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Jazzletter

P.O. Box 240
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May 1990

Vol. 9 No. 5

Mail Bag

The last person I ever expected to read about in your otherwise very special *Jazzletter* is Roseanne Barr. Quel dommage.

Ernie Furtado, New York City

I agree, with delight! I've long been musically embarrassed by *The Star Spangled Banner*, even though I still feel vestiges of pompous pride stir in my blood when I'm required to play it. (The bass line is better than the melody.) After all, I sang it daily as an innocent school child, with a good singing voice, I might add. I was always the one in every group who *could* sing the whole thing right. The song came to represent my home connection, even though I always loved *America the Beautiful* more as a song and as a poem.

Had that been our anthem, the jingoists would have been hard put to use it in their campaign to transform our love of this country (the lovely land, not the politics) into disrespect of the same love of home in people of other countries. In grade school I used to sing "and crowned her good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea" with all my heart, confident that the brotherly and neighborly love that existed around me in Kirkland, Washington, extended clear to the Atlantic Ocean! Of course, at that age, I wasn't aware that there were no blacks in Kirkland, and I thought Jews were just in the Bible. I had gotten the idea that Jesus was the last one, and nobody told me different for a long time.

But, having grown up to discover all the flaws in the American dream, I find myself still amazed at the beauty of the earth, and of this part of it that we call America (not to dismiss Canada, Mexico, and Central America, but just because "America" is a more mellifluous word than "the United States"). The spacious skies are still overwhelming. The amber waves of grain just before harvest time can still make me sing. The purple mountains are truly majestic. The fruited plains are remarkably abundant. O Beautiful indeed! And oh God, what people have done to screw it up, trying to make a million dollars.

I haven't seen Horace Silver much since he moved to California, and I miss him and his music. When I was with Mulligan's quartet in the 1960s, we did a European tour for Norman Granz with Horace and his group. I enjoyed his company and his sweet nature.

Please encourage Don Asher to write some more things for you. His Tatum piece is really fine. It helped me to relive my own joy at hearing Tatum live for the first time. That was pretty, Don.

Bill Crow, New City, New York

The piece on Roseanne Barr was a classic. Yours was the only defense of her that I heard, and it made sense.

John Aiken, Toronto

I wasn't really defending her. I was amused by the silliness of the fuss, a classic case of much ado about nothing. Russell Baker of the New York Times *wrote that a more appropriate response from George Bush would have been something to the effect of "I have more important things on my mind."*

Gene Lees' attack on *The Star Spangled Banner* is way off key.

He makes the mistake of allowing his dissatisfaction with those abominable lyrics to color his opinion of the melody, which in itself is perfectly adequate or better. When Sarah Vaughan sang *The Star Spangled Banner*, it became a thing of beauty -- especially if you didn't understand English. It didn't matter to her that the song is rangy, nor should Gene have allowed this to confuse his judgment of the melody. Did anyone ever complain that *Memories of You* was beyond the capability of many singers because of its range? And how about *Wave*, which almost nobody but Mel Torme can sing without raising those low notes by an octave?

By far the most serious error concerns Gene's analysis of the lyrics. The tune is in 3/4 time, and many of the bars consist simply of three quarter notes, among them "say can you" and "dawn's early" and, most significantly, "twilight's last", which is followed by a bar that goes GLEA-ming, which the stress most definitely on that first quarter note, as it should be. It is certainly not glea-MING. I was amazed that Gene, with his normally sensitive ear for cadences, could make such a glaring mistake.

As for Roseanne Barr, this was a disgusting performance of a disgusting song. Had she mangled *Stardust* or any other reputable melody in this manner, Gene certainly would not have attempted to defend her.

He is right on one count. Our national anthem should be *America the Beautiful.* (If Roseanne were ever to wrap her tonsils around that one, Gene Lees would crucify her in print.)

An anthem that takes pride in rockets and bombs is indeed a national disgrace.

Leonard Feather, Sherman Oaks, California

It seems to me that the question is not whether Sarah Vaughan or Mel Torme could sing the song. One might easily compile a long list of people who could sing it, including Eileen Farrell, Leontyne Price, Carmen McRae, Joe Williams, Perry Como, Beverly Sills, Andy Williams, Luciano Pavarotti, and Sally Stevens. As for its range, an octave and a fifth, this is manageable when the high notes are approached properly. In The Star-Spangled Banner, *they are not. The song hits its bottom tone in the third note, the first beat of the first bar, after a pickup of two eighth notes; it hits its top note on the first beat of the third bar. That's hardly good vocal writing. The problem is the tessitura more than it is the range.*

One can mention any number of difficult melodies, but they are written for professionals, and you won't find your average housewife humming them: All the Things You Are, Tenderly, My One and Only Love. *For that matter, few professionals tackle those three little gems. A national anthem is supposed to be singable by masses of people. As for Sarah Vaughan making a thing of beauty of it, Bill Evans made a thing of*

beauty out of Little Lulu.

The Star Spangled Banner *is not a song that schoolchildren can sing, as Bill Crow notes.* America the Beautiful *is.*

And no matter what beat the phrase falls on, I still make that glea-MING, by the flat-footed way the thing falls. I once rewrote the lyric as an exercise. If you replace "twilight's last gleaming" with something like "shimmer of the stars", you get a far better fit, although the musical phrase remains something less than graceful.

I assuredly would not have taken to print to upbraid Ms Barr had she mangled America the Beautiful. *I have not "crucified" a singer since I rapped Mary Martin in* High Fidelity *in 1967, and was so disgusted with my own review, which had the facile sarcasm that is the easiest trick in the reviewing repertoire, that I quit writing music criticism. The news media and a president made the whole affair a classic non-event, a sanctimonious hubbub about what is after all a very bad song. I wrote the piece with tongue firmly in cheek, and most people read it that way. I'm a little surprised at the few who didn't. One regret: I wish I'd called it* The Star Mangled Banner.

The piece contains a gaffe that everyone seems to have missed. I transposed part of the lyric, quoting "and the rocket's red glare" in the place where "whose broad stripes and bright stars" should have been. Incidentally, "broad" is a strong word on a weak beat. More of the mismatch.

On September 4, Detroit Free Press *columnist Bob Talbert wrote, "I agree with Bay City musician\piano tuner Tom Smith, who notes, 'Forget the unmanageability of the anthem's melodic range and the bomb-'em, blast-em gore-and-guts lyric (however valid these objections may be), the real problem is that it's a freaking waltz . . . No way can a song in three-quarter time possibly stir up that welling sense of proud nationalism that an anthem is supposed to evoke. Oom-pah-pah, what, huh?!?"*

Your article on Roseanne Barr and *The Banner* is worth fifty bucks, as was Bill Crow's piece on Pee Wee Russell. Keep 'em coming.

Ray McKinley, Largo, Florida

I used to listen to Lee Sims when I was a kid growing up in Chicago. I didn't associate him with jazz, although the recollection isn't clear. He worked with Ilomay Bailey, who I believe was his wife.

Speaking of Chicago players, someone ought to do an article on a Chicago pianist who, so far as I know, never existed.

He had some name like Don Rolando. He was sponsored by a piano warehouse and, I'm pretty sure, had a daily fifteen-minute show on one of the radio stations. I heard many years later that the name was a phony and that on a given day, any one of the good Chicago players might be hired to play the show.

Rolando, if that was his name, never spoke. Some square-sounding announcer introduced all the tunes. There were touches of jazz to the playing, but mainly it was just good straight-ahead renditions of standards. All I remember about the various players is that they had great chops.

I'll send a copy of this letter to my friend Niles Lishness, with whom I went to high school at Hyde Park in Chicago, when Mel Torme was one of our classmates. Niles' memory might fill in a few blanks in my own. He and his wife moved to Arizona a few months ago. No matter where he lands he always seems to be able to get about fifteen players together, ranging from pretty fair to scarily bad, and then sends me funny letters about the dance gigs he plays.

This recalls my own days as a band musician in the Des Moines, Iowa, and Phoenix, Arizona, areas.

I can't remember the name of the leader but since I had no car, and carried no instrument, I usually got to ride with the drummer, a guy named Russ, whom I ran into years later when he was playing with Freddy Martin.

Russ was a pretty good drummer, but he had an anger streak that could be set off by any other Arizona motorist inconsiderate enough not to dim his headlights when Russ flashed him a signal to do so. He would flick his lights once, then again. At that point, if the guy at the other end of the little drama didn't co-operate, Russ, who otherwise had a nice western sort of personality, would turn into The Incredible Hulk, move over into the oncoming traffic lane, put his own brights back on and head straight for the other driver, yelling like John Wayne during an Indian attack, "Come on, you son of a bitch, let's see how you like these lights, god damn ya!"

Usually that would induce the other driver to think it over, but sometimes the game of chicken brought the cars much too close for my comfort.

The funniest experience I remember with that band came during a street dance in an obscure community called Ajo, Arizona, which would never have existed had it not been for the presence of an enormous copper mine.

There was a bandstand set up in the middle of the street. When it came time to go to work, we all climbed up to our chairs. At that precise moment a strong blast of wind came from the nearest mountain pass and blew every part of every chart off the stand and into various parts of the neighborhood. It didn't matter much to me, since I couldn't read anyway, although I used to look at the guitar parts to find out about keys and chords.

About twenty little Indian kids began to scurry around, picking up the pieces of paper and returning them to us. They were now totally disorganized, pages were missing, and other pieces of paper returned to us had nothing to do with the music. We jammed the rest of the evening and the music sounded better that way.

I'm placing an order for the Challis album. Thank God it exists.

Steve Allen, Van Nuys, California

Does anyone know anything more about Lee Sims? I have heard a little of his music, which Lincoln Mayorga recorded, and loved it. Did he make any records?

Crow on Pee Wee is wonderful of course. But the real treasure is your interview with Bill Challis, a tribute so long

overdue our whole fraternity should feel ashamed.

Can it be, however, that you are unaware of the arrangements which served to cap his career -- a total rethinking of the five Beiderbecke compositions recorded by a guitar quintet assembled by Bucky Pizzarelli early in 1974 and released later that same year on Monmouth Evergreen MES\7066? Nor was that the end of Bill's endeavors: a year or two ago in the course of a JAM weekend at Indy, if I recall correctly, Spiegle Willcox led a performance by a trombone ensemble of several standards arranged by Challis expressly for the occasion. Beautifully played, they demonstrated conclusively that Bill's powers have not waned a bit and his explorations recognize no arbitrary limits.

John S. Lucas, Winona, Minnesota

Poet and educator John Lucas used to review for Down Beat *under the byline Jax. I have that Bucky Pizzarelli album, which casts new light on those compositions. As far as I know, it's still available.*

I never thought I'd learn from the *Jazzletter* why my Dad rests on his haunches, but I did. I too am from a Pennsylvania coal town, Tomaqua (near Coaldale, Jim Thorpe, Hazelton). All my male relatives "rest" on their haunches. We called it the Tomaqua Squat. And after forty-one years of life I know it's a way to rest in a narrow coal seam. Thanks.

Ed Kalny, Rockville Centre, New York

Sing 'Em the Way We Wrote 'Em

New York City

"My father bought that piano," Margaret Whiting said, "with the sheet-music royalties from *Till We Meet Again*." It was a thing he had tossed into a waste-paper basket.

The piano is a large brown Steinway baby grand. It stands by the wide window of the living room in her apartment in mid-town Manhattan, an acutely feminine room of sunny colors and soft furniture.

Since *Till We Meet Again* was one of Richard Whiting's early songs, published in 1918, this then was the piano on which he wrote most or all of the following: *They Called It Dixieland, Japanese Sandman, Some Sunday Morning, Sleepy Time Gal, Ain't We Got Fun, Breezin' Along with the Breeze, Horses, She's Funny That Way, True Blue Lou, Louise, My Ideal, Beyond the Blue Horizon, My Future Just Passed, You're an Old Smoothie, On the Good Ship Lollipop, Guilty, Roses in the Rain, When Did You Leave Heaven?, Too Marvelous for Words, Rhythm on the Range, Hooray for Hollywood, We're Working Our Way through College*, and *I'm Like a Fish Out of Water.*

I know Maggie, indirectly, through the late Johnny Mercer. Those who knew him tell Mercer stories, often about the off-the-wall things he said when he was drunk, insults for which he would later apologize with gifts, as often as not roses. According to one of the stories, he walked up to her after a performance and said, "You sing too fuckin' loud."

"Is that story true?" I asked her.

Maggie said, laughing, "Yes it is." Her voice has some of the woody vibrancy that comes with years, but the center of it is still that clear, pure, youthful sound I remember.

Maggie is not five foot three, but she gives the impression of being a big woman. Her speech is animated and at moments of energy and emphasis it slips into pitch: not the vague general pitch that infuses everyone's speech, but specific tones and intervals. You can check them on the piano. She has a tendency to start on D natural and jump, sometimes up a minor sixth.

I pointed out to Maggie that most of the major songwriters of her father's era were born well-to-do if not outright rich, and had solid educations, musically and otherwise. Richard Whiting was born in Peoria, Illinois, November 12, 1891 -- almost a hundred years ago.

She nodded agreement. "My dad was reasonably well off. The father was a businessman who did very well. I never knew him. I've never been to Peoria. I'll tell you who my father grew up with: Archbishop Fulton Sheen and Jim Jordan, who played Fibber McGee on *Fibber McGee and Molly*. Archbisoph Sheehan told me he used to come by and watch my father practice the piano. He had piano lessons and music lessons -- harmony and theory. His mother had the piano teacher come over and beat him with a stick and everything." His piano teacher was a woman named Clara Rees, who also taught voice.

"He must have had a gift," Maggie said. "He was loaded with music. He just loved it. Probably as a kid he wanted to play the piano. And the instinct to write was there. I don't really know that much about it. And my mother didn't, because she came into his life later. They sent him to Los Angeles, to Harvard Military Academy. It's now in Coldwater Canyon. That's how I know the family had money -- enough to send a kid to California to school." This, I realized, was before the movie industry discovered California. The real estate development that was called Hollywoodland, and later just Hollywood, hadn't been started. Movies, such as they were, were being made in Chicago and New Jersey.

"When he was very young out there," Maggie said, "he ushered at the summer musicals, the light operetta season. They did the *Naughty Marietta* kind of things, and symphony concerts. My father loved it. That got him into the early Jerome Kern shows." He hung around Morosco's Burbank Theater and the opera house that was home to the Belasco Stock Company.

"He had a friend named Mickey Nielan," Maggie said. "He and my father wanted to do an act, a couple of guys singing and playing the piano. They had written some songs. They used to rehearse at the theater where my dad worked." This was the Los Angeles Orpheum. "One day the manager said, 'Okay, boys, it's time to see the act.' And they performed. He said 'Louder, louder.' Eventually he said, 'I have to tell you the truth. You don't have the projection to be on the stage. You're just not gonna make it. I would advise you to

do other things.' And eventually my father went back to Peoria, stopping in Chicago to start talking to songwriters."

Nielan went back to his other job as a chauffer. He graduated from it to become -- under the more dignified name Marshall Nielan -- one of the famous directors of silent films. Dick Whiting continued writing songs.

A friend arranged a meeting with Jerome Remick, head of Remick Music Company.

"I was fascinated why Remick had the big music office in Detroit," Maggie said. "Jerome Remick's father was a dairy farmer. He wasn't sure the kid in the music business was going to make it. He wanted him to be in Detroit, because the farm was there.

"Daddy placed two songs with Remick, who gave him fifty dollars advance on each of them. Remick said, 'You know, I like you, Whiting. I'd like you to work for me. I think you're very talented as a songwriter, and I think you could do very well running my company. You're very young, but I'd like to groom you and have you with me.' He started out as a copy boy, handing out sheet music to the stars, such as Jolson and Eddie Cantor."

Dick Whiting earned fifty dollars a week from Remick, meanwhile writing songs and playing piano in a Detroit hotel orchestra with six Hawaiians. To pass as Hawaiian, he wore brown makeup.

In 1916, Whiting wrote *It's Tulip Time in Holland*, which sold 1,500,000 copies in sheet music. The next year he had hits with *Mammy's Little Coal Black Rose*, which became an Al Jolson standby, and *(They Made It Twice as Nice as Paradise) And They Called It Dixieland*. The royalties for the two songs came to $28,000, a substantial sum at the time.

"He met a bank teller around the corner from the office, named Raymond Egan." Egan was a Canadian, born across the River in Windsor, Ontario. "Raymond Egan said, 'I write lyrics.' And they wrote *Japanese Sandman*. There was a war-song contest in 1918, for the Michigan Theater. They wrote a thing called *Auf wiedersehen*. Daddy didn't like it. He threw it in the wastepaper basket. This is like a movie, with Doris Day as the secretary. The secretary came in. She started dumping out the paper and found the song. She could play piano. She sat down and played it. She said, 'Mr. Remick, look at this song.' He said, 'That's great, who wrote it?' She said, 'Dick wrote it.' He went into my father's office and said, 'Richard, what is this?' He said, 'It's a song. I threw it away.'

Remick said, 'Well I think it's great, and we're going to put it in the contest. The only thing is, we're fighting the Germans, and *Auf wiedersehen* won't do. What does it mean?'

"'Till we meet again,' Daddy said.

"That became the title, and it won the contest. The first week they sold 5,000 copies of the sheet music. It went on to be the biggest sheet-music sale of a popular song ever."

Ultimately it sold 11,000,000 copies. I suggested that this record may still stand. Soon records -- and radio -- would replace sheet music as sources of popular music, and the playing of the piano, once common in American homes, would decline as Americans became passive participants in entertainment.

"Maggie said, "My father knew that with the sales of a song he wrote called *Horses*. 'Horses, horses, crazy over horses . . . ' He wrote that because he loved to go to the track. That song didn't sell the copies that it should have, because there was a record of it."

The next year he wrote a song based on a sarcastic catch phrase of American soldiers in the trenches of France: *Ain't We Got Fun*, with lyrics by Egan and Gus Kahn. He continued to collaborate with Ray Egan, who wrote the lyrics for *Sleepy Time Gal* and *Some Sunday Morning*, and Gus Kahn. Egan never went back to a bank, except to make deposits.

It was in Detroit that Whiting met his wife to be. "Along comes a lady who comes from thirteen children," Maggie said. "She's the youngest. The next youngest is a very good singer. Her name was Margaret Young, and my mother was Eleanor. Margaret is like Rose in Gypsy, with a great sense of humor. She's a pusher. She wants to get out of Detroit. She's told to go see Richard Whiting, because he can write songs for her or see that she gets songs written.

"Sophie Tucker's great song-writers were Jack Yellen and Milton Ager. Daddy knew Jack very well. He made an appointment and heard Margaret and said she was great and he'd introduce her to all the writers and she should go to New York. That's how my mother and my aunt met my father. At first the sparks were between my aunt and my father. He sent the two girls to New York with an open sesame. They met all the writers, they met Irving Berlin, they met everybody. And Aunt Margaret became very successful. She had done vaudeville in Detroit. She introduced *Way Down Yonder in New Orleans* and *Oh Johnny*. Yellen wrote for her always. My father wrote some songs for her.

"Eleanor, my mother, came back Detroit. My Aunt Margaret by now had married Charlie Musconi, of the Musconi Brothers, the great Ziegfeld dancers. They used to walk up walls. They'd take a flying leap and walk up the wall. Great, great act. One thing led to another and my father and my mother get married. I was born in Detroit July 22, 1924. Sophie Tucker was my godmother. "My mother said, 'Richard, there's no future here.' They went to California. He got signed with Leo Robin to write for Paramount. He wrote for Chevalier, *My Ideal, Louise, One Hour with You*, and then for Jeannette Macdonald, *Beyond the Blue Horizon*. He wrote for Buddy Rogers and Nancy Carroll. This was the beginning of the talkies. Everyone was going out there to write for talkies.

"My father was a very gentle, generous, very funny guy -- delightful. Not a pusher.

"One of his close friends was Buddy DeSylva, who was a great songwriter and a big Broadway producer. I think it was 1931. Buddy asked him to come to New York and do a show for Ethel Merman, Jack Haley, and Sid Silvers. It was called *Humpty Dumpty*. It dumped in Pittsburgh. DeSylva brought the writers back to New York and said, 'We need a new title. I want everybody to take a chance with me.' And they said, 'That's the title -- *Take a Chance*.' Daddy wrote *Eadie Was*

a Lady and *You're an Old Smoothie* for it. But he got very nervous doing shows and went back to California, and if any more songs had to be written for it, Vincent Youmans would do them. Youmans wrote *Rise and Shine* for the show. It was a very successful show, and ran for two years. Later on Buddy came out to Hollywood, to Paramount.

"So we're in Hollywood. My father writes all these things with Leo Robin for Paramount. Then he went to Twentieth Century Fox. He wrote for several pictures there, including the song for Shirley Temple *On the Good Ship Lollipop*, for which I was the inspiration.

"The great thrill of my life was to come home from school and go into the living room and he would play songs that he had written or had gotten. He would sit at that piano. That's how I first heard *My Funny Valentine*. He said, 'This is Dick and Larry's new song.' Every day I'd come home and hear something new, whether he wrote it or Kern wrote it or whoever it was.

"I knew these people were famous because of the way my father revered them. Everyone revered Kern and Gershwin. My father adored these people and they adored him. Ralph Rainger, and Sammy Fain, and Arthur Schwartz . . . They always came by for a drink, and to play their new songs.

"I met Kern on a little golf course in Holmby Hills with Johnny Mercer and Daddy and maybe Harry Warren. They said, 'Margaret, we'd like you to meet Jerome Kern.'

"Daddy had taken me at a very young age to a show, the road company of Kern's *Cat and the Fiddle*. When the conductor came in he saw Daddy and waved. I said, 'Who is that?' He said, 'Well it won't mean much to you now, but his name is Max Steiner.' I guess I was five or six or seven." (*The Cat and the Fiddle* was produced in New York in 1931, and probably reached Los Angeles a year later, when she was seven.)

Maggie said, "Odette Myrtle was in the show, which had a play within a play, about actresses putting on a play. Odette in the second act comes out in a clown outfit and plays the violin and sings *Poor Pierrot*. I turned to my father and said words to this effect: 'I know what I want to do when I grow up. I want to be on the stage. I want to sing like her.'

"I knew every Kern song, because my father adored him so, and taught me all of them. So it could have been Jesus Christ on the golf course. He said to me, 'Just call me Uncle Jerry.' So from that moment on, he was just Uncle Jerry. George Gershwin, all of them, Yeah! They were those people! But they were my father's buddies.

"I went to school with Harry Warren's daughter Cookie, and I went to dancing school with William Powell's son. I thought that everybody's kids had chauffeurs and that the fathers and mothers were all movie stars and we were all treated like royalty and everybody lived the same. I thought everybody was somebody.

"Daddy was a great golfer. He could have been a champion golfer. He used to shoot 64s, 65s. About three weeks after we left Detroit -- my mother told me -- there was a knock on the door, and two men were standing there and said, 'We're Dick's caddies. We missed him so we hitched a ride out here and we want to caddy for him.'

"Johnny Mercer came into the picture, 1934, 1935. He was asked by Buddy Morris, who was head of Harms, Witmark and Remick, to come out to write for pictures. He'd been out before, to write for shorts, but then he went back with Benny Goodman and the radio show they did. He came out again. He was asked who he wanted to write with, Harry Warren or Dick Whiting? He said, 'Dick Whiting first. I'd like to write with Dick Whiting cause I know he's a good golfer and he'll help me with my golf game.' That's when I first met Johnny.

"They wrote songs for a picture at Warner Bros called *Ready, Willing and Able*. The producer told my father and Johnny that they had to write a song about a man who's sending a letter to a woman, and then the woman is going to read it to her girlfriends. And then Busby Berkeley, the choreographer, had this idea where the women were going to be typewriter keys. Daddy said, 'How're we going to write a song describing all the words that she is? We're going to have to go through the damn dictionary.' He and Johnny were going through the dictionary together, and laughing about it. Mercer said, 'I'll probably go for every word in the dictionary. She's beautiful, she's wonderful, she's glorious.' Eventually they came up with the title *Too Marvelous for Words*.

"They were terribly creative, the two of them. Ideas bounced off them. Then Johnny heard me sing. He said, I want to give you two words of advice: grow up. But you have a talent.' He said, 'Margaret, who are your favorite singers?' There was Ethel Waters, and Mildred Bailey, and Frances Langford. And Judy Garland was beginning. She sang in a picture called *Football Parade* around 1939 or 1940. Johnny said, 'What I want you to do is listen to them and see what makes them tick, what makes their style. Take a trick from one or another, and find out what they're doing and why.' I was copying everybody and eventually evolving a style of my own. Johnny said, 'One of the great things about you, Margaret, is that you hit a dead tone, and then you let the vibrato in.'

"When my mother heard Johnny say that I had talent, back when I was ten or eleven, I started studying with Lillian Goodman, who was also a songwriter and was teaching all the young people in Hollywood. She knew what to do with throat problems. I studied with her for years, even when I was making records. She gave me a very good basis of legitimate, correct singing. And I worked with Harriet Lee, who was working in the studios and was a great coach. I had the greatest coaches of my life, of course, with those songwriters. Harriet made me believe the lyric.

"My father said to me, 'Margaret, here's my advice to you. Sing 'em the way we wrote 'em, they took us a long time. We're studied and we know how to write songs, me and my cronies. So if you're gonna sing, sing 'em the way we wrote 'em.'

"When I was very young, he said, 'There's all kinds of music, all kinds of things in the world. There's jazz, popular music, symphony music, there's opera.' He said, 'Don't be afraid to

embrace them. At least get to know them. And if you don't care about something, at least you've exposed yourself to it. There are all kinds of colors in the rainbow, as there are in music. That's the way you should live. Dig in, embrace it all. Find out about all of it. It may not interest you, but at least you'll be aware of it. Open up your mind to everything, and make your own judgment.' It was a wonderful thing to say to a youngster, whether they had musical talent or not."

It was to some extent because of that advice that another major influence entered Margaret's life: Art Tatum.

"There were two clubs on Vine Street in Hollywood. One was next to Capitol Records, and that's where I first heard Kay Starr, and I first heard Frankie Laine." (Both names were sung, a rising fifth, and very specific: D to A). "It was right next to Capitol Records and Music City. And the other was down the street a half a block. Somebody in their infinite wisdom said, 'Do you want to hear something truly great?' And I walked in and heard Art Tatum.

"He knew who my father was, and he knew I was singing a bit. He was dear and jolly and funny. And we became very good friends. I used to go down and hear him all the time. And I never heard anything like that in my life. He's the only guy I know who had a built-in rhythm section all by himself. He just was the most incredible talent.

"He touched everybody, whether saxophone players, pianists. He touched me because he opened a world of musicality. I heard things I'd never heard before: chords, ideas, simplicity, the love, the rhythm. I was used to singing things . . . " She sang the opening of *I Hadn't Anyone Till You*, right on the beat to illustrate her point. "To improvise: it was a world I'd heard of but something I knew nothing of. To phrase, yes. But to deviate from the melody, to do something else, was unbelievable. This man opened the door for me. He just was wondrous. And the most incredible thing happened.

"The singing teacher I told you about, Lillian Goodman, had cousins in New York. I was in New York, probably singing on the *Hit Parade*. I was there about a month before I was fired. Old Man Hill didn't like the way I sang." This was in 1941, when she was seventeen. War had begun in Europe; Pearl Harbor was months away. Old Man Hill was George Washington Hill, head of the American Tobacco Company, parent company of Lucky Strike cigarets, which sponsored *Your Hit Parade*. Hill's tyranny is legendary in the music business. Anyone appearing on that show and failing to meet his rigid and peculiar standards didn't last long. Among the others he fired were the Pied Pipers, with Jo Stafford. Maggie said, "He danced with his secretary as he listened to the program every Saturday. At that time I guess I was phrasing all over the place. And he couldn't keep time. If he stumbled, or the band was too loud, that was it. He let me go.

"Whatever the reason, I was in New York, just before the war. My teacher obviously called her cousins and asked them to call me. I was with my Aunt Margaret. I'm invited to their house for dinner, and in walks Art Tatum. We're the two guests. They said, 'You're two of our favorite people. We met you on the coast with Lillian.' Art said, 'I've known this child since she started singing.' He said to me, 'Come on,' and went into the den. He said, 'I feel like playing. Sing a tune.'

"I said, 'Let's do Daddy's song, *My Ideal*. So we did it. He said, 'Do another tune."

"I said, '*Someone to Watch Over Me* is my favorite.' We did that and we did *I Get a Kick Out of You*. I sang a bunch of songs I knew and he was playing and I looked around about two hours later and there was nobody there. So I walked out and they said, 'We didn't want to bother you.' That was a great evening. It sticks out in my mind. Because I had Tatum all to myself. It was bizarre.

"Whenever he worked anywhere I was, I'd go see him.

"Then the war started. In 1942, Johnny and Buddy DeSylva and Glenn Wallichs started Capitol Records. Although ever before that, one day on a golf course, when he was playing with Harold Arlen and Bobby Sherwood, he told me, 'I'm going to start a record company. Bobby is going to record for us, and I'm going to put you under contract.'

"Johnny used to go down to Music City, as did I. He got to know the owner, Glenn Wallichs, who had amassed a fortune from two big record and radio stores. He also used to go out and fix your radio and record player. He knew about selling records. Johnny told him he wanted to start a company. Glenn said, 'I'll do it with you.' Johnny said, 'All right. You'll be the brains. I'll pick the talent.' Buddy DeSylva was then head of Paramount Pictures. Johnny was writing for Paramount with Harold Arlen. He said to Buddy one day at lunch at Lucy's, 'I'm going to start this record company.' Buddy said, 'Good, I'll give you some money.'

"They wanted Liberty as the name, but it had already been taken. So they came up with Capitol.

"The first records were Ella Mae Morse and Freddy Slack doing *Cow Cow Boogie*, Dennis Day doing *Johnny Doughboy Found a Rose in Ireland*, *The General Jumped at Dawn* by Paul Whiteman, and *The Strip Polka* by Johnny. I was at the session. That was over a million seller. That was how Capitol started.

"They got an office across the street from Wallichs' Music City, one big room. They had Paul Weston at one desk, and Johnny at another, and Glenn Wallichs at another. Johnny said, "There's got to be more records made than Bing Crosby. Bing's the only guy that's really making records. And I want people to sing the songs the way we wrote 'em.' He said, 'There's a girl that sings with Tommy Dorsey.' I said, 'Jo Stafford. I have all the records.' He was signing people right and left.

"One day I went down to the little office and there was a secretary sitting at the front. She said, 'Who may I say is calling?'

"I said, 'Margaret Whiting.'

"Johnny yelled, 'Let 'er in!'

"I said, 'I guess we must be a success. We've got a secretary.' They were all laughing. The first releases had sold several million. That was fantastic for a new company and they were on their way. So they moved to new and bigger

offices atop Music City.

"But Johnny always saw every songwriter. He listened to every song. Because he wanted to pick the things for all of his artists individually. All the songwriters were privvy to Mercer.

"He said, 'We want to record you. I want you to do one ofyour father's songs and one of Buddy DeSylva's for luck. I've got an idea. You sing like a trumpet. And there's a great trumpet player, Billy Butterfield. I want you to do this record together. I did *My Ideal* and *Without Love*. We used Les Brown's band. They were at the Palladium. I walked in and met Butterfield briefly. They put me in an isolation booth. I sang the two songs. Two or three takes. Good-bye. So now the record does very well and we need a follow-up. Johnny heard *Moonlight in Vermont*. He said, 'That's for the kid.' He called me down and he sang the song, and Paul Weston was playing it. He said, 'What do you think?'

"I said, 'It's gorgeous.'

"Now I'm glad Art Tatum had happened in my life. I could hear those notes. My father didn't write that kind of song. I'm glad he told me to listen to everything. If I hadn't, I wouldn't have been able to hear . . . " And she sang the final phrase of *Moonlight in Vermont*.

"So now I was beginning to sing, under the influence of my father and Johnny Mercer, and another great friend of my father's, Frank Loesser. He was such a vital, ballsy, different kind of guy from Johnny. Johnny was soft and funny and provocative.

"When Johnny found *Moonlight in Vermont* for me, he never brought up the fact that it didn't rhyme, and I didn't think about it for many years."

(He also might have pointed out that the front strain does not contain a verb, nor does its two repeats: only the release contains verbs.)

"I never paid attention to it," Margaret said, "because Johnny said, 'I want you to think, what does Vermont mean to you?'

"I said, 'A calendar with a church in the snow.'

"He said, 'There are more images.'

"I said, 'Well, there's got to be summer, winter, fall. Fall. Everybody goes to see Vermont in the fall for the leaves.'

"He said, 'I want you to think of those pictures. I want you to think of the coming of spring. I want you to think of summer, people swimming and people walking, people having a lovely time outdoors. And then fall, and the maple syrup. The foliage with just a tinge of crisp in the air.'

"So we go in and record it and I'm envisioning all these pictures. It gave me something to go on."

"That's Stanislavskian," I said.

"Absolutely!" Margaret agreed. "That's what he taught me, and that's what Loesser taught me. Pick up that sheet music and look at those lyrics and make them mean something. Read the lyric aloud, over and over and over. Recite it until you get it. Your own natural instincts will tell you."

Her recordings joined the parade of hits Mercer and his colleagues were turning out at Capitol. I remember some of her records vividly, particularly *Thou Swell*. I loved the purity of her singing, although I didn't know enough about the subject yet to call it that. I loved the naked, unadorned quality of it. And the images in her mind as she sang *Moonlight in Vermont* somehow communicated to me, though they are not actually in the lyric.

"Capitol used to make maybe nine, ten different records a day with different people. Paul Weston would change his style in the arrangements. It got to be a very big thing, so they brought in other arrangers, like Nelson Riddle, and Frank De Vol."

"Capitol lost its personal touch for Johnny. Oh, he still recorded, and someone would say, 'What do you think of this song?' But he didn't come to the office every day.

"Johnny got bored and hurt because the music business changed. It became a big business. Capitol was a tremendous business, and he didn't want to do that. He was a dear heart. He loved picking out songs. But suddenly it got so big that they had to bring in other a&r people. Paul was by his side.

"And then'And then we they brought in Jimmy Conklin, and Alan Livingston, and it was a big business. And one day they called and said they were going to sell the company."

"And Johnny never stopped regretting it," I said. DeSylva and Wallichs wanted to sell the company; Johnny went along reluctantly.

"No," Maggie said. "They never should have done it. Things would kill him, like when he heard about Nat Cole calling up one day and hearing the operator say, 'Capitol Records, home of the Beatles.'"

"Johnny told me," I said, "that he went down to Capitol one day to see somebody, and the receptionist asked his name, then said something like, 'May I ask what it's concerning?'"

Margaret said, "He got out of it, and he regretted it. He was still writing. We used to take walks through Beverly Hills. He'd say, 'Let's do something. I'm bored, I'm not doing enough.' Fewer and fewer scores were coming his way, and he had time on his hands. Of course he did the Mancini songs. And *Emily* with Johnny Mandel. I was getting bigger in my career. He loved that. He would listen to everything I did, every program. I was on the radio with Bob Crosby. We had Willie Smith and Jimmie Rowles and Eddie Miller. It was a great band. The Andrews Sisters and I alternated daily. And we would tour a little. I went on the next program, with Jack Smith, Dinah Shore, and Frank De Vol. And then I got into television, and did a lot of that. I began to do a lot of theater. But with Johnny, he was doing less and less, and wanted to do more."

"The business was changing fast," I said.

"I call it the day the music stopped," she said "I never stopped. I was with Capitol seventeen years. Jack Rail, who handled Patti Page, said, 'You know, you ought to go with Dot, because Randy Wood is very clever.

"I'd made some country songs, like *Slippin' Around*, and had a five-million seller with Jimmy Wakely on it. I did an album of country songs and had great acceptance in the field. I think I was one of the first popular singers to go into that field. The first thing Randy Wood said was, 'Let's do a jazz album.' And I thought, 'Oh my God! Me singing jazz?'

"Pete Rugulo said, 'You're a hell of a jazz singer, whether you know it or not.' I said, 'You're kidding me!' And he said, 'No, you've got the sound of a jazz singer.' I said, 'What's a jazz singer?'

"He said, 'Improvise. You're just afraid.'

"I said, 'Okay, do you want to do some arrangements? I've got an idea. Let me use six jazz arrangers, and they'll all do

different sounds.'

"I got Pete Rugulo, Marty Paitch, Pete King, Skip Martin, Frank Comstock, and Johnny Mandel.

"I had the Hi-Los and Mel Torme helping me. I said, 'I'll never get through this without you.' They helped me do things I never would have done before. Oh God!

"That was the first album for Dot. Then I did country songs for Dot. Then came the 1950s. I did *Crying in the Chapel*. With the claw. The claw music came in in the '60s." She was talking about the eighth-note chorded triplet pattern on the piano, an incredibly irritating sound to musical people. Suddenly it was everywhere. "Then came *Rock Around the Clock*," she said.

"Now comes my daughter's room, with an altar to the Beatles. I'm still recording. And then I stopped. And in the sixties, I found a producer called Jack Gold, and I had another country hit called *The Wheel of Hurt* on London.

"I did three or four albums for London. What kept me going was the fact that my daughter said, 'You know, Mom, the kids love the way you sing. But you gotta get with it. Those arrangements! Please. Some of those songs!' So I go up to her room one day, and I pick up the first record, and it's *Goin' Out of My Head*, with Little Anthony. And I play it, and I think, 'This is wonderful!'

"I told my daughter about Rubinstein, and Horowitz, and Tatum, and gave her my education, and she gave me hers. There was plenty to be found in some of this music. There was the beat, which they loved. And they were fighting us. The best thing to describe it was *Both Sides Now* by Joni Mitchell. There are two sides of everything. My daughter and I became very close. I got into the new music enough that I found the songs I could sing, like Buffy St. Marie, things like that.

"Since then, I've been singing the great standards, but listening to the new songwriters. Then I got with Audiophile. I did Alec Wilder's radio show. I sang my father, I sang Johnny, I did Arthur Schwartz, with Loonis McGlohon on piano. I spent three days with Alec. Rex Reed said to me, 'You ought to let them bring this out on records.' And I did, my father's songs and Johnny's. And I did two or three more albums.

"And then DRG. I'm doing a new album for DRG that will probably be called *Then and Now*. Everybody's saying, 'Margaret, you're singing so much better!' I say, 'Doesn't it stand to reason that a woman of my age, who's gone through living, knowing what life is all about, and still waking up every morning and caring about doing things, and keeping up with everything, would sing better now? God, I would certainly know what to do with the lyrics.'

"Tex Arnold has done some very brilliant arrangements. We did *Old Devil Moon* and it really swings. We've done *Old Black Magic*. We've done *It Might as Well Be Spring* as a bossa nova. We did *Moonlight in Vermont*. I said I'd always wanted to record with Gerry Mulligan and we called him on the phone and he loved the idea. We do *I Got Lost in His Arms* and *The Best Thing for You* and a song of my father's and Johnny Mercer's called *Can't Teach My Old Heart New Tricks*. It's so today. Harmonically, it does not sound like Richard Whiting. It makes me realize how he'd have been writing if he had lived.

"My father always liked to help other people. It's an egotistical thing for me to say, but it has been shown to me that my father did many things in helping people, young songwriters, young singers. I've always been able to help songwriters.

"Walter Gross for one. He wrote *Tenderly* for me. He came over in the middle of the night. He was loaded. He said, 'This is for you. I wrote this song for you.' He came upstairs. I was living on the third floor, where the Blue Angel used to be, 150 East Fifty-fifth Street. And he handed me this song. I said, 'God, it's 3:30 in the morning!' He said, "Well I gotta play it for you.' He played *Tenderly* and I thought I was hearing the new *Moonlight Sonata*. He played it five or six times.

"I finally said, 'Come back tomorrow.'

"He said, 'I don't know what to do with this.'

"I said, 'I do. I know exactly what to do with it. It's one of the most gorgeous things I have ever heard.'

"Leo Robin was in town with Jule Stein, writing *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. I got Uncle Leo on the phone. He wrote with my father, and I'd stayed at his house the month my father was dying, so he really was an uncle to me, and a dear man. I called him. I said, 'I've found a song that is so gorgeous. You should write the lyric.' He said, 'Honey, I can't. We're going out of town and we've got to finish the show.'

"My mother had met Jack Lawrence, and told him she had a young single daughter living in New York and you ought to take her out. We'd never met." (Lawrence's lyrics include *All or Nothing at All, If I Didn't Care, It's Funny to Everyone but Me, A Handful of Stars, Johnson Rag, Play Fiddle Play, What Will I Tell My Heart?, Symphony*, and *Sunrise Serenade.)* "He kept asking me out. I said, 'Jack, you have written such great things. I'm sending Walter Gross over to you.' They met, and the next day Walter came over with the original lyric of *Tenderly*, which I still have. That afternoon we went down to Buddy Morris's office. Walter played it and I sang it. And Buddy Morris took it right away and published it.

"I've helped a lot of young songwriters, as I am still doing. I hear a great song and I say, 'We're either going to record it or get it to somebody.' I've been able to help a lot of singers, by giving them tips, by opening doors to nightclub owners, getting them employed, listening to them, going to see them. This is my pleasure. I go to learn. New people can show me as well as older people. I tell people, 'Go see everybody, expose yourself to everything.' That comes from my father. Whatever I can do to help someone along the way, I do it. I realize now that it's in the genes."

Margaret Whiting married three times: "I was married to Hubbel Robinson, who was once the head of TV for CBS; I was married to Lou Bush -- Joe Fingers Carr -- and have a daughter, Debby; and I was married to Richard Moore, who was a cinematographer. Men! Oh I think they're wonderful."

Richard Whiting wrote songs for twenty-seven movies and four stage musicals. His life was rich in acclaim, rich in money, rich in friendships, and his songs are part of America's musical heritage, some of them almost folk songs by now. But he didn't live to hear Margaret record his songs.

Richard Whiting died February 19, 1938. He was forty-six years old.