



New World Records

701 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10036; (212) 302-0460; (212) 944-1922 fax
email: info@newworldrecords.org www.newworldrecords.org

Straighten Up and Fly Right:

Rhythm & Blues from the close of the Swing Era to the dawn of Rock 'n' Roll

New World NW 261

In the years before and during World War II, everyone danced—not just the swing freaks and the jitterbugs but old people, young people, rich and poor. Ever since Irene and Vernon Castle had spread the gospel of foot-warming rhythms in the early years of the century, America had been a country of dancers. Almost everyone's idea of a night out included some kind of dancing, whether it was twirling through a conservative waltz, bouncing into a black bottom or a Charleston, or stepping through the elaborate schematics of the tango. Visions of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers floated through the collective unconscious of the nation.

With the end of the war, a massive ennui seemed to blot out the vision and still the dancing feet of America's white communities. Dancing seemed frivolous in comparison to the need to build families, find homes, climb the economic ladder, and reassemble lives shattered by the tragedies of the long and fatiguing war. Frivolous, that is, for white Americans. For them, dancing, physical movement, and the continuing intersection of music and life were a relatively recent phenomenon.

For American blacks it was a different story. Unlike whites, they never stopped dancing—rhythmic energy and the use of song as a storytelling, journalistic medium were too deeply ingrained in their cultural background to fade away during hard times. Indeed, hard times simply represented another feeling to be expressed, another unfriendly spirit to be exorcised by the mysterious powers of rhythm and melody.

And for blacks, even more than for the white population, they were *very* hard times. If, as many historians suggest, the revolution of black consciousness really began with the litigation years that were set off by the Supreme Court's 1954 decision that “separate but equal” public schools

were inherently unconstitutional, the stage for that revolution surely was set by the inexorable movement of events started when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

At that time blacks had endured more than sixty years of virtual noncitizenship. Ever since Rutherford B. Hayes claimed the presidency in 1877 (by one electoral vote) when he promised to withdraw federal troops from the South and uphold the principle of states' rights, blacks survived only if they understood the uses of invisibility. Swift and violent punishment was meted out to those few who were foolhardy enough to claim the rights that legitimately should have been theirs through the force of constitutional law.

No wonder black performers became experts in—as Charles Keil describes it—“changing the joke and slipping the yoke,” in using music as something more than lighthearted entertainment, in hiding within it the voice of survival and the subtle, if indirect, language of a powerfully felt rage. (“Hard times don't worry me,” sang Lonnie Johnson in the Depression, “I was broke when I first started out.”)

The World War II years were dominated by an almost cyclic interchange between riots and civil disturbances and small but significant civil-rights breakthroughs. Between the end of World War II and the start of the Korean “conflict,” the NAACP and CORE petitioned and protested with considerable effectiveness. By the time the Korean hostilities began in 1950, the Supreme Court had issued three decisions that undercut the legal foundation of segregation. The next few years saw a series of sweeping attacks on segregation and discrimination, especially in public schools, that climaxed in the Supreme Court decision of 1954.

The effect of these changes on black art—in particular on the day-to-day musical expression that is perhaps the black community's most vital form of

editorial commentary—was astounding. Lyrics became brighter, the blues form began to open up, and a sense of positive—even urgent—energy coursed through the rhythms. A new, expansive form of black music that soon came to be called—accurately, I think—“rhythm and blues” was emerging.

Black music always had provided the creative yeast for American popular music, but in the past it was almost without exception heard by white audiences in secondhand form. Minstrel shows generally consisted of white performers doing their own versions of black comedy, dance, and music. The few minstrel companies that played before white audiences were acceptable only if the performers were “blacked up”—wore blackface (surely one of the most quixotically cruel ironies in this country's long history of racial exploitation). The tragic stories of composers such as Scott Joplin and James Bland are too well known to repeat, but even the major names associated with the abortive “Negro Renaissance” of the twenties generally found their work had to be modified, reduced, sometimes made into virtual pabulum by white performers before it was acceptable to the wider national audience.

But rumblings of change were in the air even before rhythm and blues—the black music that found its own, firsthand audience—arrived. Classic blues singers of the twenties reached a mixed audience, even though most of their recordings were released only on “race” labels that were difficult to obtain in white communities. And the big bands of the swing era were unthinkable without the prior existence of the superb music of Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and others. But a genuine and continuing crossover (to use a more contemporary term)—an integration of black music into the broad mainstream of American popular music—didn't really begin until pop music itself, in those sluggish postwar years, lost its rhythmic vitality. And, simultaneously, until black music began to reach beyond its own community of concern and began to deal with universals, with themes that were not bound by parochial vision.

The most obvious evidence of what was happening to black music in the forties, of the way it was interacting and reflecting the societal changes around it, could be seen in the way it was expanding into so many diverse style areas. Gospel music was beginning to emerge as an entity—one that showed a distinct potential for commercialization. Black jazz's most explorative young players were deeply involved in the creation of what may well be the improvised music's most difficult form, bebop. More and more black performers were heard on

the nation's concert stages (although not always—as in Marian Anderson's case—under the most felicitous circumstances). Rural and urban blues continued (as they always have) to feed into the more popular and more visible forms, and rent parties, juke joints, dance halls, and tiny nightclubs continued to provide an enormously diverse range of venues where the music could grow and develop.

There were other factors. The musicians'-union recording ban made it difficult for the big swing bands to survive through the forties, thereby opening the doors to the small “jump” bands (consisting of rhythm sections with one or two horns, playing bright, contemporary, danceable blues), like those of Tiny Grimes and Louis Jordan, which were a propulsive factor in the early days of rhythm and blues. The development of effective electric amplification for the guitar created virtually a new instrument, whose extraordinary versatility was first explored by early rhythm-and-blues players like T-Bone Walker and, in the fifties, by a generation of Chicago-based musicians. The popularity of gospel recordings and of gospel-style harmonies spawned thousands of impromptu sidewalk vocal groups; their influence—noticeable in the early work of the Ravens and the Robins, among others—had an enormous effect on the vocal-based style of fifties rock 'n' roll. Finally, there was the growing success of small, regional record companies like Savoy, Jubilee, Deluxe, and Atlantic in New York, Alladin and Specialty in Los Angeles, Checker and Chess in Chicago, Federal and King in Cincinnati, Peacock and Duke in Houston, Sun in Memphis; their willingness to release material that the major companies wouldn't handle helped broaden the base of rhythm and blues.

Each of these elements (even though some of the style areas mentioned continued as distinct entities) contributed to the music's growth. By 1948, the original appellation “race music” was clearly out of date. Rhythm and blues was a music whose specifics were hard to describe, and even though it was different from any of the stylistic forms that contributed to its evolution, it was of mixed parenthood.

Its musical elements had their basis in the era of dancing feet. Boogie bass lines were prominent, especially in the forties. Metric accents hit hard on the second and fourth beats of the bar (the backbeats), and a double-time feeling began to emerge (partly traceable to the 8/8 rhythms of boogie-woogie, partly related to the 6/8 patterns common in much country blues and gospel singing). The growing use of the electric guitar (and, somewhat later, the electric bass) led to the creation of patterned, often contrapuntal lines—a development that was

less significant in the early days of rhythm and blues but was a vital element in the rhythm-and-blues-influenced electric rock music of the sixties and seventies. (It's not all that difficult to hear a pre-echo of Jimi Hendrix in the clanging feedback chording of T-Bone Walker.)

Most important, there was the persistence of the blues form. It was reduced and expanded into eight-, sixteen-, and twenty-four-bar versions; it was altered and modified, used alone or in combination with other patterns. But it was always, at the roots, the blues—the most primal formal structure in American music.

If the blues form was constant, the subject matter of the developing rhythm-and-blues style was not. The blues had been from the very beginning open enough to include an expression of everything from despair over the death of a loved one to exultation over Joe Louis' quick dispatching of Max Schmeling. In the forties, of course, the war was a significant topic: “Just take your mind off your wife and put it on Uncle Sam,” sang Roosevelt Sykes in 1941.

As it reached out, as larger record companies came to realize its commercial potential, rhythm and blues began to hone its lyrics into areas that were not limited to the concerns of the black audience. Its primary difference from pure blues, in fact, is that it is a music that entertains and moves rhythmically (ah, those dancing feet!) first and is a teller of stories second; pure blues always told stories first and let the musical beats fall where they may. Rhythm and blues tended to deal with a narrower range of topics. Among its more specific concerns were sex and virility, partying and nightlife, fast cars, drinking (boastful and otherwise), money problems, crime and punishment, dangerous situations and remorse, appeals for religious help.

As rhythm and blues became increasingly popular—Louis Jordan produced a series of million-sellers in the late forties—the common reaction of the record-business establishment was to follow through by using safe methods. If a black performer came up with a particularly provocative new song or style, it was immediately adapted for a major-name white performer. This method peaked in the mid-fifties, when it was clear to virtually everyone in the music business that rhythm and blues was growing with an energy unlike that of any black music that had preceded it.

“Covers” (records by white performers that meticulously copied the orchestration and style of an already recorded version by a black artist) hit their peak from 1953-56. The list is virtually endless, but

consider the 1955 image of Perry Como—“in action on a great rock and roll record,” as his company trumpeted—singing “Ko Ko Mo,” a Jesse Belvin song already recorded by Gene and Eunice on the Combo label. Another white group, the Crew Cuts, also recorded “Ko Ko Mo,” as well as the now classic “Earth Angel” (which already had been associated with a black group, the Penguins). Among the other top tunes of the year were the McGuire Sisters' version of the Moonglows' “Sincerely,” Pat Boone's attempt to clone Fats Domino's “Ain't That a Shame,” Georgia Gibbs's bowdlerized version of Etta James's “Roll with Me, Henry” (Gibbs sang, “Dance with me, Henry”), and the Fontane Sisters' takeoff on Boyd Bennett's “Seventeen.”

But the winds were blowing a different breeze. Pat Boone, whose early career was virtually built on covers of recordings by performers like Fats Domino, Little Richard, and the Flamingos, found by 1956 that his version of “Long Tall Sally” couldn't match the commercial success of Little Richard's original. Clearly, two things were happening: young white audiences were finding that the rhythmic music they craved so much, after a decade or more of sweetly crooning ballad singers, was most appealing when it was heard in its original form—that is, as performed by black artists. And, equally important, black performers (and their managers, A&R men, etc.) were beginning to realize that their sales potential was far larger than in the days of race records. By the time Chuck Berry hit the national scene in 1955, the audience was ready for him; and Berry—with songs pitched specifically at the hardships and hazards of teen life—was ready for them.

When the breakthrough came, the music represented a summation of what had preceded it. Chuck Berry and Little Richard are unmistakable offspring of T-Bone Walker and Fats Waller. But more than that, the black music that broke through to national consciousness in the mid-fifties, that gave the Beatles and the Rolling Stones their first inspiration, that became the disco sounds of the seventies, was all nurtured in the forties and early fifties, when society, culture, creativity, and business combined to create a unique watershed in the history of American popular music.

DON HECKMAN was popular-music critic for The New York Times and recordings editor for that paper's Sunday Arts and Leisure section. He was also an Associate Professor in the music department of CCNY, and was later Vice-President of Artists and Repertory for RCA Records.

Side One, Band 1 *Flying Home*

(Sid Robin, Benny Goodman, and Lionel Hampton)

Lionel Hampton and His Orchestra: Karl George, Ernest Royal, and Joe Newman, trumpets; Fred Beckett, Sonny Craven, and Harry Sloan, trombones; Jack McVea, baritone saxophone; Milton Buckner piano; Irving Ashby, guitar; Wendell Marshall, bass; George Jenkins, drums; Lionel Hampton, vibraphone. Recorded May 26, 1942, in New York. Originally issued on Decca 18394 (mx #70773-A).

Lionel Hampton is one of those rare gifted jazzmen who also are successful commercial musicians. He started out as a drummer but soon became proficient on the vibraphone and set most of the early standards for that unusual instrument. After bouncing around with various groups in the thirties—most notably the big bands and smaller units led by Benny Goodman—Hamp began to organize his own big bands in the early forties and continued to maintain some sort of regular jazz-pop ensemble well through the seventies.

“Flying Home” is a showcase for jazz improvisers; Hampton has used it over the years to display the extraordinarily gifted performers who have passed through his bands, from Illinois Jacquet, Dexter Gordon, and Arnett Cobb to Milt Buckner, Jimmy Cleveland, and Joe Newman. More than that, it is the kind of piece that swing musicians used to call “killer-dillers.” Very simply, it evokes audience response. So much so that in the forties there were recurring fears that the balcony in New York's Apollo Theatre might come tumbling down from the assault of stamping feet whenever Hampton played “Flying Home.”

It was this kind of energy, this kind of sheer rhythmic exuberance, that was picked up by the jump bands when big bands became economically infeasible in the mid-forties.

Band 2 *Roll 'Em, Pete*

(Pete Johnson and Joe Turner)

Joe Turner, vocal; Pete Johnson, piano. Recorded December 30, 1938, in New York. Originally issued on Vocalion 4607 (mx #23892-1).

Joe Turner's real prominence came long after “Roll 'Em, Pete” was made. In 1951, when he was forty, he recorded “Chains of Love,” a huge hit. He continued through most of the fifties to produce innumerable top-ten classics, most notably 1954's “Shake, Rattle and Roll,” a song believed by many to be one of the sources of rock 'n' roll (although most listeners know it from Bill Haley's cover version).

Pete Johnson, seven years older than Turner, was one of the authoritative figures of boogie-woogie and frequently worked with such other keyboard greats as Albert Ammons and Meade “Lux” Lewis.

“Roll 'Em, Pete” was recorded when Turner was a young member of a brilliant generation of blues shouters whose style is associated with Kansas City. The encounters between his long-limbed, rhythmically floating vocals and the pulsating double-time rhythms of Pete Johnson's boogie-woogie piano are unorthodox but unquestionably superb.

The boogie-woogie subdivision of the beat coupled with a riff-styled, blues-inflected vocal is an extremely important vision of things to come. Precisely those musical principles are at the heart of much of the rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues of the sixties and seventies.

The title has more to do with Johnson than with the lyrics, which are a fairly familiar compendium of I've-got-a-woman-who-mistreats-me blues phrases. Presumably, Turner simply assembled a series of not particularly original blues verses for an impromptu but energetic vocal.

I've got a gal, lives up on the hill, (2 times)

Well, that woman tried to quit me, Lord,
but I love her still.

She's got eyes like diamonds, she shines
like gold, (2 times)

Every time she love me, she sends my
mellow soul.

You so beautiful, but you gotta die some
day, (2 times)

All I want is a little lovin', babe, just
before you pass away.

Roll it, boy, let 'em jump for joy,
Yeah man, happy as a baby boy,
Well, just another brand-new choo-choo
toy—yeah!

Well, babe, goin' away and leave you by
yourself, (2 times)
You mistreat me enough, baby, now you
can mistreat somebody else.

Yes, yes, yes, yes, (2 times)
Yes, yes, yes, I know.

Well, all right then; well, all right then. (3 times)

Bye-bye, bye-bye,
Bye-bye, bye-bye, baby, bye-bye.

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Band 3 *The Sun Didn't Shine*

(Roosevelt Fennoy)

The Golden Gate Quartet: Henry Owens and William Landford, tenors; Willie Johnson and Arlandus Wilson, basses. Recorded June, 1941. Originally issued on OK 6345 (mx # ?).

Nineteen-forty was the start of a great wave of gospel popularity, the beginning of a period when performers like the Golden Gate Quartet, the Charioteers, the Deep River Boys, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and Mahalia Jackson, and the songs of a gifted composer named Thomas A. Dorsey (who is generally considered the major figure in gospel music) became an important force in black popular music.

The Golden Gates' prime assets were crisp, bright rhythms, well-blended (if a bit slick) harmonies, and fine lead singing by Henry Owens. If there is a division among gospel styles from the period, it is the fundamental one that quartets are almost always all male and solo performers are almost always female. The kind of singing represented by the Golden Gates reached

out to and influenced an entire generation of male quartets who followed, although few of them felt inclined to limit themselves to the sanctified subject matter and poor income of the gospel groups.

“The Sun Didn’t Shine” is a startling example of the precision of the Gates’ performances. The vocal line passes from one voice to another, intersects, weaves away into solo passages. And all the while the beat—cooking without instrumental assistance—keeps the foot tapping and the body moving. No wonder the Golden Gates found it so easy to reach a secular audience.

Well, the sun didn't shine on Calvary,
Calvary's a mountain where the sun didn't shine,
On Calvary.
Calvary's a mountain where the sun didn't shine,
Down on Calvary,
Calvary's a mountain where my Lord
was dying on the cross.

(Repeat)

Well now, Pilate's wife had a dream,
Said it's an honest man I have seen.
Well, you give me some water, let me
wash my hands,
Well, I won't be guilty of the innocent
man.

(Repeat first stanza)

Well now, see how they done my Lord.
Children, they took Him on the mountain so high,
They put a crown of thorns upon His
head,
And the blood gushed from His side.

Well, they hammered His hands and
they raveled His feet,
Well, the hammer was heard in
Jerusalem's streets.
Well, well, good Lord, it was Jesus
Hanging on the cross.

Hm, hm, my Lord,
Hm, hm, hallelujah.

(Repeat first stanza)

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Band 4

Straighten Up and Fly Right

(Nat “King” Cole *and* Irving Mills)

Nat “King” Cole, vocal and piano;
Oscar Moore, guitar; Johnny Miller, bass.
Recorded November 30, 1943, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Capitol 154 (mx #123).

Nat “King” Cole was the first black singer to effectively and continuously reach the broad popular market. But he did so at a cost. His work, even in its earliest forms, is often so smooth, so accessible to the white audience, that it may be difficult for some listeners to perceive him at all in the context of rhythm and blues.

But at the time “Straighten Up and Fly Right” was recorded, the King Cole Trio was playing music that combined the bright, bounding rhythms of Harlem jump bands with Cole’s lyrical vocals and strong jazz-piano playing. No matter that by this time Cole rarely played before Harlem audiences; his music was still filled with the vitality of jazz and the blues. (In the mid-forties he began to record regularly with orchestral backing, effectively cutting himself off from his musical roots.)

At first, “Straighten Up and Fly Right” sounds like a pleasant, innocuous novelty of the sort that was especially popular in the forties. But a closer hearing of the lyrics has to make one wonder about their double meanings and hidden messages. “Monkey” was a common racist word for a black man, and “buzzard” could easily be the representation of an avaricious white man. Viewed with this in mind, the song might take on a more provocative meaning—even if largely obscured by Cole’s charming vocal. (That the lyrics were nominally by a white man, Irving Mills, doesn’t alter my point; Mills’s name was associated with many songs—notably by Duke Ellington—for which his principal contribution seems to have been as publisher.)

Cole’s future lay beyond such material in any case, and he certainly is not known for an astute sense of social awareness. It may well be that his greatest accomplishment was cultural rather than musical—that he opened doors for black performers.

A buzzard took a monkey for a ride in
the air.
The monkey thought that everything
was on the square.
The buzzard tried to throw the monkey
off his back,
But the monkey grabbed his neck and
said, now listen, Jack.

Chorus

Straighten up and fly right, *(3 times)*
Cool down, poppa, don't you blow your
top.

Ain't no use in divin'
What's the use in jivin'
Straighten up and fly right,
Cool down, poppa, don't you blow your
top.

The buzzard told the monkey, you are
choking me,
Release your hold and I will set you
free.
The monkey looked the buzzard right
dead in the eye and said,
Your story's so touching, but it sounds
just like lies.

(Chorus [2 times])

Fly right.

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Band 5

I Wonder

(Private Cecil Gant *and* Raymond
Leveen)

Cecil Gant, vocal and piano. *Recorded
c. 1944-45 in Los Angeles. Originally
issued on Decca 30320 (mx # ?).*

Singer-pianist Cecil Gant didn’t make his first record until he was nearly thirty, at the end of World War II. A veteran, he was billed by the Oakland-based Gilt-Edge Recording Company as “The G.I. Sing-Sation.”

Like Nat Cole, Gant played in the small-nightclub style so popular after the war—a style that came to be called “cocktail music”—but, unlike Cole, he continued to maintain a fairly strong connection with the feeling and intent of the blues for the balance of his short career.

“I Wonder,” however, is not a blues-derived song. Its familiar pop harmonies (with augmented dominant chords) and thirty-two-bar AABA song form place it clearly in the

mainstream of forties pop tunes. Gant's singing style is what makes the song work; his nasal, mournful, but eminently *feeling* voice takes the song past its superficial banalities and touches the inner sensibilities of the G.I.s who *were* "miles away" from loved ones. That association, I suspect, is what made the record so successful (it certainly wasn't Gant's heavy-handed piano playing!). When the record was released in 1945 it had enormous sales, in the white market as well, and may have been responsible for the subsequent organization of numerous other West Coast record companies.

I wonder, my little darling,
Where can you be again tonight,
While the moon is shining bright,
I wonder.

My heart is aching—
Why?—for you. Can our love be mistaken?
Darling, don't say that this must mean
our ending.
I wonder.

Baby, I've been true, I've been through
lovers' lane,
I've been making life just the same,
I've been traveling for miles around
Trying to find the one I love. Come
home.

I wonder, well, well, well, little baby,
Will you think of me every day,
Though I may be a million miles away.
I wonder.
(Repeat last stanza)

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Band 6 *Choo Choo Ch'Boogie*

(Vaughn Horton, Denver Darling,
and Milton Gabler)

Louis Jordan, vocal and alto saxophone; Aaron Izenhall, trumpet; Josh Jackson, tenor saxophone; Bill Davis, piano; Carl Hogan, guitar; Po Simpkins, bass; Eddie Byrd, drums. *Recorded January 23, 1946, in New York. Originally issued on Decca DL 8551 (mx #73305).*

Louis Jordan was probably the most successful black recording artist of the forties (and he was

active well into the fifties and sixties, too). His Timpany Five was the classic jump band and helped create a style that was both the most popular black music of the forties as well as a clear influence on the rock-'n'-roll music of Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, and, later, B. B. King.

The instrumentation—saxophone up front supported by a strong rhythm section—became the standard for the decade and lasted until the electric guitar began to replace the saxophone lead in the early sixties. (It was really only a physical replacement, at first, because early guitarists tended to play in a style that closely followed the frenetic riffing of saxophonists like Earl Bostic, Eddie Vinson, Illinois Jacquet, and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis.)

Also contributing to Jordan's success were a somewhat detached tone in his singing—a sly manner of standing aside and coolly commenting on the subject of his lyrics; a clear diction that made his songs more accessible to white audiences unfamiliar with black dialects; and, for black audiences, an unspoken but overt implication that they were all victims of an unjust society.

"Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" was Jordan's first big hit—a million-seller (extremely rare for black acts in those years). He followed with "Saturday Night Fish Fry," "Buzz Me," "Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens," "Let the Good Times Roll," "Blue Light Boogie," and others. He also recorded with Bing Crosby (1944), Ella Fitzgerald (1945), and Louis Armstrong (1950).

Headin' for the station with a pack on
my back,
I'm tired of transportation in the back of
a hack.
I love to hear the rhythm of the clickety-
clack
And hear the lonesome whistle, see the
smoke from the stack,
And pal around with democratic fellows
named Mack,
So take me right back to the track, Jack.

Chorus
Choo choo, choo choo, ch'boogie,
Woo woo, woo woo, cho' boogie,
Choo choo, choo choo, cho' boogie,
Take me right back to the track, Jack.

You reach your destination, but, alas and
alack,
You need some compensation to get
back in the black.
You take the morning paper from the
top of the stack
And read the situation from the front to
the back.
The only job that's open needs a man
with a knack,
So put it right back in the rack, Jack.
(*Chorus*)

Gonna settle down by the railroad track,
Live the life of Riley in a beaten-down
shack,
So when I hear the whistle I can peep
through the crack
And watch the train a-rollin' when it's
ballin' the jack.
Why, I just love the rhythm of the click-
ety-clack,
So take me right back to the track, Jack.
(*Chorus*)

Take me right back to the track, Jack.

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Band 7 *Call It Stormy Monday*

(Aaron Walker)

T-Bone Walker, vocal and guitar; Teddy Buckner, trumpet; Bump Meyers, tenor saxophone; Lloyd Glenn, piano; Arthur Edwards, bass; Oscar Lee Bradley, drums. *Recorded mid-1947, in Hollywood. Originally issued on Capitol T 1958 (mx #BW637-3).*

With T-Bone Walker, the electric guitar became an important element in early rhythm and blues. Other groups—notably those that included Lowell Fulson and Johnny Watson—also began to feature the instrument in the mid-forties, but Walker first recognized both its musical and dramatic potential. In performance, he frequently played the instrument while doing full athletic splits; he would swing it behind his back and strum over his head; and he understood the use of feedback effects. Walker recognized that amplification meant something more than a way to make an acoustic instrument louder, that it effectively created a new instrument. And, like the saxophonists of the period, he made his performances both visual

and aural.

“Stormy Monday” has become a classic blues, mostly because of the wistful musing of its first chorus. The second stanza—“eagle flies on Friday” (referring to payday)—is one of the most familiar of all blues choruses, and the third is an all-purpose, bring-my-baby-back-to-me blues chorus. But the combination of Walker’s somewhat hoarse, urgent vocal phrasing with the insistent sound of the electric guitar gives this fine—if too brief—song a contemporary quality that belies its age.

They call it stormy Monday, but
Tuesday’s just as bad; (2 times)
Wednesday’s worse, and Thursday’s also
sad.

Yes, the eagle flies on Friday, and
Saturday I go out to play;
Eagle flies on Friday, and Saturday I go
out to play;
Sunday I go to church, then I kneel
down and pray.

Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy on
me;
Lord have mercy, my heart’s in misery;
Crazy ’bout my baby, yes, send her back
to me.

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Band 8

Good Rockin’ Tonight

(Roy Brown)

Wynonie “Blues” Harris, vocal; Hot Lips Page, trumpet; Joe Britton, trombone; Vincent Blair-Bey, alto saxophone; Hal Singer and Tom Archia, tenor saxophones; Joe Knight, piano; Carl “Flat Top” Wilson, bass; Clarence Donaldson, drums. *Recorded December 23, 1947, in Cincinnati. Originally issued on King 4210 (mx #5386).*

Like Joe Turner, Wynonie Harris was a charter member of the Kansas City tradition of big-voiced, blues-shout singing. It was by far the most popular blues style of the thirties, held sway through much of the forties, and only began to give way to the lighter-toned approaches advanced by T-Bone Walker and Louis Jordan in the late forties and early fifties.

“Good Rockin’ Tonight” was a hit in 1948 and now stands second on

Billboard magazine’s list of best-selling rhythm-and-blues records for that year. It’s not hard to see why. The song is a classic cross of jump-band exuberance and Kansas City shouting. Harris’s big, brusque voice roars out three energetic choruses before it gives way to a typically raunchy tenor-saxophone solo. And the lyrics—“there’s good rockin’ tonight”—are a harbinger of music to come. In later years the song was recorded with great success by both Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly.

I heard the news, there’s good rockin’
tonight.
Gonna hold my baby tight as I can,
Tonight she’ll know I’m a fightin’ man.
I heard the news, there’s good rockin’
tonight.

Have you heard the news? Everybody’s
gonna rock tonight.
Gonna hold my baby tight as I can,
Tonight she’ll know I’m a fightin’ man.
Have you heard the news? There’s good
rockin’ tonight.

Go meet in the alley, behind the barn,
Don’t be afraid, I’ll do you no harm.
Baby, where’s my rockin’ shoes?
'Cause tonight I’m gonna rock away my
blues.
Have you heard the news? There’s good
rockin’ tonight.

Rock and roll around....

I got the news, everybody’s gonna rock
tonight.
I’m gonna hold my baby tight as I can,
Tonight she’ll know I’m a fightin’ man.
I got the news, everybody’s rockin’
tonight.

Well, Elder Brown, Deacon Jones,
Everybody at the happy home,
They’ll be there, just you wait and see,
A-jumpin’ and a-stompin’ at the jubilee.
Hey, man, there’s good rockin’ tonight.

Sweet Lorraine, Sioux City Sue,
Sweet Georgia Brown, Caldonia, too,
They’ll be there, jumpin’ like mad.
Hey, sister, ain’t you glad?
We got the news, there’s good rockin’
tonight.

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Band 9

Give Me a Simple Prayer

(J.Kohen)

The Ravens. *Recorded 1956.*
*Originally issued on Argo 5261 (mx
#8293).*

The Ravens bridged the early commercial Mills Brothers style and the later gospel-tinged harmonizing of groups like the Dominoes. Organized in 1945, the group had a career that lasted—with many personnel changes—into the late fifties. But its greatest impact was felt in the forties, when the lineup included the rich bass voice of Jimmy Ricks and the falsetto tenor of Maithe Marshall.

A venerable chestnut, “Ol’ Man River,” was the Ravens’ first hit, selling in excess of two million copies in 1946. Following in the next few years were “Write Me a Letter,” “It’s Too Soon to Know,” “Deep Purple,” and “I Don’t Have to Ride No More,” the last a top-ten hit in 1950.

“A Simple Prayer,” sung by one of the last versions of the Ravens, is firmly in the rhythm-and-blues tradition of inspirational songs. Not quite a gospel piece, it is personally oriented and tells of the uncomplicated, natural things in life that the singers feel are essentials: it makes no grandiose demands for fast cars, big bucks, and loose women (frequently the desirable subjects of rhythm-and-blues songs), just a humble request for “someone who’ll care for me.” And it is topped off by some remarkable (if questionable in intonation) falsetto singing.

Permission to print the text of this song could not be obtained at press time; we therefore regret that lyrics cannot be included.

Side Two, Band 1 *Well, Oh Well*

(Tiny Bradshaw, Lois Mann, *and* Henry Bernard)

Tiny Bradshaw and His Orchestra: Tiny Bradshaw, vocal; Leslie Ayres, trumpet; Rufus Gore, tenor saxophones; Orrington Hall, alto and baritone saxophone; Jimmy Robinson, piano; Leroy Harris, guitar; Clarence Mack, bass; Calvin "Eagle Eyes" Shields, drums. *Recorded February 8, 1950, in Cincinnati. Originally issued on King 4357 (mx # K 5847).*

Singer-drummer-bandleader Tiny Bradshaw paid his early dues with a variety of big swing bands, notably one led by Fletcher Henderson's brother, Horace. In the late thirties he organized his own group. Like so many other bandleaders from the period, he realized very quickly that his group would survive only if it mixed jump material with its more serious jazz numbers. Thus the somewhat anomalous presence of jazz alto-saxophonist Sonny Stitt and trumpeter Benny Harris (among others) in Bradshaw's various bands.

Perhaps because of the continuing infusion jazz energies, Bradshaw's groups usually managed to swing harder than their more commercially oriented competitors. Even "Well, Oh Well"—a jump tune if there ever was one—rocks with an almost subliminal 4/4 drive that plays attractively against the more danceable accents of the heavily pounded backbeats.

Well, I'm packing my grip, think I'll take
a trip,
Think I'll leave today, no, I'd better stay.
Well, oh well, oh well, oh well, oh well,
oh well, oh well, oh well, oh well,
Gonna stay right here, where I'm at.

Then I'll lose my sins, don't need new
friends,
I've had my fling, seen everything.
Well, oh well, oh well, oh well, oh well,
oh well, oh well, oh well, oh well,
Gonna stay right here, where I'm at.

If I turn in now, my gal won't wait for
me;
I can't lose that gal, 'cause she's too
much for me.
Well, oh well, oh well, I need Reverend
Chalmers now,

I made him promise me he would make
the two of us just one.

Let's forget the trail to the cow country,
Don't send my mail, just hand it to me.
Well, oh well, oh well, oh well, oh well,
oh well, oh well, oh well, oh well,
I'm gonna stay right here, where I'm at.
(Repeat third and fourth stanzas)

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Band 2. *Hello, Central*

(Sam Hopkins)
Lightnin' Hopkins, vocal and guitar;
Donald Cooks, bass. *Recorded c.*
November, 1950, in New York.
Originally issued on Mainstream
56040 (mx #23321, K90W 2922).

Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins' origins are in Texas blues, pure and simple. Although he has been recorded over the past thirty years in every imaginable setting, he always retains the attractive basics of the Texas style: lyric inventiveness, a sure contact with the primitive sources of the blues, an arpeggiated guitar style that ornaments and embroiders his vocals, and a sense of spontaneity, a feeling that he is inventing his lyrics on the spot (even when he isn't).

By the close of the forties most country-blues singers had lost the broad popularity they had achieved in the thirties and were reduced to working in local bars and clubs. A few Texas-grown performers modified their styles sufficiently to reach the constantly changing tastes of the larger audiences, and Hopkins (with Smokey Hogg, Li'l Son Jackson, and Frankie Lee Sims) was one of the best of these.

"Hello, Central" was recorded at the same sessions that produced another hit for Hopkins, "Coffee Blues." "Hello, Central" is surely one of the most mournfully poignant blues ever to become a hit. Hopkins' vocal, a convoluted, wailing expression of sadness, is a classic example of the way the blues achieves genuine aesthetic universality.

Permission to print the text of this song
could not be obtained at press time; we there-
fore regret that lyrics cannot be included.

Band 3 *One Mint Julep*

(Rudolph Toombs)
The Clovers (Charlie White, lead
singer). *Recorded late 1951, in New*
York. Originally issued on Atlantic 963
(mx #755).

The Clovers were the first black vocal group to be signed by the fledgling Atlantic Record Company. They joined the company in 1950 and promptly started to produce hit records, with "Don't You Know I Love You" and "Fool, Fool, Fool" at the top of the rhythm-and-blues charts in 1951. They continued to release best-sellers until the mid-fifties, when their sales were probably hurt by the success of covers of their material by white acts. (Bobby Vee's version of "Devil or Angel" and Bobby Vinton's version of "Blue Velvet" unquestionably affected sales of the group's original recordings.) They had one big hit left in them, however, and "Love Potion Number 9" a chart record in 1959, was still being performed by rock groups in the seventies.

"One Mint Julep" is not particularly characteristic of the Clovers' heavily rhythmic ensemble style; it has none of the "ooh-diddly-doo" of "Don't You Know I Love You" or the "do-do-doo" of "Fool, Fool, Fool." It sounds, in fact, more like a jump-style tune than their other material.

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fore regret that lyrics cannot be included.

Band 4
Hound Dog

(Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller, and Johnny Otis)

Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, vocal; Devonia Williams, piano; Pete Lewis, guitar; Albert Winston, bass; Leard Bell, drums. *Recorded August 13, 1952, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Peacock 1612 (mx #ACA 2258).*

Willie Mae Thornton—known to friends and fans as "Big Mama"—started out in the early fifties with Johnny Otis' touring blues company. That her talents were acknowledged quickly is obvious in her description (in Ralph Gleason's column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*) of her first appearance at New York's Apollo Theatre:

I wasn't out there to put no one off stage. I was out there to get known and I did! I didn't have no record and I was singing the Dominoes' hit, "Have Mercy Baby." They had to put the curtain down. Little Esther never got on that first show. That's when they put my name in lights....

Her style is converted country blues, rich with the melismas of gospel music and the coarse, rough, slurring rhythms of itinerant storytellers. But more than that it is brilliantly, vividly alive, demanding attention and response in a way few female performers (Janis Joplin was one) ever have.

"Hound Dog" was written by a trio of young white men, two of whom—Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller—became key contributors to the evolving crossover movement between rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll. "They were just a couple of kids," Big Mama told Gleason, "and they had this song written on the back of a paper bag." She added a few interjections of her own, played around with the rhythm (some of the choruses have thirteen rather than twelve bars), and wrapped up the piece purposefully by having her band bark at the finish. When Elvis Presley recorded the tune a few years later, he had the best possible model for his career-establishing performance.

The lyrics to this song are available from the publisher

Band 5
Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean

(Johnny Wallace, Herbert J. Lance, and Charles Singleton)

Ruth Brown, vocal (accompanied by unknown group). *Recorded 1953, in New York. Originally issued on Atlantic, reissued on Atlantic SC-2-504 (mx #?).*

Ruth Brown started out as a big-band singer with gospel overtones in her style and wound up as the most important female rhythm-and-blues performer of the fifties. Her first major recording was the 1950 hit "Teardrops from My Eyes"; it was quickly followed by "I Know," "I'll Wait for You," "Daddy, Daddy," and "5-10-15 Years," which was number one on the rhythm-and-blues charts in both the United States and England.

"Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean" was a gold record for Brown in 1953. It is sung, as it must be, with a coy but knowing inflection (notice the effective slide on the end of notes). Brown, usually a strong-voiced, up-front performer, uses a light tone here. The performance is a perfect example of the way a first-rate performer can tailor incompatible material to suit a personal style.

It's also worth noting Atlantic's production influence. Clearly—and rightly—the company believed that Brown could appeal to a pop as well as a black audience, and so there is little on the record that would be difficult or inaccessible for the wider audience. Given that commercial goal-oriented attitude and Brown's superb natural gifts, it's no surprise that she became almost as important to rock 'n' roll as she was to rhythm and blues.

Mama, he treats your daughter mean, (3 times)

He's the meanest man I've ever seen.

Mama, he treats me badly, makes me love him madly;

Mama, he takes my money, makes me call him honey;

Mama, he can't be trusted, makes me so disgusted;

All of my friends say they don't understand; what's the matter with this man?

I tell you, Mama, he treats your daughter mean;
Mama, he treats your daughter mean; (2 time)
He's the meanest, meanest man I've ever seen.

Mama, this man is lazy, almost drives me crazy;
Mama, he makes me squeeze him, still my squeeze don't please him;
Mama, my heart is aching, obviously it's breaking;
Mama, I soon saw all that I can stand; what's the matter with this man?

I tell you, Mama, he treats your daughter mean;
Mama, he treats your daughter mean; (2 times)
He's the meanest, meanest man I've ever seen.

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Band 6
Crying in the Chapel

(Artie Glenn)

The Orioles (Sonny Til, lead singer). *Recorded 1953, in New York or Baltimore. Originally issued on Roulette RE-111 (mx # ?).*

"Crying in the Chapel" was the enigmatic culmination of the Orioles' career. The Baltimore group had been producing hits for black audiences since 1948 ("It's Too Soon to Know," "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve," "Baby, Please Don't Go"). "Chapel" was their only breakthrough to the larger national audience; they never repeated that enormous success. Interestingly, much of their earlier achievement can be traced to a female manager-songwriter, Deborah Chessler, who wrote most of their original material, lined up a regular spot for them on Arthur Godfrey's television show, and negotiated their recording contracts.

The Orioles were the first pure rhythm-and-blues group, completely detached (as the Ravens were not) from the Mills Brothers' influence, and made early forays into the cool stage mannerisms and easy dance movements that dominate rhythm-and-blues-group style to the present.

"Crying in the Chapel" was originally a country tune. At the time the

Orioles decided to release their version, there already were two country and one pop version on the best-selling record charts. Yet the Orioles' interpretation—brightened by Sonny Til's high-flying tenor lead—was so effective that it became the first true crossover hit, as popular with white audiences (including—shades of Elvis Presley—country audiences) as with black listeners.

The lyrics to this song are available from the publisher.

Band 7 ***Hoochie Coochie Man***

(Muddy Waters)

Muddy Waters, vocal and guitar; Little Walter, harmonica; Otis Spann, piano; Jimmie Rodgers, guitar; Fred Bellow, drums; Big Crawford, bass. *Recorded 1952, in Chicago. Originally issued on Chess 1560 (mx # V 7589).*

McKinley Morganfield (a.k.a. Muddy Waters) was not one of the major names of the rhythm-and-

blues movement of the early fifties. But he *did* produce music that—more than that of most of his contemporaries—helped shape the future. At a time when most successful black performers were doing anything they could to battle the white covers that were taking away sales—even if it meant straying away from their musical roots—Waters stuck with the rough, hardcore rhythms of the black experience.

In the early fifties, more than a decade after he was first recorded by blues archivist Alan Lomax, Waters assembled a band in Chicago that became the model for every electric-guitar-dominated rock group of the sixties and seventies, playing a music that was tough, gutsy, rhythmic, and loud.

All the elements of rock are present in “Hoochie Coochie Man”: whining treble electric-guitar fills around the melody; a slurring, muttering, shouting delivery of the lyric;

rolling drum rhythms underpinned by a near-contrapuntal bass line and a call-and-response riff pattern; a beat that socks away unmercifully. There is even a strong sense of Mick Jaggerish mystical-macho sexism in the lyric. It took a long time—Waters couldn't even put together a rhythm-and-blues chart hit after 1957—but his influence finally began to break through in the sixties, and it is impossible to listen to Jagger, John Mayall, Eric Clapton, or any of *their* descendants without being vividly aware of the debt they all owe Mr. Morganfield.

Permission to print the text of this song could not be obtained at press time; we therefore regret that lyrics cannot be included.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Anthology of Rhythm and Blues, Vol.1.* (Performances by The Five Royales, The Dominoes, Hank Ballard and The Midnighters, Little Willie John, Bill Doggett, et al.) Columbia CS-9802.
- Echoes of a Rock Era: The Early Years.* (Performances by The Orioles, Faye Adams, Bo Diddley, The Penguins, Chuck Berry, The Moonglows, Jesse Belvin, The Heartbeats, The Crows, et al.) Roulette RE-111.
- Eighteen King Size Rhythm and Blues Hits.* (Performances by Earl Bostic, The Five Royales, Billy Ward and the Dominoes, The Midnighters, The Charms, James Brown, et al.) Columbia CS-9467.
- Fourteen Golden Recordings from the Historic Vaults of Duke/Peacock Records.* (Performances by Bobby Bland, Johnny Ace, Willie Mae Thornton, Junior Parker, The Casuals, Gatemouth Brown, et al.) ABC ABCX-784.
- The Golden Age of Rhythm and Blues.* (Performances by The Orchids, The Pastels, The Moonlighters, The Flamingos, The Moonglows, The Monotones, The Ravens, et al.) Chess 2Ch-50030.
- The Gospel Sound.* (Performances by The Golden Gate Quartet, The Dixie Hummingbirds, Mahalia Jackson, The Staple Singers, Marion Williams, et al.) Columbia G-31086.
- The Gospel Sound, II.* (Performances by The Golden Gate Quartet, Arizona Dranes, Bessie Griffin, Rev. J. M. Gates, Mitchell's Christian Singers, Dorothy Love Coates and the Original Gospel Harmonettes, et al.) Columbia KG-31595.
- History of Rhythm and Blues: The Golden Years, 1947-52.* (Performances by Ruth Brown, The Clovers, The Orioles, et al.) Atlantic SD-8161.
- History of Rhythm and Blues: The Golden Years, 1953-55.* (Performances by Ruth Brown, The Clovers, The Drifters, Clyde McPhatter, Ray Charles, et al.) Atlantic SD-8162.
- Rhythm 'n' Blues: Sweet 'n' Greasy.* (Performances by The Pelicans, The Crystals, The Robins, The Avalons, The Jewels, et al.) Imperial LM-94005.
- The Soul Years.* (Performances by Sticks McGhee, The Clovers, Ruth Brown, The Drifters, Joe Turner, The Chords, La Vern Baker, Ray Charles, Ivory Joe Hunter, The Coasters, et al.) Atlantic SD 2-504.

The Story of the Blues. (Performances by Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, Joe Williams, Joe Turner, Pete Johnson, Otis Spann, Elmore James, Johnny Shines, et al.) Columbia G-30008.
This Is How It All Began. (Performances by Roy Milton, Joe Liggins, Percy Mayfield, The Four Flames, Mercy Dee, The Swan Silvertones, The Soul Stirrers, et al.) Specialty SPS-2117.
Urban Blues: New Orleans Bounce. (Performances by Fats Domino, Smiley Lewis, Amos Milburn, et al.) Imperial LM-94004.

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Side One Total time 24:48

1 FLYING HOME (Sid Robin, Benny Goodman, and Lionel Hampton)	3:10
(publ. Regent Music Corp.) Lionel Hampton and His Orchestra	
2 ROLL 'EM, PETE (Pete Johnson and Joe Turner)	2:48
(publ. Leeds Music Corp.) Joe Turner, vocal; Pete Johnson, piano	
3 THE SUN DIDN'T SHINE (Roosevelt Fennoy)	2:08
(publ. Berwick Music Corp.) The Golden Gate Quartet	
4 STRAIGHTEN UP AND FLY RIGHT (Nat "King" Cole and Irving Mills)	2:23
(publ. American Academy of Music, Inc.) Nat "King" Cole, piano and vocal; Oscar Moore, guitar; Johnny Miller, bass	
5 I WONDER (Private Cecil Gant and Raymond Leveen)	2:37
(publ. Leeds Music Corp.) Cecil Gant, vocal and piano	
6 CHOO CHOO CH'BOOGIE (Vaughn Horton, Denver Darling, and Milton Gabler)	2:46
(publ. Rytvoc, Inc.) Louis Jordan, vocal and alto saxophone; with group	
7 CALL IT STORMY MONDAY (Aaron Walker)	2:59
(publ. Gregmark Music Co.) T-Bone Walker, vocal and guitar; with group	
8 GOOD ROCKIN' TONIGHT (Roy Brown)	2:26
(publ. Fort Knox Music Co.) Wynonie "Blues" Harris, vocal; with group	
9 GIVE ME A SIMPLE PRAYER (J. Kohen)	2:35
(publ. unknown) The Ravens	

Side Two Total time 19:13

- 1 WELL, OH WELL (Tiny Bradshaw, Lois Mann, and Henry Bernard)2:41
(publ. Fort Knox Music Co.)
Tiny Bradshaw and His Orchestra
- 2 HELLO, CENTRAL (Sam Hopkins)2:54
(publ. Sam Hopkins)
Lightnin' Hopkins
- 3 ONE MINT JULEP (Rudolph Toombs)2:28
(publ. Unichappell Music, Inc./Regent Music Corp.)
The Clovers
- 4 HOUND DOG (Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller and Johnny Otis)2:48
(publ. Elvis Presley Music, Inc./Lion Publishing Co., Inc.)
Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, vocal; with group
- 5 MAMA, HE TREATS YOUR DAUGHTER MEAN
(Johnny Wallace, Herbert J. Lance, and Charles Singleton)2:53
(publ. Marvin Music Company)
Ruth Brown, vocal
- 6 CRYING IN THE CHAPEL (Artie Glenn)1:48
(publ. Unichappell Music, Inc.)
Sonny Til and The Orioles
- 7 HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN (Muddy Waters)2:49
(publ. unknown)
Muddy Waters, vocal and guitar; with group

Discographic information and a list of the performers for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.

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For additional information and a catalogue, please contact:

New World Records
701 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10036
(212) 302-0460 • (212) 944-1922 fax
email: newworldrecords@erols.com

www.newworldrecords.org