

Oral History Interview

with

SID RAMIN

December 18, 1984

at

New York City

By Scott Ellsworth

For the "Pepsi Generation" Oral History Project

Archives Center

National Museum of American History

Smithsonian Institution

TAPE ABSTRACT AND INDEX

Ramin, Sid New York, New York, December 18, 1984. Interviewed by Scott Ellsworth.

An award-winning composer, songwriter, and orchestrator, Sid Ramin wrote the jingles for Pepsi's "Come Alive! You're in the Pepsi Generation" and Diet Pepsi's "Girlwatchers" campaigns.

The interview focuses on: the "Come Alive" and "Girlwatchers" jingles; their musical sources; what Ramin tried to do with them; and how Pepsi acquired them. Considerable attention is also given to the role of the jingle in advertising and the difference between jingle-writing and other musical composition. Mr. Ramin illustrates some of his points at the piano.

The interview was conducted at Mr. Ramin's apartment in New York City.

Abstract of interview with Sid Ramin New York, New York December 18, 1984
Interviewer: Scott Ellsworth

Tape 1, Side 1

1:10

BACKGROUND

Born in Massachusetts c. 1923. After military service came to New York in 1945 and began to write music for local orchestras. Wrote for a group called "The Three Sons" and began making some money. RCA, which was recording "The Three Sons," hired Ramin to write for other artists and orchestras, including the Ames Brothers. He then began writing for people like Barbara Streisand and Robert Goulet with Columbia Records. Wrote the music for the Milton Berle Show for eight years. Orchestrated "West Side Story" for his friend Leonard Bernstein and several other successful Broadway shows.

5:30

BEGAN WRITING AND ORCHESTRATING JINGLES

He began writing and orchestrating jingles. Being able to write his own material and orchestrate it was more exciting than orchestrating other people's tunes. Earlier, working for the recording companies, he would work on albums only if allowed to write at least one song for each album. Even today he is more an orchestrator than a composer. Writing jingles requires composing in a wide range of styles. Enjoys doing the varied work required for commercials.

9:05

WROTE MUSIC FOR SHOWS WHICH SERVED AS MODELS

In 1966 he wrote music for "The Patty Duke Show". Wrote music for the "Trials of O'Brien" and used a variation of that theme for the Diet Pepsi jingle, "Girlwatchers" in 1966.

10:40

HOW GIRLWATCHERS BECAME POPULAR.

Bob Crewe recorded the "Girlwatchers" song after it aired as a jingle. Pepsi sent out a copy of the commercial without any voice-over. This all-instrumental version hit the Top Ten Chart of popular songs. Andy Williams asked Ramin to help to record the song. Tony Velona wrote the lyrics overnight and Ramin recorded a version with Andy Williams as the singer. This version also hit the Top Ten.

14:30

APPROACHED BY BBDO TO WRITE SONG

He had been asked by Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn (BBDO) to write a song close to Herb Alpert's style about men watching a pretty girl. There were many popular records entitled "Music to Study By," "Music to Eat By," and originally the title of "Girlwatchers" was "Music to Watch Girls By." Ramin retained the copyright. He wrote three versions of the song and Pepsi picked from them. Pepsi and BBDO were pleased with the frequent airing of the song on the radio and encouraged local bottlers to ask disc jockeys to play it.

17:50

WROTE "COME ALIVE" JINGLE

Wrote the jingle for "Come Alive - You're In The Pepsi Generation." He did not know that he was competing with many composers to write that jingle. His agent for jingles, Paul Mamorsky, got the job for him. The worlds of music for theater, movies, television, and advertising jingles are separate.

22:20

COMPOSING JINGLES

Writing jingles can be lucrative. As composer, orchestrator and conductor he received four times the residual of the individual performer. It is very difficult to write a complete piece of music in twenty-nine and one-half seconds. Many composers cannot adjust to this abbreviated format, because you must leave out beats and violate some of the rules of music theory.

24:30

RAMIN BECOMES KNOWN AS A SONGWRITER

Although Pepsi was somewhat envious because the song became such a hit, the popularity of the song gave Pepsi free advertising. "Girlwatchers" established Ramin as a songwriter as well as an orchestrator. Songwriters generally cannot read music, but they have a talent for writing songs that people like. Songwriters write the title songs; they are more "tunesmiths." Composers are generally not good songwriters.

28:05

"COME ALIVE"

BBDO gave Ramin the line "Come Alive You're in the

Pepsi Generation" and asked him to write a song for it. "Come Alive" was Ramin's first important jingle.

Tape 1, Side 2

:10

WRITING "COME ALIVE" JINGLE

He had been told what the feeling of the commercial was to be, and he knew Joannie Sommers would be singing. The three notes for "Come Alive" were heraldic. He convinced them to use a bold, big swinging band sound. Does not remember a rock version but did do a vocal group version.

2:50

DEMONSTRATES ON PIANO

The part after the opening stanza "You're In the Pepsi Generation" was very much in the swing tradition. He was writing with Sommers' voice in mind. They wanted an "attention-getter" and Ramin knew she could "belt it out." She had a strong brassy voice.

Discussion about the music at piano. Had to get in all the information in the lyric BBDO had written.

7:00

NATURE OF "COME ALIVE"

Jingle is heraldic, strong, bold, big and confident; it is close to commanding. The melody accommodates their line. When writing jingles Ramin tries to combine the notes to create a mood. Certain words point a composer towards emphasizing the notes which create a mood. He knew he needed to write something that was uplifting, peppy, and happy for this jingle. He submitted only one tune for BBDO which was the successful entry among many.

13:25

HOW THE THEME FOR "TRIALS" EVOLVED INTO GIRLWATCHER

Demonstrates on piano how the theme for "Trials of O'Brien" evolved into "Girlwatcher's Song." This was not plagiarism; it was a matter of "attitude."

18:10

THE JINGLE WRITING BUSINESS

Worked for Diet Pepsi on campaign called "Double Take." "Come Alive" established Ramin in the business as a jingle writer. Many of the people writing jingles now are young composers who write

them and go right into the agency's office and play them. They usually don't have Ramin's range and versatility, because they can't orchestrate.

22:15

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ramin has never turned down a job because he thought it was offensive. He once wrote something that unintentionally offended some people--for a Florida real estate company. One of the lines was, "Give me my kind of people." It was meant to mean give me friendly, happy people, but it was misunderstood and he was sued.

24:40

SONGWRITERS ARE CATEGORIZED

Although Ramin can write many types of music, people do not come to him for the jobs. He is known as a jingle writer with a Broadway theater sound which sometimes works against him.

27:05

WRITING COMMERCIAL MUSIC

The work is extremely varied and you must keep current musically. In the commercial music world, jingles are written on one day and recorded the next. "Come Alive" and "Girlwatchers" were done in one night.

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