

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS
Presents

IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR

AS RECORDED BY FRANK SINATRA

ARRANGED BY GORDON JENKINS
PREPARED BY ROB DUBOFF AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

FULL SCORE

JLP-6446

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ERVIN DRAKE

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IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR (1965)

Frank Sinatra Biography:

Francis Albert Sinatra was one of the greatest figures in the history of American entertainment and pop culture. Born December 12, 1915, in Hoboken, New Jersey, he developed an early interest in music, becoming proficient as a singer and arranging for bands by his teens. He soon dropped out of high school to pursue a career in music. Following the exposure resulting from a successful appearance on the then-popular Major Bowes Amateur Hour radio show, he came to the attention of Harry James, who hired him to front his big band. While he gained experience and released his first records with James, they did not sell well and he soon grew frustrated with the James band and left to join Tommy Dorsey, with whom he had his first huge successes. Seeing his popularity begin to skyrocket, Sinatra soon felt the need to become a solo artist, and left Dorsey, taking arranger Axel Stordahl with him; this would be the first of several very close relationships Sinatra would enjoy with arrangers over the years.

During the World War II era, he became a sensation, earning the nickname 'The Voice' and gaining a following of young women that would presage the later crazes for Elvis and the Beatles. By 1946 he was topping the charts, selling millions of records, and also receiving serious acclaim for the quality and depth of his work. Tastes change however, and by the late 1940s he was suffering a significant decline in popularity. Exacerbated by the death of his publicist George Evans and the breakup of his marriage as the 1950s began, it was hard for many to believe how far Sinatra had sunk, but it would have been truly impossible to envision the future heights he would reach. By late 1951 his performances were often poorly attended, and Columbia, the label on which he became a superstar, dropped him.

Sinatra was also a successful actor, and he believed a part in the film *From Here to Eternity* would begin a career revival; it did, and remarkably so. The 1953 film was hugely popular and Sinatra won an Oscar for best supporting actor. He had also signed with Capitol Records, and began what was to be the most significant collaboration of his career with arranger Nelson Riddle. After the legendary first session, which included *I've Got the World on a String*, Sinatra was shocked at how well Riddle seemed to understand his abilities, ideas, and aspirations. Riddle knew how to treat dynamics beautifully, and how to craft an arrangement in order to allow the singer to clearly be the star while at the same time giving him rich, creative backing. They recorded a series of albums, including *In the Wee Small Hours*, *Songs For Swingin' Lovers*, and *A Swingin' Affair*, that both defined the genre and turned Sinatra into a massive superstar.

As the 1960s dawned, desiring more creative power and independence, Sinatra formed Reprise Records, which became another huge success for him, signing many other successful artists as well as being his recording home. He began working with other arrangers, hiring Don Costa, who had a great mind for commercial success in various genres. He also worked with the Count Basie Orchestra and Quincy Jones during this period, their greatest success and notoriety coming from the Rat Pack era appearances at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas. During the rest of the sixties, Sinatra memorably recorded with Antonio Carlos Jobim and Duke Ellington, and he continued to be an eminent presence around the world, recording and touring for the next thirty years, while receiving endless honors and accolades.

While he became one of the most famous musicians in history, and certainly had a well-publicized and colorful personal life, much is not widely known about this brilliant and complex man. He never had formal music training, but was blessed with an incredible ear and innate musical understanding which often surprised musicians he worked with. His voice was incredibly powerful, his diction precise, and perhaps no popular singer has had a more unique gift for interpreting lyrics. Classical musicians marveled at his skills, and even his conducting ability surprised those who worked with him. His combination of rare musical gifts and perfectionism, as well as his insistence on working with the best writers and arrangers, fused to create an unmatched catalog of definitive versions of many of America's greatest standards.

Sinatra had a temper, which he showed often to the world, and he could be profane, bullying, and gruff. But he also most definitely had a very serious different side as well. He was known for treating collaborators and musicians well, and was generous to a fault. Perhaps less-known is his tremendous charitable streak. Sinatra contributed generously, gave many benefit concerts, and often very quietly donated money to many causes. He was also politically active for his entire life, at first with the Democrats, and after the famous rift with JFK, the GOP. One of the most admirable parts of his character was his lifelong battle against racism. Growing up in a time and place where Italian-Americans were often heavily discriminated against, he quickly developed a visceral hatred for racism. He performed with African-American musicians during his entire career, he worshiped Billie Holiday and said that Ella Fitzgerald was the only singer he feared, and in a time when Las Vegas was much like the Jim Crow South, he fought for the rights of his close friends Sammy Davis Jr. and Count Basie and others.

Frank Sinatra passed away with his wife at his side in Los Angeles on May 14, 1998, at the age of 82. The outpouring of grief, respect, and tributes was tremendous for a figure whose only rivals among 20th century western musicians were Bing Crosby, Elvis Presley, and the Beatles. The 100th anniversary of his birth in 2015 saw countless concert tributes as well as documentaries and major new books. This is a man whose music will be listened to as long as the world continues to turn. The voice of Sinatra in his prime is peerless-powerful and comforting, historic and vibrant; he had the rare ability to make a newly-written song instantly his own, and to breathe new life into decades-old standards while creating their definitive expressions. Jazz Lines Publications is very proud to publish dozens of his best and most important original arrangements written by Nelson Riddle, Billy May, Neal Hefti, Quincy Jones, Billy Byers, and Don Costa.

Gordon Jenkins Biography:

Gordon Jenkins was one of jazz and pop's most popular arrangers from the 1940s into the 1960s, known for his work with some of jazz's greatest vocalists and for his distinctive string arrangements. Born on May 12, 1910, in the St. Louis suburb of Webster Groves, music was a big part of his life from early on. His father played the organ in a movie theater, and this got him started on keyboards; he soon was playing piano around town, and a job at a radio station led him to learn more instruments and begin writing arrangements. This early aptitude for and dedication to versatility defined a career that would see him compose standards, work in various genres and media, and arrange and conduct for mid-century musical giants.

Arranging for Isham Jones and his very popular band during the first half of the 1930s gave Jenkins the chance to really expand his skills. Jones's group was known as a dance band and featured both well-known vocalists and instrumentalists. Jenkins began to write complex original charts to accentuate the band's diverse skills. After writing and arranging for several other bands, Jenkins moved to the Los Angeles area later in the 1930s. For the next decade, he was heavily in demand and really sharpened

his impressive array of talents, also working in movies, TV, and radio, joining the staff and then becoming musical director at Decca Records, and composing the hit song *San Fernando Valley*. Decca led Jenkins to begin working with some of its vocalists in the second half of the 1940s, including superstars Louis Armstrong (who he was especially thrilled to work with; apparently becoming quite emotional in the studio), Ella Fitzgerald, and Billie Holiday. His style helped shape their performances and brought him to the attention of other important singers of the era as well. It was during this time that Jenkins composed and arranged a rather unique work, *Manhattan Tower*. The 1946 release was somewhat ahead of its time, including not just music but spoken word, dialogue, and sound effects to fully tell the story of a trip to New York City by a young man, perhaps influenced by Jenkins's own experiences. Jenkins's son calls it the "first concept album ever written." Over the next decade Jenkins expanded the work and performed it on television as well. While it is not as well-known today, at mid-century it was considered a very forward-looking innovative work. It so well captured the spirit of New York City at the time, maximizing the use of the technology available, that Jenkins was awarded the key to the city after performing the work on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1950.

The breadth and depth of Jenkins's musical vision is highlighted by his association with the Weavers at the outset of their stardom. A folk group that had struggled for years, they were playing gigs at the Village Vanguard in New York City when Jenkins basically discovered them. He was immediately taken by their style, became a huge fan, and brought them to Decca, who signed the group. They soon rocketed to stardom, with Jenkins arranging for them during their peak, including their #1 million-selling hit *Goodnight Irene* in 1950, merging his style with folk music to create something uniquely American.

As the 1950s bloomed into a golden age of American entertainment, Jenkins appeared regularly in the show business hotbeds of New York City and Las Vegas, while continuing to work in television. His prominence grew, and arranging several hits for Peggy Lee led him to Capitol Records, where he enjoyed some of his greatest successes, highlighted by his collaborations with Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra. 1957's *Love is the Thing* with Cole was the first of four records the two did together, and is widely regarded as among the very best work of either man's career. Jenkins's arranging style was a perfect match for the restrained brilliance of Cole's vocals, and some of the cuts - especially *When I Fall in Love* and *Stardust* - approach definitive brilliance. Nat's wife Maria was close to the Jenkins family and is worth quoting at length as she encapsulates much of what clearly made Jenkins so appealing to some of the era's greatest vocal talents: "...Gordon was the only person who could do those things with strings, to really embellish what (Nat) was doing on ballads...the only person (Nat) worked with where he was totally at ease...the arrangements were just there, perfect, and you can hear it in the records. I always felt Gordon had in his music what Nat had in his voice, and they really were wedded."

Frank Sinatra had thoroughly re-established his superstardom with Nelson Riddle by then and was in the midst of his remarkable run of 1950s albums. He and Jenkins teamed up for two records which demonstrated a pairing as moving and singular as Sinatra had developed with Nelson Riddle and would soon have with Billy May. 1957's *Where Are You?* and 1959's *No One Cares* marked another two milestones of Jenkins's arranging career. Both albums featured the dark themes of brooding ballads and torch songs which Sinatra loved and had first mastered with 1955's *In the Wee Small Hours*. Jenkins's style meshed perfectly with this side of Sinatra, and over 60 years later these two records stand with the other giants of Sinatra's 1950s catalog in showcasing America's greatest singer in a manner that allowed the full range of emotions his vocals were able to emote to shine for all time.

Jenkins formed a particularly close relationship with Sinatra; as tastes began to rapidly change in the 1960s, Sinatra continued to call on Jenkins periodically over the next two decades. Sinatra throughout his career became close to many of the arrangers he worked with, from Axel Stordahl, Riddle, and May to Don Costa and Jenkins. Sinatra is heard on a bonus track recording of Jenkins's composition *This is All I Ask* from Carnegie Hall in 1984 (on a later re-issue of 1965's classic *September of My Years* album) lauding "Gordie" and describing why he was so fond of him. "...when Gordie wrote a song, he wrote the words and the music and the orchestration, and this particular song...was obviously his shining hour..." Very strong and meaningful words from The Chairman which shine bright lights on not just Jenkins's arranging skills but his overall musical versatility. Sinatra was used to being fawned over, and Jenkins's bold nature clearly impressed Sinatra. Jenkins's son Bruce recalls a story where Jenkins once reprimanded Sinatra during a session when several of his regular companions were making a racket in the studio; some onlookers were shocked, as many assumed this could mean a strict rebuke from the hotheaded singer. But in this case, Sinatra immediately obeyed and quieted his entourage as requested. It is moments like this that helped Sinatra develop the deep respect he felt for Jenkins. Comedian/actor/racconteur Alan King, a member of Sinatra's inner circle, simply stated, "You couldn't threaten or intimidate Gordon Jenkins."

The changing musical tastes led to Jenkins's distinctive style somewhat falling out of favor over the coming years. He had some prominent critics, foremost among them New York City radio personality Jonathan Schwartz. Schwartz's criticism mirrored what some others thought of Jenkins's work, calling it "overblown" with an "overkill of violins." Originally a fan of *Manhattan Tower*, Schwartz had come to resent the influence it had on later projects he detested. But Jenkins certainly persevered and continued to have his shining moments, such as his Grammy-winning arranging for Sinatra's 1965 classic *September of My Years*; Jenkins was the perfect choice to help Sinatra realize this melancholy musical vision of middle age. His talents also were called upon by the eclectic Harry Nilsson, and the two collaborated on a standards record that was well before its time when it came to pop/rock figures tackling the Great American Songbook. Long before Nelson Riddle and Linda Ronstadt ushered in the era of this sort of project, Jenkins arranged for Nilsson's aptly titled 1973 record *A Little Touch of Schmilsson in the Night*. Today it is perhaps a curiosity, but Nilsson said it best in his inimitable fashion when in 1988 he apparently remembered the sessions this way: "My album with Gordon Jenkins is the best I've ever been associated with. I'll hold it up against anybody's. Show me what you got."

Jenkins stayed active in his later years, crowning his long association with Sinatra with his *The Future* contribution to *Trilogy: Past, Present, Future*. Around 1980 he began to suffer from what would be diagnosed as ALS/Lou Gehrig's disease. In November 1981 he was in a terrible car accident that left him and his wife and sister-in-law seriously injured and killed his brother-in-law. After this accident, he was left largely incapacitated-physically-and unable to speak. Jenkins remained very alive for the next two-and-a-half years, constantly writing down his often humorous and always insightful thoughts for others on ever-present pads. He died on May 1, 1984 at age 73. During his prime, Gordon Jenkins with his signature lush string arrangements was one of the architects of the hugely successful mid-century jazz vocal genre. His early time with Jones helped him develop his trademark sound, which enhanced the ensembles for which he wrote and ideally backed the great singers of his day. In addition to his arranging and performing skills, his songwriting leaves its own legacy, as he wrote *Goodbye*, which became a theme of Benny Goodman's. He was a frequent collaborator with lyricist Johnny Mercer, and their output included the often-covered *P.S. I Love You*. He also had hits putting his signature sound on standards such as *My Foolish Heart* and *Bewitched* before his later successes at Capitol. Working as he did with Sinatra, Cole, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Bing Crosby, Judy Garland, Al Jolson, and many more of similar stature, it is clear that the vision that he had for how arrangements and bands should accompany a vocalist was tremendously valued at the highest level of the art form.

While he may not have the name recognition of Nelson Riddle today, Jenkins most definitely left an indelibly large mark on popular music with his collaborations with Sinatra and Cole and others. Adding this to his songwriting, multi-media work, visionary talent scouting when it came to the Weavers, and the insufficiently credited achievement of launching the now mega-market of pop stars' standards records by helping Harry Nilsson realize his vision, it is quite a legacy to behold. Jenkins's place in American music at mid-century simply cannot be overstated. Nat King Cole's wife Maria told his son Bruce that Nat proposed to her with *Manhattan Tower* playing in the background. Mel Brooks apparently met Anne Bancroft after she sang Jenkins's *Married I Can Always Get* on the Perry Como show in 1961. Best of all, in July, 1950, four of *Billboard*'s top six songs had his imprint on them: The Weavers's *Tzena, Tzena, Tzena* at #2, the Andrews Sisters's *I Wanna be Loved* as he arranged it at #4, *Goodnight Irene* at #5, and his own orchestra's *Bewitched* at #6. Any argument regarding Jenkins's talent, versatility, artistic power, influence, success, and legacy ends here.

Jenkins's son Bruce has been a longtime sports media presence in the San Francisco Bay Area and wrote a very well-received biography of his father in 2005. *Goodbye: In Search of Gordon Jenkins* helped both raise the current profile of his father's spectacular career and fill in many more details of a man who certainly achieved considerable fame in his own right, but also often stood to the side as the musical megastars he worked with basked in the glory that was magnified by his presence.

The Music:

Ervin Drake wrote this song in 1961 for Bob Shane of The Kingston Trio, who wanted to record a vocal solo feature for the group's upcoming album *Goin' Places*. Sinatra supposedly heard the recording on the radio while driving back to his Palm Springs house and pulled over to the side of the road and called Gordon Jenkins and told him he wanted to record it. The subsequent 1965 recording for his album *September of My Years*, backed by a Jenkins arrangement, would become one of the cornerstone entries in Sinatra's catalog. This recording would net him a #1 adult contemporary hit and a Grammy award for Best Male Vocal Performance the following year. Jenkins also won a Grammy for his arrangement.

Notes to the Conductor:

The tempo of the entire arrangement is highly elastic and should follow the pacing of the vocalist as closely as possible. We have indicated several tempo shifts based off of Sinatra's original recording, but encourage you and your ensemble to experiment with your own interpretation. The string and woodwind writing is typical Jenkins - dense, lush, and dramatic, making for a perfect setting for the song's wistful, reflective lyrics and melody. Pay careful attention to how the accompaniment changes depending on where Sinatra is in the song. As the narrator ages, the writing becomes increasingly anxious, concluding with an atmosphere of triumphant contentment as he expresses satisfaction toward a life well-lived.

The string bowings were supplied by Las Vegas violinist Geri Thompson.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to an agreement with Frank Sinatra Enterprises, LLC, many of the classic arrangements written for Sinatra will be available from Jazz Lines Publications. As music fans who were greatly influenced by these magnificent arrangements, it is a great honor and thrill to work on these using the original manuscripts.

Doug DuBoff, Dylan Canterbury, and Rob DuBoff

- January 2026

flute (10)

FRANK SINATRA

IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR

4

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JACK GRUBERMAN, THE QUILL, 3826 WOODCLIFF ROAD, SHERMAN OAKS, CALIF., ST 4-4247

Above is the first page of woodwind 1 part (flute) for *It Was a Very Good Year*, recorded in 1965 and released on *September of My Years*.

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SCORE

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ERVIN DRAKE

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RIT.

SLOWLY $\text{♩} = 70-80$

Vocal

Woodwind 1: Flute

Woodwind 2: Clarinet

Woodwind 3: Oboe/Clarinet

Woodwind 4: Clarinet

Woodwind 5: Clarinet

Woodwind 6: Bassoon

Violin 1 (4)

Violin 2 (4)

Violin 3 (4)

Violin 4 (4)

Viola (4)

Cello (4)

Double Bass (2)

Harp

Percussion: Triangle

(5) A TEMPO

Vox. *sev - en - teen.* it was a ver - y good year. It was a

Ww. 2 (Cl.) *sol* - lightly *p*

Ww. 4 (Cl.) *sol* - lightly *p*

Vln. 1 *div.* *8va*

Vln. 2 *pp*

Vln. 3 *div.*

Vln. 4 *pp*

Vla. *V*

Vc. *V*

D.B. *V*

Hp. 3