

**The Vinyl Dialogues
Volume III**

“Stacks of Wax”

Mike Morsch

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Introduction

Natalie Cole gave me the impression that she really didn't want to talk. Sometimes that happens. A veteran artist gives many interviews over the course of a career, and answering the same questions over and over can be tedious.

I had requested an interview with Ms. Cole for a story that would advance a show she was doing in New Brunswick, New Jersey in March 2015. She didn't agree to the interview until late in the process, but still in time to make my deadline for *Time Off*, the entertainment section of Packet Media LLC, the company for which I work.

But it was apparent to me from the get-go that she would have preferred to be somewhere else besides on the phone, talking to me.

Ms. Cole wasn't impolite or evasive, just uninterested. In fact, she sounded a bit run-down — fragile even — so much so that I inquired about her health. She had experienced health issues in the past, announcing in 2008 that she had been diagnosed with hepatitis C, which she attributed to intravenous drug use. That eventually led to her having a kidney transplant in 2009. But she assured me that she was fine.

Ten months later, on December 31, 2015, Natalie Cole died.

Her death on the last day of 2015 seemed to usher in a rough start to 2016. Just 11 days later, David Bowie died. And six days after that, Glenn Frey, founder of the Eagles, died. Then in another 10 days, Paul Kantner of Jefferson Airplane died.

And the list continued to grow in the first half of the year. Maurice White of Earth, Wind and Fire died in

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February; Beatles producer Sir George Martin, and Keith Emerson of Emerson, Lake and Palmer both died in March; Country music legend Merle Haggard died in April, as did Prince.

The Vinyl Dialogues series has, from the beginning, been about accurately documenting the recollections and perspectives of the artists who made the music that is the soundtrack of my generation, specifically the 1960s and 1970s.

But there seems to be a sense of urgency now. The artists who crafted the soundtrack of our lives are getting older, and some of them are “moving on.” And with them go those stories about the making of the music.

The Vinyl Dialogues Volume III: Wax On continues the tradition of documenting those stories. It’s a lot of fun to talk with the people I listened to on the radio of my dad’s 1975 Chevy Impala — the one with the bench seat that allowed my girlfriend to slide over and sit right next to me while I drove.

And that’s the other thing about *The Vinyl Dialogues* series that’s always been a huge kick — many of the albums and songs remind me of a simpler time when I was younger, growing up in the 1970s. My hope is that it does the same for you.

So sit back, put some wax on the turntable, and relive those times with these stories.

- Mike Morsch

Watching the Beatles take America by snowstorm

Sands of Time

Jay and the Americans



Jay and the Americans didn't just do cover songs on their "Sands of Time" album, they acted like they had never heard the songs before and styled them after the way they did songs. (Photo by Mike Morsch)

In February 1964, a snowstorm had blasted the Northeast. The region was paralyzed and air travel was virtually shut down.

Sandy Yaguda waited out the storm at his home in Brooklyn.

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Yaguda — stage name Sandy Deanne — was one of the original members of the group Jay and the Americans, which, by winter of 1964, had recorded a couple of hit songs, most notably “She Cried,” which reached No. 5 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 1962.

And then the phone rang on February 10 at Yaguda’s house. It was the band’s manager.

“He called and said, ‘Listen, you guys have to find a way to get to Washington, D.C. You’re playing with the Beatles and the Righteous Brothers tomorrow night,’” said Yaguda.

The Beatles had taken America by a storm even bigger than the one that had rocked the Northeast that week. They had made their U.S. debut on the *Ed Sullivan Show* on February 9, 1964, in New York City, and their first live concert in the U.S. was scheduled just two days later, on February 11, at the Washington Coliseum in the nation’s capital.

Because of the heavy snow blanketing the region, all flights had been canceled and the Beatles had taken a train to D.C. for the gig. Originally scheduled to appear with the Beatles at the Coliseum were the Chiffons, an all-girl group from the Bronx who had the hits “He’s So Fine” and “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow” in 1963; and Tommy Roe, who had a No. 1 hit with “Sheila” in 1962.

But because of the storm, neither the Chiffons nor Roe could make it to D.C. Instead, the call went out to the Righteous Brothers and Jay and the Americans to fill the bill.

“We had seen the newsreels of the Beatles, with girls screaming and fainting in Germany. The hype was on but they hadn’t really been here yet. They were just starting,” said Yaguda.

Jay and the Americans made it safely to D.C. the day of the show and upon arrival were immediately greeted by the marquee on the outside of the Coliseum that read, “The Beatles . . . and others.”

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That didn't sit too well with Jay Black, the lead singer for Jay and the Americans.

"Fuck this! Turn the car around! We're leaving!" Yaguda recalled Black saying.

"And me being the voice of reason — the Ringo of the group — I said we can't do that, we signed a contract, we'll get sued for twice the money. We have to play the show," said Yaguda.

Black calmed down and the group unloaded the car and went inside the Coliseum.

A pre-show press conference with the Beatles was about to start and the members of Jay and the Americans wanted to see what all the fuss was about. So they sat in the grandstand of the Coliseum, close enough to hear what was going on between the reporters and the Beatles.

"One of the reporters said, 'How did you find America?' And Ringo said, 'We made a left at Greenland.' We all looked at each other, and we said you know what, these aren't silly little kids. These kids are sharper than they're getting credit for," said Yaguda.

The show itself was a madhouse. During the performance by the Righteous Brothers, the crowd of mostly young girls chanted "We want the Beatles!" so loudly that it nearly drowned out the opening act.

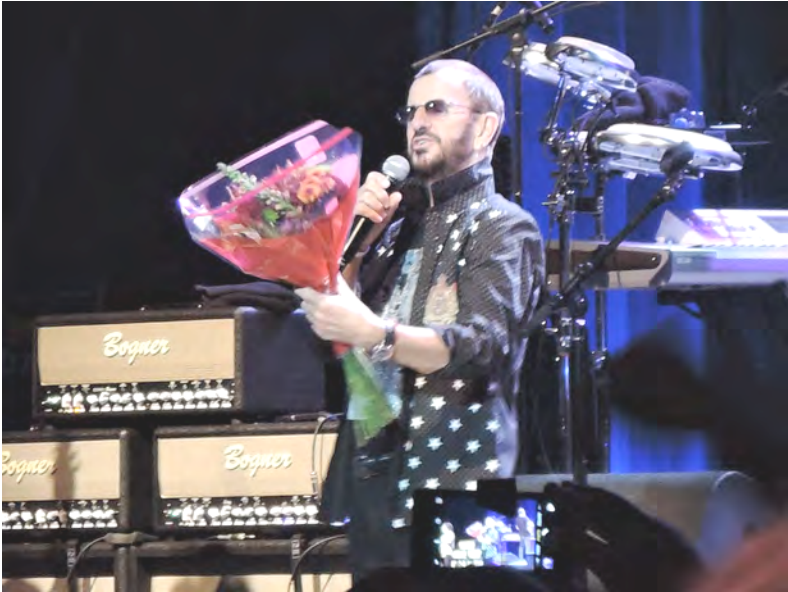
Once again, that wasn't acceptable to Black. When the crowd continued chanting "We want the Beatles!" during the Jay and the Americans set, Black reacted, but not in anger.

His instincts turned out to be right this time.

"Jay, being who is he, went out and said, 'Hey, man, I'm glad you all came out to see us tonight,'" said Yaguda. "And they all cracked up. That won them over, so they shut up and listened to us and when we were done, gave us a big round of applause."

When Jay and the Americans finished its set, the band members returned to their dressing rooms in the basement of the Coliseum.

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Sandy Yaguda said that when the members of Jay and the Americans witnessed how Ringo Starr and the rest of the Beatles handled questions from the media before their first live concert in America, “We all looked at each other, and we said you know what, these aren’t silly little kids. These kids are sharper than they’re getting credit for.” (Photo by Mike Morsch)

“About three minutes later, a noise went up the likes of which I’ve never heard in my life, not when the Yankees won the World Series, not when Elvis performed. Because it was an enclosed building, the sound couldn’t escape; it just kept reverberating,” said Yaguda.

The Beatles had taken the stage.

“It didn’t die down. It was continuous. We all had to cover our ears with our hands and we just looked at each other in amazement,” said Yaguda.

“When it finally stopped, we said to each other, ‘Something just happened.’ We saw Elvis and we played with Roy Orbison; we played with a lot of people. And we’ve seen great ovations and we’ve gotten great ovations. This was something entirely different. This was mass

hysteria. And we knew without even seeing it. We heard it and we knew it,” said Yaguda.

It would be the only time Jay and the Americans would share the bill with the Beatles.

But it wasn't always fame and fortune for Jay and the Americans. They were first “discovered” in the late 1950s. The original group consisted of John “Jay” Traynor, Howard Kane (Kirschenbaum), Kenny Vance (Rosenberg) and Sandy Deanne (Yaguda).

Three of the four members had assumed stage names early, something that was necessary when the band started getting some attention in the New York area.

In the early 1960s, households rarely had unlisted telephone numbers, according to Yaguda. He was still living at home with his parents in Brooklyn and it was easy enough to look up the rather unique name of “Yaguda” in the phone book.

“The phone would ring at three in the morning with girls giggling on the other end of the line and it would wake my mother,” said Yaguda. “And my father would say ‘I’m gonna break your legs if you don’t do something about this.’ My father was a big guy, so we said, ‘Let’s get stage names.’ That’s how simple it was. We just made up names. I didn’t like Sandy Beach, so you know, I became Sandy Deanne.”

The group eventually attracted the attention of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, songwriting and record producing partners who had written hits for Elvis Presley, including “Jailhouse Rock.”

Leiber and Stoller had a production deal with United Artists and they signed Jay and the Americans to a contract.

The first record Jay and the Americans did for Leiber and Stoller was “Tonight” from the movie *West Side Story*. It didn’t chart. The second record had the single “Dawning” on the A side and a song called “She Cried” on the B side. As was sometimes the case in the 1960s, disc jockeys flipped

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the record over and played the B side, thinking that “She Cried” would be more popular with radio audiences.

“She Cried” was indeed more popular. It reached No. 5 on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart in 1962, and became the first big hit for Jay and the Americans.

But that success didn’t carry over into the next two singles released by the group, and a dejected Jay Traynor, who was also suffering the strain of the constant travel by the band, decided to leave the group and pursue a solo career.

Enter Dave Blatt, who became the group’s next lead singer as “Jay Black” or “Jay No. Two.”

With Black singing lead, Jay and the Americans started appearing regularly on the U.S. record charts. Between 1964 and 1966, the band charted six Top 20 hits on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart, including “Come a Little Bit Closer” at No. 3; “Let’s Lock the Door (And Throw Away the Key)” at No. 11; “Cara Mia” at No. 4; “Some Enchanted Evening” at No. 13; “Sunday and Me” at No. 18; and “Crying” at No. 25.

By 1968, Jay and the Americans had earned the right to start producing their own albums. They formed their own production company and named it JATA (for Jay and the Americans) and signed a production deal with their label, United Artists.

“They gave us a big chunk of money and said, ‘Go ahead; go make some records.’ It was like giving a little kid a loaded gun,” said Yaguda.

But the band members were more performers than they were songwriters. Because Leiber and Stoller were big-time songwriters — and very successful ones by the mid-1960s — the band members were a little self-conscious about showing Leiber and Stoller some of the songs they had written.

It might not have mattered much anyway. Leiber and Stoller were having too much success with other artists who they were working with at the time — for example, Peggy Lee, who recorded the Leiber and Stoller hit, “Is That All

There Is” in 1969 — and Jay and the Americans had been relegated to the back bench.

In addition, none of the other hot songwriters of the era were submitting songs to the band to record.

“They were submitting them to hotter artists. We were singers, and really good singers and vocalists. But we needed to find material. We couldn’t find enough songs to do a whole album,” said Yaguda.

So the band members decided to go a different route. Each of them made a list of 10 songs that they loved that had already been recorded by other artists, songs that had made each member of Jay and the Americans want to become singers in the first place. From those lists, they would choose which songs they wanted to record for an album.

They would call the album *Sands of Time*, and one of the songs they chose was “This Magic Moment,” written by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman. The song, which had been recorded in 1960 by the Drifters, with Ben E. King as the lead vocalist.

“We did ‘This Magic Moment’ because we always wanted to be the white Drifters. That’s why we went to Leiber and Stoller to begin with,” said Yaguda. “And when we finished it, we knew we did it good. But we didn’t think that we did a better job with it than the Drifters did. As far as we were concerned, the Drifters’ song was the hit. This was just our tribute to how good we thought they were. That’s all it was.”

According to Yaguda, though, the songs on the *Sands of Time* album weren’t just covers done by Jay and the Americans.

“We didn’t just copy the songs and their arrangements. We attacked each song on that album like it was a brand-new song that somebody had brought to us. We acted like we’d never heard it before and styled it after our way of doing the song,” said Yaguda.

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In addition to “This Magic Moment,” Jay and the Americans recorded a song called “Gypsy Woman” by Curtis Mayfield for the album, even though Black wasn’t a blues singer and Mayfield was.

“Jay wasn’t the easiest guy to work with. He had to do forty-five takes on some things. And he would get pissed off because he wasn’t at the track,” said Yaguda. “Jay Number Two is more like Mario Lanza — he’s that kind of a singer. It’s all about power. I started yelling at him, ‘Listen man, we need this song to have some soul, like an R and B artist.’ I had to piece together a whole bunch of different takes.”

But Black pulled it off with “Gypsy Woman,” and the other songs on the album.

“When I listen to that record now, Jay just sang his ass off. If I didn’t know that was Jay and the Americans, I’d think it was an Impressions record. It’s a great performance.

“Also, we had been singing together for a very long time and I think at that point, Jay Black was at his finest vocally. There was nothing he couldn’t do. He was effortless and easy. He was better than anybody else at the time. He was that good.”

The album includes the song “Hushabye,” also written by Pomus and Shuman, which the Mystics had taken to No. 20 in 1959.

Disc jockey Alan Freed, who had become internationally known in the radio business in the 1950s for promoting a mix of blues, country, and rhythm and blues songs and calling it “rock and roll,” had used “Hushabye” as the closing song on his televised “Big Beat Show.” The Beach Boys had also recorded a version of the song for their 1964 album *All Summer Long*.

When *Sands of Time* was released in 1969, it became the highest-charting album for Jay and the Americans, reaching No. 51 on the Billboard Hot 200 Albums chart and No. 30 on the Cashbox chart. “This Magic Moment” shot to No. 6 on

the Billboard Hot 100 singles and “Hushabye” charted at No. 62 on the same chart.

Yaguda calls *Sands of Time*, and the group’s follow-up album *Wax Museum* in 1970, his and the group’s “finest hour.”

“We put our hearts and souls into those albums. We got great performances out of Jay Number Two and the rest of it we took care of ourselves. Those records are heartfelt—the choices, the arrangements, the recording techniques, the time spent mixing them and getting them to sound good...,” said Yaguda.

Sands of Time would go on to be considered “the first rock and roll revival” album of its time, according to Yaguda. And as a tribute to Freed, the band included his final radio sign-off at the end of the album.

“To be honest, there are two words in show business: ‘show’ and ‘business.’ Had we been on a record label like Capitol or Columbia, it would have been an entirely different story for our careers,” said Yaguda.

“The Beach Boys were on Capitol and the people at Columbia, they knew how to promote records. United Artists didn’t promote our records. Their record label was simply a write-off for their film company. They just wanted to put out songs that were going to be in movies to get Academy Awards. That’s what that was about. And we were caught in the middle. So had the distribution been better, I don’t think that it would have ever stopped for us,” said Yaguda.

But it did stop. By 1973, the band had split and the members moved on to solo careers. Black continued to perform under the name “Jay and the Americans” until 2006, when he filed for bankruptcy because of unpaid gambling debts.

At an auction, a federal judge awarded the name “Jay and the Americans” to Yaguda and his son, Todd. Also bidding on the name, but failing to get it, was a guy named Jay Reincke. At Yaguda’s invitation, he became “Jay No.

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Three,” the lead singer for today’s version of Jay and the Americans.

“We had no game plan. And it’s turned into a fifty-five year career,” said Yaguda, who was still performing with Jay and the Americans in 2015.

“We consider it a gift to be able to do what we do. It’s an honor and a privilege to go out and do something you love to do and actually get paid for it. That’s how we look at it. Because I would be doing it for nothing, anyway,” he said.

Discography

“Sands of Time” Jay and the Americans March 15, 1969

- "This Magic Moment" (Doc Pomus, Mort Shuman) 2:50
"Pledging My Love" (Ferdinand Washington, Don Robey) 2:45
"Can't We Be Sweethearts" (J. Herbert Cox, Morris Levy)..... 2:32
"My Prayer" (Georges Boulanger, Jimmy Kennedy)..... 2:43
"So Much in Love" (George Williams, Bill Jackson, Roy2:23
Straigis)
"Since I Don't Have You" (Joseph Rock, James Beaumont)4:20
"Gypsy Woman" (Curtis Mayfield)..... 3:15
"Hushabye" (Doc Pomus, Mort Shuman).....2:57
"When You Dance" (Andrew Jones, Jr.)2:52
"Life Is But a Dream" (Raoul Cita, Hy Weiss, Sam Weiss) 2:32
"Mean Woman Blues" (Claude Demetrius)..... 3:00
"Goodnight My Love" (George Motola, John Marascalco)..... 2:38

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Standing out while . . .

Sittin' In

Loggins and Messina

Jim Messina had spent some time in the late 1960s getting a first-hand look at what he called the “chaos” of being a member of Buffalo Springfield, a band whose short, two-year existence was plagued by drug busts, lineup changes and the creative bickering between Neil Young and Stephen Stills.

After the Buffalo Springfield disbanded in 1968, Messina and band mate Richie Furay formed the country-rock band Poco. But by 1970, Messina was newly married and just didn't want to be on the road anymore with Poco. As soon as his final album and tour commitments with the band were completed, Messina planned to settle back into being a record producer, which he had done before becoming a member of Buffalo Springfield.

He had hooked up with Columbia Records as an independent contractor. In that role, Messina met Don Ellis, who also just started working for the company in artist development. Ellis had an artist he wanted to sign to Columbia, the little brother of one of his friends.

His name was Kenny Loggins.

“I said the best thing to do is have him contact me, get a tape, and I'll meet him after October,” Messina recalled telling Ellis. Messina's last tour date with Poco was scheduled for October 31, 1970.

Just a few weeks later, in early December, Loggins called Messina to plan the meeting. Messina invited Loggins over to his house for dinner.

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“He showed up and he came in and he was very tall and kind of lanky and he had a funny beard. He was quite different than what I expected,” said Messina.

The two chatted for a while.

“I said, ‘Did you bring a tape?’ And he said, ‘Well, I don’t really have a tape of my songs.’ So I said, ‘Did you bring a guitar?’ And he said, ‘Well, I don’t really own one,’” said Messina. “I wasn’t sure what to think.”

Messina had a tape recorder set up in his house that he recorded into, so he grabbed a microphone out of a closet, plugged it into the recorder and handed Loggins a guitar.

“I said, ‘Press the “Record” button and sing your songs,’” said Messina.

Loggins ended up singing five or six songs for Messina that evening. Among those were tunes called “Danny’s Song” and “House at Pooh Corner.”

Afterward, Messina, his wife, actress Jenny Sullivan, and Loggins ate dinner. And then Loggins left.

“Well, what do you think?” Messina recalled Sullivan asking him after Loggins departed.

“I said, ‘I don’t know what to think.’ I was surprised that he didn’t own a guitar and I was surprised he didn’t come prepared with any tunes for me to listen to,” said Messina. “But I was also surprised by the fact that he was able to sit down and just do those songs live, which took a lot of courage. Also, there was quite a bit of enthusiasm in his performance. But I was going to need to think about producing an album for him because most of his songs were folk songs and we were moving away from folk music at the time.”

So Messina thought about it. And he came back around to the idea, after listening to the tapes that Loggins had recorded that evening, that he really liked Loggins’ voice.

“I liked the fact that he had some versatility in his voice. And perhaps, from what I gathered, he might be able to sing something other than folk songs,” said Messina.

The two continued to hang out and Messina eventually showed some of his own songs to Loggins. They sang together and did some more recordings there in Messina's house.

"I wanted to see how inspired he was as a musician. It took a little bit of time, a couple of months, but I finally felt confident that Kenny certainly had the vocal abilities. But the question was, could I move him into more of a rock and roll direction?" said Messina.

As their musical relationship continued to evolve, Messina learned that Loggins was more diverse than he first thought, and that Loggins enjoyed doing different types of material.

"My feeling was that in order to be successful in the music business, you had to have diversity. And perhaps Kenny might just be that one artist in a handful that could pull that off," said Messina. "And I began to be inspired by his energy and his enthusiasm and his real innocence in certain ways. He wasn't jaded and hadn't quite been bitten by the serpent of fame yet."

Messina was not that far removed from working with the likes of Stills, Young, and Furay, all artists who were set in their ways as well as in the directions they wanted to go with their music.

"It was a lot more refreshing to feel that perhaps I could really help this artist," said Messina.

With his independent production deal, Messina was committed to producing six albums a year for Columbia Records, and in return the company would deliver artists to Messina to produce.

One of the first was Andy Williams, who had joined Columbia in 1961 and had a great run of successful albums throughout the decade, all produced by Robert Mersey.

But by 1970, Williams, already a well-established star, had aspirations of appealing to a younger, more modern audience, so Columbia wanted to pair him with a producer

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who could help do that. And Columbia thought that Messina was the man for the job.

But Messina balked.

“The artists Columbia delivered to me I didn’t feel were best for me or the artists,” said Messina. “They gave me Andy Williams, who was a wonderful artist, one of my favorite singers at the time. But there was such a gap in our realities in terms of what music and age was. I didn’t think it was a good move for him and certainly not a good move for me. So I turned that down. And Kenny was sort of still in my back pocket.”

Loggins and Messina continued to work together and Messina convinced Loggins that he not only needed to be a recording artist, but also a performing artist. Loggins agreed.

The first thing they needed to do was put together a band. So Messina started looking for musicians who were available and who didn’t — or couldn’t — demand a lot of money.

The first two who joined were bassist Larry Sims and drummer Merel Bregante. Saxophonist Lester “Al” Garth, who played a little violin as well, joined next.

When Buffalo Springfield disbanded, the band didn’t have enough money to pay everybody. So Messina was offered some amplifiers in lieu of cash payment. Messina had those in storage.

Once the band had been formed, Messina asked his father-in-law if it could rehearse at the pool house at his place on Mulholland Drive in Beverly Hills.

“I took all the equipment up there and we set the drums up and started just playing and getting a sense of what we had. Kenny was borrowing my guitars at the time and it was really starting to come together,” said Messina. “The problem for me as the producer was that I needed more material from Kenny in order to create that diversification that I thought was really needed.”

All the pieces were starting to fall into place, but Messina thought the band hadn't quite coagulated.

“Somewhere in there I talked to Kenny about the idea of perhaps maybe for the first album, I would be kind of sitting in. That way, I could get things rolling for him, I could help with the direction of the band,” said Messina. “It was just a one-off thing in my mind. To be honest, I was tired of touring, I was tired of being on the road with Poco and Buffalo Springfield.

“But at the same time — and part of this is an ego thing — I just couldn't have my first artist as an independent producer come out and fail because I couldn't fill in the gaps to help him out.

“My thought was, ‘Let's do this as a one-off and I'll just sit in on this first record. I'll give Kenny some of my material if he wanted to sing it. I'd do some of the tunes so there was some credibility to it. But the focus would be on Kenny,’” said Messina.

By mid-1971, it was time to offer tapes of Loggins and the band to Clive Davis, president of Columbia Records. Davis liked what he heard, but what he heard was too much of Jim Messina on the tapes.

“I thought you wanted to get off the road?” Messina recalled Davis saying. “I said I did, and I do, but I don't feel like it's good to put Kenny out there with the wolves his first time. I was afraid that the album wouldn't have the opportunity to have the success and the attention that it needed.

“I hear you,” Messina recalled Davis saying. “But why would I want to invest in a band that's going to break up the moment the album is out? I've had too many of those already.”

“I said, ‘I think you need to consider the fact that I'm still going to be there, I'm still going to be producing Kenny's records. And that the band is his band and I'm just sitting in. What we want people to know is that there is a

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new artist out here, he's great, and I'm here sitting in and supporting him and he has a great career ahead of him," said Messina.

Davis reluctantly agreed. That first album would be called *Kenny Loggins with Jim Messina Sittin' In*.

Although the material for the album was well rehearsed, Messina wanted Loggins and the band to do some live performances to further hone and sequence the material before it was recorded.

The first professional performance for Loggins and the band was in mid-1971 at the famous Troubadour on Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood. It was well received by the audience. Loggins came out to start the show by himself and did a few of his folk songs. The band eventually joined in and moved into more rock and roll material.

About three weeks later, Loggins and the band got another opportunity to perform at the Troubadour. Curtis Mayfield was due to headline one evening but his opener canceled.

Mayfield, a soul, R&B, and funk singer-songwriter, had started his career in 1956 as a member of the Impressions, a doo-wop, gospel, and soul group. But by 1970, he had embarked on a solo career and had a loyal and knowledgeable Black fan base.

Loggins and the band were offered the spot opening for Mayfield at the Troubadour. The evening would provide more valuable experience performing live for Loggins, and it would offer an example of a new artist learning his craft and his audience.

"When we first started, Kenny would come out and he would do the first three or four tunes. He'd sing 'Danny's Song' and 'House at Pooh Corner,'" said Messina. "So he's onstage and opening up for Curtis Mayfield and there are these two beautiful young Black women sitting right down in front of Kenny, looking up at him. One of the girls started

shouting, ‘Get down, man! Get down!’ And Kenny’s energy level started to move up.”

Messina was off to the side of the stage and had observed the entire exchange. After the show, Loggins approached Messina and wanted to talk about the two women down in front of the stage.

“I can’t believe it. Those two girls up front were so beautiful and were telling me to get down,” Messina recalled Loggins saying.

“I said, ‘Kenny, they were laughing. They were telling you to get off the stage.’ He said, ‘Oh, no. I’m glad I didn’t know that because I would have never been able to finish the set.’ But Kenny eventually had gotten their respect with his music and his performance. It was a hard audience to be put in front of, but it turned out to be fabulous,” said Messina.

By the time Loggins had signed a record deal with Columbia, the material for the first album was pretty much arranged and ready to be recorded. And it was a different and refreshing experience for Messina.

“I just had a different experience of how quickly the stuff can go and how it should go. When the players are really proficient at what they do, the magic happens very quickly,” said Messina. “But having worked with Buffalo Springfield, they were very labored. That was never a lot of fun for me as an engineer.”

For the *Sittin’ In* recording sessions, Messina brought in Alex Kazanegras as the engineer, and he added percussionist Milt Holland, with whom he had worked while with Poco.

“Everything was cut live. In the first week, we cut all the tracks. If there were any mistakes made on chords, I would just pick them up as soon as the tape was finished. I’d roll them back and say ‘Gentlemen, we need to hit that B-flat note a little tighter on that part.’ Boom-boom-boom-boom, done. Next song,” said Messina.

The second week was devoted to the vocals and anything that wasn’t cut live. The third week was for mixing.

Mike Morsch

And by the end of the third week, *Sittin' In* was ready to be mastered and released.

“That’s pretty much how I made every Loggins and Messina record,” said Messina.

Sittin' In was released in November 1971. It reached No. 70 on the Billboard Pop Albums chart in 1972. Although none of the singles from the album were Top 40 radio hits, two of the songs that Loggins sang for Messina the first time they met in Messina’s house in 1970 ended up on the album, and would go on to become Loggins and Messina’s best-known songs.

“House at Pooh Corner” appeared first on a 1970 album called *Uncle Charlie and His Dog Teddy* by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band before being recorded for *Sittin' In*.

And “Danny’s Song” first appeared on an album by a band called Gator Creek in 1970 before being recorded for *Sittin' In*. Canadian singer Anne Murray did a cover of the song in 1972 and had a hit with it, reaching the Top 10 on three Billboard charts in 1973.

The album cover of *Sittin' In* features Loggins and Messina dressed in Western-type garb, sitting at a poker table playing cards.

Messina’s actress wife was shooting a movie in mid-1971 called *The Other* in Murphys, California, a mining town up the central coast in what is referred to as “Gold Country.”

“While she was on the shoot I would walk around town. I was looking at this little town, the smells and the colors and the shops and the little ice cream store. It had such a feel to it,” said Messina. “I wanted our album to have an appearance of the late 1930s, early 1940s, and to tie our music and our images into this little town.”



On the “Sittin’ In” album, Jim Messina, right, believed he got the diversification he desired from Kenny Loggins, who was able to show his skills as what Messina called “a soulful singer with peace of mind.” (Photo courtesy of Jim Messina)

Messina ran the idea by Columbia Records executives and the company eventually sent a photographer back to Murphys with the band members for the shoot.

“I told the photographer that the album was going to be called *Sittin’ In* with Kenny Loggins.’ I asked him, ‘How can we get a ‘sittin’ in’ vibe, visually?’” said Messina. “As we walked around town, I went into this old hotel and there was a poker table sitting over in the corner. And I thought, ‘perfect.’ We’re all gambling that this is going to work and the idea of sittin’ in with Kenny at this poker game might just have the right metaphor that I wanted to get. So we shot the cover there.”

Loggins and Messina are even wearing their own clothes on the cover of *Sittin’ In*.

Mike Morsch

In the end, Messina believes he and Loggins made the album they wanted to make with their debut record.

“One has to have an ego in order to have some skin in the game, so to speak. But at the same time, for me, my intention was to make the best record that I could with the components that I was given. I believed in the songs that we were doing; I believed in the musicians. I believed in the people we were working with, Columbia Records and Clive Davis. These were all hardworking, devoted people.

“For me, the idea was to get the best songs I could get together and get them sequenced right. My goal was to make albums in those days that people could put on the turntable, sit down and have a glass a wine or whatever it was that got their heads straight, and listen and enjoy it, like going to a concert,” said Messina.

“And that’s how that album was received. When people did go to a concert, they had the same experience because they had been home and listened to it. When they saw us perform, I believe we met their expectations.

“From that standpoint, that’s what I was hoping would be the outcome. No one can ever know how something is going to be received. This was about creating a performance, about creating a performance artist, about supporting that performing artist, both as a producer and as an artist, putting all those components together and staying focused, which was my job.

“That was my intent. And after it was done, I thought that I had completed that, more so than anything I had ever done,” said Messina.

Messina also believes he got the diversification he desired from Loggins, who was able to show his skills as what Messina called “a soulful singer with peace of mind.”

As far as what was going on in the music scene in the early 1970s, Messina said he wasn’t necessarily aware, nor did he concern himself, with where a new artist like Kenny

Loggins, and the band Loggins and Messina, would fit into the mix.

“When you do that, you become a follower. I’ve learned over the years — and it’s not a recipe for success; if anything, it could be one for failure — if you’re different enough and you do not necessarily fit in and people take a liking to you, you’ve got a better chance of eventually rising above the masses,” said Messina.

“In the case of Loggins and Messina, I knew that a lot of my competition was people that I had worked with, whether it be Crosby, Stills and Nash, Neil Young or Stephen Stills, or even Richie Furay with Poco. I knew we had to do what we did and I knew we needed to do it as differently and as interestingly and be more diversified than anyone else. And that’s what I went for,” he said.

Sittin’ In would be the first of six studio albums and two live albums that Loggins and Messina would record from 1971 to 1977. Five of those albums would be in the Top 20 of the Billboard U.S. Top 200 Albums chart. The duo’s highest charting single would be “Your Mama Don’t Dance” off their 1974 self-titled second album, *Loggins and Messina*.

The two amicably parted ways in 1976 before what was called a Columbia corporate 1977 release of *Finale*, a live double album. Both went on to pursue solo careers, with Loggins recording several hits in the 1980s, including “I’m Alright” in 1980, which served as the theme song for the film *Caddyshack* and reached No. 7 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart; and the title track for the 1984 film *Footloose*, which was No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart.

Messina calls his years with Loggins and Messina among his best in the music business and characterizes *Sittin’ In* as one of the highlights of his career.

“I think it’s one of my greatest accomplishments, although I feel that way about all those albums with Loggins and Messina,” he said.

Mike Morsch



The first time that Jim Messina met Kenny Loggins, he was surprised that Loggins didn't own a guitar. (Photo courtesy of Jim Messina)

Discography

“Sittin’ In”

Loggins and Messina

November 1971

"Nobody But You" (Jim Messina).....	3:00
"Danny's Song" (Kenny Loggins).....	4:16
"Vahevala" (Dan Loggins, Dann Lottermoser).....	4:47
"Trilogy:	11:13

I. Lovin' Me (Messina, Murray MacLeod)

II. To Make a Woman Feel Wanted (Loggins, Messina)

III. Peace of Mind" (Messina)

"Back to Georgia" (Loggins).....	3:19
"House at Pooh Corner" (Loggins).....	4:25
"Listen to a Country Song" (Messina, Al Garth)	
"Same Old Wine" (Messina)	8:17
"Rock 'n' Roll Mood" (Loggins, Michael Omartian).....	3:04

Mike Morsch

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