

# My Gene Puerling Story

by Paul Halac, FFS, Estes Park, CO

Back in the 90s, I was deeply involved in converting all my favorite LPs to CD even though the technology was fairly new. I was convinced that record companies would never get around to releasing all my favorites, . . . the Four Freshmen, the Hi-Lo's, the Axidentals, etc. So, I studied the subject, bought the necessary equipment and computer software and set out to convert all my albums. In those early days, it sometimes took a few solid weeks of work to remove the pops and clicks inherent in a single LP record album. Today, with improved software, I can do an album in as little as two hours.

After I finished all the Four Freshmen albums (I have my priorities), I went to work on the Hi-Lo's, transferring every album of theirs as well. At the time, this conversion process was all-consuming to me. Along the way I became acquainted with Frank D'Rone and still burn all the CDs his widow (Joan) sells on the Internet. Frank died of cancer this past fall but Joan still runs his website. Turns out that Frank knew Gene Puerling and, in fact, sat in for a few of the Singers Unlimited commercial gigs in Chicago replacing Len Dressler (another old Chicagoan) who sang bass for the SU. The SU were formed by Puerling strictly to sing commercials and "make a living".

So, Frank gave me Gene's address and I sent copies of all my Hi-Lo's CDs to Gene. Thus, we struck up an email friendship. Actually, back then it was more snail mail because the Internet was still a fairly new thing. Anyway, one LP I never had in stereo was the Hi-Lo's, *This Time It's Love*. Gene sent me his only copy which I promptly converted. It was a labor of love and took almost a month but this was for "the man." In all this time we only communicated my email and snail mail since he lived near San Francisco and I was in Chicago and cell phones were just evolving.

Then one New Year's morning (I think 1999), Kris (my wife) answered the phone and brought it to me at my computer. She said, "It's Gene," to which I replied, "Gene who?" Gene Puerling! I gulped and answered the phone. He was so gracious and we chatted for almost 20 minutes (which seemed like two to me). Here was a world renowned singer/arranger who was so down to earth and friendly. He really reminded me of Ross Barbour with the same humble demeanor. He apologized for calling on New Years Day. The reason was to let me know that the next day I would probably get a call from a Sony producer and he didn't want it to be a surprise. Sony was about to release a CD of the Hi-Lo's album called *Love Nest*, but over the years their master tape had deteriorated (they take such great care, don't they)

they) so that two of the 12 tunes were non-recoverable. The two songs were *My Romance* and *Love Nest* (the album title song). They did still have the monaural tape of the album so Gene suggested they contact me because of the stereo CD I had produced. To me it was a great honor that he thought my work to be that good.

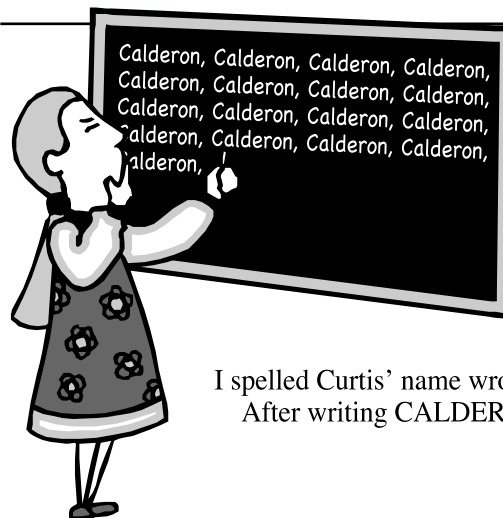
Gene told me that I should not give it away but I should be compensated for my efforts. That's the reason he called on a holiday. Sure enough, the next morning I got a call from some middle management Sony BS-er. We discussed the same issue about the missing two tracks in stereo. However, as soon as I mentioned that Gene told me to expect some compensation, this guy immediately cut me off and said he would get back to me on it. Of course, he never called back, just what I would expect from a so called "recording executive." When I told Gene about it, he laughed and said, "Welcome to the recording industry."

As you might expect, a month later that CD was released and I bought it even though I already had my own converted version since I wanted to compare the two. As I read the liner notes on the back, there was an asterisk by the song *Love Nest*, mentioned above and a note that described why that track was only mono. Since *My Romance* was all a cappella, they didn't mention that it was also in mono but assumed the listener wouldn't notice. I did right away, of course. Can you believe it? Hell, I would have been happy to just have my name mentioned in the liner notes but that arrogant so-and-so wasn't about to pay out any money (so he thought) to have a fully complete stereo album. He was probably worried it would be taken out of his commission. If you ever see it on the CD racks in stores, read the back side and you will see what I'm talking about. It's on a double album CD, paired with another Hi-Lo's gem, *All Over the Place*.

Anyway, that's my Gene Puerling story. We continued emailing infrequently over the following years until he passed away on March 25, 2008, just three plus years before our dear friend, Ross. The more I listen to his arrangements, the more I appreciate what he did. I'm convinced that many of the chords he chose were meant to express the words he was singing. He didn't follow any rules while arranging at the piano. He just played what sounded right to him. And, he really didn't play the piano, just sat down and dinked at it, like the rest of us.

I feel so lucky to have known both Gene and Ross Barbour who were personal heroes of mine. I expect they're both leading some heavenly vocal group and having a great time doing it.

For those who are interested, there is a beautiful tribute to Gene at this link.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNVZhg0Qx80>



## MEA CULPA

I spelled Curtis' name wrong on page two of the last issue.  
After writing CALDERON on the blackboard 100 times  
I finally have it.

Sorry,  
Barb