

**Foundations of Vocal Jazz: The Art of Re-imagination**  
**An examination of the work of Jon Hendricks (b. 1921) and**  
**Gene Puerling (1929-2008)**

Lecture Recital by Gregory Amerind  
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Submitted to:

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Foundations of Vocal Jazz: The Art of Re-imagination  
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Opening Songs:

1. “Charleston Alley” by Edgar Sampson with lyrics by Jon Hendricks
  - a. Recording of Charlie Barnet Band, 1947<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Live performance by “Heatwave”
2. “Try to Remember” by Tom Jones & Harvey Smith from *The Fantasticks*, arr. By Gene Puerling
  - a. Recording of “Fantasticks” original cast, with Jerry Orbach<sup>2</sup>
  - b. Live performance by “Heatwave”

We have offered the opening songs, “Charleston Alley” and “Try to Remember” to introduce the topic at hand today: The music of Jon Hendricks and Gene Puerling. In “Charleston Alley” we heard a jazz classic, a 1947 recording by the Charlie Barnet Big Band transformed from instrumental to vocal by the lyrics of Jon Hendricks, with members of the ASU Vocal Jazz Ensemble, Heatwave, performing the Darmon Meader arrangement. In both the original and in our version today, an improvised solo by Charlie Barnett is one of the highlights; Jon Hendricks’ lyrics to Barnet’s sax solo created the segment sung by our own Kendon Jung. “Try to Remember,” the opening song, from the Tom Jones/Harvey Schmidt musical, “The Fantasticks” as performed by the original cast, is transformed in the arrangement by Gene Puerling for his group The Singers Unlimited and provides a very typical example of Puerling’s arranging style. Before discussing these transformations in further detail, let us meet the individuals who created them.

First, a quote from Jon Hendricks in his typical classroom speech to freshmen students enrolled in his jazz studies course at the University of Toledo: “This is the only country in the world that systematically degrades its own cultural art form. And while it does that it pays servile attention to all the world's other art forms. When I say servile I mean they spend millions of dollars on huge ornate gaudy opera houses. That's Italian. Each city has a grandiose sumptuous art museum. That's French. Cities towns and

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<sup>1</sup> (Charlie Barnet Band Recording 1947)

<sup>2</sup> (Original Cast Recording – The Fantasticks" 1960)

municipalities subsidize ballet companies. And that's very cultured and very wonderful. Except that's Russian. And they all have symphony orchestras that play symphonic music. That's Russian too. And they have Shakespearean theatres. That's English. And what do they have for American culture? Dark cellars mostly funky bars where women and drugs are for sale. And then on top of that with their lying selves they tell you and anyone else within earshot that that nigger music was born in the whorehouses of New Orleans. The truth is that jazz is the secular music of our Christian church."<sup>3</sup>

Don Shelton, a member of The Hi-Lo's! and The Singers Unlimited was quoted in 1997 on his friend and colleague: "In my opinion, Gene Puerling is the single most significant vocal group arranger of all time. His sheer volume of work done for the Hi-Lo's! and Singers Unlimited puts him in a class by himself. His uncanny and innate sense of the human voice contributes to the wonderful musical lines crafted for each singer, not to mention the perfectly gorgeous harmonies for which he is so deservedly well known."<sup>4</sup> Mr. Shelton echoes the opinions of the lovers of vocal jazz the world over. Gene Puerling was valued and respected as an innovator, and as Tim Hauser of The Manhattan Transfer once said: "What we look upon today as the state of the art in vocal harmony is actually a style that was originated by the Hi-Los!, through the arrangements of Gene Puerling."<sup>5</sup> Interestingly though, Puerling himself didn't think of his arrangements as jazz. While acknowledging the influence of jazz in his arranging choices, he said once, "I have never represented them as jazz, the Hi-Lo's have never represented them as jazz."<sup>6</sup> Regardless

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<sup>3</sup> (Thomas 2008)

<sup>4</sup> (Zegree 1997)

<sup>5</sup> (Gold 2002)

<sup>6</sup> (Fredrickson 1985)

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of this, his music has been embraced and categorized as jazz since the beginning by aficionados and peers the world over.

As Professor Hendricks clearly attests, Jazz is widely accepted by most experts and laymen alike as a uniquely American art form, equal in its iconic cultural status to George Washington, Apple Pie, and Baseball. His lament at the often second-class status Jazz has received in its homeland goes to the heart of his passion for the music and its legacy. However, this lecture/performance does not seek to confirm that declaration or to provide qualitative evidence to back up the claim, nor to pass judgment on its standing among our perceptions of other forms of music. Neither is this lecture intended to provide an in-depth theoretical study of the harmonic content of the arrangements presented and the many composers they have influenced. I include the quotes mainly to introduce the two subjects of today's lecture/recital and the music they created. It helps to confirm what most believe, that without their innovations, vocal jazz as we have come to understand and perform it would likely not exist. I believe that even a cursory examination of their work shows how it provided a foundation upon which all vocal jazz, and arguably much of traditional contemporary choral music has been built since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**What is Vocal Jazz?**

A clear definition of vocal jazz upon which all agree has always enjoyed a rousing debate among its enthusiasts as well as its passive observers and should be approached by discussing both the ensemble itself and the type of music performed. As already noted, Gene Puerling himself didn't categorize his arrangements as jazz, even though the general consensus places them nowhere else. Even the ACDA (American Choral

Directors Association) and NAfME (National Association for Music Education) have historically had difficulty with this question, including in the past, mistaking Vocal Jazz and Show Choir as the same kind of ensemble simply because they share similar repertoire.<sup>7</sup> I myself have encountered a level of confusion from past students who disagree with my interpretation of vocal jazz as inclusive of many forms of popular American song, not just swing music. Paris Rutherford, a jazz professor at the University of North Texas, and a prolifically published vocal jazz arranger, defines his ideal ensemble as 12 singers (3 on a part for SATB arrangements), a rhythm section of at least 3 players (piano, bass and drums), and if possible, a small horn section.<sup>8</sup> Of course, a Vocal Jazz Ensemble can also be, and often is, voices only, and may be anywhere from a quartet to a group of sixteen. (Some groups even go much larger, for instance the Los Angeles Jazz Choir, a group in California during the 1980s and 1990s which often had over 20 singers.) It may be mixed voices, only men, or only women. The arrangements we will discuss today require anywhere from 3 to 8 singers to cover all of the parts, depending upon the thickness of the harmonics, and we include several different types of ensembles.

Rutherford goes on to say that in addition to the size and personnel of the ensemble, it is also defined by the elements of performance practice as well as rhythmic and harmonic styles that represent traditional jazz and pop vocal music.<sup>9</sup> As with any choral ensemble, vocal jazz repertoire is of course an area that is open to the personal

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<sup>7</sup> Mike Weaver, *A History of Show Choir*, self-published, Chicago, IL, 2001, chapter 4.

Author's note: Even at some current ACDA divisional and state conferences, reading sessions of these two types of ensembles are often lumped together for expediency, a practice that dates back to the early 1970s, but one that is lessening in great degree due to more clarity from both sides.

<sup>8</sup> (Rutherford 2008)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

tastes of the director and performers and will further be dictated by the number and ability of singers available. The general consensus is that it includes the swing era music of the 1930s-1940s, and the bebop music of the 1950s and early 1960s. But the repertoire has grown to include all forms of popular music from the last 80 plus years, and can even include modernized versions of earlier works by Bach, Mozart, and other well-known composers of centuries past. So along with swing and bebop, we can include Latin forms, Rock, R & B, Funk, as well as Classical, Baroque and Romantic. It should possess an element of improvisation and the melodic and harmonic structure should mimic that of a jazz instrumental ensemble with theme “heads” and variations, using extended harmonies, both spread and close. A complete history of vocal jazz’s development would be too exhaustive for a lecture of this length. Therefore, a discussion and demonstration on the pivotal and cathartic music of Hendricks and Puerling will provide at least a starting point, focusing on the foundations they contributed to the building of this genre.

### **Beginnings**

As contemporaries, both Hendricks and Puerling were heavily influenced by many of the same musical forces. Both are originally from the Midwest and grew up during the years covering the Great Depression and World War II. Gene Puerling was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Jon Hendricks, a preacher’s son, was from a large family of seventeen children that eventually settled in Toledo, Ohio.<sup>10</sup> Both are mostly self-taught musicians, having had informal early training, Puerling from various high school choral and music classes,<sup>11</sup> and Hendricks mostly from the culture of his environment, an African-American neighborhood where making music was a part of

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<sup>10</sup> (Myer 2009)

<sup>11</sup> (Fredrickson 1985)

daily existence. Also important was his exposure to traveling musicians that would often dine or room at his family's home while in Toledo playing a venue on the jazz circuit. Later, he became the protégé of another local Toledo musician, the highly regarded jazz pianist Art Tatum.<sup>12</sup> Both men also cite early involvement with church choirs as integral in setting them on the road to appreciation for the power of choral music.<sup>13</sup>

## **Gene**

In his early twenties in Madison, Puerling formed several vocal groups of his own during and after graduation from high school, teaching himself how to arrange by listening to other vocal groups' recordings. Gene was inspired in particular by The Four Freshmen, known for their expanded harmonies and perfectly balanced unisons, as well as groups from the big band era like The Ink Spots, The Modernaires and Mel Torme's "Meltones."<sup>14</sup> Against the advice of his idols, The Four Freshmen, with whom he had begun to correspond, (they told him it was "too hard" to earn a living in L.A. and he'd be better off staying where he was)<sup>15</sup> he eventually moved to Los Angeles, and began to get work as a studio singer. He soon set his sites on forming his own group. In a 2002 article published in the Chicago Tribune, Gene recalled: "I loved listening to The Four Freshmen and their harmony, but I didn't want to follow in their footsteps," he said. "I had groups in high school, but when I moved to Los Angeles in 1950, I decided that I wanted a male group to do something different, my own type of writing. I did that. And everything else fell into place."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> (Reid 2002)

<sup>13</sup> (Fredrickson 1985) (Thomas 2008)

<sup>14</sup> (Fredrickson 1985)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> (Gold 2002)

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In 1953, with 3 other men, Bob Strasen (later replaced by Don Shelton), Bob Morse and Clark Burroughs, whom he had met through his various engagements, Puerling formed The Hi-Los!, (playing on the idea of high voices, low voices and tall singers, short singers). Again, Puerling recalled: "We were living together in an apartment, cooking for ourselves. I wrote 30 arrangements and then we rehearsed for three months and sang them for anyone who would listen to us. You never make much money unless you're a rock star. But we worked." Soon, the combination of their seamless blend, and Puerling's be-bop influenced arrangements caught the attention of some very big names. They recorded their first album, toured with Judy Garland, were hired by Rosemary Clooney and appeared as regulars on her weekly TV show, and they were seen and heard on almost every major variety show on television between 1954 and 1962. They made dozens more recordings, including several on Frank Sinatra's Reprise label. They are members of the Grammy Hall of Fame and received three nominations for Grammy awards in the vocal group category.<sup>17</sup>

After the Hi-Los! disbanded in the early 1960s, citing death by Rock and Roll,<sup>18</sup> Gene relocated to Chicago and began singing jingles with a group that included ex Hi-Los! member Don Shelton. This group, which also included Bass Len Drexler (of Jolly Green Giant fame) and sultry soprano Bonnie Herman eventually became The Singers Unlimited. The arrangements Gene wrote for this group would fill 14 studio albums between 1972 and 1985. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Hi-Lo's! reformed and recorded two additional albums. Their final performance was a benefit concert in 1996. Gene also wrote for other groups as diverse as The Manhattan Transfer and Chanticleer,

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<sup>17</sup> (Jay Warner - The Da Capo Book of American Singing Groups 1992)

<sup>18</sup> (Fredrickson 1985)



and towards the end of his life had become a much sought-after clinician in the choral music education world.<sup>19</sup>

## **Jon**

Hendricks started his career by memorizing and performing improvised instrumental solos as a way of earning a few dollars spending money during his impoverished youth in Depression-era Toledo. He learned all the solos and band parts from the popular records of the day by repeated listenings at the local diner's jukebox. He then would sing along with them, note-perfect, when customers would put in their nickels,<sup>20</sup> and his act would earn him tips from the appreciative patrons. Jon excelled throughout his life in the subject of English, usually earning an "A", a skill that would serve him well as he developed his lyric-writing abilities.<sup>21</sup> "When I was first singing, I would forget the words and then make up ones I thought would fit and I got to the point where when I put in my own words, I found out that as long as they rhymed people didn't know the difference...I would immediately write my own words if the original ones sounded dumb".<sup>22</sup> He described this time in his life in various interviews as the origination of his interest in *vocalese*. *Vocalese* is a term actually coined by the famous jazz critic Leonard Feather<sup>23</sup> in his description of the singing done by Hendricks with his partners Dave Lambert and Annie Ross, about whom we will hear more in a few moments. In the jazz idiom simply put, *vocalese* is the technique of putting words to

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<sup>19</sup> (Gold 2002)

<sup>20</sup> (Reid 2002)

<sup>21</sup> (Myer 2009)

<sup>22</sup> Will Friedwald, *Jazz Singing: America's Great Voices from Bessie Smith to Bebop and Beyond*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 239.

<sup>23</sup> (Foster 2002)

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improvised solo lines and composed instrumental melodies, like we heard in the opening piece performed by Heatwave, “Charleston Alley.” As a teenager, he began performing extensively on the Vaudeville circuit, including engagements with the likes of Louis Armstrong, Al Jolsen, and Jack Benny, but World War II and the U.S. Army momentarily interrupted Hendricks’ singing career. It was at the end of his stint in the military that he was first exposed to the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker through a recording called “Salt Peanuts” played over the ship’s radio as he was heading for home, an experience to which he credits some of his greatest inspiration.<sup>24</sup>

After the war, and while studying pre-law on the G.I. Bill at the University of Toledo, Hendricks, encountered the legendary Charlie “Bird” Parker in person. Parker was playing a local club and invited him to sit in with his combo. Jon’s singing on that set prompted Bird to encourage Jon to move to New York, which he eventually did.<sup>25</sup> After several years, he teamed up with another singer, Dave Lambert. Both men were adept at “scat singing,” the improvisational component of vocal jazz and they found instant camaraderie as a result. As Jon had also begun experimenting more with vocalese, and Lambert possessed keen skills as an arranger, the two men recorded a version of a classic song by the Woody Herman band called “Four Brothers” (a song we will hear performed by Heatwave later in this presentation).<sup>26</sup> The recording garnered the attention and accolades of many in the New York jazz scene and another singer on the “Four Brothers” session, fellow vocalese enthusiast Annie Ross<sup>27</sup> soon joined them to form

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<sup>24</sup> Ken Burns, *Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns* PBS, Interview with Jon Hendricks

<sup>25</sup> (Gold 2002) (Myer 2009) (Reid 2002) (Foster 2002)

<sup>26</sup> (Myer 2009)

<sup>27</sup> Annie Ross penned the classic lyrics for “Twisted” to a melody improvised by saxophonist Wardell Gray over a standard blues progression. It is one of the most well-known and covered songs from the L, H & R catalogue.

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“Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross.”<sup>28</sup> This trio recorded seven LPs and performed around the world from 1957 to 1962 when Ross left the group for a solo career. She was replaced briefly by two other singers, first Yolande Bavan and later by Canadian Anne Marie Moss, but they never regained the unique sound or acclaim of the original trio, which had won the Grammy for Best Vocal Group in 1962 and consistently topped *Downbeat Magazine’s* readers’ polls in the same category. Another important area Lambert, Hendricks & Ross pioneered was in the personnel of their group. They were integrated. Not only were they a gender-mixed group in an era when all boy and all girl groups were the norm, but they were also the only group of their kind to have both Caucasian and African American members. (Interestingly, this is still unique, even fifty years later. We would be hard pressed to find a professional vocal jazz group that consists of mixed races. Not here at ASU however as you can see.)

After the untimely death of Dave Lambert in a 1966 automobile accident, Hendricks kept the flame alive. He has continued to write and perform as a soloist and with his wife and daughters, spreading his own unique gospel of vocal jazz. The Manhattan Transfer and New York Voices among others have recorded his arrangements and, at the ripe age of 91, he is an adjunct lecturer at his alma mater, University of Toledo, where he formed the resident vocal jazz ensemble, “Vocalstra” and was awarded an honorary Doctorate of the Performing Arts.

Both men began their careers at a time when jazz itself was undergoing a radical change, moving away from the swing era of the 1930s and 40s to the more urban sound of bebop, exemplified by instrumentalists like Gillespie, Parker, John Coltrane and Miles Davis. It emphasized a more complex form of melodic improvisation that was not as

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accessible to the general public as its predecessors of the swing era. It was new; it had a different kind of energy, free and dangerous thanks to its unpredictability and intellectual harmonic foundations. This style of jazz did not easily lend itself to vocal ensemble singing. Vocal groups still existed, but they were still singing in the now “older” style championed by groups like the Ink Spots and the Andrews Sisters. From this stew of differing brews, Hendricks and Puerling concocted their own recipes and gave birth to a form of arranging popular and jazz standards I call “re-imagining.”

### **Early Works: The Art of Re-imagining**

Re-imagining was completely new to the world of vocal groups and swing choirs which traditionally offered mere harmonization of the music without straying from the songwriter’s original intent. Puerling approached re-imagining through the use of alternative rhythmic and harmonic structures. In an interview for an article written by Vocal Jazz educator and arranger, Dr. Stephen Zegree in 1997 for the *Jazz Educators Journal*, Puerling describes his arranging philosophy: “Arranging is taking the melody and doing something with it. That is what the challenge is, taking the basic melody and basic chord structure of the song from the lead sheet, and making something creative. Just writing the standard chords from a lead sheet exactly as it was done isn’t arranging...Because I have no pre-set concepts, I like to add color by varying the texture.”<sup>29</sup>

One of the ways he varied texture is through the use of what he called in the interview, “wrong chords,” or more accurately, substitute chords that work with both the melody and opposing base line.<sup>30</sup> Listen to this recording of the Hi-Los singing Gene’s

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<sup>29</sup> Zegree, Stephen. "Gene Puerling: A Tribute." *Jazz Educators Journal* 29, no. 4 (1997): 49

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

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arrangement of the Gershwin classic, “Fascinating Rhythm.” Note the changes not only harmonically but the rhythmic and melodic variations that take even Gershwin’s original idea of unexpected metric accents even further, as can be seen in this excerpt of the lead vocal line. (See Figure 1)

**Fascinatin' Rhythm**

arr. Gene Puerling; Transcribed from Hi-Lo's Recording by Greg Amerind      George and Ira Gershwin

♩ = 200 Swing

lead line

Fas-cin-a-tin' rhy-thm you got me on the go, fas-cin - a-tin' rhy-thm I'm all a-  
quiv-er... What a mess you're ma-kin' the neigh - bors wan-na know why I'm  
al-ways sha-kin' just like a fliv-er... Each morn - in' I get up with the  
sun, start a - hop-pin' nev-er stop-pin' to find, find at night no work has been  
done. I I know that once it did-n't mat-ter but now you're do-in' wrong, when you  
start to pat-ter I'm so un - hap py... Take a day off and run a-long, some  
where far a - way off! Oh how I long to be the man I used to be,  
Fasc - in - a-tin' Rhy-thm oh won't ya stop pick-in' on me!

Figure 1

Hendricks re-imagined songs by adding lyrics to instrumental “heads”<sup>31</sup> and improvised solos, the afore-mentioned *vocalese*. And, unlike the “Hi Los!,” who favored and perfected a smoothly blended choral sound, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross emphasized more of a solo style, concerned less with blend than with elements of cool jazz. Since they were a trio, their sound had more in common with the wind section of a typical

<sup>31</sup> A “head” is a jazz term meaning simply the melody of the song.

bebop combo which consisted of two or three horns, usually trumpet and sax, and occasionally a trombone. In essence, they *were* horns, Hendricks' raspy yet flexible tenor had the sound of a tenor sax, Ross' soaring but at times percussive soprano mimicked the trumpet, and Lambert's bopping baritone played the roll of either sax or trombone. Here is an excerpt of one of their classic performances, Sonny Rollin's "Airegin," with lyrics by Hendricks, which illustrates their approach much better than any verbal description can provide. Notice how Ross provides the trumpet to the men's saxophone timbre as discussed. Also notice how, while scatting, Hendricks even mimes holding and playing a sax. Has anyone noticed any contemporary singers mimicking this? Unfortunately, this clip is a bit long to show you the entire improvisational section so I suggest you take a moment later to listen on your own to get the full appreciation of the artistry of these musicians. This performance is taken from Newport Jazz Festival July 2, 1960.<sup>32</sup>

Now, Heatwave's version of the classic trio, McMahon, Foster, & Jung, will render our take on the recording of "Centerpiece," a blues riff by Harry "Sweets" Edison to which Jon Hendricks composed a lyric, and Dave Lambert again provided a vocal arrangement. This time we offer a twist in the spirit of Hendricks' devotion to the art of vocalese. On the Lambert, Hendricks & Ross recording, co-writer Edison contributed an improvised trumpet solo. In our version, I've taken his solo and provided a vocalese lyric, sung today by Savannah McMahon.

### **Heatwave sings "Centerpiece"**

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<sup>32</sup> Performance of "Airegin" by Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross, Music by Sonny Rollins, Lyrics by Jon Hendricks, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U154NwmlXs> accessed November 20, 2012

### **Crossing paths**

Throughout their careers, Puerling and Hendricks were keenly aware of each other. In the obituary published shortly after the passing of Gene Puerling in 2004, Jon Hendricks was quoted, "Any vocal group that didn't listen to the Hi-Lo's! was remiss. Gene broadened the harmonies, like Bird did with bebop," said Hendricks, comparing Mr. Puerling to Charlie Parker. "The sound of the Hi-Lo's! was choral, even though there were only four of them. The way the chords were spread out, they sounded like a choir." He recalled how, in the late 1950s, when the Hi-Lo's were performing at Birdland, the infamous jazz club named for Parker in New York, he and his partners Dave Lambert and Annie Ross would sit up front, soak up the sound and try to figure out who was singing lead. "Because the blend was so marvelous, we couldn't find the lead half the time."<sup>33</sup> As for Puerling's awareness of Hendricks during this time, no similar quote is available, but since both groups were playing the same circuits, clubs, festivals, and appearing frequently on television, they no doubt were exposed to each other's music often. There was even a collaboration of sorts with Hendricks co-writing five of the twelve songs recorded on the Hi-Los! 1963 LP "The Hi-Los! Happen to Bossa Nova."

Now, the men of Heatwave will re-create the sound of the Hi-Lo's! (although not the height differential) in this Gene Puerling arrangement of "Georgia On My Mind," music and lyrics by Hoagy Carmichael and Stuart Gorrell. Our soloist is Tommy Strawser.

### **Heatwave Performance: Georgia On My Mind**

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<sup>33</sup> Jon Hendricks quoted in Gene Puerling Obituary, as reprinted on website [www.acappellanews.com](http://www.acappellanews.com), from The San Francisco Chronicle, April 3, 2008

### **Later Works and New Frontiers**

Another innovation with which both Puerling and Hendricks are associated is the use of overdubbing in the recording studio. Hendricks and Lambert had applied this technique on their premier LP, "Sing a Song of Basie." Recorded in multiple sessions between 1955 and 1957, this re-imagining of classic Count Basie charts is the direct ancestor to the early recordings of the Manhattan Transfer which began approximately fifteen years later. After trying without success to find a dozen singers needed for the arrangements that could effect the appropriate sound, attitude, and stylistic performance required, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross did all of the singing themselves with multiple overdubs. It was an innovation that was ahead of the curve, but the resulting voicings provided the foundation for later groups like the Transfer, as well as turning-on a whole generation of jazz educators that would introduce this new sound to colleges in the late 1960s. The precursor to this landmark recording was a session in which the trio attempted to actualize Hendricks' first attempts at expanding the idea of vocalese to include not just a solo line, but all the instrumental parts of a big band arrangement, building on the jukebox-replacement singing of his Toledo youth. He explained this in an interview with Terry Perkins, "In my early days in New York, I had been writing for Louis Jordan," explains Hendricks. "I had written 'I'll Die Happy' and 'I Want You to Be My Baby,' so I was doing well as a songwriter. Then King Pleasure asked me to do a song with him called 'Don't Get Scared.' That was actually my first recording. But I had been inspired earlier by his version of 'Moody's Mood for Love.' When I heard that, I realized you don't have to stop at 32 bars. You can go on and do a whole vocal arrangement of a band



chart. That's when I wrote 'Four Brothers.' My inspiration was to go beyond the vocalization of a single horn solo like 'Moody's Mood.' ”<sup>34</sup>

Another important aspect of vocalese in the traditional school is that the lyrics should tell a story, somehow expanding upon the original theme of the music, or revealing something about the players on the original creation.<sup>35</sup> In the case of “Four Brothers” the narrative follows the musical exploits of the Woody Herman saxophone section that made the original 1947 recording: Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Herbie Steward, and Serge Chaloff. During their solo breaks, we meet each player individually through the lyrics, while the ensemble sections talk about them in the collective. The first “Four Brothers” vocal session featured Hendricks singing the entire song, ensemble sections as well as solos, with Dave Lambert and Annie Ross assisting. “Sing a Song of Basie” was a logical next step. On a side-note, although this lecture is a focus on the innovations of John Hendricks, it is vital to not overlook the contributions made by his partner Dave Lambert. The vocal arrangements heard on all of their recordings are mostly from his pen.<sup>36</sup> Lambert's idea of mimicking the voicings of sax soli sections is perfectly in line with the approach of our other subject, Gene Puerling, and it is unfortunate that his talent was lost to a tragic and untimely death.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross' afore-mentioned musical progeny, The Manhattan Transfer, would breathe new life into that “Four Brothers” recording nearly 20 years later. Manhattan Transfer member Janis Siegel provided a four-part arrangement, a transcription of which now resides in the ASU choral music library. Heatwave will now

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<sup>34</sup> (Perkins 2012)

<sup>35</sup> (Myer 2009)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

perform a live “overdub” of that transcription with a double quartet, and each of the singers taking a solo turn.

### **Heatwave performance “Four Brothers”**

Overdubbing was a fairly new recording technique in the 1950s, often done by using multiple machines or rare and expensive multi-track recorders, which even predated stereo. But in the late 1960s, multi-tracking and true stereo came into its own with the introduction of eight track machines, and later sixteen and twenty-four tracks recorded on two-inch magnetic tape. The timing of these innovations coincided perfectly with the formation of Gene Puerling’s new group, The Singers Unlimited. With these new machines, Gene’s arrangements could take the same four singers and overdub as much as necessary to cover his more complex and harmonically richer arrangements. Now four singers could sound like a large choir, but with the blend of a quartet. Gene and his new partners made a demo of his arrangement of “Fool on the Hill” in a small 8-track studio and sent it out to advertising agencies to show what the group could do. It was not intended to be a commercial recording but the demo found its way through a friend of a friend to German recording engineer, Hans Georg Brunner-Schwer, known for his innovative multi-tracking techniques and state-of-the-art equipment. He liked what he heard and invited the group to record with him for the German label MPS. With Brunner-Schwer at the controls, they perfected the process to the point where they could record an entire LP in about thirty hours, the amount of time it took them to do the original “Fool on the Hill” demo.<sup>37</sup> To illustrate the effect overdubbing had on Puerling’s arrangements, the two figures below show a comparison between a typical Hi-Lo’s arrangement, and a

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<sup>37</sup> (Fredrickson 1985)

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Singers Unlimited score. Note the expansion to eight unique parts from four. Later in this arrangement, Gene further expands the group to thirteen in a double-choir format.

CHOIR

## GEORGIA ON MY MIND

ARRANGED BY GENE PUERLING, EDITED BY PHIL MATSON STUART GORRELL/HOAGY CHARMICHAEL

FREELY  
MF

MP

MF

GEOR - GIA. THE WHOLE NIGHT

4  $\text{♩} = 66$  5

THROUGH. JUST AN OLD SWEET SONG KEEPS GEOR-GIA ON MY MIND.

Figure 2- Excerpt from Gene Puerling arrangement of “Georgia On My Mind” published by Alfred Music 1993

8

and the eyes in his head See the world

and the eyes in his head World

and the eyes in his head World

Figure 3 – Excerpt from Gene Puerling arrangement of “Fool on the Hill” by Lennon & McCartney, published in 1976 by Shawnee Press

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Fortunately, some of these arrangements are still in print, although most are either POP (permanently out of print) or were never published in the first place. Out of the 200+ known Gene Puerling arrangements for his groups and others, only 24, or around 10%, are currently available through publishers. Heatwave will now present one of those, his take on the great Vernon Duke/Yip Harburg tune, “April in Paris.” It is arranged for eight voices, featuring solos sung by Tommy Strawser and Savannah McMahon. But before they sing, a few notes about the arrangement. Of particular interest are the typical “wrong chord” voicings heard throughout the song, abrupt and surprising key changes, and his lavish use of clashing notes like major and minor sevenths and seconds, tritone and seventh leaps, and planing chords with extended harmonies. (See Figure 4) While creating a beautifully striking affect, these all present tuning, breath control and register-change challenges to the singers which require a great deal of rehearsal time both individually and within the ensemble. Perhaps one of the most stunning uses of substitution happens on the final verse after a key change to A major following the tenor solo. Here we can see one of his favorite techniques, using the bass to alter the make-up of a developing vertical harmonic progression. In this instance, the bass retains a pedal “E” under the shifting harmonies, moving from an inverted ninth in a D major harmony, to a third in a C dominant 7<sup>th</sup> harmony, a flatted ninth in inversion in an Eb dominant harmony to a third in a C# minor harmony, alternating as a ninth with the original D major harmony. (See Figure 5) This kind of writing can present a major challenge for all the singers to keep the movement in tune as each harmony shifts over an unchanging note. It is also interesting to note how the harmonic choices seem to come directly from the original material. For instance, the motivic feature of the melody is a descending

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major second or minor third followed by an ascending minor second. We find these interval relationships all throughout the harmonic structure of the piece, with the most dramatic instance coming at the close of the piece as this movement is heard in parallel in a final “wrong chord” moment, as a C minor triad in the upper voices resolves to the A major triad already sounding in the lower voices, a return of the same triad-resolution from the opening measures of the piece, which had resolved enharmonically to a Db minor triad. (See Figures 4 and 6)

The image shows a page of a musical score for the song "April in Paris". The title "APRIL IN PARIS" is centered at the top in a bold, sans-serif font, with the page number "9" to its right. Below the title, it says "Arranged by GENE PUERLING" on the left and "Words by E. Y. Harburg Music by Vernon Duke" on the right. The tempo/mood is "Slowly, freely". The score is for four vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Baritone/Bass. The Soprano part has lyrics "A - pril in Par - is, doo doo doo doo doo" and is marked with *mf* and *p*. The Alto part has lyrics "(unis.) A - pril in Par - is, doo doo doo doo doo" and is marked with *mf* and *p*. The Tenor part has lyrics "Oh, A - pril in Par - is, doo doo doo doo doo" and is marked with *p* and *mf*. The Baritone/Bass part has lyrics "Oh, A - pril in Par - is, doo doo doo doo doo" and is marked with *p* and *mf*. The score includes various musical markings such as *mf* (mezzo-forte), *p* (piano), and *(unis.)* (unison). There are also triplets and slurs indicated by brackets and the number "3". The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is common time (C).

Figure 4 - Excerpt from “April In Paris” arrangement, published by Shawnee Press, 1974

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This musical score is for the song "April in Paris". It includes parts for Soprano I (S. I.), Soprano II (S. II.), Alto (A.), Tenor I (T. I), Tenor II (T. II), and Baritone/Bass (Bar. & Bass). The score is in D major and 4/4 time. Handwritten annotations include:
 

- Chord changes: D/E, C7#9, Eb7, E, C#m, E.
- Performance directions: (with Ten.), (tutti), (mel.), (div.), (opt. T. I solo with Sop.), (pp), (pp) doubled.
- Lyrics: "A - pril in Par - is. Whom can I run to?"
- Handwritten notes: "Solo - Nina" and "dovile kaida" in the Alto part.

Figure 5 - Excerpt from "April In Paris" arrangement, published by Shawnee Press, 1974

This musical score is for the song "April in Paris". It includes parts for Soprano I (S. I.), Soprano II (S. II.), Alto (A.), Tenor I (T. I), Tenor II (T. II), and Baritone/Bass (Bar. & Bass). The score is in D major and 4/4 time. Handwritten annotations include:
 

- Chord changes: G, (opt. solo or unis.), (tutti, div.), (pp), (pp) doubled.
- Performance directions: (opt. solo or unis.), (tutti, div.), (pp), (pp) doubled.
- Lyrics: "A - pril in Par - is." and "A - pril in Par - is.".
- Handwritten notes: "Solo - Nina", "dovile kaida", and "doo doo doo doo" in the Alto part.

Figure 6- Excerpt from "April In Paris" arrangement, published by Shawnee Press, 1974

Heatwave performance of "April in Paris"

## **Conclusion**

The subsequent and current arrangers of vocal jazz each owe a debt of thanks to Gene and Jon. First, they provided a road map to innovation that we are all still traveling; ever expanding the boundaries of what defines the make-up and repertoire of the vocal jazz ensemble. Second, they introduced a vocabulary to not only vocal jazz writing, but to choral music in general. Thanks to their innovations, we can say we have now a truly American choral form, one that has not only reached from shore to shore, but to countries far and wide. Universities and High Schools across the United States have vocal jazz as a standard part of their curricula thanks to the work of these two men and those they inspired over the past 50 years. Artists like Take 6, New York Voices, and the Real Group from Sweden carry on the tradition while adding their own perspectives. Both Jon and Gene dedicated their lives to innovate and inspire, through their professional collaborations and through reaching out in the education community. Among those artists who are still going strong and creating their own multi-generational group of acolytes is the Manhattan Transfer. On their ground-breaking LPs “Extensions” and “Mecca for Modernes,” they introduced two songs that have become classics with vocal jazz enthusiasts everywhere. One was a re-imagining of a beloved recording by the group “Weather Report,” with vocalese lyrics by Jon Hendricks, and the other a four-part arrangement by Gene Puerling. The Jon Hendricks lyric pays a fitting tribute to one of the iconic New York jazz clubs, which itself is a shrine to all the great innovators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Birdland.” But it does so through the language of Jazz Fusion rather than swing or be-bop, showing that Jon was and is always ready and willing to adapt and embrace new forms while still adhering to his unique vision. The arrangement of “A Nightingale

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Sang in Berkley Square” also signaled a new direction for Gene, writing slightly more accessible charts to reach the growing number of younger singers just discovering vocal jazz. Unlike his complex charts for the Hi-Los! and Singers Unlimited, this one offered a basic yet tasteful and still very “Puerling-esque” approach to SATB vocal jazz, just what The Manhattan Transfer needed for their live shows, and a great way to introduce his style and harmonies to that younger audience. Also, the vocal arrangement of “Birdland” possesses many of the voicing textures introduced by Puerling, now employed by the members of the Manhattan Transfer and their contemporaries. So these two songs provide an apropos conclusion to today’s presentation. Here once more are the members of Heatwave to sing a portion of “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square” and “Birdland.”

### **Heatwave Performance of “Berkley Square” and “Birdland”**

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