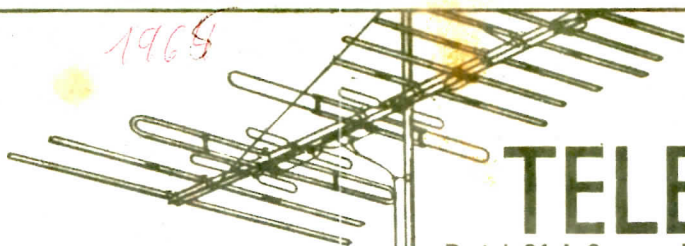


JAZZ ON



TELEVISION

Part I Of A Survey, By Leonard Feather

FOR THE RECORD—and in the interests of enlightening posterity and giving credit that is seldom acknowledged—it should be said that the last few weeks of 1964 and the first couple of months of 1965 were a fruitful period for television jazz.

The skeptic may reply: "Yeah? I didn't see Miles take over *The Lawrence Welk Show*."

But in assessing the manner and extent of the use of jazz in this medium it is reasonable to take certain facts into consideration. One is that the prime-time evening television program, for the most part, is aimed at securing the attention of as many as possible of the 192,000,000 potential viewers in the United States.

Another is the inescapable logic of the argument that music per se is not visual, and that classical music, pop music, and even rock and roll can rarely be found presented in undiluted form. If music is to be appreciated for its esthetic merit, watching it on television should be actually less desirable than listening to it on stereo radio.

Granting these factors, and granting also the complex machinations of Madison Ave. and of the networks, one must still concede that for those who for some reason must turn to TV for their jazz diet, the season was generally heartening.

The happenings may be said to have started with the hour-long Eddie Condon tribute, syndicated to various stations; most of them screened it in November or December. Assembled by Condon's old friend and frequent literary collaborator, Richard Gehman, the show had most of the merits and faults of the old Condon concerts of the 1940s.

Purporting to be a pocket history of jazz, it was actually a panorama of Condon-style music, encompassing mostly those individuals within the guitarist's frame of reference. A curious exception was Sammy Davis Jr., whose pre-taped interlude seemed out of place. There was no big-band jazz, no modern jazz—in fact, nothing but down-the-middle Dixie, swing, and ragtime of varying quality.

Cornetist Wild Bill Davison probably came off best among the horn men, his powerful lead undiminished in strength and enthusiasm. Billy Butterfield, long absent from the main scenes, displayed a disappointing weakening of tone and improvisational capacity in his trumpet playing. Clarinetist Edmond Hall and many of the other Condon regulars were on hand to provide some nostalgic moments, and Condon himself, though still ailing, was seen briefly, his back stubbornly turned to the camera much of the time.

The most relaxed and least stilted moments came with the appearance of the indomitable Willie (The Lion) Smith. The pianist ad libbed verbally and musically in some informal touches for which he was pleasantly joined by Thelma Carpenter. The latter, though a surprising choice as vocalist on a show of this type, sang with enough soul and charm to justify her presence.

Johnny Mercer's emcee role would have been a great deal easier on both him and the audience if he had been allowed to ad lib it.

In general, the Condon show was a potpourri of good, bad, and indifferent music, welcome if only for glimpses of men all too seldom seen on television.

Another one-shot special was *Duke Ellington Swings through Japan*, a segment of the Columbia Broadcasting System's *Twentieth Century* series, seen just before Christmas.

In contrast with the Condon show, which could have said in a half-hour all it had to say, this was squeezed into 30 minutes when it could well have run twice as long. Its brevity was the only thing wrong with it; in almost every other respect it was one of the best shows of its kind ever screened.

Produced by Isaac Kleinerman and admirably written by Jack Beck, this was the story of a band on tour. It did not purport to be a program of music, though there were enough extended excerpts from concerts to give it meaning on this level also.

With Walter Cronkite as narrator, the viewer was taken on the road with the band through several cities. There were snatches of informal conversations en route, scenes in and from trains and planes, a visit to the Kyoto shrine, and a healthy sampling of the thunderous reactions of the Japanese audiences to this magnificent music.

The whole effort was a mixture of dignity, informality, and honesty such as one rarely sees in musical reportage. CBS should run this show again, not once but many times; it never will be out of date. It is probably the most satisfying tribute now available on television tape to the foremost figure in jazz.

DESPITE THE INTEREST of the Condon show and the importance of the Ellington, what made the winter so eventful was the continuous run of good musical talent from channel to channel in the various late-night programs.

From November through February, in many major cities, there was a choice of three regular series of this type.

The longest-established and best known was—and is—*Tonight*, with Johnny Carson, running 105 minutes (90 in some cities) on National Broadcasting Co. stations. The American Broadcasting Co. network's counterpart was *The Les Crane Show*, running 90 minutes. Third there was *The Regis Philbin Show*, seen on the Westinghouse stations and a number of other outlets and also running 90 minutes.

Philbin's show replaced *The Steve Allen Show*, which also frequently had jazz guests.

All three featured good house bands. Crane, during the latter weeks of his run, used a good trio composed of pianist Cy Coleman, drummer Grady Tate, and bassist Ben Tucker. The group was not used extensively, but what it did was consistently agreeable.

Philbin had the most jazz-oriented house group of the three, Terry Gibbs'. In fact, it was composed entirely of jazz musicians, and its appearances on camera for an occasional instrumental number (usually two or three times a week) could be classified without qualification as good, honest, swinging contemporary jazz.

Gibbs was a thoroughly effective leader. Both his playing and his direct involvement in the casual conversation had a loose, happy quality that very often showed him more at ease than Philbin.

The sidemen were Carrington Visor, a supple and flex-

ible soloist on flute (doubling on tenor saxophone); Mike Melvoin, a fast-maturing young pianist; guitarist Herb Ellis, the only holdover from the Allen show and still one of the great swingers of any decade; Monty Budwig, a steady bassist with a good sound; and Colin Bailey, a British drummer who is scaring a lot of people these days.

Philbin handled the group without condescension and with obvious respect for their talents. One evening he gave brief biographies of the sidemen, each of whom was seen in close-up; the group then played a Gibbs original called *Rubaiyat Waltz*, featuring impressive work by Gibbs,

the pleasant informality (as in the case of Miss Vaughan), some for the money, some because this kind of appearance offers exposure to a substantially different audience, as well as a chance to stretch out musically such as is rarely found in regular variety shows. (On one Ed Sullivan appearance two years or so ago, Gillespie was held to a single number lasting just over two minutes. But in fairness to Sullivan it should be pointed out that a high spot of the season was the appearance on his show March 7 of Ella Fitzgerald and the Duke Ellington Band in a lengthy and delightful medley of Ellington's songs. It was a rare example of first-rate vocal and instrumental jazz on a prime-time network show.)

If the Philbin show went off the air as a result of low ratings, the failure may have been the result partly of the splitting up of the night-time audience among three live shows, and partly of Philbin's stiffness as an interviewer (it took somebody like Gillespie to loosen him up); but no fault could be laid at the door of the music or musicians decorating the series. Those of us who spent many evenings flipping the dial back and forth among Carson, Philbin, and Crane will remember this as a short-lived but musically praiseworthy venture.

The abrupt cancellation of the Crane show, though also related to ratings, certainly cannot be ascribed to any weakness in the quality or quantity of the conversation. More than either of its competitors, this was essentially a talk show, with music in a strictly secondary role.

Nevertheless, Crane's taste in music was reflected in the appearance of such guests as Joe Williams, Herbie Mann, Stan Kenton, Ramsey Lewis, Aretha Franklin, and a heavy sprinkling of folk acts.

There were also talking guests such as Hoagy Carmichael, who reminisced about Bix Beiderbecke, the origin of *Rockin' Chair*, and related subjects, while plugging his latest book, and Robert George Reisner, author of *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*. Though not on the show as a jazz personality, Reisner was one of the hipper guests, and his personality made a sharp and strong impression. His discussion of the hipster and hip talk had the rare virtue of authenticity.

THE *Tonight* show should be too well known by now to call for much more than a factual recap. First a word must be put in for the house band under the direction of Skitch Henderson.

This group has been taken too much for granted. Basically it is patterned along swing-band lines, both in instrumentation and style. The quality of its arrangements, and the spirit and accuracy with which they are interpreted, often surpass much of what was excessively praised when performed by some of the sloppier and more overrated bands of the swing era.

The brass section is especially strong. It includes gifted trumpeter Doc Severinsen, who functions as assistant leader and fronts the band when Henderson is absent.

Henderson and the *Tonight* show have justified themselves musically if only for what they have done in bringing Clark Terry to national prominence. During the last year he has been seen more and more frequently in solo spots, and it was on this program that he introduced his unique brand of blues singing, which led to the hit record, *Mumbles*, with Oscar Peterson. To have one of the half-dozen greatest contemporary trumpet soloists as a regular performer on a nightly series seen by millions is a joy for musicians and a boon for jazz.

Trumpeter Snooky Young also is a valuable member of the brass section, which rotates slightly in personnel from night to night. A former Charles Mingus soloist, Willie

Guest Dizzy Gillespie (seated) with the Terry Gibbs band: (l. to r.) Carrington Visor, Colin Bailey, Mike Melvoin, Monty Budwig, sound technician Ray Johnson, Herb Ellis, and Gibbs.

Melvoin, and Ellis. Gibbs also wrote all the bridging and cue music, which added considerably to the tasteful flavor of the whole show.

Another important aspect of the Philbin-Gibbs regime was the role played by the group in accompanying singers and other acts. Gibbs showed that a small jazz combo can handle such assignments more than just competently. With the help of the sextet, the jazz singer so long hidden in Kay Starr managed to peek through the tinsel Las Vegas curtain.

Aside from Gibbs' group, the Philbin show introduced guests who were often of interest to the jazz-minded audience.

In a single week, Sarah Vaughan appeared on Tuesday and Wednesday, Count Basie on Thursday, and Dizzy Gillespie on Friday. (In case you are curious about Monday, it was Della Reese and Cab Calloway.)

The Gillespie appearance was a classic; I doubt that his whole personality has ever come across more delightfully on a national program of this kind. After he and Philbin had chatted for at least 15 minutes on every subject from Oriental scales to mothers-in-law, Gillespie sang and played a Calypso number and completely broke up the show.

Philbin's other guests included Ahmad Jamal, Stan Getz, Carmen McRae, Bill Henderson, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jimmy Smith, Ramsey Lewis, and such jazz-inclined singers as Sue Raney and Gene McDaniels.

Gibbs acted as guest-suggester-in-chief. His group supplied such stimulating informal accompaniments that many who had brought music cast it aside and worked out head arrangements. Miss Vaughan once sang a medley of nine tunes in this manner. The result was a far more intimate and interesting picture of Miss Vaughan than can be gleaned from the typical heavily rehearsed formal guest shot on any major midevening program.

It should be added for the record that guests on all the late-night shows worked for union scale, some because of



Drummers three: *Tonight* host Johnny Carson, guest Lionel Hampton, show regular Bobby Rosengarden.

Dennis, is a member of the trombone section.

In the reed section are Walt Levinsky, lead alto and flute and a good soloist, and Tommy Newsom, tenor saxophone, who toured Russia with Benny Goodman. Both are also arrangers. Another reed-section member is Al Klink (ex-Miller, Goodman, Dorsey). Stan Webb is the baritone saxophonist.

There is an ample supply of Neal Hefti material in the band's book. Others who have contributed to the library, in addition to Levinsky and Newsom, include Torrie Zito, Ernie Wilkins, and, of course, Henderson himself.

Though the band is required to play a broad range of musical styles, it is significant that the filler moments, going into or coming out of station breaks, almost invariably reveal its fundamental swinging character.

In these numbers the rhythm section acquits itself most creditably. It consists of Henderson, piano; Gene Bertoncini or Tony Mottola, guitar; Julie Ruggiero, bass; and Bobby Rosengarden or Ed Shaughnessy, drums.

Carson's guests include a generous proportion of jazz combos and singers.

Regrettably, some of the jazz guests who are voluble enough to earn themselves a place in the kaffeeklatsch type of discussion that takes up much of the show are not invited to do so. For example, when the show visited Hollywood for a couple of weeks in February, the George Shearing Quintet played two numbers and then promptly

Tonight's Clark Terry and Skitch Henderson.



Clarinetist Benny Goodman and pianist Marian McPartland have been among *Tonight*'s jazz visitors.

disappeared. Paul Horn's quintet had a similar experience. Surely both Horn and Shearing could have taken lively and useful roles as talkers along with the other guests.

On the other hand, there are a few guests with at least partial musical association who are accorded the full treatment. A notable case is that of Artie Shaw, who for the last few years has been a *Tonight* irregular. Shaw is willing and eager to talk on any subject, occasionally including music, at the drop of a half-second's silence. The Henderson band welcomes him onstage with the old Shaw band's opening theme, *Nightmare*; but Shaw, as a rule, would rather discourse on his latest venture as a motion-picture producer or novelist than wax nostalgic about the big-band days. During one appearance, however, he spoke sensitively and constructively about freedom in the arts.

An occasional and gladdening visitor to *Tonight* has been Gerry Mulligan. Whether playing a casual and beautifully integrated quartet number (with trombonist Bob Brookmeyer, drummer Dave Bailey, and bassist Bill Crow) or talking about the state of his notions, Mulligan is always a welcome sight on any channel. To many viewers his must be the characteristic image of today's articulate jazzman, a role for which he is just about perfectly equipped.

Carson's other guests in the last months have included Stan Getz, Chico Hamilton, Moe Koffman, Sarah Vaughan, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Erroll Garner, and Joe Williams.

With *The Les Crane Show* replaced at presstime by a dreary mishmash hosted by various entertainers that clearly cannot last, and the Philbin show giving way to a Merv Griffin format that is expected to include a big band, the future of late-night television music is in doubt at the moment. But at least there is still the Carson show, and when one considers the dismal treatment generally handed jazz artists on the overcommercialized prime-time programs, the role being played by Messrs. Carson and Henderson in bringing music to millions in the mid-1960s becomes something to remember with thanks and relief. **[25]**

Jazz On Television Part 2

By LEONARD FEATHER

ALTHOUGH MOST JAZZ on television is confined to segments of nonjazz programs, ever since the TV era began in the late 1940s, there have been attempts to launch specialized shows on a series basis.

During the last couple of years, after a long silence, the series picture has brightened.

Jazz Scene U.S.A., produced by the indomitable Jimmie Baker (of *Stars of Jazz* memory) for Steve Allen's Meadowlane Enterprises, began its tortuous syndication route early in 1963 after 26 programs had been assembled in Hollywood.

Most of the half-hours were devoted to a single combo (Cannonball Adderley, Cal Tjader, Shelly Manne, Paul Horn, Les McCann, Pete Fountain, Firehouse 5 + 2), a few to a singer (Nancy Wilson, Big Miller, Vi Redd, Lou Rawls) and one to a big band (Stan Kenton). Oscar Brown Jr. acted as emcee and, on one show only, as principal performer. The programs for the most part were musically first rate, with no commercial concessions at all.

Jazz Scene U.S.A. has been seen in a large number of foreign countries, virtually all over Western Europe as well as in Czechoslovakia, Singapore, Ireland, Kenya, Sudan, Jamaica, and Nigeria.

Domestically, though, aside from the five Westinghouse stations (in Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, San Francisco), it has been seen only in San Diego, Calif.; Indianapolis; Grand Junction, Colo.; Lincoln, Neb.; Seattle, Wash.; Washington, D.C.; New York City; San Bernardino, Calif.; and a handful of others. Possibly Allen's substantial six-figure investment in this project, clearly motivated more by his love for jazz than by a desire for profit, can yet be recouped.

More economically produced and more widely exposed domestically (but limited to educational channels only) is *Jazz Casual*, Ralph Gleason's



Guest Carmen McRae vocalizes to the accompaniment of George Shearing on the pianist's regular TV show seen in the Los Angeles area



Jazz Casual host Ralph Gleason

admirable series, which began almost three years ago as a local operation on KQED in San Francisco but later went the syndication route via National Educational Television's network of more than 80 stations. Some of the shows have been made available for school audio-visual use, and some have been exchanged with other programs in deals with noncommercial stations overseas.

Three series have been shot so far, and another 13 programs probably will be taped next fall. Directed by Dick Moore of KQED, the shows, like *Jazz Scene*, comprise about 25 minutes of music and one brief interview a show.

Gleason's interviewing style fits the title of the show perfectly, or vice versa. He acts effectively as square's-advocate, asking questions to which

The Woody Herman Band on *Jazz Casual*



he clearly knows the answers, but which need to be asked in order to inform the less hip listener.

His guests have included Dave Brubeck, Paul Winter, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, Art Farmer and Jim Hall, Muggsy Spanier, Turk Murphy, Earl Hines, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane (with a 60-second introduction followed by continuous music), **Louis Armstrong** (no performance—conversation plus records), Jimmy Rushing, Carmen McRae, and Joe Sullivan. One particularly memorable show was devoted to Ben Webster and Jimmy Witherspoon. Woody Herman's band has done three programs. The musicians all receive syndicated-tape scale.

This summer Gleason plans a special documentary on Duke Ellington for showing in a fall series on master musicians.

Because of the expansion of educational TV, particularly on UHF channels (Gleason's show was aired for a while on KCET, Channel 28, in Los Angeles), the market for specialized programs seems at last to be opening up a little.

A series for which I acted as narrator and editor last fall was undertaken only because 13 short programs had been commissioned by West Germany. The material was drawn from Universal two-reelers produced in the 1940s and '50s with almost every name band, plus several leading jazz singers, as well as from old Paramount and Universal feature

films. The sale of these shows in the United States, Canada, and other English-speaking countries is pending at this writing; meanwhile, in Deutschland, it is Jazz Ueber Alles: the show is already on the air.

The advantage of the UHF channels, of course, is the assumption on the part of most station managements that the average listener has an IQ of more than 100, contrary to the beliefs of the network pap-peddlers.

This has resulted in some challenging UHF programs devoted to the arts. A typical recent example was *It's Modern—But Is It Music?*, a discussion in KCET's *Speculation* series, in which the panelists included Ernest Gold, Eudice Shapiro, and Nicholas Slonimsky, with Keith Berwick as moderator. (Slonimsky spoke like a relic of a school of thought I had fondly assumed to have disappeared; his remarks about the "jazz boys" as untutored illiterates were anachronistic enough to be more amusing than irritating.)

On the regular channels there is still hope for an occasional worthwhile series. A surprising recent addition was *The George Shearing Show*, which went on the air in Los Angeles in March with a view to eventual syndication.

The purpose of this venture clearly is to attract that segment of the public that is fed up with the Beatles and not yet ready for Coltrane.

Within his carefully established middle ground, Shearing has established a tasteful format, using his

quintet plus a guest each week—sometimes a singer such as Carmen McRae, sometimes an instrumentalist like Buddy DeFranco. Currently aired Fridays at 9:30 p.m. on KCOP, the half-hour, produced by Kip Walton, marks a welcome interlude in the dreary midevening diet normally found on the regular channels. Shearing's solo work, sometimes cautiously commercial, breaks out at other moments into cooking passages that remind one of his undimmed ability as a jazzman. Guitarist Joe Pass, a regular Shearingite for the last few months, is heard now and then to admirable advantage, and Hagood Hardy is a capable vibraharp soloist.

What justification can there be for the continued absence of a major national television jazz program? The answer can be found in a cogent article written a couple of months ago by Mike Gershman for the trade magazine *Music Business*. He quoted the following imaginary dialog:

"Why no TV jazz show?"

"There's not enough of a market."

"Why?"

"People don't understand it."

"Why not?"

"Because they haven't been exposed to enough of it."

"Why?"

"Because there's not enough of a market."

As Gershman pointed out, as soon as some way can be found to break that vicious circle, jazz will get on the air in the proportion to which many of us would like to become accustomed. (db)

Jazz Scene U.S.A. producer Jimmie Baker (2nd from l.) and staff supervise the filming of the Stan Kenton Orchestra

