

Boswell

1949; *Saturday Evening Post*, Aug. 15, 1953; and *U.S. News & World Report*, Sept. 9, 1955. Bolton was also regularly featured by *Independent Woman*, the publication of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs, between 1940 and 1955. An obituary is in the *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 1977.]

DORIS WEATHERFORD

BOSWELL, CONNIE (CONNIE) (Dec. 3, 1907–Oct. 11, 1976), jazz singer, was born in Kansas City, Mo., the daughter of Alfred Clyde Boswell and Meldania Foore. During the 1880's her father had appeared in tent shows, danced, and played "stride"-style piano; her mother, although never in show business, was also very fond of music. In 1911, Connie contracted polio, and from then on she could walk only if she held onto something. In spite of her disability, she was not treated differently from her sisters Martha and Helvetia ("Vet"). Boswell was expected to do the same chores, including jobs such as raking leaves.

In 1914, Connie's father took a job as manager for Fleischmann's Yeast Company and moved the family to New Orleans, La. There Meldania Boswell enrolled all three girls in music lessons at a very young age. The sisters were classically trained by a German music teacher, Otto Fink: Martha studied piano, Connie studied cello, and Vet studied violin. The three girls attended McDonogh Elementary School in New Orleans and Francis T. Nicholls School for Girls (a commercial art school); because Connie could not walk to school, her mother bought her a tricycle. Their mother instilled a sense of unity among the three sisters through music; they remained inseparable throughout adulthood.

Boswell and her sisters grew up hearing their parents and their aunt and uncle harmonize in a barbershop quartet style of singing as well as the singing of the family's black servants. Often the young girls would go to the French Market to hear blacks singing, and they even sat outside of black churches during services. In addition, the Boswell home was filled with music played by friends such as trumpet player Louis Prima and cornetist Emmet Hardy. Connie also credited local singer Maimie Smith and recordings of operatic singer Enrico Caruso as important influences.

The sisters played and sang in the blues-jazz style then prevalent in New Orleans. Martha played "stride" piano; Connie, saxophone and

piano; and Vet, the banjo. By the time the Boswell sisters were in their teens, they were interspersing jazz with classical music. (Later, during Connie's solo career, she recorded swing versions of classics such as "Amapola," a traditional Spanish song, and "Martha," a classical piece by Frederick Von Flatow.)

The sisters first recorded in 1925, on a Victor mobile unit. In 1928, although their father was reluctant to let them go, the trio left home to perform on the road. The first stop was Chicago, to audition for several vaudeville agents. The Boswells were supposed to play a classical set on violin, cello, and piano; a jazz set on banjo, piano, and sax; Vet would dance; and finally the girls would sing. They became so nervous, however, that they were unable to play their instruments and instead just sang, harmonizing as they had always done at home. From then on they were asked only to sing.

Soon afterward the Boswell Sisters trio embarked on a rigorous vaudeville tour from the Midwest to the West Coast. Connie created many of the vocal arrangements and encouraged the group's musical energy; she had a strong solo alto voice and sang the majority of the solo choruses in the trio's arrangements. The Boswell Sisters were one of the few white singing groups of the time who utilized wordless vocals (in a 1987 interview, Vet Boswell said the sisters called this "gibberish," a kind of made-up family language). The Boswell Sisters' harmonies and vocal arrangements were unlike those of most vocal groups in the early 1930's. The trio utilized cross voicings in harmony, change of musical "rhythmic feel," and changes in tempo and key within one song. Examples of their unique arrangements and vocal sound can be heard on "Crazy People," "Everybody Loves My Baby," "If It Ain't Love," and many more reissued recordings of their work.

During the trio's travel, there was no wheelchair for Connie, so her sisters found the best way to move her was with Connie sitting in their crossed arms. In California, a young hotel clerk, Harry Leedy, heard the Boswell Sisters on a radio show and recognized their unique sound and special talent. When Leedy happened to check the sisters into a San Francisco hotel, the four became friends, and he became the trio's manager. In 1930, Leedy arranged the Boswell Sisters' first coast-to-coast broadcast from Los Angeles on "California Melodies." After this initial nationwide appearance the

sisters appeared on many network radio shows. Their special sound and rhythm made them stars. The trio did fifteen-minute programs; Connie had her own fifteen-minute program on alternating nights. The sisters were regulars with Bing Crosby on "The Woodbury Hour"; they began recording for Okeh Records in 1930 and later appeared on Brunswick Records. These early recordings are still considered inventive vocal arrangements. Musicians who recorded with the Boswell Sisters included the Dorsey Brothers, Joe Venuti, Eddie Lang, Bunny Berigan, and Mannie Klein.

As a trio, the Boswell Sisters' performing career spanned the years 1931 to 1936. By 1935 each of the sisters had married. Connie married the trio's manager, Harry Leedy, on Dec. 14, 1935. The sisters appeared in several movies and film shorts. One of their best movie performances, which demonstrated their special vocal sound, was in *The Big Broadcast of 1932*, in which they sang "Crazy People." Although Martha and Vet retired from show business, Connie continued her career as a vocalist.

Connie Boswell's recordings eventually sold 75 million copies. She won a large audience on the radio shows "Camel Caravan," "Good News," and "The Ken Murray Show," and made frequent guest appearances on "The Bing Crosby Show." Frank Sinatra once said that Connie Boswell was the most widely imitated singer of all time. Among the many vocalists she influenced was jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald. Throughout the 1930's and 1940's, Boswell continued to record for Decca. She had her own television show on ABC, and appeared with Ed Sullivan, Perry Como, Steve Allen, Bob Crosby, Arthur Godfrey, and Frank Sinatra. During her solo career, Boswell changed the spelling of her name to Connee. (Some say she received a fan letter with her name spelled thus and decided to adopt it.)

When Boswell performed as a soloist, she concealed her handicap by wearing floor-length gowns that hid a stool on which she was wheeled onto the stage. She performed in movies, introducing such songs as "Stormy Weather" and "Whispers in the Dark." She appeared in *Artists and Models* (1937), *Syncopation* (1942), *Swing Parade* (1946), and *Senior Prom* (1958). She also appeared in the Broadway show *Star Time* (1944).

Boswell and entertainer Eddie Cantor were among the original founders of the March of

Boyd

Dimes. From the 1960's on, her public performances were limited to benefits for hospitals and institutions for the handicapped. She also curtailed appearances because of Leedy's ill health.

Boswell's last professional appearance as a vocalist was in New York City on Sept. 19, 1975, with Benny Goodman at Shepherds in the Drake Hotel, during a Jazz at Noon jam session. Following the death of her husband in 1975, Boswell lost her vigor and energy. In early 1976, she was diagnosed with stomach cancer. She died in New York City.

Although some of Boswell's recordings demonstrate her unique jazz phrasing, they do not transmit the energy and charisma of her live performances. Irving Berlin called her "the best ballad singer in the business." Boswell was most proud of the fact that she and her sisters "revolutionized trio and group singing." Besides the trio's influence on group singing, Boswell's solo work influenced many singers, bridging the gap between blues singing and early jazz singing.

[The Boswell Collection, written and compiled by Jan Shapiro, is housed at the libraries at Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Berklee College, Boston, Mass.; and the Rutgers Institute of Jazz Studies, Newark, N.J. See also Jan Shapiro, *Filling in the Gaps in the History of Vocal Jazz, Connee Boswell and the Boswell Sisters* (1990), and "Connee Boswell and the Boswell Sisters: Pioneers in Vocal Jazz," *Jazz Educators Journal*, Spring 1990. Other articles appear in *Down Beat* (1944); *The Second Line* (1971); *Melody Maker* (Oct. 1976); and *Storyville* (1977). An obituary is in the *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 1976.]

JAN SHAPIRO

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WITH AN
INDEX GUIDE
TO THE
SUPPLEMENTS

CALLAS, MARIA (Dec. 2, 1923–Sept. 16, 1977), singer, was born Maria Anna Cecelia Sofia Kalogeropoulos in New York City, one of three children of Evangelia Dimitriadu and George Kalogeropoulos, recent immigrants from Meligala, Greece. The family first lived in Astoria, Queens, where Maria's father, who had owned a pharmacy in his native Greece, worked for a drugstore chain; like many immigrants, Maria's father changed his last name to something more easily pronounced by Americans, choosing Callas, and by 1927 he owned his own drugstore in a Greek neighborhood in Manhattan. However, he did not meet with the economic success he had enjoyed in Greece, was forced to give up his store, and thereafter worked as a pharmacist for various drugstore chains.

Maria's mother was the daughter of a Greek officer. Although she admired music and the arts, she was not a gifted musician. However, from early on, Evangelia did recognize the musical talents of her two daughters, Cynthia ("Jackie") and Maria. Evangelia was determined that the two girls would be trained for musical careers. She bought records of opera singers and was delighted to hear four-year-old Maria sing along with the arias on these recordings. As the girls grew older, Evangelia became even more determined that they continue their music studies, regardless of personal sacrifice. Eleven-year-old Maria, though shy and awkward, participated in children's contests and sang on radio programs. In one such competition, Maria was awarded second prize by comedian Jack Benny. Unfortunately, Evangelia's ambition for her daughters was the source of many family arguments between her and George.

In the 1930's the Great Depression was devastating America. The Callas family suffered financially like many other American families at that time. Evangelia decided that the only way to afford her daughters' musical studies was to

send them to Greece. Despite protests from her husband, Evangelia first sent her older daughter Jackie to Greece for piano studies, and then in 1937 she accompanied Maria to Greece. Maria auditioned for voice teacher Maria Trivella, who taught at the National Conservatory in Athens; she helped Maria win a scholarship to study voice. The conservatory thought that Maria was sixteen, but she was only thirteen. (The young Maria was overweight. She would battle this image for a number of years, later dropping eighty pounds and generally maintaining a slim physique.) Two years after her acceptance, she began study with Elvira de Hidalgo, an artist-teacher at the leading conservatory in Athens, the Odeon Athenon. In 1940, Callas made her professional stage debut at the National Lyric Theater, appearing in the operetta *Boccaccio*.

At the end of World War II, in part because she wished to break away from her mother's control, Callas returned to the United States, where she lived with her father and pursued her operatic career. This trip home, however, was professionally disappointing, so she left for Italy in 1947.

On June 29, 1947, Callas met Giovanni Battista Meneghini, a building materials tycoon and multimillionaire who was also an avid opera fan. Meneghini took an active interest in Callas and her musical career. Though he was twenty years older than Callas, they married within the year. Meneghini thereafter served as his wife's manager and agent. Though she remained an American citizen, Callas chose to make Italy her home.

Callas made her Italian opera debut singing the title role of *La Gioconda* at the Verona Arena in August 1947. She went on to sing the parts of *Isolde* and *Turandot* in Venice, and *Aida* in Turin. Critics began to recognize her talents—not only her extraordinary voice, but her emotional interpretations of the parts she sang. In November 1948, Callas made her debut in Florence, singing as *Norma* for the first time: she would be associated with this role throughout her career, performing *Norma* ninety times in eight countries. In 1954, Maria Callas finally made her United States debut, singing in *Norma* with the Chicago Lyric Opera. Two years later she again sang the same role for her Metropolitan Opera debut. Thereafter she performed at all the greatest opera houses of the world: La Scala,

Covent Garden, the Paris Opera House, and many more.

As Callas gained fame as a prominent opera singer, the media seemed to follow her every move. Newspapers wrote of her “diva” temperament, reporting that she was difficult to work with and prone to temper tantrums. Meneghini disputed her critics, saying that Callas was warranted in the performance demands she made. Callas herself was a perfectionist; she stated, “To me the art of music is magnificent and I cannot bear to see it treated in a shabby way. When it is respected I will work hard and always give my best. But if music is treated in a shabby or second best way, I do not want to be associated with it.”

Though an accomplished vocalist, possessing a two-and-a-half octave range, she was plagued by many mixed reviews concerning her musical performances—some hailed her as the greatest singer of bel canto opera, while others criticized her voice as flawed, undependable, thin, and “metal-like” in the upper register. Callas's own colleagues were also split regarding her talent. Audiences, however, loved Maria Callas and the aura that seemed to surround her. Callas's every performance was said to command an audience; when singing a role, her charisma was astounding.

Callas's personal life was constantly sensationalized in the papers. Her disputes with conductors about repertoire and her illnesses, which some claimed were phony, were front-page news. The more prominent she became as a performer, the more the media became interested in both her professional life and her personal life as well. In later years, her long romantic relationship with the Greek shipbuilding tycoon Aristotle Onassis was an ongoing serial dramatized in newspaper society and gossip columns.

When Maria became famous, her husband and manager Meneghini demanded for her—and received—ever larger sums of money. She became rich but Meneghini invested her money and made it difficult for Callas to have access to it. Meanwhile, Callas's mother expected her daughter to share her fortune. Her mother's demands, coupled with bad memories about her mother's arguments with her father and lingering resentment of her mother's dominance caused Callas to become estranged from her mother and her sister, although she consistently sent money weekly to both of them.

Callas

When Callas fell in love with Onassis, she decided to end her first marriage. The divorce proceedings proved lengthy. Meanwhile Maria Callas lived with Onassis but never married him. For the first time in her life her career became secondary to her personal life.

Her life with Onassis shifted back and forth between happiness and sadness. She endured verbal humiliation by Onassis in front of others, as well as his philandering with a variety of women. When Onassis married Jacqueline Kennedy, Callas quietly moved to Paris. Later, when his marriage to Kennedy was deteriorating, Onassis resumed his friendship with Callas, now pleading for her to marry him. Maria refused but maintained a relationship. Onassis died in 1975.

Callas took chances with her voice to mesh voice and drama together, unlike other opera singers of her time. Vocal risks as well as fatigue probably contributed to her vocal demise. Her career lasted barely twenty years. Her most famous roles included Norma, Lucia, Violetta (*La Traviata*), Elvira (*I Puritani*), Tosca, and Lady Macbeth. She was eventually fired from the Metropolitan Opera because Meneghini constantly demanded more money for his wife's performances, while Callas disagreed with Met manager Rudolf Bing on the selection of operas that she would sing.

Callas recorded more than twenty albums for EMI-Angel records and also made recordings for the Seraphim label. Her best recordings date from the early to mid-1950's. In 1965, Callas made her last public opera performance, at New York's Metropolitan Opera House. Thereafter her singing career virtually ended, although Callas and Giuseppe di Stefano joined together to sing in a worldwide tour in 1974; her performances were well received by Callas fans, but panned by the critics.

Two years after the death of Ari Onassis, Maria Callas died in Paris of an apparent heart attack. She was only fifty-three. Her revival of forgotten repertoire and her dramatic vocal presentation influenced all opera singers who followed her.

[Biographies of Callas include George Jellinek, *Portrait of a Prima Donna* (1960); John Ardoin, *The Callas Legacy* (1977; rev. ed. 1982); Arianna Stassinopoulos, *Maria Callas* (1981); and Nadia Stancioff, *Maria Callas Remembered* (1987). See also Walter Legge, "Callas Remembered: La Divina,"

Cambridge

Opera News, Nov. 1977. An obituary is in the *New York Times*, Sept. 17, 1977.]

JAN SHAPIRO

CAMBRIDGE, GODFREY MACARTHUR (Feb. 26, 1933–Nov. 29, 1976), actor and comedian, was born in the Harlem section of New York City, the son of Sarah and Alexander Cambridge, who had emigrated from British Guiana to Sydney, Nova Scotia, before arriving in New York. His father worked at blue-collar jobs, despite his skill as a bookkeeper; his mother worked in the garment district, although she was a skilled stenographer and had been a teacher in Guiana. His parents sent Cambridge to live with his grandparents in Sydney, Nova Scotia, so that he could attend school there. His grandfather was a coal miner and also operated a small grocery store. Cambridge's grandparents were strong disciplinarians who were not averse to corporal punishment.

Cambridge rejoined his parents when he was thirteen years old and entered high school in the Queens neighborhood of Flushing, where he was popular and active in extracurricular activities. A superior student, he graduated in three years and was awarded a scholarship to Hofstra College (now Hofstra University) in Hempstead, N.Y. He entered Hofstra in 1951 intending to pursue premedical studies with a major in psychology. Early on, however, he became interested in acting and switched his major to English. (As a child he entertained his family and friends with his comic talents.) While at Hofstra, he played one of the murderers in *Macbeth* in his first onstage experience. He left Hofstra in 1953 when his grief over his father's death, overwork, and a renewed awareness of his "blackness," when taunted by members of a new fraternity on campus, made studying difficult. Of this incident he later said, "I couldn't concentrate any more. All my life I ignored being colored. I never felt racial prejudice because I was the only Negro. . . . It's terrible for someone to reach the age of 21 and realize he's Negro, to spend all that time leading a sheltered life." In 1954 he enrolled as a drama major at City College (CCNY), but left before he received his degree. Later in life he admitted that he did not "recommend dropping out to anyone." Cambridge then considered joining the paratroopers but was classified 4F.

While working at various odd jobs,