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developed an exceptionally keen sense of what is a good lyric and what isn't. He firmly believes that the only decent lyricists are those who also sing, such as Mercer.)

A few months after the singing debacle, badly in need of money, Lees took on the job of managing a State Department-sponsored tour of Latin America by the Paul Winter Sextet. During the trip he met two Brazilian musicians, cultivated their friendship and gained insight into their music. When that music, bossa nova, washed across the United States a year later, the two Brazilians were recognized as leading lights—Antonio Carlos Jobim and Joao Gilberto. When Jobim needed English lyrics for his "Corcovado," he asked Lees to write them. The result was "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars," and Lees was launched into his most successful role, that of lyric writer par excellence. Soon he was working with other composers, such as Bill Evans, Charles Aznavour, Lalo Schifrin, and Jeff Davis. Musicians rang him up constantly, wanting lyrics for their tunes. They still do. Sometimes he shuts his phone off for days at a time.

Gene Lees became a Success. He took a better apartment in New York (the two years between *Down Beat* and "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars" were financially lean). He was able to make at least one trip a year to Europe (his son and wife, from whom he is separated, live in Paris). He no longer had to have a steady job (he is pop-music editor for *High Fidelity* but is not a full-time staff member), which gave him the time for writing music as well as words. (His most recent short story, "Twice In Time," appeared in the November *Cavalier*—he is a frequent *Cavalier* contributor and will be remembered by many regular readers as the author of the controversial article, "I Owe Lenny Bruce \$20," in the February, 1968, issue—and he's currently composing the music for a movie background.) Though he is not Dollar Successful, the royalties from his songs and the money from his other writings (including a short story bought by 20th Century-Fox) keep him comfortable.

Comfortable, not happy. The Leesian view of the state of being in the United States is gloomy. Much of his social criticism is filtered through the prism of the music world, which is often, as he has been insisting for years, an astonishingly accurate indicator of the future. (One could cite, for example, the birth of avant-garde

jazz as forerunner of today's growing chaos.)

Since before his time at *Down Beat*, Lees has been distressed by the influence of big business, particularly the record industry, on American tastes and attitudes. "The growth of rock," he said recently, "is a commercial phenomenon based on the fact that American business will always take the easiest route. Old-fashioned Yankee salesmanship has been dead since World War II. This country developed an order-takers mentality during the war. Salesmen are not interested in selling a product any more; they only want to know, 'What do you want?'"

"There is a maximus mentality in American business—maximum profit with minimum effort. Record companies, for instance, simply do not care about musical quality. They are, without exception, corporate whores. They're interested in the easiest buck and the fastest buck; they and the rack jobbers are interested in the album that will sell 100,000 copies in three weeks... fast turnover, high profits."

Certainly, the maximus mentality is anathema to Lees' belief that the artist should sweat over his art. This deep concern with hard work colors much of his criticism. He is totally sworn to craft's being the basis of art. He dislikes much of what he hears in today's pop music because, to him, it is not well crafted, not well structured. The stream of social consciousness found in much-heralded rock songs drives Lees right up a tree. He feels rock became vague and pretentious before it became craftsmanlike. "We are living in the age of the instant artist," he said. "Everybody's disillusioned with being a used-car salesman and wants to be an artist... many are called but few are chosen."

"Look," he continued, leaning forward and dipping his head, a sure sign he's getting hot, "anything I have to say I write in the form appropriate to it. I'm vehemently opposed to directions of contemporary society, but if I'm politically angry—as I often am—I don't write a song about it, as this clown Bob Dylan does. Political and social criticism belongs in the form of the essay, the tract. When I want to pontificate and preach, I pontificate and preach—and I don't try to con the world into believing it's a work of art. It's me popping off. But people like Ralph Gleason and Nat Hentoff—and you can quote me—judge art on the basis of its social content, which doesn't have a God damned thing to do with art!"

Lees stands firmly opposed to almost anything Hentoff and Gleason write. While he shares cordial relations and political views with Hentoff the man, he's harbored a dislike for Hentoff the critic for several years, mainly because Hentoff seldom missed a chance to snipe at *Down Beat* during Lees' editorship. The turn against Gleason is more recent and may be a reaction to Gleason's insufferable Captain Now! pose as champion of youth. Then again, it may be that Lees simply feels neither man knows what he's talking about.

"You have Hentoff or Gleason nutting out over the lyrics of people like Dylan and Lennon, and I know bloody well those critics are very shallowly educated in American popular music. And they're calling all this crap today the birth of poetry in the popular song. Raving nonsense!"

"Take Porter's 'Love for Sale,' which is about a prostitute, the degeneration of a woman, or Paul Dresser's 'My Gal Sal,' which is an affectionate portrait of a tart, or 'Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?,' or 'How Long Has This Been Going On?,' which is a description of the sexual experience... these critics think this kind of writing started with Bob Dylan—bull shit! One reason they're paying attention now is that there is very little jazz to write about and they've got to fill column space."

"Criticism has never been at a lower ebb, particularly in the popular arts. Everybody is so bloody anxious to get on the bandwagon."

Much of the jumping has been onto the wagon carrying what Lees considers craft-weak and formless art. Through the years, he has maintained the highest respect for form as well as craft (the two are almost inseparable). He likes to work only within forms—both musical and literary—and harbors the highest disdain for those who don't.

"For instance," he said, "I like to write in rhyme because, in seeking a rhyme, my mind often goes down alleys it wouldn't normally explore. Rhyme is not necessarily something that cripples your imagination. This is why I despise formless art. In seeking to meet the needs of the form, you come up with far more original and fresh things than you would if the form weren't there. I love the pressures of restrictions. I love to see how I can outsmart them."

Though he didn't realize it, Gene Lees had just come up with another life-summation, for he's made a career of outsmarting restrictions—artistic, social, business, personal—for the last twenty years. And he's won.

