14. The Singers in Cleveland

Forgotten by many is the fact that several of the most popular singers of a generation had sung with jazz bands in Cleveland. Perry Como, Frankie Laine and Dean Martin all spent several years singing here before winning national fame. Martin and Tony Bennett met their wives in Cleveland. Other well-known singers had memorable appearances and experiences here. In addition, several native Cleveland singers made national reputations. One became an overnight success after 50 years of trying.

The singer who turned down Carlone

In the early 1930s, a young singer from Lakewood turned down an offer to join one of Cleveland’s most popular bands. That decision opened the door for a future national star.

The young Lakewood singer’s name was Bert Porter. He had played saxophone and guitar and sung with a band led by Bob Royce at Ohio State University and later with the Vernon-Owens band in Cleveland. After getting his civil engineering degree in 1928, Porter spent several years singing with various bands in Cleveland and attracted the attention of popular Cleveland bandleader Freddy Carlone who was playing at the Rainbow Gardens on the Lakewood-Cleveland border. Carlone wanted Porter to become his band’s singer, but Porter had other plans.

He went to work in engineering and in 1947 became the Cuyahoga County Engineer, a position he held for 30 years. He was the man who was primarily responsible for building the freeway system linking Cleveland and its sprawling suburbs. In 1953, he ran for mayor of Cleveland and served as the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party chairman from 1963 to 1969.

Perry Como

When Porter tuned down Carlone’s offer, the Cleveland bandleader hired a handsome young barber from Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania, named Perry Como. Copying the crooning style of Bing Crosby, Como came to Cleveland in 1933 and sang with the Carlone Orchestra at various Cleveland hotels and other spots around Northeast Ohio for the next three years. The band also performed at the March, 1933 Inaugural Ball for President Franklin Roosevelt in Washington. Another member of the Carlone Orchestra was Johnny Singer, who later led his own Cleveland band for years. Singer, who played at the Hotel Cleveland in the early 1950s, remembered Como crooning with the Carlone band at Conneaut Lake Park in the summer of 1933.

Carlone’s band also played at the Crystal Slipper Ballroom at 9802 Euclid Avenue before the name was changed to the Trianon Ballroom. When Como married his longtime girlfriend, Roselle, in 1933, Carlone was the best man. The young couple lived in South Euclid.

One night in 1936, Como was singing with Carlone at a gambling spot in Warren when another bandleader, Ted Weems, walked in to play roulette. Weems heard Como sing and saw the crowd call him back for several encores. Weems immediately offered Como a job with his orchestra. Como toured with Weems’ 11-piece band for six years and became the prototypical big band singer.

Como later became one of the most popular record and television singers of the 1950s.

Como and Frankie Laine

Como, while he was touring with the Weems band, met an ambitious young singer in Chicago named Frank LoVecchio. His main claim to fame at the time was setting the world’s record for marathon dancing – 145 days! He had also done some singing with jazz musicians Joe Marsala, Henry “Red” Allen and Art Hodes. The young singer, who later changed his name to Frankie Laine, heard that Como was about to leave the Weems Orchestra and was hoping to get the job, but, at the last minute, Como decided to stay with Weems.

Laine told me that Como apologized to him and asked, “Would you like to go to Cleveland? I can make a call and maybe get you a job.” Como called his former boss, Freddy Carlone, and LoVecchio began singing in Cleveland with Carlone’s band late in 1937.

Frankie Laine in Cleveland

In his autobiography, That Lucky Old Son, Laine wrote that his high hopes in Cleveland were “quickly shot down.” He discovered that Carlone then had a Guy Lombardo-style sweet band. Laine wanted to be a jazz singer. He said, “When I heard the reed section playing a shade sharp to get that saccharine Lombardo sound, it rasped me like fingernails drawn across a chalkboard.” When Laine wanted to sing jazz songs, Carlone said, “Frank, we just don’t do that kind of music.”

Laine sang with the Carlone band at Vincent’s Club on East 9th Street, but he stayed with Carlone for only a few weeks. Bookings for the band were scarce. “Two
weeks after I started,” Laine told me, “Carlone fired everybody.”

The future international singing star began 1938 in Cleveland – broke and unemployed. The son of gangster Al Capone’s personal barber managed to find a job singing for a man named “Twinkle” Katz at an East Side bar called the Ace of Clubs, but a week after he started, the club burned down.

“So a friend of mine,” said Laine, “suggested I go to Lindsay’s Sky Bar at East 105th and Euclid. I auditioned and I got the job there and stayed five months.” Working at Lindsay’s, Laine met a Cleveland pianist named Art Cutlip “and we used to teach each other songs. We put together a hell of a repertoire book of about 1,000 songs.” It included their own arrangement of Louis Armstrong’s classic “West End Blues.”

Laine called his five months at Lindsay’s Sky Bar “absolute musical heaven for me.” One night there, he heard Cutlip play a song on the piano. “‘What’s that?’ I asked. He said, ‘It’s a song called ‘Shine’ that Armstrong used to do.’ I said, ‘I’d like to learn it.’ So he taught it to me.” Ten years later, Laine’s recording of the song he had learned at the Sky Bar in Cleveland became one of the nation’s biggest hit records.

Dean Martin in Cleveland

The Mounds Club in the late 1930s

While Laine was singing in Cleveland in the spring of 1939, a 21-year-old singer from Steubenville got a job at the Mounds Club on Chardon Road in Willoughby Hills. Owned by Irish gamblers who paid “protection money” to the infamous Mayfield Road Gang, it was a drinking and gambling carry-over from Prohibition days. The club was a private monument to indoor sports and offered the biggest names in entertainment, excellent food, and almost any form of gambling you could think of. The young singer filled in as a singing coupier at the local mob’s private playpen.

It was a colorful spot. Eight years after Martin was there (September 28, 1947), comedian Peter Lind Hayes and his wife, singer Mary Healy, were entertaining about 250 customers at the Mounds Club when ten masked men, wearing fatigue suits and carrying submachine guns, burst in and halted the show. Most of the people thought it was part of the act until one of the bandits fired a shot into the ceiling. They forced the manager to empty the safe and took cash, jewelry and furs from the customers. On the way out, one of the bandits spotted a big diamond right on the finger of a man who was well connected to the Cleveland mob. He told the gunman, “Do you know who I am?!” The gunman said, “I don’t give a — who you are,” and ripped the ring off his finger. The hooded gunmen made a clean get-away with a take estimated at $500,000.

By the end of 1939, Martin, the singer, who grew up in Steubenville with Jimmy “The Greek” Snyder, found work at other gang joints in the Youngstown area. He decided to move on to Columbus where he joined Ernie McKay’s band. In Columbus, he changed his name from Dino Crocetti to Dino Martini. While singing at the State Restaurant in Columbus, he was heard by another singer named Lee Ann Lee. She was the wife of Cleveland bandleader Sammy Watkins.

Watkins’ orchestra was a Cleveland institution, playing at the city’s top supper club, the Vogue Room of the palatial old Hollenden Hotel at East 6th and Superior. Nick Tosches, in his biography of the singer, Living High in the Dirty Business of Dreams, wrote that Watkins hired the young singer in the fall of 1940. It was at about the time Italy’s Benito Mussolini was declaring war on England and France, and Watkins, whose real name was Watkovitz, demanded the young singer change his name again – to Dean Martin. As Dean Martin, he sang with Watkins’ band at the Hollenden for three years.
Martin later remembered it was a different Cleveland in 1940. There were one-dollar houses of prostitution downtown. The Hotel Gilissy was directly across East 9th Street from the Roxy burlesque theatre. In the 1920s, the Gilissy had advertised rooms for $1 a night ($1.50 with a bathroom). The Erie Hotel was near St. John’s Cathedral. The Milner Hotel was on Chester Avenue, also near the Roxy. There were also after-hours bars, called “sneak joints” – the Lighthouse at 9th and Lakeside, and Greek “coffee houses” on Bolivar that offered around-the-clock booze and gambling. There were also all-night restaurants offering all sorts of entertainment – the Nickel Plate Grill on Broadway, the Kit Kat Klub on Hough Avenue, and the 3700 Club on Euclid Avenue.

Laine returns to Cleveland

Frankie Laine, meanwhile, had left Cleveland for New York City hoping to find his fame and fortune, but he also had trouble finding work in New York and decided to go home to Chicago.

After a few weeks, he got a call from Cleveland pianist Art Cutlip who urged him to “come on back to Cleveland!” Laine hitchhiked to Cleveland and discovered the job Cutlip called him about had disappeared. Laine managed to find a job singing at the College Inn near Fenn College (the later site of Cleveland State University) for $20 a week.

Laine said, “Cleveland was a great jazz town in those days.” He recalled jazz musicians used to congregate at the Cabin Club at East 105th and Euclid where the comedian was a brash youngster named Joey Bishop, who later became a late night network talk show host and a member of Frank Sinatra’s so-called “Rat Pack” in Hollywood.

While he was singing at the College Inn, Laine met a girl singer named June Hart who sounded like Mildred Bailey and did an old song called “That’s My Desire.” Laine said he “absorbed the song from listening to her.” Cleveland pianist Al Lerner, who later played with the Harry James Orchestra and became Laine’s musical director, said, “Frank learned the song from her but she didn’t sing it right, the way the music was written.”

After singing at the College Inn, Laine moved to a nightclub called the Wonder Bar at East 17th and Euclid, across the street from the Palace Theatre. “One night,” remembered Laine, “Pee Wee Hunt, who was playing at the Palace, came in and I got to talking with him. I asked for an audition with his band and I showed him the song book Art Cutlip and I had assembled at Lindsay’s Sky Bar. Hunt said, ‘Gee, this is great! Can I borrow it?’” Half a century later, Laine said he never got his songbook back from Hunt.
After Laine lost his singing job at the Wonder Bar, a customer named John Curley asked him, “How would you like a regular job?” Laine recalled, “Curley put me on as a third shift, semi-skilled machine operator out at Parker Appliance at 175th and Euclid.” The firm was making airplane parts for the war effort. Laine remembered, “The first week, I made 150 bucks, so I said, ‘The hell with singing!’” He worked the night shift at Parker Appliance (later Parker-Hannifin) for the next three years during World War II, but he continued to sing in Cleveland on weekends with a variety of Cleveland jazz musicians including Fred Sharp and Bill de Arango. He remembered them both as “wonderful guitarists.” He sang at the Wade Tavern on Wade Park Avenue and sat in with his old friend, Art Cutlip, and others during the bi-weekly jam sessions of Julian Krawcheck’s Hot Club of Cleveland.

Laine was living at the Club Albion on Cedar Hill in Cleveland Heights. He remembered Cleveland being very cold during the winters. He said, “There were many mornings, when I got home from work, that I wished I were some place else because it was so cold and it was snowing. It was icy and it was hard to drive. And I lived on a hill. It was tough.”

**Martin marries in Cleveland**

**Dean Martin (left) with Sammy Watkins Orchestra in Cleveland in 1943**

At about the same time, Martin, living downtown at the Hollenden Hotel, met an 18-year-old girl from Philadelphia named Betty Anne McDonald. She was traveling with her father on a business trip to Cleveland and staying at the Hollenden. They saw Dean sing with Watkins’ band. Dean and Betty soon began dating. In the spring of 1941, the girl’s father was transferred to Cleveland and bought a house in Cleveland Heights.

By that summer, Dean and Betty were engaged. On October 1, they went to the Cuyahoga County Courthouse on Lakeside Avenue, got a marriage license, and were married the next day by Father H. N. McCormick at St. Ann’s Catholic Church at Cedar and Coventry Roads in Cleveland Heights. After spending their wedding night at the Hollenden, they took off on their honeymoon on the band bus with the Watkins Orchestra, headed for Louisville. When they returned to Cleveland a few weeks later, Martin and his wife rented a furnished apartment at 2820 Mayfield Road in Cleveland Heights.

A couple of weeks later, the United States entered World War II. Martin got a physical draft deferment and continued to sing with Watkins at the Hollenden.

On June 7 of 1942, precisely nine months after their wedding, Dean and Betty became parents. Stephen Craig Martin was born at what later became Deaconess Hospital in Cleveland. On the way to the hospital, the expectant father fainted in a taxi cab.

A month later, the young Martin made his first coast-to-coast radio broadcast. The Sammy Watkins Orchestra, voted “The Most Popular Band in Cleveland,” was featured on a radio program called *The Fitch Bandwagon* on NBC. At 7:30, Sunday night, July 5, 1942, they went on the air from the studios of NBC’s WTAM at 9th and Superior, across the street from the Hollenden.

Martin sang four songs including “What’ll I Do” and “Sweet Leilani,” but, the big night for the Sammy Watkins Orchestra and the young singer suddenly collapsed when the announcer, Tobe Reed, closed the broadcast by telling the nation, “You’ve been listening to the music of Sammy Kaye and his Orchestra.”

**Laine auditions for Benny Goodman**

Laine was still working in the defense plant in Cleveland and singing on weekends. In August of 1942, Don Haynes, then the Cleveland correspondent for *Down Beat* magazine, drove Laine to Cedar Point to audition for Benny Goodman. After Laine sang a couple of jazz tunes, Goodman turned him down. Laine told me, “Benny said I was a rhythm singer and said his girl singers did those kind of songs; the male vocalists did the ballads in his band.” Even after Laine became world famous, he said he never met Goodman again.

**Martin sings for Ohio Tool Company**

In December of 1942, Martin sang with the Sammy Watkins Orchestra at a big Christmas party for employees of the Ohio Tool Company at Public Hall in downtown Cleveland. Tom Kennish of Royal Garden Records on Lorain Road in North Olmsted gave me a rare recording of a radio air check of Martin singing with Watkins at that party. He sang “White Christmas,” very much in the style of Bing Crosby.
Laine goes to Hollywood

Laine managed to persuade Parker Appliance to transfer him to its plant in the Los Angeles area. He left Cleveland in August of 1943 and drove to California. He looked up a pianist he had known in Cleveland, Al Lerner. After touring with the Harry James Orchestra for five years, Lerner had settled in Los Angeles and was playing for a series of radio programs. “One day,” remembered Lerner, “Laine showed up from Cleveland. He had a Pontiac convertible, a wreck of a car, and drove up to my apartment. I was the only person he knew in Los Angeles.”

Eventually Laine managed to get a recording date. According to Lerner, “Frankie had 15 or 20 minutes left on the date and said, ‘Let me sing something.’ The musicians just faked the accompaniment.” He sang “That’s My Desire.” The recording became a huge national hit. After years of struggling for work, much of it in Cleveland, Laine finally became a big national singing star.

When he recorded “That’s My Desire,” he sang the song the way he had heard June Hart sing it at Lindsay’s Sky Bar in Cleveland, but according to Lerner, “She sang the song wrong and so did Frank. The publisher of the song didn’t recognize it the way Laine sang it.”

Years later, Laine told me, “I never knew she was singing it wrong and I don’t think she knew she was singing it wrong. She was doing it the way she learned it. And I learned it from her. And it was wrong. All these years, I’ve been receiving royalties on ‘That’s My Desire’ from the wrong things that I learned from her in Cleveland.”

Even with the hit record, Lerner said “The public had never seen Frankie Laine. He was bald and wore a hairpiece. The black population thought he was black. It was curious, blacks were buying a lot of Frank’s records.”

In the years after “That’s My Desire,” Laine’s records sold more than 100-million copies and he eventually won 21 gold records. He also wrote the lyrics for the jazz standard “We’ll Be Together Again” which was recorded by more than 150 artists.

Martin left Cleveland four months after Laine left. In December of 1943, Martin went to New York, and soon teamed up with comedian Jerry Lewis. They became one of the top entertainment acts in the country.

While most of their later recordings were hardly considered jazz, Perry Como, Frankie Laine and Dean Martin were all part of Cleveland’s jazz scene in the 1930s and early ’40s.

Tony Bennett’s Cleveland links

In 1946, Cleveland guitarist Fred Sharp was playing with the Adrian Rollini Trio in New York City. Sharp and his wife, Iris, were living in Astoria, Long Island. They took the BMT train from Manhattan to Queens Plaza and walked to their home. One night, they stopped in at a local club called the Shangri-La at Queens Plaza to hear the band. The band was led by trombonist Tyree Glenn who, earlier in his career had played with Louis Armstrong, Benny Carter and Cab Calloway. There was a young, singer there almost every night. On this night, when the Sharps stopped in, Glenn invited the young vocalist to sing with his band.

Sharp told me the young singer was “just great” and said, “After his set, we invited him to our table for a drink.” He told Sharp his name was Joe Bari and said he had written a song called “Satan Wears a Satin Gown” and was hoping someone would perform it. Sharp said, “We told him we were friends with Frankie Laine” who was appearing at the Paramount Theatre in New York City. Sharp suggested that Joe Bari take his tune to Laine and “tell him that Freddie and Iris Sharp had sent him.”

At the Paramount, Laine was on the bill with the Stan Kenton Orchestra and singer June Christy. Going backstage, Bari told Laine that Clevelander Fred Sharp had sent him and he sang his song for Laine. Laine, in
his autobiography That Lucky Old Son, recalled he listened to Bari sing the song and asked, “What do you need me for? You sing great!”

Laine eventually recorded the song and Bari became good friends of Fred and Iris Sharp. “He came over for dinner a few times and we played and sang together,” remembered Sharp.

Bari soon began opening other career doors. He appeared on the Arthur Godfrey Talent Scouts program and got a job singing with Pearl Bailey in Greenwich Village. In 1949, he made his first records for a small label called Leslie Records.

Bari’s first records went absolutely nowhere, but his manager had an idea. He persuaded comedian Bob Hope, who had grown up in Cleveland, to catch Bari’s performance in Greenwich Village. Hope liked what he heard and said, “Come on, kid, you’re going to come to the Paramount and sing with me.” But, Hope didn’t like the young singer’s stage name, Joe Bari, and asked him what his real name was. The singer told him, “My name is Anthony Dominick Benedetto.” “That’s too long for the marquee,” said Hope. He thought for a moment and then said, “We’ll call you Tony Bennett.”

After the gig at the Paramount Theatre, Hope took Tony Bennett, along with the Les Brown Orchestra, Jane Russell and a tap dancer, on a six-city tour. When Bennett got back to New York, he signed a contract with Columbia Records and began appearing on television programs in New York.

In 1951, his recording of “Because of You” became a big hit. It was the country’s number one record for ten weeks and sold over a million copies. This led to his own booking at New York’s Paramount Theatre and gigs in Miami, Chicago, Buffalo and Cleveland.

In July of 1951, Bennett was singing at Moe’s Main Street, a nightclub at East 79th and Euclid that booked many upcoming artists in the early 1950s. By this time, Sharp had left Red Norvo and was back in Cleveland. He was not aware of Bennett’s new hit records and noticed an ad in The Plain Dealer with a photo of the singer appearing at Moe’s Main Street. His wife said, “That’s Joe Bari, the singer we knew in Astoria! He changed his name to Tony Bennett!”

While he was singing at Moe’s Main Street in Cleveland, Bennett spotted a beautiful young woman in the audience. After the show, her date asked him to join them at their table. Bennett learned her name was Patricia Beech. She had just moved to Cleveland from Mansfield to attend the Cleveland Institute of Art and was a big jazz fan. Less than a year later, Bennett married the girl he met in Cleveland. They had two sons. Bennett’s career zoomed. He recorded a series of hit pop records, but he was too busy to pay enough attention to his wife and sons.

In 1962, Bennett recorded a song entitled “I Wanna Be Around.” The song was originally conceived by a lady in Youngstown named Sadie Vimmerstedt. She was not a professional songwriter. According to Bennett, in his autobiography The Good Life, Sadie came up with two lines:

I wanna be around to pick up the pieces

When somebody breaks your heart.

The Youngstown resident sent the lines to songwriter Johnny Mercer and said she thought the lines would make a good song. She had no idea where Mercer lived, so she simply addressed the envelope: “Johnny Mercer, Songwriter, Los Angeles, California.” Somehow her letter got to Mercer and he liked her lines. He wrote the rest of the lyrics and the music. Bennett had another hit.

While Tony was making a series of hit pop records, he did not neglect his old first love – jazz. He frequently performed with jazz artists and recorded with both Duke Ellington and Count Basie. In 1958, Bennett recorded “Firefly” with his longtime friend, Bill Basie, and his band.

During his great success, Bennett’s marriage to Patricia Beech disintegrated. After he recorded “I Left My Heart in San Francisco,” they were divorced. Patricia stayed in New York. Tony later married Sandra Grant, a young woman he had met while making a film in Hollywood. They had two daughters.

In the 1970s, after he had left Columbia Records, Bennett’s life, by his own admission, was getting out of control. In his autobiography, he wrote, “At every big party I’d go to, people were high on something. Cocaine flowed as freely as champagne, and soon,” he wrote, “I began joining in the festivities. Compounded with my pot smoking, the whole thing started sneaking up on me.”

With the help of his son, Danny, Bennett managed to revive his career. In 1995, his album Tony Bennett: MTV Unplugged was awarded a Grammy for Album of the Year.

Transcending generational lines, Bennett, who was first encouraged by Cleveland jazz guitarist Fred Sharp, and who married a Mansfield girl he met in Cleveland, was still winning new fans and was finally being recognized as a jazz singer.
Frank Sinatra in Cleveland

Frank Sinatra

Pianist Al Lerner was one of the first Clevelanders to hear and appreciate singer Frank Sinatra. It was in 1939, shortly after the 24-year-old singer had joined the Harry James Orchestra. They appeared at Cleveland's Trianon Ballroom on Euclid Avenue. Years later, Lerner said, “I had never heard a singer who sang with that approach to a Frank Sinatra song. He was unique.”

After leaving James and joining the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Sinatra returned to Cleveland in 1941 and performed during an RCA Dance Caravan at Public Hall.

The following year (1942), Sinatra and the Dorsey band played four shows a day for a week, beginning July 24th, at the Palace Theatre. By this time, Sinatra was sharing top billing with Dorsey.

As a single, Sinatra returned to Cleveland July 14, 1943 for a concert with the Cleveland Summer Orchestra at Public Hall. The Cleveland Press said the crowd of 9,142 was nearly 90% what the paper called “Sinatra girls.”

In those days, Sinatra was an extremely popular singer and he won the DownBeat Readers’ Poll nine times in the 1940s and ‘50s. He was not a “jazz singer” per se, but learned much of his singing technique by listening to jazz instrumentalists. Sinatra often said his greatest teacher was not a vocal coach, not other singers, but jazz musicians – particularly Tommy Dorsey and the way he breathed and phrased on the trombone.

Sinatra’s singing also influenced many jazz musicians. Miles Davis said in his autobiography that he learned how to phrase by listening to Sinatra sing.

Ernie Freeman, who grew up in Cleveland playing with his sister’s high school orchestra, the Evelyn Freeman Ensemble, later went to Los Angeles and arranged for Sinatra among others. Freeman arranged Sinatra’s recording of “Strangers in the Night.”

After he became a singing superstar, Sinatra recorded with the Count Basie Orchestra. Trumpeter Harry “Sweets” Edison, a mainstay of the Basie band, who was playing in Cleveland in the 1930s, backed Sinatra with Nelson Riddle’s Orchestra on many of Sinatra’s best records.


By the early 1970s, Frank Sinatra had become an entertainment icon. On October 26, 1974, he sang at the black-tie opening ceremonies for the Richfield Coliseum. The $25 million arena was built by Sinatra’s friend, Nick Mileti. When Sinatra came to Cleveland for that opening, he arrived in a private jet. He and his 20-member entourage stayed at the Keg and Quarter Hotel at East 18th and Euclid. The hotel at the time was the Cleveland home-away-from-home for many of the biggest names in show business, but, according to the owner, Jim Swingos, “None was bigger than Sinatra.”

“I got to know him,” said Swingos, “and he was probably one of the most exciting personalities I have ever met. And we had them all in the hotel back in those days.” Swingos said, “There was a certain charisma about Sinatra, a certain magic. When he walked into a room, everyone stopped, no one spoke.”

Sinatra stayed at Swingos’ hotel several times and the singer was not at all like the young rock ‘n roll stars who frequently trashed their hotel rooms. According to Swingos, “Sinatra was a down-to-earth fella who appreciated being taken care of and liked to be treated like family.”

Swingos’ most vivid memory of Sinatra staying at his hotel was the night Sinatra was leaving the hotel to perform in the inaugural show at the Coliseum. “The people in the dining room heard that Frank was going to be leaving soon to go to the Coliseum,” said Swingos. “The entire dining room emptied into the small lobby. Security called up and suggested that maybe he should take the basement route; it would be safer. So I mentioned that to Frank and he said, ‘Don’t worry about it.’ So we got into the elevator. The lobby doors opened and it was just filled with people, packed like sardines. As he walked out of the elevator, the crowd in the lobby became totally silent as if everyone held their breath. A path opened for him to exit through the doors into his limousine. After he got into the limousine and left, everyone in the lobby had a collective sigh.” Swingos said, “It was the most magical moment that I have ever experienced.”

Sinatra stayed at Swingos’ hotel again in March of 1988 when he appeared with Sammy Davis, Jr. at the Richfield Coliseum.

Sinatra’s last performance in Cleveland was November 7, 1992. Then 76 years old, Sinatra sang in the round and appeared with his son, Frank.
Sinatra, Jr., who led a full orchestra. Among the songs he sang that night was “All Or Nothing at All,” a song he had sung with the Harry James Orchestra 53 years earlier at the Trianon Ballroom.

Sinatra died May 14, 1998, at the age of 82 in Los Angeles.

Mel Tormé’s tough times here

Singer, composer, arranger, drummer, actor and author Mel Tormé had some unforgettable and frightening experiences when he was singing in Cleveland in the 1950s.

A child prodigy, Tormé was only 9 years old when he acted on a series of radio programs in Chicago. He was only 15 when he composed a song called “Lament to Love” which became a hit record for the Harry James Orchestra. He was only 17 when he became a singer and drummer with Chico Marx’ big band. He was only 18 when he made a movie with Frank Sinatra. He was only 20 when he composed “The Christmas Song.” He was only 21 when he recorded with his vocal group, the Mel-Tones, with the Artie Shaw Orchestra.

At the age of 25, Tormé was a national name and had performed in the nation’s biggest supper clubs and on network television shows. He came to Cleveland for a series of gigs.

He was booked into Moe’s Main Street. While singing at Moe’s, Tormé said he encountered an extremely noisy table, “two brassy blondes and their escorts.” When they kept talking and laughing during his songs, Tormé halted his performance and angrily announced, “Years ago, I accidentally ran over a mule and killed it. I was warned that mule would come back to haunt me. And sure enough, that jackass is with us tonight!”

The audience laughed, but Moe, the owner, was beside himself. He screamed at Tormé, “You got any idea who those guys are?” One was Julius Petrie who had spent time in prison for shooting the mother of one of his hoods. At the time Tormé insulted him, Petrie was facing a charge of robbing $70,000 from an armored truck. “And you’re standing on that stage calling him a jackass!” screamed Moe. “You better be careful going back to your hotel!”

After the show, Tormé went to a late-night restaurant in Shaker Heights. As he walked in, he noticed to his surprise and fear that the mobster and his loud friends were sitting in a booth. “He stared at me for a moment,” recalled Tormé, “but continued talking to his girlfriend.” Tormé said he never heard from Petrie, but later read about him in the best-selling book The Last Mafioso.

While Tormé was appearing at Moe’s, Cleveland Press entertainment writer Winsor French wrote a scathing review of his show. Tormé remembered, “He roasted me up one side and down the other — brilliantly. I had never been slammed with such panache, wit and style.” Tormé discovered French, who resembled movie actor Clifton Webb, lived at the Hollenden Hotel. Tormé called him and said, “I don’t like the content of the review, but I love the writing.”

The Cleveland newspaperman was flabbergasted, saying he had gotten nasty calls from wounded performers in the past, “but no one ever called to compliment me on a bad review!”

A few days later, French called Tormé and said he wanted to interview him for The Press. They met for lunch. Tormé said he found French to be “an endearing little man with a wistful countenance, a crew cut, and elegant taste in clothes, but terribly lonely and unhappy.” They became friends and French managed to get Tormé booked into the classy Vogue Room of the Hollenden.

Tormé, in his autobiography, recalled that the Cleveland newspaperman once carefully inquired if Tormé had ever experienced any homosexual tendencies. “As tactfully as possible,” said the singer, “I explained that I had always been, purely and simply, a girl lover.”

A couple of months later, Tormé was performing at the Yankee Inn on Route 8 when a huge, mean-looking, red-haired man at the bar began loudly flipping coins on the polished surface of the bar, interrupting his songs.

“After the Petrie incident,” Tormé said he was “gun-shy about opening his mouth to a noisy customer.” When the big, red-haired man continued to make a lot of noise, Tormé simply walked off the stage in disgust.

The owner of the Yankee Inn ran to the dressing room and told Tormé, “He’s an ex-marine who has broken more jaws in Akron than you could count on your fingers. He’s threatening to wipe the walls with you!” As Tormé was about to leave, “Big Red” blocked the front door and in slurred tones threatened, “I’m gonna mash you!”

Tormé, a gun collector, pulled a Colt .38 Detective Special out of his overcoat pocket, jammed it into Big Red’s stomach and cocked it. Big Red backed away, turned without a word, and stumbled out the front door. Tormé said it was the only time he had ever pointed a gun at anyone.

After his frightening experiences in Northeast Ohio, it was perhaps ironic that more than 40 years later, the former child prodigy who had become one of the most
admired jazz singers of the era, was the star performer at the inaugural broadcast of jazz radio station WCPN and was recording for Telarc International, the Cleveland-based record company.

Tormé died June 5, 1999.

Jimmy Scott

The voice reminded some people of Dinah Washington or Sarah Vaughan, but the singer was not a woman. It was Jimmy Scott, a Cleveland native who late in his life was nominated for a Best Jazz Vocal Grammy.

Scott reportedly was the victim of a rare glandular disorder which left his voice high-pitched and kept him from growing to 5 feet 8 inches until he was almost 40 years old.

Once you got past the gender shock and listened to him, you realized that little Jimmy Scott was not only a ballad stylist, but a true jazz singer who used his unusual voice almost like a saxophone.

Most jazz fans, even in his native Cleveland, had never heard of Scott until his 1992 album for Sire Records was nominated for a Grammy. His overnight success took almost half a century.

Born in Cleveland in 1925, the third of Arthur and Justine Scott’s ten children, Jimmy began singing in church to his mother’s piano accompaniment. Tragically, she died when Jimmy was just 13. She was struck by a speeding car while trying to push one of her daughters out of the way.

Jimmy developed an interest in jazz. In 1945, at the age of 20, he helped organize a summer musical festival at the Palace Theatre. He toured the South with a contortionist named Estelle “Caldonia” Young and began singing at various Ohio nightclubs.

In the late 1940s, Scott was singing in Cleveland and is said to have jammed with Charlie Parker at the old Majestic Hotel at East 55th and Central.

In 1948, comedian Redd Foxx and boxing champ Joe Louis helped Scott get a gig at the Baby Grand Club in Harlem. That’s where Lionel Hampton heard him. Always looking for new talent, Hamp gave Scott an on-stage audition and Jimmy soon joined the touring Hampton band. Other members of the band at that time included Clevelanders Benny Bailey and Willie Smith.

Scott sang on Hampton’s recording of “Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool.” The record reached the number six spot on the Billboard rhythm-and-blues chart. Ironically, that Decca 78 rpm record did not carry Scott’s name. The label said simply, “Vocal with Orchestra.” Hampton apparently felt the public would think he had a new girl singer performing the song written by his wife and band manager, Gladys Hampton.

In the early 1950s, Scott joined the band of Paul Gayten and began to influence such young singers as Nancy Wilson and Marvin Gaye.

In 1955, he signed with Savoy Records and cut such sides as “When Did You Leave Heaven,” “Imagination” and “Don’t Cry Baby.”

In the summer of 1960, at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, Scott stole the show – which included Ray Charles and the Coasters – by singing “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” Scott’s performance impressed Charles who signed him to record for his Tangerine Record label. With Charles backing him on piano, Scott made an album called Falling In Love Is Wonderful. But, his big break in 1963 fell apart when Savoy Records went to court and convinced a judge that Scott was still under contract to Savoy. The judge ordered Scott’s album with Charles be pulled off the market.

Giving up hope that he would ever become a nationally-known singer, Scott came home to Cleveland. He sang in a few clubs here, worked in the shipping room at the old Sheraton Hotel and cared for his ailing father. He even did some free singing for residents at nursing homes.

In 1969, Scott got another chance. He returned to New York and recorded an album for Atlantic Records. It included such jazz artists as pianist Ray Bryant, bassist Richard Davis, drummer Billy Cobham, and tenor saxophonist Frank Wess, but again, there were legal problems. Savoy Records heard about the Atlantic album and threatened to sue. Again, a Jimmy Scott album was taken off the market.

Despite the legal hurdles, Atlantic recorded Scott again in 1972. It was an album called The Source with Junior Mance and Ron Carter. Included was a song that had been popularized almost 20 years earlier by the Four
Jimmy Scott in the 1990s

Freshmen, "Day By Day," in Scott’s almost agonizingly slow phrasing.

Because of the continuing legal problems over his contracts, that record by Scott was not released by Atlantic Records for more than 20 years.

Now, fast forward to 1991!

The man who had come so close to stardom but never quite made it, sang at the funeral of rock artist Doc Pomus. Seymour Stein of Sire Records heard him, was impressed, and signed Scott to a long-term contract. Cleveland native Tommy LiPuma produced the album called *All the Way*. It hit the top ten lists in 1992 and was nominated for a Grammy in 1993. Finally, after almost half a century of near-misses and legal problems, Jimmy Scott from Cleveland, with his old-fashioned and romantic singing style - at the age of 67 - became a star.

In June of 1993, when Scott made his first professional performance in Cleveland in almost 40 years, he sang “Unchained Melody” and other romantic tunes at Rhythms on Playhouse Square. *Plain Dealer* reviewer Carlo Wolff said, “Scott returned to his hometown a winner, treating fans of idiosyncratic, highly intimate jazz to a unique vocal display.”

After years of obscurity and near-success, Scott finally achieved an unusual spot in jazz history. In his late 70s, he was singing all over the world.

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**Ella Fitzgerald’s last major concert**

Ella Fitzgerald made her last major public appearance in Cleveland. It was at Playhouse Square during the 1992 Tri-C JazzFest. As we listened to her that night, we were certainly aware that she was one of the all-time jazz legends nearing the end of an astounding career. But, we did not realize that within a year, Ella Fitzgerald would lose both legs because of complications of diabetes or that in four years she would be dead.

When she took the stage, she sang “Sweet Georgia Brown.” After the applause faded, she said, “Welcome to our part of the show. Hope you enjoy the songs that we have chosen. Some I know, some I don’t.” The capacity crowd roared as everybody’s favorite jazz singer joked, “I may make up my own lyrics.”

Dr. Thomas Horning, the founding director of the Tri-C JazzFest, confirmed later that Ella was not well at the time, but loved to talk with children. Horning remembered introducing his 12-year-old daughter to the world famous singer. “She had my daughter sit on her lap like a granddaughter,” said Horning, “and
they just went on and on while there were lines of people waiting to see Ella, but she was visiting with my young daughter and even invited her to visit her in California.”

When Ella died at the age of 78 June 15, 1996, there was worldwide praise for the woman who had entered an amateur contest on a dare at New York’s Apollo Theatre 64 years earlier when she was just 14 years old.

When she went on the Apollo stage that night, she said she froze. “The man said, “Do something,” recalled Ella, “so I tried to sing like Miss Connie Boswell and somebody in the audience said, “Hey, that little girl can sing!” I won first prize. Then I tried the Harlem Opera House and won again.”

Bardu Ali, who was playing guitar with the Chick Webb Orchestra, heard her and suggested that Webb hire her for his band. The little drummer didn’t want a girl singer for his swinging big band, but finally said, “We’ll take her to Yale University and if she goes over with the college kids, she stays.” She did.

Webb became not only her boss, but her mentor and guardian. Ella later remembered, “He always taught me that ‘You never want to be something that goes up fast because the same way you go up, you come down, and you meet the same people.”

By the age of 20, Ella had written some of the lyrics and recorded “A Tisket a Tasket,” a song that became a national hit. When she was 21, Webb died of tuberculosis and Ella fronted his band until 1942.

Ella and the band played the week of August 12, 1940 at East Market Gardens in Akron.

When the band broke up, she continued on the road as a single and performed at Cleveland’s Palace Theatre with Ink Spots for a week in January of 1944.

Longtime Cleveland drummer Lawrence “Jacktown” Jackson remembered one night in the 1940s when he was hired at the last minute to play drums for Ella. “She came to town and her drummer couldn’t make it,” said Jacktown. “Can you imagine I was hired to replace Buddy Rich?!”

Fitzgerald frequently said Dizzy Gillespie taught her bebop. Dizzy said he never had a better student. “She just dove into it,” remembered Gillespie. “Her choice of phrasing and using her voice as an instrument was unbelievable.” She toured with the Gillespie Orchestra in the late 1940s. A member of that band was Cleveland trombonist William “Shep” Shepherd. He said, “She was a beautiful person, a lot of fun, a beautiful person to know.”

When Ella toured South American in 1957, her guitarist was Cleveland Jim Hall.

In the 1980s, she was performing in London with the Count Basie Orchestra which after Basie’s death was led by Frank Foster. Filling Basie’s piano chair in the band, backing Ella, was Ace Carter, who had spent over 30 years playing with various groups in Cleveland. Carter later recalled that those performances with Ella in London were the highlights of his career with the Basie band.

Ella, of course, performed in Cleveland many times. Perhaps one of the most memorable for her was on December 10, 1984 when she came to Cleveland to help celebrate the 115th anniversary of the Cleveland YWCA. She was always very involved in doing things to help young women and children. The benefit began with a 6:30 p.m. cocktail buffet at Case Western Reserve University’s Thwing Center followed by a concert at Severance Hall next door and a post concert dessert reception at Thwing Center.

Everybody who ever listened to music has memories of Ella Fitzgerald, but there were some special memories for some Clevelanders.

**Vanessa Rubin**

In the 1990s, she became a popular and respected jazz and pops singer.

Born in Cleveland in 1956, Vanessa Rubin recalled, “I grew up listening to jazz before I knew what it was. I have five older brothers and they’re all jazz enthusiasts so I really didn’t have a choice in what I listened to. I love the big band sound, the Basie band, the Ellington band.”

She recalled her father used to play a lot of Glenn Miller records and he loved saxophonists Cannonball Adderley and Gene Ammons. She said she listened to singers Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson and Carmen McRae.

After graduating from Cleveland’s John F. Kennedy High School, Rubin went to the University of Cincinnati and Ohio State where she graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in journalism. While at Ohio State, she competed in the Miss Black Central Ohio contest and got a standing ovation when she sang “God Bless the Child.” Looking back, she said that was the moment she decided she wanted to become a professional singer.

In the late 1970s, after college, Vanessa began singing in Cleveland jazz clubs. She performed with such groups as the Blackshaw Brothers, Sam and Billy, and later with vibraphonist Cecil Rucker and Willie Smith’s Little Big Band. She made a record with the Cleveland Jazz All-Stars featuring saxophonist Ernie Krivda and trumpeter...
Kenny Davis at Peabody's Café in Cleveland Heights.

Determined to make it as a jazz singer, she moved to New York City in 1982. She got a day job teaching English at Prospect Heights High School in Brooklyn and began singing at such New York citadels of jazz as the Village Vanguard and Sweet Basil's with the Pharoah Sanders Quartet and Kenny Barron's Trio. She also spent a lot of time at Barry Harris’ Jazz Cultural Theatre where well-known jazz performers would come to teach struggling young artists who would present concerts on weekends. Rubin had stints singing with Lionel Hampton's big band, the Mercer Ellington Orchestra and Frank Foster’s group, the Loud Minority.

In 1991, Vanessa landed a recording contract with the RCA/Novus label. Her first album was Soul Eyes. Backing the Cleveland singer were pianist Kirk Lightsey, bassist Cecil McBee, drummer Lewis Nash, trumpeter Eddie Allen and pianist Onaje Allen Gumbs who also produced the album.

The liner notes were written by another former Cleveland, Willard Jenkins, who went from being the founder of the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society to executive director of the National Jazz Service Organization in Washington and a nationally respected jazz writer. In the album notes, Jenkins wrote, “It’s a rare occasion when a legitimate new jazz singer comes on the scene. Well, clap hands, here comes Vanessa Rubin!”

In her album acknowledgments, Vanessa thanked several Clevelanders, including her family and Dr. Lawrence Simpson of Cuyahoga Community College.

Some reviewers questioned whether Soul Eyes was a jazz record or a pop record. Many were reviewers who emerged in a period when jazz had become so esoteric that it cut itself off from popular music. They may have forgotten that in the 1940s, big band jazz was the most popular form of music and, as late as the 1950s, there was still a very thin line between pops and jazz. Such artists as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, the Four Freshmen and others made records that became very popular without surrendering their allegiances to jazz. In more recent years, such performers as Harry Connick, Jr., Natalie Cole and Diana Krall, all clearly jazz performers, were also appreciated by popular music fans.

Rubin believed she could be true to her jazz roots while producing music that also appealed to a wider audience. Making no apologies, she said, “For a long time, jazz was not being supported. Jazz is still part of the music business and there is a need for some young blood in the business. The audience is coming back and it’s time to get back to basics with something that is real and will last.”

At the 1992 Tri-C JazzFest, Vanessa got a standing ovation from her old Cleveland friends including some local jazz musicians she had sung with here. She was backed by Dennis Reynolds’ Jazz Revival Orchestra which included Ernie Krivida who had helped her and performed with her at various Cleveland clubs in the 1970s.

In 1993, she recorded another album, Pastiche, which included “I Only Have Eyes For You” and “In a Sentimental Mood.” That was followed by another CD in 1994, I Am Glad There Is You, a tribute to Carmen McRae. Other albums included Vanessa Rubin Sings in 1995, New Horizons in 1997, Language of Love in 1999, and Girl Talk in 2001. She also performed on a number of other albums.

### Vanessa Rubin Compact Discs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Album</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Soul Eyes (Novus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Pastiche (Novus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>I'm Glad There Is You, a tribute to Carmen McRae (Novus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Vanessa Rubin Sings (Novus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>New Horizons (BMG)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Language of Love (Telarc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Girl Talk (Telarc)</td>
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As guest with others:

- A Merry Christmas (RCA compilation)
- I Love Your Smile with Cecil Bridgewater (Mesa Bluenook)
- Mean What You Say with Cecil Bridgewater (Brownstone)
- We Got What You Need with James Williams (Evidence)
- The Jazz Heritage All-Stars Live at the Blue Note with Kenny Burrell (Concord)
- The Shade with Marc Puricelli (Music Masters)
- Get There with Dennis Rowland (Concord Vista)
- City Breeze with Naosuke Miyano Trio (Crown)
- Live at Peabody’s Café with Cleveland Jazz All-Stars (North Coast Jazz)
- This Is For You with Dewey Jeffries (Della)
- Jazz Directions 2, 1997 with East Carolina Univ. Jazz Ensemble (EquiJazz2)
- Christmas Songs with Ray Brown Trio (Telarc)
- A Swingin’ Wedding (RCA compilation)
- Jazz For Swingin’ Lovers (a compilation)

### Jeri Brown

She amazed Cleveland jazz audiences for 13 years when she performed here from 1976 to 1989. Later, she amazed jazz fans around the world with her sultry voice and vocal gymnastics.

The niece of jazz trumpeter Virgil Carter, the multi-faceted Jeri Brown was born in St. Louis in 1952 and began singing at jam sessions while she was still in grammar school. She began taking opera lessons at the age of 12, won a scholarship to Westmar College in Iowa, and toured Europe with a light opera chorale.

Brown moved to the Cleveland area in 1976 and got her masters degree in classical music at Kent State University. She taught music at Oberlin, Cleveland State University and Cuyahoga Community College while performing with a variety of local groups including the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. Her four- octave
Jeri Brown singing in Cleveland

range was always influenced by the sound of the horns behind her. She loved to use her voice to play off the instrumental passages of the musicians.

_The Plain Dealer_ once said of her, “Of all the young jazz singers to emerge in recent years, the one who has the greatest chance of inheriting the mantel of scat queen from Ella Fitzgerald is Jeri Brown.”

Critic Chris Colombi, Jr. wrote that Jeri Brown is “a consummate jazz musician whose axe happens to be her vocal chords.”

Brown left Cleveland in 1989 to join the faculty at Concordia University in Montreal. While teaching there, she began in 1991 to record for Justin Time Records. Her first album was _Mirage_ with pianist Fred Hersch and bassist Daniel Lessard. It was followed by _The Peacocks_ in 1993, _A Timeless Place_ with Jimmy Rowles in 1995, _Fresh Start_ and _April in Paris_ in 1996.

Jeri later moved to Nova Scotia to teach at St. Francis Xavier University.

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**Mar'Shal Baxter-Beckley**

She began singing in Cleveland and toured the country for 16 years, including performances at New York’s famed Apollo Theatre, and was even invited to sing at the White House.

Mar'Shal Baxter-Beckley said, “I started singing at about two or three years old. My mom was a gospel singer and we sang background for her in Cleveland.” They were called the Thomas Singers. Mar’Shal’s father had been a blues singer and guitar player in Mississippi and Missouri and played keyboard for the family group.

“When I was eight years old,” said Baxter-Beckley, “I decided I was going to play accordion.” Her parents went to a music store on Prospect Avenue and bought her an accordion. There was a story in a Cleveland newspaper that she was the first black girl who ever bought an accordion from that store.

Before long, the eight year old girl with a big voice and a new accordion began performing in public. “I started doing little gigs,” she said. “My father played guitar, his friend played bass, and my younger brother became the drummer.” She spent much of her youth singing and playing in all types of music settings, churches, clubs and parties – but not jazz.

One day when she was 12, she came home from school and her mother said, “You won’t believe who’s in the living room!” It was singer Marvin Gaye who had come to their home to ask Mar’Shal’s brother to play bass for him. She laughed as she recalled, “I walked in and fainted. I just passed out!”

After graduating from high school in 1966, she went on the road. In the late 1960s and early '70s, she sang at the Apollo Theatre in New York where she met such performers as comedians Redd Foxx and Slappy White. She also came home to Cleveland from time to time and performed with some major names here. “I had the opportunity to sing with Gladys Knight and Dionne Warwick at Leo’s Casino.” She also met – for the second time – singer Marvin Gaye. He remembered her, “You’re the little girl who passed out. I was so worried about that.” That night, he dedicated his show to her.

“I didn’t start singing jazz until I was 20 or 24,” she said. “I was introduced to a 20-piece jazz orchestra, Just a Touch of Class, and I started singing with them.”

After raising two children, including a son who produced his own record albums, Mar’Shal decided she didn’t want any more of the constant traveling. She came home and made Cleveland her base of operations.

“Why leave my hometown?” she asked herself. “I can make some noise here.”

Beginning in the early 1990s, she sang with a variety of jazz groups in Cleveland, including, for the first time,
a dixieland band. She added her gospel-trained singing voice to the New Orleans Stompers, delighting audiences with a style that reminded many of the early days of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. She said she enjoyed singing the old songs and having a wonderful time with a great bunch of guys who play jazz part time because they love the music.

She also recorded in Cleveland, including an album entitled *Believe in Me* with pianist Ray Odum and drummer Tony Bird.

In July of 1994, she was invited to sing for President Bill Clinton at the White House in Washington. The president was hosting a White House luncheon for PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to mark the signing of a new treaty.

"I really didn’t believe it," said Mar’Shal. "I thought it was a joke." But, after the reality of it set in, she went out and bought some new clothes. Her manager, Ray Odum, wrote a song for the occasion and asked her to add the lyrics. Literally overnight, she wrote the words to a song called "Presidential Blues."

With new clothing and a new song, they went to Washington. But things did not go quite as planned. Mar’Shal remembered what happened. "There was a tornado the night before. There was no power. We got a call saying, ‘We’re going to move it to the courtyard across the way.’ They called off the luncheon because Arafat and Rabin wanted to leave early because of the weather. President Clinton took them to the airport in his limo and got back just as I finished singing ‘My Country ‘Tis of Thee.’" Because of the power outage, she had to sing through a bullhorn.

The president apologized for what had happened and Mar’Shal gave him a recording of “Presidential Blues.”

The multi-faceted Mar’Shal Baxter-Beckley was also busy writing plays. She wrote almost a dozen plays which she produced and directed around the Midwest. As you might expect, her plays included a great deal of music and religion. One was entitled *Get Back to the Church.* Another was *The Cotton Club Moved to Harlem.* At times, she persuaded some of her jazz friends, including trumpeter Al Kinney and singer Archie McElrath, to perform in her plays.

Mar’Shal also operated a catering service.