

**BY
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SIDERS**

You're a jazz-oriented studio musician, most likely from back east. You've been out in Hollywood for a number of years because you've decided the security of studio work is preferable to the excitement of blowing in the Big Apple. You think about this as you check your present surroundings and all of a sudden it hits you. "What the hell am I doing on these rocks making believe I'm playing my instrument while elephants—big mothers, too—are breathing down my neck?"

Fantasy? Hell, no! I may have stretched the composite of the studio swinger, but it's close enough to describe many of the cats out here who have emigrated from that other coast. As for the rest of it, I'm merely telling it like it was during a recent taping session "on location" for a very successful TV series, *The Mancini Generation*.

We'll get back to the location bit in due time, but first some background on the show. *The Mancini Generation* is syndicated in some 60 markets and in many of those areas it can be seen only on UHF. Therefore, it may not be a household expression to some of you,

14 down beat

depending on where you live. But to the musicians involved—and especially to Henry Mancini—it's an ideal outlet for a great deal of first-rate music, most of which is honest to goodness jazz, a sound as rare on the tube as a Howard Hughes guest appearance.

As for the name, Mancini's agent Fred Dale ("He's a trumpet player named DiFrancesca, but he sold out," according to Hank) is the one who came up with it, and it appealed immediately to Mancini "because it defines nothing. It's one of those catch-all phrases that no one really understands. It covers a lot of people and a lot of groups, from kids who watch Saturday morning cartoons, the *Pink Panther* crowd, right on up to the older people."

The show's format is structured to guarantee such a cross-section. Two guests per show, two band numbers per show; Mancini chatting informally with the guests and playing piano. Loose, yet tightly produced and directed in terms of pacing. It's an atmosphere most conducive to jazz, and with a guy out front like Henry Mancini; and with guests the calibre of Doc Severinsen, Mel Torme, Quincy Jones, Dionne Warwick, Dick Haymes, Norm Crosby, Jackie Vernon, Bill Dana, Henny Youngman; and with additional arrangements by Alan Copeland, jazz has to flourish.

Adding to that overall feeling was Mancini's insistence that comics do their routines in front of the band. "I wanted to get the reaction of the guys in the band, because if a comedian is rolling, they're the greatest au-

dience in the world." With that in mind, the comics made sure they played off the band: without exception, each comic oriented his shtick towards music.

On the other hand, Mancini won't stand for musicians being the butt of the jokes. "I saw that happen one time, so we had a meeting and I told them I will not say anything degrading about a musician; I will not put any of them down. You see, we had a wonderful writer on the show, but he was brought in cold, and he had to learn a lot about me in a hurry. (The show itself was sold in a hurry last September—without benefit of a pilot—at a time when the networks and the major independent stations are normally "locked up" for the coming season.) The first thing that happened—which is natural when there are a lot of musicians around—was a lot of put-down jokes about the guys. Well they may laugh at those lines, but deep down it's not helping them at all. It made me a put-down artist, and I'm not that. I can do it if I have to in person, but it doesn't come across on the tube. Those were the cliches from the old days of radio."

Now I think the time is ripe for a segue to that opening situation. Sure, Mancini always has the dignity of his musicians in mind, but then there's Stan Harris—a free-wheeling, deadpan, imaginative director who came up with so many impossible visualizations of Hank's music that eventually he earned the sobriquet "Crazy Stan."

Well, what would you do if you had to direct a number like *Baby Elephant Walk*? Right, get some elephants. Not from central