

The Americans

JOE SULLIVAN

THE WESTERNER

The cowboy is as traditional and as colorfully American as is Thanksgiving. Today, however, he is too often falsely represented by those overworked mediums — the cinema and radio. In spite of this, the modern cattle man, the name he prefers to cowboy, remains as distinctive and picturesque as ever, for the vast West has changed but a little since the days of Kit Carson.

Traditional among the traditional is one man with whom the West is well acquainted. His name is superfluous, but he held the title of "Champion Cowboy of the World" for many years. I remember seeing him a number of times at rodeos. He was of medium height but had a stocky appearance because of his square build. He was also remarkably strong and agile and few people knew that he was held together by countless wires, braces and caps — trophies of his wrong encounters with fear crazed steers. His clothing had a monotonous uniformity about it. Always he wore blue jeans and a bright blue shirt. No one could remember having seen him dressed otherwise, or without his black ten gallon hat. This trademark was dusty and battered and had sweat stains above the band. It was creased round on top, in a sort of college boy fashion and was scarred from the time it had spent on ground in the center of a rodeo arena. His shirt sleeves were perpetually rolled up almost to the elbow, exposing the blue veins in his long, dark, muscular arms. The top button of the shirt was open and the collar a little frayed. A cheap tobacco label hung from a little yellow string

protruding from the bulging shirt pocket. His jeans were faded and worn about the pockets and in back, and the cuffs were rolled up a little. The black high heeled boots that he wore were well worn on one side and a little scratched across the outside, torn by tall sage and cactus. They were spattered with dried red clay and covered with range dust.

His face was red and leathery, toughened by cutting winds and darkened by the dusty sun of the plains. His nose was straight and his chin sound but firm. The eyes were dark and small beneath the heavy brows and folds of skin. His hair was dark and wavy and cut square in the back, exposing a strangely white nape of neck.

Here is a real man of the west, hard as stone in appearance, but soft as cotton at heart. Here is the real vanishing American.

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THE MUSICIAN

In the short years of my life I have come in contact with many strange and fascinating people. I often wonder what story lies behind the outward appearance of such persons, the hidden adventures, joys and sorrow of their lives. Such a man was the proprietor of a small music shop. I had taken to him my violin, which I had long since abandoned, in hopes of selling it. I had supposed of course that he knew much about musical instruments, but to hear him play my humble fiddle was a wonderful surprise.

He was at least in his seventies, but his eyes were young still. I can only vaguely remember how he was dressed, for all of my attention was given to his

stunning head and hands as he played. His hair was long and bushy in the back, traditional among the older musicians, and thinned out on top. His forehead was high and gave an appearance of intelligence and wisdom. His eyes were deep set and terminated the many small wrinkles at the sides. They were young, as I have said, and sparkled when he played. The nose was long and sloping. The most attractive of all was his long, graceful beard which flowed down in streaks of white, silver and gray. It almost hid the mouth completely and at last it rested gracefully on the chin-rest of my violin. His hands were old and wrinkled and bent, but the fingers were unmistakably those of an artist. They were wonderfully nimble and they danced over the strings, never missing a note and always moving with a masterful vibrato.

The song he played was a little European dance which I did not recognize. It was beautiful, and I wondered then why he was here in this secluded shop. He should be among the immortals of music, for this ancient person was an artist to be envied. I know that to this day I envy the way he played my violin.

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THE FLYER

He wanted to be a criminal lawyer, but war caught him, as it did thousands like him, in the middle of his education. Now he has given up all notions of becoming a lawyer and flying has become his forced profession. Although he will

never admit it, I am inclined to believe that he enjoys flying more than anything he has ever done.

He is tall and built well with broad shoulders, noticeable even though he walks with a little hunch in his back. He is always dressed with military impeccability and the silver of his lieutenant's bars and pilot's wings stands out on his jacket. No ribbons are above his pockets, for he is an instructor, fighting, as he has often said, "The Battle of Missouri," where he is stationed.

His hair is dark and stubby, cut in a sort of semi-even fashion with a small wave in front. The ears are large and stand out just a little, but enough to make them noticeable. I remember that they earned him the nickname "Donk" when he was in school. His nose is long and has a little ridge near the top, a family inheritance plus an accident when he was a child were the causes. The eyes are a light blue and are a bright contrast to the redness running through his cheeks. His mouth is small and holds a perpetual smile. When he laughs, his eye brows rise and his whole expression changes — a very pleasing laugh it is.

Such is the appearance of the flyer, the typical of thousands of American youth, just as the musician and the westerner are typically American. All of them different, yet bound together by the knowledge of a profession, each is an artist in his own field, each a master of his interest.