

May 5, 1954

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# Narcotics Anonymous Formed To Help Addicts Effect Cure

By NAT HENTOFF

New York—I went to a meeting of Narcotics Anonymous the other night. The group has been in existence for the past four years and meets every Tuesday night at the YMCA at 23rd street and Seventh avenue. The Tuesday meeting is semi-public. On Friday nights there are closed meetings for ex-addicts only.

The more than a dozen people around the table were of a wide variety of ages, professions and social backgrounds. A few were there for the first time, among them a mother whose son, a musician, is at Lexington. She wanted to know how she could help him remain off drugs when he came home.

## All Knew Problem

A middle-aged woman, whose medical condition had led her to drugs, wanted to know if someone could help her get off. An attractive girl, an ex-addict herself, was waiting for her husband's return from Lexington. The chairman, an impressively articulate man, had been on drugs for years, but had now been straight for a long time. Some of the ex-addicts present had been in institutions, and some hadn't. But all knew what it took to kick the habit.

I was invited to attend because Narcotics Anonymous is looking for publicity. Not publicity of a sensational kind, and not publicity that will lead to monetary help. Narcotics Anonymous, however, does want the fact that it has been functioning successfully to be known. In that way, addicts who have withdrawn from drugs and want to make sure that they'll stay withdrawn, will know they have a place to go for help.

Narcotics Anonymous is patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous. As their introductory booklet states, "We believe that alcoholism and addiction are basically the same and have found that the AA program can be applied to our problem. However, because there are differences in the two problems (alcoholism and addiction) we have had to modify the AA program to meet our own needs. Just as a member of AA will tell you:

in a group like NA because of their feeling that the members of NA "understand" them. The strongest memory I have of the meeting was this bond that exists between the NA members. They do feel that only someone who has been through the terror and blind craving of addiction can fully comprehend the struggle to break away, and the feeling of mutual ease and trust in the group leads to frank discussions leavened by humor and quick insights.

## De Franco Letter

In one of those discussions the week before, I discovered, one of the subjects had been Buddy De-Franco's letter to *Variety* about narcotics in the music business. At this meeting the chairman repeated what he and the other members felt had been the key points of the letter: "As long as dope addiction is to be dealt with, suppose we take it out of the back alleys and handle it like so many other ills of the present day. Suppose we deal with narcotics-users as sick people, not as, paradoxically enough, herocriminals.

"This is in no way a defense of the addict," Buddy had continued, "But we must of necessity realize that the addict is an apparent weak, sick target for profiteering, who looks constantly for a way out of the real into the obviously unreal world."

And a prime initial advantage of NA is that the ex-addicts know that they are *not* regarded as criminals there, but as human beings. As the chairman of the meeting said, "You don't blame or condemn a sick man. You try to help him get cured." And furthermore, newcomers to the warmth and understanding of the group see living proof in the other members that drugs *can* be kicked. Then, as the weeks and months go by and they themselves begin to help other ex-addicts, their confidence increases in their own ability

is belief in a higher power. Along with that must come a constant self-searching, a "moral inventory" as NA calls it, by which the ex-addict seeks to make amends to all people he has harmed in the past. He also works at keeping constantly aware of his progress and remaining firm against the temptations and irritations that try to lead him back to drugs.

## Not Vague

This all probably sounds rather vague, but in actual day-to-day application, it isn't. With regard to the higher power, as AA members know and as the NA booklet indicates, "any concept of this higher power is acceptable. The membership embraces agnostic, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic. Those labeled as skeptics and agnostics may choose to think of the higher power as being in their inner selves; others will have different conceptions. Whatever form is visualized, they must rely on it, and in their own way, pray to that power for strength."

In addition, the strength that comes from membership in and sharing of problems with the group is extremely important. So is the helping of other ex-addicts. As one man at the meeting said, "When I help someone stay off dope, I'm helped even more, it seems, by the added strength I feel in doing it." And though NA in New York does not yet have an office where someone is always on 24-hour call, members can always get help by calling another member. Sometimes hours have been spent on the phone or in personal talks as an ex-addict works out his immediate problems by talking to someone who understands. And one man in the group has often literally spent days helping make certain that a new member doesn't slip back.

Of course, at base, the struggle is a personal one. A young man in his early twenties said, "At first I had to do it on a 24-hour basis. I didn't look ahead any farther. I just concentrated on keeping free

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## Jazz Composers

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### Need Desire

And the first requirement for joining NA is just that—the desire to rebuild one's life. NA promises no cures, but every member is ready to help any addict who is sincere in his wish to break away from drugs. Each NA meeting opens with the reading of the Twelve Steps of NA. The first step, as all members at the meeting pointed out in discussing their own stories, is the most important and the most difficult.

This is it: "We admitted we were powerless over drugs — that our lives had become unmanageable."

"That was the toughest," said one man in his 20s who had been an addict since he was a teenager. "I thought I could kick anything, and I'd never admitted to myself that I couldn't stop with one shot. But, of course one always led to another, and I was hooked again. Until I came here."

As their booklet says, every NA member must first realize that "They are in the grip of a progressive emotional and physical illness which, unless active treatment such as is afforded by the NA program is undertaken, steadily grows worse, never better."

What is the NA treatment once the addict does finally admit to himself that he can not handle drugs of any kind in any form in any amount? The next step (and here is where the direct patterning after Alcoholics Anonymous' successful program becomes clear)

things are too short and too simple today. I don't think jazz should be a complex idiom. When it becomes complex it loses its identifying qualities. I want to go beyond this restriction."

If Chet's ambition and love for music is any criterion, he'll make it.

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## Jazz Composers Set 2nd Concert

New York — The Museum of Modern Art will be the site of the second Jazz Composers' Workshop Concert at 8 p.m. on May 5. The composer-instrumentalists will include Teo Macero, John LaPorta, Eddie Bert, Ronnie Woellmer, Sam Most, George Barrow, Turk Van Lake, Charlie Mingus, Wally Cirillo, Spaulding Givens, and Eddie Shaughnessy, with Teddy Charles a tentative added starter.

All but Barrow and Shaughnessy will be represented by original compositions. In addition, composer Tom Scott is writing a special work for the concert that is due to be conducted by either Leonard Bernstein or Artie Shaw. Ticket price for the concert remains at \$1.20 to enable as many people as possible to attend. There are also plans for EmArcy, Mercury's new jazz label, to record the proceedings.

## Munch Announces Berkshire's Plans

Boston—Charles Munch has announced plans for the newly enlarged Berkshire Festival to be held at Tanglewood during the six weeks from July 7 to Aug. 15. Participants are members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra plus guest artists and conductors.

There will be 24 concerts in what is regarded as the most extensive music festival anywhere in the world this year. Guest conductors include Pierre Monteux (Jean Morel, and the orchestra's regular assistant conductor, Richard Burgin. Among the soloists are Claudio Arrau, Ruth Posselt, Nicole Henriot, William Primrose, Vera Franciscatti, Zino Franciscatti, Lukas Foss, Seymour Lipkin, and Doriot Anothony.

# 'Narcotics Anonymous' Aids Cures

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for the next 24 hours. Sometimes even for one hour. And by building my will from day to day, I've stayed off dope."

## Others Forming

Other NA groups are beginning to form. This one was started by Danny Carlson, a long time addict who rebuilt his life at 42. Danny allows his name to be used because he is so active in helping not only this group of NA, but others. He went to Washington several months ago to help form a unit there, and there's another in Canada. At Lexington itself there's an organization called AA (Addicts Anonymous).

One member suggested that the best course of mutual aid in the long run would be for members with specific interests in common to branch off and form groups of their own. This has happened in Alcoholics Anonymous, where writers, doctors and other such homogenous units have formed separate circles.

## Musicians, Too

"A musician, for example," said an NA member, "could begin his membership with a general NA group like this and then perhaps from a separate group. Not only is it true that ex-addicts understand each other better than outsiders, but people with the same occupational experiences and problems also understand each other better."

The NA answers all questions from people interested in forming similar chapters in other cities, and any one interested in the problem is always welcomed at the Tuesday meetings in New York. The address for information is Narcotics Anonymous, YMCA, 23rd street and Seventh avenue, New York City.

"What NA did for us," summarized one of the men around the table, "is to provide the answer to the one question that, more than any other, weighs on all people trying to break away from the habit. Where can we go? Where's the door? Who'll understand what we're going through? We found the door here."