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GI Jo and Paul

Early in Walter Murphy's novel *The Vicar of Christ*, one of the main characters, a Marine Corps sergeant major, is pictured listening on a radio to Jo Stafford's *On Top of Old Smoky* just before a battle of the Korean War.

Stafford's recording of *Blues in the Night* figures in a scene in James Michener's *The Drifters*, and a character in one of the James Hilton novels, talking about what he would select to take to a desert island, includes a Jo Stafford collection in his list.

That scene in *The Vicar of Christ* somehow sets Stafford's place in the American culture. You're getting pretty famous when your name turns up in crossword puzzles; you are woven into a nation's history when you turn up in its fiction. And Stafford's voice was part of two American wars. What Kay Armen and Vera Lynn were to the British in World War II, Stafford was to the Americans, and the effect lingered on into the 1950s and Korea. Why she became such a favorite of Americans scattered around the planet in those wars has gone unexplained, and perhaps the question of her popularity has never been examined, as was that of Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, and the Beatles.

Possibly it was her way of letting a song happen rather than shoving it at you soaked in personal style. There was nothing sexually aggressive about Stafford, she did not seem to challenge anyone to conquer her. She was a very pretty girl, as seen in pictures that were hung up in the barracks of soldiers and over the swaying bunks of sailors, but she seemed more like, well, the girl next door than like the sweatered catch-me-if-you-can girls such as Rita Hayworth, kneeling on a bed, bosom bulging in a satin nightgown in that famous *Life* magazine photo. To me, listening to Jo Stafford from a vast distance in my high-school years, she seemed like the wise older sister, singing a piece of advice, "A heart that's true — there are such things." And now that I know her, she still does. There is also a deeply maternal quality about her; sometimes when I telephone to speak to her husband, Paul Weston, I halfway feel I should be saying, "Can Paul come out to play?"

She came across, in those war years, as someone who did not give a fig for stardom, did not want to stand above the crowd, did not consider herself better than anyone else. "Not caring what you own, but just what you are . . ." And that impression, as it happens, was exactly correct. That is what she's like, this decent, enormously intelligent, and staunchly egalitarian lady.

She was often voted "GI Jo" by companies or squadrons. The term by now perhaps requires explanation. Uniforms, rations, and other things issued to American soldiers in World War II were marked GI for "government issue;" and soldiers themselves became known as GIs, or GI Joes.

At a military hospital in Europe, one of Stafford's recordings was, by vote of the patients, played every night at lights out. Once in New York, two young fliers, just back from Europe, told her that they'd almost been court-martialed because of her. Returning from a mission over Germany, they had, against regulations, been listening to Armed Forces Radio. They'd disrupted the flight pattern over their home field rather than change bands (to get their landing orders) during one of her songs.

The favorite of all her records among servicemen, she believes, was *I'll Be Seeing You.*

Jo Stafford slipped almost unnoticed into the American consciousness as the lead singer with a Tommy Dorsey vocal group called The Piped Pipers. That's what she liked doing, group singing, and she became a star half by accident because of a song called *Little Man with a Candy Cigar.* She went to Dorsey and said, "Tommy, this is the first time I've ever done this, and it'll probably be the last, but I want a favor of you. I want to do the record of *Little Man with the Candy Cigar* solo." He said, "You got it." From then on he assigned her a lot of solos. For the rest of the 1940s and well into the 1950s she was part of the fabric of American life, as she is now part of its memories. A retired Army general, well advanced in years, wrote her that he was so disgusted with the state of the world that he wanted to retreat to a farm with his Jo Stafford records and just forget it.

Like all of us, Jo has aged, but she hasn't really changed that much and time after time people recognize her in supermarkets or gas stations and tell her how much this record of hers or that one meant to them during the war years. She still receives mail from old soldiers and fliers and sailors who were consoled by her voice during that ordeal now more than forty years in the past, and remains touched by them, and answers them.

"Yes, it means something to me, those letters," she said. "I'm a very patriotic lady, and in those years I felt very deeply about those kids. I used to see a lot of them at the Paramount Theater, because New York City was their embarkation point, and they'd be on their way, and my dressing room used to be full of them all the time. I couldn't turn them away."

"Your patriotism, however," I said, "is anything but the uncritical kind — the love-it-or-leave-it stuff."

"Oh absolutely not, that's like saying if you love somebody very deeply, you never criticize them." She looked at Paul, with a strange mixture of affectionate smile and gritted teeth and said, "That isn't true, is it?" And Paul laughed, probably at something that had happened that day.

She never did want stardom and eventually gave it up, not with a formal public announcement of retirement but gradually and quietly, first by withdrawing from public performing and later by ceasing to record. She concentrated on raising her two children, who have replicated their parents in that guitarist and former Diana Ross sideman Tim Weston is a composer who heads a successful and musical recording group called Wishful Thinking (on the Pausa label), and Amy, married to saxophonist Bryan Cumming, is an excellent singer, the lead on a vocal trio whose other members are Vicki McClure and Didi Belson. (Belson is Louis Belson's and Pearl Bailey's daughter.)

Stafford's marriage to Paul Weston has been settled, steady, and warm. Product of a profession whose practitioners are noted for psychological instability, she is sane, steadfast, and as far as I can see, very calm.

One day in 1947, when she was at the height of her stardom, Jo passed Country Washburn, chit-chatting with some of his cronies, in a corridor at Capitol Records. "There's the girl who can do it," she heard him say. That's a line to catch your attention, and she asked what it was that she could do. Washburn explained that he was planning a satiric recording of *Temptation*, as it might be done by a hillbilly singer — the term in use in those days. The girl he had scheduled for the session had, for one reason or another, fallen out, and he thought Jo could do it. So Jo made the record under the pseudonym Cinderella Stump. The song in its hilarious new incarnation was called *Timtayshun*. It was an immediate and enormous hit. The entire record industry, and its press, was speculating over who Cinderella really was. Not even Jo's manager knew. When at last he found out, he was furious. He asked her what kind of deal she had made for herself. She told him there was no deal; she had made the record for fun, and for scale, and was receiving no royalty at all.

What made the record only the funnier, and this is true of her second and later alter ego, the astonishingly incompetent society singer Darlene Edwards, was the sheer accuracy of it, the authenticity of the style. You cannot satirize what you do not know, and Jo knew whereof she was singing.

Her mother was Anna York Stafford, a distant cousin of Sergeant Alvin York, the farm-boy sharpshooter decorated in World War I. Anna York was born in Gainesboro, Tennessee, where she was noted as a virtuosic player of the five-string banjo. She married Grover Cleveland Stafford, who moved west in the hope of making a fortune in the California oil fields. He never did, but he always worked, first as a roughneck, then as a driller, finally as a foreman. Life for the Staffords was sometimes hard during the years of the Great Depression, and they lived from paycheck to paycheck. Jo was born the third of four girls on a tract of land known as Lease 35 at Coalinga, California, a small town that lies between highway 101 and Interstate 5 in a limbo about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The land thereabouts is dry, and Coalinga's chief claims to fame are Jo Stafford and a bad 1983 earthquake.

Hard at times or not, the Staffords' life was full of music. "When I was in high school," she said, "I had five years of classical voice training — all the breathing exercises, lying on my back, bouncing books on my diaphragm, doing scales. I had eyes to be an opera singer. I was always in the glee club in high school, and I thought to be an opera singer would be a good thing. But it takes more than five years to become an opera singer, and when I got out of high school, I had to go to work." The training helped make her a sight-reading shark and contributed to her accurate intonation. Her ear is so precise that she makes her fictional Darlene Edwards sing sharp or flat to ear-grating effect. It is hard to sing out of tune on purpose, only too easy to do it unintentionally, but Jo can do it effortlessly at will.

Years ago she told me that the trick to that kind of accurate vocal intonation is to think the tone just before you make it.

"I can't tell you physically how you do it," she says. "It's a mental thing. You know the song, you know the note you're going for. And a split second before you sing it, you hear it in your mind. And it gives you a real edge on hitting that note right."

Yes, but that doesn't fully explain it. The phenomenon of pitch in the voice is a mysterious one anyway, since the vocal cords contain no sensory nerves, which is why laryngitis is painless.

"Do you think that discipline grew out of your group-singing experience?" I asked her. "When you have to sing lead, you're responsible for the pitch of everybody."

"Yeah," she said, "you're responsible for the shape of the whole chord, as a matter of fact. You change everything . . . How can I explain this? I did a multiple recording of Christmas songs. I had done multiple recording years back on *The Hawaiian War Chant*. I did the lead first and then filled in the three parts underneath. When I heard the results, I said, 'I will never do that again.' So when I made this Christmas album, I put all the parts, starting with the bottom one, in first, and sometimes there were as many as eight tracks. I put the lead on last. Then I could control the way that sound was.

"In different chords, Paul made me realize, although I'd always done it, you do not sing A-flat the same as G-sharp. When you're sitting on top of the chords, you sing the lead differently on each one. I think it has a lot to do with overtones.

"I have a theory that when you sing absolutely straight tone without vibrato, you lose overtones. So if you aren't dead center of the pitch when you take the vibrato out, it's going to sound awful."

But it takes great security and control to do what she did, since it involves, at least in legato passages, thinking one tone while you are still producing the one that precedes it. Paul said to her only recently, "I still don't know how you do that." She does it, though, which is why she is admired by such superb vocal technicians as Bonnie Herman, the lead voice of The Singers Unlimited. Since Jo had long been one of her idols, in part because of her lead work with the Pied Pipers, Bonnie was surprised some years ago to get a fan letter from her. They have been friends ever since. Jo says she doesn't have absolute pitch. "But I have pretty good relative pitch," she said. Pretty good?

Jo joined her older sisters, Pauline and Christine, who were already in the music business, to form a vocal trio. It was an age of sister groups, producing the Boswell Sisters, the Andrews Sisters, DeMarco, Clark, Dinning, and Clooney Sisters, and more; Jo considers the best of them were the King Sisters. Girl vocal groups, she said, normally have a high light texture because of the range of the female voice, but Alyce King was able to sing quite low, which gave body to their sound. "Alyce had a B-flat down on the bottom," Paul said.

The Stafford Sisters had their own radio show on Los Angeles radio station KHJ. They performed as well on *David Broeckman's California Melodies* and, for five nights a week, on *The Crockett Family of Kentucky* shows. "The Crocketts," she said, "were a real, authentic, country group — not Nashville country, but country country. Folk. They were awfully good, good musicians. We had a couple of arrangements, my sisters and I did, that were satires on country folk singing." All three Stafford girls did studio work as well, and the late Hugo Friedhofer affectionately remembered them running from one movie studio to another on their appointed rounds.

Jo remembers that when she was singing back-up for Alice Faye in films, the latter would, at the end of a day, deliberately fluff a take, to force the job into overtime so that the girls could earn a little extra money. Alice Faye and Jo are still friends.

The Stafford Sisters replaced Jo with another girl when Jo joined an eight-voice group called The Pied Pipers. And it was at this point that she met Axel Stordahl and Paul Weston.

He was born Paul Wetstein in Springfield, Massachusetts, of a German Catholic father and an Irish Catholic mother. "He is Irish in everything except music," Jo remarked once. "When it

comes to music, he is German." Meaning, one presumes, precise, thorough, and disciplined. His writing is characterized by spare, clean voice-leading, and it is highly individual.

Paul grew up in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. His father was a teacher in a girls' private school. The school had a phonograph, which he was allowed to take home at the Christmas break. Though it was a big and bulky machine, he brought it to the house on skis. And he brought records, the kind that were blank on one side. One of them was *Whispering Hope*, sung by Alma Gluck and Louise Homer.

After high school, Paul went on to study economics at Dartmouth.

Paul claims he learned just enough economics to pass the exams, but this seems unlikely in view of the fact that he was graduated cum laude and Phi Betta Kappa. That was in 1933. Like so many young intellectuals of the time, he was in love with the young music called jazz. He had led a band at Dartmouth and, in 1934, while he was doing graduate studies at Columbia University in New York, he sold some arrangements to the Joe Haymes orchestra, which the late Rudy Vallee, then the nation's heartthrob, heard on a radio broadcast. Vallee commissioned him to write some charts for him. Paul's father was dismayed at the thought that his son might desert economics for music. But in those Depression years, Paul points out, nobody much was looking for young economists, and circumstance colluded with desire to make him a professional musician. His father relented when Paul sent home for deposit a check bearing Vallee's signature, which caused a considerable dither at the local bank. Paul continued to write for Vallee and Haymes and for drummer Phil Harris and his orchestra. (Harris would later marry Jo's friend Alice Faye.)

Notice

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In the fall of 1935, the battling Dorsey brothers, who could never agree on anything, including tempos and the way a rhythm section was supposed to sound, broke up their band. Tommy took over the Haymes band and offered Paul a job as staff arranger. He took it and wrote for Dorsey for five years. It was a brilliant arranging staff, including as it did Sy Oliver and Axel Stordahl. The charts on *Stardust, Night and Day*, and *Who*, among others, are Paul's.

One of his closest friends was Stordahl, whose real name was Odd Stordahl. It doesn't sound odd to a Swede, but it does to an American ear, and he changed it to something almost as odd, namely Axel. The signature on the record-date contracts for Frank Sinatra's first Bluebird sides, including *Night and Day*, reads Odd Stordahl. Paul calls him Ax, and there is always affection in his voice when he says it, so long after Stordahl died of a heart attack.

In 1938, Paul, Stordahl, Dorsey's featured singer Jack Leonard, and Herb Sanford, the B.B.D. and O. advertising executive who produced the Raleigh Kool network radio show on which the Tommy Dorsey band was playing, rented a house in Los Angeles. It was at this time that they first encountered the Pied Pipers. "Paul was going with Alyce King of the King Sisters, Ax was going with Yvonne King," Jo said. "The Kings knew about the Pipers. They'd heard us. They told Paul and Ax, 'You really ought to hear this group.' So one afternoon we went over to Paul and Ax's house and had a sort of singers' jam session."

"Half the group singers in town were invited," Paul said. "Like the Music Maids from the Bing Crosby show, and the Kings. The Pied Pipers came in the front door, and they went right to the refrigerator and ate up everything in the house."

"We were very poor," Jo said almost plaintively.

"Even the ketchup. Ax and I never got over that. The ketchup was all gone, everything that was in the refrigerator."

"I don't remember that ketchup," Jo said, laughing.

"Then they started singing. They had Jo and three guys and four other guys, and they worked in sections. Like, they'd have a sax section versus the brass section, then the two sections would be together, and four of them would sing unison here against four parts. We'd never heard anything like

"At this point Herb Sanford came home and heard them and went crazy. He went to Tommy and said, 'We've got to have them on the Raleigh Kool program.' And Tommy saw a chance to get the Pipers on the program without his having to pay anything, since Herb was pushing them. The band went back to New York, and the Pipers got in their cars and drove to New York. On the basis of doing one radio show!"

"You have to be awfully young to do that," Jo said.

"The sponsor," Paul said, "was in England. Each week the agency mailed a recording of the programs to the sponsor. One of those great big glass discs. But as they took it to the post office, they broke it, so that it got to England in pieces, so this old Sir Hubert or whatever his name was didn't know what the hell was going on. He knew he had Tommy Dorsey and he knew he had big ratings. Unfortunately for the Pipers, he came to America. He was sitting up in the booth, at NBC. Now their arrangements were pretty crazy anyway, but they were singing 'Hold Tight, Hold Tight, foodly racky-sacky, want some sea food, Mama.' And this Englishman jumped and clawed at the glass and said, 'Get them off my show, get them off!' So they were fired. They stayed in New York for a few months."

"We stayed until we had just enough money left for our train tickets home to Los Angles," Jo said. "I had gone down and picked up my last unemployment check. It was pretty panic city. And I got home and there was a message to call an operator in Chicago. I didn't know anybody in Chicago, but it was a collect call, and I had nothing to lose. I returned the call and it was Tommy. He said, 'I can't afford a group of eight, but if you have a quartet, I'd sure like to have you join the band.' Dick Whittinghill had left the group by then, and we actually were down to four. So that was it. We went with Tommy."

Tommy Dorsey was noted for being a martinet, a volatile Irish miner's son who couldn't even get along with his own brother, the affable and widely-liked Jimmy. Benny Goodman had a similar reputation for tyranny, but Dorsey, unlike Goodman, is often remembered by those who worked for him with a strange grudging affection. There is another difference. Goodman demoralized musicians. Dorsey somehow inspired them, and the Dorsey band in the years Jo was with it had an *esprit de corps* unlike any other, a collective vanity that made them think they could carve any other band. By and large they were right. It was a superb band whose recorded output doesn't

seem to date. It executed excellent hot charts by Sy Oliver with burning zeal, particularly when Buddy Rich was booting it, and played ballads probably better than any other band of the period, as often as not built around its leader's mellifluous solo trombone. It was a band with an extremely broad emotional range

And Dorsey was able to hold together some deeply disparate and brilliant temperaments, including — not long after Jo joined the band — Frank Sinatra and Buddy Rich, who were perpetually at each other's throats. How they have remained friends is a mystery. What is more, they even roomed together. Sinatra has said that he himself is amazed that they both came through the experience alive. Legend has it that Sinatra once threw a cut-glass pitcher of water at Buddy backstage at the Paramount in New York. I once asked Jo if it was true. "Sure," she said. "I was writing a letter to my mother at the time, and the water splashed all over it."

Lee Castaldo, who later changed his name to Lee Castle, grew up with the Dorsey brothers, and indeed was taught to play trumpet by their father. Lee said Tommy was the kind of man who knew the diagram of every water pipe and electric line in his house, and who always knew — or wanted to know — everything that went on in his band. In another famous incident, Buddy Rich blew up in the middle of a performance at the Paramount, quit the band and walked off the stage. Buddy headed for Florida, where his mother and father were living. A day or so later, Lee got a phone call from him, asking Lee to send him his drums.

Dorsey, as Lee discovered, had anticipated the call and had paid the hotel's telephone operators to tip him off when it came. A few minutes later Lee got a call from Dorsey, inviting him to come to his room for breakfast. Lee thought this distinctly strange, but he accepted the invitation, and wondered all through the pleasant matinal chit-hat what it was all about. As they finished their coffee, Dorsey suddenly snarled, "That son-of-a-bitch Buddy Rich called you to send him his drums, didn't he? Well, you're not going to do it!"

But Buddy got his drums, and in due course he and Dorsey were reconciled.

Paul and Jo both got along with Dorsey. Paul said, "I only ever had one argument with him. It was someplace like Louisville, Kentucky. He was rehearsing one of my arrangements, and he did something that he hardly ever did. He started to make some changes. Axel and I weren't used to that. And Tommy was very good about this. I haven't thought about this for 30 years. He was making the changes, and I was throwing a pencil up in the air and catching it. And the brass, the evil ones, started to laugh. So Tommy knew something was going on behind him. All of a sudden he turned around and caught me and he fired me. So I was out of the band for about three hours. A lot of people got fired from that band for a few hours."

Jo said, "One night in Texas, half of the band got fired. Tommy was in one of his drinking phases. And he was pretty well smashed. And he had almost a concert arrangement on *Sleepy Lagoon*. There's a part where he has to go up to a real high note. And this note just splashed all over the stage. So he stopped the band."

"This was in front of an audience?" I asked.

"Sure. We were playing a dance. It was such a horrendous mistake. He said, 'Stop. Take it from letter C.' So he tried. And again, splash! all over the stage. He stopped the band about three times. On the fourth time it started getting to the players. And they start giggling. The whole saxophone section started. And then it's like the measles, it spreads. Tommy turned and he said, 'You're fired, and you're fired, and you're fired.' He fired about half the band. And they all got up and picked up their horns and left. I can still see it. Freddy Stultz walked by the Pipers and said to us, 'See you later.' We played the rest of the night with about half a band."

She laughed, and Paul joined her. They reminisce about the business without regret, finding the laughter in life.

Paul said to me, "Did you ever hear the story about Jimmy Dorsey starting over again on a tune? It was up in Milwaukee. And there was an early morning show, and Jimmy'd had a few the night before. One of his big numbers was *Flight of the Bumble Bee*, which is not too good at 10:30 in the morning with

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I believe music . . . together with many other vanities is meet for women, and peradventure for some also that have the likeness of men; but not for them that be men indeed, who ought not with such delicacies to womanise their minds.

— Baldassare Castiglione,
The Book of the Courtier, 1528

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a hangover. So he starts. And it fell apart. So he said angrily, 'Take it from the top.' And he counts it off — probably a little faster, just to show them.

"And some guy in the audience yells, 'Why don't you play it right?"

"And Jimmy yells, 'Why don't you go and fuck yourself?'

"The theater manager came out and took Jimmy by the elbow and led him off."

He chuckled some more at memories of the Dorseys, then said, "When Jo came with Tommy, I was just leaving the band. Dinah Shore had asked me to be her arranger and musical director, and I also had a chance to do an album with Lee Wiley." (N.B. George Buck has just reissued this album on his Audiophile label. Listed as AP-1, it can be obtained by writing to him at 3008 Wadsworth Mill Place, Atlanta GA 30032.) "I wanted to branch out. Tommy said, 'Okay,' but then he got thinking about it, and he thought, 'I'll bet he's goin' with Glenn Miller.' And he made a speech one night at rehearsal about it.' But I wasn't going with Miller. I guess," he said, turning to Jo, "I wrote one arrangement that you guys sang."

"Yeah," Jo said. "It was a Mercer song. *I Thought About You*."

Paul settled in Los Angeles in the summer of 1940 to write for Shore, the Bob Crosby band, and for movies. He worked at Paramount Pictures with Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, and Betty Hutton. It was at Paramount that he met Johnny Mercer, who was about to form Capitol Records with fellow songwriter Buddy de Sylva — then president of Paramount — and Glenn Wallichs.

The conventional wisdom held that no neophyte record company could hope to buck the big three, Columbia, RCA, Victor and Decca. But Capitol was to prove, in its early years, the most creative and innovative of all the large record companies, one of which it rapidly became, spreading its influence in American music to an extent that is beyond estimate. Without it, we might never have had the Stan Kenton band, all the recordings of Nat Cole, the consequent dissemination of Cole's influence as a pianist on Oscar Peterson

and Bill Evans and all those whose work flows from them, the brilliant recordings of Peggy Lee, those of Andy Russell and Margaret Whiting, the second career of Frank Sinatra, Stafford's own after-Dorsey career, and so much more. While it is fashionable to denigrate Kenton, you hear everywhere, including in film scores, the kind of blazing brass writing that he and Pete Rugulo brought into American music. Mercer made Weston Capitol's musical director, and he was responsible for much of what went on in that company.

He carried on this executive position, producing such things as the early King Cole Trio albums, while turning out an incredible amount of writing for Mercer, Stafford, Betty Hutton, Maggie Whiting, and, later, Gordon MacRae and Dean Martin. In 1943, he went to work on *The Johnny Mercer Music Shop* network radio show. He also began to record a series of instrumental albums, the first of which was *Music for Dreaming*.

In the late 1950s, when stereophonic records were first released to the public, those albums were re-recorded. They are remarkably good stereo, even today, and Weston's writing remains as fresh as it was at the time. The format was that of the dance band augmented with strings, with one exception, a charming album called *Carefree* in which he used four fluegelhorns, four trombones, and four French horns, no strings and no saxes. A dance band can drown a full string section. In recording, one has two options with such an instrumentation: you can crank up the strings electronically or you can tone down the brass and saxes to achieve a natural acoustical balance. Paul did the latter, and the writing had a soft classical purity, almost a Mozart quality. Sometimes he would use four clarinets in harmony, as the Dorsey band often did in its ballads, and the Isham Jones band before it. It is a sound that is often heard in concert bands, and it is a particularly warm one, now almost vanished from popular music.

The albums had a gentle and tender quality about them, the strings forming cushions for such fine jazz soloists as Babe Russin, Eddie Miller, Barney Kessel, and the late Don Fagerquist. And they perfectly embody Paul's temperament, which is sunny, sensible, warm, generous, fair, and very humorous.

Johnny Mercer had told Jo back in her Dorsey days, "Some day I'm going to have my own record company, and you're going to record for me." He was as good as his word. He signed her to the label within a year of its founding, and she began to record a string of hits, one of which came from a suggestion of Paul's: "When Jo and Gordon MacRae were going to do some duets, I remembered that record of *Whispering Hope* that my father brought home. And they recorded it. We never found a disc jockey that played it, we never found anybody that bought it. And in the Bible belt it sold well over a million copies. And it's still selling."

Music people are very unreasonable. They always want one to be perfectly dumb at the very moment when one is longing to be absolutely deaf.

— Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband* Act II, 1895

When in 1950 Paul went from Capitol to Columbia, Jo went with him. Paul wrote the charts on an incredible 500 or more of her recordings, not to mention sessions for Rosemary Clooney, Doris Day, and Frankie Laine. At Columbia, her hits included ***You Belong to Me, Make Love to Me, Jambalaya***, and ***Shrimp Boats***, which Paul wrote. Whatever the cause of their affinity, in 1952 Jo became a Catholic convert and they were married. They had known each other twelve years, ever since she and the Pipers pillaged his refrigerator, so they hardly married in haste.

At this point we have to consider two more biographies, those of that inextinguishable duo Jonathan and Darlene Edwards.

Musical jokes are probably as old as the art itself, and fictional musicians with which to make them have been around for a long time. Peter Schickele's P.D.Q. Bach is a particular favorite of musicians. So are Jonathan Edwards, the incomparably incompetent cocktail pianist who insists that what he plays is jazz, and his off-pitch but earnest wife Darlene.

The Edwardses came into being at a Columbia Records sales convention at Key West, Florida. Paul and Jo, along with George Avakian and the late Irving Townsend of Columbia's a&r staff, were having a late dinner in a restaurant where they had to endure one of those wrong-chord pianists who somehow find work for tin-eared restaurateurs and bar owners all over the planet. The pianist left for the night, and Paul, who gets more than usually funny after about two drinks, went to the piano and began to play *Stardust* in excruciating imitation of him. Avakian and Townsend fell out, as the old expression had it, and, laughing helplessly, insisted that an album should be made in that style. Avakian came up with the name Jonathan Edwards, after the famous preacher of the Colonial period, because, he said, it had a "properly ossified ring" to it.

On the way back to California, Paul had some second thoughts. He wasn't sure he could sustain the gag for an entire album. He pressed Jo into service as Darlene, Jonathan's wife. They went into the studio to make *The Original Piano Artistry of Jonathan Edwards*. The drummer on that first date was Jack Sperling. Paul had to fire him because he couldn't stop laughing. Every time they would try a take, Sperling would drop his drumsticks, collapse with face in his folded arms across his snare drum, and laugh until he cried.

The album was a best-seller shortly after its release in 1957, and the dreadful duo sustained their curious brand of artistry — bars with beats missing or added, wrong chords to befog the mind, incompleted and meandering runs and what Jo calls "crumbling thirds", and Darlene's eerily inaccurate intonation — through *Jonathan and Darlene Edwards in Paris, Songs for Sheiks and Flappers, Sing Along with Jonathan and Darlene Edwards*, and the comparatively recent *Darlene Remembers Duke, Jonathan Plays Fats*. (Ellington's *Don't Get Around Much Any More* starts on the third; Darlene starts it on the tonic and lets it fall from there.) Leaping into the contemporary market, they did a single on *Stayin' Alive* and *Copacabana*.

It is a dubious distinction to have a song in one of their albums, for Darlene has a bizarre taste in lyrics. You do not realize how dreadful the words to *You're Blasé* really are until you hear Darlene do them. ("You're deep, just like a chasm, you've no enthusiasm . . .") The same is true of *Cocktails for Two* and, alas, Ellington's gorgeous *Sophisticated Lady*, which deserved better than "smoking, drinking, never thinking of tomorrow, nonchalant . . ." and "when nobody is nigh . . ."

The recordings have had some curious effects. Paul was playing golf with the head of a large corporation, who mentioned that on a trip to New York he had picked up an album called *Jonathan and Darlene Edwards in Paris*. He

asked Paul if he'd heard it, and Paul, thinking this was a joke, allowed that he had. The man said, "He's pretty good, but I don't think she's all that hot." And Paul realized the man was not joking.

In 1961 — after several years of doing television in America — the Westons moved for a summer to London, where they did a series of television shows for the ATV British network. The shows were seen throughout the British commonwealth, and their faces became as familiar in England as they were in America. One night they went to a small restaurant near their home in Hampstead. The cocktail pianist smiled as they entered and immediately went into an imitation of Jonathan Edwards, which Paul and Jo thought was a charming and amusing tribute. They smiled and nodded appreciatively to the pianist. The pianist went into his next tune, in the same style. When he used a chord that possibly not even Jonathan could have come up with, Paul realized the man actually played that way. Paul had a mouthful of red wine at the time. It got sprayed all over Jo's white dress.

The fans of Jonathan and Darlene, particularly within the music business, are legion. Leonard Feather said that Darlene was the only singer to get off the A train between A and B-Flat. When the first album came out, he gave it 48 stars in *Down Beat*.

One of the devotees of Jonathan and Darlene is George Shearing. If he knows Jo and Paul are in an audience, he will immediately play *Autumn in New York* in Jonathan's style, to the undoubted bemusement of members of the audience who are not in on the joke. Still another fan is actor Art Carney, who wrote Jonathan and Darlene a fan letter — in the personna of Ed Norton.

Once you get into the lunacy of Jonathan and Darlene with the Westons, they become curiously real. Paul and Jo talk about them as if they were, and you can see that Jo has a certain strange affection for Darlene. "She's a nice lady from Trenton, New Jersey, and she does her best," Jo said. *Los Angeles* magazine sent a writer to their home to interview Jonathan and Darlene, who supposedly live with the Westons, permanent sponges in their household. Paul and Jo slipped into the roles, and, as Jonathan and Darlene, complained about food and the fact that the Westons made them go into the bedroom when famous people came to the house.

Jo said, "It was crazy time. Because when he asked a question, the interviewer wasn't asking me, he was asking Darlene."

"Once we got into it," Paul said, "it was easy. Jonathan was saying that he played a much better stride piano than Fats, and Darlene came up with things off the top of her head. She said, 'Well, actually, a five-four bar gives you an extra stride.'"

Jonathan told the interviewer, "We do things that other people have thought of and foolishly abandoned."

"The thing about Jo," Paul said, "is her versatility. She accomplished more in more different directions than any singer I know. When you think that *Whispering Hope* was a religious seller in '46 or '47 — one of the first religious songs that a pop singer had ever done.

"And then there's *Jo + Jazz*. She's not a jazz singer, but she did a good jazz album. She was the first pop singer to do American folk songs with an orchestra. And that was in 1946. She could do show songs, she could handle a rhythm song and a ballad and whatever. I sound like an agent or something. But I think people sometimes don't realize how wide her scope was, in all kinds of American music."

The one negative in her career was that some critics said her singing was cold.

"That used to be the party line," she said. "I never made it with the critics. I think what the critics didn't like was that it was simply singing. There wasn't much . . ."

"There was a disgusting normality about it," Paul said.

"Maybe. I don't know. I think maybe a lot of 'em resented that too. I'm basically a pretty dull person. I was never on smokin' anything or drinkin' anything."

"Well," I said, "a lot of critics in America, I think for reasons of puritanism, love somebody to be a total screw-up. Bill Evans might not have been so praised if he hadn't been a junky. But he was strung out, and so they could feel sorry for him, and therefore praise him from on high. Not all of them, of course, but enough."

"They do," Jo said, "sort of lean toward people who have problems."

"They tend to like the flawed," I said. "They like the winged birds."

"When you're struggling, they love you," Paul said.

"When *Little Man with a Candy Cigar* first came out," Jo said, "the critics couldn't say enough wonderful things, they were absolutely thrilled, it was marvelous. And so because of that, I thought that's the way it was going to be. But from then on, kids, forget it."

"Well, particularly when she got radio shows and hit records," Paul said. "Then it was: She's cold." Paul is always protective of her.

"They're suspicious of commercial success," I said. "It's an American conviction: if it's popular it can't be good; if it's good, it can't be popular. Which is odd, in view of the country's galloping commercialism. But then perhaps it's a reaction of critics against commercialism. We've all seen trash sells, but it does not follow that what sells is necessarily trash. The former is the premise of the record industry, the latter is the premise of critics."

Commercial success Jo surely had. Columbia gave her a diamond award when her sales reached 25,000,000 records — and that was *after* her period at Capitol. She was the favorite woman singer of Americans in the peak years of her career, according to the *Billboard* magazine charts. In 1972 a writer and researcher named Joel Whitburn published a book analyzing the success of various recording performers between 1940 and 1955. Whitburn assigned a point for each week a performer was listed in the *Billboard* chart. The results were: Bing Crosby 693, Perry Como 606, Eddie Fisher 386, Sammy Kaye 323, Jo Stafford 310, Patti Page 306, Vaughan Monroe 290, the Andrews Sisters 279, Nat Cole 274, and Glenn Miller 272. Jo's one-time band mate, Frank Sinatra, is conspicuous by his absence. He had only one Number 1 record during that period, according to *Billboard* — although I must say that I have always found the *Billboard* charts suspect.

Nonetheless, whether those charts are indeed an accurate reflection of popularity, there is no doubting that Jo's was enormous. In itself, it seems to have meant nothing to her. "And anyway," she said, "if I'd gone funny in any way, I had a family that would have brought me right back down to earth." (To this day she remains in close contact with her sisters.) Public performing simply was not attractive to her. She found far more satisfaction in the recording studio. Of all the compliments she ever received, she still remembers most vividly, and treasures, one from the late Conrad Gozzo, the great lead trumpet player

whom Paul often booked for her dates. "Musicians don't usually go into the booth to listen to a take," she said. "But that day Gozzo came in, stood there listening, and at the end of the song, he pointed a finger at me, then turned and walked out. Without a word." She was always a heavy favorite of musicians. Lester Young said he wanted to have his own big band with Jo Stafford and Frank Sinatra as his singers.

Her two children were reaching the age of danger. Jo thought more and more about her responsibilities at home. In 1959, with a lucrative Las Vegas contract awaiting only her signature, she decided to give up public performing, though she continued to record until the mid-1960s. Darlene, however, didn't stop recording until 1982, when the Ellington album was made.

The California show business landscape is strewn with the wrecks of what have been called the Beverly Hills Brats, the sons and daughters of famous parents who have themselves attempted show business careers to embarrassing results. There are exceptions, but many of them have been burned out by drugs, drinking, or other indulgences, some of them obnoxious figures, others quite tragic.

When Amy was in her adolescence, she and Jo had a confrontation in which Amy defended herself on the grounds that she wasn't a doper. Later, I remember, Jo said in astonishment at the new age dawning, "I'm supposed to be *grateful* that they're not drug addicts!" America had come a long way from "A peaceful sky, there are such things . . ."

But her judgment that her family mattered more than a career was obviously a right one in that Tim and Amy got through the the adolescent years undamaged by the temptations to destruction that were all around them. Now in

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If an Eichmann is to be held responsible for lacking a conscience, is not a newspaper owner to be held responsible for employing a columnist who has parlayed an urge to punish into a press pass?

— Nelson Algren, *Who Lost an American?*

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their thirties, they are disciplined and intelligent and professional. And Jo is, whenever she can arrange it, the adoring babysitter of two grandchildren, one of them presented to her by Amy and the other by Tim.

Her passion is history, which she reads voraciously, particularly that of World War II. Her knowledge of it is almost awesome. This grew at least in part out of her symbolic association with the war and her awareness of how the young servicemen felt about her. Once I was discussing the loss in heavy seas of Allied amphibious craft during the Normandy landings at Omaha and Utah beaches. She knew exactly how many were used at each beach, how they foundered, how many were lost, and how many got ashore. During a dinner-party discussion of an action off Mindenao some years ago, a retired navy officer contradicted her on a detail. Politely but firmly, Jo held to her point. The officer said, "Madame, I was *there*!" A few days later he dropped her a note to say he had consulted his logs. She had been right and he wrong.

Jo has given a lot of her time to charity. She is a past president of SHARE, an organization devoted to work with mentally handicapped children. Well after Jo had given up performing and, finally, even recording, Darlene continued to work. Her last public performance was given May 19, 1978, on the occasion of SHARE's 25th anniversary. She shared the spotlight with Jo's old band-mate, Frank Sinatra.

If I like to talk history with Jo, I always seem to end up talking politics with Paul. He may claim to have forgotten whatever he ever knew about economics, but if a new tax bill is proposed or there is a change in the prime interest rate, Paul's analyses of the implications are always instructive.

Paul is involved with the Crippled Children's Society of Los Angeles of which he was president for three years. His mornings are devoted to golf, which he plays at the Bel Air Country Club, sometimes with Les Brown.

The Westons are liberal Catholics, and in an age when presidential rhetoric has brought out of the woodwork all the bumper-sticker patriots, the gun people and assorted other crazies, they remain unintimidated liberal Democrats.

A few years ago, Paul set up Corinthian Records to get back the masters of Jo's albums and reissue them — along with those of Jonathan and Darlene. At first he sold them only by mail and only in the United States, but they're now available around the world. If you can't find them, you can write to Paul (or, for that matter, Jonathan) care of Corinthian, PO Box 6296, Beverly Hills CA 90212.

Meanwhile, Time Life Records is about to issue an album of twenty of Jo's best sides, including one of Darlene's. Jo, typically, said, "I don't understand that. How can anybody listen to twenty songs by *any* singer?" Paul is negotiating with Capitol to issue in compact disc twenty tracks from his orchestral albums.

Fortune smiled on the Westons. But she has smiled on many other people in show business who have alchemically converted her bounty into failure or disaster or tragedy, and been demolished by the hubris, indeed the madness, that intense public acclaim so often induces. The Westons have handled it rationally and with grace.

Jo will probably never sing again. She is firm about that. She did it, she loved it, and it's over. Could she do it if she wanted to? Time takes a toll on voices, particularly those of women. The vocal cords calcify as people grow older which, in extreme age, produces a high cracked sound. But that doesn't happen to everybody, and Bing Crosby sang well in his seventies. Assuredly Jo could do it. Only recently I was talking to her about some theoretical musical matter or another, and she demonstrated a point. That clear voice went up and down a scale in perfect intonation, like a flute. It was a fragment, a brief bit of music flung into time, but it was so good that it startled me.

American accents derived originally from those of England — that of Brooklyn, for example, from that of east-end London dock workers who were brought over to do the same jobs here — and then were modified by those of people from other places. In Frank Sinatra's highly characteristic enunciation, one hears the slightly dentalized t and d that one so often encounters in the speech of Italian Americans from New York City and the communities around it — though not, interestingly, in those from Boston or Providence, Rhode Island.

Scholars of dialect tell us that American accents flowed westward in swaths, those of the American northwest being derived from those of the northeast, those of the southwest from the southeast.

The roads around Gainesboro, Tennessee, slant south-southwest between the ridges of the Cumberland Plateau.

Gainesboro is due east of Gallatin. It is surrounded by towns with flat-footed no-nonsense names likes Nameless, Commerce, Gentry, Prosperity, Rough Point, Difficult, and Defeated. ("How can anybody listen to twenty songs by *any* singer?") Not too far to the east is Oak Ridge, home of the macabre American Museum of Atomic Energy, where man's bleak future was engineered. Gainesboro is just above 36 degrees north latitude. So is Coalinga, California, where the roads run straight and square to each other on the flat land of the central valley.

The g is disappearing from the gerund in the English language. Indeed, it *has* disappeared in many parts of England and the United States, even though we continue to write it in a word such as *going*, as we do the vanished l in *palm* and *salmon*, the lost gutteral in *drought* and *thought*. Jo drops the g in gerunds in her speech, though not, interestingly, in her singing. Nonetheless, she has a California-modified Tennessee accent. She almost sings "ah" for the personal pronoun I, and she pronounces "on" almost as "own". That is how strongly Tennessee persists in her speech, not to mention her character.

One of the two main streams of American music, the one that led to what we now call country-and-western, has roots that go back to Scottish, Irish, and English balladry. One of the elements in its singing style is a way of skidding up to a note from a major or minor third below.

There are two primary forms of vibrato. The first is a pitch vibrato. A finger on a violinist's left hand slides up and down on the fingerboard, a trombonist rapidly vibrates the slide, to produce an oscillating. If the intonation is good, the "note" produced is the exact center of what is actually a rising and falling sound, and the ear accepts it as that tone. The second kind of vibrato is a volume vibrato. A note becomes louder and softer. Flute players use this kind of vibrato. It is produced by increasing and decreasing the force of the air pressure from the diaphragm.

In opera and most forms of American and European popular music, singers use a pitch vibrato. But many folk and some country-and-western singers have a volume vibrato. It is a variation of intensity.

Jo's Tennessee background shows not only in her accent but in her vibrato. Paul's right. She's not a jazz singer. She is what one can only describe as a highly educated folk singer working mostly in other idioms of American music. You hear her affinity for folk music when she sings *Tennessee Waltz*. She may make fun of the style in *Timtayshun* but she sings it with ease and respect in *Tennessee Waltz*, sliding up thirds to her notes. But you really hear it when she does a folk song such as *He's Gone Away (Over Yandro)*, her reading of which is chillingly beautiful.

Her vibrato is puzzling. It seems to be compounded of both kinds — she says that it's quite unconscious on her part, something that just happens. You wouldn't think that such an acoustic phenomenon would be evasive of analysis, but it is. The engineer with whom she worked at Capitol used to remark on it because it never pushed the needle on the VU meter into the red. This is what probably caused some critics to call her cold, her perfect cool control, her failure to chew the scenery and make the veins stand out on her forehead.

And it is probably what caused the kids from Tennessee and Kentucky and Kansas and Missouri and Montana and Wyoming, and incidentally from Ontario and Saskatchewan and Alberta, to love her, this small-town girl singing those big-city songs. And the calm of her style, that was probably just what they needed — the sound of rationality in the madness and horror of Wake Island and Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima and the Casserine Pass and Anzio and Montecasino and then Remagen, where the Germans forgot to blow the bridge.

No wonder they made her their GI Jo.

Jo Stafford was the voice of home.

A Bad Horn

Anglo Canadian Leather Company Band
Huntsville, Ontario, Canada
Jan. 13th, 1921

Mr. Elden E. Benge
Winterset, Ia.

My dear Mr. Benge:

Replying to yours of the 19th just received, would not advise you to change from Cornet to Trumpet, as the latter instrument is only a foreign fad for the time present, and is only used properly in large orchestras of 60 or more, for dynamic effects, and was never intended as a solo instrument.

I never heard of a real soloist playing before the public on a Trumpet. One cannot play a decent song even, properly, on it, and it has sprung up in the last few years like "jaz" music, which is the nearest Hell, or the Devil, in music. It pollutes the art of Music.

Am pleased that you are making improvements in your playing. Keep it up, and become a great Cornet Player. You have an equal chance with all the rest, but you must work for it yourself.

Wishing you all the best of success, I remain,

Sincerely yours,
Herbert L. Clarke
Conductor

The foregoing was sent to us by trumpeter Paul Grosney, who got it from cornetist Bobby Hackett. "It is legit," Paul assures us. "Elden Benge became one of the the finest trumpet manufacturers in the world, especially to jazz players, and his horn was the most flexible of all the top-line instruments."

Letters

It was wonderful to read your appreciation of Ed Thigpen.

Ed has been on Kim's three albums for Soul Note. During the last one in Milano, we had more time to hang out. Alek, my grandson, who was nine at the time, got tight with Ed. If we couldn't find him in the hotel, we would know that he was hanging out with Ed.

Alek had a new digital watch of which he was very proud. He and Ed compared watches. Ed was wearing a very expensive Rollex. He asked Alek if he'd like to trade. Alek asked how old Ed's was and decided since his was newer, it would last longer.

On that date Ed played a solo on a samba. I defy anyone to hear it and not get up and dance. Ed compared the rhythm to something Dizzy would play. On our way to dinner, Ed sambaed down the street.

Many great drummers are dancers, but Ed is more. He is a gentle man. Just ask Alek.

With love,
Chan Parker
Champmotteux, France