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Odds 'n' Ends

Recently I wrote liner notes for a Time-Life two-disc reissue of some of the best of the Sinatra material from the Capitol years, and in the process of researching the history of the songs, I came across some oddments of information you may find interesting or amusing or both.

Learning the Blues was written by Dolores Vicki Silvers, a Philadelphian. The ASCAP dictionary lists only that one song to her name. She was admitted to ASCAP membership in 1955.

When Your Lover Has Gone was written by Einar Swan. Though the ASCAP dictionary credits several other songs to him, that's the only one you've probably ever heard of. Swan was a saxophone player with Vincent Lopez and an arranger. In his day, ASCAP had its exclusionary rule that kept anyone from membership until they had had five successful songs. Swan was admitted to ASCAP in 1956, a year behind Silvers. He made no comment on this honor, having been dead for 16 years. Sinatra first recorded the song during his period at Columbia Records in the mid-1940s, then did it again for Capitol. Swan probably never knew he had written a little classic.

Willow Weep for Me is by Ann Ronnell who also wrote, of all things, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf.* But she had other distinctions. Educated at Radcliffe, she taught music, worked as a vocal coach and rehearsal pianist for Broadway musicals, and was the librettist for two operas commissioned by the Met. And she was the first woman to compose and conduct for films. The underscore to *One Touch of Venus* is hers. Interesting lady.

One of the best pictures in song of New York City is the work of a Russian, Vernon Dukelski, who wrote his pop music under the name Vernon Duke. *Autumn in New York* has a second chorus of lyrics, which contains the line "lovers embrace the dark on benches in Central Park." That'll tell you how long ago it was written.

And *Chicago*, that unofficial anthem of the Windy City, was written by a German. Fred Fisher was born in Cologne and served in the German navy and the French Foreign Legion before writing such bits of Americana as *Daddy You've Been a Mother to Me, Come Josephine in My Flying Machine, Ireland Must Be Heaven, I Don't Want Your Kisses if I Can't Have Your Love, There's a Broken Heart for Every Light on Broadway, Your Feet's Too Big* (which I always thought Fats Waller wrote), *And the Band Played On*, and *Who Paid the Rent for Mrs. Rip Van Winkle.* He also wrote a tune with the notorious title *If the Man in the Moon Were a Coon.* The ASCAP dictionary now lists it as *If the Man in the Moon Were a Loon*, which I suppose we should consider a small advance on the civil rights front.

The Dick Haymes Enigma

by Bobby Scott

For those whose intelligence never got beyond the merely clever, Dick Haymes must have been a complete anomaly. I still run into people who speak of him in terms that tell me they never uncovered even a particle of his humanity.

He was an encumbered man. Sometimes his past, including his marriages, seemed to me to be a giant pull-toy he refused to let go of. There was nothing in a present that I shared for a time with him that he could wrap his fingers around. Dick *had* to pull the weight of that toy.

I loved Dick. And I liked him too. There have been people in my life that I loved but never liked at all. I got over the times that he angered me, and he got over my angers as well. The quality of loving and liking each other was not undermined by the flare-ups. We were touchy individuals. I still am. That failing seems to be siamesed to good taste. People with a solid idea of what should be the end result of an artistic endeavor do indeed take things quite seriously, and so are touchy and easily put off.

And Dick Haymes was a monument to musical good taste. Only on a few occasions did he go for a lower denominator, and those attempts didn't make it. He was a *completed* person early in his career. If he did badly at any time, it was for mechanical reasons alone. His sole intent was to sing beautiful songs beautifully and reflect correctly the strength and genius of the songwriter's design. An excellent writer himself, he knew a great one when he heard it. I mean a *great* song, not a hit song. Hits rarely are examples of first-class writing, and Dick's sense of what that is was unerring.

The best singing he ever did was in the living room of his New York apartment when we rehearsed. The inadequacy he felt on stage was missing. Those were the only times his voice was devoid of the tremble that accompanies great trepidation. I heard the fear, at one point or another, in every show we ever did. The doubt would take charge for a bar or two, and my heart fell in sympathy for him.

He was mountain climbing, always. Even the booking agents watched like the vultures that hang around South American airports, to see if he would crack open even wider under the pressure of selling what was no longer in vogue. Most of the audiences in the smarter places, those where the tariff was higher, were aware of his earlier glory, because they were his own age, more or less. And if they went away something less than delighted, it was because it is asking too much of *anyone* to give you back a pristine past. It wasn't only that Dick had gotten older. So had the songs, and they had lost a degree of pertinence in the new era. And the audience too had grown older, and its members would no longer allow themselves to be drawn into the romantic dream of yesterday. The illusion had been dissipated during the years of World War II. And how could even a man of Dick Haymes' talent bridge such dissimilar eras? He was a dinosaur who had lived through an ice age to emerge in a wide-eyed misunderstanding.

Dick was victimized by too many forces, and by too many people, for me to know where to put the blame for what happened to him. I know little of his halcyon days. I accompanied him as his pianist and wrote arrangements and conducted for him during one of his many "come-backs". His Hollywood years, or so I am told by informed people with no reason to misrepresent him, were a time of power that he mishandled. If I assume, as I fear I must, that he was his own worst enemy, then he did indeed, as the Irish say, "call it to himself."

Alas self-destruction is compelling, even attractively intriguing,

to all too many of us, and Dick had climbed to the pinnacle and then fell in phases. Miraculously, he would grab jutting crags with his fingertips, then fall again, only to take hold once more and steady himself at a still lower level, from which he could look up to where he had once been and feel the heart contract and burst. And he would have to try to remember at what level in his falling he had left what part of himself.

He gave the press and the public all the ammunition they fired at him, by committing every no-no imaginable. He had to shoulder the burden of things he wasn't even responsible for, such as his good looks. It would have been all right if he had been handsome and somehow didn't seem to know it. Then he could have played the game of self-deprecation to endear himself to the people. Unfortunately he was bright enough to know how good-looking he was. And, worse, he had that rich baritone voice that affirmed a bigger-than-life masculinity that is sooner than later found repellent by men who are devoid of it. I remember vividly the impact he had on women in our audiences — and the reactions of their escorts. It created situations of true danger. And I heard remarks made while he was singing, remarks he could hear as well as I, that cauliflowered my ears. Most performers would have insisted on having the offending party expelled from the room. But by that point in Dick's life, the powers that be in the business had already prejudged him to the extent that any "incident" would be attributed to his personality problems. He was cornered, in every respect. Even his own fans somehow held it against him that he wasn't as famous as Frank Sinatra.

He worked hard trying to find the audiences. Too hard. He forced that marvelous baritone voice of his. And he sacrificed its most salient and noble quality, the Haymes ease and warmth of sound production. He had to push his throat, and it did not respond well. And he was put in the position of the tyro performer addressing himself to doing "shows", thinking about "openers" that had "sock", about "pacing the act", about the patter between the songs.

The booking agents, I must say in fairness, tried to get top rooms and top dollar. But this forced Dick to compete on a level that was not musical but show biz. Then, too, his then-wife, Fran Jeffries, was part of the act. She was musical and beautiful, but two chefs generally make a bland soup. At no time, though, was the act "bad". But it wasn't sensational either.

It is evident now that what Dick was shooting for, if indeed he knew what he was after, wouldn't have led him anywhere anyway. He wasn't marketable in the modern sense of the word. He was more an entity of musical history, like Coleman Hawkins or Erroll Garner. He was the personification of a Time, a totally catalyzed expression of a Period.

Ironically, certain avenues have opened up, through the sheer passage of time, that might have assured him some steady work, if at a much lower rate of remuneration. But then, even if he were alive, I think he would have gone on doing battle with the memory of once having lived high. For someone like that, the lesser life is seen as a waiting period, an intermission, until one can resume the elegant life. He was not alone in this. But he handled becoming a dinosaur better than some other singers I know.

Notice

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In music we tolerate a much greater erotic content than in the other arts; this is because born squares don't see it's there.

— Wayland Young

Dick and I were both pre-moderns in a post-1945 modern existence. Television gives credence to the momentary. It is a turn-over world now. The only "performers" who can suffer being over-exposed are those who do little or nothing. The medium itself rules out the genuine talents like Garland and Sinatra. Only psychopaths can sing credibly to a camera.

Dick was as confused as I in the late 1950s and early '60s. Luckily he had a sense of humor and an aloofness, whether real or conjured, that served him well. Dick had many well-dressed wolves at the door, including agents of the Internal Revenue Service, ready to pull the flesh from any fish he might hook. He had debts enough to demoralize anyone, and the combination of factors was reason enough to have a bloody Mary before getting out from beneath the blankets. That is how he began his da during that period.

Once I asked whether certain bills for services and copying were really going to be paid. He laughed at my doubt. "Hell, Bobby," he said, "they'll get paid all right. *I'm* the guy that doesn't get paid in this outfit." And it was quite true. His lawyers saw that everyone got his due. Haymes came later. When he had need to apply himself totally to performing, his mind was on paying bills. When, later on, his situation had improved and he had the time to hone his abilities, no one was interested. It wouldn't have mattered what he was working on, or how good he was. For when certain doors close in the entertainment industry, they close for good.

Dick had a mean streak. And it wasn't helped by his adversities. I've known only a few people with as highly developed a capacity for bitterness. To one of his makeup, loyalty was the ultimate virtue. If someone he trusted let him down, he ground it in his teeth and filed it in memory. The bitterness was bigger than he could afford to carry around. Like unaccepted love, hate has no way to leave its place of origin.

Dick had no more control over himself than most human beings. In addition, he had an *idea* of himself, albeit a fiction but a clearly defined one from his past, that was too easily offended word or a deed and sometimes even by the omission of one. So he had little faith in most people he had to deal with because the mechanism of trust inside him had been found wanting by himself. I must add, though, that once you really had his trust, he never took it back. I enjoyed his company and his friendship. I consider myself lucky to have known him as well as I did. By being at ease with me, he let me travel down the avenues of the world of Dick Haymes. His voice won attention naturally. It had a liquid quality, a fluidness that was as mesmerizing as the murmur of a mountain rill. That wonderful attribute coupled with impeccable enunciation made his 1940s recordings the hallmark of those years. I still hear only his voice singing certain songs, even if someone else is actually performing them — *Little White Lies* and *It Might as Well Be Spring* in particular. Dick put those songs to sleep, so to speak, and I have no need to hear them sung by anyone else, ever again. This is proof of his historical impact. Only Sinatra and Billie Holiday and a very few others have had this ability to put their mark on songs by the singularity of their performance.

Great singers are usually great listeners. They learn every time they hear someone else perform, if nothing more than a reconfirmation of flaws they have learned to avoid. Nat Cole has

provided a serious secondary education in utterance to several generations of singers. They don't imitate him, any more than they imitate a Haymes or a Garland, but they do seek and often find the source of the success. But mutation of a special nature goes on. If it were otherwise, there would be no thread of continuity in the recordings of the past 60 years. And there is indeed a thread. Columbo to Crosby to Como to Dean Martin is an example of it.

The biggest technical hurdle Haymes faced was in reaching a compromise, an agreement, between the rhetorical and the intimacy of what can only be called the conversational. It was the important difference between Dick singing in his living room and Haymes on the stage. In fairness, we should remember that one gets "up" when the bright lights go on and most performers tend to lean then toward a more declamatory delivery. To be able to combine such qualities as speech-making and the whispering of sweet nothings is a synthesizing at an extremely high level. And Dick did that.

Then there was the *weight* of the voice, which differs from one singer to another. A voice that "weighs"more than another moves less easily. That "weight" is what kept Dick from doing up-tempo tunes in a first-class manner. Certain types of material were ruled out for him. The "relief" for this consummate ballad singer lay in doing "bounces" that weren't up-tempo. It came from that middling area of tempi. The trick in arranging for him was to articulate, indeed over-emphasize, the rhythmic pulse by syncopated question-and-answer licks that forced the slower tempo to swing. I succeeded more often than not by making the band peck out syncops.

Dick did not like looking the problem in the face. He felt it beneath him to surrender to this "broadened"program of material. Maybe he was right. If someone wanted to hear up-tempo vehicles, they no doubt went to hear Ella Fitzgerald, not Dick Haymes.

Dick's bargain with the extremes of the spectrum was not as fruitful as, say, the one that Sinatra struck. I think this had to do with the lighter weight of Sinatra's voice. It made it easier for him to move fluidly through a song. And he chooses his moments to be "rhetorical" very carefully, using his exquisite gift for the "conversational" to its utmost. At the end of a Sinatra performance, one is apt to have the feeling that they've been spoken to, rather than sung at. Sinatra gives priority to communicating, and only a secondary role to "singing".

The Great Depression made the population seek a reason for living that was of necessity abstract. "Love costs nothing," someone said. Well, at least it was a cost people could afford. When a human being feels helpless, a condition the flattened economy imposed on millions, there is only one place to turn, inward to the heart. And the 1930s were a time of great endeavors of the heart. Cinderella wasn't a fiction. She lived on your block. Songwriters, particularly lyricists, made the class lines grow faint or erased them. They could evoke all the hopes of the individual. Why else a "Somewhere, over the rainbow . . ."? Love, in the songs and in the voices, was the relief from the dark times. Your heart wasn't in the bank that just collapsed ("Who cares what banks fail in Yonkers, as long as you've got the kiss that conquers?") and it wasn't affected by the devaluation of the currency. Songs like *I've Got the World on a String* showed the heart's triumph over the surrounding adversity. Even today those songs and vocalists are a reminder that love can prevail if allowed to. As an immutable universal, love cannot be chased away. But it can be left unwatered and shrivel to its seed state. Has anyone found out yet *what* was *Blowin' in the Wind*? The writers and singers of the last 20 years touch on the truth only when all the side-winding has failed and their sloganeering sounds shallow to the very ears that called it forth. Callousness has usurped the place of sentiment.

Why am I filled with nostalgia when I hear Haymes sing *Sure Thing* or Sinatra's *This is the Beginning of the End*? Because like a cup of Irish tea, made with lime-filled water, it is something I can put my teeth around. Even Sinatra paid dearly for being an anachronism, as you know if you remember his last recordings for Columbia, when he was coerced into performing duets with Dagmar. Miraculously, he found a market when he resurfaced with Capitol Records. I have always deemed the coming together of Sinatra with Billy May and Nelson Riddle an accident of historical proportion. For, like J.S. Bach synthesizing the baroque period long after it was a vibrant memory, those three men brought the glory of the preceding age to a high well after it was over.

Dick Haymes, unfortunately, hadn't the luck to meet the historical problem head on and win. Not that he can be called a failure for that. Sinatra's later career is a historical exception. In reality, the big loser after World War II was love. And those who expressed that dream, Haymes and Sinatra among them, suffered accordingly. He constantly alluded to his past, and I enjoyed it. I had been nurtured on his records, along with Claude Thornhill's and those of the Ink Spots and others of the period. He would talk of sharing an apartment with Richard Quine, the movie director and producer, when they were young. I got the idea that Dick's intention was to be a songwriter, which his brother Bob did indeed become. He called that time before his singing career his "pleasurable days". In making demos of his songs, he inadvertently opened the road to a career as a singer. I say this only because he implied it.

He talked too of his childhood in Argentina, where he was born. Some of the images were warm, others icy. He spoke of his father, a Scottish mining engineer, in glowing tones and terms, as the perfect model of a gentleman. He described god-like qualities in the man, not as a son would but as a zealous fan.

His mother was another matter. He resented her setting up shop in New York as a vocal coach, advertising that she had taught him. He believed his mother had been unfaithful to his father, and if conversation turned to that sort of thing, he would mention her as an example. He said he was Scottish, from his father, not Argentine, like his mother. But I never found him anything but American, and I believe that is how he saw himself.

He had his own sense of what was genteel behavior. And few people met his standard for it. The nemesis was crassness. His posture, then, was that of a qualified snob. I believed this snobbery to be part of some inner ideal of graceful living and a gentlemanly elegance of action. He therefore could be quite unforgiving of a *faux pas*. Someone with such criteria inevitably would have to hold many people in contempt. And he did. I would see his face screw up as he listened to no more than 15 seconds of the wrong thing said in the wrong terms.

That sort of gazing-down-the-nose requires that you develop a filing-card mind that serves only prejudices, not truths. That he had good reason to fear, I do not doubt. He had been promised the moon and now he was lucky to get bus fare. He could have handled a lot of it better, but he didn't. This was the enigma of the man to me: this holding of failings to his breast simply because they were

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Life is too short to learn German.

Richard Porson (1759-1808)

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his failings. Somewhere in this there was more than a little of being *true to himself.* But at what cost?

He could be small on occasion. I let it go by, because his nature was mercurial, and he would bounce back. I had been laboring under the misconception that big dogs are not hurt by the bites of little dogs. But they are. And people in the music business used the toughest measure of all in judging Dick. They compared him to his earlier self. That's the one nobody can win, a game played with loaded dice.

I will never forget the ominous quiet in Bobby Darin's dressing room toward the end of his life, as compared to the tumult of the earlier years when the payroll was bigger and the bleed-offs drew the hangers-on. And I think of my father, who was a singer and actor, and his attitude to people he would meet on the curb along Broadway. I was a child but I could see that he was play-acting. He was only too gracious to a lot of them. But when we had entered the theater where he was playing, his face would harden and his teeth would be bared. I asked about those "funny" people on the street, and he shot out, "Son, there are thousands of people hanging around these show business district streets and *not one of them* can do a damn thing to help you. But *all of their mouths* can kill you." I was only seven at the time, but to this day I can hear his voice saying that and see the steely look his eyes took on.

He was right. It is among such spectral types that the rumors, the outrageous stories, are milled with malice. Those people are a breed apart from the fan or the businessman. They get their suntans basking in the momentary attention a "star" gives them. God help him if he doesn't allow this.

And Dick didn't. He could not even put on the show that my father did. He had a long-standing reputation for "looking past" such people. Their presence galled him. He thought they were carrion-eaters of the lowest order, waiting for him to fall so they could realize their wish to pick him to pieces. He was highly aware of them, though I would try to tell him they didn't matter, and he could spot them even at a distance, those who paid to sit at expensive tables among them. Sometimes it elicited from him an "I'll show them!" that was sensational. At other times, not that he was aware of it, he hardened. And then the voice became brittle and he could not compel an audience to listen. I used to watch for that tell-tale metallic flatness to take over and I'd know that one of *those* people was at a table where Dick could not miss him.

There are indeed people who get their kicks watching a big man sink. And Dick had made enough enemies — over values — to fill an auditorium. He was also the guy who had everything and let it slip through his fingers — the most likely target for the bad mouth. I wish I had a nickel for everyone who asked me how I got along with such an imperious and self-centered person. I would say, "It's easy," and this would be taken for a kindness. But it was the truth. Dick, more than any other singer I ever worked with, gave his appreciation to creative musical people. He extolled the talent and work of countless gifted people, from accompanists, arrangers and songwriters to other singers and to writers, directors and actors. His taste was impeccable, his perceptions excellent. Dick used people like Johnny Mandel and Cy Coleman when they had not yet acquired reputations and track records.

To performers of doubtful talent, the audience is the critic, the arbiter, the final judge. But what of the total talent who knows he has a gift to bring? Does the whole scene change?Does it take on a tone of the ominous because he has little or nothing to prove to the audience? Is an audience, because it pays its money, entitled to play judge and jury? From their viewpoint they are. Is then Dick Haymes, or a similar unique individual, his own majority of one? Unfortunately, yes. He embodied the unique. The general public, however, didn't affirm that fact. They did the opposite, buoyed by the bad press Dick so often received. By the time I worked with him, he had been "put aside", maneuvered by an invisible hand, into a position where he no longer was able to pretend to a stardom of magnitude — in fact, to a position where he'd never be a threat to anyone's ego again.

My question is not whether Dick made enemies. He did. Too many. And as I've said, he handed his critics the ammunition they fired at him.What I cannot understand is how *historicity* was invoked in the cases of some others and not in Dick's case.

It was for him a time of eating crow and mending fences, to mix a couple of metaphors.He did better than I would have in his position. His smile and his sense of humor amazed me. For the middlemen of music, he was a tit with a bit of milk still left to be

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Beauty is only skin deep. Ugly goes to the bone.
— Source unknown

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extracted. Surely there were people in Peoria who'd like to see Dick Haymes in the flesh. The onus was on him, not on the public or the "business". And though he still was handsome, he was *old.* And there was no help from a record company.

But he tried and tried, fighting defeat and taking pleasure in the simple use of his gifted throat. And I found myself rooting for him to win, wanting to be of the utmost help, though the wall in front of him was of incalculable height. When I first went to work for him, I thought he was weak of character and afraid. Well I was wrong. What he was was *shaky*, and justifiably so. I wasn't aware then of the importance of each job we worked. My chores were easily mastered, but not so Dick's. Every opening had an inflated importance because he was swimming upstream, and the eyes of of the critics and the agents were on him. When we played the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, every performance was clocked by people from "the agency", bent on putting together a Dick Haymes act that could stand up to current show-biz norms. Advice flowed over him like the rivers of time. It was largely wasted on Dick, who was the least adaptable performer I'd yet met. He tried, but what he offered could only sound disingenuous because it was forced and contrary to his natural tendencies. Today, it is for me an exercise in masochism to watch such films as *State Fair* and *One Touch of Venus* and see a Dick Haymes in control of himself, doing what was required of him, because the figure on the screen superimposes itself on my memory of him as an almost broken human being, fighting to get applause from an undeserving audience. My deepest feelings of love for him turn at such moments into a painful muffled scream of "Why?"

Dick could talk about Robert Walker's alcoholism with sympathy and love while letting his own problem with the bottle guide him into one dark alley after another. I never said a thing about his drinking, for one rather obvious reason.It was fast becoming my own refuge. I did not realize at the time how destructive it was to his performance, and, more directly, his central nervous system. I look back now and see the odd way of walking, the spastic movements. I was told much later that he almost had to cancel a tour of Australia because his memory failed on stage: he was unable to remember the lyrics of songs he had sung for 20 years or more.

Dick *knew* he wasn't hitting the mark. And I knew he was gauging what his trepidation was doing to his performances, and

he was looking ahead to a time when the tell-tale tremor would leave his voice. He would have had to dry out completely before he could restore his once marvelous vocal equipment, for the drinking had married itself to his fear. Could he put aside the hooch? Not then — not with all that pressure on him.

But in the last ten years of his life he did put it aside. And I did get to hear him sing on a club date on Long Island. The conditions were less than ideal. The back-up band was so-so, the sound system less than that. Dick was still unable to breathe evenly to resuscitate the young Haymes vocal sound. I kept trying to make excuses for him. Maybe it was his *smoking*. Seeing him sober and still unable to do what he wanted to do sent my mind to questions I wanted to neither ask nor answer. Could it be that you could actually *lose* it?

That he could come out onto that dance floor-cum-stage in a nondescript Long Island nitery to a smattering of patrons and give of himself with genuine goodwill was a testimony to the bravery of the human spirit. I looked at the faces in that audience. They smiled when he mentioned movies he had starred in, and applauded his efforts to recreate long-gone moments with songs from their scores. They hung on each syllable, delighted to see history descend on them. Most of them probably saw the ethereal outlines of the loves of his life, such as Rita Hayworth, standing there with him, along with, perhaps, the ghosts of Tommy Dorsey and Robert Walker. I saw them too, and remembered Dick telling me how Orson Welles had made Hayworth a star by filming her in a closed-to-everybody-not-connected-with-the-production studio, ~~or~~ of the respect he had for Erroll Flynn's abilities as a sailor, or of the joy he derived from the lyrics of Joe McCarthy Jr.'s songs with Cy Coleman. It all came back to me as I saw him trying once more to win the people.

When he finished — to ample applause — I walked to the back of the club to speak to him. He honored me by his pleasure at seeing my face and he hugged me. I sat down in the stark theatrical lighting of the dressing room and took in that handsome carved visage, the crow's feet like ruts in a mountainside, and smiled at seeing that warrior, in whom valor had superceded discretion, still exuding the energy of the distant past, an energy that created an aura around his person. He talked and laughed about the futility of life, and I stared at my friend.

He seemed full of optimism, and I was afraid my face would betray what I felt about his performance. He asked if I was free to go back across the country with him, accompanying him as in the past. I would have gone, too, but I had recently injured my left hand and it was mending in its own good time after surgery.

I wish I had been able to go with him for ~~those~~ eight weeks. I'd have done the job without pay, because I really did love the man and I still wanted to see him win. It would have paid him back a little for what he had inadvertently taught me about *not giving up*.

And for the devastating example he had presented of how life deals out the wrong cards to its most sensitive children.

I never saw him again.

— BS

The Last Comeback

There is a road up a canyon in Malibu that I never pass without thinking about Dick Haymes. All those canyon roads have a tinge of mystery about them. You wonder what's up there, where they go, and assume there must be something, somebody, or the roads wouldn't be there. The Southern California coast isn't as pretty as its propaganda. Topographically, it is the beginning of Mexico and Central America and the land is burned brown, except for a time in the late winter when it greens up after the long relentless rains that cut these canyons in the first place.

I went up that canyon just once, in the spring of 1976, when the tiny pink star flowers are on the jade plants. This is originally desert country, and it has been said that all the flora, even the weeds, are imported, including palms from Florida, the feathery pepper trees from Brazil, the eucalyptus from Australia, the cyprus from the Mediterranean basin, and the various citrus forms from Spain and North Africa. The jade plant, one of the commonest of the naturalized California succulents, is the crassula argentea, and it came here from Argentina. So did Dick Haymes.

He was making the last of his comebacks when I went up into these mountains to meet him. He had returned after ten years in Europe to open in 1975 at the Cocoanut Grove in Hollywood to a house that was packed with his friends. Those who liked him liked him a lot, and one of them prevailed upon me to write something about him for *High Fidelity* to give him a lift, a leg up. I said I'd do it, but I didn't like doing it. It cost me nothing, of course, to give him some space in a magazine. But I disliked the fact that he needed the help. I am not one of those who takes pleasure in seeing the mighty fallen, and Dick Haymes had been a very big star. He was also a very great singer, which is another thing. In my years as a songwriter, I have had innumerable and interminable conversations with singers about songs and other singers, and Dick Haymes' name would be on the most-admired list of probably every one of them.

I would much rather have been approaching him as a supplicant songwriter with some notes and words on a piece of paper that I wanted him to breathe life into, asking for his help instead of offering him mine. A star is someone who was one when you were young; no one ever achieves that status with you after you pass your middle twenties. And Dick Haymes was a star to me. It was some sort of serious perturbation of the cosmic order that I should, at least for the moment, be in a position of greater power than he. That is what bothered me as I drove up that road that spring day; I realize that now. And I knew by some intuition derived from the very way he sang — the dignity of his work — that he was not a man who would be comfortable in the situation of soliciting publicity. Nor have I ever been comfortable in the role of the one from whom it is solicited.

And so I foresaw, I suppose, that we would be terribly wary with each other. And being wary, we would then strive not be wary, but to be natural. And there is nothing more artificial than the attempt to be natural. Ah well. It was not the ideal circumstance in which I would want to meet Dick Haymes, but what the hell, I was there to do a small favor for a man who had given me much pleasure in my life.

I drove up all the convolutions of that long mountain road, watching numbers on mail boxes until I found the one I was looking for. It was a somewhat rustic place, unprepossessing, but with a view to make you gasp. It looked down the wild slopes, hospitable to rattlesnakes, coyotes, deer and the occasional mountain lion, to the Pacific Ocean, burning silver-white in the slanting metallic afternoon sunlight.

And Dick Haymes came out of that house to meet me. He was a tall man, and strikingly attractive. His hair by now was as silver as the sea out there and it had receded a little, but the face was changed remarkably little. Two deep character lines in the cheeks parenthesized a sensitive mouth, but any moviegoer of the 1940s and '50s would have known him instantly. He wore khaki shorts

and sandals, no shirt, and a gold cross hung from his neck on a fine chain. He greeted me and escorted me into the house. If he was faking naturalism, he was doing it well. Neither one of us wanted to make the other uncomfortable. Dick Haymes was a gentleman.

He introduced me to his wife, Wendy Patricia Smith of Windsor, England, whom he had met 11 years before. It was then that he had quit drinking. She offered me coffee, which I accepted, and Dick took a Coca-Cola, and, discreetly, she left us. We sat in the living room, whose walls were almost completely of glass, with their awesome view of the ocean far below. And Dick talked about his life. If he had the capacity for bitterness that Bobby Scott describes, he was concealing it from me very well; but of course, he would, in the circumstances, if he had any brains, and he did.

He did not entirely conceal his bitterness about his mother — which I'd heard about from others — but he muted it. Whether Haymes spoke Spanish, with an Argentinian mother, I do not know but I discovered he spoke fluent French. At one point his mother ran a couture salon in Paris, so he had spent part of his childhood there. And he attended Loyola College in Montreal, out on the west end of Sherbrooke Street, which has since been absorbed into the great complex of colleges known as Concordia University. ("I should have spotted that about him!" Bobby Scott said on the phone. "Sure," I said, "he was trained by the Jesuits.") He also went to school at one point in Switzerland. He was a genuine cosmopolitan.

But that was part of the problem of his childhood, which he was quite frank about. He and his brother Bob were bounced from one private school to another. He didn't say so that afternoon, but I got an impression of two little boys clinging together for warmth as they grew up in a world that was quite uncomfortable, and very lonely.

What Bobby says about his fans not forgiving him for not being as famous as Frank Sinatra is most interesting. Sinatra's career somehow cast a shadow on that of Haymes. Haymes followed Sinatra into the Harry James band when Sinatra left to join Dorsey, and then followed Sinatra into the Dorsey band, and finally followed him out of it to become a "single".

Both of them flew high, then crashed. But Sinatra's comeback was a success, and permanent. That of Dick Haymes was not. Why? The world grew very dangerous after the 1940s. And Sinatra has a quality of the dangerous about him — the explosive, the unpredictable. Miles Davis has that same quality. So has Marlon Brando. This makes them compellingly interesting people, quite aside from considerations of talent. Dick Haymes seemed like the boy next door. He wasn't, of course, not with that complicated and sophisticated international background. But he seemed like it. And that kind of innocence was passe in the rock-and-roll age of loveless sex and of two nations madly threatening to obliterate each other and all life on this earth. Sinatra gave the world the finger and said that he'd done it *My Way*, and the world bought it, because it seemed that you needed that kind of resilience to survive in the surrounding brutality. Haymes went on saying he was going to love you *Come Rain or Come Shine*, and after Joseph McCarthy — the slanderer, not the songwriter — it seemed naive. But oh! he did it well. What a ballad singer.

I have no idea how much Haymes drank in his bad days. He said that it wasn't all that much, but he may have been masking the reality from me. "Fortunately," he said that afternoon, "I never had much tolerance for alcohol. I could get falling-down drunk on four drinks. I was rather fortunate in that, unlike friends I have who can put away a couple of bottles a day. Thus when I stopped, I hadn't done that much physical damage to myself." He certainly looked well.

The reason he went to Europe to live for ten years, quite aside from the fact that that he was very much at home there, was that "I got to the point where I'd loused up my life so much that I thought it was time to leave town. I would not advise people to go away to some distance place to find their heads. But it worked for me. I figured I'd worn out my welcome in the business. And I went away to try to find myself.

"It must have been the right move, because I did, after some more blunders. In 1965, with no problem whatsoever — which is a blessing in itself — I stopped drinking." I noticed that behind him, as he talked, there was a well-stocked bar. He had mentioned that his wife didn't drink either. So the bar must be for friends. At least he had no fear of having the stuff around. "I came to a crossroads that gave me a choice of either winding up on skid row or functioning with the gifts with which I've been endowed. Thank God — and I use the name advisedly — I made the right choice."

In the course of that afternoon I got the impression that Haymes had a mystical religious streak. One reason for his physical condition was that he was a yoga devotee. He said he no longer cared in the least about so-called stardom; he simply liked to sing and act, and at that time he had done a recent television role or two, and more roles were pending. He said he'd come to the conclusion that the key to it is "dedication with detachment," an interesting phrase that puts one in mind of Huxley's statement that art is created in a condition of relaxed tension. And Haymes said he had come to abhor involvement with one's own ego. On the wall of that living room, burned into a sheet of wood, was the inscription "Keep it simple."

"Whatever has happened in my life, either good or bad," he said, "I find myself directly responsible for. What's past is past; it's a different era. And very possibly I am a different man. There is such as thing as rebirth.

"Strangely enough, after I stopped all of this self-destruction, and self-indulgence as well, I reverted for a while to the real young man I used to be. All of a sudden, all of the things I've loved to do all my life, skin-diving, sailing, skiing, tennis, writing, singing, performing, communicating with people, all came back to me in such a crystal clear concept that I really wondered what the hell I'd been trying to prove. In my case — and everyone has to find his own thing — the problem seemed to be some form of inferiority complex."

Yeah, of course: two little boys in boarding schools, clinging together for warmth. Mrs. Haymes, I don't think you were a nice woman.

"You see," Dick said, "I love my audience. They are a reflection of me and I am they. There's a communal meditation, if you wish to call it that. People will sometimes ask me after a performance, 'How can you move me so much?' And the truthful answer is that I am you.

"I firmly believe there is a spark of beauty in everyone, and I try to tap it. I try to find it."

I think by that part of the fading afternoon he had forgotten that this was an interview. Indeed, it had ceased to be. It had become a conversation.

It came time for me to leave. He walked me out to the car. I wished him well, and I meant it. Like Bobby, I wanted him to make it. But his comeback, this time, was ended not by drink or his own follies but by cancer.

I drove very carefully down that winding road until I reached the comparative safety of the Pacific Coast Highway. And I never pass that canyon debouchment without thinking of him.

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