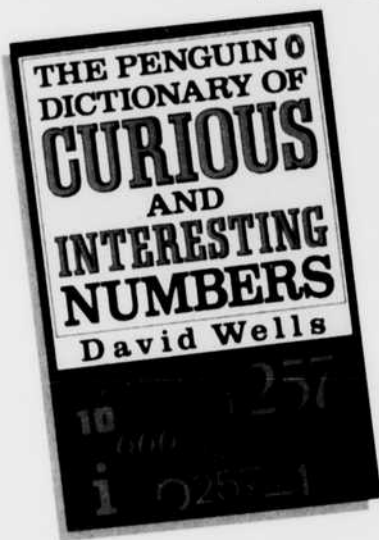


The Things That Really Do Count

Every number is interesting. In fact, practically all numbers are transcendental. Although the British mathematician G. H. Hardy once ventured the opinion that 1,729 seemed "rather dull," he quickly conceded his blunder. Take, for example, 1, the basis of all counting, the etymological root of both "universal" and "unique," immutable to the highest power. Or 2, the sine qua non of duplications and dichotomies. Consider the fearful number 13 and the demoniacal 666. Or turn your attention to Graham's number, recognized by "The Guinness Book of World Records" as the highest number



Prime numbers: Even 'uninteresting' 39

ever used in a mathematical proof. Even with the entire universe for a blackboard, standard notation could not express Graham's number.

In *The Penguin Dictionary of Curious and Interesting Numbers* (229 pages, \$6.95), David Wells offers lots more examples of the superlative, the sublime and the quirky. What if he commits a massive understatement when he says "most irrational numbers are transcendental"? (The transcendentals outnumber *all* others, and by a whole order of infinity, at that.) So what if the word "duel" has nothing to do with its twoness? (It's from the Indo-European for "injure" or "destroy.") The important thing is, no number is humdrum. Not even 39, which Wells calls "an especially interesting number, because it is the smallest number to have the property of being uninteresting." And to think people say 4 is "square." Go figure.

SAM SELBERT



FRANCENE KEERY

Polymorphously diverse: Lurie (center) with *The Lounge Lizards*

MUSIC

Two Ways to Jazz It Up

Lounge Lizards and Michael Brecker make it hot

Like any evolving art form, jazz combines the new and the old. Contemporary performers build on the stylistic polyglot that is the history of the music—from Dixielandish rave-ups to jazz-rock thunderings. Two new records—by the Lounge Lizards and by Michael Brecker—offer, in their amazing dissimilarity, proof that jazz is thriving.

When The Lounge Lizards formed in 1979, critics derided their work as "fake jazz." Since then, however, they've proven to be sincere, if polymorphously diverse. **No Pain for Cakes** (Island), their fifth recording, echoes the trembly romanticism of late '50s Miles Davis and the brassy insincerity of Kurt Weill. The heavily arranged compositions take full advantage of all eight Lizards (sax, reeds, piano, trombone, guitar, bass, drums, percussion) and make some dramatic leaps: "My Clown's on Fire" goes directly from a funky sax solo to a searing cacophony straight out of Ornette Coleman. Despite the preciousness of this NYC "downtown" approach, the music is redeemed by the white-hot alto-sax work of John Lurie (also an actor in the films "Down By Law" and "Stranger Than Paradise"). Lurie is the burning passion within The Lounge Lizards' brittle theatricality.

Michael Brecker, on the other hand, is utterly direct. His self-titled solo debut (MCA/Impulse) comes after 20 years of performing. Tenor-sax man Brecker—with his brother Randy, a trumpeter—has played

in such important jazz-rock groups as Dreams and The Brecker Brothers. As a top studio player, he's recorded with Bruce Springsteen and Billy Joel, among many others, and he also performs with the group Steps Ahead. For someone with such a rockish past, "Michael Brecker" is surprisingly mainstream—but terrifically so. Brecker is a fine composer, and a better soloist. His sax can be overpowering with its deep, muscular tone, but he knows when to let up. One incredible solo on "The Cost of Living" moves from smooth and mellow to harsh and gut wrenching. Brecker gets wonderful support from such jazz heavyweights as guitarist Pat Metheny, bassist Charlie Haden, drummer Jack DeJohnette and pianist Kenny Kirkland. If we're lucky, it won't take another 20 years for Michael Brecker to do a solo album.

RON GIVENS

Overpowering sax: Tenor man Brecker

TIMOTHY WHITE

