
Composer Meets Critic: Selected Excerpts of the Jean Berger/ Henry Pleasants Correspondence, 1962-1971

Jean Berger is a remarkable musician and human being. Having studied under some of the founders of the modern field of musicology (Egon Wellesz and Heinrich Besseler) and serving as assistant conductor of the Darmstadt Opera, he was forced to flee Germany in the wake of Nazi dictatorship in 1933 at the age of 23. His career has taken him around the world, to periods of work and study in France, Switzerland and Brazil, to name only a few of the many countries that he has visited and which now know his music.

In 1941 Berger emigrated to the United States (he became a citizen in 1943), working as a vocal coach and arranger for radio stations in New York until taking up a teaching post at Middlebury College (Vermont) in 1948. His connection to Colorado began in 1961 when then Dean Warner Imig brought him to teach at the University of Colorado College of Music. Although he prides himself on his musicological training and his many editions of the music of seventeenth-century Italian composer Giacomo Perti, Dr. Berger's heart lies in composing his own music, which has achieved worldwide fame. His special skills in choral writing and vocal music were recognized as far back as 1937, when he won first prize at an international competition in Zurich for his piece "Le sang des autres." Since 1965 he has published his own music through the John Sheppard Music Press in Boulder and Denver.

Pennsylvania native Henry Pleasants (1910-99) was a noted music critic, author, translator, editor, and lecturer. Trained as a singer and pianist at the Philadelphia Musical Academy and the Curtis Institute of Music, he served as music editor for the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin (1931-42) and as central European music correspondent to the New York Times following World War II until 1955. Choosing England as a home base, he was hired as London musical critic and editor for both the International Herald Tribune and Stereo Review in 1967 in which capacities he continued to work until the 1980s.

Lecturing and occasionally teaching both in America and on the European continent, Pleasants enjoyed traveling and writing immensely. His most famous books include The Agony of Modern Music (1955), Death of a Music?: The Decline of the European Tradition and the Rise of Jazz (1961), The Great Singers (1966, revised edition 1985), Serious Music and All That Jazz (1969), and The Great American Popular Singers (1974).

Early in 2000 Jean Berger, whose papers are housed in the American Music Research Center, called to tell us of the death of Henry Pleasants and reported that they had carried on a lively correspondence with each other for over twenty-five years. He asked if we at the AMRC had any interest in publishing these letters, which Berger had carefully preserved but had not yet turned over to us. My answer was immediate and enthusiastic after perusing just a few pages.

Judging only from their respective resumes, one could not have predicted that these two expatriates living on opposite sides of the Atlantic with utterly different day-to-day occupations would ever have become acquainted, much less struck up a lifelong correspondence. (In fact they only met face-to-face on two occasions.) Yet their letters, while at first respectful and merely flattering, quickly progress to a state of intense animation and liveliness that makes for engaging reading. Both have strong opinions and provide fascinating insights into a variety of subjects: the state of music in the American university, the impact of jazz in Europe, concert life and audience attitudes around the world, and a host of performers, conductors, and writers with whom they came in contact.

The letters included here represent only the beginning of what was clearly an important relationship for both men. Many brief and comparatively run-of-the-mill notes have been omitted. The AMRC hopes eventually to issue the complete correspondence, written from 1962 to 1999, in book form. We are grateful to Jean Berger and Virginia Pleasants for granting permission to print this sampler.

T. L. R.

June 8, 1962

Mr. Henry Pleasants
c/o: Music Editor
The New York Times
Times Square
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Pleasants:

Your undoubtedly voluminous correspondence may make you feel ill-disposed toward unsolicited letters and other communications. The reading of your latest book prompts me, however, to overlook the probability of neither my letter nor the enclosure* being read by you.

As a follower of years' standing of the "Pleasants" case, may I say that my contacting you is done neither in the spirit of criticism nor invective but, on the contrary, because I find—and have found through the years—so much convincing reasoning in your statements. The fact that I find your reasoning to coincide with much of mine pleases me though, in all likelihood, will mean little to you or even will appear impossible.

I have just returned from a lecture tour in Europe where I presented the choral activities on the American college and university campus to audiences at conservatories, largely in Germany. I found your *Death of a Music?* upon my return, just finished reading it and remain, with the expression of my admiration for your lucidity, courage, and musical discernment,

Sincerely yours,
(Mr.) Jean Berger

* Extended program note written by JB for the concert series by the Hungarian String Quartet, then in residence at the University of Colorado at Boulder. [JB 2000]

American Embassy
P.O. Box 105
APO #80
New York, New York
July 18, 1962

Mr. Jean Berger
College of Music
University of Colorado
Boulder, Colorado

Dear Mr. Berger:

Believe me, my correspondence is not now and never has been so voluminous as to render me ill-disposed toward that kind of letter. Too bad that you were not aware of my presence in Germany during your recent tour. Not only do I like reading that sort of thing; I like hearing it, too, and it would have been nice to exchange views. I was, of course, interested to note that you are composer-in-residence.* Curiously, most of the attacks on my writings, and certainly the most virulent, have come from critics rather than from composers. The latter do not agree, as a rule, with the conclusions I draw from the facts as I state them, but they do not dispute the facts, nor deny the complexity of the problems which they present. Jazz is the stumbling block, and in the second half of *Death of a Music?* I attempted to point out why—sympathetically, I hope. I am now at work expanding that second half to book length for publication in the States. Incidentally, *The Agony of Modern Music*, with some revisions, has just been reissued by Pocketbooks. I also take the liberty of calling your attention to my *Vienna's Golden Years of Music* (Simon & Schuster), a selection of the major reviews of Hanslick, and to *The Musical Journeys of Louis Spohr* (Oklahoma).

Many thanks for your kindness in writing to me, and in hopes that you will get in touch with me if you should come to Germany next year,

Sincerely,
Henry Pleasants

* which is a misunderstanding caused by erroneous statements made by the Chair of Music of the University of Colorado. [I] was on the faculty of musicology and had nothing to do with composition, as far as [my] academic activities were concerned. [JB 2000]

[hand-written postcard]

Henry Pleasants
American Embassy
Box 105, APO 80
New York City
December 28, 1962

Dear Mr. Berger:

Many thanks for your note and the enclosures. I was much taken with your reference to performers with tenure, and the business of teaching people to be teachers. Walter Ducloux spent an evening with us a couple of weeks ago and told us about the musical community of the University of Southern California. I found it all fascinating. Obviously, something is afoot on American campus that has never occurred in Western civilization—unless it can be compared with the role of the monasteries during the Middle Ages. It has its advantages. At least the performing artist can again be a working resident in a congenial community and practice his craft in a sensible manner. The airplane has made life ghastly for the itinerant professional. The danger, I suppose, is that it is a little too easy and protected. But that is a minor matter. The essential fact is that more gifted musicians are being produced today, particularly in the U.S., than the concert or opera circuits can absorb, and the arbiters of the American university community seem to provide the only alternative to a law against training people for a professional life in music.

Yes, we live here, and would love to have you drop in on your way to Bologna.

Sincerely,
Henry Pleasants

February 10, 1963

Dear Mr. Pleasants:

Your letter of December 28 was a pleasure to read. I welcome your comparison of the American academic campus with the medieval monastery, though I am not entirely convinced of the monastic habits of OUR *fratres et sorores*. But that the campus could conceivably be turned into a fertile soil for some, as yet only dimly conceived, new life in the (so-called) arts, I feel quite certain of. For the time being we are still swimming in an ocean of misconceptions, of fossilized habits and of, mainly, phony values. I remember with dread the concert given by the famous string quartet which is periodically "in residence" on our campus and which delivered itself of Op. 131 while an overflowing crowd sat and watched. This overflowing crowd is normally regarded as indicative of the quartet's outstanding success—as though Op. 131 could be evaluated quantitatively and as though even a fraction of the onlookers (I can't conceivably refer to them as listeners: some were no more than 7 years old, presumably dragged to the event because, somehow, it was supposed to be "good") had even the faintest notion of what Op. 131 is all about. That such an overflowing attendance does not reflect any particular enthusiasm for chamber music proper, as it conceivably might, was attested to a few days ago when an equally good but vastly less publicized group played for precisely 57 people scattered through the same hall. No, on this point I agree with what I understand your views to be. The concert is obviously dead. But what our monastery will be able to produce that is alive is still very much a question mark though I am really quite optimistic (and therefore perhaps not in agreement with you).

I may have mentioned earlier my lecture ventures in Europe. Most of the institutions where I spoke last year have re-invited me, this time to report to them on the interesting doings of the 18th century Moravians in Pennsylvania. It pleases me to demonstrate—particularly since America is my adopted home since Nazi days—that we (the USA) do have a history—with all that this entails of pride as well as liabilities. Since much of my correspondence goes to directors of "America Houses"—most of whom seem to have academic degrees—I have been wondering about the possibility of applying for such a position myself since, besides having a doctorate from Heidelberg, I am rather multi-lingual and think that I could do a pretty good job. I suppose that anyone would yearn to leave Academe after 15 years of uninterrupted holding forth to what seems to be the same students year after year. You have been so very kind in replying to my letters that I wonder whether you would mind my asking you—your letterhead looks terribly impressive—whether you have any ideas as to where in the State Department one writes to find out about a directorship of an

American House being available. I would be very grateful to you for sending this information—if you can easily obtain it, that is.

With best regards, I am
Sincerely yours,
[Jean Berger]

[After a long hiatus Berger resumed the letters on July 17, 1969.]

95 Roebuck House,
Palace Street,
London S.W. 1
August 2, 1969

Dear Mr. Berger:

Thank you very much for your kind and thoughtful letter. Yes, I remember both our correspondence and our meeting most vividly.

I have also read your excellent enclosures. And they prompt me to ask your opinion on a phenomenon I overlooked in my book, i.e., the choral backing in moving picture underscores and in popular song recordings, especially in TV spectacles. It's the kind of thing my wife describes as "heavenly voices" or "heavenly choir." I neither like nor dislike it particularly. It often seems corny and obvious. But in matters of this kind quality interests me less than viability and validity. Quality can come later when sophisticated hands get to work on the style or idiom. The important thing for me is that in the opinion of those responsible for this kind of choral composition there is an audience demand for it, or at least an audience vulnerability. There are, as you know, groups of professional choral singers who do this work in the studios and do it damned well. Not to overlook their contributions to radio and TV commercials. There is a distinction, of course, between this kind of thing and formal compositions for large chorus. But it is still choral singing and it is certainly contemporary.

Another subject: we are visited every year by the vacationing-touring university choral groups, and I would observe that, while they usually sing well enough, their repertoire is almost always embarrassing, especially when offering what they seem to regard as American music. Pfui! Ending with a medley from *The Sound of Music*!

About "Summertime": put the words of "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child" to it and see what you get!

Please give our kindest regards to Angelo* and (by way of a needle) tell him how delighted I am to learn from you that he had received his copy of the book.

Sincerely yours,
Henry Pleasants

* Angelo Eagon, the chairman of the Music Department of Colorado Women's College where I [Berger] taught for a few years after retiring from the University of Colorado. [JB 2000]

Mr. Henry Pleasants
95 Roebuck House
Palace St.
London, SW 1 - England
August 18, 1969

Dear Henry:

Permit this immigrant and dweller in the Western half of the land to do away with the formality of Mr. Thanks for your answer, and as you know by now that my typewriter starts buzzing any time I read something of interest. Bombarding unsuspecting authors with possibly unwanted epistles, I am sending you enclosed my letter to your colleague Taubman [Howard Taubman, music and drama critic at the *New York Times* 1935-72], prompted as it was by his article mentioned at the beginning.

Let me say that writing such a letter indicates, in my case, a more than ordinary esteem of the author in question.

To speak to your two questions, I must repeat that I am elated to have found so kindred a soul. It seems to me, too, that purely esthetic considerations are silly, at this point, when we have no esthetic framework to apply. Thus, I am as totally embarrassed by the concerts which our choral groups present abroad as you seem to be, and I do what I can in talks with directors to improve things. Similarly, my reaction to the underscores choral sounds [*sic*] is like that of your wife, "heavenly" damned nuisance. (Though, yes indeed, done with professional virtuosity quite often.) I do not mean to step on your knees so please do not misinterpret when I, the Nazi victim, say that, in my view, Orff comes out of a dung heap, too. *Carmina Burana* premiered with Goebbels present . yet—here we meet again—I, too, detect in some of Orff's music that which makes music vital. So then, choral programming notwithstanding and heavenly seraphs to the contrary, I cling to my view. There IS somethin' cooking.

Hoping to hear from you again, and with best personal greetings,

Cordially yours,
Jean Berger

PS: Angelo was happy to have your greetings. Would it interest you to know that we—at our little college in Denver—are going to throw most of music history out the window (I am a trained musicologist, Dr.phil. Heidelberg, mind you) and substitute the study of non-western music? not to mention the by now unavoidable Afro-American studies?

[London]
December 7, 1969

Dear Jean:

Your letter was awaiting me upon my return from a short and miserable trip to Boston, New York and Phila. Had my pocket picked in a Madison Ave. bus. The Arabs know the only way to handle those bastards. They cut their hands off.

I signed a contract for a new book on The Great American Popular Singers. I'll be covering the band singers, blues, r&b, c&w, theater and such singletons as Harry Belafonte and Nat Cole.

Tell you what. Get hold of a recording by Sinatra of "One for My Baby" and then sit right down at your typewriter and tell me all that you think of that in terms of vocal quality, phrasing, pacing, enunciation, etc. And I'd welcome your good wife's observations, too. Women have always understood Frank better than men. And I guess one of the reasons for that is that—as every man should—he's singing to them.

Enjoy your ski slopes. London at this time of year is stygian.

All the best,
Henry

December 14, 1969

Dear Henry:

Your letters have a way of arriving at a convenient time for answers. I had meant to go cross-country today, having just acquired a new pair of Italian boots that promise to make the venture a pure *gioia*. However, our summer temperatures these last few days probably made an unappetizing mess of the snow, and obviously nobody but a fool from Boston goes to the slopes on Sunday. So, your letter appears to be a much better way to spend time on.

But let me splurge for good and tell you something that I hope I did not tell you before. I am a bit uncertain on this point as I have told the story to some people (students) of late. If I am repetitious *gaga*, forgive me and throw the whole business in the fireplace.

My generation (b. 1909, venerable with a vengeance) had come to grips with our stylistic woes in the '30s, simply by accepting St. Arnold's gospel. Obviously, harmony as we knew it could no longer be manipulated or milked so as to yield a drop of the new stuff. Thus, structure—harmony-based as it is—was in similar need of new blood, and I'll spare you the stale argumentation. (I picked up the Redlich book on Berg the other day [Hans Ferdinand Redlich's *Alban Berg: The Man and His Music*, 1967], started reading it with little interest and stopped reading when I read again how Mozart had begun to disintegrate tonality in the C-major quartet and all the drivel so well known to one and all.) At any rate, we all composed twelve-tone, this being in Paris you understand, where anything more complex than Offenbach was most suspect. To speak of myself, and leaving out my pals, I was not truly too happy with my efforts, especially if you will understand that I wasn't at all sure that I was indeed a composer. Musicology had been my formal training, and the Nazis making my further stay in Germany undesirable (this was forcefully expressed by four guns staring me in the face point blank), yet musicology being even more suspect in Paris than any post-Offenbach sounds, I had become a performer (pianist for dancers, then for singers), and composition was a sort of outgrowth of it all. But I had written massively, and published a bit. Just a few weeks ago my first publication fell into my hands, a song on a Baudelaire poem in strict "classical" twelve-tone, whatever the hell that means. Yet, to repeat, I was not convinced that I had found the road to salvation. Then, one day, my gang received instructions from the concert agency that procured practically all our bacon that we were to attend a concert at the Salle Pleyel (it being understood that the expected audience would be small and the agency wanted the hall to LOOK full). Needless to say, we went. To hear a crazy American band. Conducted by a certain Duke Ellington (now you know why I am writing you all this). We had heard of jazz, but our particular gang was not cosmopolitan enough to have really been interested—that Strasbourg parochialism sticks with you, you know. And we had met and seen Americans and KNEW that they were worthless.

A friend had just come back from a trip to the U.S. and told us—as though we didn’t know—that the food there was “immangeable,” the people unfriendly, the weather unfit for humans, etc. So then, we clenched our teeth, made arrangements to meet after the concert to refresh our souls, and went. What am I to tell you? When we met afterwards, we were crushed, annihilated, overwhelmed. I can’t remember the details of the program, of course, but it was at the beginning I am sure that a most slender Ethel Waters walked out into a spotlight and sang “Stormy Weather.” Whatever else was on the program faded into nothingness, compared to that song. We discussed it all night, walking down to the Lion de Belfort on which we sat (we knew the police didn’t like it; talk of rebellious youth, ain’t nothin’ new under the sun . . .) and talked and talked until the first bistro opened and gave us our croissants and *café crème*. We knew that we had heard something new, unheard of in the literal sense of the word. Yet was it not tonal? Hell, tonal wasn’t the word, every chord came right out the textbook of the Conservatoire. But??? what was the answer? and here the despair gripped us that must have gripped everybody since “tonality is dead.” Was it possibly just a matter of having talent? of having substance? of having something to SAY? You guess my answer to the question.

Actually, I came to America by accident, being the pianist for a Brazilian singer, in Rio, who had organized a tour which tour, incidentally, turned out to be the ultimate omelet. Yet it got me here, so let me be self-centered enough to think that the disaster had its good sides. The lady returned to Brazil without my having married her which, in the face of the zillions involved, took stamina. I had never made the mental conclusion, from the Ellington experience, to actually consider emigration to the U.S. I guess our prejudices were too well anchored. (We also knew that ALL American women were frigid.) Having come here, I thought that I’d return to France after the *victoire* which was inevitable, *bien entendu*. However, America had begun to take me to her wheat-covered bosom, and I now could not longer consider a return to Europe. Behold the hayseed! I know how much there is here that is awful and detestable, but my own success, if I may say—or say reception—has been such that I am willing to let horror be horror and to look for what there might be that is grand. And that is here, indeed. Ellington being one of the things, but there are more. And if my small efforts can contribute one ounce of stuff, so be it. This is not to say that I fail to understand returns to Europe, or the choice of Europe in cases such as yours. I do understand, and, *carissimo amico*, the yearning for the life that once we led is sometimes almost more than can be borne, yet my life is here.

I thought you might like to know the history of my conversion at the hands of the Black Jesus. More than anything else, I am fervently hoping that the Duke’s and my own health will hold out long enough so that, one day, before all is said and done, I can tell him myself. I shall be willing to do so on my knees.

Regarding Frankie, I consulted wife and son. Offhand, the hazard hav-

ing brought us another song by Frankie on the radio at breakfast, Rita says it's because his singing is, not vulgar, but (I suggested) visceral (?), to which Jonny said, "Tell Pleasants that means gutsy." I told him to shut up and that Pleasants was a big boy who could drive him, Jonny, into a very dark corner very fast indeed, when it comes to winning a vocabulary battle. That shut him up for a minute, but I know him, he'll be back for more when I stop typing (part of the motivation, as you see, is to seek refuge from my son's cataracts of multi-syllabic outpourings). We shall get the recording, in fact we are all enjoying the prospect, and we all join in sending you and your wife our hearty wishes for serenity and good will, and adding wishes for all of us for enduring shalom.

My own modest pen has sung for similar purposes recently, and I shall take the liberty of acquainting you with the songs as they come off the press. The invitation to use your wastebasket stands.

Auguri e saluti!
[Jean Berger]

Boulder, Colorado 80302

May 21, 1970

Dear Henry:

We seem to have the letter writing passion in common, and heaven knows that our species is slowly disappearing from the TV-ridden earth. The delay, this time, has to do with much traveling, semester's end and sundry nuisances. The delay was the less warranted since I am thankful for the reading matters suggested, particularly that on the blues.

I did a good deal of conducting, including my *Pied Piper* [*The Pied Piper*, a play with music; text based on Robert Browning's *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*] in the Florence of the Midwest, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, where we had much fun and I must say a solid success with the people from town. My "combo" of two Hohner Melodicas (amplified, of course), a "real" flute, an electric bass, a "real" piano plus a Wurlitzer electric piano (also amplified and with the vibrato going full blast), not to mention a rich percussion, all this added up to lusty sounds. The flute tune which I use as the Piper takes the children with him, reminded people of "blues" and I am the more intrigued to find out about this, to me, so elusive item of American music. I meant to indicate that the Piper's taking the children away was really a good thing, as the old folks so obviously are such detestable breakers of promise. Now let me tell you that folks in Scottsbluff ain't so stupid nohow; they got the point very well, commented on it and, in fact, saw to it that the townspeople of Hamelin appeared in all sorts of garbs, medieval and modern, Anglo, Indian, Japanese, Eskimo, what have you, their point being that it wasn't the story that mattered but the timelessness of the moral. Now there is theater, I thought. I am pleased mostly by the fact that my opus has been scheduled for quite a few performances, even though Schirmer hasn't got the score out yet, and most of the performances scheduled are in black schools or communities, due possibly to the fact that the premiere was given by a virtually all black high school in Cleveland last January. Anyway, the theater now has me in its grip, and I am frantically looking for another Public Domain work, though I cannot hope to be again as lucky as when I first saw the Robert Browning poem on the *Pied Piper*.

The one item I must tell you about is a former student's reaction to the students' attitude at the University in Albuquerque where he now conducts, to his rehearsals of the Beethoven 9th. It was simply impossible to excite them about the score, neither the heroism of it nor the gestures nor the message—nothing doing. They were bored. We discussed the entire matter at length. What, after all, is art? Nothing manmade can be expected to be immortal. And if the *Missa Pange Lingua*, or the Machaut *Mass* are masterworks but are dead ones, who is to say that the hour has not rung for the 9th, the *Missa Solemnis* and who knows what? Yet my friend worried. SHOULDN'T they be interested nonetheless? No, I told him they shouldn't—rather hiding the fact that for years I have led a pleasant life

without a note of Beethoven. I AM pretty tired of that music, though I should add that when my lawyer-violinist comes by for an evening of chamber music playing, we do occasionally interrupt our standard fare which consists of Mozart and Bach, by playing an early Beethoven sonata, and playing them is still great fun. Incidentally, we are both good readers and we tried numberless 20th century works but always felt terrible. Sweat, hard labor, no reward—are we not supposed to “play” an instrument?

If the spirit moves you and you care to give your unceasing admirer new reading matter or new insights into the path of our beloved art that must be taken, I shall be honored and pleased to read you.

With best wishes and most cordial greetings-
e tutt'il ben di Dio-
bien vôtre-
[Jean Berger]

[London]
May 26, 1970

Dear Jean:

Re the student's reaction to the students' attitude. see SMAATJ [*Serious Music and All That Jazz*] beginning on page 46. What surprises me is not that the students are bored but that so many of my own generation are bored, beginning with me. And I'm talking about musicians, who have grown up and made their careers in this music. And I can duplicate your experience with playing the early Beethoven sonatas. I still enjoy singing Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, etc. But I wouldn't dream of going to a Lieder recital.

I'm frightfully busy with work on the new book—*The Great American Popular Singers*—and the regular jobs for the *Herald Tribune* and *Stereo Review*. See the May issue of *Stereo Review* for a piece I did on Schumann as music critic, which I think came out well.

With this new book I'm going about it, for the first time, in the right way. I've been working on it for a year, and haven't written a line. Just carding, filing, collating, working out the main outlines in my head, listening to records, making notes, talking to singers and composer-arrangers, etc. A bit frustrating, and a bit frightening, too; for I love to write and I know how much there is to be written. Somehow I have the feeling that I'm not getting on with it, while my good sense assures me that I have already accomplished the toughest part of it.

We're here for the summer—and for the visitors—excepting a brief excursion to Montreux June 17-25 for the International Jazz Festival and a few days with George and Nora London at Morges.* The weather, thank you, is heavenly!

All the best,
H

P.S. And congratulations on Scottsbluff!

*George London, eminent American bass-baritone of the post-war period, was forced by medical reasons to abandon his opera career in 1967. [Ed.]

POB 429
Boulder, Colorado
June 1, 1970

Dear Henry:

As seemingly always, your letter again astonished me, in that it showed such an absolutely incredible coincidence of views. I read each copy of your reviews, heart beating: this time we MUST disagree—but no, we do not. Especially the article on Sibelius intrigued me, since I, the mainland European, never had any direct relation with that music, and since it did evoke, whenever I happened to be victim to its performances, those American TV “shows” which consist of people talking about their respective “shows” but where nobody does anything worthy of being called a show. I am sure you know what I mean. Also thanks for your wonderful assessment of “Mr. Klemps” [Otto Klemperer (1885-1973), conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra (1933-39) and the London Symphony Orchestra (1959-70)] (wasn’t it he who elicited the oboist’s remark, “Mr. Klemps, you talka too much”?) Mainly though, my admiration goes toward your description of the TV caricature of the recital, particularly the song recital. I may have told you that accompanying singers was my professional life, before the song recital died, some time directly after 1945. And I KNOW what such a recital is, or can be, the specific exquisiteness of the event, the overpowering sensation of hearing Bilitis utter [in *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*, Claude Debussy’s setting of Pierre Louÿs’s “La Flûte de Pan”] “ma mère ne croira jamais . . .,” [my mother will never believe . . .] with the implication of sensuousness so totally captured by Debussy and which simply sends tremors down your spine when the right singer, a true female, speaks this line. And what does, in effect, happen at this point? In the English speaking world we hear so-called singers murder the poetry—(One grad student once told me, when I was coaching her here at the University of Colorado, that no, she didn’t particularly want me to tell her what “Gretchen am Spinnrad” meant, she had taken Dr. Coffin’s course in phonetics. I told her, nonetheless, and she took me for a libertine, no doubt a communist, an immoral lecher, who knows what. I had terrible trouble explaining to her that it was Goethe who had written the words, not I, and that communism hadn’t been invented yet at the time.)—where was I?—and mainly we watch benumbed audiences undergoing *Kultur*, not knowing what the hell goes on, being bored to the point of not even being able to suppress their yawns though too damnably uncomfortable with the constant yelling coming from the stage to take a healthy bit of a nap, and those poor devils making believe they know how to wear tails! Yoy Anyway, this is to tell you once again that, so far as I am concerned, HP is the guy all right.

Need I tell you that—though I shall live up to my promise and never subject you to a note of my music—your disquisition on the problems on post-Puccini and Strauss opera fell on most fertile ground? I do feel that,

in a very minute and very tentative and very embryonic way, just possibly my *Piper* is sniffing at unexplored and yet tillable territory.

I am working at liberation of self. Am in the process of turning my John Sheppard Music Press over for management to what sounds like a go-getting outfit in New Joisey. Keep my fingers crossed—I don't feel like losing more money than necessary, even though the price for freedom must be high. Next on the agenda is the plan of not teaching more than one semester which I feel Angelo Eagon will organize for me, for Angelo is quite a guy. If so, I'll be free from about December 15 to the end of the following August—and this, not as my starry-eyed interlocutors at tea parties ask, to have “more time for composing”—(I am drowning in free time, and good old Loulou [Berger's Paris teacher Louis Aubert] taught us to write fast. Writing is either easy or impossible, he always said. I believe that.)—but to roam, in unfettered ways. So Sir, be not surprised to see me turn up with no notice, some time after December 15, though I am a mercurial character and may well hop on a plane before. You said Montreux, and the refugee's blood never quite forgets the first breath of relief (also the hearty spitting disgust out of the train window) when the Swiss border had been crossed and the brown pestilence left behind. Shalom!

[Jean Berger]

[London]
June 5, 1970

Dear Jean:

I'm not so sure that you will agree with this. I'm not so sure that I fully agree with it either. But the reaction of the British critics rubbed me the wrong way, so just for the hell of it I went a bit further out on this limb than I might have under other circumstances. One of these days I'm going to write an article on "The British and Music." But not until I have resumed residence in the USA. They're so goddamned deutsch! Their musical nannies were Moscheles and Ferdinand Ries and John Cramer and Spohr and Mendelssohn and Richter and Neuman and Joachim and Manns and Henschel. Sterndale Bennett and Arthur Sullivan studied with Schumann and Hauptmann and Rietz. Halle was a German. And so on. And now it's Klemperer. There hasn't been any English music since Purcell. Even the Beatles have just been a limey veneer put on top of gospel music and rhythm and blues. If you really want to know where the Beatles came from, musically, listen to the old records of the Everly Brothers. The Beatles did.

I'm up to my ears. Peter, Paul and Mary at the Albert Hall tonight. To Aldeburgh tomorrow for *Idomeneo*, and not happy about it. Grace Bumbry in *Salome* next week. And then to Montreux on the 17th for the International Jazz Festival. The feature this year will be the jazz bands of North Texas State, Kent University, M.I.T. and the University of Texas. Wait until the Europeans get a load of that!

Recommended reading: *The Nashville Sound*, by Paul Hemphill, Simon & Schuster, \$5.95.

The weather is heavenly and the news is awful. But we have at least the World Cup, then the Wightman Cup and then Wimbledon. Of course, we're having a General Election, too. Oh, that? . And so back to work .

All the best,
H

P.O. Box 429
Boulder, Colorado 80302
July 5, 1970

Dear Henry:

I completely agree with you, your doubts notwithstanding, on your attitude regarding the English critics. If an orchestra, or anything else, is good, then let us say so, and let no puritanism gone sour be our basis of judgment. It is precisely this pontifical attitude in composition—which work by an American academy based composer is fun?—that prompted my leaving the halls of ivy, and as you say, the Philadelphia [Orchestra] is damn good.

We may be less in agreement in the following matter which brings me back to where our correspondence started, some millennia ago. You may not recall but I tried to convince you then that, though I had no quarrel with your reasoning regarding jazz or Afro-American music to use your more recent term, I did feel (and still do) that there is more. Using your own criteria, the number of people involved, the genuine enthusiasm in the making of the music, and many more, the amateur choral music making here is something to reckon with. I just returned from Ohio where I conducted an “honors choir” in a concert of my works but let me leave that item out. What I want to tell you is that instead of performing *Sing Ye*, the first motet of Bach, for double choir, in concert, I suggested that we make a “workshop” experience of it and so we did. The honors choir, some 80 kids (high school, from all over Ohio) formed Chorus I, the “adults,” i.e. choral directors from all over Ohio, some 110, formed Chorus II. I had a fine and, incidentally deucedly attractive organist to play along. I made some *musikwissenschaftliche* [musicological] remarks to the gang who were seated in the college’s chapel while I was standing on the chancel, discussed tempi a bit, discussed what appears to be a *chorus latens* in the second movement, without however getting to be too lengthy as I fear nothing so much as turning into a Herr Professor and then we sang. Or rather they sang, since I have a voice that is a combination of composer’s, conductor’s and pianist’s which makes a gruesome blend, believe me. No stopping, no interruption, from A to Z with, yes, some wrong notes and yes, a pretty rough manner of interpretation but all this was unimportant. When we were done, there was a moment’s silence, and then the 190 or so stood up in their pews, and clapped their hands off. Applauded whom? what? what I had been doing was no more than wave my arms around. Applauded themselves? And came by, tears in eyes, young and old, gee that was great. No concert, but music.

I wanted to tell you this. You know, as I do, that no such thing could happen in Germany, France, Italy, possibly not in Britain. It can and does here. It involves people to the very core of their soul. I am waving no flag, fear not. I too think that America, at the moment, had better do some soul searching to get its balance back. But the BASIC America is what I experi-

enced in that 45 minute event at Ashland College, Ohio, and that I do endorse, wholeheartedly.

Am I making a point?

One item of purely gossip nature but which may amuse you. I left the U. of Colorado two years ago, largely because of the things referred to above, but also because the dean and I didn't make it. And you don't buck a dean, nohow. This country which is glad to set the world on its ears every four years by choosing a new president, imparts godlike infallibility to its academic officers. Be they trash incarnate, they are unbudgeable. But I was recently asked by the Honors Division of the U. to give a course in Bach again which I gave a couple of times during my years at the U. And I said yes. The only other course in music next fall will be given by Tommy McCluskey, on rock or jazz. Behold the two outsiders!

Fare well—how are you?
[Jean Berger]

95 Roebuck House,
Palace Street,
London S.W. 1
July 16, 1970

Dear Jean:

Did you ever hear me say anything against Bach? *Sing Ye* indeed! And God bless you! But one item struck my eye in your letter: "No stopping, no interruption, from A to Z with, yes, some wrong notes and, yes, a pretty rough manner of interpretation, etc." It reminded me of the sessions I attended last February of Lenny Bernstein's recording of the Verdi *Requiem* at the Albert Hall. Take 7, Insert 3! Need I say more.

And speaking of your Bach course—I lectured at the Royal Academy of Music last year on the Afro-American origins of rock and pop, and now I have been asked to lecture at the Royal College on the Afro-American epoch. It's not that the academics are scraping the bottom of the barrel. They haven't got any barrel.

I'm beginning to work into my *Great Popular Singers*. It's going to be a ball. And not a polemic line. Well, maybe a time bomb here or there

The enclosed* will give you some idea of what I have been up to. Write soon!

All the best,
H

* copies of reviews of London musical events from the *Herald Tribune* [JB 2000]

[Boulder]
September 26, 1970

Dear Henry:

Chores of the beginning semester made a dent in my correspondence. Let me assure you that, in the meanwhile, I have not ceased to preach the Pleasants gospel. One of my most charming students in a course in music history—which I follow in the spring by a course in non-western music—is a very black young lady, of exceptional intelligence and alertness. After presenting my case, to the effect that I would base my disquisitions very much on the premise of the ethnic impacts made on the evolution on the art as described by you, especially lucidly in your latest book (or is it not the latest?), Shirley asked for an interview and we talked for hours about precisely this issue. You may chalk up one notch of credit to yourself, for having given this one citizen at least something to mull over, to meditate on, and to sustain her. Shirley left the office a rather changed girl, and I am happy to think that she and I will be friends for life, whereas you will have one more avid reader (of equally friendly disposition). I am telling you this, by way of anecdote, as I am sure that you share my views on the fact that we are not in the business of dispensing the milk of human-kindness but rather the truth. I personally do not mean to be kind to blacks, as I come out of a world that has never known what it is to be unkind to blacks. Yet, if a black kid comes my way who is as earnest and eager, and also as pretty, it pleases me to add that ounce of human-kindness to my endeavors.

In the world that interests me immediately, i.e., my own little circle, I have this bit of news that I am phasing out the academy altogether. I will be teaching only during the spring term from next year on, and maybe not even that. I wrote you earlier that one of the chief motivations for leaving the university had been my inability to accept its musical tenets, nor its apostles themselves. At this point, even the small liberal arts college is not too remote from the same mentality. Even our high school people in the music education business talk about serial and electronic and other fanciful stuff as though these were music to them, to the extent that “The Church’s One Foundation” is. Thus I want out. As I do have a teenage son to see through school and as my refugee past has not supplied me with the unending riches that would make college expenses look *une paille* [i.e. insignificant], I feel that I owe it to my offspring to take the proper precautions, and so I have arranged to be paid a half-year salary at any rate. But Jonny is a good kid and is now carrying a fabulous job at the local branch of the Bureau of Standards as systems programmer, while pursuing his studies in computer science at the University [of Colorado at Boulder] (where, as I believed I mentioned, Tommy McCluskey enlightens him in Jazz, in an Honors Course). After one more year, I feel that the situation will be clear beyond doubt and am hoping to call it quits entirely. In the meanwhile, the newly found freedom (got the letter yesterday) beckons

and I wonder what I will do in this world, my oyster. Visions of getting an Ottocento-Cinquanta [Fiat 850], top down, and driving her to Greece, sensing the cradle of our civilization while drowning it generously in retzina and the like—or visions of ambling through the dark corridors of the Cordoba cathedral, without some schedule calling for my leaving it any earlier than I feel like leaving it, and similar other visions occur. I know that I'll wind up in Alsace, as I always do. The lure of the smoked ham, the dark bread, the butter with water drops on it, served with a carafe of Traminer at 7 a.m., is more than I can resist. I'll leave it to you to imagine how the remainder of the morning is spent after such a breakfast. We are hardy types in the Haut-Rhin. Actually, I am corresponding with a few people in those parts of Europe where I speak the languages fluently. I started, among others, a fascinating correspondence with Dr. Voetterle, owner of Baerenreiter, who heard an American chorus sing my *Magnificat* during last year's Schütz festival in Holland and wrote me a most gratifying letter afterwards. So far, I am sniffing at the possibility of giving a few talks at the University of Frankfurt/Main next May, perhaps one or two lectures during the Kasseler Musik-Tage in the fall of 1971, and some such. I suppose that, when German is one's first language (also the one that has determined one's accent in all other languages) one should not *die Nase rümpfen* at the idea of spending professional time in Germany. So, I herewith quit the *Nasenrümpfen*.

Weather is heavenly here! Some snow fell but melted, except in the high mountains—my skis are ready to go, and if you are the guy who prays at night, I would thank you for putting in a word for more snow at Vail, Breckenridge and mainly Snowmass-at-Aspen which is better than any Swiss ski area and now has the added advantage of being virtually free of Swiss. (Now, that is a nasty thing to say; I'll take it back.)

Best greetings-
[Jean Berger]

95 Roebuck House,
Palace Street,
London S.W. 1
October 14, 1970

Dear Jean:

I have been slow to answer your fine letter of September 26. It arrived just as I was launching a 5,000 word chapter on Bing Crosby. I find that each of these chapters takes me about three weeks, including a lot of listening to records. But the subject is always fascinating, and I tend to let correspondence pile up until I have finished the job. Then tending to correspondence helps me to clear one singer out of my head and make way for the next, who, in this instance, will be Al Jolson.

I was delighted, of course, by your story of your black young lady. You might point out to her one day, in a friendly way, that the growing, worldwide acknowledgement and appreciation of Afro-American music is almost exclusively the work of whites, both in criticism and research. And I'm sure she would be interested in reading Paul Oliver's splendid *The Story of the Blues*. Oliver was the first biographer of Bessie Smith. He is a white instructor at the London School of Architecture. I would also recommend Charles Keil's *The Urban Blues*. He's white, too. The best of the black writers has been LeRoi Jones, whose *Blues People* is a very sound book. But more typical, I think, is my experience at Chicago, at a Sunday program by a local gospel choir. Chuck Suber (publisher of *Down Beat*) had arranged to have old Tommy Dorsey (the hymn writer) as a speaker. He explained to the young, personable leader (female) of the gospel choir that Tommy Dorsey had once played for Bessie Smith. "Who," the young lady asked, "is Bessie Smith?" And there was Tina Turner, talking to Peter Reilly in an interview for *Stereo Reviews*, who had never heard of Josephine Baker! And who was the moving spirit behind getting a headstone for Bessie Smith's grave? Janis Joplin!

One argument that the blacks and the white racists bring up all the time is that the whites are getting rich off of the blacks' music. Well, Jimi Hendrix, at 27, left an estate of somewhere between a quarter and a half-million dollars. But that's not the essential point, which is that if it weren't for Mick Jagger and Jerry Lee Lewis and Tom Jones, etc., B.B. King would still be playing jukes! It's been give and take (and two-way traffic) since the early 1920s. That's what has been so good about it. And I hope it stays that way!*

About your lecture activities in Europe. I would suggest that you write to Siegmund Bergelt (Konzertdirektion Siegmund Bergelt, 1040 Vienna, Hauslabgasse 1/10). He, with Friedrich Gulda, conducts the Internationales Musikforum Ossiachersee, held at Ossiach, in Carinthia, at the end of June and the first week of July. I was a seminarist there in 1969 (there was no Musikforum in 1970), and the fact that I was invited (by Gulda) will tell you all you need to know about what it's all about. I was asked to do my

sessions in English, but when it turned out that nobody spoke English but me, I had to do it all in German at the last minute. Austrian intellectuals are a trying lot, and the administration's SNAFU Austrian style (which is the worst in the world). But it's a pretty place, there was stimulating company, and I had a lot of fun. As I remember it, they paid only travel and a generous per diem. But if you can fit it in with other things, it works out nicely enough. I'll probably be back there this coming year, combining it with the International Jazz Festival at Montreux. No lectures there; but it's the best place I know to get a cross-section of what's going on in jazz, rock, etc. in both Europe and America. The University of Illinois Band is scheduled for next June.

Enough for today. I've got to begin to think about Jolson. He's not my favorite singer. But for what I'm about, he's inescapable.

All the best,
Henry

*As LeRoi Jones puts it, the slaves weren't herded off the ships singing "St. James' Infirmary." [HP]

[Boulder]
November 24, 1970

Dear Henry:

Consider this: following a long rehearsal at Western Kentucky University, windy and rainy day but much time before supper, I asked the kids to have coffee and that I was buying. Needless to say, they bought mine, and we chatted. Western KU is one of the schools that started desegregation early and the choir, about 60 strong, has perhaps a dozen black kids, not bad for Kentucky. Not good, but not bad. As all 15 or so of them really seemed to want to have coffee with me (the remaining 45 having gone off to their chores) I asked them what music they liked, was it something like Joni Mitchell, "Bridge over Troubled Waters," the Beatles and followers and the like? Well, Simon and Garfunkel got a somewhat condescending smile but, yes, they were okay too. What, then, I persisted when they sang MY stuff? "No difference," they said, "a little more to chew on but no difference." Well, Henry, Sir, it made this weary old soul feel good. Fear not: no swelled head, nothing of the sort, but the feeling that there were these sixty, 45 Caucasians, 15 Afro-Americans, who quite innocently and rather bewilderedly (at my question) felt that there was no difference. I pressed this issue a bit, purely clinical interest, don't you see, and heard things about, "boy, those chords of yours" (between you and me, strictly ante-arnoldian), and "how do you ever find those tunes (toons)?" Never mind, to repeat: no swelled head. But man, did I feel good though this was also the day in memory of recent minor surgery and with the nerve tissues hollering. You may say, "What's sixty?" I don't know that you would say this. If you did—let's argue a little, for God's sake, we do understand one another a little too well —I would counter by saying, "Sixty is sixty and anyway, it's the same in other places as well." To all this, let me add that—having a teenager at home who has made it his personal mission in life to initiate the old man into the marvels of his music, I do listen a lot to things (though no longer to Boulez), and I suppose that somewhere, somehow the melting pot has accepted me. You don't really have to be Jewish to like matzo balls, so why can I not come up with properly un-Alsatian stuff once in a while?

Anyway, I keep pounding away

Because of your good wishes, that was the only rainy day I had; the rest was pure Indian summer delight, much dark red and brown foliage left on the trees, green stretches all over, a solace to this parched eye, and the whole thing was great fun. I wound up in New York City, where I had an evening free and a friend who owns a Met subscription invited me to use it and to go see *Aida*. I contemplated "Ritorna vincitor" and "Celeste Aida" for a minute and bought a ticket for *Hair*. 9 bucks for the balcony rear, honestly, where are we going? A fascinating show, the music (which I had heard before) only partially interesting though played with breathtaking virtuosity, but there was something growing that was inescapable, mainly

so far as the male dancers were concerned. Bodily virtuosity of this quality always fascinates me, and I walked out in the knowledge that here was the start of something. I did not regret *Aida*.

Now the snow is beginning to fall in earnest. Am thinking of getting up to Eldora tomorrow, only 40 minutes away, and getting the legs into shape. Mainly, I am hoping to find the time—and the “bread”—for a week at Snowmass-at-Aspen before the Eastern tourists fly in. I am told that it’s the ultimate, and skiing in the ultimate is only one step removed from paradise. Or rather, IS paradise.

Am still making plans after plans about my 8 months of freedom. London looms large. I may buy you that Guinness yet.

How was YOUR jaunt in the good old USA?

Have a fine Thanksgiving: this is the one intra-American holiday I really do like. You don’t live in Vermont for 11 years without getting indoctrinated.

All the best—
as ever—
[Jean Berger]

November 26, 1970
(Thanksgiving Day)

Dear Henry:

After posting my letter to you a couple of days ago, there was something stirring in me that I thought I should tell you. As I am not in the habit, in our correspondence, to trouble you with tales referring to my own activities as a composer—simply because this does make our correspondence easier—it was precisely the reference to my experience in Kentucky that seemed to be a sour note, and the stirring inside me seemed to ask why I had made such remarks at all. Suddenly, with the turkey cooking in the oven and the house full of culinary promises, it dawned on me and let me try.

I cannot remember whether you tracked down the roots of the word “serious” in your book. I do not mean the semantic or philological roots but rather the combination of that word with the word “music.” If you did, forgive this conceited sermon. If you did not, let me say that the German *serioese Musik* obviously does not mean what the English “serious music” means, and I think that there is the rub. The German music consumer of the 19th century had to demand that music be “serious” because his whole *Weltanschauung* was predicated on this adjective. The various other terms such as *Bürger* [citizen], or its obverse term *Künstler* [artist], or the *Bürger’s* chief quality *Pflichtbewusstsein* [dutifulness] or so many others, all point in the same direction, namely a sort of Teutonic Victorianism. Music must be serious, rather *serioes*, because if not it could not be accommodated in the world of the *deutsche Bürger*. Thus, an art that does not have this implicit purpose—think of Verdi—had such troubles getting accepted. Here is the reason, then for other parallels. I am thinking of the disintegration of the impact of religion within the 19th century, and the substitutes invented to take its place (also it amuses me that both French and English have so wholeheartedly accepted the very word *Ersatz*!) of which the darkened concert hall is one. The point is not so much the concert hall as such but the attitude that its semi-darkness imposes, a para-religious one befitting the “cathedral of sound.” In church *ist man serioes*, not serious, not earnest, not theologically involved—though possibly any one of these too—but chiefly *serioes*. A grown man wears *serioese* garments, the citizen who has been burdened with a democratic way of life that suits him so little (in Germany I mean, or rather in 19th century, maybe it’s different now), that citizen in the full awareness of his burden of a *Staatsbürger*, or worse as an *Untertan* [subject] must be *serioes*. As a child, okay when I was VERY small, we still celebrated Kaiser’s *Geburtstag* [birthday], January 27, like Mozart’s. The occasion was not one of joy but one of somber *serioes* obeisance. If we did hear music, which I doubt, our attitude vis-à-vis that music would have been *serioes*.

A historian could then draw all the ramifications, particularly those that have to do with the above disintegration of a world that, while paying lip service to its heritage, no longer had the faith. If the composer, the “genius,” the superman, is of semi-divine status, and if his “message” took the place of

the sermon (which I think it did), then this whole apparatus was fatally sick since the very concept of “faith” was shaking in its very foundations.

But to bring this back to our own topics: my talk with the Kentucky kids the other day showed them to be quite taken with my stuff (forgive again this self-centered remark), and being a convinced Pleasants follower, while the fact was apt to bring tears of joy to my eyes, I HAD to question it. Was Pleasants wrong? Were these particular kids Kentucky morons? Neither, I am moved to think. In this world of ours—the general term of which might be the “academy,” of the USA—whatever the particular idiom of the music may be that is being made, the *Umgang* [i.e., attitude; see letter of September 6, 1971] with it, to use a term coined by my revered late master Heinrich Bessler, is emphatically not that of the *serioes* concert, even if the articulation of such music making knows no other societal formula than the concert. To the “kids” then, there was no difference between whatever it is that we call the music of their generation and that produced by the old geezer, their visitor composer, me. As long as it permitted being integrated melodically, perhaps rhythmically (by which I am referring to their barely contained urge to move with it), and quite regardless of its “style”—though admittedly not of its idiom—as long as it made no difference—only as the one guy said, “a little more to chew on.” Am I making an intelligible point?

Turkey time, Rita says.

[Jean Berger]

95 Roebuck House,
Palace Street,
London S.W. 1
December 13, 1970

Dear Jean:

I had my turkey with family at Groton, Mass. Your two letters have been to London and back to New York. They are now with me in London.

Don't know why you should have had any misgivings about writing of your experiences in Kentucky. Nor was I surprised at the kids' reaction. They're a better lot than anyone gives them credit for being, largely, I suspect, because the media (ghastly word) have concentrated so exclusively on the freaks that discredit them. A month of newspapers, radio, TV and moving pictures in the States has left me in a frame of mind where if I were to open my mouth on the subject, I would make [U.S. Vice President] Spiro Agnew [famous for his alliterative sound-bites and conservative views] sound like [popular liberal philosopher Herbert] Marcuse. And speaking of such things, Agnew made a speech a few days ago—when I was in New York—and said that most of the younger generation were just fine. The *Times* gave it two inches on page 36! Below the middle of the page!

I held a seminar and gave a formal lecture for about 200 music students at Capitol University, in Columbus, on November 11. Attentive audiences, very good questions, many rewarding personal meetings afterwards. But funny things are afoot,—or maybe not so funny. I was told that 90 percent of the students were in music education, and accordingly, both at the seminar and the lecture, I said that if I had anything to do with music education in the States today, I would make guitar compulsory. Both times the house came down. The kids applauded. But the faculty didn't. Remember how the house came down—to my great surprise—when, in Chicago, I said that I had never earned an academic degree credit? The system stinks, and the kids know it. They're being prepared for musical life in 19th century Germany, not 20th century America. In Chicago, it was not the students who were grouching. There were hardly any students there, except as performers. The young teachers were grouching. They have been badly prepared, or not prepared at all, and they resent it!

Which brings me to *serioese Musik*. The more common term is *ernste Musik* [serious music], so common, in fact, that German radio staffs are divided into two sections: *E Musik* and *U Musik*, the latter standing for *Unterhaltungsmusik* [popular music]. God help us! I don't know when the term came into general use—*ernste Musik*, I mean—but I would guess with Beethoven. Rochlitz uses it. As you know, I hate it, if only because it sets up what I like to call "prejudicial categorization." If you fall into the right category you are okay no matter how lousy. If you fall into the wrong category you are lousy, no matter how good. It nourishes snobs. Do you remember what I said in Chicago—that the arts may now be the only area of human activity where snobbery is still applauded, encouraged and even

subsidized? I have no objection to music's being taken seriously. I take it very seriously. But I don't believe in taking only Serious Music seriously. And neither do the kids.

All of which leads me to thank you very much for your letters and to wish you and your family all the best for your holidays and the new year.

As ever,
H

95 Roebuck House,
Palace Street,
London SW1E 5BE
June 8, 1971

Dear Jean:

Loved your account of scintillating disputation at Peterborough [home of the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire]. Yes, I know it all from memory. Heard more of it just the other evening when Harold Schonberg [*New York Times*' senior music critic 1960-80] and his wife came to dinner. The Music Critic of the *New York Times* discovers, in February, 1971, Scott Joplin, who died in 1917, and gets a Pulitzer Prize. I asked him how come Eric Salzman didn't get it. "That's simple," he said, "Aaron Copland wasn't on the jury."

Your exercise in logic was brilliant. Yes, it was I, with articles in the *New York Times* on the *Carmina Burana* and the *Trionfi d'Aphrodite* fifteen years ago, who got Orff under way in the U.S. The critics, of course (see enclosed), hated them. I sent a Jochum recording of the *Carmina Burana* to [Eugene] Ormandy at Vevey, about 1952. Virgil [Thomson] was staying with him at the time, and Gene passed it on for comment. Virgil allowed as how it might do for the Indiana University Glee Club. So Ormandy passed it up. Stokowski didn't. And so he, not Ormandy, who wanted it, by now, got the rights for the American premiere of *Trionfi*. My favorite Orff, I guess, is *Die Bernauerin*. I did the jacket liner for the Angel recording of *Die Kluge*, but I don't really like it much. Nor *Der Mond*, either. Nor anything he has done recently. I don't think there's much mileage in 244 successive Gs, whether in German or Greek.

Tuned in, briefly, last night to Humphrey Searle's *Hamlet*. Jesus!

I shall be listening to American high school jazz bands competing at Montreux June 21-25. Then holding forth myself at the Summer Vocal Institute of the American Institute of Musical Studies in Freiburg/B July 11-18. Then to Ibiza for a week. After that, I hope, a spell here to grind out a few more chapters of *The Great American Popular Singers*.

All the best,
H

P.S. This Britten piece is fantastic. This sonofabitch, who enjoyed sanctuary in the United States during World War II made so much noise about Vietnam that, at one point, Erich Leinsdorf and I had to intervene with the State Department and the Embassy to get him a visa! But the Russians walk over Czechoslovakia—which we were trying to prevent the North Vietnamese from doing to South Vietnam—and he expresses his feelings privately, and two months, no, just a month ago, was conducting the LSO in the Soviet Union, and, of course, keeping his feelings to himself. That's

a great line of the interviewer: "Britten's words suggest something less than a fervent altruism, rather more a resentment of disrupted peace!" And that's what's wrong with his music, too. No real guts. No real feeling. No real passion.

H

[London]
July 28, 1971

Dear Jean:

Your letter of July 4 was here when I returned from Graz, but that was just a quick turnaround, and I had to leave it lying here while I swam, walked, slept and had a generally quiet and lovely week with friends in Ibiza. Back now for the August grind, then off to Porto Santo in the Madeiras September 3-17. Want to be back here for Johnny Cash's outing at the Royal Festival Hall on September 18. Ray Charles will be there for two concerts September 25. If you are in London then, and haven't heard Ray Charles in person, you should. Same goes for Johnny Cash. If you want tickets, let me know.

Graz was a revelation. Fifty students there, most of them M.M. and Ph.D. candidates. Good voices. Nice people. But, good God, they're immature! I'm beginning to think that the American educational system is just one enormous conspiracy to keep the kids kids forever. Or to keep them on the campus forever. Singers in their 20s should be working in the theater, learning their trade, not working on the campus for advanced degrees. And what the hell are they giving degrees for nowadays? I mean, what level of learning and accomplishment? My wife and I took a group of four tenors through the Müllerlieder. They didn't even know what a Bach was without checking in their trot! And I had to keep telling them not to come down heavily on the accented syllables and strong beats. I knew better than that when I was 18! BUT—They don't dare go out into the world without the disaster insurance of those degrees. And they're right. The great thing that Richard Owens is doing with this summer institute is to get these people off the campus, give them a taste of music in Europe and an opportunity to work with professionals who couldn't teach in the schools because they don't have the degrees. Me, for example!

I've been up to my ears. A 2,500 word article on Frank Sinatra for *Stereo Review*. A 2,500 word article on singing (western) for the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, and a 2,500 word paper on music criticism—"If I Were Managing Editor . . ."—for delivery at an international symposium at the Eastman School in December. And, of course, the book. I haven't written a line of that since May.

Thanks for the news of Tom McCluskey. And good for Temple Buell!

Let me know your European itinerary as soon as it is firm. And remember that I will not be here September 3-17.

All the best to you and yours,
H

POB 429
Boulder, Colorado 80302
July 31, 1971

Dear Henry:

How was it again? "*Der Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt*" [Man proposes, God disposes]—or some such? (I just read somewhere Stravinsky's statement, to the effect that one speaks to cats in his native language. Poor kitty—I no longer speak any language without accent . . .) At any rate, all our beautiful plans regarding leaves-of-absence had been predicated on our unshaken devotion to our son and to our conviction that one of us must be home at all times, regardless of how much roaming the other might be doing. Thus, we the parents. Now Sir Jonathan suddenly asserted his drive toward independence and moved into his own "digs." Still here in town, still continuing his warm and endearing close relation with the old folks but there you are. In the new situation it hardly seemed to make any sense for me to take off now, then return while Rita was globe-trotting on her own. Hence, I decided to teach during the fall semester, and come December, both of us will take a leave of absence. Thus, no trip at the moment, but a very extended one later, *a deux*. We will possibly spend some weeks in one of our Western slope ski areas from where I will be able to reach the various campuses where I am booked end of January, then we are hoping to spend a month at that glorious—and by then snow-covered—MacDowell Colony, again with mild hope on my part to engagements around the land, and then . . . off to our favorite London. You will be kept posted, and as my wife has been kept posted on our letters and has become an admirer of yours whose knowledge of your literary achievements centers largely around your most outspoken sense of humor, we both look forward to that glass of stout at the "Dove" or somewhere.

It will be clear to you how much your remarks meant to me, when you take a glance at the enclosed article. I may not have mentioned my former professional guise to you, but recital accompanist of singers is what it was. With success, I hasten to add, so much so that some of my friends called me "Au piano-Jean Berger" and please note the hyphen between piano and my first name. Regarding Bach, let me tell you that I did some repertoire coaching here at the University [of Colorado at Boulder] when I first came. One young redhead was singing "Gretchen am Spinnrad," and at "und ach, sein Kuss" was about as orgasmic as my mother's best *eingelegte Hering* [pickled herring]. I asked her whether she knew what she was saying and was told, "no." Did she want me to translate? Again, "no." "We do it with phonetics," and I am quoting verbatim (to which the small voice urged to retort, "that's why you sound like trained monkeys," but didn't). Well, I did translate, and I will not forget the expression of undisguised horror on the student's face when the plot unfolded. The upshot of the incident was rather unexpected: it was I who had done the wrong, despite all of my protestations to the effect that it had really been

Goethe and/or Schubert. Nothin' doin'—I was the guilty party, the libertine, the communist probably, the Jewish lecher, the child molester, who knows what. Truly, Henry—YOU talk about American eddication, let me tell you. Whenever I showed my face in the wing of the building that houses the voice division, it was remembered that I had interpreted Schubert to be interested erotically, that “und ach sein Kuss” had been likened to an expression of that mixture of spiritual and rather down-to-earth physical love that, at the time at any rate, was as yet not the bandwagon which it has become since. Never did any student, male or female, seek my advice in vocal literature, never was I invited again to set foot in that antiseptic phonetic wing. *Menos mal*. The chairman of that vocal division, incidentally, is the immediate past president of the NATS. I must tell you this other gem. One of the grad students, at the time I got here, was a rather unlovable Teuton from Stuttgart, native thereof, and having been a member of the opera there. He gave a recital, singing *Winterreise*. I was on the faculty committee that judged the merits of the event. The vocal chairman declared that he was failing the singer. Why, I wanted to know. His pronunciation was faulty. His PRONUNCIATION? Yes, and I was asked to consult the chairman's book on German phonetics in which I would find substantial divergences between his gospel and the way in which the Stuttgart guy had said the words. Actually, let me tell you that, while we all know how the “schtuggert” German sounds, the fellow had done what all German singers do, i.e. adopted a rather flawless High German. Okay? What else? No, it isn't only the mechanism of self-defense that must insist on keeping the kids, kids, as you venture. It is far worse. It reeks. In a country that sends rovers on the moon, that sets the whole world on its ear every four years with its endless elections, that insists on the goods being delivered, in this country the academic tenure is unattackable. The feature that matters most—by this I mean the endeavor to shape that massive intellectual talent that we have here, shape it into a civilized substance—that feature we destroy a priori. Any idiot who has sung, once upon a time, as a fifteenth bass in the Robert Shaw Chorale, is allowed to spread his fat uncouth ignorance around and to make believe he can EDUCATE singers. It is tragic beyond belief. My one ounce of optimism, and rather sour optimism it is, has to do with the fact that we seem to have entered a phase of history where the B.A. and M.A. and the doctorate no longer procure the jobs. Hosanna! There is hope, bitter hope, but hope—perhaps the true deliverer of the true good will again be listened to, and not the owner of some idiotic initials!

Enclosed an article on an area of music that is terribly close to me. As you know, I make no claims to being a writer, so please read it with this disclaimer in mind. As in the case of my more recent paper on Elizabethan choral music, I can tell you that the response was zero. Not one stir. Conversely, and quite independently of the article on Faure, I have been asked recently to coach and accompany again here and there, either Faure et al. or else my own songs which I do love to play. I wrote my *Villanescas* for

good old Bidú Sayão, shortly after arriving in the U.S., at a time when I was one hell of a piano player, and by gosh, they are difficult. Now the old man is trying to get some of the rust out of the fingers, and with luck I'll be getting there.

If you do take the time to read my product, do you think that the curious situation of rubato-less left hand and ever so slightly rubato-ed right hand—"Loulou" [Berger's Paris teacher Louis Aubert] insisted that this was the way Faure himself played—might have something in common with your description of the "beat" in jazz, over which the swinging occurs? No? Yes? *Vielleicht doch?*

And so, we look at our morning glories and, *mirabile dictu*, our gooseberries which, yes, we do have this year, *en abondance*, and go up to our high mountain lakes where we know spots that the most knowledgeable furr'ner doesn't, and think that, in spite of Academe, life hath its rewards. We look forward to the semester, I chiefly because of the impending collaboration with Tommy who is a great guy, and then end of semester, mucho skiing (January is the ideal month, after all the snobs of holiday season have gone back to Philadelphia, nothing personal, pal), and then with luck the silence of the New Hampshire woods in 8 feet of snow and at 40 below. What the heck, you put on another sweater—thus the New England response.

Be well—
Best—
[Jean Berger]

P.O. Box 429
Boulder, Colorado 80302
September 6, 1971

Dear Henry:

Thanks for your letter and all the copies which followed shortly, as well as also for *Trousered Apes* [Duncan Williams' 1971 philosophical tome concerning the degradation of civilized society] which I started to read. Particularly, thanks for the copy of your correspondence with the Welsh Opera Co. I knew you to be terse as a writer; I am happy to know that your personal affirmations are no less concise and to the point. Yes, abomination. No better word for it.

As to "idiom" vs. "genius," may I make a few remarks myself, and these are not unrelated to Rosenberg[er]'s [Harold Rosenberger, author quoted by Williams in *Trousered Apes*, p. 106.] thoughts—though I think that I am tackling matters from the opposite end of the line. You know my biases, of course. I think I must have said often enough that I feel that—in addition to the radical impact made on "idiom" in our time, by the Afro-American irruption—I feel the whole concern with whether music is serious or not is, in itself, largely based on the compulsion of judging only such music as is "professional" in its execution. Here I part company with Rosenberg, as well as perhaps only partly, with you. If the criterion of potential money earnings did apply, then yes, I would be as desperate as Schonberg in the article you sent. But does it? Why should it? Is it not conceivable that, as part of the manifest metabolic change of our musical lives—our rejection of the hero-virtuoso-soloist, concomitantly our rejection of long-winded dramatics by way of developmental formats etc, I needn't go on—the rejection or, at any rate, the diminution in relevance, of the professional performer is equally important? You, the "musicologist" as SR dubbed you, know as well as anybody that the criterion of "professional," in this sense and particularly when the emphasis of an "idiom" is on collective music making (rather than soloistic) simply does not apply. So, if Rosenberger sees the basis of art as a display of the lovable or unlovable personality of him who declares himself to be artist—in which he proceeds much as you do in music—my response is apt to be: but who in hell cares? Or, to come to Schonberg's article, yes, I have known for decades that the lag of decades in comprehension (on the part of the "audience" or on my own part, i.e. that of supposedly a musician) indicated the still-born quality of the score. *Pierrot Lunaire* belongs to my tenderest infancy, and is—almost 60 years later—as indigestible as it was then. I agree. But why look THERE? Why look at the graveyard? Where I am looking, things are exceedingly bright, there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of music makers, unpaid ones, i.e. non-professional ones, but who make hellishly good music and who—they and their friends who come to hear them—derive from such collective music making the sort of transcendental rejoicing that only music, in its best incarnation, can give. Why not look there?

This brings me to “idiom,” though manifestly not to “genius.” Your own tabulations if I understood you correctly, pointed to Dufay and Monteverdi, as two examples. And you are right, of course. But doing so, is not Dufay, in addition to being molded overnight by what he heard of the ethnic Dunstable, also the Dufay of his young years, including the isorhythmic doodlings? Is not Monteverdi, in addition to voicing the raucous or at any rate very loud voice of Venice, sea merchant “to the world,” also the Monteverdi who had been shaped in the *stile osservato* by Maestro Ingegneri? What I am trying to say is: if the Afro-American impact is as formidable as you say it is, and in which only a dolt could quarrel with you, is it not conceivable that the idiom is affected by it, massively, astronomically—but is not thereby altered altogether? In addition, I think that it is not just a matter of idiom but that, together with the change in idiom, there is then change in “attitude,” or what my revered master called *Umgang* with music. That, yes, and of course you wrote about it so very well (I remember my rolling on the floor with your description of Maestro vs. a guy called Fate). So, what I am coming to—or did I by now?—is that I do not feel that there is no idiom. I do feel that there is a dismal survival of a very Prussian and puritanical concern with “serious” music, to quote you. But in my (ah so biased) experience I find that I CAN speak to my young—and not so young—singers, speak and be heard, speak and be accepted with the most extravagant warmth and eagerness any musician could wish for, speak and be answered. I look at 150 of them, standing there, spell-bound, listening to my every foreign-accented word, tears rolling down their cheeks, and sounding like so many blue-jeaned angels. And it happens and happens and happens. I don’t care where I go (am off shortly to Birmingham, Alabama, the Athens of the Southland). It’s always there. And always it functions where I think the ART ought to function: with the kids or their elders, not with the PRESS. Nobody ever writes us up, nobody except the local journalists who are usually one year older than my singers, the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, for example. But even my most explicit and eloquent letters to guys like Taubman and Schonberg remain unanswered and, I am sure, unread. The voice in the wilderness? You are the only one who ever answered me, Henry. I may be on a woefully wrong track, of course, I know that. But I think I have seen the possibility of a way-out. The way-out might lead to wholeheartedness, to total absence of sham, to the kind of art that it seems *Trousered Apes* fears is lost (I only read part of it, so far), art that, yes, openly, frankly, unashamedly, endeavors to “uplift”—though, please do not misunderstand, I am as secular a guy as you can find, and while I have written much on sacred texts, this is not the issue. But more than anything else: I feel that I have enough gray matter in my box to know my own limitations as a composer. I am not passing myself off as a genius nor even as a great composer, nor even as a mediocre one. What I did try to do was to arouse the curiosity of such people as the above named ones, only to find that it appears that they

have espoused the consequences of the Teutonic plague and really want to “suffer.” Okay, in their case, it means suffering because things are dismally uniform, or because Cage is such an ape, really (though I always think of him as a rather inspired clown). Go slumming, man, I always want to shout at them, get out of that monkey suit of yours, throw the tie in the waste basket, put on a pair of flair pants and a very very broad belt, and come listen to us. I have, in fact, taken an occasional pal along—of the serial species—and often enough have seen that glimmer of doubt. Things are not necessarily all that bright, God Almighty, they aren’t. There are so many vested interests, so many benighted school principals, so many inadequate deans (I left the university because of such a one), so little money and what have you. But what does it matter? I remember a day spent at a minuscule college, Tabor College in a Kansas village (where the old caretaker of the local little museum actually spoke nothing but a sort of curious German!!! last year, mind you!) and the kids there. 400 enrollment, and TWO choirs of 50 each—okay, 100 out of 400? singing like so many ruddy angels? looking at me as though I were Messiah himself? walking on clouds? anything wrong with it?

Am I making sense? The *Umgang* has changed; the propelling agent is no longer the desire to be as good an aristocrat as Herr Baron with his private orchestra, the propelling agent is democracy, or people if you prefer. And whatever it is people do, need, pay for, when it comes to art. At one time, this was the school (parochial school) choir which sang on Sunday. In church. Now it is rather the movies, I gather, or maybe TV. And all that which has become part of the blood stream and that includes the remainders of the erstwhile school choirs. A silly item: most of our school, college and university choruses still wear ecclesiastical robes? *Alors?* Note: I do not mean to say that they should all shout halleluja and play the harp which would be one goddam bore. I mean to indicate the scourge, where it all came from, the fact it is alive and that, being alive, it DOES have a language, an idiom, and that, the idiom being forceful, it can easily and gleefully integrate Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, and a “Bridge Over Troubled Waters.” As *Orfeo* did with Gastoldi, Marenzio and even the earlier frottole yet. Why not?

So, again, am I making any sense? The only one of the gang I have never written to is Sargeant [Winthrop Sargeant, *New Yorker* music critic 1947-72] of whom I think as much as it appears you do. A very wise and unshakeable man (is he really all that tongue-in-cheek?). I suppose I admire him too much to add him to my list of disappointments.

Cordially, as ever—
[Jean Berger]