Gene Lees
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Ojai, Calif.
93024-0240

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Jackie and Roy
An American Story
Part 1

The late Bud Freeman argued that jazz was born not in New Orleans but in Chicago. While extending him tolerance on the grounds that he was born in that city of the broad shoulders, as Carl Sandberg called it, one must grant that he had at least a partial point. For it was in Chicago that the transplanted New Orleans musicians found fervid audiences and profitable employment and disseminated the music through the new medium of radio broadcasting, and it was there that Louis Armstrong, with an assist from Earl Hines, set jazz on its course as the art of the improvising soloist rather than the ensemble contrapuntalist. Armstrong was from New Orleans, but he defined himself — and jazz — in Chicago. Carl Sandberg was born in Galesburg, Illinois, but he defined himself and his art in Chicago, a city in which he did not settle until he was twenty-five.

And although I was drawn to, not born in, Chicago, the city shaped me in more ways than probably even I know. It is my favorite city in America, that great cluster of towers rising sudden from the lake. That endless swath of parkland along the water. It is a dramatic city. And it has always been a great jazz town, producing musicians in inordinate numbers, many of them born there, like Gene Krupa and Gene Ammons, and others who were born elsewhere but came to it, some of them drawn as by a magnet. It is the jazz hub of the midwest, and musicians go there from Iowa and Indiana and Wisconsin and Ohio and Kentucky.

Roy Kral is one of those born there; Jackie Cain is one of those who were drawn to it. Making it in New York may be the key to international recognition, but Chicago has always been wealthy in jazz musicians more or less unknown beyond its boundaries.

I made most of the friendships of my life in Chicago, in a matter of months in 1959 and 1960. Jackie Cain and Roy Kral were among the most important of those friends. So was the late Irene Kral, Roy's gifted singer sister and Jackie's close friend. I first heard Jackie and Roy on their recordings with Charlie Ventura's group and admired them. By the time I met them, they were established stars in the jazz world.

Leonard Feather wrote of them: "The duo, basically geared to sophisticated night club audiences but equally acceptable to jazz fans, is unique in its smooth, airy, and thoroughly hip approach. Their performances blend witty lyrics and unusual melodies with a light modern jazz feeling."

There has been nothing like them. Aside from his contributions to their vocals, Roy (although this is usually overlooked) is an outstanding pianist and arranger.

The personal friendships of jazz musicians, given their itinerant existence, are peculiar in that they are based on quick and fleeting personal contact. They meet someone, strike up a friendship, then move on. Somehow, miraculously, these sudden spontaneous attachments bud and blossom in spite of separations of time and distance. The telephone helps you stay in touch.

Roy was one of two children in his family, Irene the other. Actually, Roy wasn't born in Chicago. He was born Roy Joseph Kral on October 10, 1921, in Cicero. Cicero is a city unto itself, but it abuts Chicago on its east — it is twelve or so miles from the lakefront — and, on the north, Oak Park, the tony community where Ernest Hemingway was born. Cicero had a reputation for being the headquarters during the 1920s of the Capone mob, and the Capones indeed held sway there. Ralph Capone, Al's brother, gave Roy his first break in show business.

Roy's background is Czech. He spoke the language a little until he was three, but his parents gave up speaking it at home. I think I detect an influence of the language on his speech even to this day. There are no definite and indefinite articles in the Slavic languages. You don't say, "I read the book," or "I read a book." You say, "I read book." After musing on this, I've come to wonder if articles are really necessary; they aren't used in Latin, either. But in any case, and for whatever reason, Roy in his speech not infrequently omits the articles. He has a beautiful speaking voice, which is one reason that he for a time did a lot of voice-over work in television commercials.

"When I was five years old," Roy said, "my parents had me study the piano. My feet didn't touch the pedals. But I was playing scales, and practicing, and getting into classical music. Then I started school, and it was difficult to continue playing. So I dropped off for a while. Later on, more lessons. I studied maybe five years, six years. I wasn't fascinated by this classical music, although now I love it. But I had studied enough to be able read music. Then I started to hear bands. I didn't go into the high school orchestra or the music department. I was playing football. I got my letter and so forth. But then I started playing again, because I could go to a party and play a song. It was marvelous.

"I remember, even before this, getting into bed and waiting for midnight. I had this little radio under the covers, and I was supposed to be asleep. But I would hear Earl Father Hines broadcasting from the Grand Terrace Ballroom in Chicago, and I thought, 'I'm in heaven.' 'Cause the drums would go . . . . " And Roy sang a drum pattern. "And a man would call out, 'Earl Father Hines,' and Earl would do his piano runs! Great! The next morning, I'd get up and go over to the piano. And I discovered that my piano didn't have those notes on it.

"I'd think, How do you do that?

"Then I was copying Teddy Wilson's runs. It was like an F minor sixth run, that you can use on B-flat seventh. And I said, 'Oh that's how he does it!' And I finally got that down. And I got some descending runs, and I thought, 'This is great!' Some of my friends and I formed a little group. We started playing Elks' Clubs, and I thought I was king of the world.

"We lived on Austin Boulevard near 16th Street in Cicero — 1634 Austin Boulevard. Al Capone, the Organization, had a huge three-story apartment building on the corner of 16th Street and

Austin Boulevard, big yellow-brick building, and a heavy-duty garage, and walls, seven feet high and solid yellow brick, on either side leading from the garage to the steel door leading to the apartment building. So when you walked from the garage, you were well protected.

"When I was about seventeen, we were rehearsing our dance band in my basement. Four brass, four saxes, three rhythm."

His sister Irene would always remember this. She said, "I was always fascinated by my brother rehearsing in the basement with different bands and singers, and they were having so much fun, I just knew that I wanted to do that too." Born January 18, 1932, Irene was eleven years Roy's junior and so must have been about six when that band was in rehearsal.

Meanwhile, Roy said, "The guys started saying to me, 'Hey, get us some work.' So I said, 'Maybe Mr. Capone can help me.' I didn't know Al or anything, but I'd seen his brother, Ralph, around. So I'm hanging around the corner, and finally I see him. I say, 'Ralph! We've got a real good dance band and we're trying to get some work. And I was just hoping there was some way you could help me.' He said, 'See me in about a week. Maybe I can tell you something.'

"Went back there in a week. Didn't see him. Ten days go by. Finally I see Ralph again. I said, 'Ralph, I was talking to you last week about getting some work for our dance band.' He said, 'Yeah, I remember. Look, we got a place up on the North Side called the Campus. It's west of the Northwestern University campus, and we need a band up there. If your band is any good, you've got a job. If it's no good, you're out. Friday and Saturday.'

"Great! So we went. We had a good band. We had a great singer named Bill Johnson. The guy who introduced me to Jackie, Bob Anderson, was on the band, playing baritone and tenor. We stayed there for six months.

"We started getting bookings all over the midwest. It was a co-operative, but they elected me the leader. I'd do announcements and so forth and so on. I was writing maybe half the charts for the band. Bob Anderson was doing the other half. We traveled a great deal, young guys seventeen or eighteen years old. All the local ballrooms everywhere. Bare essentials and making no money to speak of, but having a great time and the orchestra was excellent. It would be good today. It was billed as Roy Kral and His Orchestra. I thought it sounded too Czechoslovakian, we should change it to something classy.

"But traveling on the road, I has having a hard time keeping everybody together. Finally I took the book and a few of the players and joined a good midwestern band by the name of Charlie Agnew. He was good and we played a lot of hotels and so forth.

"But the war was on. It became a matter of enlist or be drafted, so I enlisted in the army in 1942. I went into a military police band. We lived in a tar-paper barracks up in Skokie, Illinois. Not only were we bandsmen, we were also on K.P., and walking guard duty at night carrying rifles. All of it. Four years later, I was in Battle Creek, Michigan, guarding German prisoners with a shotgun.

"Military Police for four years, first in Skokie, then in Fort Sheridan, Illinois, which was a cushy job. I had gotten in trouble with my sergeant in Skokie. Well, we had a fight. He had me shipped out for combat duty. So I took all the charts for our army dance band and said, 'Look, these belong to me. This is *my* book.' And I took it with me.

"When I got to Fort Sheridan, I ran into a Sergeant Papandrea, a career army man. He said, 'You're from the MP battalion band.' I said, 'Yeah. I ran into some trouble over there and I'm sent for combat.' He said, 'You play piano, right? You're an arranger?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'We're forming a band. So hang on.' Two days later, I get a call. I go over to this beautiful building — they called it The Hotel — on Fort Sheridan base. I had my own room, I had a piano in it, it was warm. I went from tar-paper barracks to heated heaven.

"He got me a pass for my car. I could drive my car up from Cicero, put it on the post. And he said, 'You're free to do anything you like. Just show up for formations and if you want a leave, here's a permanent pass.'

"It was really sweet. We would play the officers' club, play a lot of USO dances. Finally that broke up and I was sent to Detroit. The Detroit band did a lot of broadcasting over WWJ, the Detroit News station. A huge auditorium. We were the star band in the area. It was a concert band, 45 or 50 men. I wrote for that, I wrote for the dance band, I did all kinds of things.

"Then I went to Battle Creek, a huge hospital facility for wounded veterans. We would push a small sixty-note piano on wheels through the wards. There'd be a guy carrying a snare drum, a bass player, maybe an alto and a trumpet. We'd go through the wards, playing for all these guys. I saw what a basket case really means. No arms, no legs. They were in wicker baskets."

"Hell," I said, "you wouldn't even be able to commit suicide."

"And some of them, poor guys, part of the skull was missing and you could see the gray brain showing through transparent skin. These guys were really beat up. But damn! they enjoyed having somebody come around and play some music for them. We went through all the wards almost every day. Then we would play for dances at night. I was discharged after four years. That was 1946.

"I went back to Detroit, to WWJ, because the announcers, the producers, the music directors, knew that I was the arranger for that army band. I said, 'I'd like to have a job here at the station as an arranger.' I was hired. I lived in a hotel room. I had a little pump organ for a keyboard, and I started doing charts for the WWJ orchestra, which had violins, the whole thing. It was very nice. Finally I realized that here I am, head down writing arrangements, and I never hear them because they play them too early in the morning and I stay up all night long writing. I said, 'Wait a minute, I'm going home.' I quit, packed up my stuff, and went back to Chicago, no prospects in sight. I couldn't take just arranging.

"Got to Chicago. I met George Davis. He had a group. He'd

just lost his piano player. He had a great bass player, a great drummer, and he played very nice alto. He said, 'Join us.' They played at a little place on the South Side called Jump Town, which became quite famous. Western Avenue and 47th Street. Played there for eight or nine months, maybe a year.

"Finally, my friend Bob Anderson from seventeen-year-old dance-band days, brings a young blonde singer in to hear our group. 'Cause we were good. Hot group. And he said, 'Let her sing. She's a great singer.' I said, 'Oh man, don't be bringing your girls in and asking me to let them sing. And you want me to play for 'em?' That's that war between the piano players and the singers that we've talked about."

The girl's name was Jacqueline Ruth Cain.

Jackie was born on May 22, 1928. Once, between sets at a club in Toronto called Lyte's, I mentioned that I was born in 1928. "Oh, we're the same age," Jackie said brightly. I gave, apparently, a quizzical look; women do not normally blurt out their ages. "Well," she said, "there's no use lying about it. It's in Leonard's book." Meaning the Leonard Feather *Encyclopedia of Jazz*.

She was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a workaday city north of Chicago best known for shoes and beer. It was also the home town of Woody Herman, Bunny Berigan, and Hildegarde, who was a year or two ahead of Woody in their high school.

Like Woody Herman, Jackie's mother is of German and Polish stock, a common mixture in Milwaukee. Jackie's late father was of mixed German, Irish, and English stock.

"My mother and father were divorced when I was very young," she said. "I only saw my father maybe once a week. But I was close to him. I admired him so much. He had a great personality. He was funny, he loved music, he loved to go to theater. He was a salesman. He sold office furniture, which was not really what he wanted to do, because he was quite a good artist. But at that time, the Depression, he couldn't continue. He had to make a living, so that's what he did. I think that's the reason he later became an alcoholic. My dad could draw. He had a special talent for it. My family on my father's side, several of them are artists. My cousin is a staff artist on the *Milwaukee Journal*.

"I guess frustration is what drove my father to drink, and being a salesman, you tend to drink anyway, with clients and lunches. I think he was just a very disillusioned man. He shot himself when he was about sixty-two years old. But that's not that old. It was about the same time Jack Kennedy died. It was a big blow to me.

"I was, I guess, a natural singer. We never had a piano. My mother liked to sing, and she would teach me songs by singing them to me. My father was the manager of a little neighborhood theater in Milwaukee. They always had amateur hour on Monday nights. One Monday, they didn't have enough amateurs, so my dad wanted me to do it. I was about six years old, but I knew a couple of songs. So they entered me in this amateur contest, just to fill out the program. And I won. And that of course started it.

"My mother taught me more songs and helped me to do more, wherever there'd be an amateur hour. I started singing at places like the American Legion post when I was very, very young.

"By the time I was fourteen or fifteen, I wanted to sing very badly. I just loved listening to the radio and learning songs. We didn't have a phonograph. I learned from Jo Stafford. She must have been one of my earliest influences.

"I was a very shy person, not secure in it at all. But I got up the courage to ask bandleaders, 'Could I sit in?' I went to the Eagle's Ballroom, and if they had a good band, I'd say, 'Could I sing a number?' And they'd say, 'Are you any good?' And I'd say, 'Yeah, I'm good.' I don't know how I got the nerve to do that. I had to screw up my courage even to approach the guy. I sang with Horace Heidt's band at the Riverside Theater at fourteen. I got up and sang one time and they asked me to come back and sing at every show. They put me on a chair, because I was very small.

"After that, I started working with local bands that played for dances on Saturday night. We played the then-current big-band stock arrangements. I sang with that band all over Milwaukee. I finally graduated from high school and I got a job for a full week at a club in downtown Milwaukee with a band that was called Nick Harper. He played the violin."

Actually, his real name was Nick Hupfer. He had been with the Isham Jones band along with Woody Herman, Joe Bishop, and others who became the core of the first Woody Herman band, the Band that Plays the Blues, when Jones retired. Hupfer changed his name to Harper. He, Bishop, and Gordon Jenkins were the chief arrangers for that band. As it evolved toward becoming the so-called First Herd, Harper apparently went home to Milwaukee and formed the band with which Jackie sang during the war years. It was then that the Chicago bandleader Jay Burkhardt heard her.

Jackie said: "Jay Burkhardt was up, visiting his aunt, I think. He said, 'You sing well. I'd like you to come down to Chicago and work with my band. We have three or four jobs a week.' He gave me his phone number and his card and said, 'Please talk to your parents and see if you can make it.' Chicago is only ninety miles away, but I'd never been out of Milwaukee. In the meantime, I'd also met Bob Anderson, who was playing with a band at the Schroeder Hotel. He was also an arranger. Was he in the army with you, Roy?"

"No, he was in my band when we worked for Capone."

"The musicians in Milwaukee," Jackie said, "had been turning me on to other singers. They'd say, 'Have you ever heard Billie Holiday?' They'd give me records to play. By then we had a phonograph. I liked Peggy Lee, Anita O'Day, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and the Andrews Sisters.

"I asked my mother if I could go to Chicago and work with the Jay Burkhardt band, and of course she said, 'No. I can't let you go down there and live in a hotel by yourself. You're too young. You'd have to have supervision and everything.'

"So I cried and carried on and stayed in my room, and my stepfather said, 'Let her try it. She'll be back in a month.' So I called Jay Burkhardt. My mother spoke to him, and they arranged for me to stay at his house with his family. He had a sister, a few years older than me, and she shared her room with me. She met me at the train station and took me home and took me under her wing. We're best friends to this day. Her name is Irene Lionberg. She married Red Lionberg, the drummer with the band. She helped me in a lot of ways. I was totally naive, and needed the protection.

"I lived with the family in Hegewisch. It's right near Gary and Hammond. A real working-class area." It was then. The steel mills flamed, employment was high. Now most of the steel mills have gone cold, like those of Pittsburgh, abandoned factories line the lakefront, and Gary is drug-ridden. For seven of the last twenty years, it has had the highest murder rate in the nation.

"Jay Burkhardt's parents had a little grocery store there in Hegewisch," Jackie said. "They lived behind the store, and they owned a house. And they were wonderful people. I enjoyed that time so much, because I never had a real family life like they did. Everybody sat down at the table together. My folks had a grocery store too, and we lived behind the store. My mother or stepdad, either one of them had to get up and answer the doorbell every time someone walked in. It was a real Mom and Pop operation. Somebody always had to leave the table, and we never really had a meal together. It wasn't a warm family situation anyway, because I kind of resented my stepfather in the beginning, although he was a good man and I grew to love him in time. So being with the Burkhardts was wonderful. They all sat down. Jay and his wife and their child, his sister Irene, his parents. They'd talk. Jay's dad would tell World War I stories. They were beautiful people, and made me feel at home.

"Bob Anderson was, like, a real buddy of mine. He wrote arrangements for me with Burkhardt's band. I had a couple of really great charts. Kind of dissonant. Boyd Raeburnish. Lou Levy played piano on that band. Jimmy Gourley, the guitarist who lives in Paris now. Cy Touff. And Joe Williams. We sang the same charts, but I was an octave higher. Irene — " She referred to Roy's sister " — sang with the band. A lot of people started out with that band." (Eventually, in 1957, Irene would join the Maynard Ferguson band and leave Chicago permanently.)

It was during Jackie's period with Burkhardt that Bob Anderson took her to Jump Town to meet Roy. When Roy showed the usual pianist's reluctance to have a girl singer sit in, Anderson drew him over to the bar. "We had a couple of drinks," Roy said, "and he talked me into it. And Jackie sang. And she was *good.*

"The owner of the club, Pete Jonan, was there, and he said, 'Hey, she's great. You guys need a vocalist on the weekends.' 'We do?' 'You do.'

"We had a vocalist on the weekends, Jackie. She was seventeen, something like that. Voluptuous and beautiful!"

It is a judgment with which musicians have concurred ever since. There is a long line of musicians who at one time or another have had distant crushes on Jackie. Aside from her cool beauty, they love her intonation.

"Pretty soon we had some things going, some nice charts. Then she was singing with us every night of the week. We started to do broadcasts on WBBM radio, remotes. We became very hot around Chicago, and we were proud of it."

"Roy wasn't the least bit interested in me," Jackie said. "I sort of had a crush on Roy, but I was quite a bit younger, and he had a girl who was older, very sophisticated. If he was interested in me, he didn't look it. One New Year's Eve, we were working at Jump Town. Midnight came, and I thought, 'Here's my chance!' I was waiting to kiss the guy. After we sang *Auld Lang Syne*, I gave him this big wet juicy kiss. Suddenly he started looking at me differently. So then he started driving me to the train. I was still living with Jay Burkhardt's family in Hegewisch.

"The last train was at 2 a.m. If I missed it, we had to sit in a restaurant until 6 in the morning. Luckily, Roy and George Davis would join me, and we'd sit and talk and have a ball. Sometimes other friends would come in and hang out until I got my 6 o'clock train. Roy would borrow his father's car on the weekends, when he could get it. He still lived in Cicero, which was just as far on the other end of town.

"Dave Garroway had his radio show, the 1160 Club. He talked about us all the time. He'd say, 'You ought to hear this group at Jump Town.' He talked about me. At that time he was playing a lot of Sarah Vaughan and building her. She became well-known through Dave Garroway. He dubbed her the Divine One."

Roy said, "And Garroway would present us in his concerts at the Morrison Hotel. Name groups and local groups. We had heard Dave Lambert and Buddy Stewart with Gene Krupa singing *What's This?* We'd heard Louis Armstrong . . . " Roy imitated Armstrong's scat style " . . . and Bing Crosby, and we added it together and said, 'We can *do* that.' So I wrote some things for two voices and the alto.

"We were on one of Dave Garroway's concerts opposite Charlie Ventura's group. Buddy Stewart, Kai Winding, Shelly Manne on drums, Lou Stein on piano, Bob Carter on bass. A hot group."

Jackie said, "Buddy Stewart was the first one I ever heard sing *Try a Little Tenderness*. He was singing ballads, then he also did the stuff with Kai and Charlie, the three-way thing they did. If he had lived, he would have been a big star."

Stewart, who was from New Hampshire, had sung in a quartet with the Glenn Miller band, then in the Claude Thornhill vocal group called the Snowflakes, and, after service in the army, joined the Gene Krupa band. The Dave Lambert-Buddy Stewart *What's This?* with Gene Krupa was the first recorded bop vocal. But Stewart was equally effective as a ballad singer. He died in a New Mexico car crash in May, 1950, about two years after Jackie met him. He was twenty-eight.

"Shelly was such a gas," Jackie said. "I remember I had *never*

heard a drummer play so beautifully behind a singer. When I would do a ballad, he would play all these brush strokes and these little touches, nuances and color. I almost forgot what I was singing, sometimes, because I'd be listening to him, and I'd say, 'Where am I?'

"Once in a while that will happen with Roy, too. He'll throw a chord in there and you almost forget your lyrics. Yeah!

"Buddy Stewart was just so good. It was nice getting to know those guys, working with them. And of course after that was when we started to work with Charlie. He came to hear us at a Dave Garroway concert. He liked Roy's writing."

"We were a well-rehearsed group," Roy said of the Davis band. "Tight. We just poured it on. Three days later, Charlie Ventura came out with his manager, Don Palmer, and listened to us at the Beehive, where we were playing now. They sat all evening, listening and talking. Next day they called us, and said to Jackie and me, 'We're forming a new group, and we'd like to have the two of you join us. We're going to open at the Blue Note in Chicago in three weeks. Will you write the book for us?'

"I did nothing but write charts for the Charlie Ventura group."

Jackie said, "That's when he had Ben Ventura on baritone, Ernie on tenor, and Pete played trumpet. He was trying to help his brothers get started."

"They could play nice whole notes or half notes," Roy said. "It was difficult."

"But it was a smash," Jackie said, "even though it was kind of rough. The charts sounded good, and we got all kinds of rave reviews, and the band just took off.

"Actually, I joined Charlie first. He hired me alone, because he had a job at the College Inn at the Sherman Hotel. He had a ten-piece band. And I worked with Buddy Stewart and Shelly Manne and that group. They only needed a girl singer for that particular job. They had air time every night from the College Inn. I just did my little tunes, and Roy wrote my arrangements. The announcer was in the studio and couldn't see us. So he thought Kai Winding was the girl and Jackie Cain was the guy. And he'd say, 'And now the lovely Kai Winding.' Kai was teased about that one for a long time."

Roy said, "Then Charlie got Benny Green on trombone, Ed Shaugnessy on drums, Conte Candoli on trumpet, Boots Musulli on baritone, Charlie on tenor, Gus Cole on bass, and me on piano. We started recording, doing concerts all over, traveling, we won all the polls, *Down Beat*, *Metronome*. It was a very hot group."

"What was the first record you made with Charlie Ventura?"

"I'm not sure," Jackie said.

"Neither am I," Roy said.

"*Lullaby in Rhythm* was one of them," Jackie said, "but I don't think it was the first."

As we were talking, I heard in my head Jackie's voice singing the verse of the song, so long ago: "When the day is done and the sun is red, out in the western sky. Then you la-ay your head on your tiny bed, and you close your sleepy eyes." I sang it back at her, with the dropping-fourth melisma on the word "lay".

She said, "I remember going into the other room at the record date, and thinking, 'I don't like this straight. Let me think about this a minute.' I thought about the phrasing for a minute, how to do it a little differently. And I made it up.

"I sang the first chorus, and Roy came in on the vocalese." By then we had started hanging out together."

"Romance in Chicago," Roy said sardonically.

"Romancing a little," Jackie said. "And then when we were on the road with Ventura, we actually started living together."

"Shocking stuff, in those days," I said.

During this period, Jackie was studying with a voice teacher named Don Maya. Then Irene Kral studied with him and, at Irene's suggestion, so did I. He was a short, barrel-shaped Mexican who had a wonderful gift of teaching: not coaching, teaching.

"Who first found Don Maya?" I asked.

"He was in the Fine Arts building on Michigan Boulevard," Jackie said. "I found him through a singer named Bob Dunn. He gave up singing because he had to make a living. He was a really very good singer, and I admired his work. I asked him if he had studied, and he told me about Don Maya. I called him and made arrangements and took some lessons, and I liked him right away.

"Don was good at teaching technique. There are a lot of teachers who know how to coach and how to work with songs. But I don't think that's what you want. You want to develop your own style and the way to do that is by doing it. It's an evolutionary process. In the beginning, you always emulate whom you admire.

"Early Sarah is what I really admired. And so I tried to sing like her, and I sounded a little like her at that point. I used to do all those slurring things. And one day I realized it was silly to try to sing like somebody else, because you had to develop your own sound. You had to be original to be anybody. And I said, 'I'm not going to try to be anything I'm not. I come from Milwaukee, I'm American, I'm white. I'm just going to sing straight ahead with a good sound and try to make the lyrics mean something.

"But the midwestern r is detrimental in singing, really. People to this day can still peg that I'm from the midwest, because I have those very hard r's, and the broad a's. The broad a's are okay for singing, because you *want* to have the broad vowels. But the r's are a give-away."

"Yeah," I said, "most singers learn to soften the r almost to a silent h."

"Yeah," Roy said.

"I do that," Jackie said. "But sometimes I use the r's."

"Did you study voice, Roy? Ever?"

"Nope."

Jackie said, "In fact Roy always hesitated singing. He never really wanted to sing. I started to coax him as we went along, and he had to do a couple of things where we sang lyrics. I guess it was hard at first to do both. When you're a piano player, it's

difficult."

"Nat Cole told me *he* found it difficult," I said. "If anybody should have been at ease, he should have. He said it divided your attention. He said he sang better when he didn't play."

"And you play better if you don't sing," Roy said.

"Roy never really wanted to sing because he didn't think of himself as a singer. In the beginning, he had kind of a funny little fast vibrato . . . "

"It was a Skinnay Ennis vibrato," Roy said.

"A French vibrato," I said. "Piaf, Lili Pons . . . . "

"I hated it," Roy said.

"Sarah Vaughan's control of vibrato is one of the most incredible things I've ever heard," I said.

Jackie said, "Sarah Vaughan could have been an operatic singer, if she'd wanted to. She had the instrument."

Roy said that Jackie told him, "Listen, why don't you use this Don Maya approach? It'll help you."

"So I started practicing. We'd warm up together. Play the chord on the piano. Like Don Maya did. And then sing the long tones. Then sing the scale going up and coming down a few times. Then half step up, right up for two octaves."

"Well," Roy said, "all of a sudden it was much easier to sing. I could control it, I had breath control, I could hit the notes where they were supposed to be. And it fixed my vibrato."

"The thing about scales that's important," Jackie said, "it's not so much singing — it's a question of becoming really comfortable and familiar with your voice. The more you sing, the more you feel natural doing it. And when you sing scales and sing long tones, you're actually building your diaphragm. That was Don Maya's main thing, to sing on the breath. Remember when he'd say, 'On the breath'? Because you have to build up the diaphragm so that it can support the tone. For example, when we do clinics and talk to kids, you're not telling them what they want to hear. You say, 'Look, what you really have to do is learn a little about technique and sing long tones and do these things. It's like being a weight-lifter. You have to build up the musculature necessary for singing, if you want to be really good at it.

"And it's better if you play an instrument, and really understand chords and the way chords move, and so forth, to be able to do improvisation. And they don't want to hear that. They want to get up and sing off the top of their heads, but it's never going to be very good if they do that. You have to have more knowledge and more experience with vocalizing."

Jackie's work with Don Maya came to an end: she and Roy went on the road with Charlie Ventura. First stop: New York.

Jackie said, "That first time in New York with Charlie Ventura was a very special thing. To drive to New York, to come through the Lincoln Tunnel, to see this big city, to be working at the Royal Roost — opposite Bird, and Tadd Dameron's group — was thrilling. Such an exciting time. The images of the city. We stayed in a hotel at 49th and Broadway, and worked at the Royal Roost, which was right nearby . . . "

Roy said, "First we were opposite Tadd Dameron's group, then Dizzy's. Then Billy Eckstine was there. Then Charlie Parker. And another singer was there, Kenny Hagood."

"I remember he used to eat an onion like an apple, before he'd go on," Jackie said.

"Said it was good for his voice," Roy said. "When Charlie Parker was there, opposite Charlie Ventura, occasionally when it was time for Charlie to go on, Al Haig would be delayed, for one reason or another. Or not show up. And Bird would say, 'Hey, Roy, come on!' And I would play the first tune, and that would be it. A few days would go by and Al wouldn't be there again. Bird would say, 'Okay, Roy, you be Al now.'"

"Were you nervous?" Jackie asked.

"Sure I was nervous! Are you kidding? Coming to New York? Working at the Royal Roost? Opening a set with Charlie Parker? Oooo! Look out!"

Jackie said, "There's one scene I have always remembered from that time. We were working opposite Mingus. One time we worked there, Mingus was there, working with Bird. And for some reason — well, I know the reason — Bird was late and he didn't show up. And Mingus got on the microphone and delivered a tirade about how this kind of musician gave the music a bad name, and gave us a bad reputation. And he was talking about Charlie Parker.

"And I remember at that time too, we'd loan Bird a lot of money. Hey, got five, got ten? He nickeled and dimed us to death, and he was doing that to a lot of people. You knew what he was doing, but you couldn't say no to him. He was a wonderful guy."

"He was so *brilliant*," Roy said. "And charming! A *nice* man, a lovely man. And so eloquent."

"I used to love to sit and watch him play," Jackie said, "because of the way he used his hands on the saxophone. His fingers hardly moved from the keys. Minuscule movements. He kept his fingers sort of open. They weren't real bent. He was just so technically proficient on that instrument, it was amazing, and I just used to sit and watch his fingers, because I couldn't believe all these notes were coming out and the way he was playing — so effortlessly. Total focus."

"This was 1948, '49," Roy said. "With Ventura at the Royal Roost, we were doing live broadcasts with Symphony Sid. He would come on the air and . . . " Roy sang the front strain of *Jumpin' with Symphony Sid*. "And one night, I remember, he said something like, 'And now Jackie Cain and Roy Kral are going to join Charlie Ventura. They've been doing a little light housekeeping around New York.' I thought, 'You son of a bitch!'"

"He was probably stalling," Jackie said. "He probably couldn't think of anything else to say. He was kind of a goofy guy."

"Blurted to the world?" I said.

"Well, on the radio," Roy said. "Cat's out of the bag."

"I'm glad it wasn't being broadcast in Milwaukee, that's all I can tell you," Jackie said, laughing. "But I wanted to get to know

Roy better. We were living together, and getting along very well."

"Well it worked," Roy said, "because here we are, we'll be celebrating our wedding anniversary in June. We got married June 19, 1949." This alone makes Roy unusual: one of the few men who can remember the date of his wedding anniversary.

Jackie said, "We were only with Charlie a year and a half."

"Yes," I said, "but it had a considerable impact. Then you went on your own. But as I recall, the billing wasn't Jackie and Roy, it was Jackie Cain and Roy Kral."

"Jackie and Roy was catchy, and it was easier," Roy said.

"We left Charlie Ventura and got married," Jackie said. "We were having problems with Charlie. He was a wonderful guy and we loved him. But he was very, very jealous. Whenever we would do something that would get a lot of applause . . . If I sang a solo, and got a lot of applause, he wouldn't let me sing the next set."

"He sounds like Benny Goodman," I said.

"A lot of crazy things like that," she said.

"Well, like," Roy said, "newsmen would come up to us if we had been doing something unique with the unison voices or voices and horns, and they'd want to talk to us. He forbade us to talk to anyone until he okayed it. Or they had to go through him before they could talk to us."

"One time," Jackie said, "the whole band was supposed to be interviewed for a New York paper, I think the *Mirror*. It was a feature story for the Sunday magazine section. At that time he had Virginia Wicks for a publicist. She probably set this thing up. We all went to this meeting and he didn't show up on time. He came in maybe a half hour to forty-five minutes late. In the meantime, we were there with the photographer and the guy who was going to write the piece started asking questions. And so we started answering. Finally Charlie arrived. Then the band got up and they took pictures of us. When the article came out the following week, it was mainly about us. Which was not our fault. The article was all about the voice-horn thing."

"How was that voiced?" I asked. "You'd be an octave down from Jackie, and in the same register with the tenor?"

"And sometimes we did things with trombone and Jackie and me. There were all kinds of ways."

Jackie said, "Charlie got very angry about the article, and we had a big fight about it. It happened quite often. And we thought, 'Do we need this?'"

"It was quite upsetting," Roy said.

"Actually we were stupid to leave that early, because the band had just reached a pinnacle. We were named the best small band that year by both *Metronome* and *Down Beat*. We were at a crest of popularity. The last concert we did, the Gene Norman concert in Pasadena, they still sell that record. And it still sounds good."

"It was a very attractive band," I said.

"And we had a very nice way of laying back with the rhythm section," Roy said.

"And the way it was presented," Jackie said, "the way Charlie would introduce the guys as they came out, it had a certain quality about it. But it got uncomfortable, and when we decided to leave, the bass player, Kenny O'Brien, who was also unhappy with the job, decided to come with us. His wife, Elaine Leighton, was a drummer. And so we said, 'Lets use Elaine on drums.' So we formed a group with cello. We made four sides on Atlantic."

Roy said, "It was amplified cello, tremolo guitar to sustain long notes, and arco bass, and then the drums and piano and voices. For ensemble work, it was an unusual sound, among other applications."

"We had it for about a year," Jackie said, "but the world was not ready for that kind of a group. It was ahead of its time. It was the first time I ever heard of a group having a cello. It blended well with the voices. Roy wrote some nice arrangements. Finally we had to disband, because we weren't making any money. Then we started doing a duo. Sometimes we worked with bass."

"We worked around Chicago," Roy said. "Little odds and ends jobs. We wound up with some group . . . . You were pregnant, and it was the last of the engagements because you were going to retire to have the baby. We were at the Stage Door in Milwaukee. The following week Anita O'Day was coming in and she needed a pianist. She talked to me and said, 'Listen, would you like to travel with me for a while?' Jackie said, 'Well I'm going to be home, I'm not going anywhere.' So I did that for about nine months. Traveled with Anita as pianist and conductor, rehearsed all the groups we'd pick up in Kansas City and Denver and wherever."

"She had nice things to say about Roy in her book," Jackie said. "One of the few nice things she said was about Roy."

"Anita was going to Hawaii, and I didn't want to be that far from Jackie. I got a job working at some little joint in Chicago, just playing solo piano. And occasionally singing a song, *I've Got the World on a String*, all that kind of stuff. I worked there for months and months and months. A woman owned the place. And she was a singer. And she would always want me to accompany her. And she sang like, well, like a hysterical Judy Garland. It was loud and poignant . . . and super-adequate. And the bartender, Sammy, would also sing, but he was Mario Lanza!" Roy sang in a Lanza voice: "See the pyramids along the Nile . . . . Same song, every night. I didn't hate it. I was making a living.

"That was 1951. Nickie was born in 1952.

"I continued to work at this place, the Casbah, on Rush Street. Then I worked at the Black Orchid, playing intermission piano. They had class acts, and I would accompany different acts when they needed it. Once again, I was making a living, but it was not what I wanted to do."

"And we didn't want to start anything until Nickie was at least a year and a half old," Jackie said.

"Then, all of a sudden," Roy said, "out of the blue we got a call from Charlie Ventura. He said, 'I've bought a jazz club, it's in New Jersey, outside Camden. I'm starting up the group, and I'd like you guys to join us.' It was called Charlie's Open House, and

it was really great. He would have acts, we played for dancing, and we also did the show. Here was a marvelous way to get back into the business, be together, and have employment. Start over again.

"We stayed with him about a year, traveled, played theaters, did more recordings."

"It was kind of nice," Jackie said. "We had Nickie with us, and I got a baby sitter and started working again."

"We were in New York doing something," Roy said. "One of our friends we'd known in Chicago, Rogers Brackett, who was an advertising man, introduced us to Alec Wilder. He said, 'Alec Wilder is a very important man. He has a lot of connections and I'd like to have him hear what you do, because I've been talking about you.' I had admired Alec Wilder early on. I heard his octet in 1938. On my Victrola! He was one of my early heroes. We finally met him. Our friend set up a meeting in someone's apartment on Central Park South, twentieth floor or something like that, just Jackie and me, piano and the two voices.

"The piano was a spinet. Alec went over to a couch and sat down with his back to us. I understand why. He didn't want to have to register like or dislike. We go into our stuff. We were doing some very good things. We were very well prepared. We'd finish a song, like we were doing a *Lover* at breakneck tempo. And it was all working. And we'd hear Alec going . . . . " Roy imitated Alec's growl: "'Oh no! Oh no!'" and I thought, 'Oh shit, we're dead.' But he meant, 'Oh my God! I don't believe it.'

"We finally knew that, and we went on and on. We finally started looking up at the pictures on the piano. I see Winston Churchill, seated with a young woman and his wife. I said, 'Where are we?' And Rogers said, 'This is Sarah Churchill's apartment and I'm sort of taking care of it while she's out of town.' I thought, here we are looking at a picture of Winston Churchill and at the same time we're performing for Alec Wilder. What a day!

"Alec got us an audition with Max Gordon at the Blue Angel on 55th Street near Third Avenue. It was a very famous cabaret. We were hired. Bart Howard was playing in the show room. We got to know him, we got to know all the acts. Andy Griffith, Orson Bean. We stayed and stayed and stayed. The pianist in the barroom was Bobby Short. He was just wailing.

"It was a really slow, slow time for jazz. But we were able to work, with just piano and two voices, all over the country. We were out in Los Angeles in a supper club, up in San Francisco, the Purple Onion in New York, Boston, Toronto at the Town Tavern."

Jackie said, "We often worked opposite people we liked. We worked opposite Lenny Bruce quite a few times, or near him. We'd be at the Interlude in L.A., and he'd be at the Crescendo, downstairs, and we got to hear him a lot. We got to meet people."

"Then after doing enough work that way," Roy said, "we had a circuit we could go on. We were making more money so we could take a rhythm section with us. Or we'd get out to California and give Shelly Manne a call. He'd work with us and Leroy Vinnegar on bass. A lot of recording with Creed Taylor."

I said to Jackie, "Are you aware that you're Creed's favorite singer?"

"Noooo!" she said.

"Yes. He told me so."

"You know," Roy said, "it's a *treat* for me to play behind Jackie. I take great pride in accompanying her, and of course I love listening to her. To this day, after working all these years, I'm still thrilled. Certain songs she finishes, I wish I could go out in the audience and applaud. Sometimes I'll do what I've seen the symphony musicians do. I'll knock on the corner of the piano when she finishes something that just knocks me out.

"And the so-called war between pianists and vocalists is a war only because the vocalist will come up and name some song that you've never heard of, and she'll say, 'Oh, you don't know th one? Well, just do it in the key of E-flat.' And you'll say, 'Hey, lady, just get out of here, you'll make me look bad.' So that's what the war is all about."

While they were working in Los Angeles at Gene Norman's Crescendo, Jackie learned she was pregnant again.

"Having a second child was perfect," Jackie said, "because it was four years after Nickie and we wanted them to have each other."

"At that time," Roy said, we were living at Barney Kessel's house in L.A., remember? And we didn't know what we were going to do or how we were going to work it out. We came back to our apartment in New York, which we hadn't seen for a year. We'd been traveling that much. Meanwhile the water has been turned off, the gas has been turned off, and pushed through the mail slot is a mound of mail about three feet high. We took care of that, we lived there for a while, then decided to move to Milwaukee and live in an apartment above Jackie's mother's. And Dana would be born in Milwaukee."

Jackie said. "It was perfect, because my mother had just bought this house, and we could have the upper apartment and do what we wanted with it."

"However, before we left," Roy said, "we did the *Tonight* show. Steve Allen still had it. They put Jackie behind the piano so they couldn't see she was pregnant. Then we got to Milwaukee. There was a big IGA supermarket that Jackie's mother and father had by now. One morning one of the helpers doesn't show up. Jackie's dad, Ted, says, 'Hey, Roy, could you help out at the store?' I said, 'I'd be happy to.' So here I am stocking shelves, loading coffee cans up, putting the price stamp on them, take the old ones from the back and put them at the front, dust them off, and there's a woman walks by with a cart. She hesitates a moment and looks at me. She goes about ten feet past me, and she backs up and she says to me, 'Excuse me, weren't you on the *Tonight* show four or five days ago?' And I say, 'That's right, Ma'am.' And I keep moving those coffee cans."

(To be continued)