'On The Couch' with Hal David

Interview By Art Phillips, President of the Australian Guild of Screen Composers (AGSC).

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Art: Welcome everyone; and welcome Hal David. It's absolutely an honour to meet you. On behalf of everyone here; we really appreciate your time, and it's an honour for us to have you hear. We have a great group of people here tonight, record people, music publishers, songwriters, all very high profile industry people.

Hal: I want to thank everybody for coming to see me and I love to be with people in my own business; it's been my life, and fortunately it's been a pretty good life, and I'm very at home in this kind of atmosphere.

Art: Fantastic. Well, Hal, your work has become such a major part of everyone's life, and certainly my life. Universally accepted songs; living gems; legacies and landmarks in the moments of music, landmarks in the history of pop. Your works mark time and musical moments. Monster hits, exquisite craftsmanship of contemporary lyrical and musical innovation. Soaring vivid themes, clear honest descriptions, novels encapsulated in a nutshell of a few verses, a chorus and possibly a bridge. A wordsmith is, I think, the appropriate word.

When your lyrics reach the listener they have such depth of meaning, depicting feelings of young hearts: love, heartache, laughter, loneliness, dreaming. Honest messages about living in the real world. And the emotions that they have portrayed actually go straight to people hearts. There's those million sellers, I don't really need to list them all but here's a few - *Alfie, I Say a Little Pray, What The World Needs Now, Raindrops Keep Falling on Your Head* .....and the list goes on. We all know what they are; I don't think I need to take time listing all the songs. There's even the recent Australian TV ad for Uncle Toby's' Oats, where they use your song *Close to You* - I'm sure you'll find out from about those performances from the next royalty statement you receive from ASCAP.

Hal: I hope I am getting paid

Art: Everywhere we turn we hear your works… literally making a big dent in everyone's emotional life, there's just no doubt about it. We're all probably aware of

the accolades that have been given to Hal—Grammy's, Academy awards, Oscars. Over 20 (plus) gold records, platinum records, and more. And of course, Hal was the president of ASCAP for, ……I'm not sure how many years……

Hal: Six years.

Art: Currently, on the board of ASCAP and very heavily involved with intellectual property issues. Hal is also on the board of the ***Cedar Sinai Medical Hospital*** (in LA)……and, works for numerous charity groups.

You've said - that poems are written to be read and lyrics are written to be sung. There is a difference….?

Hal: Well sure, there's a huge difference. I mean, any of us who do write lyrics and write songs, you know, ….words sit on notes, syllables sit on notes, and syllables have to open up when you've got a half note or a whole note. You don't have to worry about that with a poem: you just read it. So, lyrics have to do more, have to say something, but have to fall in love with the melody. And it almost has to be as if the words and music were written by the same person. There a real few geniuses like Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, who have written fantastic songs all by themselves…and that's spectacular, but for most of us, to get that song that really works, it should sound…firstly, it should sound like it wasn't written. It should sound so natural that anybody could have done it. But of course not anybody can do it. And it should sound like it just spilled out from one person.

Art: So what you're talking about it is the cohesiveness of the motion of the melody and the emotion of the melody as well, the words, and the vowels sounds - the syllables ?

Hal: I've always thought it was interesting…I think if you took one melody, any great melody that you like, and you gave it to ten different lyrics writers, you would get not only ten different lyrics, but you'd probably would get stories that are so far apart from each other that you'd wonder how the same melody could do that to ten different people. But I think that's true, and when I hear music, well, I only write to ……..I don't write to a melody if I don't like it. That doesn't mean a melody isn't terrific, but if it doesn't speak…. i might (not) hear a melody that speaks to me. I hear words, I really hear words - and that's where I keep looking for -- exactly what it's saying to me.

Art: What The World Needs Now is an Australian musical that's happening right now. …which is why you came out to Sydney.

Hal: Exactly.

Art: So, would you talk a bit about that for a moment?

Hal: Sure.

Hal: Well, an Australian director/writer named Steven Helper—I don't know how many people her know him; I just met him yesterday — but he's wanted to do a show based on the songs of Burt Bacharach and myself… For years this has been going on. And back and forth letters would come, and when the time came to finally make a deal that they had to put up some money, suddenly, it became a little difficult. But about two years ago, they were able to put the financial package together, they sent a script, which we kind of liked, and they went forward. We came in yesterday—I'd even forgotten the story cause I read it about two or three, ….four years ago—went to the theatre where they were in rehearsal. We saw four or five scenes in the first act; it looked very very interesting. You know I've got a lot of faith in it. And that's really how it started. I met the director and the writer just yesterday, and I met the producer just yesterday. Everything else has just been done in the mail. And my son, Jim David, who was just here last week, who's a consultant on the show, knows my songs, probably better than I do. And he came back enthusiastic. He's the one who'd been dealing with the show and dealing with the people. And we have Michelle Guthrey who's the public relations person for the show, who's had me on a merry-go-round, and - I would recommend her to anybody. She gets it done, gets the show done.

Art: That's terrific. Here is a promotional video of the show.

Hal: Oh good, I haven't seen it.

THE PROMOTIONAL VIDEO PLAYS

Hal: I hope everybody likes it.

Art: That's great. The idea here tonight is that we try and get everybody involved in questions, so I'll sort of start with one important thing: is there a formula in your own mind, in the way that you actually approach a project or a concept?

Hal: The one thing that I don't have is a formula. I would think that would be death. And people think that Burt and I had a style, and I guess you know perhaps we did, but I really don't think so. We didn't try to be different. I think we were different, but we didn't try to be different. All we tried to do, and we weren't trying to write standards, we were trying to write hits.

Art: Right, pop hits…

Hal: That's what we were doing. We're in the music business, writing records that were trying to be hits. I think that the thing we had, is we both tried like hell to really write the best song we could—tried not to let a song out of our hands until it was as good as we knew how to make it. Which wasn't always as someone else may have been able to make it, but it was as good as we were able to make it.

Art: The formula, (well) I guess there isn't one, -- but, these words come to my mind, and I guess it will be interesting to see how everybody else feels --- Pop sophistication… sophistication, in the style of writing. The Beatles had their thing, --- and, we're talking about the same era.

Hal: Yeah very much the same era

Art: Beatles had their thing; the English genre was happening; The US, American rock thing was happening. But Bacharach and David …I'm sorry I should say David and Bacharach.

Hal: That's ok.

Art: You guys had this contemporary, sophisticated style. Hints of Jazz, certainly hints of R& B without a lot of people even maybe realising…

Hal: R&B was very much a part of what both of us loved.

Art: And lyrically, …..I'm not sure if you even like the word lyric, because, I think that you write **words** more than lyrics…

Hal: No, I think I'm a lyricist.

Art: The only reason I said that is because sometimes people don't like to be classified as a lyricist, because they're more of a wordsmith. But lyrically there was an incredible sophistication to it: a lot of twists and turns. And the thing about the style that I know, off the top of my head, if you take songs like *I Say a little Pray*, is the odd time signatures that actually happen—4/4, 7/4, 4/4/, 7/4 then three bars of four/four—it's a nine bar phrase. It's a very unusual music thing. But lyrically, you have to work with that or did he have to work with your lyrics for the odd sort of flow of the motion. That's something very interesting.

Hal: Well the interesting thing…we wrote a lot of songs with different time signatures. And if it ever felt uncomfortable with the time signature jump from 5/4/ to 4/4, it would bother me and being the …I'm something of a musician but not a great musician… I (just) wouldn't do it. But most times it felt so smooth. I mean once you're playing the melody, you're suddenly aware of the changes, but when you're just listening to it, it comes out very naturally. And if it didn't come out naturally people would fall over themselves; they'd stumble. And so, it never really became a problem. And I suspect very often, in doing some of the things, he didn't know he was doing it until he did it.

Art: So it just happened naturally.

Hal: Yeah. And you mentioned *I Say a Little Pray* before; the title of that song comes in the verses, not the chorus. Why I don't know, but it just felt natural to do that.

Art: Of course, the same with - *The Look of Love*. -- it's the opening line. It feels very "versey" but it's actually the hook, and the chorus is a huge hook in itself, but it's not those words.

Audience Question: Just one of the millions of questions I have—a couple of things; do you ever get the impression that you were doing well as you were doing it?

Hal: As we were doing it?

Audience question: Yeah, did it occur to you that it was going to such an international hit?

Hal: In that given song?

Audience question: In everything you have written.

Hal: I used to feel very often, you know we wrote something and it felt terrific and it felt that could be a hit and of course it wasn't. And then…….

Audience question: Did you ever come to doubt yourselves and write something that you were concerned about?

Hal: Well I sure doubted myself many times in my career—I think everybody does—(but) you have to feel very confident things are going your way. Probably the major part of our success realistically, had something to do with the time signatures. We'd make a demo and send it up to the record producers or the A&R man, and then they'd like it and when they'd sit down to try and make the arrangement, they squared it out! So you know, you'd be waiting another bar to stop again…. and the records come out terrible—the same record they loved from the demo, but they didn't know how to do the same on the commercial record—and because of that we used to go crazy!

Audience question: We all your songs…did you answer to someone whenever you wrote a song? Was it commissioned in that sense?

Hal: Well in the beginning we were just trying to get…writing songs and trying to get records. And then that was the reason Burt and I decided—when we ran into Dionne Warwick—that we better start making our own records, because people were killing us with the way they were making them. (They were) very good arrangers, very good record producers but they just didn't get it; didn't get what we were doing.

Audience question: So, is there material of yours out there that you're really not proud of—the way it was performed?

Hal: Well having our own artists, (and luckily we broke through right away: our first record was *Don't Make Me Over*, which was a big hit in the US), and so, from then on they left us alone. We just wrote it and recorded it.

Art: The story is that Dionne Warwick was one of your demo singers, recording demo's for you in New York.

Hal: She was more than a demo singer. For us she was a demo singer. She and her whole family were singers, gospel singers; they sang in their church. When we met her she was singing on a Drifter's (recording) date. She and her Aunt Sissy Houston another actor— cousins really.

Art: So, that's the mother of Whitney?

Hal: Of Whitney's mother.
And Dionne's mother used to sing with Sam Cook. It's a great musical family. So she came to us one day and she said she'd like to make some demos and she came up and sang for us - and she blew us away.

Audience question: Hal, what sort of time elapsed before your thinking- 'I'd like to write songs' and 'be a song writer' --- and your first six hits?

Hal: Well a lot of time elapsed. I don't know how many of you are aware, or if any of you are aware, my brother Mac David, who has since passed away, was a very successful songwriter and he was sort of, I wouldn't say my mentor, but he was my role model. I worshipped him, I thought he was the greatest guy in the world. And I wanted to be like my brother. He played the violin so I played the violin. He wrote songs…didn't have quite the easy part in my family; he was supposed to be a lawyer, and when my father found out that his son was going to be a Broadway bum instead of a lawyer, my father threw him out of the house. Really, it was like a bad movie, and my mother used to go down and give him some money to keep him going. And then my brother wrote his first hit, and there it was on the radio. My father suddenly said, "That's not so bad." (Laughs)

Audience question: What was the hit?

Hal: It was a song called *Rain Rain Go Away* based on that nursery rhyme. And so I was writing songs, and I was the editor of the school magazine, I wrote short stories and my brother discouraged me. He said, "It's a tough field, and with your ability I think you ought to go for journalism or advertising, cause it's going to be an easier way, you'll do great at it." So I was going to school—I went to NYU in New York and I was majoring in Journalism. I did get a job at the New York Post as a copywriter; you know I was just a young kid. And I was there until I was drafted into the war—and it's a story, which may have something to do with my success in some way. The first day we got, after basic training, -- we were shipped overseas to Hawaii, and the day we go there there was a strike; a longshoreman's strike. There was a guy named Harry Bridges who was the longshoreman's head of the union and he was supposedly a communist - and he called a strike. And there we were unloading our ship, let me tell you that was back breaking work, and they set up temporary tents for us. The day was over and I go back; I'm looking for my tent, I want to take a shower, and I pass the orderly tent and there's a sign saying 'Audition for Army show – looking for Dancers, singers, writers'. I went in, my first day in Hawaii, and I asked for a pass so I could go to the audition, and they gave me a pass. In retrospect it's amazing that the guy gave me a pass (the Sergent). And the next day I had to find my way into Honolulu, where I got a bus that took me there. There was the USO building, and I don't know how many of you know Honolulu, and there was a line out unto the street people wanted to do that instead of shoot guns! And finally when I got up there and there was a table with a lot of soldiers at one end doing the auditions. And, I got there, and gave them my name and I was a private. I gave them a real juicy resume of all the things I didn't do but said I could do: I wrote songs, wrote sketches, did this did that. And a guy called me over, turned out to be Morris Evans the famous Shakespearean actor who was now the Major in the United States entertainment

section. And he got me into the outfit and I was there for almost three years writing shows, writing songs. I was with not only Evans but Alan Lutton, Carl Rhiner, Howie Morris, Ernie Flat, a great choreographer Renard Climper. It was almost three years of sheer education and fun and that's where my sophistication came from! (Laughs)

Art: So, that's how worked on your craft - and developed.

Hal: I learned a lot, and I also knew that's what I wanted to do. I never went back to the New York Post.

Audience question: Were you writing melodies then as well?

Hal: I wrote melodies and lyrics, but then I realised I was a better lyric writer than I was a melody writer. And I came back and you know, started to knock on doors. A fellow I did work with in the army came back too, and we wrote, and we couldn't even get to see music publishers…we started out doing…we started writing special material. There was a lot of nightclub material in those days, much more than there is today in New York. And we were writing comedy material for this performer and that performer, and that's how I made a living, until I started to get some songs published.

Art: So just talk a little bit about the Brill building in New York, because that's something that we all missed, unfortunately. It was totally different era as to what we're used to now as a composer. Nowadays we have the home bedroom. We all sort of write our songs in our little studio, which happens to be in somebody's garage or bedroom these days.

Hal: Yep.

Art: In those days, you were really just at the very end of that era.

Hal: It's gone really, but it was fabulous. There were two buildings; there was the Brill Building where Burt and I had an office, but I was involved there long before I met Burt. And then there was another building called Sixteen-Fifty, like a block away from Broadway. And there we were, I was around, Burt was around, Carol King was at Sixteen-fifty, Neil Diamond was at Sixteen-fifty, Kevin Stoler ….And we all knew each other. And there was a restaurant called 'The Turf' in the Brill building and we sort of all, if we were around, we go down and have lunch. It was like a club in a way, you'd just walk in and sit at a table with other people. And we all knew everybody else's songs—we sang our songs to them and they sang their songs to us—and if somebody had a hit we'd be half jealous and half happy for them. And we wrote with so many different people. Burt was writing with Bob Hilard a terrific lyric writer, Bob wrote, *Bongo Bongo Bongo, I don't want to leave the Congo,* and a lot of terrific songs. And Burt and he were writing together. I was writing with Lee Pocris and Sherman Edwards and then one day Burt and I… we were now both working for Paramount in New York, and our offices were immediately next door. The offices were cubicles and there was an upright piano. For example, in the office Burt and I ended up working in together, there was, say from over here to there, I'd have to squeeze through past the piano (I'd have trouble now) to get by. There was my desk by the window. The window was never opened—we had air conditioning and that's

where we wrote. We used to send out for sandwiches…and we wrote all the time. And everybody knew everybody else's songs.

Art: So did you guys basically have a set time schedule like eight to five, was it like that?

Hal: We used to try to meet everyday. Burt is always late, so if we had a date say at ten o'clock in the morning, and I'd get there at ten o'clock as I'm punctual, and Burt would show up say at a quarter to eleven. And that would go on for days; we'd make a ten o'clock appointment and I'd show up at quarter to eleven, and he saw I caught onto it, and then he'd come in at twelve-thirty. It was great because you just knew what was going on. It was a simple business; I'm not sure if its easier or harder, and I have a feeling it's harder today but I'm not sure, everything's so fragmented today…

Art: I think it's just different.

Hal: Because you know, you'd have four or five major record companies and a few other small companies but…you had an A&R man. For example, Mitch Miller used to like our songs and we were with Paramount, and one day we played something for Mitch, which Mitch didn't like in particular. He said, "You don't need a publisher", anytime we saw him he'd say, " I like your stuff just call me". And one day we became our own publisher.. There was Mitch, and a few other guys, and you knew everybody. The business was closer to being in one hand.

Audience question: How difficult was it to, did you ever feel that you had a problem to strive and get into that circle?

Hal: Oh yeah, oh yeah. There's no question, you know, I've had people tell me they always knew I was going to be ok but they were turning down my songs all the time. It wasn't easy you know, I was lucky enough to get enough songs recorded and published so that I was able to make a living; that was the first step. Because I didn't have any financial support, and so it was important that I'd do that or else I'd have my Father down on the delicatessen and I'd have to go slicing it all up.

Audience question: We've left out the difficult parts and it's nostalgic in one sense and you've left all that behind you, and the successes and so on, we see all the successes, but there were probably times when it was…….. ?

Hal: Very difficult - and where I sort of…wasn't sure of myself. Half of me thought I was terrific and the other half thought better.

Art: Does that still happen?

Hal: It doesn't happen anymore.
I love to write. In January I did an album of new songs asked, I guess you'd call commissioned—I wasn't paid for it—to do an album of songs for Zomba. They're important here; they're important all over.

Hal: I did it with a very good friend of mine, do you know John Cavodis? John is essentially a film and TV writer, we've been friends forever. We've always liked each other, never wrote a song together. And John said we ought to do this, we've got to write. And Zomba said to do an album—write some songs and produce them. And we wrote fifty songs and we recorded them in London in January, and it's coming out in the next few weeks. They loved it. It's not today's songs, I mean it's not in the market but they weren't looking for something that's very much in the market today, they were looking for songs that they feel are going to make - standards.

Art: The more classic…

Hal: They loved it and they asked us to do another one. And we did fifteen songs like *The Big Band* , which is where I started out; I started out at the tail end of *The Big Bands*. In fact my first job, how I made a living -- Sammy K heard some of my songs and he had someone bring me up to the hotel where he was playing and he signed me up for fifty dollars a week and that's how I made a living.

Audience question: That probably was pretty good money at that time.

Hal: Well it wasn't bad but it could have been better.

Audience question: Just about *Alfie*, it's one of the trickiest songs to sing for any vocalists. I'm curious to know how that came about.

Hal: Well that was when Burt and I were with Paramount. They came to us whenever there was a Paramount song that they needed and it had a low budget! They'd come to us in New York, the real swingers were in California but we were in New York. And we'd have things like *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and *Lonesome Lovers* that's because there was a very small budget. If they had a lot of money we would never have written them, they would have given them to somebody else. But they came to us to do *Alfie*, it was an English movie and Paramount bought the rights to it, and was going to put it out, but they felt they needed a song and they came to us. At this time Burt and I were working on a strange schedule; he was now spending more time in California, he was going out with Angie Dickinson, whom he married. And so we started working; I'd fly out to California and we'd work about ten days to two weeks and then I'd go back the New York and spend a week or so back there. The he'd fly to New York and we'd do the same…back and forth. And they gave us a script, because the film hadn't come into California yet or New York… they gave us a script and they wanted the song to accompany under the movie. Then Burt called and said he'd just saw the film and he said, "It's terrific". I said, "How close is it to the script" and he said, "It's exact", so I said "I don't need to see it at this point". I said, "How do you want to start?" and he said, "Well, why don't you start?" So I sat down and I wrote most of the lyric…and I called him on the phone and I gave him the lyric I had on the telephone—that was before faxes and email—and then he…I don't know if I flew to California or he flew to New York…and he played me the melody he had, and it was almost like my lyric but he had it two bars in every, I don't want to say eight bar phrases because they weren't eight bar phrases, but you know what I'm talking about. And the original lyric I had was:

'What's it all about
Alfie

Is it just for the moment we live
What's it all about
Alfie
Are we meant to take more than we give.

And Burt wrote:

'What's it all about…dah dah dah dah dah Alfie

So I had to come up with…so I needed to come up with a phrase there.
I came up with:

'What's it all about when you sort it out Alfie

Now that's turned out to be a terrific line that I probably would never of thought of if the melody hadn't... and then we finished the song—I'm not sure if I had the bridge, or the bridge of the melody—but we finished the song, we liked it. We played it for the guy at Paramount in New York, Eddie, who loved it, and made a demo and sent it out to California. It was an English picture; the director was Lewis Gilbert. He heard the song, didn't like it …so the pressure was on… the guy, Howard Katch, was the head of Paramount, we'd become very good friends over the years (he's since passed away), anyway we went out to California and there was pressure on Gilbert to put the song in the picture. So he said "Let me show it to my son… he knows what's going on". And the report came back—the son didn't like it either. True! Then Howard Katch, who was the head of the studio, said, "Let me hear this song", so we went and played it for Howard, and Howard loved it. Howard was also a producer and a writer—he was not only a great guy but he had taste; he was terrific. And he trusted his own opinion, his own judgement. He said to Gilbert, "That goes in or the picture doesn't come out". We were very lucky we had…we have to be lucky in our business. *Raindrops* is another example where we were lucky we had the right director.
But then we wanted to do it with Dionne Warwick and Gilbert didn't like Dionne Warwick. In fact we did it with Dionne, and he didn't like it. And then we were recording Jack Jones, and we'd just had a hit with him—*Wives and Lovers*—and so we went and did that with him. And he didn't like Jack either; this guy doesn't like anything we do! He wanted Cher. Then we recorded Cher, and that's the movie…everyone thinks Dionne Warwick's record is in the movie; it was Cher. Cher is in the movie.

Art: I didn't realise that.

Hal: So now it came out in America…Cher came out and we put Dionne's record out. Cilla did everything that Dion was doing in those days. Cilla went and recorded it and that was it. Cilla had the big hit in Europe and Dionne in America.

Audience question: There's amazing footage of the actual session (of Cilla's recording); it's unbelievable!
It's just a curious melody, and such a strange meter for any vocalist to move on…from where it starts to where it finishes

Hal: It's a great melody.
I think one of the most difficult things for a composer to do, and I don't know how many composers can really do it as well as Burt was able to do it, and Richard Rogers was great at writing to lyrics…but Burt was great at writing to a lyric.

Audience question: The bold thing….Alfie was a bold movie anyway because we'd never seen a character like that on the screen until that movie came along. But what was doubly bold was to couple a song with it that actually goes against the character and says what we all think about the character --- although it's a beautiful melody, it's a wonderful song, but the lyric is almost conversation, it's kind of what you'd say if you met Alfie

Hal: And going against what appears to be in the scene is something I always like to do—I did it in *Raindrops* if you remember that scene with Paul Newman on the bike…

Art: The bicycle scene.

Hal: It looked like happy, happy days and they're singing:
'Raindrops are falling on my head'.
But I think sometimes you do the internal rather than what's the obvious that you see.

Art: *Alfie's* one of those songs that probably has the title in the song more than any other song...it's actually ten times.

Hal: Is it?

Art: Yeah. It's like lets beat it in the head. But it's a very conversational dialogue song and it's really amazing because the title is what it is and it actually happens at the end of the line. It's the line, pause then 'Alfie'. So it's very unusual. There are a lot of things that you did that were very unusual that actually made a lot of headway and broke ground for lyricists.

Hal: Well I like conversationalist songs.

Audience question: Hal, was there ever a lyric you wrote whose sentiment you didn't believe?

Hal: In the days when I was trying to make a living, I'm sure I did. We all do what we have to do. But not in a long, long time.

Audience question: What do you get when you kiss a girl and get enough germs to catch pneumonia? Is that your sentiment?

Hal: Well the interesting thing about that, and I didn't realise at the time I wrote it, we were in Boston, with *Promises Promises*. The show sure looked like it was going to be a hit; it looked awfully good. But you're out of town and certain things don't work and we had a song that didn't work. And Neil Simon was going to write a new scene because he though the scene didn't work either (it was in the second act). He wrote the scene after we wrote the song...And Burt got sick and Burt had pneumonia! He was in a hospital in Boston, and David Merrick was the producer; he said, "When's he getting out, when's he coming out?"…He had a big heart definitely!
I said, "Well David…" And he said, "We've got to get a song out". He's said, "Maybe we ought to bring Lennie Bernstein in?"
Everyday he was telling me about another composer!

While I was waiting for Burt, it was about ten days they had him in hospital, I was writing lyrics for whatever the scene was going to be. The last thing I wrote was *I'll Never Fall In Love Again*, and Burt came out and, he's always been a bit of a hypochondriac, but anyway, it's in the winter and he's sitting in this hotel room at the piano, he has his coat on. He's sitting there, and I've got the lyric hand-written of *I'll Never Fall In Love Again*. We were never the fastest writers in the world. And he sat down…and they say Richard Rogers can sit down with a lyric and in fifteen minutes he had a great melody; it came to him, it was at his fingers. And Burt just did it very quickly. And I had, *I'll Never Fall in Love Again*:

'What do you get when you fall in love again?
A pin to burst your bubble,
That's what you get when you fall in love again.
I'll never fall in love again.'

I didn't have that melody. The only thing he changed was he wrote the line twice: 'I'll never fall in love again, I'll never fall in love again'. And he just did it that way and I think he wrote it in a half and hour. And we put it in the show. The next day we taught it to Jill O'Hara who was going to play guitar, and she didn't play that well. She was going to be doubles in the pit. And it stopped the show. It's amazing when something works.

Audience Question: So there was no particular system that you and Burt wrote with. It wasn't always lyrics first. Sometimes he'd come to you with a complete piece of music and you'd have to mosaic word-for-word?

Hal: A lot. *Raindrops* was… And Burt, if you want to change a phrase of Burt's he's say he'd rather right a new melody!

Art: That poses a really interesting question: Are you careful not to fall in love with something and you keep the trashcan near your writing desk? Are you really conscious of that?

Hal: I think so. It comes with experience. But I also think you have to have…you know most of us write…it's collaborated. To make a collaboration really work yo both have to believe each other. Time and time again, often enough, Burt would say, "I don't know," or I'd say to Burt, "I like it but I don't know." Speaking for myself I'd go back and look at what I'd done, and sometimes I'd start all over again, in fact I'd always start all over again. Sometimes I'd think that what I had originally was the ways it was meant to be and he'd always accept that, and visa-versa. Yeah I really think you have to believe each other if it's really going to be a collaboration.

Audience Question: Did you write dots or did you have a Dictaphone to take melodies home with you to finish lyrics for things you'd worked on in the day without Burt being there?

Hal: Yeah for example, with *Raindrops* I wrote that right through the melody. I flew out to California, and I checked into the hotel and I called Burt and he said, "I think I've got something that works." And we made a date: The next day I went to his

house—he was now married—and living in Beverly Hills. And he played me *Raindrops*. I can't tell you I knew it was going to be the big hit it was, but it certainly was a damn good melody. And I liked it and he put it on a little cassette. I borrowed his Sony or whatever it was, took it back to the Hotel and wrote the lyric, in the Hotel over the weekend. I was there for the July 4th weekend. He said, "I don't know…don't you think it should be funnier?" That's how he imagined it. So I went back and wrote another lyric, with the same title, and he wasn't sure of that. I thought maybe it's the wrong title. I got another title and I didn't like that; he didn't like that either.

Audience question: At this stage did d you know what scene it was going in? You knew where the song was going to fit?

Hal: Oh yeah the scene was all done. Before I went to Burt's house, I went to 20th Century and they played that movie for me. There was supposed to be two scenes for two different songs, and George Royhill cut out that one scene and we just had that one scene. Anyway, George Royhill the director was a pilot and used to fly a World War One plane, an open-seated. He was flying with his son and every night they would stop some place new and so forth. And George Royhill wanted to go on his trip so he was rushing us: "where's the song?" So we had a day to play it for George and he said, "That's terrific, just what I want." Suddenly we all agreed it was pretty good! You've got to be lucky. We didn't play for George Royhill and say, "This is great". He was a great director, he knew music and he knew songs and he knew what he liked.

Art: So 'things aren't so perfect all the time, 'Raindrops are falling on my head'. That's really where it came from.

Hal: And that was the guy, Butch Cassidy, happy-go-lucky. He was real hard-luck guy. So you took a happy-go-lucky melody and wrote…telling a story about a guy who gets everything screwed and falls through for him.

Art: It's a really very clever way of saying It because 'Raindrops keep falling on my head' is a beautiful feeling, but yet it actually imposes exactly what it is…..

Hal: But just like the guys' feet are too big for his bed—nothing seems to fit.

Art: 'Those raindrops are,' is interesting because interchangeable adjectives here… 'Raindrops keep'; 'those raindrops are'; 'they keep falling'. One of the things I've noticed is that you always reinstate the impact of something in particular at the end of the line, and I'm not sure if that's because of the way you and Burt wrote together or, just the way that it actually happened. For example: 'These raindrops keep falling on my head, they keep falling'.

Hal: But the melody let me do that.

Art: But the words probably did that for a particular reason in your mind, I'm sure.

Hal: Probably!

Audience Question: You mentioned occasionally you'd come up with a metric construction, which is just too complex that's not going to work. You mentioned earlier that because you guys write in a lot of interesting time signatures, but you mentioned that in doing that sometimes something would come along that was too complex and you'd reject it. My question is, didn't that thought occur to you with *Promises Promises*?

Hal: No. I think by this time I was aware of the changes of music. *Promises Promises* is a tough song, and in using that title you start out with promises—everything goes bad and sour, but end with promises that of promising love and hope and all the good things—I just turned it around. It was a very tough song but I loved it. I wrote it to the melody, and I just loved the melody. It had that drive. It was the end of the show and it gave it a real kick when you wanted it to.

Audience Question: Can I ask a publishing question?

Hal: Sure.

Audience question continued: With use of your songs in synchronisation, like in films and TV adds, sometimes you see your works used in a fantastic, for example the song used in a Julia Roberts film was just the highlight of the movie. We're talking the story of Dionne Warwick, supposedly in a mental asylum, and he starts singing, 'The moment I wake up', which is easily the highlight of the movie. But then you see your music being used for magic moments, for Golden Crumpets…

Hal: Oh I haven't seen that!

Audience question continued: Do you decide if songs can be used in different ways like that?

Hal: Yeah. Years ago, early in my career, I think generally speaking, writers and publishers felt, and I think maybe writers more than publishers, didn't want to see there songs on a commercial—they felt it might cheat them. Then little-by-little songs went into commercials and finally enhanced the values, not only that you get paid for it, but suddenly it became known again; it helps it become a standard. I love commercials; we have a bunch of them right now. In New York we have 'What The World Needs Now Is Love'; we've got three commercials on now. Calvin Klein and whatever…it's the first time it's every happened to me…the same song at the same time both advertising agencies and clients were told and they didn't care.

One day my wife and I went to New York, in our apartment, and there was two messages form John Barry, saying something was important. So, I called John, and John was home, and he said, "We've got a hit." I said, "That's terrific."
We did a few James Bond pictures together, and we wrote a song for 'Majesty Secret Service', called We Have All The Time In The World, and it was recorded by Louis Armstrong. It came out and made a little noise but it didn't set the world on fire. And nineteen years later, Guinness beer used it in London, in the UK. People started to call and get a hold of the record, and so they put out the record just for the commercial.

Audience question: Can I just ask, can you talk a little about Dusty Springfield?

Hal: Oh Gosh, she was one of the all-time great singers. She did so many of our songs. My favourite singers, for my stuff has always been Dionne Warwick. But right next to Dione is Dusty Springfield. She was just an incredible singer!
I love rhythm and blues and Burt loves rhythm and blues, and I think that's been a basic part of a lot of our …(well) a great influence on our work. And where did rhythm and blues come to my life? I lived in Brooklyn New York, Jewish parents; what the hell did I know about rhythm and blues? And yet it was very much a part of me, and Burt as well. And it was very much a part of Dusty Springfield; I don't know where it came to her, but that aspect of her singing was incredible.

Audience: She wasn't very confident about her own singing.

Hal: She was just a doll to work with. Never gave you a bad time.

Audience comment: She was a perfectionist……(?)

Hal: Yeah, that's a sickness all of us have.
I just spoke to Jacky Shannon who I hadn't talked to in a long time; we're doing a benefit in Los Angeles we did last year, in fact it was my wife's idea, called The Writer, The Singer, The Song. Paul Williams is the MC, the funniest, cutest guy. And Paul was there and he sang; he told a story about it. At the very end of the show he did the second song with Helen Reddy. I think Alan Bertman sang, I forget which. I did a song that I sang and told another story… Sally Kellerman, Mike Stolller, Rosemary Clooney…

Art: I think you guys are responsible for one big thing — correct me if I'm wrong— but there are a few black artists/ African American artists that actually really made the cross over to the pop charts. One was Dionne Warwick of course.
And it's because of your songs that that actually happened. Prior to that it was the R&B charts where the black artist were doing OK. They were of course accepted but not through the American "pop" market.

Hal: We were really the major…well The Beetles too, but of course they did their own songs…but we were probably the major influence on bringing the rhythm and blues and the black and white together and turning it to the "pop".

Audience question: Was that at all conscious politically?

Hal: No it was just natural. We love those singers.

Audience question: Was there ever any racism involved?

Hal: I don't ever remember… I'm sure there must have been, but certainly not with Burt, and not with me. I'm sure somewhere in the business…but never in my experience.

Audience question: It was only in the early sixties that those freedom riots were starting. All around that time, black artists were being told that they sit at the back and whites had to sit at the front.

Hal: That wasn't as bad as… there'd be big stars like Louie Armstrong and Sammy Davis Jr. and they'd go into a town down south and they couldn't stay at a hotel. Say they were with whites in the band, the whites could stay at the hotel but they couldn't, someone would have to put them up.

Audience question: Have you ever been asked to put your lyrics or music to a political organisation? Has there been any struggles (with the) licensing of that?

Hal: Years ago I wrote a song for a guy named Jim Cromolly, he didn't run for President of The United States, but he ran for supervisor somewhere in New York. People were pushing him to run, for the nomination for the Presidency. I was enthusiastic about it and Burt didn't want to do it, he said, "I'm a democrat." So we didn't do it. But it wouldn't have happened anyway.

Audience Question: I'm really intrigued by the level of sophistication, I can't really think of anyone; I suppose Cole Porter from the golden era of the thirties, they were writing very sophisticated, harmonically and lyrically. Hardly anyone else apart form you and Burt and a couple other people, have been able to get that level of sophistication into the pop charts, and obviously you weren't afraid…was this a courageous act or weren't you aware of that? Was this your mission as writers, to try and see something very involved, complicated and sophisticated, to get into peoples minds?

Hal: No. It's just the way we did it.

Audience question: Can I just go on from what you were saying, because it's what I wanted to ask you. I've always been absolutely fascinated and in awe of not what I would call sophisticated lyrics, but clever lyrics. People like Johnny Mercer, who would be like one of my oldest idols…

Hal: You couldn't be better than Johnny Mercer

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Audience question continued: People, who can, like yourself, come up with something … and you go, "what a line…where did someone come up with that?" It might just be what you're actually saying – may be fairly straight forward that people have said before; it's just the way it's been said. What I was going to say, because I think that's true, there's some people, like you here, who just can come up with it. What about today, you listen to the pop music today, and to me, all I hear, often is empty clichés that anyone could write. I've been a lyricist, I'd love to be a better one; I'm in total awe of you, I listen to the pop music and think I wouldn't be very proud if I written those lyrics. The question is: what do you think Hal about today? Is it gone, is it dead, is it not necessary anymore?

Hal: Firstly I always have a problem, I hate to sound like an old person because I don't want to say what they're doing today….. - I'm sure there are terrific people today, but I have a feeling it's tougher today. Everything seems so fragmented today.

Audience comment: I think it's that people are happy to eat McDonalds today.

Audience comment: And that's what's they have on the pop music chart. That's what it sounds like.

Audience comment: They dish it out and will buy it if it's shiny enough.

Hal: There seems to be no national music. It used to be, through a major part of my life, and going back to my brother's life. There was a hit parade years ago. The number one song was the number one song. There are so many different number one songs. And so there's less room. In my opinion, for what I would call 'As Time Goes By'—a pretty good song. Write that today and you'd have a hell of a job getting that recorded.

Audience question: So what you're saying is what I think that lyrics aren't as important to people anymore?

Hal: Not the people— people only get what they hear…. but to whoever are making the records.

Audience question: Basically what was number one on Broadway was number one on all the bandstands around the world, and therefore everyone heard those songs. Before radio there was actually the world wave as a source.

Hal: But before radio there were great pop songs. There were always great songs; there don't seem to be as much today.

Audience question: Once a year a New Yorker writes an article about the death of the well-made song. But even hip-hop, now, things go around circles and there have been a lot of R&B soul songs that have been recorded. So there are still songs on the charts, but they tend to be songs form back then - re-made.

Hal: I love it when there are hip-hop records that come out with my songs. Do I really like them? I'm glad to get them, but do I really like them? No. I hate to sound like an old person.

Audience question: There was a version of *Say A Little Prayer* a few years ago; a hit version, and the way they had to square that up to keep their mentality! I think there's the digital way of recorded is tending to force-square everything so that it falls into the grid. And your songs are the absolute opposite. Follow the beauty of the melody, follow where the words fall, and damn the time signature. If it sounds right it doesn't mater.

Hal: If it sounds right, it sounds natural.

Art: We (as writers), often wonder, what songs are there out there today – well, are they going to be the standards (tomorrow)? It's going to be the Elton John's, the Billy Joel's, but is it still the same thread, as it was, when you were there?

Hal: Well there's a big difference today as apposed to our payday. Elton John is a wonderful writer, but he's a performer. Today the singer/songwriter has got a major part of the market. We didn't have singer/songwriters. Burt and I were new at

producing records; writers didn't even produce their own records. I think Lever and Stoler were there, and ahead of us. There were a few others, and that gave us a lot of control…the more control you have the better off you are. But today a major part of the market is done by the guys who sing and make their own records. Oh, there is a smaller area of opportunity. That's not only here—I'm assuming you have the same thing here (in Australia) as the UK and United States.

Art: Well, we could certainly spend many more hours with you, and we thank you Hal for coming this evening. There's just one more question I have, if that's OK. That is, my absolute favourite lyric in the world, and I wish I would have some time to actually chat to you about this, but my question is:

'Two shots rang out,'
Had they both died or just Liberty?
The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance… Is the other guy still alive?

Hal: 'He shot Liberty Valance,
He shot Liberty Valance,
He was the bravest of them all.'

Art: But is the other guy dead; two shots rang out?

Hal: Well, that was a lousy shot! (laughs)

Art: Thank you very much.

Hal: I had a great time; I appreciate it. It's good to be with people who do what I do.