



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside@Out

PRODUCED BY THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT OF THE DENVER CENTER THEATRE COMPANY

MAY 2004



GREGORY PORTER • PHOTO BY GARY ISAACS

NAT KING COLE & ME

A MUSICAL HEALING

May 13 - June 5, 2004 • The Stage Theatre

Gregory Porter has a story to tell; a story of yearning, inspiration and true love. Growing up in California in the 80's he had a strong sense of family and self-worth thanks to a hard-working mother. Never knowing his father, a spiritual connection is made while listening to an old Nat King Cole record and he finds a hero, a father and a friend. The music and lyrics take on a new meaning as Porter performs "Unforgettable," "Smile," "Sweet Lorraine," "Ballerina," "LOVE," "When I Fall in Love" and more. Gregory Porter was an original Broadway cast member of *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* and joined the National Tour of *The Civil War*. He has performed on "Late Night With David Letterman," "The Rosie O'Donnell Show" and NBC's "Today Show." This young man reaches into his soul and emerges to touch our hearts.

Special thanks to the
**HAROLD AND MIMI
STEINBERG
CHARITABLE TRUST**

for supporting new American plays at
the Denver Center Theatre Company.



Biography of NAT KING COLE

THE MAN BEHIND THE INSPIRATION

The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return.

Eden Ahbez, "Nature Boy"

Nathaniel Adams Coles was born on March 17, 1919 in Montgomery, Alabama. He was born into a prominent black family; his father was pastor of the First Baptist Church. In 1921 the family migrated to Chicago. He learned piano by ear from his mother – who was choir director in the church – from the age of four. When he was 12 years old he took lessons in classical piano, "everything from Bach to Rachmaninoff." Jazz was all-pervasive in Chicago, and Cole's school was a musical hotbed, producing musicians of the stature such as Ray Nance, Eddie South and Milt Hinton. Cole's first professional break came touring with the show *Shuffle Along*, a revival of the first all-black show to make it to Broadway, which he joined with his bass-playing brother, Eddie. Stranded in Los Angeles when the show folded, Cole looked for club work and found it at the Century Club on Santa Monica Boulevard. It was a hangout for musicians and the young pianist made a splash: "All the musicians dug him," said Robert "Bumps" Blackwell, "that cat could play! He was unique."

In 1939 Cole formed an innovative trio with Oscar Moore on guitar and Wesley Prince on bass, eschewing the noise of drums. Like Fats Waller in the previous generation, Cole managed to combine pleasing and humorous ditties with piano stylings that were state-of-the-art. Times had moved on, and Cole had a suave sophistication that expressed the new aspirations of the black community. In 1943 he recorded his "Straighten Up And Fly Right" for Capitol Records – it was an instant hit and Cole's future as a pop success was assured. In 1946 "The Christmas Song" added strings, starting a process that would lead to Cole emerging as a

middle-of-the-road singer, accompanied by leading arrangers and conductors including Nelson Riddle, Gordon Jenkins, Ralph Carmichael, Pete Rugolo and Billy May. In the 40s Cole made several memorable sides, including "Sweet Lorraine," "It's Only A Paper Moon," "(Get Your Kicks) On Route 66" and "(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons." By 1948, "Nature Boy" (a U.S. Number One hit), where Cole was accompanied by Frank DeVol's Orchestra moved away from small-group jazz, towards his eventual position as one of the most popular vocalists of the day. Absolute confirmation came in 1950, when Cole, with Les Baxter conducting Nelson Riddle's lush arrangement of "Mona Lisa," spent eight weeks at the top of the US chart with what was to become one of his most celebrated recordings. Throughout the 50s the singles hits continued to flow.

During the 50s he was urged to make films, but his appearances were few and far between, including character parts in *Blue Gardenia*, *China Gate* and *Night Of The Quarter Moon*. Cole's most effective film role came in 1958 when he played W.C. Handy in *St. Louis Blues*.

It was not so much rock 'n' roll that concerned Cole's purist fans during the 60s: they had acute reservations about a Sherman Brothers number, "Ramblin' Rose" (1962), the singer's first big hit in four years, which came complete with a "twangy C&W feeling." They also objected to "Those Lazy-Hazy-Crazy Days Of Summer," which also made the Top 10 in the following year. Cole himself felt that he was "just adjusting to the market: as soon as you start to make money in the popular field, they scream about how good you were in the old days, and what a bum you are now."

Before his death from lung cancer in 1965, Cole was planning a production of James Baldwin's play *Amen Corner*, showing an interest in radical black literature at odds with his image as a sentimental crooner. Nat Cole's voice, which floats but-

Biography of NAT KING COLE

C O N T I N U E D

ter-won't-melt vowel sounds in an easy, dark drawl, is one of the great gifts of black music. No matter how sentimental the arrangements, he always managed to sing as if it mattered. In 1991 his daughter, Natalie Cole, revived his "Unforgettable," singing a duet with his recorded vocal. Perhaps, like Louis Armstrong, the most moving aspect of his legacy is the way his music cuts across the usual boundaries – chart-watcher, jazz-heads and rock 'n' rollers can all have a good time with his music.

(This man) gave so much and still had so much more to give. Sometimes death isn't as tragic as not knowing how to live. This nice man knew how to live and knew how to make others glad they were living.

– Jack Benny, Eulogy at Nat King Cole's funeral Feb. 18, 1965

A Brief HISTORY of Music, 1935-1970

The function of pop music is to be consumed.

– Pierre Boulez, conductor

In the 1930s the Depression was at its height, but as the decade waned, 1939 brought the rumblings of war. Hitler marched into Austria and then declared war on Poland, Great Britain and France. Despite the poverty and the threats of conflict, the United States escaped reality by listening and dancing to the Big Bands of the Swing era. According to the *New Grove Encyclopedia of Jazz* swing is a name “given to a jazz style and to a related phase of popular music that originated around 1930 when New Orleans jazz was in decline.”¹ It is characterized by an emphasis on solo improvisation, larger ensembles, a repertoire based on popular songs and more equal weight given to the four beats of a musical measure. The development of swing coincided with the emergence by 1932 of the 13-piece dance band (three trumpets, two trombones, four reed instruments, piano, guitar, double bass and drum set). Each band had its own recognizable signature: Benny Goodman played his clarinet over a grooving rhythm section; Glenn Miller took his clarinet lead over four saxophones. Tommy Dorsey’s smooth trombone floated over a full orchestra; Duke Ellington’s sophisticated piano stylings fronted Johnny Hodges on alto sax, Rex Stewart on trumpet and Count Basie with his piano created a jumpin’ sound. In 1941, the Big Bands began a trend of using featured vocalists and singers such as Frank Sinatra, Dinah Shore and Doris Day.

The 1940s saw the spread of World War II. In 1941, the Japanese attacked our naval base at Pearl Harbor and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war on Japan and Germany. With war came the draft of eligible men for service; women’s entrance into the work force and the rationing of food and gasoline. Nevertheless, the Big Bands provided the needed release with love ballads and jump tunes. Glenn Miller did “Moonlight Serenade” and “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree” while Duke Ellington played “Don’t Get Around

Much Anymore.” Winston Churchill and Roosevelt conferred in 1943 over post-war plans and 1944 saw the beginning of the end with the invasion of Normandy. In 1945 the war ended – and so did the Big Band era. Because the bandleaders wanted \$4,000 a night for appearances, with an option of 60% of the profits, ballroom operators had to raise prices to even make a small profit. At this time, there was a cutback in individual spending on entertainment because of the uncertainty of the immediate post-war period. Thus, many ballrooms were sold and transformed into supermarkets or cinemas. To be fair to the bands, salaries and traveling expenses were spiraling and they, too, were in a bind. Music also was changing. Bebop, country, rhythm and blues, and various ethnic sounds were capturing the attention of the youth population which was gaining financial strength. The sheer numbers were able to create and sustain demands for a new kind of music that would truly emerge in the latter part of the 1950s.

The mid-1940s saw the beginnings of the United Nations and the establishment of the Atomic Energy Commission. In 1947 Jackie Robinson became the first African-American athlete to enter the Major Leagues with his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The following year saw the passage of the Marshall Plan which aided war-torn Europe while Winston Churchill headed the Hague Conference for European unity. In an atmosphere promoting peace and harmony, Nat King Cole’s recording of “Nature Boy” was a resounding hit.

As the 1950s began, the top songs on the charts included “Good Night, Irene,” “Mona Lisa” sung by Nat King Cole, “I Can Dream, Can’t I” by the Andrews Sisters, and “That Lucky Old Sun” by Frankie Laine. By the end of the decade, not one performer from the top ten of 1950 had made it into the top ten of 1959. However, in 1951, the number three song was Nat King Cole’s “Too Young.” This ballad was about five years before its time, in that it deplored the fact that parents were not understanding and that the “establishment” lacked romance. “Too Young” may even have had a part in precipitating the “generation gap.” *They tried to tell us we’re too young/Too young to really be in love/They say that love’s a*

A Brief HISTORY of Music, 1935-1970

C O N T I N U E D

word/A word we've only heard/But can't begin to know the meaning of,... Does anyone have to be told who "they" are?²

In 1954, a pop group from Canada called the Crew Cuts had a huge hit with "Sh-Boom," a jumpy kind of love song that was fun to listen to and sing. The next year rock 'n' roll exploded.

This amalgamation of rhythm and blues influenced by country and western produced hits such as Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock" and Chuck Berry's "Maybelline." The teenagers of the USA finally had their own music and, what's more, it opened up the doors for both white and African American performers. Elvis Presley may have been The King, but The Platters, four black guys and a girl, had hits with "The Great Pretender" and "My Prayer," while Bill Dogget, a rhythm and blues pianist, played "Honky Tonk" into the number ten spot on the top ten. By 1957 rock 'n' roll was here to stay. Dick Clark's "American Bandstand" was on TV six times a week, playing to a total of 20 million viewers a day. On the show, Clark paraded a stream of top rock stars before the cameras and his microphone; as they lip-synched their latest hit, adoring teenagers from local high schools danced the latest craze. Needless to say, Clark wielded a powerful influence over the recording industry and what we heard on our radios.

The Sounds of the Sixties were punctuated by the

election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and the assassinations of Kennedy and Martin Luther King. As the Vietnam war escalated, young people rebelled against the conflict and the mores of society that restrained their freedom. There was turbulence over race issues and the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement and Bob Dylan wrote his songs of protest such as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Masters of War." People gained release in the music of the decade and its performances by The Beatles, Chubby Checker, The Supremes, The Monkees and The Rolling Stones, among others. The decade ended with men landing on the moon, a dream that went back to man's earliest days on earth.

The sixties had made so many casualties, its war and its music had run power off the same circuit for so long they didn't even have to fuse.

– Michael Herr. *Breathing Out* (1977)

ORIGINAL Songs for NAT KING COLE & ME

music and lyrics by Gregory Porter

“Dreamboat,” “Hey Little Boy,” “In Heaven They All Get Along,” “Never to Know,”
“Sun and the Moon,” “Unintended Consequence”

Songs made FAMOUS by NAT KING COLE

“Dance Ballerina Dance” composers Bob Russell and Carl Sigman, Harrison Music Corp; “I Wonder Who My Daddy Is” by Freddie Cole; “Looking Back” writers Benton/Hendricks/Otis, Iza Music Corporation (administered by Famous Music Corporation) (ASCAP) – Used by permission / All rights reserved; “L.O.V.E.” composed by Gabler, Screen Gems/EMI music, All rights reserved; “Mona Lisa” writers Ray Evans and Jay Livingston, Famous Music Corporation (ASCAP) – Used by permission / All rights reserved; “Nature Boy” by Eden Ahbez, Golden World, All rights reserved; “Pick Yourself Up” words and music by Dorothy Fields and Jerome Kern, Polygram International Publishing and Aldi Music Company, All rights reserved; “Smile” Music by Charles Chaplin, words by John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons, ©1954 by Bourne Co., Copyright renewed, All rights reserved, International copyright secured, ASCAP; “Straighten Up and Fly Right” by Nat King Cole and J. Mills, EMI Mills Music, All rights reserved; “Sweet Lorraine” music by Cliff Burwell, words by Mitchell Parish, EMI Mills Music, All rights reserved; “Unforgettable” by Irving Gordon, ©1951 by Bourne Co., Copyright renewed, All rights reserved, International copyright secured, ASCAP; “What’ll I Do” music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, used by special arrangement with The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, on behalf of the Estate of Irving Berlin, 1065 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 2400, New York, NY 10018. All rights reserved; “When I Fall in Love” words by Edward Heyman, music by Victor Young, Warner / Chappell Music, All rights reserved.

ACTIVITIES

1. How do you define a hero?
2. What is a mentor?
3. Do you have heroes and mentors in your life?
4. How important is it to have heroes and mentors in your life? Is it important at all?
5. Think about the music you listen to. Ask your parents about the music they listened to when they were your age.
What are the differences?
What are the similarities?
How does your music relate to current events?
How did your parent’s music relate to current events?
6. How big of a role does music play in your life?
7. Does the music you listen to have any significance in the way you view your place in life?

Colorado Model Content Standard for Music – #5. Students will relate music to various historical and cultural traditions.

Bibliography

pg. 2-3

N O T E S & S O U R C E S

- www.Highstreets.co.uk
- www.jazzwithbobporlocher.com

pg. 4-5

N O T E S & S O U R C E S

- Kernfeld, Barry, ed. *The New Grove Encyclopedia of Jazz*. London: Macmillan Press, 1988.
- Stowe, David W. *Swing Changes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Symphonette Society. *Our Century in Music*. New York: The Stonehouse Press, Inc, 1974.

1. Kernfeld, p. 232.
2. Symphonette Society, p. 112.

Administration 303.893.4000
Box Office 303.893.4100
www.denvercenter.org

Katharine Tyson • Director of Communications
Tracy Witherspoon • Editor
Sally Gass • Contributing Writer
Dane Witherspoon • Audience Development Manager
Tina Risch • Community Outreach & Director of Group Sales
Megan Cranston • Designer



FLORENCE RUSTON

STEINBERG CHARITABLE TRUST



JANUS

Microsoft



MAYOR'S COMMISSION OF ART, CULTURE, AND FILM



Denver Center Theatre Company

Donovan Marley, Artistic Director • A division of The Denver Center for the Performing Arts

This document was produced on equipment provided by

IKON

Document Efficiency At Work.™