

STREET CORNER SERENADE



TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

The
ROCK'N'ROLL
•ERA•

Digital Remaster

STREET CORNER SERENADE

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The Schoolboys (1957) 4 I'm So Young The Students (1961) 5 Deserie The Charts (1957) 6 This I Swear The Skyliners (1959) 7 Tonight I Fell in Love The Tokens (1961) 8 Who's That Knocking The Genies (1959) 9 Little Darlin' The Gladiolas (1957) 10 Just to Be with You The Passions (1959) 11 Mio Amore (My Love, 'Till the End of Time)
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Ronnie and the Hi-Lites (1962) |
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WARNER
SPECIAL PRODUCTS

The
ROCK'N'ROLL
'ERA'

STREET CORNER SERENADE

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

2RNR-45
OPCD-2628

TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

- Ka-Ding Dong Little Girl of Mine Please Say You Want Me I'm So Young
 Deserie This I Swear Tonight I Fell in Love Who's That Knocking
 Little Darlin' Just to Be with You Mio Amore
 Rang Tang Ding Dong Hearts of Stone Baby Blue Our Anniversary
 Tonight Coney Island Baby Rockin' in the Jungle
 Baby Oh Baby Daring Dear Till Then
 I Wish That We Were Married

The Schoolboys



STREET CORNER SERENADE

The emergence of "doo-wop" vocal-group harmony records in the early 1950s and their proliferation during the next 10 years illustrate that necessity is the mother of innovation. After World War II, independent record companies sprang up across the country. Working with comparatively limited capital, many of them found that they could cheaply produce viable rhythm and blues discs by using vocal harmony groups with minimal instrumental backing.

A piano or guitar would chord the melody, a drum or bass would mark the rhythm, and perhaps a saxophone would contribute a break. The harmonizing group members would fill the rest of the aural spectrum by singing lyrics or chanting words or nonsense sounds such as "doo-wop, doo-wah." Using this formula, a number of groups including the Larks, the Swallows, the Cardinals, the Clovers, the Five Keys and the "5" Royals reached *Billboard* magazine's R & B charts. The Counts, from Indianapolis, did too with **Darling Dear**, released late in 1953.

As the '50s approached mid-decade, more and more R & B vocal groups sold to a broader audience. Records by the Orioles, the Dominoes, the Crows, the Four Tunes, the Crickets (Don Barlow's, not Buddy Holly's), the Drifters, the Midnighters, the Spaniels, the Chords and the Harptones crossed over from the R & B to the pop charts, often in the face of competing pop cover versions. The Jewels, from Los Angeles, had the unusual experience of having their recording **Hearts of Stone** covered for an R & B hit by the Charms, and the Charms were in turn covered by the Fontane Sisters, who took the song to No. 1 on the pop side. With the emergence of rock 'n' roll in 1955, R & B groups got wider radio exposure, which made them less vulnerable to covering.

In 1956, Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers became rock 'n' roll's first teen superstars with *Why Do Fools Fall in*

Love. Frankie's youth and the myth that the group was discovered while singing a cappella on a Harlem street corner (the actual story is a bit more complicated) are often cited as being responsible for an explosion of street-corner singing by teens in urban neighborhoods, most notably in New York City. The Clefnotes, who recorded for the same label, followed the Teenagers onto the charts with *You Baby You* and **Little Girl of Mine** while attending Jamaica High in Queens. And the G-Clefs, students from Roxbury, Massachusetts, scored with the onomatopoeic **Ka-Ding Dong**.

In Frankie Lyman's wake, dozens of releases also featured youthful-sounding lead singers (including his younger brother Lewis). A typical example was **Please Say You Want Me** by Harlem's Schoolboys. The record was not a big seller when it was released in 1956, but it became a classic of the teen-tenor genre, and Little Anthony and the Imperials revived it in 1961. In 1957, the Charts, another Harlem group, barely cracked the Top 100 with their falsetto-lead **Deerle**, but it sold steadily to group aficionados and has been included on more than a dozen oldie collections. The Gladiolus, from Lancaster, South Carolina, hit with 15-year-old lead singer Maurice Williams' composition **Little Darlin'** after it was covered by the Diamonds, who had also covered (but not smothered) the Teenagers and the G-Clefs.

The distinctive new style of vocal harmony received a fair amount of derision, good-natured and otherwise, within and outside the industry. Stan Freberg cut biting satires of *Sh-Boom* and *The Great Pretender*. The Cellos, a real doo-wop group from Jamaica, Queens, gently kidded the form with **Rang Tang Ding Dong (I Am the Japanese Sandman)**. The song resurfaced in 1970, supposedly performed by John Lennon, on the *Rolling Stone* magazine-inspired **Masked Marauders** LP.

By the late '50s, so many group singles were coming out

that many quality sides, often on newer, less established labels, got lost in the deluge. However, Top 40 radio, which was still looking for novel sounds, gave exposure to unique recordings such as **Rockin' in the Jungle**, with its simulated animal noises by the Bronx's Eternals, and the infectious **Who's That Knocking** by the Genies from Brooklyn, released in 1958.

Generally, though, the successful group records were coming from the performers who blended the established techniques into smoother, more sophisticated glee club-style arrangements. Brooklyn's Passions did well with the quietly disarming **Just to Be with You**. The ultraslick Skyliners, from Pittsburgh, utilized strings on their records, three of which, including **This I Swear**, made the top 30. The Flamingos, who started out in Chicago, had been making smooth group records since 1953, but mass acceptance eluded them until 1959, when **Lovers Never Say Goodbye** and **I Only Have Eyes for You** kicked off a string of hits that included **Mio Amore (My Love, 'Till the End of Time)**.

As the 1960s dawned, things looked bleak for the group sound. Although its distinctive harmony patterns had become musical staples, most successful producers no longer had the need or inclination to skimp on instrumentation. However, the audience that grew up on rock 'n' roll had developed an appreciation for its past, which translated into audience demand. The first significant LP collection of past rock 'n' roll hits, **Oldies but Goodies in Hi-Fi**, containing eight of the greatest group classics, was selling briskly. **Earth Angel** by the Penguins and **In the Still of the Nite** by the Five Satins were back on *Billboard's* Hot 100. By 1961, most Top 40 radio stations were regularly playing oldies.

In New York City, a group-sound cult had developed among collectors, and its mecca was Slim Rose's Times Square Records, located in the Seventh Avenue subway station. The shop was loaded with thousands of group 45s, and one wall was covered with rare discs selling for what then seemed like astronomical prices. This scene was in-

strumental in rescuing three '50s group records from oblivion. **Baby Oh Baby** by the Shells (originally released in 1957), **There's a Moon Out Tonight** by the Capris (1958) and **Rama Lama Ding Dong** by the Edsels (1958) did not chart in *Billboard*, and only the last was on the more comprehensive *Hot Charts* the first time around. All three became national hits after selling exceptionally well at Times Square Records during 1960.

Similarly, the Frankie Lymonish **Everyday of the Week**, backed with **I'm So Young** by the Students, from Youngstown, Ohio, didn't chart in 1958, despite having been bought from tiny Note Records by Chess, which issued it on Checker. Three years later, New York disc jockey Murray the K started playing both sides as his signature oldies, and the disc, reissued on Chess's Argo subsidiary, became one of the Big Apple's favorites. In 1964, **I'm So Young** was revived by one of Murray's former "dancing girls," Ronnie Spector.

The group-sound revival of the early '60s was not limited to old records. Veteran artists also got a second chance at the charts. The Brooklyn-based Tokens, who had cut **I Love My Baby** for Morty Craft's Melba Records in 1956, disbanded when their leader, Neil Sedaka, left to pursue a solo career. In 1960, original member Hank Medress and three new Tokens released **Tonight I Fell in Love**, also on a Craft-owned label. The song's success led to a string of hits on RCA (including **The Lion Sleeps Tonight**), their own record company (B.T. Puppy), and outstanding careers as producers of records and commercial jingles.

Not every group with a hit in the early '60s had roots in the '50s, though. Brooklyn's Echoes achieved national prominence with their first release, **Baby Blue**, which was originally put out by SRG Records. Some group hits of the '60s came from outside New York, which had adopted group harmony as its own even though the style was not exclusively indigenous. The Velvets, from Odessa, Texas, were taken by Roy Orbison to Nashville, where they cut



The Shells

Tonight (Could Be the Night). Fourteen-year-old Ronnie Goodson and the Hi-Lites, from Jersey City, tore up the charts with their little-boy-style **I Wish That We Were Married.** The Classics were from Brooklyn, but their revival of the pop hit **Till Then** in the newer, smooth style could have been cut anywhere, while *You Baby You*

backed with **Coney Island Baby** by the Excellents, also from Brooklyn, fairly reeks of the sound of that city.

Times Square Records is not in the Seventh Avenue station anymore, but chances are an a cappella group is still doo-wopping for donations there.

—Dr. Oldie



Shep and the Limelites

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

1. **Ka-Ding Dong** The G-Clefs • *Music and lyrics by Robert Jordan and John J. McDermott Jr. Pilgrim 715 (1956). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 53**
2. **Little Girl of Mine** The Clefones • *Music and lyrics by Herbert Cox and George Goldner. Gee 1011 (1956). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 57**
3. **Please Say You Want Me** The Schoolboys • *Music and lyrics by Donald Hayes. OKeh 7076 (1957). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. Did not chart.*
4. **I'm So Young** The Students • *Music and lyrics by Prez Tyus. A&O 5386 (1961). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 26 (R&B)**
5. **Deserie** The Charts • *Music and lyrics by Clarence Johnson and Leslie Cooper. Everlast 5001 (1957). Courtesy Bobby Robinson. No. 88**
6. **This I Swear** The Skyliners • *Music and lyrics by James Beumann, Walter Lester, Joseph Rock, John Taylor, Janet Vogel and Joseph Verscharen. Calico 106 (1959). Courtesy of Original Sound Entertainment, Inc. No. 26**
7. **Tonight I Fell in Love** The Tokens • *Music and lyrics by Henry Madess, Mitchell Margu and Philip Margu. Warnerck 615 (1961). Courtesy of MC Productions. No. 15**
8. **Who's That Knocking** The Genies • *Music and lyrics by Claude Johnson and Fred Jones. Shad 5002 (1959). Courtesy of Mainstream Records, Inc. No. 71**
9. **Little Darlin'** The Gladiolas • *Music and lyrics by Maurice Williams. Excello 2101 (1957). Courtesy of AVI Productions, Inc. No. 47**
10. **Just to Be with You** The Passions • *Music and lyrics by Marvin Kalin. Audicon 102 (1959). Courtesy of Continental Communications Corp. No. 69**
11. **Mio Amore (My Love, Till the End of Time)** The Flamingos • *Music and lyrics by Jacob Carey, Nathaniel Nelson, Terry Johnson, Charles Hunt, Paul Wilson and Ezekiel Carey. End 1073 (1960). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 74**
12. **Rang Tang Ding Dong (I Am the Japanese Sandman)** The Cellos • *Music and lyrics by Alvin Williams. Apollo 510 (1957). Courtesy of Malaco. No. 62**
13. **Hearts of Stone** The Jewels • *Music and lyrics by Rudolph Jackson and Edward Ray. R&B 1301 (1954). Courtesy of Original Sound Entertainment. Did not chart.*
14. **Baby Blue** The Echoes • *Music and lyrics by Sam Guillino and Val Lagueux. Seg-Way 103 (1961). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 12**
15. **Our Anniversary** Shep and the Limelites • *Music and lyrics by Jesse Murphy and James Freeman. Hull 748 (1962). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 39**
16. **Tonight (Could Be the Night)** The Velvets • *Music and lyrics by Virgil Johnson. Monument 441 (1961). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. No. 26**
17. **Coney Island Baby** The Excellents • *Music and lyrics by Vincent Catalano and Peter Alonzo. Blast 205 (1962). Courtesy of MC Productions. No. 51**
18. **Rockin' in the Jungle** The Eternals • *Music and lyrics by William Martin and Carlos Girona. Hollywood 68 (1959). Courtesy of MC Productions. No. 78**
19. **Baby Oh Baby** The Shells • *Music and lyrics by Hiram Johnson, David Bouknight and Walter Coleman. Johnson 104 (1961). Courtesy of Janus Records, Inc. No. 21**
20. **Darling Dear** The Counts • *Music and lyrics by Carl Herman and Robert Young. Dot 1188 (1954). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 9 (R&B)**
21. **Till Then** The Classics • *Music and lyrics by Eddie Seiler, Sol Marcus and Guy Wood. Musicnote 1116 (1963). Courtesy of MC Productions. No. 20**
22. **I Wish That We Were Married** Ronnie and the Hi-Lites • *Music and lyrics by Marion Weiss and Edna Lewis. Joy 260 (1962). Courtesy of American Record Sales, Inc. No. 16**

Street Corner Serenade

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Ronnie and the Hi-Lites (1962)



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Associate Director of Production: Karen Hill

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The Author: Dr. Oldie, Dean of the University of Musical Perversity, is a pop culture historian and a DJ at radio station WIRE. He has appeared as a cartoon character in *The Village Voice*, *Spin* and *Creem*.

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