How Can We Miss You…



Frank Sinatra died 18 years ago today. It's like he never left. Really. Books, and re-releases, documentaries and tribute albums. Even Bob is in on the act.<fn>YMMV</fn> Frank is everywhere, still. And that's pretty great. I grew up listening to Sinatra. My dad loves him, and every Saturday night at martini time, we would listen to *Sinatra at the Sands*, with the Count Basie Orchestra. Great, great stuff.

But this ramble isn't really about Frank.

Yesterday, for no reason other than idle intertubing that led me down a rabbit hole of 70s pop hits<fn>Spurred by a search for the Staples Singers' *I'll Take You There.</fn>*, I found myself listening to Jim Croce.

Croce had a couple of #1 hits and was on a rocket trajectory until his charter plane crashed on takeoff after a concert in Natchitoches, LA, in 1973. He was everywhere back then – *Midnight Special*, *The Tonight Show, Dick Cavett*, *The Helen Reddy Show*, Don Kirshner's *In Concert* – and on top of some tightly crafted pop songs, he was a pretty amiable storyteller. He was good and popular and likely would have gone on to bigger things. And then he was gone.

But this post isn't about Jim Croce, either.

Because alongside Croce in that video – and on every appearance you can find – is a very unassuming guy named Maury Muehleisen. This post is about him.

Back then, as a fledgling guitar player, I loved this guy. His touch and timing – even though I didn't really know about that kind of thing then – was just fantastic. Listening last night, I realized that the arrangements they were playing were pretty clever and tight. And that apparently came from Maury.

He was the guy who brought that sense of structure and sophistication to the music everyone knew as Croce's. His harmony singing is subtle and lovely. Here was a guy, very soft-spoken, who barely moved when he played and sang, just delivering the goods with no undue fuss. And it made what would have been a more-or-less novelty folkie into something a little more.

I'm not going to oversell this. Croce's was pop music, albeit at a time when pop music could actually deliver a surprise or two. He wrote entertaining lyrics and was by all accounts a genuinely good guy. And this song, though played to death over the years, is really wonderfully constructed. It's a damned model of a pop song.

I spent hours trying to figure out Maury's part on this tune. I never got there.

Maury Muehleisen. The guy was the real deal, a true musician who was happy to sit in back and make everything sound better, never hungry for a spotlight, a player who worked the road and died from it.

How can we miss you if we don't remember?