Richard M. Sudhalter. *Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contributions to Jazz, 1915–1945.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. xxii, 890 pp.

Reviewed by David Sager

Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contributions to Jazz, 1915–1945 is fascinating historical criticism, both extremely well written and well researched. It is a work that intends to shed light on white and supposedly "forgotten" players of jazz from the pre-bebop era. Its author, Richard M. Sudhalter, sets out to make clear the enormous contributions and talents of these important white musicians. His intention to do so in a balanced way, so as not to cast aspersions on any black musicians, is not wholly successful.

In his introduction, Sudhalter asks, "Are we entitled to judge another age from the viewpoint of our own, informed as it is by knowledge of the outcomes of past thought and practice?"(xv). The implication, therefore, is that anything discussed shall be viewed in the light which shown during its existence. If jazz grew up in a largely racist world, then there shall be no juggling of social rules to make the story fit our contemporary preferences. Doing so would result in an "outcome oriented" jazz historical text, one that would be molded to the prejudices of the author. We are then introduced to what Sudhalter calls the "noble lie," which basically states that black musicians, having been deprived of the social status that whites were afforded during the early twentieth century, need to be wholly recognized as the true pioneers, creators, and upholders of jazz and its traditions—white musicians are merely imitators. This notion, he says, will become "junk food history for young minds." What would be much more laudable, according to Sudhalter, would be to teach that throughout the history of jazz, we can find both blacks and whites working side by side, often defying social norms of the day. However, Sudhalter has some of his own preferences and cannot wholly ignore shaping an outcome. To approach a sense of balance, Sudhalter has written himself a small provocation at the end of his introduction, encouraging the reader to go back to the music, to investigate and see what it is he is talking about. It is then, after the reader has gone to investigate, that Sudhalter believes his mission shall be fulfilled.

In nearly 900 pages, Sudhalter details and gives an essence of approximately thirty musicians and several sub-genres of early jazz. He does so with enormous zest and clarity, giving the reader a real sense of what these people and styles were about—and they are mostly about music. The book's sections run roughly chronologically. They consist of "The

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Sophisticates," which describes the heady music of Red Nichols, Miff Mole, and Adrian Rollini; "The Hot Lineage," a description of the "Austin High Gang" and their disciples; and two sections devoted to the "Big Bands." The second of these "Big Band" sections is comprised of reprinted interviews that Sudhalter conducted with Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw.

A recurring annoyance for me in *Lost Chords* is the frequent comparison of black and white musicians, apparently designed to shed light on overlooked aspects of white jazz, hence the full title of the work. However, such comparisons often make the black artists in question the subject of embarrassment, and these comparisons, in turn, embarrass me. For instance, Sudhalter points out white arranger Elmer Schoebel's thoughtful touches on the New Orleans Rhythm King's 1922 recordings "Farewell Blues" and "Discontented Blues." These arrangements, he states,

> bespeak rehearsal and behind-the-scenes work aimed at achieving a polished and varied band sound. Nothing on any record by a black band of the early '20s is anywhere near as aesthetically venturesome. (33)

Is the second sentence of this excerpt necessary? Couldn't it be left at citing the under-sung talents and achievements of Elmer Schoebel? The notion of "aesthetically venturesome" seems to imply a classical sensibility —carefully sculpted, varied in tonal colors and dynamics. Are these hallmarks found in music that is primarily white? Is this a rejoinder to Albert Murray's insistence that jazz cannot exist without the blues? I am not certain as to why Sudhalter must qualify the statement racially, for it stands perfectly well on its own.

Another example is in the chapter on tenor saxophonist Bud Freeman, where Sudhalter discusses the relative merits of Freeman, Eddie Miller, Coleman Hawkins, and Chu Berry:

> Chu Berry also tended to ride the rhythm, but in a far less elastic manner—and with a heavy tone and legato attack which often creates the impression of a solo being played on ball bearings. (253)

The remarks about "ball bearings" sounds like a put-down. True, Chu Berry favored the heavier "belly" sound of Coleman Hawkins as opposed to the lighter approach of Eddie Miller. But then, wasn't Freeman's tone and attack of the heavier type as compared to Miller, or for that matter Lester Young?

Sudhalter turns the tables at times and quotes from a variety of African American musicians who asserted white influences. Saxophonist Eddie

Barefield memorized Jimmy Dorsey's famous "Tiger Rag" variations and "Doc" Cheatam recalled the relative merits of not only King Oliver and Freddie Keppard but also of white cornetist/trumpeter Louis Panico: "What a wonderful player he was" (184). Sudhalter seems to want to show the reader that racial prejudice as it existed in the "real world" did not live in the world of jazz musicians, at least not to a high degree, perhaps in defiance of social norms of the day. His underlying point here is that jazz musicians tended and tend to influence each other across all sorts of cultural boundaries.

Sudhalter does, however, give even-handed treatment to biracial phenomena such as the cross influence between the Isham Jones Orchestra and the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band. All too often history has relegated players such as trumpeter Louis Panico, who was featured with the Isham Jones Orchestra, to the "novelty" category of popular music. Panico was a highly-skilled player who used "freak" effects such as "baby cries" and "laughing" without descending into caricature. His solos always remained well poised and partially derivative of the hot style played by King Oliver. Sudhalter offers some remarkable testimony from long-time Isham Jones manager Jim Breyley via James T. Maher (91). Apparently, the entire Jones outfit would frequent the Lincoln Gardens on the South Side of Chicago to hear Oliver's band. As Sudhalter points out, the Jones records, such as "Aunt Hager's Children Blues," bear this out. Also insightful are Sudhalter's comments regarding Panico's admission to jazz historian John Steiner that he was not a true jazzman since he did not improvise. Sudhalter reminds us that in the context of an early 1920s dance band, trumpeters regardless of race were "melodic embellishers, rather than improvisers. For the pre-Armstrong New Orleans hornmen, as for Louis Panico, the task was to play a strong, lively melody lead" (93).

He also gives credence to the idea that the ensemble writing style often credited to Don Redman was perhaps not so much attributable to a black or white precedent, but rather "appears, after a time to have been a matter of independent and spontaneous gravitation toward universally accepted principles of ensemble organization" (90). Sudhalter is probably basing this statement on recorded evidence and perhaps somewhat on "stock" arrangements published during the early 1920s. There were indeed some prominent black arrangers—Charles "Doc" Cooke comes to mind. But before 1925, although there were a large number of black jazz composers, their material had been published as arrangements by white orchestrators.

Most notably, it is the evidence found on phonograph records that seems to weigh in more heavily on the white side of things, at least within the covers of *Lost Chords*. White bands such as the Original Memphis Five seem to have a smoother and more relaxed approach to the music than

do Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds or Wilbur Sweatman's Jazz Band. Is this because the only black bands invited to record were the ones with greater novelty appeal? This does seem a bit at odds with, or at least complicates, the almost reverse discrimination practiced by record companies that Sudhalter describes. Apparently the Jean Goldkette band suffered the fate of "the black band gives us the 'hot' stuff and the white bands will record the straight dance stuff" syndrome (303–4).

In a footnote, Sudhalter makes the case that Bix Beiderbecke's devotion to the repertoire of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, as shown by his choice of recorded material, would have been "unthinkable" by a black jazzman. For example, Louis Armstrong did not choose to record material by his mentor King Oliver for the Hot Five sessions (785). The disparity is noteworthy. But didn't Armstrong *participate* on those Oliver dates? In contrast, Beiderbecke did not play on the ODJB sessions. This does not, however, nullify Sudhalter's comparison, which calls attention to the fact that black jazz musicians almost exclusively recorded original material in the 1920s.

The book's first section, "In the Beginning: New Orleans to Chicago," contains the most soberly written discussion of cornetist Emmett Hardy to date. Hardy's legend is based purely on anecdotal evidence since he died in 1925, barely twenty-three years old, having never recorded. But those anecdotes are not ones to ignore. Testimonials came from the Boswell Sisters, bandleader and drummer Ben Pollack, cornetist Paul Mares, drummer Monk Hazel, and even Bix Beiderbecke, who all remembered Hardy's music as something wonderful and different from all else. In fact, those who knew Hardy generally felt that Bix Beiderbecke formulated his style with Hardy as a model. Hazel remembers Hardy's "legato style," which Sudhalter contrasts with the "raggy" or old-fashioned staccato style of Freddie Keppard and Nick LaRocca. I can't agree about LaRocca being "raggy" in his approach; if anything, LaRocca had fairly smooth execution and played in a somewhat "rolling" manner. Still, this chapter is one of thoughtful speculation and research. Sudhalter does not, however, refer to something I feel is quite obvious: a "white" New Orleans school of cornet playing not based on the blues and primarily diatonic, with which Hardy might be associated. This approach shows up in the early recorded work of Stirling Bose, Sharkey Bonano, Paul Mares, Johnny Wiggs, and others. It is even the mainstay of a much younger New Orleans cornetist, Connie Jones, who once told me that his playing reminded Monk Hazel of Emmett Hardy.

Righting some errors committed by past chroniclers of jazz, Sudhalter turns in a fine chapter devoted to the Dorsey Brothers. The brothers, especially Tommy, have repeatedly been the targets of left-handed compli-

ments and misunderstandings by writers such as Gunther Schuller. Sudhalter cites, then quickly rebukes, Schuller's remark from *The Swing Era* that Tommy frequently ran into "note trouble" during his recorded hot choruses of the 1920s. "In truth, few brassmen of the era are as free of such blemishes as Tommy Dorsey" (362), Sudhalter counters, providing several examples for the adventurous listener to pursue. He cites Dorsey as a fine hot trombone soloist, albeit, "not a particularly original one" (363). We are then shown a comparative table of jazz trombonists who could easily fall into the same category: Jimmy Archey, Claude Jones, and Sandy Williams—all fine jazz players and all black! I agree with Sudhalter's summation, but why could he not also list white players, such as Al Philburn, Joe Yukl, Moe Zudekoff, or even Glenn Miller? Such digs taken at black musicians in order to point out the various virtues of important white musicians grow tiresome over the course of the book. Perhaps there have been too many books, articles, and television documentaries that have ignored the rich and vital contributions by white players, but turnabout as in *Lost Chords* becomes rather tedious and unnecessary.

It is Tommy Dorsey's skill as a hot trumpeter that commands center stage here. In this matter, Sudhalter seems to be on very agreeable terms with Gunther Schuller. Both men in a sense give a nod to Dorsey's "dependable" work on trombone, but rapture is reserved for the hot trumpet work that graced so many Okeh recordings of the 1920s. "Rough, rugged, passionate, badgering" are the terms used by Sudhalter to describe TD's trumpet work and some excellent examples are given, ones which, hopefully, readers will go to the trouble of seeking out—although some (even in this age of almost everything being available on CD) may be quite difficult to find. One of these, the obscure "It Won't Be Long Now" is a jewel. Tommy's muted horn nearly bursts forth in response to legato phrases sung on a baritone saxophone. At the recording's end it is unmuted for a raw, bluesy statement that sounds like, in Sudhalter's words "no other hot trumpet player—white, at least—making records at the time" (362).

The chapter on trombonist Miff Mole is beautifully written. The sad denouement of Mole's career is juxtaposed with a vivid account of Mole taking the New York music scene by storm in the early 1920s. There are also musical excerpts to read and follow along with while listening to the recordings, such as on page 103 where we are given a "before and after" example of the introduction to "Original Dixieland One Step"—"before" being the standard approach with a two-bar trombone glissando. "After" is Miff Mole's version taken from a 1927 Okeh recording. Mole's is swift, lithe, and inventive. The example sets up the old cliché about how in the early days of jazz the trombone was "a kind of musical Falstaff," contributing crude ground bass figures, comical glissandi, and "lowing cattle

noises." Sudhalter is exaggerating here to set up Mole's importance. Mole indeed was a pioneering force behind the trombone's emergence from the "tailgate" style. However, things were not all that bleak before his appearance. Eddie Edwards, the man whose glissando provided the "before" example, was actually quite a nimble player. Bellowing like a cow or making broad glissandi were exceptions to his aggressive, single-tongued style. The reader need only sample a title such as "At the Jass Band Ball" or "Skeleton Jangle" for confirmation. Tom Brown was also an inventive player of countermelodies, capable of graceful swing. Sudhalter puts trombonist Honore Dutrey in the "tailgate" category. However, close listening to his playing on the 1923 King Oliver records reveals his parts to be well thought out and smoothly executed. Dutrey plays rather long lines similar to published cello parts of the time. Sudhalter never mentions white trombonist Roy Maxon, whose swift, fleet style is heard on records by Russo and Fio Rito's Oriole Orchestra as early as 1922. Maxon was later featured in Paul Whiteman's orchestra and recorded an impressive solo on that ensemble's Victor recording of "Mama Loves Papa." Sudhalter does, however, have the right idea. Given the extraordinary virtuosity of band soloists like Arthur Pryor, Leo Zimmerman, and others during the early 1900s, it is surprising that a Miff Mole did not come along sooner in jazz, demonstrating a crossover of highly developed technique to this new music.

Mole's genius is hinted at in a transcription of his solo from the *Jam Session at Commodore* version of "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (127). Sudhalter describes it as being like "a cadenza over a steady pulse, so unrestrained are its phrases by beat or bar line." Sudhalter reminds the reader that accurate notation of such rubato playing is no substitute for hearing the performance.

The same goes for Brad Gowans. Like many others in this volume, Gowans is given long overdue praise. The man whom trumpeter Max Kaminsky described as "a sweet soul and an extraordinarily talented musician" is otherwise not even a footnote today. A multi-instrumentalist and inventor, Gowans is probably best remembered as the valve-trombonist on the stand at Nick's in the Village, or at Eddie Condon's first night club. Sudhalter pays him fine tribute and includes a transcription from a live 1940 recording of the Dixieland standard "Ja-Da." The transcription reveals Gowan's penchant for using major ninths and thirteenths to striking effect.

One very delightful chapter is devoted to guitarists. It begins with a story told by the late George Van Eps, one of the great performers and innovators of the jazz guitar from the 1930s through the '90s! Van Eps recalled being twelve years old when he met his idol, jazz guitar pioneer

Eddie Lang. Lang, duly impressed with the lad's prodigious banjo technique, offered to lend young George his Gibson L-4 guitar overnight. Sudhalter recounts the story in a charming way, making the reader keenly aware of young Van Eps's awe of Lang and his devotion to playing the instrument. One can almost feel the excitement in Van Eps's voice as he tells of building a crystal radio set the mid 1920s and picking up the Roger Wolfe Kahn band over WJZ: "Joe Venuti and Eddie Lang were in that band. Even as horrible as the sound was on our little crystal set, I could hear the sound of the guitar. It had a singing quality . . . the first time I heard that sound I decided, 'That's for me. That's what I want to do' " (518). Van Eps went on to develop the seven-string guitar.

Other musical temperaments and technical innovations are detailed. Carl Kress's unusual tuning, George Barnes unique style and temperament, and Django Reinhardt's adaptive use of his injured fretting hand are but some of the fascinating examples. Sudhalter writes about Texas guitarist Bob Dunn, who played the "pedal-steel" instrument in the pioneering Western swing band of Milton Brown. Dunn experimented with ways to amplify his instrument and also incorporated horn-like phrasing, chiefly inspired by trombonist (and fellow Texan) Jack Teagarden. Sudhalter relates how such pioneering black guitarists such as Oklahoman Charlie Christian, Eddie Durham, and Floyd Smith (also from the Southwest) most likely heard Dunn over the radio. This time the fact is stated simply, without the impression of a backhanded compliment. Still, there is the implied documentation of "who came first."

Black guitarist Lonnie Johnson also comes under scrutiny. Both Lawrence Cohn, a noted blues historian, and Doug Caldwell, a contributor to *Guitar Magazine,* rank Johnson alongside Lang as the major guitar innovator of the 1920s. Sudhalter for once steps a bit more gingerly and makes his point well, arguing that "such claims seem altogether too inclusive in their implications of musical range and depth." Johnson was certainly a powerful blues man with a nimble technique and large sound. But according to Sudhalter there were problems with being "pattern bound and lacking in harmonic or melodic variety" (522). In this instance, I agree with Sudhalter. I do, however, think he goes a bit overboard in claiming that Johnson's contribution to the 1928 "Star Dust" by the Chocolate Dandies "all but derails the performance." True, it is a bit clunky, but the claim of "wrong accidentals" seems less valid, at least to my ears.

Innovator and inventor Les Paul is seen as a true adventurer, a fine player who was in fact an explorer, traveling the country to seek out legendary musicians such as New Orleans guitarist Snoozer Quinn. Paul, upon hearing about Quinn's ability, took off for the Crescent City in

search of him. Paul found Quinn sitting on his front porch! We also see Paul taking off from his job in Chicago to jump on a Greyhound bus to Oklahoma City to hear Eldon Shamblin of the Bob Wills Texas Playboys. Paul got more than he bargained for by also meeting young Charlie Christian. Paul was also one of the early experimenters in the use of electrical amplification for the guitar. Whereas players such as George Van Eps quickly forsook the electrified instrument because it distorted the guitar's natural timbre, Paul took the idea and ran with it. Paul experimented with radios and movie projectors—anything with an amplifier—to transform the guitar into an instrument that produced a whole array of new sounds.

Shortly after beginning work on *Lost Chords,* Sudhalter realized that he was writing "two books in one." One tells several stories "combining biography, reminiscence, commentary and . . . narrative." The other is a technical work with musical examples to help illustrate the "specifics of [white musicians'] achievements."

He exhorts the non-music readers to "stay with" him and not let the narrative "become lost in the particulars of music making." Perhaps being musically literate I am prejudiced, but I do believe that this kind of illustration is most important. What I find disagreeable in the musical excerpts in *Lost Chords* is the transposition for the various instruments on which the given examples were played. For example, the transcription of Bud Freeman's Bluebird recording of "The Eel," originally played on the tenor saxophone in B♭, is shown in C (246). Similarly, Jimmy Dorsey's famous "Tiger Rag" variation is found on page 141 in the transposed key of F. What purpose do these transpositions serve? Sudhalter explains that few musicians playing transposing instruments actually think in terms of concert pitch while improvising. I suppose a heated discussion could ensue about jazz musicians consciously thinking about chord changes while deep in improvisation mode, but for now it is safe to say that there is no widely-accepted rule on the subject. To me, the importance is where the original sounds. It seems senseless to have an excerpt transcribed unless one can easily go to the piano and reproduce the excerpt.

Lost Chords is an important and even great work. I, for one, have gone back to the music and have become enlightened through some recordings that I somehow missed before. The volume is elegantly written, well researched, and above all musical. I found only a few factual errors in the book—for example, on page 25 he quotes from Ray Lopez who states that Blossom Seeley did not record until 1921 when in fact she did record one side for Columbia in 1911—and in any event, Sudhalter has made it clear in subsequent correspondence that he is gladly accepting corrections to be used in future printings.

Where I am disturbed lies in Mr. Sudhalter's own use of his ground rules. He comes close to successful exposition of neglected white jazz pioneers and then lapses into the very tendency he was trying to avoid—criticizing non-white musicians. Will the "noble lie" be righted and will those learning about jazz get a balanced viewpoint? If *Lost Chords* makes a lasting contribution to the future of jazz education it probably won't be as a whole work. The enduring value of this book will be what others can glean from it as a research tool, for there is a great deal of valuable and insightful material within. But will it teach us that blacks and whites coexisted peacefully? That Richard Sudhalter has gone to great lengths to show that jazz musicians have traditionally been the exception to the rule is perhaps the true hallmark of this book. Hopefully, someday we will see these rules change.