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John Galsworthy and the CD

John Galsworthy wrote a short story titled *Quality*, about a bootmaker in the time when the standardized manufacture of footwear was beginning. The bootmaker laments the loss of quality he insists is inherent in mass production, and is ruined in the end by his refusal (or inability, which amounts to the same thing) to accommodate himself to the changing world. The high school teacher who forced this story on me seemed to be on the side of the boot-maker, though I thought in my naivete that making inexpensive shoes available to the masses might just be a Good Thing.

Two or three years after I read that story, I encountered a small record-shop owner in Montreal who railed against the new-fangled 33 rpm LP developed by CBS. He insisted its sound was not as good as that on the 78 rpm, and argued that people didn't object to the break in a long piece of music as the next record fell to the turntable. I assume he joined Galsworthy's bootmaker in a limbo of poverty.

This argument that the public didn't mind interruptions in music, incredibly, was advanced by RCA in justification of its 45 rpm records, which did not accommodate long pieces. The LP has replaced it.

CBS and RCA again revealed their lack of public spirit when they competed in the development of color television, then had at it again in the development of Quad.

Quad? you might well ask, your voice in italics. As when comedians used to ask the musical question, Sonny Tufts? Whatever happened to Quad? You do remember Quad, don't you?

Anybody who bought Quad got screwed, because RCA and CBS soon ceased making records in either of the systems they had attempted to force on the public. Meantime, RCA was on to its next major fiasco, the video disc that was to be played with – a stylus! A needle. A scratchable, wreckable plain old dumb record! I remember telling executives of RCA, when they proudly unveiled this idiotic innovation to me, that it would go the way of Quad, and that if the video disc ever did catch on, it would be the one that was read by a laser.

In the last couple of years, I have heard the echo of John Galsworthy's bootmaker in the discussion of the Compact Disc. Chiefly, I heard that the sound was "brittle" and "cold", which one heard of the hardware when transistors replaced tubes in our amplifiers. The oddest argument against the CD was that when old albums were reissued in the new process, if the original sound was not good, the CD made it worse by rendering its shortcomings only the more conspicuous. Run that by me again. Have I got it right? You prefer the LP because the lousy sound of its surface masks the lousy sound of the original tape?

I first heard CDs in the living room of a friend, who asked what I wanted to hear first, jazz or classical music. Classical music, I said, because the orchestral colors were more complex. We chatted. Suddenly I felt a rumble in the room, almost sub-audible. What was that? It was the low basses at the start of Stravinsky's *Firebird*. Then I listened to some newly-recorded jazz albums. I was startled by the clarity of the sound.

I hope you are familiar with that stereo record of the Duke Ellington band in 1934, issued on a label called Everybody's. Two microphones were set up in front of the orchestra and two separate disc recordings of the band were made. A few years ago, two recording engineers who were ardent collectors discovered serendipitously that they had different recordings of the same session. Excitedly they hypothesized that if they could synchronize the two and derive a tape from them, they would have a stereo recording of Ellington made a quarter of a century before commercial stereo came to the marketplace. They did, and the album is a remarkable document of the band at that time.

There is a recording that I have heard about but not heard by Caruso in high fidelity sound. Engineers located the original acoustic horn through which he recorded, used a computer to analyze its deficiencies, and set up a program to compensate for these losses in making a new recording from the original disc. It worked. Caruso in good modern sound.

I suspect the time is not far off when the early Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke records will be similarly "restored" – and perhaps even (computers should be able to do this) with the instruments spread out in stereo. And I await the day when such recordings become available in CD.

For I am gradually retiring my LP collection. As reissues become available, I am unloading the original LPs. I cannot speak too highly of the CBS CD reissues of Columbia Masterworks, among them Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic doing Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, the first Glenn Gould recording of the *Goldberg Variations*, Bruno Walter conducting Mahler's *First Symphony*, George Szell and the Cleveland in Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra*. The sound is superb, and only the closest listening will detect the difference from that of a modern full-digital recording such as that of Dutilleux's *L'Arbre des songes*.

Equally impressive is Fantasy's CD jazz reisssue program. Where the original sound was deficient in the first place – as in the Lester Young sessions in Washington D.C. from private tapes Bill Potts had treasured and preserved over the years – it remains so, although one can hope that computerized enhancement will come some day, to Lester Young and to Bix. But where it was good in the first place, as in the Bill Evans Riverside sessions, all of which are now out in the new process, the CD has only enhanced it. Much of the Creed Taylor Verve catalog is being resissued, and in the case of Bill's *Conversations with Myself* the sound on the CD is far superior to the original's. MCA has undertaken a huge reissue program of the Impulse albums produced by Bob Thiele, a stunning collection that includes important albums by Oliver Nelson and Art Blakey and the very core of John Coltrane's best work.

But be careful. I acquired a Pausa recording of the Rob McConnell *Big Band Jazz* album, put it on the CD player – and went screaming back to the original direct-to-disc LP. The sound on the CD is awful, compressed, muffled, dull.

Apparently Pausa, having established an unblemished record of bad pressings, plans to continue its tradition into the era of the CD. And one of the tracks in the *Miles Ahead* CD reissue has some serious distortion in it.

Furthermore, I have heard some friends with exceptional ears say that all-digital recording, from the sessions in the studio to the finished CD, can produce terribly dry sound. I suppose that's true; one hopes this shortcoming will be diminished or eliminated as the medium mellows with time.

It is difficult to put into words the difference in sound between a good CD and an LP. To draw an analogy to vision, it is as if you have been looking through a department-store window at something. Because of your concentration on the object, you did not notice all the reflection from the glass. You move on to the next store, which has that kind of curved window that eliminates reflection. It is as if there is no window there at all. The CD is like that. It is as if in the LP there was an acoustic veil of which we have all been unaware, so anxious were we to get the music. But once you have heard the music with the veil removed, you cannot tolerate the older disc.

My thought on hearing the first CDs was that it seemed that the art of recording sound had finally come close to being perfected. I can conceive of slight enhancements. A four-channel system that was used for room ambience instead of the surround-sound gimmick of the Quad hype might offer a modest further improvement, but the disadvantages of a four-speaker system will no doubt offset the small gain. I can conceive of a smaller disc, though once the CD takes hold it is unlikely people will scrap their equipment for so marginal an improvement. The CD comes remarkably close to "real" sound, and I think the system will be with us for a long time.

To me, the advantages of CDs loom large indeed. They have better stereo separation, there is no practical limitation to their dynamic range, they hold more music, they're easily handled, lighter in weight than the LP (and anybody who has ever moved a large record collection will appreciate the advantage of that), and do not get scratched by needles. Theoretically, the CD will last your lifetime, whereas even LPs that go unplayed can develop scratchy sound as esters in the vinyl sublimate and leave the surface brittle. I don't suppose it's a good idea to drop a CD on a driveway and then grind your heel on it, but otherwise this kind of record is indestructible. The CD doesn't wear out, and neither does the laser that plays it. And the players themselves are smaller than any turntable, the really small ones being only six or seven inches square.

The overwhelming advantage of the CD, however, is that it is the simplest possible system for playing recorded music yet developed.

You don't have to carefully set the weight of a tone arm, and then adjust the skate control. There is no need to be meticulously careful that the equipment is perfectly level. There is no dust buildup in the grooves, and within reason you don't have to clean the CD. All that Discwasher paraphernalia and record brushes go into the trash can. There is no difference between the outer and inner tracks. If you want to play one track only, you don't have to lift the tone arm and set it down again, at the risk of marring the record: you just push a button telling the equipment what track you want to hear. And if you want to repeat a track you've just heard, you just push a repeat button. Or if you want to skip a track, you press the skip button. What's more, even modestly priced players come with remote control: you can do all that from across the room.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that all the major record companies must have vice presidents in charge of stupidity. Don't those people ever do any market research? They tried to foist on the public a Quad system that any rational thinker could foresee would not sell. And when the CD came along, they failed completely to perceive its advantages and foresee its public appeal. They got caught flat-footed and for a time every pressing facility in the world was jammed up in the rush to meet the demand. Possibly they were too busy lobbying Congress for that outrageous, immoral, and unconstitutional tax on blank cassettes.

One acquaintance of mine, expert in the business, says he is telling his friends that if they are truly devoted to their LP collections, they should go out now and buy up a lot of cartridges and styluses, because in a few more years they will no longer be manufactured. And neither will LPs.

The LP will fade away even faster than the 78 did, because the CD players are startlingly inexpensive. Recently I dropped into the classical-music store of Tower Records in the Sunset Strip area of Los Angeles. It's huge. And I would estimate that three- quarters of its floor space is now given over to CDs, with LPs confined to racks and bins around the walls. That's how fast the conversion is coming.

I heard the voice of Galsworthy's bootmaker in the comments of a friend in Chicago, an audiophile and ardent collector who can afford the best equipment money can buy. He says that his equipment will give him sound as good as that of the CD. And perhaps it will. But the cartridge he uses goes for something like $2,000. You can get a good CD player for about a tenth that.

I heard the voice of the bootmaker again in a television news feature about a man in England who collects pre-World War I radios. He has 1,700 of them, all of them refurbished and functional. He faced the camera and said that there was distortion in the sound of these 1930s receivers. But, he argued, we hear with the same kind of distortion, and so those mono standup table model receivers are the way we *should* be listening to music....

NOTICE

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Looking for a Boy

Part II

I first met Henry Mancini in 1959, when he was on a promotion tour for the *Peter Gunn* album. This was shortly before the success of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and of the song that has ever since been identified with it, *Moon River*. It was

possible still for songs with tunes as melodic as that and lyrics as literate as the one Johnny Mercer attached to it to be hits in America; the great American song tradition had not yet been fully effaced by rock-and-roll. Ironically, Hank told me in Pittsburgh, his father at that time and even after *The Days of Wine and Roses* continued to press him to go back to school and get a degree, so that he could teach. It is as if he never fully grasped what had happened to his son – an impression again at odds with Madeleine Paoline's story of Quinto Mancini's fierce pride in Henry. Hank's mother, Anna Pece Mancini, didn't live to see his success: she died when Hank and Ginny were still struggling.

The release on records of movie scores was common in the late 1950s and early '60s, but what was not common was the release of music from television shows, and what was actually unprecedented was for a film-score composer to have a record contract that guaranteed the release of all his movie music. Hank was the first Hollywood composer to become a star or, as one says in our era of debased currency, a superstar. Only two other film composers have come anywhere close to the level of fame that was thrust on Hank almost overnight at that time, Andre Previn, who achieved it not as a composer but by leaving the film industry and becoming a major symphony conductor, and John Williams.

The mood of the man during our first encounter, in his room at the hotel, has stayed with me all these years, though I am not sure what to call it. He seemed hurt, or suspicious. Or perhaps he was merely baffled by his sudden fame. If he was suspicious of me, as I think he was, it was no doubt because he had been under a vindictive assault from elements of the east coast jazz critical establishment because of *Peter Gunn*, and I probably appeared to be a part of that establishment. Ironically, I was as much under suspicion by that gang as he was.

It is necessary to remember the atmosphere of the jazz world at that time. It was the dawn of inverted racism. What was called west coast jazz was equated with white. A lyrical approach to jazz was considered effete, and by subtle inference it was implied that anyone who took that approach was a white racist. The purpose of jazz was protest, anger at the American society, this esthetic suggested. The dominant instrument was the tenor saxophone, and it was supposed to sound hard, raspy, "muscular", and therefore virile, producing a music that took the right stand on questions of civil liberties. "Let's sweat," as bassist John Heard has ironically characterized the philosophy of the music that was known as hard bop. Only to the extent that a white player assumed this kind of tone and style, playing a sort of scream, only to the extent that he denied his own cultural identity, surrendering any right to express his own experience, only to the extent that he emulated what were considered the right black models, could he have any validity in jazz at all. And he couldn't win anyway, since if he did do that he would be branded an imitator. It was a very shallow esthetic, but it had articulate spokesmen with heavy influence in various publications. To observe that jazz could express anger was one thing; to extrapolate from it a view that this was its purpose, indeed that this was its only purpose, was quite another. Yet that was the inference drawn, and it set up a schism in the music that almost certainly contributed to the diminution of its public appeal in the years thereafter.

The whipping boys of this esthetic were the white musicians who had dropped off the band bus in California when the big-band era ended and gone into the recording studios, such musicians as the late Shelly Manne. Because of a white racism that is still only too evident in American music, black players – with a few exceptions such as Buddy Collette, Plas Johnson, and Ray Brown in the west, all of whom Mancini used – were unable to get such work, and had little choice but to go on playing jazz, nomads of music when the white west coast players were installing swimming pools in their backyards. Black ex-bandsmen tended to settle in New York; and so there was the arbitrary absurd division of this most vital American music into east coast and west coast styles.

And along came Mancini to emerge as the most visible and prosperous composer in American history with the one exception to that point of George Gershwin, and he used those supposedly effete west coast musicians to make his music. He was the perfect target, and the big guns fired, railing that the *Peter Gunn* albums were not "pure" jazz, that this was the classic example of the imitation making it when the real thing struggled for survival and recognition. Actually, the main *Peter Gunn* theme was not jazz at all. It was rock-and-roll, and in 1987, a rock group called Art of Noise had a huge hit on it.

His detractors were so busy deploring what Mancini had done with jazz that they overlooked what he was doing for it. Up until that time, film-scoring was almost entirely derived from European symphonic composition. Mancini more than any other man changed that. Johnny Mandel, Quincy Jones, Benny Golson, Neal Hefti, and other film composers trained and nurtured in the big-band era, will attest that although others had used elements of jazz in film scoring before him, Mancini was the man who opened the way for the full use of this music in drama. Until Mancini, about the extent of jazz use in film was to have an alto saxophone moan a heavy-handed explanation of a woman's hip-swinging walk. Mancini proved the vocabulary of jazz could be used to express tenderness, romanticism, fear, laughter, pensiveness. Henry Mancini more than any man before him, or for that matter since, established before a broad American public, and before the executives of the communications industry, the extraordinary expressive range of jazz. But his purpose was not then and is not now to write jazz, any more than it was to write symphonies, it was to do what he had heard done in *The Crusades* – underscore drama. "Everything I have ever written comes from the picture," he has repeatedly asserted.

Mancini was the principal figure in developing what could be called the song score. Whereas earlier composers in the field had tended to use "classical" music techniques of thematic fragmentation and non-melodic orchestral writing – with exceptions, of course – Mancini began writing scores such as that of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and those in the *Pink Panther* series that contained almost as many fully-developed song melodies as a Broadway musical score by Frank Loesser. And he used all sorts of devices of the dance bands to set these melodies off, from jazz walking bass to Caribbean dance rhythms. That he was capable of a quite different kind of writing is evident in the score for the suspense mystery *Arabesque,* which is comparatively abstract, or that of the documentary *The White Dawn* or the stripped and austere score of the recent Paul

Newman version of *The Glass Menagerie.*

It is a little noted phenomenon that American jazz musicians and composers tend to replicate the styles of their cultures-of-origin. Jewish jazz players retain a strong element of their liturgical and other musics, the classic example, as his friends point out, being Terry Gibbs. The Irish tend to play very Irish, and the Italians retain even in their instrumental work the sense of vocal contour of the country that is after all the wellspring and land of origin of the entire western musical culture.

The magnificent tradition of American song, music and lyrics alike, in Broadway and Hollywood, was mainly the creation of Jewish composers, with a few exceptions such as Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, Alec Wilder, and Harry Warren. Warren was Italian, and his music – by his own unabashed and even aggressive admission – strongly reflected the influence of Puccini, who died in Brussels eight months after Henry Mancini's birth in Cleveland, Ohio, April 16, 1924. The Sons of Italy band was in itself enough to imprint forever an Italianate melodic sensibility on its youngest flute player, and Mancini's music has always reflected that tradition. The love theme he wrote for the score of *The Glenn Miller Story* at Universal, later to be known with a Don Raye lyric as *Too Little Time*, reveals what was to come in the later scores.

The gift of writing melody is a somewhat mysterious one. Even some of the most trained and skillful composers lack it. Conversely, the melodic gift is not the only criterion of musical worth: Tchaikovsky had a torrential melodic gift far beyond anything Beethoven possessed, but no one would argue that he was the greater composer. Yet the melodic gift is not to be undervalued. Nelson Riddle, an excellent orchestral writer and like Mancini a big-band arranger who eventually wrote film scores, simply didn't have it. It is the gift of Kern, Gershwin, Arlen, Youmanns.

Mancini's "guys" treasure with laughter a review by a Cincinnati critic referring that his "odd and limited concept of orchestration," which exposed not Mancini's limitations but the critic's. Mancini was revealed from the time of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* as an inventive and original writer who enormously expanded the vocabulary of modern orchestration. An awareness of "classical" orchestration developed by his studies with Krenek and Castelnuovo-Tedesco and the one other way a sense of orchestration grows – by studying scores – was wedded to a fluency in American big-band writing, to sometimes startling effect. He would, for example, use French horns in harmony playing footballs in the manner of a dance-band sax section in accompaniment to solos by other instruments. He extensively used alto flutes in his scores, and even introduced bass flutes at a time when it was hard to find them: they were so rarely manufactured. The penetration power of the flute family drops as you go down in the register, and bass flutes are not used in symphonic orchestration for the good reason that you can't hear them at any great distance. They are only useful in the recording studio, where microphones can pick up their strange low haunting tones. Mancini used jazz techniques on this odd and cumbersome instrument, writing falls at the ends of notes – descending glissandi – that produced a weird and vaguely paranoid effect.

And he brought into the recording studio various instruments that were part of neither the jazz nor symphonic orchestras, such as the boo-bams from Africa, which Shelly Manne drew to his attention, tuned drums with their own curious character, and such things as the autoharp. The consequence of his experiments was an enormous expansion of orchestration, and his techniques would be widely imitated, though never used as effectively. Henry Mancini had acquired his own singular voice.

But it was a voice developed in the recording studio. To present his music in pops concerts with symphony orchestras, he had to re-orchestrate much of it. Bass flutes don't work in the symphony orchestra, for reasons noted, and orchestras are not equipped with calliopes, one of which he used in the *Hatari* score. The reorchestration has been beautifully and skillfully done, which is why orchestras like playing his music. The boogie-woogie calliope figure of *Baby Elephant Walk* had been assigned to clarinets, with no loss of humor.

Humor permeates his music, a kind of whimsy. The Pittsburgh repertoire included his *Overture to a Pops Concert*, a commission of the Boston Pops Orchestra for its hundredth anniversary, a slapstick Stan and Ollie theme from *A Fine Mess*, three of his television themes (*Hotel, Newhart*, and *Remington Steele*), three movie songs, (*Life in a Looking Glass* from *That's Life*, *Crazy World* from *Victor-Victoria*, and *It's Easy to Say* from *10*, music from *The Thornbirds*, *Charade,* themes from *Lifeforce*, *The Great Mouse Detective*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and part of his *Beaver Valley '37* Suite, a memoir of his childhood original written for the Philadelphia Orchestra, and finally, of course, the requisite *Pink Panther, Peter Gunn, Two for the Road, Mr. Lucky, Dear Heart, Days of Wine and Roses*, and *Moon River.*

The audience devoured it. Afterwards there was a reception by the Rotary Club in a large room in the basement of Heinz Hall. As Hank descended the broad stairs, ladies pressed programs upon him for autographs, all the faces in the room turned upward to watch him, and this person and then that person said some variant on, "Henry, do you remember me? I used to..." And he always did remember. It was amazing. He stayed for a time, signing autographs, chatting with strangers and old acquaintances alike, and then with a conspiratorial smile and a lift of the eyebrows suggested it was time we left. It was obvious that when he is traveling, the company he prefers is that of his "guys", and some of them were waiting.

Al Cobine said the symphony musicians sometimes ask, puzzled, "Why does he do this? Obviously he doesn't have to, he doesn't need the money." He assuredly doesn't. Indeed, he has been giving it away for years, having signed over the rights and earnings of many of his albums to charities, funding scholarships at UCLA and Juilliard and elsewhere. He tells his guys to live it up on the road, eat well, sup well, sleep well, do everything first class.

Then why does he do it? "Because he likes it," Cobine tells them.

And as we left with one or two of his guys, laughing about something or other, I suddenly realized what Henry Mancini, in his heart of hearts, really is. Larry Bunker said years ago that Hank handled that Hollywood business scene gracefully and well, but he always had the feeling Hank would rather be hanging out with the cats. In Pittsburgh I saw that Larry was right.

Henry Mancini is an old road musician.

November 14, 1987

About noon the Musengos arrived. They drove down from Cleveland on the freeway. The trip is perhaps a hundred miles. When Quinto Mancini made it in his old Chevrolet in 1930, to apply for work at Jones and Laughlin, tires were poor and roads were narrow, and it is not recorded how long the journey took. It was probably an ordeal. Henry was six then. The family waited eight years to get a company house.

When Hank first mentioned Helen Musengo to me, he referred to her as his sister, soon amending this to say, Well, she's not really my sister, she's my cousin, but she's like my sister. She was born Helen Pece, the daughter of Henry's mother's brother. She had no brothers and only one sister, who has since died, and so she and Hank are the only surviving members of their families.

I had lunch and spent much of the afternoon with Helen and her husband, Ralph Musengo. They are genuinely charming people, articulate, warm, and unguarded.

I asked them about Hank's mother. Ralph described Anna Pece Mancini as "a really nice woman. She and Helen's father came from a family of contentment and joy."

In World War II Ralph Musengo served in the U.S. Army's Counter Intelligence Corps, the CIC, working with the Italian partisans, mostly Communists, behind German lines in the North of Italy. One reason he was thus assigned is that he spoke fluent Italian. Because of this, and postwar visits to Italy, Ralph knows the country much better than his wife or Henry does. Henry speaks very little Italian. His mother had been in America since her infancy, and she and Quinto spoke English at home. So Henry never learned the language.

When the war ended Ralph was stationed as a special agent at Pont San Luis in the south of France, near the Italian frontier. Henry's mother wrote to him asking that he find Hank. Ralph was headquartered in a villa near Nice. Toward summer's end in 1945, he drove into the city and asked Hank's commanding officer if Henry and a few of his friends could visit for a few days. Ralph picked up Henry and two friends, both Italian Americans, in the Alfa Romeo that had been owned by Mussolini's mistress, Clara Pettaci, who had been executed with him and hung by her heels in a Milan filling station. When the political situation stabilized, Ralph turned the car over to the the newly-formed Italian government. You can feel that about him: he is that kind of man, in contrast to the chaplain Hank watched stealing stained-glass windows.

The villa to which he took Hank and the two other GIs was owned by a Swiss millionaire named Enrico Wild, pronounced with a V. Ralph had helped Wild locate and rejoin his wife, Magda Brard, a French concert pianist who had toured the United States as a child prodigy.

Wild dabbled in hypnosis. He put Henry, who turned out to be susceptible to it, into trance, and regressed him, and announced that Henry was a reincarnation of Verdi. Hank had told me with amusement about the regression, but until now I had not known where it occurred. Hank and his two buddies stayed at the Wild villa for three days, during which Ralph took a great many photos.

Ralph said that Scannoni, in the Abruzzi region, in the province of Aquila, is now a ski resort. Hank had said it is where the Italians go to ski, a place that has not yet been discovered by the international ski crowd, like Cortina.

Quinto Mancini's grandfather, according to Ralph, was a farmer who owned a house. So he was a man of some property, not a sharecropper.

Quinto, according to Ralph, disliked his cousins, and with cause. When Quinto's grandfather died, the property was deeded to Quinto's father and his brother. The uncle cheated Quinto's father out of the property in some Machiavellian maneuver that is the dark side of the Italian character. "That sort of thing was common in Italy," Ralph said. Quinto and his siblings were thrown off the land. His sister, Maria, married a man named Eustacio Silla and died in Rome in 1969. A brother, Enrico, was killed in Yugoslavia in World War I. Another brother, Luigi, was killed in an industrial accident in Stuebenville, Ohio, date unknown. Quinto rarely discussed his family, according to the Musengos, and had little or no contact with second cousins living in Cleveland.

Helen said that Anna Mancini had suffered in childhood from rheumatic fever, which left her with a scarred heart valve. She had a difficult labor with Henry, and finally had to be taken to hospital. Her health was fragile even before the pregnancy, and after Hank's birth she was told she could have no more children.

Helen's family, the Peces, had a large house in Cleveland. Her father was a lithographer, and so even in those days he must have made good money. In 1924, when Hank was two, Quinto took his family to New York where Hank's mother had a half sister named Ismalia, married to a Cleveland man named Ferdinando Malaragno. They had two children named Ada and Hugo. Ada was a singer. She would sit Henry on the piano and accompanying him as he sang things like *Pony Boy* and Italian songs such as *Siciliana Bruna* and *O Bambino.*

Quinto heard that the Jones and Laughlin steel company was hiring men, and he drove to Aliquippa to apply.

Helen said, "This was the Depression, and jobs were hard to come by." And, which she didn't mention, they were particularly hard to come by if your name was Italian.

"I think Quinto was a sentimental man," she said "He cried when Ralph and I got married and when our first child was born. Quint always talked about Henry and the great pride that both he and Annie had in him."

The Mancinis returned to Cleveland often and always on the holidays – Christmas and New Year's. She remembers her father asking Henry to play for family friends. If anyone started to talk, he would shout, "Let the kid play," and Henry would play the piano for them.

Quinto was making fifteen dollars a week, Helen said. She remembered that Anna once forswore a winter coat so that Henry could have his arranging lessons.

I said, "Hank told me that he doesn't remember his father showing ever one sign of affection to either him or his mother."

Helen said, "I think it was the era. Parents of that generation were not as outgoing as they are today. I think Ralph will agree with me. We thought Quint was very loving toward Henry. A very sentimental type person, I always thought."

Ralph said, "Especially away from his immediate family. It was more noticeable then. In front of friends, relatives, there would be less reason to show emotion, unless there was a drastic occasion, such as a death. Or a marriage."

Helen said, "I don't remember that my parents were real huggy, or kissin' all the time. There was no question that Henry was just everything to Quint and Anna, they were both very supportive, and did everything they could for him. She was tiny, short, kind of rolly-polly, round face. And always smiling. A very pretty lady."

Ralph said, "Henry looks like his father. And so does his son Chris and even little Chris." They were referring to Hank's grandson. "They all look like Quint."

Helen said, "Little Chris looks exactly like Henry did as a child. Henry was blond. He had the banana curl when he was a baby. Annie was madly in love with Quint. I was just a little kid, about four years old, when they were married. She had other opportunities to marry, but she was mad about Quint.

"As far as I know, Annie was about two years old when they came over from Italy – the mother, the father, Annie and my father. These were people who were landowners in their little town. The Pece family were a large family. My grandfather, and Henry's, came to America supposedly only on a visit. After they had been here a few years, the mother got cancer and died, and then I guess is when they came to Cleveland to stay with Ismalia. As far as I know my grandfather never worked after they got here. He was killed accidentally by a truck in Cleveland when he was sixty or so. There are a lot of Peces in Italy, all well-to-do people. They came from a little town called Forli del Sannio, at that time in the Province of Campobasso, now the Province of Isernia, just on the edge of the Abruzzi. Therefore we were always known as Abruzzese."

Ralph said, "Of Helen's family, there's Helen, her sister Irma, her mother and father. Helen is the only one left in her family, and then Henry's mother and father died in '53 and '63, I think it was. So Henry and Helen are the only two left."

Helen said, "It's odd among Italians to have so small a family."

Ralph said, "In about '41 or '42, we made a trip to visit Annie and Quint in West Aliquippa. It was a very meager home, meager surroundings. You could tell that there wasn't much money in the family."

Helen said, "But she was happy, made the best of everything."

Ralph said, "She was *always* happy. It shows how much she loved Quint. And I'm sure it was reciprocated."

Helen said, "Ada always used to say she really loved that man, and she would have known because she was the same age, they were buddy buddy and used to share secrets. Annie used to have a little garden behind the house, she used to grow Swiss chard, tomatoes, the usual kind of stuff. I still remember the soot that used to fall on the produce. Annie was a great cook, she was always cooking.

"When Annie and Quint and Henry would come for holiday meals, it was her job to fry the rice croquettes and the fritters in the morning.

"We used to serve ravioli with a mixture of ricotta and eggs in them with a tiny bit of cinnamon and a bit of sugar, we were the only ones in the area, I think, that made them that way. Henry used to call them cheese boxes."

Ralph said, "You know, I remember the two Italian boys that came to the villa with Hank, we had a hell of a lot of fun. One of those boys said, 'Some day this guy's gonna be a big star. You wanna put some money on it.' As much as we knew of him at that time, it was very premature for us to even think of it. Helen's father died in January of 1945. He would have appreciated Hank's success more than anybody, being musically inclined."

Helen said, "I remember about 1950, on radio, Hank did a piece of music for something. And at the end of this program they said, 'Music was composed and conducted by Henry Mancini,' and we all cried. You know, Quint always felt so bad that Max Adkins never lived to see Henry's success. He always used to mention that."

Before the concert that evening there was another glorious Italian dinner at another restaurant, with Hank in an elated mood and ordering the wines with the grand satisfaction of some great signore entertaining his friends. "This is what life on the road is all about, man," he said.

The Musengos attended the concert. Backstage at intermission Hank's face was full of affection for them.

The next morning Jack Gilfoy met us in front of the hotel and handed Hank the keys to the Lincoln. Hank had rented it for five days, but only his guys used it. This morning we needed it. We drove out along the Allegheny River, with its countless bridges, into the point of land where the Monongahela meets it, creating that prow point of downtown Pittsburgh called the Golden Triangle. We crossed a bridge heading north and found ourselves in a tangle of small streets in an area of small industries. "Hey, I remembered!" Hank said triumphantly as he made a turn into one of the streets.

"What, are you afraid senility is setting in?" I chided.

"No, man," he said, "it's just that it's been so long." We picked up a street on the northeast bank of the Ohio called, logically enough, Ohio River Boulevard. The day was clear, and exceptionally warm for November. The road ran along the shoulder of the high riverbank. Bare trees stood like black lace on slopes made brown by fallen leaves. The car sifted smoothly along to Ambridge, a community whose name is contracted from that of the American Bridge Company. We crossed the river on a long bridge, then swung north. We were now, Hank told me, in Aliquippa. Aliquippa at this point consisted of a treed slope above us on the left and a long – very long – expanse of dead factory on the right. I had heard about this, read about it, seen it on television, but all of it together had not prepared me for the vision of a dead industry. What had been the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company, stretched for miles northward along the riverbank, was a deserted dead thing, with smokestacks like the fingers of supplicant hands against the sky. All the prayers in the world wouldn't help: the massive mismanagement of the economy had done its work, and American capital had fueled the steel mills of Korea, among other countries, whose newer equipment and advanced management had destroyed the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of American workers. American banks had lent the savings of the people who had worked in these places to deadbeat nations around the world whose leaders had said the magic words, that they were standing up to Communism. Even now, as we drove, they were reneging on their loans, and the banks that made them were quaking.

We passed long stretches of chain-link fence protecting

properties whose furnaces would never be warm again. And a few miles to the south, in West Virginia, towns such as Davy were dying because Pittsburgh no longer bought their coal. In a strange bleak way, this vista of ruined industry was impressive. One thinks of America as young, and growing, and vital, not depleted and moribund. Yet Carbondale, Illinois, died when the coal was exhausted; and before that Nevada towns died when the silver gave out. But such cities died of the exhaustion of resources. The United States is a land of capable, willing, and skilled workers, a great people blended of all the nationalities of the world, and these Pennsylvania communities were dying not of the depletion of resources but the misuse and mismanagement of the economy. The terrible reality we were seeing was heartbreaking. And awesome.

I said, "Do you remember a song Gordon McRae did called *River of Smoke*? It was about a worker who sees these rivers of smoke on the sky as wonderful, because they enable him to make the money to marry his girl."

"Yeah, I remember it," Hank said.

At last he turned off the highway. "Well, this is it," he said. "West Aliquippa."

It was the worst of all. Hank swung the Lincoln into shabby streets of a tiny town. They were paved with brick cobbles; the town had never even never even got to asphalt. Grass grew between the bricks. "Now at one time we lived . . . " Hank said, turning a corner. "It's gone!" We looked at an empty lot between two crumbling and deserted frame houses. "Wait a minute," he said. He seemed completely disoriented. He drove on. Nobody lived in these houses. This town wasn't dying, it was dead. "Now, this is one of the places we lived," he said. "This is 401 Beaver Avenue." We got out of the car and looked around. Hank walked up the short sidewalk to the house. The house was painted a hideous green, and it was in an advanced state of decay. I turned 360 degrees, surveying the decay of the community. Perhaps because I once was a construction worker, I have a reverence for buildings, and I felt an overwhelming urge to restore these places, and realized even as I detected the emotion that such an attempt would be futile. I thought about the condition that the wiring of these places must be in, the crumbling foundations, the dry rot and wet rot of the wood, all the ravages of neglect. There was nothing you could do for this town but put it out of its misery: burn it to the ground and let nature reclaim this devastated terrain.

I tried to imagine the boy Hank had been, playing stickball in the streets. I listened for the cries and laughter of children. I heard nothing, not even wind. It was a still day. I turned and looked at 401 Beaver Avenue. Hank was sitting on the steps to its porch. He was wearing an exquisite black windbreaker of thin glove leather, and a black Greek sailor's cap, purchased perhaps in Athens. Then, just for a second, I almost saw the boy who used to practice flute in this house.

We got back in the Lincoln. Ahead of us a cat crossed the cobbled street. We drove around the town a bit: it comprises no more than ten square blocks. Hog and Crow Islands, where Hank's mother tended her vegetable plot, were gone: landfill had joined them to the shore, and on it stood a large steel plant. It appeared to be fairly new, but it was deserted.

We passed a building whose windows and doors had been bricked in. Why? Why preserve it? It would never be used again. "That was the Sons of Italy Hall," Hank said. One house we passed had a well-tended little vegetable plot in the backyard. An old man was standing looking at it. Somebody still lived here. I wondered what he thought of the Lincoln passing by. "We lived here for a while, upstairs," Hank said. It was a two-story building of flats. "There was a fire, and I remember my father carrying me down the steps." But the steps were gone, and the sagging balcony would fall in a year or two. "Over here was the Serbian hall, and that empty lot, that's where the bandstand was, where we played in the Sons of Italy band."

We left West Aliquippa, and not far away turned into the main street of Aliquippa proper. Hank said it was named for some ancient Indian queen. Its main street lies in the length of a wooded ravine cut eons ago by some feeder of the Ohio. It was a much larger community, not yet as dead as West Aliquippa. A few people were to be seen on the street, though they seemed to be going nowhere in particular. Storefronts were boarded up, there was trash and broken glass in the gutters and on sidewalks, and weeds grew in cracks in the cement. "How do you feel, seeing this?" I said.

"Empty. Hollow," Hank said. "Just hollow."

He headed the car up a slope of the river bluff. "This was my high school," he said. It was an extensive brick plant on the brow of the hill. We got out. "I want to see if I can find the band room," Hank said. We entered a door and looked around. Hank walked ahead of me. A small stern woman in her sixties emerged from an office and said to me severely, "Can I help you gentlemen?" Hank was too far ahead of me to hear her.

"My friend," I said, "used to go to this school, and he wanted to look around."

"And who is your friend?" she said, with no loss of suspicion. Maybe she thought we were dope pushers. Who knows nowadays?

"Henry Mancini," I said.

"Henry!" she cried, her face lighting. "I graduated with you!"

And she rushed toward him. I thought she was going to embrace him. She told him about her family, and Hank remembered them.

Hank said he was looking for the band room. She led the way, and they talked about old friends.

We climbed a flight of stairs, and in a dusty cluttered office the woman introduced us to the band director. This is how the world has changed: the band director's name was Victoria Eppinger, and she told us she had graduated from the University of Illinois. She was in her late twenties or early thirties. What's your instrument? I asked her. Would it be harp, piano, flute, the instruments girls traditionally play? "Trombone," she said.

"I've found a lot of clippings about you," she told Hank, and dug them out. "I've only been here this year, and I'm still going through old files." She showed us the newspaper clippings, most of them about his occasional returns to Beaver County, to play benefits for one cause or another. "Henry Mancini Returns to Help," one headline proclaimed.

She even had his high-school year book. The entry on Hank said that he wanted to be an arranger and hoped some day to have his own band.

We went into the bandroom. Two boys were sitting on

folding chairs, looking at music stands. "Hey, that's the same piano!" Hank said, looking at a scarred old brown spinet standing against the wall by a blackboard. The keyboard cover was secured by a padlocked hasp. "I think that's the same goddamn padlock! I used to play this piano!"

We went to the school's main office. The lady who had greeted us so severely introduced Hank to two women on the staff. One of them asked Hank if he remembered So-and-So, her cousin. He did. At last we left. We were standing in front of the school's pillared portico when a black man in his forties with a compact, neat, muscular body came up to us and said, "Aren't you Henry Mancini?"

"Yes," Hank said.

"You went to this school."

"Yeah," Hank said.

"I work here," the man said. He had a bright, warm, accepting smile, which Hank reciprocated. In photos Hank has a rather stiff smile, not unlike the uncomfortable smile of Glenn Miller, but in person it is ready and easy. "Man, what a pleasure to meet you," the man said, pumping Hank's hand.

In 1946, Pittsburgh instituted a grand reclamation project. Blighted areas were razed and laws were put in place requiring the steel and coke industries to put scrubbers on their stacks and cease their pollution of the air. Today the rivers of smoke are gone and Pittsburgh is one of the cleanest cities in America. Further, its dead industries are being replaced by computer and communications companies and it is becoming a major medical and educational community. It is a great city, rated by surveys and studies as probably the best in America in which to live. And that orchestra is superb.

Hank had been wrong about something: the Stanley Theater, where he once studied arranging with Max Adkins, had not been torn down. On the contrary, it had been refurbished at a cost of millions and now was named the Benedum Center. Its stage had been enlarged and now it was a home for opera and musical theater. *I Pagliacci* had just closed; *Cats* was coming in next week.

We stood in the wing stage left, watching a crew break the set of *I Pagliacci*. "I used to stand here and watch the bands," Hank said. "You know that mist they use on movie sets for effect? Well, they didn't need that: the air looked like that on this stage in those days. You could always smell the coke ovens. I remember watching the Ellington band here. Across the street there was an instrument repair man. I was in there one day, and he was talking to this black man about his baritone sax – you know what's coming. I said, 'Hey, do you know who's playing here this week? Duke Ellington!' 'Yeah, I know,' the guy said, 'this is Harry Carney.' And that's how I met Harry Carney. I was blown away. You see that first balcony out there? Well in the 1937 flood, the water was right up to there."

Hank asked someone on the Benedum staff about the basement of the place, where he'd studied with Max Adkins. But the whole basement had been restructured and that office was gone. Hank asked when the old Loew's Penn had been torn down. He was told that it had never been torn down: on the contrary, it had been restored on a grant from the H.J. Heinz people, and it was now Heinz Hall, home of the Pittsburgh Symphony.

It hit us both at the same time. I said, "That's where you're standing to conduct. Just in front of the proscenium. Right where the screen was on which you saw *The Crusades*."

November 17, 1987

Hank is one of those fortunate souls who can sleep on airplanes. Perhaps because he travels so much. He and Royce and Al and Jack and Steve and Dick Dennis do at least fifty of these concert gigs a year. And Hank is always flying to London to record. Or to New York for ASCAP meetings. Or to Vale to ski. He almost lives on airplanes, and not long after we lifted off from Pittsburgh he was asleep. We changed planes at St. Louis, and then were on our way home to California.

Immigration from Italy to the United States has virtually ceased, because Italy's standard of living is now so much higher than that of the United States. The American consulate at Naples, from which port Henry Mancini's father embarked for America, now gets only two or three applications a week for residence visas. It used to get hundreds, even thousands.

I felt I had come to understand something subtle about the Peces and Mancinis. Most of the immigrants to America came from deep poverty, from a desperate peasantry. The Pece family had money. And so, until his father was cheated of the house and the lands around it, did the Mancinis. Possibly – we'll never know now – this was the reason for Quinto Mancini's silence: a bitterness that he, he of that family in Abruzzi, had to work in a steel mill. There was probably a knot of anger in his stomach. James Joyce's short story *Counterparts* describes a man's frustrations during his working day which, at its end, he takes out on his kid. Maybe that's what Quinto Mancini did. But he made sure Henry had his music lessons, and Henry never went to the steel mills. Who wrote, "We are all the victims of the victims"? I told Hank what Ralph Musengo had recalled of the family history, the theft of the house.

"I never knew that," Hank said, and fell silent.

"Helen," I said, "gave me an impression of a warm and affectionate man."

"Yeah," Hank said. "Well, that's what he showed to the world. It's not what he showed me." And Hank certainly did not invent the expression *porco Madonna*: someone certainly said it to him.

After a time he opened the handbag he carries, took out Pat Conroy's novel *Prince of Tides*, and began to read. Something caused him to pause and sit pensively. He handed me the book, tapping his finger on the final paragraph of an early chapter. "Read that," he said. I read it. It shook me. I assumed it was the story of Henry Mancini's life. It sure as hell was the story of mine. The passage read:

"When parents disapprove of their children and are truly deceitful about that disapproval, there will never dawn a new day in which you know your own value. Nothing can fix a damaged childhood. The most you can hope for is to make the sucker float."

The plane plowed on through the sky and after a while the Grand Canyon again passed under its wing.