

SATURDAY
December 21, 2002

CITYSCAPE



**Susan
LYDON**

slydon@angnewspapers.com

Jazz for swing dancers

BILL and Lupita Jackman of Oakland e-mailed me not long ago suggesting I might like to do a story on their home-grown company, Lupita Records. Lupita specializes in kind of a unique combination: jazz music for swing dancers.

Lupita Records has produced six CDs of dance music and an instructional video for dancing to their music. The Bill Jackman Trio, which plays jazz for swing dancers, is available for bookings. You can find out more about them on their Web site, www.LupitaRecords.com.

Jackman, 58, an economist and statistician by trade, is a jazz pianist. He and Lupita met salsa dancing, then she surprised him by turning out to be fluent in the "easy, floating" movements of swing dancing.

Lupita, 52, who works as a dental assistant, was raised in Mexico City with six sisters and a father who played swing music and was known to be a good dancer. Jackman says typically when someone learns the rhythms of Latin dancing at a young age, swing dancing can prove almost impossible to master. However, Lupita's natural gracefulness proved him wrong.

Bill Jackman grew up in Oakland in the late 1950s, where he learned how to swing dance with a partner. In those early days of rock and roll, the dance was called "the bop" and was, he says, "part of the culture."

"This music," Jackman wrote in a recent letter, "which was derived from the African-American Rhythm & Blues (R&B), had medium tempos, rather than the fast to very fast swing tempos that were popular when Benny Goodman was the 'King of Swing' in the 1930s."

Jackman grew up to become a dancer — he went out dancing three or four nights a week — and the dancing that had been popular in the 1950s came to be known as West Coast swing and became something of a fad around the country.

The trouble was, Jackman says, most of the bands providing music for West Coast swing either played blues or early rock and roll, stuff like "Splish Splash" or "Bony Moroni." Jackman wanted to dance to classic American pop tunes, played at a moderate tempo.

"We couldn't find anyone interested in jazz and dance," says Jackman, "so we had to produce the music ourselves."

He characterizes his music as "Jazz Piano for Dancers and Listeners." He bemoans the closing of some of his former dance haunts, such as the Terrace Room at the Claremont, where he took Lupita for their first date, or the end of the regular dances of the Bay Swingers, which took place at the Colombo Club for 25 years. He also mourns the disappearance of the piano — which he says was once ubiquitous in restaurants, supper clubs and many public places — from American life.

Bill and Lupita have been married for 6½ years. They live in the Fruitvale house where Bill grew up. It's the same house where his mother tried to teach him classical piano in his youth but succeeded only in instilling in the boy a love for boogie-woogie. I bet she'd be proud of him now.

Cityscape runs Thursdays,
Saturdays and Sundays.