

THE '50s POP REVIVAL



TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

Tony Martin



THE '50s POP REVIVAL

Most music fans, when they think of the unforgettable pop records of the 1950s, automatically think of singers—the smooth vocal stylings of artists like Perry Como, Nat King Cole, Patti Page and dozens of others. Yet these singers didn't do it alone; they had the support of a talented group of backup musicians, arrangers, conductors, writers and song finders. The actual sound of the era's best records, the lush studio orchestras and complex arrangements that provided such sparkling settings for the Comos and Coles, was what made the music of the era unique and timeless. But too often the contributions of the studio personnel went largely unappreciated.

A case in point is the collaboration between Columbia studio man Ray Conniff and country-pop singer Marty Robbins. In 1957 Conniff was a 41-year-old ex-trombone player who had worked his way up through the big bands of people like Bob Crosby, Artie Shaw and Harry James. He recalled: "I knew Mitch Miller because I wrote arrangements for Harry James and Harry recorded for Columbia and Mitch was head of A&R and we got to be friendly." Miller hired Conniff to work at Columbia in 1955, arranging for Frankie Laine, Johnnie Ray and Guy Mitchell. Conniff also began issuing his own LPs of slick studio arrangements for the "easy listening" audience, and he placed more than 50 albums on the charts.

Marty Robbins had written **A White Sport Coat** on the road during a tour of Ohio. In 1955, he had watched as Conniff and Guy Mitchell's pop version of his own country hit *Singing the Blues* became a million-seller, and he determined to work with Conniff himself. In January 1957 Robbins finally persuaded Columbia to let him record in

New York with the formal arrangements of the New York studio "A" team. As Conniff remembered: "Mitch Miller would call us into his office, he'd get the music up on the piano, I'd play some chords for Marty to sing to, or he'd play us a demo, so I could get a key." Conniff would then write out the arrangement, hire his musicians and set up the session. Robbins' instincts were good; the Conniff arrangement of *A White Sport Coat* hit the pop charts almost at once and soon became the theme song of young prom-goers all over the country.

What Ray Conniff was to Columbia, Hugo Winterhalter was to their major rival, RCA Victor. It is his arranging and conducting that frames Perry Como's mandolin-drenched serenade, **You Alone** (1953); Eddie Fisher's Broadway optimism from *Damn Yankees*, **Heart** (1955); and Jaye P. Morgan's evocation of the Glenn Miller band, **The Longest Walk** (1955). A native of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Winterhalter began playing violin at six and studied at the New England Conservatory. To support himself, he played sax with big bands in the 1930s and 1940s, including those of Larry Clinton, Benny Goodman and Vaughn Monroe.

By 1944 he was also arranging for many of these bands, and by 1950 had joined Victor, which was then in the process of building up its huge studio orchestra system. After he was appointed chief musical director for the label, he was often able to use a 35-piece orchestra and a chorus in his work with the studio's star singers. He also had a string of hit singles and albums on his own.

Vanessa (1952), from a "mood" album called *Music by Starlight*, was composed by Bernie Wayne, best known for

Blue Velvet. The song is dressed up here with pizzicato violins and an echo of the familiar *Holiday for Strings*.

Another former bandleader, Henri Rene, was responsible for Tony Martin's **Domino** (1951). Rene grew up in Germany, studying piano at Berlin's Royal Academy, playing in various U.S.-style dance bands and working as a musical director in German films. After he emigrated to the U.S. in 1936, he became a director for Victor's growing international division and later became West Coast A&R manager. At home in both pop and light classical styles, he accompanied everyone from Eddie Cantor to Eartha Kitt.

Like Winterhalter, Rene had numerous hits under his own name, as well as LPs like *Music for Bachelors*. *Domino* started out as a French song, and English words were added by Don Raye, a boogie-woogie veteran who produced *Beat Me Daddy (Eight to the Bar)* and *Cow-Cow Boogie*. (Another Raye creation was the Vaughn Monroe novelty **They Were Doin' the Mambo**.)

The extent to which a leader and arranger can shape a record can be seen in Gordon Jenkins' arrangement of the Weavers' **Wimoweh** (1952). Better known today as *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* from the Tokens recording of the 1960s, *Wimoweh* à la Jenkins will surprise listeners who think of it only as a folklike sing-along. Jenkins introduces the Weavers with a couple of choruses of screaming brass and fan-hat trombones.

The vocal itself was taken from a South African record called *Mbube* by Solomon Linda and his vocal quintet, the Evening Birds; the song became so popular there that it lent its name to an entire school of South African singing featuring high descending falsettos. The Weavers had heard Linda's record in New York in the early 1950s and did their best to copy it. Jenkins himself later became a conductor for Judy Garland and Nat King Cole.

Not all arrangers used big bands or string choirs to make their point. Johnnie Ray's 1953 reading of the World War I

former railroad brakeman, was a superb old-time fiddler who liked to play the song to the sparse accompaniment of the Delmore's' guitars. Miller retained this feel in his understated, evocative arrangement for Clooney. Though a nasty authorship dispute developed over the song, it became a major hit for Clooney.

The Kingston Trio's **A Worried Man** (1959) used the standard guitars and banjo of the song's Appalachian origins. Recorded in the 1920s by the Carter Family, it became a country favorite in the 1930s and a standard for Woody Guthrie a decade later. Lonnie Donegan modeled his version of **Rock Island Line** (1956) on that of folk singer Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly), who had learned it in the 1930s from a convict work gang in rural Arkansas. (The narrative about the engineer was added by Leadbelly in an attempt to help his Northern audience understand the song.)

Other session musicians and arrangers were steeped in rhythm and blues or gospel. Roy Hamilton's **Don't Let Go** (1958), later revived by Manhattan Transfer, was very much the product of Jesse Stone, who both wrote the song and conducted the studio band. Stone, whose real name was Charles Calhoun, was a major figure in '50s R&B, penning hits like *Money Honey* and *Shake, Rattle and Roll*.

Elvis Presley's **Don't** (1958) came from the dynamic rock 'n' roll team of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, but its wistfulness is a far cry from earlier efforts of theirs such as *Hound Dog*. The arrangement spotlights Elvis' regular

Somebody Stole My Gal

used the Buddy Cole Quartet, and with it conjured up a nostalgic small-club atmosphere. A native of Illinois who grew up in Los Angeles, Cole honed his style playing for jazz great Frankie Trumbauer, bandleader Alvino Rey and on the radio shows of Bing Crosby and Phil Harris. By the early '50s he was generally considered the best accompanist on the West Coast.

An even simpler background style came from arrangers who found themselves dealing with folk or country material. Rosemary Clooney's **Beautiful Brown Eyes** (1951) was one of a series of country songs producer Mitch Miller found and adapted for her and other Columbia artists. It was written and recorded in the 1930s by two Grand Ole Opry acts, Arthur Smith and the Delmore Brothers. Smith, a



Jaye P. Morgan

backup group, the Jordanaires, who had earned national reputations in gospel long before they met Elvis.

Les Paul drew upon his own experience as a hillbilly guitarist and radio star to produce his arrangement of **Smoke Rings** in 1952. The song was already known as the theme for Glen Gray's Casa Loma Orchestra in the big-band era. Paul recalled, "I latched onto themes that got lots of air play and sounded like hits. I knew this just needed the right rendition." The sound was created by a custom-altered Epiphone guitar Paul called the Log—a 4 x 4 board attached to a conventional neck and finger-board. As backup, it was a long way from the orchestras of Hugo Winterhalter, but it got the job done and helped the music roll on.

—Charles K. Wolfe

6. Night Lights Nat King Cole • *Music by Chester Conn, lyrics by Sonny Gallop. Capitol 3551 (1956). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*

7. Vanessa Hugo Winterhalter and His Orchestra • *Music by Bernie Wayne. RCA Victor 4691 (1952). Courtesy BMG Music.*

8. Anna Silvana Mangano • *Music by R. Vatro, lyrics by F. Giordano. MGM 11457 (1953). Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.*

9. They Were Doin' the Mambo Vaughn Monroe • *Music and lyrics by Don Raye and J. Francis Burke. RCA Victor 5767 (1954). Courtesy BMG Music.*

10. Wimoweh The Weavers • *Music and lyrics by Hugo Peretti, Luigi Creatore, Paul Campbell, George David Weiss, Pete Kameron and Al Brachman. Decca 27928 (1952). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc.*

11. Be Anything (But Be Mine) Eddy Howard and His Orchestra • *Music and lyrics by Irving Gordon. Mercury 5815 (1952). Vocal by Eddy Howard, with the Jack Halloran Choir. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.*

12. You Alone Perry Como • *Music by Robert Allen, lyrics by Al Stillman. RCA Victor 5447 (1953). Courtesy BMG Music.*

13. Don't Let Go Ray Hamilton • *Music and lyrics by Jesse Stone. Epic 9257 (1958). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.*

14. A Worried Man The Kingston Trio • *Music and lyrics by Dave Guard and Tom Glazer. Capitol 4271 (1959). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*

15. Gonna Get Along without Ya Now Patience and Prudence • *Music and lyrics by Milton Kellern. Liberty 55040 (1957). Courtesy of EMI Records Group/EMI Records, under license from CEMA Special Markets.*

16. A White Sport Coat (And a Pink Carnation) Marty Robbins • *Music and lyrics by Marty Robbins. Columbia 40864 (1957). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.*

17. An Affair to Remember Vic Damone • *Music by Harry Warren, lyrics by Harold Adamson and Leo McCarey. Columbia 40945 (1957). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.*

DISCOGRAPHY

1. Heart Eddie Fisher • *Music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross. RCA Victor 6197 (1955). Courtesy BMG Music.*

2. The Longest Walk Jaye P. Morgan • *Music by Fred Spielman, lyrics by Eddie Pola. RCA Victor 6182 (1955). Courtesy BMG Music.*

3. Domino Tony Martin • *Music by Louis Ferrari, English lyrics by Don Raye. RCA Victor 4343 (1951). Courtesy BMG Music.*

4. Smoke Rings Les Paul and Mary Ford • *Music by H. Eugene Gifford, lyrics by Ned Washington. Capitol 2123 (1952). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*

5. Somebody Stole My Gal Johnnie Ray • *Music and lyrics by Leo Wood. Columbia 39961 (1953). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.*



division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

18. Rock Island Line The Lonnie Donegan Skiffle Group • Music and lyrics by Lonnie Donegan. London 1650 (1956). Courtesy of PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.

19. Mama Look at Bubù Harry Belafonte • Music and lyrics by Fitzroy Alexander. RCA Victor 6830 (1957). Courtesy BMG Music.

20. Beautiful Brown Eyes Rosemary Clooney • Music and lyrics by Alton Delmore, Arthur Smith and Jerry Capehart. Columbia 39212 (1951). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

21. Don't Elvis Presley • Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. RCA Victor 47-7150 (1958). Backup vocals by the Jordanaires. Courtesy BMG Music.

22. Who Needs You The Four Lads • Music by Robert Allen, lyrics by Al Stillman. Columbia 40811 (1957). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

23. Come What May Patti Page • Music and lyrics by Vaughn Horton. Mercury 5772 (1952). Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.

24. Because You're Mine Mario Lanza • Music by Nicholas Brodsky, lyrics by Sammy Cahn. RCA Victor 3914 (1952). Courtesy BMG Music.

Philadelphian Alfredo Coccozza became the most popular operatic tenor since Caruso.

THE '50s POP REVIVAL

1. **Heart** Eddie Fisher
2. **The Longest Walk** Jaye P. Morgan
3. **Domino** Tony Martin
4. **Smoke Rings** Les Paul and Mary Ford
5. **Somebody Stole My Gal** Johnnie Ray
6. **Night Lights** Nat King Cole
7. **Vanessa** Hugo Winterhalter and His Orchestra
8. **Anna** Silvana Mangano
9. **They Were Doin' the Mambo** Vaughn Monroe
10. **Wimoweh** The Weavers
11. **Be Anything (But Be Mine)**
Eddy Howard and His Orchestra
12. **You Alone** Perry Como
13. **Don't Let Go** Roy Hamilton
14. **A Worried Man** The Kingston Trio
15. **Gonna Get Along without Ya Now**
Patience and Prudence
16. **A White Sport Coat (And a Pink Carnation)**
Marty Robbins
17. **An Affair to Remember** Vic Damone
18. **Rock Island Line**
The Lonnie Donegan Skiffle Group
19. **Mama Look at Bubú** Harry Belafonte
20. **Beautiful Brown Eyes** Rosemary Clooney
21. **Don't** Elvis Presley
22. **Who Needs You** The Four Lads
23. **Come What May** Patti Page
24. **Because You're Mine** Mario Lanza



President: Steven L. Janas
Vice Presidents: Fernando Pargas, Donna Pickett, Martin Champagne
Executive Producer: Charles McCardell
Recording Producers: Joe Sasy, Steve Carr
Series Consultant: Charles K. Wolfe
Creative Director: Robin Bray
Associate Producer: Brian Miller
Art Director: Alice Sexton
Chief Financial Officer: Pamela Chinn
Associate Director of Production: Karen Hill
Special Contributor: John Bonfield (copy)

The '50s Pop Revival was produced by Time-Life Music in cooperation with BMG Music. Manufactured for Time-Life Music by BMG Music. Digitally remastered at Hit and Run Studios, Rockville, Md.

The Author: Three-time Grammy nominee Charles K. Wolfe teaches English at Middle Tennessee State University. He has written or co-authored numerous books on music, including *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*.

Time-Life Music wishes to thank William L. Schurk of the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, for providing valuable reference material.

TIME-LIFE MUSIC is a division of Time Life Inc.
© 1993 Time Life Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

Picture Credits: Cover art by John Maggard © 1988, 1993 Time Life Inc. All photos courtesy Michael Ochs Archives, Venice, Calif.
Manufactured for Time-Life Music by BMG Music.
© 1993 BMG Music.

TCD-137 HPD-36