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‘You’re Messin’ Up My Mind’: Why Judy Jacques Avoided the Path of the Pop Diva

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Introduction: Stardom and Talent

This chapter puts forward a conceptual framework for a ‘stardom in flux’ illustrated through the internal and external growth of a single female career. With a freakish vocal range spanning C below middle-C to high E-flat, the singer-songwriter Judy Jacques (born in Melbourne, 1944) has progressively manifested varying forms of stardom moderated by the biases of popular culture. In view of the niche scenes and musical movements outlined below, I propose that a stardom in flux may represent society in flux as much as a life in flux. In contrast to a hypothetical ‘steady-state stardom’, the complex social relations, stylistic trajectories and geographical contexts that hinge around a stardom in flux prove to be many and varied.

Talent, defined by McLeod and Herndon (1980, p. 188), is ‘the concept of an innate predisposition to competence’. It was a compulsion for singing that propelled the young Jacques into the limelight of Melbourne’s jazz/folk boom and gospel circuits. Riding on her success in 1960s television, she was on the cusp of becoming the pin-up ‘Olivia’ or ‘Kylie’ of her day—had it not been for a crisis point when the singer balked at the barriers

being put up around female artists. Jacques diverged to an experimental phase that established her as ‘one of the most technically competent vocalists in Australia’ (Johnson, 1987, p. 58) and, more specifically, as ‘one of Australia’s most adventurous improvising jazz vocalists’ (Whiteoak, 2008, p. 44).

I began to research the subject in 2001 and collected context-specific performance data in Melbourne and Flinders Island, Bass Strait. Informed by the binary opposition between commerce and creativity moderated by Negus (1995), the case study highlights the anxieties germane to the commodification of female musical identity practices in the 1960s at local, state, national and transitory international levels revolving around the tensions of ‘local’ versus ‘big star’ culture. As Negus (1995) points out, a celebrity dynamic may include interplay between commerce and creativity as well as discontinuity.

Jacques’ critiques of the systems within which she worked in stage, screen and studio furnish previously unpublished information in a periodisation for how she achieved an unusually fluid experience of singing, and of how—in an ironic twist—her 1966 Northern Soul pop single ‘You’re Messin’ Up My Mind’ found its way back onto high rotation. New slants on the character of Jacques’ times and contemporary cultural forms other than pop emerge in the following overview (see Ryan [2014] for a more detailed biographical account).

Teenage Jazz Stardom

In 1952, eight-year-old Judy Jacques delivered a performance of ‘Smoke Gets in Your Eyes’ at a Pakenham hotel. By age 11, she was a regular performer on Radio 3AW. Determined to be a professional singer, Jacques left school at 14 to perform country songs and pop hits by Bill Haley, the Everly Brothers and Elvis Presley with her sister Yvonne (The Two Jays). In 1958, the fledgling Yarra Yarra New Orleans Jazz Band (henceforth The Yarras) were offered the Saturday night dance at Moorabbin Scout Hall on the condition that 15-year-old Jacques could retain her regular appearances.

Initially, a couple of the men—who did not want a ‘sheila’ in the band—attempted to discourage Jacques by calling her a ‘good pop singer’. Displaying a precocious degree of female agency, Jacques returned each

night until she was accepted as central to the band's 'sound'. Her local self-made stardom became a form of consumption negotiated by fan communities. As Eric Brown (n.d.) writes, 'In later years she was to become so popular that she even became a cult figure. In 1963 every girl in Melbourne seemed to be wearing her hair in Judy's style—long with a fringe in front'. In a mediation of female body perception, television reviewers described Jacques as 'refreshing' since her healthy-looking, shiny hairstyle (see Figure 4.1) prevailed in an era when female performers backcombed their hair into lacquered 'beehives'.¹



Figure 4.1: Fans surround Judy Jacques at *Jazz as You Like It*, Melbourne Town Hall, 1963

Source: Photo by Bruce Anderson, courtesy Judy Jacques Collection.

Jacques nevertheless determined to establish her voice as the trademark of her rising stardom:

I had the idea that if I held on to being true to myself then I would develop the same in my music. I was also aware that the huge majority of musicians were men, and most treated girl singers as decoration. I was

1 Jacques claims that her 'look' preceded that of Mary Travers, to whom she was to be compared in the heyday of the Great Australian Cringe (email to the author, 11 October 2016).

determined to prove my worth as a musician, as I gradually understood that female singers got gigs because they looked good or sexy in front of a band. Even back then, that made me very angry and I didn't 'glam up' until I was quite a mature singer. (email to the author, 26 November 2015)

Bandleader Maurice Garbutt² nurtured the young Jacques in the art of improvisation by testing her ability to change key mid-song, to cope with extended blues progressions and invent her own lyrics on stage—tactics that taught her to think about the 'inside' of the music. A leading player in Melbourne's early 1960s trad-jazz boom, The Yarras performed at Australian Jazz Conventions in Melbourne (1960), Adelaide (1961) and Sydney (1962).³ In 1962, they shared Downbeat and Jazz at City Hall concerts with a newly formed folk vocal group, which—in a meteoric rise to fame—were to become the first Australian group to clinch a UK number one (Bartlett, 2015, p. 15). At one of these performances, The Seekers invited Jacques to join them in advance of their overseas venture but she graciously declined because she was committed to learning more about Black American blues, gospel and jazz from The Yarras' purism:

Those were early days, and I felt I was on a journey of sorts, knowing I had a long way to go. Joining The Seekers would have been a very sharp right-hand turn. I've never regretted that decision. (email to the author, 4 December 2015)

Marcus Herman, who operated the local independent Crest label for just over a decade, recorded a broad range of material from jazz to blues, pop and organ music (Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC], 2013a). Herman produced The Yarras' first recording in 1962, followed by a live LP recording of the Moomba Lunch Hour Concert Jazz as You Like it (see Figure 4.1) in 1963. At the same time, Jacques' youthful celebrity status was taking an independent side turn.

2 Garbutt led the band's original line-up of Bob Brown, Eddie Robbins and Lee Treanor.

3 The Yarras staged a crowded weekly dance at Gas Works in Kew Town Hall, played at Jazz Centre 44 in St Kilda and ran the Yarra Yarra N.O. Jazz Centre punt in South Yarra. Traditional jazz flourished as an alternative to rock, with Melbourne teenagers confrontationally divided along the lines of 'jazzers' versus 'rockers'—that is, until surf music and the Beatles came to dominate popular music (see Gaudion, in Sharpe, 2008, pp. 125–156).

Gospel Pioneering Stardom

Jacques was introducing songs from the black gospel canon to mainstream Australia by age 18, well before the genre infiltrated the repertoires of church groups and choirs nationwide. To set the pace, Judy Jacques and her Gospel Four (Australia's first popular gospel group) toured Victoria and released a 45 EP with Crest in 1963. Conventional ministers of religion complained to the press about her style of singing. However, with the benefit of hindsight, *RareCollections* presenters Jordie and David Kilby have described Jacques as being 'without doubt one of the finest gospel singers to ever cut a record in Australia, the proof being in her great reading of the standard "Didn't It Rain Children"' (ABC, 2013a). In 1964, Segue recorded a new line-up of Jacques' group performing four tracks on the 45 EP, *Be My Friend*.⁴ A GTV 9 producer featured Jacques on *In Melbourne Tonight (IMT)*, and she went on to freelance with all television channels.

Jazz and folk clubs flourished 'cheek by jowl' in 1960s Melbourne. The idioms connected for Jacques in offering an alternative to the blander popular songs of the 1950s and 1960s. Warming to the activist sense of responsibility in folk music, she stayed behind to mix with folk singers whenever The Yarras performed in coffee bars. Besides extending her repertoire, Jacques formed a productive relationship with the fine interpretive singer Margret RoadKnight. At barely 19 years, Jacques used her economic success to purchase a farm north-east of Melbourne at St Andrews, where she entertained the acclaimed American trio Peter, Paul and Mary (formed in 1961 during the folk music revival phenomenon) during their 1964 Australian tour:

We sang and ate and Mary Travers rode my horse, Big Boy Pete. They talked about this amazing young singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, and I suspect their concerts introduced him to Australia. I attended their Festival Hall concert as their guest. They were very impressive on stage, tight and shiny, but with integrity as well. They made folk accessible and popular. (Jacques, cited in Ryan, 2014, p. 7)

Later in the year, the original cast of *Black Nativity* (renamed in Australia *Go Tell it on the Mountain*) arrived at 'Wild Dog Hill' for a barbecue: Alex Bradford, Princess Stewart and the entire Patterson Singers.

⁴ Jacques remained attached to gospel, performing in The Angels of Soul, Calling All Angels and Judy Jacques' Sweet Rosetta Band in the mid to late 2000s.

In Jacques' words:

They just gathered around my piano and away we went! Their magnificent voices are still with me ... I just couldn't believe that they were in my house, far less me singing with them! Alex invited Margret and I to his 30th birthday party at Southern Cross Hotel: another night of unforgettable gospel music. (cited in Ryan, 2014, p. 7)

In the wake of these breathtaking experiences, Jacques began to feel uncomfortable with the way that television was squeezing her into a pop-diva mould.

Commodity Pop Stardom

Commenting on the *thinness* of the experiences that commercial art offers to women, Frith (1996, p. 19, 213) observed how '[t]he female performer is inevitably much more self-conscious than a male performer in that she has to keep redefining both her performing space and her performing narrative if she is to take charge of her situation'. The structures of contemporary pop culture invited a reaction (and eventual revolt) on the part of the young Jacques as she flirted for a short period with teenage television shows. She chose vocally challenging items of 'soul' in preference to 'pop': 'Burt Bacharach, Aretha Franklin, Dionne Warwick to name a few ... not just to be different, but because I thought they were musically more interesting' (Jacques, email to the author, 11 October 2016).

Mid-1960s celebrity branding was the exclusive domain of the industry. When Channel 9 producers asked Jacques to sing more 'accessible' songs, she was faced with the choice of either dropping out of television or coming up with something better than donning a hairpiece to sing 'rocked-up' quasi-gospel songs to the sound of backing singers, far removed from the rousing gospel music that she loved. So, in 1966, when ABC2 invited the singer to add a fresh image to their *Dig We Must* television series, it was perfect timing: 'the beginning of checking out a bigger, more versatile world' (Jacques, email to the author, 26 November 2015).

Jacques co-compered two series with Idris Jones for ABC TV's *Start Living*. She also performed gospel items on *Bandstand*, including *Live at the Myer Music Bowl* in 1965. In the 'bigger, more versatile world' of the late 1960s, she supported Johnny O'Keefe concerts at Pentridge Prison and in Sydney clubs: 'I liked John, loathed the clubs, and wouldn't do

anymore!' (Jacques, email to the author, 11 October 2016).⁵ The singer also shared an ABC radio series with Ronnie Burns and cut a recording with The Idlers Five. To accommodate a pop image and attitude, Jacques designed braided linen pants with a silk ruffle-fronted shirt to be worn under an open jacket—something a little 'artier' than the 'glam' gowns worn by her contemporaries. In an example of how stardom buys leverage, designers and boutique owners supplied Jacques with clothes in exchange for acknowledgements in her show credits, and sometimes allowed her to keep the garments (email to the author, 26 November 2015). Ron Tudor from Astor Records invited Jacques to record two pop singles for the commercial market in 1966. She selected 'You're Messin' Up My Mind', cut by Herb Fame and produced by its composer Van McCoy for Blackwood, BMI. Peter Robinson and John Farrar from The Strangers produced the 45 rpm single with 'Since You're Gone', written by Bobby Darin, on the B-side.⁶ Jacques recorded the song at Bill Armstrong Studios on the Astor label (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3) and, in the words of ABC Radio National (2013b), 'made it her own'.



Figures 4.2 and 4.3: Jacques Records 'You're Messin' Up My Mind' at Armstrong Studios, 1966

Source: Images by Mary Thompson, courtesy Judy Jacques Collection.

5 While working with O'Keefe, Jacques sang hits like 'Leaving on a Jet Plane' on *Bandstand*.

6 Playback Records producer Nathan Impiombato (email to the author, 19 November 2015) supports the view of Jacques and the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, that the single was recorded in 1966 rather than 1967 (cited by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2013b).

Jacques played the record ‘full bore’ at parties; however, her producer thought it a risky choice, and correctly predicted that it would not achieve good airplay in Australia because it sounded ‘too Black’ (Jacques, email to the author, 13 April 2015). In 1969, Jacques submitted a tape of original David Langdon songs to Ron Tudor, who returned it on 20 December 1969 with a letter, commenting:

For some reason or other this record business seems to have a jinx for girl singers ... David has a real Bacharach ‘feel’ to some of his songs, and while this is admirable in many respects it can also be dangerous because many songs of this calibre just miss out on mass acceptance in this country. (Letter from Heathmont, Victoria)

Northern Soul Stardom

Paradoxically, the driving rhythm and horn arrangement in ‘You’re Messin’ Up My Mind’ made it perfect for British dance floors (ABC, 2013b). Thus, Jacques’ name took root within the vital Northern Soul scene that emerged in the Manchester in the late 1960s. Journalist Dave Godin coined the label following a visit to the Twisted Wheel nightclub to describe a distinctive brand of music that could not be found in London clubs at the time (charly.co.uk, n.d.).⁷ Jacques personally describes Northern Soul as ‘a play on the label “Southern Soul”—the blues from down south USA and all its influences’ (email to the author, 17 November 2015).

The Northern Soul scene exhibited the typical traits of a cult movement as ‘vibers’ adopted their own dance moves, flamboyant clothing and haircuts. According to the ABC (2013b):

As the all-nighter club crowds proliferated, so did the public appetite for new and increasingly obscure recordings. DJs looked abroad for fresh sounds, and over the years Australian singles by Lynne Randell, Cheryl Gray, Doug Parkinson and Judy Jacques developed a reputation amongst DJs and dancers alike.

These so-called ‘obscure’ cultural products were, of course, well established back in Australia.

7 Emanating from a Brazenose Street coffee bar, the Twisted Wheel relocated to a Whitworth Street warehouse in 1965. Its reputation for imported soul, R&B and ska saw fans flocking to hear live sets by artists of the ilk of Little Richard, Bo Diddley and Fats Domino. The famous Manchester club was bulldozed in January 2013 (Pidd, 2012).

Stardom or Free Singing?

Meanwhile, the notion of posing to gratify Australian audiences began, in a metaphorical sense, to 'mess' with Jacques' mind. Drained from constructing a façade of pop stardom, and in a type of leap into the void, the singer left television in late 1971 to assess her future artistic direction. Her desire to recapture the ecstatic feeling of being *at one* in the music propelled her into a delayed adolescence: 'What I was searching for needed to be let out and, somehow, it was let out in a wild and uncompromising way: an exhilarating period of personal and artistic growth' (Jacques, cited in Ryan, 2014, p. 8).

The late 1970s became a time of experimental thinking and doing for Jacques after saxophonist and big band leader Barry Veith and his colleagues at La Trobe University 'opened up her mind space' to the unrealised expressive potential of using her voice as an instrument. The singer's symbolic resistance to commodification characterised the thrust of the historic Clifton Hill Community Music Centre countermovement (1976–1983), in which participants engaged in challenging and confronting performances of collective free improvisation.

While this dissembling and reordering of Jacques' musical priorities could be understood as 'changing boxes for spheres' (after King, 1980, p. 170), it also suggests that a star persona is 'a performer for self' as well as 'a performer for others' (the audience). The singer developed a primal wordless language that found its expression in free-form opera, theatre, world-beat and a fermenting crucible of composition—albeit at the cost of career fragmentation.

Fallen Stardom, Restored Stardom

Frith (1996, p. 214) notes that performers always face the threat of the ultimate embarrassment: *the performance that doesn't work*. Jacques' atonal vocals mostly 'fell on deaf ears', alienating lovers of the 'standards' and even, on one occasion, inciting a riot. During an avant-garde performance at a late 1970s Christmas Hills music festival, a vociferous crowd ran towards the singer shouting obscenities and throwing cans. Metaphorically speaking, the star system had been struck as if by an asteroid. Historically speaking, the rise of 'new music' in Australia had sparked a cultural struggle. Jacques nevertheless persisted with the avant-garde into the

1990s. She recorded the LP *Winged Messenger* in 1987, inspiring Sigmund Jorgenson to commission Brian Brown's jazz/modal opera of the same title for the opening the 1994 Montsalvat Jazz Festival.

Inescapably, a stardom in flux was enacted between the singer's countercultural freedom and a pragmatic need, from 1972, to acquire a revenue stream from television. She spent time abroad with her family from 1974–75 and returned to Australia freshly inspired. In 1981, Jacques supported US trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie during his Melbourne tour; she performed with the Brian Brown Ensemble in Sydney in the late 1980s and—returning to an established jazz discourse—she joined the Yarra Yarra Reunion Band for part of their residency at Bell's Hotel, South Melbourne.

In the late 1990s, Jacques variously performed with High Steppin', Blues by Five, Blues on the Boil, and her own groups Judy Jacques Ensemble and Wild Dog Ensemble. Her formation of the band Judy Jacques' Lighthouse to compose and perform *Going for a Song* for the 1997 Edinburgh Festival Fringe was a more ambitious move, followed by a tour of Wales, Italy and France. Unable to survive free of commercial restraints, Jacques was successfully negotiating the aesthetic and the commercial (concept after Negus, 1995, p. 323), and—as the next phase confirms—reaching beyond experiences of a purely musical kind.

Mature Autonomous Stardom

Using her Bass Strait ancestral roots from 1835 as a referent for her identity, the singer redefined her artistic space to articulate the ecological, political and social history of Flinders Island (the largest island in Tasmania's Furneaux Group). In the domain-specific album *Making Wings* (2002), she blended original balladry, gospel and folk jazz with wordless improvisations, taped location sounds and revived Indigenous Tasmanian song. This free rein over her musical direction projected a more specialised star identity. The inaugural Australian Jazz Bell Awards (The Bells) delivered the Best Australian Jazz Vocal Album category to the Judy Jacques Ensemble on 28 August 2003,⁸ and performances followed across the eastern states.

8 Jacques' strong suit of Doug de Vries, Sandro Donati, Nicola Eveleigh, Howard Cairns, Michael Jordan and Denis Close was supported on various tracks by Brian Brown, Tony Gould and Bob Sedergreen (see Jacques, 2005).

The singer had enjoyed her farm horses and vineyards for over 43 years. Fortuitously, she sold Wild Dog Hill in advance of its razing on 7 February 2009 during the worst bushfire in the nation's recorded history. Her plucky partner, the trumpeter Sandro Donati, saved lives and property in the St Andrews area, and produced the Montsalvat Black Saturday Recovery Benefit Concert in Eltham. In a sequence of cumulative change, Jacques had already purchased land at Killiecrankie, Flinders Island, to where the couple—still burdened by the deep loss of friends and their former farm—moved permanently in 2011.

Island Community Stardom

To what extent the singer's relocation to a secluded geographical locus has worked to obscure her long mainland career remains to be seen. However, the implication is that stardom affects, and in turn is affected by, an acute sense of place. A period of healing allowed Jacques to ground her stardom regionally through interaction with the Flinders Islanders (see Ryan, 2009) in small-scale musical contexts that are immediate and sustainable (e.g. variety nights and impromptu musical sessions).

As Pedelty (2012, p. 129) has remarked, it takes a great deal of work to cultivate ecologically meaningful musical relationships within a local community, and to this end Jacques has by no means 'rested on her laurels'. In partnership with Donati, her curation of the museum exhibition 'Celebrating the History of Music and Dance on the Furneaux Islands' (2013) entailed extensive research, musical instrument gathering and conversations partly focused around the search by local Indigenous peoples for security and self-determination. This productive attachment to island folk life reflects a view developed by Pedelty (2012) that the deceptively simple answer to the problem of unsustainable music is for all of us to start making more of it locally.

The power of music sometimes allows songs to outlive their original purpose, to find new meaning in new eras (Pedelty, 2012, p. 106), as was recently the case when Jacques' 1966 single reappeared in cyberspace.

Revived Northern Soul Stardom

In mid-2011, Niteowl Northern Soul Vids reactivated Jacques' cover version of 'You're Messin' Up My Mind'. In this clip, a set of archival still images captures the excitement of the Manchester nightclub scene, revealing more about the addictive subcultural movement than it does about Jacques. A promotion for the album *Club Soul Volume 2* spruiked the Northern Soul Revival: 'Go out and find a copy and play LOUD ... take yourself back to those hallowed dancefloors, feel the hairs on the back of your neck tingle and drink in the atmosphere' (Scooter Geek on charly.co.uk, n.d.).

The canons of the movement's discrete repertoire were remarked in Australia by the Radio National broadcasters for *The Inside Sleeve*, who aired Jacques' single during an 'Obscure Australian "Northern Soul"' session on 1 February 2013 (ABC, 2013c). *RareCollections* subsequently presented the single in their sessions 'Northern Soul from Downunder' (ABC, 2013b) and 'Northern Soul' (ABC, 2014). Dismissed as having no commercial potential in Australia, 'You're Messin' Up My Mind' legitimised itself by taking root in the northern hemisphere, reappearing decades later in a revival movement and, in tandem with the latter development, rippling on in a heritage recording.

Heritage Stardom: *The Sixties Sessions*

Nathan Impiombato, producer of the specialist reissue label Playback Records, negotiated with Jacques in early 2015 to remaster her vinyl recordings. Channel 9's senior archivist listed approximately 20 of the singer's television performances, but could not easily access those on film (Nathan Impiombato, email to the author, 25 March 2016). Jacques provided a memory list of her shows on other networks; however, the heritage CD released on 17 October 2016 does not include bootleg recordings of live performances or television tracks from the era. Virtually all the songs make their CD-era debut: the studio recordings that Jacques made with The Yarra Yarra New Orleans Jazz Band and The Gospel Four; her solo work including the Northern Soul classic 'You're Messin' Up My Mind'; plus live tracks featuring Jacques on The Yarras' live LP—24 songs in total (Impiombato, email to the author, 15 November 2015).

Playback Records website (2016) advertises 'the complete sixties recordings by Australia's Queen of Gospel and Trad Jazz', packaged with a retro cover (see Figure 4.4) and a 32-page booklet featuring rare and unpublished photos.



Figure 4.4: *Judy Jacques: The Sixties Sessions*. CD album cover

Source: Image courtesy Playback Records, 2016.

Summary: Shades of a Star That Has Not Yet Set

The application of the star metaphor to Judy Jacques' career has drawn out aspects of female gender in interplay with prevailing consumer taste. An internal precondition of talent saw the traction Jacques gained from an early position of musical promise hold firm until adult tension arose

between her needs for public visibility and personal creativity. True to an early bent for female empowerment, personal wrests and turns saw Jacques eschew structured popular music orbits all for the delight of being free to sing 'herself'. Her career waxed and waned even as her imagination was freed and her vocal flexibility increased.

As manifested in other starscapes of sorts, that which is appreciated by one fan base may be anathema to another as an individual develops skills according to, against and beyond rigid models. In the negotiation between musical freedom and industry objectification, the determination of a star to evolve despite consumer taste is likely to be out of sync with the aesthetics dominating producers' decisions. It was Jacques' continual practice of singing across a lifetime that cohered the dismantling and reconstruction of her stardom. The patterns and tensions of change that the singer experienced between obligatory and emancipatory performance may be applicable, in varying inflections, to the careers of other performers. However, no single dominant paradigm can define the dynamic of a stardom in flux.

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