

ally worked enough to get unemployment. During this time, I sang when I got the chance—at a family place called Vinnie's Horseshoe Bar, in Astoria, and on a concert tour with Marian McPartland and Mose Allison. I sang all the time in elevators and supermarkets and on the street. But I didn't work anywhere as a singer after 1964. I had become a housewife and an actress in California, and after that I got my master's in drama at San Fernando Valley State College, and came back East and taught speech at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and acting at Hofstra College.

"In 1972, I ran into a piano player I'd worked with fifteen years before. He said he was in a little place at Fifteenth Street and Irving Place, and I sat in with him for three hours one night. I began dropping in there, and I started going back to Vinnie's Horseshoe one or two nights a week. Things have multiplied, and it looks as if I'm back singing again. I did Alec Wilder's radio show and had two engagements at Michael's Pub. But I will always keep my hand in the theatre.

"There is nothing as sensual as singing. Acting is quite different. There is the teamwork, and exploring another person and his emotions and responses. In a way, everything is given to you—costumes, script. The words are not your responsibility but the character's. Singing is nothing but *me*, and years ago I was swamped by the responsibility of it. Now my face isn't locked, my back isn't frozen. I can let my face and my body go with what I'm singing about. Phrasing has to do with the meaning of the lyrics and the play of rhythm against rhythm. Even when I'm singing a phrase, I hear two or three other ways of singing it. I like to think the unheard ways are subliminally present. Singing is a very physical act. It's your lips and teeth and mouth. It's your chest, where the sounds are resounding. The meaning and textures of the words you sing roll around in the body before they gather and go into the microphone. It all comes back through your ear, and that's another sensation, as is moving any part of your body while you're singing. I didn't realize how marvellous the textures of the consonants are until I studied speech with Arthur Lessac. He likens the letters of the alphabet to the instruments of the orchestra. 'B's, 'P's, 'D's, 'T's, 'K's, and 'G's are drumbeats: 'Ch's, 'Dg's, and 'Ts's are cymbals. 'L's are saxophones. 'R's are trombones. When you say a word like 'asks,' you fall in love with English and realize what an

extraordinary language it is. Something happens at a good performance. The singer and the audience hold it together. When Teddi King was at the Carlyle last winter, singer and song and audience became one. I'm totally involved when I'm singing, but part of me is always monitoring the rest of me to keep the content and the precision in balance. I want to weave as nearly complete a tapestry as I can. Singing isn't playing an instrument. There are words, and words have their own music. They also have meaning, which should be expressed in your tone, your timbre. The tone you employ is consciously not always the most beautiful. When you sing 'That man of mine ain't comin' home,' in Irving Berlin's 'Supper Time,' you should use a sound that expresses anger and sadness and finality. Some singers sing every song with the same tone, and that is like speaking in a monotone. If you're going to do 'Down in the Depths on the Ninetieth Floor,' you should have some rage and bitterness in your tone. You should not have a beautiful sound. There are many singers who *use* music. I resent that. Music is sacred. The song has to control the performance. Doing anything else—employing this or that trick—to make the audience applaud is an outrage. Then you are making them applaud *you*.

"A good accompanist must know that he and the singer are there to serve the song. He should love songs, and I mean music *and* words. And he should be free of attitudes and prejudices and judgments—like if it isn't a so-called jazz tune, it isn't good. The most important quality musically in an accompanist is rhythm, and that means being able to swing and to control the motion of the song. A good accompanist has to know how to go along with your phrasing—whether to play counterpoint or echo you or put in a little resonant harmony. Just one right note from a good accompanist can send you flying. An accompanist like Jimmy Rowles *listens*, and with one like Dave McKenna I can almost *see* the power descending from Heaven and coming out in those hands."

—WHITNEY BALLIETT