

A NOVEL BASED ON THE LIFE OF
HENRY MANCINI

GRACE NOTES

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PROJECT

Prologue

On a trip to Pennsylvania in 1988 to conduct the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Henry Mancini felt an unmistakable tug luring him back to West Aliquippa, the town where he'd grown up. It had been decades since Henry had been back to see what had become of the place where his life and musical journey began. The musician friends traveling with him from Los Angeles were happy to accompany their beloved bandleader on the impromptu roots trip.

Henry shared some of his personal history with his companions on the drive. He told them how West Aliquippa was once a thriving steel town where the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company employed the majority of the town's residents, including his father. It was not unlike other Rust Belt towns of that era, filled with hard-working immigrant families. As they pulled into what was left of the town, it was clear that Henry had not prepared himself for the level of economic devastation that had befallen West Aliquippa, which seemed to have been reduced to

dust and broken glass. There were no people on the street—just a feral cat that darted out in front of their car.

They drove around until Henry was able to trace his steps back to Beaver Avenue, which took longer than it should have because things were not all where they used to be. As they turned a corner, he felt a bit disoriented as he searched for numbers on the houses. Then he finally found it: 401, his childhood home. It was here that he lived with his parents, Quinto and Anna, who had immigrated to America from Italy. The car came to a stop and Henry got out slowly, cautiously approaching the modest clapboard structure that once held all his dreams. He never would have expected this experience to affect him so deeply. As he slowly sat on the front steps, memories came back to him in a flood, like the one that nearly wiped out the entire town when he was a boy. He remembered sitting on this same front step watching houses wash downriver, animals clinging to the roofs for dear life. He hadn't thought about that in a long time.

After a few moments, they returned to the car and drove further into town. Henry wanted to see if Aliquippa High School was still standing, although he was doubtful the town had enough people left to sustain it. But as the car pulled up to the school, Henry was encouraged to see signs of life. Flanked by his fellow musicians, he entered through the front doors and found his way to the music room, where his eyes were drawn to a little spinet piano—a smaller and much less expensive model than a regular piano. It was the very same one he used to play all those years ago when he was a student there. He placed his fingers on the keys and closed his eyes, remembering everything . . .

Chapter One

SONS OF ITALY

Italian family life is one rich in tradition and flush with culture. The Mancini family was no different in this respect. Enrico Nicola Mancini, or “Henry” as he was called, was born to immigrant parents willing to make every sacrifice necessary to ensure a better life for their child. Despite their desire for a large family, Quinto and Anna Mancini only ever had one child. Henry was born on April 16, 1924, and was named after Quinto’s brother who died in Yugoslavia in World War I. Anna suffered several miscarriages before Henry and doctors advised her not to have any more children. This came as a blow to the couple, but it also meant that every bit of their energy and attention could be poured into their beloved son. Perhaps being an only child named after an uncle who perished at a young age put a great deal of pressure on Henry to accomplish extraordinary things. And he did.

Forte piano is a musical term used to denote a mode of playing that is strong yet gentle. This may be the best way to

think about Henry's father, Quinto, who was infused with a boundless love of music but was simultaneously a man of steel in two ways: a steel worker by trade, and a stoic old-world Italian who rarely showed much outward expression of love for his wife or son. He was the ultimate study in contradictions as a piccolo flute-playing steel worker.

Quinto and Anna emigrated from Abruzzo, Italy, on the coast of the magnificent Adriatic Sea. Quinto had been somewhat hardened by life by an uncle who cheated Quinto's father out of his inheritance and forced Quinto and his siblings off their father's land. A professional musician for a time, Quinto was determined to prevent his son from following his same life in the steel mills, where he found work in the new world. His dream was for Henry to go to college and earn a degree; Quinto was instrumental in this effort as Henry's first music teacher. After he'd taught his son as much as he could, Quinto sought the best instruction for him. Even at the depths of the Depression, the steel mills of West Aliquippa never stopped, and Quinto and Anna were able to scrape together the money needed to ensure their son would have the best opportunities they could possibly provide, even if that meant going without elsewhere in their lives. One winter, Anna went without an adequate overcoat so that there would be enough money for Henry's lessons.

Quinto was a strict father. As Henry's music teacher, he could be highly critical of his young son at times. When Henry was eight years old, Quinto contracted a terrible case of the mumps, which is often excruciatingly painful for an adult. One day during his illness, Quinto was stuck indoors with Henry and sent him to the closet to get two cases down from the upper shelf. Henry dragged a chair across the floor, climbed on top of it, and pulled the cases down.

“What’s in here, Papa? BB guns? Butterfly nets? A telescope?”

Henry’s father looked at him sternly. “We’re going to put all of your excess energy to good use, boy. Handle those carefully! Put them on the table. Over here.”

Henry did as he was told. Then he placed his hands on the locks and popped the first case open. Inside was a shiny flute in three separate pieces.

“That one is too big for you yet. Open the other one.”

Henry popped the locks on the second case and found a similar instrument. It was about half the size of the flute.

“Are we going to play music, Papa?”

“It will take many hours of practice before you will be able to play.”

This did not seem to discourage young Henry.

“Is this a child’s flute?”

“It is a flautino, but most would call it a piccolo. That is not entirely correct, though, because a piccolo just means the smallest and most high-pitched of a family of instruments. So, you have your violin piccolo, piccolo clarinet, and timpani piccolo. But we are getting ahead of ourselves . . .”

Henry’s first lesson began in earnest with one command from his father: “*Blow.*”

Henry blew. He blew. And he blew. But no sound came out. He continued blowing until he felt light-headed, but *still* no sound came out. Quinto was soon exhausted and fell asleep without any noise to keep him awake. Henry just kept on blowing.

It took many more lessons for Henry to develop the embouchure, or correct position of the mouth—to make any sound come out of the flautino. He learned that even this could be a misleading name because some composers used it to refer

to a small recorder, making it difficult to determine for sure what they actually intended just by looking at the written music. After learning to finally coax sound out of his instrument, Henry was a fast learner and played plenty of notes, including lots of wrong ones. Whenever this happened, Quinto would reach inside their birdhouse for its wooden perch and whack Henry's fingers with it.

At school, Henry's best friend, Jack, noticed Henry's red knuckles.

"Hey, Henry," he whispered, trying not to draw the teacher's attention. "What happened to your hands?"

Henry looked down, then back at Jack. "Bar fight."

Jack could hardly stifle a laugh as the teacher looked up from her desk. This was one of many chuckles the two boys would share. Henry was always making Jack laugh with his extra-dry sense of humor. Class let out and, once they were in the hallway, Jack asked about the red knuckles again, hoping to get a straight answer this time.

"So, are you gonna tell me what really happened?"

Henry shrugged. "My father whacks my knuckles every time I play a wrong note."

"Jeez, I bet you don't make the same mistake twice!"

"I try not to."

"But you're getting so good on that little flute. Maybe I should get my father to whack my fingers when I practice trumpet."

"Give a try. But just remember, it's the patented Mancini method."

"Got it."

They laughed again heartily, running outside into the bright sunshine.

Once Henry had become a competent piccolo player, his father broke the news to him that the two of them were going to join the local Sons of Italy band.

“But I don’t want to play in front of people,” Henry protested.

“Nonsense,” his father replied.

The Sons of Italy band played all the local graduations, parades, and games, so there was always a big audience.

“I really don’t.”

“You would rather waste your God-given talent?”

Henry’s mother, Anna, understood that Henry could be very shy at times. “Must you be so hard on him, my dear?” she said to Quinto.

Henry turned to his mother with pleading eyes. “Why must I play in front of others, Mother?”

“When the Sons of Italy band plays on holy days, my son, it is for the glory of God. Sure, the strongest men in the town carry the saint’s statue through the streets in parade, but it is the Sons of Italy band who lead the way.”

“Can Jack do it too? He’s getting pretty good on the trumpet. He even asked his father to whack his fingers like you do to me when he plays a wrong note.”

“Is he Italian?” Quinto asked.

“No, he’s Irish.”

“Tell him to start a Sons of Ireland band.”

Against Henry’s protesting, he and his father joined the Sons of Italy band, which practiced at the Sons of Italy Hall. At first, it was just as bad as Henry expected. There he got his weekly ration of Puccini, Rossini, and Verdi. They met every Sunday at eleven a.m. after mass to rehearse. At events, Henry disliked performing in front of people even more than he thought he would,

though he really didn't know why. One rare Saturday on which the band did not have an engagement, Quinto decided to take Henry to a movie theater in Pittsburgh. Henry had seen many of the silent films of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Laurel and Hardy, but this would be his first talkie.

They walked up to the box office, where his father paid for their tickets. As they entered the theater, Henry's eyes grew wide. He ran his hands over the plush red-velvet seats, following behind his father. Once they sat down, he felt his chin tip toward the ceiling as he marveled at all that glittered above him in vibrant colors and gold leaf. Chandeliers sparkled like objects dropped straight from heaven. Henry had never been surrounded by so much opulence and knew he was in for something special.

Just as soon as the house lights dimmed and the curtain went up, Henry heard the opening notes of a spectacular fanfare. On the screen, three knights on horseback came into view, flickering in black and white. The film title read:

The Crusades

Produced and Directed by Cecil B. DeMille

Henry thought that sounded like quite a grand name. A few seconds later, the words *Music by Rudolph Kopp* came across the screen and Henry later made sure he remembered that. The film's music was so magnificent and affective that Henry felt transported directly into the story. He was thunderstruck. The music filled up his entire being to the point that he could feel his insides vibrate. As an angry mob cheered onscreen, a group of men used ropes to pull a large cross off the top of a building and the crowd erupted when it was smashed to pieces. Henry yanked on his father's coat without taking his eyes off the screen for a

second. He whispered into his father's ear, "How do they fit the whole orchestra behind the screen, Father?"

Quinto shot Henry a look in the dark and, in a dialect spoken in his native Abruzzi, answered him. "You misunderstand, *cafone*," he told Henry, using an Italian word for a rube or a dope, but Henry didn't seem to care what name he was being called. Shaking his head, Quinto tried to explain. "The orchestra is not behind the movie. It is *part* of the movie."

Henry scrunched his brow, unable to comprehend what his father was saying. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the film and wanted his father to stop talking because he just wasn't making sense. Henry decided right then and there that he wanted to write music for the movies too, even if he didn't totally understand how it was *part* of the movie.

When they returned home to West Aliquippa, Henry ran straight to Jack's house. He couldn't wait to tell him all about his marvelous experience. He breathlessly tried to explain everything he'd seen and heard.

"There were knights on horseback and the horses were draped in shiny banners. There was King Richard the Lionheart, and swords and flags and coats of arms and battles. And the *music*! You wouldn't believe it! It played almost throughout the whole movie without stopping. I thought that the orchestra was been behind the screen."

"And was it?"

"No. My father said it was *in* the movie."

"Well, if they can get talking into the movies now, maybe that's how they get the music in it too." Jack thought long and hard about this. "Oh, I know! The orchestra must play along with the actors, you know, off to the side, where the camera can't see them."

Henry began nodding his head. "Hey, why didn't I think of that?!"

The days that Henry and Jack had together to run free and play to their hearts' content were special to them because Henry was so often ill. If there were a childhood disease, it seemed that Henry was destined to catch it. One day after school when Henry was home with the chicken pox, Jack showed up at the door. Henry's mother answered.

"Hello, Jack. I'm sorry, but Henry is ill with chicken pox," she said.

"Yes, I know. My mother sent me because she wants me to catch it."

Anna Mancini was puzzled. "Some of these American customs are so strange. Very well," Anna said, ushering Jack inside.

"Besides, I have to tell Henry that I signed us both up for the school play. It's called *Babes in Toyland*. It's about these two children who run away to a magical place called Toyland and their parents have to go and search for them, but then they also get swept up in the magic of the place."

"That sounds wonderful. And that is very kind of you to sign Henry up. Maybe it will help him with his stage fright."

Jack leaned in to whisper to Mrs. Mancini, not knowing if Mr. Mancini was home from the steel mill yet. "Henry doesn't have stage fright."

"No?" Anna asked.

"He just doesn't like playing in the Sons of Italy band."

Jack smiled and strode off toward Henry's room, where he found his friend covered with red dots.

"And here I thought you might be faking," Jack told Henry. "I came to cheer you up. I volunteered us both for the school Christmas play, *Babes in Toyland*."

Henry shrugged.

“You’re not mad?” Jack asked.

“Not as long as you do it too.”

“I need you to keep it from getting too dull.”

Quiet as Henry was, Jack always knew that Henry’s silence was really just giving him time to set up his next joke. When rehearsals for the play got underway, Henry took to wearing his costume hat backwards. This got a laugh out of everyone and only encouraged Henry to continue to keep clowning. Doing *Babes in Toyland* taught Henry a very important lesson: you could goof off all you wanted in practice, but when it came time for the real performance, it was time to get serious. The night of the show, Quinto and Anna sat in the audience feeling very proud of their son.

“Perhaps he is growing out of his stage fright,” Quinto whispered to Anna.

She smiled and patted him on the leg lovingly.

“His flute playing is improving greatly as well,” Quinto told her. “It is possible he will surpass me soon.”

Anna was surprised. She was not a musician but always thought that her husband was an impressive flautist. She would have thought it would take many years for Henry to reach his level.

“*Superare?*” She asked, using the Italian for *surpass*. “Does that mean he is better than you already?”

He gave her a stern look. He was a proud man, after all.

When Henry wasn’t practicing flute or running around with Jack, he could be found at the house of a neighbor who owned a player piano. He would sit for hours, mesmerized by watching the keys move up and down on their own accord as they played

syncopated ragtime tunes. “The Entertainer,” “Maple Leaf Rag,” and other compositions by Scott Joplin set his mind ablaze as he soaked up and memorized the entrancing rhythms. After spending weeks with this piano, one day the neighbor showed him how to switch the rolls, and with the player turned off, Henry inadvertently pressed a few of the piano keys. Suddenly, he realized it could be played manually! It was as if a portal to another world opened and he became completely enamored with this new instrument that allowed him to look at and hear music from another angle. He sat down and began to play both of his favorite Joplin songs by ear.

That night at dinner, he excitedly told his parents what had happened and asked if he could begin taking piano lessons.

“Is this a way to get out of playing in the Sons of Italy band?” Quinto asked.

“No, Father. I want to play flute, piccolo, and piano.”

Quinto and Anna smiled at their boy and his ambition. As soon as he began studying piano, it was clear he would become a formidable multi-instrumentalist. The only problem for Henry was that the music teachers of the time were only teaching classical. Henry enjoyed composers such as Ravel and Debussy, but the style in general did not make his heart beat faster the way ragtime did. Studying strictly classical music left him feeling stilted when it came to practicing and playing. He even preferred playing Italian folk music styles such as the tarantella—a style of music to accompany a dance for those bitten by a wolf spider who needed to dance explosively for many hours to an upbeat tempo in order to sweat out the poison delivered by the bite.

During a Sons of Italy performance in which many complex pieces were played, someone Henry had never met before approached him at the end of the parade and introduced himself.

“Henry? I’m Joshua, the drum major from the Aliquippa High marching band,” the young man said.

Henry and Quinto both turned.

“I wanted to compliment you on your playing!” Joshua said.

“Thanks,” Henry sheepishly replied.

“How old are you?”

“Twelve.”

“How would you like to play in the high school band?”

“Sure, someday.”

“No, I mean this year.”

“But I won’t be in high school for another two years.”

“What if I told you that the band director sent me over here to ask you to play with us *now*?”

Henry looked over at his father, not sure what he was missing.

“Of course he will,” Quinto said.

“Yes?” Henry did not entirely mean to answer in the form of a question, but it didn’t change Joshua’s reaction.

“Fantastic! Practice is every day after school. We’ll see you on Monday, then!”

Henry watched Joshua run off to rejoin his friends waiting for him on the sidewalk—it was clear that he was very happy as he stuck out his palm to smack hands with the others.

Quinto turned to Henry. “You see? This never would have happened if he had not seen you play with the Sons of Italy,” Quinto said.

Henry shrugged, still trying to picture himself in a high school band. Like so many other young and incredibly gifted musicians, he still had no idea just how talented he was and how much he already stood out from the crowd.

Chapter Two

MUSICAL AWAKENINGS

As if already suffering through a severe case of chicken pox weren't bad enough for young Henry, he went on to contract mumps, measles, and diphtheria. Perhaps it was these frequent illnesses that gave him more time than most kids to practice music. Even when he was too weak to play, he would listen to records on a constant loop, analyzing every note. Then the worst one of all struck when he was a young teen and he came down with rheumatic fever. Left temporarily crippled by the illness, he took to crawling on the floor. But all this time out of school and band practice didn't seem to affect his progress—he was a very fast learner, a natural leader, and was beginning to enjoy music more and more ever since he joined a larger group of peers. His flute playing soon became top notch and, in 1937, when he was only thirteen, he was named first flautist in the Pennsylvania All-State Band.

When he wasn't playing with one of his two bands, Henry was becoming fascinated with stretching his left hand to reach

a ten-key span, as the legendary pianist and bandleader Count Basie was doing. Jazz had caught the ear of arrangers and given rise to the big band, which included anywhere from twelve- to twenty-four-piece ensembles. At the same time, sweeter-toned groups incorporated jazz into a more commercial style that led to the birth of swing and dance bands. As Duke Ellington described swing, “The rhythm causes a bouncy, buoyant, terpsichorean urge.” This was a fancy way of saying that the music made people want to get up and dance, inspired by the muse of dancing, Terpsichore. Swing continued to evolve as big band music was becoming more frequently arranged than improvised.

Henry wanted to emulate the greats as much as humanly possible. The biggest breakthrough for swing happened when Benny Goodman, who had a legion of radio fans, purchased and began using a few dozen arrangements from Fletcher Henderson, an African-American bandleader, thereby spreading the influence of black music to a wider American public. As dance halls across the country began to fill, Goodman quickly became known as the “King of Swing,” with his musical instinct and magical touch on the clarinet. Henry fell in love with this music and could not get enough—he wanted to learn everything. Luckily for Henry, he had long fingers. He spent every minute at his desk at school stretching his left thumb away from his fingers, pressing down on his desk over and over until he mastered it. Henry was incredibly inspired by the new rhythm of the double bass in the rhythm section, which produced a four-in-a-bar walking bass style instead of the two-beat stomping feel of earlier jazz. He also grew to greatly admire Goodman for pioneering musical racial integration.

These developments began to help Henry discover his identity as a musician and as a person. Like his father, he did

not suffer fools gladly. It was around this time that the school bully had started going after kids in the cafeteria at lunchtime by pounding the hands of anyone who had them on the table. Henry and Jack watched this day after day, wondering what could be done about it.

“Who does that guy think he is, running around and terrorizing everyone all lunch period long?” Henry asked Jack.

They stood with their backs against the wall thinking about it.

“Wait. I think I might have an idea,” Henry said. “C’mon.”

Jack followed Henry to a couple of open seats at a table. Henry was becoming lightning fast with his hands from all his piano practice. He motioned for Jack to sit down with a group of particularly vulnerable students as the bully was making his way across the room.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

The bully sailed through the room like a wrecking ball, pounding the hands of anyone who didn’t see him coming.

Henry leaned over to the boy next to him and asked, “Has he been over here yet?”

The boy shook his head no.

“Perfect.”

The shy boy was confused.

Henry kept a close watch on the bully from the corner of his eye, and as the tyrant moved ever closer, he stretched both arms straight up over his head to purposely draw attention to himself. Then he brought them down, casually placed both hands on top of the table, and pretended to play piano. In a bit of an exaggerated fashion, he began to whistle to himself, looking left to right, doing his best to act nonchalant. Henry could see Jack

getting nervous as the bully got closer, clearly identifying Henry as his next victim.

“Henry, look out!” one of the other kids mumbled under her breath to warn him.

“Yeah, he’s coming this way,” said another.

As the bully came to the edge of the table and was about to pound Henry’s fingers with a punishing blow, Henry yanked his hands out of the way just in time so that the bully ended up slamming his own hands *hard*. The bully howled in agony and the entire cafeteria erupted in laughter as Henry was heralded a hero.

Henry rejected any notion of himself as hero, though—not when he was just doing what he thought was right. As a rather innocent-minded young lad, his childlike presumptions about how things worked continued to unfold. Just as when he was convinced that there *had* to be an orchestra behind the movie screen at *The Crusades*, and when thought that a player piano could not be played manually, he also didn’t have any reason to believe that one could buy *blank* music paper, so he’d spend hours drawing out five-line staves with a pencil and ruler. Once he had the lined paper finished, he could get to the real work, which was feverishly copying Artie Shaw arrangements from Shaw’s big band recordings. Henry had become a self-described Artie Shaw nut. He became a boy obsessed with learning how the arrangements worked, to the point of getting reprimanded for working on them in school.

As a devout Catholic family, much of the Mancini’s social life revolved around parish activities. One of the traditions of their

church was organizing riverboat day trips. Henry had been on several of these, but when he was fourteen, he went unaccompanied by his parents for the first time. He had to wake up early to meet at St. George Byzantine, where the church bus would be waiting to transport the group to the Ohio River. They arrived at the dock and began to line up to board the vessel when Henry heard the first sounds of a band playing.

It wasn't like any live band he'd ever heard before. His keen musician ears told him that the band was only warming up, but even that made him stand at attention. Once aboard the boat, he searched the decks following the sound and found a group made up entirely of black players. As they began their first song, Henry got goose bumps. Their style was so fresh and the rhythm section so tight! It was the most electrifying music Henry had ever heard live. As the riverboat paddles began to spin, Eddie, one of Henry's friends, found him sitting as close as he could to the band.

"C'mon, we've got a game of fivestones going on the top deck," Eddie told him, using the then-common term for a game of jacks.

"I'll catch up with you in a while," Henry said.

Eddie didn't understand what he was missing. "What are you doing down here anyway?" he asked.

"Can you please stop talking? I'm trying to listen to the music."

"Suit yourself."

And that is precisely what Henry did. During the twelve-hour excursion, Henry spent at least ten hours close enough to the band to reach out and touch them. On their first break, Henry worked up the courage to talk to one of the horn players.

"Hi, my name is Henry. I, uh, just wanted to tell you how

much I'm enjoying your band. I play a little myself, but *you guys*. I mean, first of all, how do you play without any sheet music?"

The horn player laughed and said, "You play through a song enough times and it just sticks, you know?"

"No. Not really. I mean, I never realized that could happen. How many times do you have to play it?" Henry asked.

"Oh, hundreds, I would guess."

"Wow."

"I'm James. What's your name, kid?"

"I'm Henry. Henry Mancini."

They shook hands.

"Nice to meet you, Henry. What do you play?"

"Flute, piccolo, and now piano too," Henry said. "I started lessons with a teacher in Pittsburgh, but it's mostly classical. And I play in the Sons of Italy band with my father. We play a lot of weddings—so, you know, polkas, Greek wedding songs, Italian folk songs. I've been teaching myself some Artie Shaw arrangements. And ragtime is my favorite, but the way you guys just lock . . . man. I didn't know music could sound so good."

"Hey, it looks like we're getting back to it here in a minute."

"Is it okay if I sit a little closer to you to hear everything? I don't want to miss a note."

"You're all right, Henry, you know that?"

They struck up the band once again and some of the players couldn't help but smile and laugh at how Henry was practically right on top of them. As the trumpet player began a solo improvisation, he looked over at young Henry, who closed his eyes, appearing as though he'd been transported to another world. At the end of each song, Henry applauded with the vigor of an entire crowd. He took pride in demonstrating for the other

onlookers how to clap for solos. He'd heard this on several of the live albums he'd been studying.

When the band took another break, he went to compliment the trumpet player. James saw Henry coming with more questions.

"Hey, Jermaine. This here is Henry, a piano and flute player."

Jermaine smiled. "Is that right?"

Henry felt a little embarrassed to be talking about his own playing in front of these guys, but he also wanted desperately to keep the conversation going.

"I, uh . . . Yeah, I was named first flautist in the Pennsylvania All-State Band."

"No kidding!" Jermaine was impressed.

"You didn't tell me that!" James said jokingly to Henry.

For a moment Henry was speechless. He had so many questions that he didn't know where to begin.

"How does it feel when you improvise like that?" he asked Jermaine.

"Like heaven."

"Funny," Henry said.

"What's that?"

"That's what it's like listening to it too."

By this time, Henry was quickly becoming the band's mascot. When they began their next set, he stood by the saxophones for a while, then moved next to the upright bass. To be in the presence of music and musicians this good was like magic—the kind he wanted to learn how to create himself, over and over again.

Just like seeing *The Crusades* on the big screen, the day on the boat completely rearranged Henry's brain musically. He joined another group, the Beaver Territory Band, and was anxious to

start working out some of the things he'd learned listening to the group on the boat. He got his chance when a new trumpet player showed up to sub for the regular guy. The trumpet sub was named Roy, a sixteen-year-old black kid whose sophistication was exactly what Henry was thirsting for. From the moment Roy blew his first note, Henry knew there was a lot he could learn from him. As the band ran through several of their tunes, Roy took things to a whole new level. When the leader called for a five, Henry went over to introduce himself.

"Hi, I'm Henry," he said.

"Oh, I'm Roy. Good to meet you, Henry."

"Say, where'd you learn to play like that?"

Roy laughed. "Oh, man, I don't know. Listening, mostly."

"You've never taken lessons?"

"Just from my uncle. He plays in a big band and gave me this trumpet when he got a new one."

"So, you learn mostly by ear? Whatta you have, perfect pitch or something?"

Roy shrugged. "I never thought about it."

Henry just stared back at Roy in amazement.

"Hey, has anyone showed you the 6/9 chord yet? You know, the one that Duke is using a lot?" Roy said.

"6/9 chord? No. What is it?" Henry asked.

Roy proceeded to demonstrate. The wheels in Henry's brain started spinning fast as he quickly tried to integrate this new information.

After rehearsal, he rushed home and stayed up all night exploring the 6/9, playing it chromatically up and down. He wanted to hear how the lush and beautiful chord sounded in every key. Roy had sent him on a totally new trajectory, opening an exciting new door. Coming into contact with more black

musicians expanded Henry's awareness not just in music—which was deepening his appreciation of the influence of black music and musicians on American popular music—but it also increased his sensitivity to the role of race in society in general. There were only a few black students at Aliquippa High School and Henry began to think more about what life must be like for them. One event in particular had shaken him to the core.

After attending a meeting with Jack on how to be a good citizen at the Hi-Y club, a branch of the YMCA for high school boys, a group began walking home together. The message of the meeting must have not made much impact, because a few of the boys started throwing rocks at streetlamps. Dozens of stones were hurled into the dark night sky until one finally hit the light, shattering it completely.

“Oh, man! We got it!” one of the boys said.

“Who threw that winner?” another asked.

“Henry, was that you?” Jack wanted to know.

“I didn't throw any. But, man, what a *beautiful* sound it made . . .” he said kind of dreamily.

The other boys were not sure what to make of this response.

A few minutes later, a police car turned the corner. As it approached, officers focused a light on the broken glass on the street and then, like a spotlight, over to the boys. Henry pulled down his fedora and broke off from the group as the police stopped to question them.

“Say, boys, you know anything about this smashed-out light?”

They froze with fear as the officers stared them down. Then one spoke. “Just what a beautiful sound it made when it broke?”

The two officers exchanged a look.

“All right, wise guys, get in the squad car. You can explain all this to your parents when they pick you up at the station.”

As the police car passed Henry further down the street, he tipped his hat to Jack and flashed him a sly smile. He let out a little laugh, tickled that he was able to gracefully duck getting in any kind of trouble. The big smile remained until he reached the end of the block. Then it vanished in an instant. Across the way, he saw crosses burning on the hillside and it stopped him cold. He gasped audibly. He thought of his new friend Roy and it made him upset and angry to think of Roy ever having to see anything like this that signaled the horrible hate some people carried in their hearts. It terrified Henry that these kinds of people were in the world, much less in his own town. If there were one thing he'd learned in all his years of going to church, it was that God created man in his own image. Nothing about the way these people thought made any sense to Henry and he prayed Roy would never come across anything like this. He tried to calm himself by believing that God would protect Roy.

The more Henry was learning outside the Aliquippa High School band, the more he ended up clashing with the band director, who had one way of running things and didn't tolerate suggestions or insights from students. When Henry turned sixteen, Aliquippa made it into the all-state band competition in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, the home of the famous groundhog. Henry was disappointed but not entirely surprised when the band director only chose one student to play a solo, and it was Jack. Henry felt that his not being chosen was supposed to serve as some kind of punishment, but he was also genuinely happy for Jack. He

knew how hard his friend worked and admired his diligence in practicing his trumpet every day.

When competition day arrived and they boarded the band bus for Punxsutawney, the entire band was very hyped up and Jack was beginning to feel the pressure. There were dozens of bands from all over the state—nothing but top high school musicians as far as the eye could see and the ear could hear. The Aliquippa Quips sat in their designated area, feeling more intimidated by the level of musicianship around them with each passing minute. Some kids started to break out in a sweat. Had they practiced enough? Why did some of the bands sound so *professional*?

Finally, the time arrived for them to take to the field to perform. The piece got off to a strong start and the band members found their confidence. Then it came time for Jack's solo and Henry watched his friend with pride. Everything sounded great until the end of the section, where Jack missed his high C note. His face turned tomato red and Henry felt terrible! He could see how upset Jack was. The Quips had now lost any chance they had at taking home a trophy and that would forever be blamed on Jack. Knowing Jack better than anyone, Henry knew there was only one thing to do now—make him laugh. But how?

As the band marched off the field and into the locker room, Jack did not want to face the wrath of the band director and rushed over to Henry.

"I need to find a men's room. NOW," Jack demanded.

Henry took his meaning—Jack just needed to disappear for a moment. Scanning the area quickly, Henry spotted just the place and ushered his friend in that direction. As they ducked inside, Jack spotted a trashcan and dropped his horn squarely

inside it. Henry very calmly reached in and began pulling out used towels and trash before rescuing his friend's trumpet from the unknown gunk and grime.

"Oh, man, I blew it. I mean, I really *blew it*," Jack said.

Henry swatted this idea away with a flick of his wrist. "Nah," he said. Then he took a moment to set up his perfect timing. "But you know what I did notice?"

"What's that?" Jack asked.

"When you blew that note, I think I saw Punxsutawney Phil pop out of his hole with both ears covered!"

Jack erupted with such a howl that Henry had to drop his mock seriousness immediately and join in the laughter.

"That'll teach band director McCullough not to pick anyone for a solo except Henry Mancini from now on!" Jack said.

"Well, if it'll make you feel any better, you can come over to my house and I can ask my father to whack your knuckles."

They walked out of the boys' room arm in arm, friends for life.

One of the few perks of living in Aliquippa was that there was a little bit of money to be made as a young musician. With nearly every European ethnicity in the area, one could be hired to play all the weddings and get paid all-you-can-eat plus maybe an actual dollar or two. Aliquippa was a prearranged town split into "Plans" designated by Jones and Laughlin Steel after their purchase of the town, which was on the ruins of an old amusement park. The company divided the area for its workers into a dozen different sections that segregated people by ethnicity. Italians, Serbs, Croats, Irish, Poles, and others were all

placed strictly according to their race. For example, Plan 6 was for management and Plan 11 extension was for black people who had come north during the Great Migration.

One Saturday, while Henry was getting ready for the wedding of a Czech friend of his father's from work, Quinto came into his room. He sat down on Henry's bed while holding all of Henry's handwritten Artie Shaw arrangements.

"Son," he said.

"Yes, Father?"

"It is good—all this experience on the bandstand that you are getting from playing weddings."

"And don't forget the cake."

"Yes," Quinto said. "But because you will go to college to become a music teacher, you will need to learn more about arranging. You already have a good basic understanding, which I can see from all the work you do. But what if you are not doing it right? You need someone to show you. You don't want to learn things wrong. That will only make them harder to learn correctly."

"Who could teach me?" Henry asked.

"I was wondering the same thing. So, I asked your piano teacher and he told me there is someone right across the street from him in Pittsburgh—a man who is a conductor and arranger at the Stanley Theatre. His name is Max something. We will go to meet him this week after your piano lesson."

The following Saturday, they entered through the stage door of the Stanley Theatre as Henry's music teacher had instructed them. Searching the hallway, Henry spotted Max Adkins' name on one of the doors. Quinto knocked and the door opened, revealing a dapper gentleman on the other side.

"Mr. Mancini? Henry? I've been expecting you. Please, sit down."

“Thank you,” Quinto said.

“Mr. Ochsenhardt tells me that you are becoming an excellent piano player, Henry.”

Before Henry could say anything, Quinto interjected. “He listens to the radio nonstop, always writing all these notes on paper. He needs someone to teach him.”

“Well, that’s very exciting, Henry. You would like to learn arranging?” Max asked Henry.

“Oh, yes. I mean, I’ve been trying to teach myself what I can from writing out all the Artie Shaw charts,” Henry said, pulling out a stack of his collection of copied arrangements and handing them to Max.

Astonished, Max thumbed through them quickly and looked up at Henry. “You even made your own music paper?”

Henry stared back with his trademark naïveté. “Don’t you?”

Max smiled broadly. “You’ve come to the right place, Henry. I’d be happy to teach you everything I know. And maybe you could teach me a thing or two.”

A few weeks into his studies, Henry found out that Max didn’t teach just high school students—he’d taught Billy Strayhorn, who Henry knew had just gone off with Duke Ellington’s band. The idea that Max taught Billy and was now teaching Henry brought an actual tingling into his fingers. He wanted to impress Max and show him how much he could learn and how hard he was willing to work. And then there was the fact that Max was one of the few people at the time who actually had a system for teaching arranging. Stock arrangements put out by music publishers were designed for a set number of players—say fifteen, ten, or five—so it was the job of the arranger to create flexibility in the charts. Max’s method was to give Henry the parts of a stock arrangement for the individual instruments

and have him reconstruct the full score from that. Through this exercise, Henry came to learn what was essential and what was expendable. It required creative thinking and challenged his musical mind like never before.

The other amazing thing about being Max's student was that because he was the resident arranger and conductor at the Stanley Theatre, he invited Henry to listen to all the bands that would come to play there. Not only was this thrilling, but it also allowed him to synthesize everything he was learning in his lessons with Max. Henry's aptitude for orchestration was developing simultaneously alongside his natural knack for understanding and writing melodies. Max couldn't help but be incredibly impressed with his new young student. Something told him that Henry could go far. To prepare him for everything else that would come with the territory, Max turned to Henry one day after his lesson.

"I've got half an hour before rehearsal. What do you say we take a walk and I'll introduce you to my tailor, Mr. Bellantoni. Every musician needs at least one good suit. Your father will be pleased he is Italian."

"Sure. Thank you, Max. How will I pay for the suit, though?"

"I will have you do some copy work for me. This is very important, Henry. Very important, indeed."

On another occasion, Max took Henry out to a diner to do some work. It was the first time Max asked for Henry's help on the arrangements for an act that was coming to the Stanley. When their bill arrived, Max took it as he reached into his pocket for his money clip. Then he placed it down in front of Henry.

"See the total amount there?"

"Yes," Henry replied.

“That’s not actually the total.”

“It’s not?”

“Whenever someone gives you service and waits on you, you must give them a tip. Folks in the service industry rely on tips to make a living. As musicians, we’re in a unique place to understand this.”

“We are?”

“Sure,” Max said. “Leaving a good tip is also good for us. When we’re good to others who work hard, people will take care of us when we work hard. Your father, he makes a salary at the mill. That means he can rely on being paid the same amount of money each week. But when you’re a waitress or a musician, you don’t always know how much you’ll make in a week or a month. So, if you’re generous with others, chances are, people will be generous with you.”

Henry thought about this for a while, then said, “You know, Max, that makes a lot of sense.”

Max was an incredible mentor to Henry, who was very eager to learn everything he could about music and life. The more training Henry got for arranging, the more excited he got about music in general. He started to believe that he could really have a future in it, just like Max. He got so wrapped up in his arranging assignments that he brought them to school each day and became very skilled at slipping them under his schoolwork when the teacher would come by to commend his diligent study habits. On the day Max took Henry to be fitted by Mr. Bellantoni, he told Henry about an idea that had occurred to him.

“So, I’ve been thinking, Henry. You really should apply to Juilliard,” Max said.

“The Juilliard in New York?”

“You know of it?”

“Of course. But I don’t know if my father would be able to pay for a private conservatory like Juilliard,” Henry said.

“I don’t think he would have to pay very much, because you would receive a scholarship.”

“You really think so?”

“Well, we’ll never know if you don’t audition.”

“And wearing this suit,” Mr. Bellantoni chimed in, “how could you lose?”

The only real downside to studying with Max Adkins was that it caused Henry to quickly outgrow his high school band director as well as his music theory teacher. The tensions between Henry and the director came to such a head that Henry was kicked out of band in his senior year. That meant that the only time Henry and Jack would see each other in school was if they took music theory together, even though the teacher had a reputation for being the strictest of sticklers. For the class’s final exam, the students were asked to apply all the rules of theory to harmonize the song “America.” Instead, Henry made up his own rules; the teacher took one glance at his test and threw it in the trash. Somehow, Henry was still able to graduate. It was 1942 and he was only eighteen.

Then, days after graduation, the King of Swing himself arrived at the Stanley Theatre with his big band for a week-long engagement. Max took Henry by surprise when he called him down the hall to Benny Goodman’s dressing room. Henry pointed and mouthed to Max, *Is he in there?*

Max smiled and raised his eyebrows, cool cat that he was.

Henry reached the doorway to Benny’s dressing room and stood next to Max.

“Benny, this is the kid I was telling you about,” Max said. “I really think he should do an arrangement for you.”

Henry stuck out his hand to shake with Benny Goodman. "It's an honor to meet you, Mr. Goodman."

"Henry is on his way to New York to audition for Juilliard, so he will be there during your week at the Paramount," Max told Benny.

"Great. Drop in and see me there, kid. I'll find an assignment for you," Benny said. "If you're as good as Max here says, there could be even more work for you."