

## Adele Girard and Joe Marsala:

### *The Sweethearts of Swing*

by Phillip D. Atteberry

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*In May of 1993, I requested an interview of Adele Girard Marsala. She was willing, but physically unable, so her daughter, Eleisa Marsala Trampler, took my questions and taped her mother's responses as health permitted. The process continued for weeks, with me providing streams of follow-up questions and Mrs. Marsala providing almost six hours of interview tapes, the last of which she completed five weeks before her death. Those taped recollections provide the basis for the following. I wish to thank Eleisa Trampler for her extraordinary help and encouragement.*

The marriage of Joe Marsala to Adele Girard in 1937 created a curious musical partnership. Marsala was a largely self-taught swing musician; Adele Girard enjoyed predominately classical training. Marsala's parents emigrated to Chicago from Italy at the turn of the century, while Adele's emerged from a distinguished French-Canadian ancestry. Adele's grandfather was one of the original contractors of Williams College, her father a violinist, and her mother an accomplished pianist and opera singer who won a scholarship to Williams and an opportunity to study at the La Scala Opera in Milan,



*Adele Girard and Joe Marsala, 1957*



*Adele Girard at 25*

though she declined both for fear of being unladylike. "My poor mother," reminisced Adele, "wanted me to be a lady more than anything, but despite her efforts, I married a clarinetist and ended up in a jazz band."

But marrying Joe Marsala at age 24 was not the first time Adele had ruffled her mother's sensibilities. "When I was 18, my older brother, Don (who was also a pianist), found me some jobs in the Catskills singing and playing piano in resort lounges. I enjoyed the work, was well received, and being young, fearless and quite silly, resolved to seek my destiny in New York. Poor Mother didn't want me to, but when she saw I was going, she packed up and went with me, determined to preserve whatever shreds of my respectability she could.

"And we had an awful time. It was 1931, the depression was severe and work scarce. I had an agent who got me an occasional job, but nothing that would pay the bills. And Father wasn't doing much better back home in Springfield, Massachusetts, so we literally went hungry.

"One day, after we had been scrounging for months, I spent virtually our last two dollars to go riding at the jockey club. I was good looking, had always looked good on a horse, and resolved to pick up a wealthy beau. Poor Mother, of course, was horrified at the impropriety. But



it worked! I met a fine looking gentleman; we spent a gay afternoon together, and he asked me to supper. Of course, then I had to confess my circumstances because I couldn't eat without Mother. He laughed uproariously, told me to get Mother, get dressed, and we would all go out. And we did. At the end of the evening, he even gave us some money—twenty-five dollars, I think, and that kept us afloat until my agent called with big news—he had a job for me in Chicago. Of course, Chicago was like the other side of the world, but jobs were scarce and the agent had bus fare, so we went.

"And lived high for two weeks. I played piano and sang in a restaurant lounge, and Mother and I ate free. But it ended abruptly when the manager couldn't afford to keep me.

"So there we were, broke again, only this time 800 miles from home. Fortunately, Harry Sosnik's orchestra was in Chicago and advertised for a singer. I auditioned and got the job. This was near the beginning of 1933. Mother was ecstatic! It wasn't the Metropolitan Opera, but it was several steps above the lounges where I had been playing.

"Mother was a wonderful seamstress and made me a beautiful dark green taffeta gown edged in pink. It had long sleeves and a touch of lace to help cover my hands, which were too big and a constant concern of Mother's. We also used part of our meal money to buy me some stylish high heels.

"I opened with the band at the Edgewater Beach Hotel and, wouldn't you know, suffered a pratfall the first night. Mother helped me dress, did my hair, and fussed over me as if I were Mrs. Astor's pet horse. But

she did me up beautifully. The dressing room was at the top of a concrete stairwell which led to the wings, and as I was going down just before my cue, one of my heels broke and I fell, thoroughly rumpling my hair and beautiful dress. Three male backup singers saw it and collapsed with laughter. Harry couldn't see what happened from where he was on stage, but heard the commotion, walked into the wings and said, 'What in the hell is going on back here?'

"'Nothing,' I squeaked, 'I'm fine, I'm ready.' All I could do was run my hand over my hair, straighten my dress as well as I could, and totter to the microphone, trying to camouflage my broken heel. I even remember what I sang that night, 'Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf.'

"Poor Mother, who had already gone out front, knew when she saw my entrance that something had happened and suffered agonies over it. I was always a good athlete, could swim, skate, ski, horseback ride, even play field hockey, but I was never graceful in those detestable high heels.

"Before I left Harry Sosnik about a year later, I suffered another bad fall, this one on stage at the Brown Palace in Denver. A very young Woody Herman was in that band, and he and I did a rumba dance together as a novelty. But as we were walking on stage one night for our routine, one of my heels caught in a microphone wire, and I went all the way to the floor. Harry and Woody rushed to help me, of course, the pictures of sympathy and compassion, but Harry said under his breath, 'My God, woman, when are you going to learn to stand up!'

Before Adele left Harry Sosnik in 1934, she began playing harp with the orchestra. "Mother, who was ever



Joe Marsala and his Chicagoans opened on St. Patrick's Day, 1937, at the Hickory House. From left: Adele Girard—harp, Joe Bushkin—piano, Ray Biondi—guitar, Joe Marsala—trumpet, Danny Alvin—drums, Artie Shapiro—bass.



concerned for my career, told Harry none too subtly that I could play harp and that he ought to let me. Of course, I was scared pink of playing with the orchestra, for I had no music and was far from accomplished. But Harry liked the idea. All the bands were looking for ways to be unique and my playing harp was a novelty. I never did play much with Harry, but we worked up a couple of features, including 'Tea for Two'."

Adele had begun playing harp at 14. "We had a friend, Alice Mikus, who was harpist for the Springfield Broadcasting Symphony, and Mother thought it a lady-like instrument, so I took lessons from Alice. She taught me how to put my hands on the harp, how to position it against my body, and how to work the pedals. I had taken piano lessons for years and had perfect pitch, so I found my way around the instrument quickly, but I had never played regularly before joining Harry Sosnik."

Adele and her mother did not like traveling, so in the winter of 1935, Adele joined Dick Stabile's orchestra, which had a standing engagement at New York's Lincoln Hotel. "I was with Dick Stabile the first time I saw Joe Marsala. This would have been early in 1936. Dick invited a small group of us to the Hickory House after work one night to see a musical/comedy team called Riley and Farley. Mike Riley had just written a hit song, 'The Music Goes Round and Round,' and everyone was talking about it. I don't remember much about Riley and Farley, but I remember being impressed with the young, handsome clarinet player. I didn't know enough about jazz to be impressed with his music; I just admired his looks. But I didn't meet him that night, nor see him again for many weeks. Mother was still traveling with me and expecting me back at the hotel, so I left before the show was over. (By the way, I learned from Joe later that he only appeared with Riley and Farley a couple of weeks. He wasn't the clowning type, and when he got hit with a dead fish during one of their routines, he quit.)

"My job with Dick Stabile only lasted a few months because he decided to go on the road and couldn't afford to take the harp. I didn't want to go anyway, for I had had enough of traveling. I needed a job, however, and was plenty concerned about finding one when a formal looking, goateed gentleman walked up to me one night after work and introduced himself as Frank Trumbauer. I'm embarrassed to say that I had never heard of him, let alone the musicians he worked with, Jack and Charlie Teagarden. But that night he offered me a job in their group, 'The Three T's.' Their harpist, Caspar Reardon, had taken a job in the Broadway production of *I Married an Angel*.

"Playing with The Three T's was the first musically challenging job I ever had. For the first time, my primary responsibility was as harpist rather than vocalist, and it is positively frightening what I didn't know about jazz. But the Teagardens and Frankie Trumbauer were fine musicians and treated me well. From them I learned the jazz repertoire. They knew every good song that had ever been written, and I learned them as fast as I could. But even more importantly, I learned how to improvise.



*Adele and Joe in New York city, 1937*

My having been forced to play without music so much had given me a knack for knowing which notes to play, but I had no sense of the feel, phrasing, and logic that go into jazz improvisation. I learned those from listening to the Teagardens and Frankie every night.

"We played several places around New York, but most frequently at the Hickory House. That's where we were when I learned that Paul Whiteman had hired Jack, Charlie, and Frankie. My situation was desperate this time because I had just purchased a \$2,500 gold Lyon and Healy harp. So I went to Jack Goldman, owner of the Hickory House, to see if he could help me. He told me that a young clarinetist, Joe Marsala, was putting a group together to replace us. (Joe and Jack Goldman, I later learned, were well acquainted because Joe had often worked the Hickory House with Wingy Manone.) The upshot was that Jack told Joe to hire me and Joe did, even though he had never before thought about using a harp.

"We opened at the Hickory House on St. Patrick's night, March 17, 1937, and it was one of the happiest of my life. The band was the hottest I had ever been part of, and thanks to what I had learned from The Three T's, I could appreciate them. In addition to Joe and me, the group included Joe Bushkin on piano, Marty Marsala (Joe's brother) on trumpet, Ray Biondi on jazz violin, Danny Alvin on drums, Artie Shapiro on bass, and Eddie Condon on guitar.

"We were a hit from the beginning. In those days the Hickory House was not only known for its music but its food. It was the best steak house in New York. Log fires glowed along the back wall where the steaks broiled and



sizzled, and a meat locker with huge glass windows displayed the hanging sides of beef. The aromas were exquisite. The walls on both sides were covered with pictures of celebrities who had frequented the place. In the room's center was a horseshoe bar with an elevated bandstand in the middle.

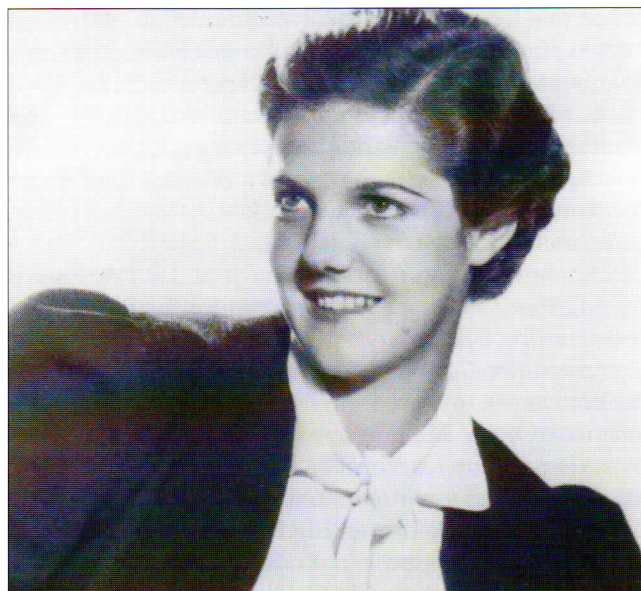
"Of course, we dressed to the nines in those days. I wore the gowns Mother had made for me, the boys were in black tie, and Joe wore a white jacket. I had a fresh corsage every night, and the boys had carnation boutonnieres. The spotlights were good, the music was good, and the place was packed four or five deep around the bar every night. Like many musicians, Joe wasn't a clock watcher, and we often played until 2:00 or 2:30 in the morning.

"The clientele was also impressive, though I didn't realize how much so until years later. During our early days, for example, John Wayne was a regular. He hadn't made it in the movies yet and was unknown to the public. A little later on, when *Mr. Roberts* became a hit on Broadway, Henry Fonda came over most nights for the last set. Clifton Webb frequented the place, Joe DiMaggio, Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Only in retrospect did I realize what an impressive group they were."

Adele and Joe were married four months and one day after opening at the Hickory House. "Our first 'date' was an afternoon tryst at Schrafft's restaurant on the east side, where hot tea and cinnamon toast was a ritual on winter afternoons. It sounds ridiculously quaint, but Joe suffered from chronic colitis and never could drink alcohol. So, we had tea and toast. He told me that day the only reason he led the band was because Mr. Goldman could count on his being sober at the end of every evening. I still remember the music playing that afternoon because I had to ask Joe what it was. He said, 'It's *Retourna a Sorrento*,' and being Italian, he knew it well. It's a beautiful melody and became 'our song' for all the years that followed.

"At that time, Joe was rooming with Wingy Manone in the Plymouth Hotel next to Joe and Sally Venuti. My Joe and Joe Venuti were great friends even though their personalities differed completely. My Joe was serious and shy, but Venuti was raucous and irreverent. I never laughed harder than when Venuti told of the time he called 30 bass players to meet him on the corner of Vine St. and Sunset Boulevard for a gig. Sure enough, they all showed up and, while falling all over each other, kept saying, 'Did Joe Venuti call you?' Another time, Venuti sent Wingy Manone one cuff link for a birthday present, and yet another time he sent Bing Crosby a swayback workhorse for his stable of thoroughbreds. Venuti was a funny guy and added considerable spice to our lives in those days."

Adele and Joe were married in the "Actor's Chapel" on 49th Street on July 18, 1937, though nobody knew it. "Mother was still staying with me, and I knew she would erupt if I married Joe. She always did have a lot of New England blue blood in her veins and never got over wanting to make me a lady. So, we eloped. Joe wanted



*Adele's Hollywood days, 1938*

things done in the open, but I convinced him that I knew Mother better than he did.

"And we kept our marriage secret for a long time. The first few weeks were dreadfully exciting. Joe and I found plenty of time to be together because Mother wasn't supervising me very closely by then. But our circumstances were cloak and dagger enough to give me a sense of delicious wickedness.

"But then, complications arose. I never did know whether Mother suspected something, but my agent mysteriously found a job for me and my father and brother on the West Coast. I was to play harp for the MGM studios and Father and Don were to arrange. Joe nearly had a fit. But for reasons I can't explain or justify, I convinced him to keep quiet and let me go. I didn't regret marrying Joe, but I dreaded Mother finding out, and the longer the secret went on, the more I dreaded it.

"So I went west with the family. Joe would never have tolerated it except that he thought I might benefit professionally and make some contacts that would help us both down the road.

"When we got to Hollywood, Mother encouraged me to date and be sociable, and I did a little, just to quiet her suspicions. Mickey Rooney even took me bowling once, though you can imagine what a dead fish I was. And I explored getting into the movies. I had some screen tests done and even tried out for the part of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. Can you imagine such silliness? In short, nothing worked out very well on the West Coast. Mother, Father, and I weren't getting along, and during one of our quarrels I told them I was going back to New York because I was married to Joe Marsala. I can see poor Mother now. She was positively stricken. 'Adele,' she wailed tragically, 'he's a damned Italian who'll murder us in our beds!' Mother thought that every Italian from Chicago was like Al Capone and had some vague idea of my being mixed up with gangsters.



"But even if Mother hadn't been tortured by visions of gangsters, she wouldn't have wanted me to marry Joe because she was afraid I'd get fat eating all that pasta. She always was concerned that my carriage and deportment be ladylike. In fact, with her encouragement, I took some new-fangled reducing treatments at MGM (in a steam box that would surely be condemned as a torture chamber now) and experimented with special diets. Can you imagine it? And all I got for my trouble was a drooping bustline.

"Of course I called Joe immediately, told him what had happened, and he was on the next train west. When he arrived a couple of days later, we were still in an uproar. Joe handled himself better than any of us, though. He was courteous but firm. He told Mom and Dad he was taking me with him and he did. The following week I was back at the Hickory House. The details of our elopement became known around the city, provided some colorful publicity, and earned us the nickname 'The Sweethearts of Swing'.

"Mother's dislike for Joe lasted a long time, but in the end—when she became convinced he had nothing to do with gangsters—she accepted him. Joe was never one to talk about himself or tell stories of his childhood, but he did tell one story that softened up Mother quite a bit. When he was a kid, his mother sent him to the market on an errand. He had a little money left over, so he bought a peanut butter sandwich and was eating it as he walked out the door. Before he had taken a half dozen steps, a black limousine wheeled around the corner, the doors flew open, and machine gun bullets riddled a man standing next to him. Joe dropped everything and ran, but before going half a block, an old man on his porch said, 'Walk, son, walk. Don't call attention to yourself.' And Joe did. He never ate peanut butter again nor could tolerate the smell of it."

Shortly after the Marsalas' return to the Hickory House, they popularized a tune called "Little Sir Echo," that has mistakenly been attributed to Joe. Adele explains: " 'Little Sir Echo' was written by a couple of unknown composers (Laura R. Smith and J. S. Fearis) in the late Thirties. Joe and I heard it, wrote a verse for it, rearranged it, and made it popular at the Hickory House. I used to call it our 'kiss and make up' song because ordinarily I sang the opening line, 'Little Sir Echo, how do you do?' and Joe answered, 'Hello, hello, hello.' But once in awhile, if we had been sparring, Joe wouldn't answer. When that happened, I made sure we did the song again later, and yet again if necessary, until I hear his 'Hello, hello, hello.' Then I knew things were all right."

The band's theme was "Singin' the Blues." "I fell in love with 'Singin' the Blues' while with The Three T's because it's a natural for improvising. The notes seem to spring from the instrument automatically. Jack Teagarden played it marvelously. Every night his solos were as fresh as if the song had never before been touched. Shortly after, I returned to the Hickory House, Bobby Hackett helped Joe and I arrange it for the group."

The Marsalas stayed at the Hickory House for ten satisfying years. "Our daughter, Eleisa, was born in 1939,

and that made us happy, but just as importantly, we had stable, rewarding work and good friends."

One of those was businessman Jack Gordon, whose son, clarinetist Bobby Gordon, became Joe's musical protégé. Adele recalls: "Jack loved jazz and frequented the Hickory House. Over time, he and Joe became friends and collaborated on several business ventures. The first and most unusual was a children's game called 'Toono,' which Joe invented when Eleisa was six or seven. 'Toono' was like bingo with tunes. The game included a record, some 'Toono' cards (like bingo cards only with nursery rhyme pictures), and chips. When the record played a nursery rhyme ('Mary had a Little Lamb' for example), the child placed a chip on the matching picture. The first child to cover a row of pictures won and yelled 'Toono.' Jack and Joe had several Toono games manufactured and peddled them to publishers, some of which showed interest. Finally, they sold the rights to F.A.O. Schwarz, though Schwarz later decided not to publish the game. Joe was an extremely creative person, and his creativity was never confined to jazz, but his business ventures seldom worked out."

Adele also took pride in Joe's having the first racially mixed group on 52nd Street. "We hired Red Allen as our trumpet player shortly after the band opened at the Hickory House. Joe was thoroughly aware of the ramifications and discussed them with Jack Goldman. Mr. Goldman, to his credit, agreed that musicians should be hired according to ability, not race, so Red joined the group. We never had a problem in the Hickory House, but often ran into trouble elsewhere. Not long after Red



*Adele and Joe in 1938*



joined us, for example, we played a Sunday afternoon gig at the Waldorf-Astoria. When the Manager saw us setting up, he asked who the 'black gentleman' was. Joe said, 'He's our trumpet player,' and the manager ever so politely said that 'under the circumstances,' the black gentleman would not be able to participate. Joe was equally polite in saying that 'under the circumstances, the band would not be able to play.' Only when the manager saw us packing up in earnest did he relent."

These extra engagements made for a grueling schedule but were helpful financially. "Joe and I made good money at the Hickory House, but never got ahead. Joe not only paid the guys in full and on time, but floated loans when they needed extra money. Unfortunately, he didn't keep good track of those loans. And it's not only money that he gave away. One winter night an unemployed musician showed up and sat in with us. Joe didn't need him and couldn't afford him, but felt guilty because he couldn't give him a job, so he gave the guy his tailor-made winter coat as consolation. That sort of thing was frustrating to me, but it's hard to resent such generosity. I had Joe's tailor make him another coat and gave it to him on his next birthday. Joe's heart was always better than his judgment."

Adele's only significant regret about those years was that women weren't as artistically respected as they are today. "And yet at the time, I never thought about it, never felt mistreated, but I was a woman of the Thirties and Forties; a woman of the Eighties or Nineties couldn't have understood."

Adele used Eddie Condon to illustrate her point. "Joe and I never saw eye to eye about Eddie. Joe always stuck up for him as being a good musician, a good promoter, and good for jazz, and that's no doubt true, but about women he was narrow-minded. To Eddie, women were physical objects; even his jokes revealed that. George Wettling's wife, for example, was an attractive lady with a nice sense of humor, but larger than most girls, and no matter where he was, Eddie referred to her as 'Sea Biscuit.' Can you imagine that? Calling attention to a woman's size by giving her the nickname of a racehorse? But that was Eddie.

"Musically, Eddie saw nothing wrong with a female vocalist—if she looked and sounded pretty—because that reinforced his idea of 'womanliness.' But he had no use for a female instrumentalist, especially a harpist in a jazz band.

"But Eddie wasn't the only one. Jazz groups in those days were bastions of male bonding, and females were interlopers. Jealousy was also a problem. Young females attract attention, especially in a context like that, and the guys didn't like it.

"Which explains why I wasn't part of the famous Carnegie Hall concert on Christmas of 1945. Eddie arranged that date, lining up, among others, everyone in the Hickory House group except me. And he didn't line up Joe until the last minute, so we wouldn't realize I was being left out. It was one of the most frustrating moments I ever experienced."

Adele's daughter, who was seven at the time, remembers the day. "I stood in the Carnegie Hall wings and watched the concert with Mom, who was crying. I asked her why, and she said, 'because nobody would bring the harp,' which was no doubt the only explanation a seven year old could understand, but which clearly masked some complicated dynamics."

Adele acknowledged, however, that some of this unfavorable treatment was prompted by her music rather than gender. "Oh yes, there have always been those who said I couldn't swing. Joe Bushkin used to be quite vocal about it. But the harp is a complex instrument, after all. It has seven pedals, each of which governs a small number of notes, and if one attempts more than elegant glissandos, a lot of foot work is required, which limits what you can do. But all instruments have their limitations; that's not the real reason jazz people complain about a harp.

"They complain because they don't have ears for it. What we hear in a piece of music has a lot to do with what we expect. We don't expect a bass player to play like a pianist or a trombonist to play like a saxophone player because our ears have been trained to know what those instruments can and can't do. We don't know what to expect of a harp. We aren't used to its sound in a jazz context; it makes us a little uncomfortable because we associate it with other forms of music. Too often when people hear a harp, images of clouds and angels pop into their heads and they can't get beyond it. Why do you think the harp is nicknamed an 'angel box'? That's why people are quick to say that harpists don't swing. People accused Caspar Reardon of not being able to swing. That's part of the reason he didn't stay on the jazz scene."

The Marsalas' long run at the Hickory House ended in 1946, though they reappeared intermittently until 1948. "The late Forties were difficult years for us," Adele admitted. "The jazz world was being transformed by bebop, and neither Joe nor I felt comfortable with it. We missed the swing rhythms, the ensemble cohesiveness, and, most of all, improvising within a chord structure. The bebop guys were all exciting and unpredictable, but we never understood what their ground rules were, so we went to work in the studios, myself at NBC and Joe at ABC, but Joe wasn't happy. The music, the hours, and the studio stifled him. He wanted to put together a big band, but it didn't work. I, on the other hand, was more satisfied. The money was extremely good, and I found studio work, if not always interesting, at least more enjoyable than Joe did. In short, we had middle-aged adjustment problems.

"Fortunately, Joe expressed his frustrations in the song, 'Don't Cry, Joe,' and made a pile of money from it. Joe had connections with Tommy Dorsey (who made a habit of hiring away our best people at the Hickory House) and Tommy had connections with Frank Sinatra. Sinatra looked at the song, liked it, and made a hit of it.

"Not surprisingly, when our friends heard the lyrics—'Let her go, let her go, let her go'—they assumed Joe and I were calling it quits. But that was never the case.



We were both Catholic, didn't believe in divorce and never discussed it as an option. We did decide, however, that our lives needed changing, so we left New York and went west. Joe had seen an article in *Life Magazine* about Aspen, Colorado, with its beautiful snow and mountains, and decided that's where he wanted to live. So, using the royalty money from 'Don't Cry, Joe,' we bought a Ford station wagon and headed for Aspen.

"And what a trip it was. None of us had ever seen a real mountain before, and driving over the Rockies nearly did us in. And what's worse, when we got to Aspen, it was nothing like the magazine said it would be. Poor Eleisa, who was ten at the time, got out of the car, looked around, and said, 'What kind of a mine dump is this?'"

The Marsalas, however, settled in Aspen and found both work and friends. Within a year, Joe was collaborating with western writer Fred Glidden (who wrote under the pen name "Luke Short") on a musical comedy called *I've Had It*. Joe wrote the music and lyrics, Glidden the book.

"Aspen was a curiosity in the early Fifties," Adele explained. "The town was full of cowboys and sheep herders, but also skiers and classical musicians, for the community was making itself into a resort area for classical music performances and seminars. Joe and Fred wrote a musical play which satirized all this. And the results were good. Joe's score contained some of his best songs. So he and Fred pooled their resources and mounted the show, with me playing the female lead.

"As remarkable as it sounds, I had taken singing lessons for years while we worked the Hickory House. My teacher, Neville Lander, specialized in opera, and I practiced every day, singing into a pillow because my voice was so high and strong that I drove the neighbors crazy. Anyway, that training helped me in *I've Had It*. And the show was a smash hit—in Aspen. The theater was full every night and Joe's songs were being sung all over town."

After a successful run in Aspen, Joe and Fred Glidden booked *I've Had It* into Phipps Auditorium in Denver to see whether or not this peculiarly Aspen show had appeal elsewhere, and it did. Alex Murphree, the crusty drama editor of the *Denver Post*, spoke glowingly of the opening night performance: "[The show features] a magnificent musical score by Joe Marsala, full of singable tunes, dancy rhythms, and . . . sophisticated Cole Porterisms, . . . [but] the show's success is largely attributable to the distinguished, handsome, and carefully professional performance of Adele Girard."

And yet *I've Had It* never went beyond Denver, as Adele explains: "We hoped to take the show to Broadway, and talked to several producers. But they were afraid a show about Aspen would flop in New York. So we faced a dead end—until Ethel Merman got interested. She flew west, saw the show, and offered to buy its rights. In retrospect, Joe and Fred should have sold, for Ms. Merman might have gotten the show to Broadway, but she wanted to transform it into a vehicle for herself. That left me out. It left Dick Murphy, our leading man, out too,



*Adele, Joe, and Eleisa in Aspen, 1950*

and jeopardized Joe's score, for Ms. Merman wanted freedom to keep the songs or replace them. In the end, Joe's artistic sensibilities were offended. He and Fred held out for another offer, which never came."

The script and music for *I've Had It* have been lost, even though Adele retained the song copyrights. Mrs. Trampler explains: "At the time, neither Dad nor Fred Glidden thought about preserving the script and score. I guess they couldn't imagine their ever being lost. But time went by, people moved from here to there, contacts were lost, then people died, and after Dad's death in 1978, no one could locate them. Even the producer, Ed Smart, and the musical director, Max DiJulio, are unable to find copies."

A few of the songs, however, were recorded. Again, Mrs. Trampler: "While the show was playing in Aspen and enjoying such huge success, people clamored for records. So Dad and Fred had six songs recorded with the full orchestra. Mom and Dick Murphy sang two duets, 'You'd Make a Wonderful Stranger,' and 'Spring Rhymes with Everything.' Dick Murphy sang two solos, 'The Train with the Diamond Stack Engine,' and 'Morning Star,' and Louise Duncan, a low-pitched singer with a sizable following in Denver nightclubs, sang 'According to the Latest Nationwide Survey' and 'Some Days (It Don't Even Pay to Get Up).' Ms. Duncan was not associated with the production, but Ed Smart, the show's producer, hoped to turn the latter tunes into nationwide hits, and felt Mom's voice was too operettaish for that. Needless to say, Mom was unhappy. The records sold well in Aspen, but distribution elsewhere was never worked out, so hundreds, maybe more, were left over.

"When the show closed in Denver, Fred used his investment as a tax write-off, but to do so, he was forced to destroy the records. He pitched most of them in the Aspen dump, and his children used the others for target practice. Fortunately, Dad saved a set, for I found them in his belongings. There can't be more than a handful of others left; and I don't know who might have them." (*Hearing these recordings, by the way, which Mrs. Trampler taped for me, was one of the pleasures of researching this article.*)



Adele explains what happened after *I've Had It* closed: "Joe began looking for something else to do. He played very little clarinet during these years because of an allergy that affected his hands. It was a rash, something like eczema, which was aggravated by the metal alloy in the clarinet keys. He suffered from this all the years I knew him, keeping him from the clarinet for long stretches at a time.

"In 1954, we moved back to New York so that Joe and Jack Gordon could establish a music publishing company, Beatrice Music. (Beatrice is my first name.) While Joe and Jack were busy with that, I went to work in the studios of WOR.

"Beatrice Music survived for eight years, until it was absorbed by the Seeburg Music Corporation. Beatrice's biggest money-maker was 'And So to Sleep Again,' which Joe had written a few years earlier—about the time he was writing the score to *I've Had It*.

"One of Joe's most satisfying activities during these years was giving clarinet lessons to Jack Gordon's son, Bobby. When we left New York for Aspen in 1949, Bobby was still a small child. When we returned, he was 12 or 13, interested in music, and wanting to play clarinet like Joe. Of course, Joe loved that and spent a lot of time teaching Bobby."

Bobby Gordon recalls, "As a youngster of four or five, I have vague recollections of Joe. He seemed incredibly large and important. Dad had all his records, played them constantly, and even took me to see him a couple of times, probably at the Hickory House, though I was too young to know where I was.

"When Joe and Adele returned from Aspen, I was 13, interested in music, and wanting to play clarinet, just like Joe. So Joe gave me lessons. He and Adele came over to the house one night a week, and Joe and I went to the

basement for a couple of hours to practice. To this day, those are the only lessons I've had.

"At the beginning, Joe taught me fingering, for I knew nothing. Afterward, he taught me chord progressions. Joe often had me write out familiar tunes and figure out the changes. From there, it was a short step to improvising, which we worked on a lot. Joe stressed respecting the song and staying around the melody. When I got even more proficient, we worked on tone. Joe taught me that if I let a little air escape out the sides of my mouth—just a little—I could achieve a rounder, fuller sound. Another thing I learned from Joe, though he never mentioned it to my recollection, is the value of the clarinet's lower register. Most clarinetists have been influenced by the Benny Goodman style, which makes extensive use of the upper register, especially on hot numbers. And that's great. But Joe was a master of the lower register. It gave him a distinctive, original sound, and I just naturally picked it up.

"Perhaps the biggest thrill I got from all this was Joe's taking me with him when he played occasional jobs. He introduced me to Jack Teagarden, Pee Wee Russell, Eddie Condon, and many people from that generation. Of course I never sat in with them—I was much too shy for that—but I listened, thought about how they played and gained a lot of musical knowledge."

Meanwhile, Adele kept busy in the studios, and in 1955, joined Tommy Dorsey at the Paramount for a reunion with his brother, Jimmy, and Frank Sinatra. "I've always been glad Tommy asked me," explains Adele. "Relations between Joe and Tommy hadn't been good for a long time. Years earlier, Tommy had invited Joe and me to join his band, and we declined. We didn't want to travel, and Tommy, though a wonderful musician, was too temperamental for us. Tommy got offended when we



Frank Sinatra, at a return engagement at the Paramount Theatre in New York City in 1956, performs with Adele Girard Marsala and Bill Miller under the baton of Tommy Dorsey.





Adele plays in England with the "Fantasticks," 1969.

declined his offer, however, and stayed that way. I always felt that his asking me to be a part of the Paramount reunion was his way of saying things were OK between us."

In 1962, when the Seeburg Music Corporation absorbed Beatrice Music, Joe was made a vice-president. "But he didn't have a desk job," noted Adele. "He could never tolerate a conventional job with conventional responsibilities. When he was a young man in Chicago, he had worked as a salesman for a shoe company, as a plant worker in a foundry, as a mail order clerk, even as a truck driver. And he was no good at any of them. Joe wasn't happy unless he had some way of exercising his creativity. So at Seeburg he traveled a lot, looking for new talent and setting up album dates. One of the first albums he helped put together was *Warm and Sentimental*, one of Bobby Gordon's early albums. Bobby was 21, and at the time, I felt Joe should have done the album. Even though he wasn't playing much, he still had a name in the jazz world and would have helped sales. But Joe had been working with Bobby for years and wanted *Warm and Sentimental* to be Bobby's album."

Adele had little to say of her own activities during these years, and her daughter explains why. "Mom got away from music for awhile. She did play on the *Warm and Sentimental* album, but otherwise, she busied herself elsewhere. She fell in love with old furniture, for example, and spent hours refinishing beautiful pieces that she found in second-hand stores. She was also an artist of exceptional ability and devoted much of these years to drawing and painting. She fell in love with the Impressionists and spent whole days in the Chicago Museum of Art.

"And even though she was approaching 50, she rediscovered ice skating, one of her childhood loves, and often skated in the public facilities around Chicago. These were rewarding and refreshing years for her, even though they were the least musical years of her life."

In the mid-Sixties, however, Seeburg Music suffered financial problems, and the Marsalas moved to the West Coast, where Adele found work in the University of Southern California's drama department.

"I was an 'adjunct instructor', though I never taught classes. I assisted in production development and played piano accompaniment for rehearsals and shows. It was fun. We even toured England with a production of the *Fantasticks*. I began that tour as pianist, but stepped into the female role when our actress fell ill. I had some hopes of building an acting career when I returned, but it was too late. I was too old and had been a musician for too many years to accomplish much on the stage or screen."

Joe and Adele's last public appearance was in 1970 at Donte's in North Hollywood. "We played for about two weeks," recalls Adele, "and it was a happy time. A lot of our old friends from the Hickory House, who had migrated to the West Coast over the years, joined us as they could. Joe gave Shelly Manne one of his first breaks in 1940 or so, and Shelly came over to join us for an evening. Dick Cary joined us, so did Neil Hefti, Manny Klein and Artie Shapiro. Leonard Feather was there, and even sat in on piano one night. But as happy as those evenings were, we all had the feeling that this was the last time we would play together, and it was."

Peter Tanner, writing in the October 1970 issue of *Jazz Journal*, describes his feelings after attending one of these evenings: "When I left Donte's in the early hours of the morning, I felt that even though Johnny Dodds, Leon Rapollo, Jimmie Noone, Pee Wee Russell and so many others were no longer with us, at least the rich, heady Marsala wine was still flowing strongly."

And so it was, though shortly afterward, ill health silenced Joe's clarinet. He died in 1978. Adele, however, continued playing up and down the coast in resorts and restaurant lounges, much like she had so many years earlier. Bobby Gordon remembers these years: "I was living in San Diego, and when Adele was anywhere around, I took my clarinet and sat in with her. It was only during these years that I came to realize how much she had accomplished, what a pioneer she had been, and what a dogged, indomitable spirit she had.

"In 1990, when I was in Florida doing some gigs with Dan Barrett, Rick Fay, and some of the Arbors people, Mat Domber, head of Arbors records, approached me about an album. I told him I had always wanted to do an album with Adele Girard. But by this time Adele had suffered two strokes, and I feared she wouldn't be able, but I called and asked."

Adele's daughter explains what happened from that point: "After her second stroke in 1990, Mom sold both her harps. But she missed them, and in September of 1991, after regaining some of her health, she bought an orchestra harp. Then Bobby called. She wasn't playing



much, and she wasn't very well, but I never knew her to say 'no' to an opportunity. She started practicing in earnest and continued, by herself and with Bobby, until the album was cut a few weeks later. When I first heard the tape I cried, Bobby sounded so much like Dad. When I told him that, he smiled and said, 'Yeah, I guess maybe I stole a few of Joe's licks.' "

Adele had little to say about her musical accomplishments. "There is only one musical accomplishment worth anything, and that is to please yourself and your audience. Joe and I never cared much about anything else. I guess that's why our music never changed. We knew what we liked; we knew who we were as musicians, and we never cared to be anything else."

In assessing her life more generally, Adele spoke of music only secondarily. "When you come to the end of your life, what really matters are the friends you've made and the memories you've acquired. Those are the things that make you feel your life has been worthwhile. Music has been such a wonderful career because it's given me such good friends, such wonderful memories. For example, few people will ever know the name 'Tony Bassi,' but he was a wig maker for the Metropolitan Opera, an old Italian gentleman who took his teeth out and put them in with the same nonchalance that other people take off and put on their glasses. He was a true eccentric, but a dear friend, and he knew opera and loved it as passionately as I, and some of my best times were with him in



Adele at the Avawaw Gardens in Palm Desert, CA, about 1985

the old Met listening to Rossini, Puccini, or Verdi. After the performances, we typically met Joe at an Italian restaurant (for Joe never liked opera), and Tony always ordered spaghetti, put his nose over the steaming plate when it arrived, inhaled deeply, announced that it was 'beauuuuutiful,' then sucked it up so that the sauce flew everywhere. His manners embarrassed me then, but what I wouldn't give to spend an evening with him now.

"And then there was the little Italian miner in Aspen who wore size 13 shoes. His feet were as long as he was tall. I can't even think of his name, but he was one of our first acquaintances when we moved, and Joe so loved to talk with him in Italian.

"But I'm rambling. The point is that you can talk and write all you want about a person's life, but you can never capture it. The important things are so often the little things—and they evaporate so easily when you try to put them into words."

### *About the Author*

Phil Atteberry teaches English and jazz history at the University of Pittsburgh at Titusville. In addition, he frequently teaches summer seminars on jazz artists at the Chautauqua Institute in New York State.

He received his Ph.D. in English from Washington University in St. Louis. When not teaching or depleting his bank account buying CD's, he writes feature articles and book reviews for *The Mississippi Rag*, *CODA Magazine* and *Cadence*.

### *Notes*

*Eleisa Marsala Trampler, daughter of Adele and Joe writes: Readers may also want to hear what little is available of Adele on CD. Here is the very brief discography:*

"Wolverine Blues", "Jazz Me Blues", "Clarinet Marmalade": were recorded April 21, 1937, in NYC with Joe Marsala's Chicagoans. (Earliest known recordings to my knowledge. Adele's choruses are very short. She was regarded as a novelty and not taken very seriously, even by the musicians she worked with!) "Bull's Eye", "Lower Register", (both are listed with the name "Gerard" as composer, a misspelling of my mother's last name. Adele and Joe wrote these tunes together, I believe), "I Know That You Know" (some of my father's finest clarinet playing can be heard on this tune, the fullness of sound in the lower register of the horn was Joe's unmistakable trademark, indeed the preceding tune, "Lower Register", was named for this), and "Slow Down": were recorded March 21, 1941, in NYC with Joe Marsala and his orchestra.

The harp imparts wonderful elements of surprise, mystery, elegance, romance, and sheer fun to these old jazz tunes. In addition, watching Adele, with feet and fingers flying both at once, was a startling and amazing image. It was no wonder that Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond series, was one of her most ardent fans. All seven of these tunes can be found on *The Chronological Classics: Joe Marsala 1936–1942* (Classics # 763).



The second *Chronological Classics: Joe Marsala 1944-1945* (Classics #902) offers the following array of tunes featuring Adele at her finest. Adele is allowed much more leeway here, and her own arrangements for harp are in evidence on: "Romance", "Zero Hour", "Joe Joe Jump", "Southern Comfort", "Lover, Don't Let it End" (this tune was written to commemorate the musical era that Joe and Adele found so appealing; in Adele's own words, "the music was alive), "Gotta Be This or That" (Joe can be heard singing here), "East of the Sun", "Slightly Dizzy", "I Would Do Anything For You."

The third CD offering some of Adele's final renditions is titled *The Bobby Gordon Quartet, Featuring Adele Girard Marsala: Don't Let it End...* This was recorded in Newport Beach, California, in 1992, after Adele (aged 79) had suffered two strokes from which she recovered almost completely. A slight slowness on her left side accounts for a couple of bloopers about which my mother remarked: "What was I doing there!" Bobby Gordon was my father's protégé and plays clarinet with much of Joe's intonation. Thanks are due to the producer, Matthew Domber of Arbors Records, Inc., who was eager to record Adele before her artistry was lost to us.

I was thrilled to find the old recordings on the *Chronological Classics* because my parents in many years of moving around the country had kept nothing of their past. Indeed it brought tears to my eyes to hear once more the

tunes I remembered falling asleep to as a child. I would gladly have carried on my mother's legacy, but even though I begged Mother to teach me the harp, she wouldn't. I am a primary school teacher for the Denver Public Schools. Joe and Adele have three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren scattered from coast to coast.

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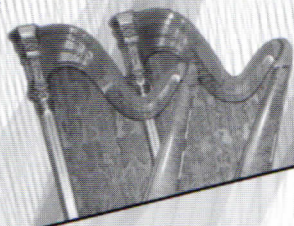
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