

## Introduction

Welcome to “The Greatest Hits Explained”. My name is Michael Winter and I’m the host and editor of the show. I’m a German American passionate music lover and I would now like to invite you to go on an exciting musical journey with me.

I’m glad you’re here. No matter where you are right now and what you’re doing while you’re listening to this, if you’re in the mood to be entertained by music history, you’ve come to the right place. I’m really looking forward to this journey together.

If you like this show, please subscribe, leave a review, a like, a comment – whatever applies to the specific platform on which you’re listening to this. Also, I really appreciate donations. You can find the link on my website or YouTube channel. Those donations help me cover my expenses for this show such as hosting fees, equipment cost, etc. I’m doing all of this to entertain you based on my endless love for music and since there is no big network pumping dollars into this show, I’m the one who has to pay for all related expenses. Therefore, a small donation would already be amazing.

Today, we’re gonna talk about one of the most beautiful love songs ever: “Too Young” by the legendary Nat King Cole. I couldn’t be more excited. This song is one of my absolute favorites and I hope you’re interested in hearing a couple of facts about it.

“Too Young” is one of those legendary classics that, to many people, is much more than just a song. It’s their wedding song, the first song that they danced to, the song they saw their parents or grandparents dance to, the last song that they danced to together and so on and so forth. “Too Young” is much, much more than just an old song.

In addition to the song, we’re also gonna talk about Nat King Cole’s life which was cut short way too early and we’re also gonna talk about some of his contemporaries like Sidney Lippman and Sylvia Dee, for example, who wrote the music and the lyrics for “Too Young”.

That’s the approach I follow here for “The Greatest Hits Explained”: I pick a highly successful song that made music history and then I analyze both the song and also everything around it. And all of this with a noticeable German accent. I hope this works for you. Also, being a music lover and not a historian, I always do my best to provide you with the most accurate information I find on the web and other sources and if there should ever be any mistakes, they are not intentional and please point them out to me.

You’re gonna hear *some* music and sound effects in this show – that is music and sound effects that I purchased the reasonably priced licenses for. But, unfortunately, I’m not able to actually play Nat King Cole’s “Too Young” for you. We’re gonna discuss the song a lot, yes, but since the song is considered copyrighted material, I would need to spend astronomical dollar amounts on licensing to be able to play it here which is impossible from a budgetary perspective. Nevertheless, I can promise that discussing and exploring the song together with me will be almost as exciting as listening to it. This, by the way, is a common challenge for a lot of podcasters and one that will hopefully soon be solved in a creative and effective way by the music industry. Maybe it has already been solved by the time you’re listening to this episode.

Maybe you want to drop me a note from one music lover to another – I hope to hear from all of you.

Always remember that music is one of the major positive forces that connects us all as it does not know any borders.

It's now time to travel back into time, back to the year 1951 when the world was quite different from today. First, we're gonna go through some of the important events of the year 1951 and then we're gonna focus on the music by discussing the song, its production, success and reception. After that, we'll get to know the artist, Nat King Cole, a lot better and we'll also explore more of the musical aspects related to "Too Young". The grand finale will then be a quick exploration of the song's legacy.

## The Times

Let's see what a crazy place the world was like in 1951 – the 951<sup>st</sup> year of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, the 51<sup>st</sup> year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the 1950s.

1951 – these were the early 1950s. A time when World War 2 had ended six years earlier and both the Cold War and the Nuclear Arms Race were at their early stages. Harry S. Truman was the president of the United States. The Second Red Scare, also known as McCartyism, haunted the United States, the Marshall Plan expired and The Korean War between North Korea (supported by China and the Soviet Union) on one side and South Korea (supported by the United Nations and there mainly by the United States) on the other side had been going on since June of the previous year.

On January 27<sup>th</sup>, the United States began their nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site with a 1-kiloton bomb dropped on Frenchman Flat, Northwest of Las Vegas.

Muhammad Reza Shah, the last Shah of Iran married Soraya Esfandiary-Bakhtiari on February 12<sup>th</sup>.

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution is ratified which limits Presidents to two terms.

Germany joined the UNESCO on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

Remington Rand delivered the first UNIVAC I computer to the United States Census Bureau on March, 31<sup>st</sup>.

A fire on a train killed more than 100 people in Yokohama, Japan, on April 24<sup>th</sup>.

A military coup occurred in Bolivia on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

On July 20<sup>th</sup>, King Abdullah I of Jordan was assassinated while attending Friday prayers in Jerusalem.

The first Volkswagen Type 1 rolled off the production line in Uitenhage, South Africa, on August 31<sup>st</sup>.

September 8<sup>th</sup> was a big day: 48 representatives out of 51 attending signed a peace treaty titled the "Treaty of San Francisco" with Japan formally ending the Pacific War. And both the United States and Japan signed the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty which allowed the United States Armed Forces to be stationed in Japan after the occupation of Japan.

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, NATO accepted Greece and Turkey as new members.

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox released the Robert Wise science fiction film “The Day the Earth Stood Still” in the United States. Have you seen this one? Wow. That’s one of my absolute favorite science fiction movies.

Another movie classic was released on October 8<sup>th</sup>: “An American in Paris” a Technicolor musical film by MGM starring Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron, directed by Vincente Minnelli. It won 6 Academy Awards, including Best Picture. This is one of the greatest movies ever. If you haven’t seen it, do it tonight. You’ll love it.

The state of war between the United States and Germany officially ended on October 19<sup>th</sup> and U.S. President Harry Truman declared an official end to the war with Germany on October 24<sup>th</sup>.

Winston Churchill was re-elected as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on October 26<sup>th</sup>.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6,000 British soldiers were brought to Egypt to put an end to an unrest in the Suez Canal zone.

The direct dial coast-to-coast telephone service began in the United States on November 10<sup>th</sup>.

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, The Marshall Plan expired after distributing more than \$13.3 billion US dollars in foreign aid to rebuild Europe.

In terms of sports, one of the highlights in the US was the New York Yankees beating the New York Giants 4 to 2 to win the World Series.

And here’s another one: Color television was introduced in 1951 with the first color broadcast being transmitted from CBS in New York. The popularity of TV was growing fast and so movie theaters came up with experiments to attract customers – examples here are wide-screen projection and 3-D effects.

And here are a few birthdays of well-known people:

- Kirstie Alley, an American actress, was born on January 12<sup>th</sup>.
- African American politician Elijah Cummings was born on January 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Eric Holder, an African American politician who was the 82nd United States Attorney General was born on January 21<sup>st</sup>.
- January 23<sup>rd</sup>: Chesley Sullenberger also known as Sully – an American airline captain best known for his role as pilot in command in the 2009 forced water landing of US Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River off Manhattan after both engines were disabled by a bird strike; all 155 people aboard survived thanks to Sully.
- January 30<sup>th</sup>: Phil Collins, an English singer, musician and producer.
- English actress Jane Seymour was born on February 15<sup>th</sup>.
- March 4<sup>th</sup>: Chris Rea, a British singer and musician.
- March 17<sup>th</sup>: Kurt Russell, an American actor.
- Tommy Hilfinger, an American fashion designer was born on March 24<sup>th</sup>.
- April 20<sup>th</sup>: Luther Vandross, an African American R&B and soul singer and songwriter.
- June 8<sup>th</sup>: Bonnie Tyler, a Welsh singer.
- Pete Carroll, an American football coach of the Seattle Seahawks and other teams was born on September 15<sup>th</sup>. Go Hawks!

- German singer Wolfgang Petry was born on September 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- We have two birthdays on September 25<sup>th</sup>.
  - Pedro Almodóvar, a Spanish filmmaker.
  - And Mark Hamill, an American actor, best known for his role as Luke Skywalker in the Star Wars movies.
- British singer and musician Sting was born on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- October 5<sup>th</sup>: Bob Geldof, an Irish musician.
- November 9<sup>th</sup>: Lou Ferrigno, an American actor and bodybuilder best known as “The Incredible Hulk”.
- November 15<sup>th</sup>: Beverly D'Angelo, an American actress and singer.
- November 29<sup>th</sup>: Roger Troutman, an American funk musician. Roger, one of my favorite artists and I will never forget how he wore my baseball cap for a few minutes during the intro of one of his concerts. Do it, Roger, do it. Admittedly, that was a lot better than catching the sweaty towel of Vanilla Ice during one of his concerts. What can I say – I was young.

All these people – regardless if still alive or deceased by the time you hear this show – belonged to the Baby Boomers generation which followed the Silent Generation and preceded Generation X. The Baby Boomers define a cohort of individuals born between 1946 and 1964. Exploring the details and characteristics related to the Baby Boomers generation would go beyond the scope of this show but I encourage you to read up on the topic offline in case you’re interested.

As usual, this, of course, was no exhaustive or complete review of the year 1951 but I hope it was a good overview of the year that “Too Young” was released in.

## The Song & Production

The music for “Too Young” was written by Sidney Lippman, also known as Sid Lippman, and Sylvia Dee wrote the lyrics for the song. Both Sid and Sylvia were longtime collaborators and they had the idea for the song when Sylvia told Sid that her younger brother was getting married and that she thought he was too young. Sid later recalled "As she said that, she looked at me and I looked at her and we both said, 'Title?'" . I’m sure they also had a good laugh. I guess that writers like Sid and Sylvia are constantly looking for ideas which they find everywhere. Well, they picked the title “Too Young” and the rest is history.

Nat King Cole wasn’t the only one who released a version of “Too Young” but his one was objectively the most successful and best-known one and subjectively the most beautiful one. There were even three other versions released in the same month as Nat King Cole’s: Those were versions by Toni Arden, Johnny Desmond and Denny Vaughan and His Orchestra. But more on the cover versions in section “The Legacy”.

The First recording and release of the song was by Louanne Hogan with Victor Young and His Orchestra. Recorded on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1950 and released in December of the same year, this was also a wonderful rendition of “Too Young”. Of course, it wasn’t and isn’t able to hold a candle to Nat King Cole’s version, in my opinion, because there was only one voice like Nat King Cole’s. But again, it was a wonderful interpretation of the song.

Nat King Cole’s version was recorded on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1951 in Los Angeles – in Hollywood, to be more precise – and subsequently released in March as a 7-inch 78RPM single with a catalog number of F1449

on Capitol Records. "Too Young" was on one side of the record and a song titled "That's my Girl" was on the other side. The recording session for "Too Young" had number 2049 and took place from 2:30pm until 5:30pm Pacific Time in the Capitol Recording Studio at 5515 Melrose Avenue. It was one of three songs recorded during this particular session: The other two were "Early American" and "Because of Rain". "That's my Girl", the other track on the record, had already been recorded a few days earlier, on February 1<sup>st</sup>, as part of recording session number 2044 also from 2:30pm until 5:30pm Pacific Time. In addition to Nat King Cole himself, Capitol Records producer Lee Gillette, the conductor Les Baxter, the arranger Nelson Riddle and 19 members of the orchestra were present to record one of the most beautiful songs ever. There were more people in the studio that day but for now, I just focused on the ones that directly contributed to the song. The day of the recording, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1951 was a pretty warm day in Hollywood. The high temperature that days was 80 degrees Fahrenheit which was reached during the recording session at 3pm. By the way, 80 degrees Fahrenheit is almost 27 degrees Celsius. The maximum wind speed was 7 miles per hour and the visibility was 50 miles. When the recording session ended at 5:30pm and the musicians stepped outside to go home or to their hotels, the temperature was still between 76 and 78 degrees Fahrenheit. Between 76 and 78 degrees Fahrenheit translates to between 24 and almost 26 degrees Celsius. The net is it was a beautiful and warm February day in 1951.

Please note that there's also a well-known version by Nat King Cole that is a stereo remake from 1961 conducted by Ralph Carmichael – the arrangement of that one is very similar. The 1950s were actually a very exciting decade from an audio engineering perspective. When "Too Young" was recorded in 1951, stereo recordings had not really been on the horizon for record labels and so the song was recorded in mono only. Today, mono sound has largely been replaced by stereo sound in most entertainment applications. In a nutshell, stereo recording is a recording technique where two microphones are used simultaneously to record one instrument; the mono signals from each microphone are assigned to the left and right channels of a stereo track to create a sense of width in the recording. Mono sound, on the other hand, is sound intended to be heard as if it were emanating from one position. Mono recordings, like stereo ones, typically use multiple microphones fed into multiple channels on a recording console, but each channel is "panned" to the center. In the final stage, the various center-panned signal paths are usually mixed down to two identical tracks, which, because they are identical, are perceived upon playback as representing a single unified signal at a single place in the soundstage. When stereo came up and made its way into recording studios, some of them – notably Capitol Records – began to use two sets of equipment and two engineers for a few years to record in both mono and stereo separately. They used close-mic techniques, using around eight microphones or channels in a session for their mono recordings which allowed for more detail, more balance, and generally a more intimate sound on their mono records. For their stereo recordings on the other hand, they used two to three overhead microphones which resulted in an ambient, concert hall sound. Although this was able to produce a big, beautiful, and natural sound, details were sometimes lost. For a long time, I thought stereo was superior but boy was I wrong. Mono *can* actually sound better. If you're up for some fun, please listen to both the mono and the stereo version of "Too Young" online to compare them. Which one sounds better to you? I have an even better example for you where the differences come out super clear: The song "Only the Lonely" by Frank Sinatra. A lot of folks, me included, think that the mono version sounds far superior. Please listen to both the mono and the stereo version of "Only the Lonely" online to compare them. In the fully-rounded mono version, Frank Sinatra's voice is placed far up-front and apart from Nelson Riddle's orchestra turning him into "The Voice". Also, the audio has an unbelievable clarity here where the detail and tender playing of every instrument is not lost but accentuated. The net is, mono *can* sound better than stereo and Nat King Cole's "Too Young" was mono recording at its best.

On the day the song was recorded, February 6<sup>th</sup>, by the way, a Pennsylvania Railroad passenger train derailed near Woodbridge Township, New Jersey, killing 85 people and injuring over 500. What is today known as the Woodbridge Train Wreck was one of the worst rail disasters in American history.

It was one of Nat King Cole's closest friends, music publisher Ivan Mogull, who brought "Too Young" to Nat. Ivan arranged a meeting between Nat and Sid Lippman, who wrote the music for the song, so Sid could play the song to Nat at the Zanzibar in New York, the venue where Nat would play one of his last dates with his trio. While I don't know what happened when they met, we have to assume that Nat really liked what he heard.

"Too Young" was recorded with music provided by an orchestra conducted by Les Baxter. According to the history books, an arranger named Nelson Riddle actually created the chart for "Too Young" but – as was the custom back then – he wasn't credited but the official orchestra conductor Les Baxter was. Nelson Riddle, a pianist and then trombonist, had already run into the same situation a year earlier when he ended up without any official credits after creating the chart for the Nat King Cole hit "Mona Lisa". Nat himself didn't know about this at that point.

The recording session for "Too Young" would mark the turning point, however, and triggered a chain of events that would help Nelson Riddle get the visibility and recognition he deserved. The recording session was attended by Artie Mogull who was Ivan Mogull's cousin and would later be successful as a music publisher involved in Bob Dylan's as well as John Lennon's careers. Also in attendance was Lee Gillette, who was Nat King Cole's longtime record producer and Artie Mogull's closest friend. Lee Gillette worked for Capitol Records. At some early point during the recording session, Nat, being a great musician who would know the difference between a correct and a wrong note, asked his producer Lee over the intercom: "Lee, in bar 27, there's a problem. It says a B flat but I'm sure it's an A sharp." Later, Artie remembered: "Right in the middle of one of the first takes of the tune, there was something wrong in the arrangement. Over the intercom, Lee Gillette asked Les Baxter, who was the conductor of the orchestra, to correct it. Les Baxter walked over to a guy – who turned out to be Nelson Riddle – who was sitting along the wall and then corrected the mistake. Lee Gillette turned to me with 'Who the hell is that?' and I said, 'I don't know'. Lee Gillette said 'Well, after the session, let's find out'.

Also, Nelson Riddle had complained to others how frustrated he was by Les Baxter putting his name on the arrangements for Nat King Cole. Billy May, a musician, composer and arranger, was one of them who told Nelson to tell Nat the truth – that the great arrangements of "Mona Lisa" and "Too Young" were his.

Pete Rugolo, an American jazz composer, arranger and record producer, was another one that was on Nelson's side. Pete was friends with Carlos Gastel, an influential producer (and Nat's manager) involved in Nat King Cole's recordings who would later become known for "The Nat King Cole Show". One day, Pete was in Carlos' outer office waiting to go out to lunch with him when he overheard Carlos and Nelson having a conversation in Carlos' office. Pete later remembered: "The door of Carlos' office was open, so I couldn't help but overhear the conversation that was taking place inside. I heard Nelson Riddle explaining to Carlos that *he* had written the charts for 'Mona Lisa' and 'Too Young' and that Les Baxter was taking all the credit. When I heard that, I knocked on the open door and went in and said, 'Carlos, that's true. I know that Nelson wrote those things because I ghosted for Les Baxter, too.' I told Carlos to please use him on the next Nat Cole date because he would find out that Nelson really wrote the arrangements. Carlos said all right, he would. The rest is history. I knew about Nelson. I wasn't a close friend, but I wanted Carlos to

know that he wrote those arrangements.” Well, it seems Pete was an honorable man indeed.

And the last example comes from Chris Riddle, Nelson Riddle’s son who was born on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1950 just when “Mona Lisa” was becoming a hit. He once told a story about a conversation between his father and his mother about Nelson not getting the credit he deserved: “My mother said that when those two records took off – ‘Mona Lisa’ and ‘Too Young’ - , she told my father, ‘Listen, Nat and the Trio are playing at the Windsor (a restaurant and nightclub behind the Ambassador Hotel on 8<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Los Angeles). You’re going to go and tell him that *you* wrote those arrangements.’ Now that’s what my mother told me, and she told me that a bunch of times. After that, when Nat Cole finally began working with Dad, Nat said, ‘I thought you were the copyist because you were always running around fixing notes in the fiddle section’.”

It seems that even beyond the stories I just mentioned, musicians in Hollywood knew what was going on and talked about it as they couldn’t believe that Les Baxter was taking all the credit that Nelson Riddle would have deserved.

I mentioned these conversations or incidents because they caused Nat King Cole to discover who the true writer behind the wonderful arrangements of his two hit songs “Mona Lisa” and “Too Young” was.

Once Nat, who had become one of the biggest names in show biz, found out the truth, he wanted to work with Nelson. And once Nat decided he wanted something, no one could talk him out of it. Nat had recognized what a genius Nelson was and that Nelson was the perfect match for Nat’s approach to singing ballads. Nelson had proven that already by providing Nat with two hit arrangements.

From then on, it seems, based on accounts by contemporaries I found online, Nelson Riddle hated Les Baxter. Can we blame him?

The truth coming out paved the way for the unbelievably successful recording careers of both Nat King Cole and Nelson Riddle that earned them many hits and provided us with some of the most beautiful songs ever arranged and sung. Actually, through many, many more collaborations and releases, Nelson Riddle went down as one of the greatest arrangers of all time. One of the other singers he worked with on a regular basis was Frank Sinatra but more on that in section “The Artist”.

I love this story as it shows that a song is always more than just a song. Every song has a story with real people and both their actions and emotions involved. That’s why I love doing these shows: To be able to share this information about the greatest songs ever with you so we both are entertained and forget about work, money or any other problems for a little bit while exploring our musical past.

Nat King Cole himself *really* liked “Too Young”. In one interview, he said that “Too Young” was perhaps his favorite of all the songs he recorded. And in another interview, he said that “Too Young” was one of his three favorites among his own songs. Just think about all the amazing songs that Nat King Cole recorded. For him to then say something like this about “Too Young” – that is something.

Let’s now talk about the record label that “Too Young” by Nat King Cole was released on: Capitol Records. At the time of this recording, Capitol Records is owned by the Universal Music Group through its Capitol Music Group imprint. Capitol Records was the first major label on the West Coast of the US. It was founded in 1942 by Johnny Mercer, Buddy DeSylva and Glenn E. Wallichs. British music conglomerate EMI acquired Capitol Records as its North American subsidiary in 1955 and EMI, in turn, was acquired by the Universal

Music Group in 2012 and merged with the company a year later, making Capitol and the Capitol Music Group both a part of the Universal Music Group. I'm sure you've seen their iconic circular headquarter building on photos at least. It is a recognized landmark of Hollywood, California. By the time "Too Young" was recorded, the building had not been built though – it was opened in 1956 only and therefore, "Too Young" which was recorded in 1951, wasn't able to benefit from the legendary studios with their groundbreaking and state of the art recording technology that was used there. A lot of great artists found a home at Capitol Records over the years – probably most notably The Beatles during the years of the Beatlemania in the US between 1964 and 1967.

Nat King Cole and his Nat King Cole Trio were one of the first artists that signed with the young Capitol Records label soon after it was founded and Nat King Cole would remain with the label until his untimely death after a string of hits released on Capitol Records. Right after they signed with Capitol Records, the Nat King Cole Trio recorded three songs that became major hits: "Straighten Up and Fly Right", "Sweet Lorraine" and "Embraceable You." And this was just the start. Nat recorded almost 700 songs for Capitol Records including 150 singles that charted on Billboard's Pop, R&B and/or Country charts. This unbelievable success was the reason that some referred to the iconic round building on Vine Street in Hollywood that Capitol Records built as "The House That Nat Built." Some say that it was Nat King Cole himself who suggested the unusual shape for the Capitol Records building. Also, some say that the unique, 13-story building was purposely designed to resemble a stack of records topped by a stylus. From what we know, both is untrue as the lead architect of Welton Becket Associates, Louis Naidorf, designed the building for cost-efficiency; he didn't even know their client would be a record label.

The building was designated a Historical Cultural Monument in 2006. Its three recording studios beneath the tower were the first high-fidelity recording spaces. Known as the reverberation chambers, the recording studios were designed by guitar pioneer Les Paul. A last fact I have for you related to the building is the fact that the red light on top of the building continually blinks out the word "Hollywood" in Morse code every few seconds.

The famous Capitol Records building hadn't been built in 1951 when "Too Young" was recorded. The recording session for "Too Young" took place in the Capitol Recording Studio located at 5515 Melrose Avenue in Hollywood, California. The building next to the Paramount Pictures lot in Hollywood was originally built to house the Consolidated Film Laboratories before the National Broadcasting Company also known as NBC turned it into their audience studios and production facilities in the 1930s where they broadcast NBC radio shows for coast-to-coast entertainment from mostly. Since more and more NBC shows began moving from New York City to Hollywood, NBC wanted to expand their studio space and so they built their new Radio City offices and studios at Sunset and Vine which opened in 1938. 5515 Melrose was then vacant for more than a year until KHJ and the Don Lee-Mutual Network moved from the Don Lee Building at 7th and Bixel to 5515 Melrose in the late 1940s. And after Capitol Records bought what were the KHJ Studios, their studio opened its doors on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1949.



## Success & Reception

“Too Young” by Nat King Cole – one of the premier voices in American music – was an immediate hit. It sold around one million copies, was on the main US charts for 29 weeks in total and stayed on the number one spot of the main US charts for five weeks and also made it to rank three on the R&B charts.

Let’s take a look at the three most important bestseller lists that “Too Young” found itself on after its release:

“Too Young” entered the “Best Sellers in Stores” charts on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1951 and made it to the #1 position on June 23<sup>rd</sup> after 10 weeks on the charts; it stayed there for 5 weeks until July 28<sup>th</sup>. It stayed on the charts for another 14 weeks and left the “Best Sellers in Stores” charts after their October 27<sup>th</sup> issue.

“Too Young” entered the “Most Played in Jukeboxes” charts on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1951 and made it to the #1 position on July 7<sup>th</sup> after 11 weeks on the charts; it stayed there for 4 weeks until August 4<sup>th</sup>. It stayed on the charts for another 14 weeks and left the “Most Played in Jukeboxes” charts after their November 3<sup>rd</sup> issue.

“Too Young” entered the “Most Played by Jockeys” charts on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1951 and made it to the #1 position on June 30<sup>th</sup> after 10 weeks on the charts; it stayed there for 4 weeks until July 28<sup>th</sup>. It stayed on the charts for another 14 weeks and left the “Most Played by Jockeys” charts after their October 27<sup>th</sup> issue.

“Too Young” was received well by both audiences and critics alike, it clearly was the summer hit of 1951 and at the end of the year, it was also the Billboard’s top song of all of 1951. Tony Bennett came in second with his late-in-the-year hit “Because of You”. 1951 marked the sixth annual recapitulation of The Billboard’s weekly pop charts and represented an exhaustive and definitive evaluation of the music scene for the entire year; the summary was based on votes received from record dealers and juke box operators between January 1<sup>st</sup> and December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1951. After “Mona Lisa”, it was Nat King Cole’s second number one hit arranged by Nelson Riddle.

Regarding the question why “Too Young” was such a success, Nat King Cole told the “Time” magazine in an interview that it was because he sang words rather than notes in the song. He said, “when I perform, it’s like I’m just sitting down at my piano and telling fairy stories”. And to another writer he said “well, I guess I just get to the heart of people’s feelings, that’s all”. Yes, you do, Mr. Nat King Cole. And you will continue to do so forever.

## The Artist

Let’s now get to know all the great people more or less directly involved in the song “Too Young” by Nat King Cole.

Needless to say, we’re gonna spend a significant portion of our time on Nat King Cole himself. But before discussing Nat King Cole’s life, we’re also gonna get to know the following people better:

- Sid Lippman and Sylvia Dee, the two people who wrote the song.
- Ivan Mogull, the music publisher who brought “Too Young” to Nat.
- Les Baxter, the conductor.

- Nelson Riddle, the arranger of the 1951 original Nat King Cole version of the song.
- Lee Gillette, the Capitol Records producer.
- Artie Mogull, a music publisher who was Ivan Mogull's cousin and present during the recording of the song.
- The 19 orchestra members who played the music.
- And Ralph Carmichael, the arranger of the 1961 stereo version of the song.

First, we're gonna get to know **Sid Lippman** better. He is the gentleman who wrote the music for "Too Young":

Sid Lippman was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1914 and he died at a nursing home in North Bergen, New Jersey, on March 11, 2003 at the age of 89. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, Sid was a fine composer and songwriter.

During World War 2, Sid was a merchant seaman and after the war, he moved to Manhattan where he studied musical composition for one year at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York City.

Later, Sid lived in Fort Lee, New Jersey, where he was active in the community, contributing 42 years of volunteer work for the Bedside Network, a nationwide organization that works exclusively in veterans' hospitals.

Before Nat King Cole's number one hit "Too Young" that he wrote the music for, Sid had already had successful songs in the 1940s. One example here is the 1945 number one hit "Chickery Chick" by Sammy Kaye which Sylvia Dee had written the lyrics for – yep, that is the same Sylvia Dee who would later also write the lyrics for Nat King Cole's "Too Young". "Chickery Chick" is a rather playful song and some say that the lyrics are deeper than they seem. If you like, why don't you listen to the song online and then decide if you want to give it a shot and analyze the lyrics. If you do so, have fun! I'm sure you'll have some. And another example of Sid's talent and success is the 1949 number one hit "'A' - You're Adorable (The Alphabet Song)" by Perry Como and the Fontane Sisters with lyrics by Buddy Kaye and Fred Wise, recorded on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949 and released by the RCA Victor label which reached number one on the US charts on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949. This is a song that a lot of parents and grandparents have sung to their kids and grandkids since it came out in 1949. And it is still being sung in a number of homes every night as a lullaby. A really beautiful tune.

Sid's most memorable and probably most profitable success though was the song "Too Young" that he wrote the music for and that Nat King Cole made unforgettable in 1951. One of Nat King Cole's closest friends, music publisher Ivan Mogull, actually brought "Too Young" to Nat. Ivan arranged a meeting between Nat and Sid at the Zanzibar in New York so Sid could play the song to Nat. The rest is history. Beyond Nat King Cole, a number of other singers sang "Too Young" over the years which, I assume, secured a steady stream of royalties for Sid. We'll discuss some of those cover versions in section "The Legacy".

As you'll find out soon, we're not saying good-bye to Sid yet as we're gonna hear about him in the next section again.

Next up is **Sylvia Dee** who wrote the lyrics for “Too Young”:

Lyricist and novelist Sylvia Dee was born as Josephine Moore Proffitt in Little Rock, Arkansas on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1914 and she died in her home in New York City on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1967 at the young age of 52.

A graduate of the University of Michigan, Sylvia started her career as a newspaper copywriter in New York City and later, she worked for a paper in Rochester, New York, where she first came into contact with the entertainment world eventually providing lyrics to songs by composer Sid Lippman.

She not only has written the lyrics for successful songs but she has also written a number of successful books such as “Dear Guest and Ghost”, “There was a Little Girl” and “Never Been Kissed”.

Sid and Sylvia – the tag team – had their first success in 1941 with Glenn Miller’s version of “I’m Thrilled” which made it to number 16 on the pop charts. Then, while not much was happening for Sylvia and Sid, they wrote the score for the 1947 musical Broadway show titled “Barefoot Boy With Cheek” with Sylvia contributing the lyrics. The wait was over when Nat King Cole’s rendition of “Too Young” catapulted Sylvia to songwriter stardom. And since a number of other singers beyond Nat King Cole sang “Too Young” over the years, I assume, also Sylvia received a steady stream of royalties that provided her with a good income in addition to the royalties of her other songs and the income from her books. Again, we’ll discuss some of those cover versions in section “The Legacy”.

“Too Young” was the big moment for both Sylvia and Sid – the peak of their songwriter and composer careers. Together, they later had around a half-dozen or so more songs on the charts before Sylvia started to collaborate with other songwriters to adjust to the musicians and sound of the 1960s.

The 1960s started well for Sylvia as she had a top ten hit with the 1941 song “Mama” by Connie Francis where Sylvia had written the English lyrics for. “Mama” was in Italian originally and Sylvia helped Connie Francis land on number 8 of the US charts.

In the early 1960s, Sylvia worked with songwriter Arthur Kent a lot. Their first song that made the charts was “Somebody Nobody Wants” sung by Dion which landed on the number 106 spot in 1961. Not great. Yet.

In early 1963, they had a number one hit with “The End of the World” by Skeeter Davis. The song, recorded towards the end of 1962, climbed to the number 1 spot on the US Billboard Easy Listening Charts, and to the number 2 spot on the US Billboard Hot 100 Charts, the US Billboard Hot Country Singles Charts, the US Cash Box Top 100 Charts and the US Cash Box Country Singles Charts. Just like “Too Young”, this one spawned many cover versions – one, for example, by The Carpenters.

Sylvia’s next noteworthy collaboration was with George Goehring which resulted in the song “Please Don’t Talk to the Lifeguard” performed by Diane Ray. The song reached number 31 on the Billboard Hot 100 charts in the fall of 1963.

Beyond “Too Young” and “Chickery Chick” which we already discussed, Sylvia wrote the lyrics for a lot of songs – further famous examples here are “I Taught Him Everything He Knows” which she co-wrote with Arthur Kent and which was recorded by Ella Fitzgerald on her 1968 Capitol release “Misty Blue” and “Look for Me (I’ll Be Around)” which she co-wrote with Guy Wood and which was recorded by Sarah Vaughan on “The Benny Carter Sessions” and later by Neko Case on “Blacklisted”. Sylvia also wrote songs for Elvis Presley in the films “Blue Hawaii” and “Speedway”.

And here are a few more songs Sylvia provided the lyrics for: "It Couldn't Be True", "Stardreams", "My Sugar Is So Refined", "Laroo Laroo Lilli Bolero", "Have You Changed", "After Graduation Day", "Angel Lips, Angel Eyes", "Pushcart Serenade", "A House With Love In It", "Moonlight Swim" and "That's the Chance You Take".

Other musical collaborators of Sylvia beyond Sid Lippman, Arthur Kent and Guy Wood included Elizabeth Evelyn Moore (her mother) and Al Frisch to name a few.

Sylvia's mother was an early member of ASCAP, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, and so Sylvia assumed that her inspiration came from her mother. Sylvia herself joined ASCAP in 1943, by the way. But the inspiration also came from her grandmother, her mother's mother, it seems, who wrote songs in the latter half of the 1800s under a different name because writing songs was considered beneath the dignity of a matron. Her grandmother's husband, her grandfather, came to the US from Ireland together with the "Dion Boucicault Players", met her grandmother and then dropped out of acting so he could marry her because her parents considered acting a disgrace. Their child, Sylvia's mother, was a writer for the concert stage which gained her a great reputation but few financial rewards. On Sylvia's dad's side, she also inherited a love for the arts. He attended West Point but her dad's mother, Sylvia's other grandmother, was a well-known artist in Little Rock, Arkansas. Sylvia's dad was killed in World War 1 where he was an aviator.

For Sylvia, writing was no "off the cuff" thing. For her, it was a 7-days-a-week, 12-to-18-hours-a-day job. She once said that writing songs was even more difficult than writing novels. She said that for her books, there was a literary agent involved, who would conduct negotiations for her and then place the book with a publisher at the best terms obtainable and under the most favorable circumstances. Writing songs, she sometimes saw up to 20 publishers before one took the song. Or she had to see artists at 3 or 4 in the morning to get them interested in her songs – often travelling to other cities for that. To then get a record deal, she had to find publishers and get a hearing. Unfortunately, many publishers turned her songs down. But whenever she believed in a song, she would not give up. According to Sylvia, this actually happened in the case of "Too Young" as the song was turned down by publishers, artists and record companies before a publisher finally offered to work on the song. The rest is history.

At the time Sylvia died, she was married to Dr. Jere B. Faison, who was born on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1909 and died on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1996 at the age of 86 - he was 5 years her senior. Her husband was a gynecologist, licensed to practice in the State of New York and connected with the Department of Health as a Deputy consultant to the maternity and newborn division.

Sadly, Sylvia, who died in 1967, would not see the success Donny Osmond had in 1972 with his rendition of her most successful song "Too Young" which landed on spot number 13 on the US Billboard Hot 100 Charts and on spot number 5 in the UK.

It's now time to talk about **Ivan Mogull** the music publisher who brought "Too Young" to Nat King Cole. Without Ivan, Nat would probably have never recorded "Too Young". Therefore, a big "thank you" goes out to Ivan.

Ivan Jerry Mogull was born in New York on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1924 to Peter and Fannie Mogull and he died on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 at the age of 93. He was married to Marcia Ghozland since 1964 who died on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010 of lung cancer. The couple had two sons David and Peter.

When Ivan was still a teenager, he joined the army during World War II. He couldn't read notes or play an instrument but that didn't prevent him from organizing and leading a band that toured army bases all over the world.

Ivan was a music publisher for around seventy years – that is unbelievably long. A lot of sources say that he wasn't only a business partner but also a friend to a lot of famous artists such as Nat "King" Cole, ABBA, Nina Simone, Julio Iglesias and Jose Feliciano. As I explained earlier, Ivan was one of Nat King Cole's closest friends and it was him who brought "Too Young" to Nat by arranging a meeting between Nat and Sid Lippman, who wrote the music for the song, so Sid could play the song to Nat at the Zanzibar in New York. Again: Thank you, Ivan.

Ivan, who called himself the "Global Mogull" in trade ads, resided in the famous Brill Building at 1619 Broadway in Manhattan, the long-time hub of music publishing just north of Times Square. The Brill Building, which opened in 1931, is famous for housing music industry offices and studios where some of the most popular American songs were written. It is considered to have been the center of the American music industry that dominated the pop charts in the early 1960s. According to Ivan, around 90% of New York City's music business would take place in the Brill Building back then. Ivan's father, Dr. Peter Mogull, a foot doctor, was actually the first tenant of the Brill Building. Therefore, Ivan first came to the building when he was seven years old and so, from a young age on, Ivan would run the halls of the building and, by doing so, get to know a lot of the other tenants including musicians and music publishers. Early on, he met the likes of Frank Sinatra, Tommy Dorsey or Harry James. A lot of big names hung around in that building on a regular basis – from Paul Simon to Neil Sedaka to Burt Bacharach – it must have been an exciting and creative atmosphere. Ivan grew up in the business after he was hired as a counter boy to assist with the stock of the publishers. He started his career at Famous Music after graduating from High School in New York and later joined Shapiro-Bernstein, a music publishing company established in 1900. After World War 2, he worked for Bregman, Vocco & Conn, another music publishing company – this one was founded in 1937. He eventually founded his first own companies "Ivan Mogull Music" in 1948 and "Harvard Music" in 1950. Out on his own, he promoted a string of early Rock'n'Roll recordings like "Itsy Bitsy Teeny-Weeny Yellow Polk-A-Dot Bikini" or "Running Bear". Later, Ivan became the publishing rep for artists like Nat King Cole, Bob Dylan, ABBA, Neil Diamond, John Lennon, George Harrison and Chet Atkins, to name a few. He also represented publishing catalogs like the ones of Shapiro-Bernstein and Bourne Music.

Ivan founded a couple of companies over the years and he sold a couple of them to the English conglomerate "Filmtrax" in the 1980s which was renamed to "FilmTrax Mogull" as part of that transaction. After that, he continued to publish out of New York though and he worked as a consultant to Sony for possible catalog acquisitions.

For a long time, Ivan also resided in Remsenburg, a hamlet located in the Town of Southampton, Suffolk County, Long Island, New York as well as in Florida in addition to his time in New York City. He was active in the business until the end of his life as a consultant to The Orchard, a subsidiary of Sony Music Entertainment.

In one of his obituaries, he was described as a charming, irrepressible, often audacious, always much loved and always loving man who lived his whole life with joy and energy. He used to say "Be Healthy, Be Happy".

The conductor for “Too Young” was **Les Baxter**. Details about his life and career are next.

Musician and composer Les Baxter was born Leslie Thompson Baxter in Mexia, Texas on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1922 and he died in Newport Beach, California on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1996 at the age of 73.

Before he convinced his parents to move to Los Angeles where he studied at Pepperdine College, Les studied piano at the Detroit Conservatory. He started to play the piano when he was 5 years old and his family moved from Texas to Detroit when he was 7.

During high school, he played the piano in dance bands and from 1943 on, he played tenor and baritone saxophone for the Freddie Slack big band and other travelling dance bands of the time. He even sang and became a member of Mel Tormé’s Mel-Tones at the age of 23 where he could be heard on a few records such as Artie Shaw’s “What Is This Thing Called Love?” but the majority of the time was spent touring the country.

A few years later though, he changed his focus again and started conducting and arranging for Capitol Records. His 1947 album “Music Out Of The Moon”, composed by Harry Revel, was his first album with Capitol Records and an immediate success. He released a couple of more albums with Capitol Records in those early years: “Perfume Set to Music” in 1948 also composed by Harry Revel and “Music for Peace of Mind” in 1949.

In 1951, Les was the conductor during the recording session for the two Nat King Cole hit “Too Young”. Earlier he had already conducted Nat King Cole’s “Mona Lisa”.

Let’s discuss the situation around “Too Young” again – but now with additional details. Les Baxter was the conductor for “Too Young” and he was the one who received the credits as the conductor. That’s fine. The problem just was that, according to the official version most people consider credible, the actual arranger Nelson Riddle, who was ghosting for Les Baxter, received no credits at all and no one – including Nat King Cole himself – even knew that the arrangements weren’t by Les Baxter. While I don’t know what specific deal Les Baxter and Nelson Riddle had, we must assume that Les Baxter did nothing to reveal the truth and give credit where credit was due. Ghost producing was and is a common practice but since we don’t know if the two men had a solid contract, we can’t say if things were watertight there on the legal side. The fact that Nelson grew increasingly frustrated by Les not giving him the credit he deserved in his opinion could indicate the fact that Les Baxter could and should have come forward with the truth but seems to have been enjoying the praise he received for the arrangements of both “Mona Lisa” and “Too Young” instead. The latter now, “Too Young”, was the song that made other folks realize that Nelson Riddle and not Les Baxter was behind the recent beautiful arrangements written for Nat King Cole. Now to Les Baxter’s version of things. In an online interview with Les Baxter I listened to, he said that his friend who ran his publishing company took the sketches Les had made directly to Nelson Riddle who then took credit for them. He said it was like the secretary typing a letter and saying “I wrote this letter. Not the boss. I typed it, I wrote it.”. Les then said that his secretary later remembered and admitted to delivering the sketches personally to Nelson and that the sketches were totally Les style. His chords, his string voicing, his everything. Why exactly he had his friend deliver the sketches to Nelson remains unknown. According to Les, Nelson then complained to record producer Lee Gillette that he wasn’t getting any credit for his work and that Capitol Records said that they would fix the issue by letting Nelson arrange for Nat King Cole from then on without anyone saying a word to Les. He also said that back then, he decided to just let this go by as he was too busy making his own albums. I’ll summarize things at the end of this section and I’ll also provide my personal conclusion and verdict. But let’s just go through the remainder of Les Baxter’s career first.

After “Too Young” and the end of his collaboration with Nat King Cole, Les said in the online interview I mentioned above that Frank Sinatra wanted to do a record with him but that Les had the feeling that Lee Gillette at Capitol Records, who was in favor of Nelson Riddle, would prevent that. According to Les, Frank thought that he would get what he wanted but that wasn’t the case and Frank ended up starting a highly successful collaboration with Nelson Riddle instead.

Subsequently, Les recorded more albums and singles, he worked on movie and TV soundtracks like the one for “Lassie”, for example, and he even had hits with his own orchestra – “Unchained Melody” in 1955 is a famous example for that. But let’s keep in mind that Les Baxter’s version and interpretation of the song was only one of many that were released at the time – but still, it was a number one hit and some say it was the most beautiful version. Yep, he had his successes but it was nothing compared to the success Nelson Riddle had.

The 1960s saw Les forming his own conservative folk group, the Balladeers, and him working in radio as the musical director of “The Halls of Ivy” as well as both the Bob Hope and Abbott and Costello shows. Also, his film work continued during the 1960s and even lasted into the 1970s. In the 1980s then, Les would score music for theme parks such as SeaWorld in Orlando, Florida.

In addition to the issue with allegedly stealing Nelson Riddle’s credit that I explained earlier, there was a bigger controversy where certain people claimed that Les couldn’t competently conduct, that he couldn’t read scores and that, therefore, someone else wrote the music for him. On the other hand, there were people who said they saw his own handwritten score sheets – a lot of which are now housed at the University of Arizona and – which confirmed that he indeed wrote a lot of the music himself. This doesn’t mean that he didn’t employ ghostwriters though.

Now, a long time later, it’s really hard to tell if Les was a fraud or liar or not. My take would be that his career was too long and successful for him to have fooled people consistently and successfully for such a long time. But I think there’s probably something to the story which the whole Nelson Riddle drama is an indicator for. It seems to me that Les was an able musician but that he may have had his limitations that he knew how to work around by getting help from other musicians and that he wasn’t always as open as he could or should have been about it which rubbed a number of his collaborators the wrong way. Again, that’s just my speculation but an online interview with him that I recently listened to and that I mentioned before cemented my opinion with regard to this. There, Lee described himself as a lone wolf, not belonging to any cliques or anything. He said that he belonged into a special category musically, that he didn’t need anyone or their approval when he started out and that his music was always ahead of its time. What I heard there didn’t sound like a nice and humble man. But, of course, I never met Les and know too little about him to really know what kind of person he was. All I can do is share my feelings which are based on processing what I read and heard about him.

So what’s my conclusion and verdict regarding the Nelson Riddle issue? Well, we know from other sources that Nelson complained to them about the situation with Les stealing his credit, we know that others who were present in the studio when “Too Young” was recorded observed that Nelson had to come in and fix wrong notes on the arrangement for “Too Young” and there’s that controversy according to which Les couldn’t read the scores and didn’t write arrangements himself. Also, why did he just let it go by when Capitol Records reassigned him after Nelson complained to them? He said he was too busy with his own albums. Really? Too busy so that he wouldn’t fight to be able to continue to work with one of the biggest stars at the time? Come on. In addition, Nelson Riddle’s career that followed “Too Young” serves as proof

to me that Nelson was indeed a musical genius and a lot of his songs after “Too Young” were in a similar style although Les Baxter claimed that “Too Young” was totally his own style.

Based on all of this, I personally believe Nelson Riddle’s version of what happened back then and I think that Les lied about what really happened back in 1951. In no way is my goal here to disrespect Les Baxter for the sake of it. May he rest in peace and I respect the man for what he did right in his life. But I’m always looking for the truth that needs to be told, in my opinion. We owe that to Nelson Riddle. Again, I could be wrong but I think I’m not in this case.

Let’s now focus on **Nelson Riddle**, the actual arranger of the 1951 original Nat King Cole version of “Too Young”.

Arranger, composer, bandleader and orchestrator Nelson Riddle was born Nelson Smock Riddle Jr. in Oradell, New Jersey, which is around 10 miles west of New York City, on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921 and he died in Los Angeles, California on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1985.

Nelson was one of the greatest arrangers ever and instrumental in creating the trademark sound for a lot of artists – especially for Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra. He, who won an Academy Award and three Grammy Awards during his long career, also worked with many other giants like Ella Fitzgerald, Linda Ronstadt and Dean Martin to name just three here.

Nelson was the only child of his mother, Marie Albertine Riddle of French and Spanish descent who was born in France and loved classical music, and his fun-loving dad Nelson Smock Riddle of English-Irish and Dutch descent who was a music lover and played the trombone and ragtime piano. At some point, the family moved to Ridgewood which isn’t too far away and there, Nelson attended Ridgewood High School where he continued his musical pursuits after starting piano lessons at the age of 8 and trombone lessons at the age of 14.

Nelson had a key experience during his high school years when he saw and heard Serge Koussevitsky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra play Maurice Ravel’s Boléro at Carnegie Hall. He later said about it: “I’ve never forgotten it. It’s almost as if the orchestra leaped from the stage and smacked you in the face.”

By the time he was a teenager and he graduated from high school in June 1939, he had already made up his mind and knew he wanted to become a professional musician. He once said that he wanted to be a jazz trombone player but that he began composing and arranging as he didn’t have the coordination he needed to play the trombone but only the ideas.

From his teenage years and into his early 20s, Nelson gained experience by playing in bands, first taking arranging lessons with jazz bandleader, pianist, arranger, and composer Bill Finnegan who was an arranger in the Glenn Miller Orchestra in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and then arranging for local bands. Nelson was working for the Charlie Spivak Orchestra when, in 1943, he joined the Merchant Marine; since he was serving at Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, New York, he was able to continue to play for the orchestra. Under his fellow merchant mariner, composer Alan Shulman, a composer and cellist, Nelson studied orchestration and in 1944, after his time with the Merchant Marine, he joined Tommy Dorsey’s orchestra in Chicago as the orchestra’s third trombone. In April 1945, right before the end of World War 2, Nelson was drafted by the Army and then discharged in June 1946 after a little bit more than one year of service. He then moved to Hollywood at the end of 1946 to become an arranger and so he spent the next few years arranging for record labels and the radio. Nelson secured his first job in Los Angeles, which was



arranging for Bob Crosby, with the help of his friend Bob Bain. In 1947, he joined NBC radio as a staffer while continuing to study arranging and conducting with Victor Young, an American composer, arranger, violinist and conductor, and with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, an Italian composer, pianist and writer. Nelson's first taste of success was Doris Day's 1949 number 2 hit "Again" which he had written the arrangement for.

Things would take off when composer Les Baxter hired Nelson to write arrangements for a recording session with Nat King Cole because Les himself was too busy with conducting. The reason behind this was that Capitol Records wanted to expand Nat King Cole's career beyond the Nat King Cole Trio sound and try out a more orchestral sound. Nelson once told radio DJ Jonathan Schwartz in an interview that back then, there was a prevalent tradition of the conductor handing out the arrangements because many of the conductors couldn't write which, he said, wasn't true in the case of Les Baxter but nevertheless, he gave Nelson the job of arranging "Mona Lisa" for Nat King Cole. As we discussed earlier, "Mona Lisa" was a huge success in 1950 and "Too Young" went number one in 1951 which eventually led to a long-lasting partnership between Nelson Riddle and Nat King Cole after the latter found out that Nelson was behind those arrangements and not Les Baxter. From then on, Nelson was no longer an anonymous arranger and he had his own name printed on the record labels. In 1952, the two had the next success with "Unforgettable", the first song officially credited to Nelson. While the two recorded a bunch of albums together – examples here are "The Piano Style of Nat King Cole", "To Whom It May Concern" or "Wild Is Love" to name a few –, they mainly recorded singles together towards the late 1950s. Nat would turn to other arrangers for his albums and Nelson would work with Frank Sinatra on other album projects – more on Frank's and Nelson's collaboration shortly. After their 1960 album "Wild is Love", Nelson would fully focus on his work with Frank Sinatra and Nat would team up with arranger Ralph Carmichael who was able to give Nat his full attention. Nevertheless, Nelson and Nat remained close friends until Nat's death in 1965. Nelson's and Nat's collaboration was one of the most fruitful in the history of pop music during which they made more than 250 recordings for Capitol Records. The relationship between the two was easy-going and professional plus they were very good friends – which their music benefitted from greatly. Together, they took American pop music to a whole new level. John Collins, who also worked with Nat, once recalled the following: "Riddle understood each singer he wrote for. He really understood what Nat was about. He was a champ." Nelson had a tremendous amount of respect for Nat King Cole: He once said that Nat had what is called an absolute pitch which means that he could "hear the note". As a result, Nat didn't need the orchestra to provide an introduction for the songs they recorded. He said that Nat could sing 30 songs in a row with no intro as he knew what the pitch was for every single one of them.

The executives at Capitol Records knew what a musical genius Nelson was and so, in 1953, they picked him to work with Frank Sinatra who had just joined the label after experiencing a decline in his career in the early 1950s and who needed a hit. That doesn't mean that Frank was on board with the suggestion the folks at Capitol Records had for him right away. Frank wanted to continue his collaboration with his long-time arranger Alex Stordahl whom he had worked with at Columbia Records. Capitol Records relented but the first couple of productions the two did together at Capitol Records didn't take off and so Frank agreed to work with Nelson. The first song Frank and Nelson did together was "I've got the World on a String" and it was an immediate success which music historians oftentimes credit with relaunching Frank's career. It is evident that Nelson complemented Frank's talents better than any other arranger Frank had worked with before. One of the key ingredients to their success was that they would record conceptually unified albums that created consistent moods. This was something that was very important

to Nelson. He wasn't a fan of arranging single songs for artists and when he worked with Linda Ronstadt in the 1980s he told her that he would only do full albums with her and he once turned down Paul McCartney who had asked Nelson to write an arrangement for an album. Nelson said: "I just couldn't do it. You can't put something like that in the middle of a bunch of other things. The mood comes and then it changes. It's like putting a picture in a bad frame." Between Frank and Nelson, there was a great mutual respect and in a 1985 interview with KCRW, a National Public Radio member station broadcasting from the campus of Santa Monica College in Santa Monica, Nelson said: "He opened some doors which without his intervention would have remained closed to me." With regard to his own contribution to saving Frank's career he once said in an interview that can be found online that it was all about timing as well as being at the right place at the right time with the right notes. One thing is for sure: That even though Nelson had hits before like the ones with Nat King Cole we already talked about, it was the collaborations with Frank Sinatra that made him the probably most famous arranger of all time.

From then on, Nelson was a busy man working with both Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra as well as other famous artists such as Dean Martin over the next 10 years. Also, he arranged music for films and he recorded his own instrumental records of which "Lisbon Antigua" became a number one hit in 1956.

Nelson's success and busy schedule continued during the late 1950s, the 1960s and 1970s. Towards the late 1960s, Frank Sinatra started to prefer other arrangers like Billy May or Don Costa and the two grew more distant. It seems that this was mainly driven by Frank Sinatra's behavior but, of course, this is hard to tell so many years later. "Strangers in the Night", released in 1966, was the last full album they did together. However, Nelson continued to arrange various songs for Frank until 1977.

After five nominations, Nelson won his first and only Academy Award in 1974 for the score he wrote for "The Great Gatsby". Nelson then did more movie and TV work – he scored around 40 movies overall –, played live with his The Nelson Riddle Orchestra and, in 1982, recorded one more album with Ella Fitzgerald titled "The Best is yet to come".

Around 1982/1983, just when his recording career was in a bit of a decline which was initially triggered by Rock'n'Roll entering the world stage – which he didn't like much – as well as electronic instruments becoming more and more popular, Nelson was contacted by Linda Ronstadt who asked him to work with her on an album of jazz standards. This request turned into a 3-album contract and the arrangements for Linda's three albums were, except for an album for his old friend, the opera singer Kiri Te Kanawa, the final arrangements of Nelson's career. The three records sold well; over 7 million people bought them which introduced Nelson to a young audience and reignited his career during the last three years of his life. He really enjoyed his late success and he would tell his kids how amazing it felt to be back on the charts again.

He won two of his three Grammy Awards for two of his three albums with Linda Ronstadt: "What's New" released in 1983 and "Lush Life" released in 1985 – both in category "Best Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying Vocal(s)". He had won his first one, by the way, for "Cross Country Suite" released in 1958. Nelson had 7 Grammy nominations in addition to 7 Emmy nominations in total and he received his third Grammy for "Lush Life" posthumously on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986 and Linda Ronstadt accepted it for him. The third album with Linda Ronstadt was released in 1986 after Nelson's death; his last three arrangements for Ronstadt's album "For Sentimental Reasons" were conducted by Terry Woodson. Nelson said about Linda in a 1985 "People Magazine" interview: "She's got a strong, beautiful voice and really unbelievable power. God, when she belts out 'What's New,' you really believe it."

A couple of months before his death, Nelson was the conductor at the 50<sup>th</sup> Presidential Inaugural Gala which took place before the second inauguration of president Ronald Reagan; the show was televised across the country and hosted by Frank Sinatra who sang some of his hits there. This event held on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1985 was the last time a lot of people saw Nelson Riddle on stage.

Nelson's last performance overall was on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1985. He died in Los Angeles, California on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1985 of cardiac and kidney failure as a result of cirrhosis of the liver, with which he had been diagnosed five years earlier, at the age of 64.

If you're interested in Nelson's work and genius, I can recommend the book "Arranged by Nelson Riddle" which is a study guide for arrangers and a showcase of his thinking and approach. In the book, that he had started to write as early as 1971, he summarized the main task of an arranger as follows: "As an arranger, your task is to set forth another person's composition in the most attractive and effective manner possible within the combination of instruments available." And, I think we can all agree that Nelson did a wonderful job there. He always put the artist first and created his arrangements in a way that was most attractive for them and for the song they were singing. Nelson once told a funny story about Nat King Cole sending his drummer Lee Young as a messenger to Nelson to ask him why he didn't write Frank Sinatra arrangements for Nat and Nelson told the messenger that he should tell Nat that Nelson just thought of Nat differently musically. I think that sums up Nelson's philosophy and approach nicely and you can really tell when you listen to the music. Nat was a gentle man with an unbelievably silky smooth voice and Nelson's arrangements for him were mostly soft and gentle ballads that reflected Nat's personality and were perfect for his voice whereas the songs for Frank were not as soft but had a different depth to them that catered to both Frank's personality and voice. Nelson knew how to make a singer sound better because he hid – with either brass or strings – the things that the singer couldn't do and he knew how to work with strings to underline what the singer could do. He knew how to showcase a singer better than anybody else. He got into the soul and artistry of each person he was arranging for. While Nelson was highly successful arranging for others, he once admitted that that wasn't quite as much fun as writing his own songs and arrangements. He enjoyed writing dramatic music and picture music, music to a story that is, which resulted in his solo albums and work for movies and TV. I will discuss Nelson's arranging and musical style more in section "The Music".

One very interesting aspect about Nelson's personality one can read in the book "September in the Rain: The Life of Nelson Riddle" is the fact that gloom and unhappiness seems to have characterized Nelson's life. Emil Richards, a vibraharpist and percussionist who worked with Nelson a lot, once said: "Ya know, all those years I never saw Nelson smile or laugh. He just seemed to be an unhappy kind of guy." A number of Nelson contemporaries seem to have confirmed this observation according to the book and so I wonder what the reason for his somber outlook was – despite all the great success he had. Some, if not most of this aura of sadness that surrounded Nelson, seems to have been rooted in his childhood as he grew up in a rather cold household that was lacking a nurturing atmosphere and, as he described it, was "strait-laced and stodgy". Also, a lot of it had to do with the fact that Nelson never knew how good he was and he never realized the genius he really was. He was always under pressure. He just thought he was a hard worker and that he was pretty good. But he never realized *how* good he was.

Despite being a genius and a naturally-gifted but serious arranger and also conductor who was strict with his orchestra members and who wasn't really open to suggestions his orchestra members raised to improve the scores, it seems, he still was a down-to-earth gentleman and professional that brought out

the best of all the musicians he worked with during his long career in the music business. Of course, you had to be really good to be treated well and deserve a seat in his orchestra.

In a 1983 interview that can be found online, Nelson was asked if he sometimes felt like playing the second fiddle because he was more in the background whereas the artists he worked with were the focus of attention and in the limelight. He indicated that he was fine with that saying that he would be scared to death doing what they do and that he had his hands full doing his part of the show.

Nelson was married twice: From October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 until January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1970 to Doreen Moran whom he had 7 children with and, after the divorce from Doreen, he was married to Naomi Tenenholtz, who was his secretary at the time, from April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1970 until his death.

**Lee Gillette** is next. He was the Capitol Records producer involved in the “Too Young” recording. Our show today wouldn’t be complete if we didn’t talk about him as well.

Lee was born as Leland James Gillette in Indianapolis, Indiana on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1912.

He was not only a record producer but also an A&R director and musician. Although born in Indianapolis, he was raised in Peoria, Illinois and then in Chicago during the 1920s. As a teenager, Lee sang and played the drums in local bands and he formed a vocal trio named “The Campus Kids” together with his buddy Ken Nelson who worked as a movie-house organist and dance-band vocalist and, later, as the music director and announcer for WJJD's Chicago Symphony Orchestra broadcasts before Lee offered him a job at Capitol Records which made him move to Hollywood in 1948 where he was a record producer and an A&R man.

In 1939, Lee moved to Hollywood, California, where he met record store owner Glenn Wallichs who was responsible for recording the radio show “Fibber McGee and Molly” on transcription discs and who was one of the founding members of Capitol Records a few years later. “Fibber McGee and Molly” was a very successful American radio comedy series by and with Jim and Marian Jordan, a real-life husband and wife team, that ran from 1935 until 1959. In Hollywood, Lee joined the orchestra for the radio show as a drummer. At some point, Lee went back to Chicago to work on radio but after Glenn Wallichs had co-founded Capitol Records in 1942, Lee returned to California in 1944 to be in charge of the country music artists and repertoire section of the young record label. As part of his job as an A&R, he signed and then worked as the producer for most of Capitol's country artists right after World War 2 including Tennessee Ernie Ford, Jack Guthrie, Merle Travis, Jimmy Wakely, Tex Ritter and Tex Williams. He was famous for using jazz musicians and horn sections on country and pop-oriented recordings on a regular basis. Aside from co-founder Johnny Mercer, Lee was Capitol Records’ first A&R man. Lee and his pioneering work in country and pop music helped Capitol Records establish its musical identity during its first twenty years.

The year was 1950 when Lee moved over to the pop and jazz music division of Capitol Records. His old friend Ken Nelson took over the country division in 1951 which he would oversee for the next 25 years releasing hit after hit. Lee continued to produce Tennessee Ernie Ford but more and more, he became associated with Nat King Cole. Lee would produce Nat King Cole’s records from the early 1950s on until Nat King Cole’s death in 1965. Lee also worked with “The King Cole Trio” in the very early days.

Beyond Nat King Cole, Lee worked with artists like Nelson Riddle, Dean Martin, Peggy Lee, Georgia Gibbs, Joe "Fingers" Carr, Vic Damone, Stan Kenton and Carr to name a few. His collaboration with legendary music director Nelson Riddle provided the music world with unforgettable classics by Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee, Margaret Whiting and many others.

And beyond Capitol Records, Lee helped organize the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (or short NARAS) and he co-founded the country music publishing company “Central Songs” in Chicago in the late 1940s together with his friend Ken Nelson who, as I mentioned before, also worked at Capitol Records and with Cliffie Stone who was one of Lee’s A&R men and who played the bass on the West Coast sessions of Capitol Records – especially the country sessions with Tex Ritter and Wesley Tuttle; also, Cliffie was instrumental in signing Merle Travis to Capitol Records. The guys sold their company “Central Songs” to Capitol Records in 1969.

Lee was active in his career from 1930 until 1965. The latter was the year in which Nat King Cole died – an event that caused Lee to suffer from depression and to retire. Lee was one of the pallbearers at Nat’s funeral. This shows how close Lee was to Nat and his family. Lee spent much of his later years travelling and seeing the world together with his wife. Only now and then would he produce music again – one such example was a collaboration with Alvin Rey, an American jazz guitarist and bandleader.

By the way, Lee Gillette was a ham radio operator and his call sign was K6HSZ. Kilo 6 Hotel Sierra Zulu went Silent Key on August 20th, 1981 when Lee died in Los Angeles at the age of 68 but his contributions to the world of music will never die as long as there are people like you in this world – music lovers who appreciate the pioneers and legends that gave us the greatest gift they had – their eternal music.

Our story continues with **Artie Mogull** who was Ivan Mogull’s cousin and a music publisher for most of his career and present during the recording of Nat King Cole’s “Too Young”. That is reason enough to also talk about him a little bit.

Artie was 3 years younger than his cousin Ivan. Artie was born as Arthur Mogull in Mount Vernon, New York on March 26<sup>th</sup> or March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1927. I found conflicting information regarding Artie’s exact birthday. Not a problem.

He was one of the big names in show biz with a career that spanned five decades. He grew up in the suburbs of Mount Vernon, New York. His dad was a Russian immigrant and a part-owner of the “Mogull Firm and Library Shop” on West 48<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. After graduating from Columbia University in New York City, Artie was hired by his cousin, Ivan, to work on his music rights business in the Brill Building in Manhattan. His first job in 1949 was managing The Tommy Dorsey orchestra. Artie became a record promoter within a year which had him travelling all over the US to provide radio stations across the country with advance copies of records so they could play them. At one point, Artie grew tired of life on the road and switched over to the publishing business becoming an A&R man. Early acts he worked with were Paul Anka and The Kingston Trio, for example.

In the early 1960s, while with Warner Brothers, it was Artie who signed Bob Dylan to his first contract.

In 1968, Artie released John Lennon’s first solo album “Two Virgins” which was quite a story as it had both John Lennon and his wife, Yoko Ono, naked on its cover. Artie was sued over this and the album was a commercial flop. But hey, that happens.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Artie very successfully worked with artists such as Kenny Rogers, Peter, Paul & Mary, Deep Purple, The Electric Light Orchestra also known as ELO, Olivia Newton John, Helen Reddy and Laura Nyro. Kenny Rogers is just one of those names but he is a good example of how successful Artie’s work with these artists was. Kenny had hit after hit after hit after hit during their collaboration – “Lucille” and “The Gambler” are only two examples here. In those years, Kenny had five gold albums in a

row (two of which went platinum), three number one country hits (one of those with Dottie West), several Grammy awards and countless other accolades.

Artie was Vice President of A&R at Warner Brothers Records, Capitol Records and MCA Records. After Warner Brothers, he was with Capitol Records in the early 1970s, where he was the first to sign Helen Reddy. Then, he spent time at MCA, where he secured the rights to the "That's Entertainment" soundtrack. In 1976, Artie was named president-chairman of United Artists Records – short UA –, a company that he acquired in 1978 in partnership with Jerry Rubinstein, a former chairman of ABC Records, from Transamerica. Artie was responsible for records by The Electric Light Orchestra as well as country music artists like Kenny Rogers and Crystal Gayle; the "Rocky" soundtrack also was something he oversaw, by the way. Artie sold UA to EMI in 1979 which had financed the initial deal and returned to being an independent A&R man.

Artie was known as a great storyteller. One, according to his long-time lawyer Robert Nathan, that would know how to embroider a good story. He said "Artie was a little mendacious. He would say 'It makes a better story my way.' It was large grains of salt with Artie."

One story is from the year 1977, the year that Elvis Presley died and Artie was president-chairman of United Artists Records. Artie had heard that the death of Elvis had caused fans to order hundreds of thousands of his records on RCA. Some sources say that Artie then said, "Let's shoot Paul Anka." He loved to finish the story with Paul Anka calling him in the middle of the night to complain about it and Artie replying to him "Do you realize you were the only artist I could think of whose death would warrant those kind of sales?" Paul Anka just had a big hit during the mid-1970s together with Odia Coates with "Havin' My Baby" and this answer appeased Paul Anka according to Artie.

Also, Artie seems to have been an impulsive guy, a character trait that sometimes contributed to his business success. There is a story that says he signed the group "Hootie and the Blowfish" with Darius Rucker without even having heard their demo tape just because he liked their name. The group was his last major acquisition. Artie remained in the music business and founded JRS Records in the early 1990s and indie label Insane Records in 2004 before his death.

Artie died on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in his Beverly Hills, California, home at the age of 77 of heart failure.

Artie and Ivan – probably the most successful cousins the music business has ever seen.

And then we have **Ralph Carmichael** before we get to the orchestra members and Nat King Cole himself.

While he wasn't involved in the original 1951 mono version of "Too Young", he was the arranger and conductor for a very nice 1961 stereo version of the song which was recorded during session number 8296 on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1961 at the Capitol Records recording studios located at 151 W. 46th Street in New York City. In addition to Nat King Cole and Ralph Carmichael, it is assumed that John Collins played the guitar, Charles Harris the bass and Lee Young the drums. It seems that not more is known about the orchestra that played on this recording unfortunately.

American composer and arranger Ralph Carmichael, the son of a Pentecostal pastor who started to play the violin before he was four years old and later added other instruments to his resume, was born in Quincy, Illinois on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1927. From age 6 to 12, he and his family lived in North Dakota before they moved to San Jose, California where Ralph won a seat in the violin section of the San Jose Civic Symphony.

After a long and successful career that followed, he is now considered a pioneer of contemporary Christian music and some even say that he is the father of Christian rock.

In the early 1950s, Ralph sang backup with Nat King Cole while Nat was the summer replacement for Dinah Shore on her NBC radio show which aired a couple of times per week. Ralph got the job of singing baritone through vocal contractor Jimmy Joyce. Nelson Riddle was the conductor. Although Ralph didn't meet Nat back then, this was their first collaboration – in a sense.

At the end of the 1950s, one day, Ralph was at the Capitol Records studio recording “Rhapsody in Sacred Music” with a 48-member orchestra he had been asked to put together. The mixer for that session was Val Valentine who liked what he heard and gave Lee Gillette, Nat King Cole’s A&R man at Capitol Records, a copy of the tape he had made.

Ralph immediately caught Lee’s attention and shortly after listening to the tape, Lee called Ralph and asked him if he could provide the arrangements for an album of mainly sacred Christmas songs by one of the label's biggest stars, Nat King Cole. Nat was still working with Nelson Riddle on the album “Wild is Love” though that he needed to finish first. This is an album where Nat tells a story in between singing his songs. One day, Lee called Ralph and said that they needed a short overture and backgrounds for the narrations because Nelson wasn't available. This resulted in the first recording Ralph did with Nat.

“The Magic of Christmas” was the result of their first bigger collaboration and it was released for the 1960 holiday season. The album actually didn't include the famous “Christmas Song” and they let Ralph use only nine strings as he later complained – nine wasn't enough for Ralph.

Since things were going very well for Capitol Records with the duo Cole and Carmichael, they asked Ralph to work with Nat King Cole on a few more secular albums.

And so also in 1960, they worked on the “The Touch of Your Lips” album together, which contained romantic ballads backed by lots of strings. Nat liked Ralph’s string writing which included clusters Ralph had put together using four parts for violins, two parts for violas and two parts for cellos.

In 1961 then, Ralph wrote the arrangement for the definitive stereo version of Nat King Cole’s “Christmas Song” which Nat had first released in 1946 as a mono version and which would be part of the album “The Nat King Cole Story” – a concept album for which Ralph rearranged 36 of Nat’s earlier mono hits in stereo. For this project, Ralph had convinced Lee to let him use 20 strings. Finally. Ralph just loved strings. As he mostly built his new arrangements on Nelson Riddle’s already perfect mono arrangements, all he could do in a lot of cases was to use even more strings and turn the “stringy” sound into a “glow”, as he would call it, giving the sound a rich nostalgic feel. It was for this project that Ralph rearranged Nat’s “Too Young” in stereo. Ralph once told the story that Lee Gillette used to tease him because Ralph liked the sound big and with a lot of strings. Lee always said that the night before a session, Ralph would wake him up on the phone and beg him to use more and more musicians.

Ralph soon became Nat King Cole's regular arranger – a close collaboration that lasted until Nat King Cole’s death in 1965. The final project the two worked on together was Nat King Cole's last album, L-O-V-E, which had beautiful, jazzy big band arrangements. Ralph also wrote arrangements for other famous artists such as Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, Al Martino, Pat Boone, Roger Williams, Julie London, Jack Jones and Stan Kenton. But later on, he had his biggest success in the field of Christian music.

Let's now meet the **19 orchestra members** that were present during the recording of "Too Young" in 1951:

There were:

- 9 violinists
- 2 violists
- 2 cellists
- 1 pianist
- 1 harpist
- 1 guitarist
- 2 bassists
- and 1 drummer
  
- The **9 violinists** go first:
  - **Harry Bluestone**. He was an English violinist, composer, conductor and music producer who was born Harold B. Blostein on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1907 in England and died in Studio City, California on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1992 at the age of 85. Harry came to the US as a boy and started to play the violin at a young age. As a teenager, he played for Josephine Baker in Paris, later graduated from the Institute of Musical Art which later became the Juilliard School and he freelanced on a number of radio programs with Benny Goodman, the Dorsey Brothers and Artie Shaw, for example, during the 1930s. Harry moved to Hollywood in 1935 where he played with the Lennie Hayton Orchestra, he had his own 15-minute radio show, did recordings for the Brunswick Records label and became the concertmaster for the Paramount Studios. He joined the Air Force in 1942, became a Master Sergeant and organized both the Army Air Force Training Command Orchestra that replaced Glenn Miller, who went to Europe, as well as the Army Air Force Orchestra. After the war, Harry formed his own orchestra which played for Dinah Shore and Jo Stafford. And later, he established a number of music publishing houses and played the violin as a heavily in-demand "first chair" on hundreds of albums by artists like Dolly Parton, the Beach Boys, Stevie Wonder, Lionel Richie, Peggy Lee and the Beatles to name a few. Also, in the 1980s, Harry wrote books on playing the violin, the guitar and the trumpet. When it comes to session musicians and violinists in particular, Harry was among the best ever.
  - Next is violinist and concertmaster **Misha Russell** who was born on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1901, died in April of 1982 and played with Gordon Jenkins and His Orchestra, Harry James and His Music Makers, Harry James and His Orchestra, Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Eartha Kitt and many others over the years.
  - Next, please: **Daniel Lube** known as **Dan Lube** who played with Artie Shaw and His Orchestra, Gordon Jenkins and His Orchestra, Harry James and His Orchestra, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Louis Armstrong, Dean Martin, Ella Fitzgerald, Les McCann and Percy Faith to name a few.



- Our next violinist is **Jack Shulman** who had his own group called “Jack Shulman Strings”, worked with “The Gene Page Orchestra” as well as famous artists like Marvin Gaye.
- Jazz violinist **Benn Gill** also known as **Benny Gill** is our next in line. He played the violin on a lot of successful movies such as “Around the World in 80 Days” or “The Great Escape”. Also, he played with Percy Faith, Jimmy Lunceford, Stan Kenton, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald and other big names.
- A gentleman named **William Miller** was also part of the line-up of violinists but unfortunately, I couldn’t find any information about him.
- The same goes for the next one, actually: **Seymour Kramer**.
- I was more successful with professional violinist and strings conductor **Gerald Vinci** who is known by this thing called the internet. Gerald was born in Brooklyn, New York on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1927 and died in Fallbrook, California on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001 at the age of 74. Gerald was 3 years old when he started to play the violin. At age 11 he made his professional debut at the Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan where he was a member of the New York Civic Symphony Orchestra that played the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with his dad conducting the musicians. When he was around 13 years old, Gerald moved to Los Angeles where he continued his violin studies and also played on the radio and on television on a regular basis. From 1950 to 1951, he was the San Diego Symphony’s concertmaster and after that gig, he returned to LA to pursue a career as a studio musician. Beyond Nat King Cole, Gerald worked with a lot of famous artists like Dean Martin, Barbara Streisand and Frank Sinatra, for example. Gerald also played on movie soundtracks where one famous example is his violin solo in the 1974 Mel Brooks film, “Young Frankenstein” starring Gene Wilder, Madeline Kahn, Terri Garr, Marty Feldman and Peter Boyle. One of my all-time favorite movies. Put the candle back! Frau Blucher.
- And our 9<sup>th</sup> and last violinist is **Robert Sushel** who entered the music recording scene in the 1950s by playing the violin on a lot of pop, jazz, classical and movie soundtrack records. Beyond being a session musician, he is known from his membership in the “The American Art Quartet” which was formed in 1943 and which included violist Virginia Majewski, violinist Eudice Shapiro and cellist Victor Gottlieb.

This concludes the violinist section – 9 of the finest violinists one can imagine played on Nat King Cole’s 1951 hit “Too Young”.

- The next group of musicians to be introduced are the **2 violists**:
  - **Joseph DiFiore** also known as **Joe DiFiore** was born on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1906 in New York and he died in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he had lived for over 30 years, on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the age of 98. There was a time when Joe was considered to be one of the two best violists in the world. He studied at the Julliard School of Music in New York City and later played as first viola at the Universal Studios and at the Greek Theatre in Hollywood,

California. In addition to this, he played with big bands, radio station WOV as well as in Broadway plays. And if that wasn't impressive enough, Joe was a hard-working session musician who can be heard on countless records by famous artists like Frank Sinatra, The Beach Boys, Bobby Darin, Dean Martin, Peggy Lee, Chet Atkins and so on and so forth.

- The other violist on "Too Young" was **Louis Kievman** also known as **Lou Kievman** who lived from 1910 to 1990. Lou was also one of the best and he played a viola from the year 1580 built by one of the earliest and most famous violin makers, the Italian Gasparo da Salo born Gasparo Bertolotti who lived between 1542 and 1609. Lou studied at the Institute of Musical Art and the Juilliard School of Music in New York. He had his first gig at Carnegie Hall and he played for the "Musical Art Quartet" from 1931 to 1937 which he helped form and he played for the "Stuyvesant String Quartet". After that, he became a member of the NBC Symphony Orchestra under famous Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini. Lou started his long run as a session musician in the 1940s after moving to Los Angeles. He worked with the greatest of the great like Bing Crosby, The Carpenters, Bobby Darin, Ella Fitzgerald, Doris Day, The Benny Goodman Orchestra, Neil Diamond, Judy Garland, Eartha Kitt, Dean Martin, The Platters, Peggy Lee, Frank Sinatra, Diana Ross, Neil Sedaka and the list goes on. Wow. Lou also wrote a couple of string instruction books in the late 1960s and early 1970s that are still used by both string instructors and students all over the world. For example, "Practicing the Viola", "Practicing the Violin" and "Introduction to Strings". Also, he taught at the California Institute of the Arts as well as the California State University. Not only was he a great musician, he was also a great teacher.
- Now, please meet our **2 cellists**:
  - First, we have **Armand Kaproff** who was born in Brooklyn, New York on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1919 and died in Los Angeles, California on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the age of 85. Armand was affiliated with the Baker String Quartet, Billy Moore and his Jumpin String Octette and Gordon Jenkins And His Orchestra. He was an accomplished session musician who played with the likes of Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Peggy Lee, Stan Kenton, Percy Faith, Judy Garland, Ella Fitzgerald, Sammy Davis, Jr., The Beach Boys, etc. In addition to Armand's recording sessions and work in orchestras, he can be heard in a lot of movies. Examples here are "The Great Escape" and "Escape from the Planet of the Apes".
  - The other cellist was **Eleanor Slatkin**, who was born as **Eleanor Aller** in New York City on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1917 into a musical family with Russian roots and she died in Los Angeles on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1995 at the age of 78. Together with her husband, Felix Slatkin, an American violinist, conductor and soulmate of hers, whom she married in 1939, she founded the "Hollywood String Quartet". Eleanor received her first cello lessons from her father when she was 9 and it didn't take a whole year before she won her first gold medal in a competition. She won another competition when she was 12 which earned her an appearance at the famous Carnegie Hall. At age 16, Eleanor secured a scholarship to the Juilliard School of Music in New York.

When she was 19, she became the Warner Brothers Studio Orchestra's principal cellist; Eleanor was the youngest person and also the first woman to hold a principal chair in a Hollywood studio orchestra. Well done. Victor Aller, her brother, later became their orchestra manager and also her father had played for the orchestra for some time. Also, Eleanor worked as a session or studio musician in Hollywood which led to recordings with Frank Sinatra, a family friend of hers, and other famous artists. In 1958, Eleanor won a Grammy Award for "Beethoven: Quartet 13" as a member of the "Hollywood String Quartet". After 36 years with Warner Brothers, Eleanor moved to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox in 1972 to become their principal cellist – a position she held until 1985.

The next time you watch Steven Spielberg's famous 1977 movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind", please pay attention to the solo that composer and conductor John Williams had written for Eleanor. She did a lot of different things and once said: "You name it. I've done it! I've done rock and roll. And I loved every minute of it!" Her son, the conductor Leonard Slatkin, speaking on behalf of his brother the cellist Frederick Slatkin and himself, once said about their mother's cello playing: "Our mother was a peerless cellist who inspired musicians around the world. She was uncompromising in her musical beliefs and everyone who knew her respected her judgement. It is gratifying that, towards the end of her life, she began to get the recognition she long deserved." Eleanor had a warm, larger-than-life personality with a wicked sense of humor and she always wanted to learn new skills. After her husband died in 1963, she fulfilled her dream of becoming an airplane pilot. She once said: "I know I'm a crazy lady but I like to try everything and there isn't enough time to do it all."

- There was **1 pianist** in the studio for the recording of "Too Young".
  - And that was jazz pianist, orchestra leader and composer **Buddy Cole**, who was born Edwin LeMar Cole in Irving, Illinois on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916 and died in Hollywood, California on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1964 at the young age of 47. Buddy played in a number of orchestras over the years, here's a selection: Buddy Cole And His Orchestra, Buddy Cole's Boogie Woogie Seven, John Scott Trotter And His Orchestra, The Mahlon Clark Sextette, The Buddy Cole Quartet, The Buddy Cole Trio and The Four Of A Kind. Buddy started out as a pianist in movie theaters where he would play between movies. At age 19, he joined the band of Gil Evans and in the second half of the 1930s, he found himself playing in dance bands like Alvino Rey's and Frankie Trumbauer's. In 1940, Buddy was married to Yvonne King who was a member of the King Sisters. After that, he focused on working as a studio musician playing almost every instrument that had keys: Piano, electric organ, celeste and harpsichord. Buddy recorded a number of organ albums for different labels and he worked with famous artists like Henri Mancini or Bing Crosby for whom he played on "Ol' Man River", for example. Buddy Cole was a genius and I recommend listening to some of his organ songs which will take you to a different place and time – I promise.

- Pianist Buddy Cole is now followed by, **Kathryn Julye**, the lone **harpist** on “Too Young”:
  - Kathryn Julye, who later became Kathryn Julye Gilbert, was born in California on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1904 and she died in Los Angeles, California on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1986 at the age of 81. Kathryn, who was also a composer, can also be heard on Nat King Cole’s “Unforgettable”. But this is just one of many collaborations with well-known musicians as she also worked with Frank Sinatra – a lot, I should say –, the Andrews Sisters, Dean Martin, Chet Atkins and others. Chances are that it’s Kathryn’s harp if you hear a harp on a Frank Sinatra record.
  
- Next up is the **guitarist** whose name was **Irving Ashby**.
  - A true jazz guitarist who also played the upright bass, he was born as Irving Conrad Ashby in Somerville, Massachusetts, on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1920 and he died in Perris, California on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1987 at the age of 66. When Irving was 20, he joined Lionel Hampton’s band and 7 years later, he joined the Nat King Cole Trio taking over for Oscar Moore. He then joined the Oscar Peterson Trio with which he stayed until 1958. After that, Irving did a lot of session work together with artists like B. B. King, Pat Boone, Billie Holiday, Count Basie and others. Irving owned a couple of guitars by Charles A. Stromberg, a giant among guitar makers who, together with his father, built some of the finest instruments the world has seen. Like other local Boston artists, Irving would hang around Mr. Stromberg’s shop as he was known to let local artists break in new instruments before he sold them to customers. In his later years, Irving was teaching guitar in Perris, California, but at some point, arthritis prevented him from playing the instrument he loved so much – that must have been hard.
  
- It’s time for some bass now. 2 **bassists** can be heard on the recording of “Too Young”.
  - One was **Joe Comfort**, who was born in Alcorn, Mississippi on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1917 and died in Los Angeles, California on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1988 at the age of 71.  
Joe grew up in a musical family in Los Angeles. His dad taught him to play the trombone and then, Joe taught himself how to play double bass. Joe played with Lionel Hampton and band in the 1940s and with Nat King Cole in the 1950s. Especially in the early 1950s – this is the time that “Too Young” was recorded in –and further into the early 1960s, he worked as a studio musician and collaborated with Nelson Riddle a lot recording music for artists like Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, etc. Also, Joe played in nightclubs. He played and worked in LA a lot because he didn’t like flying and so he turned down many offers. Pam Ward, a Los Angeles writer and graphic designer and great niece of Joe once said that "Uncle Joe's funeral was a giant celebration of L.A.'s jazz musicians, a Central Avenue homecoming which included a stellar performance by trumpeter, Clora Bryant."
  - The other bassist was **Milton Kestenbaum**, who was born on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1914 and died on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at 89 years old. Milton, taught by the great Fred Zimmerman, was the principal bass of the Pittsburgh Symphony under Fritz Reiner and a member of the NBC Symphony under Toscanini. On top, he was one of the best session musicians one can

think of – he played with John Denver, Quincy Jones, Earth, Wind & Fire to name a few – and so it is only a side note to mention that he also played the bass on famous movies such as “Gremlins” and “Escape from Alcatraz” to name just two out of a very long list. Milton was a great teacher at the Music Academy of the West and at UCLA, for example. He was a teacher that, as one former student of his put it, “all that a teacher should be: a guide for life as well as a teacher of music”.

- The final orchestra member I’d like to introduce to you is **Lee Young, the drummer.**
  - Lee, who could also sing and worked as a bandleader, was born Leonidas Raymond Young in New Orleans, Louisiana on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1914 and he died in Los Angeles, California on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008 at the age of 94. In the 1920s already, Lee found himself in the family band, the “New Orleans Strutters”, which played at carnivals and other events and before he was old enough to play, Lee stood on stage in a miniature tuxedo before the band as its “conductor”. As soon as he was old enough to play then, Lee learned to play trumpet, trombone, piano and soprano saxophone. More family bands followed and he eventually became the drummer in his dad’s band. By the way, Lee’s brother Lester was even more famous than Lee: Lester was a jazz tenor saxophonist and occasional clarinetist. He became famous as a member of the Count Basie orchestra where Lester evolved into one of the most influential players on the saxophone. The family moved around quite a bit: First to Minneapolis and then to Phoenix. Lee and his family eventually moved to Los Angeles around 1928/1929 where Lee played the drums in school orchestras and later completed his formal education. He then sang at the Apex Club on Central Avenue (until the authorities pulled him out since he was an under-age singer at the time) and other venues in the local jazz scene before departing for New Orleans in 1934 to join the band of trumpeter Mutt Carey. Again, more bands followed and in 1937, Lee started to work with Nat King Cole. During off times when they weren’t working on any projects together, Lee would work for the Paramount and MGM film studios as a singer and also as a singer for Lionel Hampton’s band for some time in 1940. Lee was the first African American to work as a Hollywood studio staff musician. By the way, while at MGM, he taught actor Mickey Rooney how to play the drums for the film “Strike Up the Band”. In 1941, Lee was back with Nat Cole and Lee also assembled his own quintet, the “Esquires of Rhythm”, at Billy Berg’s Club Capri in Hollywood. Over the years, Lee worked with lots of famous artists such as Billie Holiday, Dinah Washington or Benny Goodman and he recorded with “Jazz at the Philharmonic” in 1944 and 1946. The time between 1953 and 1962 belonged to the Nat King Cole Trio, where Lee was the conductor and musical director. This was the climax of Lee’s career and this is also how he saw it as he once said: “When I leave Nat I don’t expect to play any more music. I think I’ve done just about everything I could do: Studios, TV, jazz.” After leaving Nat King Cole’s group in 1962, Lee focused on record labels and music production becoming an A&R man for Vee-Jay and ABC-Dunhill before becoming the vice president of Motown Records in the 1970s to name a few of his stops as an executive. Lee Young, one of the greatest jazz drummers to ever walk the earth.

Those were the **19 orchestra members** that were present during the recording of “Too Young” in 1951. You may have noticed that for some I had more information to share than for others. This is not due to the fact that some would have interested me more than others. The sad fact just is that there’s not an equal amount of information available online for all these great musicians. But regardless how much information there is for each individual, I hope I have succeeded in helping ensure that these wonderful musicians will never be forgotten. These musicians were the best of the best at the time and they still are some of the best to ever play their instruments. That’s just mind-blowing to me and makes me see a record like “Too Young” from a whole different perspective. The craftsmanship in those recordings is just unsurpassed.

Now that we know all the other players involved in making “Too Young” such a phenomenal hit, it's now time to talk about **Nat King Cole** himself:

Nathaniel Adams Coles was born in Montgomery, Alabama on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1919 not long after World War 1 had ended and he died in Santa Monica, California on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1965 at the age of 45. Not only was Nat a singer but also a very fine jazz pianist and a composer. Actually, he was a pianist first but more on that soon. In addition to that, he would act in films and on TV and even perform on Broadway.

Nat had three brothers – Eddie, Ike and Freddy who were also great musicians – and he had a half-sister Joyce. Eddie played the piano, brass and he sang. Ike played the piano and the guitar. And Freddy played the piano and sang.

When Nat was four years old, he and his family moved to Chicago where his dad, Edward, had found work as a Baptist minister. Nat’s mom, Perlina, who was the church organist, taught Nat to play the organ from the age of 4 on and so Nat would play gospel songs at church at an early age already. He loved his mother so much and would still talk a lot about her when he was all grown up and married.

The Coles weren’t the only family that moved North at that time – a lot of, especially African American families, did the same thing: They moved from the South to the North hoping for better opportunities.

At age 10, a still shy Nat won a music competition and his formal piano lessons started when he was 12.

Soon, he was able to apply his skills in the band he joined: The “Bud Billiken Club” which was the band of the news delivery boys of The Chicago Defender newspaper. And this is only one of a number of bands that Nat was involved in during his high school years.

Nat went to “Wendell Phillips Academy High School” in Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood located on Chicago’s historical South Side – the same school that singer Sam Cooke would also attend a few years later. Violinist and music educator Walter Dyett, also known as Captain Walter Henri Dyett, offered a music program at DuSable High School that Nat also participated in. Also, Nat began taking piano lessons from the mother of his classmate Milt Hinton, who later became a double bassist and was considered the Dean of American jazz bass players.

Right around that time, Nat would actually sneak out of his home and visit clubs to see and hear famous artists like Louis Armstrong play. The Chicago music scene of the early 1930s was both exciting and educational for Nat. After Nat experienced pianist Earl "Fatha" Hines and his Orchestra at Chicago's Grand Terrace Ballroom, whom he later challenged in a battle of the bands contest and won, by the way, Hines became a big influence on Nat's piano playing; and so did Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson and Albert Ammons.

Nat dropped out of high school when he was 15 years old and he had only one goal: To become a professional musician. This meant that his dad's wish remained unfulfilled which was that his children would follow his footsteps and work for the church.

The initially shy Nat liked how skilled musicians earn recognition from their audience and so he became more and more outgoing which was an important step towards a career on stage. But overcoming his shyness it remained kind of difficult for him for a long time to come. As one of Nat's first steps in the music business, he and his brother Eddie formed a sextet and even recorded two singles for the Decca record label in 1936 as the "Eddie Cole's Swingsters" while Nat was still a teenager. The two brothers then performed in a revival of the musical "Shuffle Along" which Nat even went on tour with after playing for six weeks in Chicago. By then, Nat had already adopted his nickname "King", presumably inspired by the nursery rhyme about "Old King Cole". Nat's brother Eddie quit the show and argued with Nat – some say it was the worst fight of their lives –because Eddie wanted to keep Nat in Chicago so they could play together. Nat decided to leave though because the musical had a cast member that Nat had fallen in love with: dancer Nadine Robinson from St. Louis who was in her late twenties at the time – around 10 years older than Nat who was attracted to her beauty and maturity. They got married while on tour in 1937 and they settled in Los Angeles after the show had folded in Long Beach after around 8 uncomfortable weeks on the road after somebody had stolen the payroll of around one thousand dollars and not enough people wanted to see the show. The young couple liked the weather, the palm trees, etc. and also, Nat didn't want his dad to see that he was doing poorly; neither did he want to face his brother Eddie who had his reservations about going on tour with the musical and, as it turned out, was right about it.

Nat found work leading a big band and playing the piano in nightclubs. He later said that he played practically every beer joint in LA and around on out-of-tune pianos while never making more than 5 dollars a night. But that didn't break him. He knew he was young and had time and so he kept on chasing his dream of being rich and famous. The couple didn't have a lot of money but they were happy. Nat worked at the Century Club in LA where a lot of jazz musicians would hang out on a regular basis; this helped Nat to become known and popular in jazz circles.

While working at the Swanee Inn on North La Brea in Los Angeles where Nat started to work at in the September of 1937, Nat formed a band and he, who played the piano and led the band, asked guitarist Oscar Moore and bassist Wesley Prince to join him and so the "Nat King Cole Trio" was born and the jazz trio invented. The band was initially supposed to be a quartet but drummer Lee Young was a no show when the band met to play at the Swanee Inn and so they went ahead as a trio and without a drummer. The owner of the club, who had promised Nat to try them out, liked their sound and hired them for 7 months. They not only played in a couple of local bars in Long Beach, for example, they were also hired to play at the Long Beach Pike, an amusement zone in Long Beach, California, along the shoreline south of Ocean Boulevard, for 90 dollars per week. Sure, they first called themselves "The King Cole Swingsters" but that didn't last long and by the time they recorded for small record labels and made radio transcriptions, they had changed their name to "Nat King Cole Trio". It turned out that not having a drummer worked well for them musically and it allowed for more space for Nat's piano playing. A number of people say that Nat's piano style had a harmonic and rhythmic advancement that really set him apart from other pianists back then.

Radio played a big role in the trio's success during those early years. Their first radio gig was NBC's "Blue Network" in 1938 and later they would also appear on NBC's "Swing Soiree." From 1940 on, they could also be heard on the "Chesterfield Supper Club", the "Old Gold" and the "Kraft Music Hall" shows.

The first hit came in 1940 with "Sweet Lorraine" which was released on both Decca and Brunswick and the trio continued to record songs for different labels such as "That Ain't Right" for Decca in 1941 or "All for You" in 1942 and "I'm Lost" in 1943 for Excelsior.

The trio toured the US in 1941 and they spent a significant amount of time in New York City where they played all the top jazz clubs. This early in the game, Nat occasionally added a few vocals to the songs to make them more interesting but he was not yet the full-time singer the world would later celebrate.

The band signed with the young Capitol Records label in 1943 and they were initially paid 165 dollar per week. "Straighten Up and Fly Right", composed by Nat and recorded in 1943, was their first hit with Capitol Records and it was based on a folk tale Nat's dad had used as a theme for a sermon. Songwriter Johnny Mercer, the leading founding member of Capitol Records, had invited Nat to record the song for the young Capitol Records label. "Straighten Up and Fly Right" which was sort of an early Rock'n'Roll type record sold 500,000 copies which was a great start and followed up by the next single "Embraceable You". It was on.

Wesley Prince was replaced by Johnny Miller during World War 2 who was later, in the 1950s, also replaced by Charlie Harris. A lot of musicians were drafted and had to join the US Army, Nat was classified as 4-F – not qualified for service in the Armed Forces.

Things were going well and Nat turned from a pianist to a singer putting his piano skills and playing into the backseat. In a 1956 interview with "Voice of America", he said "I started out to become a jazz pianist; in the meantime, I started singing and I sang the way I felt and that's just the way it came out." One has to point out that Capitol Records also played a role here as they wanted to emphasize Nat's vocals more and give him a more orchestral sound. There were people who were critical of Nat moving away from his jazz roots and, as they called it, selling out as a pop artist. But what I'm wondering is, how can one be critical of Nat focusing on a side of him that would produce the most beautiful ballads ever recorded and performed? I don't get it. Good music is music. No matter if it's jazz or not. If you ask me at least.

Nat's career continued in 1944 when he was part of the "Jazz at the Philharmonic" concerts and even the first person to be asked to play there. "Jazz at the Philharmonic" was a series of jazz concerts, tours and recordings produced by Norman Granz, an American jazz music impresario. Since Nat already had an exclusive contract with Capitol Records at that time, he appeared as "Shorty Nadine" there – a name inspired by his first wife's first name.

Speaking of his first wife, thanks to the money Nat made, she no longer was required to work but with Nat being very successful and performing and traveling a lot, she was increasingly alone.

Also in 1944, by the way, Nat became a member of the Thomas Waller Lodge No. 49 in California thereby entering into Freemasonry. He joined the Scottish Rite Freemasonry eventually becoming a Master Mason – an attainment of the highest rank in all of Masonry.

Two years later, the trio even got their own 15-minute radio program, the "King Cole Trio Time" – the first radio program sponsored by an African American musician. Nat made history and that wouldn't be the last time for him to do so in this space.

Next were radio transcriptions the trio recorded for the "Capitol Records Transcription Service" between 1946 and 1948. Those were recordings made in the radio studio specifically for radio broadcast that used



to be played on the radio instead of commercial recordings. Also, they could be heard on different radio programs such as "The Chesterfield Supper Club".

Nat's musical style moved more and more towards pop-oriented songs and soon, the string orchestra accompanying him would become one of his trademarks. The trios and his early hits paved the way for the superstardom that followed – here's a list: "All for You" in 1943, "The Christmas Song" in 1947, "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66" and "(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons" in 1946, "There! I've Said It Again" in 1947, "Nature Boy" in 1948, "Frosty The Snowman" and "Orange Colored Sky" both in 1950. Out of the songs I just mentioned, "The Christmas Song" in 1947 already had a fair amount of strings added to it and then in it was the song "Nature Boy" in 1948 that was recorded with the backing of a full orchestra.

While Nat was becoming more and more famous, the other members of the trio moved more and more into the background and by 1955, the trio had fallen apart. While his second wife Maria, who was his advisor, seems to have played a role there probably having the best intentions for her husband in mind and pushing him towards a solo career in some way, many assume it was bound to happen anyway due to the big star Nat was becoming. A number of musicians and friends of Nat felt that Maria was pushing him away from jazz which they didn't like. Nat himself didn't see embracing other types of music as a problem as he was open to and loved many kinds of music. Maria knew that, if Nat wanted to be a big star, he had to get up from behind the piano and sing standing at the front and the center of the stage.

In September of 1950, Nat toured Europe and soon after that, arranger Nelson Riddle entered the stage who would take both Nat's sound and success to a whole new level: As discussed earlier, their first collaboration was the 1950 number one hit "Mona Lisa" before Nat even knew that Nelson had arranged the song. It was Nat's biggest selling song at that point. "Mona Lisa" transformed Nat from a cool jazz swinger into a romantic fireside balladeer and set him on the path to becoming a mainstream entertainer. Nat and Nelson collaborated again one year later, in 1951, which resulted in the number one hit song of the year 1951: "Too Young" – the song that is the very subject of this show episode I'm recording for you. This is when Nat found out that Nelson was the arranger for both hits "Mona Lisa" and "Too Young".

The shy pianist Nat was a star now. He toured Europe again in 1954 and later started to host his own TV show, The Nat King Cole Show on NBC on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1956. By doing this, Nat made history one more time as he was the first African American man to host an American TV series. For the first eight months, the show was 15 minutes long but then it was extended to 30 minutes. While it was a great show and successful with both audiences – black and white – and with critics, it failed to secure the sponsors that were needed to keep it alive – and this despite efforts by NBC and contributions by artists like Tony Bennett or Harry Belafonte who loved Nat and what he was doing there. No national client could be persuaded by the advertising agencies to buy time on Nat's show as they were afraid, for example, that the white Southerners would boycott their products. What a shame. Nat pulled the plug and ended the show after over a year of struggling to secure sponsorships and once commented the failure of the show with his famous words "Madison Avenue is afraid of the dark". There was hope though. Even though the show failed in a financial sense, a taboo was broken and TV hosts were not only white any longer.

Nat had a string of hits in the 1950s – and by hits, I mean million sellers. A huge part of his success was based on the brilliant arrangers he worked with at the time: First and foremost, Nelson Riddle and later Ralph Carmichael and Gordon Jenkins.

In 1958, Nat even recorded a Spanish album in Havana, Cuba titled "Cole Español". Based on its success, Nat recorded two more Spanish albums: "A Mis Amigos" in 1959 and "More Cole Español" in 1962.

Towards the end of the 1950s, in 1959 to be precise, Nat earned a Grammy Award for "Midnight Flyer" in the category "Best Performance By a "Top 40" Artist". This was not his only Grammy but the only one he won and received during his lifetime.

In the early to mid-1960s, Nat's huge success waned a bit as his ballads failed to reach especially young listeners who had fallen in love with Rock'n'Roll. He was not the only one though. As discussed earlier, also Frank Sinatra's career suffered a dent at the time. And so did the careers of Dean Martin, Tony Bennett and others who were wildly popular in the 1950s. Some music historians say that Nat was the most successful singer between Bing Crosby and Elvis Presley. In those years, no one was able to keep up with Nat – not even Frank Sinatra.

To make things worse, Nelson Riddle spent more and more time on Frank Sinatra projects and even left Capitol Records for Reprise Records, a label founded by Frank Sinatra.

That doesn't mean that Nat's career was over. Nope, far from it. But his days of superstardom were counted. Nat actually had a couple of more hit songs in the 1960s: "Let There Be Love" together with George Shearing in 1961, "Ramblin' Rose" and "Dear Lonely Hearts" in 1962, "That Sunday, That Summer" in 1963 and, also in 1963, "Those Lazy-Hazy-Crazy Days of Summer" which was his final top-ten hit while he was alive, reaching number 6 on the pop charts.

Nat continued to record albums with his final one being "L-O-V-E" which was recorded in December 1964 – just days before Nat would enter the hospital for cancer treatment – and it was released just before Nat died in 1965. The album reached the number 4 position in the spring of 1965. Also, a "Best of Album" released in 1968 a few years after his death went gold and it was the 1980s when Nat reached the charts again: This time with "When I fall in Love" which charted in the UK in 1987 and peaked at number 4. Nat King Cole would enter the charts one more time though: In the posthumous 1991 release "Unforgettable" which was a duet of Nat and his daughter Natalie Cole made possible by modern recording technology. For this song, the 1961 stereo version of "Unforgettable" was used which was originally recorded in mono in 1951. A whole tribute album was released in that manner back in 1991. It was a huge success earning a number of Grammy Awards. Four other of Nat's songs have been named to the Grammy Hall of Fame and he also received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and was inducted into multiple halls of fame – more on that though in section "The Legacy".

No other Capitol Records artist was as successful as Nat. Not before him and not after him. He sent 150 singles to the Billboard Pop, R&B and Country charts and he sold over 50 million records during his career.

To this day, not one Holiday season goes by without radio stations playing "The Christmas Song" along with other classics like "White Christmas" by Bing Crosby or "Last Christmas" by Wham. "The Christmas Song" even charted again on the Billboard Top 40 in December 2017.

On the personal side, Nat loved baseball, especially Hank Aaron, who, from 1954 through 1976, played 21 seasons for the Milwaukee/Atlanta Braves in the National League, then two seasons for the Milwaukee Brewers in the American League and later became the senior vice president of the Atlanta Braves. Nelson Riddle repeatedly told the story about an incident that took place during a recording session where music studio engineers were trying to find the source of a noise that was negatively impacting their recordings

only to find Nat listening to a baseball game on a transistor radio in another room. He really loved the game. Nat's second wife Maria once said in an interview that Nat was a baseball addict first and a musician second.

As discussed a short while ago, Nat married his first wife Nadine Robinson in 1937. They got divorced in 1948 after 11 years of marriage. Only six days after his divorce was final, Nat married his second wife, singer Maria Hawkins. He had met Maria, a singer, in 1946 at the Zanzibar in New York and, according to Ivan Mogull, they were attracted to each other immediately. They got married on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1948. Maria soon got involved in Nat's career and became his trusted advisor regarding his finances, contracts, etc. Rumor has it that a number of people in Nat's circle – mainly musicians – didn't like Maria as she came across as cold, calculating, domineering and snobbish. Maria and Nat had five children: Successful singer Natalie, adopted daughter Carole (she was the daughter of Maria's sister), adopted son Nat Kelly Cole and twin daughters, Casey and Timolin. Nat and Maria were together until Nat's death. After Nat's death, Maria admitted that Nat was not perfect – who is I would ask you – but at the same time she expressed her love for him and emphasized the musical legacy he left behind. There's no doubt about that.

Before we conclude this section about Nat King Cole, I would like to spend a few minutes on the negative experiences Nat made with racism so that current and future generations can learn from them. Please keep in mind that the following incidents are just a subset of many Nat had to endure during his lifetime. Let's keep in mind that Nat was successful at a time when schools and neighborhoods in the US were still segregated.

While I'm sure it wasn't the first time that Nat encountered racism, the first widely known account of racism Nat experienced was an incident that happened in 1948 after Nat bought a house in the back then all-white Hancock Park neighborhood in Los Angeles. At that time, the Ku Klux Klan was active in Los Angeles and so they placed a burning cross on Nat's front lawn and poisoned their dog among other things. Also, members of the homeowner's association told him at a meeting that they didn't want any "undesirables" moving into the neighborhood. Can you imagine how Nat must have felt? Guess what he answered. He said: "Neither do I. And if I see anybody undesirable coming in here, I'll be the first to complain." What a response, well done. Nat refused to move.

Another incident happened in 1956 when four men assaulted Nat in Birmingham, Alabama while he was singing his second song of the evening, "Little Girl", on stage in front of 3,500 people – all white due to Alabama still being segregated back then – at the Municipal Auditorium. Nat being from Alabama, this was a special gig for him. The criminals stormed on stage and one of them swung at Nat sending him reeling onto the piano bench that split under him. They even tried to kidnap him. The local police had been tipped off before and they knew that there would likely be some sort of demonstration. The police were positioned by the steps at the end of the stage as they thought that this is where attackers would try to enter the stage. Since the four attackers climbed onto the stage from the front though, the police was caught off guard for a second and when they realized what was going on, 8 to 10 policemen rushed onto the stage from the wings. They were able to save Nat and handcuff all attackers including the one that they had to wrestle down because he was twisting Nat's foot. While this was happening, the British orchestra was playing a valiant version of "My Country 'tis of Thee". Nat did not continue the show. Actually, he injured his back when he fell onto that piano bench as part of the scuffle that ensued on stage. The crowd wanted Nat to come back out and so they gave him a 5-minute or so ovation. Nat limped back onto the stage – shocked and shaky as he was – and he said: "I just came here to entertain you. That was what I thought you wanted." And the crowd shouted "We do! Sing!" He replied saying "Those folks hurt my back. I can't continue because I have to go to a doctor" and walked off the stage. He told a band

member right there: "Man, I love show business but I don't want to die for it." The police found and arrested two more men outside the auditorium bringing the number of involved criminals up to six. Eventually, the charges against the attackers were changed from assault with intent to murder Nat to conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor and all they got were short jail sentences and minor fines. That was not the first time the judicial system failed an African American citizen. And, sadly, it wouldn't be the last time. Check this out: Later, it turned out that the original plan to attack Nat originated in Anniston, 60 miles from Birmingham, and included 150 men from Birmingham and nearby towns. Sickening. Absolutely sickening. They were part of some sort of White Citizens Councils led by an officer of the North Alabama Citizens' Council (a segregationist group) and their plan was to storm the stage and carry Nat off the stage. It was Nat's luck that out of the 150 people, only 6 showed up that evening. After the Birmingham incident, Nat said "I can't understand it. I have not taken part in any protests. Nor have I joined an organization fighting segregation. Why should they attack me?" In hindsight, this may sound a bit naïve to some but given Nat was a really nice, gentle and patient man, he may have really struggled to explain the horrible actions of these criminals. It is and must have been really, really difficult to face the fact that, unfortunately, the color of his skin was enough to give some people a reason to have a problem with him. Also, in some way, it seems that Nat believed that racism and segregation were symptoms of ignorance and misunderstandings rather than of actual evil. Also, he believed that music and the arts could be strong and magical bridges between people of all colors, nationalities, religions, etc. Nat resumed the tour in Virginia a few days later as he had no lasting injuries but he never went back to Alabama again; although he assumed that the racists who attacked him didn't represent the majority of the people.

Later, Nat was an active and visible participant in the civil rights movement until his death in 1965 and he played an important role in planning the March on Washington in 1963. It wasn't easy for Nat. While there were white people who had an issue with him because of the color of his skin, there were even African American newspapers and some African Americans that attacked him due to Nat also catering to white audiences with his music. The thing with Nat was that he just crossed over. He was an incredible talented, handsome African American man who sang Cole Porter, George Gershwin or theatrical songs with a voice that the world had not heard before and that few could resist – and all of this with a romantic aura about him exuding sex appeal. His second wife Maria, by the way, once characterized Nat as an introspective man. Anyway. Who he was and what he did was new. The US had never or heard seen a performer like him. And as a result, people of any ethnicity found him appealing. And, sadly, there were some who had an issue with him. Back to the African America newspapers now: The Chicago Defender, for example, wrote that Nat's performances for all-white audiences were an insult to his race. And the New York Amsterdam News wrote similar things. This really hurt Nat. He emphasized his opposition to racial segregation "in any form" and he agreed to join other entertainers in boycotting segregated venues. Also, he paid \$500 to become a lifetime member of the Detroit branch of the NAACP which is short for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. That didn't make Nat an activist though as he thought, some say, that showing more political engagement would have probably been detrimental to his career success. As one historian once put it: Nat gave an abundance of love to the world. A world that would not always love him back.

Nat's health took a turn for the worse in September of 1964 when he started to lose weight and have back pain that was so severe that he even collapsed after a concert at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas. In December of the same year, the doctors diagnosed Nat with lung cancer in an advanced stage. The doctors gave Nat, who had been a heavy cigarette smoker since he was 14, smoking up to three and a half packs per day, only a few months to live. He must have smoked a lot indeed as he has a cigarette in his hand on most pictures of Nat you can find online. In 1953 already, when he had a surgery related to

stomach ulcers, doctors urged him to quit smoking but he didn't. He couldn't. He even once said that he believed the smoking helped shape his voice and that he probably wouldn't have been as successful hadn't he smoked. I guess there's, of course, no scientific evidence to support this claim by Nat – many believe it though. Maybe there was something to it. But was it worth it? Clearly not. Against his doctors' advice, Nat finished his "L-O-V-E" album in San Francisco between December 1<sup>st</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1964 with arranger Ralph Carmichael. Nat checked into St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica on December 7<sup>th</sup> to start cobalt therapy to fight the cancer. Although his condition worsened, Nat was able to spend the days around New Year's at home. He checked back into the hospital on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965 and had his left lung removed on January 25<sup>th</sup>. Then, Nat's dad died on February 1<sup>st</sup> from heart problems. On February 14<sup>th</sup>, Valentine's Day 1965, Nat and his wife Maria were able to leave the hospital for a short time and they drove by the sea. A day later, in the early morning hours of February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1965, Nat King Cole, one of the greatest pianists and singers the world had ever seen, died at the St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica at the age of 45. This must have been quite a surprise to the public as his publicists made people believe all along that Nat would be well and working again soon. Sadly, that wasn't true at all. It was a lie.

Not to make Nat look bad but to show that he was a human being with all his flaws, I'd like to mention the fact that after Nat had returned to the hospital in early January of 1965, it came out that he had been romantically involved with singer Gunilla Hutton for around one year at that point. While Nat was in the hospital, Gunilla called his wife Maria trying to convince her that she should get a divorce from Nat. Maria declined and confronted Nat about it who, as a result, broke up with Gunilla. Nat and his wife Maria reconciled and she continued to be there for him during his last days. What he did to his wife was disgusting and being a superstar doesn't change that. Later, Maria said in an interview that, married to a famous singer, she knew that problems with other women would come with the territory. It must have been hurtful, nevertheless. Again, this is just another proof of the fact that famous artists are – although they may be famous, extremely talented and all – nothing but ordinary people in a sense. And I mean that in the best sense of the word.

Nat was a singer's singer: "From Ray Charles to Sam Cooke to Marvin Gaye — all of them loved him. Everybody wanted to do some Nat King Cole." And Frank Sinatra once admitted that when he went home, he played Nat King Cole records to relax. Nat was the real deal – the perfect package and very convincing both on the musical end of the spectrum as well as on the style and physical presentation side of things. Everything was seamless. This was no coincidence though. Nat knew how important the optics were. He once said: "Make it look good and it will sound twice as good to the average guy because everything is visual to the public." Therefore, how he and his band was lighted on stage, what they were wearing, etc. – all those things that created the overall atmosphere were super important to Nat. By the way, I'll talk some more about Nat's beautiful voice in section "The Music" – so stick around.

Jack Benny, an American comedian who delivered the eulogy at Nat's funeral in Los Angeles on February 18<sup>th</sup>, said the following about Nat: "Nat Cole was a man who gave so much and still had so much to give. He gave it in song, in friendship to his fellow man, devotion to his family. He was a star, a tremendous success as an entertainer, an institution. But he was an even greater success as a man, as a husband, as a father, as a friend." One friend later recalled: "Nat didn't like arguments and tension. He didn't like to get upset and seldom did. But when necessary, he could make you listen to him." Nat King Cole followed his bliss. For the closing line of his very last show, he used an expression that was a favorite of his in private, too: "Enjoy yourself. Because when you're dead- when you're dead life ain't just worth living."

## The Music

After “Mona Lisa”, “Too Young” was the second really big hit for Nat King Cole and musically, here Nat had arrived at his trademark sound: Romantic ballads with a lot of strings. And when I say “a lot”, I mean “a lot”.

One more time, here’s the list of instruments that can be heard on “Too Young”:

- 9 violins
- 2 violas
- 2 cellos
- 1 piano
- 1 harp
- 1 guitar
- 2 basses
- and 1 drum set

Nelson Riddle, who arranged the song in the key of G, wrote his scores vertically, four bars at a time on a standard piece of score paper which indicates that he heard all instruments as they would take turns or play together and that he knew exactly where which instrument and note belonged. Nelson didn’t create sketches first, he just wrote the arrangements without handing them to an orchestrator for completion. That’s remarkable.

In terms of his writing, Nelson’s goal was simplicity. Nelson never overdid anything. And you can really hear that when you’re listening to “Too Young”. Two sections are never competing against each other. There’s always only one section that’s doing something and then he’ll hand it off to the next section and then they’ll hand it off to another section and eventually everybody’s playing and then, of course, there’s a diminuendo and then it’s over. Those were two of the things that made his arrangements so good in addition to the musical prowess. Nelson didn’t like singers who cannot own their record without screaming their lungs out. Starting small, then a big crescendo in the middle and ending quietly, to Nelson, was as boring as it gets. In his opinion, it needed to be mixed up. Nelson was always very proud of his endings.

Nelson created a dance orchestra sound with the addition of a string cushion and made it distinctive by a couple of soloists he would highlight during the songs. It was a combination of instruments with cascades of strings heavily based on the ideas Nelson would get when he was a member of the Tommy Dorsey band. Nelson wrote his arrangements with an absolute understanding of how each instrument would sound and play a role.

Nat King Cole’s distinctive baritone voice is an important aspect of the song: It was oftentimes described as timeless, soft, silken, velvet-piled, velvet-textured, liquid, soothing, honey-voiced, warm, ear-caressing, accessible and with an impeccable pitch. There’s one description I found that I really love: The author said that Nat’s voice was a voice to curl up on a grey afternoon, a fleecy blanket for the soul. A lot of people said and still say that hearing Nat’s voice, which was also described by one author as the sonic glue that held his records together as a unifying factor, primarily does one thing to them: It relaxes them. I feel the same way. And “Too Young” is one of those Nat King Cole songs where his voice, in combination with the music and especially the strings created this wonderfully relaxing atmosphere. Nat’s brother once said:

"When you start listening to him, one of the most important things is: He keeps you relaxed." So true. Music historian Will Friedwald said: "The amazing thing about Nat's voice is that it has this kind of incandescent quality to it. It's like some kind of magic spell is being cast." And fellow singer Aaron Neville once had this opinion to share: "He just hypnotized me. It was like medicine to me. If I had got a spanking or something that day, Nat would smooth it all out." In addition to his voice being so unbelievably good, Freddy Cole shared another success secret of Nat: Their dad made them enunciate very well. That means the kids had to say or pronounce every word clearly. "Yeah, my father, he didn't allow you to be messing over the language," Freddie Cole says. "He would make you enunciate very well. He would get on your case about that." Nat's mellow and careful enunciation of the lyrics he sang really contributed to him being a great contrast to other singers at the time and it helped him to convey his songs with meaning and a depth that maximized his, what some experts say, was a limited vocal range. Nat once said about that: "Mine is a casual approach to a song; I lean heavily on the lyrics. By that I mean I try to tell a story with the melody as the background."

Before we take a closer look at the song with its structure and instrumentation, let's discuss the music of the 1950s a little bit:

The 1950s were a time of change. World War 2 had ended a few years earlier and while the world was slowly moving on from this dark period, a lot of people were still holding on to the societal norms of the past to some extent. One can't talk about the 1950s in the US and music without also talking about racism which was haunting a large portion of the country and society during that decade with some of the music released at that time reflecting those tensions. Jazz, R&B and Rock'n'Roll were music popularized by a lot of African Americans and while some were quite successful with releasing and performing their music, many were even denied access to audiences because of the curse called segregation. Despite Rock'n'Roll entering the stage in the 1950s, traditional pop and country music with old standards was still very popular. Classic pop music - often using orchestras to back the vocalists - dominated the charts for the first half of the 1950s since at the end of World War II, vocal-driven classic pop had replaced big band and swing music. The post-war and early 1950s era pop music focused on the song's story and/or the emotion being expressed. Some of this, I assume, reflected people's desire to hold on to the societal norms of the past I mentioned earlier. There was sort of a sentimental feeling in the air. All of this sounds a lot like Nat King Cole and "Too Young" is a prime example here.

I think Nat kind of belonged to both camps actually and catered to both audiences at different stages of his career. While he started out as a jazz pianist and played a big role in popularizing jazz, he later switched to songs that were rather characterized as pop or old standards. Without a doubt, he was commercially more successful in that second phase of his career.

Alright, time to describe the song's structure and instrumentation:

When it comes to Nat King Cole's "Too Young", I'm struggling to find a classic verse chorus verse chorus or similar structure in terms of the lyrics and music. This is due to Nelson Riddle's great approach of mixing things up to keep a song interesting. I'll speak to the lyrics in more detail in the next section but for now, let's just capture that we have three lyrics sections here: One introductory section and one more section which is repeated twice so that we end up with three sections in total with two of them being the same (the second and the third). The best way to describe this is probably to say that we don't really have verses and a chorus here but three sections that serve as both individually - the verse and the chorus

combined. There's a school of thought that those are verses but I just can't convince myself to follow this approach because the sections do have both to me a verse and a chorus character.

The song starts with a dramatic piano intro that is backed by strings that eventually take over and welcome Nat who's entering the song with his first vocal section.

Throughout the song, the strings and all other instruments provide a warm and cozy cushion for Nat's voice that floats beautifully on top of the orchestra. The vocals definitely draw the attention to them. And whenever Nat stops, the brilliant orchestra shines brighter than the brightest star you can think of. It's absolutely marvelous.

During the vocal sections – the second section seamlessly attaches to the first section – one notices the strings and the piano mainly that accompany Nat. One of Nelson Riddle's brilliant arranging techniques here is that he first has the strings kind of repeat the last few syllables of Nat's lyrics at the end of each line which has basically some sort of an echo effect. After starting with the strings, he has the pianist do the same so that the first and second sections end up with both the strings and the piano echoing what Nat is saying giving it more emphasis and almost serve as a confirmation of his words. On top of this, the strings add an additional layer of emotion where needed.

After around one and a half minutes, when the first two vocal sections are done, the piano takes us into an almost danceable section with full instrumentation and emotion. Towards the end of that whirlwind, the piano takes over and paves the way for Nat's third vocal section.

Nat's third vocal section differs from the first two as the bassists, among others, add some distinctive and pronounced rhythm to the music that is incredible.

Nat then closes out the song gently and what follows is one of Nelson Riddle's amazing short outros with the classic diminuendo and mainly piano and strings on the way out.

"Too Young" is a true masterpiece and it is no wonder it was such a success. Sid Lippman wrote a wonderful song. Nelson Riddle wrote a beautiful score. And Nat King Cole sang beautifully. It can't get any better. Period.

## The Lyrics

The lyrics contain the phrase "they tried to tell us we're too young" which some say was an indicator of the fact that lyricists were beginning to acknowledge and cater to the emerging youth culture in the US.

I'm not sure if this thought crossed Sylvia Dee's mind who wrote the lyrics for the song. Sid Lippman, who wrote the music for the song, and Sylvia were longtime collaborators and they had the idea for the song when Sylvia told Sid that her younger brother was getting married and that she thought he was too young. Sid later recalled "As she said that, she looked at me and I looked at her and we both said, 'Title?'" I'm sure they also had a good laugh. I guess that writers like Sid and Sylvia are constantly looking for ideas which they find everywhere. Well, they picked the title "Too Young" and the rest is history.

Let us now explore the lyrics together. You'll see how simple, beautiful lyrics can be. These lyrics combined with Nelson Riddle's – the arranger's – clean and simple approach to arranging was a brilliant recipe and it is no wonder that this song ended the year 1951 as the most successful song of the year.



What we have here is basically three sections, two of which are the same.

The introductory section explains the situation that people tell the young couple that they're too young and that they don't know yet what love is.

The next section which is repeated twice is then the couple's answer almost defiantly stating that they're not too young and that they're gonna proof them all wrong.

So we have the first section stating the problem in the form of people telling the couple they're not ready for love and then two sections disagreeing with the nay-sayers.

Simple and brilliant.

Here are the lyrics.

Section 1:

They try to tell us we're too young  
Too young to really be in love  
They say that love's a word  
A word we've only heard  
But can't begin to know the meaning of

And then section 2 repeated two times – I'm only gonna read it once:

And yet we're not too young to know  
This love will last though years may go  
And then someday they may recall  
We were not too young at all

And yet we're not too young to know  
This love will last though years may go  
And then someday they may recall  
We were not too young at all

Those were the lyrics for "Too Young". Again, simple and brilliant.

## The Legacy

Without any doubt, "Too Young" is and will always be a testament to Nat King Cole's enduring popularity. While it is *one* of his many timeless classics, it remains *the* most successful one in terms of its charts success as it ended a whole year as the top single; that year was 1951. "Too Young" is a typical Nat King Cole song – it's a perfect example. So if you meet someone and they wonder how Nat King Cole sounded, it would be a good idea to play them "Too Young".

As discussed earlier, Nat will be more remembered for the second part of his career where he was known for beautiful ballads than for the first part of his career where he amazed audiences as a jazz pianist. The second part of his career was just more successful in terms of record sales as the sound he provided found its way into more homes and hearts than the pure jazz sound he was known for before.

Some critical voices call Nat's pop music over-played sentimental ballads but I violently disagree with this sentiment. From the craftsmanship of all musicians involved to the beauty of the music – Nat's ballads belong to the finest pieces of music humanity has created. In my opinion. And I know that many – if not all – of you out there share my feelings.

Yes, some may have thought Nat King Cole was selling out but he knew better; whatever he played, it was music he loved and beautiful music that people wanted to hear. His music really was for everybody, he communicated across racial barriers more immediately and intimately than any other musician of his time.

With over 50 million sold records and around 150 hit singles on the charts, Nat was the most successful Capitol Records artist of all time.

Nat's presence started in 1955 when he had his first Billboard Hot 100 Top 10 song with "Darling Je Vous Aime Beaucoup" and it ended with "Those Lazy-Hazy-Crazy Days of Summer" in 1963, his final Billboard Hot 100 Top 10 hit while he was alive. Nat's big success was kicked off in 1950 with his first number one hit which was "Mona Lisa" (it also earned the Oscar for Best Original Song for its appearance in the movie "Captain Carey") followed by the 1951 song "Unforgettable" which peaked at number 12.

Four Nat King Cole songs have been named to the Grammy Hall of Fame so far:

- "Mona Lisa" released in 1950
- "The Christmas Song" released in 1946
- "Nature Boy" released in 1948
- and "Unforgettable" released in 1951

In addition to this, Nat was nominated for a Grammy seven times and out of those seven times, he won one Grammy.

- Nat won a Grammy at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Grammy Awards in 1959 with "Midnight Flyer" in category "Best Performance by a Top 40 Artist".
- Nat was nominated for six more Grammys – here's a list:
  - The song "Looking Back" was nominated in category "Best Rhythm & Blues Performance" at the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Grammy Awards in 1958.
  - The song "Midnight Flyer" was nominated in category "Best Rhythm & Blues Performance" at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Grammy Awards in 1959. Again, he won a Grammy for it in category "Best Performance by a Top 40 Artist" where the song was also nominated.
  - The album "Wild is Love" was nominated in categories "Album of the Year" and "Best Vocal Performance Album, Male" at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Grammy Awards in 1960.
  - The album "The Nat King Cole Story" was nominated in category "Album of the Year (Other than Classical)" at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Grammy Awards in 1961.
  - The song "Ramblin' Rose" was nominated in category "Record of the Year" at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Grammy Awards in 1962.

No matter if you know those songs and albums or not, if you want to spend a few wonderful minutes, why don't you go and listen to them online after this episode? You'll love it. I promise.

On top of those seven Grammy nominations and the one Grammy win, Nat posthumously received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Grammy Awards in 1990 and, as we discussed

earlier, he was inducted into multiple halls of fame – most notably probably the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000.

Nat King Cole posthumously found a new audience and renewed success in 1991 when his daughter Natalie Cole recorded an album titled “Unforgettable” which contained covers of her father’s songs and duets with him that were made possible by modern recording technology. The album, which also included a cover version of “Too Young”, was extremely successful. It went 7 times platinum at the time of this recording and, in 1992, it won a Grammy Award in the prestigious “Album of the Year” category. The song “Unforgettable” (a duet with her father Nat King Cole) won two Grammys in categories “Record of the Year” and “Best Traditional Pop Performance”. Also in 1992, the album won a Soul Train Music Award.

Another cornerstone of Nat’s legacy is the Nat King Cole Generation Hope organization that Nat’s twin daughters Casey and Timolin Cole established and which honors the legacy of their parents Nat and Maria Cole by dedicating their resources to build sustainable music programs for schools around the US.

And Nat King Cole has never been gone from radio. Every year around Christmas time, we can hear Nat King Cole’s “The Christmas Song” played on the radio over and over again. His Christmas song is one of the eternal Holiday season classics along with Bing Crosby’s “White Christmas” and Wham’s “Last Christmas”, for example.

Let’s now close out the legacy section by exploring a couple of different versions of the song “Too Young”.

In terms of movie appearances, I could only find one example which seemed not a lot. In the Akira Kurosawa movie “Ikiru” from 1952, protagonist Watanabe's daughter-in-law is heard humming the tune in a point-of-view scene in which the character is approaching the family home late at night.

There were many cover versions of “Too Young”. I’m not sure though if we can even all call them cover versions as music publishing was slightly different in the 1950s when “Too Young” saw its biggest success. The song was written by Sid Lipmann and Sylvia Dee and then there were many artists who performed the song. Nat was one of them. As discussed earlier, he wasn’t the first artist to do so. The first recording and release was in 1950 by Victor Young and His Orchestra with vocals provided by Louanne Hogan. Nat King Cole was the first one though who was really successful with the song.

Based on online sources I found, I counted almost 80 versions of “Too Young”, including the one by Nat King Cole, but not all of them saw chart success. In 1951 alone, there were 9 other versions released and in March of 1951, the same month that Nat’s version was released in, there were three other versions released: By Toni Arden, Johnny Desmond and Denny Vaughan and His Orchestra. In addition to the vocal versions, I counted almost 30 instrumental versions of “Too Young”. And on top of that, there was more than a dozen of non-English versions in Italian, French, etc.

In the 1950s, it wasn’t unusual that a song was sold or licensed to many different artists, labels or publishers so that it wasn’t an uncommon phenomenon to see many different versions of a hit song pop up around the same time. Usually only one or two of those became big hits though.

Since there were a lot of versions of “Too Young” that did not chart, we’re only gonna focus on the better-known English language ones that *did* chart.

An early and successful version was the one by Patty Andrews, who was one third of the famous Andrews Sisters. She was born in 1918 and died in 2013. Her version with Vic Schoen And His Orchestra made it to

the Billboard Charts in June of 1951 where it spent 6 weeks and reached the number 19 spot. Vic Schoen was an American bandleader, arranger and composer who was born in 1916 and died in the year 2000. Vic arranged for and recorded with a long list of famous artists; he was one of the really big names in the arranging, composing and bandleading game.

And there was another version of “Too Young” that charted in June of 1951. Toni Arden peaked at number 15 on the US Billboard charts which she visited for 9 weeks with this song and she even scored a number one hit in Australia with her “Too Young” which stayed on the charts for 9 weeks there in September of 1951. On her version of the song, she was supported by Percy Faith and his orchestra so this song has the typical and beautiful Percy Faith feel to it. Toni Arden was an American pop singer who lived from 1924 until 2012. She recorded a number of records and was even able to enter the charts with a couple of her songs. Her biggest hit was the song “Padre” in 1958. Beyond that, she did successful work for both radio and television.

In July of 1951, singer Fran Allison with support from orchestra leader Jack Fascinato visited the charts for two weeks with her version of “Too Young” and peaked on position 20 of the US Billboard Charts. Fran Allison, who lived from 1907 until 1989, was an American TV and radio personality as well as a singer. She is best known from her starring role in the NBC TV puppet show Kukla, Fran and Ollie which aired weekdays between 1947 and 1957. For “Too Young”, she teamed up with Jack Fascinato, who was the orchestra leader of Kukla, Fran and Ollie. Jack, who lived from 1915 until 1994, was a composer, orchestra leader, arranger and pianist and today, he is best known for his television work. In addition to his work on Kukla, Fran and Ollie, he contributed to Sesame Street and wrote campaign songs for John F. Kennedy and Barry Goldwater to name just a few examples of his activities.

Also in July of 1951, American singer, actor, game show host and DJ Richard Hayes entered the charts for one short week with his rendition of “Too Young”. He made it to spot number 24 and that was it. Richard Hayes lived from 1930 until 2014 and the time between 1948 and 1953 when he was between 18 and 23 years old was a very successful one for him musically as he was able to score 14 top 25 hits – including four top 10 hits – within this five year period. He also starred in movies and later hosted the game show “Name That Tune” and worked as a radio DJ in Philadelphia and New York City. Other than that, he came to fame during television’s early days with his role in the ABC sitcom “Two Girls Named Smith” that ran for two seasons in 1951.

A little bit later in 1951, in August to be precise, Jimmy Young charted with his version of “Too Young” in the UK reaching the top spot on both the UK Sheet Music Charts and the UK 40s Sheet Music Chart. The song was on the former charts for 12 weeks and the latter charts for 28 weeks. And while I’m calling those charts, we should keep in mind that this was before the classic “charts” as we know them today were introduced. Anyway, Jimmy was also number one on the Radio Luxembourg charts where he had a 12 week run. That was quite a hit for Jimmy Young, mainly in the UK. Jimmy Young was a famous English singer and radio DJ who lived from 1921 until 2016. Beyond “Too Young”, he had number one hits with “Unchained Melody” and “The Man from Laramie” in 1955. But Jimmy was even more famous as a radio personality; his show on BBC Radio 2 ran from 1973 until 2002.

The next noteworthy version of “Too Young” that entered the charts came in 1960 and was from Bill Forbes who visited the UK charts for one week with the song in the December 1959 / January 1960 timeframe peaking at number 29. Dressed adequately for the 1960s, this version of the song is a clear departure from the style of the versions that were released in the 1950s and it was so 1960s.

Bill Forbes was a singer from Sri Lanka who went to the UK in 1955 when he was 17. He is regarded as the first Sri Lankan solo artist ever to secure a recording contract and a hit recording outside his native country. While he recorded a number of songs, "Too Young" was his biggest hit.

The probably most famous and most successful cover version of "Too Young" was by legendary singer Donny Osmond. Recorded on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1972 and released on the MGM label on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1972, as a single from his album with the same name, when Donny was just 14 years old, the song reached number 13 on the US Charts on which it spent 9 weeks, number 5 in the UK where it spent 15 weeks on the charts and number 9 in Canada where it spent 5 weeks on the charts in addition to other countries. This version of "Too Young" was produced by two musical giants: Mike Curb, a musician and record company executive, who later, in 1979, would serve one term as the 42<sup>nd</sup> Governor of California. And Don Costa, a conductor and record producer who, among many other things, discovered singer Paul Anka and worked with Frank Sinatra on some of his records like "My Way".

Again, there were a lot of other versions of Sid Lippman's and Sylvia Dee's "Too Young". I just would like to pick two really quick here to share an example that I think is suboptimal and another example that I really like: Believe it or not, Michael Jackson recorded the song in 1972 and it was released on his album "Music & Me" which was released in 1973. At the end of the day, given this was Michael Jackson singing the song, I find both the arrangement and the vocals to be a bit underwhelming if not boring. But that's just my opinion and otherwise, I always liked Michael musically. And my other example is Engelbert Humperdinck's version of "Too Young" – while it is not groundbreaking in any way, it is a very solid Engelbert recording from both a vocals and an arrangement perspective. Engelbert released the song on both the album "Love Unchained" in 1995 and on the live album "Live At The Royal Albert Hall" in 1998).

Those were a lot of cover and other versions of "Too Young" but at the end of the day, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than the one that Nat King Cole's version stands out as the most beautiful one. And that is thanks to an unbelievably simple, wonderful and smart arrangement by Nelson Riddle and Nat King Cole's voice – a voice no other artist before or after Nat was blessed to have.

"Too Young" remains a prime example for both Nelson Riddle's and Nat King Cole's styles and the genius of both men which made them such a successful team. Their sound shaped and dominated the musical landscape of much of the 1950s – rightly so.

## The Good-Bye

That was it. What a journey. Another episode of "The Greatest Hits Explained" with me, Michael Winter, your host and editor of the show comes to an end.

Please note that you can find a link to the sources I used for this show in the show description. Also, I'm mentioning all the sources I used at the very end of this show. As I explained during the intro, this show is based on my personal research of sources I found online and otherwise. Therefore, I owe a lot of thanks to the authors of these original sources. I have used both paraphrased and literal content and quotes from these sources without declaring them during the show as it would have taken away from the flow. In no way was this intended to claim that I came up with all the original content. I see my job as putting together and processing the content from a variety of different sources in a way that it creates a new and exciting narrative that wouldn't necessarily be possible and available using the single sources alone in an unprocessed way.

And if there's anything that I pronounced incorrectly, please forgive me. I did my best.

I hope you enjoyed this musical journey during which we explored many interesting facts about the wonderful song "Too Young" by Nat King Cole which included lots of information about Nat King Cole himself and the people involved in making this song such a success and classic.

If so, if you enjoyed this musical journey, please subscribe and make sure to also check out and tune in to other episodes of "The Greatest Hits Explained".

Until then, stay safe and have music in your heart.

## Outro

If you like this show, please subscribe, leave a review, a like, a comment – whatever applies to the specific platform on which you're listening to this. Also, I really appreciate donations. You can find the link on my website or YouTube channel. Those donations help me cover my expenses for this show such as hosting fees, equipment cost, etc. I'm doing all of this to entertain *you* based on *my* endless love for music and since there is no big network pumping dollars into this show, I'm the one who has to pay for all related expenses. Therefore, a small donation would already be amazing.

## Sources

And finally, here's a list of sources I used for this show. A big thanks goes out to all the authors of these sources. Please note that I have used both paraphrased and literal or verbatim content and quotes from the following fine sources as appropriate.

*<Please see the separate sources PDF doc for the sources.>*