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Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

June 1998 *Vol. 17 No. 6*

Make the Sucker Float
Part II

His father played flute and piccolo. When Hank was eight, his father started him on these instruments. "He was determined that I would learn them. Very determined. He took the wooden perch out of a bird cage, and if I'd play a wrong note when I was practicing, he'd hit me on the head or on the back with it."

One day in 1935, when Hank was eleven, his father drove him to Pittsburgh and took him to Loew's Penn Theater, one of those gloriously rococo old movie houses that went up all over North America in the 1920s. Hank said: "We entered this luxurious cavern with a gold-and-white ornate ceiling that seemed as far away as the sky. We settled into red velvet seats, the lights went down, and the big screen lit up with the name of the movie. It was Cecil B. DeMille's *The Crusades*.

"I still remember the huge black-and-white images of knights in armor, Arab warriors in flowing robes, horses and tents and sand and gigantic faces that opened their mouths and talked. I had never seen a talking picture, only the silent comedies of Charlie Chase, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, and the Keystone Cops. But what I remember most of all from that day is the music, the sound of a big orchestra. I'd never heard anything much but the music of the Sons of Italy Band in which I played flute and piccolo. We played such things as the *Zampa* overture and *Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna*. I had the flute solo on *The William Tell Overture*.

"He told me that the reason we were seeing this movie was that he wanted me to have a sense of history. But why?"

In the countless interviews I have conducted in my lifetime, I have been often amazed at how early in a boy's or girl's life an ambition is born and a life's direction is set. Hank was a classic example. He said:

"I was fascinated by the movie and the music in it. That score, I learned many years later, was composed by Rudolph Kopp. I thought that there was a big orchestra behind the screen, but my father said that this just showed you what an ignorant little *cafone* I was. He told me the sound of that orchestra was actually *in* the movie.

"We headed north in the valley along the riverbank toward home. My Dad told me I would study hard, go to university, get a degree, become a teacher, and escape the steel mills. But I had already made up my mind I was never going to be a teacher. I didn't tell him then or for a long time, but I knew what I was going to do when I grew up.

"I was going to write music for the movies."

The next day, about noon, November 14, 1987, the Musengos arrived in Pittsburgh from Cleveland and Hank introduced me to them. I knew who Helen Musengo was: the cousin he considered his sister. And of course Ralph Musengo was her husband. They had driven down from Cleveland on the freeway. The trip is perhaps a hundred miles. But when Quinto Mancini made the journey in his old Chevrolet in a time long before freeways, tires were poor and roads were narrow, and it is not recorded how long it took him. Henry was six then. The family waited eight years to get a company house.

Quinto Mancini — Quinto means *fifth* in Italian — was born in Scanno, a small town in Abruzzi. According to Ralph Musengo, who had researched the family's history, Quinto Mancini's grandfather — Hank's great grandfather — was a farmer. He owned a house, and so was a man of some property. Quinto hated his cousins, and with cause. When Quinto's grandfather died, the property was deeded to Quinto's father and his brother, but the brother cheated Quinto's father out of the property in some Machiavellian maneuver that is the dark side of the Italian character. "That sort of thing was common in Italy," Ralph said. Quinto and his siblings were expelled from the land.

Probably for that bitter reason, about 1910 or 1911, at the age of twelve or thirteen, Quinto Mancini made up his mind to leave. He walked, apparently, to Rome and then Naples, boarded a ship, made his way to Detroit, then Boston, where he worked in a shoe factory, then Cleveland, and finally to West Aliquippa. Where and how, during these peregrinations, did the boy learn to play flute and piccolo? Hank was always mystified by this.

Europeans who came to North America tended to settle in regions that resembled those they knew in the old countries: Ukrainians, for example, in the immense featureless reaches of prairie in Western Canada; Scandinavians in the dark forested lake country of Minnesota, upper Michigan, and northern Ontario. A great many Italians settled in the California valleys hospitable to the grape. And they tended to group among their own, in part no doubt because those who had discovered amenable regions wrote to praise them to friends and family back home, who then joined them.

"Wherever there were communities of Italians in the small towns of America," Hank said, "and especially in western Pennsylvania, they were like modules, cocoons, of the old country. It was as if they had taken bubbles of the Italian culture, floated them

across the ocean, and put them in the little towns of Pennsylvania." Hank said he might as well have been growing up in Italy, so insularly Italian was the West Aliquippa community. Surprisingly, he never learned to speak Italian; but he did put olive oil on his hair which, his mother said, would make it strong and healthy. Comparatively early in life, Hank's forehead receded and he went bald. So much for olive oil as a hair treatment.

But all the young would-be Valentinos in the town used olive oil on their hair. Hank remembered that at the 10 o'clock Mass on Sunday mornings, when the pews were already filled, they would lean against the wall, heads back, eyes half closed with hangover, leaving marks of olive oil so that the wall looked as if it had been repeatedly hit with a dirty tennis ball. Every few weeks it would have to be washed. Hank loved food, and liked to cook. Once when I said something about buying a full gallon of olive oil, he said, laughing, "Just a gallon? I *spill* more than that."

Hank's mother's family name was Pece, which should be pronounced Paychay. Ralph Musengo described Anna Pece Mancini as "a really nice woman." She and his wife Helen's father came from "a family of contentment and joy."

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

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

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

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

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

Helen said, "I don't remember that my parents were real huggy, or kissin' all the time. There was no question that Henry was just everything to Quint and Anna, they were both very supportive, and did everything they could for him."

Ralph said, "Henry looks like his father. And so does his son Chris and even little Chris, his grandson. They all look like Quint."

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

"As far as I know, Annie was about two years old when they came over from Italy — the mother, the father, Annie and my father. These were people who were landowners in their little town."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hank never forgot the soot and smoke from the mills. Sometimes in Pittsburgh, street lights would be turned on in the day. The mills, Hank said, stained the night skies orange, and "the soot and fly ash murdered the air we breathed . . . .

"The first snowfall always seemed magical. It was lovely when it first came down, putting caps on roofs and clinging to the branches of the trees . . . but it soon became what is called black snow . . . . " One of the titles in his *Beaver Valley* orchestral suite is *Black Snow*.

On the hills above Aliquippa lived the white collar workers and supervisors of Jones and Laughlin, looking down — literally — on the homes of the mill hands. In high school, he tried to make friends but was soon reminded by the Cake Eaters, as the minorities of the town called those who lived above them, that he was Italian. It didn't help that the lunches his mother packed always contained a salami sandwich, in a time when salami was really greasy. It would soak through the brown-paper bag, leaving a grease stain in his desk. Hank said he expected a culture would grow on it. He was very sensitive to this memory.

Hank's mother had a close friend and neighbor named Minnie Steffalo in whose home there was a player piano. Hank said, "I would put roll after roll of the hits of the day into the piano and be fascinated by the music coming out. To prove my father's point that I was a bit thick, I thought this was the only way the piano could be played. It was entirely by accident that I sat down one day and started fooling around and discovered that one could play this piano alone, without any help from the piano rolls. This was my first encounter with the piano. I must have been ten or eleven years old."

He took piano lessons, but it was his father's instrument, the flute, on which Hank became most skilled. His use of flutes in later orchestration, banks of them, including the bass flute — virtually an unknown instrument when he started using it — reflects his thorough knowledge of this family of instruments. He

played in the Sons of Italy marching band and in small regional dance bands. He began to teach himself arranging. He would take records of the day, Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw records, put them on the gramophone, which could play at different speeds, and slow them up so that he could examine the voicings. This was an ingenious thing for a boy of fourteen to do, but arrangers and composers of his generation did this quite commonly. It nonetheless suggests impressive musical hearing.

The family's house was about a hundred yards from the Ohio riverbank. Offshore were Hog Island and Crow Island, connected to the shore by two barges that functioned as a pontoon bridge. Families who worked at Jones and Laughlin were allowed to garden there. His mother had a vegetable plot, where she would grow tomatoes from which she would make paste or dry in the sun.

From time to time a paddlewheel steamer would pull in at Crow Island and Hank, with others from the community, would go on excursions to an amusement park downstream in West Virginia. When he was about fourteen, he heard a dance band on one of these excursions. Its personnel included a rhythm section, three trumpets, two trombones, and five saxophones. The musicians were black. The band was in what he would later recognize as the Fletcher Henderson-Count Basie style. He was exalted by their music. He never knew the name of that band. But the experience, he said, was metaphysical: "At such times you know you're in the presence of something extraordinary."

Whatever the strain in their relations, Hank's father sent him to Pittsburgh for piano lessons. Hank studied arrangeing with Max Adkins, who led the pit band at the Stanley Theater in Pittsburgh. Adkins trained a number of major musicians, including Jerry Fielding who, like Hank, would become an important film composer, and Billy Strayhorn, with whom Hank became friendly at that time. Adkins not only taught Hank to write, he taught him to dress, how to give tips, how to be a gentleman. Hank always considered him one of the most significant figures in his life.

Hank was graduated from high school at seventeen. Adkins recommended Hank to Benny Goodman when the latter played an engagement in Pittsburgh. Goodman assigned him to write an arrangement. Hank did so and sent it to Goodman. Goodman wrote back, "Come to New York."

By then Hank had applied for admission to the Juilliard School of Music. He left for Juilliard on a scholarship in 1942. Goodman was playing the Paramount. He assigned Hank to write an arrangement on the song *Idaho*, and Hank met the band's pianist and arranger Mel Powell, scarcely older than he. Goodman didn't like the arrangement and never played it.

Hank played gigs around New York, with Johnny Long and Vincent Lopez, among other bands. His father sent him a little money every month. Hank was studying the music of Bartok, Mozart, and particularly Debussy and Ravel. He turned eighteen, was drafted, assigned to the Army Air Corps, and sent to Atlantic City for basic training. There he met some of the members of the Glenn Miller Air Force band. They urged him to apply for the band and arranged a meeting with Miller.

He remembers Miller sitting at a table, looking at him through his rimless glasses and saying, "I hear you're an arranger. Do you write well?"

Hank said, "Well enough, for what I've done. I also play flute and piccolo and piano."

Miller said, "Okay," and took Hank's serial number.

When he finished basic training, Hank expected to be sent to gunnery school. To his surprise, he was assigned on Miller's recommendation to the 528th Air Force band under Master Sergeant Norman Leyden, an arranger and conductor with a degree in music from Yale. Without that introduction to Miller, he would later reflect, he might have died as a gunner on a B-17.

At the time of the Battle of the Bulge, many Air Force band musicians were reassigned to the infantry, and Hank was sent on a troop ship to Le Havre, where he was posted to an engineering brigade. But when he was on the way to the front, he was reassigned yet again — as organist for the company chaplain. Hank played hymns on a small pump organ.

That chaplain had a small trailer behind the jeep Hank was assigned to drive. He would load it with champagne that he would sell to soldiers at the front. And as they passed through the many villages, the chaplain would enter empty churches and remove their stained-glass windows, some of them hundreds of years old, which he would have crated by the engineers and ship back to the United States, where he could sell them after the war. Hank retained contempt for that chaplain all his life.

Hank reached Linz, Austria, in early May, 1944. His company was sent on an assignment. They were not told where they were going. Hank said. "I was with the chaplain, driving the jeep. We proceeded east for about fifteen miles and went through a small village. Making a final turn leaving the town, we came upon an expansive meadow of lovely green grass reaching to the top of a nearby hill. Perched on it was a huge gray stone structure. It was the Mauthausen concentration camp. We went in.

"The scene was unreal, dreamlike. Under American supervision, surviving prisoners, in their striped uniforms and carrying rifles, were escorting squads of SS troopers in full uniform. The SS men were carrying shovels, and with the rifles of the prisoners on them, they were using the shovels to give decent burial to the dead, many of whom were simply lying there naked in the dirt. The smell of quick-lime was everywhere. The cremation ovens were still warm, with traces of smoke rising from the chimneys.

"At the end of the day we left. As we drove back to our camp, I saw the villagers through different eyes than I had a few hours before. Within a mile of them, unspeakable horror had occurred; here life went on as usual. Some of them must have known. No one could convince me otherwise."

After the European war's end on May 8, 1945, by yet another stroke of luck, Hank was able to get assigned to a band on the French Riviera, posted at Nice. "It was one of the best periods of my life, ever," Hank said.

His cousin Helen had married Ralph Musengo, who was in the Counter Intelligence Corps, the CIC. Ralph, who spoke fluent Italian, had been working with Italian partisans behind the German lines. Now he was stationed at Nice, awaiting repatriation. Ralph

told me that two of Hank's friends at that time told him that someday, Henry Mancini was going to be someone important.

Hank was discharged from service on March 30, 1946, at Fort Dix, New Jersey. His old Master Sergeant, Norman Leyden, was now chief arranger for the post-war Glenn Miller band, led by Tex Beneke, who was just out of the navy. Like the wartime Air Force from which it descended, it had a good-sized string section. Its other sections included Conrad Gozzo, Bobby Nichols, Paul Tanner, Rolly Bundock, and Jack Sperling. Hank would some day use a number of them on the *Peter Gunn* music. But first Hank went home to see his mother and father and his old teacher, Max Adkins. Hank's father wanted him to go back to Juilliard, so that he could become a teacher, but Hank had by now gained valuable writing experience and wanted to go directly into the business. Adkins encouraged him, and Hank returned to New York and on Norman Leyden's recommendation, was hired without audition by Tex Beneke as arranger and pianist. He was paid $125 a week.

"So I went with the band and didn't go back to school," Hank said. "I felt this was an opportunity I couldn't miss. I could speculate as to what might have been. I might have been further ahead in certain ways as far as education goes, because my musical education is a patchwork. I've had some great teachers, like Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Krenek, I've done a lot of study, but I have not had that formalized thing where you go through this which leads to that. But I don't think I'd trade it now.

"The big thing about the Beneke band was that I was there, I would write something, we'd rehearse it, and I'd hear it played."

A symphony orchestra uses up to sixty strings, needed for projection and to balance the other, implicitly louder, instruments. Dance bands, when they carried strings at all, usually had ten or twelve strings, and in Beneke's case thirteen. I said, "How in the world did you balance thirteen strings against all that brass?"

Hank laughed. "We usually didn't. In an up jazz arrangement, there is no way to do it, unless you're recording. I think they had only one mike on the strings. The bands in those days did not have many mikes, they were hardly miked at all. It was on the ballad arrangements that I really learned a great deal about balances. Thirteen isn't a lot. In fact, I remember after I was married, Jerry Fielding — we were living in the Valley, in our first apartment, in Burbank — called me one day and said, 'I'm going to have to write for strings here, and I don't know what to do.' He came out to see me. He said, 'You've been writing for Tex, can you tell me something?' We spent a whole day just talking about strings, and here I was, the expert — who had probably done about fifteen charts for strings!"

"But you'd studied the books, the Berlioz, the Rimsky-Korsakov, the Forsythe."

"Sure. But I hadn't had much actual experience with strings."

Hank would evolve into a supremely sophisticated writer for strings.

With the Beneke band, he said, "we played the Glen Island Casino, the Meadowbrook, Coney Island in Cincinnati, and all the theaters. Sometimes we would stay in a location for a week or two at a time. In theaters we would play four shows a day. It was an exciting time. Nobody had even a remote idea that the age of the big bands was ending. The public still idolized bandleaders like Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Woody Herman.

"When you were on the road with a band, you lived in a capsule, a cocoon. There was no other world but the band, because you were always leaving behind the people you met along the way. The only continuity you had was with the band itself. You breathed and talked the life of the band. You could almost complete everybody else's sentences. You knew everything about everybody. You were always on that bus, and you settled into a groove. Everything came down to two things: where do we eat, and what time does the job start? I was by now more than slightly interested in girls, but even they didn't enter into it that much: you were always waving good-bye to them through the bus window.

"I cannot remember ever finding a restaurant that was any good, nor can I figure out how we got our pressing done. You did your socks and underwear yourself in the hotel-room sink, but how we got pressing done is still a big mystery to me."

The Miller-Beneke band took on a vocal group from Los Angeles, the Mello-Larks. A member of that group was Ginny O'Connor. Hank was skeptical of Hollywood people and, he said, reflexively looked down his nose at her. Born in California, Irish on her father's side, Mexican on her mother's, Ginny in later life had the exotic good lucks of that ancestry. She spoke Spanish before English. Her father had driven trucks at MGM, and Ginny had a certain practical knowledge of the movie business.

Ginny told me she was taken by Hank from the very beginning. The musicians in the band knew it. They would see to it, on boarding the band bus, that all the seats on the bus were occupied except the one by Hank, which they'd left for her. Hank said, "I think Ginny saw something in me as a musician that I didn't see myself," which is a serious understatement. Ginny said that because of the way she was always looking at him, the musicians called her Dopey. But soon they were dating, and without a formal proposal assumed they would be married.

Ginny hated life with that band. As a California girl, she loathed the cold. She was making $90 a week; Hank by then was earning $300. When the band played Cleveland, Hank took her on a side trip to West Aliquippa to meet his parents.

Ginny's mother — who had played piano professionally — disapproved of the relationship. She didn't want Ginny to marry a musician. She said that if she did, she'd starve.

Ginny by now knew Hank's dreams. She told him that if he really wanted to write music for movies, he should make his move now. She gave Tex her notice and returned to Los Angeles. Hank stayed with the band a little longer, then he too gave his notice, telling Tex he was going to be married. Tex told him that even if he couldn't travel with the band, he'd like Hank to keep writing for it. Ginny's mother, despite her reservations about musicians, set up a room for him in their home, and he lived there until they were married and took an apartment in Burbank. Hank's best man was Jerry Gray, born Graziano, who had been Glenn Miller's

arranger and composer of the Miller hit *A String of Pearls*. Gray and composer David Rose got Hank some of his early assignments in writing for drama — in those days radio drama. With Ginny singing in the studios — she was a skilled sight reader — they eked out a living, doing without furniture in their living room.

Hank told me, "My mother and father came out to visit both summers after Ginny and I were married, driving all the way across the country. They liked it, and then in 1949, when my father got his Social Security, they wrapped up everything in Pennsylvania and moved out here. I realized when he arrived that year that my dad had it in his mind that he was going to live with us, as is the custom with families in Italy. We didn't even have a house yet, only our apartment.

"I was not working very much, and things were very difficult for Ginny and me. With what little money I did have, I helped my parents buy a house in Bell, southeast of Los Angeles. It was a little cracker box of a place, but comfortable.

"My relationship with my father grew more strained, and eventually turned a little nasty. He went back to work, in a shoe factory, doing I suppose, whatever he had done in that shoe factory in Boston, not long after his arrival from Italy.

"Then my mother had the first of eight heart attacks. We found her the best of nursing care around the clock. She had a telephone by her bedside, and the anticipation of hearing our phone ring at odd hours of the night was a nightmare for us. She was visibly deteriorating.

"My dad became even more difficult to deal with. He felt he was being punished for something and he blamed everyone. He was even angry at my mother for being sick. He wouldn't give her the time of day, and she just remained sweet and quiet. I don't think his attitude did much to make her want to get well.

"I would try to talk with my parents every day. We would drive the two hours there and back at least once a week. He became very sullen and more difficult to communicate with, and I came to feel guilty about the situation. He was always civil to Ginny but he really took his anger out on me.

"And he never let me forget that I hadn't gotten a degree in music. He pounded me with it. When I would get a nice little job, and turn in a piece of work I was proud of, and try to tell him about it, he'd say 'Well, if you had your degree you'd be teaching school.' He simply never let up on that, even after the success of *Peter Gunn* and *Moon River*.

"I have felt an overwhelming sadness, the kind of pain you can't control, emotion that overwhelms you to the point that you break down and sob, once in my life. It was after we received the call that my mother was dying. We drove to Bell, and I cried in the car. A priest was there. We were at her bedside when she released the death rattle. It's a sound you don't forget. "

Hank always wondered what would have happened to him if this thing or that thing had occurred along the path of his life. I wondered what would have happened to him had he not met and married Virginia O'Connor. Ginny was — and is — a remarkable woman. She had grown up in comparative poverty during the depression. By the time she was twelve she was dancing professionally to add to the family's meager income. She would save pennies all week to go to the movies on Saturday and forget, in their flickering fantasies, the difficulties of her daily life.

She learned to sing early and she was doing it professionally before she was out of her teens. Her friends were the young Hollywood crowd, including Donald O'Connor, Peggy Ryan, Judy Garland, Mel Tormé, Sammy Davis Jr., and Blake Edwards, whose father and grandfather had been in the movie business. She knew the ways of the industry, and indeed she got Hank his first movie assignment: writing an arrangement for a short subject featuring the Jimmy Dorsey band at Universal in which she and the Mello-Larks were appearing. The studio was about to make several musicals and Joseph Gershenson, head of the music department, liked Hank's work and gave him another assignment, writing music for one scene in an Abbott and Costello film called *Lost in Alaska*. The job, at $225 a week, was supposed to last two weeks; Hank stayed on staff at Universal for six years, thoroughly learning his craft. He rarely did a complete score, writing only a few scenes here and there in association with other staff composers.

By now Hank and Ginny had three children, Christopher, born July 2, 1950, and twin girls, Monica and Felice, born May 4, 1952. The girls looked so much alike that later, they could fool their father about which of them he was talking to; even in their adult years, they could deceive him on the telephone.

Better pictures, and pictures with bigger budgets, came Hank's way. He wrote the underscores for both *The Glenn Miller Story* and *The Benny Goodman Story*. The former included a melody that gave one of the first hints that Hank was a formidable melodist. With lyrics by Don Raye, it took on a life of its own as the song *Too Little Time*. And then Hank got a more important break: he was assigned the score of the 1958 Orson Welles film, now viewed as a classic despite butchery in the editing room by studio executives, called *Touch of Evil*. And it is here that we first hear a distinctly Mancini-esque score, with jazz brass used to contribute to the dark mood of the picture. He used such musicians as Conrad Gozzo and Shelly Manne in the band. It was a genuine departure in film scoring, though it was little noticed as such at the time. It has a brooding sense of the ominous, built out of elements of big-band jazz and Latin music, which became characteristic in his later music. Hank never claimed to be a jazz musician or composer, and he had enormous respect for those such as Billy May whom he did put in that category. But the fact is that he had roots deep into jazz and, more particularly, to the big-band era that was coming to an end when he was with the Beneke band. And as soon as he had the stature, the authority, and the opportunities to draw on that background, he did so.

Hank retained a vivid horrific memory of his days at Universal.

One of his closest friends was the actor Jeff Chandler, an aspiring lyricist who also liked to sing, although, according to Hank, despite a rich and beautiful voice, he had pitch problems. Hank wrote act music for him when he played Las Vegas. They wrote a song for the Ross Hunter movie *All I Desire*. Then Tony

Curtis made a movie called *Six Bridges to Cross*, which Hank was to score. It needed a song to be used during the closing credits. Hank and Jeff Chandler wrote one. Hank knew Sammy Davis Jr. quite well; and Ginny had known him since they were very young. And in his autobiography, *Yes I Can*, Sammy said that Jeff Chandler was like an older brother to him. Chandler telephoned Sammy, who was playing the Last Frontier in Las Vegas with the Will Mastin Trio, to tell him that he and Hank wanted him to sing the song for the film. Sammy's career was on the verge of major success.

For Davis, the engagement had enormous significance. Prior to that, black performers were not allowed to stay in the hotels they were playing. They had to find lodgings in the "colored" part of town. The Last Frontier, aptly named in the circumstances, finally gave in, paid the Will Mastin Trio $7,500 a week, good money then, and gave them the best rooms in the hotel. Sammy had a hit record at the time, and was excited about recording his first soundtrack song.

Sammy told Chandler he would drive down to Los Angeles to record the song. He finished work at midnight and left in his new Cadillac convertible with his valet Charley. Charley drove for a time, then Davis took over and Charley slept in the back seat. Sammy heard his hit recording of *Hey There* on the radio. At sunrise, a car passed him. Then its driver tried to make a U-turn on the highway. Sammy swerved to miss the car, lost control, and hit the other car's rear fender. The police arrived. Charley groaned in the back seat, unable to speak because of blood in his throat. He pointed at Sammy's face. Sammy put his hand up and found one eye dangling by a thread of nerves on his cheek. He tried to stuff it back into the socket, falling to his knees and saying, "Don't let me go blind. Please, God, don't take it all away!" And in the ambulance he thought, "I'm never going to be a star. They're going to hate me again."

Hank, Jeff Chandler, and the orchestra assembled in the recording studio at 9 a.m. When Sammy didn't show up, they were surprised, and increasingly uneasy. Hank rehearsed the musicians, then at noon dismissed them for lunch. Chandler, on a dark hunch, called the sheriff's department and learned that Sammy was in a hospital in San Bernardino. His eye, injured beyond repair, had been removed.

Even in this adversity, Davis was the full professional, conscious of his obligations. He asked Chandler to sub for him at the Last Frontier, and Chandler flew to Las Vegas with the act music Hank had written for him. As soon as Sammy was out of the hospital, he recorded the song for the picture.

Chandler, born Ira Grossel in Brooklyn on December 15, 1918, died on June 17, 1961. He was forty-three. The official cause of death was given as blood poisoning sustained during back surgery. Hank and others of his friends said he died of medical bungling. They were heart-broken — he was very well liked — and furious.

Sammy acquired an artificial eye and became the star he had always wanted to be. He remained close friends with Hank and Ginny until his death on May 16, 1990.

Touch of Evil was one of the last scores Hank would do at Universal; he always considered it one of the best he'd ever written. The old studio system was breaking down, with more and more movies being made by outside production companies. Universal got rid of its staff composers; and, newly unemployed, Hank went back to the lot for that haircut. "I've often wondered what would have happened to me if I hadn't needed a haircut that day," Hank said.

Johnny Mandel and others with jazz background were getting into film scoring. Indeed, Johnny — like Mancini a graduate of the big bands; he had written for the Woody Herman and Boyd Raeburn bands — had composed a jazz score for the 1958 Susan Hayward movie *I Want to Live*. But Johnny is the first to tell you that it was Mancini who made jazz widely acceptable in film scoring. Hank proved how successful and expressive it could be, thereby opening the way for Benny Golson, J.J. Johnson, Oliver Nelson, Roger Kellaway, Billy Byers, Patrick Williams, and many others.

"The idea of using jazz in the *Gunn* score was never even discussed," Hank told me. "It was implicit in the story. Peter Gunn hangs out in a jazz roadhouse called Mother's — the name was Blake's way of tweaking the nose of the censors — where there is a five-piece jazz group . . . .

"It was the time of so-called cool West Coast jazz . . . . And that was the sound that came to me, the walking bass and drums. The *Peter Gunn* title theme actually derives more from rock and roll than from jazz. I used guitar and piano in unison, playing an ostinato. It was sustained throughout the piece, giving it a sinister effect, with some frightened saxophone sounds and some shouting brass."

In those days, it was unusual for the scores to movies to be released on records, and unprecedented for TV scores. But Ray Anthony had had a hit record with the theme from the television show *Dragnet*, and then another with the *Gunn* theme, which Hank arranged for him.

And that's when Hank's next massive stroke of luck occurred: the sheer, opened-hearted generosity of the late Shorty Rogers, who was known for that quality back in his days in the trumpet section of the Woody Herman band. Shorty was by now a big jazz star, and his LPs for RCA Victor automatically sold 80,000 copies or more, a lot of albums in those days, and certainly for jazz. An RCA executive thought Shorty should record the *Gunn* music. But over lunch, Shorty said, "Hank, I have no reason to record this. It has no connection with me. *You* wrote it, *you* arranged it, and *you* should record it. This music is *yours*."

Hank said, "But Shorty, I'm not a recording artist. I'm just a film writer. Nobody knows who I am. You have a name."

Shorty was immoveable. He told Hank, "It's your baby, and you should do it." And with Shorty's encouragement, RCA agreed to let Hank record his *Gunn* music.

Peter Gunn came to the television screens of America in September, 1958. RCA had pressed eight thousand copies of the album. They were gone in a week. There was chaos in the company as pressing plants tried to meet the demand. The album

went to the Number 1 position in the *Billboard* charts and stayed there for ten weeks. Though it dropped from that position, it remained in the charts for more than two years, ultimately selling more than a million copies, an unprecedented sale for a jazz record.

And it made Henry Mancini a huge name with the public. Later, as always aware of his luck, Hank would wonder not only about that haircut but what would have become of him if Shorty Rogers had decided to record that music himself. The *Peter Gunn* album was the beginning of one of the major recording and concert careers in American history.

Woody Herman said once, "The light may never hit you, but if it does, you'd better be ready."

Henry Mancini had been getting ready for a long time.

The success of *Peter Gunn* led to a new opportunity for Blake Edwards and thus for Hank. Prior to *Gunn*, Hank had worked on three pictures with Edwards. One of them was *Mister Cory*, a film about a professional gambler starring Tony Curtis. This was the source of the idea for Edwards' next television series, *Mr. Lucky*. Hank wanted to come up with something different for a main theme, and he found it: a gorgeous melody played by strings with Buddy Cole on Hammond organ punching out accents, like a brass section. I remember being quite captivated by its sinuous melodicism the first time I heard it on television, and it remains striking to this day, nearly forty years later. Since the film was about a suave character who runs a gambling ship off the California coast, religious fundamentalists, elements of the group that would later call itself the moral majority, put pressure on CBS, and Blake Edwards was forced to turn his protagonist into a restaurateur. The ratings of the series began to slip, but not before Hank had another top-ten album with *Music from "Mr. Lucky"*. After a year, Edwards told Hank he could no longer lend his name to this compromise, and he closed the show down.

Edwards' television days were ending, in any event. He was about to move on to directing solely for the big screen. The first picture he was to do was *Breakfast at Tiffany's* for Paramount and he asked Hank to do the score.

The score, however, required a song for Audrey Hepburn to sing on a fire escape. The producers of the picture, Dick Shepherd and Marty Jurow, thought they should hire a Broadway composer to write that song. Mancini had no track record as a writer of melodies. It seems ironic now that one of the most magnificent writers of melody should have been treated with such skepticism. I suspect that the one in the background with all the faith in him was Ginny. In any case Hank begged Blake Edwards for the chance to write the song as well as the score. Blake took up Hank's cause with the producers and they decided to let him have a try at it.

At first Hank couldn't think of anything. Finally, at home one night after dinner, seated at the piano, he came up with a simple three-note fragment in the key of C. It took him only minutes to write the tune; it had taken him six weeks to get the idea for it. He called Johnny Mercer to ask if he would write a lyric for it.

Johnny, who was a melancholiac, was at a low point in his career. Rock and roll had inundated the music business, and he felt that his own career was probably finished. He listened to Mancini's new tune and made one of the most inaccurate predictions in music history. He said, "Hank, who's going to record a waltz? We'll do it for the picture, but after that it hasn't any future commercially." Hank gave him a tape of the tune and Johnny went home and began to write.

Hank was to conduct the orchestra for a benefit at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. Johnny arranged to meet him there to show him what he had written. Hank played the melody on the piano in the deserted ballroom. Johnny showed Hank three different lyrics. The third was *Moon River*. It gave Hank chills.

Alan Jay Lerner was of the opinion that Johnny Mercer was the greatest lyricist in American history. Many lyricists, Alan and Marilyn Bergman and Jay Livingston and Ray Evans among them, concur. Composer and arranger Paul Weston, Johnny's close associate when Johnny headed Capitol records, said, "Johnny did more things well than any lyricist I ever knew." John had amazing range, from sardonic humor as in *Hooray for Hollywood* to deeply bluesy lyrics evocative of the south such as *Blues in the Night* to songs that sounded French, such as *Once Upon a Summertime* and *When the World Was Young*.

And the lyric to *Moon River* was perfect for the picture, evoking the wistful yearning of the somewhat lost girl of the story. Johnny was very much in touch with his southern roots, and the song has a folk quality about it. Blake Edwards and the producers loved it.

Ironically, it almost didn't make it to the movie screens. After a preview screening in San Francisco, Marty Rackin, then head of Paramount Pictures, said the song had to go. Hank said later that he could see the rage growing in Blake Edwards' face. The song stayed in the picture.

And as for Mercer's prediction that the song had no future, it it was a huge hit for Andy Williams, ever afterwards identified with it.

Though they had worked together before, Mancini and Edwards were really launched on their unusual — actually odd — partnership by *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Ultimately they would do twenty-eight pictures together. What made the partnership was the total mutual trust, and to grasp this, one needs to know about the usual relationships between composers and their producers and/or directors, and Edwards has been both. Jerry Goldsmith, one of the most respected of film composers, has said that nothing frightens him like a meeting with a producer or director who says he played saxophone or drums or some other instrument in his high school band, for that man thinks he understands film scoring and doesn't.

In view of the propensity of producers and directors for meddling in the scoring process — some have been known to importune composers on the telephone, asking to hear themes even as they were being developed — the freedom Edwards accorded Hank was amazing. He took no interest in the score while it was being created, wouldn't ask to hear even the title theme. Blake Edwards' first knowledge of what Hank was doing would come at

the recording date.

And this went on in picture after picture after picture, *Days of Wine and Roses*; *Victor/Victoria*; *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* (one of the funniest war satires ever made), *The Party*, and *S.O.B.* The only reason I am constrained from saying *The Party* is the funniest and most delicious satire on the Hollywood movie industry ever made is that I think *S.O.B.* is the funniest. Evelyn Waugh was able to satirize the British upper classes with scorched-earth totality because he grew up among them. Similarly, Blake Edwards could mock Hollywood with coruscating accuracy (every character in *S.O.B.* is based on a real and recognizable person) because he had been around sound stages since childhood.

Hank had received his first Academy Award nomination in 1954 for *The Glenn Miller Story*. But in 1961, he received three nominations, one for the score of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, another for the song, and a third for the song *Bachelor in Paradise*, with a lyric by Mack David. He won awards both for the score of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and the song *Moon River*. He had already won a Grammy for the *Peter Gunn* album.

Hank by now had so much prestige that he could demand the publishing rights to his own music. This was unheard of. Movie companies extorted from composers the rights to publish the music they wrote for the picture. This meant that on any subsequent use of the music, in recordings or radio or television performances, the movie companies' music-publishing subsidiaries got half the royalties. Hank, again, broke precedent. And the reason, again, was the generosity of Blake Edwards.

Johnny Mandel is of the opinion that Hank had a good business head. He thinks Hank liked and enjoyed the business part of the profession. Whatever the reason, Hank made astute moves. He asked Edwards, as an independent producer, if he would let him retain the full rights to the *Peter Gunn* music, and Edwards quite casually consented to this. Later, Hank would ask for publishing rights before signing a contract to score a movie. He wouldn't always get them, and he didn't turn down attractive assignments if he couldn't. But sometimes he would get what he wanted, and sometimes he would get half the publishing.

He always thought he was an unlikely person for all this to be happening to. Major singers were recording his songs. Almost every film score he wrote was immediately issued in an album by RCA, and would usually make the best-seller lists. It was at this point that Jerry Perenchio, who was in the concert-booking division of Music Corporation of America, approached Hank about doing concerts. The first experimental concert, putting Hank on a bill with Johnny Mathis, took place at the Seattle World's Fair. Hank later told me he was very uncomfortable on stage at that time. He said that he was devoid of stage presence, which is hard to credit if you saw him in later years, at ease and at home conducting a symphony orchestra. Perenchio then proposed a series of concerts, with Hank himself as the headliner. But those first concerts with pickup orchestras were not successful.

"By then I had done a concert album," he said, "and I was building better programs. For example, I featured a ten-minute show piece called *Tribute to Victor Young* on one album. So instead of second-string pick-up orchestras, I started to think in terms of the true symphony orchestras around the country. I began to get offers from them. Then the one came in from the Cleveland Orchestra. Since I was born in Cleveland, I figured if I couldn't make it there, I couldn't make it anywhere.

"That engagement, in the fall of 1963, was very successful. After that I began to make regular appearances with symphony orchestras, both major ones and local ones like the San Fernando Symphony Orchestra, in high school auditoriums or even in parking lots. In 1965, I did a concert at the Greek Theater in Hollywood, and in 1968, in a program with the Fifth Dimension, the first of many at the Hollywood Bowl.

"If I'd shown any tendency to a swelled head, my father took care of it. I remember that he came to one of the concerts — probably the one at the Greek Theater. It was a great thrill for me. I thought I conducted well, and the audience gave me a standing ovation.

"After the concert I was walking out through the parking lot with my dad. He gave me one of his I-want-to-say-something-but-I-don't-know-how looks. Finally he said, 'You know, Henry, you should take conducting lessons.'"

By the 1970s Hank was doing two kinds of concert: one with symphony orchestras, the other at colleges and universities. The orchestras for these college concerts numbered forty musicians, including twenty string players. He eventually set up a system centered on Indianapolis, where saxophonist Al Cobine lived. Cobine became his contractor for concerts in the eastern states.

Two stories add insight into Hank's relations with musicians.

In the 1960s, Hank dropped into the London House, a great Chicago chop house now gone that featured major jazz artists, to hear the Oscar Peterson Trio. Ray Brown mentioned that he was tired of life on the road and was going to settle into Los Angeles. Hank told Ray to call him, saying he could do some of his recording work. Ray put as much stock in that promise as he did in most show-business offers. But when he got to Hollywood, he did call Hank, who immediately hired him for a record date. In a short time, Ray was the busiest bassist in the Hollywood studios. He is heard on many of the Mancini recordings.

The second story concerns bassist and composer John Clayton. Hank was about to start work on the TV series *The Mancini Generation*. On a record date, Ray introduced John, then only nineteen and Ray's protegé, to Mancini. Ray told Hank that other commitments prevented his doing *The Mancini Generation*. He recommended John. John told Hank that he could not do the whole series: he was going away to university that autumn. Hank said he could do part of the series. All this, be it noted, without having heard John play. As John was about to leave, Hank said, "Where are you going to school?" John told him: "Indiana University."

Hank said, "Oh, good. When you get there, call my contractor, Al Cobine, and you can do my concert work."

John played his way through Indiana U. as a member of Hank's concert group, needing neither scholarships nor assistance.

(To be continued)