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Portrait of a Lady
Part Two

The next day, Jane told Peggy that Goodman had telephoned. Peg was incredulous.

"Well, I'm telling you," Jane said. "You should return the call. What can you lose?" Peggy called and asked for Mr. Goodman. The voice said that this was Mr. Goodman. She gave her name and asked if he had called.

He said, "Yes I did. I want to know if you'd like to join my band."

Goodman, typically, gave her no time for rehearsal: he was famous for lack of consideration and sometimes downright cruelty to musicians. He told her to wear something pretty and come to the job. The band was playing at the College Inn. Later, she often reflected on the help Mel Powell gave her. Mel, a native New Yorker, remembers his first sight of her: "this gorgeous blonde Scandinavian from the deep midwest."

"I don't know how I'd have done it without Mel," Peg said. Fortunately, she knew all the songs, but they were in Helen Forrest's keys.

"When I first started singing with Benny," she said, "I immediately caught a psychosomatic cold, because I was confused. And frightened.

"And then I realized that I was trying to fill the shoes of Helen Forrest, which were golden slippers. She was very much loved, justifiably so. And I couldn't quite imagine that I was going to take the place of someone I'd been playing and listening to. Whenever I had an extra nickel, it went into the jukebox. And it was Benny. Or it was Tommy Dorsey. I was listening to Frank Sinatra sing *This Love of Mine*. Oh!"

"Peggy must have been a nervous wreck," Mel Powell said many years later. "Her first assignment was to make a recording. Columbia Records, to whom Benny was contracted, always came out to wherever the band was playing. So they arrived in Chicago to record. There Peg was, making a recording with Benny Goodman just a day or two after she joined the band.

"She met producer John Hammond in the control room, and he handed her the sheet music for *Elmer's Tune*. This was a pretty tough rap for a kid. There was no taping in those days. You just made records. If you blew something, you started from the beginning. You didn't say, 'Well let's take it from measure 39 and splice it.' She was so nervous. The sheet music John handed her made such a racket, and they didn't have high-tech ways of beating that, so, unfortunately, it sounded like a forest fire that was going on over the brass, over the saxophones.

"Peggy had probably been up all night learning this thing, and then she came in, and the arrangement was disorienting, because *Elmer's Tune* was very clever, very fancy, full of stuff.

"I led her into an adjacent studio and we sat down and ran through a couple of things that were in the arrangement, especially the cues for her . . . . I was cuing her about where she came in, and told her that during the recording of the arrangement, I could always improvise something.

"I also told her, 'You're going to have your first tone, Benny won't know, nobody will know. I'm just gonna pop that in there in the midst of what seems to be just a ramble over the band while the band's playing. You catch it from that; that'll be your cue, count four and go.' Well, I think she's never forgotten it."

Nor has she ever forgotten his kindness. They remain friends to this day.

Her opening with the band received scathing reviews. *Down Beat* ran her picture with the caption "Sweet sixteen and will never be missed." So hard on her were these first days with the band that she told Goodman, "I'd like to quit, please."

Goodman gave her his cool stare and said, "I won't let you."

Ever afterwards, she remembered with amazement that she had once occupied a bandstand with Mel Powell, Jimmy Maxwell, Big Sid Catlett, Cootie Williams, Billy Butterfield, Cutty Cutshall, Lou McGarrity, Miff Mole, and Hymie Schertzer: it was one of the finest bands Goodman ever led, and my personal favorite of his bands. Years later, I remember, Gerry Mulligan and I were riding up Madison Avenue in a taxi. I started, for no good reason, to sing the opening figure of *Six Flats Unfurnished* from that period of the band's history. Gerry immediately sang the counterline. We sang the entire chart, with interruptions only for laughter. Peggy and Mel Powell used to do that on the band bus: sing the band's charts all the way through.

Goodman, despite his notorious detachment, took her to 52nd Street to hear such performers as Fats Waller. Waller was the first celebrity whose autograph she obtained. Soon she met Count Basie, whose broadcasts from Kansas City she had listened to so avidly in her strange and, to me, darkly haunted childhood. She met Duke Ellington and Louis and Lil Armstrong.

She carried a portable windup phonograph on which to play her favorite records. One of these was Lil Green's *Why Don't You Do Right?* — words and music by Joe McCoy, publishing date 1942. "Benny heard me playing the record in my dressing room," she said. "He could hardly help it, I was always playing it. Finally he asked me, 'You really like that song, don't you? Would you like to sing that with the band?' The song was recorded at Liederkranz Hall in New York, Columbia's favorite studio and the favorite of many performers as well. The record wasn't released for two years, however. She was earning seventy-five dollars a week out of which she had to pay her living expenses. She was paid ten dollars for the recording session, with no provision for royalties. That was the standard contractual arrangement: the royalties went to the bandleader.

The song is worth examination. It is a tough-minded statement by a woman to a feckless man who is unable to get his hands on money enough to support her: "Get outa here, and get me some

money too." Peg could not possibly have known it at the time, but in that song she was setting the direction of her career: a remarkable gallery of portraits of women in the miniature drama form that is the popular song; or at least the best kind of popular song. In all the good ones, there is a keen sense of character, and in selecting that one, she displayed some sort of instinct about how the particular evokes the general. Why that song about the denizens of a kind of under-culture should touch people who knew nothing of it is puzzling, but it did, and that recording still sells, more than a half century after it was made.

The work with Goodman was gruelling. The Paramount theater in New York is notorious in the memory of everyone who played it. They hated it, and those who survive still do. They played seven or eight shows a day, between movies, starting at 10 a.m. And at one point, Peg remembered, the band was adding to that schedule a set at the Terrace Room of the New Yorker Hotel. There was never time for a meal: the musicians survived on sandwiches brought to them by them by Popsy Randolph, the band boy, later a well-known photographer. Yet the experience was invaluable. She was absorbing lessons no school can teach, things that go deep into the subconscious, into the viscera, even into muscle memory.

"Johnny said something someplace," Peg said to me in one of our conversations. There was no need to specify who Johnny was. To both of us, there was one Johnny: Mercer. "It had to do with sudden fame being so dangerous. So many people have sudden fame and they can't handle that. If you have to pay your dues, you have to do it.

"I used to call Benny Goodman's band boot camp. A finishing school.

"Time has to pass. You need a lot of experience. You learn as you go. You crawl before you walk before you run. You know how to handle a situation on the stage when some crisis comes up. If it's early in your career someplace, it doesn't matter because very few people are going to see it or hear about it, and it won't be in the trades the next day: So-and-so bombed. That's the heavy advantage of learning how to handle your stage presence by the experience you've had. If you do even a high-school play and the butler doesn't come in when he's supposed to, you learn to improvise. Or if your gown gets caught on the heel of your shoe, you learn to lean on the piano while somebody crawls under there and unfastens it.

"I had one silly thing happen like that once. I was wearing a spaghetti-strap gown with a sheath. My gowns were like mermaid's gowns. I was singing, Max Bennett was playing the bass. He was going to dig in and really play it. And he being such a proper musician, so immaculate about everything he did, somehow managed to get his hand *under* the strings. I laughed so hard that I broke the strap of my gown. I quickly grabbed; I put my hand where most people think their heart is, and held that part of my gown up, and said to Lou Levy, who was my accompanist and music director, 'Excuse me, I'll be right back. Play something while I'm gone. Play *Bye Bye Blackbird.*' The gown was black. Lou played *Ding Dong, the Witch Is Dead.* I can still see the whole scene.

"You learn to make light of something. If you ever take it seriously on the stage, the audience becomes nervous. But if you can make a joke out of it, you're in business.

"If you have a heckler, you're fine as long as you don't do anything. The audience is with you. But just say one angry thing to the heckler . . . . Well, maybe you can later on, when you have some seniority. But you let the audience handle the heckler. I have seen audiences turn as one on really fine performers, because they started to dress the heckler down. It's important for young singers to learn this. And you can only get it from experience."

In 1942, about a year after Peg joined the Goodman "boot camp", Goodman hired a new guitarist, Dave Barbour. Peg seldom to this day refers to him as anything but "David". He was born David Michael Barbour on Long Island, New York, on May 28, 1912, and was thus eight years her senior. Barbour had already enjoyed a full career before joining Goodman. He worked with Wingy Manone in 1934, Red Norvo in 1934 and '35, Bunny Berigan in 1936, and Louis Armstrong in 1936 and '38. He was in considerable demand as a studio musician, primarily as a rhythm guitarist, though he was, when he chose to be, a graceful and thoughtful soloist.

Photos show that he was extremely handsome. And Peg fell in love with him almost instantly. "He would always be the love of her life," Jane Feather said. Peg said, "David was very dapper. He wore the right kind of tweed jacket, and the birdseye shirt, and the thin knit tie, and always the right haircut." He was also a little eccentric, with a wild sense of humor. What she didn't know is that he had a drinking problem, although once she found him all but helpless in his hotel room just before a performance. A doctor sobered him up enough to play.

They were married in 1943, and left the Goodman band to settle in Los Angeles. There had always been a conflict in Peg: although she loved to sing, performing made her nervous, hardly an uncommon dichotomy. Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie, the last men you would think would be discomfited by it, both told me they got nervous before performing.

She said, "I talked to a doctor about it once. I said, 'What makes me get so wound up? I'm fine the minute I hit the stage.' This was early on. I still get excited. It's a windup of adrenalin, without which you don't give a very good performance.

"He said, 'You're not really worried about you. You're worried about the whole orchestra and the show.' If one musician made a sizable clam, then I would make a mistake, and then there would be a third one following that."

Peg and David found a modest apartment in Los Angeles. By now *Why Don't You Do Right?* was an international hit, and she was constantly receiving offers, which she would turn down,

ecstatic about her married life. In view of her childhood, this is not hard to understand.

Then she learned she was pregnant. She told her husband, "David, we're going to have a baby."

He paused at length, she recalled, then said, "Why, Peg, I hardly know you!" and smiled.

Barbour was waiting out his Los Angeles musicians' union card, a six-months hiatus usual in most locals and one of the oddest regulations the American Federation of Musicians ever installed, for its only accomplishment was hardship on its own members. Peg had given up singing completely. Nor was she receiving royalties on her many recordings: they went to Benny Goodman.

"Women do have a rough time," she said, remembering her pregnancy. "They have to take so much responsibility. After procreation is finished, he says, 'Excuse me, I'm going down to get the papers,' or something. A woman has this period of time to go through, and all of the changes in her body, and all of the emotions that at first, sometimes, they're not quite ready for, not quite ready to have the child just now. It's not convenient. But they have to go through with it. And then in about two or two-and-a-half months, they begin to love that child.

"I like it when I see men taking an interest in a child before it's born. They don't always. And the girl wanders around looking a little funnier and funnier, and the man always tells her she's beautiful. And she is. She has a certain radiance about her, because there is a life force. But then she has to look forward to who's going to take care of the child. How is she going to manage? Has she ever had a child before? Does she know how to take care of the baby? Is there someone she can go to and say, 'Will you watch my baby while I go to the store?'"

They named their daughter Nicole, but she soon was known as Nicki, a bright little girl and beautiful whom David Barbour adored. So did Peg. "I was a fearless child," Peg said. "But I became a jellyfish when Nicki was born. She was so precious to me that I didn't sleep the first year of her life."

As far as Peg was concerned, her performing days were over. And then Dave Dexter of Capitol records planned a multiple-disc album, a rarity in those days, except in the classical field with symphonies issued on several twelve-inch 78 r.p.m. records. It was unprecedented in jazz. He asked her to be a part of it.

Peg thought, "Well I suppose I could get a baby-sitter and go down and sing a couple of songs."

The personnel of the album, to be titled *New American Jazz,* was a loose group pseudonymed the Capitol Jazzmen. It was not the same on all the records, but collectively it included Dave Barbour or Nappy Lamare, guitar; Shorty Sherock or Billy May, trumpet; Barney Bigard or Jimmy Noone, clarinet; Dave Matthews or Eddie Miller, tenor; Les Robinson; alto; Artie Shapiro or Hank Wayland, bass; Zutty Singleton, drums; Jack Teagarden, trombone and vocal; and Joe Sullivan or Pete Johnson or Stan Wrightsman, piano.

Capitol Records was an upstart company, founded in 1942, in the dark of World War II, by songwriters Johnny Mercer (its first president) and Buddy Desylva and radio and record retailer Glenn Wallichs. Its silver-on-black label, with its outline drawing of the Capitol dome in Washington, D.C., became synonymous with quality in popular music, and the roster of artists soon included Stan Kenton (whose career was built at Capitol), Bobby Sherwood, Nat King Cole, Paul Weston and his (later) wife Jo Stafford, Andy Russell, and more.

Peg went into the studio on January 7, 1944, as the war was grinding to a close, and recorded two songs, a blues called *Ain't Goin' No Place* and the standard by Lew Brown and Sammy Fain *That Old Feeling.* Instead of piano, Stan Wrightsman played celeste on the latter, and Eddie Miller contributed a lovely tenor saxophone solo.

I was a month shy of sixteen when that record was made, but such were its beauties that I remember it brightly to this day, including its cover: the artist who designed it showed a group of jazzmen in black silhouette against a blue-gray background. Fifteen years later, when I was editor of *Down Beat* magazine, I photographed Zoot Sims, Charlie Byrd, Urbie Green, and Conte Candoli against a coastal sunset during the Monterey Jazz Festival and used their images in black silhouette against a blue background on the magazine cover. Only now do I realize that this cover was an unconscious tribute to the *New American Jazz* album.

Peg had no need to prove she could sing a ballad. With Goodman she had recorded, among other things, *All I Need Is You, Everything I Love,* and *How Long Has This Been Going On?* But the intimacy of the small-group setting, with Wrightsman's delicate celeste, let her go deeply into *That Old Feeling.*

It was a new kind of singing, pioneered in the 1940s by Frank Sinatra and by Peg, something I came in time to call Stanislavskian singing, reflecting the inner life of the "character" in the song. It would supplant the belting vaudeville style best exemplified by Al Jolson and the Irish tenor sounds of Morton Downey, Kenny Baker, and Dennis Day. It was an earthier, and much more immediate, style, and Peg would delve more profoundly into its potential as her career at Capitol progressed.

Given the nature of her childhood, she had more than enough pain to draw on, and humor too — it is often overlooked that Peg is an extremely funny singer, and, in private, she is a witty and humorous woman. I once asked her if, in her moments of later triumph, dressed in gorgeous gowns and singing to vast audiences of ardent admirers, she ever thought back in mid-phrase, as it were, to that childhood. The answer of course was predictable, but I wanted to hear it.

"Oh yes," she said. "Often. My memories all served me well. I used it all later, the emotion I felt, singing. I understood the feeling, and so it was incorporated into my interpretation.

"It seems as if I really haven't understood myself. It's only in

retrospect that we understand. We look back and say, 'Oh, that's what that meant!' Walter Matthau said somewhere that I was a Stanislavskian singer and that I reminded him of Marlon Brando. I didn't know how to take it at the time. I do now. I should call him and say, 'Thank you.'"

I said, "I see you as more like Montgomery Clift. Clift had a quieter, inner quality, and you've always had it too."

Dave Barbour felt strongly that she should not give up her career. He said that she would later regret it if she did. And the esteem in which *That Old Feeling* rapidly came to be held fortified his argument.

Peg had begun to write lyrics, encouraged by Mercer. Capitol Records at that time was housed in a little office above tailor Sy Devore's shop — a chaotic office, from all accounts, with Glenn Wallichs on the phone drumming up sales and Mercer indifferent to them, interested only in the music and always wanting to hear it loud. In that office Peg and Dave Barbour were offered contracts with the label and accepted. Dave would frequently conduct her record dates. Then there came a question of material.

During her pregnancy, she'd had an idea, while doing housework, for a lyric. She was vibrantly happy at that moment and the phrase, "Well, it's a good day!" popped into her head. She soon drafted a lyric and melody. When Dave got home, he harmonized it. She wrote another song with Barbour, *I Don't Know Enough About You*, and they recorded it December 26, 1945. *It's a Good Day* for some reason wasn't recorded until July 12, 1946.

In common with many artists, and probably all the good ones, Peg is often discontented with her work. More than forty years after she recorded it, she told me: "I don't like part of the lyric to *It's a Good Day*. The lines about 'for curing your ills. Take a deep breath and throw away your pills." I don't like that, partly because I wish it were possible to throw away all the medicines I have to take! But mostly because it sounds a little corny to me."

"I don't think it is," I said. "Do you know the story about Oscar Hammerstein and *All the Things You Are*?"

She didn't. So I told her. Hammerstein never liked its last two lines, specifically the words "moment divine", and hoped up to the day he died to find a better ending for the song.

"Oh that's dear!" Peg said.

Barbour had quit drinking when they were married. But now his drinking resumed. And it had grown worse. "I knew I was in big trouble," Peg said. Barbour had a taste for boilermakers, bourbon with a beer chaser. Peg claims that he even fed bourbon to the goldfish. She would try to extract him early from the parties they attended, watching as his flash point approached. She worried more when he developed ulcers.

She said, "There was a shyness about him that wouldn't let him accept compliments or anything."

Her single 78 r.p.m. records came out in a steady stream, hit after hit: *Waiting for the Train to Come in, Golden Earrings*, and a new version of *Why Don't You Do Right?* recorded November 19, 1947. Norma Deloris Egstrom was now one of the biggest stars in the profession, and the sales of her records and those of Nat Cole were the foundation on which Capitol Records was built.

It became politically correct in jazz-criticism circles to say that her work was derived from that of Billie Holiday, but that is demonstrably not so.

She said, "Mel Powell played me the first Billie Holiday record I ever heard, which was in 1941. That was after my style was set. Then I met her and absolutely adored her. She would say, 'Hey, Peg, how's Nicki?' I can see her, just the way she was. I wrote a lyric called *She Wore a Flower in Her Hair*. She had the deepest kind of eyes. Dave and I gave a party for her. Duke Ellington was there, Tallulah Bankhead was there. It was Ralph Watkins' place, the Royal Roost, in New York. We were very big then." She laughed. "We were bigger than Sonny and Cher! We were Mr. and Mrs. Music."

"Bigger than Bonnie and Clyde," I said, and she laughed even louder. Her laughter is joyous and unrestrained.

You realize how different the two styles are when you hear Peg deliberately imitate Holiday. She has a great gift for mimicry (and various foreign dialects) and when she imitates Billie Holiday, in speech or in singing, the effect is uncanny.

Pianist Lou Levy, her accompanist and conductor over a longer period of time than any other, said, "Norman Granz, Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, and I went to hear her at Basin Street East in New York. We were all leaving for Europe with Jazz at the Philharmonic. I had just worked with her, and we all knew her. She did her tribute to Billie Holiday. By the time she was half-way through it, Norman, Ella, and Oscar were all in tears. It was that accurate. It was eerie. It was scary. And I guess I was the only one who didn't cry because I was dumbstruck by what was going on.

"I had not had that much personal experience with Billie Holiday, except that the year she died, I was with Shorty Rogers' group and she was on a tour with us. But that's how accurate Peggy was with that. She scared Count Basie to death with it."

"I used to do it," Peg said. "But it brought so many people to tears that I stopped."

She was learning constantly, and to polish her work, she engaged choreographer Nick Castle. The late Henry Mancini was at one point Castle's partner and collaborator. Mancini would write "act music" for performers and Castle would choreograph their work. Castle was godfather to Mancini's children.

"Nick was a New York kind of person, streetwise and funny," Mancini said, "with prodigious energy. He was about five-eight, very lean, in the manner of dancers, with his hair combed straight back. He was often hyper and on edge, though in a likable way. He smoked constantly. Nick was still another Italian. He'd worked extensively at MGM and Fox with Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, and he was highly respected . . . .

"Nick had a little studio next door to a delicatessen on Pico Boulevard, just west of Beverly Glen. It consisted of a bare room with a wooden floor, a coatrack, an upright piano, a mirrored wall, and a ballet bar. Nick worked days in the studios and nights in his own place with these understandably worried stars. Night after night I went there to help him get them ready for appearances in clubs and hotels. An impressive parade of people . . . . "

Some of Peg's televisions shows give a choreography credit to Castle. But in fact, Peg was never one of the dashing dancing movers.

"Nick would never really tell me any physical things to do," she said. "I kept saying, 'Nick, I want to move.' And he would say, 'You move enough. I just want to hear you sing.' Nick was a very wise man. He taught Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, you name it right down the line."

(The list also includes Ann Miller, Anna Marie Alberghetti, Jane Powell, Kathryn Grayson, Ginny Sims, and Peg's stable-mate at Capitol, Betty Hutton.)

"He was so much fun," Peg said. "He used to say, when we'd rehearse, 'I shouldn't take any money for this. I just enjoy hearing you sing.' I used to love it when he'd walk into a rehearsal and throw out a big kiss to everybody with both hands and say, 'Now share that amongst you.'

"He had a great sense of humor. He was very warm, and very inspiring. Once Anna White came in to check me out. She said, 'I don't have anything to tell you. Maybe on that one little note, make a little motion with your finger.' And I thought, 'What's wrong with me?' A shyness came out, I think. I thought, 'What am I doing wrong?'

"That was in the '50s.'"

This conversation occurred as we were watching videos of two of her television shows at her home in Belair. She wore a tight, stark black gown in one, an equally tight white one in the other, and she had a gorgeous, voluptuous figure. I noticed in these shows something I had first paid attention to when she would play the Copacabana in New York: the minimal use of motion. Such, however, was the effectiveness of the focus she established that if she cocked an eyebrow, the whole audience would laugh at the minute expression.

So, watching her stand almost motionless, singing, on television, I said, "Peg, where the hell do you get the courage to do *absolutely nothing*?"

There was a long pause. Then she said, "There is power in stillness."

It is a maxim every singer (not to mention actor) should learn.

"I do a little meditation before I go out on the stage," she said. "I didn't always do that. But the last thirty, forty years, I've done it. I stomp my foot as I'm announced, just once. It's like a demand. There's a burst of energy that almost lifts my body up. And some people tell me they think I look taller on the stage.

"I don't know what it is, but when I would walk on stage, I could feel myself get taller. It was as though there were a rubber band in my spine. Whatever that is, it's the inner me coming out. I ask for my inner self to step forward and shine. At the same time, of course, the lights come on, and they add to that. But the biggest thing that happens is an inner experience. I think there's probably a jolt of adrenalin. The whole body responds. And the body is the temple of the living God.

"I think it's because that is a moment of *very* necessary humility — when you know that you can't even take the next breath without that beautiful spirit that lives inside of you. Unless the spirit is willing, you don't have anything to do out there."

And she added: "I have outlived the intimidation."

She and David were now managed by Carlos Gastel, at that time so visible that he was a celebrity in his own right. "He was a very large man," Peg said. "His nickname, which he knew — it was no secret — was the Aga Khan. He was from Honduras. That was another nickname: the Honduran. He was well educated.

"Carlos had his own boat, a power boat. David and he were drinking buddies. I used to go along with Carlos and David on the boat to protect them from burning themselves up. They had a kind of burner stove on the boat. We had one really bad fire."

Barbour's drinking finally resulted in bleeding duodenal ulcers. He was hospitalized in grave condition. But he recovered — because of prayer, Peg believes.

When he left the hospital, they drove to Rosarita Beach in Baja California. They were impressed by the relaxed attitude of the Mexican people, in contrast to the frenetic activity of the show-business Los Angeles world that had become their natural habitat. David had a guitar with him, of course. And together they wrote *Mañana*, which they recorded soon after returning home. It was an immediate hit, with sales running into the millions. In later years, it would become controversial, with accusations that it was condescending to the Mexican people. Peg denies this, saying it was written in admiration.

Peg and David, who were living in a house they had built, now sold it and purchased a much bigger house, in French Norman style, in Westwood Hills. Her expanding circle of friends and acquaintances included many of her heroes from her childhood, among them Al Jolson, Bing Crosby, and Jimmy Durante.

Gastel's client list now included Woody Herman, who had just folded his big band and organized a small group. The group was to play an engagement at the Tropicana in Havana, Cuba. Gastel had now brought Woody to Capitol, and for the Cuban trip, Woody had hired Dave Barbour.

"I know Woody would never do anything to hurt me," Peg said. "And I was told that Woody had asked Dave to go on the Cuban trip. I'm not sure it wasn't the other way around. Or possibly Carlos Gastel arranged it. It was like Carlos to send David off someplace over Christmas and New Year's."

While David was in Cuba with Woody, Peg worked on

preparing a studio for him over their garage. "I kept busy," Peg said. "I had all kinds of hobbies. I liked refinishing furniture, hand-painting it. While he was away, I worked on that studio. It was a private place where he could go and practice, with a sycamore weeping over the window, and a little balcony. I had a chair that I sandpapered and sandpapered. Then I rubbed color into it, I rubbed some gold into it. And I had 'The Happy Chair' printed on the back of it."

During this time, her father paid her a visit, told her that Min hadn't changed, and one night in tears said, "I haven't been much of a father to you." Then he went home. The next year, North Dakota gave Peg a statewide homecoming. The visit was the last time she would see her father: he died the following April.

Peg tried to get David to join Alcoholics Anonymous, but he wouldn't. Finally, afraid Nicki would see him in one of his darker tunnels of drinking, Barbour begged Peg to divorce him. "I didn't want to divorce David," she told me. "He insisted on it. He made me do it, and it was the hardest thing I ever did in my life. I never wanted anything less than that divorce." So loving were she and David at the legal hearing that the judge asked if they were there for a marriage or divorce. The night Peg gave him the divorce papers, Dave Barbour performed an odd act: he removed the strings from five guitars that he owned.

He remarried, but only for a short time. Money by then was no problem. His royalties from the hit songs they had written were considerable. He and Peg remained close. Peg said, "After he moved to Malibu, he came to the house one day looking so sad, and so pitiful. And he said, 'May I borrow that happy chair?'

"He took it out to Malibu. I don't know what happened to it. I think he thought that if he sat in that chair, some of my happiness or strength would rub off. And I always hated the idea of getting strong on someone else's weakness. It made me cry. I would run to my books and learn something and get through that period of sadness, and then I'd realize that that strength must be a trial to him. Because he wasn't getting stronger at that time. Later he did."

In the 1950s, Peg toured, playing New York's Copacabana so many times she lost count, played the Sands in Las Vegas, and continued to record one successful LP after another. She also wrote songs for films. With composer Sonny Burke, she wrote all the songs for the 1955 Disney animated cartoon feature *Lady and the Tramp*, and sang most of the voice parts, including Si and Am, the Siamese cats.

Curiously, one of her biggest hits, *Lover*, was not made for Capitol. She had an idea for an up-tempo version of the song with a complex Latin rhythm section giving the impression of a herd of galloping horses. Capitol's executives turned her down on the grounds that Les Paul and Mary Ford had just had a hit on the same tune. Her contract was expiring. She left Capitol and signed with Decca, who permitted her to make the record, which became a huge hit.

But the association with Decca was not as comfortable as that with Capitol, and after a five-year absence, she returned to the label, which had long since moved from its chaotic offices above Sy Devore's store to its round tower, designed to look like a stack of records, on Vine Street. Her producer and close friend Dave Cavanaugh took a notion from the success of *Lover* to do two albums titled *Latin à la Lee* and *Olé à la Lee*. The *Latin* album won a Grammy award in 1960.

Victor Young, the great film composer whose scores were filled with soaring melodies — though he is often overlooked, his songs include *Sweet Sue, I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance with You, Street of Dreams, Can't We Talk It Over?, A Hundred Years from Today, Weaver of Dreams, When I Fall in Love, Love Letters, Stella by Starlight*, and *Golden Earrings*, which Peg recorded on September 24, 1947 — approached her about writing with him. Their collaboration produced *Where Can I Go Without You?*, which she recorded on February 7, 1963.

All the while, she was building her own classic repertoire, a gallery of women characters that really begins with her recording for Goodman of *Why Don't You Do Right?* No singer, male or female, in American music (and none that I have heard in any other country) has shown the ability to play so many different "characters" in song form as Peg. In France, Edith Piaf performed the kind of character songs that Peg likes, but Piaf's audiences would not let her be anything but a tragedienne, for all that she loved laughter. Peggy judiciously avoided that *cul de sac* and audiences accepted her as a happy character in one song, comedienne in the next, tragedienne in yet another. To watch her in a concert or nightclub performance proceed through a whole gallery of characters is to take a lesson in acting. It is no accident that she was nominated for an Academy Award for her portrayal of a fading nightclub singer of the 1920s in Jack Webb's picture *Pete Kelly's Blues*. She hoped that this would open the way to a broader career in films, but it never happened, which is one of the disappointments in her otherwise starry career.

Interestingly, Peggy recorded (on October 17, 1958) one of Piaf's songs, *My Man*. The music is by Maurice Yvain, the English lyric by Channing Pollock. This is one of the few examples of an English lyric that bears some relationship to a French original. She gives us a vivid picture of a beaten creature who for whatever reason continues to endure life with an abusive man.

One of her most brilliant portrayals of a woman is the Johnny Mercer lyric (to a French tune) *When the World Was Young*, a striking picture of a world-weary demimondaine, plaything of rich men, reminiscing on and yearning for the simple apple-blossomed sunlit days of her youth. It is one of Mercer's greatest lyrics, and one of her finest records, although I heard her top even that performance once. I had fallen asleep without turning off the television. I was awakened deep in the night by her voice, singing that lyric on one of the old Judy Garland television shows. I called

her within days to say I felt it was the finest performance the song had ever received or ever would receive.

Her stationery and often her advertising have long borne the inscription "Miss Peggy Lee," the very name Ken Kennedy gave her in Fargo, pointedly asserting identity as a woman. She assuredly is not Ms Peggy Lee, and when I saw a reporter's reference to her that way, I thought, "Oh how wrong you are!"

The character in *I'm a Woman*, by her friends Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, recorded November 14, 1962, is not the one we encounter in *My Man*. This is no brow-beaten victim but, on the contrary, a woman boasting of her prowess at the complex of tasks that society imposes on her sex. *Big Spender*, recorded October 27, 1965, vividly conveys the mockery of a hooker putting the mark on a john, and Peg sounds truly hard-bitten in her performance.

Another song in this gallery is *You Came a Long Way from St. Louis*, by John Benson Brooks and Bob Russell, which she recorded May 28, 1959. Again, it portrays a woman skeptical about a man's accomplishments. The lady in the song may be on a higher social plane than the girl in *Why Don't You Do Right?*, but the two have a lot in common in their refusal to be taken in by a man's tall tales and attempts to impress.

Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe, another portrait of a woman, this one by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg, was recorded April 4, 1957. It is notable, among other things, for the identity of her conductor on the date: Frank Sinatra.

Black Coffee, which borders on being an art song, has music by Sonny Burke and a strikingly dark poetic lyric by Paul Francis Webster. It laments the general condition that women — particularly in those pre-lib days — so often faced. This was recorded not for Capitol but for Decca.

Yet another portrait of a woman, although this was not particularly intended to be the case, is *The Right to Love*. It is a song I wrote in collaboration with composer Lalo Schifrin, and although I did not intend the lyric to be what we might call gender specific, the fact is that it has been recorded mostly by women. Peg was the first to do so. Carmen McRae picked it up from Peg's record, and so did Nancy Wilson. The song is about social rejection because of love. Carmen used to discuss it at length before performing it in a club, pointing out that the rejection could be for any reason whatever that violated society's mores, including race. This is indeed what I intended in the lyric, back in the 1960s after Quincy Jones told me it was impossible to get away with writing a song about a mixed racial relationship.

Curiously, for all the years Peg and I have been friends, this is only lyric of mine she has ever recorded, although she has performed others in nightclubs and elsewhere, including *Yesterday I Heard the Rain*. Her performance of it one night at the Copacabana in New York gave me chills.

Don't Smoke in Bed, which she recorded on December 2, 1947, is the work of Willard Robison, whose songs superbly evoke images of America, including *Old Folks* and *Guess I'll Go Back Home This Summer*, and of troubled family life, such as *A Cottage for Sale*. *Don't Smoke in Bed* is another portrait of a woman, one who is leaving a man but doing it with heartbreak. Almost certainly the song reflect's Peg's feelings over her troubled relationship with Dave Barbour. Peg wrote much of this lyric, but left the credit and the royalties with Robison.

She was still visiting Dave Barbour at Malibu, making sure that he ate properly. She remarried, three times and never for long: to actor Brad Dexter, percussionist Jack del Rio, and actor Dewey Martin. "It was always Dave," Jane Feather said.

Once their daughter Nicki gave her a jolt of reality in talking of her father, as much as she loved him. She said, "Mother, you're dealing with a child."

Peg said to me some years ago, "Please tell people that for the last thirteen years of his life, Dave didn't have a drop to drink. He asked me to marry him again. We were going to be remarried, and he had a physical. His doctor told him he was in excellent condition. Four days later, the aorta burst in his heart, and he died."

David Michael Barbour died at Malibu on December 11, 1965. He was 53. His death was another in the long series of blows to her life and her emotions. And all of it finds its way into her work. Now in her seventies, she still performs, despite a series of health problems, including heart trouble that necessitated open cardiac surgery. Last year she played Carnegie Hall to capacity crowds.

Because her performances are at a low level of dynamics, it is sometimes assumed that she has no power. Rest assured, she has power to spare. She just won't use it, for reasons of personal style and aesthetic consistency.

"Each individual voice has its own quality," she said to me once. "It's like a fingerprint. I remember when they used to say, 'Oh, using a microphone!' If I want to lay back and let one fly, I can do it, but it would offend my own ears. What you learn about the microphone is to comfortably amplify the little subtleties within the makeup of the voice."

She might have added that microphones exaggerate the flaws in singing, as well as bringing forth the virtues.

I asked her once if stardom did not impose problems for a woman, especially a singer, in dealing with men. A singer has to be in control, and for the most part her accompanists are going to be men, who may resent her. If the musicians make a mistake, the audience tends to blame the star. A singer is out there all alone.

"Yes," Peg said. "The musicians have their sheet music, and they can look at it. *You're* looking at the air."

She chuckled: "That's why I came up with the idea that my favorite color is plaid. That's because of the diplomacy I would have to use, and the psychology necessary with men, so that I wouldn't offend them. For many, many, many years!

"But generally the musicians are on your side."

Well, shall we say, they're on *her* side, because of her sheer

professionalism and competence. Pianist Mike Renzi, who has worked with her often as accompanist and music director, said, "Aside from anything else, she has incredible time." It is a quality jazz musicians value almost above all others.

No musician has worked as pianist and conductor with Peg as much as Lou Levy, "my good gray fox," as she has always called him because of his white hair.

"Peggy Lee became half my life, and in a way still is," Lou said. "I spent fifteen years, off and on, mostly on, playing for her. I learned from her about as much about sensitivity towards music as I ever have in any situation in my life. Because it didn't involve just playing the piano. It involved lighting, staging, scripting and format. You really learned how to put a show together, and not just play a tune. This is the major leagues. And major leagues musically, because you found yourself working with Nelson Riddle and Bill Holman and Billy May and Benny Carter and Johnny Mandel. She had everybody writing for her who was the best.

"I learned so much through her about sensitivity in accompanying, and paying attention to lyrics, and to the whole package. Not just the chord changes. And finding what far-out chord I could play instead of this one. This was the real truth.

"When I *really* learned the value of a lyric was when I worked for her, because she is such a dramatic performer. She becomes an actress when she sings. Then I became her conductor. And you have to be really on the ball to do that. You don't just react. You listen. You pay attention. You pay attention to dynamics. Because it's different from night to night or even show to show. I learned a lot from her."

To which Peg commented, when I told her what Lou had said:

"When someone says they've learned a lot from me, especially someone I respect and admire as much as I do Lou Levy, I'm always overcome — surprised and overwhelmed.

"Because when you're working together, the work takes over, and you don't notice. You put your heads and hearts together, and out of this you get a multi-dimensional view of the performance and how the audience is experiencing it.

"Lou is a huge talent. He had a wonderful reputation as a jazz pianist before he ever worked with me. When someone with that great a talent and reputation surrenders his or her ego for the sake of the performance, they seem to discover later that this has somehow improved them.

"I wasn't really aware that Lou took such careful note of all the details of performance, the lighting and the rest of it. It pleases me so much to hear that. Many jazz musicians don't pay that kind of attention to these details, so important to the performance. Lou was always very disciplined and correct, and so was Grady Tate." Grady Tate has played drums for her over a period of many years. "They got so they knew the lighting cues. You have to be careful with lights. They affect your mood when you're performing.

"Not that it was always that serious. There were a lot of funny times together. Lou is very funny. And Grady Tate was always cracking us up.

"We all loved to play practical jokes. One night we opened in Philadelphia. My dressing room was so full of flowers that you could hardly move. It happened to be Lou's birthday. Grady and I and some of our friends took all the petals off all the flowers, and believe me, it was some job. The musicians had the petals under their music stands.

"We were doing *My Man*. I was doing the verse, just piano and voice. I had everyone cued. When we got to the modulation going into the chorus, the band went into *Happy Birthday* and threw the flower petals all over Lou. It came out perfectly. Lou is so cool. Nothing fazes him. But that did. He fell apart.

"But you had to be careful about these jokes. You had to let a certain amount of time go by before you could set up another one. We were playing Basin Street East. I had an apartment at the old Park Lane hotel.

"Whenever we had any kind of musical problem, we'd talk it over and work it out. I told Lou, trying to be very cool and serious, that I had something I wanted to discuss with him after the show. He came up to the apartment, and I took him into the library and said, 'You know what I want to talk about.'

"He said, 'No, I don't.'

"I was stalling for time. Finally I said, 'Well, if you don't know, we'll just talk about it later. Why don't you have a drink?' And I opened the library doors and outside were all the members of the band and people from Basin Street and a lot of our friends. It was Lou's birthday again.

"The other day I received a note from him. It was the nicest, kindest, most loving note. I got the impression that he considered those years a very special period of his life. We had a wonderful relationship. We were so sensitive to each other.

"There was a thing that happened at the Copa. I was singing *Lover* with the full orchestra. At that speed it is going by so fast and I made a mistake. I skipped a chorus. And the entire orchestra, without anyone saying anything, skipped it too! It was amazing. An entire orchestra. And there's a key change in there. They caught all of it!"

Peg's home in Belair is exquisitely decorated in the kind of faultless taste her work would lead you to expect: the carpets are deep and excellent art covers its walls. Her correspondence and telephone conversations maintain contact with friends all over the world. Her constant companion is a strikingly intuitive gray cat she calls Baby, who adores her.

One day when I was visiting her — she was sitting up in bed, clad in a pink bed jacket, recovering from a bout of illness, and had ordered tea for me — she said, "I have known so many different kinds of love. I'm very lucky."

Peg took such amusement from her birthday surprises on Lou Levy. Well, her seventy-sixth birthday comes up in May, and this little tribute is *my* surprise.

Happy birthday, Norma Deloris.