

He died when they were 3 years old.
But to Nat King Cole's youngest daughters,

THEIR FATHER IS STILL UNFORGETTABLE

And the twin sisters, who live in Boca Raton, are trying to carry on his legacy through a charitable group to benefit music education in local schools.

By LESLIE GRAY STREETER
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

"This is the last time I played piano," Timolin Cole Augustus says, gesturing to a large black and white photo on the wall of her immaculate Boca Raton kitchen.

There is a tiny girl, maybe 2 years old, staring down at the keys, enveloped in the helpful, adoring gaze of a tall, handsome man who's leaning over to direct the toddler's fingers.

Most people will see a picture of Nat King Cole, legendary crooner, television personality and iconic personification of a more stylish era gone by.

Timolin and her twin sister, Casey, see their father.

Just a year after this picture was taken, Nat King Cole, whose classic recordings include *Mona Lisa*, *Unforgettable*,

Nature Boy, *Stardust* and *When I Fall In Love*, died of lung cancer in 1965, at the age of 45.

Timolin and Casey, the youngest of his five children, were just 3½ years old.

"Growing up, we got to know him through other people," says Casey. "We had to lean on our older sisters and the old music."

They know what the rest of the world knows — Nat King Cole, who began his career as a jazz pianist, came to fame as the leader of the King Cole Trio, and became one of the most popular vocalists of his or any time, as well as the first African-American to have his own television show.

But even though they have few memories of their father, they do bear his legacy in the smooth timber of their voices, their elegant, lean builds, and

their smiles.

The twins, who live down the street from each other in Boca, have built their image of their father in bits of memory, of photographs and mementos, and the legacy of his enduring music.

"There's just the incredible magnitude of him. He represents, to me, true American royalty," Timolin says. "His voice was just velvety, like he was talking to you. He just had this chocolate-smooth sweetness."

And now the 47-year-olds, the younger sisters of Grammy Award-winning singer Natalie, are using their father's legacy to ensure that South Florida children will be exposed to the medium their father loved so much.

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CHRIS PIZZELLO/The Associated Press

'(She's) very funny, with a great sense of humor. She doesn't have that star thing. She can go out to dinner, and she's the last one to leave the restaurant. She doesn't care about (celebrity). She's just very down to earth.'

— CASEY, ON HER SISTER NATALIE

During Thanksgiving weekend, the two will host the Black & White Gala for Nat King Cole Generation Hope Inc., a nonprofit foundation to benefit music education in schools in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

"We feel, having grown up in a musical environment, with it as a part of our lives, that it should be a part of the curriculum. It's so important for (kids') self-esteem," Timolin says. "Our goal is to provide instruments and mentors for kids."

The sisters have had varied careers — they had their own public relations company, Cole Public Relations. Timolin was Harry Belafonte's publicist and was a production assistant at NBC News. Casey has a jewelry line.

But for the moment, their full-time job is the foundation. They visited some schools in Palm Beach and Broward counties to see what their needs were, and they were concerned.

"They have 50-80 kids and one (teacher). There's no money for supplies and the sheet music is old," Casey says.

Medicine for the soul

"They had tape around their clarinets," Timolin adds. "They can't afford new ones. And that should not be. We're trying to bridge the gaps, and preserve our dad's legacy. He had a universal appeal, and we feel it's important to bring (his legacy) across generations. We're not looking to nurture virtuosos. We're looking at the bigger picture, to tell people that music is medicine for the mind and soul. We want to cross all barriers..."

"Just like our dad did," Casey adds.

The twins sit in the living room of the immaculate home Timolin shares with husband Gary Augustus, a music producer who once played bass for 1980s hitmakers Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam. Also in the household are

their sons Justin, 10, and Julian, 12, and Treble Clef, "the biggest Lab in the world."

Like you might imagine, they look a lot alike, but they also share the tendency of close siblings to finish each other's sentences. Casey, her husband, former NFL player Julian Hooker, and son Wyatt Cole Ray, live close enough "to call and say 'I ran out of dog food! I'm coming over!'" Timolin says.

Her home is dappled in sunlight and dotted with photos and mementos — her father with President Kennedy and Sammy Davis Jr.; the twins with Oprah Winfrey; a photo of Timolin, Casey and Natalie with a beaming Ray Charles at their father's 2000 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction and the actual trophy commemorating that honor; a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award presented to their father, and a gorgeous shot of a young Natalie ankle-deep in the Pacific Ocean, holding her tiny sisters' hands on either side of her, staring into the surf.

Cherished memories

Nat King Cole and his second wife, Maria, who now lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, below Jacksonville, had five children — Natalie, Carol, son Nat Kelly Cole, who died in 1995, and the twins.

There is an adorable photo of Nat and Maria playing with the identically dressed girls in the courtyard of their home, a moment the two cherish, although they honestly don't always know what parts of the father who lives in their minds come from photos and the memories of others, and which are their own.

"We were so young," Casey says. "It's hard to distinguish what I really remember."

After their father's death, the family remained in Los Angeles for a while, where the twins attended school with the children of Vincent Price, John Wayne and Jack LaLanne — "We were always surrounded by (celebrities)," Timolin says. "It was just nor-



Family photo

Casey (left) and Timolin, both 2, with their father, Nat King Cole, in their Los Angeles home in the early 1960s.

mal, a great time to grow up."

There was no shortage of people who had been touched by their father and his music, and the twins made the acquaintance of many people who were household names to most, but just friends of the family.

"Harry Belafonte used to come to the house," Timolin says, "and Ella (Fitzgerald), Sidney Poitier, Andy Williams, Johnny Mathis, who was a dear friend, as was Diahann Carroll."

'We just sing in the shower'

When they were 11 years old, they moved with their mother to Lenox, Mass., home of the Tanglewood Music Center and its annual music festival. Again, their lives were filled with music, as singers like James

Taylor performed nearby.

"The Berkshires were an incredible place to grow up," Timolin says. "It's a very intellectual environment."

They may have been surrounded by music, but besides having been in a band in high school, "we just sing in the shower," Timolin says.

Always close, the girls separated for colleges just a few hours away from each other: Casey went to Brown, along with John Kennedy Jr., while Timolin attended Amherst College with Prince Albert of Monaco and Francisco Flores Perez, who would go on to be president of El Salvador.

The sisters attended Perez's inauguration and found that even there, the legend of Nat King Cole preceded them — "He was a god in Latin America," Timolin says.



Then: Timolin learns from her father, Nat King Cole, in the early 1960s.

Family photo



Now: Casey (left) and Timolin have devoted time and energy to improving music education locally.

MEGHAN McCARTHY/Staff Photographer

Nat King Cole Generation Hope gala

Tickets for the Nat King Cole Generation Hope gala on Nov. 29 are \$500 each and include a black-tie gala with a black and white theme, a full dinner and bar, entertainment by singers Siedah Garrett (co-writer of Michael Jackson's hit *Man In The Mirror*) and Boca Raton's Dennis Lambert, platinum-selling songwriter and star of the recent award-winning documentary *Of All The Things*, as well as an appearance by actress Sheryl Lee Ralph of the original Broadway cast of *Dreamgirls*. The gala takes place 7-11 p.m. at Miami's The Forge, 432 41st St., Miami Beach. For more information, go to NatKingCole Foundation.org or call Elizabeth Grace at (561) 989-9855.

After college, Casey settled in Los Angeles, while Timolin moved to New York, where she lived until moving to Miami with Augustus in 1991 as the city became a mecca for R&B music production.

They found, Timolin says, "that Miami was like New York with palm trees," and found a tropical alternative to the fast scene there while visiting friends in Boca Raton. They soon moved north, settling into a home west of Interstate 95 with a guest house her husband converted into a studio.

Casey followed seven years later, after the encouragement of her sister, and admits "it took a little while to get used to."

"She considers herself to be an L.A. girl," Timolin says. "But we've seen a renewed interest here, as far as the makeup of the people here. It's more diverse, with more youth. It's being taken more seriously as a place for the arts and culture."

Natalie's album magical

Around the time that Timolin moved to South Florida, their sister Natalie released an album called *Unforgettable* on which she, through studio magic, duetted with her late father. The Grammy-winning project not only brought Nat King Cole's music back to the radio, but brought him to life, in a way, for his youngest daughters.

"It was crazy," Casey says. The (album) was two generations coming together. It was chilling, and it made us very proud. It resonated with a lot

of history."

Natalie, due to perform at the Kravis Center in the spring, recently returned to the road after near-fatal kidney failure, the result of a hepatitis C diagnosis. Her sisters report that her liver is doing better — she has taken her dialysis machine with her on tour. Casey describes her as "a lot like Dad, kind shy, not as effusive as we are. But she hangs out."

Timolin adds that she's "very funny, with a great sense of humor. She doesn't have that star thing. She can go out to dinner, and she's the last one to leave the restaurant. She doesn't care about (celebrity). She's just very down to earth."

Natalie, her sisters say, has shared her memories of their father with them. And together, the three shared one of their favorite memories, the posthumous 2000 induction of their father into the Rock Hall as an "early influence."

"It shows that his music was timeless," Timolin says. "He was a jazz pianist who became a pop singer. That award shows his incredible diversity, and how he conquered racial and musical barriers."

While the two look forward to introducing local kids to their father's legacy and to helping them navigate similar barriers, they both admit that there's someone they wish they could share their project with.

"It's bittersweet," Timolin says. "Of course, I wish I could have known him."

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