on touring for the Navy.

Shaw: Yeah. They stayed in the Navy, so they went to London and did what they did. But it was no longer my band. They played some of my book, but not much. Different philosophy, different thinking. Poor Sam.

Talbot: A rather different experience for your band than Miller's Army band.

Shaw: Oh yeah, altogether. Oh, Miller, Jesus. Well, you know. Hubris. So he died. If he'd stayed with the band, he wouldn't have died. If he'd been an enlisted man, he wouldn't have flown with that General. If if if. An old gambler once said, and I've got this in my book, "If the dog hadn't stopped to take a [expletive deleted], he'd have caught the rabbit." You know, the dog track.

Talbot: When you came back, what did you do?

Shaw: Oh, boy. That was a low spot. I was married to Jerry [Jerome] Kern's daughter, Betty. And I had a kid, Steve. My first kid. It was . . . The marriage was no good. It was hopeless. And I knew it, but I tried to stay with it as long as I could. It didn't work. Finally there was nothing to do. Got divorced, which is a miserable experience. Whatever you want to say about it, any marriage, a divorce is a miserable experience. So that was a low spot, and I got into psychoanalysis, which began a slow ascent back to normal, back to whatever my normal is. At least back to life, because I was unable to live. I didn't want to get out of bed. There was nothing to live for. When I saw the world as I saw it, and thought, [expletive deleted] it. I was over there in that [expletive deleted] war, being shot at, losing my left ear, and all this bull[expletive deleted], for what? To come back to Beverly Hills, to the height of rarefied atmospheres, and listen to you people complain because you had to stand in line to get certain cuts of meat? I thought, Holy Christ. This is the American way. Mom and blueberry pie.

I was very disillusioned with everything. I got into analysis because it was a way to get out of bed every morning. I had no reason to get up. I was making all the money I needed. I was getting the equivalent of, say, a million dollars a year in royalties from the records. Well, 150,000 back then. Again, you could have bought a Cadillac for about

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1100 dollars. So, multiply by 10 if you want, or 15. In any case, the analysis began to take root, but I was a totally confused person, about music, about me. What was I doing? Music obviously was part of it. But I didn't want to play. I didn't do any more of that. I was disillusioned.

Talbot: It was a time when music was changing a lot, too.

Shaw: Yeah, but that wasn't it. That didn't bother me. I had heard what that . . . they called bop. I had listened to Bartok and all those people that Charlie [Parker] were listening to. None of that bothered me. When I went back with the band, the Musicraft band, we were doing that. The Gramercy Five, with Dodo [Marmarosa] and Roy [Eldridge], they were pretty modern. Barney Kessel and Roy. So I wasn't worried about the changes. I was worried about the relationship of me to the world, the world to me, the audience. What was I doing there? I'm not an entertainer. I began in the analysis to separate out the difference between a sensibility that leads to an entertainer, meaning please the people, primary motion . . . primary motivation. Give the people what they want, and you've had a good night. And my emotion, which is give *me* what I want and hope the people like it. If they like it, they pay my rent, and they enable me to continue. Even so, they like it, but I get bored with it after a while. If they like it, but they want to hear it over and over again, I cannot do that. The essence of being a performer is to do it over and over and over again. Lennie Bruce couldn't do it. He used to say, "I can't tell the same joke twice the same way." It was hard for me to play the same piece twice the same way. But then, all right, let's say they allowed you to do it. There's only so many ways you can do it, and then finally it's "Where are you going Miss Hayes? You just did the first act." So I've just played that piece over and over. When people say they don't know why I quit, they're telling me more about themselves than about me. The straitjacket was too tight. I couldn't handle the constant need to do the same thing, or something similar with the same piece of material. If I could have done what Glenn Gould did, go into a studio and work on one piece 'til it's good and then go away and leave it alone and never play it again, that's fine. That's very difficult for me, because he plays Bach. There's an audience for that. Nobody wants to hear American music. If I could have gone and done modern American music. See, I was a victim of my own success. Miles was able to do what he wanted to do. I remember hearing *Miles Ahead* when I came back from Spain—this is way up the road—and thinking, "Jeez, if I could do that, I'd be in the music business forever." But no-one would let me. They want me to do the same [expletive deleted] things. To this day, if you followed me around . . . I did . . . I came out to California when I was in the film business, because we wanted to get Academy notice for a film called *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*. I was in the film business for a while. I came out here, and I hired a guy to handle the p.r.

Talbot: That was a British film, wasn't it?

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Shaw: Huh?

Talbot: British film, I think.

Shaw: Yeah. Brian Forbes. We went around the country . . . around the city. He had press, and he had news people coming up to the hotel. I was giving parties for people, press. It's big stuff. We did get Kim Stanley an Academy nomination for that, for an unknown film. At a certain point, Bob Thomas, who was doing the p.r. for me . . . Was it George? No, Bob is the guy with U.P. [United Press International]. It's his brother. George said to me at one time . . . We were going toward a studio in the car. He said, "How do you handle this without going crazy?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Everywhere we go, they ask you the very same two questions." I said, "Really? I hadn't noticed." I said, "What are the questions?" "One is, 'Do you ever play any more?'" And I'd say, "No." "Not even for your own amusement?" Then I would say, "What's amusing about it?" He said, "Jesus Christ, there isn't a place we go . . ." The next studio we went, sure enough, after the coffee and the sit down, "Do you ever play any more, Mr. Shaw?" "No." "Not even for your own amusement?" "Not even for yourself?" Either variation on that. You could go crazy. He said, "I couldn't do that." I said, "I'm doing it without thinking. I'm just . . . I just walk through it." You develop a kind of attitude which is, these are the jokes. You know the Lennie Kent line? "These are the jokes." This is how it is. You're going to have to go through this. Now let's get on with it.

It's interesting to do an interview where somebody's asking you questions, like you are, because you obviously listen, and you're not asking for the same old thing, and you are listening. See, a guy like Schuller is such an asshole. I really have lost all respect for that man, because he cannot hear what you're saying. I'm a big enigma. Why did I quit? Well what he's saying is that, "If I'd had that much success, I'd never quit. So I can't understand it. He's never explained it." I've explained it over and over and over. I've given every metaphor for it I can think of. You can't tell a pregnant woman to stop growing. You can't put a straitjacket on a guy if he's gaining weight. You can't . . . et cetera . . . stop me from thinking. At a certain point, I have to get bored with the audience and the ambience. Meanwhile you are playing in a band, and you've got to keep going to pay those men, like Duke Ellington did. Duke said to me, when I quit, he said, "Boy, you've got more guts than any of us." So I said, "Well Duke, if you hate it that much . . ." He said, "What else could I do?" And what's-her-name, who handled him . . . Pat Willard, from the Smithsonian. She was up here the other day. She visited me. We're old friends. She said, "I remember Duke saying to me, 'Jesus, there were times when you get so bored, so tired of it. I ought to just get a little quintet and go somewhere and play hotels and forget it all'."

Talbot: Duke said that?

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Shaw: Duke.

Talbot: Yeah. He said that?

Shaw: Yeah. And he said to me, over and over, “I’ve got to have the band. Otherwise I can’t hear my music. I can’t . . . If I don’t . . .” So he had to pay these guys, out of his ASCAP earnings. He developed a bunch of prima donnas. When the band was good, it was good. Like the lady with the forehead, it was hard, when it was bad. It’s a strange business, and I am not suited to it. I’ve realized that since I’ve been writing. Every day’s a different job. Every day’s a different thing. And I can polish it until it’s where I think it ought to be. But that’s never. Paul Ivory said, “A work of art is never finished. It’s abandoned.” There comes a point at which you just say, “I’ve done all I can do with it.” When I get this last draft that I’m working on now, done, I’m going to give it to an editor who will be able to give me something I’ll never have again, which is a first-look at the material. I don’t know what that material looks like. I’ve read it so much I’m snowblind. I know what’s coming next. My only question is, “Are these the right words or is that the right approach? Maybe I should turn that sentence around. Instead of saying this first, say that.” Et cetera. “Make it a dependent clause instead of the . . . a subordinate rather than the principal clause in the sentence.” Et cetera. That’s all it’s about. But with music, you play it and it’s gone. It’ll haunt you for the rest of your life, if it wasn’t what you really meant. As you grow older, you say, “Oh, my God. Why didn’t I . . .” With writing you might do that too. But at the time you publish it, it’s the best you can do. Otherwise you have nothing to talk about. If you let an editor talk you into doing something you don’t want to do . . . Your name is on the book. I write what I have to write. If it’s not . . . if I can’t do it that way, I ain’t going to do it. As they used to say, “I ain’t comin’.” That’s the point, and that’s my view of what I do.

The problem is that you are in an entertainment business. No matter what your sensibilities may say, that’s what you’ve got to do: please that audience. Why? Because you need their money to pay those men. One way or another, you’ve got to pay the men. So you can’t take the time off. They’ve got to work. So I used to quit and put a new band together later. Recharge the batteries a little. Then do that a while, and again quit. On and on. People: “Why did you do all those different things?” Jeez, that’s like asking, why did Beethoven write sonatas and quartets and symphonies. He wrote a lot of different things. Trios and octets and whatever. Because that day you feel like doing that. I know American knifemakers. They’re the best knifemakers in the world. A guy named Harvey McBurnett. He lives up in Eagle Nest, New Mexico. He makes a knife. That’s the last knife he’ll ever make like that. You can buy it. You want another one? He’ll make you a different knife. You don’t like it? He’ll give you another one. He doesn’t care what you buy, but he ain’t gonna make one you want, and when it’s done, it’s unique. It’s his knife. That’s an artist.

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I can't stand doing the same bloody thing over and over. I'd say, "I did that. Let's get on with it." The audience is saying, "We just caught up with that. Oh, that *Begin the Beguine*." I go to parties where people say, "*Begin the Beguine*, what a . . ." I say, "My God, you're talking about four . . . what is that? 50 years ago. Don't you think I've grown a little in 50 years? I'd have to be spinning my wheels pretty hard to be caring about that now." I don't knock it. At its time, it was the best I could do.

Talbot: You did—obviously after you came back—you continued to progress, because your music changed, didn't it? Music evolved, yeah?

Shaw: You're part of your culture. Either that, or you're a dinosaur.

Talbot: When you were in analysis . . .

Shaw: I wasn't playing.

Talbot: Did . . .

Shaw: The net result was, at the end I said, "I guess I gotta go back now." She said, "Yeah. Life is first. Analysis is second." I said, "If I go back, I've got nothin' I can do except have a band." She said, "Have that."

Talbot: How long did you not play the clarinet for?

Shaw: I didn't play for about nine months, except now and then, when I'd have to go out . . . no, when I got ready to go out, Basie came to town. I used to sit in with Basie down in Central Avenue. I'd sit between Lester and Earle Warren. That's when Lester and I got to know each other. Lester liked what I did, and I liked what he did.

Talbot: That must be quite rejuvenating.

Shaw: Oh, it was very interesting. Sure. As a matter of fact, they put out some records. A couple of pieces. Basie with me playing in them. One of them's *Lady Be Good* and a blues. I don't know what. I never knew it. Somebody played me the record. That's what I used to do. That was fine. I'd go down there for one night and play. Play what you want.

Talbot: You kept your chops up, because obviously . . .

Shaw: That was to build my chops up.

Talbot: Yeah, build your chops up, because it's a long layoff.

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Shaw: Then I'd go out on the road. Then I went out on the road with a band. It was fine. That was that Kitty Kallen, Jerry . . .

Talbot: This is the Musicraft band.

Shaw: Yeah, and there were some good records. But how many times can you do that?

Talbot: What was the . . . This was at a time when we read that the band business was getting tougher.

Shaw: Oh, it was impossible. There's no band business anywhere. People say, "The big bands are coming back." I say, "Yeah, next football season."

Talbot: At that time of the Musicraft band, things were getting tougher then, right?

Shaw: Yeah. It was very difficult. Also, in '49, when I had the last big band I ever had, which is shortly after that, that was the worst period I've ever been in. The audience loathed that band.

Talbot: Why was that?

Shaw: Because we were playing what you might call today a sort of boppish book. And there was no accent on oom-pah oom-pah to dance to. They'd go like this. They'd make signs of pulling a toilet chain, holding their noses, and it was horrible. I stood between the band and that hostile world. The band loved what was going on in the book, but that hostile world out there. It was hopeless.

I told somebody the story of Dodo Marmarosa. The last time I ever saw Dodo. We were up in Minnesota somewhere, playing a gig, and *Frenesi*. We had that in the book. The string arrangement, transcribed [for reeds and brass]. So we played it. A request. I wasn't crazy about that arrangement any more. As I said, it was a trial balloon. So we played it, and the band didn't play it too well. I remember calling them in and saying, "Look fellows. You guys are great musicians. You like the book we play. Here's a tune we got to play. This is our rent payer. For Christ's sake, you can make it sound good. Play it good. Play it like you like it." I remember Dodo saying, "I can dig it. I can dig it," with that big nose of his, and the band listening. Yeah, yeah. All right. So the next time we played it, it was fine. Somebody requested it again. Third time somebody requested it, and we played it again. Same night. After intermission. "Guys, please play *Frenesi*." "We just played it." "Oh, man, I just walked in." All right. What are you going to do? It's fraudulent not to play it. So Dodo came up to me after the third time. He said, "Man, if we have to play that once more, I'm leaving." Sure enough, about 11:30, a guy came and he's gotta hear *Frenesi*. Came in late. I said, "Here we go, Dodo. One, two, and the

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band,” and we started, and Dodo got up and left. Never saw him again. That was the end of Dodo. Had to get somebody else. He went to Pittsburgh.

But it’s a fact, you see. He did what . . . I couldn’t get mad at him, because I understood exactly what he felt like, but I couldn’t afford to do that. I had these dependencies, hungry mouths to feed. The papa bird has to take care of the baby bird. That’s what it’s about. That has nothing to do with music. It has nothing to do with growth. Nothing to do with self-development. Nothing to do with being interested. It’s boring. That’s what it’s about. To play two Tad [*sic*: Thad] Jones pieces, you got to play three *Frenesi*’s and one *Begin the Beguine*. The trade-off is too high. It gets down to, what’s the price of money in personal worth? I couldn’t do it. That doesn’t seem to me a very esoteric or enigmatic thing. If you’re temperament says, I want to do something that pleases me, and I’ll do it just so long, but I can’t keep doing it. I’m not a trained seal. There it is. It doesn’t seem a complicated state. I think anybody in his right mind can hear that and say, “Yeah, I understand that.”

Now I’m not knocking the guy who can do it. I remember Basie saying to me when I came back from Spain. I went into Birdland. He was down to a trio or no, a quintet. They were playing in Birdland with this noisy audience. He came over to the table. He hadn’t seen me in a year. I’d just come back to America. He said, “Man, why don’t you come back in the business? It needs you.” I said, “Bill, do you like what you’re doing?” He turned to me and he said, “What am I supposed to be? A janitor?” I said, “But see, Bill, if those are your only options, I have others.” He understood me.

I saw him in Spain. Matter of fact I saw Joe Williams not long ago, when they did that party for Dizzy out here, and Joe said, “Remember that night in Spain?” I threw a party with a flamenco thing. It was the most amazing thing. Bill and Joe and Kate, Bill’s wife. These flamenco gypsies were doing this stuff, this wild music they played. Bill was sitting there, “They’ll never believe it. They’ll never believe it.” I said, “Who, Bill?” He said, “The people. I go back and tell them what’s going on.” He said, “These cats are crazy.” They were playing great music. Fine flamenco music is as much improvised as good jazz. Clapping, off the [beat; Shaw sings and claps a syncopated rhythm]. Hard to do. They do it like that.

I finished the analysis and went out with a band. I found after about eight months to a year I could no longer keep doing that. For about six, seven months, it was interesting. Then it got to be too much. We’re back to “You just finished the first act.” You’re doing it by rote. There’s only so much you can do with a piece called *Bedford Drive* or whatever the piece may be. After that you say, Glen Gould must have known that when he walked away. So much you could do with the Bach *Partitas*. He did them. Got them perfect and went away. Or the *Goldberg Variations*. He did it. Beautiful record. But he couldn’t keep doing that.

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Talbot: Do you think that the big band—so to speak, for want of a better word—that that kind of idiom was being exhausted?

Shaw: I think it is exhausted in terms of the audience apprehension of it. Yeah. There is no audience. You see the problem we have—and this is kind of complex. It's not all that complex—we have a thing called culture in this country. In literature we finally learned that America is capable of making its own, since Mark Twain. Before that it was all English. What's his name? I'm blank. The guy who wrote *Rip Van Winkle* and *Ichabod Crane*. God, everybody knows his name. An American writer. Well, I could lay my hand on the book.

Talbot: We know who you mean.

Shaw: You know who I mean. Want me to find the name. Well, you can fill that in. I've got it right here.

[recording engineer:] Irving.

Talbot: Washington Irving.

Shaw: Washington Irving. There you go. Washington Irving was writing British literature with an American background. Aaron Copland was doing musical . . . European music, and he's calling it *Billy the Kid*. None of those people are doing American music. American music is jazz, rock, bluegrass. Call it what you like. The American spirit is embodied in jazz as serious music, because jazz is no longer a very easy idiom. It's very complex. In order to understand what somebody—and we'll go back a way. Let's say [Art] Tatum, what he's doing. Let's forget about Muhal Richard Abrams. Let's get back. Tatum. You have to know the tune. You have to know the structure of the tune. You have to know the chord structure, the length of bars, and then see what he's doing with the extensions and the chord changes and the key changes and the modulations that go back to the . . . You have to know a lot to be able to hear it, especially if you don't even know the tune, it's an original. Bud Powell asked me once about a record he made, *Exactly Like You* [*sic: Embraceable You*], a 10-inch record. The company sent it to me, at his request. Next time I saw him, he said, "How'd you like it?" I said, "Fine, but it's fraudulent." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "There's no *Exactly Like You* in there." He said, "I did what I had to do with the tune." I said, "But you didn't even state the theme. Not once. So I'm Mr. No-Nothing. I pick up the record *Exactly Like You*. I like that song." [Shaw sings the melody of *Embraceable You*, not *Exactly Like You*.] "You could give me a touch of that. Not the way I just sang it, but you could play it with a little melody. Art Tatum does." He said, "But that would be . . ." I said, "You could have called it Opus. 1, and I

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would have said, ‘That’s a good piece of music’. But calling it *Exactly Like You* is a lie. It isn’t.”

Here you have this problem. Is jazz a statement of a theme. Or is it a statement of an artist’s ability to do something with that theme? I don’t think anyone’s really seriously addressed that question and said, “What are we doing?” and “Where’s the audience?” If they lag too far behind, you’ve lost them. Lenin once said, as the leader of the Russian revolution, “Walk at the head of the parade, but not too far ahead.” You get too far ahead, they turn the corner, you’re gone. You’re on your own. Or you turn the corner and they’re going straight.

The problem with American jazz is that no-one is talking it seriously, because the musicians don’t take it seriously enough. If they demanded dignity for it and fought for it . . . You see we’ve trained a symphonic audience. That’s culture. But when they hear jazz, they whistle and scream, because they’re used to playing and hearing it in noisy joints where they can clash drinks and bottles and smoke and carry on. It has nothing to do with music.

We are now the victims of Muzak. Wherever we go there’s music. It’s too cheap. We’re making it too easy to get and therefore devalues it. And the bad, in the Grisham’s law, crowds out the good. You have a bunch of guys who’ve been told they’re artists, and they’re playing 99 choruses of a tune where they’ve said everything in two choruses. Maybe in one. I listened to a record the other day in KLON. I’ve driving in. I put the radio on. And it’s an old record of Charlie Parker’s in Storyville. At one place he played awfully good stuff. Then he goes [Shaw sings the *High Society* melody that Parker routinely incorporated into his solo on *Koko*]. A little later, he’s playing a jazz chorus, and again [Shaw sings the same melody]. He forgot he said it. You want to say, “You said that, Charlie. Why didn’t you stop with one statement of it?” You get into this thing of playing riffs, and Jesus Christ, Goodman . . . [Shaw sings a riff repeated four times]. How many times can you do that and not want to puke? For me, that has nothing to do with music. Music is hearing something in your ear, and say, “What can I do with that?” Each note should be a surprise to you. If it isn’t, you’re cheating. Most jazz today is cheating. They’re doing too much noise.

And then there’s the honking and the braying, because if it sounds pleasant, it’s no good. There’s that. Then there’s the black rage. So we’re living in Crow Jim times now. It’s all very screwed up. If you’re going to get political, music is not the place to be. You’re not going to tell me that a guy who plays angrily, because he’s sore at the world, is playing good music. I’m not interested in his rage. If it’s written in literature, it might have some value. ?J [inaudible. evidently a reference to James Joyce.] wrote a lot of crazy things, and I’m not sure what value that has. You talk to a college student of literature, and he’ll say, “What about *Finegan’s Wake*?” I say, “If *Finegan’s Wake* . . . If he had not written

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Dubliners and *Portrait of the Artist [as a Young Man]*, you'd never have heard of him." *Ulysses* was about as far out as he could go and still keep touch with the public. If he's saying, in effect, "You've got to spend 10 years to read my book," then there's too many other things to do. I don't blame him. It's his right to do that. I don't blame Lee Konitz when he turns his back on the audience when they don't like what he's doing. But that has nothing to do with what we're talking about. Music is music. You play it because it's something you enjoy or you love or you're stimulated by or something. At its best it's stimulating. At its worst it's rote. And that's what you do when you're a popular performer. It's rote, and that's not something I want to do.

That's where it got with me. I could not keep doing that. I'm amazed that anyone can. All I know is, I remember seeing Benny toward the end of his career, and I said, "Jesus, how can you keep doing that?" He said, "You gotta get out of the house." That's no reason to play music.

[Interruption, with a sudden change of topic. From the context that follows, it becomes apparent that this is a resumption of the interview on the next day, October 8, 1992, with Shaw and Talbot having listened to some recordings in the interim.]

Shaw: . . . at CBS for example, Bunny Berigan was in the band, and one of the other trumpet players was what we used to call a "square."

Talbot: These were radio studio orchestras.

Shaw: Right. They're contracted musicians. They couldn't play a note of jazz. So it was very strange. Those orchestras were made up of guys who could play the notes, and a few guys here and there just to leaven the mix.

Talbot: This is in the 1930s.

Shaw: Yeah. Those things we heard a few bars of. Such a strange period. It reminded me a little bit . . . It reminds me a little bit—[inaudible] want to talk about—what happened when I joined the Navy. I told you they put me into a . . . made me lead a band. I found out something very strange about leading bands. I've talked to people about this. Most people don't believe it, but it's true. The band sounded like hell. It was dreadful. It was made up of Navy musicians who played military music. They could play marches. They couldn't play a note of jazz and they didn't know . . . barely could keep time. They could keep time in a legitimate, ponderous way. There were about four guys in the band who played with a certain amount of dance band experience. Not good, but not bad either. They at least knew the idea. Well, it was a war. Every time you gave a downbeat, this band would do something else. You never knew what was coming. After playing two or three nights with it, or two or three rehearsals, which was also strange, because the men

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outrated me, outranked me. I was a Seaman when I went in, and they were all different rates: Seaman 4, Seaman 1st, Seaman 3rd. I was an apprentice Seaman. I got permission to order them. For the rehearsals, I became the boss. It was a very strange thing. I found out something interesting. The only thing I could do . . . The straight military musicians could not play with a beat. So I told the guys with the dance experience to play square. They played along with the other guys, and suddenly the band sounded like a piece. It was a band. The guys would say, "Jesus, what did you do to this band?" I didn't want to say, "I had the other guys play bad, because the bad guys couldn't play good." Changed the band around. It became a perfectly good bad band, whereas before, it was nothing.

People have never seemed to realize . . . In my day, Guy Lombardo was the joke. But nobody seemed to realize. Guy Lombardo had a very good band for the '20s. The only problem is he was doing it in the '40s and the '50s. His brag was, "We've never changed what we play." I used to say, "That's like Ford saying, 'We're still selling the Model T,'" bragging about it. There it is.

Anyway, so about the band, yeah. That's . . . I recognize the name, right? Rudy Tanza, of course. I heard him, because . . . you know this was during . . . the war was still on, when I was discharged. Very hard to get good musicians. The ones that were there were . . . Sometimes you got junkies. Sometimes reformed junkies. Guys who couldn't get in the Army or Navy. So I got these guys. Rudy, when he sat down and played, had a good sound. The records, you can hear lead alto [saxophone]. It was very good.

Talbot: Yeah. Beautiful. What became of him, I wonder?

Shaw: I have no idea. Once the musicians came back out of this, they probably couldn't get work. Went into something else. But [tenor saxophonist Ralph] Roselund I remember he had very good control of his horn. He could do things . . . Herbie did most of the solos. But a couple of the things I let Roselund . . . Roselund made a couple of records where he played something quite interesting.

Talbot: That's Herbie Steward, who later was with Woody Herman, yeah?

Shaw: Herbie Steward. Herbie was a good player. Nice guy and really good musicality. He's another one who had great musicality. Somebody sent me some tape of him playing clarinet. Sounds marvelous. He has a very good sound. It's like Lester's sound was good on the clarinet. Couldn't do much with it, but what he did was good. Some people have that immediately. I mentioned Warren Vaché. Of the modern players today, he's for me one of the most musical. But we talked about Woody Shaw, who's also musical. There are a lot of very good ones around. But they don't get the credit they deserve, because today there's a kind of angriness going around, and they don't meet those standards.

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Talbot: Did you know—just on the subject of various musicians—did you know Duke Ellington very well?

Shaw: Who?

Talbot: Duke Ellington?

Shaw: I knew him. Not well, but we were colleagues. We'd see each other. He respected me. I respected him. We got along.

Talbot: What's your feeling about Duke's music, from the point of view of 1992?

Shaw: It's strange, because during that period, he had no influence. People ask me. When he died, I did a program. "How much influence do you think he had on what was going on?" And I would say I'd put him down around 4 or 5. Basie was much more influential. But Duke was sort of *sui generis*. He was his own person. He was what he was. Of course he'd been there so long, all the way back to the old . . . downtown. What is it? The name of that club downtown.

Talbot: Cotton Club?

Shaw: No. The Cotton Club was uptown. The first place he played in New York. Something. I don't know. [The Kentucky Club.] That was when they started playing *Mood Indigo*. The thing that he did that was interesting was pitch instruments in different use, make different uses of them. I like the idea of the clarinet down low and the trombone and trumpet on *Mood Indigo* . . . What he did with that was interesting, analogous a little bit to what Stravinsky did when he started *Sacre du printemps* with the bassoon way out of its range, or Strauss writing notes for the horn that couldn't be played 'til they played 'em. Extended things.

Duke of course has now become very venerated by a lot of people. I think overly so, but I can't fault him. When he was good, he was very good. As I said, when he was bad, it was horrid. Some of the things they did were dreadful. But still, I think people have a right to be judged by their best. We don't judge runners by their boo-boos. We don't judge . . . Look at Babe Ruth. We don't know how much strikeouts he made. Somebody must have that record, but we do know that at their best, they did great. I think that's fair enough. An artist has to be judged by his best. We should. As I said, you write a bad book, you're on your way to a better one. You made a mistake. We mentioned yesterday . . . I believe I spoke about Hemingway and *Across the River*. I re-read that book not long ago. It was really . . .

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I read . . . re-read an interesting thing. I told a friend of mine, a literary friend, “Re-read *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. And he read it. He says, “My God, it’s really so [?ou très] when you read it today.” “Oh, one doesn’t do that old man. It’s just not done.” When he refused to go into the . . . when he got panicked by the lion that was wounded, and he was “It just isn’t done.” Well, good God, nobody goes by those old school club, those club tie rules any more. It just seems strange, but we were all tremendously influenced by that. He influenced an entire generation of writers. You couldn’t get around his prose. It was remarkable.

As I say, nobody’s eclipsed Bix, as far as I’m concerned. No-one. You can hear what they do, and they’re doing it technically. People who don’t know, who aren’t aware of the values changing in history, the changing values of history, will say, “Well God, he had no technique. What did he do?” They can’t understand you put him in his context. I’ve said to people, no-one alive today, unless he’s my age, has heard Louis Armstrong, because you hear him in the context of what other people have imitated. And so you hear the original and say, well, you know. But if you heard him back then, in terms of what was going on, it was . . . I’m sure that Mozart must have been astounding to people in his day. Now we hear him. We say, “It’s very nice.” But people who don’t know say, “What’s all the fuss?”

In my classes sometimes I’ll play records. I’ll start with a Mozart piece that the group doesn’t know. They’re very comfortable with it. I’ll say, “Because you were raised with this kind of diatonic music through church hymns, through popular music. You were hearing this all the time.” Then I put on something a little further up the road, like Stravinsky. Yeah, that’s o.k. They understand it, but not quite as comfortable any more. The early Stravinsky. Then you get up to Bartok, the second string quartet. There’s a fast movement in it. Ooo boy. What’s that? Then finally I play [Arnold] Schoenberg’s *Kammersymphonie*, and they are totally at sea. They don’t know what is going on, and they say, “Is that supposed to be good?” I say, “It’s like Hitler looking at Paul Kley. A child could do it. But the child ain’t doing it.”

I had an interesting experience once at a party in New York. When I was a young man, I was just beginning to find out what was going on and beginning to attack my lack of education. Started reading, taking extension courses in literature, and whatever. And going to art galleries, going to museums, whatever. Doing it. I was at a party of a group of New York intellectuals. Their conversation got a little, for me, rarefied. I can reach a certain place where I hear too much literary talk. I wandered over to the piano and started plinking away, just hitting random notes. And one guy turned . . . “Schoenberg.” I said, “You’re right. Yep.” It had nothing to do with Schoenberg.” [Shaw sings a melody.] The interesting thing about that is if I had written that, if I kept writing that kind of thing, I’d have ended up being a composer of . . . what? A minimalist? Whatever they would call you. Look at the career John Cage made. I have a picture on my desk of him, and he’s

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laughing like hell, and I've written on it, "Why is this man laughing, and at whom?" At us, obviously. When you write a piece to be played 24 hours in relays, long pauses where the audience goes out and gets a cup of coffee . . . It's part of music. You've got to say, "I don't know what he's doing." It's philosophical. An attack on our lack of perception of what music is. It's like the black on black or white on white paintings. Or the contact paintings. There's a French artist who used to take his models and roll them in paint . . . washable paint . . . acrylic . . . and roll them on canvas. Whatever came out was the painting. One man in London, I heard about, took an old canvas, took a piece of canvas, dirtied it up, ashes and dirt and whatever, and then rode a bicycle over it a few times. Sold 'em.

I'll tell you one that is to me still inexplicable. I was in Venice. I was walking down along the streets, looking around. There was an art gallery. I looked in the window. and there was this remarkably beautiful frame, red velvet inside of mahogany or ebony, carved, and the painting was of a turd. If you painted a turd, that's what it would be. Very good picture of a turd. I went into the gallery. I was utterly astounded. I said, "Who is that man?" He said, "He's very . . ." and they told me his name. The wall was covered with his paintings, and they were all various turds, shapes and . . . Come'on. At a certain point, you say, "What the hell . . ." People bought them.

So you see, when you get away from representational art, you open the door for all kinds of scoundrels. And when you get away from playing a tune, you open the door for scoundrels. Some are good. Some are bad. Some are clever scoundrels.

I don't know what's happening. I think we're very close to the heart of what's wrong with the relationship of jazz to the audience today. We have total confusion. I've heard people play . . . I won't mention names, because I was driving in the other night, and I heard somebody singing. A record, a jazz . . . KLON. And I couldn't tell at a certain point whether that person was singing a B or a B-flat. My ear is very good. I deliberately play flat sometimes, because it causes a certain tension. And someone like Tommy always tuned sharp. It does something. I know this guy who teaches clarinet here. A very good player. He said to me, "When you did that, did you mean that?" I said, "Yeah, of course I meant that. That flat note was deliberate, and later you'll notice I play the same note, and it goes up." "Oh, yeah, well . . ." I couldn't tell what this singer was doing. I don't know whether she meant it or didn't mean it. All I know, it was ugly. The song she was singing was a nice tune, and she melisma'ed all over the place. She did all kinds of ridiculous things to be . . . a band scratching the right ear with the left hand. There's got to be an easier way to make a living. And she's a good player, a good singer. So I thought, "Oh Jesus."

I don't know what's happening. I don't know what's happening to jazz entirely. I think first of all the word is a misnomer. I've always hated the word. I've come up with a word

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for it, with a phrase for what it is: “informal American music,” as opposed to formal European or formal American music. [Aaron] Copland, [Samuel] Barber, [William] Walton, they write formal music. Jazz is informal. You get together with guys, shake hands, and let’s go. “What are you going to play?” “The blues.” “O.k. What key? All right. What tempo? Here we go.” And you make music. A very American notion. Other countries . . . well, the gypsies do it. There are other informal musics. But American informal music is jazz.

I can’t call rock “music.” I don’t know. Some of it is. There are some good rock players. But the performance . . . the percentage of good to bad is totally out of kilter. And then when people talk about country, I don’t know what they’re talking about at all. Also, you’ll notice that with rock, people talk about the words. “He wrote this tune and he says . . .” But music isn’t supposed to say. Music is an abstract art. It’s not supposed to be a language that you understand with words. Tom Wolfe wrote a book called *The Painted Word*. I don’t know whether you’re aware of it. Do you know the book, where he talks about modern art . . .

Talbot: Yeah.

Shaw: . . . and all these essays telling you what to look for. Well the damn painting’s supposed to tell you what it is. Goya didn’t write a lot of essays. He painted his pictures. Cezanne, my God, his philosophical approach to painting was so diametrically to, say, [?R...]. When you look at the two people and their totally different thumbprints, you don’t need guidebooks. You need to look a bit, just as if you want to hear jazz, you need to listen a bit.

Like I said last night when we were finishing, this project I wanted to do about the . . . I’ll give you the inception of that if you’re interested. I told you about the Hiyawaka lecture, where he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, jazz is essentially a pre-verbal experience. The rest of the lecture will be devoted to listening.” Put one record after another on, and then said, “See you later.” End of session. I do that largely. I can talk about writing. I can talk about painting. But essentially, you can’t talk about painting. You’ve got to show it. Then you can talk about it. The same way with a book. You can talk about story. First read it. Sometimes I’ll read a story to the class. It’ll be, say, Flannery O’Connor’s *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*. It starts out like a pleasant little American soap opera, and then this horror, this existential horror, appears. I remember women . . . a woman grabbing her husband, saying, “I didn’t come here to listen to that.” And they left. They didn’t belong in the class. I don’t know what they wanted. I guess they wanted me to give them soothing syrup. Rub ’em with baby oil. I’m simply saying the world is composed of a number of things. I’m sure we should all be happy as kings, and everybody knows how happy kings are. They don’t like that joke. They want it to be nice. Make nice.

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It's o.k. I talked to a friend of mine the other day, and I said, "The world is going to pot." I try to ignore it, because I got to live in it. I'd hate to be 15 today. I just read something to somebody. There's an island called Ducie Island. 4,000 miles northeast of New Zealand. It's nearest neighbor is about 300 miles away, and that's Pitcairn. It's in that area. A man walking on the beach counted, within an hour, I think 400 . . . 320 pieces of garbage floating up. A large majority were whiskey bottles and broken bulbs. So the sea must be totally teeming with this stuff. You can't get much further out of the way. There it is. What we're doing is flooding the planet with our debris. Get to the moon enough and we'll do that. We'll be tilted out of orbit, we keep doing that. We've got the means to tilt the earth out of it now. Take all the known nuclear weapons and put them at one area, one point on the equator and wait for the right tilt, away from the sun, and set them off, and this sucker will be turned loose. Something'll happen.

Anyway, we've got it now, and one of the things that scares me is . . . One of the things we do learn from history is we never had weapons that we didn't use. Never been a weapon that sooner or later we didn't use. I don't know whether you know about Harper's Index. Did I ever mention that to you?

Talbot: No, you didn't. But I know what you mean.

Shaw: You know what I mean.

Talbot: I read it. Yeah.

Shaw: All right. They have a series of percentages. Percentage of people who say that the United States never dropped an atom bomb, an atomic bomb, in anger. Hiroshima and Nagasaki don't exist. We're talking about Orwell. Newspeak. "Didn't drop it, because I don't know about it." That's pretty frightening.

Somebody wrote a book. An old anarchist named Charles Erskine Scott Wood. I read it many years ago. Called *Heavenly Discourse*. It's that old scenario. You're up in a green room in heaven, and everybody's there: Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, and Jesus. Whoever. They're all in a dialogue, and Jesus keeps repeating the same thing: "The only sin is stupidity." That's some sin. You can reason with a crazy man . . . not with a crazy. With a bad man, if he's intelligent. And Machiavelli, for example, wrote that book, about all the things you could do if you want to perpetuate yourself. Camus wrote a play called *Caligula*, where he made a case for Caligula. Remarkable play. Well, nobody reads. When you stop and think of the percentage of people, the population who read, it's frightening. And yet there, I keep telling people, here are these dead voices by the hundreds of thousands screaming wisdom at you, and you're walking right through this babble of voices and not paying any attention. Making the same old mistakes. Reinventing the wheel.

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This applies to music, though. It applies to jazz, particularly. It's a new art form. Until the artists grow up to a realization of the value or validity of what they're doing, it's not going to be understood by the public. It's like some kid painting and making good paintings, but he doesn't know what he's doing, so he can't relate it to the mainstream or any stream in which he works. We have to know what we're doing. We can't keep on doing Charlie Parker. Charlie Parker didn't keep doing Louis Armstrong. That's why we listen to him.

Talbot: At some point do you think that jazz left its audience behind? Got ahead of its audience?

Shaw: I think it did. I think it's left its audience behind now. I think the vast American audience is listening to Rod whatever his name is [Stewart] and Prince and Mick Jagger and Madonna. That's where it's at. Or now, what they call rap music, whatever that is.

Funny they don't call jazz "music." Rap is music. What a strange confusion of language and thought, because we think with language.

Talbot: Do you think that one of the dividing points might have been that a lot of people have difficulty in following a fairly complex line?

Shaw: You mean the bop business?

Talbot: Yeah. Maybe there. But generally people, a lot of people, can't listen to a complicated linear piece. They can't listen in a linear fashion. If it becomes complicated, they turn off. They stop listening.

Shaw: Yeah, because you see, it's quite understandable. They've got their own pursuits. They're manufacturing shoes or television sets or bulbs or socks or whatever they do for a living, and they're not supposed to have to do that. It's true of Schoenberg. I'm very close to the Schoenberg family, and I don't say this often, but Schoenberg certainly took music away from the audience. When you get into serial composition, you've lost your audience. He's got melodies. He complains bitterly in some of his books. *Style and Idea*. I've got the book. Doesn't understand why audiences don't see that that's a melody. It takes them a while. This record of mine that's doing well right now. In 1953, when I made it, no-one wanted . . . none of the record companies wanted to release it. CBS was given the records. John Hammond recommended it to them, and he had found people like [Bob] Dylan for them. John was . . . whether I liked John or not, we got along.

Talbot: This is the Gramercy Five with . . .

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Shaw: Yeah, with Hank Jones, Tommy Potter, and Tal Farlow. That group. We were making damn good music, but in 1953 no-one wanted it. The recording companies, from Columbia through RCA through every company. Nope. They couldn't see a market for it. There was no market for it. The recording I made, called *Modern Music for Clarinet*, I put in a year and a half, getting that stuff together. It probably sold 12 copies or 12 and a half. I don't know.

Talbot: What was that? Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Shaw: Yeah. I took a small symphony orchestra and embedded a jazz band in it. We made . . . well first of all we did . . . I got Hershey [Hershel] Kay, and we sat down and picked a repertoire of things, from [Francis] Poulenc through [Claude] Debussy, and . . . I don't know. Let's see . . . [Maurice] Ravel. Debussy. [Dmitri] Shostakovich, a piano sonata. [Darius] Milhaud. I don't know. Eight composers. Morton Gould wrote me a nice little piece called called *Guajiro* . . . *Guajira*, in 7/4. Got this marvelous orchestra together. Julie [Julius] Baker on flute. Just the best players around. Earl Brodice [?spelling], the marvelous concertmaster-violinist who had a quartet I used to play with. The Pro Arte Quartet, I think they called it. We played these eight pieces. Made them a clarinet solo, instead of a one-finger . . . like the Shostakovich sonata [Shaw sings a snippet of melody.] It went into [he sings further]. It went into an odd little off-note, off the chord notes. We played that. We made eight sides. Eight pieces on one side. The other side I put this jazz band inside a rhythm section inside the symphony, and we did [The] *Man I Love*, a Gershwin tune, and Cole Porter's *I Concentrate On You*. In between there was a clarinet and string quintet, with harp, called *Mood In Question*, by Allan Shulman, who played cello with the [Arturo] Toscanini Orchestra. The other one was a piece called *Rendevous For Clarinet and Strings*, again a quintet, but without harp. That was the record.

It was an L . . . It was a 12-inch record, and they didn't know what to do. I remember Manny Sax said an interesting thing. I've never forgotten the words. Manny Sax, when they came back with the tests . . .

Talbot: Who was Manny Sax?

Shaw: Manny Sax used to be the head of A & R for CBS. He was with RCA for years, but for a while he was CBS. I went to CBS and saw him, and I said, "Look, I'd like to do some recordings, but I don't want to do . . . I don't want to play any more of that other stuff that people think I should be playing. So I'll come in with a project every once and a while. I don't want anything from you. Pay scale. Pay me scale and royalties." Well, he bought that. So I got this group together. I had Walter Hendl conducting. He was . . . he later became conductor of . . . I don't know . . . one of the Texan symphonies. Dallas or . . . I don't know. Anyway, damn good music. The record is hard . . . you can't find it any

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more. I may re-release it myself. I think I will, actually. My lawyer says the record's been abandoned, and the worst that can happen is SONY, who now owns CBS, could say to me, "What are you doing?" and I would give them the royalties, they would give me [indecipherable]. They can't lose by that.

In any case, I couldn't find the record. I went everywhere. Finally went to Schirmer's, and they didn't have any recording . . . record of it. Then they looked in the 12-inch records in the so-called classical rec . . . There it was. So it sold nothing. It never came close to recovering its costs, and that was the last record I made for CBS. So there was nowhere to go.

Talbot: It probably would do pretty well now.

Shaw: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't know. Maybe today, maybe.

Talbot: Yeah, I think it would.

Shaw: Clarinet players would buy it. Every clarinet player I know says, "Jesus, I'd like to get that record." It's called a rare record now. See this last thing was called *Rare Recordings, Rare and Unreleased*.

I don't know. We have a peculiar schism in the audience today. There's that part of the audience that doesn't want to hear it because it doesn't sound like broken crockery. It can't be jazz. Then there's the other audience that's considered the squares. It's like in painting. What's his name? I'm blank. The guy who did the Helga drawings. [Andrew] Wyeth. He's looked down on by many modern painters. And a guy who plays with any vibrato—you mentioned [Stan] Getz—he's not considered . . . That's old hat. You're not supposed to vibrate. You're not supposed to make music sound nice.

As I told you, I have this friend who plays clarinet, and I asked him, "Why do you play high E without any embellishment on it? You know, it comes out . . . it sticks out . . . it sounds like a pig being killed." He said, "I know it, but that's what your teachers tell you." And I . . . we were back yesterday about the vibration. "Clarinet's not supposed to vibrate." Why? Who said that? Maybe they couldn't back then. Do we have to keep perpetuating a lack of ability? Teach people that when the clarinet goes ooooooo, and the flute is going ahhhhhhhhh, and the . . . they're all of them vibrating. Every other instrument in the quintet. Very strange. I don't know what that's all about.

Talbot: Can you tell us a bit about Billie Holiday?

Shaw: Well there isn't a lot to tell. I knew Billie when I used to sit in up in Harlem at Pod's and Jerry's, which in my book I call Bob's and Sherry's. There's that short story I

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told you about. Anybody that reads it knows I'm talking about Willie "the Lion" [Smith], but I changed him totally. I called him "The Tiger." Billie used to fall in there once in a while and sing the blues, and I got to know her a little bit.

Talbot: And you recorded with her.

Shaw: Yeah, that was many years later. That was when I got to playing in the studios. Many . . . I'm talking about three years.

Talbot: Oh, I see. This is earlier.

Shaw: Huh?

Talbot: This is earlier than that.

Shaw: Pardon me?

Talbot: This is earlier than that.

Shaw: Oh yeah. This is when I first got to Harlem. It must have been 1929, '30. Somewhere in there. I heard her sing, and she was a good little singer. She sang the blues. She was influenced by Louis [Armstrong]. Louis was her influence. I said to her once, "Some day I'm going to have a band, and you're going to sing in it. If I ever have a band, you'll sing in it." She said, "Yeah, that'll be the day." That was the end of that.

Then many years later I had the band up in Boston. I think I told you about that, when we were getting a thousand a week for the whole band and the truck and the bus and everything else. As a matter of fact I used Tommy . . . I bought Tommy Dorsey's old truck, and we didn't have money to paint it. So it said, "Tommy Dorsey." [laughter] We'd show up in a town. There was Tommy Dorsey's band.

Anyway, we were looking for singers. I must have gone through six or eight different singers. None of them could make it with that band, the band that finally Helen Forrest joined. But before Helen Forrest joined the band, I thought, why don't I get Billie? Maxie Kaminsky writes a book in which he gives himself credit, telling me to get Billie Holiday, and I say, "Who's that?" [laughter] Maxie was weird. He really believes that, I think. At least he likes to believe it.

We went down and got her and drove her up to Boston. I said, "Come on. You're joining the band." She had just got through with Basie, where she had to play Old Mother Hubbard to their plantation outfit. She hated it. She was living in Harlem with mama. You know, "Mama's got and papa may have" [*God Bless the Child*]. That old thing. I

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said, “Come on. You’re joining the band.” She said, “What are you talking about?” This is like three in the morning. We finished a gig in Boston, drove down to New York. At that hour you could make it in about three hours. Got to Harlem about 3:30 maybe and woke her up. She came out, rubbing her eyes, and said, “What’s happening.” I said, “Get your clothes. Come on.” She said, “Oh, come on. I can’t sing with a white band.” I said, “Yes you can.” Ofay band. So she got in the bus . . . truck with us . . . I mean the car, and we drove up to Boston. Rehearsed her, a couple of tunes, next morning . . . next day, before the gig. Showed up at the gig a couple of hours early. Rehearsed three or four arrangements for her, and she sang them.

She stayed with the band all through the end of the summer, into the Chase Hotel in St. Louis. Went down South with her. Strange things happened. Down South we arrived . . . were going past that so-called Mason-Dixon line, and I was a little nervous about it, because she had an explosive temper. She didn’t have a lot of self-control. Roy [Eldridge] was the same. [Hot] Lips Page, on the other hand, never had a problem. Lips apparently just had very good self-control, and he could handle it.

Anyway, we get down . . . by the way, remind me to tell you about that story about Lips, another thing on our Southern tour. An amazing story. It’s hard for me to believe as I tell it, but it was true. I don’t think he could make this up. . . . We were driving down, and on the way, I went over to where Billie was sitting on the bus. I said, “Listen, Billie, I’ve been thinking about this. You know you’re going into uncharted territory, into deep water. You’re gonna be with this band. It’s a white band, and you’re a black girl” . . . not black . . . colored, “and you’re going to be sitting in the crook of the piano. It’s gonna be a strange one, but I think the audience will like it.” She said, “Should I do it?” I said, “It’s up to you. I wouldn’t advise you, but on the other hand I think it’s important that you do it, because,” I said, “it makes . . . It’s a milestone, and you’d be the first black performer to work with a white band in the South. I don’t know what that does to history, but it’s important that you do it. Try it anyway.” And I said, “If anything happens, we’ll get you out of there.” Well, she got up and sang, and it was marvelous. First night.

Talbot: Where was this? Do you remember?

Shaw: I don’t remember. Some little town in Virginia. Then went down below. The second night was three or four hundred miles . . . 300 miles we’d do . . . second night she got up to sing, and the audience loved her. It was an odd thing. They would sit up there . . . stand up in front of the band. A lot of people stood. They didn’t dance. We finished a tune. I think it was *Travelin’*. *Travelin’ All Alone*, that old tune. A nice arrangement. She finished it. A lot of applause, and she went back to sit down in her chair. In those days, the girl singers sat in the crook of the piano. Some redneck standing in front of the band hollered, “Have the nigger wench sing another song.” “The nigger wench” was his way of saying “the colored girl.” “The nigger wench.” So I thought, oh Jesus Christ. Gave a

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down beat or two beats. We went into *Back Bay Shuffle* or something immediately. He kept yelling, “The nigger wench! The nigger wench!” Billie’s sitting there, and she’s getting redder under her tan, and I could see something’s happening. All of a sudden she leans forward, “That [expletive deleted] son-of-a-bitch bastard,” and I could see these words, [expletive deleted], son-of-a-bitch, bastard, coming out of her, and the guy saw what she was doing. She was really hissing at him. Well, all of a sudden, little knots forming. He mentioned, “She’s gonna . . .” I could see groups of people. I got nervous. I thought, this is gonna . . . this has got the makings of a riot, a lynch, whatever. So I went, “psst,” and my bus driver and my truck driver and a couple of cops that I had posted came in, closed in on her, took her off, put her in the bus and drove away. That was the end of Billie’s Southern tour. That was it. But meanwhile she had at least established that they liked it musically.

Now, an interesting one. Years later, with the band with Lips Page . . . This was the 1940s, just before the war . . . before I got in the Navy. The war had already started, I believe. No, the war . . . It started. The Jap war started then, in Providence. But before that, we were supposed to do a Southern tour. I had never played the tour because there was black guys in the band, somewhere. Did you know I had Zutty Singleton in my band, in my first string band?

Talbot: No.

Shaw: Nobody knows that. He was in the band. We played in Atlantic City. Zutty was a nice little drummer for that band. Perfect. He played quietly. He used to turn his head like this. I loved him. A nice guy.

Anyway, there was always a colored guy somewhere in there. Couldn’t have too many. Even Benny never had one. He had them outside the band. They came on as a specialty act. Anyway, they booked this tour of the South. Very lucrative. I think I told this story in my film. I don’t know whether you saw the film on me: *Time Is All You’ve Got*.

Talbot: Yeah. I’ve seen the film.

Shaw: I told the story there. The agents came to me at a certain point and said, “Artie, we’ve got a problem.” I said, “What’s the problem?” He said, “On the South tour.” He said, “You know, it’s a lot of dough. Big one-night stands and about 25 or 30 of ’em.” As I told you, the money didn’t mean anything to me. You get to a certain place, and who cares? I never could understand this need for money, beyond a certain need. You need the rent, et cetera. So they said they don’t want to have Lips in the band. I said, “Well screw it. Cancel the tour. I don’t care. Contract or no contract, I’m going down there with him, if I go there. He’s in the band. Nobody tells me who to have.” They said, “It’s worth considering.” I said, “No, it’s not. No amount of money would make me do that.” “Let’s

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go back and ask some folks . . .” So the agents went. It was a very lucrative tour for me. They had to make money. They were getting 15% of the gross.

They came back about a week later and said, “We got it solved.” I said, “What’s the solution.” “Lips can play in the band, but he must sit no nearer than 15 feet from the nearest man in the band.”

Talbot: I remember the story now.

Shaw: So help me God. I said, “You’re joking. That’s a joke, isn’t it?” I said, “I can’t picture it. Here’s the band. Lips is sitting in a chair with a music stand in front of him, way off there? They want blacks untouchable, right?” . . . colored . . . So we cancelled the tour. We didn’t play the South. Amazing. It’s just amazing. Hard to believe these things happen.

Talbot: After Billie left the stand on that Southern tour, when you went back North, she rejoined the band?

Shaw: Oh she joined. She was with the band. Soon as we finished a couple of Southern tours . . . Southern nights . . . Southern gigs, we went back through Pennsylvania. She was with the band. She was with the band all the way through, past New Year’s, into the Lincoln Hotel, I believe, if my memory’s right about the dates. But then, a fracas occurred . . . problem occurred. I can see both sides of it, and I was in the middle. Billie . . . by that time I had hired Helen. Helen had sent me a demo record. I’d heard her sing in Washington.

Talbot: Helen Forrest.

Shaw: Yeah. She looked like she . . . she looked like Eurasian. She had her eyebrows way up here and a funny hairdo. I said to her, “Lose about 20 pounds, make yourself look like an American girl, and you can join the band.” So she did. She even commented on that, in that film, I believe. So she joined the band, and she and Billie sat there on the bandstand. Billie would sing the jazz things, and she would sing the nice pop ballads.

Talbot: Did they get along o.k.?

Shaw: Oh, marvelously. Sure. She loved Billie. Billie called her “child”: “Let the child sing that one.” We got along fine. Then Billie began . . . The reason I got Helen is that I began to see problems, and besides, that thing about the record, and she’s signing other contracts on her own.

Talbot: *Any Old Time.*

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Shaw: It was too difficult. It was just going to be too tough. Same as Roy [Eldridge]. I'll tell you a story about Roy, how he got out, how he left the band. He's told the story, but he's not told it the way it was. I can understand. He's a little embarrassed by it. He was then.

Anyway, I hired Helen. They had roughly the same range, so it was a question of what the type of tune was each would sing. In any case, the woman who ran the Hotel Lincoln, whose husband owned a string of hotels . . . it was a little like Leona Helmsley, really. She was married to a guy . . . Her name was Maria . . . Oh, God, I've got pictures of her. Maria . . . something. She ran the hotel. She was a nice lady and loved the band and loved Billie. In a hotel, there's no room on the bandstand for the girls, so they had a little table, little round table, this side of the bandstand, to the left side. They could walk up steps when they heard their introduction . . .

Tell me when. You want to change it? [Time for a change of tape reel, evidently]. Oh, o.k.

. . . They would walk up to the stand and sing their tune. The introductions are always at least eight bars, and then the band would play a chorus. They weren't solo things, except for Billie. Once in a while we had some of those. So the girls sat there, and in order to come to work, they had to have a dressing room. They gave the band a suite where they kept their uniforms, clothes, mutes, and whatever gear, and the girls had a room that they could change in. They kept their evening clothes or whatever. They'd come into the hotel and go up to their room and change.

Maria came up to me one time and said, "Artie, we're having some problems. You know, I run a hotel. This is just one room." I said, "Yeah, I understand. What's the problem?" "Well," she said, "you see, when Billie Holiday gets in the elevator, people think we take colored. You know, we're running a big hotel here."

Talbot: And in those days, big hotels didn't.

Shaw: Oh, no. Colored people couldn't stay in the same hotels as whites. Joe Williams pulled my coat one time at the Fairmount Hotel, when he was playing there. I was there with Jean Bach. He came out and pulled my coat. He said, "Colored folks time." Because now he's the headline attraction.

Anyway, back then, no. So in any case, Maria asked me if there was any way I could tactfully propose to Billie—she was nice enough to come to me instead of going to Billie—"Could you ask her if she would mind taking the freight elevator so she doesn't see the guests and the guests don't see her?" I said, "Jesus, I know Billie. I think I just

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lost Billie as a singer in this gig, but I'll try." She said, "I have to do it Artie. I can't . . . We can't do it any more. We're losing customers. People are checking out. And that's what we run. A hotel." So I said . . . I went to Billie that night. I said, "Billie, this is not going to be something you like. I don't like it. But I'm going to ask you what you want to do." Just like I did with Hank Jones and Tommy Potter when we went to [Las] Vegas. I said, "Do you guys want to go? You can't sit in the room we work in." Did you know that?

Talbot: No. Even in the '50s?

Shaw: They give you a trailer outside there. We'd finish a gig, you go out to the trailer. Cab Calloway had to do that. What's his name . . . Sammy Davis had to do it for a while. Then they finally opened it up.

In any case, I said, "Billie, it's up to you. This is the problem. They run a hotel, and I know you're going to say, 'I don't give a damn,' but if you could go take the freight elevator up there, they wouldn't lose business." She said, "Artie, this is too much." I said, "Really, it's a matter of imposition. It's an imposition, in terms of your attitude toward it. You could say, 'It's a gig. I want to do the gig. The hell with it.' Because I think you're accomplishing more on the bandstand than this little . . . but that's up to you. I'm not going to advise you." "No," she said, "I think I'll go, because people have been coming to me about doing a solo . . . single." I said, "I don't blame you. Whatever you want to do." So she gave me her notice then. Very amicable. *Down Beat* said, "Artie Shaw Fires Billie," because she's black. Well, they neglected to say I hired her when she was black. She didn't change color.

Anyway, those rags . . . They printed awful crap. I get the worst press anybody ever saw. People who know me say, "I can't believe that." Well, it was true. So that was Billie.

About Roy . . .

Talbot: Before you leave Billie . . . Did you . . . We know that she only made one commercial record with your band. Did she record anything else, like on radio, air checks or anything?

Shaw: That's what I've been looking for. I've been trying to find these air checks. They must exist. You know, in the film that they did, I could have sued them. My lawyer in New York said, "No, I won't. I'm not going to take the case, because I . . . You're dealing with black mafia people. I don't want any part of that." He said, "You could win, but I don't know whether we'll be here."

Talbot: You presumably had arrangements written especially for her, did you?

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Shaw: The arrangements were written for vocalists, and some were when Billie joined the band. I give her some full solo records. We did a program one time in Boston one time. I thought, “The hell with it. Everybody’s playing popular tunes. Let’s do the blues for a half hour.” Billie sang slow blues. The band picked it up. Then we doubled it up and went on, solos, jazz, all of that. One half-hour broadcast. It created a minor furor, because the song collectors were sore as hell.

Talbot: It would be wonderful to find that.

Shaw: Wouldn’t it. It would be one hell of a record. Somebody must have taken those air checks. People did it. But I’ve never been able to find one. That’s why I talked to this man, Brylawski . . . What’s his name?

Talbot: Yeah. Sam Brylawski.

Shaw: Yeah. Couldn’t find them. They haven’t found them yet. I told you John Hammond said he knows they’re out there somewhere, and John was a pretty good ferret.

The colored problem is a big problem, you see. You go to a town, and Billie would have to go to what they called “nigger town,” and the band would go to white town, and they’d stay at a decent hotel. I mean, there were fleabags, anyway, but at least . . . One time we got around that for a stunt. We had Tony Pastor and I think Chuck Peterson carried her bags in, and we painted a little dot on her head with this lipstick. One red dot between her eyebrows. We called her the Princess Majarani so-and-so. She checked into the hotel. But she didn’t like that too much. She felt it was cow-towing.

Roy had the same problem.

Talbot: Yeah, what was Roy?

Shaw: The story about Roy. Would you like to hear that? It’s jumping through space and time.

Talbot: That’s o.k.

Shaw: Later on, when Roy was in the band, I paid Roy the highest price going at that time. I think it was 500 bucks a week. Today that would be roughly a couple of thousand, maybe three thousand. It was a good salary. The rest of the band, the most a man, any other man got was two or three hundred. Bernie Glow. There’s a story about him I’ll tell you too. Interesting.

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Roy joined the band, and I said, “Look, Roy, I’m giving you this money. I’m not the boss of the world. On the bandstand, you’re equaler. You’re getting more than anybody. Off the bandstand, I have nothing to do. I don’t run the world. I’m not the emperor. But I’ll take care of you on the bandstand. I know it’s tough.” He was . . . had been with Gene [Krupa]. It was too tough. Gene couldn’t handle it. He couldn’t. I took very good care of him. I saw that he was o.k. But you couldn’t get around the fact that he’d break it up. He’d play a tune, and the audience would roar with applause. Get on the bus on the way to the gig, he couldn’t go to the diner and get a hamburger. He didn’t like it much, but we all took care of him, bring him sandwiches, bring coffee out to him, whatever. He didn’t like it. Some of the guys would sit in the bus and eat with him, because we liked Roy. He was a nice little guy. I liked him a lot. He came to see me at the Blue Note. Looked like Uncle Tom, with the white hair. I’ve got a picture of him with me somewhere. By that time he wasn’t able to play any more.

This one night in San Francisco . . . We were playing the auditoriums. There’s a big auditorium up there, and we had sold the joint out. It was a jam. It was a mob, a riot, a real bash. We got there. The men got out of the bus, got on the bandstand. Roy said he’d join us. No Roy. Eight o’clock, we’re supposed to hit. We start at eight o’clock, and Roy ain’t there. Finally about 8:30, quarter to nine, commotion up front. My band manager is called up front, and it turns out Roy’s trying to come in through the front entrance, and they said, “What are you talking about? It’s a white band. They’re playing. Who the hell are . . .” They thought he was trying to crash in. He had a bad time, and he came in very salty, very angry, very . . . and his playing was angry. He’s glaring at me like I was at fault, and I thought, “Oh Jesus. This . . . I’ve just about had this.” I said to the band manager, “Look. Tell him to treat this as two weeks’ notice. I’ll give him an extra bonus and all of that, but it’s just not worth it.” I can’t get into these wars, because they said to me, “We didn’t know, Mr. Shaw. You know, this guy shows up and he says, ‘I’m with the band.’ How could he be with the band? The band’s playing. We don’t know.” I had four trumpets, see. So anyway, he gave him his notice. Intermission came, and Roy knocks at my door. I didn’t know who it was. Someone knocks at my dressing-room door. In comes Roy, and he’s got a knife. He said, “Any reason I shouldn’t use this on you, you [expletive deleted]?” So I looked at him, absolutely astounded. I said, “Roy, if I’m your enemy, who the hell are your friends? You know I’ve broken my [expletive deleted] for you.” He looked at me and started to cry. I put my arms around him and said, “For Christ’s sake, get out of this country. You don’t belong here. Go to Paris. Get a . . . All these other guys have gone there.”

I saw him many years later, when he was with J.A.T.P. [Jazz at the Philharmonic]. He came up to me and said, “Man, you were right. You were right, but I couldn’t handle it. I didn’t like the food, I didn’t like any . . . I could have lived like a human being back then, but I couldn’t do it.” The poor guy was a victim. He was a spoiled American, like we all are. When you live here a while, we’re all living on the fat of the land. Here we are

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worrying about diets and most people can't get enough to fill their bellies. It's crazy. Just nuts.

Bernie Glow. I'll tell you a little thing about him. Bernie joined the band when I was at the . . . I think it was when . . . Roy was finished by then I believe. Yes, and Bernie was coming in to replace him. On the stage we had to play "Stardust," and it started with Billie Holiday's first chorus.

Talbot: Billie Holiday's?

Shaw: Billy Butterfield. Billy Butterfield's first chorus. Roy, I mean Bernie, could blow. He could really play. Before the first show that day, which was like eleven o'clock in the morning, he was out in the dressing . . . out in the hallway, practicing, and I hear him go [Shaw sing the melody of "Stardust."] Played it beautifully. Blasted it. It was great. Get on the stage, and I go [Shaw sing the opening notes of *Stardust*] and it faded out. Couldn't play the [expletive deleted] thing at all. I said, "What's going on?" Somebody else started blowing. I don't know who it was, but played the chorus. Bernie looked like he'd been killed. Poleaxed. He looked pale. I said, "It's o.k. Keep going." Finished the tune, and we . . . The rest of the book he played fine. After the show I said, "What happened?" He said, "Oh, man, I panicked. I don't know what happened. I just panicked." I said, "Well, when you crash in a plane, you go up again. Next show, do it." So the next show, he got about four bars in [Shaw sings], faded again. He did it three times. I gave him three shots at it. Fourth time, I said, "Jesus Christ." He said, "I gotta quit. I'm giving my notice. Can you get somebody?" I said, "Yeah, we'll get somebody." He left. I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I don't know." I saw him years later. He went into psychoanalysis and he got cured, whatever it was. He couldn't . . .

You know, it's a joke. Leopold Auer tells a joke about . . . He was the teacher of [Jascha] Heifetz and [Yehudi] Menuhin and what's his name?

Talbot: Elman?

Shaw: [Mischa] Elman. People said, "You must have been a great teacher." He said, "No, I had damn good pupils. I had very good pupils. As a matter of fact, I had one pupil you never heard of. He could play better than Heifetz or any of them." "No kidding? Why haven't we ever heard of him?" He said, "Well he can't play for anybody." That's a marvelous joke. Very subtle. If you can't do it, there's no use. I can write fine, but when I sit down to write, I freeze. I can do it in here.

The other line of course is the old Yiddish joke. "I blow in so sweet and it comes out so sour." Poor Bernie. But Bernie turned out to be a hell of a trumpet player, and he was then, but he couldn't conquer the inner demons, whatever they were.

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I had some very interesting things happen with the band. I never told many people this one. You know how I kept Billy Butterfield in the band? Billy was a very fine player, but he got very restless. Like Dodo. He would just quit and go somewhere else.

Talbot: Like Dodo Marmarosa.

Shaw: Yeah. So Billy joined the band, and I said, “Look. I know about you. You’re like me. I used to quit a lot of bands, and I don’t want to pay you the kind of money I’m going to pay you and lean on you and rest the band on your shoulders . . .” First trumpet player’s like a concertmaster. In an ensemble, that’s what you’re hearing. He’s carrying the lead. I said, “Billy, if you’re going to be there, I want you to stay there for a while.” So he signed a contract. I said, “O.k.” I said, “Billy, contracts are no good, because you can quit, and what am I going to do to enforce it? You can say, ‘I’ll play lousy,’ and it’s over.” I said, “I’ll tell you what you do. I’ll give you 500 a week.” Again, big salary. “How much do you need to live on, on the road?” “Oh,” he said, “Maybe a couple hundred, two and a half.” I said, “O.k. I’ll give you two and a half a week, and the other two and a half goes into an account. Special account, Billy Butterfield, to be paid in full at the end of the year.” In the event that the year is not finished, he loses it. Well, boy, four months went by, you couldn’t have lured him away. He had a lot of money in the bank. He stayed there. Stayed for the year. He looked at me once in a while, “You tricked me.”

You had to learn a lot of things to run a band. You had to learn . . . psychologically, you’re dealing with musicians. They’re good or bad, and if they’re good, they’re temperamental. They have their own views. Running a band. People talk about running a band as if it’s . . . you’re a better musician. It has nothing to do with that. God knows Glenn Miller wasn’t as good a musician or trombone player as Jack Teagarden, but he could never run a band, Jack. Bix could never run a band. Harry James could. It gets down to a sense of being able to handle people, and handling yourself, primarily. Bunny couldn’t. People . . .

Also the other thing that a lot of jazz critics don’t seem to understand: when you become a star, you’re transcending music. It’s like saying John Wayne wasn’t as good an actor as whatever name. But John put the asses in the seats, and that’s what it gets to be after a while. I learned that line from Reggie Jackson. Somebody asked Reggie, “What the hell is all this about getting more money? You’re nothing but a baseball player.” He said, “It’s got nothing to do with baseball. I put the asses in the seats. That’s what the park owners want.”

Talbot: I sometimes think that a lot of jazz critics lose sight . . .

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Shaw: Hmm?

Talbot: Sometimes I think a lot of jazz critics lose sight of the business side, the fact that musicians are out there primarily to earn a living, not to please a jazz critic.

Shaw: I told . . . Dick Johnson and I had a little discussion one time. We were playing at . . . with the Boston . . . not the Boston . . . the Houston Pops Orchestra. They played the first half. We played the last half. It was dreadful. I hated that evening, because a forest of microphones. The first time I'd ever run into that phenomenon. Microphones and somebody out there twisting those dials and changing everything. You tell them, "Make sure the piano comes on." He forgets to turn off the piano while you doing another thing. Just awful.

We came back, after an intermission, and Dick said, "Let's do the *Porgy and Bess* suite." Written by Hal Crook. Very good arranger. Very modern, very interesting thing, but we had a limited amount of time, and the people wanted to hear the book, the old Artie Shaw Orchestra book. I said, "Jesus, Dick, it would be fraudulent. These people want to hear what they paid for. I don't want to do it. I'd love to play the *Porgy and Bess* suite, but can't do it. We haven't got the time. We got 20 minutes. We got to get six or eight tunes in there." "Jesus, Artie, everybody wants it." I said, "Who do you mean by everybody?" He said, "There's got to be at least 40 musicians down there." I said, "How many people do you think there are out there?" He looked out. Maybe 2,500 people. So 40. I said, "Where's the percentage?" Turn 2,500 people off to please 40 people. It doesn't work that way.

I've got a chapter in my book about that same kind of problem. You're broadcasting, and they want a sponsor to buy the program. They don't care how good the music is, or how bad the music is. When I started talking one time on a talk show, Buddy Rich and a couple of other musicians were there, and I was talking about Lawrence Welk. They were making fun of it. I said, "You'd like him very much if you owned a network." They look at me. "That's not our business." I said, "I know it isn't, but you're in a business which requires that you be aware of that." It's a very difficult thing to explain that you're living in the real world and that when you're doing great art, no-one usually gives a damn. You could go to your death doing great art, as many have done. Cezanne died an embittered man. Modigliani, they used to wrap fish in his painting.

What are you going to say about this? A man is out there on that freeway going in to pay an invoice that he owes. He doesn't know about music. Turns on the radio and it's doing something weird. "Jesus. Let me hear something I can understand." That's why I think rock has taken over, because the words are there. They're saying things, either shocking you or pseudo-poetry. Dylan, you know, something blowin' in the wind. Wow. Heavy stuff. I don't think anybody who's listened to that has ever read *Dover Beach* or anything

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really. These guys are supposed to be poets. Well, I guess they are for younger kids. They're saying what the younger kids want to hear said. So that's what they're talking about. I'll read books, and they'll say Roy Orbison was on or so-and-so was on and he said and his words said. Nothing to do with music, but they call it music. I never could understand it. See I didn't even understand opera.

Talbot: The interesting thing was that in the '30s there wasn't this kind of divide of music for youth, if you like, and music for adults. The music you played . . .

Shaw: We did have singers.

Talbot: But the music you played was appreciated by teenagers and adults, wasn't it?

Shaw: Yes, but see, that was a fad. The singers had to be there. They wanted to hear those words. On a pop tune they wanted . . . my . . . The strange thing to me was *Beguine* becoming a hit, without a word. Just that that was the music. The difference between the lyric and the song are tremendous. There's a great story. I think it's true. Oscar Hammerstein's wife Dorothy was here with some people, and they were saying something about her husband wrote *Ol' Man River*, I mean Jerome Kern's *Ol' Man River*. She said, "Jerome Kern never wrote *Ol' Man River*. Jerome wrote boom-boom bu-boom ba boom-boom bu-boom. My husband wrote *Ol' Man River*." Oscar Hammerstein. There's a case where I think the lyric transcended the tune. The tune was very well designed for that lyric, but the lyric is what made it be this piece of American history, whereas you take *All the Things You Are*, and the lyric there is fatuous. "Hush of evening trembling on the brink of a lovely star." What the hell does that mean? How do you tremble on the brink of a star?

I never cared much about lyrics. I never cared much about singers, so when I did have one, I had either Helen or Billie, once I had those people, and Tony would make fun of lyrics. "Ro-sa-lee."

Talbot: Tony Pastor?

Shaw: Tony Pastor, yeah. He was like a soprano Louis Armstrong. People thought it was a woman half the time. But he made me laugh. [Shaw sings:] "I'm ropin' and a-tiein'." He's talking a saddle. Gimme my horse and saddle. So weird. But the band had fun with him. So I couldn't see the lyrics as anything to be taken very seriously, except the pop tunes, and I thought that was a nice thing for a girl to sing.

Talbot: Later on you had Mel Tormé singing with you, didn't you?

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Shaw: Yeah, but that was a stunt. I was doing a Cole Porter album, and somebody recommended that I talk to Mel and listen to what he did. He had that little group, the Meltones. Did you ever hear the record called *Guilty* that we did with them? “Guilty of loving you?”

Talbot: Yeah.

Shaw: Nice record. I used them as a section. [I] *Got the Sun in the Morning*. They were part of the orchestra, and you could do nice things with them. But it was not . . . I couldn’t take any of those lyrics, those words, even with . . . you said about Kitty Kallen. We made something out of that tune. Cole loved that record. He loved that record. Porter just called me. He was in ecstasy about . . . He said it’s the best record he ever heard of *My Heart Belongs to Daddy*. And he loved *Rosalee*. He said, “I would never in a million years have believed that song could lend itself to that kind of treatment.” He loved it. So it was fun when a songwriter would like what you did. Today they hate what’s being done. Kern stopped a few records that they made of his tunes. *The Song Is You*. Some jazz guy did it, and I remember Kern was furious. He said, “That’s not what I wrote. I had nothing like that in mind.” He called the record company and said, “You cannot use that song. If you do, I’m going to put a lawyer on you.”

Talbot: I think it was something Dizzy Gillespie did too. I think it was . . .

Shaw: Whoever. I told you my discussion with . . . what’s his name? The piano player . . . Bud Powell. About *Embraceable You*. It wasn’t *Embraceable You*. It was Bud Powell’s variations on a theme by Gershwin. He could have called it that and let you figure out what the theme was. Wouldn’t have been a bad stunt. Today there’s a more educated audience, so maybe it would work.

Talbot: So you didn’t actually tour with Mel Tormé?

Shaw: Oh, no no. That was studio work. Studio orchestras. Matter of fact, the first time an instrument was dubbed was in those sessions, on *Love For Sale*. I had to have some dental work done on the front of my mouth. I didn’t know it, but there was a tooth that had to be recapped. I didn’t know that at the time. The band was called for a date, and there were I think 44 men in the studio. Big string section. I had to show up, and either pay the 44 men . . . So I finally said to one of the control men, “Is there any way we could make my recording, stick it in over this some way, later?” The guy said, “We’ve never done it, but we could try it.”

Talbot: This is before tape, is it?

Shaw: I’m not sure we had tape or not. I don’t know what they did.

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Talbot: What year was it?

Shaw: 1940s. Early 1940s.

[recording engineer:] They had a tape machine in the '40s, I think.

Shaw: Whatever they did . . .

Talbot: So they maybe had tape.

Shaw: We recorded the tunes. *Love For Sale* and whatever it was . . .

Talbot: Has to be tape.

Shaw: . . . and I came at a later date and played with the earphones. So it must have been tape. But that was a brand new idea. I thought it was a hell of an idea, because then I could think of what I was doing. Never mind what the band was doing. That was done. Play it over a few times and then play it like I was listening to a band and playing my part.

Talbot: That was the start of something, wasn't it?

Shaw: Yeah. God. Now you can make a career out of that.

Talbot: You didn't make many more records after around that time, right?

Shaw: No. I was pretty disillusioned with the band business by then. There was nowhere to go. As I say, in '49, that was my swan song. Did I ever tell you what happened then?

Talbot: Nope.

Shaw: I went out with that '49 band, and it was the best band I could find. I had to go out, because I had to make some money. I had a farm, and I had to meet some IRS payments and whatever. So I thought, I was going to have a band, I might as well have a good one, rather than bore the tears out of myself. So I got this band together. We got a great book. Tadd Dameron, Johnny Mandel, Gerry Mulligan . . . who? everybody . . . Gene Roland . . . what's the guy? some . . . all of the fine arrangers that were around. So we got this great book. We rehearsed it and went to work. Went out on the road, and it was absolutely doomed. I looked at that audience. They didn't . . . We had one good engagement. One week we played at the Blue Note in Chicago. I remember seeing Dave

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Garroway many years later. He said, “That was one of the great music experiences of my life.

We walked in there. We were doing the Ravel *Piece en forme de habanera* with the band. I had it transcribed from the Hershey Kay arrangement to the band. Then we did . . . We had a sonata written by a teacher of composition at New York University, whatever. Out of tempo. It was a club. People sat and listened. It was a bitch of an engagement. If that could have gone on, I’d have stayed in the business forever. I’d have never quit. It was a great means of expression. Sometimes ecstatic. But then you’d go into a nightclub . . . a ballroom, and it was shocking. The audience would go, “Nyaaaaaaa.” Say, “What are you doing? Good ol’ band. The ’38 band. The old days. They’re good old . . .” I used to say, “Yeah, when Hitler was running around. All those good old days.” Anyway, this was ’49. Eleven years later. That’s three generations in jazz. I thought, this is hopeless. We played about a month. It was a three-month tour. I figured I’d get the money to pay the IRS, but I couldn’t handle it. I called Rockwell-O’Keefe, who were handling me, and I said, “Look, cancel the rest of this tour. Give me a hiatus.” He said, “You can’t. They got the advertisements.” “I don’t care. I’ll walk if you don’t.” They knew me. I would. He said, “O.k.” They postponed the dates. I went into New York, and I called a guy and said, “Get me a ’38 band.” I got Lee Castle, and he got me the ’38 band. Lee liked that. So we went out with the ’38 band and played that book, which bored me to tears. They were good arrangements, but they were good ’38 arrangements, like Guy Lombardo was a good ’20s band. It was . . . I was way past that. Anyway, we did that, and the audience loved it.

So then my own private sense of sardonic humor came in. I said the best band I could get, they hated it, and the band that I’m long through with, they loved, what would they do if I got the worst band in the world? So I went out and got a guy named Milt Gray, who was a viper, a real marijuana smoker. He always wanted to manage my band. “Jeez, Artie, . . .” You know what I mean. I said, “Milt, you got a job.” He stayed at the Forrest Hotel in New York. Remember that place? It was one of the two musicians’ hotels. The Forrest and the Plymouth, on both sides of Broadway on 49th Street. I got hold of Milt, and I said, “Listen. You want to handle my band? Be the manager. I got one month of tour to do. Or three weeks left. “All right. Great. I’ll get you . . .” I said, “No. Here’s what I want. I want 14 men, and I want them to be able to read stock arrangements, and they have a blue suit and black shoes and black socks, and I’ll get the necktie, the black tie. White shirts.” He said, “You wouldn’t play stock arrangements.” I said, “That’s what we’re gonna do.” “Jeez, I don’t believe this.” I said, “Get the men, can you?” He said, “Sure,” so he got 14 men. We met at Nola’s rehearsal studio. There they are, up on the bandstand, guys who couldn’t blow. Not very good players, but they could play stocks. I said, “Can you guys read?” “Yeah, we can read.” I said, “O.k. We’re going to start with book 1, tune 1, and we’ll go through 15. The top 15 on the charts. *Billboard* chart.

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Talbot: Before you get any further, what did you tell Milt? How did you describe the kind of musicians you wanted?

Shaw: \$100 a week on the road. You can't get anybody who can do anything for that, so that's the guys I want. They got to go for \$100 a week on the road. So he took 'em. He got the men. Well, the calibre was pretty low.

We went into rehearsal, and I said, "Can you guys read?" I said, "Tonight we're going to start with number 1." My band boy went to the publishers and got the top 15 tunes. I gave him instructions. The publishers called me. "There's a guy says he's your . . ." I said, "He is." Tommy Thomas was the name. Tommy Thompson. So they got me the . . . He had the arrangements. We numbered 1 through 15, and they were tunes like, *If I knew you were coming I'd have baked a cake*, and *Hoop De Do*, a polka, and *Blue Tango*. Stuff I would never look at. So we read through them.

Talbot: This is very funny.

Shaw: I said to the band, "Here's your instructions. You start with 1 and we go through 15. I'm not going to have to . . . I'll just hold up my hand. 1, 2, whatever piece. I don't have to tell you the name of the tune. Each set will be 1 through 15. When we get to 8, next one will be 9. And we'll just repeat them. Go right through the whole evening that way. If you get to the first ending and I've got time, I'll go, 'first ending,' or 'second ending.' Right?" That was it. You know how stock arrangements are. So, we got on. The guys said, "Aren't you here . . . gonna rehearse the band?" I said, "No. That's it. You've got it." "What about the theme?" I said, "We'll run through that." We ran through the theme. They could play that. Opening and closing of it. That was the only thing I could play with the band. Who do you play with on a stock arrangement? So I used to make fun of it. Put the clarinet over my shoulder and march up and down and make fun of the audience. Usually I was a pretty dour guy in front of a band.

So, we finished the gig. Played . . . finished . . . The first night, by the way, was in Brooklyn, and a guy named Manny Hecklin . . . I remember his name, because he was a lousy trumpet player with Vincent Lopez's band when I played with Lopez's band for a while, to keep body and soul together. Manny came up to me. He said, "Remember me?" I said, "Sure, you used to play . . ." He said, "Yeah." He said, "Jeez, that's a good . . . new band. Great band." Audience loved it. The audience loved it. All the tunes they wanted to hear. "Will you play so and so?" I said, "It'll be up in about . . ." If we were on number 3, I said, "Six more tunes ahead of you." We'd get to it. We did that. Last night we played was in Allentown or Reading, Pennsylvania. Forgot where, but it was an American Legion Post outside of town. Little brick building. We played the dance. At the end of the evening, I was making fun of the audience, making fun of myself, making fun of the band, everything. I was so disgusted with everything I was beyond anger, so I was

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laughing and . . . a joke on everybody but me. When it was all done, the gig was over and I was finished. I was going to get in my car and drive back to my farm. The manager of the dance, the promoter, whatever it was, came up to me and he said, “You know, Mr. Shaw, I always heard you were a pretty tough guy to get along with, but,” he said, “tell you something. This is the best night we’ve had since Blue Baron.” So help me. I don’t kid you. Blue Baron was one of the lousiest Mickey Mouse bands that ever lived. So I thought, this is not a business for a sane man, and I got out. And it wasn’t. So expect to . . .

I’ve used this as a metaphor. If you were in the candy business and you thought candy was an art form, and you would study the making of confections, hand-dipped, blah blah blah, whatever it is, and you found that suddenly everybody was giving away candy on street corners, cheap candy, so the public’s taste for candy had been perverted, wouldn’t you say that’s the wrong business to be in? That’s the truth. Maybe you could open a special shop in Beverly Hills and charge \$42 an ounce and get along for a while, but you’d have a dim future. The long pull was not there, and in music, you’ve got to go for the long pull. That’s the problem. I couldn’t. There wasn’t any long pull. The long pull was, singers were coming up. It didn’t matter who they were, what they were, whether it was Paul Anka going [Shaw sings] “And you-uu and I-ii.” This kind of craziness going on.” I couldn’t understand any of it.

I still don’t. Oh, I understand why. It’s easy to understand. It’s like that audience that I play Mozart for, as opposed to Schoenberg or Bartok. It’s very simple. It’s easy to grasp. The singers sing, “I love you.” Well, we all know what that is, and we all . . . that is, all of us sing in showers. So he sings. He’s got a lovely voice. I hear people say, “She’s got a nice voice.” What the hell’s that got to do . . . Louis Armstrong had the lousiest voice in the world. He sure sang good. It’s crazy. It’s just crazy. So that was part of what drove this fella out of the business.

Talbot: You must have been feeling pretty bemused on your way back to the farm.

Shaw: Oh, no. I knew then that I was finished. I never had a big band again, except that ’49 band. But that was the one. That was the big band. I’m sorry. Never had a big band again *after* that ’49. The last one was the ’38 band and then this stock band. Never a big band again. When I had to go back for another round to make some money, I got together the group with Hank [Jones] and Tommy [Potter] and . . . good players. The reason for that was, I didn’t think we were going to have a better audience, but we’d have a smaller audience. I wouldn’t be as straitjacketed. If they didn’t like it, I could say, “Here’s your money back. Go home.”

Talbot: And how did that work out ultimately?

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Shaw: Oh, the audience loved it. But a year of it, and as I say, my attention span isn't that good on concentration on the same thing. We're back to Helen Hayes walking home after the first act. I'd forget what we had played. I'd played it so often by then, and you can only do so much. We did make . . . did you ever hear the record of *Begin the Beguine* we did with that group?

Talbot: No.

Shaw: I'll play it for you, if you'd like to hear it. We did it note-for-note, the arrangement, but it sure was different. The playing was altogether different. Chords were altered. I played different. Tal [Farlow] played. We didn't have that constriction of that . . . And I did *Frenesi*. Did you ever hear *Frenesi* with that . . .?

Talbot: Yeah. I did.

Shaw: The long version?

Talbot: Is that on . . . that's on the new CD that's come out?

Shaw: No. It's not on. I've going to put that out. It's on the *Legacy* album.

Talbot: No. I've only heard the stuff on the CD that's come out recently.

Shaw: No. It's not on the CD. These were the tunes that people were expecting you to play, so I played them. *Stardust*. Did you ever hear that version? I'll play you those three records if you'd like to. You'll see what I'm talking about, because I had grown out of that other. It like asking Picasso to go back into his classical period again, or his blue period. He was through that. He was trying other things. I'm not making invidious or not invidious comparisons. But the comparison is apt. You can't tell a person who's trying to develop to go back and do what he's through with.

Talbot: Somewhere around about the time when you were finishing up with that, or after you finished up with that group, you went to Australia for some reason?

Shaw: When I finished the gig with the band . . . We played [Las] Vegas, where I told you, where the black guys had to go sit in the . . . I gave them the option. I said, "We don't have to take the gig, but you'll get a lot of money." I paid them well, because they paid a lot in Vegas. When I finished with that tour, we went to San Francisco and played some nightclub there. It was a nice place. We played what we had to play, but I say by then I was weary. I'd done that set of pieces enough, and there was no time to rehearse. I don't know. I was . . . by that time I was pretty disillusioned with audiences. Somebody came along and said, "There's a guy gonna do a tour of Australia, American musicians."

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I said, “Well, I could take the group.” He said, “No, we can’t afford to pay the transportation.” I said, “It’s only five men.” “No, he needs a big band.” I said, “I can’t bring a big band. I haven’t got a big band. I’ll never have a big . . .” He says, “You got good musicians down there, so you can rehearse them.” I did the tour. It was terrible. The guys couldn’t play the book, but they played the notes. When I got through with it, I took my money and ran, as they say.

Some shocking things happened. Buddy was down there. Buddy and I at least played with a . . . We made a little impromptu Gramercy Four, and we had some fun. But that was it. I never have gone back to the business again, and I’ve been, God knows I’ve been offered sun, moon, and stars to do it. I turned down . . . What was it? \$50,000 for one appearance. It just isn’t . . . There isn’t enough money to get me to do it. I suppose if somebody said, “Here’s three million bucks,” but that’s unlikely.

Talbot: What did you do after that? What did you do after you stopped playing?

Shaw: Did what I wanted to do. I wrote my first book, *The Trouble With Cinderella*, and then I wrote a second book, *I Love You, I Hate You, Drop Dead*. Then a third book, which wasn’t printed until God knows how long, all those short stories. I’ve got a whole file of short stories in there that have never been published. We picked enough for *The Best of Intentions*. That’s this book. And I’m working on this fourth one.

Talbot: When did you go to Spain?

Shaw: I left this country in 1955. That was an IRS problem.

Talbot: Was that the first time you’d been to Europe.

Shaw: No. I went to England when it was time to edit *The Trouble With Cinderella*. I decided I might as well edit it. It’s a mechanical job, and the book was more or less finished. There were some inserts and excerpts to make, and so on. So I stayed at the Savoy Hotel and wandered around London when I wasn’t working. Met some interesting people. A guy named Ernest Borneman. Did you ever hear of Ernest?

Talbot: Yeah.

Shaw: He took me around. And Ernie Anderson was there. I was going to make some recordings in London with a big band, and [James] Petrillo [president of the American musicians union] stopped it. He got a lot of squawks. There was so much publicity about it. I said, “Jesus, you let . . .”

[interruption, as someone leaves his home]

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Goodnight, Pat. I'll see you Tuesday.

[Pat:] You shall.

Shaw: Take it easy.

I said, "You let Sinatra do it. You let Dinah Shore." He said, "They didn't get this much publicity." He said, "We've got a lot of musicians coming in, saying 'Shaw's taking the work away from us and giving it to English musicians'." I got a lot of squawks. Petrillo's very cynical. One vote, one musician. He's the guy who made that famous line about, as far as he's concerned, there's no difference between the fiddler in the corner tavern and Heifetz. Each was one vote. Hardly a musically encouraging remark.

Talbot: So you went off to Spain eventually.

Shaw: Yeah. That was when the IRS got their hooks into me and came up with a totally implausible reading of a law by which . . . in which terms I was supposed to give them money that was income to me, but they claimed that the source of the income was before my marriage. I was a California resident, and income is income, but they said, "The royalties that you've given us, you divided in half with your wife. You're not entitled to that." "Why?" I said, "The money came in in those years. That was income." "Yeah, but . . ." My lawyer said, "You could win the case, but by the time you did, you'd spend more on lawyers." So I went out, sold the cattle and machinery, and left there. It was one of the most fruitful periods of my time, of my life, that period on Picardy Farm. I'd have stayed there the rest of my life, too.

Talbot: Whereabouts was that?

Shaw: Duchess County, New York. Right near the . . . oh, five miles, you're in Massachusetts, five miles, you're in New York. We were in Connecticut. No, we were in New York. We sold the Connecticut. Five miles to Connecticut. Five miles to Massachusetts.

Talbot: Why did you pick Spain?

Shaw: I didn't. I knew I wanted to leave America. I was disillusioned. I'd been hauled up before the Un-American Activities Committee. A blight hit me. Up 'til then I could run the farm. I could go into New York and do game shows. *What's My Line* and *Password*. I was very good at those. So I was making two or three thousand a week doing that. Then suddenly the doors closed. I wrote a story about that in the book called *I Love You, I Hate You, Drop Dead*. It dealt with what a controversial figure was. Television had that

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nickname for us. “Controversial figure.” So I couldn’t appear any more, and there was no income. The farm was not yet fully self-sufficient. It was getting there. I was raising a head of thoroughbred cattle, and I was writing. It was a great life. I had work in the morning at my book, afternoon go out and plow a field, work . . . It was a great life.

Talbot: What did the Un-American Activities Committee think you’d done? What did they accuse . . . ?

Shaw: Communist party. I joined a lot of organizations. One of the things they asked me was, would you join this and join that? I said, “Yeah. Committee for a Democratic Far-Eastern Policy. What’s wrong with that?” “Don’t you know it’s a communist front?” So then it got to the World Peace Congress. I said, “[Eugene] Ormandy was on that. Thomas Mann was on it. Einstein.” He said, “All pinkos.” I said, “I take my stand with those pinkos.” Anyway, then they said, “Don’t you know that was a communist front?” I said, “I saw nothing wrong with a bunch of people from foreign countries all over the world getting together and discussing peace. I had been in the Navy. I joined up. I wasn’t drafted. I felt that was a just war. We had to get rid of Hitler, regardless of how he got there and what our part in it was. But now, I don’t understand what this is all about. We’re trying to find peace.” “It’s a communist front,” they kept saying. Finally I said, “If you can send me to the Republican Peace Congress, I’ll join that.” The audience applauded. I said, “That’s not meant as a joke.” And one of the senators turned to [? (inaudible)], who was the head of the committee at that point. He said, “It’s true. There are a lot of well-meaning people like this man, who want a peace, and we weren’t giving them an alternative.” So that was the only spot in the entire hearings for which I didn’t have contempt, but I couldn’t express the contempt, because I’d have been in jail by now.

I wanted to go to Europe. The only thing I had my eye on was, walk that narrow line that would allow me to get a passport. It cost me the equivalent of 50,000 bucks to get a passport. Had to hire a lawyer whose wife had been to school with Elizabeth Shipley. That’s how I got my passport. Then I . . . Oh, by the way. Going to Australia. I needed a passport, and they offered me a limited one. I said, “I won’t go there with a red flag over my head.” “We’ll give you a passport for those three weeks.” “No way.” So that’s when I hired this guy, and the gig was good enough so I could pay him, and we did it.

That’s when I left America, and I went to Europe. I decided I wanted to live on the coast somewhere, near the ocean. I figured the Mediterranean was the place to go. I drove all over Europe. I started with Naples, where we docked, drove all the way up through Paris, into, up north to St. Jean de Luz and across there, then up through San Sebastian [Donastia], down through Burgos, into Madrid, Valencia, then up through Barcelona, and that Barcelona, a little further north, a place called Sagaro, I stayed there and started looking around for land. I found this piece of land. Did you ever see that place? I’ll show you some pictures downstairs. Beautiful place. Just beautiful. So I built this house up

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there and lived there. Then I met Evelyn [Keyes]. We got married. Well, we didn't get married. We lived together for a while, and then she wanted to get married, because it was an awkward position in those days. And that was that. Meanwhile I wrote and I fished and I breathed. I'm a devout breather. I keep advising people, don't stop doing that. They talk about, you need water. You need air, first.

Talbot: So you were in Spain and your . . . How long did you stay in Spain for?

Shaw: I built the house there. It took about a year and a half before I could move in. Meanwhile I was living . . . No, it was under a year. Had to be under a year, because in Spain they have the old Napoleonic law. If you stay in a house . . . I rented the mayor's house on the bottom of the mountain where I was living . . . where I built my house, rather. If you stayed in one house over a year, they could never evict you and you'd have to stay for the same rent. There's a great story about Truman Capote, about that, but I'll tell you about that another time. So I built the house and moved in when it wasn't quite finished yet. Then I lived in . . . I stayed from '55 to '60. I left in '60, and the reason I left is I was told that things had changed and it was better. I'd come to America. Somebody wanted me to do a television talk show. I flew out to the Coast and tried to do it. I found I couldn't. It's too . . . you've got to homogenize what you do on television. You can't displease someone. That controversial figure business again. So I found I couldn't do that, but I thought, if they want me to do a talk show, at least it's opened up, because when I left America, I wasn't able to do anything. I found I could not anyway. I was still not kosher in terms of radio or television. I did Bing Crosby. I did a couple of shows, but it was on the whole very difficult.

In any case, I came back to America and bought this house in Lakeville. I thought I'd make a living, but I didn't make much of a living, so I lived on royalties. Got along. Fortunately a lot of the records I made "have legs," as we say. Keep selling. So I was able to get along. That was about the time that I tried to make that record . . . no, no. That's what I'd done before I left for Spain. That was '47. I don't think I did any . . . I wrote. I got into rifle shooting. I became fourth place national rifleman, Connecticut state . . . no, Pennsylvania state champion. I got to be a pretty good shooter. I got off into that, and I'd been . . . What really saved my sanity was fishing. I got very caught up in fishing. Fly fishing. That's a remarkable business, because you're out there in a stream and you're outwitting a wild creature on its own turf. You've got to be pretty good to catch a trout with a dry fly, unless they're very naive trouts. A friend of mine goes to places where . . . He said, "It's unfair. These trout don't know what the hell . . . They never heard of a dry fly, so they go to it."

What I did was write, and did a lot of thinking about what I wanted to do, and finally ended up here. I don't think there was any . . . no. There was no music. Oh, I did get those records, those 1943 [*sic*: 1953] records. Teo Macero got me into CBS. He thought

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he would stage a coup there. He helped me get them edited, because they were taken . . . just raw tapes. I fixed them. Get the sound more or less even.

Talbot: Which recordings were these?

Shaw: This is what turned out to be these two CDs. Then I got another collection together of that same material, that went to Book-of-the-Month. I was going to play you, and I will later play you, a couple of records of that that I was talking to you about.

Talbot: This is the quintet.

Shaw: Yeah. That quintet. Again, that was . . . no, that was before I went to Spain. After I tried playing just concert music for a year . . .

Talbot: '52, '53.

Shaw: . . . playing long-form music. The Berezowsky [Nicolai Berezowsky]. De la Joya [?who] did a concerto. And I did the Mozart and the Brahms quintet, and the Mozart quintet, and all of that. I'm going to put out the Mozart quintet and the Berezowsky concerto, which are all on that *Legacy* album. That's what I'm going to do. At that time, that's what I was doing. Getting stuff together, and meanwhile writing. Writing, writing, writing. That's what I did. I worked at writing like I used to at music.

Talbot: The book you're . . . the project you're on at the moment, this book about Albie Snow, is it?

Shaw: Yeah, Albie Snow, if you look at it fast, looks like Artie Shaw. It's a roman à clé.

Talbot: A lot of this is obviously based on experiences that you had yourself?

Shaw: Mine and others. The nice thing about the fiction is that I can draw on any source I know about.

Talbot: One of the things that you've got is that you saw people like, you saw and heard people like Louis Armstrong in the 1920s.

Shaw: I made it a project to see him. After I . . . See, I listened to Bix [Beiderbecke]. His records were more easily available, because Louis's making race records. Race records were records made to be sold in ghetto neighborhoods. Or, as we called them, colored neighborhoods, in those days. Somehow, after hearing a lot of Bix and a lot of Tram [Frankie Trumbauer], who were my early idols . . . I have a funny thing downstairs I'll show you, where I was elected to a hall of fame with Bix and Tram and me and

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Toscanini. It's a very strange closing of roads. "Everything what goes up . . . everything that goes up must converge," I think Flannery O'Connor said.

Anyway, when I was about 16 or 17, I somehow stumbled into some Louis Armstrong records. First one was *Savoy Blues*. [Shaw sings the melody.] That caught my ear. It sounded different, very different. Sounded what we'd call "dirty" as opposed to "clean." Bix was very clean. The different between black and white. It was uneducated music, but it had a vitality and there was a . . . At first I didn't know whether I liked it or not, but as I heard it, I thought, "God, either this guy's a genius or he got lucky." So then I got other records. I'd go to the jobber in Cleveland, where I was then working and dig around on the shelves and find these records, before they went out to the neighborhood. He was a jobber. I got all of Louis's records, and every time a new one came out, I'd get it, immediately. This guy knew me. And so that's what I . . . All of a sudden, I thought, "Wait a minute. This guy's playing somewhere." So I went up to Chicago. The first thing I ever heard him play, a set on the stand, he came out, with the group, and I saw this bull-headed, stocky guy, and he played [Shaw sings the opening of Armstrong's *West End Blues*]

Talbot: *West End Blues*.

Shaw: I thought, "What is that!" [Shaw sings more of it.] I can play it right now. I thought, "Holy Christ." [He sings more.] Into the blues.

Talbot: This must have been in somewhere like the Sunset Café.

Shaw: *West End Blues*.

Talbot: The club was somewhere like the Sunset Café or somewhere?

Shaw: No. This was in the Savoy Ballroom. The stand was low, about as low as this couch. Then there was the carpet. So I sat on the edge of the stand, and he started playing. Oh. That's what I put in my book. If that wasn't enough to blow you away, what would? It was just remarkable. I sat there in a trance, the rest of that evening, listening to him, and then I went back to Cleveland.

Talbot: Who else was in the band that night?

Shaw: Earl.

Talbot: Earl Hines.

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Shaw: Johnny Dodds. Didn't impress me much. Baby Dodds, drummer. What's his name?

Talbot: Kid Ory?

Shaw: Kid Ory. Banjo player and a tuba player.

Talbot: Pete Briggs, maybe.

Shaw: Can't remember the names. The guy that I was listening to was Louis . . .

Talbot: Johnny St. Cyr on [banjo].

Shaw: . . . and Earl. Earl was marvelous. He had just joined the band, and I hadn't heard that record yet. I don't know if the record had come out yet or not, but I either heard it just before it came out, or it was out and they were playing it. But boy, that opened my eyes to what could be done with an instrument. Of course, before that, hearing Bix and Tram. As I say in my book, "He stood and listened to that band, and the *sound* they got out of their horns." He was playing an instrument, and they were making musical sounds. Most people are not aware of how important the sound you get out of a horn is. They just think of how much . . . what you play. The notes you play. That's secondary. First is the sound, your command of that horn, that you can make that instrument speak. First thing I ever heard with Coleman Hawkins was that, that sound. He played with a very small piece of the reed in his mouth, but God, that thing opened up.

Talbot: Can you remember the first occasion you heard Coleman Hawkins?

Shaw: I think it was Fletcher [Henderson] at the Roseland Ballroom. I remember him. I remember Tricky Sam [Nanton]. I can't remember a lot about that band. I didn't . . . The band didn't impress me much. But when the Hawk played, or Bean, as they called him, that was a whole new thing. He had great chord sense . . . Now, today, that's nothing, but in that day . . . *One Hour*, Jesus, what he did with that *If I could be with you one hour tonight*. It was remarkable.

Bix was always around. When he was with [Paul] Whiteman, *Sweet Sue* and *Changes* and some of those records, they were remarkable. *Dardenelle*, what he did with that.

Talbot: Did you hear Bix with the Whiteman band? Did you hear them actually?

Shaw: Yeah. Yeah. But the first time I heard him I went out of my way to go from New Haven to Bridgeport, the Ritz Ballroom, where the [Jean] Goldkette band played. That was my first . . . I was 16. No. Hell, I was 15.

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Talbot: You heard Bix playing with Goldkette?

Shaw: With Goldkette. Yeah, sure, I heard that band. Joe Venuti was in it. Steve Brown, slapping the bass. Nobody'd ever done that before.

Talbot: That gave it so much drive.

Shaw: Chauncey Morehouse was playing drums. Later I worked with all those guys. Chauncey was a drummer. I got to know Chauncey very well. I had a lot of them . . . in one rehearsal I have in my book, Chauncey's in the band. Fidgey McGrath. Fulton McGrath. And Bunny [Berigan]. Dick McDonough and Carl Kress.

Talbot: When you got to New York, and a lot of those guys were in the studio scene as well . . .

Shaw: The ones who could read, who were disciplined musicians, were in the studios, yeah.

Talbot: . . . did they . . . What was the general attitude toward playing the music that they had to play every day? Were they frustrated by it? or . . .

Shaw: I've written an awful lot about that. I was. I quit at 23. I quit the business. Went out and bought a so-called farm in Bucks County. Found I couldn't write, and came back, and to support myself, had to go back into it.

Talbot: But some of them didn't mind it?

Shaw: Mannie Klein didn't mind it at all. I can't think many of them did. Arnold Brillhardt calls me every now and then. He's 84, 85 now. 86, I think.

Talbot: He's still alive?

Shaw: Yeah. He's making mouthpieces.

Talbot: I used to play his mouthpieces.

Shaw: He was a good alto man. He said to me, "You were the guy. Everybody knew you were the natural guy. Benny [Goodman] had studied and played and worked like hell at it. You used to play things we couldn't believe." I said, "Really. You never told me. Where were you when?" He said, "We were rivals, looking for work." But he's very

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kind. He's been very, very . . . what's the word? Flattering? I don't think he's flattering. I think he means it.

I was the new kid on the block when I came in, you see. Benny was well established. Jimmy [Dorsey] had been there forever. And Tommy [Dorsey] was the big man in that business. And Mannie Klein and Charlie Margulis and Fuzzy Ferrar. I got to know all of them. Miff [Mole]. All these guys were legendary names to me.

Talbot: Red Nichols?

Shaw: Red Nichols wasn't in that. No. He never . . . I joined Red Nichols's band. I played in that Red Nichols band.

Talbot: Tell us a bit about Red. What was Red like?

Shaw: At the Park Central. Oh, Red was . . . He was a Bix follower, but he wouldn't admit it. He was limited.

Talbot: Quite a good arranger, though, wasn't he?

Shaw: Red didn't arrange.

Talbot: He didn't.

Shaw: No. Red didn't . . . I didn't have a lot of respect for Red. Matter of fact, Art Michaud . . . Did you ever hear of him?

Talbot: No.

Shaw: Arthur Michaud was a guy who took care of Bunny, got him work. Arthur was a businessman. He was in the insurance business, but he hung out on the fringes of the jazz world, and when Red was looking for people, he told me to go over and rehearse and audition. He said to me, not too many years ago, he said to me, "When Red called me, he said, 'That kid's never going to get anywhere'."

Talbot: Is that what Red Nichols said?

Shaw: About me.

Talbot: About you.

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Shaw: And Arthur said, “No, he’s not going to get anywhere. He’ll probably run the [expletive deleted] business before he’s through.” So Red hired me, and I sat in a section with Babe Russin and a guy named Fletcher somebody. I forget his name. A white guy. Not much of a player. Second alto. That was the section. Three saxes, three brass—two trumpets and a trombone. There was a marvelous trombone player in that band, named Snub. We called him Snub Pollard. I don’t know what his real name was. Snub Pollard was a movie comic.

Talbot: He was a movie actor.

Shaw: But he was marvelous, and whenever he would play, Red would . . . He’d make Red sound silly. He played in a sort of . . . Oh, and I’ll tell you who else I worked with every once in a while: Paul Specht would get a band together, and there would be Sterling Bose, and Bob Chester on tenor, and Charlie Spivak on trumpet. Some good musicians around. But a lot of them couldn’t play studios. Bob Chester never made it to studios.

Talbot: Their reading wasn’t good enough.

Shaw: Sterling Bose couldn’t. They could play, but they couldn’t . . . you know, snap the finger and there it is. Mannie could do that. Mannie could read anything you put in front of him. You had to. That was a requisite. You sit down, and they stick the music in front of you, play it through, and let’s go for a take. That was it. You couldn’t mess around. If you did, you’re . . . They’re paying union scale to as many as 40 men. They couldn’t wait. So I finally got . . . I came in first on second alto [saxophone], because nobody’d heard of me. Then one day there was a guy named Larry Abbot, who was playing all the first alto chairs, and Dave Raksin came in with an arrangement. Dave Raksin’s still around.

Talbot: He did *Laura*.

Shaw: He’s doing movie music.

Talbot: Yeah. He wrote *Laura*, didn’t he?

Shaw: Yeah, but he’s done a lot of movies. He teaches now. Anyway, he brought an arrangement in. It was a nice arrangement . . . by radio standards. Nothing was nice. It was all crap, designed to sell crap. There was a section there for clarinets in the middle register or low register, playing something. One clarinet was supposed to play this against the trumpet, muted trumpet solo or something. I forget. Larry had a hell of a time. He kept not being able to play it. He was playing lead alto, and he couldn’t play it. So Goodman, Al Goodman was running the . . . He’s a show conductor. So he said, “What’s

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the matter? What's the matter?" And Larry said, "This thing is written very strangely." He says, "It doesn't lay right," and all that. So Al said to me, "Can you play it?" I said, "I think so. Yeah." He says, "Give him the part." So I played the part. From there on in I was first alto man. And then I got to be about . . . I think I was first call guy in New York. If I couldn't make it, somebody else did it. Arnold and Alfie Evans were the other two good players. Alfie Evans was a bitch of a good alto man. There it was. We were the three guys. One or the other of us was on every program, most of the programs that came out of New York. I was at one time ending up a program not playing the closing theme. Mannie and I would run down the hall and get a cab that would be waiting for us and go from NBC to CBS, which was a couple of blocks away and come in after the theme on another program. That was how much they wanted us. Dick Hember wouldn't go on the air without me.

Talbot: Richard Hember.

Shaw: He wouldn't go anywhere without me. Oh, and I remember one time he was trying to put me on. He was trying to get me mad. I got into a big fight with him about something, and the next program we had, he had Benny playing in the same section, and there was a sax . . . clarinet chorus. We used to do two programs. One at 7 and one at 10. The 10:00 for New York and the 7:00 for the Coast.

Talbot: We've got Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw sitting in the same section.

Shaw: Yeah. The same section. We did that many times. Benny started playing. It was *Dinah*, and it goes right over the hump of the clarinet. Starts on F and goes from Bb to C. And Benny got a squeak out of there. It was so awful. It was just EEEEEK. Hember looked at him, shot daggers at him, and Benny was very embarrassed.

I had a funny like Indian sign on Benny. It was very strange. He would do that a lot when he got nervous. I don't know whether you know that he did that with Toscanini on the *Rhapsody in Blue*. He couldn't get over the hump. Oh, God. Had to do it three times. Twice, at any rate, and it was really embarrassing. He couldn't make the gliss, you see.

I was on a program with Benny . . . You want to hear a funny story about me and him?

Talbot: Yeah.

Shaw: I was taking courses in philosophy at that point. I was taking these extension courses, because I was trying to figure out a way out of the music business. I could see no future in it. Benny and I were sitting in this same orchestra. Larry Binyon on tenor, and Benny and me. That was the [reed] section. We were doing the Ruth Etting show. Colonel Gimph [?] in there, going like this while Ruth was singing, selling it to

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everybody. She was not a bad singer, as singers go. I was studying at that point. I've still got the book under "E" over there, a limp green-leathered Epictetus, *The Discourses of Epictetus*. We get a five-minute break, and the band would go out. Benny said, "Come on and have a smoke." I was the only other jazz guy around. Jerry Colonna was playing trombone in that group. I said, "I'll see you out there. I'll join you." I was using the five minutes. I'd open the book on my music stand, and I'd study the assignment I was reading. Benny'd come back, the band would come back, and I'd close the book and put it . . . I was embarrassed by this. It looks so highbrow.

One time, Benny said, "What are you reading? What are you reading?" He's the only guy I ever know who said to me one day—he knew I liked books—he says, "There's a book you ought to read." He says, "I don't know the name." I said, "Who wrote it?" "I don't know, but it's a red book," he said. So help me God. I'm not kidding you. [laughter]

Anyway, this one day, he came in. He said, "Who you reading? Who you reading?" I said, "Nothing." "What are you reading?" One day, he came in a little early, and I could feel somebody over my shoulder. I looked, and he was looking at the stand. He was curious. What was I doing? Because I didn't join him for the cigarette. So I said, "Here." And I handed him the book. He looked at it. It was about a discourse on death, on its validity as part of life, et cetera. In effect he was saying, if you don't like it, bear it, because if you leave, you can't come back, unlike a theater. Words to that effect. Benny said, "What the hell is that?" I said, "It's a course in philosophy. Jesus Christ, I'm not asking you to read it. Forget it." All right. So we packed up. Now we used to keep our music cases, our instrument cases here, and we'd put the instrument . . . when you're playing clarinet, put the alto down. When you play alto, put the clarinet down. At the end of the day, you'd close up. The end of rehearsal, open it up, put the cases in, and leave. As we were closing them for the end of rehearsal, Benny said, "See you tonight, J.B."

Talbot: J.B.?

Shaw: I knew he wanted me to ask, who was J.B.? So I said, "I'll see you tonight." And so we left. Came to work that evening for the show. He said, "How you doing, J.B.?" I said, "Great." Benny had this kind of smirky smile. He'd look at you. J.B., J.B., for about two weeks. Finally, I said, "All right. Who's J.B.?" "George Bernard," he said. [laughter] I kid you not. He was too much.

Talbot: That's funny.

Shaw: Isn't that a funny story? Another nice one that happened . . . This is a weird story, if you want anecdotes. I was living out here. I was married to Lana Turner. It was like living with a beautiful vase. She was a remarkably beautiful girl, but you don't talk to vases. I heard Benny'd come in to town, and he was going to open at the Coconut Grove

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or whatever the hell it was. I had not seen anybody from New York in a long time. I was living on that mountain top. The ivory tower gets a little rarefied after a while. So I called him at the hotel two or three days before the opening. Figured he would be there. They said he'd be in tomorrow, so I called him the next day. There he was. I said, "How ya doin', Pops?" We called each other Pops. He called everybody Pops. I said, "What's happening, Benny?" He said, "We're opening." I said, "Yeah, I know. What are you going to do before that." He said, "Nothing." I said, "Come on out for dinner." Somebody to talk to from New York. After he said he would come, I gave him directions and everything else, and it suddenly dawned on me, I'm going to be sitting at a table with him and Lana, and who's going to be talking? There's nothing to talk to. You know, they look at you. Lana would go, "Tee hee," and he would bite his tongue. Benny would [Shaw mumbles]. He had new choppers put in about that time. I decided I'd have a friend of mine named Ben Oakland, and his wife Betty. They were chatterers, so I said, "Come on up to dinner." I'll have somebody to talk to. They sat at one side of the table, Benny over here, me at one end, Lana at the other end. Benny came alone. And we talked. Ben and Betty and I did. Benny never said very much. I'd say something. "Yeah." "Um-hmm." Then he'd chomp away.

After dinner we went out to the living room to have some coffee, after we'd had dessert and everything. We're sitting there, and the conversation was languishing. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, Benny said to me, "Hey Pops. You ever been to Banff?" I said, "Banff? Yeah. You mean up in Canada, Lake Louise?" "Yeah." I said, "Why? I hear it's beautiful." He said, "Yeah." That's the first word he'd uttered all night, unsolicited. So everybody stopped talking. He was going to say something. I didn't want him to lose the thread. So he said . . . I said, "Why?" He said, "I don't know." He said, "I went up there, and I checked in . . ." Like that. He went away. He wasn't anywhere. So I said, Jesus Christ, let's get the hell out of here. So I made up some excuse. There's some band playing downtown. Let's all go down. Get in the cars. We went, and broke up the evening that way.

All right. Benny was opening at the Rainbow Grill one time, and he called me. "Please come to the opening. Come as my guest." Blah blah blah, or as the hotel guest, whatever. So I showed up. I didn't want to go alone, so I called a kid named Donald Ross. He's a playwright. He's the son of a guy named Charlie Ross, who was involved in that Imperial Swing Concert, way back. This is Donald. He's married to a cute little girl named Pauline, a comic. They were cute kids. I liked them both. They came along with me. He knew this story about Benny and the Banff, so when we were sitting at the table and listening to the band, he . . . Benny had Bob Brookmeyer . . . good band, but he was playing [Shaw sings, "Something about the way he loves me" (the Beatles' *Something*)]. That's what his modern music was. Then he did *After You've Gone*. [Shaw sings a fast-moving, swirling melody.] All that. Set was over. He pulled one. He pulled a dandy. Something about, "Think it's time to trapse the light fantastic." Trapse the light . . . He

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was always doing things like that. I think he said something about, “to be screaming like a bunch of stuffed pigs.” He said that one time.

Anyway, this one night, he started coming over to the table to say hello, and Donald saw him coming, and he said, “Artie, ask him what happened at Banff.” That’s 25 years later. I thought that was a cute idea. Donald had that kind of warped sense of humor. Benny came over and sat down. “How ya doin’, Pops?” “Fine. Band sounds good.” Yeah, da-da. Then I said, “By the way, Benny, I’ve often wondered: what happened at Banff?” He looked at me. Total puzzlement. Where’d that come from? He probably forgot the whole incident. Not that he’d been at Banff, but what did I know about it? He said, “I don’t know.” I said, “Something you must have . . . You checked in. What happened?” “Oh, I enjoyed myself.” Donald fell off his chair. Donald started to roar. Benny walked away in total mystification. Didn’t know what the hell we were laughing at. But that’s Goodman. He was an amazing guy.

Freddy was his brother.

Talbot: Freddy Goodman.

Shaw: Freddy was my band manager a long time. When I said . . . He came to me. Asked me if I’d let him manage my band. I said, “Well Jesus, what’s Benny going to say?” He said, “[Expletive deleted] ’im.” I said, “That’s what you call brotherly love, right?” He said, “You don’t know him.” I said, “No, I don’t know him that well.”

Freddy used to come around here. He lives down the road, on the freeway . . . off the freeway. He found out I was living here. He showed up a few times. One time he called. He wanted to come up and talk to me about something. I got thinking about him and about Benny. I often think about those days. I’m busy doing something else. When he came in, I said, “Freddy, could I ask you a question? You grew up in the same family with Benny. You were the younger brother, and Harry is the older brother. Irving was the youngest.” “Right.” And then there was Rachel, or whatever the hell her name was. The one who took care of the books and all that. I said, “Tell me something. I have a theory about Benny. People always tell these bad stories about him. I used to defend him all the time. I’d say, ‘He doesn’t know what he’s doing. He’s not with it.’” I said, “Is it . . . What kind of a guy was he when he grew up, when he went to school? Is he smart?” “No, he was dumb as hell.” I said, “He learned to play clarinet superbly. He could play the clarinet. His fingers were marvelous. He could do what he had to do. Is it possible, do you think, that maybe everything that he had in his mind was focused on that one thing? There was nothing left over.” “Yeah,” he said. “I never thought of it that way, but that’s probably true.” He said, “I . . . We were all astonished that he could play an instrument that well. The only thing he ever could do. He was no good at anything else.” I said,

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“That explains a lot.” Freddy agreed that that was the truth. I believe it. Not quite idiot savant, but that idea. Specialized. That one thing.

Did you ever read [Stephan]Zweig’s *The Royal Game*?

Talbot: No.

Shaw: Oh, it’s a marvelous . . . You must read it some time. It’s a remarkable story about a peasant who has no awareness of anything. He becomes one of the greatest chess players who ever lived. He was in prison, and he learned to play chess. He made the pieces out of bread . . . made the bread balls, and then made pieces. And he did it in his head. Finally they took that away from him. So he played chess in his head. And it is the damndest story. You must read it some time. It’s a remarkable piece. Anyway, it’s a little like that.

Talbot: There are one or two musicians . . .

Shaw: Now Tommy [Dorsey] was not like that. Tommy played like he was.

Talbot: More of a rough and tumble guy.

Shaw: Yeah. He had a big temper. He broke a lot of trombones.

Talbot: But a more complete guy.

Shaw: Huh?

Talbot: A more rounded personality.

Shaw: More of a person. Yeah. A mensch, as we say.

Talbot: There are one or two musicians that you hear of who are superb players, but there doesn’t seem to be much else outside the musician.

Shaw: It’s unfortunate, as I say. See a guy like Bill Evans, I think was a great player, and he seemed to have a view of the world. Bill was a rounded person. Unfortunately the junk [heroin] did him in. Gil Evans was another guy who knew something about the world.

Talbot: What about . . . just something about Benny Goodman . . . this thing about the way he stared at people?

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Shaw: Oh, well, we all did that. Guys in the band called it “the ray.” With me, it was “watch out.” Something like that. I’d look at a guy. “What are you doing?” But I would verbalize it. I had a guy in the band once who did something I didn’t like. I never fired people, but I would give them a chance to leave. This guy was playing, and I don’t know what it was. He was doing this, leaning back and playing like that. Trombone. I said . . . I used to say, “Look like you’re playing. Sit and play your horn. You don’t do that.” He was paying no attention. The band was playing. Pretended not to hear me. So I walked over and I just did that [?pushed the chair forward], and his trombone probably hit a little pressure against his lip. He mouthed, “You jerk.” I said nothing. Played the set and finished. After it was over I went off into the wings. They gave you a little dressing room where there was a broom closet or whatever, and I told my band manager, “Tell him to come over. Tell him I want to talk to him.” He came out, shuffled in. Musicians. “What’s up, man?” I said, “When are you leaving?” He says, “What do you mean?” I said, “Do you want to leave tonight or do you want to wait two weeks? What do you want to do?” He said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I said, “You gave me your notice on the bandstand. I thought you were leaving.” I said, “If I’m a jerk, what are you? You’re working for me. What’s that make you? Assistant to a jerk?” He said, “I . . . you know . . . I just . . . I don’t know . . .” I said, “Do you want to leave, or do you want to stay?” He said, “I want to stay.” I said, “Well, then, we’ll cut out that [expletive deleted], won’t we?” “Yeah, we’ll cut it out.” And he never had any problems with me.”

This is part of what running a band is about. I’m not saying it to be a smart guy or any of that. It’s simply trying to give somebody who hears this an idea that playing an instrument is only one small part of the job when you’re leading a band. You got the whole band to lead. You’re playing a band, as well as an instrument, as well as your own instrument. Some people can’t do it.

Talbot: Do you think the guys who are unsuccessful maybe got too close to the musicians, wanted to be one of the boys?

Shaw: I don’t know. I never did that. I never had that problem. Neither did Tommy. We were part of the band when we played.

Talbot: I mean socially.

Shaw: But there was a line. That was the problem with Pat, the woman you saw here. She got a little too tough one day and did something I didn’t like, and I said, “Pat, we have a relationship here. You work for me, and I pay you, and you do this. You crossed a line the other day. I don’t want to hear . . . I don’t want that to happen again. If you feel tempted to do that again, there’s the front door. Just leave.” And I’ve never had any problems with her. She’ll get feisty every once in a while. That’s the way she is. But she does her work.

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It's important that you keep it clear, the employer - employee relationship exists. It doesn't mean you've got to be a son of a bitch. You don't have to be Ross Perot and have people examined or chased around or trailed. There's no reason for that. But I do believe that as I've said to people when they hit a clinker . . . oh, I had one with Billy Butterfield, after the one I told you about. He used to drink a little bit. It did him in at the end. He was a big drinker, and Jack Jenney the same. Jack could control it though. Billy couldn't. One night Billy came in a little half sheet . . . two sheets into the wind. We had a broadcast that night, and he was very bad. He was lead trumpet player, and he clinked pretty badly a few times. At the end of the evening I didn't say anything to him. I'm sure he expected me to, because he knew the difference. At the end of the week, when my manager came around with the paychecks that I was supposed to sign, I saw Billy Butterfield's check, and I said, "No. That's not it." What is one-seventh of 500? So we figured it out. We were playing at the Palladium here. I said, "Take a seventh off." So he said, "I don't understand." I said, "You're not supposed to understand, Ben. Just do it, and give him the check. Let him not understand either. When he comes to me, I'll explain it in my own way." So he gave him the check. It was a seventh of 5. That's 350 . . . 30-whatever.

A little while later, a knock at my door. Here's Billy. Shuffles in with the check. "Hey man," he says, "there's a mistake here." I said, "I don't think so, Billy." He said, "Why?" I said, "I pay you for seven nights a week," and he looked at me. I said, "There was one night there, you had some sub that I don't know who the hell that was. I wouldn't have accepted him." He said, "Yeah, I know what you mean. Yeah. Sorry about that." I said, "O.k. Any night you play . . . You play your seven nights, you get your full . . ." That was that. Never another word out of it.

But again, you see, what do you do if you're Harry James and you're drinking? What do you do if you're Bunny Berigan and you're drunk as anybody in the band? It doesn't work. I'm amazed that Harry could keep going at all. He was astounding. Somebody should have done an autopsy on him. He used to drink five martinis at lunch. He would have a bottle of booze, and he would finish it before the end of the night. And he still could play. I don't know how. Remarkable. If you can do that, o.k. See it killed Bix. Couldn't handle it.

Talbot: Coleman Hawkins was doing that at the end as well. You know, brandy.

Shaw: Yeah. He was a little . . . He felt the business had passed him by. Didn't get his just desserts, I think he felt. He had so much worship. Bix had the same thing. Couldn't understand the difference between worship from musicians and total indifference from the public. They couldn't get the idea that you're playing for an uneducated mass of people, musically uneducated. It's tough to swallow that. It's very difficult to have been at the very peak of your profession and then come down.

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I've told people who see the way I live. I have friends who live . . . oh my God. 3500 square feet houses. This house would about fit into the servant's wing. They say, "Jesus. You like this." I say, "I like what it gives me. I have freedom. Thoreau said, 'A man's well can be gauged in terms of the things he doesn't need.' I don't need what you have. Your overhead's killing you. You've got to keep doing that crap." They know it. Walter Matthau. Fine actor. "What are you doin', Walter?" "Looking for a job." The reason he's looking for a job is they live in such a way that he . . . I think he spends 30,000 a month on his overhead. You've got to take in that two- or three-million-dollar picture two or three times a year, and he hasn't been able to do it. He doesn't put the asses in the seats any more. Finally he's doing a picture, but boy, that took a lot of pulling teeth to get him to do it. I sat down and talked with him and talked with him and talked with him. He said, "I can't afford it." I said, "Your deal's too high, Walter. When you . . . You're getting 10% of the gross. You got to justify that by audiences. You made six pictures in a row that bombed. We're not talking about good or bad." He said, "Yeah, but I can't afford to work . . ." I said, "Can you afford not to work?" He didn't want to pursue it, because he had rationalized himself into a situation where he'd rather not work and be a star, than work and not be a star. It's too tough. Very difficult. Stardom is a heady dose, and the people who have achieved it very rarely retain their sanity. I keep telling people I must have done something right. Here I am. I'm still alive. Most of my colleagues are dead. All of my colleagues who played an instrument and led a band, are dead, every one of them, and I feel fine. I have no plans on going anywhere. So it's a big difference, you know.

It gets down to, the price is too high. Basically it's a young man's business. I don't know how people over 50 can handle it at all. Especially in the days, the barnstorming days. Now it's a little easier. You go from a nightclub, and you play a few sets in a club, and you play a few sets in the next one, some . . . In my day, you see, we would do 30 one-nighters in New England and 30 one-nighters in Pennsylvania. Then the Midwest, the jumps got long and you were traveling three-, four-hundred miles. Play a gig. Get in the car. Drive more. It's like a circus life.

Talbot: What's the story of this famous old Rolls Royce that you used to travel in?

Shaw: It was a kick. I thought, I was going to drive, I might as well have a fancy Rolls Royce, so I bought this Phaeton with the double windshields. Billie was in that car when we hit a road one time and turned around, all ice. We'd be out on the road and the rain would be coming down. It was 32 degrees. Suddenly you're on an ice skating rink. You don't know it.

Driving around on one nighters was just horrendous, and in those days we couldn't afford a bus yet, so I bought that old Rolls Royce. It was a second-hand, beat-up old car, but a

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beautiful car. But in winter it had no windows. It had what they called eisenglass side flaps. I used to take Billie along, because she didn't like going in the other guys' cars. We got along very well, Billie and I did. She knew that I was very businesslike, and as she wrote in her book, what I said, you could take to the bank. But they so vilified me in that movie. I was so pissed when I saw that movie. That was a movie called "down with whitey." They had . . . The implication was the band couldn't work without her. Just exactly the opposite. I said to the guy who made the movie . . . They called me and wanted to buy my rights. I own certain rights in it. They couldn't use my name without it.

Talbot: They call you Les somebody or something. They made up a name, didn't they?

Shaw: What they did was write . . . I have a whole file of letters offering me large sums to give them carte blanche. I said, "No. The only way you can do it is I want the right to approve or disapprove what the character representing me says and does. I don't mean the dialogue, but the thrust of the dialogue." "Can't do that." They couldn't make their deal. The other one was, I said, "I'll go in and bring the charts and work with Diana Ross to do the charts Billie sang. I'll do it free. I just want . . . in the interest of authenticity." I said, "They'll sound like the period and it'll . . ." He said, "No. We can't. We've got a musical . . ." I said, "Jesus Christ, come on, man. I'm offering you something very valuable for nothing." "Can't do it. Can't do it." So finally I said, "I'm not . . . You can't have my rights." So he said, "We'll do it without you." "That's like doing the story of Jackie Robinson and leaving out Branch Rickey." I was the bridge on which she crossed from cult singer to nationally-known person. She was on the air nationally with me, all over the place. God, they had this ridiculous scene where she's sitting, waiting to go on on the *Old Gold* show, and then suddenly she's not called. How the hell can you do . . . You don't do programs like that. She was on every radio program we did. By the time we got to the *Old Gold* show, she was no longer there. She wasn't in the band. It was so bad. Historically wrong. Of course I could have sued on the other basis, that my best friend the piano player turned her on to junk. Just ridiculous. But the lawyer, as I say . . . I have a lawyer here who said, "I could have got you 200,000 bucks if I'd known about that. They'd have just put it on the budget. They wouldn't want to go to court on that." So it goes.

[Transcribed by Barry Kernfeld from a digital copy of the tape reels]

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