

Jon Weber: Nice to Have Him Back

By Marilyn Lester

Amidst the wintery early afternoon of the twelfth of December, it sure was a

two APSS guests, is multitalented. She's also a musician, writer and visual artist.



bright spot to have Jon Weber back with us performing for the American Popular Song Society—more so because this wizard of the piano also brought with him a couple of friends, Nicolas King and Mia Berman. This trio of talent came together for a superb few hours of entertainment under the producing eye of the show's conceiver, Jerry Osterberg. Avoiding the potential for tech glitches, and to ensure that the concept of the presentation went smoothly, Jon Weber: Nice to Have Him Back was filmed live in Weber's apartment, with Berman remotely located in her own digs. The result was a delightful immersion into the talents of two performing virtuosi and a very sharp host in Berman. Osterberg's concept was to emulate a radio show in which the emcee interviews his/her guest and cuts away from time to time to showcase that guest's talents. Berman is indeed a radio host, who, like our other

Those of us who know Weber probably have figured out by now that he's a certified genius. This appearance on our computer screens left no doubt—and it may have revealed to this APSS audience just how much of one he is. For one thing, Weber is musically untaught; he figured it all out himself as a toddler! At age five he was playing piano and composing music; by age 16 he was composing sophisticated music—and was much attracted to jazz—such as his “theme” song of that day, “Home Away from Home.” This he played along with a contemporaneous Weber tune, “Jam Szechuan” (because it's hot), which featured plenty of swing and superb rhythm changes. Another Weber original, “While She's Dreaming,” containing a bit of borrowed J.S. Bach, was written for a niece about a quarter century ago.

In a dialogue with Berman, Weber spoke of his childhood, revealing that he

announced to his mother while he was still a tot, “Mom, I'm going to be a piano player whether you like it or not.” He doesn't actually remember saying that, but it's become part of Weber family lore. There's no doubt this prodigy was born into the right house. His father owned about 3,000 vinyl records, in which Jon immersed himself. There were 2,000 rolls for the player piano, which he learned and mastered (yes, all of 'em!) while still in knee pants. He was never musically discouraged by his parents, and soon, as a youngster, he was playing in nursing homes and the like. After Jon's explanation to us about his fascination with numbers and time signatures, if any doubt remained about his genius status, it was quickly wiped away. Throughout this interview segment, Weber illustrated his narrative with snippets of piano playing of various and sundry pieces—including two lesser-known Harry Warren compositions, “This Is Always” (1946) and “Sweet and Slow” (1935). Discussion moved on to samba's influence on American music and on his playing and composing process. Asked if he hears the lyric to a tune when he plays, he answered “pretty much, yes,” and told



of how Ben Webster, one of the great classic tenor sax players of jazz, who made it a policy to learn the lyrics of all the tunes he played, once stopped dead in his tracks in the middle of “Stardust.” Asked why, later, Webster said he suddenly blanked on the words.

The other prodigy of the day, Nicolas King, entered the frame and revealed he began performing professionally at age

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President's Message...

Linda Amiel Burns, President

Dear Members, Friends, and Fans of APSS,

By the time you read this message, it will be just about be 2021! I am sending my best wishes for all of you to have a safe, healthy and joyous year ahead.

Due to the way the pandemic changed our lives in so many different ways, 2020 has been a difficult year. However, we are pleased that we were able to keep our wonderful organization, the American Popular Song Society, alive and well through our Zoom meetings and the gallant efforts of our Producers and Board of Directors. We have had to make adjustments, but we are very grateful to all of you for joining, rejoining, paying the membership fees, sending in donations and your supportive generosity.

Many thanks to our Producer, Jerry Osterberg, for putting together the December Program featuring Jon Weber, Nicolas King, and our moderator Mia Berman. It was a terrific afternoon, and you can read all about it in our lead story written by Marilyn Lester.

Don't miss our next meeting on Saturday, January 9th with Jamie DeRoy producing one of her renowned "Jamie DeRoy & Friends" Programs, directed by Barry Kleinbort. Jamie has been one of the mainstays of the cabaret world for many decades, which led her to becoming a successful Broadway producer. I know you will enjoy this marvelous event starring a terrific cast of performers.

We are entering the winter months, and my deepest wish is that you will all stay safe during this time. With the good news about the Covid vaccine, I look forward to meeting again in person in the near future. In the meantime, I look forward to seeing you on Zoom the 2nd Saturday of each month for our APSS Meetings, and I am happy that we can still stay in touch, and see each other, if only on our computer screens.

Happy New Year and may 2021 bring you good health, joy, prosperity and much music and song!

xoxo
Linda



Linda Amiel Burns became friends with Charles Osgood when CBS Sunday Morning filmed a feature on Linda and The Singing Experience.

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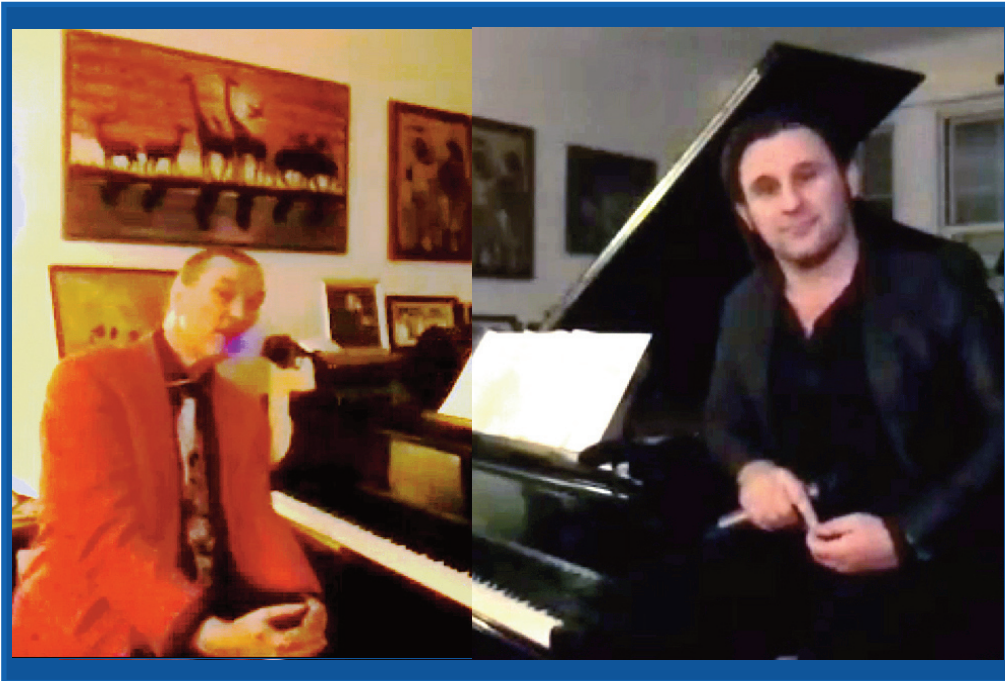
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four and a half. The two acknowledged they met some time ago at a Mabel Mercer Foundation Cabaret Convention, and although they have worked together in the past, King's "regular" accompanist and music director is Mike Renzi. Starting off with the great Duke Ellington's "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," King demonstrated why he's a first-rate jazz singer in his mastery of phrasing and improvisation. On a Mike Renzi



arrangement of "On Second Thought," which flowed seamlessly into "Here's That Rainy Day," he proved his versatility. Asked by Berman how he chooses his material, King revealed that for him, it's all about the story. He explained that he started out as an actor, with jobs rolling in from toddlerhood to his late teens. But at that point he realized roles for him in the future, as an adult, might not be as plentiful. He switched to singing.

But King was no stranger to the

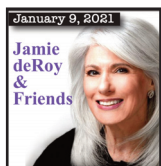
vocalist's world from his earliest days. His grandmother, Angela Bacari, is a famed vocal coach. His father owned a bar in his native Rhode Island, in which he listened to American Songbook standards regularly being played. It was in his father's establishment that he heard the tune, which he said fatefully, "changed my life." This was Ella Fitzgerald's hit, "(If You Can't Sing It) You'll Have to Swing It (Mr. Paganini)," and like the great Ella, King presented her arrangement of it, swinging the tune with the kind of prime scatting that made Fitzgerald famous. King revealed that hearing these tunes, and being an actor,

is what makes Songbook standards so appealing is because they tell stories. Each has a plot line and can be dynamically sung to build a dramatic arc. Modern music, he said, is geared to dancing, not to storytelling. To prove his point, he sang the usually jumped up "Goody Goody" as a jazz blues.

In a glorious finale, coming all too soon, the Weber-King collaboration ended with a soulful rendition of "I Remember You," which featured King's superb talents as an interpreter of the lyric and a generous jazz solo on the keys by Weber. The meeting returned to real time, as it had begun (with president Linda Burns' greeting and Osterberg's introduction of the recorded segment). Questions and comments were taken, and finally, it was time to Zoom off the airwaves with thanks to Jerry Osterberg for a truly informative and wholly entertaining couple of hours respite from bleak pandemic time.



REMAINING 2020-2021 SEASON SCHEDULE



January 9- Jaime DeRoy and Friends
Tony winning producer Jamie deRoy, brings her star-packed cabaret show to us.



February 13- Peggy Lee / James Gavin
Producer Will Friedwald



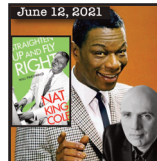
March 13- Nancy McGraw: The Lyrics of Johnny Mercer.
Musically directed by Mark Nadler



April 10- Jazz Month featuring Danny Bacher. Producers Marilyn Lester/Danny Bacher



May 8- Songwriter Series.
Produced by Sandi Durell



June 12- Nat King Cole & Will Friedwald's latest book. Producer Will Friedwald

Susannah McCorkle – For All We Know

By Jerry Osterberg

Allen Farnham was the music director for Susannah McCorkle for the last decade of her life. Of the eleven albums she recorded with Concord Jazz, he was responsible for four, including the acclaimed *From Bessie to Brazil* (1993), and her last *Hearts and Minds* (2000). Farnham said: “Few contemporary singers tell stories with the same intensity as Susannah McCorkle...she really knew how to grab an audience.” Gwenda Blair, writing for *New York Magazine*, wrote “McCorkle’s was an intimate art; when she sang, you felt there was no one else in the room but you and the singer.”

But, before McCorkle became a singer, she was a writer. In 1957, at the age of 11, she published her first story, a homage to Carolyn Keene, the pseudonymous author of the Nancy Drew series, in *Keen Carolyn and the Christmas Mystery*. The story was published not in a children’s magazine, but in the University of Iowa’s literary publication, *Parnassus*. Two years later, another story was accepted by *The American Girl* magazine. McCorkle continued writing throughout her youth and entered the University of California at Berkeley in 1964. It was there she joined the campus humor magazine, *The Pelican*. Under the pseudonym Susan Savage, she wrote satires of campus life. Already a gifted linguist and fluent in several languages, McCorkle was also a brilliant mimic, known for her impersonations of foreign film stars such as Jeanne Moreau and Marcello Mastroianni.

McCorkle was born in Berkeley,

California on January 1, 1946, the official start of the Baby Boomer generation. Her father was an anthropology professor; her mother a schoolteacher. The family, which included two sisters, moved



frequently because McCorkle’s father was always restless for a change. By the time of her high school graduation, she had attended more than a dozen schools. It was during those years when she became a skilled observer of the human condition. While McCorkle listened to her mother’s recordings of Broadway musicals, she tried to understand the stories of the characters and deduce why they were happy or why they were unhappy.

Following her nomad father’s mental breakdown in 1969 and armed with a BA in Italian literature and a graduate studies nest-egg, McCorkle moved to Paris

where she discovered the Parisian love of American movies and jazz. While still in Paris, a friend introduced her to a recording of “I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues” by Billie Holiday, and McCorkle’s plan to become a translator in Brussels was shelved forever. Of the experience, she would later say: “That one record completely revised my thinking and made me want to become a professional singer.” Undeterred by a lack of formal training, and whose only experience consisted of six years in school choirs and two roles in civic theater musicals, McCorkle began performing at cafes and pubs in Paris and later in Rome, before settling down in London.

With solid experience now on her resume, McCorkle relocated to London in 1972, where she found slots within the bands of John Chilton and Dick Sudhalter. Jazz singing gave her a sense of identity. “Before that, I had always been solitary and introverted,” she said. “As a singer, I began meeting other people who were solitary and introverted but who were also great jazz musicians. It was like finding my tribe.” Her first recordings were made here in 1975, demo sessions with the pianist Keith Ingham, which led to her first albums, *The Music of Harry Warren* in 1976 and *The Quality of Mercer* in 1977. After releasing both records in the United States, and with plenty of good advance notices, McCorkle and Ingham moved to New York in 1980. Starting with a five-month run at the Cookery, they went on to fill the house every night at Michael’s Pub. McCorkle came to be a regular fixture at leading cabarets, especially the

Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel. She played Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall numerous times and was a featured soloist with Skitch Henderson's 80-piece New York Pops in a concert of Brazilian music. McCorkle continued to record throughout the '80's, eventually contracted by Concord Jazz in 1988. Her first two albums, *No More Blues* and *Sabia*, the latter well-served by her ability to translate from the original Portuguese lyrics, were resoundingly successful. These were followed by *From Bessie to Brazil*, for a total of eleven, including three anthologies devoted to the songs of Porter, Berlin, and Gershwin.

Throughout her music career, McCorkle kept up her writing. It began with the publication of a semi-autobiographical short story *Ramona by the Sea*, that was published by *Mademoiselle*, and won the O. Henry Award.

Among her published works was an ongoing series for *American Heritage*, including extended appreciations of Ethel Waters, Bessie Smith and Irving Berlin. Jacqueline Onassis, then an editor at Doubleday, also expressed strong interest in an unfinished memoir/novel.

As to her music, McCorkle's approach was similarly literary and

scholarly. She did exhaustive research into the origin of the songs she performed, many of them obscure and neglected tunes of the American Songbook. She also championed contemporary writers like Dave Frishberg, Fran Landesman, Jimmy

Susannah McCorkle / Dream



Webb, and Paul Simon, and had an affinity for bossa nova and the music of Antonio Carlos Jobim, whose "The Waters of March" became McCorkle's signature song.

It's been said that she had an "uncanny ability to crawl inside a song and wear it like a second skin."

Dan DiNicola, McCorkle's former

husband and manager wrote: "She used to love it when she'd be in a club singing a song like "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face," and she'd see a man and woman looking into each other's eyes, holding hands and relating to the lyrics. It used to make her feel so good to be able to take the audience into that territory. That's what singing was all about for her. When she was singing, she was happy."

A few months before Susannah McCorkle's death on May 19, 2001, Leon Wieseltier, writing for *The New Yorker*, met with her over lunch in Washington, D.C. She was praising Sam Lewis's lyrics for their directness, while he was praising her direct way with the song's directness. Wieseltier wrote "Her achievement was based...on an extraordinary intuition of the musicality of language. With a scholar's strain and a poet's liberty, she studied

the words that she sang in their meanings and in their sounds, until meaning and sound became indistinguishable; and in this way she made speech into an experience of the senses. Susannah was...certainly the most literary singer in the history of her art."



Song Facts You May Not Know

By Stephen Vratos (A writer and Classic Arts Editor at *Playbill*)

Lost in the Stars: The titular song of tonight's concert comes from the 1949 Broadway musical of the same name. With a score by Kurt Weill and a book and lyrics by Maxwell Anderson, the production was the composer's last work for the stage before he died the following year and based on the 1948 worldwide bestseller about a South African Zulu Priest and his son set against a land and people riven by racial injustice. Though many reviews, such as New York Herald Tribune theater critic Howard Barnes's, who described the show as "A work of truth, beauty and immense artistry... a triumphant piece of theater," were overwhelmingly positive, the show, which opened at the Music Box Theatre on October 30, 1949, closed on July 1, 1950, after a disappointing 281 performances. The opening launched a spate of opera productions on Broadway that season, which included premieres of Blitzstein's *Regina*, Menotti's *The Consul* and Britten's *Rape of Lucretia*. The Jewish Weill fled Nazi Germany with his wife Lotte Lenya in 1933 and it is certainly his first-hand experience of hate and intolerance there which explains his audacity in producing such a controversial Broadway musical in 1949. *Lost in the Stars*'s use of apartheid as a metaphor for the "separate but equal" racial injustice rife in the United States is perhaps best evinced by two related events at the time: cancellation of the national tour of the production, due to African-American cast members not being allowed to stay in the same hotels as whites, and the long overdue breach of the barrier against African-American singers at the Met—five years after the musical's closing.

Remembering International Cabaret Sensation, Hildegarde

By Marilyn Lester

At the height of her career, the glamorous pianist-singer, Hildegarde, a pioneer of one-name billing, was so popular that the likes of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt dubbed her “First Lady of the Supper Clubs.” For most of her career she was known as The Incomparable Hildegarde, a title given to her by influential newspaper columnist Walter Winchell. Revlon even introduced a Hildegarde shade of lipstick and nail polish. She was at the height of her career in the 1930s and 40s—on the cover of *Life* magazine in 1939, hosting a Top-10 radio show and traveling with her own orchestra. From the 1950s through the 70s and beyond, she continued to work in clubs, and also recorded albums, appeared in television specials and toured with the national company of Stephen Sondheim’s *Follies*.

It was a chance meeting with a budding songwriter, Anna Sosenko, that propelled her career. She was born Hildegarde Loretta Sell in Adell, Wisconsin on February 1, 1906 to German immigrants. The family was a musical one. Her father played the drums and violin; her mother played organ and directed the church choir. Hildegarde and her sisters sang in the school choir and played in the orchestra. At 16, she began studies at Marquette University’s College of Music, while also playing piano for silent movies at the Merrill Theater in Milwaukee. In 1928 she joined a vaudeville troupe, toured for two years and then spent another year as an accompanist to various performers. Hildegarde was living in Camden, NJ when she met Sosenko, her landlady’s daughter.

It was Sosenko who became the

architect of her career, developing Hildegarde as a charismatic and somewhat exotic “class act”—a highly stylish presence who always appeared in couture gowns, jeweled glasses, glittering earrings and long white gloves. As she delivered her patter between numbers, Hildegarde would flutter a lace handkerchief. Sosenko became her business manager and the two lived together for 23 years (the relationship ended in litigation over a



financial dispute concerning their joint efforts). The pair traveled to Paris and lived there for three years early in their relationship where Sosenko worked with Hildegarde to perfect her technique. There, the diva learned to sing in French, Russian, Italian and Swedish. She also worked on her diction. The results were a Hildegarde with international flair and an air of sophistication, yet retaining a wholesome quality born of her Wisconsin roots. She subsequently worked in the best clubs, to admirers that included notable members of high society, royalty and celebrities of stage and screen.

Her recordings of such songs as “The Last Time I Saw Paris” and “Lili Marlene” became worldwide hits. Sosenko wrote “Darling, Je Vous Aime Beaucoup” for her, which became her signature song. In her act, Hildegarde was noted for her flirtatious ways and her wit. She once quipped, for example, that “Miss Piggy stole the gloves idea from me.” In many ways, Hildegarde was a template and inspiration for fledgling cabaret singers, particularly in the days when rooms were plentiful, still often glamorous and cabaret held an exalted place among the arts. Hildegarde never married and has said, “I traveled all my life, met a lot of men, had a lot of romances, but it never worked out. It was always ‘hello and goodbye.’” Hildegarde was still performing well into her 80s. She died of natural causes at age 99 in Manhattan on July 29, 2005.

This article is reprinted with permission from NiteLifeExchange.com. It originally appeared in November in the “Who Was Who!” column.

A footnote: Hildegarde’s death was widely reported nationally and internationally. In 2015, an online paper in her home state of Wisconsin (Who’s New, Discover the Best of Northeast Wisconsin) did an extensive article on the diva. It was entitled, “Was Cabaret Singer Hildegarde the Most Romantic Wisconsin Woman of All Time?,” citing her as an almost forgotten Wisconsin legend. The article quotes Monica Gallamore, who wrote a dissertation on Hildegarde (Introducing the Incomparable Hildegarde: The Sexuality, Style, and Image of a Forgotten Cultural Icon) at Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, in 2009: “The exotic and mysterious accent which lent an air of mystery to Hildegarde’s persona was in reality nothing more than the lingering sound of her hometown of Milwaukee and her German parents. The audiences didn’t know the difference.” For more of the inside scoop on Hildegarde and to read the article, click here:

<http://whoonev.com/2015/02/hildegarde-wisconsin-woman/>