

## BIOGRAPHIC

## Dancers make their own jazz music

By Jennifer Baldwin

STAFF WRITER

**L**UPITA Lopez Jackman and Bill Jackman are dancers. They do the mambo and the cha cha. They dance swing and salsa.

But mostly, they love jazz.

Bill is a statistician and a pianist. Lupita is a dental assistant and, most recently, a record producer. Together they have recorded six CDs of music by the Bill Jackman Trio (Bill on piano, plus a drummer and bassist) and a video of themselves dancing to six of the songs.

The duo met at the former Kimball's Carnival salsa club in Emeryville in 1994. Lupita had come from Mexico City to the Bay

Area to study English. She and Bill fell in love with salsa and swing dancing. They married later that year and now live in a house in Oakland, Bill's hometown.

The front living room of their home is bright as the sun enters the large windows. Bill, 58, wears a pink shirt and moves from a cream-colored armchair to his black Yamaha grand piano, intermittently talking about his music and playing it. Lupita does not reveal her age and sits on a blue Victorian-style chair, wearing a red sweater with red beads around the neckline and flowing black pants.

They say they launched Lupita Records two months ago because no companies seemed to want to produce albums of danceable jazz

music. Often, jazz tempos are too fast for couples who want to dance the cha cha and mambo, Bill Jackman says.

So the Jackmans took it upon themselves to share Bill's slow-tempo jazz with others, whether or not they like to dance. The CDs and video are available only on their Web site, at [www.lupitarecords.com](http://www.lupitarecords.com).

"Now we're trying to show people jazz is not only for listening. You can dance," Lupita says. "His music is wonderful. It's really relaxing, also."

Bill learned to improvise on the dance floor long before he learned

See JAZZ, Living 5



NICK LAMMERS — Staff

**LUPITA LOPEZ JACKMAN** launched a record company to sell her husband Bill's piano music.

## Musician never strayed too far from piano

► **JAZZ**, from Living 1

to do it on the piano. He says that's probably why slow, danceable tempos come naturally to him.

"My mother tried to get me to play piano when I was a child. But I thought piano was for sissies," Bill says.

He grew up in the 1950s, when rock 'n' roll music was for partner dancing — namely, swing. And even though dance became more individualized in the 1960s with moves such as the twist and the swim, Jackman never gave up his desire to lead women around on the dance floor.

"Some clubs tried to keep the partners dancing going," says Bill, who has continued frequenting the swing revival clubs over the years.

But Bill never strayed far from the piano. His mother was an accomplished player of classic popular music, and when Bill went to college his appetite was wetted further by jazz.

He took a few piano classes

while at Merritt College. But just as he was getting the hang of playing jazz, his left hand was crushed while cleaning a conveyer machine at the cookie plant where he worked.

He lost the top one-third of his ring finger, but a doctor was able to save the rest of his hand.

"When I tried to play the piano, my finger was extremely sensitive and it would not go down to the key. I thought, 'That's it. I can't play any more.' But I kept trying. I could still use it. It was a little bit of a nuisance, but it still works," he says.

Bill now uses all 10 fingers, which he moves up and down the keys smoothly. He plays chords at the left end of the keyboard while improvising melodies at the right. Then he brings his hands together for rich, multi-layer chords at the center.

When Bill became good enough at piano playing to improvise, he realized his playing had a special quality.

"I was a dancer. So when I

sat down to play, a dance tempo was natural," he says.

He still improvises at the eighth- and sixteenth-notes like all jazz musicians, but at his slower tempo, couples can keep a steady swing or mambo step without speeding up. And listeners who don't dance can easily tap their toes.

His bassist, Terry Hilliard, and drummer, Ron Marabuto, keep in time with Bill's slow tempo for a variety of songs that range from classic American pop to Latin jazz and ballads. Their repertoire includes Stevie Wonder's "My Cherie Amour," which makes for a great cha cha.

As Bill plays at his grand piano on a recent afternoon, Lupita closes her eyes, nods her head and taps her foot.

"This is jazz, but not like jazz," she says. "I respect a lot of music, but sometimes (contemporary) jazz is too much to listen to. This is different."