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"TAXI costs a fraction of a songplugging company."

— Jimmy Clark,
TAXI Member

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Passenger Profile: Hank Jones

by Kenny Kerner

I usually spend a paragraph or two writing a simple introduction so y'all can get some insight into the monthly Passenger Profile. Not this time. Ladies and Gentlemen—the amazing Hank Jones!

How do you balance the life of a genealogist with that of a singer/songwriter. They are so unrelated!

I've had two passions in my life since I was very young: show-business AND genealogy. NBC's *Unsolved Mysteries* TV program even did an episode about me and how I started being a family history detective at age eight when I started exploring an old trunk in the basement of our home that had been brought to California in the Gold Rush in 1849.

At that same age, I started putting on shows in the backyard for my friends, writing scripts, and making hokey movies with my Dad's 16mm camera. Actually genealogy was very therapeutic for me during my years as a film actor: instead of waiting for the phone to ring for my next acting gig, I would head off to the genealogical library, write books, do seminars, and keep busy with my "other life."

How did you first get into the music/entertainment business?

I formed a high school rock band called Hank Jones & The White Bucks and we gradually made a name for ourselves throughout the San Francisco Bay Area in the late '50s. When I then went to Stanford, my singing and songwriting partner Dean Kay (who later went on to write Sinatra's classic "That's Life," has been elected to the ASCAP Board of Directors ten times, and hosts the popular "The Dean's List" blog) and I would spend our summers pitching our songs and our sound to A&R directors and publishers down in Hollywood.

Gradually, after four hard years of trying to get in the music business door, we did! We landed a

lucrative RCA recording contract (Steve Sholes, who stole Elvis from crafty Sam Phillips at Sun Records, signed us to the label), signed with Robbins, Feist & Miller as our publisher, and then won an audition over 1,000 other singing hopefuls to appear every day on the ABC TV *Tennessee Ernie Ford Show*, which we did for two years. We learned while America watched. We worked with an amazing group of artists in that period, from Jimmy Dean to Patsy Cline, Minnie Pearl, Flatt & Scruggs, Homer & Jethro, Dizzy Gillespie, George Shearing, Peter Lorré, Bobby Rydell, and even Bobby Kennedy – the list never ended.

For our readers, can you list some of the movies and/or television shows you were in as an actor?

I was blessed to be thought of as a member of the Disney Stock Company of character actors whom they used often in their live-action features in the '60s and '70s.

I co-starred with Peter Ustinov, Dean Jones, and Suzanne Pleshette in Walt's last film *Blackbeard's Ghost*, and appeared in seven others at The Mouse House including *Shaggy D.A.*, *The Cat From Outer Space*, and *Herbie Rides Again*. I also was featured in Universal's *Young Warriors*,



Successful TAXI member
Hank Jones

20th Century Fox's *Tora-Tora-Tora* and (my proudest moment) Paramount's *Village Of The Giants* - once voted one of the 50 WORST Films of All Time!!!

As to TV shows, I was on most every sit-com in the '60s and '70s, including recurring roles on *My Three Sons* and *The Patty Duke Show*, and then guest star appearances on *Love Boat*, *Love American Style*, *The Jeffersons*, *Mod Squad*, *Petticoat Junction*, *Mork And Mindy*, *Family Affair*, and a host of others.

I guess my most interesting role was in playing Ringo Starr's twin brother on the NBC TV Special version of Mark Twain's *Prince & The Pauper*. The make-up was so good you literally couldn't tell us apart. I learned then one of life's great lessons: being a Beatle was a GREAT way to meet girls!

Who were your songwriting influences through the years?

Believe it or not, I go way back to Victor Herbert in regard to melody influences. I loved Cole Porter, Rodgers & Hammerstein & Hart, Irving Berlin, Michel Legrand, Willie Nelson, Lieber and Stoller, and especially the Gershwins. I got to know Ira Gershwin in his later years: he was a quiet, humble man. I have letters Ira wrote to me where he was mad as hell that one of the new Gershwin biographies gave *him* credit for certain songs in *Porgy & Bess* that he DIDN'T write, and how he wanted to give credit where credit was due to the rightful lyricist.

Of all the songs you've written, which two are your favorites and why?

"Midnight Swinger" which Mel Tormé recorded on Capitol. I was flabbergasted and flattered that he found my tune up to his immensely high standards. I keep updating the lyric on this tune to keep it relevant: initially the line written "You watch Johnny Carson 'til you turn out the light" is NOW "You watch Jimmy Kimmel 'til you turn out the light..." etc. Also my new-age/spiritual song "The Other Side," which I originally wrote as a closing poem for my book *Psychic Roots: Serendipity & Intuition In Genealogy*; so many people used the poem at memorial services for their departed friends that I then set the poem to music.

Please explain to our readers, briefly, how you came to get signed first to RCA then to Capitol.

Good old plain persistence and hard work – never taking "no" for an answer, and sweet-talking the kind secretaries at every record company in Hollywood to get us in for appointments with record company brass. We wore them down! Dean Kay and I were signed as "Hank Jones and

Dean Kay" to RCA (when it was RCA Victor) and later to Bob Keene's DeFi label. When we recorded with Ernie Ford on his Capitol label, we were credited as "appearing thru the courtesy of RCA Victor Records."

Do you write songs alone or do you collaborate? If so, with whom do you write?

In my early years, I wrote with my singing partner Dean and also with Larry Ray (who went on to run Tumbleweed Records for Gulf & Western, and was one of the top record promo men in town for years – he was responsible for hits from Judy Collins, Jack Jones, Joe Cocker, and The Doors). However, most all my later songs were written alone.

With all of the success you've achieved, why become a TAXI member? How could they help you?

I had cartons and files of songs I'd written and even masters I'd sung on after leaving RCA as an artist. They languished at my home for nearly fifty years – my garage overfloweth! – until I decided to join TAXI after hearing excellent word of mouth and reviews from other members. One of the BEST professional moves I've ever made.

What career accomplishment are you most proud of?

One day on the air on the *Ford Show* Ernie asked a few of the cast members if we could spend an hour with anybody at all from history, who would it be? Our announcer said Lincoln, our vocalist said Jesus, and I said Stan Laurel! I was a huge fan of all the wonderful Laurel & Hardy movies.

Two weeks later I got a phone call at my Toluca Lake home ... a soft English voice said, "Is this Hank Jones? This is Stan Laurel speaking ... Lincoln and Jesus weren't available." Stan and I developed a friendship and bond – he really became my mentor, having no agenda except in helping me to have a successful career and a happy life. He was a dear, sweet man, and I was honored to get to know him.

How has TAXI changed your perspective of the business?

It's shown me how music has changed and grown. When I was recording in the '60s on RCA with Dean, we made our singles and our album on just four track tape, with hardly any pickups



"I think I'm lucky that I've found out about TAXI so early in my career."

— Djamel,
TAXI Member

"Nothing bad can come from belonging to this unbelievable organization that has definitely allowed my songs to be stronger than ever."

— Justine Kaye,
TAXI Member



"I have been a member of TAXI for the last two years and have enjoyed all the perks membership has offered."

— Dwight Nichols,
TAXI Member

"Thanks to TAXI I no longer have a day job! The membership fee was a drop in the bucket compared to what I have earned because of TAXI!"

— George Nelson,

TAXI Member

for clams or wrong notes. Honestly, I miss those live sessions: adrenalin flowed freely, because no one wanted to screw up in front of anybody else – there was a strong sense of DANGER at every recording session. We had the crème de la crème backing us up in those days: the fabled Hollywood “Wrecking Crew” of musicians like Tommy Tedesco, James Burton, Hal Blaine, Earl Palmer, Carol Kaye, plus Glen Campbell, Barney Kessell, Leon Russell, Plas Johnson, Billy Preston, on and on; our arrangers were tops – Jimmie Haskell and Jack Nitzsche. Now with all the technical advances it’s a whole new world – and I’m learning slowly as best as I can.

What are the most recent successes you’ve experienced as a writer?

Having ace music supervisor John Houlihan place my song “Born Lonely” on CBS’s *Vegas* TV show, signing my song “I’m Gonna Laugh ’Til I Cry” with a leading film & TV music publisher, having my song “Losers-Weepers” pass muster for TAXI’s own ’60’s rock CD, and signing up eleven of my masters of songs I’ve written with a thriving music publisher that specializes in vintage masters music. [All of those deals and placements happened through TAXI connections. - Ed.]

What have you learned from becoming a TAXI member?

That there are still nice people with integrity in the music business, and that THE SONG is still *the* key in a record’s success.

What are your remaining goals for 2013?

One of the hymns we used to sing with Ernie Ford on his TV show was “If I Can Help Somebody As I Pass Along – Then My Living Shall Not Be In Vain.” I’d like a few more years to be able to try and do just that.

Name: Hank Jones

Residence: San Diego, CA

Occupation: Actor, Songwriter, Singer, Genealogist, Author, Speaker

Year Joined
TAXI: 2010

Website: <http://www.hankjones.com>



For more info about TAXI call

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