
John Michael Shaw

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by

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A Dissertation

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Major: Music

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“Well, it’s bye bye babe, Lord I got to go.  
I said, bye bye people, Lord, I got to go.  
I can’t live in Mississippi, Lord you’ll find me in old Shreveport.”

-David “Pete” McKinley, Shreveport Blues, 1949
ABSTRACT

Although there has been some scholarship in regard to country music in the city of Shreveport, Louisiana, as well as research into the lives of Jimmie Davis and Huddie Ledbetter, no comprehensive research into the city’s rich Black music scene has heretofore existed. Furthermore, the area has been home to a number of Black artists about whom little has been written.

This dissertation attempts to document Shreveport’s Black music scene, both in live performance and recording, during a forty-year period stretching from 1948 to 1988. These years interestingly coincide with the opening and closing of an iconic record shop and distribution firm, Stan’s Record Shop, which had a tremendous impact not only on Shreveport but on the entire South. These years also frame an economic boom and then an economic decline for the city, and also are the forty years during which the city had a functioning recording and live music scene. The present work contends that Shreveport was an important Southern city in the recording industry which has been overlooked.

In order to document a city’s scene comprehensively, I used daily and weekly newspapers, discographies, recordings, books, interviews, city directories and telephone directories. While the chapters are arranged chronologically, within them are vignettes of Shreveport’s clubs, bands, artists and studios, as well as summaries of civic events against which the Black music scene developed. The dissertation is intended to look at the evolution of Black American music through the lens of a Southern city, and in the hopes that Shreveport will be added to Memphis, New Orleans, Nashville and Muscle Shoals as a Southern recording center.
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Shreveport until 2005 was the second largest city in Louisiana, a state known for a rich musical tradition. Being on the border between the South and the West, at a crossroads between railroads heading from Mississippi to California, and from Kansas City to Lake Charles, Shreveport developed a large African-American population and a rich Black musical culture. While Shreveport is known as the home of Huddie Ledbetter, better known as “Lead Belly,” and for the Louisiana Hayride, which rivaled Nashville’s Grand Ole Opry from 1948 to 1960, it suffered from being in the same state with New Orleans, a city full of musical traditions. The city’s Black music culture and history have been little studied. Yet Shreveport is more important than the lack of published sources would suggest. Shreveport was a place where a record store, independent record labels, radio stations, and recording combined to create the local dawn of American youth culture. It was a city whose unique blues guitar style influenced the great John Lee Hooker. It was a city where Mira Smith disproved the Southern idea of what a woman could do and built her own recording studio, recording Black rhythm and blues and white rock-and-roll. It was a city where songwriter and producer Harding Guion Des Marais followed his instinct and produced incredible doo-wop and soul records despite his background in country music. It was a city where country writer Jerry Strickland and soul singer Bobby Patterson came together to write a batch of iconic songs at the twilight of the soul era. It was briefly the home of Sound City, the nationally-known studio which gave it a moment of greatness. It was the city bluesman Jesse Thomas returned to after...
his travels out west. It was the city where Geater Davis came to find fame and fortune.

And it was a welcome destination for many famous musicians, including Roy Brown, T-Bone Walker, Roy Milton, Milton Larkins, Ted Taylor, Little Johnny Taylor, B. B. King, Ike Turner, James Brown and Little Joe Blue, a never-ending circuit of talent which both entertained Shreveporters and inspired the city’s young musicians.

The vast number of excellent blues and soul records released on Shreveport labels and recorded in the city demand that Shreveport receive the recognition it has until now been denied. It is hoped that this work will be definitive in establishing Shreveport as one of America’s great music and recording cities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without many helpful people who assisted me, beginning with Garland Jones, who introduced me to Reuben Bell at a time when I thought he had passed away, the late Rev. Elbert “Eddie” Giles, the late Toussaint McCall, the late Charles Pennywell, Chris Brown, the archivist at Centenary College in Shreveport, Dan Garner, Betty Lewis, Ron Johnson, the Rev. Bernard Kimble, Gene Tomko, Dr. David Evans, Scott Billington, Dr. Kenneth Kreitner, John Glassburner, Betty Lewis, John Ridge, the members of the Real Blues Forum on Facebook, and Dr. Leslie McLemore at the Northwest Louisiana Archive at LSU-Shreveport. And of course, I always thank God, who makes all things possible.
INTRODUCTION
THE RECORDING INDUSTRY AND THE SOUTH: AN ETHNOMUSICOCOLOGY OF CITIES.

During the pre—World War II recording era, with rare exceptions, most recording studios were in large cities in the northern United States. Recordings took place in the South, but the vast majority of them were as a result of field sessions set up by the northern recording corporations. The companies did not set up permanent studios in the South, but rather sent their agents out to scout talent and locations. Recordings were often made in rented facilities, such as hotel rooms, radio stations, auditoriums, or office spaces.

However, when the postwar recording era began in 1948, the recording industry changed in significant ways. One was caused by technology, especially the advent of tape recording and the invention of multi-tracking and/or overdubbing. Furthermore, in the pre-war industry, there were only a fairly small number of record labels. Large companies dominated the market, even if there were some smaller labels that we might today consider independent. By contrast, the postwar recording atmosphere was dominated by independent record labels, recording vernacular musics that had been largely neglected outside of niche markets, especially hillbilly music and forms of secular Black music which the industry publications would soon rename “rhythm and blues.” Before the war, the record labels had sent scouts to the South for talent in these categories, but now the industry itself moved into the South on a more permanent basis. Many Southern cities
saw the opening of recording studios, some independent, others affiliated with new
Southern record labels that were emerging. While there had always been a market for
Black and hillbilly musics, the market had been broadened considerably by the ASCAP
strike against the radio stations in 1941 and the resulting formation of Broadcast Music
Inc. or BMI. BMI chose to emphasize areas of music that ASCAP had neglected,
resulting in a large number of new songs in the country and blues fields being published
and licensed.

Although talent was broadly distributed throughout the South, the industry
seemed to center on particular Southern cities. The city of Nashville became known as a
center for country music recording and publishing, Memphis became famous for
rockabilly and early rock and roll, as well as rhythm and blues, soul, and Black gospel
recording, Muscle Shoals became well known for country and soul recordings, and New
Orleans became known as a recording location for its unique blend of local musical
styles, which included a considerable number of hits in the 1950s rhythm and blues
tradition. The musical activities of these cities have been fairly well documented.

**NASHVILLE**

A number of books exist which document some aspects of Nashville’s recording
scene, and not surprisingly, most of them deal with country music. Travis Stimeling’s
*Nashville Cats*¹ is a fairly recent look at a group of musicians who played a large role in
the city’s recording industry during its heyday. Michael Kosser’s *How Nashville Became

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¹ Travis D. Stimeling, *Nashville Cats: Record Production In Music City* (New York: Oxford
University Press 2020).
Music City USA\textsuperscript{2} approaches the city’s industry history more from the publishing and corporate standpoint. Martin Hawkins’s \textit{A Shot In The Dark: Making Records In Nashville 1945-1955}\textsuperscript{3} stands apart from much of the other scholarship about Nashville by going beyond the confines of country music to deal with the recording of popular music and Black music during the earliest years of the local industry. A similar emphasis on Black music drives Paula Blackman’s \textit{Night Train To Nashville: The Greatest Untold Story of Music City}.\textsuperscript{4}

**MEMPHIS**

At various times in its history, the city has been home to some of America’s greatest musical icons, and it looms large in the popular imagination when American music is considered. Perhaps the best history of the city’s music is Robert Gordon’s excellent \textit{It Came From Memphis},\textsuperscript{5} which documents something of the city’s quirky and iconoclastic music scene, even if the emphasis is on rock and roll and something of the city’s counter-cultural vein. Blues researcher Bengt Olssen in 1970 published \textit{Memphis Blues}, which remains the definitive discussion of blues in the city.\textsuperscript{6} Music journalist Stanley Booth, who lived in the city during the glory years of Stax Records, chronicles his own career in \textit{Red Hot and Blue: Fifty Years of Writing About Music, Memphis and Michael Kosser, \textit{How Nashville Became Music City USA: A History of Music Row} (Lanham, MD: Backbeat Books, 2022).

\textsuperscript{3} Martin Hawkins, \textit{A Shot In The Dark: Making Records In Nashville 1945-1955} (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).


which, like Gordon’s book, reflects something of the city’s bohemian tendencies in the late 1960s. British author Stuart Cosgrove took an interesting approach to Memphis music scholarship by writing an in-depth account of the city’s recording industry during the pivotal year of 1968, the year of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. *Memphis 68: The Tragedy of Southern Soul* is unique in the extant literature for covering only one year in a city’s music scene. David A. Less’s *Memphis Mayhem: A Story of the Music That Shook Up The World* intertwines the city’s history with that of the music Memphis has produced, highlighting a number of local music heroes. Roben Jones’s *Memphis Boys* looks at Memphis from the perspective of one of its iconic recording studios, Chips Moman’s American Sound Studios. Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins’s *Good Rockin’ Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock ’N’ Roll* remains the definitive history of the Sun Records label, and two books chronicle the history of Stax Records, including Rob Bowman’s *Soulsville USA* and Robert Gordon’s *Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion*. Peter Guralnick’s book *Sweet Soul Music* is not strictly about the city of Memphis, but devotes a considerable amount

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of space to the city’s soul music scene. Beyond these are many more books dealing with individual Memphis musicians or unique genres of music.

**MUSCLE SHOALS**

Although the recording scene in Muscle Shoals, Alabama started later than those of Memphis or Nashville and lasted for a shorter period of time, it too has been well-documented. Carla Jean Whitney’s *Muscle Shoals Sound Studios: How The Swampers Changed American Music* chronicles the career of a studio band, in a way somewhat similar to *Nashville Cats* and *Memphis Boys*, while Blake Ells’s *The Muscle Shoals Legacy of FAME* documents the history of the region’s best-known recording studio. The studio’s owner, Rick Hall, has also written his own autobiography, *The Man From Muscle Shoals*, in conjunction with Peter Guralnick.

**NEW ORLEANS**

Nearly as many books exist about music in New Orleans as about music in Memphis. Good general accounts of the city’s recording scene include John Broven’s *Rhythm and Blues In New Orleans*, which was previously published under the title *Walking to New Orleans*, and two essential books by Jeff Hannusch, *I Hear You Peter Guralnick, Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986).


Knockin’ and The Soul of New Orleans: A Legacy of Rhythm and Blues. It is interesting that despite the many books dedicated to New Orleans music and musicians, none seem to be dedicated to particular local record labels or recording studios.

OTHER CITIES

Although Nashville, New Orleans, Memphis, and Muscle Shoals accounted for a large percentage of the independent recordings made in the South, they were certainly not the only Southern cities where records were made. However, books or scholarly research about these secondary Southern cities are far less common. Jackson, Mississippi, a small regional recording hub for Mississippi and nearby states has been the subject of two books. Marc W. Ryan’s Trumpet Records: Diamonds on Farish Street is a history of the pioneering record label owned by Lillian McMurray in 1950s Jackson, and Rob Bowman’s The Last Soul Company: The Malaco Records Story records the history of Jackson’s best-known label and studio. Houston, Texas, has also been the subject of a couple of books regarding its often-overlooked recording scene, including Anne Bradley and Roger Wood’s House of Hits, a history of the city’s most important recording studio, and Roger Wood and James Fraher’s Down In Houston: Bayou City Blues, a


detailed and thorough account of the blues genre in Houston.\textsuperscript{24} As can be seen, aside from some books written about the recording industry in the South in general, very little has been written about music recording in what might be called secondary Southern cities.

\textbf{WHY SHREVEPORT?}

Shreveport, the largest city in northwest Louisiana (with a population of around 200,000) is also the regional center of the Ark-La-Tex region, which involves southwestern Arkansas, northwestern Louisiana, northeastern Texas, and southeastern Oklahoma. It became an important music industry city shortly after World War II for several reasons, including the early establishment of retail record shops and wholesale record distribution in the city, and the local popularity of country music. The formation of the Louisiana Hayride show and radio broadcast in 1948 made the city briefly a rival to Nashville for country performers, and the impact of Stan Lewis and his record distribution and mail order businesses brought the owners or representatives of many independent labels to the area on a regular basis. From 1948 until 1982 or so, a considerable number of records were made in Shreveport or by Shreveport performers. In that regard, the city was no different from many other Southern cities where there were studios. Records were also made in places like Jacksonville, Tampa, Montgomery, and Atlanta. But in contrast to those locations, many well-known artists from other parts of the country ended up recording in Shreveport, such as Ted Taylor, Little Johnny Taylor, Little Joe Blue, and Geater Davis. This fact makes the neglect of Shreveport as a recording city all the more surprising.

\textsuperscript{24} Roger Wood and James Fraher, \textit{Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
Furthermore, Shreveport makes a good city for in-depth research and study due to the fact that both the morning and afternoon daily newspapers have been completely digitized, and there is a nearly complete archive of the *Shreveport Sun*, the city’s weekly Black newspaper, which has belonged to the same family since its founding in 1926. The sheer volume of musical activities in the city, the quality of the recordings involved, and the relative fame and reputation of some of the participants make a thorough study of Shreveport’s Black music long overdue.

**PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ABOUT SHREVEPORT**

For a city of fairly significant size, little has been written about Shreveport in print. There is no modern history of the city available. One history of Shreveport’s Black community exists, Willie Burton’s *The Blacker The Berry: A Black History of Shreveport*, which was an expansion and revision of his earlier *On The Black Side of Shreveport*. The corruption and shocking murders surrounding Shreveport Police Commissioner George W. D’Artois in the 1970s have occasioned two books, Bill Keith’s *The Commissioner* and Jere Joiner’s *Badge of Dishonor: A True Story of Police Racism, Brutality and Murder in a Deep South City*. Ronald C. Sloan’s *The Cedar Grove Riot* is the only book-length account of the largest civil disturbance in Shreveport’s history.

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Published research about post war music in Shreveport is even harder to come by. Only one dissertation exists on a subject related to Shreveport music, Tracey E. W. Laird’s *KWKH: A City and Its Radio Station in the Evolution of Country Music and Rock-and-Roll*. Laird’s dissertation seems to have formed the basis for her book, *Louisiana Hayride: Radio and Roots Music Along the Red River*, which is not primarily dedicated to the city’s Black recording scene, although it does provide useful background about the city in general. Laird also delves into the influence that local Black musicians may have had on the development of the city’s country and rock music communities.

Only one book has gone beyond the realm of country music in Shreveport, the anthology *Shreveport Sounds in Black and White*, edited by Kip Lornell and Tracey Laird. This volume, written by various contributors, offers unique resources about the city and its music scene. Articles written by Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, Vallie Tinsley, Paul Oliver, Eleanor Ellis, Paul Swinton, Dan Garner, and me deal solely with blues. John Ridley’s liner notes to the reissue compact disc *Shreveport Southern Soul: The Murco Story* are also included in the book, as is a summary of my interviews with Reuben Bell and Eddie Giles, which were originally intended for the late lamented *Voices From The Shadows* soul magazine. Also useful for Shreveport researchers is an included article about KWKH and its sound engineer Bob Sullivan. While *Shreveport Sounds* is not a comprehensive work, it is the only currently available resource with broad coverage.

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for the scholar wishing to investigate post-war Shreveport music beyond country or early rock. No definitive investigation of Shreveport’s Black music recording or performing scene has appeared until now.

**RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY**

The goal of the present work is to create a definitive and comprehensive history of Shreveport’s post-war Black music scene. As such, there is an effort to chronicle the record labels, studios, artists, bands, musicians, venues, festivals, and concerts. The work also intends to place this music scene against the larger scope of Shreveport’s history, showing the ways in which Black musicians and artists were impacted by civic events and crises.

The central foundation of this dissertation is a series of interviews with Shreveport musicians, singers, and producers, conducted by the author over a twenty-four year period. These are supplemented by interviews conducted by others, as well as a thorough search into the weekly African-American *Shreveport Sun* and the daily *Shreveport Journal* and *Shreveport Times* between 1948 and 1988.

Research into individual artists, especially those who are better known, involves articles from a number of journals, including magazines such as *Living Blues*, *American Music*, and *Juke Blues*. For dates of birth and death, I have consulted online obituaries, websites like *Genealogy Bank* and *Family Search*, Gene Tomko’s *Encyclopedia of Louisiana Musicians*,33 and Bob Eagle and Eric LeBlanc’s *Blues: A Regional*

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When all else failed, I have occasionally hypothesized a birth year by the age given in census records.

For information on Shreveport’s retail music scene, its record labels and its recording studios, issues of Billboard and Cash Box were searched from 1948 to 1988, and Record World from 1964 to 1976. These resources were particularly useful in chronicling the rise and fall of Stan Lewis’s enterprises.

Finally, my work was aided significantly by a number of online resources, including Centenary College archivist Chris Brown’s Shreveport Songs blog, as well as Shreveport music historian John Ridge’s Facebook groups The Lake Cliff Club and Shreveport Confidential. The latter was particularly useful in enabling me to locate and make contact with members of bands who were still living in and around the Shreveport area. Mention also has to be made of the many people who graciously placed dubs of rare Shreveport-related records on YouTube. Because of the city’s relative obscurity, many of its best Black records have never been reissued in an easily-accessible form. Conversely, many Shreveport funk records are highly sought by collectors and can fetch outrageous prices, making acquisition of the originals untenable for a researcher such as myself.

While it is my hope that the present work is comprehensive, it is intentionally limited to a forty-year period, and primarily to secular music, although it is impossible to avoid mentioning gospel in a city where that genre was so ubiquitous. Shreveport musicians often crossed back and forth over the line between gospel and blues or soul during their lifetimes, yet the city’s gospel scene is deserving of a comprehensive work of

its own. I also mention rap and hip-hop but do not desire to delve into that Shreveport scene here, as it really took off after the closing date of the present work. It too is a subject that is worthy of future scholarship in its own right. While my intent is to be comprehensive, it is also hoped that this work will spur others to investigate Shreveport music further, as well as the music of other mid-sized Southern cities and their recording scenes.
CHAPTER 1
728 TEXAS STREET

At the end of World War II, Shreveport, Louisiana was a city of 100,000 people, and the second largest city in the state. Although a part of the Pelican State, the city had many historic ties with the nearby Texas, as evidenced by its main street being named Texas Street, and nearby streets bearing the names of Crockett, Milam, Fannin, and Travis, heroes of the Texas Revolution. Founded as a river town in the 1830s, Shreveport was named for Captain Henry Miller Shreve, whom the Federal government had commissioned to break up a 150-mile-long logjam on the Red River known as The Great Raft. Shreve’s success in breaking up this jam made the river navigable further north, and Shreveport became a viable river town. Surrounded by plantations, the city soon was a cotton trading point, and with the coming of railroads, became the largest city in North Louisiana. It was the trade center for a three-state region known as the Ark-La-Tex, although southeastern Oklahoma was also within its orbit. Shreveport had already begun to industrialize by the early 1920s, and the discovery of oil in the Rodessa field in northern Caddo Parish brought further prosperity to the area. While the Great Depression proved a setback for many other communities, Shreveport was spared the worst of it because of the construction of Barksdale Field, one of the U. S. Army’s first aircraft training schools. As World War II came to an end, Shreveport had reason for optimism, as growth had been sustained and steady.

Shreveport’s character had also been shaped by its odd juxtapositions. The rural plantations on its outskirts gave the city an aura of the Old South, yet it was also very
much a gateway to the Western frontier and an industrial powerhouse. It was pious yet rowdy, staid yet raucous. Railroads passed through it, running from Jackson, Mississippi to Dallas, Texas and on to California, and from Kansas City to Lake Charles, Louisiana; the Kansas City Southern railroad maintained large yards north of the city in a predominantly-Black community called the Cooper Road. African-Americans moved to Shreveport from rural areas, while many others passed through on their way to Texas or California, or made brief stops in the area while riding the rails to other points. A vibrant Black nightlife scene existed in the city, both along Texas Avenue, which was known to Black Shreveport residents as “The Avenue,” and in a rough-and-tumble warren of low-lying streets known as St. Paul Bottoms, or more often simply “The Bottoms,” where hotels, lunchrooms, juke joints, liquor stores, brothels and shotgun shacks were jammed together in chockablock fashion. The Shreveport Opera House director and composer William Christopher O’Hare had been captivated by the African-American music he heard there in the nineteenth century,¹ and similar sights and sounds must have attracted songster Huddie Ledbetter as a young man when he would venture into Shreveport from his native Mooringsport against his family’s advice. No Bottoms street was more notorious than Fannin Street, and it remained a party destination into the 1940s. One of the peculiarities of Shreveport was the location of this rough-edged African-American neighborhood directly behind the imposing First Methodist Church at the head of Texas Street; here the Black and downtown communities met. And it was here that Shreveport’s

The postwar music scene would be sparked through the opening of a small, nondescript retail store.

The building at 728 Texas Street sat literally in the shadow of the imposing First Methodist Church. Since 1900 it had been home to a host of businesses, the only common denominator of which was their failure. The city’s two daily papers, the *Times* and *Journal* dutifully recorded the various occupants over the years; a grain and feed store, a sign shop, a watch shop, a sewing machine shop, an electrical supply store, a bicycle repair shop, a meat market, a car dealership (selling the St. Louis-based Moon Motor Cars), a player piano store, a fruit and produce store, a bakery, another produce shop, another sign shop, a barber shop, a lunch counter, yet another produce market, a meat and fish market, a tailor’s shop, and a popcorn machine company. Few of the various businesses at the address lasted a full year; the place seemed cursed, and the papers ran as many ads listing it vacant and for rent as they did ads for the businesses that operated in it. But that string of misfortunes would come to an end in 1946.

The aftermath of World War II left America prosperous; demobilized soldiers had money to spend, and the war had demonstrated America’s industrial might. The G.I. Bill allowed veterans to go to college or purchase a home. And with Americans having excess money to spend, entertainment became important again. The recording industry had nearly ground to a halt during World War II; the situation was not helped by American Federation of Musicians’ president Leon Petrillo’s two recording bans in 1942 and 1948, but the biggest obstacle had been the wartime shortage of shellac, which was needed for the war effort. Government rationing limited the number of records that could be made,
and priority was given to the so-called “Victory Discs,” which were pressed for broadcast to the troops. With the war over and soldiers demobilized, the recording industry began to rev up again, and the opening of new postwar independent pressing plants such as Plastic Products in Memphis (which opened in 1948) made possible a plethora of new independent record labels, many of them recording the blues and gospel music of African-Americans that had become popular during the war years.

In October of 1946, the Shreveport Journal published a small classified ad for a store called Artistry in Rhythm at 728 Texas Street, featuring “radios, records and record players.” The store’s name was taken from the name of a song by progressive jazz bandleader Stan Kenton, and a larger and more eye-catching ad a few days later pointed out that records were 35 cents each, and bragged that the store had “thousands of selections” with blues notably mentioned first. Although many businesses had failed in the space, 728 Texas was uniquely located to be successful in the music business. Located at the upper end of Texas, the store was in the business district, although a fair walk from the riverfront or the bigger shops and department stores. Yet it was also merely steps from the traditional African-American neighborhood of the Bottoms. Located at the very street which divided Black from white Shreveport, a store at that location could grab business from both races. And music was something that everyone seemed to love.

By April of 1947, the store had become a branch of the Edelen Radio and Electronic Service, but an ad noted that the location still had a record shop, and in

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December the store became the J & M Record Shop. The J & M stood for Jimmie Burrage and Mike Theodos, who were the two partners in the operation. Burrage was working with country musician Owen Perry and disc jockey Ray Bartlett in a fledgling Shreveport record label called Job (“because we had a job to do,” Perry recalled), and Theodos was a Bossier City nightclub owner. Early J & M ads highlighted the fact that customers could listen to any record in the shop before making a purchase; the business soon expanded, opening a second location at 418 Spring Street in January of 1948 featuring the blues guitarist T-Bone Walker at the Spring Street store for an in-store appearance; evidently the Texas Street store at the time was too small. By April, the Texas Street location was listed in the paper for sale.

On June 22, 1948 a young up-and-coming Italian entrepreneur named Stanley J. Lewis purchased the J & M shop on Texas for $2500. Lewis, the son of a grocery store owner, had been a go-getter from a early age. Mentions are made of a popcorn stand, but it seems more likely that Lewis rented popcorn machines from the Bung Lo firm that had occupied the 728 Texas Street building before the location became a record shop. In keeping with his goal to make money by any means, Lewis invested in peanut and

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6 Telephone conversation with the author. The Job label in Shreveport should not be confused with the better-known J.O.B. label out of Chicago. That both labels recorded blues has heightened the confusion; Job’s releases were pressed in seemingly tiny quantities before being licensed to Gotham Records in Philadelphia or other labels.

7 “Announcing the Opening of J & M Record Shop No. 2,” *Shreveport Times*, January 10, 1948, 6.


gumball machines, and by 1948 he had purchased five Wurlitzer jukeboxes which he placed in Black locations around Shreveport. Jukeboxes required a fresh rotation of records at regular intervals, and Lewis’s motive in purchasing the J & M store seemed to have initially been to give himself a more convenient way to keep his machines restocked.

Lewis ultimately changed the name of his shop to Stan’s Record Shop, and he quickly established relationships with the various independent labels which were recording Black music in the late 1940s. Leonard Chess of Chess Records came through from Chicago; the Bihari brothers of RPM-Modern Records, Bob Shad of Sittin in With Records, Art Rupe of Specialty, Lew Chudd of Imperial, and Eddie Mesner of Aladdin were all frequent visitors. Shreveport was a city with a large and growing Black population, and thus Stan’s fledgling store was important for the growing market of what would soon be dubbed rhythm and blues. Lewis continued the best practices of his predecessors in the space, such as allowing customers to hear records before purchasing and shipping records by mail order, but he also decided to grow the latter business by buying time on radio stations. By 1949, he was advertising his store in local newspapers under its new name, and that store was the foundation of an empire which would last for

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13 Williard Manus, “Spinning Tales.”

14 Stan Lewis was advertising in the *Shreveport Sun* under the new name as early as April of 1949, but discographical references to Stick Horse Hammond being recorded at the “J & M Record Shop” in 1950 raise questions. It is possible that people were slow to adopt the new name, or that the location of Hammond’s recordings was the J & M Shop No. 2 at 418 Spring, which Lewis did not purchase.
almost forty years. Stan Lewis was almost single-handedly responsible for much of the postwar recording in the city, despite never actually owning a studio.

15 “Stan’s Record Shop,” Shreveport Sun, April 23, 1949, 2.
CHAPTER 2

TRAVIS STREET BOOGIE: DOWN HOME AND JUMP BLUES IN
SHREVEPORT 1948-1952

As Shreveport entered the postwar era, the city’s Black music scene was in
something of a transitional period. Big band swing music had been the dominant musical
style during the war, and remained popular within the city. But other forms of music were
making inroads into the area. From nearby rural communities in surrounding counties of
Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas came people bringing a unique style of country blues, and
a new small-combo style of urbanized blues called jump blues, featuring powerful
vocalists and danceable uptempo grooves, was becoming popular in the city’s bars and
nightclubs.

PROFESSOR A. T. CHAMBERS AND THE DUKES OF SWING

As 1948 dawned, the primary Black band in Shreveport was the Dukes of Swing,
a thirteen-piece band led by A. T. “Teddy” Chambers, the band director of Shreveport’s
Central Colored High School.¹ Chambers had been a band director in the Caddo Parish
schools since 1934, eventually becoming the assistant principal of Booker T. Washington
High School, retiring in 1965.

The Dukes of Swing were a popular band in the Shreveport area, playing for a
number of events in both the white and Black communities, including performances for
the airmen at Barksdale Field, American Legion dances, and social club events as far
away as Minden in Webster Parish. In the city’s Black community, the Dukes of Swing
were hired for nearly every social function in 1948; a “Pre-Valentine Dance” of the Black

¹ “New Band Play For Officer’s Dance,” Barksdale Bark (Barksdale Air Force Base, LA), July 28,
1945, 2.
American Legion post in Shreveport featured the Dukes of Swing and took place at the Palace Park, the premier Black entertainment venue in the city. Two weeks later, the Esquires Social Club also engaged the Dukes for a “Pre-Easter Dance” at the Odd Fellows Hall on Western Avenue in the Allendale neighborhood. In March, the YMCA Ladies’ Clubs sponsored a “Fashion Carnival” in conjunction with almost twenty other neighborhood organizations and sororities; this event was so large that it was hosted in the Municipal Auditorium on Grand Avenue, and the Dukes of Swing Orchestra were hired to play “musical numbers and folk dances.” Yet another dance at the Palace Ballroom adjacent to Palace Park was sponsored by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the most powerful Black labor union in America, and again the Dukes of Swing were the featured band. From the extent of available work, it would seem that business for live bands in Shreveport was booming, but Professor Chambers stated that he did not agree, in an interview conducted with the *Shreveport Sun* editor:

> Those in the entertainment field, especially in Northern Louisiana, are not making much money these days, averred Prof. A. A. “Teddy” Chambers, maestro of the Dukes of Swing, a local music aggregation. During the summer, there are too many detracting factors to make the entertainment field profitable, he said. Among the things that cause the seasonal slump are cars, night baseball, air conditioned movies, picnics, vacations and among other things, the lack of an air-conditioned ballroom in Shreveport.

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Chambers went on to further decry the increase in the cost of living that accompanied the post-war boom, claiming that it was making it increasingly hard for Black people to afford entertainment. Yet despite Chambers’s grim assessment, the pages of the *Sun* continued to feature advertisements and reviews of local dances and music events. Although the Dukes of Swing was ostensibly Professor Chambers’s band, the name occasionally appeared with other leaders, notably that of drummer Eddie “Coot” Lewis, as when the Dukes appeared at a “Stunt Night” during the “Negro Day” of the Louisiana State Fair. The event also featured a pianist, Eddie Williams, who would be a part of the local scene at least through the 1950s.7 The Dukes continued to play a number of events in 1949, at least two for white country clubs, and again with Eddie Lewis as the bandleader, but mentions in the newspapers decline after 1950. But the Dukes must not have been entirely gone, for they were an entry in a 1954 talent show sponsored by KRMD radio station and the Strand Theatre, a popular theatre downtown,8 and in 1955 they had a half-hour afternoon program on Shreveport’s new Black radio station, KANV.9 The Dukes of Swing name seems to have disappeared after that.

Professor Alonzo T. Chambers died in Shreveport on March 6, 1975, at the age of 66. His obituary did not mention the Dukes of Swing at all, referring to him merely as a “pioneer band director in the Caddo Parish school system.”10 But a 2002 obituary for another Shreveport musician, Harold Armster Robinson, mentioned the Dukes of Swing,

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saying that Robinson played in the group while in high school.\textsuperscript{11} It would seem that Professor Chambers took promising young high school musicians and gave them their first professional opportunities on their instruments. Those who came through the Dukes would play a large role in Shreveport’s music community in future years.

**EDDIE “COOT” LEWIS**

Eddie “Coot” Lewis, who seems to have at least sometimes fronted the Dukes of Swing after 1948, was a Shreveport drummer. He was first mentioned in 1930, when he was part of a band with Jenette Mills and Hugh Huntley.\textsuperscript{12} They were arrested when they were hired to play by the owner of a luncheonette at Line Avenue and Stephenson Street, after neighbors complained, on the basis of a 1928 ordinance that prohibited band music if it could be heard for more than three hundred feet. The judge dismissed the charges, mentioning that the ordinance did not indicate whether it applied to business areas or residential areas. The business owner also agreed to turn down the volume of his radio in the business.

“Coot” Lewis got his nickname from his dad; he had been born on June 10, 1903, and began his interest in music by carrying the drum for the older drummer in a local marching band. He got his first opportunity to play the drum in a parade himself in 1918, and formed his first band, by his recollection, in 1935.\textsuperscript{13} Yet the *Journal* in fact has an earlier reference to “Coot Lewis’ Orchestra” performing at a “May fete” for the Black


\textsuperscript{12} “Seems as Those Suffering From Neighbors’ Loud Radio To Get A Break,” *Shreveport Journal*, June 24, 1930, 18.

\textsuperscript{13} Marge Fischer, “Coot,” *Shreveport Journal*, February 18, 1980, 11.
schools in Shreveport in 1931.\textsuperscript{14} A gig at a rural location called the Pine Grove followed in 1933, “three miles from the Texas line” on Highway 80, where the band was dubbed “Eddie Kutz Lewis and His Star Jazz Band,” probably through a misunderstanding of “Coot.”\textsuperscript{15} A 1937 performance at the Shreveport Boat Club on Cross Lake featured “Eddie Lewis & His Band” with singer Janet Mills, presumably the woman misidentified as Jenette Mills back in 1930.\textsuperscript{16} Many of Lewis’s gigs before and during World War II were for predominantly white audiences and events; one notable event held by the Shreveport YWCA at Camp Margaret featured performances by both Eddie Lewis and hillbilly musician and future Louisiana governor Jimmie Davis.\textsuperscript{17} Nor was his popularity confined to Shreveport; Lewis could be found at the Rainbow Inn in Monroe,\textsuperscript{18} and even as far south as Abbeville, in Cajun country, where he was booked twice at the Lafitte Supper Club, the second time during Mardi Gras 1940.\textsuperscript{19} Shows in Youngsville and Duson followed, before a July show back in Bossier City at The Woodlawn.\textsuperscript{20} During World War II, Coot Lewis’s band was clearly the premier big band in Shreveport, if not in a large part of Louisiana. A February 1942 Shreveport Country Club show billed the band as “Eddie Lewis and His Sepia Syncopators,” a new name for the group.\textsuperscript{21} 

\textsuperscript{15}“Pine Grove,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, December 22, 1933, 15.
\textsuperscript{17}“Benefit Barbecue at Camp Margaret Will Be Social Event of Wednesday,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, October 23, 1938, 32.
\textsuperscript{19}“Two Dances Announced By Lafitte Dinner Club,” \textit{Abbeville Meridional}, January 27, 1940, 1.
\textsuperscript{20}“Dance Tonight,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, July 20, 1940, 11.
that year, Lewis was playing famous clubs in the central part of the state, such as the Silver Moon Club south of Alexandria and the Blue Moon Club in Bunkie. While the Bunkie gigs continued in 1943, Lewis also added a new club in Oakdale called the Pine Grove to his regular rotation. Lewis’s frequent gigs in Central Louisiana during the war years were likely a reflection of the high number of servicemen in the area due to Camp Claiborne and the Alexandria Army Air Field.

By 1948, Coot was back in Shreveport, playing on the nascent Bossier Strip at a new club called Sammy & Veto’s Gay Room on Texas Street; Lewis was now fronting a small five-man combo, which was typical of the jump blues groups of the era. Although it is often said that Black musicians were not hired to perform on the Bossier Strip until the 1960s, clearly Lewis beat that by almost two decades. The Strip formed in Bossier City for the same reason that gigs had been so prevalent in Central Louisiana, the entertainment of servicemen; Barksdale Army Air Field was soon to become Barksdale Air Force Base. The gig at the Gay Room lasted from late 1949 through 1950, and by 1951, although the venue had changed names to the Twilight Lounge, Lewis was still on drums, playing now with Bob Gilmore’s orchestra. Gigs became fewer and further between as the 1950s progressed, and in 1960, Eddie Lewis was arrested in a day of raids

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24 “Dance This Week at Local Club,” *Oakdale Journal*, February 25, 1943, 1.
on three Shreveport night clubs that were alleged to be allowing people to bet on horses.\textsuperscript{27} Peculiarly, the newspapers did not name which of the three clubs he was in, nor why he was there, but it seems most likely that he was at the Spot Club on Marshall Street, and had probably been performing there with a band. His last advertised gig came in 1965, when the Coot Lewis Trio played New Year’s Eve at The Chef on Kings Highway.\textsuperscript{28} By 1979, Lewis had moved into Nursecare, a nursing home for elderly people in Shreveport, but he was still able to play music at times.\textsuperscript{29} Finally, in 1980, Coot Lewis got the attention he deserved, with a half-page article in the \textit{Shreveport Journal}, in which one of his students, Marvin Modicue stated, “He’s been an inspiration to a lot of young people.”\textsuperscript{30} Eddie “Coot” Lewis passed away five months later, on July 11, 1980.\textsuperscript{31}

\section*{THE MYSTERY OF PADDY BROWN/PAT NELSON}

One of the stranger mysteries about Shreveport area big bands is deciphering the identity of a big band leader named occasionally Paddy Brown or alternately Patty Brown. A comparison of club advertising in area newspapers suggests that he also was known as Pat Nelson, but that does not reveal any further information about him. He first appears in 1935 as Pat Nelson & His Black Devils, playing at a Cross Lake location known as Crescent Beach.\textsuperscript{32} Later In December of the same year, he was billed as Pattie


\textsuperscript{29} “Nursecare Residents Rock ’n’ Roll for Hearts,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, February 14, 1979, 23.


\textsuperscript{32} “Dance Tonight Crescent Beach,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, August 9, 1935, 11.
Brown and his Harmony Boys, performing at the Club Castle.\textsuperscript{33} A year later, in December of 1936, the band was referred to as Paddy Brown and His Night Hawks, and was playing at the Woodlawn Beer Garden outside of Bossier City.\textsuperscript{34} An ad four days later for the same night club referred to Pat Nelson and His Night Hawks, making it fairly clear that Pat Nelson and Patty/Paddie Brown were the same person.\textsuperscript{35} As for the Night Hawks name, it was a dominant name through early Black Shreveport music history, having been associated with the bandleader Bert Benton before World War II. Afterwards, the name is found with numerous leaders, including Paddy Brown, Pat Nelson, on one occasion Fats Lewis,\textsuperscript{36} and in later years Alex “Snook” Jones. Whether the various bands named “Night Hawks” in Shreveport were different iterations of the same band, or different entities simply incorporating a popular local name, is unclear.

By April of 1937, the band was now Pat Nelson and his Swing Band,\textsuperscript{37} and ten years later in Plain Dealing, a Halloween Party advertised Patty Brown’s Famous All-Colored Orchestra.\textsuperscript{38} There was no further mention of Mr. Brown or his band until 1955, when he appeared for two weeks at the Nite Spot Bar in Bossier City as Pattie Brown and His Combo with Al Page “The Blues King.”\textsuperscript{39} Page (or sometimes Al Pace) was associated with Eddie “Coot” Lewis. The last mentions of Paddy Brown occur in late

\textsuperscript{36} “Dance Tonight Shreveport Boat Club,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, October 1, 1938, 11.
1957 and early 1958 as he was playing the Lake Cliff, a night club and motel at the dead end of Milam Street adjacent to Cross Lake.\textsuperscript{40}

Despite frequent performances, no “Paddy Brown” is ever mentioned in interviews with old Shreveport musicians, and he appears on no recordings. He is never mentioned in the \textit{Shreveport Sun}, except on one occasion when his band is featured in a KENT radio Palace Park Revue in 1948. The Black Shreveport trumpet player Isaac Greggs occasionally was called by the nickname “Patty,” but being born in 1929, he could not be the Patty Brown whose first advertised performance was in 1935. What seems most likely is that “Patty Brown” was perhaps a pseudonym for Eddie “Coot” Lewis himself. For one thing, almost all of the Paddy Brown/Pat Nelson gigs were at clubs where Lewis had played, including the Woodlawn and the Shreveport Boat Club. Paddy Brown is active around the same years that Lewis was active. Another mysterious gig by “Fats Lewis and the Night Hawks” at the Shreveport Boat Club in 1938 is probably Coot Lewis. Al Page/Pace was often mentioned with Eddie Lewis, and in 1955 in Bossier City, he is appearing with Pattie Brown and His Combo. While there is no way we can be sure, and it is unclear why Eddie Lewis would use a pseudonym, the most logical answer is that Lewis and Brown were the same person.

\textbf{GENE PEARSON’S ORCHESTRA}

Another fairly mysterious Shreveport band leader was Gene (or sometimes Jean) Pearson, who was seemingly active only during the ten years between 1945 and 1955. He first appears at the Woodlawn Night Club outside of Bossier City as “Jean Pearson’s

Orchestra.” The next year, in April, he is at Club Forrest, also near Bossier City, as Gene Pearson and His Colored Orchestra. One of the more peculiar things about white night clubs in the Shreveport area in the era was that they often emphasized having a “colored orchestra” as a selling point. It would seem that white audiences in the area must have preferred Black bands for their dancing and listening pleasure. By August of 1946, Gene had become “Jean” again, but still at the Club Forest, which had also managed to lose an “r” from its name. Pearson remains at the Forest through much of 1946 and 1947, but in October 1947 appears at Pappy’s Show Bar in the Agurs neighborhood of Shreveport on a double bill with Alex “Snook” Jones and his Night Hawks. There is no mention of Gene Pearson at all in 1948, but in January of 1949, he is advertised at the Airmen’s Club on Old Mooringsport Road in Shreveport. That gig seems to have lasted through the end of March, and then on April 14, Pearson opened at a new club called The Flamingo which had formerly been called The Belvedere on Greenwood Road. The residency lasted the entire month of April, and eventually featured a blues singer named Eddie Smith. In September, he had returned to the Airmen’s Club, and it seems that he remained there through the rest of the year. In January of 1950, Pearson was at the

Arrowhead Club on Old Mooringsport Road, which may have simply been the Airmen’s Club under new owners and a different name. After a couple of months there, Pearson moved back to Club Forest where he remained for the remainder of 1950. But one Club Forest ad in August was different from the others, giving some unique details about the Gene Pearson band. The ad referred to “Gene (John) Pearson,” perhaps explaining the occasional spelling “Jean” and suggesting how it might have been pronounced. And it further states, “The same orchestra that was so popular here. Remember this popular orchestra played here in 1946, ’47, and ’48.” and lists the band members as “George and his Trumpet, Page at the Piano, Dick on the Saxophone, Patty the Drummer.” Assuming that “Patty” is “Patty Brown,” his being a drummer furthers the idea that he might indeed be Eddie “Coot” Lewis. “Page” might well be Al Page from Lewis’s band. Aside from two appearances at the Skyway Room in Bossier City in April 1951, Pearson remained a fixture at the Club Forest throughout 1951, 1952, and the first four months in 1953. But in May of 1953, Gene Pearson started a new regular gig at a new Bossier City club called the Ole Bridge Inn, and this gig continued through June, July, and August of 1953 saw Pearson back at the Arrowhead Club in Shreveport, and then in September he returned to Club Forest for the remainder of the year. Gene Pearson’s gigs began to taper off in 1954; while most of them were at Club Forest, he did a couple of one-time appearance at

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50 “Dance, Thursday, Friday and Saturday,” Shreveport Times, August 24, 1950, 10.
clubs on Barksdale Boulevard like the Pelican Club and the Club Coronado. His last mention is in connection with a New Year’s Eve Party in 1955 at Club Forest.53

Like Patty/Paddie Brown, the lack of any non-musical information about Gene/Jean Pearson suggests that this name is also a pseudonym. He seems to have been a trumpet player, and there seems to be overlap in the members of his band and that of Eddie “Coot” Lewis. How these various bands were related will likely remain a mystery. Perhaps the goal was to avoid oversaturating the market with the same band name, while getting maximum income for the musicians. It is likely also noteworthy that Eddie “Coot” Lewis, Paddy Brown, and Jean/Gene Pearson all begin to slow down activities by the mid-1950s, a further indication that there was something synchronized about these bands.

**ALEX “SNOOK” JONES & HIS SHREVEPORT NIGHT HAWKS**

At some point in 1947, the Night Hawks seemed to have passed from the control of Patty Brown to Alex “Snook” Jones, a Shreveport pianist. Jones is first mentioned in the Shreveport papers in October of 1947, when he appeared at Pappy’s Show Club in Shreveport on a double bill with Jean Pearson’s Orchestra.54 In December he appeared at Gene & Ozell’s on the Old Mooringsport Road, but as that was also the location of Pappy’s, one wonders if it was merely the same club under new management.55 In January 1949, Jones was featured at the Airmen’s Club, again on the Old Mooringsport Road, this time featuring a vocalist named Iteria Cooper, who was billed as “the girl with

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the golden voice.” An April “Style Show” at the Palace Ballroom featured the Shreveport Night Hawks, and later that month they were playing the Club Forest outside of Bossier City. When the Benton County Training School held their community fair in November, Snook Jones and His Night Hawks were hired to provide entertainment for a “social hour” that was to follow the daytime activities. The Beauticians’ Fall Dance was also played by the Night Hawks in December, at the Palace Park.

In March of 1951, Snook Jones was advertised for the reopening of the Rosemary Night Club in Cedar Grove, “under the supervision of N. G. Burckett,” and with the odd note that “only couples will be permitted,” presumably to prevent fights caused by people cutting in on others’ dates. Nor was Jones confined to Shreveport, because in December of 1951 he appeared at The Palms in Kilgore, Texas, with his singer Iteria Cooper, this time billed as “The Songbird of the South.” For a couple of weeks in August of 1952, Jones was at Skib’s Club Pelican in Bossier City, and then in 1953, he placed an unusual advertisement in the Shreveport Sun indicating he was looking for a male vocalist to sing “ballads and blues, especially blues.” Most interestingly, Jones included his address,

57 “Make Plans Now To Attend The Louisiana State Beauticians Ball,” Shreveport Sun, April 2, 1949, 7.
60 “The Shreveport Unit of the Louisiana State Beauticians…,” Shreveport Sun, December 3, 1949, 8.
63 “Male Vocalist Wanted,” Shreveport Sun, January 3, 1953.
which indicated he was living at 3027 Leonard Street in Shreveport in 1953. Beginning in May of that year, Snook Jones started a regular gig at the Club Coronado in Bossier City which lasted through June and July.\(^\text{64}\) In August, he was back on Old Mooringsport Road at the Arrowhead Club at where he and his Night Hawks had been fixtures through the years despite name and ownership changes.\(^\text{65}\)

In 1954, the Strand Theater on Texas Avenue and KRMD radio station began sponsoring a series of Talent Hunt shows, and the first show was won by Snook Jones and His Night Hawks, which seems somewhat odd in that they were already a professional band, but apparently the show was not restricted to amateurs. Indeed the Dukes of Swing were competitors in the second show.\(^\text{66}\) In September, the Night Hawks were booked at the Skyway Room on the Bossier Strip for a three-night engagement.\(^\text{67}\)

In early 1955, a new venue called Steve’s Lounge opened at 2008 Market Street north of downtown Shreveport, and Snook Jones became the featured band there, playing regularly from February to April.\(^\text{68}\) But in November, he was back at the Arrowhead, his old haunt, and the band played there for a month.\(^\text{69}\) In 1956, the Night Hawks were routinely featured at the Skyway Room in Bossier for almost the entire year, before a Christmas Eve gig at Club Forest.\(^\text{70}\)


\[^\text{70}\] “Christmas Eve Dance Tonight,” *Shreveport Times*, December 24, 1956, 2.
Unlike the Coot Lewis, Dukes of Swing, Gene Pearson, and Patty Brown bands, which seemed to fall off after the mid-1950s, Snook Jones seemed to keep his momentum into the late 1950s and early 1960s. He played jazz gigs at Bossier City’s Four Aces; he played regular gigs at the Lake Cliff with a large ensemble. He even played a “rock & roll” gig at the Pinstripe Lounge. Perhaps Jones’s versatility was a key to his remaining relevant in a rapidly-changing music scene. Between 1960 and 1964, Jones played with his band at the Pinstripe Lounge, the Stork Supper Club, the Planters Inn, the Shanty Club, the Zebra Room, the Four Aces, and Club Old Gold, alternately billed as classics, jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll. Then, somewhat abruptly, he disappeared from the scene for nearly ten years.

Jones seems to have come back out of retirement about 1973, when the Revana Restaurant opened in Bossier City at the Western Hills Motor Hotel. Jones had reinvented himself yet again, becoming a solo pianist and singer in a style which reminded Journal entertainment columnist Bob Griffin of Major Lampkins, an elderly Shreveport pianist much beloved in the city. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, Jones was a fixture at Lowell’s Seafood Restaurant on Mansfield Road, and in a handful of local Shreveport hotel bars and restaurants, but he came out with a band to play the two Shreveport Blues Fests that were held in 1980 and 1981, and in 1983, at the Red

River Revel, Jones unveiled his new band, called not the Night Hawks, but the Club of Clouds.\(^{76}\) For the last five years of his life, Jones appeared frequently in Shreveport with the Club of Clouds, and also as a solo pianist.

In an interview given shortly before his death, Alex “Snook” Jones stated that he was born on November 4, 1913, in Shreveport, and grew up on Logan Street. He had studied piano with Stella Green in Shreveport, and then at Minnie Hightower’s School of Music on Vernon Avenue in Los Angeles, before he returned to Louisiana.\(^ {77}\) Jones passed away in September of 1988, at the age of 75.\(^ {78}\)

**OTHER BANDS IN NORTH LOUISIANA**

While the Dukes of Swing and Coot Lewis’s Band were the two primary bands in the Shreveport area, they were by no means the only Black dance bands in the region. A bandleader named Sarge King had a band based in the all-Black college town of Grambling, Louisiana, four miles west of Ruston. The band was referred to alternately as King’s Grambling Orchestra,\(^ {79}\) or Sarge King and His Grambling Collegians.\(^ {80}\) The eight-piece band was likely made up of students from Grambling College. King ultimately became the band director of Bossier City Colored High School, which was later renamed Charlotte Mitchell High School.


\(^ {77}\) Monty Brown, Interview with Alex “Snook” Jones, January 24, 1988.

\(^ {78}\) “Funeral Announcement-Mr. Alex H. Jones,” *Shreveport Times*, September 9, 1988, 14.


Thirty-four miles east of Grambling, Ben Burton had the prominent Black orchestra in the fairly large city of Monroe, Louisiana. Burton’s band was constantly in demand not only in Monroe, but in smaller towns like Columbia, Winnfield and Rayville; on occasions, he was even booked in Shreveport. During the early 1950s, Burton recorded as a bass player with Ike Turner, the Clarksdale, Mississippi pianist, and at least one session of four songs with Burton’s band was recorded by Joe Bihari in Monroe, Louisiana in April of 1952, for the RPM/Modern label out of Los Angeles. The four songs, “Bee Hive Boogie,” “Blues and Jam,” “Lover’s Blues,” and “Cherokee Boogie,” would seem to all be instrumentals, and in discographies were said to have been recorded in “East Monroe.” As there is no known area or neighborhood called East Monroe, it seems likely that West Monroe was meant.

A school dance at the Morehouse Parish Training School in Bastrop featured a band led by one of the school’s students, a saxophonist named DeSota Atkins, whose band was called DeSota Atkins’ Famous Orchestra. A December article from the same year revealed that Atkins was a member of the Morehouse Parish Training School Band, and that he played the alto saxophone. Although he is never mentioned again with regard to music, DeSota Atkins went on to become an important Black community leader in Bastrop.

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An “After Football Dance” sponsored by the “Tuskegee-Hampton Club” on Halloween 1949 in Shreveport included music by a band called Alcee Vaughn and His Natchitoches Serenaders. Vaughn was well known as the band director for the Natchitoches Parish Training School, which was the Black high school in Natchitoches. Like Ben Burton in Monroe and Coot Lewis in Shreveport, Vaughn seems to have been in considerable demand for fraternity and sorority parties, and for other white social events and affairs. Although Vaughn and his Serenaders were not frequently booked in Shreveport, they were in the city again in 1950 for an informal dance at the American Legion sponsored by the Veterans Administration.

A 1950 Pre-Valentine’s Dance sponsored by the Chemistry Club of Booker T. Washington High School featured music by a band called Howard Robinson and his Robins. Robinson seems to have been a faculty member at Booker T. Washington, and still had his band in 1952, when he ran an ad in the Sun looking for gigs. The ad, which said, “we play for public dances, parties, private dances etc.” also listed a Shreveport address at 2005 Ashton Street, presumably Robinson’s residence. The band is never mentioned again.

Most of the various bands and combos in Shreveport during the early years after the war were led by men, but an exception was Mary Lou and her Harmony Boys, who

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84 “Meet Your Friends And Classmates at the After Football Dance,” Shreveport Sun, October 22, 1949, 8.


87 “If You Want Music,” Shreveport Sun, January 26, 1952.
were first mentioned in September of 1951.\textsuperscript{88} “Mary Lou” was Mary Lou Simpson, a piano player who was apparently well known in Shreveport; she had been noted for singing and playing the piano as early as the 1940s, and the Ranch House, where she became the featured attraction, had been a country music venue about seven miles north of Bossier City toward Benton, but the owners evidently were not making a profit and tried converting to a Black clientele. Presumably because the club was still white-owned, their advertising warned that the establishment was “for colored only,” to discourage the usual white patrons from attending.\textsuperscript{89} Mary Lou and her band were advertised there at least through early October, but then advertising for white country bands at the Ranch House appeared again, and in 1952, Simpson opened her own night club, Mary Lou’s Groovey Club at 1733 Southern Avenue in Shreveport. The opening ad in the \textit{Sun} promised “hickory-smoked barbecue” and “the coldest beer in town,” and reminded patrons that “we all remember Mary Lou for her great piano playing.”\textsuperscript{90} Unfortunately, her club did not seem to be a success; in 1953, it was purchased by a man named M. B. Murray, although the name Groovey Club remained.\textsuperscript{91} Mrs. Simpson is not mentioned in Shreveport papers after the 1950s; in the only photo of her, from a club advertisement from 1943, she appears to be white. She claimed to have been born in Paris, France, and to specialize in blues.

\textsuperscript{88} “Orchestra Every Night at the Ranch House,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, September 6, 1951, 10.

\textsuperscript{89} “Grand Opening, For Colored Only,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, September 29, 1951.

\textsuperscript{90} “Mary Lou’s Groovey Club,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, April 12, 1952.

As for the Ranch House, by December of 1951, they were promoting another band, the Bob Gilmore band.\textsuperscript{92} Robert H. Gilmore, a Prince Hall Mason, founded the Gilmore’s News Stand in downtown Shreveport in 1916, and as a pioneering Black businessman, also helped to found the first Black drive-in movie theatre in the city. The Bob Gilmore fronting the orchestra however would seem to have been his son, Robert H. Gilmore II, and it is unclear whether he was a singer or a musician. His band seems to have existed only for a few months in late 1951 and early 1952, with a performance at the Twilight Cocktail Lounge in Bossier City in December, featuring “Coot” Lewis on drums,\textsuperscript{93} and a few gigs the following year at the Lake Cliff.\textsuperscript{94} The young Gilmore would eventually take on the news stand after his father’s death in 1966, and it remained in the Gilmore family until it closed in 1997.\textsuperscript{95}

Another mysterious band is the Rhythm Jumpers, featuring “Jazz Bo Williams and His Hot Trumpet,” which appeared for only a couple of weeks at The Corral at 4707 Greenwood Road in Shreveport in May of 1952.\textsuperscript{96} The name “Jazz Bo Williams” seems like another pseudonym, and being a trumpet player, might have been the same person as “Jean Pearson.” This perhaps may have been another Eddie “Coot” Lewis—related band. Peculiarly, none of these many Shreveport bands seem to have recorded.

In addition to numerous big bands and combos, Shreveport had a number of solo musicians, especially pianists. Perhaps none was better known and more popular than Major Lampkins, whose career spanned over fifty-two years. Born in 1902, Lampkins was the son of Joseph Lampkins, a choir leader and former fiddle player who had learned music while an enslaved person, and Major might have become a guitarist had his father not told him that he was “too little” to play a guitar. Taking up the piano instead, he became a professional musician when he joined Ed Dutty’s band in 1923, and spent time with Burt Benton’s Night Hawks, and with Eddie “Coot” Lewis. But it was as a solo pianist that Lampkins would become famous. Family folklore had it that he had been offered the part of the Black pianist in the movie *Casablanca*, but had refused it because filming would have required him to fly. Notably, his son Ernest learned to fly airplanes and obtained a pilot’s license.

From 1948 until 1952, Major Lampkins was the house pianist at The Hurricane, a Bossier City bar on Traffic Street at the foot of the bridge between the two cities. By 1955, he had moved to the Thomas House Lounge at 333 Market Street in downtown Shreveport, and he was still there in December of 1956.

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In 1958, Major Lampkins was at the Gold Room of the Town and Country Motor Hotel in Bossier City, a lounge that was run by Ernest Palmisano. Lampkins would play at several of Palmisano’s various restaurants and clubs over the years, and was still at the Gold Room two years later in 1960. When Palmisano took over management of the Famous Mirror Steak House in Shreveport on Highland Avenue in 1961, the venue featured not only Major at the piano, but also Walter LeBeau and His Mules, the band name hinting that bluesman Jesse Thomas might have been part of the group, since Thomas’s nickname was “Mule.” In 1962, Lampkins had moved to a Commerce Street supper club called Dino’s, and a year later he had moved to the Alibi Room of the Forest Lounge. Two weeks after his apparent debut there, he had moved again to Brocato’s Stopmoor Restaurant in the Broadmoor neighborhood, where the Times entertainment editor Margaret McDonald caught up with him and called him “an institution in Shreveport.”

But like many musicians of his generation, Major Lampkins quit playing regularly in the 1970s, playing only occasional gigs at a local spot called the Krock-O-Cheese, and big community events such as the early Red River Revels in the fall, and on one occasion nightly at the Gold Room.

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occasion, a Jazz Festival at the Veterans Park Amphitheater. In 1982 the first of several
anual tributes to him were held. Major Lampkins died on January 8, 1985 in Shreveport,
and despite his long career and stellar reputation in the area, he never recorded
commercially.

**THE PALACE PARK**

Central to Shreveport’s Black entertainment scene in the years immediately after
World War II was the Palace Park, an entertainment venue consisting of a nightclub and a
baseball field. Shreveport music researcher John Ridge has detailed the history of the
Palace Park from opening until its closure in his excellent *Shreveport Confidential* blog,
and learned that the complex opened in 1913, primarily as a baseball stadium, although it
had at various times had a movie theatre and a nightclub. It was often the site of baseball
and football games, as well as boxing matches, concerts, and allegedly sometimes
gambling and dog-fighting. After the Second World War, the ballroom became more
prominent, and the biggest stars in Black music came to Shreveport to perform there.

T-Bone Walker likely played the Palace Park in February of 1948, judging from
his in-store appearance at the J & M Record Shop No. 2 on Friday February 6th, although
peculiarly the actual show does not appear in the *Sun*. A month later, the “Queen of the
Blues,” Memphis Minnie, appeared on a Monday night, March 8th, backed by Ivan
Green and His Orchestra. Although Minnie was immensely popular before World War

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II, by 1948, her career had started to ebb, as popular tastes were changing from her style of blues to the hotter jump blues style which gave birth to rhythm and blues. Her booking at Palace Park was one of the few for a country blues artist. May brought another throwback artist, Erskine Hawkins and Orchestra, which had come to Shreveport before, and were evidently popular in the city;\footnote{Erskine Hawkins and His Orchestra,} a Bossier City nightclub even bore the name of Hawkins’s biggest hit, “Tuxedo Junction.”

In June a collegiate baseball game between Grambling College and Tuskegee Institute also featured an evening concert by Joe Lutcher, a popular bandleader from Lake Charles who had moved to California. Lutcher was also to crown a young woman as “Miss Club 51.” Club 51 was a popular club north of Shreveport in the Cooper Road community. The promoter for the event was Lawrence Patton, a local Black businessman who owned Pat’s Service Station on Milam Street, which was always a ticket outlet for Black dances and concerts in Shreveport.\footnote{Top Negro Nines Here Saturday} After the fact, the \textit{Sun} said that over three thousand people attended the baseball game, which occurred over the Juneteenth weekend, and four hundred attended the Lutcher dance, at which a local woman named Ada Brown sang.\footnote{Shreveport Celebrates 19th of June In A Big Way} The prominence of Juneteenth as a celebration in Black Shreveport reveals something of the city’s strong ties to Texas; large celebrations were the rule through the 1950s.

Although the summer months of 1948 did not feature a lot of advertising about the Palace Park, “Rambler,” the \textit{Sun}’s entertainment columnist, could write that “the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{112} “Erskine Hawkins and His Orchestra,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, May 15, 1948, 8.
\end{thebibliography}
Palace Ballroom is sporting [one] known band right after another and the guys and gals are having the maximum of fun there.” Later the same month, he wrote “Saw loads of the Bishop College—out Marshall, Texas way—lads over for the T-Bone Walker dance at the Palace park the other night.” Walker’s frequent appearances in Shreveport are a testament to how popular he must have been in the city, and once radio station KENT began broadcasting the Palace Park Revue program in August, the city’s white teenagers could begin to hear the kind of music that went on at the venue. Despite its obvious popularity, the Palace Park must have been extremely hot in the summer months. In an August interview with the Sun, Professor A. T. Chambers noted that Shreveport did not have an air-conditioned venue. The Sun eventually gave more details about the KENT broadcasts from the Palace Park:

The first of a series of Wednesday night broadcasts was made by the Lawrence Patton-James Jackson floor show over radio station KENT Wednesday night July 28. The show, featured nightly at the Park, consists of local musical and dancing talent, and the broadcast over Shreveport’s Mutual Broadcasting outlet, was made from the park.

Participating on the program were: Ada Brown, Frank Butler, Marie Black, Jerry and Ernest Miller, Dick Huntley and Patty Brown’s Orchestra. Prof. Herman Selber acted as master of ceremonies.

119 “Palace Park Floorshow Broadcast Over KENT,” Shreveport Sun, August 7, 1948, 8.
About a week later, an August 20 show by Roy “Good Rocking” Brown, a New Orleans singer was announced.\textsuperscript{120} Said the Rambler afterwards, “Everybody had a wonderful time jiving and jumping to the tunes made by the mad Roy Brown and his jive cats.”\textsuperscript{121} Brown actually owed his career to Shreveport and the Palace Park, as he told John Broven in a 1977 interview:

And after I entered the amateur contests and won a few prizes, I went back to Houston, Texas to be inducted into the services. But due to my flat feet they rejected me, and during the next few days, I went around the clubs and a guy from Shreveport came, he wanted an MC and a singer. I had learned a few more songs like “Barefoot,” “Temptation,” some of Crosby’s hit tunes like “Blue Hawaii,” “South Sea Island Magic,” stuff like that, crooning, you know. So he said, “here’s a Negro who sounds white, perhaps you’ll be a novelty for my club, would you like to work for me?” I said, “Sure!” he said “How much money do you want?” I said, “Oh, my pay?” I would have been satisfied with fifty a week. He said “One hundred and twenty-five a week.” I said, “Let’s go!” And I stayed at that club in Shreveport about nine months. It was called Billy Riley’s Palace Park. It was a big ballroom, there was a big ball park. It was away from Texas Street and Fannin which were downtown. It was my first big real job.

But anyway, that was where I first learned to sing the blues. The first blues song I ever learned was Buddy Johnson and Ella Johnson’s “When My Man Comes Home” and Billy Eckstine’s “Jelly, Jelly.” And I started doing those songs because the other singers on the show were doing the blues and the people were throwing their money. Dollar bills, half dollars, they were making pretty good tips.

So then my buddy, my drummer, says, “Look, man you got a voice, why don’t you sing some blues?” I said, “I don’t like the blues, I just won’t sing ‘em.” So he said, “You gotta learn some blues to make some extra money,” so then I learned some extra songs, and I went from there. My backing was drums, tenor saxophone, guitar and bass, we used four pieces at that time, the Al Pace and Eddie (Coot) Lewis Combo. They were elderly men, there was nothing more than what they were doing. I was doing “Temptation,” “When They Ask About You,” “Lucky Old Sun,” that kind of stuff, then I learned the blues.

\textsuperscript{120} “Coming in Person,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, August 14, 1948, 5.

\textsuperscript{121} “Around Town,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, August 28, 1948, 3.
they were just playing music, that’s all. And I hadn’t developed my shouting or crying style because I was doing a Crosby. This particular club had big show, reminded me of the vaudeville, we had all kinds of acts, and I became a favorite there. We had all types of clientele there, whites, Blacks, they had me singing the Crosby things, and I loved it. It was the biggest club in Shreveport.122

Roy Brown would go on to become a huge star, and a major influence on Elvis Presley, whose career also was spurred by time spent in Shreveport.

West coast bluesman Roy Milton performed at the Palace Park on August 27,123 Lonnie Johnson and Milton Larkins on September 24,124 and Jimmie Liggins and His Drops of Joy on October 1.125 With the announcement of a King Perry show, the Rambler stated “Shreveport is really getting on the map; more celebrities have poured in this week than, I dare say, on Broadway itself.”126 The advertised King Perry show took place on October 15,127 and the Rambler mentioned a Ravens show at the Palace Park a week later.128 The year was closed out with shows by T-Bone Walker and a Christmas night dance with Roy Brown. The Rambler was there and gave a detailed description: “Roy Brown drew a tremendously large crowd when he played in his hometown Christmas night at the Palace park—the ladies swooned and one even ‘fainted’ as the ‘Good

123 “Roy Milton,” Shreveport Sun, August 28, 1948, 8.
125 “Jimmie Liggins,” Shreveport Sun, October 2, 1948, 2.
126 “Around Town,” Shreveport Sun, October 16, 1948, 2.
128 “Around Town,” Shreveport Sun, October 23, 1948, 2.
Rocking Brown’ entertained the throngs of fans who jammed the dance hall to view Shreveport’s own famous musician.”

The new year of 1949 saw Palace Park host shows by Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson, Buddy Johnson, T-Bone Walker, Charles Brown, Roy Brown, Eddie Williams, and Floyd Dixon. But tragedy would strike the venue early in 1950 when its manager Willie Stewart shot Mack Taylor, a man with whom he had been having a legal dispute. The club came under new ownership, and no shows were advertised until April, when Amos Milburn appeared for the Easter weekend. Roy Brown was back on May 5 and Floyd Dixon on the Fourth of July. But it was evident that under the new owners, the Palace Park was booking fewer shows. Roy Milton came to Shreveport on August 4, and Louis Jordan on September 11, 1950. The Palace Park ended the year with a dance on Christmas night, with blues singer Ivory Joe Hunter performing.

In 1951, the Palace Park opened the season in March with another appearance by Roy Brown, who was much beloved in Shreveport, but it was an April “Battle of Blues” between Ray Charles and Lowell Fulsom that was the highlight show of the

129 “Around Town,” Shreveport Sun, January 8, 1949, 5.
131 “Big Easter Dance Amos Milburn,” Shreveport Sun, April 8, 1950, 7.
132 “Yes! Everyone Will Be There!” Shreveport Sun, April 29, 1950, 2.
133 “Big Fourth of July Dance,” Shreveport Sun, July 1, 1950, 4.
135 “The Greatest Dance In Shreveport In the Last Two Years,” Shreveport Sun, September 9, 1950, 5.
137 “The Dance You Have Been Waiting For,” Shreveport Sun, February 24, 1951, 6.
spring.\textsuperscript{138} No more shows were advertised until August, when an appearance by Joe Fritz and James Wayne was advertised on August 31.\textsuperscript{139} Joe Fritz was from Houston, and James Wayne originally from Atlanta, but both were signed to Bob Shad, the owner of the Sittin’ In With label in New York City. Shad had been in Shreveport in 1950, and had recorded bluesman Lonnie Williams at a Shreveport radio station, probably KWKH. Three of the other artists on his label seem to have been from the Ark-La-Tex: Blind Johnny Beck, whom blues researcher Bob Eagle found in Panola County, Texas in 1950 census records, Nelson Carson, a blues guitarist from Texarkana, and Shreveport’s own Ever Ready Gospel Singers. Of the two artists appearing at the Palace Park, Fritz was probably the bigger star, at least in Houston, but Wayne had recorded a hit song the year before called “Junco Partner.” A week later, on September 7, Louis Jordan was back with his fourteen-piece band.\textsuperscript{140} But the good times at Palace Park seemed to quickly come to an end. No more shows were advertised for the rest of 1951, and in 1952, not a single show was promoted. The venerable old Shreveport venue would have a rebirth and another heyday a few years later, but in 1952, things looked grim.

**THE STAR THEATER**

The other big venue for major Black touring acts in Shreveport during the early postwar years was not a nightclub at all, but rather a movie theater. The Star Theater at 1050 Texas Avenue was the city’s only Black theater, located in the middle of the Black

\textsuperscript{138} “Ray Charles In The Battle of Blues With Lowell Fulsom,” *Shreveport Sun*, April 14, 1951, 2.


\textsuperscript{140} “Palace Park Presents An Entire Week of Entertainment,” *Shreveport Sun*, September 1, 1951, 2.
entertainment district. The Star ran feature films like most other theaters, but it had also sponsored vaudeville shows back in the 1930s, and in 1948, it began doing so again, eventually booking national acts in competition with the Palace Park.

After World War II, the Star Theater first advertised a live show in December of 1948, when they advertised an appearance by Sam Green’s Hot Harlem Review, featuring “five big acts.” The same group was being advertised in late January of 1949, but with a “complete change of show.” In April, Shreveport was visited by Charles Taylor’s Bronze Manikins, with singing, dancing and comedy, and in November Sammy Green was back. So far, the pace of live bookings and star power of the performers was decidedly limited, but that would change.

In February of 1950, the Star Theater opened the year with an appearance by Jerrie Jackson’s Hi-Steppers, featuring singing and dancing, but hosted no other live shows that year. The relatively obscure groups that were brought, and the lack of mention in the Rambler’s entertainment columns for the period suggest that the Star at that time could not compete with the nearly weekly shows of major stars across town at the Palace Park.

In September of 1951, the Star hosted a vaudeville show with its first big star. While the advertised group The Elopers are obscure, the bill also featured Memphis Slim,

141 “Special-Friday Only,” Shreveport Sun, December 18, 1948, 5.
142 “Sunday & Monday,” Shreveport Sun, January 29, 1949, 8.
143 “Friday Only, Vaudeville,” Shreveport Sun, April 23, 1949, 3.
144 “Sunday & Monday,” Shreveport Sun, November 19, 1949, 5.
a well-known blues pianist who had been popular since before the war. By 1951, he had converted his band into the customary jump blues combo to keep up with changing times. But there were no more live shows at the Star until December, when the Swing Revue was advertised with the customary “five big acts.”

It was perhaps the demise of the Palace Park in 1952 which caused the Star Theater to attempt to step up the quality and pace of their live music stage shows. The year opened with a “Battle of the Saxes,” featuring Tab Smith, Frank Culley and Wild Bill Moore. February brought an appearance by The Dominoes, and the Rhythm Express, and in March John Lee Hooker, for what was seemingly his first public performance in Shreveport.

Hooker had unique ties to the city of Shreveport. He was raised and mentored by Will Moore, his stepfather, who was from Shreveport, and Dr. David Evans has noted similarities between Hooker’s well-known “boogie” style and the music of Mansfield, Louisiana bluesmen Country Jim Bledsoe and Clarence London. The music of Blind Johnny Beck, who was likely from Carthage, Texas, about thirty miles west of Mansfield,

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146 “Sunday Only,” Shreveport Sun, September 1, 1951, 8.
shows the same resemblance, suggesting that the sound Hooker became famous for had its roots in the rural areas of the Ark-La-Tex region.

An April 1952 show was the Star’s biggest yet, featuring B. B. King and H-Bomb Ferguson “singing their blues,” and Milton Larkins and His X-Rays.153 and in May, the Orioles were the featured group.154 September brought shows by Tiny Bradshaw and Mable Scott,155 and October a return performance by The Dominoes.156 Later that month, the actor Peg Leg Bates came to town with a revue that included a “good orchestra” and advertised “dancing,”157 and in November, a “new group” called The Checkers, singing their hit “Flame In My Heart.”158 This would prove to be the last advertised show of the year.

**THE LAKE CLIFF**

The other prominent Shreveport club that occasionally featured Black bands was the Lake Cliff, a roadhouse and tourist court at 3115 Milam Street (although the address would change over the years, the building never moved) which opened in 1938, on the edge of Cross Lake.159 While the Lake Cliff appealed to a white clientele and normally booked white bands, it occasionally booked Black bands as well. The first advertisement for a dance featuring a Black band at the club appeared in the *Shreveport Journal* on

April 15, 1950, but the band is not named, described merely as “Ark-La-Tex’s Hottest Colored Orchestra.”¹⁶⁰ The tendency of Shreveport clubs to keep their Black bands anonymous in advertising is peculiar, and it corresponds to the flurry of band names which seem to be pseudonymous in the same time period. The reasons for all of this are unclear, but might be related to several factors. Clubs may not have wanted the American Federation of Musicians Local 116 to know they were booking musicians who were not members. Bands may have been cheating on exclusive contracts they had with a particular venue, requiring them to either use a false name or remain anonymous. Bands may not have wanted to oversaturate themselves locally, causing them to occasionally book under other names, or anonymously. And finally, Alex “Snook” Jones mentioned some local bands getting into tax trouble with the Internal Revenue Service for not paying taxes on their earnings. For whatever the reason, both anonymous or pseudonymous names were common in Shreveport during the years between 1948 and 1952. On April 22, 1950, the first named Black band appeared at the Lake Cliff, advertised as the Coot Wills Band.¹⁶¹ Given the name “Coot” and the suspicion that Eddie “Coot” Lewis used pseudonyms during this era, it seems likely that the Coot Wills Band is really the Eddie “Coot” Lewis Band. And indeed on May 6, the Lake Cliff advertises the Eddie “Coot” Lewis Orchestra.¹⁶² Another named Black band at the Lake Cliff was Robert Gilmore’s Rhythm Orchestra, which was advertised by the club in

February of 1952. Gilmore was of course the son of Robert Gilmore who owned the Gilmore News Stand in downtown Shreveport. The Lake Cliff would continue to be an important music venue in Shreveport for many years.

**KWKH, ROY “GROOVIE BOY” BARTLETT AND THE EARLY SHREVEPORT RADIO SCENE**

Besides the advent of retail record shops and the live music scene, the third component of Shreveport’s popular music culture was the live broadcast or playing of records over the airwaves by radio stations. Shreveport’s primary radio station was KWKH, one of the oldest radio stations in the South. From 1925, it was owned by Shreveport businessman William K. Henderson, whose name was encoded in its call letters; Henderson was also arguably America’s first “shock jock,” famous for his diatribes against the Department of Commerce, the Federal Radio Commission, the radio networks and the chain retail stores, all beginning with his famous opening, “Hello, world, doggone ya!” Henderson lost most of his money and the station in the Great Depression, and in 1935, KWKH was purchased by John Ewing, the owner and publisher of the *Shreveport Times* newspaper. About a year later, on August 2, 1936, KWKH moved its broadcast studios into the Commercial National Bank building in downtown Shreveport, where they would remain for many years.

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164 A detailed history of KWKH and its role in Shreveport’s history can be found in Tracey E. W. Laird’s “Shreveport’s KWKH: A City and Its Radio Station,” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2000).

165 Interestingly, this bank was also one of William K. Henderson’s *bêtes noirs*. The Commercial National Bank of Shreveport had failed early in the Depression, and it was rehabilitated by the formation of a basically new bank called The Commercial National Bank in Shreveport. Thereafter, whenever he was given time on the radio, Henderson would rail against “the IN bank,” as he called it.
In its earliest years, KWKH had been primarily talk, although Henderson pioneered a number of innovations that eventually became mainstream practice in radio, including playing records over the air, with a turntable wired directly to the transmitter instead of putting a microphone in front of a gramophone. After Henderson lost control of the station, the musical programming shifted decidedly to country music, and it is no accident that KWKH created the famous Louisiana Hayride country music show in 1948. Yet it was also in 1948 that the station created the first program which was perhaps aimed at African-American audiences (as well as white teenagers). Roy “Groovie Boy” Bartlett was actually a white DJ, but one who used “hip” or “jive” slang, in imitation of African-Americans, and played the new jump blues sound that had become popular during the war. Initially called “Jive Parade,” the show eventually became better known as “Groovie’s Boogie.” He also served as comic relief during the Louisiana Hayride shows, and Tracey Laird refers to Bartlett’s show as an “extension of the blackface minstrelsy that began a century earlier.” However, that really does not seem to be the case, as Laird admits in a footnote that African-American women sent love letters to Bartlett, suggesting that his delivery and slang were authentic enough to retain Black listeners. Furthermore, unlike minstrelsy, Bartlett’s program does not seem to have involved ridicule of African-Americans for the entertainment of whites; advertising in the


Shreveport Sun, the city’s weekly paper for the Black community, suggests that Black Shreveport was actually a target audience for his show.

Bartlett soon became involved in other aspects of the music business. He seems to have had some involvement in the formation of the Job Records label with Owen Perry and Jimmie Burrage, and in February of 1950, he opened his own record shop, Groovie’s, in a corner of the Hull Furniture Store at 530 Common Street in downtown Shreveport. Groovie’s Top 10 sellers list, published weekly in the Sun, provides a useful indication of what songs were popular in Shreveport; his initial chart, on February 11, 1950, listed producer Bob Shad’s recording of Peppermint Harris’ “Raining In My Heart,” on the Sittin’ In With label. Harris was from nearby Texarkana, although it seems that the recording had been made in Houston. The next chart on February 25 featured the “Canal Street Blues” by John Lee Hooker, whose similarity with a regional blues style in the Ark-La-Tex made him hugely popular in Shreveport, and for the first time the chart included a local artist, Stick Horse Hammond, with a song called “Truck ‘Em On Down.” The prevalence of Black records in Groovie’s top sellers further argues against any parody or minstrel element in his radio show; Black listeners clearly liked Groovie and flocked to his record store, at least for a while.

By March 4, the top selling song at Groovie’s record shop was “Groovy Boy,” the theme song which country artist Red Sovine had composed for Bartlett, but also of interest is the song “Shreveport Blues,” by Pete McKinley, another artist from the Ark-
La-Tex region.\textsuperscript{172} The March 11 chart reveals yet another local song, “Avenue Breakdown” by Country Jim, who was of course Country Jim Bledsoe.\textsuperscript{173} Of interest is the way that Groovie’s charts reflect country, blues and Black gospel, which are the three components that seem to have contributed to rock and roll, suggesting that Groovie Boy’s show might have been somewhat similar to Dewey Phillips’s “Red Hot and Blue” show on Memphis’s WHBQ; such shows paved the way for a teenage culture to emerge in the South, and indirectly forced a reassessment of the issue of race, at least with the younger generation. Groovie’s Record Shop seems to have failed at the beginning of April 1950, as no further charts were published in the \textit{Sun}.

But Groovie Boy remained popular; by 1951, he had a band called Groovey Boy and his Band the Rhythm Masters, who were engaged for a dance at the Harvard Theater in Winnsboro, suggesting that his radio show and his fame stretched across a large swath of North Louisiana.\textsuperscript{174}

Despite Shreveport having a population that was nearly half African-American, the city had no Black radio station at this point; Ray Bartlett’s “Groovie’s Boogie” on KWKH had no competition until October 20, 1950, when competitor KENT debuted a similar show called “Buster’s Boogie.”\textsuperscript{175} Apparently hoping to do KWKH one better, they hired the Ark-La-Tex region’s first Black disc jockey Ben “Buster” Lewis to run the show, which eventually was scheduled directly against KWKH’s Groovie’s Boogie in the

\textsuperscript{172} “Groovie’s 10 Top Tunes,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, March 4, 1950, 2.

\textsuperscript{173} “Groovie’s 10 Top Tunes,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, March 11, 1950, 2.

\textsuperscript{174} “See and Hear Groovey (sic) Boy,” \textit{Franklin Sun} (Winnsboro, LA), November 8, 1951, 3.

\textsuperscript{175} “KENT,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, October 20, 1950, 32.
same time slot. After the show had been on the air a year, an article in the Sun noted its first anniversary. But aside from that one article, KENT did not advertise or promote Buster’s show. There is no indication of who the sponsors were, or any useful information about who Buster Lewis was. His show lasted until 1953, and then he briefly ran the Stan’s Record Shop show.

KCIJ was the third station to attempt to capture the Black listening audience; they already had a number of Black gospel quartet programs on Sunday mornings, but otherwise, their programming was geared to sports, talk, and country music. But on October 1, 1951, the station launched a new program by the area’s second Black radio personality, Daddy-O Hot Rod. Daddy-O Hot Rod was Houston-born Chester McDowell, who was not only a disc jockey but also a singer and songwriter. His proto-raps like “Ain’t nothin’ runnin’ but the watermelon vines, and they wouldn’t be runnin’ if they could walk sometime,” or his familiar phrases like “You better watch that stuff” soon made him the most popular DJ in Shreveport. He parlayed that popularity into the business world also, opening Daddy Yo Barbecue at 1950 Milam Street near Booker T. Washington High School, before moving to a larger building at 914 Lewis Place, where he opened Daddy Yo’s Drive-In. Both businesses suffered from frequent break-ins and vandalism. McDowell would leave Shreveport in 1957, cut a delightful single for Don Robey’s Duke label in his hometown of Houston, and move to Memphis’s WLOK radio

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176 “Buster’s Boogie Celebrates Anniversary,” Shreveport Sun, October 20, 1951.

177 “KCIJ,” Shreveport Journal, October 1, 1951, 8.

178 Andrew Harris, “Daddio Hot Rod Yearns For Good Ole Days of Black Radio,” Shreveport Sun, September 19, 1985, 6.
station, where he became the noted Memphis DJ Hunky Dory, and produced an amazing a cappella doo-wop group for Sam Phillips’s Sun label called Hunki Dori, although the tracks would not see release for over twenty-five years. He ended up back in his hometown at KYOK, until he retired from radio. The rhyming slang and catch-phrases of early Black DJ’s like Daddy-O Hot Rod played a role in the development of hip-hop culture and music as we know it today.

**DID JIMMIE BELL RECORD IN SHREVEPORT?**

The first post-war Black recording in Shreveport was made in 1949 by a pianist from Peoria, Illinois named Jimmie Bell, with his trio. Or maybe not. Earlier versions of the postwar *Blues Discography* certainly thought so, as did JSP Records in England when it reissued the two tracks in question on an LP in 1979. More recent versions of the *Blues Discography* associate the recordings with Chicago, Illinois, presumably on the basis of their 1950 release by the Chicago-based Premium label. However, there is little more to link the session to Chicago than there is to link it Shreveport. Certainly many sessions cut in Shreveport were released on California labels like Imperial and Specialty, or New York labels like Sittin’ In With.

Jimmie Bell was a Midwestern bluesman, but unlike other Northern blues figures, he spent extensive time in the South. The summer of 1947 found him in Dallas, Texas, performing for a month at a club called The Oaks at 740 Fort Worth Avenue on the west side of town. His band at the time was called the Bombshells, and was playing every

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179 Liner notes to *Jimmie Bell Plays Blues & Boogie—Stranger In Your Town*, JSP Records 1007, 1979.
night in July. A trip to Chicago in December 1947 resulted in four songs which were released on Aristocrat and its successor label Chess, “Just About Easter Time,” “Jimmy’s Swing Boogie,” “Me and My Baby,” and “If You Believe In Me.” Presumably none of these records sold in any noticeable quantity, and by 1949, Bell was back in the South, based at Lafayette, Louisiana in April of 1949 through at least September of that year. In April, he was performing with his trio “nationally known as the Ebony Dots” at the Mardi Gras Lounge in Lafayette, and by the end of August, he and his trio were at Chag’s Country Club in Lafayette, for the Labor Day weekend. Life in the South was not easy for Black musicians from the North:

Bell recalls an experience in Lafayette, La. in 1948. “This guy kept sayin’, ‘Boy, you niggers really got a band.’ And I would say “Yeah, we enjoy playin’ for you peckerwoods.” This guy invited us all out to his house for dinner! We went, but before we did, I told some of my boys who were from Chicago to take it easy there. We got along. That guy had a house with everything, but every time he opened his mouth, “nigger” would come out.

Gig advertisements from 1947 and 1949, as well as interview anecdotes from 1948 put Bell and his band members in places fairly close to Shreveport, including Dallas and Lafayette, but there are no advertisements for any public gigs in Shreveport. That does not mean that Bell could not have played a private function, such as a country club or a party. If Bell and his musicians did come to Shreveport, they undoubtedly visited

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183 Mike Foster. Liner notes to *Jimmie Bell Plays Blues & Boogie—Stranger In Your Town*, JSP Records, 1007, 1979.
Stan’s Record Shop on Texas Street or the J & M Record Shop on Spring. The principals in the latter store, Jimmie Burrage, Mike Theodos and Owen Perry, were also involved in a record label called Job Records, along with KWKH disc jockey Ray “Groovie Boy” Bartlett. This label seems to have formed in 1949, and if Jimmie Bell did indeed record “Boy Doy” and “Stranger In Your Town” in Shreveport, it seems likely that they were intended for release on Job, and were likely recorded at the studios of KWKH radio, inside the Commercial National Bank building, with station engineer Bob Sullivan running the board after hours, as was the custom.184 The trio at this session consisted of Jimmie Bell on vocals and piano, Walter Scott on guitar, and Andrew Harris on bass. If “Boy Doy” and “Stranger In Your Town” were recorded in Shreveport, it seems likely that the tracks listed as “Stranger In Town” and “The Creep” on the Paris, Texas-based Royalty label were also cut in Shreveport, and likely at the same session.

Royalty was a label that belonged to Paris, Texas entrepreneur Jimmie Mercer, who owned the Melody Lane Record Shop and the Swingtime Record Manufacturing Company. Mercer sometimes claimed to be the brother of songwriter Johnny Mercer (which he almost certainly wasn’t), and he had created a small vertically-integrated facility in Paris where the entire process could go from recording to mastering to manufacture and distribution. Mercer dealt primarily with country music, but he picked up a blues record by Nathaniel “Stick Horse” Hammond from the Job label in Shreveport, and this is the strongest piece of evidence that Jimmie Bell recorded in Shreveport.

Owen Perry and Ray Bartlett licensed one of their records to Mercer’s Royalty label, it makes sense they might have done so a second time. It seems very unlikely that Bell would have signed a deal with Mercer or recorded in Paris, Texas. At any rate, Mercer’s small empire unraveled when he was indicted for having sexually explicit “party records” imported into the United States from Mexico. By 1950, his operations had shut down. And if the second two tracks had been licensed to Royalty, the first two might have been licensed by Job to Premium in Chicago. A check of the matrix numbers shows that “Boy Doy” and “Stranger In Your Town” do not have the standard matrix numbering system of Premium releases, making it almost certain that they were purchased from elsewhere. None of this is conclusive proof that any of these songs were recorded in Shreveport. We will probably never have such proof. But the circumstantial evidence is strong. If we follow the current edition of the discography and assume that the four songs were indeed cut in Chicago in 1950, then we have to account for why Premium would have issued the first two tracks themselves, but licensed the second pair to Royalty in Paris, Texas of all places. Royalty would not have had a distribution advantage compared to Premium, and there is no logical reason for Premium to do such a license deal. A Chicago session location for these tracks does not seem likely.

**HOT ROD HAPPY**

The first two record labels to emerge locally in Shreveport after the war both seem to have been founded in 1949, and involved on-air personalities from KWKH radio. The emergence of the Louisiana Hayride as a country music broadcast showcase may

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have played a role in the founding of both of these labels, although one of them, Job
Records, owned by Owen Perry, Jimmy Burrage, and Ray Bartlett, ended up recording
only blues. The other and more prolific label was Pacemaker Records, a venture started
by country singer Webb Pierce and Hayride announcer Frank Page. The tiny Shreveport
label recorded seventeen singles over several years, some of which were cut in Houston
at Bill Quinn’s ACA studios, others apparently at KWKH after hours by Bob Sullivan.
Two were picked up for broader distribution by the Gotham label out of Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania, a label which also picked up at least one record from Job, suggesting an
ongoing interest in Shreveport which could have resulted from Gotham selling records to
the J & M Record Shop and Stan’s Record Shop. Of the seventeen released Pacemaker
singles, sixteen were country music, but one, Pacemaker 1014, was a blues record made
by a man called Hot Rod Happy.

It is known that Hot Rod Happy was in fact a bluesman from Mansfield,
Louisiana named Jim Bledsoe. Mansfield, in DeSoto Parish about thirty miles to the
south of Shreveport, seems to have been a hotbed of country blues. Bledsoe had a guitar-
playing brother named Parker Bledsoe, who had apparently already moved to Shreveport,
and Bledsoe’s granddaughter, Eliza Brown-Asher, stated that the blues musicians
Clarence London and David “Pete” McKinley were friends of her grandfather who were
also from Mansfield.186 The musical similarities of a fourth bluesman, Blind Johnny
Beck, who most likely was from Carthage, Texas, thirty miles to the west of Mansfield.

186 Facebook messages in possession of the author.
have already been noted, and Jesse Thomas and Willard “Ramblin’” Thomas were from Logansport, a town in DeSoto Parish.

What is not clear is why Webb Pierce and Horace Logan chose to record Bledsoe, or why they renamed him Hot Rod Happy. Given other accounts of early Black music recording by country artists and producers, it would seem that country music guitar players had sometimes been mentored by Black guitarists and were well aware of an older generation of these men, suggesting an interracial cultural exchange that did not fit the growing segregation of music within the industry itself. Zeke Clements had suggested to Owen Perry and Ray Bartlett that they record “Stick Horse” Hammond at Job Records; Parker Bledsoe had mentored Johnny “Slim” Campbell. Charlie Feathers recommended Junior Kimbrough to his record label at the time, Memphis-based Philwood Records. Black Texarkana guitarist Nelson Carlson taught many white kids at a Texarkana music store during the 1960s and 1970s. It seems most likely that Bledsoe was someone that either Webb Pierce or Pacemaker artist Tillman Franks was familiar with, or who perhaps was brought to them by one of the other country musicians on Pacemaker. Jim was also being used as a “novelty act” by Alex “Snook” Jones and other local rhythm and blues acts as Jones recalled in a 1988 interview with Monty Brown, so he at least had some local exposure at the time.¹⁸⁷

As for the origin of the pseudonym, Hot Rod Happy, there is little doubt; the name was a character in a popular comic strip of the era, a “lawless, spoiled, delinquent,

¹⁸⁷ Monty Brown, Interview with Alex “Snook” Jones, January 24, 1988.
disrespectful cad, who is the antithesis to good, clean-living American youth.” The comic strip ran in the Shreveport papers, and the name might have been chosen quite randomly by Pierce or Page. It is also worth noting that fast cars were yet another element of the American youth culture that was developing. But why did Jim Bledsoe need to record under a pseudonym? The answer may lie in his recordings for the Imperial label in January and April of 1950. In the absence of paperwork for the Imperial label, we don’t know when Bledsoe signed with Lew Chudd, but if that had occurred in 1949, it is entirely possible that Bledsoe was already signed to Imperial when he recorded “Hot Rod Boogie” and “Worried Blues.” In that case, the only way Pacemaker could have released the sides would be to use a fictitious name, and to hope that Chudd did not realize who Hot Rod Happy was. In that era, country blues artists were notorious for disregarding contracts and recording for anyone who would pay them an advance. Usually attributed to their ignorance of the music business, the reality is that it was the result of their awareness of the shadier practices of the indie labels; they quite rightly realized that the advance was all the money they were likely to ever see. But Bledsoe seems to have been extreme in this practice even for the era. His granddaughter quoted him as saying he had been blackballed from the music industry for being under contract to too many different labels at the same time.

The style of these two recordings is country blues, with vocal and electric guitar only, and they sound remarkably archaic for the time in question; it comes as no surprise that Bledsoe was booked at Shreveport clubs as more of a novelty act, as by 1949-1952,

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the public taste had shifted to the four-or five-piece combos with a saxophonist. “Hot Rod Boogie” features the kind of riff that was used in piano-based boogie-woogie, but Bledsoe absolutely refused to ever go to the dominant chord, a feature that is frequently noticed in rural blues style. In the slower and more mournful “Worried Blues,” Bledsoe remains on the tonic chord throughout, setting up a kind of repetitive, trance-like pattern. Discographies list a bass player and a drummer on this session, but they are extremely hard to hear if they are present, possibly because of the low recording quality, and because the LP compilations which included the tracks were of necessity mastered from 78 RPM records, the master tapes being unavailable (and possibly lost). The recording location was almost certainly KWKH, as Page was employed by the station, and Bob Sullivan was the likely engineer. Steven Moorwood gave a thorough description of this studio in his article about Sullivan:

Its studio was built as a room within a room. About two feet away from the outside walls of the building another wall was constructed stuffed with fiberglass. The only windows faced the announcer’s booth and an area in front of the studio where the coffee machine and several chairs and tables were situated. The latter was a viewing area for people who came up to the studio in the morning when acts were broadcasting. This guest room was often filled with people who could listen through a speaker to the program as it went out live. It also served as a lounge for KWKH employees where they could take a break and drink coffee.

The dimensions of the studio were approximately twenty-five by thirty feet with a twelve-foot ceiling, which was similar to the Beck facility (a studio in Dallas). Not that KWKH’s studio was state-of-the-art. Recording facilities were primitive in the extreme: a one-track broadcast board with no echo or equalizer and just five knobs to turn to achieve a good mix. Again, only five microphones were available, which meant their positions had to be carefully
chosen to achieve a good balance between singer and musicians. Everything needed to be recorded live and there was no possibility of an overdub.\textsuperscript{189}

That the earliest Shreveport recordings operated under these limitations explains their somewhat rough sound quality, and might also explain why so much of the earliest post-war recording in the city was of rural country blues artists, despite jump blues being the obvious preference of Black Shreveporters. The Pacemaker label never again recorded any Black artists, and soon disappeared. A later Houston label of the same name, owned by the “Crazy Cajun” Huey P. Meaux, was unrelated to this Shreveport label.

**NATHANIEL “STICK HORSE” HAMMOND**

For many years, Nathaniel “Stick Horse” Hammond was something of a ghost. It was known that he recorded in Shreveport and died in 1964, and that was about the extent of what researchers knew. Fortunately, recent scholarship has made things clearer.

Nathaniel Hammond was born on April 16, 1896 in Palestine, Texas, one of five children born to B. B. and Laura Hammond.\textsuperscript{190} His draft card during World War I indicated that he was working for the Union Pacific Railroad and living in Denver, Colorado; his railroad work may have resulted in the loss of a leg, and the resulting peg leg he wore was probably the origin of his nickname “Stick Horse.”

It is unclear when he became a traveling musician, but he was in Shreveport by 1950, and according to Owen Perry, was well-known for performing “on the levee” (the


Shreveport riverfront) or “under the bridge” (the O. K. Allen bridge between Shreveport and Bossier City). Perhaps through those outdoor performances he came to the attention of country artist Zeke Clements, a performer on the Hayride, who suggested to Roy Bartlett that he be recorded; Bartlett was involved with Perry and perhaps Jimmy Burrage in the Job label, and the fledgling label decided to make what would prove to be Hammond’s only recordings.

Because most of KWKH’s paperwork was discarded or destroyed when the station was bought by outside interests, we have no way to date the many recording sessions that went on there after hours. Although it has occasionally been suggested that Hammond was recorded at Stan’s Record Shop on Texas Street, or the J & M Record Shop, there is no real evidence that anyone ever recorded at either store. Almost certainly the Hammond sides were recorded at KWKH in early 1950, and more than likely all at one time. Zeke Clements recalled that they had spent three days with Stick Horse riding him around and getting him drunk enough to record. Six songs were cut at that session, “Gambling Man,” “Alberta,” “Highway 51,” “Too Late Baby,” “Little Girl,” and “Truck ’Em On Down.” All of them except “Alberta” and “Truck ’Em On Down” show Hammond’s preference for drone-like repeated riffs; Hammond’s style in slow blues songs resembles that of the Mansfield-area bluesmen, suggesting that his style had been shaped by his time in Shreveport. “Alberta” and “Truck ’Em On Down,” the only up-tempo numbers, would seem to come from an outside (and possibly older) tradition, suggesting that Hammond had a repertoire that might have drawn on the earlier “songster” style. What makes Hammond stand out from other country blues artists in
Shreveport is his extremely deep voice, his tendency to encourage himself with exclamations like “Sing ’em Stick Horse!” and his recorded laughter in at least one song. Of the six songs, Job released the first two as a 78 RPM single on Job 100, and the second two as Job 105. This second single was then licensed to Jimmie Mercer’s Royalty label out of Paris, Texas, suggesting that Job had distribution problems from the very beginning and was seeking to use licensing deals to increase the reach of their releases. The final two songs never came out on Job at all, although they almost certainly were recorded by Job Records, and most likely at the same session as the others. “Little Girl” and “Truck ’Em On Down” were released on Irvin Ballin’s Gotham label out of Philadelphia as Gotham 504 in 1950. Ballin picked up several Shreveport-recorded records at this time, both in blues and country music.

Given the high quality of the six previously-recorded sides, it was not surprising that Stan Lewis wanted to introduce his friend Leonard Chess, the owner of Chess Records, to Nathaniel “Stick Horse” Hammond, who by this time was living as a sharecropper on a plantation at Taylortown in Bossier Parish. Lewis often repeated the story of the plantation owner running him and Chess off the property with a shotgun, presumably worried about losing one of his good sharecroppers.191 Hammond remained in Taylortown and died in Shreveport on May 17, 1964. He was buried in Taylortown, presumably in an unmarked grave, as his name appears on no cemetery transcriptions for Bossier Parish.

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As the first Hammond release was on Job 100, and the second was on Job 105, it raises natural questions about Job 101 through Job 104. There is no evidence that any of them ever came out, but they could well have been the Jimmie Bell songs, “Shreveport Blues” and “Ardelle” by David “Pete” McKinley on Gotham 505, and/or the two “Stick Horse” Hammond songs that were released on Gotham 504.

DAVID “PETE” MCKINLEY

As with all of the country bluesmen who recorded in Shreveport, we know very little about David “Pete” McKinley, although the liner notes to the Alley Special compilation of Gotham blues recordings claim that he was a nephew of Bessie Smith.192 Eliza Brown-Asher, the granddaughter of Country Jim Bledsoe, stated that David “Pete” McKinley was from Mansfield, Louisiana, in DeSoto Parish, and that he was a friend of her grandfather. Ray Bartlett and Owen Perry recorded two songs, almost certainly at KWKH, in 1950, possibly at the same session as “Stick Horse” Hammond. The first one, “Shreveport Blues,” was the first of two songs by that title which McKinley would record; the lyrics to this one refer to leaving Mississippi in order to go to Shreveport, begging the question of whether McKinley had indeed started out in Mississippi. His guitar style, like most country players in the Ark-La-Tex, involves a repeating pattern with almost no chord changes; his playing shows marked similarities with the style of Blind Johnny Beck from Carthage, Texas, which is also in the Ark-La-Tex region. “Ardelle,” the other song McKinley cut at this session, makes use of traditional lyrical formulas, but the guitar work is, if anything, even more extravagant than in the other

192 Chris Smith, Liner notes to Alley Special, Krazy Kat 802 (UK), album, 1987.
song; he still avoids the subdominant and dominant, and there is no real twelve-bar form as such. Although these songs were undoubtedly intended for release on Job, they only came out on Gotham, where they were released immediately following the last “Stick Horse” Hammond release. With that, the Job record label was no more, likely failing at the same time as Groovie’s Record Shop, in April of 1950.

COUNTRY JIM BLEDSOE AND IMPERIAL RECORDS

Lewis Robert Chudd, né Louis Chudnofsky, founded Imperial Records in 1946 in Los Angeles, initially with a focus on jazz and Mexican music. Although never based in New Orleans, the label became indelibly associated with the Crescent City through its association with New Orleans bandleader Dave Bartholomew, whom Chudd hired as an A & R representative and producer. Stan Lewis had an amazing knack for building strong friendships with the owners of the various independent labels that recorded blues, rhythm and blues and Black gospel, and trade publications mentioned Chudd’s visits to Shreveport. Even as early as 1950, Lewis had the most successful retail record outlet in Shreveport, and his mail order capabilities and radio advertising made him a desirable customer to the independent labels. Lewis soon was considered a distributor and one-stop as well as a record store.

It was likely at Lewis’s suggestion that Chudd signed Country Jim to Imperial, but while Chudd was a frequent visitor to Shreveport, we cannot be certain if he was in the studio in January 1950 when Country Jim recorded. More than likely Lewis was, and the studio was again almost certainly KWKH. The January session resulted in four songs, and their Imperial matrix numbers place the recorded order as “Old River Blues,” “I’ll
Take You Back Baby,” “Rainy Morning Blues,” and “Avenue Breakdown.” However, when released, the latter two were released first, as Imperial 5062, and the first two afterwards as Imperial 5073.

“Avenue Breakdown” is the more interesting of the two, apparently referring to the Texas Avenue\textsuperscript{193} entertainment district in Shreveport. Bledsoe’s lyrics mention a busy Friday or Saturday night on the avenue, when “people were jumping” and he “decided to jump some too.” He spies a beautiful woman, and then suddenly the police raid the establishment and take nearly everyone to jail except him. The song has the feel of authentic experience, and the Shreveport papers in fact record a number of raids against Black night clubs over the years, some looking for weapons, others for illegal gambling or drugs.

Imperial 5073, “Old River Blues,” is most interesting, as Bledsoe says he went down to the “old river” to look to the other side, but didn’t find his “baby” there. There is a specific oxbow lake on the Red River southwest of Shreveport called Old River, which is today adjacent to the LSU-Shreveport campus, but it is unclear if Bledsoe means that specific lake, or just the Red River in general. Not finding his girlfriend across the Red River, he decides to travel to the Mississippi River and look for her there. On the flip side, “I’ll Take You Back Baby,” he tells his girlfriend he’ll welcome her home no matter the hour or how dark the night. It should be noted that all four songs are originals and do not make much use of floating verses or other traditional blues formulae. Yet Imperial

\textsuperscript{193} Texas Street was the main street of downtown Shreveport, and ran to a dead-end at the corner of Common Street where Stan’s Record Shop was. To the southwest from there was Texas Avenue, which was the center of the Black entertainment district.
only sporadically advertised these releases in the trade publications, and they were not reviewed either, possibly reflecting the disconnect between their archaic style and popular trends in 1950. Although Bledsoe’s guitar work is admirable, and his unusually young voice (he was nineteen years old at the time of these sessions) is strong, all four songs are remarkably similar to each other, and in the same key of E; only “Avenue Breakdown” somewhat brightens what otherwise is a rather stark and bleak musical and lyrical vision. A comparison with the early Hot Rod Happy sides shows that they too were in the key of E, suggesting that this was Bledsoe’s “home key” in which he was most comfortable.

Yet Lewis and Chudd must have felt that there was potential in Bledsoe, for they were back at KWKH in April of 1950, cutting another four songs. The master numbers show that they were cut in the following order.: “Sad and Lonely Blues,” “Good Lookin’ Woman,” “Philippine Blues,” and “Plantation Blues,” with alternate takes for the first and third tracks. Again, all four tracks were in Bledsoe’s preferred key of E, and all had a similar sound to the first four that had been recorded in January. But the latter two tracks were the most remarkable lyrically. “Philippine Blues” is a most unusual song in which Bledsoe considers going “across the water” to reconnect with a girl he met in the Philippines. The inspiration for the song is puzzling, because Bledsoe, born June 28, 1930, was only fifteen at the time World War II ended, and the Korean War did not begin until June of 1950, two months after the song was recorded. It seems most unlikely that Bledsoe ever visited the Philippines; it is possible that a relative or friend had been in the military and had spoken of the islands to him, as both Barksdale Air Force Base and Fort
Polk were fairly close to Mansfield. In the song, he ultimately decides that such a long trip to see her is too risky.

Even more remarkable is “Plantation Blues,” a song which seems to obliquely reference the incident with Nathaniel “Stick Horse” Hammond, his landlord, and Leonard Chess and Stan Lewis:

I’m gonna leave this plantation, tired of picking cotton on my knees.
I’m gonna leave this plantation, tired of picking cotton on my knees.
Said, I’m gonna try to have a hit, Oh, Lord, if You please.194

In Bledsoe’s song, the protagonist makes it off the plantation through blues music, a divergence from what happened in Stick Horse Hammond’s case. But the song clearly portrays the plantation culture which existed along the Red River both north and south of Shreveport, where things would not change much for African-Americans until 1970.

Imperial released “Good Lookin’ Woman” and “Plantation Blues” as Imperial 5091, and “Sad and Lonely” and “Philippine Blues” as Imperial 5095. Like the previous two singles, they do not seem to have registered any attention in the trade publications, nor did Imperial make much of an effort to market them. They show Bledsoe as a remarkably mature artist, strong of voice and with a very accomplished guitar technique, which makes us wonder who his mentor was. There must have been something of a blues guitar tradition in Mansfield, Louisiana, because most of the country blues artists who recorded at Shreveport were in fact from DeSoto Parish. But Bledsoe was recording in a style whose popularity had largely passed, which might account for the lack of marketing

or interest in the singles. Imperial did not record him again, although presumably his contract remained in force.

**BOB SHAD IN THE ARK-LA-TEX**

Robert Abraham Shad was born in Brooklyn, New York on February 12, 1920. The son of Jewish Russian immigrants, he managed to find success as an employee of several jazz record companies before launching the first of his many labels in 1948, Sittin’ in With. Although Shad had intended to record jazz, he soon found through a friendship with Joe Bihari of the RPM-Modern labels in Los Angeles that blues, particularly rhythm and blues, was outselling jazz in the post-war Black music environment. Shad was not familiar with blues as much as he was with jazz, but his response to the situation probably says a lot about his future success; he purchased about 300 blues records, and listened to them multiple times until he felt he had a decent understanding of the genre and style. Then, purchasing a portable tape recorder, he headed South, acting more like an ethnomusicologist than a young record executive. Fortuitously, he made Houston his primary destination; although the city had a wealth of Black musical talent, and a recording studio, almost all recording done before Shad’s visit had been for locally-based labels. Shad recorded wherever he could find space and a piano, even on one occasion at a whorehouse, but the result was a stack of tapes which produced some hit songs. Of special interest was the man whom Shad renamed Peppermint Harris (because he could not remember the correct name). When “Raining In My Heart” exploded onto the charts in 1950, Shad became desperate to reconnect with

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Harris and record more material. On a return trip to Houston, he was told that Harris had left the city and returned to his hometown of Texarkana, which sent the record producer driving as quickly as he could to the Ark-La-Tex region.

Although the Blues Discography shows Shad only making one session of recordings in Shreveport, it seems he may have made more. Both Peppermint Harris and guitarist Nelson Carlson were Texarkana residents, and Shad found them there when he drove up from Houston in 1950; it seems relatively unlikely that he drove back with them to Houston to record, all the more so when we consider that Shad had portable recording equipment and that Shad was generally not using recording studios in Houston. While it is possible that Shad might have carried them to Shreveport to record, using the facilities of KWKH, he also might have simply recorded them somewhere in Texarkana. With no session logs or paperwork, we may never know what Peppermint Harris sides Shad cut in the Ark-La-Tex region, but it seems likely that the two sides by Nelson Carlson released on Sittin’ in With 557, “My Baby Left Me” and “Crazy About My Baby,” were recorded in Texarkana.

(Blind) Johnny Beck may have been recorded on the same journey, although his matrix numbers suggest an earlier date. The discographies usually locate his session in Houston, but if he was from Carthage, Texas, in Panola County, as Bob Eagle suspects based on the 1950 census, then it seems very unlikely that Shad would have recorded him in Houston, unless Beck happened to be there already. Carthage is about thirty miles southwest of Shreveport, and about thirty miles due west of Mansfield, Louisiana, and Beck’s recordings resemble the guitar styles from the Mansfield musicians Country Jim
Bledsoe, David “Pete” McKinley and Clarence London. It is entirely possible that Beck was recorded in the same session as Lonnie Williams, which Shad recalled as being “at a Shreveport radio station.”

Lonnie Williams will likely forever remain a mystery, as there were so many African-American men of that name in the northeast Louisiana area, according to census records, whose ages would be right to fit the singer and harmonica player. As he never recorded again, there is nothing to compare these recordings with. Williams is never mentioned in the *Shreveport Sun*, nor in the daily *Times* or *Journal*. It is almost certain that the four songs, although split across two different releases on the Sittin’ In With label, were cut the same day, and while Shreveport had several radio stations, only KWKH was known to allow its studios to be used for custom recording. We can be relatively certain that Lonnie Williams’s four sides were cut at KWKH, with Bob Sullivan engineering. The use of the radio station offers a clue that Williams might have been recommended to Shad by Stan Lewis. Shad had probably visited the record store owner to hawk some of his Sittin’ In With releases.

Because Shad used masters taken from field recordings, it does not seem that the matrix numbers can aid us in determining what was recorded when, but “Tears In My Heart” and “New Road Blues” were the first to be released as Sittin’ In With 567. They inhabit a very different sound world from the country blues records made in Shreveport up until that point; the electric guitar style is quite urban and modern, with considerable jazz influence. The style of playing resembles Jesse Thomas, originally from Logansport in DeSoto Parish, but who had recorded in Houston in 1949 and presumably occasionally
visited Shreveport. In addition, there is a harmonica player, likely Williams himself, as well as a string bass. No drummer can be heard. Williams has a good voice, and the songs are well done, but there is nothing that stands out in the lyrics, other than the reference to a “new road” in the second song, and to Williams’s statement that “the Bottom is my home,” likely a reference to the Bottoms neighborhood a few blocks west of Stan’s Record Store. This lyric, the only possible reference to Shreveport in these songs, suggests that Williams might have been a local resident.

“Wavin’ Sea Blues” and “I’m Tired Of Runnin’ Around” were released as Sittin’ In With 593, and their key and instrumentation are identical to the previous two songs, furthering the likelihood that all four songs were recorded at one session. The “Wavin’ Sea Blues” would seem to be a reference to World War II (or perhaps Korea) as Williams describes being on a “big ship” and his woman not writing to him, making him “wonder what she’s doing wrong.” Of the four, only the final one, “Tired of Runnin’ Around” has the stomping rhythmic pattern typical of the Mansfield players, but again, the guitar work is far more sophisticated, with a richer chordal vocabulary and clear jazz influence. It is hard to imagine anyone other than Jesse Thomas in the Shreveport of that day playing in that style.

From time to time, other Shad sessions have been proposed for Shreveport, including some or all of the James Wayne sessions, which are generally now believed to have taken place in Atlanta, and certain Ed Wiley tracks. Wiley tracks recorded in Shreveport seem unlikely for the same reason as Nelson Carlson or Johnny Beck tracks recorded in Houston seem unlikely, namely that Shad would not have transported
musicians hundreds of miles to record when he could have recorded them on location with his portable recording equipment. Of course, if Ed Wiley and his band had a show in Shreveport, Shad might have recorded them there. Certainly James Waynes and Joe Fritz performed at the Palace Park in August of 1951. But we have no advertising suggesting an Ed Wiley show in Shreveport.

**COUNTRY JIM BLEDSEOE AND SPECIALTY RECORDS**

At some point in 1951, according to his granddaughter Eliza Brown-Asher, Country Jim traveled to New Orleans and made several gospel recordings. Whether these are the three gospel recordings listed in the *Blues Discography* is unclear, but if so, they were done for Specialty Records, which raises more questions than answers. Did Imperial Records sell Bledsoe’s contract to Art Rupe at Specialty? As it seems likely that Stan Lewis, who was a friend to both Rupe and Lew Chudd, would have set up the sessions at which Rupe recorded Bledsoe, it does not seem Lewis would have helped Rupe circumvent an active contract, so we have to assume that either Imperial had dropped Bledsoe, or else had agreed to sell his contract to Specialty. Brown-Asher’s recollection calls into question the recording location of these three gospel songs, “Jesus Said I’ll Go,” “Undertaker,” and “I’ll Be Waiting Up There,” which in the *Blues Discography* are located in Shreveport. The three songs certainly have a different and more archaic style than the blues recordings, with guitar work that resembles ragtime. “Jesus Said I’ll Go,” is the most unusual, depicting a cosmic strategy session at which Jesus tells God He will go to earth to save mankind, and God warns repeatedly, “They won’t believe in You.” “Undertaker” is Bledsoe’s reworking of “Will The Circle Be Unbroken,” and “I’ll Be
Waiting Up There” is a variant of “Oh, Mary, Don’t You Weep, Don’t You Mourn,” which became more famous later as the civil rights anthem “If You Miss Me From The Back of the Bus.” However, the position of these three songs at the end of a reel of other material known to have been recorded in Shreveport casts some doubt upon a New Orleans location for these recordings. It is possible that Ms. Brown-Asher’s recollection was of other unreleased gospel recordings that are not listed in the discography.

Determining exactly when the rest of Country Jim’s Specialty material was recorded is not easy, because of conflicting information in the Concord vaults and the liner notes of reissue albums and compact discs. A sheet accompanying a reel of tape in the Concord vaults which came from Art Rupe’s Specialty label is headed “Stan’s Tapes,” and suggests that all the material listed occurred “before August 29, 1951.” Listed are the five tracks recorded by the mysterious “Pine Bluff Pete” and the following Country Jim tracks: “Stormin’ and Rainin,’” “Cold in Hand,” “Come Back Baby,” and “Hollywood Boogie.” However, liner notes to the Specialty CD Bloodstains on the Wall place these recordings at a session on March 12, 1952 in Shreveport, as does the Blues Discography. This information seems to be based on Art Rupe’s recollections from years after the fact, but some confusion remains.

An undated reel of tape is likely another 1951 session of Country Jim Bledsoe’s, which accounted for “Travis Street Boogie,” “Dial 110 Blues,” “Mean Little Girl,” “Jimmie’s Jump,” “Lonesome Today,” “What More Can I Do,” “Hollywood Blues,” “Texas Street Blues,” “Going Away Baby,” “Gonna Leave Baby,” and “Last Winter Blues.” It is noteworthy that so many of Bledsoe’s titles at this point reference
Shreveport, including “Hollywood Boogie,” “Travis Street Boogie,” “Hollywood Blues,” and “Texas Street Blues.” It is also interesting that the first eight of these tracks would seem to be in the key of D. Given that E was Bledsoe’s “home key” in which he felt comfortable, it would seem that these tapes are at a slower speed which shifted the key down a step.

**THE MARCH 12, 1952 SPECIALTY SESSION AT KWKH**

Perhaps the biggest session of the country blues era in Shreveport was held on the evening of March 12, 1952 at KWKH studios. As was usually the case, the session was evidently booked by Stan Lewis, but on behalf of Art Rupe, the president of Specialty Records in California, who was in Shreveport and at the session. Given that Rupe was no fan of country blues, it seems he was invited to the session by Lewis and that it was Lewis who chose the artists to record. As it turned out, the session was a marathon that lasted well into the night and produced a considerable amount of material by a number of artists, including Country Jim Bledsoe, David “Pete” McKinley, Clarence London, Big Joe Williams, and possibly a mysterious blues singer that music researcher Barry Hansen named “Pine Bluff Pete” when he discovered the tapes in the Specialty vault. Bob Sullivan was likely engineering, and “Pine Bluff Pete” was running errands, including, as Rupe recalled, bringing the artists whiskey at two in the morning!

The main reel of this session lists thirteen tracks by David “Pete” McKinley, which are “Pitch A Boogie,” “Bye Bye Blues,” “Pete’s Blues,” “Cold Chills,” “Don’t Want Me Blues,” “4:30 In The Morning,” “David’s Boogie,” “Sail On Little Girl,” “4th

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196 Country Jim almost certainly had in mind the Black neighborhood on Shreveport’s west side near the airport, not the Hollywood in California.
Street Blues,” “Puppy Dog Blues,” “Looka Here Boy,” and “Run Around.” The *Blues Discography* adds to those titles the following: “Mean Black Snake,” “Crying For My Baby,” “Shreveport Blues” (his second tune of that title), and “Whistling Blues.” This was by far the largest body of work McKinley had recorded at one time, and our assessment of him is still hampered by how little of it has been issued. The tracks we have suggest that McKinley was a competent bluesman, but one who fell short of the startling originality of Country Jim. At the same time, there are hints of the unique Ark-La-Tex style of country blues in his guitar style, and for the first time, a drummer is present on some of the recordings. Occasionally, other musicians can be heard yelling encouragements in the background on some of the tracks, and at one point McKinley mentions “Jimmy” between verses, showing that Country Jim was certainly in the room and that the session had something of a party atmosphere.

The same list of tracks has the following by Country Jim, evidently from the same night’s session: “One Thing My Baby Likes,” “Jesus Said I’ll Go,” “It’s So Lonesome,” “Undertaker” and “I’ll Be Waiting Up There.” Obviously, if these tracks were cut at KWKH in Shreveport in March of 1952, they cannot be the gospel tracks that Bledsoe recorded in New Orleans, and if they had been recorded in New Orleans, it is hard to imagine why they would be on the same reel with the David Pete McKinley tracks.

Also in the room that night was Big Joe Williams, although how he happened to be there is quite unclear. His most recent sessions had been for Lillian McMurry’s Trumpet label in Jackson, Mississippi in December of 1951; Shreveport was only a few hours to the west, and it is possible that Williams had settled there for a period of time.
Prominent blues scholar Dr. David Evans has said of Williams that “he had a knack for finding opportunities to record.”\(^{197}\) Somehow, he managed to get invited to the recording session, and the result was four tracks which were not released until years later: “Baby Please Don’t Go,” “Ride My New Car With Me,” “Rather Be Sloppy Drunk,” and the Chicago-themed “Cottage Grove Blues.” Why these decent tracks by a known blues artist remained unissued is not clear, but Lillian McMurry was not afraid to sue people that she felt had interfered with her artist contracts, and Rupe may have decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

In his recollections, Rupe referred to the session as a “Pete McKinley and Clarence London session,” and that makes sense, as Eliza Brown-Asher identified both Pete McKinley and Clarence London as friends of her grandfather Country Jim who were from Mansfield, Louisiana. It makes sense that they would come up to Shreveport together, yet almost all of London’s known material was cut at a later session in April. The exception would seem to be two tracks which have never seen the light of day, “Old Frisco Blues” and “I Feel So Fine Today.” These would seem to be the tracks that London recorded that night.

**PINE BLUFF PETE**

The final artist who may have recorded at the March 12, 1952 session was a “very large, very black” man whom Art Rupe recalled. “He had been running errands during the session, and when the other performers were too drunk or fatigued to record, he asked to record. Everybody was feeling good, and he looked as if he could use the recording fee,

\(^{197}\) Email, Dr. David Evans to author.
so we recorded him, not even getting his real name.” Referred to on the sheet accompanying the vault reel as “Mr. X,” the singer was dubbed “Pine Bluff Pete” by Barry Hansen, the reissue engineer who compiled some of the tracks for release. Four tracks exist, but the tape box sheet refers to a fifth that cut off during the third verse. The tracks are “Boogie Chillen No. 4,” “Hampton Stranger,” “A Woman Acts Funny,” “Uncle Sam Blues,” and “Mean Mistreater,” which is cut off by the tape ending and thus remains unissued. Beyond the mystery of “Pete’s” identity, the tracks offer other mysteries as well. All four reissued tracks that Pete performed are credited to “Jimmy Bledsoe,” which begs the question of what Pete’s relationship was to Bledsoe. The guitar playing behind Pete on three of the songs sounds like Bledsoe, so it is possible that Pete was singing and Bledsoe was playing. But it is the “Uncle Sam Blues” which is even more remarkable, in that it is accompanied by a very accomplished blues pianist, who is not credited. We can only guess at the identity of the keyboardist, but Shreveport had several great ones in the era, including Eddie Williams, Alex “Snook” Jones, Water LeBeau, and Major Lampkins. Of those four, only Eddie Williams ever recorded in a style where comparison would be possible, but there are just not enough points of similarity to say with any certainty that it is Williams who is backing Pete. Yet another mystery is that Pete has a strong, sure voice, and certainly sounds better than someone recorded as an afterthought as Rupe indicated. Furthermore, we need to note that the sheet accompanying the tape box on which these tracks are found states that they were recorded “before August 29, 1951,” which would make the March 12, 1952 date unlikely.

198 This title I once thought might hold a clue to a location that could help identify Pete. Instead, it proved to simply be a misunderstanding of “Handsome Stranger.”
Of course Art Rupe came to Shreveport many times because of Stan Lewis, and recalling some thirty years after the session, it is possible he had his years or visits mixed up. It is also possible that whoever wrote the sheet attached to the reel was in error. We will likely never know.

Because of the high quality of his recordings, speculation over the identity of “Pine Bluff Pete” has been rampant. Australian Blues researcher Bob Eagle suspected that “Pine Bluff Pete” might have been an Arkansas bluesman named Roland “Boy Blue” Hayes. Eagle interviewed Hayes in Hughes, Arkansas, about twenty-five miles southwest of Memphis, and Hayes told Eagle that he had recorded for Stan Lewis in 1958 and gave Eagle specific song titles which he recorded. Hayes’s recollection of recording for Stan Lewis is quite interesting, but he cannot be “Pine Bluff Pete,” because Pete recorded in either 1951 or 1952, and the song titles Hayes told Eagle he recorded do not correspond to any of the four known recordings by Pete. So who was “Pine Bluff Pete?”

I believe the clue to Pete’s identity is to be found in the fact that he performed four songs attributed to Jimmy Bledsoe, and at least one of those, “A Woman Act Funny,” is definitely a Bledsoe original. Yet “Pine Bluff Pete” delivers an assured performance, and that at two or three in the morning presumably after he (and everybody else) had been drinking. It would suggest that Pete was eminently familiar with Jim Bledsoe’s material. In fact, Country Jim had an older brother named Parker Bledsoe, born in 1924, who was also a guitarist; he was living in Shreveport by 1957 and he mentored a young white guitarist named Johnny “Slim” Campbell before being murdered in 1977.199 It is

my hypothesis that “Pine Bluff Pete” is in fact Parker Bledsoe. He would have known everyone at the session except Art Rupe, Big Joe Williams and Stan Lewis. He was originally from Mansfield, Louisiana, as were his brother, Clarence London, and David “Pete” McKinley. And he would have been used to singing with his brother and playing guitar with him. It would also explain why his songs were credited to Jimmy Bledsoe. There is of course nothing to prove this hypothesis, but I think it is the closest to a coherent answer we will ever get.

Almost none of this material saw release at the time. Nothing of Country Jim’s was released, presumably because of his November 1951 signing to Peacock Records. Peacock owner Don Robey was another litigious individual who would certainly have sued Specialty if he could have. Bledsoe would move to the Acres Homes neighborhood of Houston in 1952; he told his granddaughter that the industry had blacklisted him because he had signed too many different recording contracts that overlapped. That fails to explain entirely why Robey never recorded him, but then again, Robey recorded almost no country blues whatsoever. For a brief time, Bledsoe performed in a far more urban style in Houston clubs, before finally retiring from music altogether in 1956. He died on October 15, 1988.

Out of the numerous tracks that David “Pete” McKinley recorded on March 12, 1952, Art Rupe only chose to release “Mean Black Snake” and “Crying For My Baby,” which he released as Fidelity 3008. The Cash Box issue of May 24 gave a brief review of the two sides. “Crying For My Baby” was given a C, and “Mean Black Snake” a C-plus. Of the latter, the reviewer wrote “McKinley has another low down blues number he sells
with feeling. The chanter has a better disk on this side.”200 *Billboard* reviewed the single a week later on May 31, describing “Mean Black Snake” as a “strong shouting of a bluesy item done in the deep South manner,” and “Cryin’ For My Baby” as “a real weeper.”201 Neither song gained any traction, and McKinley seemingly did not record again.

Like Country Jim, Big Joe Williams likely presented contractual problems for Art Rupe and Specialty Records, which likely explains why the four good songs he recorded in Shreveport were never released until they were issued on compilations in the early 1970s and again on compact disc in the 1990s. And of course Rupe said that there had never been any intent to release the Pine Bluff Pete material, nor were the two Clarence London songs recorded that night released. However, London was about to have a session of his own, at which he would record more material.

**CLARENCE LONDON**

Bluesman Clarence London was also from DeSoto Parish, and was a close friend of both Country Jim Bledsoe and David “Pete” McKinley, but very little is known about him. Stan Lewis would say that he was a construction worker living in Shreveport, but that he was from somewhere rural. He was present on March 12, 1952 at the all-night KWKH session and had recorded two tunes. They did not see release as did two that David “Pete” McKinley cut that night, but they must have impressed either Art Rupe or Stan Lewis enough for another session to be scheduled. This session took place on April

200 “Jazz & Blues Reviews,” *Cash Box*, May 24, 1952, 18.

29, 1952, and a typewritten sheet with the reel box from the Concord vaults indicates that this was a “session cut by Stan (Lewis).” The songs listed are “Got A Letter This Morning,” “Walking Down the Levee,” “Ain’t Done Nothing Wrong,” “Mamma, Look At Sis,” “Sure Look Good To Me,” “Jumping The Boogie,” “She Left Me,” “Peeping Through My Window Pane,” “Goin’ Back to Mama,” and “One Rainy A.M.” This makes a total of ten tracks recorded on April 29, and of those, “Goin’ Back to Mama” and “One Rainy Morning” saw release as Fidelity 3009. Cash Box reviewed both sides, and said of “Goin’ Back to Mama” that “Clarence London dishes out a slow blues dramatically. Clarence’s low down delivery is given a string backing,” and of “One Rainy Morning” that “London pipes another slow blues with feeling. Arrangement and backing are top deck.” A week later, Billboard reviewed the sides also, saying of “Goin’ Back to Mama,” “London, in this Southern blues, succeeds in creating a moody atmosphere. Should catch reasonable spins,” and of “One Rainy Morning,” “Another mournful blues is chanted effectively by London to massed guitar backing.”

A third song, “Ain’t Done Nothing Wrong,” appeared on the British Specialty’s “Country Blues” LP compilation in 1973, and when the Billy Vera-compiled compact disc “Bloodstains on the Wall” appeared in 1994, it included a fourth track, “Got A Letter This Morning,” and a mysterious fifth track, “Want to Boogie-Woogie,” which is not even listed on the typewritten list which accompanied the reel of tape, and thus would constitute a thirteenth track, including the two London cut on March 12, 1952. This

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means that “Walking Down The Levee,” “Mama Look at Sis,” “Sure Look Good to Me,”
Jumping the Boogie,” “She Left Me” and “Peeping Through My Window Plane” have
never been heard; presumably they are on the reel in the Concord vaults, but have never
been digitized.

Finding out what became of Clarence London is not easy; Shreveport newspapers
mention a lawsuit involving a Clarence London in DeSoto Parish; another Clarence
London, from Ringgold, Louisiana, in western Bienville Parish, was rear-ended in an
auto accident in Bossier Parish in 1966. A Clarence London Jr. went to high school in
Coushatta in Red River Parish in the early 1970s, and was said to be son of the late
Clarence London Sr. and Daisy Mae London. Determining which of these (if any) were
the musician is not possible; what is clear is that Clarence London never recorded again.

With the end of the April 29, 1952 session, the early country blues recording era
in Shreveport came to an end. Country blues by that date was archaic, and generally not
the sort of thing that entrepreneurs like Bob Shad, Lew Chudd, or Art Rupe were looking
for. But this fact brings up two questions; why were so many early Shreveport blues
recordings in the country style? And why were there no recordings of the more popular
jump blues style? Perhaps one reason that most of the early Black recordings in
Shreveport were of country blues artists is that this was the style of blues preferred by
Stan Lewis, Webb Pierce, Owen Perry and other whites from the Shreveport area who
owned the record companies and instigated the recording sessions. Lewis in particular
showed a personal preference for country blues all his life, despite recording many
modern blues and soul artists. And another factor could have been the space limitations of
the only studio available, that of KWKH. With its fairly primitive conditions and small dimensions, fitting a jump blues group into the studio would have been difficult, and without the ability to multi-track, getting a good sound balance would have also been difficult. Finally, Black Shreveport in the era seemed to be primarily focused on large ensembles of ten to fifteen pieces. Neither the Dukes of Swing nor the Night Hawks would have fit into KWKH’s studio; while there were undoubtedly smaller groups, they don’t occasion as much mention. And notably missing from newspaper accounts of the era are references to singers; aside from a female singer named Ada Brown who won a few amateur contests, bands seemed to be more important than singers. That would soon change as the decade progressed.
CHAPTER 3

The independent label activity in Shreveport surrounding sessions organized by Stan Lewis during the period from 1948 to 1952 was arguably as close as Shreveport ever got to “hitting the big time” nationally in Black music. The heads of the most popular independent labels were visiting Shreveport, recording artists there, and even releasing material. But none of these records sold particularly well, causing the labels to lose interest. Shreveport perhaps seemed stuck in an archaic past; although country blues was rapidly being supplanted by jump blues combos, most of the recordings which had been made in Shreveport were in the older style, which may have been a contributing factor to their poor sales. And Shreveport’s only available studio belonged to a radio station, had no ability to multi-track, and was extremely limited in space. These conditions would hamper a music industry in Shreveport for many years. But the city still had a vibrant live performing arts scene, and the growing medium of radio was flourishing as well.

THE STAR THEATER

From 1953, the Star Theater on Texas Avenue continued to occasionally offer live shows, but on a reduced scale. An early show in January featured Duke Hampton, Little Esther, and five big acts,¹ and one in January featured The Royals with Anna Mae Winburn and her orchestra.² In April, the theatre merely advertised “Vaudeville” without naming any particular performer at all,³ and another vaudeville show in November 1953

¹ “Sunday Only,” Shreveport Sun, January 17, 1953, 5.
² “Sunday Only,” Shreveport Sun, February 7, 1953, 5.
³ “Sunday Only,” Shreveport Sun, April 11, 1953, 7.
was described generically as a “swing-revue.” There were no further Star Theater advertisements promoting live shows, and within another year, there were no more Star Theatre advertisements at all.

**DADDY-O HOT ROD**

By 1953, KCIJ radio station’s Chester “Daddy-O Hot Rod” McDowell was the most popular on-air personality in Shreveport, but that did not come without controversy. In March of 1953, McDowell was arrested in connection with the shooting of a man named Thomas Vinson after an argument in front of Sparks’ Place at 1249 Milam Street; McDowell had told police that Vinson was advancing on him with a stick, and McDowell was not charged in the incident. Yet controversy remained, and some of it came out into the open when the Federal Communications Commission held hearings in Shreveport regarding rival proposals between the Shreveport Television Company and Texas-based Southland Broadcasting (the parent company of KCIJ) about the awarding of a television license for Shreveport’s new Channel 12 TV station. In the course of the hearing, Southland’s representative J. W. Hargrove was questioned about the company’s plan to meet the needs of Shreveport’s Black community:

Attorney Griffith probed the witness about how he and Southland felt about KCIJ’s “Daddy-O Hot Rod” and other “boogie-woogie” broadcasts. Hargrove said he thought Chester McDowell was doing a lot of good for both the Negroes and the development of friendly inter-racial relations. Pressed as to details, he said the KCIJ programs were devoted in part to scripture and religious benefit, partly to spirituals, and partly to recordings of Negro artists who had made a reputation for themselves in the world at large that Negroes could be proud of. He credited the Negro programs, as well, with raising the

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self-respect and self-esteem of the Negro, and developing his civic consciousness. Such programs were far from all “boogie-woogie” he said, and had made a decided contribution to inter-racial relations and their betterment in the city of Shreveport.⁶

One of the peculiar overtones of the FCC hearing was the decidedly negative way in which “boogie-woogie” music was framed, in a manner not all that different from how rap music would be framed forty years later.

Yet more negative publicity resulted from the arrest of four of Daddy-O’s musicians after a gig in Texarkana. The Bowie County Sheriff, W. J. Wallington, claimed that the four musicians had pulled into a service station in a station wagon with the logo “KCIJ” painted on the side, and that while the attendant was fueling the vehicle, the four young men had entered the station office. After they had left, the attendant found the phone cord pulled out of the wall and the money missing from the cash register. Shreveport police received a complaint from the Texas sheriff and arrested Albert Bowman, Rayfield Devers, Eddie Williams and Marvin Modicue. Chester McDowell was initially arrested too, but was ultimately released.⁷

The disposition of the case was never mentioned by the local newspapers, but evidently the charges were dropped, because most of the musicians continued to be active in the Shreveport area over the next couple of years. All of the off-air drama may have contributed to Chester McDowell’s decision to leave Shreveport in 1956. He moved to Memphis and WLOK radio, becoming the popular personality Hunky Dory. In Memphis, at legendary Memphis Recording Service at 706 Union Avenue, McDowell oversaw the

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recording of several remarkable tracks by an a cappella doo-wop group called Hunky Dory, including versions of his own compositions, but these did not see release until the 1980s. McDowell ultimately moved back to Houston, where he finished out his career at KYOK radio.

He recorded his first released single, “Baby, Don’t Leave Me” b/w “I Wonder Why,” on Don Robey’s Duke label in his hometown of Houston in 1958. Another single on Duke, “Tell Me Now” b/w “Joy In My Tears,” was given a release number, but it is unclear if it was ever released. McDowell passed away at some point in the 1980s.

Although Daddy-O Hot Rod was one of the earliest and most influential Black disc jockeys, no air checks of him from Shreveport appear to exist.

Of the young musicians who played with McDowell, Rayfield Devers went on to have the biggest career. A baritone saxophonist, he became part of Bill Harvey’s Band in Houston, which was often the backing band for various Don Robey productions for the Duke and Peacock labels. He is credited on some of bluesman Little Junior Parker’s sides, but ultimately he left Duke Records to join Ike and Tina Turner’s backing band. That band broke up in Los Angeles, where Devers became a fixture in the local soul and R & B scene, as well as a session musician often called upon by producer Phil Spector. He died in California.

Eddie Williams had a certain degree of local success as a pianist with local blues musicians, especially Oscar “T. V. Slim” Wills.
Marvin Modicue, a drummer, considered Eddie “Coot” Lewis to be his mentor, and went on to become a local jazz drummer and jazz activist. He passed away on June 8, 1985, in Shreveport.

After moving back to Houston, Chester McDowell became known as the radio personality “Hotsy Totsy,” and in 1960 he returned to Shreveport with Clarence Green’s Orchestra for a dance sponsored by the Magnolia State Peace Officers Association at Club 66.8

THE RISE OF STAN’S RECORD SHOP

Despite a lull in Black music recording in Shreveport, Stan Lewis’s record store and distribution enterprises were growing in local and national prominence. In April of 1953, Cash Box’s “Rhythm N’ Blues Ramblings” column mentioned the numerous visits of label executives:

You’ll find everything buzzing around Stan’s Record Shop down Shreveport, La. way. Funny how such a little fellow draws the big ones down. In the last 10 days nine manufacturers dropped into the shop to sell him. Art Rupe and his new addition to the Specialty staff, John Imradulio; Joe Bihari, RPM; Leonard Chess, Chess Records; Jim Bulleit of the new Sun label arrived to chase “Hound Dog” with his punchy answer “Bearcat”; Art Sheridan, Chance; Morty Shad, Sittin’ In; and a couple of the big wigs from RCA Victor.9

Two weeks later, the columnist wrote: “Leonard Chess, Chess Records, invaded Shreveport, La. last week. And invaded is the word, what with being armed with Willie Mabon’s ‘I’m Mad,’ Little Walter’s ‘Off The Wall,’ and Danny Overbea’s ‘Train, Train,

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9 “Rhythm N’ Blues Ramblings,” Cash Box, April 4, 1953, 23.
Train.’ Also in to see Stan’s Record Shop was Art Rupe, Specialty, with the Mercy Dee’s ‘One Room Country Shack.’”

The week after that, the same column reported a new one-hour show on KTHS in Little Rock, sponsored by Stan’s Record Shop and hosted by Ray Bartlett, who had left KWKH in Shreveport and moved to Arkansas. Radio shows were a big part of Stan’s business strategy; they not only helped break new records, but they helped Lewis increase his mail-order business, which was a big deal for communities that did not have retail record shops. As Lewis’ bought time on more powerful stations, orders came in from all over the country.

By November 7, 1953, *Cash Box* could report that Stan had four radio shows, two he fully sponsored himself on KWKH and KTBS, which were 50,000-watt stations and which could be heard all over the country, and then two more co-sponsored on local Shreveport stations KCIJ and KENT.

In 1954, *Billboard* finally noticed Stan’s as well, giving a good overview of the state of his business:

“Stan the Record Man,” Stan’s Record Shop, Shreveport, L.A. writes that he is doing a thriving business in hillbilly, pop and rhythm and blues, with r & b accounting for his largest sale volume. In addition to the store, Stan has a big r & b mail order business and “a one-stop service for operators” covering all three record categories. He pushes the platters on four sponsored radio shows—one a nightly affair—and makes all the record conventions. “In other words,” says Stan, “I eat, sleep and live the record business.”

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10 “Rhythm N’ Blues Ramblings,” *Cash Box*, April 18, 1953, 27.
Stan’s Record Shops continued to be the primary driver of the music scene in the area.

MAJOR RECORDING ARTISTS IN MINDEN

Minden, Louisiana, the seat of Webster Parish, is about thirty miles to the east of Bossier City, and is the hometown of blues artist and songwriter Percy Mayfield, best known for the song “Please Send Me Someone To Love.” But in the summer of 1953, the city’s all-Black Webster High School gymnasium became the destination for several frontline rhythm and blues artists at the height of their popularity.

On June 26, 1953, the King Perry Recording Orchestra from Chicago, who had a few years earlier played at the Palace Park in Shreveport, appeared in Minden, and in September of 1954, the Webster gym was the scene of a concert by Johnny Ace and His Orchestra, the hottest R & B group of the day. There are no indications that Ace ever played in nearby Shreveport, although one problem is that the entire year of 1954 is missing from the Shreveport Sun’s archives and unavailable to us. Barely three months after his show in Minden, Johnny Ace was dead on Christmas Day 1954, having shot himself in the head backstage at the Municipal Auditorium in Houston, apparently playing with a gun he thought was unloaded.

In March of 1955, the saxophonist Earl Bostic came to Minden with his orchestra, and performed at the Webster High School gymnasium on March 14. These concerts seem to have been held in connection with the school.

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Although Shreveport was a southern city, and fairly segregated, one unusual fact is that Blacks were permitted to hold events at the city’s Municipal Auditorium at 705 Grand Avenue, a venue which was the scene of the weekly Louisiana Hayride. Beginning in 1953, shows too big for local clubs were scheduled there, beginning with a show hosted by retired heavyweight boxing great Joe Louis, featuring Ruth Brown, Buddy Johnson, The Clovers, jazz saxophonist Lester Young, Wynonie Harris, and Dusty Fletcher.\textsuperscript{17} Although the bulk of the seats were reserved for African-Americans, a small number of the orchestra suites were reserved for whites. The \textit{Times} was not particularly thrilled with the show, particularly Joe Louis’s portion of it, although the reviewer was more complimentary of the singers and musicians.\textsuperscript{18} In October of 1953, the “Biggest Show of ’53” was announced, with Nat King Cole, Sarah Vaughan, jazz saxophonist Illinois Jacquet, and Ralph Marterie and his Downbeat Orchestra.\textsuperscript{19} February of 1955 brought “Lou Krefetz’s Top Ten Rhythm & Blues Review” to the Auditorium, featuring The Clovers, Faye Adams, Joe Turner, Bill Doggett, The Charms, Lowell Fulson, The Moonglows, Paul “Hucklebuck” Williams, Al Jackson, The Spence Twins and the Moonlighters,\textsuperscript{20} and in September of that year, a fairly young B. B. King came to the Coliseum on the Louisiana State Fairgrounds.\textsuperscript{21} It would be three years before another

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rhythm & blues show came to the Municipal Auditorium, when Little Junior Parker and His Orchestra came to Shreveport in August of 1958; the advertisement noted that the venue was “air-conditioned,” recalling Professor A. T. Chambers’s complaint nine years before about the lack of air-conditioning limiting entertainment during the summer months.22 A May 1959 auditorium show featured Brook Benton as the headliner, as well as Ted Taylor, Clarence Green, Lee Allen, and a local Shreveport doo-wop group called The Fairlanes.23 Ted Taylor would become an ever-popular artist in the city, frequently performing and even recording in Shreveport. An article after the event revealed that it had been sponsored by KANB, Shreveport’s Black radio station, and more than two thousand people had attended.24 July brought a “Battle of the Blues” to the Auditorium, featuring Bobby “Blue” Bland, B. B. King, and Little Junior Parker, arguably the three biggest blues stars of the day.25 Two of them, Bland and Parker, recorded for Don Robey’s Duke label, and were represented by Robey’s Buffalo Booking Agency in Houston. Robey seemed to have an ongoing interest in Shreveport, and many of his recording artists performed there on a regular basis, as evidently the booking agency had a good relationship with Shreveport venues. October brought Ruth Brown, Brook Benton, The Falcons, and James Moody and His Recording Orchestra to Shreveport and the Municipal Auditorium.26 After 1959, there were no big rhythm and blues shows at

22 “By Popular Demand Colored Dance,” Shreveport Sun, August 2, 1958, 3.
23 “In Person Brook Benton,” Shreveport Sun, May 2, 1958, 8.
24 “KANB Rock And Roll Show Draws Over Two Thousand,” Shreveport Sun, May 16, 1959, 5.
the auditorium. This may have reflected growing backlash on the part of Shreveport city
government as the civil rights movement began in earnest, or perhaps simply the lack of a
big local promoter to bring those kinds of shows to Shreveport.

THE PALACE PARK BECOMES CLUB 66

After several years in a dormant state, the Palace Park reappeared in 1953, with a
show called the Harlem Night Hawks of 1953. This was apparently a new incarnation of
a Harlem-based band that had been popular during World War II. But the Palace Park
would soon see a rebranding as Club 66. Given that this occurred in the 1950s, the name
could have had nothing to do with a year, and of course Shreveport was nowhere near
Route 66, so the reason for the new name has been lost to the vagaries of time. But as
Club 66, the old Palace Park would again become the center of Black nightlife for
Shreveport.

The first mention of the renamed club was in June of 1955, when Roy Milton
returned to Shreveport, and one notable difference in the venue besides the name was the
fact that it now boasted that it was “air-conditioned,” which certainly had not been the
case back in 1949. A few weeks later, the club advertised a “Battle of Guitars” between
Guitar Sam and T-Bone Walker. Walker was of course immensely popular in
Shreveport, and performed in the city many times, but the identity of “Guitar Sam” is
mysterious, unless the advertisement should have read “Guitar Slim.” Of further note is
that the new Club 66, unlike the Palace Park, advertised in the white daily newspapers as

27 “Palace Park Night Club,” Shreveport Sun, September 26, 1953, 2.
well as the Black weekly *Shreveport Sun*. This would seem to account for the handful of older white Shreveporters who recall seeing Black stars of rhythm and blues at Club 66.

In October, Club 66 announced a dance that at first glance probably caught people’s attention, as it advertised T-Bone Walker and a “zordico band” seemingly featuring Clifton Chenier.\(^{30}\) But a closer look at the advertisement might have raised questions; in tiny letters, it stated that it was “Little” T-Bone Walker who was coming, not the blues star. And likewise, in careful wording, it stated “Zordico Band” featuring Clifton Chenier’s “Yey-Tee-Fee,” which probably meant merely that the anonymous band would play a cover of Chenier’s big hit, not that Chenier would actually be present. Such deceptive advertising for low-budget shows was not uncommon at the time; the Black live entertainment circuit was full of these kinds of deceptions, including false impersonators of big stars in some cases, and in others, artists who themselves sent out multiple versions of their bands to increase profit and allow them to double-book intentionally. Both practices annoyed the Black show-going public, and probably also impeded advance ticket sales at legitimate events. The other artist advertised on the bill was Grady Gaines and His Blues Ramblers, a Texas-based blues ensemble led by saxophonist Grady Gaines, which suggests that Houston promoters were responsible for this somewhat deceptive event. However, the odd spelling “zordico” is most interesting. As the name of this francophone Black music genre is thought to have derived from “les haricots” (literally “the string beans”), the ad copy author probably wrote the word as it was pronounced in the early years.

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February of 1956 brought a show by The Four Jacks, Amos Milburn, Billy Louis Brooks, and Leo Baxter,\(^{31}\) and June brought a Masquerade Ball by the Shreveport chapter of the Grambling College Alumni Association, featuring a presumably local band called Chuck Ellis and His Blue Notes.\(^{32}\) Not much is known about this band, but a 1953 article in the *Bossier Banner-Progress* revealed that Chuck Ellis was Joseph “Chuck” Ellis, the bandmaster of the Bossier Parish Training High School in Benton, a school that was later renamed C. H. Irion High School.\(^{33}\) Eventually he became the band director at Charlotte Mitchell High School in Bossier City. In July, a “Summer Dance” featuring B. B. King was scheduled on an unusual night, a Wednesday night in the middle of a week, but King’s popularity probably brought out the crowd anyway.\(^{34}\)

In March of 1958, the blues singer Big Joe Turner came to Club 66, along with the Choker Campbell Orchestra,\(^{35}\) and in April, B. B. King was there with his orchestra.\(^{36}\)

Unfortunately, with Club 66’s growing popularity came a growing reputation for violence and trouble. Black youth gangs began to become an issue in Shreveport during the late 1950s, and in April of 1958, the police arrested Charles Dudley, the leader of the Allendale Gang, after he allegedly threatened another club patron. He managed to break away from the officers and was not recaptured.\(^{37}\) Yet the big names kept coming.

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\(^{32}\) “Masquerade Ball,” *Shreveport Sun*, May 26, 1956, 8.


\(^{34}\) “B. B. King and His Band,” *Shreveport Sun*, July 21, 1956, 8.


regardless, with Bill Doggett and His Famous Combo in May, and Little Junior Parker and Bobby “Blue” Bland coming later the same month. That show occasioned another incident in which a man named Theodies Douglas hit a man named David Page over the head with a .32 caliber pistol after the two had bumped into each other on the dance floor. Douglas had fled the club, tossing the gun under a parked car, but was arrested shortly afterwards.

On June 27, Roy Milton came to Club 66, with his Solid Senders featuring Mickey Champion, and in July a group of female impersonators came to Shreveport from the Club Matinee in Houston. When Little Junior Parker and Bobby “Blue” Bland returned to Shreveport in August, demand apparently exceeded the capacity of Club 66, so the event was scheduled at the Municipal Auditorium instead. But the big names continued coming, including Ray Charles on August 29, and Bill Doggett again on October 2. In October, during the Louisiana State Fair, the club sponsored a “Fair Dance” with Lowell Folsom, Floyd Dixon, Curley “Guitar” Mays, and Classie Ballou.

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38 “Dance Hammond Organ Stylist,” Shreveport Sun, April 25, 1958, 8.
41 “Dance With Mr. R. M. Blues,” Shreveport Sun, June 28, 1958, 7.
42 “Entertainers Hop Big Floor Show & Dance,” Shreveport Sun, July 26, 1958, 8.
43 “By Popular Demand Colored Dance,” Shreveport Sun, August 9, 1958, 3.
44 “Dance Club 66 Shreveport,” Shreveport Sun, August 30, 1958, 3.
46 “Fair Dance,” Shreveport Sun, October 18, 1958, 8.
On December 5, B. B. King was back with Millard Lee, Johnny Board, and Mildred Jones, a show which finished out the year.47

By January of 1959, Club 66 had a new owner named Robert Don Brown,48 but the parties and good times continued. A big western dance was held in March, featuring a local band called the House Rockers which was affiliated with radio and TV personality Jockey Jim,49 and in May Ted Taylor was back, with Jimmy Barnes, Miss Lavell, The Gibraltars and Bill Johnson and his Orchestra.50 But disturbances continued as well, with eight people convicted in city court in connection with three separate incidents at the club:

Eight Negro men involved in three separate disturbances at the same dance hall were convicted yesterday in City Court on charges including resisting arrest, disturbing the peace and assault.  
...  
The disturbances occurred at Club 66, 1900 Clay.

Five others were convicted on disturbing the peace counts and Judge Ruvian D. Hendrick told arresting officers to “clean up that place.”51

But cleaning up the Club 66 was easier said than done. On November 9, a man named Walter Jett was shot inside the venue by Bennie McFan, who later told police he thought Jett was going to shoot him.52

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49 “Big Western Dance at Club 66 March 6,” *Shreveport Sun*, February 28, 1959, 8.
Not surprisingly, there were no more shows at the club in 1959. But in January of 1960, B. B. King started off the new year with his “sensational 10 piece orchestra,” and Bobby “Blue” Bland and Little Junior Parker were back on February 12. Lowell Fulson and Curley Mays returned on February 26, and then Bill Doggett and His Orchestra featuring Doris Gage, and Shreveport’s own Good Rocking Luke, whom Doggett had discovered on a rural Louisiana road when his tour bus got lost en route to the club! In April, Little Junior Parker came back with the Joe Fritz band from Houston, and in June bluesman Nappy Brown was in town with Guitar Slim’s band. Bill Doggett was back a week later on June 21, and B.B. King on July 2 to kick off the Fourth of July weekend. In August, Ted Taylor was back, along with Wiley Terry and His Los Angeles Orchestra, for what was billed as a “big double attraction,” and a couple of weeks later, Little Willie John was booked with the Upsetters Orchestra and Alfred Jackson. Shows by Little Junior Parker and Bobby “Blue” Bland, Sonny Boy Williamson, and T-Bone Walker finished out the year.

55 “Dance In Person Lowell Fulson,” Shreveport Sun, February 27, 1960, 8.
59 “Dance! Dance!,” Shreveport Sun, June 18, 1960, 8.
61 “Dance! Dance!,” Shreveport Sun, August 6, 1960, 8.
62 “Dance! Dance!,” Shreveport Sun, August 20, 1960, 8.
By 1961, it seemed that Club 66 had locked in firmly with the Buffalo Booking Agency in Houston, as a lot of shows booked were of artists who recorded for Duke and Peacock Records, like the first show of the year, featuring Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown with Pete Mays’s House Rockers and Buddy Ace. Shows during the rest of the year featured Bobby “Blue” Bland and Little Junior Parker, Jerry Butler, Wade Flemons and Bobby Peterson, Ted Taylor and Wiley Terry, Bill Doggett and Good Rockin’ Luke, B. B. King, and the Ike & Tina Turner Revue.

In 1962, the club had shows by Little Junior Parker, Buddy Ace, Joe Hinton, Bobby “Blue” Bland, Al “TNT” Braggs, Hamp Simmons and His Orchestra, Ike & Tina Turner Revue, Joe Henderson and his Twisting Band, Aaron McNeil and the Blind Blue Note Orchestra from the Arkansas School of the Blind in Little Rock, Solomon Burke, Big Joe Turner, the Cavalcade Stars of 1962, B. B. King, and Freddie King.

During its heyday, Palace Park and Club 66 brought the biggest national names in Black entertainment to Shreveport. Several generations of Black Shreveport residents and a handful of white ones as well saw greats like B. B. King and Big Joe Turner at this historic club. Unfortunately, as the 1960s progressed, the club declined in popularity, and it was eventually torn down.

THE EBONY CLUB

In March of 1954, a new club appeared in Shreveport called the Ebony Club, owned by Sherman Lewis, and this club briefly made a big impact on Shreveport’s

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63 “Dance! Dance!,” Shreveport Sun, February 18, 1961, 8.
entertainment scene. The club was at 400 6th Street, not all that far away from the
corner of Fourth and McNeil streets, immortalized in David “Pete” McKinley’s lyrics
from 1950. By June, the club was advertising an appearance by Illinois Jacquet, although
their newspaper ad misspelled his name as “Jacket,” and Roy Hamilton was the featured
singer. Unfortunately, the owner, Sherman Lewis, ran into trouble when he was charged
with selling beer to a fifteen-year-old boy and fined. He told the police that he thought
the boy was buying the beer to take home to his parents. The incident led the city to call a
hearing as to whether the Ebony Club should lose its beer license, but Lewis did not show
up for the hearing. Mayor Clyde Fant allowed a rescheduling of the hearing when he
became convinced that Lewis had misunderstood the time of the original hearing, but at
the rescheduled hearing, the council voted to suspend the Ebony Club’s beer license for
thirty days. In October, the Ebony Club was the setting for the screening of a movie
called *Negro Shreveport on Parade*, a color film produced by the Rev. James Austin,
pastor of the Mount Moriah Church, who described the movie as showing “virtually
every phase of Negro life in the city.” Sadly, the film seems to have been lost.

For New Year’s Eve, the Ebony Club brought in Roy Milton and His “Silent” (sic)
Senders featuring Camille Howard and the Shirley Gunter Queens; this was a big

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undertaking and likely quite expensive for the club.\textsuperscript{70} In January of 1955, Fats Domino was at the Ebony Club, and the advertisement also pointed out that the venue had weekly dances on Saturday nights in its Anchor Room.\textsuperscript{71} But none of it was enough, because on April 1 the \textit{Times} ran an ad selling all the fixtures from the Ebony Club, including five hundred oak folding chairs, three chrome dinette sets, 175 tables, and a baby grand piano.\textsuperscript{72} Because the entire year of 1954 of the \textit{Shreveport Sun} is lost, we have little commentary of the Black community’s response to the Ebony Club, or how the shows there were attended. We do know that Sherman Lewis was only twenty-four years old, and the club seemed an ambitious undertaking for such a young man. Although it did not last a year, it made a big impression on Shreveport while it lasted.

\textbf{KANV AND KOKA: BLACK RADIO COMES TO SHREVEPORT}

Up until 1954, Shreveport had no radio station uniquely dedicated to the Black community, although there were Black DJs on KENT and KCIJ. The latter station was the most popular with the Black community, thanks to Daddy-O Hot Rod, but on June 9, 1954, the \textit{Shreveport Journal} mentioned that Glenn V. Wilson, a former manager at Shreveport’s KRMD, would be the manager of a new station called KANV, which would have an all-Black staff.\textsuperscript{73} The ANV in the station’s name was said to stand for “America’s Negro Voice.” The \textit{Times} mentioned that the station’s studio and tower were under


\textsuperscript{72} “Fixtures For Sale From The Ebony Club,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, April 1, 1955, 48.

construction and that the station would be located at 2730 Talbot Street. KANV formally entered the airwaves at 10:50 AM on Sunday, July 18, 1954, with a program consisting of “spirituals, folk songs, popular, jazz, band and bop.” It would be a daytime station only, operating from 6 AM to 7PM, and began with Jack Davis as “Dr. Jazmo, the Musical M.D.,” Brown Moore, the “Voice of S. M. M.,” and Robert James as “Bob About Town,” as on-air personalities. The parent company was called the Northwest Louisiana Broadcasting Corporation. Early on, KANV seemed skewed toward religious music, and was somewhat slow to catch on; putting a program called “Gospel Memories” up against Daddy-O Hot Rod on KCIJ in the same time slot probably did not help matters. But Dr. Jazmo was the station’s R & B disc jockey, and with time, he became quite popular. There was also a “Cavalcade of BJ Blues” show each afternoon, which was apparently hosted by Bob James as the “Man About Town.” Sadly, without air checks or playlists from this early period, we can only guess at exactly what kinds of songs KANV was playing.

As many Black DJs did in that day, including Daddy-O Hot Rod, Dr. Jazmo had his own band, called Dr. Jazmo and His Blockbusters. They debuted on December 3, 1954, at the Pelican Club in Bossier City, and by January of 1955 they had moved to Steve’s Lounge on Market Street in Shreveport. By February 17, they were at the

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Arrowhead Club, now billed as Dr. Jazmo, His Orchestra and Floor Show, in April, “Dr. Jazzmo and His 5-Piece orchestra” was booked at the Skyway Club in Bossier City, and that seems to be the last time they appeared.

By 1955, KANV had gained a new personality named “Jockey Jim” Randolph, who became immensely popular in Shreveport, not only on the radio, but eventually on KTBS television as well, where he hosted a show called “Jockey Jim’s Sepia Showcase,” which was said to be the first African-American television variety show in the nation. He also had a column in the Sun briefly during the summer of 1955, which yielded some information about the Black “scene” in Shreveport at the time. For one thing, despite him and Daddy-O Hot Rod being on different stations, they were good friends, and the Daddy-Yo Drive-In was clearly a preferred hang-out spot for the KANV staff:

Ha! Was out by my great friend’s place Daddy-Yo’s Drive Inn the other evening and bumped into cohorts Brown E. Moore, Uncle Bill and Dr. Jazzmo feasting on some tasty chicken….Incidentally the lovely Erma McDowell (that’s Mrs. Daddy Yo, y’know) adds to the attractiveness of the restaurant and serves as a hostess deluxe…

Of further interest in his debut column was Jim’s ranking of currently popular songs in the summer of 1955, which he listed as “Ain’t It A Shame,” by Fats Domino, “Fool For You,” by Ray Charles, “It’s Love Baby,” by Louis Brooks, and “It’s My Life Baby” by Bobby “Blue” Bland.

His column a week later is all the more interesting for an early “rap” which he started it off with, clearly revealing again how the early R & B dee-jays paved the way for hip-hop:

Ah! C’mon you hounds and gather round….sharpen the blades of these spades….try to help stay alive by digging this jive….Now, are you ready, Freddie, Bettie and Eddie?….Alrighty…Let’s flim, Jim.82

One can imagine that this was likely the kind of rhyming banter that Jim used on the air.

He went on to describe the current goings-on at Club 66 in the Allendale neighborhood:

“Everything’s been jumping on Sunday nites at “66”…The boys making the music last Sunday nite are a part of my ole group, y’know….But the hottest thing out that nite was the appearance of Daddy Yo Hot Rod, who cracked with crazy antics with Alabama Blossom, the king of the clowns….the well-dressed dee-jay concluded by chirping ‘Flip, Flop & Fly.’”83 Elsewhere in his column, he mentioned Mr. and Mrs. Sherman Lewis as running the Tuxedo Junction in Bossier City, and planning to bring big names like Louis Brooks, B. B. King, and Louis Jordan, and apparently Isaac “Patty” Gregg had played a gig at the Elamito Terrace housing project, but the occasion for it was not mentioned.

Unfortunately, after three weeks, Jim’s column disappeared from the Sun.

However, in 1957, big changes came to KANV, as the station was purchased by John McClendon and his Ebony Radio concern, which already owned KOKY in Little Rock and WOKJ in Jackson, Mississippi.84 The new owners immediately changed the station’s call letters to KOKA, and evidently dismissed most of the existing on-air


84 “Third Negro Station Slated,” Monroe Morning World, October 6, 1957, 2.
personalities. Changes were far-reaching and immediate. New on-air personalities, such as Honeymoon Garner from Memphis, Bill “Omar” Jackson, and Shelby the Playboy replaced familiar names like Jockey Jim and Robert James, and new programs were brought on the air, such as the West Milam Blues Association. Such a rapid and drastic change was undoubtedly not uniformly popular in Black Shreveport; meanwhile the old KANV call letters were assigned to a station in rural Catahoula Parish, Louisiana.

About a year later, in October of 1958, Charles E. Ray of the Twin City Broadcasting Company decided that there were enough people in Shreveport’s Black community angry over the changes that McLendon had made at the former KANV that he could exploit the situation, so he flipped his “good music” station KLUE, known as “Lucky 1300,” over to a Black format, rehiring all the old KANV on-air personalities, including “Jockey Jim”; he could not get back the old call letters KANV, which were now at a station in Jonestown, but he got as close as he could, changing the call letters to KANB. The new station signed on the air on October 26, 1958, with an open house at their new studios on Haven Road in North Shreveport.

The launch of KANB in Shreveport set off a period of intense rivalry between the two Black-oriented stations in the city; Shreveport was not unique in that regard, as Memphis also had two Black radio stations, but Memphis was larger than Shreveport. To a certain extent, the war was a battle of on-air personalities, and in the early going, KANB seemed to win, being voted the Number 1 station in Shreveport by the Shreveport Times.

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86 “Here Comes the KANB Parade,” Shreveport Times, October 26, 1958, 63.
Negro Chamber of Commerce. KANB routinely ran advertisements with sayings like “On which station do you hear “Jockey Jim?”87 On another page of the same newspaper, KOKA ran an ad highlighting Rev. Amos Terrell, Bill “Omar” Jackson, and Larry “Dr. Jazmo” Daly.88

By May of 1959, “Jockey Jim” left KANB to become the Director of Public Relations and sports announcer at KOKA, but KANB could still draw over two thousand people to a rock ’n’ roll show it sponsored at the Municipal Auditorium that month.89 In May, KOKA moved to a new studio at 1315 Milam Street, next door to Pat’s Service Station, which was a neighborhood landmark in the Allendale community, and was also only a block or so from Booker T. Washington High School. Not only were people invited to meet the station’s personalities, but appliances were given away to lucky fans.90 Meanwhile in June, KANB landed a new personality named Big Hunk O’ Junk, while KOKA highlighted their Metropolitan Softball League team.91 By January of 1960, KANB had yet another new personality, Terrible Turk, who would be popular in Shreveport for many years.92 But as the battle continued, KOKA gained the upper hand, and in 1965, KANB signed off for the last time.

The advent of Black-staffed and Black-programmed radio probably seemed like a positive development within the Black community, but it contributed to the growing

87 “KANB,” Shreveport Sun, April 18, 1959, 5.
88 “KOKA,” Shreveport Sun, April 18, 1959, 8.
89 “KANB Rock and Roll Show Draws Over Two Thousand,” Shreveport Sun, May 16, 1959, 5.
91 Shreveport Sun, June 13, 1959, 8.
segregation of American music, even if some white youth listened to Black stations. With rock music on some stations, and country on others, and Black blues, rhythm and blues, gospel, and soul restricted to Black-oriented stations, the opportunity for creativity and fence-straddling was greatly reduced.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

Blues musician Joseph Young Jr. was born on September 23, 1927 in Shreveport, Louisiana, but moved to Milwaukee in 1945. He briefly was an amateur boxer, but decided that he preferred music, and took the performing name “Mighty Joe Young” after the title of a 1949 film. Although he sang in Milwaukee, he returned to Shreveport in 1955, and formed a local band.

Young’s first advertised appearance in Shreveport was at the Lake Cliff at the dead end of Milam Street at Cross Lake, billed as Joe Young and His Mighty Mighty Mites “direct from Milwaukee.” On New Year’s Eve, he was playing for a dance at the Samba Club in Bossier City, billed as Joe Young’s Orchestra.

During his brief autumn sojourn in Shreveport, Young also recorded two songs for a label called Jiffy Records, at a session that seems to have taken place in Ruston, Louisiana, under circumstances that are not entirely clear. The Jiffy label belonged to Luther Franklin “Jiffy” Fowler, the owner of the Twin City Amusement Company in West Monroe, Louisiana, about a hundred miles east of Shreveport. The Jiffy label recorded a number of country and rockabilly 45 RPM and 78 RPM singles during the 1950s but


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occasionally dabbled in Black music, recording material by the Black Monroe pianist Fred Dunn in addition to the Mighty Joe Young session.

The songs “Broke Down Hearted and Disgusted” and “You Been Cheatin’ Me” were supposedly recorded in Ruston, a college town about thirty miles west of West Monroe, but if that was the location of recording, it is certainly not clear where the session took place, as Ruston had no recording studios in that day. The recording must have been made at the studios of KRUS radio station, or else at a live performance, either in Ruston or in nearby Grambling, where Grambling College was located. On the other hand, the matrix numbers are prefixed with ACA, which indicates Audio Corporation of America, Bill Quinn’s legendary studio in Houston which was later called Gold Star and eventually Sugar Hill. Since Quinn made lacquers and did mastering, the prefix does not conclusively prove that the session took place in Houston, but that is also a distinct possibility. As these earliest recordings of Young have never been reissued, most people have never heard them, and it was at one time suspected that they had never come out. However, the blues collector John Tefteller found a test pressing of the songs, and has it in his possession. Whether ordinary store stock copies were ever pressed remains a mystery.

The band Young recorded with was likely the one that played at his gigs at the Lake Cliff and Samba Club, and consisted of Herbert Henderson on trumpet, Rayfield Devers on alto sax, Robert Skinner on tenor sax, unknown people on baritone sax and piano, Jasper Reed on bass, and a drummer.
Young left Shreveport in 1956 and did most of his subsequent recording in Chicago, going on to have a fairly successful career as a blues artist associated with the Chicago style.

**JASPER REED**

Bassist and bandleader Jasper Reed was born in Shreveport in 1925 and grew up living at various times in both Shreveport and Bossier City. At the age of 24 he opened the Blues Shop at 1020 Marshall Street, which may have been Shreveport’s first Black-owned record store, selling “the latest in blues recordings and spirituals” and offering “the cheapest radio repair in town.”95 He first appears as a musician on the recordings made by Mighty Joe Young in Ruston, Louisiana in late 1955, but by the summer of 1956 he had his own band, Jasper Reed and the All-Stars, playing at the Lake Cliff on Cross Lake.96 That engagement was only for one weekend however, after which Jasper Reed’s band is never again mentioned in the Shreveport papers.

But Reed would make news in May of 1964, when he stabbed his next-door neighbor Charles Harris to death with a butcher knife on Marshall Street during a fight.97 Originally charged with homicide, he was eventually found guilty only of negligent homicide and sentenced to a year and a half in prison, which was suspended.98 Reed is not mentioned again in Shreveport; social security records indicate that he died in Texas in 1974 and did not live to be 50 years old.

THE MONTCLAIRS (BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE)

Peculiarly, Shreveport encountered not one but two vocal groups called the Montclairs in its long history of popular music, and the two groups had no connection with each other at all. Both were from out of town, the first drawn to the area by the Air Force, the second an East St. Louis ensemble drawn to Shreveport by the recording industry in the early 1970s. Radio personality Jockey Jim had mentioned the first Montclairs in his third and final column for the Sun in August of 1955:

BARKSDALE-Pretty nice quartet is located at the base in the personalities of a group who calls themselves the MONTCLAIRS. Nice harmony, and I see the gals have been doing quite a bit of swooning lately…Not so much over the music either; for you see these guys carry some pretty nice-looking faces and right wavy hair besides doing a good job with the sounds…

As all of the members were in the Air Force and assigned to Barksdale Air Force Base, it does not seem that any of them were from Shreveport. The leader of the group was named Douglas DuBois, and it seems likely that he was the inspiration for the group’s recordings, both of which were made in 1956 and released on the Sonic label, which belonged to something called the Echo Publishing and Recording Company of Shreveport, Louisiana. DuBois seems to have written the songs and produced the sides, which were likely cut at Mira Smith’s RAM Recording Studios at 2439 Lakeshore Drive in Shreveport. The first two songs, “All I Want Is Love” and “I’ve Heard About You,” were released as Sonic 712 in 1956, backed by a local band called Chico Chism and His Jetanaires, although spelled “Jettinaires” on the record. “All I Want Is Love” is a lovely

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doo-wop ballad, but it is the mambo-inflected flip side “I Heard About You” with its Caribbean feel that stands out for its originality, with Chism’s drums standing out, as was his tendency, and a prominent saxophone.

For many years, it was assumed that these Montclairs only made the one single, but at the Allentown Record Show in Pennsylvania on September 23, 2018, the only known copy of their second single on Sonic was displayed and both sides were played on a YouTube video. This single would seem to be “Take A Chance” backed with “Betty Lou.” The former is a lovely jazz ballad with the group sounding even more assured than on the previous single, and the latter is a spirited jump blues with more rock and roll about it than doo-wop. Although there are no photographs of the second single allowing us to see the credits, it seems likely that these songs were also written by Dubois, and that Chico Chism’s was again the backing band.

By 1960 Douglas DuBois was at Offutt Air Base in Bellevue, Nebraska, where articles mention him as a pianist. Because there has been more than one Douglas DuBois in the Air Force, from there it is impossible to track him, but it seems likely that his transfer to Nebraska led to the end of the Montclairs.

ISAAC GREGGS

Another popular band during the mid to late 1950s was the group led by Isaac Greggs, a band director at Central Junior High School in the Caddo Parish School District. A trumpet player, Greggs first appears as the leader of his own band in 1950 when he is hired to provide the music for a Holiday in Dixie public dance at the Palace Park; his band at the time is named Isaac Greggs and his Night Hawks, which ties his
band to the earlier Paddy Brown and the Night Hawks. In fact, Greggs would gain the nickname “Patty,” which would stay with him throughout his years in Shreveport, perhaps conferred on him by the older “Patty,” who might have been Eddie “Coot” Lewis.

By 1955, Greggs had a quintet, which had one of two Black-oriented shows on Shreveport’s KTBS television station, and he was gigging more often around the city; in December of 1955 he was advertised as playing for Lambda Zeta sorority party at Northwestern State College in Natchitoches. At that time, he used the name Isaac Greggs and His Dukes of Swing, showing the way that the traditional Black band names were constantly being reused and rehabilitated in Shreveport. On August 11, 1956, Greggs played his first of many gigs at the Lake Cliff roadhouse and motel on the shores of Cross Lake; although the advertisements referred to “The Sextets,” it seems likely that Isaac Greggs had expanded his quintet to a sextet. They would play the Lake Cliff on a nearly weekly basis from the middle of August until the Thanksgiving holiday, when they played a Thanksgiving Dance at a different club, the Pelican Club in Bossier City. Yet by December, they were back at the Lake Cliff, where they would remain until the third week of January in 1957.

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101 “Negro Parade on April 26 to Feature Bands, Floats,” Shreveport Times, April 18, 1950, 12.
In March of 1957 the Twilight Lounge in Bossier City was advertising the “Gregg Quintet,” which played there for a couple of weeks, and perhaps longer, as they were being advertised there again in April. They wouldn’t appear again until December, when they were advertised at Club Forest in Bossier Parish as the “Greggs Quartet,” where they also played a Christmas Eve gig, another dance on the 28th of December, and a New Year’s Eve party.

In the new year of 1958, Greggs was back at the Lake Cliff, where he played through the end of January, and with the launch of KANB Radio in October of 1958 Greggs was given an on-air position as “Professor Greggs.” But there were no more advertised performances of his band. Greggs left Shreveport in 1969 to become the band director at Southern University in Scotlandville, Louisiana (now a part of Baton Rouge), a position he held for thirty-six years. He retired in 2005 and died on April 28, 2014. Greggs’s larger-than-life image as a band director somewhat eclipsed his past in popular music and jazz, and his Shreveport beginnings were often overlooked or not mentioned.

OSCAR “T.V. SLIM” WILLS

Bluesman Oscar Wills was born at Bethany, Texas, in Panola County, just across the state line from DeSoto and Caddo Parishes in Louisiana, on February 10, 1916. It seems that he moved to Houston as a young man, and began his blues career as a

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109 “Here Comes The KANB Parade!” Shreveport Times, October 26, 1958, 63.
harmonica player, citing DeFord Bailey as an early and primary influence. Drafted into the Army during World War II, he learned to repair radios, telephones, and televisions while serving in the Pacific theatre, and on his demobilization in 1947, he and his wife Clara moved to Shreveport, opening Oscar Wills’s Radio Repair Shop at 1011 Caddo Street, in the heart of The Bottoms neighborhood. With Wills’s business only a few blocks from Stan Lewis’ record shop, it was inevitable that the two men would eventually meet, and it is said to be Lewis who dubbed Wills “T. V. Slim” because of his slim appearance and the fact that he was a television repairman.

Rather than sign to any of the existing record labels of the day, Slim formed his own record label, Speed, to self-release his blues records. Precisely dating his material is difficult, but it would seem that his first release was “You Can’t Buy A Woman” b/w “To Prove My Love” issued three times as Speed 6865, Speed 6858 and Speed 704, which was likely recorded in 1955, probably at RAM Recording Studios. The band consisted of Wills on guitar, Mighty Joe Young on guitar, Baby Joe Little on bass, and Bobby Davis on drums.

The next single was likely “The Fight” b/w “Darling Remember,” which was issued on Speed 6863, and was also released in 1955. This recording was backed by the Heartbreakers, a band consisting of Bossier City pianist Eddie Williams, Mighty Joe Young on guitar, and Jimmy White on drums. “The Fight” was Wills’s first humorous song, based on the concept of “signifying,” a third party instigating a fight between two others. “Hen-Pecked Joe,” one of a colorful cast of humorous characters invented by

Slim, tells his wife that people are talking bad about her in the community, and she responds by telling him, “Don’t you know? The people talking bad about me live next door!” which leads to him storming over to his neighbors’ house and starting a fight. The fight escalates, drawing police as spectators, and eventually the mayor, who gets knocked out in trying to break it up. There is an explicit link to African-American folklore in Wills’s lines “like the Elephant and the Lion, somebody’s leavin’ this town. They keep hollerin’ all around, let them monkeys clown!” The reference is to the epic African-American toast *The Signifying Monkey*, in which the monkey, unable to defeat the lion, convinces the lion that the elephant has been bad-mouthing him in order to bring about a fight that will defeat the monkey’s nemesis. So familiar was this toast in 1950s Black America that Wills needed only to mention the Elephant and the Lion to evoke the popular tale.

For some reason, Wills returned to this song in 1956, recording a different version of it backed only by the piano of Eddie Williams, released as Speed 6864 attributed to “T. V. Slim” and Speed 834, where it is credited to Eddie Williams, “featuring T. V. Slim” on vocals. This version captures the “feel good” ambiance of a house party, with spectators or musicians yelling “What?” after Wills’s line “They keep hollerin’ all around.” The opposite side, “Going to California, Ain’t Got But Fifteen Cents,” is prophetic, as Wills would indeed head to California in 1959. The journey was one that a large number of African-Americans from Shreveport were making. Later in 1955, Wills sold his song “My Dolly Bee” to Don Robey of the Duke/Peacock complex of labels in Houston; Robey had Little Junior Parker record it, and it became a minor hit when released on the
opposite side of “Next Time You See Me,” on Duke 164. This particular song has a
“swamp blues” feel that is more reminiscent of southwestern Louisiana than Shreveport;
it would not have been out of place at J. D. Miller’s studio in Crowley, or Goldband
Records in Lake Charles.

Oscar Wills seemed poised for bigger things by 1957, when a Springhill
businessman named Cliff Hagin partnered with Mira Smith to form the Clif label, which
signed Wills. Smith had excellent knowledge of recording, and a love of all kinds of
music, but Hagin provided the funds to enable better marketing and promotion of
releases. The first T. V . Slim release on Clif was a recut of “Darling Remember” b/w
“Flatfoot Sam,” a new song featuring another humorous character of Slim’s, one who
would be encountered for the remainder of his career. This recording was released as Clif
103 (the first release had been a country single, and the second was by Chico Chism) and
again featured the usual band of Eddie Williams, Mighty Joe Young, and Jimmy White.
“Flatfoot Sam” would prove to be Wills’s most enduring hit, an amusing tale of a ne’er-
do-well who’s “always in a jam.” Its impact at least around Shreveport can be judged
from the local white rockabilly artist Tommy Blake’s cover of it not a month after the
original release, on the venerable Sun label of Memphis no less.

But Cliff Hagin apparently was not happy. He felt the original recording had a
rawness that he disliked, so he arranged for Wills to cut it again in New Orleans, using
Paul Gayten’s band instead of The Heartbreakers. This version was undoubtedly cut at
Cosimo Matassa’s famous J & M Studio and saw release on Leonard Chess’s Argo
subsidiary, backed by a Gayten instrumental called “Nervous Boogie.” Hagin must have
sensed potential success, as he opened a New Orleans office for Clif Records. But it was Gayten’s instrumental that people preferred. It charted, and “Flat Foot Sam” did not. Nor did it help matters that Chess had credited Slim’s side of the song to Oscar Wills rather than T. V. Slim. And then, as if to confuse matters further, Chess reissued the original Shreveport sides, putting them out on Checker 870 under the name T. V. Slim. By now Hagin had overextended himself financially, and the Clif label failed. Beset by mental illness, he is alleged to have committed suicide.

Wills only recorded one more single in Shreveport, probably Speed 6567/6568, as by T. V. Slim and His Good Rocking Band, featuring “Flatfoot Sam Made A Bet” b/w “Pearly Mae.” Although these are often listed as Wills’s earliest recordings, and given a date of 1955, it seems obvious that “Flatfoot Sam Made a Bet” is a follow-up song to “Flat Foot Sam” and would not have been recorded before the original song. These two songs were almost certainly recorded in 1957, but it seems likely that they were never released. They are not included on any compilation of T. V. Slim tracks, nor have they been uploaded to YouTube as videos. Nor do any pictures of these sides exist on the internet. If they did in fact see release, they would seem to be the rarest of all T. V. Slim releases. Wills would move to California in 1959, but he would continue returning to or amplifying the tales of his invented characters; later releases included “Flat Foot Sam Met Jim Dandy,” “Hen Pecked Joe,” and “The Big Fight,” a reworking of his Shreveport recording “The Fight.” In later years, Slim had a considerable following in Chicago. He died tragically in a road accident caused by an oil slick outside of Kingman, Arizona, in 1969, while driving home to Los Angeles from an engagement in the Windy City.
Although T. V. Slim was fairly well known amongst blues aficionados, assessing his impact locally in Shreveport is far more difficult. He was never mentioned in the *Shreveport Sun* other than the advertisement that ran in connection with the opening of his radio repair shop in 1945. That does not necessarily prove that Slim was not popular in Black Shreveport. The *Sun*, like most Black newspapers, was geared to the middle and upper classes within Black Shreveport, people whose tastes were likely more refined than the kind of blues that was Slim’s stock in trade. Nor was he mentioned in the white dailies either, except for a notable advertisement where he was booked to play at the grand opening of a business. That he was chosen for such an event would seem to indicate that he had some following in Shreveport, as would Tommy Blake’s cover version of “Flatfoot Sam.” But mentions of Slim during the twelve years he resided in Shreveport are few and far between.

**CHICO CHISM & THE JETANAIRS**

Napoleon F. “Chico” Chism was born on May 23, 1927, by his own account on a riverboat in the Red River; his parents, Napoleon Chism and Willa Mae Thomas lived in the Agurs neighborhood adjacent to the river.\(^\text{112}\) It is unclear how Chico learned to play drums, but the evidence of his playing on the four Montclairs sides from 1956 and his own two recorded sides from 1957 show that he was a talented and accomplished drummer by the age of twenty-nine. While the nickname “Chico” might have been borrowed from Chico Hamilton, a very well-known West Coast drummer in the 1950s, it also would seem to reflect Chico’s fondness for rhumba and mambo rhythms, which is

\(^\text{112}\) Chris Brown researched the details of Chico Chism’s birth and discussed the issue on his excellent *Shreveport Sounds* blog.
evident on all his extant recordings from Shreveport. Indeed, his first gig might have been at a Bossier City night club called The Samba Club, which opened in September 1956, advertising an appearance by “Chico.”\textsuperscript{113} While this doesn’t have to be Chico Chism, this club featured other Black Shreveport artists, including Mighty Joe Young and Alex “Snook” Jones, so it seems likely that this opening was played by Chism, who had recently made his first recordings with his band the Jetanairs, backing the Barksdale Air Force Base doo-wop group known as the Montclairs on the Sonic label. One wonders if the unusual but catchy name Jetanairs was originally chosen because they were backing a group comprised of members of the Air Force.

In 1957, Chico Chism signed with Clif Hagin and Mira Lewis’s new Clif label, and recorded two sides at RAM Recording Studios on Lakeshore Drive. The A-side was a romping mambo called “Hot Tamales and Bar-B-Que,” which celebrated Texas Avenue, the Black entertainment district in Shreveport, with Chico’s drums busy and prominent in the mix; the B-side was credited to Chico Chism featuring Jerry and Garland, and was a rocking instrumental called “Romp & Stomp,” seemingly consisting strictly of piano, guitar and drums. “Garland” would seem to be Garland Griffin, a guitarist who later recorded with Sherman “Blues” Johnson at RAM studios. These sides were the second single on the Clif label, released in 1957 as Clif 102. While distribution was likely limited to the Shreveport area, the single likely led to a lot of local bookings. \textit{Billboard} was not particularly fond of either side; of “Hot Tamales” they said “Deep South item shouted with attractive agony and recorded under what sounds like primitive conditions.

Could have some regional success,” but gave a blistering critique of “Romp & Stomp” which they described as “primitive out of tune rumbling….bad enough to make it dangerous.”

The Jetanairs were particularly in demand for various sorority and fraternity events at Centenary College; Chico Chism is mentioned performing for a “Cowboy Dance” sponsored by Kappa Sigma in 1958, and for another Kappa Sigma party at Rider’s Inn in 1959. Shreveport music researcher and archivist Chris Brown notes that Ernest Lampkins recalled playing gigs with Chico when the usual drummers were unavailable, and remembered him being sent to the Caddo Parish Prison Farm on at least one occasion. News articles from 1954 mention an arrest for selling bootleg liquor.

There are no references to Chism in Shreveport after 1959, and at some point during the 1960s he moved to Chicago, where he became a drummer quite in demand, playing in Howlin’ Wolf’s last band. In 1986 he relocated to Phoenix, Arizona, a city without much of a blues scene. However, he was well known and beloved in the city, and around the world. He died on January 28, 2007.

**BLACK RODEOS**

Shreveport’s affinity with Texas has been discussed elsewhere, and this seems in some ways even more pronounced in the city’s Black community. Juneteenth, a Texas state holiday was celebrated in a big way each summer, and another point of connection with Texas was Shreveport’s tradition of Black rodeos at a place called Sundown Arena at

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114 “Rhythm & Blues Reviews,” *Billboard*, July 1, 1957, 64.


the intersection of Mansfield and Kingston Roads in the vicinity of Keithville. While music was usually advertised as part of the event, the bands were usually not specifically named. An exception was an ad that ran in the *Shreveport Sun* on July 20, 1957, mentioning a band called Jimmy McKinley and the Rhythm Rockers. This band is mentioned nowhere else, but the name is interesting. David “Pete” McKinley was one of the country blues artists from DeSoto Parish to record in the early 1950s, and the same last name raises questions as to whether Jimmy McKinley might have been related to David McKinley. The Sundown Arena was located just above the parish line between Caddo and DeSoto parishes.

**THE PROGRESSIVE MEN’S CLUB**

The Progressive Men’s Club was formed in Shreveport at some point in the 1930s as an organization of prominent Italian men in the city, many of them engaged in trades and business. A similar organization of the same name was founded in Monroe, Louisiana, around the same time, and there was eventually a state organization called the Progressive Men’s Club of Louisiana. In 1953, the Progressive Men’s Club of Shreveport moved to a location near Cross Lake on Dilg League Drive, and this clubhouse became the scene for a number of rhythm and blues performances in later years. Stan Lewis of Stan’s Record Shop was a member of the organization, and it was doubtless his

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119 The name of this street has mystified Shreveporters and non-Shreveporters alike. It commemorates W. H. Dilg, the head of an early 20th-century advertising agency who was president of the Isaac Walton League and an early advocate of outdoor recreation and conservation.
connections with the industry that made it possible for these bands to be booked for events.

On July 25, 1957, the first of these events was advertised, a dance featuring New Orleans artist Larry Williams, who recorded for Specialty Records. The ad even mentions his best-known hit “Short Fat Fanny.”120 In March of 1958, the DGC Social Club of Byrd High School sponsored a dance for all (white) teenagers of Shreveport, featuring the blues artist Big Joe Turner, also at the Progressive Men’s Club hall.121 New Year’s Eve 1959 saw a dance and breakfast featuring New Orleans artist James “Sugar Boy” Crawford, famous for his popular hit “Jockamo,” which formed the basis for the later Dixie Cups hit “Iko Iko,” both songs deriving from the tradition of the Black Indians of New Orleans, sometimes called Mardi Gras Indians,122 and New Year’s Eve 1960 featured Tommy Ridgley, another well-known New Orleans bandleader. On July 3rd, 1961, the Progressive Teen-Age Club sponsored a show by Lake Charles based swamp pop stars Cookie & The Cupcakes, known for their big hit “Mathilda,”123 and on New Year’s Eve 1961, Tommy Ridgley was back from New Orleans for the second year in a row.124 In 1962, the club was the scene of a “Back to School High School and College Dance” featuring Cookie and the Cupcakes,125 and the same band was back on New

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Year’s Eve to close out the year. Almost all these events had tickets on sale at Stan’s Record Shop, and it seems likely that Stan Lewis helped get the artists in question booked for these various dances and events.

SHERMAN “BLUES” JOHNSON

Blues musician Sherman “Blues” Johnson was a fairly prolific recording artist, yet much of his life and history remain elusive. He was born on July 22, 1925, in Meridian, Mississippi to George and Gertrude Johnson, and in 1943 was a music columnist for Meridian’s Black newspaper, the Echo. He later also had a radio program on Meridian’s WTOK.

Johnson cut his first recordings for Ernie Young’s Nashboro label in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1951, when apparently he was briefly living in Tennessee. Johnson was a pianist, and the piano was prominent on both sides, showing a decided influence of Cecil Gant, whom Johnson admired. Later the same year, he made his first trial recordings for Lillian McMurry’s new Trumpet label in Jackson, Mississippi, but she refused to release them, feeling that they were too imitative of Gant.

Almost a year later, on September 30, 1952, McMurry sent him to Sam Phillips’s Memphis Recording Service to record. She had a friendly relationship with Phillips and probably felt that the change of location would result in a different sound, which it did. Johnson now fronted a band called the Clouds of Joy, and recorded seven sides, “Blues Jumped a Rabbit,” “Hello Pretty Baby,” “Pretty Baby Blues,” “Sugar Mama,” “Hot Fish,” “Lost in Korea,” and “Broke and Hungry.” The band consisted of Richard Sanders

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on tenor sax, Phineas Newborn Jr. on piano, and Phineas Newborn Sr. on drums.

Although it is often claimed that Johnson recorded for Sun Records, there is no indication that he ever did. All of the material he recorded in September of 1952 was intended for release on Trumpet Records. McMurry released all of it except “Blues Jumped A Rabbit,” “Hello Pretty Baby,” and “Broke and Hungry.” They reveal Johnson as an artist who had adapted to the current style of rhythm and blues, but Johnson’s relationship with McMurry would fall apart through Johnson’s self-doubts about his ability as a performer and the ambiguous wording of his Trumpet contract. McMurry was known to be fair to her artists, but she was fairly critical of Johnson, and he began to believe that his future lay in songwriting rather than recording. Toward that end, he took a song which he had written before he signed with McMurry called “Saving My Love For You” and sold it to Don Robey of Duke and Peacock Records in Houston, who had Johnny Ace record it, and it became a hit. McMurry was furious, as she had recorded a demo of the song with Johnson in 1951, and had filed copyright papers on it at the time, although she did not release the recording. As it turned out, the wording of her contract with Johnson was ambiguous. She seemed to have intended that all his existing songs would become the property of Diamond Recording Company, but the contract’s wording seemed to lay out exactly the opposite, that only the songs written after he signed would become the label’s property. The result was a lawsuit which McMurry lost. In the wake of this, Trumpet Records cut ties with Johnson, and apparently he either moved to Shreveport, or chose to travel there to record.
It would seem logical that when Sherman Johnson arrived in Shreveport he would go to the only place where one could record, which was Mira Smith’s RAM Recording Studio. Smith was at this time in partnership with Cliff Hagin in the Clif label, and it seems likely that Johnson’s 1957 New Orleans recordings with Paul Gayten were set up by Hagin, who had set up a similar session for T. V. Slim. It is clear that “Dream Girl” and “Why Did You Leave Me” were intended for release on Chess, as the first of these was reissued by the Japanese P-Vine label on a Chess compilation, and the songs were probably recorded at Cosimo Matassa’s J & M Recording Studio. Another track, a remake of “Hey Pretty Baby,” was recorded in Shreveport at RAM, also in 1957, featuring Garland Griffin on guitar with the rest of the band unidentified. This version had a very up-to-date rock and roll sound and feel, but did not see release until it was anthologized by the British Ace/Kent label on the RAM Records blues compilation *Red River Blues* in 1998. Johnson does not seem to have recorded again, and died in Mississippi in May of 1988. His son, also named Sherman Johnson, died on May 29, 1988, and it is not clear if they died together, or under what circumstances.

**BANNIE PRICE**

Guitarist Bannie Price first appears in the Shreveport newspapers in 1957, but he was born in Monroe, Louisiana in Ouachita Parish on February 9, 1897. He is first mentioned in connection with a Football Jamboree dance sponsored by the Bossier City Hi-Y organization and held at the Bossier City Recreation Center in August 1957. The dance was intended to raise funds for megaphones for the Bossier City High School.

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cheerleaders. An article about the same event in the *Shreveport Journal* stated that the band was known as Banney (sic) Price and His Rock & Roll Cats.\(^{128}\) A September article in the *Shreveport Times* indicated that Price’s band played all the Friday night dances for teenagers at the Bossier Recreation Center whenever the high school football games were out of town.\(^{129}\)

In 1959, the announcement of a teen dance sponsored by the Top Teens Club at the Bossier Recreation Center revealed that Bannie Price now called his band the “Dixieland Band,” raising questions about what kind of music he was playing at the time.\(^{130}\)

No definitive date for Price’s first recordings exist, but the song “Rushing” resembles somewhat the Mar-Keys’ song “Last Night,” which suggest that it was recorded in 1961. The instrumental was recorded at RAM but did not see release at the time, only surfacing on the British *Red River Blues* compilation in 1998. It seems likely that Price recorded at the same session as his longtime associate Elgie Brown, a saxophonist, whose recordings also did not see release. Dominique Anglares, in his excellent article on the RAM label, suggests that Price and Brown’s recordings were intended for a pending production deal between Mira Smith and Don Robey in Houston which never came together.\(^{131}\)


\(^{129}\) “Registration For Bossier Classes Set,” *Shreveport Times*, September 12, 1957, 33.

\(^{130}\) “Dance Scheduled For Tomorrow In Bossier,” *Shreveport Journal*, February 5, 1959, 27.

\(^{131}\) Anglares, “Mira Smith” 16.
Mira Smith shut down RAM in 1962 and two years later, Stan Lewis launched his first record label, Jewel Records. Lewis had held off on starting a label because of his distribution business, fearing that his distribution clients would resent his forming his own record company in competition, but by 1964 he changed his mind, launching what he evidently intended to be a blues and gospel label. Most of the artists that Lewis recorded were from other locations, but Bannie Price was the exception, recording “There Goes The Girl” and “Monkey See Monkey Do” in July 1964, which were released as Jewel 733. “There Goes The Girl” is a bittersweet soul ballad with bright horns, featuring two singers, of which the second is uncredited and unknown, while “Monkey See Monkey Do” is a rocking instrumental. Both songs are credited to Elgie Brown, suggesting that he was on the recording and that the band was likely Elgie Brown and the Downbeats. But where the session took place is unclear. The current edition of the *Blues Discography* places the session in Shreveport, but in July of 1964 Shreveport did not have a recording studio, as RAM had already closed. It seems unlikely that the sides were cut under KWKH’s primitive conditions, and it is possible that the recordings took place at Robin Hood Brians’s studio in Tyler, Texas, which had opened in 1963. Two more recordings, “You Love Me Pretty Baby” and “You Know I Love You” were recorded in 1965 and have matrix numbers TM1361 and TM1362, which strongly suggests that they were recorded at Leonard Chess’s Ter-Mar studios in Chicago. Chess and Stan Lewis were lifelong friends, and it was Chess who had suggested to Lewis that he should start his own label; by some accounts Lewis came up with the Jewel name after seeing a Jewel Tea Company grocery store while riding with Chess in Chicago, and Lewis also named
one of his sons Leonard. “You Love Me Pretty Baby” exists in two takes, the second a half-step lower than the first. The song is an uptempo minor-key romp with a definite Louisiana sound and prominent horns, including a trombone solo, which was probably played by Shreveporter Dunny Gilyard, a member of Elgie Brown’s band. “You Know I Love You” is the only blues in Price’s extant recordings, and it is one that follows more the “Junker’s Blues” template familiar to New Orleans and Louisiana rather than the traditional 12-bar blues pattern, also including a bridge. Despite the excellence of these recordings, Price remained only locally popular.

If the Jewel recordings did not make Price a nationally-known name, they did seem to relaunch his local live gigging. On April 4, 1967, Price was advertised as performing at Lum’s Stage Door at 1303 Grimmet Drive in the Agurs neighborhood. This would seem to be the building that had been the Airmen’s Club and the Arrowhead Club back in the 1950s and which during its various incarnations had booked many great Black Shreveport bands. Price played the Stage Door nightly through August of 1967, when he disappeared from Shreveport newspapers. According to Social Security death records, Bannie Price died in 1988 in the state of Georgia.

LITTLE MELVIN UNDERWOOD

Melvin Underwood was born on Christmas Eve 1935 on the Mont Helena Plantation near Rolling Fork, Mississippi, in Sharkey County. He decided he wanted to be a blues musician after seeing Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown perform, and played his first performances in the town of Tallulah, Louisiana, across the Mississippi River from

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Vicksburg. Eventually, he moved to Monroe, Louisiana, where his career began in earnest. Underwood first appeared in the *Monroe News Star* on August 30, 1957, when he was booked to perform at the South Side Club on Highway 165. Underwood’s early band was a major repository of northern Louisiana talent; both Good Rocking Sam (who was the great soul singer Mighty Sam McLain) and Little Sonny Green were members. By November he had moved to a private members-only club in Monroe called Woody’s Private Club Inc., where he was billed as “Little Melvin and His Band featuring Mack on trombone and James Morris Green with his bass.” But tragedy struck in December, when two members of Underwood’s band were involved in a crash north of Winnsboro which killed three people; Joe Lester Frazier and Joseph V. Jennings were both residents of Natchez and were driving back home after a gig in Monroe when they were struck head-on by a car driving north from Natchez to Monroe. Frazier and Jennings survived and were carried to the hospital in Natchez, but three occupants of the other car were killed.

At some point before 1959 Little Melvin took his band to RAM Recording Studios in Shreveport and recorded two songs that, like much of the other R & B material cut there, were not released until the Ace/Kent compilations appeared in 1998. “Something’s Wrong Baby” and “Little Melvin’s Gonna Move” both have a typical early 1960s feel and sound; neither is really blues in the ordinary sense of the term; they are

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instead late-era rhythm and blues which is beginning to turn into soul music. They are fairly good recordings, and it is hard to imagine why they were not released, but the record business was becoming more difficult in 1959; small labels like RAM were increasingly finding it harder to get payments due from the distributors, and the major labels were beginning to control more of the market share. Furthermore, the payola scandals led to tighter playlists, more oversight of radio stations by the Federal Communications Commission, and less opportunity for small independent labels to get radio play. Later in 1959, Melvin ventured to New Orleans and recorded two more sides for the local Ama label; “Wabble” is a horn-driven instrumental that has a remarkable similarity to Booker T. & The MG’s hit “Green Onions,” which wouldn’t be recorded until 1962, and the other side, “Life is Miserable,” is based on the swamp pop template that is usually more common in southwestern Louisiana than in New Orleans or the Monroe or Shreveport areas. While the Blues Discography places this recording in 1960, it is clearly in error, for an advertisement by the record department of Abdalla’s Department Store in the Opelousas Daily World in December 1959 lists the single in the best sellers of the “race” department.\(^{137}\)

Meanwhile, Melvin continued to perform around Louisiana; he played the Commencement Ball of Tensas Rosenwald High School in St. Joseph, Louisiana, in May of 1960,\(^ {138}\) and he played a New Year’s Eve Dance in the Flamingo Room of the Hollywood Restaurant at North Fourth Street and Hudson Street in Monroe.\(^ {139}\)


\(^{138}\) “59 Colored High School Students to Graduate Here,” Tensas Gazette, May 20, 1960, 1.

Melvin and His Band played a Delta Beta Sigma Dance in Monroe in June of 1961, and at the Evangeline Club in Ville Platte in August with Larry Williams and Little Sonny Green.

By December of 1961, Little Melvin was on a “Cavalcade of Stars” tour with Little Sonny Green and a Chubby Checker impersonator who called himself Chubby “Twist” Checker; they played an Orange, Texas club called the Big Oak Club on December 12. But the fake Chubby Checker would cause the promoter problems in April of 1963 in San Angelo, Texas, when disgruntled fans complained that they had expected the real Chubby Checker, who was actually performing at a New York City amusement park called Freedomland. In October, Melvin seems to have played his last gig in the South at a resort called Rocket Beach near Carencro, Louisiana, between Opelousas and Lafayette. The promoters unashamedly advertised the The (LA) Falcons, doubtless hoping that the audience would expect to see the better-known Falcons from Detroit. But the real Little Melvin and Little Sonny Green were along for the ride. Rocket Beach and its competitor Carnival Beach on the opposite side of Highway 167 were lake beaches popular with young people in Acadiana during those days. They were often the scene of swamp pop concerts and performances, but fell victim to changing tastes, increased insurance costs, and a growing awareness that both parks had snake

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140 “DBS Adrift In The South Seas Sets Theme For Sorority’s Rush Season,” *Monroe News-Star*, June 15, 1961, 8.


142 “Big Oak Club,” *Orange Leader*, December 12, 1961, 12.


infestations. In the 1970s, a snake bite caused a drowning at Carnival Beach, and attendance began to fall off at both parks. They closed at some point in the 1980s.

Little Melvin undoubtedly thought he was better than playing shows for crooked promoters with fake stars; at some point in late 1963 or early 1964, he moved to Evansville, Indiana. By May, he was being advertised in local papers there, playing at Pete Wood’s Crystal Palace at 5th and Pennsylvania.\footnote{“Table Talk About Town,” \\textit{Evansville Courier}, May 23, 1964, 4.} Underwood lived a rather itinerant life as a bluesman, spending time in both Florida and New Jersey, but becoming more familiar to blues fans by the 1990s. He died in Lakewood, New Jersey, in 2014.

\textbf{FRED DUNN}

Monroe blues pianist Fred Dunn was a community institution in that North Louisiana city, with a long reputation similar to that of Major Lampkins in Shreveport. Dunn was born on October 15, 1914, apparently in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, and is first mentioned as a pianist in regard to a 1947 party sponsored by the Delta Beta Sigma sorority.\footnote{“The Younger Set Plan Festivities,” \\textit{Monroe News-Star}, April 22, 1947, 2.} The same year in September, Dunn made seven recordings for the Signature label in New York, billed as Fred Dunn and His Barrelhouse Rhythm. The songs recorded were “Railroad Blues,” “Fred’s Boogie Woogie,” “Mountain Blues,” “Blues at Sunrise,” “Baby Don’t Feel Lowdown,” “The Morning After the Night Before,” and “The Devil and the Moon.” These did not garner much attention at the time, and were later used to fool the public by their inclusion on an LP credited to Ray Charles after the latter’s ascent to stardom. Dunn’s recordings were excellent, and deserved a better fate. His first
 advertised public appearance came in January of 1950, when he appeared at The Melody Bar in Monroe and was billed as “The South’s Finest Boogie and Blues Piano Player.”\textsuperscript{147} and in August of 1951 he was advertised as Fred “Gravel” Dunn, “The Piano Artist of the South” at Sonny’s Café and Cocktail Lounge on Masonic Drive in Alexandria, “direct from the Hotel Alvis, Monroe, Louisiana.”\textsuperscript{148} In October of the same year, Dunn played for the Rush Week events of Sigma Alpha Chi sorority in Monroe and was described as entertaining “rushees with his fascinating style at the piano and his hilarious interpretations of modern songs.”\textsuperscript{149} Either in 1953 or early 1954, Dunn made his last recording under his own name for the Jiffy label in West Monroe which belonged to Jiffy Fowler; the songs were recuts of “Fred’s Boogie Woogie” and “The Morning After the Night Before,” and perhaps saw release as Jiffy 100 although only an acetate has surfaced. Where these sides were recorded raises questions, as it does not seem that Monroe had a recording studio at the time. Mighty Joe Young’s Jiffy sides were cut in Ruston, perhaps at KRUS, and one wonders if that is also the case with Dunn’s two sides; on the other hand Joe Bihari’s Ben Burton recordings located in “East Monroe” suggest that there was some place that recording could be done either in Monroe or West Monroe. Although Dunn never again recorded under his own name, he does seem to have played on six unreleased Jiffy sides recorded by Papa George Lightfoot, the blues musician from Natchez.


\textsuperscript{148} “Under New Management!” \textit{Alexandria Town Talk}, August 9, 1951, 25.

\textsuperscript{149} “Gala events Crowd Rush Week For Sigma Alpha Chi Fraternity,” \textit{Monroe Morning World}, October 7, 1951, 23.
By February of 1953, Dunn had started a nightly residency at a cocktail lounge called Bakal’s at 1610 Louisville Avenue in Monroe, and he was still there in December of 1953 and in April of 1954. He appeared at Julius’ Lounge in July of 1955 as part of a “New Rhythm & Blues Show” featuring him as “Fred ‘Mouff’ Dunn” along with Luther “The Cat” Mitchell, and at Ticheli’s Lounge on the Winnsboro Road in May of 1956.

But Dunn’s first advertised appearance in Shreveport came in September of 1957, when he was promoted by the Silver Grill, a venue “in the alley between Market and Edwards, between Milam and Texas.” The earliest ads simply mention “Fred at the piano,” but by October 4, they read “Fred Dunn at the Piano.” The Silver Grill was a new establishment and was probably hoping to compete with the venues that featured well-known Black pianists like Major Lampkins or Alex “Snook” Jones. Dunn was advertised through the end of October and then is not mentioned again in Shreveport.

By March of 1960 he was back in Monroe, appearing at the Spare Room of the Bowlero at 1402 Louisville Avenue, and back at Julius’ in June, where he remained for the remainder of the year. He is never mentioned in the Monroe papers again, but he

seems to have moved to Indiana at some point, as his social security card was issued there. Yet he died in Monroe in 1966.

**JESSE THOMAS**

Jesse “Mule” Thomas was born February 3, 1911, at Logansport, Louisiana, in DeSoto Parish. His brother Willard “Ramblin” Thomas and nephew Lafayette Thomas were also blues musicians. Thomas is best known for the four sides he recorded for the Victor label in 1929 in Dallas, Texas; one of them, “Blue Goose Blues,” celebrates a grocery and juke that was located south of downtown Shreveport near the railroad station. He eventually moved to California, where in 1948 he began making records again.

Thomas’s first post war recordings were for the Miltone label, the independent label that Roy Milton had set up for himself when he was at the height of his popularity. The first single consisted of “Same Old Stuff” b/w “D Double Due Love You.” The former tune, although cut in California, shows Thomas working in a guitar style which greatly resembles Country Jim, David “Pete” McKinley, and Clarence London, all of whom were from DeSoto Parish, as Thomas was. This gives further weight to the idea that there was a unique Ark-La-Tex blues guitar style that may have developed in the Mansfield area.

In 1949, Thomas formed his own label, Club Records, to release material. During his life he would form several such labels of his own, interspersed with occasional releases on labels owned by others. The B-side of his first release on Club, “You Are My Dreams,” also shows Louisiana influence by being built on the “Junkers’ Blues” template so beloved in the New Orleans area. “I Wonder Why,” the A-side of the next Club release,
shows again the Mansfield guitar style typical of Northwest Louisiana, while “Another Friend Like Me” shows Thomas’ other side, a complex and virtuosic jazz-inflected style. Thomas also provided guitar backing for a Los Angeles female evangelist Sister Rosetta Winn, whom he released on his Club label. But in 1949, he seems to have traveled to Houston, Texas, for a recording session for the local Freedom label, under odd circumstances. It seems odd that Thomas would have left California to record for a small Texas independent label unless he happened to be in Houston for other reasons, either for a performance, or else because he had traveled back to the Shreveport area to visit relatives and passed through Houston going or coming. The two sides “Guess I’ll Walk Alone” and “Let’s Have Some Fun” are in the burgeoning jump blues style that was developing by 1949, and they have a distinctively different sound from any of Thomas’ previous recordings. The first-rate band consists of all Houston musicians: Sam Williams on tenor sax, Conrad Johnson on baritone sax, Lonnie Lyons on piano, Louis “Nunu” Pitts, on bass and Allison Tucker on drums. Houston would in fact play a big role in the development of the rhythm and blues sound as we know it from the period of 1949 through 1956.

But Thomas soon returned to Los Angeles, recording for the Biharis’ Modern Records label in August of 1949. Thomas’ “Meet Me Tonight on the Avenue” which went unreleased at the time may be a reference to Shreveport’s Texas Avenue (or perhaps Los Angeles’s Central Avenue), and shows similarities to the up-tempo boogie sides of David

157 Conrad Johnson would go on to become an important high school band director at Houston’s Kashmere High School. During his tenure, the Kashmere Stage Band won national accolades and awards many times, and their recordings are rare and highly sought by collectors.
“Pete” McKinley and Jim Bledsoe, and “Tomorrow I May Be Gone” is again in the Mansfield style. Yet by 1951, Thomas had moved to Jack Lauderdale’s Swing Time label in Los Angeles, and judging from his output there, Lauderdale wanted Thomas to adjust to a more modern style. Most of the Swing Time tracks sound as if Thomas is being forced out of his comfort zone, and they occupy a strange liminal position between blues and rhythm and blues. The exception is a track which went unreleased at the time, “I’m So Blue,” with the piano of Lloyd Glenn on a blues based again on the “Junkers’ Blues” template, and thus a Louisiana sound.

When Thomas signed with Art Rupe’s Specialty label in 1951, he had fully made the transition over to an urban blues style heavily influenced by jazz, but when in 1953 he moved to the Elko label, he had returned to a more blues-oriented style, showing both Thomas’s versatility and his tendency to go in the direction his record labels preferred, giving a more urban and rhythm and blues style to those labels which wanted it, and a more blues-oriented approach to the labels who wanted blues. His two Elko sides are excellent, especially “Gonna Move To California,” which shows a complex guitar accompaniment more reminiscent of his pre-war blues style, but by 1956 he had moved to the Hollywood Records label.

John Dolphin originally founded the “Recorded in Hollywood” label in Los Angeles in 1948 as an adjunct to his Dolphin’s of Hollywood record shop in South Central Los Angeles. The label had many successful releases, yet by 1953 it had significant financial problems. The Swing Time label for whom Jesse Thomas had also recorded had leased some of their tracks to Hollywood Records, but in 1953, the
Hollywood label was sold to Don Pierce, the Nashville, Tennessee owner of the country label Starday Records. Pierce ran the labels separately, using Hollywood primarily for pop and rhythm and blues.

Thomas’s first Hollywood single, “Long Time” b/w “Cool Kind Lover,” was released in 1956, and both sides were in a sophisticated urban style, with the latter track practically an early example of rock and roll. The sides are believed to have been cut in Los Angeles, but the identities of the musicians are unknown. By the time of Thomas’s next session for Hollywood, he had moved back to Shreveport, and it would seem likely that “Blow My Baby Back Home” and “Take Some and Leave Some” were recorded at Mira Smith’s RAM studios in Shreveport. Both sides have a more rural sound, again reflecting Thomas’s ability to “read” his intended audiences, realizing how to adapt his material to a Shreveport audience now that he had returned to Louisiana. “Blow My Baby Back Home” features a prominent harmonica player whose identity is uncertain. Shreveport as a city produced very few harmonica players; Lonnie Williams recorded on harmonica for Bob Shad in 1951, and then disappeared; Sonny Boy Williamson III, “the Golden Boy,” would record for Mira Smith in 1960. Either of them could perhaps be the harmonica player on this 1957 recording.

Thomas’s next recording was apparently made on April 15, 1962, and its location is somewhat unclear. “When I Squeeze Your Hand” and “Take Me Back Baby” were recorded with L. C. Williams’s Band, which was a Houston band, and which suggests that these songs were likely recorded in Houston. L. C. Williams, a Houston bluesman, had died in 1961 at the age of 31, but the single does not state that Williams was on the
record, only his band. “Take Me Back” is most interesting, as it is based on the traditional Acadian song “Hip et Taiuet,” which also forms the basis of “Midnight Special,” “Bucket’s Got A Hole In It,” and many other blues songs. Although the Blues Discography lists both songs as unreleased, they actually did come out, on a Shreveport label called RTA Victory, clearly a parody of RCA Victor, which from its P. O. Box address likely belonged to Thomas himself. A further oddity is the songwriting credits attributed on both songs to Thomas and to one W. S. Stevenson. Stevenson was a pseudonym for William A. McCall, the owner of 4-Star Records in Los Angeles. He had derived the name from William Shakespeare and Robert Louis Stevenson, but what connection there was between McCall and Thomas or how 4-Star might have been involved with RTA Victory are anything but clear. By 1962, 4-Star’s biggest days were behind it, and within a decade McCall would sell the label to interests in Nashville.

Finally, it has to be noted that many other things about this session are unclear. Could the songs have been recorded years before, at a time when L. C. Williams was still living? Were the songs recorded in Shreveport at Mira Smith’s RAM studios? And because the Shreveport record producer Harding Guion Des Marais recalled recording Jesse Thomas in the back room of his Bayou Record Shop in Cedar Grove during the early 1960s, could that have been the location of these two recordings? The answers to these questions likely died with Thomas.

Jesse Thomas’s next session was only slightly less mysterious than the one before, apparently taking place in 1963 and in the final days of the RAM Studios in Shreveport. There is little doubt of the location, since the masters were selected from RAM material
by the British Ace/Kent label when the *Red River Blues* compilation was being put together. Four songs seem to have been recorded at this session. “Guitar Riff” is a fairly sophisticated instrumental shuffle, and “Anything You Want” has a strong soul music influence with a beat perfect for the twist dance rhythm which was popular at the time. “Watch Out” is a slow blues, and “My Baby” is another up-tempo shuffle. A fifth song, “Everything I Do For You,” was originally unreleased, but has since been released on a compilation called *Louisiana Blues Early 50s & 60s R & B*; it lasts only a minute, and is a guitar and vocal demo of what would eventually become “Anything You Want.” The band consisted of Jim Smith on piano and organ, Micky Mac on bass, and Sammy Edwards on drums. The first two songs were released on a Red River label 45, and the second two were issued on a second Red River 45, but Thomas placed no release numbers on either release. The first two songs carried the matrix numbers 13997 and 13998, and the second two carried the matrix numbers 78995 and 78996. Thomas would use the Red River imprint for most of his remaining self-produced releases, including some productions of other local artists. A late Red River release by Thomas called “Looks Like Rain” is so rare that it has never been anthologized or placed online.

By the late 1960s, Thomas was on his way to becoming an institution in Shreveport. He was a member of the Steamboat Swingers at Ernest Palmisano’s downtown supper club; he later played there with his own Jesse Thomas Combo. By 1979 Thomas had put together a band called Jesse Thomas and the Clicks, and was playing events like the Brown Bagger Bash downtown on the lawn of the Caddo Parish
Courthouse,\textsuperscript{158} and the first annual Blues Fest at the Veterans’ Park amphitheater.\textsuperscript{159} One of the members of the Clicks was a blind pianist named “Peaches” Sterling who increasingly became Jesse Thomas’s partner in the later years.

Jesse Thomas recorded two final albums late in his career, but neither were cut in Shreveport. \textit{Blues Is A Feeling} was recorded in Chicago for the Delmark label in 1992, but did not see release until 2001, long after Thomas had died. Thomas’s final solo album \textit{Blue Goose Blues} was recorded in Dallas, Texas in 1995 on the Top Cat label, owned by Iris Music Productions. When picked up by the New Orleans label Black Top Records in 1996 it was renamed \textit{Looking For That Woman}.

But Jesse’s last Shreveport recordings are far more interesting, recorded probably sometime between 1990 and 1993, with his longtime partner “Peaches” Sterling at Nightwing Studios at 4321 Fairy Avenue. Monty Brown of Red River Radio on the LSU-Shreveport campus was producing, and Ron Capone was the engineer. A digital recording process was used, allowing the musicians to play what they wished without worrying about specific “takes” or tracks, with just guitar and piano. The material ranges from originals to some of the best-known and loved classics of the Black blues and jazz repertoire, and these recordings represent so far as is known the only documentation of the Bunkie, Louisiana-born pianist Leon “Peaches” Sterling. These recordings did not see release at the time, but were released posthumously by the Document label in 2013 under the title \textit{Another Friend Like Me}. Jesse Thomas died on August 13, 1995 in


\textsuperscript{159} “Neville Brothers at First Annual Blues Fest,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, June 1, 1979, 36.
Shreveport. His longtime friend and collaborator “Peaches” Sterling died less than month later on August 30, 1995, in Downey, California, where he had moved.

**CHARLES PENNYWELL & THE FAIRLANES**

Charles “Diamond” Pennywell was born in Shreveport near Cedar Grove in 1940 and began singing at the age of ten, but didn’t get really serious about singing until high school, when he joined with Eddie LeJay, Thomas Odom, and Steve Ross to form a vocal group called The Fairlanes.¹⁶⁰ Pennywell recalled:

> We were in high school around 1957. We got together and just starting singing around school. There were so many high school groups singing around Shreveport. Everyone knew one another. We all started off singing on the street corners, and luckily, our group took off.¹⁶¹

The Fairlanes first came to the attention of Bill “Omar” Jackson, a popular DJ at KOKA Radio Station, and Omar introduced them to Mira Smith of RAM, who in turn introduced the group to Harding Guion Des Marais, the owner of Bayou Record Shop on 70th Street in Cedar Grove. Des Marais, who was better known in Shreveport as Dee Marais, was known as a producer, although most of his production prior to 1959 had been for country or rockabilly artists. Dee Marais allowed the Fairlanes to rehearse in the back of the record shop but did not record them there, deciding to send them to Eddie Shuler’s Goldband studios in Lake Charles instead.

Eddie Shuler had opened his studio and record shop in a former church at 313 Church Street in Lake Charles; Pennywell recalled that the group would go to Goldband

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periodically and work out ideas with a pianist. One of those sessions resulted in a song called “Johnny Rhythm,” which would be on the group’s first single. But the flip side, the haunting “Seventeen Steps,” was written from the perspective of a Black convict facing execution on the following day, having to take the “seventeen steps” to the electric chair. Thirteen electrocutions took place in Louisiana between 1955 and 1958, all of African-Americans, and the song idea was worked out by Marais, Stan Lewis, and a man named Gordon Elliott, but Pennywell and the group members fleshed out what was a basic story line for the song. Releasing such a song took courage in 1959 Louisiana, but Dee Marais released it and “Johnny Rhythm” as Lucky Seven 102. Two more tracks, “Just For Me” and “Bullseye,” were also produced by Marais, but this time the songs were given to Pappy Dailey’s Dart label in Dallas for release. They came out at some point in late 1959 as Dart 109. “Just For Me” was a fairly typical doo-wop ballad, but it was still competently sung by the young group; the flip side, “Bullseye,” was more uptempo rock and roll, with a rocking band including a saxophonist. Nothing indicates who these musicians were. In an interview, Pennywell recalled southwest Louisiana pianist Katie Webster playing on one of their sessions, and since these songs were likely cut at Goldband in Lake Charles, it may have been her band that is backing them.162

Memphis pianist Rosco Gordon moved to Shreveport in 1959, and was impressed with the Fairlanes when he heard them; the group was soon asked to join Gordon’s tour, which they did throughout 1960.

162 Interview by the author, September 1, 2003.
But it was the group’s third single recorded in 1961 that really stood out. “You’re Lonesome Now” was unusual for demonstrating in practical terms how doo-wop was giving way to soul, and it was the first single to give Charles Pennywell separate billing, although for some reason his name was rendered “Charles Perrywell.” The B-side, “Come Along With Me” was also far removed from the traditional doo-wop style, instead opting for the sound of early rock and roll, with lyrics that mentioned “the prom” and current dances such as the “hully-gully,” the “continental” and the “twist.” Dee Marais does not seem to have had anything to do with these recordings, which were made in Lake Charles and which were released on Eddie Shuler’s Tic-Toc label, but they were by far the Fairlanes’ most important single. “I Hear Someone” went unreleased at the time, and was another up-tempo rocker, which may have been an alternate song for the B-side of “You’re Lonesome Now.” It ultimately saw release on the Collectibles label as part of a three-volume set of Goldband blues material. With these 1961 recordings, the Fairlanes as a group came to an end.

Pennywell, however, was signed to the Smash subsidiary of Mercury, probably through Shelby Singleton, a native Shreveporter who had started out as a regional promoter for Mercury and ended up moving to Nashville to head the label’s country operations. Pennywell’s 1963 single “Web of Love,” b/w “It’s So Funny I Could Cry,” was clearly aimed at the pop market rather than the soul market, and its slick production style was quite different from all of Pennywell’s previous recordings.
Pennywell ultimately moved to the West Coast, first to Los Angeles, and eventually to Las Vegas, where he found success as a lounge performer under the name Charles Diamond. He died in Las Vegas in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**JOHN GOSEY**

The fairly obscure Black Shreveport singer John Gosey seems to have been discovered by the aspiring songwriter Wilson Evans, who was living at the YMCA in Shreveport in 1959, the same year he founded his record label Music of America. Evans was by day an accountant at ArkLa Gas Corporation but had been writing songs for twelve years, and he seems to have conceived Music of America as a vehicle for his songs, recording them with a number of both white and Black artists.  

Centenary College Archivist Chris Brown has found Johnny Gosey in the 1959 Shreveport City Directory, listed as a waiter, but not much more about him has surfaced. It seems that Johnny Gosey was born in Many, Louisiana in Sabine Parish on July 18, 1933. He would have been about twenty-nine years of age when he recorded his only known single at RAM Recording Studios. Alton Warwick seemed to recall Gosey as having worked for the building where ArkLa Gas was located in Shreveport, but later indicated that it might be the other African-American artist on Evans’s label he was recalling, John Greer.

Gosey’s two released sides are exquisite, with Alex “Snook” Jones and his Nighthawks providing the musical backing. They are basically doo-wop songs, but they have a later sound and feel than those of the Shreveport Montclairs or the first Fairlanes.

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163 “Local Songwriter Is Own Publisher,” *Shreveport Journal*, December 5, 1959, 4.
recordings. “Fools Will Take Chances” is a moody, atmospheric ballad that would not sound out of place on the jukebox of a 1950s chrome and formica diner; Gosey’s confident lead is backed by an uncredited doo-wop group. “I Lost My Baby ’Cause I Can’t Rock and Roll,” on the other hand is more of a jump blues. Gosey’s voice is lower than Charles Pennywell’s, although he has extensive range, and is clearly self-assured. It is strange that he never recorded again, as the talent is evident. Both sides of the record are characterized by notable saxophone work as well.

Four more recordings under Gosey’s name exist unreleased in the RAM vaults. “Do-Wa”, “Hey Brown Frame,” “I Wanna Be Loved,” and “Little Girl” are unaccompanied vocal group recordings by an unknown doo-wop group, probably the same that appears on “Fools Will Take Chances.” These recordings allow us to imagine what such groups sounded like on the streets, community centers and public parks where they often practiced or gave impromptu performances in their neighborhoods. It seems likely that these recordings were demos that were being considered for full recording with Alex “Snook” Jones’s Nighthawks, but were ultimately not used, in favor of “Fools Will Take Chances” and “I Lost My Baby.” The recordings also show very much how Black street-corner vocalizing was related to the world of Black gospel quartets, at least in the South. These tracks have yet to see commercial release, as they far more resemble field recordings than commercial ones, but they are a window on the brief doo-wop era in a Southern city. Johnny Gosey died on June 12, 2004 in Louisiana. It does not seem that he ever recorded again.
THE MYSTERY OF SHREVEPORT’S JOHN GREER

The other African-American artist on Wilson Evans’ Music of America label was a man named John Greer, but even less is known about him than John Gosey. Alton Warwick, a cousin of Mira Smith of RAM Records, could not recall whether it was John Greer or John Gosey who worked for the ArkLa Gas Company building where he and Wilson Evans worked. To make matters more confusing, there was a well-known rhythm-and-blues artist named Big John Greer, who was originally from Hot Springs, Arkansas. The *Blues Discography* assumes that the Music of America single recorded in Shreveport is that John Greer’s final recording. And there is at least one thing which might add credence to that theory, the fact that by 1959 Big John Greer had moved back to his Arkansas hometown, which was only perhaps three hours from Shreveport. On the other hand, Big John Greer was primarily a saxophonist, and comparison of “Honey, Why” from Shreveport’s John Greer shows a very different vocal style from any extant recordings of Big John Greer. And that John Greer had been on major labels such as Groove and RCA Victor. Though times were changing, it seems unlikely that he would have fallen so far as to be recording for a new unknown label in Shreveport. The discography editors aside, most are of the opinion that the John Greer who recorded in Shreveport is a different artist.

The Music of America 1002 single was released with “Honey Why” b/w “It’s Natural To Be In Love.” The single is quite rare, and of the songs, only the A-side has been included on YouTube or played on radio shows. The song is credited to Wilson Evans and John Greer, and since Evans was in fact a songwriter, this probably
represented an actual collaboration rather than Evans simply taking writer’s credit as was often the case in the music business of that era. The song is a twelve-bar blues, and Greer sings it in fine style, with a backing band featuring a prominent saxophone, suggesting that this is Alex “Snook” Jones’s Nighthawks again. The session was undoubtedly cut at RAM studios on Lakeshore Drive. The other side of the single, “It’s Natural To Be In Love,” is a song credited to Wilson Evans and one D. DuBois, who is undoubtedly Douglas DuBois of the Montclairs. This raises a number of questions, including whether this John Greer was in the Montclairs, and whether the vocal group backing John Gosey on “Fools Will Take Chances” and his unreleased demos might have been the Montclairs. Nothing further is heard from either of the John Greers. Big John Greer died in Hot Springs, Arkansas, on May 12, 1972. Most of the John Greers in Caddo Parish, Louisiana were white. One Black John Greer is listed in Shreveport in the 1950 census, but he was 67 years of age that year, and by 1959 would have been 76; the record does not sound like the voice of a 76-year-old. The identity of this particular John Greer may remain a mystery. On a rockabilly website, Dominique Anglares suggested that Wilson Evans had died in a nursing home in Delhi, Louisiana, in the mid-1980s. However, a news article indicates that a man named Wilson Evans and his wife Kathleen were killed at Keithville, Louisiana just south of Shreveport on April 22, 2014 when their pickup truck was struck by a train. Evans was 85 and his wife 79. It is not clear whether this Wilson Evans was in fact the man that owned Music of America and Reba Publishing Company.
At some point in 1959, a man named Shelby Singleton opened a new record shop in the Cedar Grove neighborhood of Shreveport called the Bayou Record Shop. It was a bold proposition; at that point, Stan Lewis had been open for more than a decade and was the dominant retailer of recorded music in the city. And the city had other record shops, including Beam’s in Bossier City, Ram Records on Greenwood Road (the retail outlet of Mira Smith’s RAM label and studios), and Wilson’s Hi-Fi Center. But peculiarly, none of these stores were convenient to Cedar Grove, which was far to the south of the city and had once been a separate town with its own government. At 408 East 70th Street, Bayou Records was in the center of the neighborhood.

Shelby Singleton had been born in Waskom, Texas, in 1931, a town that lay just across the state line from Greenwood, Louisiana, in Caddo Parish, but he grew up in Shreveport. He had enlisted in the Marine Corps during the Korean War, and injuries he received during the war left a metal plate in his head. According to Charles Pennywell, it was Harding Guion Des Marais who gave Singleton his start in the music business, although Pennywell gave no details about how it came about. At some point, Singleton was hired as a promoter for the Starday Records label in Nashville, which at the time was distributed by Mercury Records; when Starday left Mercury’s distribution in 1957, Mercury offered Singleton a position as southeastern regional promotion director. At the time, it was rumored that Mercury was considering building a large regional headquarters and studio in Shreveport, a development that would have made Shreveport a large

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164 Interview with the author, September 13, 2001.
alternative to Nashville. Why the plans were cancelled is unclear; some have suggested that the mayor and commissioners at the time were concerned about the outside influence and changes to the city’s culture that could result from such an entertainment business influx. Singleton’s background was in country music, and he undoubtedly intended Bayou Records to be a country-oriented record store. But Cedar Grove was a neighborhood in flux; having been a separate town, Cedar Grove had always had a Black neighborhood, but during the decade between 1960 and 1970, Cedar Grove increasingly became a Black community, as whites fled to newer developments elsewhere in Caddo or Bossier Parishes. When Singleton moved to Nashville in 1960, he sold the store to his friend and mentor Dee Marais, who owned it well into the 1990s.

Marais undoubtedly sensed the changes that were occurring in the area; blues became one of his biggest selling genres, and his customer base undoubtedly influenced his decision to begin recording Black artists on his record labels. Local Black musicians rehearsed and recorded demos in the back of the store, including The Fairlanes and Jesse Thomas. While it doesn’t seem that anything was recorded in the store that ever was released commercially, Marais made the space available to the Cedar Grove community for rehearsal and demo purposes. The story of Shreveport, particularly with regard to blues and soul music, must include the history of this store.

**RAM RECORDS/ROYAL AUDIO MUSIC**

The most important music-related business during the late 1950s in Shreveport was Mira Smith’s RAM Recording Studios, also known as Royal Audio Music Inc. Female-owned recording studios were a rarity, although there were at least three of them
in the South. Smith built her first studio at 2439 Lakeshore Drive, with assistance from her cousin Alton Warwick. Her intent was to provide musical infrastructure in the hopes that Louisiana Hayride artists would not leave the Shreveport area, but like other maverick women in the industry, she branched out not only into early rock and roll, but also into Black music. As the only available recording studio in Shreveport from 1955 to 1963, RAM was the only place for local artists to record without traveling out of town.

Smith also formed the RAM Record label, which occasionally featured a large horned ram on the label with the legend “Master of the Trail.” Concerned about pressing plant bootlegging, which was an industry issue at the time, she created an elaborate and seemingly unpredictable code system to number her releases. By making it impossible for a pressing company to predict the number of her next release, she hoped to prevent unauthorized pressing of her material.

In the middle of 1957, she opened a retail record shop at 2816 Greenwood Road, which at the time was the main road leading toward Dallas. Record shops were often attached to recording studios and record labels during the era from 1948 to the late 1960s; it was actually a fairly brilliant concept, as seeing what customers chose to buy would enable the studio and label to have a decent idea of what hits were made of. In 1960, Mira Smith moved her studios from Lakeshore Drive to 2812 Greenwood Road, steps away from the retail record shop she had opened.

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While the bulk of RAM artists were white country and rockabilly artists, Smith recorded a considerable number of Black blues artists, early soul artists and doo-wop artists, as well as at least one gospel artist.

VINCENT WILLIAMS

Vincent Lopez Williams was born on August 21, 1940, in Longview, Texas. He came from a musical family, as his father had played with Count Basie and Earl “Fatha” Hines.\(^\text{166}\) He began his career as a pianist, a tenor and baritone saxophonist, and a songwriter before he began singing himself. He stated that he began performing at a strip club in Longview called the Embers Club when he was still a teenager, and that he was often called to play with touring stars, such as Jimmy Reed, because the traveling artists did not usually carry a full band with them, choosing to get local musicians in each city to back them. Williams recalled playing the Bossier Strip and the Hollywood Palace in Shreveport; this was probably in the 1960s.

Williams began recording with Mira Smith at RAM in either 1959 or 1960. His only released RAM single was “Do I Have a Chance With You” b/w “Girl In The Street,” released as RAM 2100 in 1960. “Do I Have A Chance With You” is a Chuck Berry styled rock and roll romp, while “Girl In The Street” is a sad ballad with a haunting female chorus background, lamenting a female love who seems unable to be faithful. Williams recalled that the saxophone player was Elgie Brown, and that former Elvis Presley drummer D. J. Fontana had played drums on his sessions. The excellent single did not make much of an impact, perhaps as it had something of an archaic sound by 1960. Also,

\(^\text{166}\) Interview with the author, February 28, 2002.
it seems that RAM was increasingly having distribution problems as the new decade dawned. The major labels were crowding out the small independent labels, and the latter were increasingly finding it hard to generate radio play or to get paid for records sold by their distributors.

At least two more Williams recordings remained unreleased at the time but have since been released in a couple of reissues of RAM material. “Going Back to Chicago” and “Trying to Make a Fool Out of Me” feature Williams’s piano and vocals; the latter track also has a tambourine keeping the rhythm, but these recordings sound like rough demos that were made in consideration of recording them over with a full band. They are decent songs, however, and definitely highlight Williams’s considerable skill as a pianist.

It is unclear exactly how long Williams remained active in Shreveport during the 1960s, but at some point he left and traveled extensively in Europe. In 1965, he was in Longview, playing at the Brown Derby at 2737 High Street with Cozy Cole on drums, and in 1969 he was playing in Longview at Harry Pettey’s Sir-Loin House. In an interview, Williams recalled performing in the Shreve Square development in downtown Shreveport, specifically recalling playing at Ernest’s Supper Club in the early 1970s. He had no published advertisements for performances until 1984, when he was performing at Johnny Cace’s Seafood and Steak House in Longview as a pianist. Most of Williams’s later gigs were piano gigs, and he seems to have been to Longview what Fred Dunn was to Monroe and Major Lampkins and Snook Jones were to Shreveport. Through the 1980s

and early 1990s, Williams played at clubs like Mona’s Town Lake Plaza, Bentley’s, and Tequila Willie’s in Kilgore, all while managing a retirement apartment complex in Longview. He also started his own record label, Mohawk, releasing singles that are extremely rare. Vincent Williams died in October of 2004 in Longview; he left behind eight descendants.

JEFF “SONNY BOY III” WILLIAMSON

As if two Sonny Boy Williamsons were not enough, a third one made his way to Mira Smith in Shreveport in 1960 or 1961. Jeff “Sonny Boy” Williamson was actually named Edward William Johnson;\(^{170}\) he seems to have been from New Orleans, and he called himself “The Golden Boy.” Like the other two Sonny Boy Williamsons, he was a harmonica player, unfortunately working in a style that was rather archaic by the standards of 1961.

One single appeared at the time as RAM 2501, “Mailman, Mailman” b/w “Pretty Lil Thing,” released in 1961. “Mailman, Mailman” is a rather typical blues, while the B-side has a Bo Diddley—like mambo feel. While the pianist and drummer remain unknown, it is known that a man named James Moore played guitar on this session. Two more songs were recorded at the session which went unreleased at the time. “You Better Sit Down” is an uptempo blues, arguably stronger than “Mailman, Mailman,” which raises questions about why the latter was released and not the former. The other song, “I Gotta Cry” is basically constructed on the “Junkers’ template,” which is not surprising if Williamson was from New Orleans; as is occasionally the case, a bridge is added in this

particular song. Unlike some of the other unreleased RAM tracks, these two songs are fully fleshed out records that could have been released; that they were not released might have had something to do with the first single underperforming, or perhaps with the fact that, confronted with a changing record industry, Mira Smith and her songwriting partner Margaret Lewis were contemplating a change of focus toward acting and/or songwriting. Williamson does not seem to have recorded again. A man named Edward William Johnson Sr. died in New Orleans on May 31, 1992. He was sixty-four years old.\footnote{If this Edward William Johnson was indeed Jeff “Sonny Boy” Williamson, then he was about thirty-two or thirty-three years old when he recorded for Mira Smith.}

**ELGIE BROWN & THE DOWN BEATS**

Elgie Brown was born in Bossier City, Louisiana in 1938, the son of Joe and Ahleavy Brown, according to the 1950 census. He knew that he wanted to be a musician as an elementary student when he saw the members of the Charlotte Mitchell High School band in his hometown, and he was given an alto sax by Chuck Ellis, who was the director of the high school band. Brown would change from alto to tenor to baritone and then back to tenor sax during his life in music.\footnote{Brown’s big break came through the show promoter and service station owner Lawrence Patton, who was a pioneer businessman and community leader in Black Shreveport. In addition to owning the service station, Patton was a part owner in the Palace Park/Club 66, and was also a local promoter, bringing the biggest names in Black music to the city. Elgie soon was leading...}

\footnote{“Deaths,” *Times Picayune*, June 4, 1992, 60.}

\footnote{Interview with the author, October 15, 2023.}
the house band at the Palace Park, a band known as the Down Beats, backing most of the
big-name acts from out of town which played the venue. And it was also through Patton
that Brown was introduced to Rosco Gordon, the Memphis pianist, with whom he went
on the road.

Elgie’s only recordings under his own name were made at RAM Recording
 Studios in 1959 and 1960, and did not see release at the time. He seems to have come to
the studios with Bannie Price and then made several records of his own. “Let Me Feel It”
is a bright shuffle blues, while “You’ll Be Back” has the southwest Louisiana feel of
swamp pop; the guitar work sounds like that of Mira Smith herself, and Brown sings
competently on both tracks. A third track “Chewin’ Gum” has been uploaded to YouTube
by Arthur Warwick, and has a late 1950s rhythm and blues feel, and a fourth, “Gimmie
Gimmie,” features a harmonica player (Jeff Williamson?) and has a moderate blues
tempo with lots of reverb. Unfortunately, these were not released until 1998. Two more
Elgie Brown instrumentals were released by RAM (now run by Alton Warwick) in 2022;
by their sound they would seem to be recorded at a different date from the vocal tracks,
possibly later. “Joy Ride” is an uptempo rock and roll stomper that features trombonist
Cornelius “Dunny” Gilyard prominently; “No Foolin’” is also an uptempo instrumental
with plenty of horns. While none of these songs were released at the time they were
recorded, two RAM recordings, the song “Rushin’” by Bannie Price and “Let Me Feel It”
by Elgie Brown, were included in the soundtrack to the 2018 film The Green Book,
through the efforts of RAM’s distribution partners.173

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173 The heavily distorted and bizarre gospel sides on Designer by Elige Brown are not by the
Shreveport artist Elgie Brown. Elder Elige Brown was an evangelist and guitarist in Ohio.
Rosco Gordon had moved to the Shreveport area at some point in 1960, and Elgie Brown and his Down Beats soon became his backing band, touring with him, Roscoe Shelton, and Gene Allison across the United States and into Mexico. By May of 1961, Gordon and Brown were back in the Shreveport area, playing at Saks Cocktail Lounge in Bossier City with the Drifters; Brown was billed as “Elgie Brown, His Tenor Sax and Orchestra.”

March of 1962 saw “Elgie Brown and His Band” playing for the Abdul Temple No. 94 Shriners at Club 66, featuring a vocalist named Gloria Jean Williams, who was known as “Miss Blues,” and in September of 1964, Shreveport Sun columnist The Browser wrote: “Elgie Brown and His Swinging Soul Brothers are appearing every Wednesday night from 8 to 12 at the LeSabre Inn. I understand that this is really a swinging group.” September of 1966 found Elgie Brown and the Soul Brothers out in the country near Natchitoches for a Kappa Alpha fraternity party at the plantation of Mrs. Beth Cloutier, and in October, they were back at the Natchitoches Elks Club for another KA dance.

In May of 1968, Leon Tarver became the first Black candidate for Congress from Shreveport since Reconstruction, and the United Citizens Committee, a Shreveport civil rights organization, sponsored a dance for Tarver which featured Elgie Brown and the

Downbeats; the dance was held on the Louisiana State Fairgrounds, in the Vacation Land Building, which had formerly been the Agriculture Building.\(^{179}\) When the Star Theatre reopened under new management in August of 1968, Elgie Brown was listed in the advertisement as the music director; this might account for Roscoe Shelton being hired as the act for the grand reopening, as Shelton and Brown had toured together earlier in the 1960s.\(^{180}\)

Elgie Brown and the Downbeats remained active through the end of 1972; they played a dance for the Magnolia State Peace Officers Association, an organization of Black law enforcement officers, at the Club 51 in the Cooper Road in April of 1969,\(^{181}\) a style show and dance for the Bossier Parrish anti-poverty program at the Cobra Club, which was the former Star Theater, in May of 1970,\(^{182}\) and the grand opening of the Mark IV Club at 824 1/2 Texas Avenue (the former Zebra Room) in September 1972.\(^{183}\) But Elgie Brown was ultimately tiring of performing. As he explained:

I was playing down in The Bottoms. I can’t remember the actual name of the place. We called it The Bottoms. Me and George Sanford were out in the back smoking weed. I got so high until I tripped. I got back into the place, and I got to playing so hot until I was sweating, and I thought it was drops of blood. I told him, “I’m going home,” and I left; gave my horn to a little boy down the street. Ain’t played since.\(^{184}\)


\(^{183}\) “Grand Opening Mark IV Ltd.” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, August 31, 1972, 6.

\(^{184}\) Interview by the author, October 15, 2023.
Although Elgie has been honored for his work for the city of Bossier City for many years, until recent years, he has not received the honor he deserves for the important role he played in Shreveport and Bossier City’s music scene. The inclusion of his music in recent movies and television shows is a welcome step in the right direction.

**CORNELIUS “DUNNY” GILLYARD**

Many musicians passed through Elgie Brown’s Downbeats over its nearly twenty years in existence, including singers like Good Rockin’ Sam, and musicians like Chico Chism, Eddie Williams and Vernon “Geater” Davis; so many musicians passed through the band in fact that Elgie Brown cannot recall them all. But interestingly, we know a lot about the band’s trombone player, Cornelius “Dunny” Gillyard, because of a paper written about him by William Gay, a student at Louisiana Tech University in 1998, obviously based on interviews that Gillyard gave him.\(^\text{185}\)

Gillyard first became interested in music not through hearing other musicians, but through the beautiful uniforms that band members wore. His friend told him that he could wear one if he would join the band and play a trombone, as presumably this is where the Booker T. Washington High School band had a need for musicians. Gillyard recalled playing at a “social,” and the band members, who knew he could only play in one key, changing keys on him in the middle of a song. They saw that as quite amusing; Gillyard likely didn’t.

But it was Gillyard’s transfer to Charlotte Mitchell High School in Bossier City at the start of his junior year that set the course of his journey in music. There he met Elgie

Brown, with whom he began a lifelong friendship. They began working with piano players like Eddie Williams and Jerry Dennis, and the drummer Eddie “Coot” Lewis arranged for Dunny’s first paying gig, a Masonic parade. Gillyard recalled playing clubs like the Palace and the Harlem club; while Brown could not remember the band members at that time, Gillyard recalled them as himself on trombone, Elgie Brown on sax, Bannie Price on guitar, Eddie Williams on piano, and Chico Chism on drums.

When Roscoe Gordon picked up Elgie Brown’s band for touring, Gillyard was on the tour as well, and in 1998 he recalled more details of the tour than Brown mentioned; he recalled traveling to Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad, and the Bahamas as part of a tour sponsored by the State Department; Gordon was extremely popular in the Caribbean, as his piano style had contributed to the development of ska. At various times back in the United States, the tour involved such entertainers as Big Joe Turner and Jimmy Reed, the latter a man that Gillyard recalled as “missing a lot of gigs.”

When the band finally returned to Shreveport, it had a slightly different lineup; Herman “Buzzard” Lot was on bass, and the band went through various drummers; it also took on various names, including the “Soul Brothers” and “Peace and Love.” Gillyard also recalled various tours across Texas and Oklahoma with Lowell Fulson, Etta James, Freddie King, Johnnie Taylor, Z. Z. Hill, and Little Willie John. King became especially fond of the Down Beats; he eventually started calling them directly, using the Wonder Bar, a Bottoms nightclub where members often hung out, as a go-between.

By the late 1960s, Gillyard tired of the rough life of a touring musician; he also began to feel that the economics just were not right. He accepted a permanent job with
Willis-Knighton Hospital, although unlike Elgie Brown, he never quit playing. Over subsequent years, he played with Peaches Sterling and Jesse Thomas, with Raymond Blakes, and with a band called The Lightnin’ Bugs. Cornelius Gillyard died May 23, 2013 in Shreveport.

**L. C. STEELS SR.**

According to his obituary, L. C. Steels Sr. was born July 4, 1933, in Doyline, Louisiana, a town in Webster Parish between Minden and Bossier City.\(^{186}\) Although his obituary mentioned only his activities in gospel music, Steels had a long career both in gospel and in rhythm and blues.

Elgie Brown did not recall Steels, and he is not mentioned in the Shreveport papers at all, so it is unclear how he ended up at Mira Smith’s RAM studios in 1959 or 1960, but he recorded two songs which were released on Mira’s K Records subsidiary (named for her sister Kathleen) as K Records CS-14 in 1961. “Come Back Betty” was a rather maudlin doo-wop ballad, but the flip side “Don’t Play No Woman For A Fool” was a much more enthusiastic jump blues even if Steels’s angelic high voice lacked the grit and growl for such a blues. In the wake of the single’s indifferent reception, he moved his family to Fort Worth, Texas.

His first single after the move was a rocking instrumental called “Looking Good,” recorded for the Roma label in 1963. It is so rare that there is no information about the song on the other side; only “Looking Good” has been anthologized. A year later, Steels recorded a single for the Manco label, a Fort Worth label that belonged to a man named

Manning; the affiliated publisher of the label, Bluebonnet, may account for the claim that Steels had recorded for a label of that name, which does not seem to be the case. “I Always Will Love You,” is another doo-wop ballad with a decent sax-driven band backing; Steels’s voice sounds stronger and more suited to the material than on his Shreveport recordings for Mira Smith; the flip side, “Go Ahead Baby,” is a more uptempo jump blues. These two sides were released in 1964 as Manco 1061, credited to L. C. Steels and the Jivers, but Manco must have failed in 1964, because the same two songs were then issued by Steels’s own Steels Enterprise label as Steels Enterprise 101; the only difference in the two releases is that background vocals were added to both sides on the Steels release.

Four years later, Steels recorded his absolute masterpiece, a soul ballad entitled “Yesterday Is Already Gone,” which has remarkable similarities in sound to the recordings that were being made in Shreveport around the same time. Steels uses his gospel background to good effect, and the background of vocalists and horns sets the mood; peculiarly, this gets released with the 1963 “Looking Good” on the other side, and labeled as Steels 101.

In 1970, Steels opened a record shop in Fort Worth, and three years later he seems to have returned to Shreveport to record one final secular single for Don Logan’s tiny label Faces. “Dandy” Don Logan had been a producer for Stan Lewis’s Jewel-Paula-Ronn complex of labels in Shreveport, but he also formed his own small group of various tiny labels that perhaps were custom operations. Brother, Memorial, and Cal were, for the most part, gospel labels, while Faces was a vehicle for secular material. Few of the
records were actually cut in Shreveport, and one of the stranger things about Faces was that some of the singles were cut by gospel singers who had recorded for some of Logan’s other labels. Presumably, Logan allowed artists who wanted to make a record to do so for a fee; given the extreme rarity of all of his labels, distribution must have been sporadic at best. But Steels may have come to Sound City Recording Studios at 3316 Line Avenue in Shreveport to record his Faces single. For the A-side, he chose an interesting cover tune, Shreveporter Eddie Giles’s biggest hit, “Losing Boy.” Choosing a song so indelibly linked to a particular artist is fraught with danger, but Steels manages to pull it off, giving the 1966 song a 1973 sound and feel, with a blazing horn section and a considerable amount of wah-wah guitar. The B-side, “Pretty Black Woman,” is by contrast a Steels original and a slow love ballad. Both are quality recordings, but like most Faces releases, they seem to have been pressed in extremely tiny quantities.

After 1973, Steels seems to have restricted himself to gospel music, and between 1990 and 2002 he had a gospel radio show on an AM station in Fort Worth, where he was known as the Paperman. His son became a well-known guitarist in Dallas and Fort Worth. L. C. Steels Sr. died on January 4, 2002 of arterial lateral sclerosis.

OTHER RAM ARTISTS

The mysterious song “So Lonely, So Blue” by Robert Tucker would seem to be a rhythm-and-blues recording from the RAM vaults uploaded to YouTube by Alton Warwick, Mira Smith’s cousin who currently owns the RAM catalogue, but who Tucker was or when this lovely track was recorded are unclear. The presence of strings in the backing track would argue for a later date, probably from 1960 to 1962. It was neither
released at the time, nor has it been issued on any of the various recent compilations of RAM material that have seen release since 1998.

June Bug Bailey was allegedly the teenage daughter of a woman from Alexandria who had moved to Shreveport and was working at Pioneer Bar-B-Que on Greenwood Road as a waitress. The restaurant was close to the RAM Record Shop and Studios, and presumably the girl was brought to Mira Smith by her mother. “Louisiana Twist” was of course intended to take advantage of the twist dance craze of the early 1960s, while “Lee Street Blues” referenced the primary entertainment district of Black Alexandria, referring to a “wine-head” that frequented the street. The two sides were released in 1962 on the Jo subsidiary, as Jo 5810.

RAM shut down in 1963, when Mira Smith and Margaret Lewis went to Los Angeles for screen tests with the motion picture studios; after that, the two friends and songwriting partners moved to Nashville, where they wrote a number of hit songs, of which the best known is “Reconsider Me,” which has become a standard in both country and soul music. Margaret Lewis eventually moved back to Shreveport and married Alton Warwick. They labored for many years to preserve the Municipal Auditorium and the legacy of the Louisiana Hayride; their elaborate plan for Shreveport redevelopment and tourism based around the city’s musical legacy was sadly rejected by the political leadership of Shreveport. Margaret Lewis Warwick died on March 29, 2019.
EDWARD SHIELDS

Saxophonist Edward Shields was Shreveport’s foremost advocate of modern jazz, which of course did not have a huge following in any Southern cities. He was first mentioned in the local press in 1959, when he began performing with his trio at a place called the Club Capri. Located at 1303 Grimmet Drive, it was yet another incarnation of the Airmen’s/Arrowhead Club, where so many Black bands and musicians played over the years.\(^{187}\) By January of 1960, Shields had moved with his band the Cyclones over to a new “espresso coffee house” called The Cradle of Sound at 710 Cotton Street,\(^{188}\) where both white and Black musicians met to play, which was definitely unusual in Shreveport. From the perspective of 1990, Shields said, “We were doing an odd thing.”\(^{189}\) Black musicians like Shields, Charles Parker, on bass and Marvin Modicue on drums were collaborating with white musicians from Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City. While this seemed unusual from a Shreveport standpoint, it was not nearly as unusual within the jazz music community. Many white musicians who played jazz admired Black musicians, and were aware that the music had emerged from African-American culture. Edward Shields died on March 23, 2007 in Shreveport, at the age of 70.\(^{190}\)

The Cradle of Sound was oddly not Shreveport’s first coffee house. That honor belonged to the Rubaiyat Coffee House at 1609 Southern Avenue, which had opened in November of 1959, but that establishment seemed to feature more guitarists and folk


music, while the Cradle was a hangout for beboppers. Neither establishment lasted past 1961.

**GOOD ROCKIN’ LUKE**

One of Shreveport’s more obscure Black artists was a singer named Luke Anderson, AKA Willie C. Smith, better known as Good Rockin’ Luke, who does not seem to have ever recorded, but was often associated with organist and King Records artist Bill Doggett, who was credited with discovering him. Yet advertisements in the *Shreveport Sun* show that Luke was already a known performer at least in Shreveport. He first appears as a participant in a show at the Ritz Theatre at 1705 Milam Street in February of 1960. The “Silver Satin Review” featured dancers and a band called Ben Amos and His Rhythm Makers with Calvin James and Good Rockin’ Luke. Calvin James and Luke were apparently the vocalists with the band.

In March, Bill Doggett and his band came to Club 66 in Shreveport, and their show featured “Shreveport’s own Good Rocking Luke,” whom Doggett had run into on a backstreet when his band was lost looking for the Palace Park, probably in 1958. Clay Street was not a major street in Shreveport by any means, and it is not hard to imagine that people from out of town might have gotten lost looking for it. What was an odd was coincidence was their pulling over to ask directions of Luke; being a singer himself, he was all too thrilled to join them in their bus to direct them to their destination.

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192 “Floor Show!” *Shreveport Sun*, February 27, 1960, 8.

By Doggett’s account of the incident, Luke’s boasts that he could sing led to an impromptu audition, and ultimately to his touring with Doggett for a period of time.\footnote{194 “Louisiana Singer Clicks With Bill Doggett,” \textit{Louisiana Weekly}, December 10, 1960, 15}

Although he is rarely mentioned in the daily papers or the \textit{Sun}, copies of the \textit{Conglomerate} newspaper and \textit{Yoncopin} yearbook from Centenary College show that Luke was popular with the fraternities and sororities on the campus. In the Fall of 1965, a \textit{Conglomerate} article stated: “This Saturday the KA’s will be entertained at a Bar-B-Cue and dance at the KA House. Hamburgers and “Good Rockin’ Luke” will be on hand for members, dates, and guests.”\footnote{195 “Greek to Me,” \textit{Conglomerate} (Centenary College), November 15, 1965, 2.} At the end of the 1965-1966 school year, the \textit{Yoncopin} mentioned that Good Rockin’ Luke and the Casanovas had been hired for a KA Riverboat Party, but that for some reason, the party had to be moved to the Western Hills Hotel in Bossier City.\footnote{196 \textit{Yoncopin} (Centenary College), 1966, 103.}

Shreveport music researcher John Ridge found other mentions of Good Rockin’ Luke in connection with fraternity parties at Northwestern State College in Natchitoches, and an ill-fated KA boat party on Caddo Lake in 1964, where the boat began to sink and everyone had to go ashore. The association of Luke with the band name Casanovas is quite interesting, given that band’s later association with singer Abraham Ester. Ridge also deserves credit for finding Good Rockin Luke’s obituary; although he is listed as Willie C. Smith, the notice also gives the nickname “Good Rockin’ Luke.” He died in Shreveport in March of 1997, apparently without ever recording or being interviewed.
TERRIBLE TURK AND THE HOT SHOTS

During the period of intense rivalry between Shreveport’s two Black radio stations KANB and KOKA, both stations were constantly trying to find a way to give themselves the upper hand, and frequently new personalities and shows were the tactic they tried. In January of 1960, KANB introduced a new personality, the Terrible Turk, who, like many other Black disc jockeys in the Shreveport area, had his own band called T. T. and the Hot Shots. He unveiled his band in April of 1960 when they made their debut at the Lake Cliff on the shores of Cross Lake at the foot of Milam Street.197

Terrible Turk and his band were evidently somewhat popular, as they played the Lake Cliff through the month of April 1960. Unfortunately, we have no indication of who the musicians in the band were, and after April of 1960 they are not mentioned again. But Terrible Turk remained a popular DJ in Shreveport, moving to KOKA after the failure of KANB. He was active on the air in Shreveport at least through 1977.

SHREVEPORT NEIGHBORHOOD GANGS IN THE 1950s

Unfortunately, the music and fun in late 1950s Shreveport occurred against a backdrop of increasing social unrest. The Shreveport Sun had warned about the problems of delinquent youth as far back as 1948, and had ominously pointed out that recreational facilities for Black youth were inadequate. The City of Shreveport had taken steps to improve recreation facilities, but the biggest factor seems to have been the rapid expansion of the city’s Black neighborhoods occasioned by people moving from rural areas to the better opportunity and relative safety of Shreveport. Other factors that may

have led to the establishment of gang culture in Shreveport included movies which
glamorized teenage gangs and youth delinquency, and the prevalence of gangs in national
news, as both New York City and Jacksonville, Florida, made headlines frequently with
“rumbles” between youth gangs.

Perhaps Shreveport’s first gang was known as the Bottoms Gang, which took its
name from the Bottoms neighborhood behind the First United Methodist Church. Its
members were accused of assaulting news carriers and creating a disturbance at Booker
T. Washington High School as early as 1954.198 Said the Times: “The majority of this
gang comes under the jurisdiction of juvenile court. According to police, the youths hang
around the area including Fannin, Baker, Douglas, Travis and Christian Streets, creating
disturbances.”199

But it was nearly two years later when Shreveport became aware that it had a
serious problem with Black youth gangs. A shoot-out between the Bottoms gang, the
Lakeside gang, and the Stoner Hill gang at a dance held at the Lakeside Recreation
Center in Lakeside Park, caused terror and serious injuries. An article in the Shreveport
Times gave a description of the gang members: “A gang of teenaged Negro hoodlums
clad in red caps turned a Negro dance into a hall of terror when they walked into a
crowded recreation building and without provocation began firing pistols, shotguns and
rifles. Three persons were wounded, one critically, in the shooting.”200

200 “Teenaged Negro Hoodlums Wound Three At Dance, Shreveport Times, April 7, 1956, 1.
Further articles during 1957 revealed the existence of gangs in Hollywood, Mooretown, Allendale, and the Cooper Road. The disputes seemed to be neighborhood rivalries that perhaps had started as school rivalries and were then escalated by resentment of youths from one neighborhood “talking” to girls from other neighborhoods. The rivalries culminated in a violent shooting on the Midway of the Louisiana State Fair in October of 1957, which sent fairgoers running:

Juvenile Detective Jim Pynes said the gangs of youths turned the Midway into a battleground. Allied against the Stoner Hill gang were the Bottoms Gang, the Lakeside gang, the Allendale gang, and the Pine Grove gang. When the shots rang out, fairgoers along the Gladway, predominantly Negroes observing Negro Day, scattered. Screams drowned out the barking of the midway concessioniers (sic).

Gang warfare would remain a problem in Shreveport’s Black neighborhoods through about 1960, when a combination of harsher sentencing in the courts and the ethos of the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement caused it to subside.

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CHAPTER 4

By 1963, doo-wop and rhythm and blues music were largely giving way to a new gospel-infused style that would become known as soul music. This evolution seemed to signify a change in emphasis from popular audiences in general to specifically African-American audiences, and from the North to the South in some ways; soul music reflected the harder edge that had developed in jazz music through the hard bop phenomenon of the New York scene, and also reflected changes of mood in the Black community as the Civil Rights Movement grew in scope and success.

The transition perhaps started with the wave of dance crazes that swept Black America with the emergence of the Madison in 1959, perhaps the first line dance. But it was the Twist which dominated the early 1960s, and its rhythms were the inspiration for many upbeat songs of that period.

What limited aural evidence we have suggests that the transition was occurring in Shreveport around the same time it was occurring in Memphis; Elgie Brown and Bannie Price’s instrumental recordings from the 1959-1960 period have a sound similar to that of the Mar-Keys and Willie Mitchell in Memphis from the same era; and their later recordings from 1964 to 1966 for Stan Lewis at Jewel do not sound remarkably different from what Stax Records was cutting in Memphis at the time.

Yet the development of soul music was hampered in Shreveport by the lack of a recording studio. Mira Smith’s RAM operations closed down in either late 1962 or at some point in 1963, leaving the city without any place to make records on a professional
basis. That would remain the state of affairs in Shreveport until new facilities opened in 1969.

ROBIN HOOD BRIANS STUDIO IN TYLER, TEXAS

In the absence of suitable facilities in Shreveport, some Ark-La-Tex musicians turned to a new facility in Tyler, Texas known as Robin Hood Brians Studios, built behind a house in the East Texas city where young Robert Brians had grown up with his parents.1 One of his teenaged bands had been called Robin Hood and His Merry Men, and from that point on, he was known as Robin Hood Brians. His father died abruptly as he was opening his studio in a garage behind the main house in 1963, so the studio became an operation run by Brians and his mother. During the 1960s, the Brians studio was the scene of a number of Shreveport recordings, including many for Stan Lewis’s new Jewel label, as well as some of Dee Marais’s early Murco sides. The facility had a good reputation long before it became famous for Z. Z. Top recording there. Although remodeled several times, Robin Hood Brians studio still remains as a working facility. Unfortunately, its oldest session logs, which would enable us to place the date of certain Shreveport recordings, are lost.

THE NIGHTCLUB SCENE, 1963

By 1963, the popularity of Club 66 had been eclipsed by the rise of El Grotto Club at 1533 Milam Street, if columns in the Sun are any indication. Walter Lebeau was installed as the house band there, as W. C. Ellis noted: “Stopped by the club the other nite

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(Grotto Club), and it really seemed like old times. Lebeau and Trio is back.”

Apparently, some of these shows were being broadcast on the radio: “Back at the club (El Grotto) Friday nite, the band was on the air, so were you if you were there.” A week later, a group called the Dixieland Singers appeared, not further identified, but certainly not the gospel group signed to Chess Records, and a Twisting Contest at Club 51 on the Cooper Road featured an appearance by Calvin James and the Dreamers, one of many Shreveport bands that never recorded. That they did not record is a pity, as the reviewer stated: “The twist party at Club 51 last Friday nite was a solid sender with Calvin James and His Dreamers sending sounds your way.”

Nor were the happenings confined to the El Grotto Club or Club 51. In June, W. C. Ellis mentioned the Green Road Inn having music on Monday nights, and the Congo Club having live music on Friday nights, with a later column revealing that the band in question was Tiny Tim’s Wildcats, yet another band that never recorded. A column in August does not further identify Tim, but suggests that he was a tenor saxophonist. And Club 66 may have declined in popularity, but it was certainly still active, sponsoring a large dance with Ted Taylor, comedian Pigmeat Markham, Fort Worth bluesman Finney-

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Mo, and Houston singer Miss Lavell on July 30, 1963. Although no specific musicians were mentioned in connection with the Cotton Club on Sprague Street, an amusing anecdote suggests that they had live music as well:

Running on down by the Cotton Lounge, I happened upon a little problem the host and hostess were having. It seems that one of those fancy organs was purchased and it was a little too fancy. No one could play it. It was exchanged for a more simple one and we will be able to listen to the fine sounds from the Cotton Lounge.

THE MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM, 1963

By 1963, bigger shows aimed at the Black community were again taking place at the Municipal Auditorium in Shreveport. The first one of the year occurred in June when Jackie Wilson headlined a show that also included The Orlons, The Cookies, the Sims Twins, Ben E. King, and The Upsetters Band, with Gorgeous George as the master of ceremonies. In July, another huge show was advertised, featuring Etta James and Solomon Burke as headliners, along with Barbara Lynn from Beaumont, Texas, Curley Mays, The Original Drifters, and Garnell Cooper and His Kinfolks Orchestra. An October show brought Sam Cooke to the Auditorium, along with Bobby Bland, Al Braggs, Delores Johnson, The Blandolls, and Joe Scott and His Orchestra, at a time when Shreveport was extremely tense because of the police suppression of a civil rights march. The show ultimately took place, but only after a delay resulting from a telephoned

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bomb threat. Later in October, Jackie Wilson was back, this time with The Impressions, The Orlons, Garnett Mims, Mitty Collier, Dionne Warwick, and Johnny Guitar Taylor (sic). As to the latter artist, it is unclear who was meant. There was of course a Johnnie Taylor, but he was not a guitar player. There was also a Little Johnny Taylor, but there was also a Johnny “Guitar” Watson from Baton Rouge. With no after the fact reviews of the show, we will likely never know. At the auditorium, Black Shreveporters saw some of the biggest names in Black music on a regular basis.

CIVIL RIGHTS IN SHREVEPORT, 1963

Unfortunately, by 1963 Shreveport was becoming a racial powder keg. During the years from 1959 to 1962 there had been a series of bombings, and several segregationist organizations had formed, including the National Organization of Whites and the Shreveport Citizens’ Council. Local Black activists, led by Dr. C.O. Simpkins, had formed the United Christian Movement, an affiliate of Dr. Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Atlanta. Simpkins was the victim of repeated bombings in an effort to persuade him to leave Shreveport. Other local leaders included the Rev. Harry Blake and Ann Brewster. It was also known that Shreveport and Bossier City had active Ku Klux Klan organizations, even if they kept their activities out of the public eye. By 1963 tensions were reaching a breaking point.

The year began with the arson fire of Rosie’s Hideaway, a Black nightclub in Haughton in Bossier Parish, where the owner and her family were ordered outside by two

carloads full of white men who then burned the establishment to the ground.\textsuperscript{15} Whites in the community were incensed after the owner was charged with allowing three airmen from Barksdale to bring underage girls into the club in the company of a Black airman on New Year’s Eve 1962. The Black airman was being transferred to another base, and the party was a going-away party for him. No one was ever arrested or charged with the arson.

In February, Shreveport police raided the La Brocko Private Club at 1212 1/2 Western Avenue in the Allendale neighborhood and arrested over a hundred Black patrons, including the owner, Johnny Brock, who was charged with selling liquor and beer without a license. Public Safety Commissioner George D’Artois and Shreveport Police Chief Harvey D. Teasley referred to the raid as “another step in the continuing crackdown on vice in Shreveport.”\textsuperscript{16} The same month, Shreveport police Lieutenant Dale Carpenter was terminated after he was charged with putting up Ku Klux Klan signs in Bossier City, where the Federal government was seeking to have schools integrated because of the presence of members of the Air Force in the community.\textsuperscript{17} D’Artois was a known segregationist, but he held an office that was elective, and somewhat surprisingly, he stated that he would dismiss any other policeman who held membership in organizations like the KKK.

By May, against a backdrop of mass protests in Birmingham, Alabama, and Jackson, Mississippi, Major Johns of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was


in Shreveport attempting to organize the Black community. When Johns and a local insurance named Daniel Harrell tried to visit Commissioner D’Artois to present a petition, Harrell was arrested by the commissioner and charged with vagrancy.\textsuperscript{18} In June, the United Christian Movement, Shreveport’s SCLC affiliate, sent a letter to Mayor Clyde Fant and the Shreveport City Commission asking for the establishment of a bi-racial committee to discuss the city’s racial problems. Fant promised an official city response within five days.\textsuperscript{19}

Shreveport’s Black community felt they had won a victory when the Shreveport Chamber of Commerce’s executive committee supposedly voted to support a bi-racial committee in the city,\textsuperscript{20} but the members of the Chamber of Commerce soon reversed course, stating “the majority of the board believes it is wise to determine whether there are responsible Negroes in Shreveport who believe in and will fully support our segregated way of life.”\textsuperscript{21} A week later the chamber formally rescinded its original motion to look into the establishment of some sort of dialogue with the Black community,\textsuperscript{22} and a week after that, the United Citizens Committee, which had formed in the Black community to seek such a dialogue was dissolved. In its statement, the committee stated, “We must come therefore, to the only logical conclusion and that is that city officials and the so-called responsible white citizens, for the most part, seem only to

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\textsuperscript{18} “SCLC Volunteer Arrested on Vagrancy Charge,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, June 1, 1963, 1.


\textsuperscript{22} “C of C Rescinds Motion for Bi-Racial Committee Here,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, July 13, 1963, 1.
\end{flushleft}
intend by such statements that they be left undisturbed in their efforts to perpetuate and continue a system wherein the white man alone decides what the Negro wants, what the Negro needs, what the Negro must do, and how he must do it.”

On Friday, July 19, Black young people launched sit-ins against segregated lunch counters at Walgreens and Woolworths in downtown Shreveport. Eleven people were arrested by Shreveport police, and an arrest warrant was issued for the Rev. Harry Blake, despite the fact that he was not present at the demonstrations. Police Commissioner D’Artois warned that he had directed the police officers not to wear their nameplates or badges when dealing with racial disturbances. “We have to protect our officers,” he said. On the next day, more Black youths took seats at the coffee bar at Sears and Roebuck and were arrested. The arrest of Harry Blake on the following Monday seems to have abruptly halted the demonstrations. Yet by August, the demonstrators had been released from jail on bond, and mass meetings continued to be held.

But the other side was having meetings as well. Alabama Governor George Wallace was in Shreveport at the Municipal Auditorium on August 10, in what was billed as a “Mobilization Rally” for the Citizens Councils, a racist pro-segregation organization which had considerable support in Shreveport, while the Black community again petitioned Mayor Fant for a bi-racial committee. It was during this stand-off between

the city government and the Black community that the city finally began hiring Black school crossing guards, something they had previously refused to do. Of course such tokenism did nothing to assuage the bitterness that was developing in Black Shreveport.

Things finally exploded in the wake of the September bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, which killed four little girls; Blacks across America were outraged and plans were made to hold a memorial march in Shreveport. Yet, when those organizing the memorial met with Commissioner D’Artois, he refused to issue them a parade permit, and on Sunday September 22, the marchers were attacked on Milam Street by more than two hundred police officers, some on horseback. Police claimed that neighborhood youths began pelting them with stones and bottles, whereupon officers invaded Little Union Baptist Church, where the memorial service was being held. By some accounts, George D’Artois was present, and officers rode horses into the church. The Rev. Harry Blake was taken out of the church by police officers and beaten.

The next day, Monday, September 23, angry students at Booker T. Washington High School staged a demonstration outside the school in protest of what had occurred the day before and were then attacked by Shreveport police and Caddo Parish deputies, using sticks, riot guns, and tear gas. The school’s principal, Raleigh H. Brown was clubbed to the ground by police officers, as was the assistant principal A. T. Chambers, who had been a band leader years before. A business teacher was carried bodily to a

30 “Memorial March, Services Planned For Sunday,” Shreveport Sun, September 21, 1963, 1.
31 “Local NAACP President Beaten After Memorial Services Sunday,” Shreveport Sun, September 28, 1963, 1.
paddy wagon after she pleaded with police to leave the campus and allow the
administration and faculty to calm the students and end the disruption. One teacher noted,
“What protection do we have? What protection is there for us?” while another said, “I
wanted to call the police, and then realized that these were the police.” Five students had
to be hospitalized, and eleven were arrested and turned over to juvenile authorities.32

On Tuesday, demonstrations broke out at J. S. Clark Junior High School during
the lunch hour, originally involving only about two hundred students who were chanting
“We want freedom now!” But when Shreveport Police officers appeared along Hearne
Avenue and Ford Street, the students began throwing rocks and bottles at cars along the
street, and when a Black police officer fired his gun into the air, the students stoned
Commissioner D’Artois’s car. D’Artois stated, “I’m sick and tired of having to move my
whole force out here and receiving no cooperation from the Negro people. The police are
going to move into the school and use whatever force is necessary to break this up.”
Fortunately, the chairman of the school board persuaded D’Artois to move back his
officers from the area, and the students were brought under control.33 In the wake of all
the disorder, the NAACP asked students to halt demonstrations. While officially the
statement expressed concern for the safety of students, the NAACP’s national office was
especially ambivalent about street demonstrations, which were a tactic preferred by the
younger and more militant civil rights organizations. The NAACP had used coercion to
convince its Jackson, Mississippi chapter to halt demonstrations and focus on voter

registration instead, and it seems likely that similar pressure was brought to bear on the local leadership in Shreveport from the national office.

But the halt in demonstrations did little to ease tensions. During the week after the stalled memorial march, the NAACP received complaints from Blacks all over Shreveport who had been beaten by police in various incidents around the city. A scheduled Sam Cooke show at the Municipal Auditorium almost had to be cancelled because Cooke and members of his band were arrested by Shreveport police when the musicians allegedly caused a disturbance by honking their vehicle horns in the parking lot of a Holiday Inn on Market Street which refused to honor their reservations. They were eventually released on bond, but the Auditorium show was delayed by a bomb threat. Meanwhile, the group’s Chicago-based chauffeur, Charles Cooke, who had been arrested in the first incident, was arrested again at 9:30 PM the night of the show and charged with driving under the influence. Even a well-known Black entertainer was not immune to racist harassment in Shreveport.

In the following weeks, the Rev. Harry Blake returned to Shreveport, and the young people in the NAACP Youth Council and the Congress of Racial Equality announced that they were prepared to step up and take the leadership in the city’s civil rights crisis. Meanwhile, Booker T. Washington High School was broken into, fires were set, and the office was ransacked. When Booker T. Washington High School Principal Raleigh H. Brown suspended Frank Daniels Jr and two other students

35 “Four Troupe Members Are Charged Here,” Shreveport Times, October 9, 1963, 11.
36 “Must Teenagers Take Over?” Shreveport Sun, October 12, 1963, 1.
indefinitely for their participation in civil rights demonstrations, protests broke out again. Seventeen students were placed on probation.37 On October 21, 1963, 1800 Black students stayed home from schools across Shreveport, honoring what the NAACP Youth Council had proclaimed Frank Daniels Day, to protest the suspension of Daniels and two other students from Booker T. Washington High School.38 Yet in the wake of the suspensions, and the conviction of six students who were arrested out of the hundreds who demonstrated, the protest movement came to a halt. The beating of a popular Shreveport pastor, however, and the riding of horses into his church was something that was never forgotten in Shreveport’s Black neighborhoods.

THE DEATH OF ALBERT CARTER

Young boys looking in Cross Lake for minnows found the body of a young Black man face down in the water in March of 1964. The man proved to be a Shreveport musician named Albert Carter, who was a member of a local band and had made records;39 early articles had put his age at twenty-four, but later ones said he was thirty-three years of age. The young man’s trousers were found inside out on the shore, and his shirt was missing. Although the Shreveport police were supposedly investigating, and the coroner ruled the cause of death as suffocation, no further disposition of the case was ever made.40 What band Carter was a member of, or what instrument he played, was never mentioned.

37 “3 Suspended, 17 on Probation At BTW For Demonstrations,” Shreveport Sun, October 19, 1963, 1.
38 “1800 Students Stage Protest of Suspensions,” Shreveport Sun, October 26, 1963, 1.
40 “Cause of Death Ruling Issued,” Shreveport Times, March 6, 1964, 10.
THE CLUB SCENE, 1964

Shreveport’s live club scene was still very active in the new year. The anonymous *Sun* nightlife columnist described the happenings in March:

Nowadays there are great happenings at Club 51. Greggs and his “Upsetters” are there weekly. Try Friday nights in particular, you’ll enjoy yourselves. In case you miss the “Upsetters” on Friday nights, drop down on the “Strip” and catch them on Saturday nights at Cotton’s Cocktail Lounge. Down around El Grotto way, it’s the music of the Walter Lebeau combo, unmistakably the finest.

A week later, the columnist mentioned further happenings, hinting that Club 66 was beginning to have further problems with fights and violence:

While the duckings, dodging, pushing and running was taking place out 66 way, it was the rocking and rolling of the Walter LeBeau’s Combo at the El Grotto Club. The house was packed beyond capacity with all the little “cuties” from the college campuses making up most of the many patrons along with the old regulars.

In July, the “Browser” mentioned that William LeBeau, nicknamed “Butchie Boy,” had added a vocalist named L. C. Wells to his band, and in September Elgie Brown was at the LeSabre Inn with the Swinging Soul Brothers. The same month, the column mentioned Ernest Lampkins, Major Lampkins’s son, with his group at the Cotton’s Cocktail Lounge on Sprague Street.

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41 Isaac Greggs, later the band director of Southern University.


LITTLE JOE WILLS

Singer and Stoner Hill community activist Joe Wills was born in 1944 and first appeared in the local press in 1964, when he was mentioned twice in the “Browsing Around” column as a singer. In April, the Browser stated: “Did you see Little Joe Wills ‘whooping it up’ at the Deb’s Ball. Dark shades and all. Sing pretty for the people.”47 And in July: “Margarette Thompson is the last word on the dance floor. She was dancing to the wails of ‘Little Joe’ the other night and that’s enough said.”48 Peculiarly, the latter column did not reveal where Little Joe was performing, or who his backing band was. He is mentioned again in April of 1965 in connection with a “Pre-Easter Dance”:

A local “soul brother” who is a member of the “Sportsmen Club” asked that we throw their hint your way. Come “Good Friday” which is April 16 your presence is of great necessity at the beautiful remodeled Club 51, for the Big Pre-Easter Dance. Little or Big Joe or some Joe, backed by the Comets will furnish the sounds - Shall we see you there?49

The Browser ran into Wills again between Christmas and New Year’s Eve of 1965, and gave an even more detailed description:

Saw Little Joe Saturday night singing the blues and did that cat wail! He was nice standing up there in his long-legged Bermuda trousers wailing away. In the background was Walter, providing as usual with Clyde the drummer. But he had a stud known to his friends as “Mule”50 on the “git fiddle” and to my surprise was “Tape” working out on the “starvation box.”51 Twas nice because there was no room in the inn. The joint was crowded. The night

47 “Browsing Around,” Shreveport Sun, April 18, 1964, 2.
50 Jesse Thomas.
51 Possibly L. J. Tapo.
before saw a guest artist on the set. None other than Claude B. T. LeBeau. How sweet it was!\footnote{52 “Browsing Around,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, December 30, 1965, 2.}

The \textit{Shreveport Sun} had no local entertainment column in 1966, but in 1967, the Browser was replaced by the Prowler, who mentioned Joe Wills in his second column of the year, noting that Wills had joined Walter LeBeau’s band:

> While prowling the Milam Street end of our beat Friday night we dropped in on the El Grotto Lounge where Walter LeBeau and his aggregation with Little Joe on vocal were sending the patrons with some of the coolest live sounds in the city. Apparently the sounds put down by LeBeau has all of the elements of a big city Indian Love Call, because by the time of the first downbeat the joint was filled with foxes from near and far.\footnote{53 “Prowlin’ The Port,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, January 19, 1967, 6.}

Wills was not mentioned in connection with performing after 1967, but in April of 1972, he was a candidate to represent Louisiana at the Democratic National Convention, and he urged Black residents of his neighborhood to vote, stating that area Blacks had a chance to be elected if Blacks turned out to vote in large numbers.\footnote{54 “Stoner Hill Residents Are Asked To Vote For Joe Wills,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, April 13, 1972, 7.} Wills was ultimately defeated.

In July of 1975, Joe Wills came out of his semi-retirement from the entertainment business to be the master of ceremonies at the Second Annual Family Day Parade and Concert at David Raines Park in the Cooper Road, an event which featured local Shreveport bands like Peace and Love and Ivory and Ebony as well as the blues artist Geater Davis.\footnote{55 “2nd Annual Family Day Parade and Concert,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, June 29, 1975, 7.} The event had been postponed for a week due to rain.
In 1976, Wills came back into the entertainment business, not as a performer, but as the owner of a new night club in partnership with Glenn Stroud. The club, known as Li’l Joe and Stroud’s Place, was at 600 Pierre Avenue in the Allendale neighborhood, a place which had been the Rex Key Club and then Eddie Giles’s Club Reo. The club would become one of the most prominent night spots in Shreveport during the 1970s and 1980s.

By 1979, the Shreveport Sun published a feature article on Wills and his accomplishments, in which he was quoted at length:

I’ve never been one to just sit and complain about situations. I started at the bottom of the ladder and I have worked myself up. I believe if there is a problem something or someone can do something about it. I believe in rolling up my sleeves and attacking whatever it is that’s presenting a problem. You can’t sit and twiddle your thumbs and expect things to just happen. …I guess I just love Stoner Hill. It’s not Spring Lake and it’s not Broadmoor. But it’s my roots. It’s my Tobacco Road and I feel a commitment to it.

Wills was also involved in the formation of Blacks United for Lasting Leadership (BULL), an organization which sued the city of Shreveport to force a change from the at-large commission form of government to an aldermanic form by districts, and his wife Shirley, also a community activist, became the first Black woman elected to the Caddo Parish Commission.

Toward the end of his life, Wills, who ironically lived on Easy Street in Stoner Hill despite the fact that little in his life had ever been easy, was known primarily for his

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community activism. His musical past had been largely forgotten. Joe Wills died on March 11, 2016, in Shreveport. He left behind his beloved wife and a son.58

THE ZEBRA ROOM

Located at 824 Texas Avenue in downtown Shreveport, the Zebra Room night club opened in April of 1964, and was open less than a year in its original incarnation, yet was remembered fondly by a number of Shreveport musicians. Initially, the featured band was Alex “Snook” Jones and the Shreveport Night Hawks,59 and then a band called The C Notes on the following Wednesday.60 By April 25, the club was advertising “twisting” with The Chevelles.61 No more bands were advertised for the remainder of the Zebra Room’s brief life, but the club advertised for waitresses throughout the summer of 1964, and advertised a shrimp boil during the month of July. By the next year, it was a lounge called Barbara’s Lounge, but in 1970, the Zebra Room name came back briefly. Between 1971 and 1976, the place was the Zebra Lounge, the New Zebra Room, Barbara’s Lounge, the Cobra Club and Giles’ Lounge. Interestingly, 824 Texas Avenue is one of the few historic Black music spots in Shreveport still standing.

THE NATCHITOCHES PROM INCIDENT

Although it had been common for white high schools and colleges to hire Black bands, in the heightened racial climate of 1964 Louisiana, some whites were not comfortable with that long-standing tradition. In April of 1964, a Black band from Ville


59 “Dance Friday and Saturday Night,” Shreveport Times, April 11, 1964, 15.

60 “Tonight the C-Notes,” Shreveport Journal, April 15, 1964, 27.

61 “Friday and Saturday 8 PM,” Shreveport Journal, April 25, 1964, 16.
Platte was prohibited from performing at the Natchitoches High School prom for which
they had been engaged, by a mob of about a hundred white men who appeared on the
school campus and surrounded the vehicle in which the band members had arrived.\footnote{62}
When the principal of the school, Dan Carr, could not convince the men to allow the
musicians to do the job for which they had been hired, he advised the band to leave,
promising them that the money they were due would be sent to them. Witnesses said that
the majority of the men were not from Natchitoches, and leaders of the segregationist
Citizens’ Council denied that their organization had anything to do with the disruption of
the dance. Angry parents of some of the high school students threatened to bring legal
action against the men who barred the band from performing. The \textit{Natchitoches}
\textit{Enterprise} added the information that the band in question was “Ruby and the Jewels”
(sic) of Ville Platte, Louisiana,\footnote{63} a town in southern Louisiana close to Opelousas; they
were known for their 1963 swamp pop hit “Kidnapper.”\footnote{64} The local paper quoted Police
Chief Durr as saying, “If I had been there that band would have gone in there and played.
If there had been any trouble those men would have been arrested.”\footnote{65} One of the men
who disrupted the event was quoted as saying that he did not object to the band because
they were Black, but because they had a bad reputation and were “likely dope addicts,”
and that he wanted Natchitoches to remain a “clean town.” He said there were plenty of
in-town bands that could have been hired. Another of the men who blocked the band,


\footnote{63} The band’s actual name was Jewel and the Rubies. The \textit{Enterprise} got the band name reversed.

\footnote{64} “Colored Band Turned Away By Mob at High School,” \textit{Natchitoches Enterprise}, April 30, 1964, 1.

\footnote{65} Ibid.
Mac Wedgeworth, stated that “because of the racial situation today,” Principal Carr should not have allowed the students to hire a Black band.

The incident provoked a lot of strong feelings on both sides in Natchitoches. The city attorney stated that he intended to prosecute the men who blocked the band, while parents at St. Mary’s Parochial School worried there could be problems at their school’s prom, as the students there had also invited a Black band to play.66 In the May 7 Enterprise a man named Grits Gresham wrote eloquently:

The issue involved in this matter is not, of course, one of segregation or integration. Nor is it one of whether a colored band should play for the Junior-Senior Prom. The issue is simply whether or not mob rule will be permitted in Natchitoches. I am proud that the people of Natchitoches have said that it will not.67

The St. Mary’s High School dance, featuring Little Bob and the Lollipops, another swamp pop band from Opelousas, was held in Natchitoches on May 24, 1964, and came off without an incident, in the wake of the community outrage over the previous disruption.68 After an anonymous donor gave $350 to District Attorney George Anderson, Anderson paid the fees due to Jewel and the Rubies for their disrupted performance at Natchitoches High School. But the incident highlighted the way that Black music and growing social changes in America made many white Southerners uncomfortable, even with what had been longstanding traditions before the era of civil rights.

ALEX “SNOOK” JONES, 1964-1965

Shreveport pianist Alex “Snook” Jones had already been active on the Shreveport scene for some time by 1964, but for some reason he was especially active during that year, starting the year at the new Zebra Room on Texas Avenue in April.69 By June, he was at Club Old Gold at 2910 Barksdale Boulevard in Bossier City,70 and on the July 4th weekend he was at Carolyn’s Tavern at 4600 Mansfield Road.71

Jones recorded his only single under his own name in 1965.72 Although “For My Worst” and “Mean Old Greyhound” were issued on his own Blue Boy label as Blue Boy 1001, the matrix numbers TM1316 and TM1317 suggest the involvement of Stan Lewis in some form or fashion, as Ter-Mar was Leonard Chess’s studio in Chicago, and many early recordings on Lewis’s Jewel label had TM matrix numbers. On the other hand, the Heads Up Publishing shown on the record indicates some involvement by either Dick Martin or Dee Marais, the owners of the publisher, which was affiliated with Shreveport-based Murco Records. “For My Worst” is an easy blues shuffle, featuring Snook’s piano and vocals, backed by a top-rate band, likely his Night Hawks, featuring two saxophones and a trumpet; “Mean Old Greyhound” on the flip side has the same easy shuffle feel, although the arrangement sounds a little looser and less formal, and a prominent guitar solo occurs in the middle of the track. Altogether, the single has quite the sound of a live

69 “Dance Friday and Saturday Night,” Shreveport Times, April 11, 1964, 15.


72 Although the Blues Discography lists the session as occurring in 1964, the Ter-Mar matrix numbers show it had to be in 1965.
gig performance, and gives the listener an idea of what a night at El Grotto or the Congo Club must have sounded like.

Determining exactly who played on this record is difficult, as we cannot be sure where it was recorded. The best guess is that it was recorded in Shreveport, although in 1964 there was no recording studio in the city. It has been suggested that Dee Marais might have recorded in the back of his Bayou Record Shop on 70th Street in the Cedar Grove neighborhood, although the record does not have the rough sound one would expect from that kind of a jerrybuilt recording site. The same set of facts likely precludes any live recording scene, such as one of the local night clubs, unless the building was closed to the public at the time, and even then the recordings sound more polished than what such a site would likely produce.

Stan Lewis’s involvement may suggest that the songs were recorded in Tyler, Texas. Robin Hood Brians Studio in Tyler was within an hour and a half of Shreveport, and was the scene of a lot of the earliest Jewel Records recordings which Lewis paid for. Alternately, the Ter Mar matrix numbers suggest that the session could have taken place in Chicago at Ter-Mar Studios at 2120 South Michigan Avenue. On the other hand, Ter-Mar often did mastering, so perhaps a Ter-Mar matrix number does not prove a Chicago recording location. We likely will never know. The bigger mystery, given the quality of these sides, is why Snook Jones never recorded commercially again.

WOLFMAN JACK, RANDY MEEKS AND THE NEW RHYTHM KINGS

Record retailer and wholesaler Stan Lewis had built his business on the practice of purchasing advertising time on powerful radio stations and playing records on those
programs; this motivated labels to give away records to Stan’s Record Service, sell them to Lewis at a discount, or sell to him directly, without requiring him to buy through the middlemen called one-stops. They knew that when Lewis played these songs on his broadcast shows, they would be credited with radio play, and by 1964, Lewis had hit upon his most successful tactic yet. Radio stations in the United States were under wattage restrictions from the Federal Communications Commission, but no such restrictions existed in Mexico.

Lewis began purchasing time on XERF, a 250,000 watt radio station in the city of Ciudad Acuna, across the Rio Grande from Del Rio, Texas, where a young DJ named Robert Weston Smith, known as “Wolfman Jack” was the on-air personality. For the first time, Stan’s Record Revue could now reach the entire continental United States and parts of Canada, and the mail orders for records came pouring in. Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, and Buddy Holley are thought to be among the young people who purchased records from Stan’s after hearing songs broadcast on Lewis’s paid programs.

Jack’s first appearance in Shreveport took place on June 12, 1964, when it was announced that he would record a live album from the Peppermint Lounge in Bossier City. Although the backing band was not named in the advertisement, subsequent ads reveal that it was Randy Meek and the New Rhythm Kings, billed as “The Band With The Big Sound.”

Although The Rhythm Kings were a white band, their sound revealed the extent to which Black music, especially rhythm and blues and soul music, had

impacted the teenage culture in the South in the days before Beatlemania swept the country.

While the album recording was advertised, it does not seem that the record was actually released at the time; it exists in two different pressings which have the look of bootlegs, but one of which fortunately has been uploaded to YouTube. A listen to “Yeah, Yeah, Yeah” reveals it to be a frenetic white teenage version of Marvin Gaye’s “Stubborn Kind of Fellow” from Motown in Detroit. The Bossier City version has exchanged Gaye’s suaveness for a rowdiness borrowed from rockabilly, with Wolfman Jack interjecting from time to time in his signature growl. Yet it is clearly in the vicinity of soul music, and one of the interesting phenomena of Louisiana white teenaged bands in the late 1960s was the number of them that included the word “soul” in their names, especially in the areas around Shreveport and Monroe.

In August of 1964, Wolfman Jack returned to the Peppermint Lounge where he appeared on stage with Margaret Lewis, the rock and roll star from RAM Records who had been performing at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. This performance does not seem to have been recorded, but the repeat engagement would indicate how popular Jack was in Shreveport. Stan Lewis may well have been involved in bringing him to the area.

**MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM, 1964**

Although there were fewer Black music events at Shreveport’s Municipal Auditorium in 1964, the ones that occurred brought a number of stars to the city. A May 2 show featured James Brown as the headliner, as well as Solomon Burke, Dionne

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Warwick, Garnet Mimms, The Tams, Otis Redding, The Orleans, Dean and Jean, Anna King, Timmy Shaw, Bobby Byrd, The Famous Flames, and Johnny and Bill. A September 24 show brought Solomon Burke, Chuck Jackson, Betty Everett, The Drifters, Jerry Butler, The Tams, Johnny Thunder, Patti Labelle, and Jackie Ross to the Auditorium. Unfortunately, neither the weekly *Sun* nor the daily papers reviewed any of these shows, so we have no details of these performances, or local opinions of them.

**STAN LEWIS AND JEWEL RECORDS**

Although primarily a record retailer and later a record wholesaler as well, Stan Lewis had also spurred a number of recording sessions from almost the very beginning of his record store operations. Of necessity these recordings were generally released on labels which belonged to others, as Lewis did not have a label of his own. Part of this was doubtless due to the political realities of the music industry. Record labels were using Stan’s Record Service as a one-stop and distribution firm, and part of the price of success in that business was avoiding being a competitor to the firm’s customers. Among other things, this probably motivated Lewis to not expand his retail operations beyond Shreveport, and to not form his own record label. It is not entirely clear what motivated Lewis to change his mind in 1964, but Leonard Chess seems to have suggested the idea to Lewis. Lewis also might have been influenced by the rise of the Beatles and the shift of the American recording industry toward the teenage market. That would seem to be borne out by the prevalence of swamp pop and Black blues in the early Jewel catalogue:

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Lewis seemed to be picking up what the other labels were choosing to leave behind. He probably reasoned that his distributed labels would not see his tiny Jewel label as a threat.

Despite being based in Shreveport, Jewel Records did not sign many local artists at all, and none of the early recordings were made in the city. The earliest releases were by swamp pop star Bobby Charles. The first two Bannie Price songs were perhaps the first Jewel recordings that were recorded in or near Shreveport, probably at Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, Texas. In early 1965, Dale Hawkins produced two Peppermint Harris sides in Tyler as well. “Markin’ Time” is an upbeat rocking blues, while “Bad Bad Woman” is a slow and more traditional blues. Compared to earlier Jewel singles, these two songs, released as Jewel 742, have none of the “sweetening” and polish which characterize the Bobby Charles releases. They represent the beginning of the label’s commitment to authentic Black blues, which would remain through the mid-1970s.

Peppermint Harris’s second single was cut at some point before July of 1965, and also cut in Tyler, Texas, but the results were more mixed. “Mama Mama” is an ill-conceived attempt to adapt Harris to the swamp pop genre. The result is a song that likely pleased neither blues nor pop fans. The slow flip, “Anything You Can Do,” also shows the influence of swamp pop, but is better overall. Harris seems comfortable in that vein, and the concept manages to work. The two songs were released as Jewel 747. The year 1966 saw Harris record a modernization of his early blues “Raining In My Heart” (not to be confused with the swamp pop standard) and “My Time After Awhile,” a shuffle blues, both of which were released as Jewel 762. A 1967 session in Tyler resulted in “Anytime Is The Right Time” and “Wait Until It Happens To You,” the latter more of an unusual
soul music diversion for Harris. These came out as Jewel 772. Harris recorded four more songs for Lewis in Tyler in 1968. These were “Bad, Bad Whiskey,” “Lonesome As I Could Be,” “Little Girl” and “24 Hours.”

Bannie Price’s second single was released in August of 1965 as Jewel 749. It might have been recorded at Ter-Mar studios in Chicago, but more likely was cut in Tyler, Texas. Around the same time, harmonica player Jerry McCain signed with Jewel and recorded two sides in Tyler, an instrumental called “728 Texas (Where the Action Is),” which celebrated Stan’s flagship record store, and “Homogenized Love,” a standard medium tempo blues. Another session in 1966 in Tyler accounted for “Sugar Baby,” “Honky Tonk,” “Love Ain’t Nothing To Play With,” “Put It Where I Can Get It,” and “Stick ’Em Up.” “Sugar Baby,” and “Honky Tonk Part 2” were released as Jewel 761, and a 1967 session in Tyler produced “She’s Crazy ’Bout Entertainers,” “Juicy Lucy,” and “I Don’t Care Where I Get My Loving.” “Love Ain’t Nothing To Play With” and “She’s Crazy ’Bout Entertainers” were released as Jewel 773, and “Put It Where I Can Get It” and “Juicy Lucy” were released as Jewel 790 in 1967. The remaining tracks remained unreleased until the Japanese label P-Vine issued a compilation of the entire Jewel recordings of Jerry McCain. That collection has since seen re-release by the Demon/Westside label in the UK and Fuel 2000 in the United States. McCain’s Jewel recordings are something of a mixed bag. The slow blues tracks are good, but the efforts to have him adapt to modern soul and rock do not work quite as well.

Curtis “Jack” Griffin was originally from Poole, Louisiana, on Highway 71, about forty miles to the southeast of Bossier City, but he moved to Los Angeles after World War
II. All of his records were made in Los Angeles, including the singles released on Stan Lewis’s Jewel imprint. However, the songs “Move On” and “I Gotta Lump” were recorded by the Movin’ label, which was co-owned by Melvin Alexander and Ferdinand “Fats” Washington. Washington was a Shreveport-born songwriter and producer, and a friend of Stan Lewis. He is best known for writing the song “Pledging My Love,” which became a huge hit for Johnny Ace, and it was probably at Washington’s suggestion that distribution of the Movin’ record was picked up by Jewel. Stan Lewis agreed to release a second single as Jewel 767 consisting of “I Found Something Better” and “Baby, Have Your Way,” which came out in 1966. These tracks were also cut in Los Angeles, but Griffin’s sound was heavily influenced by artists like B. B. King.

The 1966 soul duo Lonnie & Floyd presents a number of mysteries. From songwriting credits, we know that Floyd’s name was Floyd Beard; John Ridley seemed to think that Beard was from Baton Rouge, and that there was a Sound City Recording Studio there, but that theory is complicated by the co-writer on the flip side of their first single, Wister LeFlore. Wister is the name of a town in Oklahoma, and it is the county seat of LeFlore County; the name was apparently one of many pseudonyms used by producer and songwriter “Dandy” Don Logan, an employee of Stan Lewis’s Jewel Records enterprises. Further confusion results from the legend “Sound City Recording Corp.” on the label of Lonnie and Floyd’s two singles. Shreveport would be home to a modern recording facility called Sound City Recording Studios between 1968 and 1977, but Lonnie and Floyd’s first single was recorded in 1966. That Sound City Recording

Company was founded by Don Griffin, Jerry Strickland and Lewis S. Robinson III; most scholars have it being founded in 1968, but Strickland had been producing sessions at Robin Hood Brians studios in Tyler as early as 1965, and it is possible that the production company was formed as early as 1966, two years before the studios were opened in Shreveport.

Lonnie and Floyd were released at a time when male soul duos were becoming immensely popular; Stax Records was seeing success with Sam and Dave, and Major Bill Smith was recording the duo Pic and Bill in Fort Worth. “You Got To Feel It” was very much like a Sam and Dave song, perhaps too much. The flip side “What You Gonna Do” had a more laid-back sound, but with prominent horns. The production on both sides is first-rate, but it is the flip side which shows a soul aesthetic that sounds demonstrably different from the Memphis sound. About a year later, in August or September of 1967, the duo recorded their second and final single. “I Pledge” is the most anthologized of their four sides, and is a slow atmospheric ballad with horns which has seen traction in the low-rider culture. The B-side, “Whip It Up Baby,” is an unfortunate clone of the Isley Brothers’ “Twist and Shout,” which is not made any better by fake audience screams in the background. It is by far the weakest of the four tracks. Yet over all, Lonnie and Floyd were good singers who released fairly good records. Their complete disappearance after 1967 is quite a mystery, as is their place of origin.

RUFUS AND MARCUS BROWN

Singers and entrepreneurs Rufus and Marcus Brown were two of seven siblings, sons and daughters of Ben Franklin Brown and Hattie Mae Fuller Brown of Frierson, Louisiana, a small town in southwest Caddo Parish. Rufus Brown was the owner of a small TV and radio repair shop at 648 E. 70th Street in Cedar Grove, and was later the co-owner of Brown’s Amusement Company in Frierson and Cedar Grove, a jukebox firm which he operated with his brother Marcus. Marcus also owned Brown’s Grill at 625 E. 70th Street in Cedar Grove in 1965, and it is noteworthy that the two brothers’ businesses were nearly across the street from one another.

Rufus Brown made his first recordings in 1964 for the Brown’s Recording label which apparently belonged to his brother Marcus. Marcus Brown was listed as the producer on both sides, and the address on the record was Marcus Brown’s house in the Eden Gardens subdivision. Although the Blues Discography lists the session as occurring in 1965, the matrix numbers RB1964-A and RB1964-B strongly hint that the session occurred in 1964 instead. “Somewhere Over the Mountain” was a typical 1964 twist song with a romantic lyric. The flip side “Evil Eyes” has a swamp pop feel somewhat reminiscent of Phil Phillips’ “Sea of Love.” Both songs were somewhat archaic for 1964, and while they were good recordings, they generated only local appeal. Where they were recorded is unclear, as in 1964 Shreveport had no recording facilities, although Dee

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80 “Burglars Hit Adjacent Firms,” Shreveport Journal, August 18, 1969, 11.

Marais did some demo recording in the back of the Bayou Record Shop. More likely, the record was cut at Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, Texas.

Rufus’s brother Marcus recorded in 1969 for Dee Marais and Dick Martin’s Peermont label, which seems to have been a subsidiary of the Murco label. “I’m Coming Home” is a bluesy venture written by Willie James, organist for Eddie Giles’s band the Jive Five. The other side, “Hey, Little Girl” is written by Marcus Brown himself. Unlike Rufus, Marcus’s voice sounds rough at best, but his involvement in the jukebox business and personal friendship may have motivated Dee Marais to record him. Through the obituaries of relatives, it is evident that Rufus Brown had died before 2005. Shreveport newspapers have no obituary for Marcus Brown, but he no longer lives at the address on the 1965 record. He may have moved from Shreveport, and has likely passed away.

**NIGHT CLUB SCENE, 1965**

The *Shreveport Sun*’s entertainment columnist known as the Browser continued to document the city’s nightlife scene in the new year, mentioning that Walter LeBeau was still playing at El Grotto, that the bass player L. P. Tapo had been playing bass with him, and in April, that “Joe and the Comets really had things swinging down at Cotton’s Lounge last week. They were Jerking, Twisting, Monkeying and lushing to the rock and roll music being rendered by the trio.” Toward the end of the year, a Pre-Christmas Dance sponsored by the Esquires Social Club was announced with the Dynamic Comets as the band, and a Christmas morning breakfast dance was advertised at the Masonic

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Hall with Jimmy McConnell and the United Jazz Quintet. In the last column of the year, the Browser mentioned a Christmas Eve gig with one of the city’s longest-standing bandleaders:

It was a pleasure to see Mr. Eddie “Coot” Lewis on the band stand Christmas Eve night. The gentleman is still one of the better drummers around the city. The young people seemed to enjoy it as well as the older ones. Keep up the good work, “Coot.”

Club 66 was certainly not the destination it had been by 1965, but it was the scene of an appearance by the Bobby Blue Bland Revue on March 22, which must have been one of the last major shows there.

**MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM, 1965**

Sam Cooke, arguably the most popular African-American popular singer in the country, was murdered at the Hacienda Motel in South Central Los Angeles on December 11, 1964; Cooke was much beloved in Shreveport, and had appeared at the Municipal Auditorium in 1963, and in the wake of his death, a memorial concert was scheduled for the Municipal Auditorium for March 31, featuring both soul and gospel performers. From the gospel side, the show featured appearances by The Soul Stirrers, the Highway QC’s, the Meditation Singers, the Rev. Julius Cheeks & The Sensational Nightingales, the Pilgrim Jubilees and L. C. Cooke; from the secular side, Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, a Georgia artist named Little Clarence, and someone called Louis Rogers

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and the Magnificent Seven. As was generally the case, there were no reviews of the show after the fact.

In April, Jackie Wilson came with a huge package show including Solomon Burke, Ben E. King, B. B. King, Little Stevie Wonder, Barbara Lynn, The Tams, and Mittie Collier, and afterwards, the Browser reported “They came in droves from all over the Ark-La-Tex, and even came in from the ’sippi, you know, like ‘Missi’ to dig the Big Show down at the Auditorium. B. B., Jackie, Solomon and a list of others had the house rocking.” A month later, James Brown came to the Auditorium, with a big show consisting of Bobby Byrd, Baby Lloyd, The Famous Flames, Al “Briscoe” Clark, and James Crawford, and the Sun’s entertainment writer indicated that there was considerable enthusiasm before the show:

It’s a little while before press time and we’ve just received a call concerning the big concert tonight at the Municipal Auditorium. They say that they’ll be in droves from far and near to dig James Brown and the Famous Flames. Brown, a consistent poll winner and recording bestseller will make his screen debut in the American International film Ski Party. So, shall we see you and yours there?

In June, the “soul queen” of New Orleans, Irma Thomas, came to the Municipal Auditorium, backed by the Walter Bourgeois Band, also from New Orleans, for what was promoted as a dance and a concert. Unlike the bigger package shows, Thomas’s appearance was sponsored by Frank Hart of New Orleans and Chuck Selber of

89 “Jackie Wilson Show,” Shreveport Sun, April 15, 1965, 10.
93 “Recording Artist To Appear Here Friday Night,” Shreveport Journal, June 21, 1965, 22.
Shreveport; unfortunately, throughout the run-up to the show, the Journal consistently referred to Thomas’s current hit as “I Wish Someone Would Come” rather than “I Wish Someone Would Care.”94

**JERRI WILSON WITH JESSE THOMAS AND THE CLICKS**

Bluesman Jesse Thomas was not merely a musician, but also an entrepreneur who started several labels during his lifetime, including Club Records in Los Angeles, and the RTA Victory, Red River, and Jockey labels in Shreveport. By 1965, he had formed a band called The Clicks and hired a female vocalist named Jerri Wilson; the extant recordings show that Thomas had certainly adjusted to the modern soul music trends. That year, he recorded two songs credited to “Jerry Ann and Las Vegas Cats” on his Red River label; the reason for the Las Vegas reference is unclear, but the Nevada city had a large expatriate Shreveport Black community, and Shreveport artists were frequent visitors there. Go-go girls in nightclubs were the latest thing in 1965, and the song “Go-Go Girl” takes advantage of the trend. Based on the twist dance rhythm, the song had a fairly contemporary sound, but the recording was made under extremely rough conditions. The flip side “Hello Hello” is more of a medium blues shuffle, but recorded under the same primitive conditions. Peculiarly, it is Thomas’s voice which is more prominent on both sides rather than Jeri Wilson’s, although she is clearly present. The 45 has no issue number, and only two matrix numbers, 17057 and 17058.

Nobody has seriously questioned the 1965 date for the release, but it is worth noting that Jerri Wilson and the Clicks were not advertised for live appearances in

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Shreveport until the summer of 1967, when they were appearing regularly at the Beach Comber on Commerce Street, so it is possible that the record was made later. Given the rough nature of the recordings, we can rule out Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, Texas as the recording location; Harding Guion Des Marais recalled recording Jesse Thomas in the back of Bayou Records, so it is possible that this was the location of recording; alternately the recordings could have been made in a local club, although the lack of audience sounds in the background would seem to preclude a live recording. On the other hand, the address 7302 Line Avenue appears on the released record, and the building, which still stands, is currently a neighborhood bar. It is entirely possible that the recording was made within this structure. At any rate, it seems almost certain the record was made in Shreveport.

Jeri Wilson’s second and last single was a dance song called “The Tease” in two parts, which was released on Jesse Thomas’s Red River label as Red River 101. The song features a first-rate backing track which sounds as if it could have started out as an instrumental. There is a prominent organ, which could have been played by Walter “Butch” LeBeau or Willie James. Like most dance songs, the lyrics of “The Tease” merely describe how the dance is done. But unlike the previous single, Wilson is the only vocalist, and she proves to be a good singer. Discographies do not generally attempt to date this release, but given the sound of the recording, it was likely recorded in 1967.

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96 Interview with the author, February 2, 2003.
**NORTH LOUISIANA AND RHYTHM AND BLUES RECORDS**

In March of 1966, the magazine *Record World*, one of the three great American music industry publications, published a chart showing what percentage of record sales were of Black music in major American cities. Washington, DC came in at the top, with Black music accounting for 53% of all sales, and Fort Pierce, Florida was second with 50%. Black music accounted for 43% of all record sales in Monroe, 41% in Alexandria, 37% in New Orleans and Memphis, and 35% in Shreveport. While the statistics showed that cities with more African-American residents sold more Black records (naturally), there is a fair amount of evidence that white kids bought these records too. Shreveport and Monroe were big consumers of Black music, and thus it is not surprising that they eventually became big creators of music as well.

**MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM, 1966**

The first big Shreveport show of 1966 took place in April when Jackie Wilson headlined a Municipal Auditorium show with B. B. King, The Impressions, Laverne Baker, Ben E. King, The Drifters, The Manhattans, Peg Leg Moffett, and the B. B. King Orchestra. Strangely, this was also the last big show of the year in Shreveport. Apparently there were not promoters willing to bring these shows to the Auditorium on the same regular basis as in previous years.

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EDDIE GILES & THE JIVE FIVE

Elbert Wiggins Giles was born on March 17, 1938, to Cuffy Giles and Uneeda Wiggins in the small town of Frierson, Louisiana, in Caddo Parish, which was also the hometown of Rufus and Marcus Brown.\(^9^9\) He was raised by his grandmother on a farm, as Frierson was an agricultural area, and Giles had a love of music from an early age. As a young boy, he had gotten in trouble for building a two-string instrument with baling wire on the wall of his grandmother’s wooden house. Later, after seeing an advertisement that he could win a guitar by selling packages of garden seeds, he sent for the seeds and sold them to friends and neighbors, and thus got his first guitar, which he practiced on until he had learned a few basic chords.\(^1^0^0\) By his high school years Giles had moved to Shreveport to live with his mother and attend Booker T. Washington High School. Incredibly, he was working as a bellhop at the Washington-Youree Hotel from 11 PM until 7 AM, and then would make his way to high school for classes.

Around that time, he joined a local gospel quartet called the Humming Bees, and while playing with them on a program at the Municipal Auditorium, was introduced to the Pilgrim Jubilees (who were also on the program) by the gospel singer and disc jockey Willie Caston. He was asked to audition for the Jubilees, and they accepted him, so he left the next day and went out on the road with them in 1962.

Returning to Shreveport in 1963, Giles began writing songs; he had a small three-piece unnamed band which had started playing at the Three Corners in Allendale. This


\(^1^0^0\) Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.
club had belonged to the mother of Giles’ drummer, Andrew “Caveman” Harris. Dee
Marais became aware of this band, and suggested to Giles that he start writing his own
material. His own life experience with his wife leaving him led him to compose “Losin’
Boy,” one of the biggest hits to ever come out of Shreveport. Judging from fraternity
notices in the *Centenary Conglomerate* during the 1965-1966 school year, Eddie Giles’s
band went through several name changes. At a Kappa Sigma party mentioned on
December 10, 1965, they were referred to as Little Eddie G. and the Troops,\(^{101}\) and in
February of 1966 as Little Eddie G and the Soul Brothers.\(^{102}\)

Giles’s first advertised gig with his band, which was now called the Jive Five, was
at a club called The Great Fox’s El Zorro Club at the corner of Portland and Laurel streets
in the Lakeside neighborhood. The band was playing there every Wednesday night in
March of 1966,\(^ {103}\) and later in the year, Giles took the Jive Five, which included Charles
Lawrence on bass, Andrew “Caveman” Harris on drums and James Stewart on the
saxophone, to Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, to record a single for Dee Marais’
Murco label.

Marais amazingly allowed the band to record its material without much
interference from him, and the sound was likely what one would have heard at a Eddie
Giles and the Jive Five gig. According to Marais, Stan Lewis’s producer Gene Kent had
actually attempted to ridicule him about the lack of “production,” such as added strings
and other effects, saying that Marais “didn’t have a feel for soul” and should “stick to

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\(^{101}\) “Greek To Me,” *Centenary Conglomerate*, December 4, 1965, 10.

\(^{102}\) “Greek To Me,” *Centenary Conglomerate*, February 11, 1966, 3.

\(^{103}\) “Now Open Fox’s Hill Top Inn,” *Shreveport Sun*, March 17, 1966, 7.
country music,” but Marais’s instincts served him well, and audiences responded to the basic recording, which had a rawer, more Southern sound that the slick, polished soul Kent was producing.

The single recorded that summer paired Giles’s “Losin’ Boy” with a slower minor-key original called “I Got The Blues.” But it was the A-side which proved to be a hit, becoming popular in Shreveport and then spreading rapidly to other markets, including Dallas, Texas and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Released as Murco 1031, the single was quickly picked up for distribution by Stan Lewis’s Jewel-Paula-Ronn complex of labels, although all pressed copies kept the Murco label. As Shreveport soul records go, “Losin’ Boy” has had a remarkable life. Covered by L. C. Steels in Shreveport in 1973, it has since been covered by Nick Lowe, Ry Cooder, Charles Wilson, Jay Kay & The Blues Gang, Buddy Flett, and Paul Weller with Primal Scream. “Losin’ Boy” would seem to be the most-covered song ever recorded in Shreveport.

Its success occurred at a time when Stan Lewis’s label operations were beginning to boom, and it was interestingly artists from Shreveport and Monroe that were beginning to fuel that boom, as was noted in a March 1967 column in Record World:

Stan Lewis in Shreveport is a very hot Southern label with Jewel-Paula, as Toussaint McCall goes well over 100,000, and Jerry McCain keeps growing. Call him and let him play a great shouting blues he just picked up that was broken over WLAC with John Richbourg and Hoss Allen—“Rough Dried Woman,” Big Mack. Stan’s “Losin’ Boy,” Eddie Giles, Murco, is over 10,000 in Dallas. The new Peppermint Harris is “Wait Until It Happens To You,” and he has a Ted Taylor called “Keep Walkin’ On.”104

A column from the same magazine a week later pointed out that Eddie Giles’s “Losin’ Boy” was now the top record on Dallas-Fort Worth radio station KNOK.105 By April 8, the song was getting radio play in Chicago, Memphis, New Orleans and Detroit,106 and by May 13, “over 20,000 in Chicago and strong in Dallas, Cleveland, New Orleans and Shreveport.”107

By June 1967, Eddie Giles and the Jive Five had started a weekly Thursday night jam session at the Hollywood Bar at 3710 Hollywood Avenue in far west Shreveport near the airport.108 Willie James had now joined the band as an organist, and the band had added a young female singer named Dori Grayson, and on June 10, “Losin’Boy” finally cracked Cash Box’s Top 50 R & B Location Singles at No. 48.109 Record World charted it at No. 42 on the same day,110 and a week later stated that “Losin’ Boy, Eddie Giles—Giant Chicago, Cleveland, now going in Dallas, Detroit, Charlotte, Nashville. Over 50,000.”111 By June 24, Giles’s hit had moved to No. 43 in Cash Box, and by July 8, to No. 34.

Giles recorded at least five more songs during the year 1967, and according to him, all were cut at Robin Hood Brian's studio in Tyler, Texas. The uptempo “Don’t Let Me Suffer” was very much a reworking of “Losin’ Boy” with different lyrics, but the B-

106 “R & B Beat,” Record World, April 8, 1967, 43.
110 “Record World’s Top 50 R & B,” Record World, June 10, 1967, 23.
side, “While I’m Away” also known as “Keep The Faith,” was something different altogether. Giles noted that people were being drafted and sent to Vietnam, including two of his cousins, but unlike a lot of Blacks at the time, Giles was neither opposed to the war nor anti-American. He recalled that Freda Payne had released a song called “Bring The Boys Home” and he thought in terms of addressing the war causing the separation of lovers. The resulting song was a heavily gospel-influenced ballad with two titles. “Keep The Faith” was ironically popular as a militant slogan at the time, popularized by Representative Adam Clayton Powell from Harlem. Unlike Giles’s previous recordings, this one featured two vocalists, Giles and Charles Brown of the gospel group the Violinaires, who would ultimately sign with and record for Stan Lewis’s Jewel Records label. How Brown ended up on the recording or being in Shreveport at all is something that Giles never explained. Yet Giles’s recorded remark “Say it again, Charles” at the song’s end indicates that Brown was indeed present. “Keep the Faith” barely made ripples at the time, but came to people’s attention when the sub-genre of Vietnam War-era soul became an interest of musicologists and record collectors. Giles’ song was undoubtedly one of the few Vietnam-era soul songs to not express a feeling of protest or opposition to the war. “Don’t Let Me Suffer” and “While I’m Away” were released as Murco 1033, as by “Eddy G Giles and the Jive 5.”

Perhaps to highlight the song, the next single placed “While I’m Away” as the A-side, backed with another new song called “Eddy’s Go-Go Train,” which in its lyrics calls out the many cities where “Losing Boy” had been popular. Giles’s song, while somewhat

112 Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.
different, may have been inspired by Houston singer Jackie Paine’s Huey Meaux—produced 1965 single “Go-Go Train.” While Paine’s song name-dropped most of the big Black recording stars of the mid-1960s, Giles’s name-dropped cities instead. Both songs are upbeat romps, and in the same key. These two songs were released as Murco 1034.

Giles’s next single was his first really great deep soul ballad, “Happy Man,” which not only turned the sad lyrics of “Losin’ Boy” inside out, but also mentioned the title of every song Giles had recorded up until that point. “Happy Man” is a gospel-tinged ballad in typical 6/8 time, with a prominent horn section, but its sound world is quite distinct from similar ballads cut in Memphis or Muscle Shoals, not the least because of Giles’s unusual and idiosyncratic guitar style. With his gospel background, Giles’s vocal capabilities are perfectly suited to this kind of Southern soul. The flip side, “Music” returned to the upbeat style that had characterized much of Giles’s earliest work; the presence of Charles Brown on backup vocals suggests that perhaps this song was recorded at the same session as “While I’m Away.” These two songs were released as Murco 1037 with an orange label. It got reissued again with the same release number and a red label in 1968.

In February of 1968, Eddie Giles traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for a two-night appearance on February 23 and 24 at a club called The Scene at 624 North 2nd Street. Billed as “Eddy Giles” (probably due to that spelling on his records) he was on the same bill with Sean Taylor, Ben and the Cheers, and Junior and the Classics. Although he was not advertised at the time, a tribute website to The Scene club indicates that

Shreveport soul singer “Rueben Bell” (sic) was also on the February 23 and 24 shows; the site’s “Gigology” section shows that during its six years of existence, The Scene featured shows from Chuck Berry, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles, Earl Hines, Tommy James and the Shondells, Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson, The Impressions, Junior Walker, Duke Ellington, Major Lance, Joe Simon, Wes Montgomery. The O-Jays, The Chi-Lites, The Four Tops, Gladys Knight, Sam and Dave, Eddie Floyd, Bobby “Blue” Bland, The Montclairs, Clarence Carter, Steppenwolf, and Jimi Hendrix. Eddie Giles and Reuben Bell were clearly performing at the city’s premiere music venue. In fact, Jimi Hendrix appeared on February 28th and 29th, less than a week after the Shreveporters’ performance, and a complete recording of his sets exists. Unfortunately, no such recording exists of Giles’s and Bell’s performance. A review of the show did get published in the *Shreveport Sun* however:

Local entertainment artists Eddie Giles and Reuben Bell appeared last week at the popular Scene Club in Milwaukee, Wis. along with Giles’ band, the Jive Five.

Giles, popular for his recordings of “Losing Boy” and “Music,” along with Bell, who sang his hit “It’s Not That Easy,” appeared on a star-studded show there and according to the entertainment editor of the weekly Milwaukee Journal, the group was well-received by the enthusiastic audience.

Despite the column’s reference to the *Milwaukee Journal*, that newspaper was a daily newspaper, not a weekly one, and no entertainment column or article seems to have run in it mentioning Reuben Bell or Eddie Giles. On the other hand, such dailies in those days

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ran multiple editions each day, and it is possible that the Sun columnist had seen a clip which was not in the edition that was microfilmed. Peculiarly, the African-American weekly newspaper in Milwaukee did not mention the show at all.

About a month after the Milwaukee show, Murco released another Eddie Giles single, 1042, featuring the songs “Baby, Be Mine” and “Love With a Feeling.” Although some discographies list this release as being from 1969, a Cash Box review from March of 1968 shows that it was released at that time.116 “Baby, Be Mine” was another ill-advised attempt at recreating “Losing Boy” although Giles performs it well enough; it is the B-side that holds the greater interest, as “Love With A Feeling” is Giles’s first twelve-bar blues. He handles it with ease, backed by his band with a prominent horn section, raising the question of why he did not record more blues songs, as he was thoroughly comfortable with the style. For this release, Murco billed Giles as “Eddie G Giles,” and the constant changing of spellings probably interfered with what should have been a growing career. In August, Murco released “Soul Feeling Part 1 and Part 2,” which was as close to funk as Eddie Giles ever got, allowing solos to all the band members including the drummer; the release was Murco 1048.117 The turn toward funk in Black music in America has been hypothesized as a adjunct to the Black Power movement, and one noted in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Certainly, the trend reflected the democratization of Black music, with opportunities for the bass player and drummer to be highlighted, whereas these musicians had traditionally been viewed as

116 “Cash Box Record Reviews,” Cash Box, March 16, 1968, 112.

117 “5 Big Hits From Jewel/Paula,” Cash Box, August 10, 1968, 44.
holding a supporting role. Giles’s single was released at the height of the Black Power movement in Shreveport, as young people were picketing stores and marching in a demand for changes in the community, including jobs and the inclusion of Black history in local schools.

In November, Eddie Giles was advertised for the first time as the featured performer at the Non-Commissioned Officers’ Club on Barksdale Air Force Base.\textsuperscript{118} He was popular on the base, and would remain in the entertainment line-up there for several years.

**RUFUS ANDERSON AND HIS BAND**

Rufus Anderson was born on October 29, 1911 in Kilgore, Texas, and first was mentioned in print for being named the band director of the Kilgore Colored High School in 1948.\textsuperscript{119} A pianist and organist, Anderson formed his first band, the Honey Drippers, in 1953.\textsuperscript{120} By 1954, he had added a vocalist named Tubby Wallace, and the band was now known as Tubby Wallace and his Honey Drippers, with Wallace on vocals and saxophone, Anderson on piano, John C. “Fastfoot” Marshall on drums, and Charles Scott on bass,\textsuperscript{121} and by 1957, Anderson was playing at the Theatre Lounge in Longview.\textsuperscript{122}

From about 1958 on, Anderson formed his own orchestra, usually called the East Texas All-Stars, but sometimes called simply the Rufus Anderson Orchestra. His band

\textsuperscript{118} “Eddy Giles Headlines NCO Entertainment,” *The Observer*, November 15, 1968, 2.

\textsuperscript{119} “Four News Teachers Employed; School Facilities Studied,” *Kilgore News Herald*, December 12, 1948, 1.


was in demand for Black debutante balls and high school proms from Corpus Christi and Austin to Shreveport, Monroe, Alexandria, and Lake Charles. He was especially a favorite of the Magnolia State Peace Officers Association, an organization of Black deputies, police officers and constables in Louisiana. His band was the usual choice for the organization’s balls and dances, which were often held in Shreveport.\footnote{123}

After the Black high school in Kilgore closed, Anderson was involved in the purchase of its campus and the conversion of it into a recreation and community center and apartments,\footnote{124} and was still playing the organ and piano at 88 years of age. Rufus B. Anderson died on September 26, 2000 in Marshall, Texas; while his obituary mentioned his background as an educator, it strangely made no mention of his years of musical performance.\footnote{125}

**THE HOLLYWOOD PALACE**

The Hollywood neighborhood had formed west of Mooretown during the late 1940s, but came into its own during the 1950s, and was already a well-known area in 1952 when Country Jim Bledsoe recorded “Hollywood Boogie” for the Specialty label. But it really did not begin to develop a nightlife scene until the 1960s, when its biggest and best-known club, the Hollywood Palace, opened at 3825 Hollywood Avenue. The club opened to the public on Christmas Eve 1966, featuring a performance by Memphis soul singer O. V. Wright and his band.\footnote{126} Although initially Mrs. Effie B. Prince was

\footnote{123}{“M.S.P.O.A. Presents Rufus Anderson and Band,” *Shreveport Sun*, May 5, 1966, 8.}


\footnote{125}{“Rufus B. Anderson,” *Marshall News Messenger*, September 30, 2000, 5.}

\footnote{126}{“Grand Opening Hollywood Palace,” *Shreveport Sun*, December 22, 1966, 5.}
listed as the owner in advertising, the popular belief in Black Shreveport was that the
supper club was owned by a man named Joe Catanese. How Mrs. Prince and Mr.
Catanese interacted, or whether they were co-owners, is unclear. The Hollywood Palace
existed for a number of years, and the building still stands, although it is no longer a club.

TOUSSAINT MCCALL

Soul singer, songwriter and musician Toussaint McCall was born on March 26,
1939 in Delhi, Louisiana, in Richland Parish. The son of a minister, he began playing the
piano at the age of six, being recruited to play for his father’s church, as nobody else was
willing to do it. His family soon relocated to Monroe, and McCall attended college at
Southern University in Scotlandville near Baton Rouge, majoring in music. Upon
returning to Monroe, he taught music at Swayze Elementary School, began performing in
local night clubs, and writing original songs.

In the absence of recording studios in Monroe, McCall bought his own recording
equipment, and installed it in the den of his home. Playing the piano and organ parts
himself, with Jimmy Williams on drums, McCall recorded what he considered his most
promising song, a mournful ballad called “Nothing Takes The Place of You,” by his
recolletion in late 1966. For the opposite side, he had a young Monroe female singer he
had discovered named Barbara West perform a song he had written for her called “I’m a
Fool for My Baby.” McCall had these pressed up as 45 RPM singles in limited quantity,
presumably on his label Nu-Sound. Taking them to Shreveport, he put them on
consignment at Stan’s Record Shop, but Lewis was not immediately impressed. Leaving

127 Interview with the author, February 15, 2002.
there, McCall went across town to KOKA, where he also gave copies of the record to “Bird Brain” Davis and Sunrose “Gay Poppa” Rutledge. McCall said, “I was driving back to Monroe when I heard the station play the song. Not too many people had telephones in their cars in those days, but I did, and I called the station to thank them. B. B. Davis told me, ‘we don’t know what it is, but the phones have just been lightning up ever since we played that song.’” Stan Lewis would later tell people that he drove to Monroe to find McCall and sign him on the spot, but McCall disputed that account. Lewis agreed to pick up the existing record for distribution, but he told McCall that the jukebox operators would not accept two different artists being on the same record, so he needed to have a second song to go on the B-side by McCall. McCall gave him another tune that had been recorded by himself and his drummer in his den, the instrumental “Shimmy.” This established a pattern for McCall’s early career, juxtaposing slow ballads with uptempo instrumentals. Lewis pressed these two songs in early 1967 as Ronn 3; Lewis had started the Ronn label as a vehicle for pop and contemporary soul, and had named the label for his brother Ronnie Lewis.

“Nothing Takes The Place of You” was a sad, soulful ballad of lost love, with the unmistakable influence of country music; it would prove to be the biggest hit of McCall’s career. Stan Lewis was singing its praises as early as January of 1967, where he called it “a hit in Shreveport” to the R & B reporter for Record World,128 and by February, Joe Bihari, the owner of the Kent-Modern family of labels in Los Angeles stated that “every

station in the South” was playing “Stan’s great blues on Ronn.”129 By March, the song had hit #1 in Cleveland, Ohio and was popular at WIGO in Atlanta,130 and a week later, Record World’s R & B editor wrote “This will be the biggest record ever to come out of Shreveport.”131 The song had first hit Record World’s R & B chart at #25 on February 25, improved to #23 on March 4, and was back at #25 on March 11. By March 18, it entered the Cash Box R & B chart at #36,132 and Record World was highlighting Stan Lewis’s growing success in Shreveport, stating “Toussaint McCall goes well over 100,000.”133 As of March 25, the song had reached #25 on Record World’s chart, and the editor noted its growing success in Cleveland, New Orleans, Miami, Baltimore, Winston-Salem, and San Antonio.134 The sudden and fast-moving success of “Nothing Takes The Place of You” caused McCall to begin doing more performing, such as a “Pre-Easter Dance” at the Stardust Lounge in Alexandria, Louisiana on March 27.135 By April 15, McCall’s single had reached #6 on Billboard’s R & B chart.136 It would reach #5, but went no higher, and subsequent records by McCall never matched the success of that early hit.

McCall’s second single was cut in Tyler, Texas, at Robin Hood Brian’s studio, and produced by Scotty Moore, the guitarist with Elvis Presley’s touring band. Its A-side, “I’ll

132 “Cash Box Top 50 in R & B Locations,” Cash Box, March 18, 1967, 30.
Do It For You,” was a minor bluesy ballad somewhat reminiscent of “I’ll Take Care Of You,” which had been a big hit for Bobby “Blue” Bland. Moore chose a sparse production style, which highlights guitar and Toussaint’s organ on the ballad, while the B-side “The Toussaint Shuffle” was another danceable instrumental. These two songs were released in 1967 as Ronn 9. The next single, Ronn 13, was also produced by Moore and cut in Tyler, pairing the country ballad “Step By Step” with another funky instrumental whose title McCall could not recall, leading to the amusing title “This Title Escapes Me.” Despite the excellence of all of this material, nothing measured up to the initial success of “Nothing Takes The Place of You.”

As a result, in 1968, Stan Lewis sent McCall along with Jewel’s staff producer Gene Kent to Fame Recording Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, which had been producing soul hits for a number of artists and labels. But McCall failed to find success there either. From the perspective of 2002, McCall described himself as “not ready” for the experience, and viewed himself as having squandered an opportunity through his youthfulness. “Like Never Before,” McCall’s first song at Muscle Shoals, is very much another sad country song about a lost love, but at Fame it received the full production treatment. Dee Marais had recalled Gene Kent ridiculing his sparse production style on Eddie Giles’s “Losing Boy,” so not surprisingly, Kent filled up McCall’s song with strings, horns, and even female background singers. But McCall’s voice, which sounded somewhat older than the average soul singer in 1967, seems out of place amidst all the built-up production. The B-side, “I’m Gonna Make Me A Woman,” was McCall’s first uptempo vocal tune, and worked better. Kent produced this side as well, with a large horn
section, but the production was less intrusive, and McCall sounded more comfortable with the song. These songs were released as Ronn 20. Apparently four more songs were cut on McCall’s journey to Alabama, including “One Table Away,” “My Love is Guaranteed,” “I Stand Accused,” and “Baby You Got It.” All except “I Stand Accused” were produced by Gene Kent. The first two songs were released in 1968 as Ronn 26, and the latter two in 1969 as Ronn 31. In between Ronn 20 and Ronn 26, Stan Lewis rushed out McCall’s original tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “King For A Day,” in the wake of the King assassination in Memphis on April 4, 1968. The song had been produced by Robin Hood Brians in Tyler, Texas; it was paired with “All For A Love Like You,” which had been produced by Scotty Moore in Tyler, probably during the earlier sessions. This single was released as Ronn 23.

In addition, an album had been released by Ronn Records in 1967, called “Nothing Takes The Place of You,” which featured a picture of Stan Lewis’s brother Ronnie on the front cover rather than a picture of Toussaint McCall. McCall was pictured on the back cover. All of the album tracks are credited to Scotty Moore with regard to production, which means that they were cut in Tyler, Texas, and some of them did not appear on any single. The album-only tracks include covers of “I Left My Heart In San Francisco” and “Summertime,” an instrumental reading of “La Rea,” and two McCall originals, “Perhaps I Love You” and “I’m Undecided.” Of the latter two, “I’m Undecided” was the best, an up-tempo romp that managed to have a fairly uptown sound without the overproduction of the Muscle Shoals material. One wonders what it might have done had Lewis chosen to include it on a single.
By 1969, Toussaint McCall had become involved more in politics in his hometown of Monroe, Louisiana, taking a leadership role in the Black Citizens Council of Ouachita Parish, an organization whose name was a wry reversal of the White Citizens Councils which had attempted to halt integration in North Louisiana. In 1971, he married in Reno, Nevada, and then relocated to Los Angeles. He recorded there sporadically during the 1970s, but in 1988, a chance phone call from movie director John Waters resulted in McCall making a cameo appearance playing himself in the nostalgic Baltimore coming-of-age movie *Hairspray*. Waters had said that “Nothing Takes The Place Of You” was his favorite song, and he wanted permission to use the song in the film; McCall agreed, but only on the condition that he be allowed to sing it himself in the film. Waters objected, since all of the other characters were being played by younger actors and actresses, and because he felt that Toussaint McCall would not look like the young man he had been in 1967. But at Waters’s request, McCall sent a current photo, and Waters flew him to Baltimore to appear in the film. The unexpected film role was something of a rejuvenating factor in McCall’s music career. He returned to songwriting and recording, and moved back to Monroe in the 1990s, running a nightclub on South Jackson Street for nearly a decade. Afterwards, he returned to Los Angeles, where he died on August 7, 2023.

**BIG SHOWS, 1967**

By 1967, James Brown was the biggest act in Black music in the country, and his show on March 8 at the State Fair Coliseum on the Fairgrounds in Shreveport was a big deal indeed. The *Sun* gave an account of it after the fact:
Wow! We feel good, just like we knew we would….Yes, that’s the way it is, Soul Brothers and Sisters, after attending the big James Brown show Wednesday night at the State Fair Coliseum. We have attended quite a few concerts, dances, reviews, lyceum attractions, etc. but we have never attended an event where the artist was as dynamic and vibrant as the little Mighty Mite, James Brown. He really packed ’em in. Young and old, cool and square, black and white, fat and small came to help kindle the Famous Flames and to give warm ovations to “Butter Beans and Dixie,” The Go Go Dancing Girls, James Crawford and Bobby Byrd.137

A little over a month later, Dionne Warwick came to the Haynes Memorial Gymnasium on the Centenary College campus for a show sponsored by the Student Senate of the college.138 A week after Dionne Warwick’s appearance, Jackie Wilson was at the Hirsch Youth Center, as part of an all-star event which included Aretha Franklin, Freddie Scott, Howard Tate, B. B. King, The Drifters, and Peg Leg Moffett.139

July brought a B. B. King dance to the Municipal Auditorium, a venue which was beginning to be used less often, most likely because it had a smaller capacity than some of the facilities at the fairgrounds.140 All the same, Otis Redding came to the Auditorium on July 30th along with Arthur Conley, Percy Sledge, The Manhattans, The Five Stairsteps, Betty Swann (who had grown up in Shreveport), James Carr, Betty Harris, and the Bar-Kays. It was perhaps the biggest lineup of stars on one stage in post war Shreveport, and had been put together by Sunrose “Gay Poppa” Rutledge of KOKA

140 “Dance B. B. King and His Orchestra,” Shreveport Sun, June 22, 1967, 8.
radio, who had formed Gay Poppa Enterprises as a Shreveport show promotion firm. A month later, James Brown was back, at the Hirsch Coliseum.

On Thanksgiving 1967, Gay Poppa brought another big show to the Municipal Auditorium, featuring Percy Sledge, Otis Clay, Joe Simon, Betty Harris, the Kelly Brothers, Arthur Conley, and Johnnie Taylor. It was the last big local show of the year.

**THE FABULOUS UNTOUCHABLES**

In May of 1967, the LaSabre Social Club sponsored a dance at Club 51, the large nightclub on the Cooper Road north of Shreveport, and the advertising for the event stated that music would be provided by a band called the Fabulous Untouchables. Not much is known about this band, although the name was a common one. Bands called the “Fabulous Untouchables” were advertised in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Iowa, Indiana, and even England between 1967 and 1975; only one is advertised anywhere near Shreveport, a band called Ira Littlefield and His Fabulous Untouchables in Austin, Texas. Yet, despite all the bands of the name, only one recorded 45 RPM single seems to exist by any band of that name, a 1969 single on the Memphis-based Camaro label owned by Style Wooten, consisting of “Love On My Mind” b/w “Put on World.” It has been theorized that this Fabulous Untouchables was from Memphis because they recorded for a Memphis-based label, but given the custom nature of Style Wooten’s labels, that does not seem likely. None of the other rare funk singles on the Camaro label are by Memphis

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artists, and the style of the Untouchables is not consistent with what was being recorded in Memphis at that time, nor are they ever mentioned in Memphis newspapers.

Shreveport guitarist Ron Johnson believes that the band perhaps was from Grambling, and that Shreveport musician Melvin Landry might have been a member.

**ADOLPH WASHINGTON AND THE ENTERTAINERS**

One of Shreveport’s universally-remembered Black bands was Adolph and the Entertainers, a band which managed to have a huge impact on the city despite making only two recorded singles during their existence. Adolphus Washington was born in Shreveport in 1950. He first appears in the *Shreveport Journal* in 1967, already with his band the Entertainers, when he is engaged to play for a talent show at the Municipal Auditorium intended to raise funds for the David Raines Association.145 David Raines, an early successful Black Shreveport landowner, left an endowment that led to the parish’s first juvenile justice facility for Black Shreveporters (hence the name “Juvenile Road” in the Cooper Road community), and which continued to fund civic improvements in the unincorporated Cooper Road community, which by the late 1960s was approaching a population of 20,000 residents. In 1967, the Raines Association was seeking to provide a neighborhood park and community center to the people of the Cooper Road area, so the talent show was part of an effort to fund these improvements. It featured performances by the bands from Valencia, Union, Washington, and Clark schools, as well as Adolph and the Entertainers, and appearances by dancers, models, and KOKA radio personalities.

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Washington also performed on a November 1969 Soul Festival sponsored by the NAACP in Shreveport, and on a December 6, 1969 “Pop Festival” at the Bayou Club on Mansfield Road. The band seems to have made their only recordings for Stewart Madison’s Alarm label in 1973; the label was based out of the Sound City Recording Studio at 3316 Line Avenue in Shreveport, and that is likely where the recordings were made.

“I Need A Little Girl” b/w “My Baby’s Gone” was the first single by Adolph and the Entertainers, which was released on the Alarm label in 1973 as Alarm 101. The A-side features Washington’s vocals on a deep soul ballad, while the B-side features an otherwise unknown female singer named Barbara Thomas who “testifies” in true “soul sister” fashion. The better remembered single was Alarm 103, “Old Folks Shuffle Part 1 and 2,” a humorous funk tune produced by an otherwise mysterious Elton Mango. Although little is known about Mango, he is buried in DeRidder, Louisiana; his gravestone reads Elton Glen “Bull” Mango, and gives his dates as November 30, 1943 to September 17, 1993, along with a quote from him: “Everyday is a holiday. Twice on Sunday.” This single, despite earlier dates in discographies, was clearly released in 1973. The Alarm label did not exist until 1973, and Alarm 103 would not have been issued earlier than Alarm 101. However, the sound of the recordings and the involvement

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146 “Local Talent To Be Feature of NAACP’s Soul Festival Here Saturday,” Shreveport Sun, October 30, 1969, 1.


of Mango raise questions about the date of recording of the songs versus the date of release.

It is in fact possible that the songs on Alarm 101 were recorded in 1970, and that those of Alarm 103 were recorded in 1971. Sound City had opened in early 1969, and Adolph Washington may have made these recordings as custom recordings at the same time as other local soul bands like the King Cobras and the Road Runners. If so, they did not see release until 1973, when the Alarm label seems to have debuted, perhaps because Washington did not want to spend his own money to press the records, which presumably he would have had to do at the Custom Sound label which also operated out of Sound City.

Keeping up with Washington after his recordings is difficult, because there were improbably two men named Adolphus Washington in Shreveport during that time, the other only a few years younger than the musician. One of these two men was charged with several crimes of increasing severity over the years between 1974 and 1981, including check forgery, breaking and entering and attempting to defraud a Shreveport police officer.

Washington the musician was shot to death on New Year’s Day 1981 at a home in the Bottoms neighborhood of Shreveport. The Shreveport Sun gave a detailed account of Washington and his career:

Well-known local entertainer Adolphus Washington, who has thrilled audiences from coast to coast with his antics of playing his guitar with his teeth, behind his back and even while laying down, became the city’s first homicide victim of 1981 when he was shot and killed at a Bottoms residence on New Year’s Day.
Washington, who released at least two records and played as a sideman with several nationally-known artists, was found dead in the Pearlie N. Vasiles residence at 1248 1/2 Rear Fannin about 3:30 AM New Year’s morning. Ms. Vasiles was booked into city jail at 6:24 the same morning and charged with second-degree murder.

Washington, whose last known address was 4013 Illinois Street, played in local clubs for a number of years with a group billed as Adolph and the Entertainers. In the late 1960s, Washington recorded “I Need A Little Girl” and later came back with a song entitled “Old Folks Shuffle.” He played with numerous national artists, including Little Milton, Ike and Tina Turner and Ted Taylor. Washington toured throughout the south and southwest and had a successful fling at the famed Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas with his own group.

Detectives said Washington’s assailant told them that he was shot while trying to assault her. The woman said she then ran to a neighbor’s house and called the police. Washington died of a single gunshot wound to the abdomen. 149

It does not seem that Pearlie Vasiles was ever charged in Washington’s death, as she is never mentioned again in the Shreveport papers.

Incredibly, the other Adolphus Washington, a 29-year-old man who lived in the Cooper Road, was also murdered in 1981, beaten to death by a group of white men who were out to punish a friend of Washington’s for having dated a white woman. They abducted Washington from a Bottoms night club, robbed him, then beat him to death and left his body along the Springridge-Texas Line Road in October of 1981. 150 Given the relatively unusual name of Adolphus Washington, it seems as if there could have been some connection between the two men, but what, if any, is unclear.


THE SOUL BROTHERS

Like the Fantastic Untouchables, the Soul Brothers were also a Grambling-based group, made up of six members of the college marching band, all but two of whom were music majors. The group was organized by Harold Bray, a junior student from Lake Charles, and was at first an instrumental band until fellow Grambling students suggested that the group needed a vocalist. Earnest “Nick” Warren of New Orleans became the vocalist, and the group’s debut in the Black and Gold Room of the Favrot Student Union was a triumphant success. They not only played for campus events, but also occasionally in area nightclubs, although the offer of a three-month contract in a Monroe night club was turned down, as the members felt it would interfere with their studies.151 A group of the same name was advertised as playing a New Year’s Eve party at the Forty & Eight Club on Cross Lake in Shreveport on December 31, 1968,152 but it seems that the Soul Brothers never recorded.

BRENTON WOODS & BETTYE SWANN

Although neither pursued their professional careers while in Shreveport, two of 1967’s biggest soul stars had roots in the city. Brenton Woods, a Los Angeles-based singer who had been a track runner during his high-school days in Shreveport garnered attention for his self-penned “Oogum Boogum Song,” which was an immediate hit; his follow-up, “Gimme Some Kind Of Sign,” was equally popular.153


Bettye Swann was also raised in the Shreveport area, but did not begin recording until she had left; however, she returned to the area on tour during the summer of 1967, and was best known for her hit “Make Me Yours.”

**PLAS WILSON**

On September 21, 1967, the “Happenings Around Town” column in the *Shreveport Sun* announced a debut single by a new Shreveport singer:

One of the biggest happenings in our town this week is the unofficial announcement that Shreveport native Plas Wilson will release his first record this week entitled “I’m Tired” and backed with “A Fool in Love.” Plas recently returned from New Orleans and is now performing at the Carousel Lounge with Li’l Joe Wills and the Upsetters. He plays the organ along with his vocal stylings on his new release.

While the columnist got most of the pertinent facts right, he failed to mention the involvement of Shreveport bluesman Jesse Thomas, whose name appeared prominently on the single, and who may have actually owned the Jockey label on which it appeared. Of the two songs on the single, only “I’m Tired” has circulated on the Internet. The rarity of the record probably accounts for the failure of anyone to reissue its two sides. While both Toussaint McCall and Plas Wilson were singing organists, their styles could not have been more different; McCall’s country-influenced ballads express an earnestness and sadness over the loss of a lover; by contrast, Wilson’s jazz-inflected style exudes sophistication, and his lyrics show defiance toward a woman who refuses to do right. Determining the location of recording is not easy, as Wilson does not appear in the *Blues*

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Discography, but a clue may lie in the column’s mention of Wilson having recently returned from New Orleans. Shreveport still did not have a commercial studio in 1967, and the quality of the recording suggests that it had to have been done in a professional studio setting. If it was done in the Shreveport area, it likely had to be cut at Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, Texas, or at the new Americana Sound Studios in Ruston, Louisiana, which had opened in 1967. The records were pressed by the Rite Record Pressing Company in Cincinnati, Ohio. Peculiarly, given the high quality of the extant side, Wilson does not seem to have recorded again, but articles in the Louisiana Weekly from New Orleans in 1973 and 1974 suggest that Plas Wilson moved there.

O. C. SMITH

O. C. Smith, né Ocie Lee Smith, was born in Mansfield, Louisiana, on June 21, 1932. He moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, and then ultimately to Los Angeles, where he found success as a Black singer attuned to a pop and country sensibility, known especially for his hit with the Bobby Russell-penned “Little Green Apples,” which hit #2 on the pop charts in 1968. Smith was not really a soul singer, but beginning in 1967, the Delta Sigma Theta sorority alumnae in Shreveport brought him to the Municipal Auditorium on an annual basis as a fund raiser. Smith eventually became pastor of the City of the Angels Church in California, and died in 2001.

AMERICANA SOUND STUDIOS

When Mira Smith closed her RAM Recording Studio in Shreveport in order to move to Nashville, North Louisiana was left without a recording studio; such business as

there was in the area was largely redirected to the fairly recent Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, Texas. But at some point in 1966, brothers Phil and Roger Lawson opened the Americana Recording Studios at 707 West California Avenue in Ruston, Louisiana. Although the Lawsons seemingly intended for Americana to be a studio for Christian music, the studio ended up recording a considerable amount of good soul and funk music. Some of the artists who recorded at Americana are truly important, including Eddie Bo, Anthony Butler and the Invaders, Errol Chandler, Sam Alcorn and Mary Jane Hooper, and perhaps the best-known funk recording made in Ruston was Eddie Bo’s sublime “Hook and Sling” with the funky drumming of New Orleans’s James Black.

EDWARD SNEAD & MARY MOULTRIE

Edward Snead, born in Cambridge, Maryland, was a musician for much of his early life before choosing a career in academia. After teaching foreign languages for nine years at Alabama State College in Montgomery, he accepted a similar position at Grambling College and moved to the small town of Grambling, Louisiana, near Ruston. But Snead, who played both the banjo and the upright bass, had not completely given up music; not only did he use original compositions to aid his students in learning German, but he also wrote songs like “I Ain’t Fattening Frogs For Snakes” by Pigmeat Markham, “Your Wires Have Been Tapped” by The Larks, and “Baldhead Lena” by Piano Red.157 But it was “Rover,” which he wrote for a young Montgomery soul singer named Mary Moultrie that would lead to her coming to Ruston, Louisiana, to record.

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Soul singer, journalist, and civil rights activist Mary Moultrie was apparently from Montgomery, Alabama, and whether she was kin to the Selma soul singer Sam Moultrie is unclear. A vocalist with the popular Cherokee Dance Band in Montgomery, she began making records in 1963, apparently under the auspices of Nashville pianist Floyd Cramer’s Cramart firm, although her first record came out on Columbia. “Rover” the A-side of her first single was co-written with Edward Snead, who until 1962 had been a professor at Alabama State in Montgomery, and who may have known her through the Cherokee Dance Band. “Rover” is an early popcorn-beat soul song of epic proportions, marked by background vocals and dramatic strings. Its production by Don Law, Columbia’s country producer for the eastern half of the country, suggests that the recording was made in Nashville. Three years later, Moultrie recorded a single for the Cincinnati-based King label, the frenetic Northern-flavored “They’re Trying To Tear Us Apart,” backed with the rather maudlin and swamp-pop-oriented “Last Year Senior Prom, This Year Viet Nam.” In that same year, Moultrie began writing for a civil rights newspaper in Montgomery known as the Southern Courier, which she remained with until its failure in 1968.

But in 1967, she traveled to Americana Recording Studios in Ruston, Louisiana to record another single, apparently at the suggestion of Edward Snead, who had moved to Grambling. Moultrie’s Ruston recording “You Gotta Hum” was co-written with Snead, and was backed by Hutch’s Trio, which was probably a reference to Conrad Hutchinson, the band director of Grambling College, who was also an organist. There is a prominent organ on the recording. Moultrie’s soulful contralto-ranged voice has never sounded
better, and the record could be rightly called the high point of her career. Unfortunately for its success, it was released on the studio’s own tiny Americana label, backed with “Another Man.” The two songs came out as Americana 1002, and the single is incredibly rare. In the same year, another single was released as Americana 1006, featuring Mary Moultrie performing “You Gotta Hum” again, this time with the Monroe-based band called The Dynamics; the backing song on this release is called “I’ll Prove My Love To You.” This single is even rarer than the other. The Fabulous Dynamics would play around the Monroe, Louisiana area for several years, but do not seem to have recorded again.

After 1967, Mary Moultrie did not record again, and what became of her is not clear. She was of course a different person from the union organizer Mary Moultrie who led the Charleston Hospital Strike in South Carolina in 1969, as that woman was born and raised in Charleston.

Americana Recording Studios lasted into the 1970s, and then at some point the Lawson family converted it into a car stereo firm that lasted well into the early 2000s. Sadly the building was then sold to a young man who wanted it for a hand car wash. He seems to have taken all the master reels and other recording studio materials and thrown them into a dumpster in the process of remodeling the building. Priceless recordings, some of them unreleased, may have been lost forever.

**REUBEN BELL**

Although historical records are sparse, it would seem that Shreveport soul singer Reuben Bell was born in Jefferson, Texas (apparently as “Ruben Bell”), on October 16,
1945. He grew up in Shreveport, and attended Union Street Junior High School, where he decided to become a singer for a fairly unusual reason:

At five-three and 135 pounds, I wasn’t going to play football, and I was too short for basketball. The athletes got all the women. And one day some guys, the Fairlanes, came to our school after school and performed, and students were screaming and all the girls went wild. And then when I was a bit older, my parents let me go to the Municipal Auditorium for a show, and I saw that same kind of response. So I knew I wanted to be a singer.\textsuperscript{158}

Reuben Bell would graduate from Union High School in 1962, but it would be five years before he made his first recording. At some point Bell crossed paths with another slightly older musician, Eddie Giles, who introduced him to Dee Marais. Bell contends that when he made his first recordings, “It’s Not That Easy” b/w “Humming A Sad Song,” he thought he was making a demo recording not intended for release; Marais denied the contention. What we do know about the release is that it was cut at Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, Texas in 1967, and that the backing band was the Casanovas, who were now under the direction of a Cedar Grove musician named Abraham Ester. Both of the sides were songs composed by Reuben Bell, who during his career proved to be a masterful songwriter, both on his own and in conjunction with his longtime friend Vernon “Geater” Davis. But it was the mournful A-side “It’s Not That Easy” which established Bell as an artist. Bell’s youthfully naive tenor voice belied his twenty-two years, expressing his dismay over a lost love in a somber, atmospheric minor-key ballad with an undercurrent of growing shadows. The up-tempo B-side “Hummin’ A Sad Song” continues the theme of the previous side, but with a rather incongruous fast pace.

Although Bell would make many fine recordings during his long career, few could equal

\textsuperscript{158} Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.
the exquisite perfection of “It’s Not That Easy.” Whether intended for release or not, the songs were in fact released on Marais and Dick Martin’s Murco label as Murco 1035. One peculiarity of the recordings are that they do not have the usual Murco matrix numbers, but rather oddly named ones Su-Ma 1 and Su-Ma 2. Su-Ma was the name of Stan Lewis’s publishing company at the time, and Lewis ultimately ended up distributing the record; Bell claimed he intended to sell the songs to be recorded by someone else, and one wonders if Su-Ma was the publisher he was trying to sell them to. At any rate, by November of 1967, B. B. Davis was playing the song at KOKA, and it had reached No. 4 on the local chart.

Reuben Bell traveled with Eddie Giles to Milwaukee in February of 1968 to perform at The Scene, and then came back to record his next single for Murco, which was released in June of 1968. By that point, Bell had put together a duo of backup singers, Jimmy Jackson and James Hayes, who were known as the Belltones, and the three of them went into Robin Hood Brians in Tyler in the spring of 1968 to record the gospel-tinged “You’re Gonna Miss Me” and the early-60s-styled “Another Day Lost.” Determining who the backing band is on these recordings is unclear, as they are not credited. The guitar work sounds somewhat like Eddie Giles, and it is possible that the Jive Five are the nucleus of the band on this record, but there is also a full horn section on both sides. These songs were released in June as Murco 1046, and they received only a perfunctory review in *Cash Box*.159

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Bell did not record again in 1968, but he recalled opening up for Jackie Wilson at the Municipal Auditorium, undoubtedly the show that was advertised as the “Big October Explosion of Stars” featuring Jackie Wilson, William Bell, Judy Clay, Gene Chandler, Barbara Acklin, The Fantastic Four, Emory and the Dynamics, Peg Leg Moffett, and Johnny Jones and the King Casuals. Like most of Shreveport’s big soul shows at the time, this one was sponsored by Gay Poppa Enterprises. Reuben Bell would continue recording and writing songs well into the 1970s.

**DORI GRAYSON**

The soul singer Dori Grayson was born Doris Grayson on June 23, 1950, in Shreveport. She was only sixteen years old and still a student at Booker T. Washington High School when she came to the attention of Eddie Giles’s organ player Willie James through her singing abilities; Giles wanted to add a female vocalist to his band the Jive Five. A year later, in 1967, she signed with Dee Marais’s Murco label, the same label that Eddie Giles and Reuben Bell recorded for, and she recorded her first two songs, “Try Love” and “Got Nobody To Love,” both of which had been written by Jive Five organist Willie James. The songs were recorded at Robert Hood Brians’ studio in Tyler, Texas and released as Murco 1038 in 1967 at some point prior to October 14, when *Cash Box* reviewed the single positively, stating “splendid vocal effort from Grayson and a big bouncy rhythmic funk.” By November, KOKA was playing “Try Love” and listed it as

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161 Interview with the author, February 21, 2003.

an “Up and Coming Hit” in its November 24, 1967 chart. “Try Love” as a debut single
had a certain simplicity and lack of artifice, but what was amazing was Grayson’s strong
voice, which sounded so mature for a seventeen-year-old; Dee Marais’s decision to use
female background voices was an inspired one, which made the side a classic slice of
female soul. The slower, more mournful B-side added a horn section to the band, as
Grayson sadly lamented her lack of a lover. It would be the only sad song of her career.

Grayson soon found herself performing on the Bossier City strip with Reuben
Bell and Eddie Giles; she crossed paths with other Bossier Strip musicians, including the
pop act Dan and Jerry and the drummer James Stroud, who later was a prominent studio
musician at Malaco Records. She also recalled a weekly Monday night residency at the
Zebra Room on Texas Street where she met Vernon “Geater” Davis, who had moved to
Shreveport from Nacogdoches, Texas, after his release from the Army in 1967.

Dori Grayson returned to Robin Hood Brians studio in the spring or summer of
1968, recording “I Can Fix That For You” and “Never Let Go,” which were released as
Murco 1045; Cash Box reviewed the single on June 22, in positive terms: “An appealing
number gets a smooth, soulful treatment from Dori Grayson. Lark’s pretty vocalizing
could spring her into national prominence.” The A-side, co-written by Grayson and
Willie James, was Grayson at her sultriest; the song was fairly unconventional for the
time, but seemed to take the advice of “Try Love” to the next level. The B-side “Never
Let Go” was a buoyant paean to true love. although with the same kind of archaic style

164 “Cash Box Record Reviews,” Cash Box, June 22, 1968, 22.
which characterized Reuben Bell’s “Another Day Lost.” While the Murco recordings are notable for their earnestness, simplicity and lack of pretension, perhaps their weakness is most evident in some of the up-tempo songs, which make use of the “twist” rhythm which was characteristic of the early 1960s, despite being recorded in 1968. It is perhaps this fact that hindered their progress on a national basis.

By the time Dori Grayson recorded her last single, a new studio in Shreveport had opened called Sound City, and it is likely that these last two songs were recorded there. “Be Mine Sometime” is the only Shreveport recording to have a distinct similarity to the Memphis sound of Stax, and the song was written by a man named Steve Ross, not otherwise identified. The B-side, “Sweet Lovin’ Man,” was written by Eddie Giles, and Giles’s unique guitar style is very evident throughout the song. These were released in 1969 on the Peermont subsidiary of Murco as Peermont 1056. This single received no attention in the music trade publications, and Grayson soon abandoned her singing career, eventually becoming a schoolteacher in the Caddo Parish Schools, singing occasionally with a local big band. She died on September 29, 2022.

**ABRAHAM AND THE CASANOVAS**

Musician and bandleader Abraham Ester was born on June 13, 1943, in Shreveport, and lived most of his life in the Cedar Grove neighborhood. Ester’s long-time band was called the Casanovas, and they are first mentioned in the 1966 *Yoncopin* yearbook of Centenary College in Shreveport, where they are mentioned as the backing band for bluesman Good Rockin’ Luke, who was a popular performer for dances sponsored by the local chapter of Kappa Alpha fraternity. A year later, the Casanovas
served as the backing band for Reuben Bell’s debut single on Murco, and then made their own debut recording for the same label.

“That’s Why I’m So Sad” and “Let Me Be The Fool” were basically solo features for Abraham’s wife Marion Ester, although credited to Abe and Marion Ester and the Casanovas, and released as Murco 1036 in 1967. The A-side is a fairly fast tune with horns, the upbeat tempo contrasting with the lyrics, but again, the style is somewhat archaic for the time frame. The high point of it is a raucous saxophone break between verses. But it is the B-side that stands out. “Let Me Be The Fool” was a Dee Marais composition that was originally recorded by Lucky Clark, a young white pop singer who had lived in Shreveport briefly from 1962 to 1963. The song was released on Chess Records, and was credited to Marais and Stan Lewis, although it seems likely that Lewis’s share was likely a quid pro quo, part of a deal to motivate Lewis to push the song through his national radio programming. As cut by Lucky Clark, the song was a typical early 1960s pop number, with a feel not all that different from Abe and Marion Ester’s “That’s Why I’m So Sad.” But Abraham and Marion change “Let Me Be The Fool” until it is practically unrecognizable as the same song Lucky Clark. The Esters convert the song into a slow soul ballad with a prominent saxophone and B3 organ, and Marion’s alto voice carries the melody and the message. An overall feeling of gloom is broken up by soaring climaxes, and the recording is likely similar to the usual sound of the Casanovas in neighborhood clubs. Both songs were undoubtedly recorded in Tyler, Texas, where Dee Marais was doing all of his recording before the opening of Sound City Recording Studio in 1969.
The year 1968 saw the release of a second single credited to Abraham and the Casanovas, “Soul Power” b/w “Summer in Winter” released as Murco 1044. Both sides of the record were instrumentals; “Soul Power” had a title that seemed to reflect the growing militancy in Shreveport’s Black community in the late summer of 1968, and “Summer in Winter” was a feature for saxophonist Chuck Ellis. For some reason, this single received no reviews in the trade publications. Abraham would continue to record in Shreveport through the mid-1970s.

BARBARA WEST

Soul singer Barbara West was born in 1948 in Monroe, Louisiana, and began her singing career at the age of five, singing with her father’s group The Missionaries on a local radio program called Voices of the South.\textsuperscript{165} She left Shreveport briefly at age sixteen to join Bowlegs Miller’s Band in Memphis, where she stayed a year.\textsuperscript{166} Yet her recording career began fourteen years later in 1967 when she recorded “I’m A Fool For My Baby” in Toussaint McCall’s living room for inclusion on his self-produced single before he was picked up by Stan Lewis’s Ronn label. McCall made sure that West was signed to Ronn as well, and she recorded eight high quality sides for Stan Lewis before her recording career came to an end.

The first of West’s recordings for the Ronn label was “Will He Come Back” b/w “The Love Of My Man,” recorded and released in late 1967 as Ronn 16. With production


by Stan Lewis and arranging by Gene Kent, it seems likely that this record was made in Tyler, Texas, where Stan was doing most of his recording at the time.

The A-side, “Will He Come Back,” had to be one of the most auspicious beginnings for a new female soul singer ever. Although Gene Kent had a tendency to over-arrange his soul sessions, here he creates just the right atmosphere for West’s confident voice, although the result sounds anything but southern. Indeed, the track has a distinctly Northern sound, full of strings and horns, with a driving, uptown beat, and sounds little different from what Detroit was doing at the time. The B-side, on the other hand, a cover of an Ed Townsend song which had been recorded by Theola Kilgore in 1963, has a strong gospel flavor and Southern deep soul feel. Both sides are strong in their own right, and their failure to even garner reviews from the trades is quite strange. On the other hand, by 1968, soul music was reaching its zenith of popularity, and the volume of new releases in the genre was hitting a fever pitch. Reviewers and DJs were probably having a hard time keeping up with the amount of new material crossing their desks by 1968. Yet West’s debut was better than many others which got reviewed.

West’s second single appeared in June of 1968, and this time Toussaint McCall was handling the production, with Gene Kent doing arranging. The session was likely done at Fame Recording Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where Kent was supervising McCall’s sessions in 1968. A bluesy up-tempo A-side “Oh! Little Boy” was given the full production with horns and strings, and was backed with “I’m A Fool For You Baby,” which was the original Toussaint McCall song that West had recorded in McCall’s bedroom in 1967. However, the sound of this version makes it plain that it was
recorded in Muscle Shoals just as the A-side was. This time the single earned a review in
*Cash Box*, but only the A-side was reviewed: “This strong, hand-clapping blues song
could make Barbara West a name to reckon with. Heavy brass is an added appeal. Eye it
closely.”167 The two sides were released as Ronn 22. The same month, Barbara West had
a cover feature on the special features section of the state-wide *News-Leader* family of
Black newspapers in Louisiana, which ran weekly newspapers in Baton Rouge, Lake
Charles, Alexandria, and Monroe. The article featured a summary of West’s career up to
1968, and two large photographs.168

By September, Jewel-Paula-Ronn was advertising West’s third single, consisting
of “Anyone But You” backed with “You’re No Good.” For the first time in her career,
Toussaint McCall had nothing to do with either song, both of which were cover versions
of songs that had been recorded by others. “Anyone But You” however is a masterful
performance by West, communicating to the listener the hurt of an untrue love. The
opposite side “You’re No Good” has an interesting history, having originally been cut by
Dee Dee Warwick in 1963. Another version of the song was cut that year by Betty Everett
which reached the R & B charts, and then a year later a white pop group called The
Swinging Blue Jeans recorded the song. Barbara West’s version was recorded in late
1968, but the song would become a worldwide hit when country artist Linda Ronstadt
picked up the song from the Swinging Blue Jeans version and recorded it herself in 1974.

167 “Cash Box Record Reviews,” *Cash Box*, June 8, 1968, 18.

June 9, 1968, 14.
These two Barbara West tracks were produced by Gene Kent and most likely recorded in Muscle Shoals.

West’s final single for Ronn was released in 1969, and again produced by Gene Kent. This time both songs were written by Toussaint McCall, and both proved to be excellent vehicles for West’s voice. “Give Me Back The Man I Love” is a deep southern gospel-flavored ballad with plenty of organ, piano, and strings, while the flip side “Congratulations Baby” is more buoyant and driving, reminiscent of “Will He Come Back.” Despite the excellence of these sides, they received no mention in the trade publications at all. With their release, West’s career effectively came to an end, all the more so after McCall’s marriage and subsequent move to Los Angeles. At some point, the Japanese label P-Vine discovered an unreleased duet between Toussaint McCall and Barbara West in the Jewel-Paula-Ronn vaults, which they released on a compilation of Toussaint McCall material. “Let It Be Me” is the only known duet between the mentor and his protege, and it is beautifully performed. It probably remained unreleased because the song in question was so frequently recorded in that era as to become almost a cliché.

Barbara West seems to have remained in Monroe, and did not follow McCall out to California. One wonders what might have happened to her career if she had. She reconnected with McCall when he moved back to Monroe in the early 1990s, and recorded again for his revived Nu-Sound label, but the records on this label are extremely rare. Barbara West died on February 17, 2016, and was posthumously inducted in the Northeast Louisiana Music Hall of Fame.
THE INTEGRATION OF THE BOSSIER STRIP

The Bossier Strip was a collection of lounges and night clubs which developed along Texas Boulevard in Bossier City after World War II, fed at least in part by the nearby Barksdale Air Force Base, although eventually violence and the reputed involvement of gangsters led to the base declaring many of the establishments off-limits to base personnel. The Bossier Strip had a reputation for being segregated, although advertisements make it clear that some of the clubs had booked Black performers as far back as the 1950s; Blacks would not be hired to work regularly there until the 1960s, and even then, in some of the clubs, they were required to remain in the back when not performing. Reuben Bell recalled the scene:

I was the first Black entertainer they let on the Bossier Strip in Bossier City. They didn’t mind if you came in the club on the Bossier Strip, if you just came in to sit in and sing a couple of songs with the band, whatever, and then you could be on your way. But I went with a friend of mine to a club called Kim’s where Danny and Jerry, Jerry Beach, were playing there. I got up, and we found a couple of songs that I knew that they knew. James Stroud they had on drums. James was not only a good timekeeper; James was also a show drummer, and it didn’t take much for him to read you. What you wanted, to make the music come down, or whether you just wanted to fade out. He was good at timing that, and knowing more or less what you wanted to do. And, man, by the time we got through with two songs, you would have thought that James Brown or somebody was up in that club. The manager went and called the man that owned the club; he told me, “Be back up here Monday for rehearsal with Danny and Jerry,” and he told me how much he would pay me for five nights. We had been there about three or four weeks, and B. B. Davis, disk jockey with KOKA, brought Allen Orange into Kim’s to hear me; well, Geater (Davis) was working down the street, but when they got through playing they had to go in the back and sit down until time to start back playing, and he was playing a club down at the other end of the strip with Eddie Giles. But he would always come up to Kim’s where I was, because you had all the freedom you wanted in Kim’s. So Geater would always leave and come to Kim’s. Allen Orange was having chills; he said he was catching the
flu. But B. B. Davis brought him by Kim’s, and I asked him to stay and just listen to Geater Davis do one song.\footnote{169}

Perhaps as a sign of the shifting times, the Stork Supper Club brought in rhythm-and-blues star Lavern Baker for a one-week engagement in January of 1968. Although by then, time had largely passed Baker by, she was probably recalled fondly by white Ark-La-Tex residents of a certain generation, and the Bossier Strip was increasingly taking on the image of the Las Vegas of the South, which only grew grander after Governor Orville Faubus had suppressed the gambling and nightlife scene in Hot Springs in the early 1960s.

In February, the Stork brought Roy Hamilton, another Black star of the late 1950s, probably aimed at the same older audience. Despite some exceptions, such as Dan and Jerry, Reuben Bell, and Eddie Giles, much of the Bossier Strip was aimed at a supper club audience by this time.\footnote{170}

MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM, 1968

With the formation of Gay Poppa Enterprises, KOKA DJ Sunrose Rutledge had rejuvenated the Shreveport Black concert scene by the late 1960s, and again, nationally prominent acts were coming through the city on a regular basis. The year 1968 began with a James Brown show at the Municipal Auditorium, which came at a time when Brown’s popularity was soaring as his music was beginning to reflect a new-found Black pride and political militancy.\footnote{171} Two months later, Ike and Tina Turner were in Shreveport

\footnotetext{169}{Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.}

\footnotetext{170}{“This Week Only, The Golden Boy Roy Hamilton,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, February 2, 1968, 17.}

for a March 16 show with the Ikettes,\textsuperscript{172} and in May, Jackie Wilson returned to Shreveport heading a huge show that included The Impressions, Peaches & Herb, Jimmy Church, Johnny Jones and the King Casuals Band, Barbara Mason, Peg Leg Moffett, and the Five Stairsteps.\textsuperscript{173} The same month, Gay Poppa Enterprises brought Shreveport native Bettye Swann back home for a Municipal Auditorium show which included Joe Simon, William Bell, Oscar Toney Jr., Calvin Arnold, Peggy Scott and JoJo Benson, Barbara Christian, and the Swinging Sextette Band,\textsuperscript{174} and in June, Wilson Pickett came with Peggy Scott, JoJo Benson, Arthur Conley, Etta James, and a battle between the Arthur Conley and Wilson Pickett bands.\textsuperscript{175} An August 30 Gay Poppa-sponsored show was held outside at Braves Stadium instead of the Auditorium, featuring Joe Tex, Percy Sledge, Pigmeat Markham, The Delfonics, Sad Sam, the Joe Tex Orchestra. and the Joe Tex Go-Go Girls.\textsuperscript{176} The Braves Stadium, also called SPAR Stadium, was located in the Allendale neighborhood at the intersection of Park Avenue and Gary Street near Galilee Baptist Church. From 1938 until it was abandoned in 1985, it was the home of minor league baseball in Shreveport, although Shreveport had been without a team through much of the 1960s. The name Braves Stadium resulted from the new Shreveport Braves, an affiliate of Atlanta, coming to the city in 1968. The stadium, now owned by Galilee Baptist Church, is a smaller renovated facility, with the upper part of the grandstands removed. On


\textsuperscript{176} “Gay Poppa Enterprises Presents The Summer Shower of Stars,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, August 30, 1968, 42.
October 20, Jackie Wilson was back for the second time that year, with a show featuring William Bell and Judy Clay, Gene Chandler and Barbara Acklin, The Fantastic Four, Emory and the Dynamics, Peg Leg Moffett, and Johnny Jones and the King Casuals. It was the last major show of the year.

THE FOUR GENTS

First mentioned in February of 1968, the Four Gents was a Shreveport band consisting of saxophonist Earl Tims, guitarist Joe Hughes, drummer Marvin Modicue, and Lenward Seals, a pianist. The band was first mentioned in connection with a ball by The Brothers Social Club at Club 51 on the Cooper Road, and were engaged a month later for a Southern University Alumni Association costume ball at the same venue to raise money for scholarships. When the band was engaged for Notre Dame High School’s Junior-Senior Prom, they were referred to as “Mr. Scott A. Butler’s Four Gents Plus One” in the article. News articles indicate that Scott Butler was the band director at Walnut Hill High School in Caddo Parish, but it is not clear what role he had in putting the Four Gents together.

A June Afro-American dance of the Excelsiorettes Social Club brought yet another appearance of the Four Gents, with a mention of Charles Brown as vocalist, perhaps the same Charles Brown that had recorded with Eddie Giles on the latter’s song

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181 “Junior-Senior Prom Held At ND,” Shreveport Sun, May, 9, 1968, 5.
“Keep The Faith” on Murco. Brown may have also been the “plus one,” on the occasions when that was added to the band’s name.\textsuperscript{182}

Another mention of the Four Gents occurred in September of 1970 when they were one of two groups booked for a jazz concert intended to raise money for the Louisiana Heart Association. The band was pictured in the \textit{Shreveport Journal}, and the band’s members were named.\textsuperscript{183} They would remain active through 1973.

**THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN**

At some point “a few years” before 1967, a group of Grambling College students formed a band called the Magnificent Seven. First mentioned in the \textit{Shreveport Sun} in July of 1967, the band consisted of Calvin Howard of New Orleans on drums, Curtis White of Mobile, Alabama, on organ, Willie Hill of Mobile and Calvin Ross of Mansfield, Louisiana, on tenor saxes, Alan Wicker of New Orleans on baritone sax, Vernon Smith of Winnfield, Louisiana and Archie Stevenson of Mobile on trumpets, Bobby Peoples of Jonesboro, Louisiana on bass, Little Johnny Mitchell on vocals, and the Newtones, a vocal duo consisting of Wilton Banks and Charles Lowe. They were said to have already performed in Dallas, New Orleans, and Las Vegas.\textsuperscript{184}

The band was mentioned again in April of 1968, when the Louisiana Tech Engineers’ Association hired them to play for the Engineers’ Weekend Dance at the Old Women’s Gymnasium on the Tech campus in Ruston,\textsuperscript{185} and at some point, the

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{182} “Happenings Around Town,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, June 20, 1968, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{184} “Magnificent 7 Making It Big,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, July 20, 1967, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{185} “Engineers’ Event Plans Made At Tech,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, April 3, 1968, 8.
\end{footnotes}
Magnificent Seven recorded a single for the Americana label in Ruston featuring “The Skate” b/w “Philly Dog,” although the single was credited to the Newtones, consisting of Wilton Banks and Charles Lowe. Interestingly, both songs would seem to be covers of songs recorded by Don Julian and the Larks in 1965 in Los Angeles. Like everything on the Americana label, the Newtones single is extremely rare.

A final mention of the Magnificent Seven occurred in conjunction with a Campus Carnival at Louisiana Tech in October of 1970, where they were engaged to play for a street dance, and were billed as “The Return of the Magnificent Seven.” It would seem that the group disbanded around that time. Singer Wilton Banks went on to have a career in gospel music.

ROOTS OF SOUND CITY

Ostensibly, the Sound City Recording Corporation was founded in Shreveport in October of 1968 for the purpose of building a modern recording facility in the city. Principals in the company were Louis Robinson, Don Griffin, and Jerry Strickland. That would seem straightforward enough, but records had appeared as far back as 1967 with the designation Sound City Recording Corporation on them, notably the two singles that Lonnie and Floyd recorded in Tyler, Texas, for Stan Lewis’s Jewel label. Furthermore, in June of 1968 a record was released by the Stop Records label out of Nashville on a soul artist named Bobby James where the songs were produced by Don Griffin and Jerry Strickland. So it would seem that Sound City, at least as a production

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187 “Sound City Completes Studio,” *Record World*, November 9, 1968, 56.
firm, was founded in late 1966 or early 1967. By the time that renovation of the building where the studio would be installed began, Sound City consisted not only of a recording and production firm, but also Rogan Publishing, Sound City Publishing, and the RPI Record Label.

Jerry Strickland, a native of Minden, Louisiana, had begun doing production work at Robin Hood Brians studio as early as 1963, the year it opened. Most of his work was either in country music or teen-age rock and roll, but he also produced the occasional soul record. He may well have been involved in the Lonnie and Floyd sessions, although his name does not appear on the record. However, there is no doubt about his involvement with Bobby James.

James, whose real name was Robert Newsome, is thought to be from Louisiana, but not much else is known about him. He is almost certainly not the Bobby James who recorded for the Lanor label in Church Point, Louisiana, as the recordings of that Bobby James sound like they were made by a Cajun artist who was aiming at the white teen market. By contrast, the Bobby James who recorded for Don Griffin and Jerry Strickland was very much a deep soul singer. “Where Were You,” the A-side, is in the Otis Redding style, but tells a much darker narrative of a man who stole and served ten years in prison for a woman who then abandoned him. The B-side is entitled “Hold On To Your Woman,” and both songs were released on the Stop Records label out of Nashville as Stop 185, through a distribution deal which Sound City had with Stop. However, the first mention of this release appears in Cash Box in June of 1968, a good six months before the Sound City studio would open for business, so it would seem that the production firm
already existed, and that the songs were most likely cut at Robin Hood Brians in Tyler, Texas.188 Almost a year later, a duet single between Bobby James and Vicki Adams was released on Stop, containing the songs “Love Is Such A Sweet Thing” b/w “We Got Love,” which were released in 1969 as Stop 275. Again, both songs were written by Don Griffin and Jerry Strickland, and may have been cut at Tyler, or in the new Sound City studios which opened in early 1969.

Vicki Adams, about whom nothing is known except that she probably knew Bobby James and therefore was likely from Louisiana, also recorded one single for the Stop label. “I’m Drowning” is a Northern soul stomper, while “So Glad You’re Home” is another one of those moody, atmospheric ballads with B-3 organ that were so common in North Louisiana. Unfortunately, both songs suffer from Adams’s occasional uncertainty of pitch and a certain tentativeness. These songs were released as Stop 244, again with songs written by Griffin and Strickland, and recorded either in Tyler or at Sound City’s new facility in Shreveport.

None of these records made much of an impact, more than likely because Stop Records had been founded as a country label and knew very little about the soul and R & B market. Sound City was also a new production company and label, and its primary focus during that time was to complete the building of its studio facilities on Line Avenue. Vicki Adams does not seem to have recorded again, but Bobby James recorded later for the Chicago-based Karol label, a single which is highly prized on the Northern

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188 “Cash Box Record Reviews,” *Cash Box*, June 8, 1968, 18.
soul scene in England. Sound City would eventually find considerable success in Black music, but that would not occur for another year.

**GRADY LARK**

In the summer of 1968, an advertisement appeared in the *Shreveport Sun* for an August 10th dance at Club 51 on the Cooper Road featuring Grady Lark, Cal Turbin, the Blue Mission Revue and Hattie Calligari. While none of these performers appeared in Shreveport very often, they were well-known in Alexandria, about 125 miles to the southeast.

Organist Grady Metoyer Sr. was possibly from Natchitoches Parish, where the Metoyer name was prominent, but he was associated for most of his early musical life with Alexandria in Rapides Parish. His 2014 biography stated that “early in his career as a keyboardist, he joined the Sonny Boy Williamson show and signed on with Little Sonny Green and the Ike and Tina Turner Revue to tour army bases. He then joined the cadre of musicians promoted by Duke-Peacock Records in Houston and performed with Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown, Joe Hinton, Little Jackie Payne, Sam Cook, and Al “TNT” Bragg.189

Lark first is mentioned in 1964 in the Alexandria newspapers in connection with a private club on Upper Third Street called The Palm Club, where he was described as playing the piano with his combo.190 A newspaper reference to a prom at the Black high school in Glenmora in May of 1968 mentioned all of the musicians who were later

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appearing in Shreveport in August: “The junior and senior prom was held last Friday, which was considered real ‘groovy.’ Featuring Grady Lark and Cal Turbin and starring Miss Hattie Calligari. This group is fantastic. The girls say especially Cal and the organist, the Lark.”

In August of 1968, the News Leader gave them a feature article and photograph of their own:

Grady Lark and the Blue Message of Alexandria, La., is a most promising local talent in the field of music. They have collected some of the finest musicians from South Louisiana and Central Mississippi. The Blue Message revue boasts three very talented vocalists…Miss Hattie Calligari, Cal Turbin and Grady Lark. They feature a vast variety of music in the fields of jazz, rhythm and blues and soul music. In the past four months they have backed name artists throughout the South and are fast growing to have a name of their own.

Lark was active in the Alexandria area through 1970; he had briefly opened the Grady Metoyer Record Shop on Lower Third Street, and led the house band at the Petite Lounge. He later moved to New Orleans and then eventually to Houston, where he was still active as recently as 2019.

THE STAR THEATER

After several years of decline, in 1968, the Star Theater reopened under new management as a concert and event venue rather than a movie theater. The first announcement was of a big weekend in which swamp pop band Cookie and the Cupcakes from Lake Charles performed on Friday, August 3, and the O. V. Wright Revue from

Memphis performed on Saturday, August 4. On August 23, there was a “Drag Ball” and on August 25, an appearance by Roscoe Shelton of Nashville; the ad mentioned Shreveport bandleader Elgie Brown as the theater’s music director. The theater was also the scene of civil rights meetings and rallies during the hot summer of 1968 in Shreveport. By 1969, it had become the Cobra Club.

**PHIL “CURLY” DAVIS**

Natchitoches drummer and bandleader Phil “Curly” Davis was born on September 12, 1934, to Willie Davis Sr. and Daisy Johnson Davis. He graduated from Central High School in Natchitoches in 1954, and was mentored by Alcee Vaughn, who was the band director at the school. After serving in the Army, Davis returned to Natchitoches, where he worked as both a musician and a cabinet maker. He also became a disc jockey and an on-air personality at KNOC radio station in Natchitoches.

Davis’s first band was called the Night Owls, and they recorded a single in 1967 for the Boss Rock label under the name Phil “Curley” Davis and the Night Owls. Although some have associated the Boss Rock label with Alexandria, all the best evidence is that it was based in Bossier City. The associated music publisher was called Bossier Music BMI, and the label name likely was short for “Bossier Rock.” Furthermore, the Cheques, the white garage band of England Air Force Base musicians who recorded the first release on the label, stated that they recorded in Shreveport. But all of this presents new questions, as Shreveport did not seem to have a recording studio in

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1967, so where the records were made is unclear. However, advertisements in the *Bossier Press* during the second half of 1967 show a man named Dr. Robert Parkman selling the controlling interest in a “well-equipped professional recording studio,” and city directories for Shreveport at the time show a recording studio called Archer Recording Studio at 3309 Line Avenue, almost directly across the street from where Sound City would open in 1969. But it is unclear if any commercial releases were ever made at Archer Recording, as nothing appears in the Discogs website.

The A-side of that single, “Hey, Little Girl” is a slow, swamp-flavored ballad, with a large horn section; Davis is revealed to be as decent a singer as he is a drummer. The B-side, “Money’s So Short” is an early funk groover with significant James Brown influence. The two sides were released as Boss Rock 221, and the band was soon in demand for all kinds of fraternity events at Northwestern State College in Natchitoches. In October of 1968, the Night Owls were mentioned in connection with a Tau Kappa Epsilon party,\(^{195}\) and were hired by the TKEs again in December for a Christmas party.\(^{196}\)

At some time between 1968 and 1971, Davis changed the name of his band to Curly Davis and the Uniques, obviously with no connection to the white Springhill garage band Joe Stampley and the Uniques, which had recorded for Stan Lewis.

Thereafter, probably in late 1971, Davis and his band entered the Sound City Recording Studio at 3316 Line Avenue in Shreveport and recorded “Black Cobra Part 1 and 2,” for the tiny Custom Sound label which was part of the Sound City complex. This recording

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\(^{196}\) “Fraternities Slate Activities,” *Current Sauce* (Northwestern State College, Natchitoches, LA), December 6, 1968, 6.
has become one of the most sought-after funk records in the United States, having auctioned for as much as $400; the song is actually based on a guitar riff lifted from “Play The Music Toronadoes” by the TSU Toronadoes out of Houston, a funk instrumental which had appeared on the Memphis-based Volt subsidiary of Stax despite having been cut by Skipper Lee Frazier’s Ovide label. Curly Davis changed the mood somewhat by changing the tonality, moving the key from B-flat to the relative minor key of G minor. This had the effect of making the two songs sound different, despite the identical guitar riff. Dating this recording is fairly difficult, as Custom Sound almost never placed dates on their releases, as they most likely were usually intended for sale from bandstands rather than national distribution. However, with a release number of Custom Sound 148, we know that it had to be released after September of 1971, when country artist Norma Dragoo was featured in the *Shreveport Journal* for her song “Nightmare” on Custom Sound 144.¹⁹⁷ The title, too, would seem to place the song during the heyday of Black action figures and so-called “Black exploitation” films. It seems likely that “Black Cobra” was cut in either late 1971 or early 1972. It is unclear when Curly Davis and the Uniques broke up, but Davis apparently remained active in the music ministry of his church. He died on October 24, 2009 in Natchitoches, having never been interviewed about his long career in music. One of his band members was named Image Helaire Jr., who would become popular in Louisiana in the 1980s and 1990s as the bluesman B. B. Major.

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EARL CARTER AND THE UPSETTERS

In November of 1968 the Jet Lounge at 118 Marshall Street in Shreveport advertised a band called Earl Carter and the Upsetters “for your dancing pleasure.” Although there had been an earlier Upsetters Band mentioned in connection with Little Joe Wills, it is not clear if there was any connection between that band and this one.

The band was mentioned again, for the last time, in August of 1970, in conjunction with a party sponsored by the Confederate Memorial Medical Center Wives’ Club, which also featured a singer who called himself James Brown Jr.

Information on Earl Carter or on who else was in the Upsetters is lacking, but the band is last mentioned in the mid-1970s.

CIVIL RIGHTS IN SHREVEPORT, 1968

After the momentous events of 1963, Shreveport had been fairly quiet through the mid-1960s. Newspapers reported that most Shreveport restaurants and hotels complied with the Civil Rights Act once it went into effect in 1964, and there was little civil rights activity other than voter registration. The city’s political machine worked through selected Black community leaders and pastors to keep the city quiet, and allowed the numerous cafes, juke joints, and night clubs as another safety valve to defuse tensions. But beneath the surface, Shreveport had a considerable amount of racial hostility. White residents were by and large opposed to racial integration, particularly in schools, and Black communities faced abysmal conditions in housing and sanitation. Police brutality

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was a constant complaint. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis in April of 1968, the equilibrium could not hold.

Some five thousand Shreveporters assembled at Braves Stadium to hear local speakers, including Dr. E. E. Jones and Leon Tarver, speak in memory of Dr. King. The crowd, which included some white residents, joined hands and sang “We Shall Overcome.”

Down at 728 Texas Street, Stan Lewis moved quickly to respond to the tragedy. He advertised Barry Gordy’s album of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speeches called *The Great March To Freedom* in the *Shreveport Sun*, and moved quickly to release tribute songs on his own labels. These included Toussaint McCall’s original song “King For A Day” on Ronn, and the Southerners’ songs “Tragic Story” and “He Taught Non-Violence” on the Jewel label. But Lewis would eventually run into problems with the Black community because of a record from a different label which he was distributing.

In May, the Shreveport police arrested nine Blacks and a white woman as they were talking in front of the Cotton Club on Sprague Street in the Bottoms area, and charged them with loitering. Those arrested included two administrators for the Community Action Program of Caddo and Bossier Parishes (CAP-CAB), the local anti-poverty program. Ten people pled not guilty in city court.

On May 24th and 26th, the Shreveport NAACP, under its new young president B. J. Mason, held two mass meetings to discuss complaints, which included the arrests in

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200 “Memorial Services Held Here For Dr. King,” *Shreveport Sun*, April 11, 1968, 1.


front of the Cotton Lounge, the refusal of a local Pizza Inn to serve an integrated group, and instances of police brutality. But the biggest charges were against Stan Lewis, for allegedly selling in his store a record that called Blacks “nigger,” “nigger-coon,” and “jiggerboo.” At the next mass meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee on Equal Employment voted that the Black community should withdraw its trade from Stan’s Record Service in downtown Shreveport because it had “contributed to racism in this city by selling a racially-offensive record entitled ‘Kajun Ku Klux Klan’ and ‘Looking For A Handout.’” Furthermore, B. J. Mason stated that Blacks comprised a high percentage of Stan’s customer base, but that Lewis had neglected to hire Black sales staff. Mason unveiled the slogan “Soul brothers don’t buy where soul brothers can’t sell.”

The offensive record was recorded by the artist Johnny Rebel (actually Clifford “Pee Wee” Trahan) and released on J. D. Miller’s Rebel label out of Crowley, Louisiana. That Miller made much money by recording such Black blues greats as Lazy Lester and Slim Harpo is one of the ironies of the situation. The Miller family has to this day refused to discuss their involvement with the Rebel label and the anti-Black records released on it.

A week later, B. J. Mason and 35 pickets appeared outside Stan’s flagship store in downtown Shreveport, parading with signs that read “STAN’S UNFAIR TO BLACK CUSTOMERS,” “DON’T SHOP WHERE YOU CAN’T SELL,” and “WE WANT OUR

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204 “Local NAACP Initiates Selective Buying Campaign,” Shreveport Sun, June 6, 1968, 1.
The June 13 Shreveport Sun also printed a response from Stan Lewis, which read in part:

When we were recently contacted by Mr. Mason of the local NAACP concerning the record “Kajun Ku Klux Klan” on the Rebel label, which they felt was offensive to the Negro race, he requested that the record be removed from our shelves and sales stopped. In the interest in the welfare of all of us, and hoping to further improve our community relations, I immediately complied with this request, and the same day, all copies of this record (which had been shipped to us by a manufacturer just as all of our records are) were packaged for shipment and returned to the manufacturer.

Several days later Mr. Mason again contacted me with the request that I hire a certain number of Negro employees in addition to those I already have on my payroll. I complied with this request, not only because it was requested of me, but also because I had been planning for some time to place some Negro employees in my shop. Consequently Laverne Smith and B. B. Davis were placed on the payroll. I told Mr. Mason that other Negroes would be hired by me, however each of you, whether you have your own business, or are a salaried employee, know that there are only a certain number of positions in any business, and I cannot fire my current employees who have been faithful in their jobs in order to hire someone else.

The picketing of Stan’s Record Shop continued through much of the summer, with a few counter-protesters harassing the pickets with the connivance of Shreveport police officers. One officer threatened a young picketer, known as Larry “Boo-Ga-Loo” Cooper, and told him “I have already shot three or four niggers and wouldn’t mind shooting another.” Cooper would become a hero to many young Blacks in Shreveport during the summer.

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By July, B. J. Mason and the Shreveport NAACP announced new boycott targets, Michael’s Drive-In across from Booker T. Washington High School, whose owner had allegedly pistol-whipped a Black teenager; the Fairway Drive-In located where Daddy Yo’s Drive-In had been years before; and the Suprette chain of supermarkets, whose owner’s son had allegedly beaten a boy over a three-dollar debt. The drive-in on Milam Street was the scene of an especially-large and rowdy demonstration of about three hundred teenagers, who jeered anyone patronizing the establishment. That night, the drive-in’s windows were bricked.208 Within a week, both Michael’s Drive-In and the Fairway had closed.209

On July 21, the weekly mass meeting was led by the Black actor Ossie Davis, who was in Shreveport for the filming of the movie *The Slaves.*210 The soul singer James Brown had been offered a role in the film but had refused it, objecting to the character he was asked to play. The filming was taking place at the Buena Vista Plantation about twenty miles south of Shreveport.211 The following Saturday, after Stan Lewis had hired a total of five Black employees, the picket line was removed from Stan’s Record Shops. One of the first to enter and purchase records was Ossie Davis, who also signed

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autographs for his fans. B. J. Mason also announced an agreement with the Suprette chain of supermarkets, and the boycott was lifted from them as well.

Back in 1963, the Shreveport police had used brutality to prevent a freedom march before it ever started, but on August 14, 1968, anywhere from six hundred to two thousand young people staged a march along the sidewalks from Booker T. Washington High School to the Star Theater on Texas Avenue, where they gathered for a political rally, sponsored by the NAACP Youth Council. Commissioner George D’Artois, who had suppressed the 1963 protests, met the students along with the police and fire chiefs, and warned the students that they did not have a parade permit and could not obstruct traffic, but when they agreed to remain on the sidewalk, the march was allowed to go forward. Some of the speeches at the Star Theater afterward reflected the change in attitude following the assassination of Martin Luther King. Lynn Braggs, vice president of the Youth Council, was quoted as saying, “If whitey doesn’t straighten up, he’ll wake up one morning and look towards downtown and see clear to Grambling.” David Boyd, the NAACP Chief of Operations, said, “we ain’t shucking and we ain’t jiving and you ain’t seen nothing yet.” Perhaps the most ominous note was sounded by

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212 “NAACP Lifts Picket Line From Stan’s,” *Shreveport Sun*, August 1, 1968, 1.


214 City officials tended to cite low numbers of participants, while civil rights leaders tended to claim much larger numbers,

Larry “Boo-Ga-Loo” Cooper, who said, “Black people built Shreveport and if we can’t share in its progress and enjoy it then I’ll be damned if anyone else will.”216

Sunday August 25, 1968, was perhaps the most momentous day in the history of Black Shreveport, as over nine thousand people filled Braves Stadium for an event billed as a “Black Rally” by the Shreveport NAACP. The crowd listened to speeches by B. J. Mason, Larry “Boo-Ga-Loo” Cooper, actor Ossie Davis and others; Isaac Greggs, the longtime Shreveport music educator and bandleader, played the spiritual “Nobody Knows The Trouble I See” as a trumpet solo.217

In the wake of the rally, the NAACP began to address the issue of school textbooks in the Caddo Parish schools; there were complaints that the history textbooks used ignored the contributions of Black people. Acting Superintendent Donald Kennedy stated that he did not see the need to change textbooks as long as each school library was properly stocked with books that mentioned the contributions of Blacks; NAACP President B. J. Mason and Youth Council President Larry Cooper did not find this response adequate.218

On Tuesday, September 10, pickets appeared outside high schools across Caddo Parish; those at Black schools were generally allowed to picket without incident, and those at Byrd High School left before police arrived, but those at Fair Park were warned twice by Commissioner D’Artois and Chief Harvey Teasley to leave the school grounds


217 “Over 9,000 Attend Black Rally At Braves Stadium,” Shreveport Sun, August 29, 1968, 1.

218 “Local NAACP Poises For Black History Campaign,” Shreveport Sun, September 5, 1968, 1.
before they were arrested and taken to jail. Eight were charged with disturbing the peace and were placed under both bail bonds and peace bonds, including “Boo-Ga-Loo” Cooper.\textsuperscript{219} A week later on Tuesday evening, a huge rally on the Booker T. Washington High School campus involved a bonfire at which effigies of “whitey” and “Uncle Tom” were burned, along with piles of discarded textbooks, which had been labeled “White Lies.”

The next morning, Black students boycotted most schools in the district, and the largest protest march in Shreveport history occurred from the Booker T. Washington High School campus to the school district’s Materials Center on Midway Avenue, where the school board meeting was taking place. The board’s meeting was primarily concerned with elevating Donald Kennedy from acting superintendent to permanent superintendent, but Black community leaders and teachers were on hand to complain about the textbook issue, with many of the board members objecting to what they perceived as the “threat” of the hundreds of students outside.\textsuperscript{220} By October, the Caddo Parish School Board issued a statement that it would begin to use multi-ethnic textbooks as soon as they were delivered by the textbook distributors. It was a major victory for the Black community in Shreveport.\textsuperscript{221}

Unfortunately, things soon began to unravel. The courts began using peace bonds on members of the Youth Council to make it harder for them to participate in


\textsuperscript{220} “School Boycotts And Rallies Staged By Local NAACP,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, September 19, 1968, 1.

demonstrations, and eventually a dispute between the Youth Council and the adult
NAACP led President B. J. Mason to resign in November. When the members of the
organization rejected his resignation in a meeting, Mason agreed to remain as NAACP
president in Shreveport, and promised a Black Christmas campaign downtown, intended
to get Black Shreveporters to boycott downtown businesses.222 But when Mason tried to
lead a march in downtown Shreveport on Saturday December 14, police blocked off the
entire downtown area, keeping the marchers on the grounds of the Municipal
Auditorium.223 A second attempt at a downtown march on December 21 led to the arrest
of around forty people, including “Boo-Ga-Loo” Cooper.224 It had been perhaps the most
momentous eight months in the history of Shreveport’s Black community, but it all
ultimately came to nothing. B. J. Mason resigned again as NAACP president in 1969, and
left Shreveport. Larry N. Cooper would be a figure on the fringes in and out of
Shreveport over the years, briefly allied with the Republican Party, but never with the
following he had commanded in 1968. The Black community itself would be hopelessly
divided, with a faction actually supporting Police Commissioner George D’Artois in his
re-election campaigns. The marches, rallies, and boycotts of 1968 would largely be
forgotten.

222 “Mason Retracts Resignation; Promises Hard Fight,” Shreveport Sun, November 14, 1968, 1.
CHAPTER 5
SOUL POWER IN SOUND CITY: SOUND CITY RECORDING STUDIO AND
SOUL MUSIC IN SHREVEPORT 1969-1975

One of the primary factors that inhibited the development of a recording scene in
Shreveport was the ongoing lack of recording studios. Rarely had the city ever had more
than one recording option at a time, and between 1963 and 1969, there were no recording
studios in the city at all. There seemed to be something of a divide between the large
amount of talent in the city, and the conception of music as a business worth investing in.
Obviously, there were a number of small record labels, some of them owned by the artists
themselves, and there was Stan Lewis’s large enterprises, including record labels. But
peculiarly Lewis had never invested in a recording studio, although he may have
considered it from time to time. Instead, the formation of Sound City Recording
Corporation by Don Griffin and Jerry Strickland set the wheels in motion for the opening
of Shreveport’s largest and most modern recording studio.

Sound City Recording Corporation first filed for a formal charter at the end of
October of 1968, capitalized at $500,000,\(^1\) and a couple of weeks later announced the
acquisition of all the outstanding stock of a Minden corporation called B.M.C. Inc.,
which had “writers, artists, records and a backlog of approximately 2,000 published but
unproduced songs.”\(^2\) Given the Minden location of B.M.C., it would seem that there was
some connection between the company and Jerry Strickland, as he was from Minden. By
March of 1969, the firm had taken out a permit from the City of Shreveport to erect a

\(^1\) “North Louisiana Firms File For State Charters,” Shreveport Journal, November 1, 1968, 21.
sign at 3316 Line Avenue, the location of their studios, in the former location of Baird’s
Department Store, and in May, announcement was made of the new studios, with Jim
Wilhite named as president of the firm. However, the article in the Journal seems like a
press release published out of date, for by May of 1969, the studios were almost finished,
and the article mentioned “just leased” masters on Bobby James and Vicki Adams from
Sound City to Peter Drake’s Stop label in Nashville, despite the fact that these two singles
had been released in 1968. A Record World article from November of 1968 indicated that
the entire studio had cost $120,000 to build, including a $30,000 custom board and eight-
track recorder designed by Welton Jetton of Audiotronics in Memphis.

After the grand opening of the studio on July 28, Sound City was given a double-
full-page feature article in the Shreveport Journal in September, full of photos of the
inside and outside of the new facility. Jim Wilhite was quoted at length on the potential of
the city: “Some people are asking ‘why Shreveport’ for a major recording studio….It’s
simple….This part of the country has contributed immensely to the recording empire
with writers, artists, producers, et cetera….So there’s no reason why Shreveport can’t be
a sound capital like Nashville, Memphis, Los Angeles and New York.” Although
originally, it seems that the principals in the operation intended a country and possibly
rock operation, Wilhite ended the interview with a prescient quote: “There is an
enormous amount of talent in this area among the Negro population. Talk about soul!

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5 “Sound City Completes Studio,” Record World, November 9, 1968, 56.
They have the real music soul. I’ve heard songs that have never been written down, from people who have never sung professionally in their lives, and the only way to describe it is, well… just fantastic! We want these people!”

GEORGE PERKINS

Gospel and soul singer George Perkins was born on September 25, 1942 in Denham Springs, Louisiana, just outside of Baton Rouge. He grew up singing in churches, and by 1968 had joined a quartet in the area called the Silver Stars. This quartet came to the attention of a Baton Rouge record producer and retail store owner named Ebenezer K. Harrison, who was better known in the state capital as Ebb-Tide. The first two singles which the Silver Stars recorded for Harrison’s Ebenezer’s Gospel imprint did not make much noise, but the third one, a mournful paean to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., yet expressed in only abstract terms, struck a chord with the Black public, coming only a year and a half after the King assassination. The song, “Crying in the Streets,” although recorded with a gospel sound, amounted to a “secular” gospel song, and thus crossed over rapidly into the soul music world on Black radio. It was also credited, for the first time, to George Perkins and the Silver Stars, rather than just the quartet name, and the song was so long that it comprised a Part 1 and a Part 2 on one 45 single. Stripped down to just guitar, bass and drums, it was a most unlikely hit, but a hit it was.

While there is little doubt that the first two Silver Stars singles were recorded in Baton Rouge, there is considerable uncertainty over the recording location of “Crying In The Streets.” The late soul singer Eddie Giles stated that George Perkins’s big hit was

7 “Sound/City Tracks The Shreveport Sound,” Shreveport Journal, September 19, 1969, 47.
recorded at Sound City in Shreveport, and that Giles played guitar on it. There are certain facts that would seem to support that idea. The guitar player on “Crying In The Streets” certainly plays like Giles, who had an unusual and recognizable guitar style. Furthermore, Perkins would return to Shreveport in 1972 to record at Sound City for the Soul Power label. So it is not far-fetched to believe that the song might have been recorded in Shreveport. On the other hand, the original release was on Ebb-Tide’s Golden imprint from Baton Rouge, and it is hard to imagine why he would have sent Perkins to Shreveport to record when there were studios available in Baton Rouge. First released on the Golden label in October of 1969, it was picked up by the Nashville-based Silver Fox label in early 1969, spending nearly three months on the R & B charts. Much like Toussaint McCall’s, Perkins’s career would be largely imprisoned by his first big hit, an achievement he was never able to repeat. Perkins recorded at least one more single for Ebb Tide in 1971, then recorded for Johnny Vincent’s Ace label out of Jackson, Mississippi and an obscure New Orleans label called Second-Line, but none of these singles did anything. So in 1972, Perkins returned to Shreveport and signed with Soul Power Records, a new label which was ostensibly a partnership between Stan Lewis and Dallas producer Bobby Patterson who had relocated to Shreveport. In reality, it seems likely that Stewart Madison, who by this time was running day-to-day operations at Sound City, was also involved, as was Jerry Strickland, who had begun a songwriting partnership with Patterson in late 1969.

Perkins’s first Soul Power side, “A Man In Love,” was co-written by Jerry Strickland, Eddie Giles and Roger Barnes, and it is an amazing piece of Southern soul,
enriched by female background singers and a horn section. The flip side “When You Try To Use A Good Man” is in the same key and a similar mood. Released as Soul Power 108, these songs show that indeed a “Shreveport sound” had developed, a Southern soul sound that was quite different from the sound of Memphis or that of Muscle Shoals.

Perkins’s final single for Soul Power consisted of “Baby You Saved Me,” a mid-tempo tune written by Jerry Strickland and Bobby Patterson, backed with “How Sweet It Would Be,” a tune co-written by Isaac Hayes’s dancer Helen Washington from Memphis and Jackson, Mississippi soul singer Tommy Tate. The latter song had been recorded a year before by the Bar-Kays on their Black Rock album on Volt, and would be recorded by Luther Ingram on his final album on Profile Records in 1986. These two songs were released as Soul Power 113.

Despite the high quality of all four sides Perkins recorded at Sound City in Shreveport, nothing really caught on with the releases. Soul Power was distributed by Stan Lewis’s Jewel-Paula-Ronn complex of labels, which was at its most successful in those years, yet the reality was that the soul music industry was becoming mainstream, and the major labels were trying to find a way to force out the independents. Atlantic had been bought outright by Warner Brothers, and Stax had signed an exclusive distribution deal with CBS, a deal which would ultimately contribute to Stax’s failure. Perkins would return to Baton Rouge, and pursue a career in insurance, although he continued to record for a number of small labels, including one that belonged to the insurance firm he worked for.
BIG SHOWS, 1969

Big shows with national stars continued to come to Shreveport in 1969, beginning with the Temptations who came to the Hirsch Coliseum on the Louisiana State Fairgrounds on February 14, along with Jerry Butler, followed by James Brown at the Hirsch Youth Center on February 28. On April 12, a “Soul Festival” came to the Hirsch Coliseum, featuring Moms Mabley, Jackie Wilson, The Prolifics, and a Miami band called Frank “Super Spade” Seay and the Soul Riders, and on August 15 James Brown was back again at the Hirsch Memorial Youth Center, this time with featured guest Marva Whitney. No further large concerts were advertised in Shreveport during 1969, and notable was the absence of anything at the Municipal Auditorium. The focus of these shows was shifting to the Louisiana State Fairgrounds.

COOPER ROAD YOUTH BANDS

By 1969, the Cooper Road community was a virtual Black city, with about 20,000 residents living in an unincorporated area. There were schools, a branch of the Southern University system, churches and businesses, as well as a sanitation district, but no fire protection or any other form of local government. Mrs. Emerlyon Jackson, a woman consistently involved with efforts to help the youth in the Cooper Road, sponsored a series of Cooper Road Youth Nights at Club 51, and at the first one, which was attended by over a hundred young people, a band of boys twelve to seventeen years old called the

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8 “The Temptations!” Shreveport Sun, February 6, 1969, 5.
Soul Stirrers provided the music. At a second event in March, sponsored by the Citizens Voter League, over 500 attended, with music by the Cooper Road Soul Strutters Youth Band and records played by KOKA DJ Terrible Turk. The existence of these youth bands shows how embedded music was in the cultural life of Black Shreveport, and also how musical traditions were passed from older generations to younger generations.

ZELIA LOGAN

Monroe soul singer Zelia Logan knew from an early age that she wanted to be a singer, and began performing at the age of three with her parents, collectively known as the Logan Family. She graduated from Carroll High School in 1966, and two years later began performing around Monroe as the female vocalist for a band called The Impacts. But somehow, Logan came to the attention of Ray Charles, who had formed a West Coast—based label called Tangerine Records. The label decided to come to Monroe and record Logan at the city’s most popular nightclub, Cain’s Lounge, at 1207 Griffin Street in the Booker T. Washington Addition; local Monroe musicians were used to back her on the recording. When released, the recordings were credited to Logan’s bandleader Dee Andrews rather than Zelia Logan. “Stop! You’re Hurting My Heart” is a fairly fast-paced soul dancer, with Logan’s voice backed by female background singers, a full band and horn section. The B-side is the more outstanding of the two, a slow sultry ballad.

16 D. Isaac Andrews was the band director at Carroll High School, and was the leader of the band that backed Logan on her two sides.
which highlights Logan’s vocals to good advantage. One of the unique characteristics of North Louisiana was the number of high-quality female soul singers in the region, and Logan certainly highlighted that fact. Unfortunately, the record, although distributed by ABC, failed to gain traction outside of Monroe, and Logan did not record again. Rather, she has continued to perform around Monroe, both in gospel and classical settings, and also as a member of the band Delta Blue. The building where her two recordings were made in late 1968 or early 1969 later became the Elite Lounge. It is still standing, although abandoned and awaiting an uncertain fate.

ROCK AND THE FANTASTIC ROADRUNNERS REVUE

The soul band known as the Road Runners was formed by students at Bethune Junior-Senior High School in the Mooretown neighborhood of Shreveport in early 1969. The members included Ben Green on drums, Ricky Silas on guitar, Luther Mason on bass, Homer Allen on trumpet, and Dorsey Summerfield on saxophone. Summerfield was the only non-student in the group; he was actually a band director at Bethune. The first mention of the group in newspapers in 1969 was from the newspaper of Barksdale Air Force Base, mentioning a May Day Dance on the base featuring the Roadrunners combo,¹⁷ and the group continued to be booked frequently on the base. In October, the Shreveport NAACP sponsored a large Soul Festival in the Municipal Auditorium which booked nearly every young Black band in the city, including the Road Runners,¹⁸ and in December the band was booked for the annual dance of the Royal and Royalettes Social

ⁱ⁸ “Local Talent To Be Feature Of NAACP’s ‘Soul Festival’ Here Saturday,” Shreveport Sun, October 30, 1969, 1.
Club at the Crystal Ballroom of the Washington-Youree Hotel, this time billed as the Fantastic Roadrunner Revue.\textsuperscript{19}

At some point in 1969, the Road Runners entered the new Sound City Recording Studios at 3316 Line Avenue and recorded two incredible funk instrumentals; “Every Man For Himself” and “No Names Will Be Called” were driven by Ben Green’s funky yet rudimental drum style, to which were added Ricky Silas’s guitar and the B-3 organ. Both sides had a tightness that was somewhat amazing for a group largely comprised of high-school students. Because Sound City’s in-house label RPI Records was only a country label at the time, the two songs were released instead on Custom Sound, the label Sound City used for custom releases; it seems likely that the band in question paid for the records to be made, and then the singles were sold from the bandstands, out of the trunks of cars, or on consignment at local record stores like Stan’s or Bayou Records. The Road Runners single, released as Custom Sound 1023 in 1969, is extremely rare; out of two thousand pressed, at one point only nine had been found. More copies have since surfaced, and the record sells for slightly less money than it used to. It has also been anthologized on several funk compact discs, and the single has been pressed again on vinyl. All the same, it did not make any noise on a national scale at the time, and the Road Runners did not record again.

They were, however, still active in the new year of 1970, when on March 30 they were booked for the first Youth Night for the young people of the Cooper Road at Club 51; again, the band was billed as “The Fantastic Roadrunner Revue” and “The Hardtime

Trio.”²⁰ By some accounts, the Hardtime Trio consisted of the Road Runners’s “roadies” who hauled their equipment to and from gigs, but unlike most “roadies,” these men could perform in their own right and were made part of the revue. A further article about the same event indicated that the Road Runners were managed by Hayes Gipson.²¹ The band was again on hand on April 27 at Club 51 for yet another Cooper Road Youth Night,²² and on June 27, they were booked for the Potentate’s Ball in the ballroom of the Union Masonic Temple at the corner of Murphy and Allen streets; they were referred to on that occasion as “one of the top aggregations in this area.”²³ An article about the event after it occurred indicated that the ball was held at Club 51 instead of the Masonic Temple, and that the Roadrunners “did their thing.”²⁴

By the fall of 1970, the people of Cooper Road were trying to raise enough money to purchase a fire engine and form a volunteer fire department; the nearly 20,000 residents in the area were outside the Shreveport city limits, and fire had been a constant threat. Now, with schools and apartments and a college campus in the area, fire protection was an absolute necessity. To raise funds, the organizers got creative, scheduling benefits including ladies’ teas, fish fries, and dances. Usually involved in these activities was the indefatigable Emerlyon Jackson, who was director of the Cooper Road Youth Council.

²³ “Potentate’s Ball To Be Held Saturday Night At Masonic Temple,” Shreveport Sun, June 18, 1970, 7.
An October 14, 1970 benefit dance at Club 51 featured the Rocking Roadrunners,25 and fire extinguishers were being sold at Lear and Terry Grocery at 1355 Cooper Road, which was the closest thing to a city hall for the unincorporated area.26 Cooper Road would ultimately get its fire truck, but the Road Runners disappeared after 1970.

ABRAHAM AND THE CASANOVAS

Abraham Ester and his band the Casanovas remained popular in the Shreveport area, playing for teenaged parties and fraternity/sorority events, such as a ’69 Year of Aquarius Party at the Progressive Men’s Club in Shreveport in May of 1969.27 In July of 1970, his band, along with Eddie Giles and the Jive Five, was chosen to provide music for outdoor summer dances sponsored by Shreveport Parks and Recreation and Local 116 of the American Federation of Musicians; the Casanovas were scheduled to play every Thursday at Valencia High School in the Stoner Hill neighborhood.28 They were hired again in the summer of 1973 for a fifteen-week Shreveport Parks and Recreation series of outdoors concerts in city parks, along with Justin Johnson and the Funk Factory and Eddie Giles and the Jive Five,29 and chosen to be part of the local segment of the Labor Day Telethon for Muscular Dystrophy, held at the Municipal Auditorium in 1974.30


The Casanovas also continued to record in 1969 and afterward. With Sound City now open, Dee Marais began to move his recording sessions to the new studio in town, and Abraham Ester also seemed to shift his orientation toward musical changes that were occurring after 1968. All of his recordings after 1969 were basically funk instrumentals (or dance songs with limited lyrics), most of which were of extended length and split over the two sides of 45 RPM singles. The first of these was “I-Cee Part 1 & 2,” which was released in 1969 on the Peermont subsidiary of Murco as Peermont 1049, which was followed by “Kangaroo Part 1 & 2” which Marais arranged to be picked up by the Wand subsidiary of Chicago-based Scepter Records. after it had been initially released as Peermont 1057. Although the single did not have a national impact, it does demonstrate how amazingly tight the Casanovas were as a band, which was basically true of most of the Shreveport funk bands of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

At the end of 1969, Dee Marais basically shut down the operations of Murco and Peermont; Dick Martin had divorced his wife and moved away from Shreveport, and Marais had basically been running the operation alone. Fearing that at some point Martin might resurface and want a share of the proceeds, Marais set up his own record labels called Hy Sign, Hy Rok and Hy Tree in 1970 that he used to continue recording artists. Abraham recorded “Hook and Boogie Part 1 & 2” in 1972, a modernization of Eddie Bo’s “Hook and Sling” from 1969, which had been recorded at Ruston, Louisiana; this instrumental was released as Hy Sign 3511, and in 1973, Abraham recorded his last single “Funky Spider” b/w “Scared Fly,” although the B-side was basically a Part 2 of the A-side. The two sides were released as Hy Sign 3514. While Murco singles were not
widely distributed, the Hy Sign releases were even rarer, and they seemed to be distributed primarily around the Shreveport area. Abraham Ester would not record again, but remained active in the area through the 1980s.

**REUBEN BELL & EDDIE GILES, 1969**

The departure of Dick Martin from Shreveport led to the demise of the Murco label; Dee Marais continued on with his new labels Hy Rok, Hy Sign, and Hy Tree, but he probably felt that Eddie Giles and Reuben Bell were worthy of better promotion than he could provide, and toward that end, he arranged for them to be picked up by one of Shelby Singleton’s labels in Nashville. Marais and Singleton had been friends for years, and Marais had helped Singleton get his start in the music business. Both Giles and Bell were placed on Silver Fox, the record label that was a joint venture between Leland Rogers and Shelby Singleton, but the tracks that were released had been recorded by Dee Marais at Sound City in Shreveport.

Reuben Bell’s release on Silver Fox was simply a reissue of Murco 1052, containing “Action Speaks Louder Than Words” b/w “Too Late.” Marais and Bell probably hoped that the potentially larger distribution of Shelby Singleton’s enterprises could increase these recordings’ impact, but it sadly did not. By contrast, Eddie Giles’s Silver Fox single “So Deep In Love” b/w “That’s How Strong My Love Is” was intended for release on Murco but never came out on the label, having received its release on Silver Fox instead. “So Deep In Love” has a bit of a different sound from Giles’ previous recordings; although it is one of Giles’s faster-paced songs, it does not particularly resemble “Losin’ Boy,” and it has a slicker sound, possibly reflecting the capabilities of
the new Sound City studio facilities. The opposite side is a cover, one of only two in Giles’s career. “That’s How Strong My Love Is,” is a Memphis soul ballad written by Memphis songwriter and promoter Roosevelt Jamison; first recorded by O. V. Wright in Memphis, it was almost immediately covered by Otis Redding at Stax, and then covered by the Rolling Stones in England. It has been covered extensively by many groups in both pop and soul music, from Candi Staton to Humble Pie, and is one of the most recorded songs in soul music. Giles’s reading follows the original Wright version which was recorded for Goldwax. Otis Redding made significant structural changes to the song in his version which almost made it a different song; it is his version which the Rolling Stones covered in 1965. Dee Marais and Shelby Singleton had reason to believe in this single by Eddie Giles. The recording quality from the new studio was superior, and the label had plenty of marketing and promotion capabilities and strong distribution. Peculiarly, nothing happened with it, and Giles remained in Shreveport.

**WANDA DAVIS**

Minneapolis soul singer Wanda Davis was born in Shreveport, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Obie Williams in the Shreveport neighborhood of Cedar Grove; she graduated from Union High School in 1967 and then moved to Minneapolis. Signed to the local Project Soul label, she recorded one single, “Save Me” b/w “Take Care,” backed by a band called the Soul Sensations, who provided a funky, jazzy background for Davis’s voice.31 “Save Me” was a cover of an Aretha Franklin tune, and “Take Cover” a cover of a June Conquest tune, but, unbeknownst to Davis, these sides became very popular with

soul fans overseas. Because they did not become hits at the time, after a few years, Davis moved back to Shreveport. Her song “Save Me” had been anthologized on the Now Again label’s *Midwest Funk* compact disc, but Davis did not seem to have been aware of it.

In 2014, however, the Minneapolis-based Secret Stash label contacted Wanda Davis and convinced her to record again; interestingly, she chose “Where Did You Sleep Last Night,” also known as “Black Gal” or “In The Pines,” a song made famous by another Shreveporter, legendary folk singer Huddie Ledbetter, and she performed several shows around that time.

**NAACP SOUL FESTIVAL**

Actor, playwright, and activist B. J. Mason had resigned as president of the Shreveport NAACP in May of 1969, and had moved to Los Angeles. He was replaced by David Boyd, but the organization quickly disappeared from the newspapers for the most part. Perhaps to get the local chapter in front of the public eye again, the NAACP in Shreveport decided to hold a Soul Festival at the Municipal Auditorium on November 11, 1969. The show featured KOKA DJ Gay Poppa, the King Cobras, Eddie Giles and the Jive Five, Rock and the Road-Runners, Phil “Curley” Davis and the Night Owls, and Adolph and the Entertainers.^{32} Unfortunately, there is no extant account of the event after it was held, so we know nothing of how well it was attended, or whether everyone who was advertised actually appeared. Worse, there do not seem to be any existing pictures,

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^{32} “Local Talent To Be Feature of NAACP’s Soul Festival Here Saturday,” *Shreveport Sun*, October 30, 1969, 1.
flyers, or recordings of the event either. Rarely were so many Black Shreveport bands on one stage on the same day.

THE JOHNNY RIVERS DAY POP FESTIVAL

Along the same lines, a club called The Bayou Club at 7500 Mansfield Road in Shreveport extensively advertised a “pop festival” in honor of what they called “Johnny Rivers Day.” The rather bizarre event advertised “free beer” and was scheduled to run from 7 in the morning on December 6 to 7 in the evening, with a $5 admission charge and free beer until 4 PM. The bands advertised as appearing were Buddy Williams and the Soul Saints (not encountered elsewhere), The Family Tree (a Shreveport rock group), Eddie Giles and the Jive Five, and Adolph and the Entertainers.

There is some question as to whether the event even took place, as there is no account of it after the fact, and nobody can remember playing it or attending it. On the other hand, the event was advertised extensively in both the Shreveport Times and the Shreveport Journal, which would preclude any kind of joke or hoax. If it did not occur, it must have been cancelled for a reason. Suffice it to say that no photos, flyers, or footage have surfaced of the Johnny Rivers Day Pop Festival.

JOE SIMON AT GRAMBLING

By late 1969, Joe Simon was one of the more popular soul performers in the United States, and although he was based in California, he was originally from Simmesport, Louisiana, in the central part of the state. Perhaps for that reason, the Student Government Association of Grambling College decided to bring him to campus for a show at the T. H. Harris Auditorium on December 11, which ran from 8 PM to
midnight. Simon told the *Alexandria News Leader* that in Simmesport there was a rich musical tradition, and that he had grown up listening to jazz, gospel and rhythm and blues.³³ This was the first concert in what would become a growing trend of bringing top name artists to the Grambling campus.

**THE KING COBRAS**

The band known as the King Cobras was founded in the Eden Gardens neighborhood of Shreveport, through the encouragement of neighborhood adult musicians Roy Hinson and Clarence Sanders. Former band member Dr. Bernard Kimble recalled that most of the members were sixteen years of age, and went to Eden Gardens High School until it was closed in 1970; in the school integration process in Shreveport which was called the “crossover,” they were transferred to Captain Shreve High School, where they continued to play as a band. As young people, they could even play in nightclubs, provided that they were supervised by adults and did not mingle with the audience. Kimble recalled them playing at the Hollywood Palace and Gay Poppa’s club on Texas Street.³⁴

Formed in 1968, the King Cobras were soon competitors with the Roadrunners for the #1 spot among Black bands in Shreveport, and the bands often battled at the Hollywood Palace to large crowds. The King Cobras consisted of Bernard Kimble, Justin Johnson, Francis Johnson, Artis Case, Carl Rose, Willie “Frogman” Henderson, Essie

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³⁴ Interview with the author, October 14, 2023.
Johnson, Robert Anderson, and Mary Kimble; Justin Johnson was the bandleader, and he came up with the name King Cobras.

The King Cobras are first mentioned in print in connection with the NAACP’s Soul Festival in the Shreveport Municipal Auditorium on November 11, 1969, and in February of 1970, they were part of a talent show held by the Black Cultural Theater at the Celebrity Club on Line Avenue, along with another band called the Black-A-Delics. In August 1970, the King Cobras played at Club 51 as part of the effort to help the Cooper Road community buy a new fire truck for their volunteer fire department, and in January of 1971, they were hired for a Fair Park High School Mardi Gras Party at the American Legion hall.

The move from Eden Gardens High School to Captain Shreve High School would have been traumatic for the members of the King Cobras at any point, but occurring in the middle of a school year, during the Christmas break, it was very disruptive, and the young musicians were not sure what to expect. As it turned out, they were fairly well-accepted in their new high school, likely because of the universal power of music. When Captain Shreve High School held their Showcase ’71 talent show in March of 1971, the King Cobras were participants, along with the Captain Shreve Stage Band, the band Dark Horse, and the George Hancock Quartet.

35 “Local Talent To Be Feature of NAACP’s Soul Festival Here Saturday,” Shreveport Sun, October 30, 1969, 1.


39 “Shreve High Talent Show This Week,” Shreveport Times, March 17, 1971, 5.
In August 1971, the King Cobras were engaged for a very special event for the young people of the Cooper Road, by Mrs. Emerlyon Jackson, who was so often involved with activities for the youth of the community:

Youngsters who live in the Cooper Road area who have never seen a parade will sit curbside tomorrow and watch a parade organized for them according to Emerlyon Jackson, parade chairman and Cooper Road Youth director.

The 400-500 participants that Mrs. Jackson said are expected to take part in the parade will march to the Southern University Science Lecture Hall for the first annual “State Tea,” featuring products from all 50 states, with emphasis on Louisiana products.

A band, the King Cobras, volunteered to play children’s songs for the youngsters on the campus, since a lot of the children had never seen a band play, she said.

The participants will meet at the Willow Baptist Church, 2060 Stanley Road, at 2 p.m. today, and begin the parade at 2:30 p.m., according to Mrs. Jackson.

Many small children will march or ride in the parade, including a young king and queen chosen for the occasion. Cars will be decorated with a symbol associated with each state to carry out the parade theme, she added.40

The King Cobras recorded their only single at Sound City Recording Studio on Line Avenue in 1969. The song, “Get Frogish Part 1 & 2” had started with an organ riff that Willie Henderson had come up with during a rehearsal, and his nickname “Frogman” led to the song’s name. Like their rivals the Roadrunners, the King Cobras’ single reveals them to be a band at the cutting edge of what was being called “funk,” a style that emphasized the band and musicians as much as it did vocals, heavily influenced by the innovations in James Brown’s band since 1967. Like the Roadrunners’ “Every Man For Himself,” the King Cobras’ “Get Frogish” is among the rarest of American funk records,

and highly prized by collectors. It was released as Custom Sound 1010; while the record has no specific date on it, because Custom Sound 1011 is known to be from 1969, it is pretty certain that the single was released in 1969. Like all Custom Sound releases, it was probably pressed in limited quantity, and sold mainly at shows.

Dr. Bernard Kimble indicated that the King Cobras broke up, primarily because they graduated from high school and scattered, with some going to college and others entering the military or going to work. Some, notably Justin Johnson, continued a career in music. One of the odder facts that Dr. Kimble noted was that three former members became involved in the gospel ministry, including Kimble, Willie “Frogman” Henderson, and the drummer Robert Anderson.

**SUNROSE “GAY POPPA” RUTLEDGE**

Sunrose Rutledge, better known to Shreveporters as the “Gay Poppa,” had come to the city as a DJ for KOKA radio station. He later formed a promotion firm to bring big national acts to town, and opened a nightclub on Texas Street, but he also recorded a much-beloved single for the Custom Sound label that is still remembered locally and which has puzzled record collectors for years.

The story seems to begin with a producer named Frank Virtue in Philadelphia, who produced a 1968 record by a female soul group called The Sweet Delights entitled “Baby, Be Mine.” With a funky backing track featuring a large horn section, the track must have been fairly popular, and got picked up by the Atco subsidiary of Atlantic, which guaranteed national distribution and promotion. But Virtue did something interesting by putting an instrumental version of the backing track on the other side for...
entitled “Paul’s Midnight Ride,” by the Delights Orchestra. This practice of putting an instrumental “version” on the opposite side of a single was common in Jamaica, but much rarer in the United States. In Jamaica, these “versions” became backing tracks for dee-jay “toasting,” an early form of rapping over instrumentals, and that is what seems to have happened with “Paul’s Midnight Ride.”

In early 1969, Gay Poppa seems to have created the song “Mercy Baby” over the “Paul’s Midnight Ride” instrumental, and released it on the A-side of Custom Sound 1007. Notably, no credit is given for writing to anyone, not Frank Virtue nor the Delights Orchestra, and given other strange things regarding this story, it is not clear whether it is in fact Sunrose Rutledge who is singing on the record. If it is Rutledge on the recording, then it is clear that only his voice would have been recorded at Sound City and not the backing track. The B-side, “Gay Poppa Cha-Cha” would also seem to be based on a much older instrumental track, but nobody has suggested a source for it. The vocal on this side clearly announces “Gay Poppa Cha-Cha” and resembles the vocal on the opposite side, suggesting that the voice is indeed that of Sunrose Rutledge.

However, the “Paul’s Midnight Ride” track appears again with the title “Mercy Baby” on the Solo label out of Wichita, Kansas, which was part of the family of labels owned by nightclub owner Dick Smart, which have been thoroughly anthologized by the superb Numero label out of Chicago. This version of “Mercy Baby” was credited to Tim Jacobs, a Wichita radio personality, and released in 1972, three or four years after the Gay Poppa release on Custom Sound. Yet a careful listen to the record suggests that it has the same vocals as the Gay Poppa release. Likewise, the Solo release does not credit Frank
Virtue either. How all of these releases link together is unclear, as is how the Gay Poppa and Tim Jacobs releases avoided litigation from Atlantic or Frank Virtue. What seems likely is that the Gay Poppa and Tim Jacobs releases were used promotionally on local radio stations and were possibly given away by the stations at events, thus remaining under the radar. It is possible that neither Atlantic nor Virtue ever knew about them at all.

**FREDERICK DOUGLASS KIRKPATRICK**

The Rev. Frederick Douglass Kirkpatrick was born in Haynesville, Louisiana, northeast of Shreveport, in 1933. He was taught to play guitar in the “Sawmill Quarters” of Haynesville by his brother Robert, who later became a blues musician in Dallas; both brothers attended Grambling College. Kirkpatrick became a folk musician, as well as a civil rights activist, and was active in the civil rights movement in Jonesboro, Louisiana, helping to form the Deacons of Defense and Justice, an armed Black organization intended to protect the Black community from the Ku Klux Klan. He was later an instructor at Grambling before becoming well known during the Poor People’s March and Resurrection City demonstrations in Washington, D.C. during the summer of 1968.

In January of 1970, Kirkpatrick came to the Municipal Auditorium in Shreveport, performing in conjunction with James Collier, who had appeared on his first Folkways album release, and with Chicago singer Wende Smith. Kirkpatrick would ultimately record three albums for Folkways Records, and would organize a Louisiana Folk Fest in 1978. Kirkpatrick, an ordained minister, moved with his wife to New York, where he pastored a Baptist church before his sudden death in 1986.

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JAMES BROWN IN GRAMBLING AND SHREVEPORT, 1970

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, James Brown was arguably the most popular Black entertainer in the United States. His musical style had a large impact on the various young Black bands that appeared across the country, including the Roadrunners and the King Cobras in Shreveport. He had appeared at least once a year in Shreveport since 1967, and was often booked in Monroe as well at that city’s Civic Center, but in 1970, for the first time, he was booked to play on the Grambling College campus on February 6, and then at the Coliseum on the Louisiana State Fairgrounds in Shreveport on February 7.\textsuperscript{42} Peculiarly, there was no mention of either show in the newspapers of Monroe, Ruston, or Shreveport afterward, but the fact that Brown was booked to appear on Grambling’s campus again in October of 1970 would suggest that at least the Grambling show was a success.

THE CELEBRITY SUPPER CLUB

In May of 1970, advertising appeared for the Celebrity Supper Club at 7937 Line Avenue in the Cedar Grove area of Shreveport. This was one of a sequence of membership-based clubs in Shreveport, which was somewhat unusual for a city in which liquor was legal. The intent might have been to project an atmosphere of exclusivity, or perhaps to reduce the chances of police raids, which were common in those bars and nightclubs which were open to the general public. However, Public Safety Commissioner George W. D’Artois was not above raiding private membership clubs either, especially those frequented by Black patrons.

The press release announcing the opening of the supper club stated that a small combo would provide the entertainment for three shows nightly; while the musicians were not mentioned, Miss Evelyn, formerly of the Roadrunners, and Jimmy Soul, formerly of Reuben Bell’s Belltones were mentioned as the vocalists. The Celebrity did not last long as a private club, but the building remained a venue for live music for several years under various owners.

**STAN’S SHOW OF APPRECIATION**

On June 13, 1970, Stan’s Record Service was twenty-two years old, and to celebrate that fact Stan’s son Lenny Lewis planned a free outdoor concert on the corner of Common and Travis streets in downtown Shreveport. The show was held from noon to 4 PM, and featured Eddie Giles and Dori Grayson, as well as radio personalities B. B. Davis of KOKA and Steve Kelley of KEEL. The *Journal* reported that the show coincided with the grand opening of Stan’s expanded store at 728 Texas Street, and also featured Reuben Bell, and rock bands Rain and the Five By Five. Lenny Lewis was quoted as expecting 1500 to attend. Unfortunately, as is the case for so many Shreveport music festivals and events, no reviews, photographs, or film footage after the fact ever surfaced, so there is no way of knowing how many actually attended the event.

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BUSY BEE BAR

While most of the venues that booked live music were in the downtown area or adjacent to it, occasionally bars and clubs elsewhere in the city attempted to book live music and draw larger crowds. One such bar was the Busy Bee at 513 E. 70th Street in Cedar Grove, which first appeared in the Shreveport papers in January of 1969, when it was advertising for a barmaid.46 A man named Darrell Irvine bought the bar in February of 1970,47 and by June was advertising his upstairs room “The Honeycomb Room” as “Shreveport’s newest cocktail lounge” with entertainment every Friday and Saturday night.48 A week later, the Busy Bee was advertising a “Soul Festival” with a Friday night show by The Check Mates with Linda Small and Jiving Joe Davis, and a Saturday night show by The Eliminators. While neither of these bands is ever mentioned again in print, they would both seem to be Shreveport area groups. Linda Small was a student at Eden Gardens High School, and had been one of three hundred students to protest the closing of their school and their impending transfer to Captain Shreve High School in January of 1970. After that weekend, the Busy Bee is not mentioned again. The place where it was located is now a vacant lot.

LARRY WEST

In 1970, Dee Marais had shut down the Murco and Peermont operations due to the departure of Dick Martin from Shreveport, and had replaced them with three labels of his own, Hy Sign, Hy Rok, and Hy Tree. Larry West was the only artist to record on Hy


Rok, and Dee Marais could recall little about him, suggesting that he might have been from Texas. Since he was never mentioned in any Shreveport newspapers, that might well be the case. “Another Row of Heartaches” is a Bobby “Blue” Bland-styled soul-blues arrangement which was recorded in 1970 and issued on Hy Rok 117, backed with “Cracking Up.” West does not seem to have recorded again.

**SLIM & THE SOULFUL SAINTS**

Alabama guitarist Stanford “Slim” Barnes put together the band Slim and the Soulful Saints in Montgomery in 1970, featuring saxophonist Larry “Fish” Fendley and drummer Chip Remell, although Fendley and Barnes had played together in an earlier band. The new group became the house band at a Montgomery night spot called the Tijuana Lounge, and then Barnes took out a personal loan to fund a recording trip to Fame Recording Studios in Muscle Shoals to record Hendley’s original tune “Fish Head” and a cover of Z. Z. Hill’s “Someone To Love Me.” What isn’t clear is how these recordings ended up on “Dandy” Don Logan’s tiny Cal label in Shreveport. Logan was an employe of Stan Lewis at the Jewel-Paula-Ronn family of labels, but he had his own family of labels too, which seemed to function more as a custom operation, pressing records for bands and choirs on demand. The vast majority of releases on his several labels were gospel, and indeed Slim and the Soulful Saints is the only secular release on the Cal label. It also happened to be the first release on the label, released in 1970 as Cal 200. Like Hy Sign and Custom Sound, Logan’s labels were very sporadically distributed and extremely rare. Although the Shreveport address on the label caused some to speculate that the Soulful Saints might have been from Shreveport, the band has always
been based in Alabama and is still quite active there. A version of Slim and the Soulful Saints has been performing in Montgomery and Wetumpka as recently as 2022.

**BOBBY PATTERSON**

Dallas soul singer and guitarist Bobby Patterson was born on March 13, 1944, and did most of his recording for the Dallas-based Abnak label owned by John Howard Abnor, whom Patterson had met at the University of Texas at Arlington. Most of Patterson’s Abnak recordings were made in Dallas; two were made in Memphis at American Sound Studio, and two in Muscle Shoals. But Patterson’s next to last Abnak single was made at Sound City in Shreveport in 1970, apparently through a relationship with songwriter and producer Jerry Strickland, as Patterson recalled years later:

“If A Man Ever Loved A Woman (Baby I Loved You),” (Jetstar 119) was the first song I ever wrote with Jerry Strickland. Me and Jerry wrote a lot of songs together. I think I first met Jerry at a club in Shreveport where Geater Davis and Reuben Bell used to play. Jerry was a country writer and we just clicked. I put all the music and half the lyrics and sometimes more than that. I used to meet him halfway between Dallas and Shreveport in Tyler, Texas and we’d get a hotel room and just write songs.49

“If A Man Ever Loved A Woman” was an easy-going ballad, as was the B-side, “You Taught Me How To Love, “ which had been written by Patterson, Strickland and Shreveport soul singer Reuben Bell. The resulting single was released as Jetstar 119, and had a slicker and more polished sound than a lot of Patterson’s previous releases. The good vibes of this initial Sound City session probably played a role in Patterson’s decision to move to Shreveport in 1971.

DARREL ISAAC ANDREWS

Monroe bandleader and trumpet player Darrel Isaac Andrews graduated from Southern University in 1949 and was hired that same year as the band director of Carroll High School in Monroe, a position he held for thirty years, retiring in 1979. In 1971, he released a self-produced single on his own Switch label which produced a minor sensation in and around Monroe, the soul ballad “You Gotta Love Me” b/w the funky instrumental “Spider Soul.” The ballad, although a beautiful song, suffers from Andrews’s weak vocals, but the instrumental became extremely popular in Monroe, to the point that the local Black weekly paper mentioned that it could be purchased at Dave’s Record Shop at 2301 1/2 DeSiard Street. Like all such funky instrumentals, the single has become popular again during the funk resurgence brought on by DJ culture.

Andrews moved to Shreveport, where he wrote orchestral pieces for the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra, and became composer-in-residence for the Shreveport Regional Arts Council. He died on June 19, 2016.

SOUL INC.

The band Soul Inc. was one of a number of local bands in Shreveport that were mentioned only once in local media. The name appeared as entertainment in connection with a Benefit Dance and Domino Tournament sponsored by the Cooper Road Volunteer Fire Department in March of 1971. Presumably Soul Inc. was made up of young people from the Cooper Road community.51

51 “Cooper Road Dance and Domino Tourney Slated,” Shreveport Sun, March 18, 1971, 7.
THE NEW EMBASSY LOUNGE

In late May, Shreveport entrepreneur Jerry Thomas announced the opening of the New Embassy Lounge at 4140 Hollywood Avenue in the Mooretown area. Featuring a lounge, bar, dance hall, and restaurant, the Embassy proclaimed itself “Shreveport’s finest and most elegant establishment,” and booked Eddie Giles and the Jive Five for its grand opening on May 27, 1971.52 Barely a month later, Thomas told the Shreveport Sun he was considering legal action against the King Cobras band and their manager, because they had agreed to play for a Roulettes Social Club party at the Embassy on June 19th and then did not appear, playing instead for an event at the Masonic Temple across town.53 Thomas apparently never filed the suit, and the incident was probably the result of a misunderstanding.

The establishment must not have lived up to expectations, because in February of 1972, the building and furnishings were advertised for rent.54 The building is now the Mooretown Family Medical Clinic.

BIG SHOWS, 1971

The year 1971 was a big year for live music concerts in the city of Shreveport, beginning with a return of James Brown to the Municipal Auditorium on February 7, along with the JB’s, Vicki Anderson, and Bobby Byrd.55 The next month, the Ike and Tina


53 “Niteclub Operator To Take Action Against Local Band,” Shreveport Sun, June 24, 1971, 1.

54 “For Rent The Embassy Club,” Shreveport Sun, February 24, 1972.

Turner Revue came to the Hirsch Coliseum on the Louisiana State Fairgrounds, and in July bluesman B. B. King came to the Municipal Auditorium for a show along with local rock and rollers the Bad Habits, and Dallas soul singer Bobby Patterson, who was in the process of moving to Shreveport. Concerts at the Monroe Civic Center began to be advertised in Shreveport papers as well, such as a July 8th show featuring the Ike and Tina Turner Revue with B. B. King.

In August, the Municipal Auditorium was the site of a “Soul Smash,” featuring such nationally-known artists as Clarence Carter, David Ruffin, Candi Staton, and Jackie Moore, and later that month, James Brown was back for his second Shreveport show in a year, this time featuring comedian Clay Tyson, the Stylistics and Brenda and the Tabulations.

With 1971 an election year in Louisiana, a candidate for the state legislature, L. C. Pendleton, brought actor Ossie Davis and jazz trumpeter Freddie Hubbard and his band to Shreveport for a fundraising event at the Washington-Youree Hotel; Davis spoke to the crowd, urging them to back Black candidates for statewide office.

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DEATH OF LAWRENCE PATTON AND WALTER LEBEAU

The last two months of 1971 were sad for Shreveport’s Black community, as two very prominent figures in the city’s music and entertainment scene passed away within a month of each other. Local Black entrepreneur Lawrence Patton, known as the owner of Pat’s Service Station, died on November 15, 1971 of heart failure; although his obituary did not mention it, he was a consistent promoter of concerts and dances, as well as sports events, and briefly owned the Palace Park nightclub.62

On December 21, 1971, organist and pianist Walter “Butchie Boy” LeBeau passed away, who for years had led the house band at the El Grotto Club on Milam Street, as well as being a favored entertainer on the Barksdale Air Force Base.63 Despite nearly thirty years of performing, he was never recorded.

VERNON “GEATER” DAVIS

Blues guitarist and singer Vernon “Geater” Davis was born on January 29, 1946, in Kountze, Texas, a small town north of Beaumont; the constant reference to Nacogdoches as a birthplace may have resulted from Davis feeling that nobody had ever heard of Kountze. He was one of eleven children, and acquired his first electric guitar in 1957. Moving to Conroe in 1960, he received lessons from local musicians, and also occasionally from T-Bone Walker, who had relatives in the small town. In 1963 he moved to Houston and joined a local band called The Twisters; Houston was a booming music and entertainment city at the time, and Davis likely could have progressed there, but in


1965 he was drafted into the Army, where he was stationed at Fort Polk in Louisiana. After discharge, Davis lived briefly at Nacogdoches and then moved to Shreveport, Louisiana in 1967. Davis moved into the Cedar Grove neighborhood, not far from Reuben Bell’s house, and soon joined Elgie Brown and the Downbeats, one of the city’s premiere bands. Later, Davis joined Ted Taylor’s band in late 1968, touring with him for almost seventh months. But it was Reuben Bell who became Davis’s closest friend in Shreveport, and who mentored him on the process of songwriting: “Reuben is a super-writer. You know, I didn’t know anything about writing until Reuben broke me in.”

The opening of the Bossier Strip to Black performers in 1968 changed the scene in the Shreveport area significantly. Davis was performing regularly at the Fountain Lounge with Eddie Giles, while Reuben Bell was down the street at Kim’s. Jerry Beach was playing guitar with Bell at the time, and had apparently written “I’ll Play The Blues For You” then. Davis would record the song, and three others, as part of a demo tape recorded at Sound City either in late 1969 or early 1970, sent to Stax Records in Memphis. The results of the demo were somewhat disappointing for Geater, as instead of picking him up as an artist, Stax chose to have their bluesman Albert King record “I’ll Play The Blues For You.” As a result, the song became an immediate blues standard.

However, when Nashville-based promoter Allen Orange came through Shreveport promoting Joe Simon for Nashville record man John Richbourg, he was brought to Kim’s

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65 This is disputed by Reuben Bell, who intimated in an interview that he and Geater Davis had written “I’ll Play The Blues For You.” However, Davis in the interviews Kuhn used to frame his *Juke Blues* article does not dispute Beach’s authorship.
by KOKA DJ “Bird Brain” Davis, the visit that was recalled by Reuben Bell. It is possible that Orange was already aware of “I’ll Play The Blues For You”; what is certain is that Orange was looking to break away from Richbourg and form his own record company, for which he would need talent, and he saw Shreveport as an untapped market. By 1970, his House of Orange label had become a reality, with offices in Memphis, at the King Cotton Hotel, although the movers and shakers behind the label’s formation are anything but clear.

Affiliated with Orange’s new House of Orange label was Santo Records, a Memphis label that had been started in 1960 by rockabilly artist Wayne McGinnis as Slim Wallace’s Fernwood label was coming to an end. Santo had a subsidiary called SanWayne, and these labels released a considerable amount of country and rockabilly during the 1960s, some of it material left unreleased when Fernwood collapsed. The original version of Santo quit releasing material in 1965. But in late 1969, Santo Records reappeared, now affiliated with a Little Rock, Arkansas, label called San American Records and the House of Orange, with John Vincent as the contact person at the King Cotton Hotel offices. Johnny Vincent was the Jackson, Mississippi—based mogul of the Ace label, but it is hard to see why Vincent, who had existing facilities in Jackson, would have maintained an office in Memphis. Orange, for his part, was based in Nashville at the time, so it is hard to imagine just exactly what was going on in the King Cotton Hotel office; in fact the King Cotton was a hotel in steep decline, as was all of downtown Memphis by 1970.66 A further oddity is that the San American subsidiary label only

released reissued material. One of the singles, by Isaac Hayes, had been originally recorded for Stan Kessler’s Youngstown label in Memphis in the early 1960s before Hayes became famous, and raises questions about whether the interests behind Kessler’s Sound of Memphis operations could have also invested in Santo, San American, and House of Orange.

Allen Orange, with funding and talent in place, told Bell and Davis to write material for a forthcoming recording session, and then carried them to Boutwell Recording Studios in Birmingham, Alabama for a session, where Davis cut six songs that he and Bell had written. Whether the three solo Reuben Bell tracks on House of Orange were also cut at this session is unclear because of Orange’s peculiar practice of using separate matrix numbering for each of his label’s artists. Nothing reveals exactly which six songs were recorded at Boutwell Recording Studios, but it is clear that “Sweet Woman’s Love” and “Don’t Marry A Fool” were cut there; this was Davis’s first single, released as House of Orange 2401. Bell recalled that “Sweet Woman’s Love” was a song that he and Davis had written for their wives. In a minor key, it was a somewhat peculiar love song, with a dark and foreboding bass intro that created an atmosphere of melancholy if not menace; yet the song proved to be the biggest of Davis’ career. The B-side was a more uptempo offering of advice, “Don’t Marry A Fool,” which had also been cowritten by Bell and Davis.

Reuben Bell may have recorded his three Allen Orange-produced sides at the same Birmingham session. Although House of Orange would release two singles on Bell, “What’s Happening To The World,” a song which reflected angst about the Vietnam War
and the killings of college students on the Jackson State and Kent State campuses, was
the A-side of both. The earlier single was backed with a groover called “I Can’t Feel This
Way At Home,” which was about as commercial as Reuben ever got; it should have been
a huge hit, but House of Orange’s limited promotion and distribution probably hurt.

Bell’s second single backed “What’s Happening To The World” with “Don’t Give No
More Than You Can Take,” another uptempo effort with good advice. All of these three
songs were written by Bell and Davis, and the first pairing was released as House of
Orange 2403 and the second as House of Orange 2406, both in 1971. That same year,

Orange sent Geater Davis to Little Rock, to a studio called San American to cut
additional tracks for what would become his first album, entitled Sweet Woman’s Love,
released on the House of Orange label and distributed by the Jamie/Guyden label out of
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The LP contained not only his big first hit, but also a nearly
eight-minute reading of the Jerry Butler classic “For Your Precious Love.” Although the
album had its fans, sales were lackluster at best.

Geater Davis’s second single probably also was recorded at the Boutwell sessions
in Birmingham, because William Crump is again listed as co-producer with Allen Orange
on the two sides. “My Love Is So Strong For You” is a funky item with significant brass
and distorted guitar, a song written by Davis and Bell, but it is the slow blues ballad “I
Can Hold My Own” with its moody atmosphere and flute solo which is the standout
track; this song is credited only to Davis, and has a certain degree of similarity to “Sweet
Woman’s Love.” Throughout his career, Davis excelled at these kinds of slow ballads.
Davis’s third single on House of Orange also would seem to come from the Birmingham sessions, as Bill Crump is credited on the label. House of Orange 2405 consisted of a single edit of the album cut “For Your Precious Love,” backed with “Wrapped Up In You,” a more funky tune written by Davis. Originally released in 1971 with an orange and green label, this single for some reason was pressed again in 1975 with a black and orange label; on this version on the B-side, “Wrapped” was misspelled as “Wraped.”

By the fourth single, Davis was recording at home in Shreveport at Sound City Recording Studio and working with their house band, likely the African Music Machine, which had been put together by bass player Louis Villery. The A-side was an original written by Davis and Reuben Bell called “I Know My Baby Loves Me,” which opens in a blaze of horns and maintains its upbeat good spirits throughout, an example of a Shreveport sound which somewhat resembled the early Malaco sound in Jackson; that was hardly coincidental, as many musicians such as Ron Diulio and James Stroud frequently commuted between the two studios in the early 1970s. The B-side was another cover, this one of a Larry Lee song called “Best of Luck To You,” which had originally been cut by Sam Baker in Nashville for the Athens label; it was subsequently recorded by Earl Gaines and Johnny Adams. Usually performed as a 6/8 ballad, Davis’ version gives the song a funkier and more contemporary feel, again with a significant horn section in the background. These two songs were released as House of Orange 2407 in 1972, and would seem to be the last Davis ever recorded in Shreveport.
Despite being remembered by most Shreveport musicians, Geater Davis was almost never mentioned in the local newspapers; one exception was when he was engaged to perform at the 2nd Annual Family Day Parade and Concert at David Raines Park in the Cooper Road on June 29, 1975. The advertisement, misspelling his name as “Geter Davis,” stated that he would be performing his hits “Cold, Cold Winter” and “Precious Love.” The concert in the park ran for about three hours before it was ended due to rain; it was scheduled to be completed on July 6, 1975, but it is unclear if that second make-up up date ever took place.

Davis had begun recording in Nashville and Muscle Shoals in 1972, and by 1977 had moved to Jackson, Mississippi. Vernon “Geater” Davis died in Dallas, Texas on September 29, 1984, and was buried on what was to have been the first day of a new recording session for him. Although Davis was a pioneer in the style which would become known as Southern Soul, he has largely been forgotten; some have suggested that his vocal similarity to Bobby “Blue” Bland hurt his career, but although Davis admired Bland, there were notable differences too, especially the way that Davis pursued a more “country” soul aesthetic than the slicker, uptown sound Bland preferred. Ultimately, his failure to make it onto a big label with adequate resources was probably his undoing. Geater Davis deserved better.

**BOBBY PATTERSON, 1971**

The failure of Dallas-based Abnak Records and its Jetstar subsidiary left Bobby Patterson without a label home to continue to release material; his familiarity with Jerry

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Strickland may have led him to Shreveport, where Stan Lewis was looking for someone to head up his efforts in Black music. Lewis ultimately hired Patterson as an A & R representative for Black music, but also signed him to Jewel-Paula-Ronn as an artist. Patterson began working out of the Sound City studio in Shreveport, and, for the first time, a lot of Jewel-Paula-Ronn’s productions began taking place locally instead of in Texas, California, or Muscle Shoals. Patterson’s first single on Paula consisted of “Right On, Jody” b/w “If You Took A Survey” released as Paula 352. “Right On, Jody,” written by Jerry Strickland, Jerry Beach and Reuben Bell, was one of a number of early 1970s songs that referenced “Jody,” short for “Joe the Grinder,” a Black folklore figure from World War II, referencing the man that was romancing a soldier’s sweetheart while he was in the military; from there it expanded to any “back door man.” With Patterson handling his own production, the song had a contemporary, funky edge which set it apart from previous soul records on Stan Lewis’s labels. The B-side, “If You Took A Survey,” was written by Patterson, and maintained the same funk edge, and Patterson’s typical emphasis on cheating and affairs in the lyrics. The backing band was likely the African Music Machine.

Patterson also easily fell into his production duties at Jewel, and his sessions with other artists on Stan Lewis’s labels were among the best at the label. He would continue working out of Sound City studios through 1973.

THE GENIES

Absolutely nothing can be found about female soul group The Genies, who recorded a single produced by Bobby Patterson in 1971. Given that their previous
recording for the Ronn label was produced by Detroit producer Andre Williams and their final one by Chicago producer Tom Washington, it seems likely that they were from the North, possibly from Chicago. Yet their second Ronn single, produced by Patterson, had a distinctly Southern sound and was cut at Sound City. The A-side “No News Is Bad News” is a Jerry Strickland/Bobby Patterson composition, with an easy shuffle rhythm and a horn section; the B-side “Sunday Morning People” is a cover of The Honey Cone’s song, which had also been released in 1971, a critique of people who go to church but cannot love or get along with their neighbors. Although the single was well-produced, it did not get any traction, and the group’s subsequent single was recorded in the North and pressed by Stan Lewis. It does not seem to have fared any better.

ANN ALFORD

In 1971, a woman named Ann Alford was brought to Sound City studios by producer Dee Marais and cut an amazing slab of funk called “Got To Get Me A Job” on Marais’s Hy Sign label, but for years she has been a mystery. John Ridley in the liner notes to the Ace/Kent reissue compact disc *Shreveport Southern Soul: The Murco Story* suggested that Alford was just passing through town, but Marais recalled that her husband was named Donald Alford, and a man of that name was living on 67th Street in Cedar Grove at that time, and for many years thereafter.

What we do know is that Annie Alford first recorded for the Groove subsidiary of RCA-Victor in 1956, and then for the Vik label in 1957; these recordings presumably took place in New York City, and it is generally believed that Ann Ford who recorded for the Apollo label in 1959 is also Ann Alford. Listening to these recordings suggests that
they are in fact all the same singer, and show strong vocal similarities with the Ann Alford who recorded in Shreveport in 1971.

While “Got To Get Me A Job” did little at the time it was released, it has, like other funky Shreveport records, taken on a second life in the rare funk scene; the amazing band backing was provided by the African Music Machine, which at the time served as a house band for Black recordings at Sound City. The B-side, “If It Ain’t One Thing It’s Another,” is a slow ballad seemingly modeled on James Brown’s “It’s a Man’s World,” which expresses Alford’s struggles with poverty and inner-city living. The tiny Hy Sign label did not have the resources to promote the record, and it does not seem that Alford ever recorded again.

CHARLES CRAWFORD

Shreveport deep soul singer Charles Crawford cut his only single for Hy Sign at Sound City in 1971, although he is recalled by a number of musicians from the era, so he clearly was known in local entertainment circles. His masterpiece, the slow and mournful “A Sad, Sad Song,” was written by Willie James, who had been the organist for Eddie Giles’s Jive Five. The lyrics lament the plight of a man who has lost everything, in a fashion not unlike country music. The production duties were shared by Jimmy Johnson of the rock band The Peermonts and Dee Marais, and again, backing band was likely the African Music Machine. The other side, aptly named “Fat N Funky,” was also written by James, whose organ is prominent in the track; although not an instrumental, it has a number of funky breaks and an irresistible groove laid down by African Music Machine drummer Louis Acorn. Like Ann Alford, Crawford does not seem to have recorded again.
JACKIE PORTER

Grambling College had, prior to 1967, been a fairly obscure Southern Black college in Louisiana, but the combination of an ABC sports documentary called “100 Yards to Glory” in 1968 and a Look Magazine article the following year brought national attention to the school, primarily for its years of football success and the extreme number of players it contributed to the National Football League. At a time when Grambling game highlights were being broadcast nationally on television, Mercury Records decided to release an album by Conrad Hutchinson’s World-Famous Marching Tiger Band at Grambling; the resulting album, called *Tiger Time*, was not just a typical marching band album as had been cut by many other colleges. Instead, it also featured a young co-ed from California who was an amazing soul singer named Jackie Porter. Choosing Margie Joseph’s “Same Thing,” which the Louisiana singer had recorded for the Volt subsidiary of Stax the same year, Porter performs the song in true soul-testifying fashion, slower than the original, with the brass of Grambling’s band and Conrad Hutchinson’s organ providing the backing. It is a most amazing and perfect slice of Southern soul. Porter was apparently from Los Angeles, where she still resides, but sadly has never recorded again. Photographs in Grambling yearbooks from the era show that she was a frequent performer on campus. Unsurprisingly, Mercury chose her vocal track as one side of the single released from the album.

EDDIE GILES, 1971

By 1971, Eddie Giles had started back recording in Shreveport. With producer Bobby Patterson based out of Sound City studios, Giles was brought in to make a recut of
“Losin’ Boy” that was intended to be shopped to a larger label for distribution. Giles’s signature song this time received the full Sound City treatment with studio musicians and female backing singers, but Giles did not play guitar on it, and was not happy with it. Although the record was picked up by Stax in Memphis, it did not make even a ripple. Far better than the A-side recut was the B-side, a Bobby Patterson and Jerry Strickland song called “It Takes Me All Night (To Do What I Used To Do All Night), which is classic Shreveport soul at its best. By 1971, the Stax label was beginning to fracture into a number of internal factions and a deepening economic crisis. They do not seem to have made any effort to promote Giles.

COMMISSIONER D’ARDOIS, THE HIPPIES, AND THE KKK

Although Shreveport had made it through the turbulent 1960s without any major violence, the conservative forces in the city were not happy about the changes that were occurring both in American society and locally. There was considerable outrage over the Black-run poverty program, the Community Action Program of Caddo And Bossier, known as CAP-CAB, which received its funding directly from the Federal government. When the Caddo Parish Police Jury decided to take over the program and run it themselves, the Black community was outraged and vowed to fight the measure. Soon, the Rodessa center in North Caddo Parish was the target of Ku Klux Klan harassment. Klan warnings were nailed to the door of the center; crosses were burned throughout Rodessa, and Klan leaflets were left in the parking lot of the center, frightening Black community residents from taking advantage of the center, where there had been sewing

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68 Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.
lessons and other community events. CAP-CAB eventually asked the FBI to investigate.69

However, the Klan and local police soon turned their attention to local hippies, after the Shreveport Journal published a five-part series in which it was claimed that Columbia Park was an open-air drug market and that all kinds of illegal drugs were available for sale.70 On the day following the news article, June 2, the Shreveport police sent a hundred officers to Columbia Park, along with state police officers, and detained all the young people in the park at the pavilion, to the fury of some of the youths’ parents. Seventeen young people were arrested, the remaining youths began chanting “We want our freedom,” and eventually the others were allowed to leave. Commissioner George D’Artois stated, “We called for the state police after we received complaints from nearby residents that the park had become a hippie haven and was no longer a park that could be used by small children.”71 Subsequent letters to the editor revealed that individuals driving in cars near the park were ordered by police to pull over and were then detained in the park, people who had absolutely nothing to do with the raid but apparently were judged by the officers to “look like hippies.”

On June 6, the young people, calling themselves “The Shreveport Freaks,” attempted to hold a rally and band concert at Betty Virginia Park, but Commissioner D’Artois ordered the group to leave the park or be charged with unlawful assembly and


disturbing the peace. Shreveport’s new mayor, Calhoun Allen, approved D’Artois’s actions, stating “These young people seem to think they are the only ones with rights. They think they can come into these parks in noisy groups and run everybody else out. That is not going to happen.” The subsequent civic debate brought issues to the forefront that heretofore had been largely something only the Black community was aware of. As one white woman wrote to the editor of the Shreveport Times, “Shreveport cannot continue to deny certain select groups, whether they be black, poor, or ‘hippie-type’ the rights to which all citizens are entitled.”

On Sunday June 13, the young people, now calling themselves the Free People’s Movement, gathered in Betty Virginia Park, but several youths were attacked by white men who told the police they were members of the Ku Klux Klan. Commissioner D’Artois claimed the men were from New Orleans. They destroyed several cameras belonging to the young people, and the victims were arrested, charged with vagrancy and loitering. D’Artois then proclaimed the park closed and ordered everyone to leave it. The young people then marched to Columbia Park, but the police soon appeared there and herded them from that park as well, whereupon about seventy-five youths then marched to Highland Park. When the police forced them to leave that park as well, they marched to Shreveport City Hall where they chanted “We Want Our Freedom.” Ordered to disperse from there, they marched four times around the Caddo Parish Courthouse before

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leaving. Later in the day, several young people in the Cedar Grove neighborhood were arrested after Commissioner D’Artois claimed they were making molotov cocktails.\textsuperscript{74}

Although Mayor Calhoun Allen had run as a moderate, he continued to take a tough stand against hippies, telling the Broadmoor Kiwanis members “If they come back to the park next Sunday, we are going to shut them down, and we’re not going to allow them to parade up and down our city streets. These young people are not the young people you and I know. They are irresponsible and have no morals at all. They are totally lacking in responsibility, and yet they cry out ‘We want our freedom.’”\textsuperscript{75} The opposite view was taken by Sound City keyboardist Ron DiLulio in a letter to the \textit{Journal}, who compared police behavior to “storm trooper tactics,” and pointed out that Commissioner D’Artois had taken no action to stop drug sales in Columbia Park until the newspapers had written an article about it.\textsuperscript{76} Two more young people, Luther Furlow and Walter Mitchell, wrote a letter in which they mentioned being run out of Betty Virginia Park by members of the KKK who were posting Klan posters and leaflets in the park.\textsuperscript{77}

On Monday June 21, 1971, a lawsuit was filed in United States District Court in Shreveport on behalf of the hippies,\textsuperscript{78} and after several days of testimony in July, Judge Ben Dawkins denied a temporary restraining order, claiming that young people had held


\textsuperscript{75} “Mayor Affirms Tough Policy Toward Youths,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, June 16, 1971, 1.


\textsuperscript{78} J. L. Wilson, “Parks Case Appealed In U. S. Court,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, June 22, 1971, 1.
the park rallies in order to “provoke” the police. But after an amended complaint was filed, Dawkins struck down two city ordinances as unconstitutional in a September ruling, stating that cities could not ban political activities or meetings from parks, and that cities could not empower one official, such as the Public Safety Commissioner, to decide who may or may not use parks.

But the Klan continued to organize in and around Shreveport, finally holding a rally and cross burning at Oil City in October, at which Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton of Tuscaloosa spoke. Shelton stated, “Never will I apologize for being a white man who favors white supremacy.” The Klan saw Shreveport as a fertile field for organizing. Not only were white citizens angry over the “crossover” in which white and Black schools were merged, but they were anxious over social change in general, as reflected by the summer’s battles over the hippies in local parks. Such police repression and Klan cross-burnings convinced many of the city’s creative musicians that Shreveport was, as Bobby Patterson put it, “stuck in a time warp.”

THE SOUL POWER LABEL

As Bobby Patterson got settled into his new career in Shreveport, he seems to have convinced the people at Sound City to unleash a new label venture in partnership with Stan Lewis, the owner of the Jewel-Paula-Ronn complex of labels and Stan’s Record Service and Stan’s Record Shops. Ostensibly a venture between Patterson and Lewis, the Soul Power label seems to have also involved Stewart Madison, who was now along with

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George Clinton the major player in Sound City, and probably Jerry Strickland as well. Strategically, Soul Power had a lot going for it. Shreveport was loaded with talent, Sound City was a reasonably good studio by the standards of the day, Jerry Strickland, Bobby Patterson, and Reuben Bell were excellent songwriters, and the studio had excellent musicians, from James Stroud and Ron DiIulio to Louis Villery and the African Music Machine. The partnership with Lewis filled in the only gap in Sound City’s game, the ability to release, distribute and promote product.

First release on the Soul Power label was a single by Shay Holiday, whose real name was Georgia Hollingsworth. Bobby Patterson recalled that Stan Lewis’s producer Gene Kent had discovered her in a Shreveport restaurant where she was a waitress, and had given her the stage name Shay Holiday. For her, Patterson and Jerry Strickland wrote two new songs, one called “It’s Not How Long You Make It, It’s How You Make It Long,” and the other “Fight Fire With Fire.” Both followed the Strickland-Patterson formula to a tee: their titles reflected witty or popular sayings, and contained a dose of naughtiness in their narratives. Holiday’s two sides were fairly good, and received a positive review in Record World: “Bobby Patterson produced and had a hand in writing this one. Its hook-title makes it stand out; strong vocal puts it over. Try some.” The single was released as Soul Power 107, but there were no releases before it, and it is unclear why the label numbering started at 107. Unfortunately, despite fairly strong

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83 “Single Picks,” Record World, January 11, 1972, 10.
vocals, good songs and two great funky backing tracks, Holiday’s single did not generate much interest. She never recorded again.

Yet the same Record World issue which reviewed her single also reviewed another single by Patterson himself, on the Paula label, “How Do You Spell Love” and “She Don’t Have To See You (To See Through You).” Both of these songs were backed by the African Music Machine. The cynical “How Do You Spell Love?” (the answer is “M-O-N-E-Y”) has the funky sound that Patterson liked in his productions, while the B-side “She Don’t Have To See You” is a Southern soul ballad warning of the dangers of cheating. Released as Paula 352 in early 1972, the single did not make a whole lot of noise at the time, but its two sides would have a significant impact on American popular music, given the relative obscurity of Bobby Patterson. “How Do You Spell Love” was covered by New Orleans singer Margie Joseph on her eponymous 1975 album for Atlantic; it was covered again in 1987 by Texas roots rockers The Fabulous Thunderbirds on their album Hot Numbers. The B-side was covered almost immediately by Dallas soul singer Tommie Young, whose recordings were produced by Patterson, but then the song came to the attention of the Minneapolis musicians who comprised the loosely-affiliated alternative band Golden Smog. This band consisted of members of other bands, including members of Soul Asylum, The Jayhawks and the reformed Big Star. It would seem that Jeff Tweedy of Wilco brought “She Don’t Have To See You” to the Golden Smog sessions, as he sings it on the album, but how he became aware of Patterson’s southern soul song is unknown. The song, like much of Sound City’s productions between 1971 and 1973, was a cooperative effort between Patterson and country songwriter Jerry Strickland; in the
Golden Smog version, Tweedy picks up and amplifies the country music implications in the song that were dormant in Patterson and Tommie Young’s versions. That the song worked as well in the field of alternative country as it did in soul music is a tribute to excellent songwriting. Golden Smog’s unexpected cover of the song on their debut Down By The Old Mainstream spurred Bobby Patterson to come out of retirement and begin recording and performing again.

MAJOR CONCERTS, 1972

Nationally known soul acts continued to come to Shreveport in the new year, beginning with a Hirsch Memorial Coliseum appearance of the Jackson Five in March, followed by Texas bluesman Freddie King, who came to the same venue along with Creedence Clearwater Revival and Tony Joe White in April. Bobby Womack, who was riding a wave of national popularity behind his song “That’s The Way I Feel About Cha” came to the Grambling College campus on May 6 for a concert, and on May 17, the Staple Singers, Little Milton, King Floyd, Denise LaSalle and Little Johnny Taylor came to the Hirsch Coliseum for a performance. Little Johnny Taylor had actually signed with Stan Lewis’s labels and was frequently in Shreveport for business or recording. Isaac Hayes, whose Black Moses album had become the #1 soul album in the country in January 1972, came to Shreveport on June 24 for a Hirsch Coliseum show, and on July

84 “Jackson 5 To Appear at Hirsch,” Shreveport Journal, February 18, 1972, 55.
85 “Creedence Clearwater Revival in Concert,” Shreveport Times, April 14, 1972, 27.
86 “Singer Bobby Womack To Perform At Grambling College May 6,” Shreveport Sun, May 4, 1972, 3.
88 “The Isaac Hayes Movement,” Shreveport Sun, June 1, 1972, 6.
14, Gladys Knight and the Pips, the Manhattans, the Persuaders, and the Chairmen of the Board all came to the coliseum.\textsuperscript{89} When the Louisiana State Fair came to Shreveport in October, the Jackson Five came back for two performances on Friday, October 27, and on November 11, James Brown was back.\textsuperscript{90} While it was a banner year for Black concerts in Shreveport, it is worth noting that not one of the year’s shows was held in the Municipal Auditorium.

**THE AFRICAN MUSIC MACHINE**

Bass player Louis Villery came to Shreveport in 1969, and was mentioned in connection with the sessions at Sound City for actor David Soul, which would later be contentious as Soul moved to keep them from being released. People in Shreveport at the time believed that Villery was from Lake Charles, but he claimed to be from Tunisia.\textsuperscript{91} Comments left on a blog post about the African Music Machine band mention Villery on tour with Bobby “Blue” Bland in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and also a stint at the Flamingo Club on West Ninth Street in Little Rock, in the early 1960s.

Records from the 1950 Census indicate that Louis Villery Jr. was born in Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana, of which Lake Charles is the parish seat, in 1941, and while little is known of his youth, the city of Lake Charles was a hotbed of musical talent, and was the home of Eddie Shuler’s Goldband Records, and George Khoury’s Khoury and Lyric labels.


\textsuperscript{90} “He’s Coming! Soul Brother No. 1,” *Shreveport Sun*, November 9, 1972, 8.

Not long after landing in Shreveport, Villery put together the African Music Machine, a concept band that was made up primarily of Shreveport musicians, and in keeping with the theme of the band, each member was given an African name. Villery, a bass player, took the name Rasheed, Louis Acorn on drums was called Abdul, Tyrone Dotson on tenor sax was Yusef, and other members were Osman on percussion, Amal on trumpet, Ete-ete on tenor sax and flute, Jumbo (Ron Johnson?) on guitar, and Obitu (Charles Player), piano and organ.92

The band came together at precisely the point at which Sound City was getting involved with soul and funk music, as Bobby Patterson was moving from Dallas to Shreveport, and it managed to become the house band for most of the Black soul and funk recordings after 1970, although James Stroud, Jerry Beach, and Ron DiIulio were certainly also competent soul music musicians, and played on some soul sessions both in Shreveport and at Malaco in Jackson, Mississippi. But what brought attention and acclaim to the African Music Machine was a series of instrumental funk singles which the band recorded on the Soul Power label, which Patterson’s move to Shreveport had launched. The first single, “Black Water Gold” b/w “Making Nassau Fruit Drink,” was released as Soul Power 109 in 1972, and was an immediate hit, climbing into the Soul Top 10 in the United Kingdom.93 The A-side song, the biggest hit of the African Music Machine’s career, was covered eight years later by Florida band K.C. and the Sunshine Band. The next single “Tropical” b/w “A Girl In France” came out the same year as Soul


Power 111, but Villery was not happy with it. “I was never really satisfied with ‘Tropical’ because although it was artistically creative and sounded good in the studio, it was somehow not rich enough when we heard the final product,” Villery told an interviewer.\(^\text{94}\)

Although he stated that the band was about to release its debut album in 1973, it does not appear that the album ever came out at the time. “Never Name A Baby Before It’s Born” was released in 1973, backed with “The Dapp,” as Soul Power 115, and the James Brown tribute “Mr. Brown” b/w “Camel Time” was released in 1973 as Soul Power 117. There was certainly enough material for an album, and one finally appeared in 2000, collecting all the single sides together. Villery would record a second and new African Music Machine album in 2001, but he was the only member of the original band in the new version, which had nothing to do with Shreveport.

Unlike most instrumental funk bands of the period, the African Music Machine had a fair number of gigs under its own name, both in and out of town. As new clubs opened in the downtown area as part of the Shreve Square development, the Inside/Out club booked the African Music Machine in September of 1973, and got a good review from Bob Griffin in the Journal:

They had a sound that pulled the people onto the dance floor and everybody seemed to enjoy their performance. I know I did. The Machine has some eight people in the group with Rasheed as the leader. The group is especially strong on guitar and flute and put out the kind of music that makes you enjoy an evening out.\(^\text{95}\)


They continued playing for events like the Great South Fair in Hattiesburg, Mississippi,\(^{96}\) and the Washington Parish Fair in Franklinton, Louisiana,\(^{97}\) as well as in holes in the wall like Grimble’s Black and Gold Lounge in Newellton,\(^{98}\) or frequent appearances on Barksdale Air Force Base for several years. The African Music Machine lasted until 1976 and then broke up; according to guitarist Ron Johnson, there was a dispute between Louis Villery and Louis Acorn that resulted in the band’s demise.\(^{99}\) Acorn would ultimately form his own band called Ten Degrees Below Funk. Louis Villery was most recently living in the small town of Carlisle, Arkansas, between Little Rock and Memphis.

**LITTLE JOHNNY TAYLOR**

Little Johnny Taylor was born John Lamont Merrett in Gregory, Arkansas on February 11, 1943, and moved to Los Angeles in 1950 at the age of seven. He began his singing career as a gospel singer in the Mighty Clouds of Joy, before opting for a secular career. Taylor first found success with his Galaxy label single “Part Time Love,” which hit Number 1 on the *Billboard* R & B Hits in October of 1963. Following the failure of the Galaxy label, he signed with Stan Lewis’s Jewel-Paula-Ronn complex in Shreveport, but he continued to record on the West Coast and also in Muscle Shoals, finding another hit in “Everybody Knows About My Good Thing.”\(^{100}\)

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\(^{97}\) “Free Fair Program,” *The Era-Leader* (Franklinton, LA), October 17, 1974, 14


\(^{99}\) Interview with the author, October 14, 2023.

But, with Bobby Patterson now producing at Sound City, in 1972 Taylor began recording in Shreveport, and the first result was the single “Open House At My House Part 1 and 2,” written by Jerry Strickland and Bobby Patterson. As was typical of their songs, “Open House” contains a fair amount of naughtiness and humor, as in the line “He knows where your birthmark is, baby, and how many corns you got on your feet. Ain’t no way he could know that baby, unless you’ve been doing me wrong,” and the African Music Machine proved as adept at electric blues as they were with funk or soul. Record World gave the single a favorable review: “Blues with a feeling from one of the best practitioners of the art. No reasons in the world why this won’t be a hit.”101 Cash Box said “Taylor’s been two-timed again. This time he’s really been played cheap. Soul market will be more than sympathetic.”102 “Open House at My House” spent more than a month on the rhythm & blues charts, peaking at Number 16 on Billboard’s chart. It was released as Ronn 64.

In November 1972, Taylor’s next Shreveport single was released. “As Long As I Don’t See You,” was another Strickland-Patterson composition, but this one ditched the blues sound for a funkier aesthetic; the African Music Machine was in fine form here with the live horns and female backing vocals. The B-side however, “Strange Bed With A Bad Head (And No Bread),” was strictly for the blues lovers, and contained one of the more memorable Patterson-Strickland lyrics. Billboard relegated the single to the “also recommended” category,103 but Record World gave it a favorable review: “Always

101 “Record World Single Picks,” Record World, July 1, 1972, 12.
102 “Cash Box Singles Reviews,” Cash Box, July 15, 1972, 20.
charting in the r&b column, Taylor is bound to have a pop hit. This swinger, which sounds a bit like “Hold On I’m Coming,” could do it all.”

“As Long As I Don’t See You,” released as Ronn 66, did not fare as well as “Open House,” with only a few weeks on Cash Box’s R & B charts.

The next single, Ronn 69, was released in 1973, featuring two more Patterson-Strickland compositions; “I’ll Make It Worth Your While,” is a funky minor blues quite reminiscent of “I’ll Play The Blues For You,” while “You’re Not The Only One” is the final installment in the series of cheating anthems that began with “Everybody Knows About My Good Thing.”

Whether the next single “My Special Rose” b/w “A Thousand Miles Away” was cut in Shreveport is not clear at all. The songs are credited to Johnny Taylor rather than Patterson and Strickland, and there is no indication of Sound City on the label. On the other hand, the sound is definitely similar to the Sound City tracks, so it could possibly have been cut in Shreveport. These songs were released as Ronn 73.

The last Little Johnny Taylor single known to have been recorded in Shreveport is “You’re Savin’ Your Best Loving For Me” b/w “What Would I Do Without You.” The A-side is the last Patterson-Strickland song that Taylor recorded, and it is one with a clever set of lyrics:

I took off my dirty clothes and put them in the washing machine
And when I turned it on, I heard some dude scream.
You came running in, and accused me of being so mean,
One thing’s for certain, baby, he’s sure gonna come out clean.

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104 “Record World Single Picks,” Record World, November 4, 1972, 16.
While it seems likely that the A-side was recorded in Shreveport, the B-side is less certain. “What Would I Do Without You” as a song is credited to Stan Lewis as the sole writer; since Lewis was not known to actually write any songs, the writer was probably someone who sold songs outright to Lewis. The recording does have some similarities of sound with known Sound City recordings, but there is nothing to indicate whether it was actually cut in Shreveport. Although most stock copies of the single have the year 1974 printed on them, the promotional pressings of this single were from 1973, and the sides were probably cut in 1973. The songs were released as Ronn 78. By late 1973, Bobby Patterson had left Shreveport, and the co-operation between Jewel and Sound City was coming to an end. Although Little Johnny Taylor would continue recording for Lewis’s Ronn label until 1981, his recordings after 1973 would seem to have been made in other cities. Taylor died on May 17, 2020 in Conway, Arkansas.

**REUBEN BELL, 1972**

Reuben Bell continued to work with producer Allen Orange, and in 1972 Orange produced four songs on Bell for the Tennessee Recording and Publishing Company in Nashville, which had acquired the rights to all of Syd Nathan’s labels, including King, Federal and Deluxe. The session, which was held at Sound City in Shreveport, produced Bell’s most successful single of his career, a brooding, moody reading of bluesman Tarheel Slim’s “I Hear You Knocking,” although on early pressings, Bell’s version was titled “It’s Too Late.” The title occasioned some confusion, as Bell had recorded a song called “Too Late” for Dee Marais’s Murco label in 1968. The two songs are in fact unrelated. Bell’s reading of the Tarheel Slim song is beautifully arranged by Orange, with
a string orchestra amplifying the mood, and something of the same dark atmosphere as Geater Davis’s “Sweet Woman’s Love.” Bell’s high falsetto voice carries plenty of emotion, but here sounds fully mature, with none of the youthful innocence of his earlier recordings. *Cash Box* reviewed the single in July of 1972 and called it a “dramatic rendering of the Tarheel Slim & Little Ann soul burner from the fifties. Could happen again, r & b.” And happen it did, entering the *Billboard* R & B chart on October 7, 1972, where it reached a peak of #38 and charted for seven weeks. Unfortunately, the flip was a fairly ill-conceived re-reading of the Supremes’ “Baby Love,” which Bell delivered in a fairly decent manner, but which did not at all fit his image or style. Nevertheless, the track has found some favor on the Northern Soul scene in the UK. The songs were released as Deluxe 140.

A second single on Bell was co-produced by Allen Orange and Hal Neely in 1973; Neely was at the time the president of the Tennessee Recording and Publishing Company. The A-side was a cover of “Leave My Kitten Alone,” a song which Bell absolutely detested, but which Neely probably pushed him to record because it had been written by King Records artist Little Willie John, and thus already belonged to the Tennessee Recording and Publishing firm. Like the “Baby Love” cover from the previous single, “Leave My Kitten Alone” did not fit Bell’s image as an artist, nor his preference as a singer. The B-side, on the other hand, a love song called “All The Time” written by

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107 Interview with the author, February 5, 2005.
Walter Harper and Jerry Middleton, was perfectly suited to Bell’s temperament, and he handled it brilliantly. Bell recalled that the song had been written by a man in Vietnam to his wife or girlfriend back home; the production style for this side followed the playbook that Stax in Memphis had been using with Isaac Hayes, full of strings and horns, and in fact, it was the very type of song which Hayes excelled at. The single was released as Deluxe 148. Unfortunately, by 1973, the Tennessee Recording and Publishing Company was collapsing through internal strife. Mike Leiber, Jerry Stoller, and Frank Bielenstock were feuding with the CEO Hal Neely, whom they eventually fired; the assets were sold to Moe Lytle of Koala/Gusto Records, which was basically a budget reissue label. At that point Reuben Bell ended his relationship with Allen Orange and would not record again until 1975.

TOMMIE YOUNG

In the same Cash Box issue where Little Johnny Taylor’s “Open House At My House” was reviewed, there also appeared a review of a single by Tommie Young called “Take Time To Know Him” b/w “Hit & Run Lover,” released as Soul Power 110. Young was a Dallas singer who had been discovered by Bobby Patterson, and she would prove to be the most successful artist on the label.

Patterson recalled the circumstances of how he met Young in an interview with Mike Haralambos:

I’d always wanted to record someone who sings as good as Aretha Franklin. Then I saw Tommie Young singing at a club in Dallas. The first time I heard

108 Interview with the author, February 5, 2005.


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her, I told her “I want to get a hit record on you.” She said, “OK, yeah, sure. I’ve heard that before.” So I went to Shreveport and I stopped what I was doing and cut a remake of O. V. Wright’s “That’s How Strong My Love Is” and the Percy Sledge song “Take Time To Know You” and changed it to “Take Time To Know Him.” So I called Tommie and said I got your tracks ready. So she came to Shreveport and put her voice on the tracks and did them in one take.110

The success of that early session motivated Patterson to write new material for Young, and he and Jerry Strickland wrote a string of good songs for her, even if they all tended to be formulaic. “Hit and Run Lover,” “Everybody’s Got A Little Devil In Their Soul,” “Do You Still Feel The Same Way,” “That’s All a Part of Loving Him,” “You Came Just In Time,” “You Can’t Have Your Cake and Eat It Too,” “You Can Only Do Wrong So Long,” and “You Brought It All On Yourself” were all written for and duly recorded by Young. Although her sound was often compared to Aretha Franklin, there was a Southern sound to Young’s recordings that Franklin lacked. All of the singles, plus an album only track, “Do We Have A Future,” were released on the album Do You Feel The Same Way as Soul Power 3316 in 1973.

Although it has been assumed that the African Music Machine handled the backing duties on Young’s singles, the album credits would suggest otherwise, showing a mix of Sound City’s white and Black studio bands, mixing Louis Villery with drummer Ray Yeager and keyboardist Ron DiIulio, and some very prominent background singers, including Jewel Bass and Dorothy Moore, both of whom were from Jackson, Mississippi.

Young’s career seemed on the upswing, but she had begun by singing in church, and as her secular career unfolded, she began to be drawn back to her gospel roots. Her

decision may have been helped by the drama that was unfolding in Shreveport. Bobby Patterson was becoming disgruntled with Stan Lewis as well as the city itself, and the relationship between Sound City and Lewis also seemed to be deteriorating.\textsuperscript{111} Young eventually abandoned secular music altogether and returned to being a gospel singer and evangelist in Dallas. In 1978 she recorded the soundtrack for the ABC network’s “A Woman Called Moses.” Now known as Tommie Young-West, she continues to perform and record gospel music in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

**ROSCEO ROBINSON**

Soul singer Roscoe Robinson was born on May 28, 1928, in Dermott, Arkansas, and sang with a number of gospel groups, including the Fairfield Four, the Highway QC’s and the Five Trumpets. Switching to secular music in 1966, he had some R & B chart success with “That’s Enough” in 1966 and “Do It Right Now” in 1967, and in 1971 signed with Stan Lewis’s Paula label in Shreveport, although his first singles for the label were produced by Cash McCall in Chicago.\textsuperscript{112} However, in 1972, Robinson began to record at Sound City in Shreveport, cutting two Patterson-Strickland songs. “We’re Losing It Baby” is a funk romp based on Louis Villery’s strong syncopated bass line, while “We Got A Good Thing Going” is the typical Southern soul “back door” song about an illicit relationship, with the full orchestral and female vocal backing. These were released as Paula 378. At least one other song was recorded at Sound City, “You Qualify,” a soul ballad written by Strickland and Patterson, and released as the A-side of Paula 384;

\textsuperscript{111} Mike Haralambos, “Bobby Patterson Taking Care of Business,” *Juke Blues* 45 (Autumn 1999), 54.

the B-side does not sound as if it was cut at Sound City. Robinson eventually returned to gospel music and has continued to record in that genre.

**BOBBY PATTERSON, 1972-1973**

In addition to all the songwriting and production work that Bobby Patterson was doing at Sound City, he also continued to record material for his own career as well. “Take Time To Know The Truth,” b/w “It Takes Two To Do Wrong,” were both songs written by Patterson and Jerry Strickland, and were released in 1972 as Paula 379. “Take Time To Know The Truth” was a sad Southern Soul ballad with a long spoken intro, while “It Takes Two To Do Wrong” was funkier, with lyrics full of the humor that was typical of the best Patterson-Strickland songs. The next Patterson single consisted of two more Patterson-Strickland songs, “If Love Can’t Do It (It Can’t Be Done)” and “I’m In The Wrong.” Continuing the pattern of releasing a funky side with a slow ballad, the A-side is a strong piece of funk, while “I’m In The Wrong” is Patterson’s most gospel-tinged ballad, a song more in the style Reuben Bell preferred, with a prominent organ and horns in the backing track. These songs were released in 1973 as Paula 388.

In 1972, Patterson had also released an album on Paula called *It’s Just A Matter of Time*, which was released as Paula 2215. It contained twelve songs, including “If You Took A Survey,” “How Do You Spell Love,” “She Don’t Have To See You,” and “Right On, Jody,” which had all been released as singles. The other eight tracks, all cut at Sound City, were album-only, including “I Get My Groove From You,” “Make Sure You Can Handle It,” “Everything Good To You (Don’t Have To Be Good For You),” “Recipe For Peace,” “Quiet! Do Not Disturb,” “I Just Loved You Because I Wanted To,” “One Ounce
of Prevention,” and “The Whole Funky World Is A Ghetto.” The funky “Quiet! Do Not Disturb” was a three-way collaboration between Bobby Patterson, Jerry Strickland and Reuben Bell, but it was the Strickland and Patterson ballad “One Ounce of Prevention” that was the stand-out track. Like all of their best co-written tunes, the starting point was a familiar maxim or saying, but the tune had the Memphis atmosphere of a Sam and Dave song. Why it was not made a single is anybody’s guess.

But toward the end of 1973, things were changing. Relations between Sound City and Stan Lewis’s Jewel-Paula-Ronn labels were deteriorating, and Bobby Patterson was growing tired of Shreveport in general:

I never liked Shreveport, not to live there. It was like going into a time zone. I’m from Dallas and things there had progressed a lot faster in terms of racial relationships. Even just riding around Shreveport and looking at the neighborhoods, people had a sense of separatism. I remember this old guy who had a restaurant next to Jewel/Paula. He was kind of hard of hearing and he had this arrow pointing round from the front of his restaurant round to the back and he had on the arrow “Colored Entrance.” So when I came out of Jewel/Paula I used to say to him, “Hey what colour you have to be to go in that entrance?” “Uh?” I said, “Green people go through there?” “Uh?” I used to play with him everyday.113

So intense was Patterson’s dislike of Shreveport that on weekends he would drive the 185 miles back to Dallas. In late 1973, he left Shreveport for good.114

TED TAYLOR, 1972-1973

Soul singer Ted Taylor was born in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, in 1934. He was a frequent visitor to Shreveport as a performer long before he signed with Stan Lewis’s

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Jewel-Paula-Ronn complex, but his recordings for Lewis from 1967 to 1971 were recorded either on the west coast or in Muscle Shoals. Yet in 1972, Taylor began working with the team of musicians and producers at Sound City, recording a Bobby Patterson and Jerry Strickland composition called “I Want To Be A Part of You, Girl.” In October 1972, Billboard proclaimed it a “Hit of the Week,” stating: “Always an r & b charter, Taylor should break pop with this Al Green-ish tune. It’s a winning sound that could prove to be singer’s ‘Let’s Stay Together.’”115 The B-side, “Going in the Hole,” was not cut in Shreveport. The single was released as Ronn 65, and ultimately did not chart; as the review noted, Patterson’s production was something of a style departure for Taylor, with a modern sound and orchestral production.

A 1973 single featured another Patterson-Strickland tune, “Break of Day,” which like most of their compositions, dealt with cheating and a back door affair. But the involvement of John Stevens as co-producer raises questions about whether the song was actually cut at Sound City, or in Los Angeles, where Stevens was based. There is no indication that the B-side, “Fair Weather Woman,” had anything to do with Shreveport. Taylor would record one more single in California for Stan Lewis and then left the Ronn label, recording for his own Soulpugits label in 1974, although he would return to Shreveport in 1976 to record another album in the city.

**THE MONTCLAIRS (EAST ST. LOUIS)**

A doo-wop group called The Montclairs from Barksdale Air Force Base had recorded in Shreveport in 1956, but it had no connection to the Montclairs who recorded

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115 “Hits of the Week,” *Billboard* October 14, 1972, 1.
for Stan Lewis in the 1970s, who were from East St. Louis, Illinois. Produced by well-known St. Louis saxophonist and bandleader Oliver Sain, the Montclairs recorded for the Stax-distributed Arch label and the local Vanessa label before signing with Stan Lewis’s Paula label. The group consisted of David Frye, Phil Perry, George McLellan, Kevin Sanlin and Clifford “Scotty” Williams, and had taken its name from a popular brand of cigarettes.\textsuperscript{116}

While Oliver Sain had his own studio, Archway at 4521 Natural Bridge Avenue in St. Louis, it seems that all of the Montclairs’ debut album \textit{Dreaming Out of Season} for Paula was recorded at Sound City in Shreveport during 1971 and 1972. Although Sain and Keith Frye (the older brother of David Frye) were handling the production duties rather than Bobby Patterson, the strings on all the tracks were arranged by Ron DiIulio, who was one of the staff musicians at Sound City. Two songs, “Make Up For Lost Time” and “I Need You More Than Ever,” were written by Bobby Patterson and Jerry Strickland, and at least two of the Montclairs’ singles on Paula clearly stated on the label that they were cut at Sound City in Shreveport.

\textit{Dreaming Out of Season} was a quintessential soul vocal group album at a time when the vocal group tradition was fading in popularity; Phil Perry’s extensive vocal range, the group’s sweet harmonies, and the dramatic orchestral arrangements made the album an example of what could have been a way forward for Black vocal groups in the early 1970s. Unfortunately, the Montclairs came out at a time when the American

economy was beginning to run into problems, and although they worked on a second album for Paula, by 1974, Stan Lewis was scaling back his operations due to the financial fallout from the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973. None of the tracks intended for the second album saw the light of day until the Japanese P-Vine label released them on a self-titled Montclairs compact disc in 1990. In 2001, the British Westside label combined all known material together into a definitive double-CD set called Make Up For Lost Time: The Paula Recordings 1971-1974, which is not easy to obtain but essential. The Montclairs’ lead singer Phil Perry has gone on to have a successful career as a solo singer and songwriter.

**LITTLE JOE BLUE**

Blues musician Joseph Valery Jr. was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi on September 23, 1934, and raised across the river in Tallulah, Louisiana, where he became known as “Little Joe Blue” for his tendency to play “Little Boy Blue” on his harmonica as a child. He first became acquainted with the blues by peeking in the windows of the Green Lantern Club in Tallulah.\(^{117}\) He moved to Detroit, did a stint in the Army, worked on assembly lines, and played amateur contests before beginning his professional career. After a brief stay in Reno, Nevada, he located in Los Angeles and cut for a number of small labels, even recording one session for Chess, before signing with Stan Lewis’s Jewel label in Shreveport in 1968. Like many of Lewis’s other blues artists, Little Joe Blue cut his first Jewel singles on the west coast. But in 1972, he came to Sound City

\(^{117}\) Opal Louis Nations, “Little Joe Blue,” [https://opalnations.com/files/Blue_Little_Joe.pdf](https://opalnations.com/files/Blue_Little_Joe.pdf) (accessed 01/15/2024). Although Nations’s article states that the Green Lantern was in Vicksburg, it was actually located on West Green Street in Tallulah, Louisiana.
Recording Studio in Shreveport for an album session produced by Don Logan and George Clinton, the latter a Shreveport sound engineer, not the funk musician. The resulting album *Southern Country Boy*, released as Jewel 5008, contained ten songs of electric blues, with a horn section, and was as good a modern blues album as Jewel ever released. Others involved on the production included Randy Meeks, whose band had played the Bossier Strip with Wolfman Jack back in 1964, and the mysterious Jimi Jellibean, which was yet another of Don Logan’s pseudonyms.

**FONTELLA BASS**

Also signed to Stan Lewis’s Paula label during the 1972-1973 period was St. Louis soul singer Fontella Bass, who had had a previous hit with “Rescue Me.” Most of her Paula sides were recorded in Chicago with Cash McCall, or in St. Louis with Oliver Sain, but at least two sides were recorded at Sound City in Shreveport and produced by Bobby Patterson. “Home Wrecker,” written by Jerry Strickland and Bobby Patterson, is a typical Southern soul anthem, with something of a resemblance to Ann Peebles’s “Breaking Up Somebody’s Home.” It was released in 1973 as the A-side of Paula 389. “It’s Hard To Get Back In,” another Strickland-Patterson song, has more of a funk edge, with the African Music Machine handling the backing track. This was the A-side to Paula 393. Bass’s voice fit the Southern material quite well, but neither of these Shreveport tracks were included on her Paula album *Free* which was released in 1972, and which had a very different sound, as well as a more political edge. Bass was married to the avant-garde jazz trumpeter Lester Bowie, and would soon travel abroad with him.
SPEED LIMIT 25 BAND

Although Grambling College was located about seventy miles east of Shreveport, the college was always popular with Shreveport residents; not only did many Shreveport young people attend the school, but it provided many of the teachers in the Caddo and Bossier Parish school systems, and its football team typically played at least one game a year in Shreveport. In 1972, Grambling scheduled their game against the University of Nevada at State Fair Stadium in Shreveport, in a game that was being sponsored by the Prince Hall Masons to raise funds for Camp Chicota, their summer camp. Mayor Calhoun Allen proclaimed November 25, the day of the game, Grambling College Day, and a parade in downtown Shreveport featuring the Grambling College Band and local bands was scheduled. 118

In the Cooper Road, Club 51 advertised both pre-game and post-game parties featuring music by a Grambling band called Speed Limit 25; the ads suggested that fans would be able to meet the Grambling team members after the game.119

The band opened up for Curtis Mayfield at T. H. Harris Auditorium on the Grambling College campus in May of 1973,120 and performed for a Thursday night dance during Homecoming Week in November of 1974.121

Speed Limit 25 is not mentioned after 1974 and does not seem to have ever recorded.

119 “Fun in Football,” Shreveport Sun, November 16, 1972, 8.
By 1972, Shreveport’s city government and community leaders were expressing concern over deterioration in the downtown area. Mayor Calhoun Allen soon unveiled a concept called Shreve Square, a $4.5 million plan by Memphis investors to create an entertainment district with “retail shops, cocktail lounges, restaurants and night spots.” Within a month, construction work had begun on the project, and the first businesses had been announced for the project, many of which had a Memphis flavor: “Some of the shops to be included in the Texas Street development include T. G. I. Friday’s Restaurant; Alan Abis Men’s Store; Silky Sullivan’s restaurant, and a Capt. Jay’s Tobacco Shop.” By August, Shreve Square was running advertising in the local papers, mentioning an establishment called the Inside/Outside Club, along with the somewhat dubious slogan “Yesterday Begins Today at Shreve Square.” Just before New Year’s Eve, the first ads for the Inside/Out Club appeared in local Shreveport papers, featuring a New Year’s Eve Party with the Original Drifters.

JAZZ WORKSHOP

Jazz was not tremendously popular in Shreveport, but in September of 1972, after the Celebrity Supper Club had failed, a local entrepreneur named Raymond Washington remodeled the location at 7937 Line Avenue and advertised it as the Jazz Workshop. Live

124 “Yesterday Begins Today At Shreve Square,” Shreveport Journal, August 28, 1972,
125 “Greet ’73 Here!” Shreveport Journal, December 29, 1972, 42.
music was featured five nights a week, with taped jazz concerts played on Tuesdays and Thursdays.126

But tragedy struck the Jazz Workshop on March 23, 1974, when an argument developed between two members of a Dallas band during an intermission at the club. R. C. McCray shot and killed his fellow band member James Brown Jr., and was charged with homicide.

The club closed in June, and on August 29, 1974, caught fire and burned.127

**BIG CONCERTS, 1973**

Artists of national stature continued to come to the Hirsch Coliseum in Shreveport in the new year of 1973. A Curtis Mayfield, The O’Jays, and The Meters concert was scheduled on March 19,128 but the show was cancelled due to Mayfield’s illness.129 Bobby Womack came on March 28, along with the rock band Santana,130 and Isaac Hayes was in town on April 14.131 The Temptations and the Spinners were at the Hirsch on May 10, 132 and the band War came on May 19.133 Stevie Wonder, B. B. King, and Timmy Thomas were at the Hirsch Coliseum on June 16,134 but peculiarly, there were no

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shows for the remainder of the year, suggesting that perhaps there was an economic downturn during the second half of the year.

JUSTIN JOHNSON AND THE FUNK FACTORY

Shreveport trombonist Justin Johnson had been a member of the King Cobras, and after the King Cobras broke up, he formed his own band called the Funk Factory, which was first mentioned in connection with an El Capularo Social Club dance at Club 51 in April of 1973.\textsuperscript{135} By July, Shreveport Parks and Recreation (SPAR) announced that Justin Johnson and the Funk Factory would be one of three bands performing free summer concerts in Shreveport parks, along with Abraham and the Casanovas and Eddie Giles and the Jive Five.\textsuperscript{136} In April of 1974, they were hired, along with another band called the Portrayers, for an Easter fashion show and dance sponsored by the Mark IV Social Club at Club 51 on the Cooper Road,\textsuperscript{137} and on July 12, they were one of the bands hired to perform in David Raines Park in the Cooper Road, along with Orchestra Heavy, the Port City Express and the Peace and Love Band.\textsuperscript{138} By August of 1974, an article in the \textit{Shreveport Sun} announced that the former Funk Factory was now called the First Production Band.\textsuperscript{139}


\textsuperscript{139} “Free Concert at David Raines,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, August 1, 1974, 3.
OTHER SHREVEPORT BANDS, 1973

Shreveport was a hotbed of funk-oriented Black bands in the early 1970s, and sadly few of them recorded. The “Showboat '73” talent show at Captain Shreve High School in April brought out bands called the Black Factory, All Kinds of Soul, and Black Rose. Ultimately, the Black Rose band won the best band award in the contest, but apparently never recorded. By November, a benefit concert for the non-profit Satori House was held at the Municipal Auditorium, featuring Sammy Holloway and Friends, All Kinds of Soul, and Black Rose, along with a number of rock bands. The concert took place from 4 PM to midnight on November 24. Satori House was a non-profit counseling and assistance center for young people in Shreveport.

A similar benefit for Shire House, an acute drug treatment center sponsored by Shreveport CODAC, an anti-drug agency, was held on December 1 in the Gold Dome on the Centenary College campus, featuring Upward Bound, the African Music Machine, and Sam Holloway, among others, with KOKA disc jockey Gay Poppa as one of the masters of ceremonies for the event.

ORCHESTRA HEAVY

Shreveport was somewhat unique among Southern cities in that the Black community had a public golf course in Lakeside Park, and golf was popular in the Black community. Local Black golfers had formed the Caddo Ebony Golfers Organization and

sponsored dances and events. Many of their earlier events featured a jazz group called the Four Gents, but in November of 1973 they sponsored a dance at the Progressive Men’s Club featuring a new band called Orchestra Heavy, which would appear from time to time over the following year.\textsuperscript{144}

The next year, on April 13, 1974, the Mark IV Social Club in Shreveport sponsored a “Salute to College Students” at Club 51 on the Cooper Road, featuring Orchestra Heavy,\textsuperscript{145} and in July, when a concert was scheduled in David Raines Park in the Cooper Road, Orchestra Heavy was scheduled to perform along with the Funk Factory, the Port City Express and Peace and Love.\textsuperscript{146} An end of summer concert at the same park in August featured the First Production Band, Peace and Love, Orchestra Heavy, and Abraham and the Casanovas. The David Raines Park concerts were sponsored by former singer and community activist Joe Wills.\textsuperscript{147}

\textbf{GEATER DAVIS, 1973}

After Geater Davis signed with John Richbourg’s Luna label in 1972, he began recording in Muscle Shoals, Alabama and Nashville, Tennessee. But in 1973 he moved from Luna to Seventy-Seven, another Richbourg-owned label, and cut his second single for the new label at Sound City in Shreveport. The two songs, “Your Heart Is So Cold,” and “You Made Your Bed Hard,” were both written by Davis and Reuben Bell, and were released as Seventy-Seven 77-130. “Your Heart Is So Cold” was a blues notable for its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144} “Golfers To Present Dance,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, November 1, 1973, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{145} “Club To Present Pre-Easter benefit Show and Dance,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, April 4, 1974, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{146} “Free Concert at David Raines,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, July 11, 1974, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{147} “Free Concert at David Raines,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, August 1, 1974, 3.
\end{itemize}
lyrics: “Your heart is so cold, baby, Hitler ain’t got no thing on you. You could walk through the graveyard and chill a dead man through and through.” Nothing on the 45 single itself indicates that it was cut at Sound City, but in the *Billboard International Directory of Recording Studios* of 1974, “Your Heart Is So Cold” by “Geator (sic) Davis” is listed as one of the records made at Sound City in the listing for the studio.\(^\text{148}\) It seems likely that the B-side was cut there also.

**ALARM RECORDS, 1973-1975**

Following the departure of Bobby Patterson, the shuttering of the Soul Power label and the collapse of the partnership between Jewel-Paula-Ronn and Sound City Recording, Stewart Madison and Jerry Strickland set up their own new in-house label called Alarm Records, which released its first four singles in 1973.

**THE WORLD WONDERS**

Alarm 101 and 103 were singles by Adolph Washington and the Entertainers, consisting of songs that might have been cut in 1970 or 1971 but which did not see release until 1973. But coming out of sequence was a single by a band called the World Wonders, released as Alarm 21644, consisting of “Funky Washing Machine” b/w “Flip A Coin.” The two instrumental sides are typical funk excursions for the time and have proven popular with funk revival DJs. Yet the exact identity of the World Wonders has been something of a mystery, despite a 2017 repressing of the single by the Tramp Records label in Germany. However, a clue to at least the city where the band was from

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can be found in the writing credits to the songs on each side, as a man named Bennie White was involved in writing both songs.

Bennie White first appears in connection with a band called the Rocking Roulettes from Bastrop, Louisiana, who were mentioned in the *Monroe News Leader* in April of 1968; White eventually became a member of the Monroe-based band the GTOs. A further article revealed that White was a native of Rayville, Louisiana, and was the leader of the GTOs, a band which also included Billy Robertson on bass, Stanley Robertson on drums, and Leon Jenkins on saxophone. While there is no source material regarding the World Wonders, it seems likely that they were a Monroe band, and may have contained, besides White, other members of the GTOs.

**EDDIE GILES, 1973**

Also in 1973 Eddie Giles returned to Sound City and cut a new single for the Alarm label. “Are You Living With The One You’re Loving With” b/w “Married Lady” was produced by Bobby Patterson and released as Alarm 106. The A-side was written by Jerry Strickland, Giles and Roger Barnes and is in the tradition of preachy anti-cheating songs that began with Johnny Taylor’s “Who’s Making Love” in 1969. As usual, the African Music Machine seems to be providing the background. The B-side, “Married Lady,” is exactly the opposite, with Giles explaining that sometimes people married to others fall in love with each other. The song was written by Bobby Patterson, who had cut it in Dallas as the B-side for Jetstar 121 in 1970. Giles’s version was given a more

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orchestral treatment, with plenty of strings and horns. Although Giles is in fine form on both sides, the single did not register with the national trade publications nor with radio. These two sides were the only ones Alarm chose to release at the time.

Yet Giles recorded a considerable amount of material at Sound City between 1971 and 1973, comprising a total of at least ten songs. It is not clear whether Alarm intended to release an album on Giles at that time, but in 1979 the Japanese label Vivid Sound released the album *I'm A Losing Boy*, with an Alarm label also imprinted on the jacket. This compiled ten Giles tracks recorded at Sound City with “Baby Be Mine” and “Losin’ Boy” from Dee Marais’s Murco sessions. The vast majority of the material had been unreleased, although the album included both sides of the Alarm 106 single, as well as the B-side “It Takes Me All Night” from the ill-fated Stax single Giles had cut in 1971. Fortunately, Vivid Sound chose to include the original Murco reading of “Losin’ Boy” rather than the dismal Stax recut, and for fans of Eddie Giles or Shreveport soul in general, this album is essential. Among the previously unreleased gems on the album were a Bettye Crutcher and Frederick Knight-composed song called “Swearing Out A Want (sic) For Your Caress,” a Patterson-Strickland composition called “How Many Times,” Giles’s own original “Baby I Care,” and then four Allen Orange compositions: “There Must Be A Place,” “I Can’t Get Over You,” “Soul Bag,” and “You’re My Sweet Inspiration.” The backing musicians are in fine form throughout, with Giles playing guitar on most of the songs, and an overall sound not particularly different from what was coming out of Malaco in Jackson, Mississippi, at the time. Had it seen release in 1973, Eddie Giles might have had a resurgence of popularity, at least in the Southern market.
Orange’s involvement with Giles is quite interesting, but it is possible that these tracks were recorded around the time that Orange was at Sound City cutting “Your Heart Is So Cold” with Geater Davis. Whether the four Orange-produced tracks were originally intended for release on House of Orange, or Alarm, or John Richbourg’s labels is uncertain.

*I'm A Losing Boy* proved to be expensive and difficult to obtain in the United States, but, fortunately, the Soulscape label in the United Kingdom released most of the Sound City Giles material on the compilation *Sound City Soul Brothers* released in 2007, dropping only the fairly weak tune “Soul Bag,” and the two Murco tracks, which had already been reissued on Ace/Kent’s *Shreveport Southern Soul: The Murco Story.*

**REUBEN BELL, 1975**

After a year-long hiatus in recording, Reuben Bell signed with the Alarm label in 1975 and went into Sound City to record new material. His first single, “I’ll Be Your Woman” b/w “Asking For The Truth,” was released as Alarm 107, and the songs, written by Bell and Jerry Strickland, demonstrated the way that classic soul was transitioning to Southern soul. “I’ll Be Your Woman,” unusual in being a song sung by a man quoting a woman’s words, is a somewhat humorous tale about a one-night sexual affair that leads to something more, but it is the B-side, “Asking For the Truth (But Praying For A Lie),” which stands out, another anguished Bell performance about a failing relationship, complemented by strings and horns. Both sides were produced by noted New Orleans producer Wardell Quezergue, who had also been active at Malaco in Jackson, Mississippi, producing Jean Knight’s 1972 hit “Mr. Big Stuff.” Despite the excellence of
the two sides, they did not make even a ripple in the music industry of the day; Alarm was a new label, and it is unclear how its early distribution was set up. Furthermore, blues and Southern soul were moving out of the mainstream of the music business and becoming a niche category within an older and more Southern Black community. This dynamic had an adverse effect on the careers of artists like Reuben Bell, Eddie Giles, Ted Taylor, and Geater Davis. The rise of disc jockey culture and disco music only made the situation worse.

Two more songs were released the same year as Alarm 111, “I Still Have To Say Goodbye” b/w “Superjock,” both of which were Bell-Strickland collaborations, and which were also produced by Wardell Quezergue. They may well have been recorded at the same session as the other two sides. “I Still Have To Say Goodbye” is another song about a love affair destroyed by cheating, but the B-side, “Superjock,” is a most unusual song that reflected the growing popularity of DJ culture as nightclubs replaced live music and bands with DJs spinning records. In Monroe, about a hundred miles to the east of Shreveport, by 1975 live music in the Black community had been almost completely displaced by “record hops” and DJs. The trend was also noticeable in Shreveport, although the transition took longer there. Ironically, today “Superjock” is probably Reuben Bell’s best-known and best-loved song. Not only was it picked up by funk revival DJs, but it was sampled by DJ Shadow and Cut Chemist on their 1999 album *Brainfreeze*. Bell would continue recording for Alarm through the end of 1977.
THE FACES LABEL

Don Logan had been a producer and executive for Stan Lewis’s complex of labels, but he also had set up his own family of record labels, including Brother, Memorial, Cal, and Faces, as well as a music publisher called Cabriolet. Although most of his labels were involved with gospel music, Faces was the exception, a label dedicated to secular music, although many of the artists involved were gospel artists recording secular material under pseudonyms. The Faces label seems to have begun in 1973, with the release of the first single by a New Orleans artist named Little Leo Price, who was the older brother of rhythm and blues star Lloyd Price.

LEO PRICE

Little Leo Price was born on January 9, 1935 in Kenner, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans, but spent a considerable amount of time in Houston, Texas, a city which is mentioned in the song “I’ve Been A Prisoner,” which is the B-side of his Faces label single. The A-side, “The Bullet,” is a funky dance song, but one that Price says was “the only dance invented in a foxhole in Vietnam.” As such, both songs deal with the Vietnam War, and are credited to Don Logan and Leo Price, and because the single states that both sides are Don Logan productions, it seems that the sides were cut in Shreveport, almost certainly at Sound City and with the African Music Machine as the likely backing band. The sides were released as Faces 3-1, and pressed with Leo Price’s face pictured on both sides. It may have been Logan’s original intent to put the face of each artist on the

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singles, hence the label name, but if so, he ended the practice after the first few releases. It also seems unlikely that many of the later Faces releases were cut in Shreveport.

**ALVIN HEMPHILL**

Dallas organist Alvin Hemphill is best known for having been part of Texas bluesman Freddie King’s band, and he has played with a number of different blues musicians in more recent years. He had recorded a couple of instrumental singles on small Dallas labels in the late 1960s or early 1970s, but after 1973 he recorded two singles for Don Logan’s Faces label under the name Al Hill.

Hemphill’s first single paired a deep blues, “Do What You Want To,” with a funkier organ and bass-driven tune called “Hey Girl,” released as Faces 3-2. The A-side features an amazing and uncredited blues guitarist, while the B-side more prominently features the organ, bass and drums, but both sides suffer from Hemphill’s relatively weak vocals and the atrocious sound quality on the sides, which raises questions about the location of recording. While both sides of the record refer to a “Don Logan Production,” the “garage” nature of the sound would seem to rule out Sound City as the recording location. It rather sounds as if the whole band was recorded together in one room, perhaps at a performance in a nightclub.

Hemphill’s second single was released as Faces 2012 in 1975, consisting of “Big Marie” b/w “Try To Be A Man.” “Big Marie” seems a stronger single than those on Hemphill’s first single, with a funky backing track with prominent organ; the B-side is an organ instrumental which also makes use of moog and other effects. Given the use of
such instruments, it seems likely that these sides were cut at Sound City, but the sound quality of the record seems a little rough.

RAY QUARLES

Soul singer James “Ray” Quarles was from Hayneville, Alabama, but first came to prominence in Montgomery, as a singer with a local band called The Sheiks. He was photographed performing with them at the Laicos Club in Montgomery by the Southern Courier, the civil rights newspaper that soul singer Mary Moultrie worked for.152

But Quarles made his first recordings for the Shreveport-based Faces label, although there is nothing to indicate where the recordings were made. “Ain’t Love Good When It Rains” has a relatively typical Southern soul sound, complete with rain and thunder sound effects in the background, and the overall sound is consistent with what was going on at Sound City in those days, so it might have been cut in Shreveport. The B-side, “It’s Gonna Be All Over,” has a funkier sound and a groove which resembles Tyrone Davis or King Floyd. These songs were released as Faces 3-11 in 1974, but like all releases on the label, they had extremely limited distribution. Quarles would record again as part of a soul group called Alabama (not the country group) who recorded for the Gomp label in Montgomery. He died on April 29, 2015.153

152 “Ray Quarles Performing On Stage at the Laicos Club in Montgomery, Alabama,” Umbrasearch, https://umbrasearch.org/catalog/8c5bbd42cc900f7362ebd52c9eed0e77377df025 (Accessed 01/16/2024).

BIG CONCERTS, 1974

In March of 1974 Rufus Thomas came to Shreveport, along with the Soul Children and Betty Wright, and for the first time in several years the concert was held at the Municipal Auditorium rather than the Hirsch Coliseum. The financial crisis in the wake of the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973 was affecting concert promotion, just as it was affecting every other aspect of American society. It is likely that the Municipal Auditorium cost less to rent than the Coliseum. Even so, Al Green came to the Hirsch Coliseum on March 23, and the Journal put the crowd at about 8,500 people. At a break in the show, Green was presented with a proclamation from Shreveport mayor Calhoun Allen proclaiming the day Al Green Day; it was presented to him by the Rev. Rex Hardy, the city’s manpower program director.

On July 21 the O’Jays came to the coliseum, along with Kool and the Gang, and on the weekend of September 14 and 15 Ike and Tina Turner came to a downtown club called Caesar’s Palace at 601 Spring Street. Formerly the Country and Western Palace, the club had a capacity of 1200 patrons.

November 1, James Brown came back to the Hirsch Coliseum, along with Lyn Collins, Fred Wesley and the JB’s, Maceo and the Macks, The Shades of Soul, and

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157 Deloris Allum, “Al Green...”
158 “Universal Concerts Presents The O’Jays,” Shreveport Sun, June 27, 1974, 3.
Bennie Lattimore,\textsuperscript{160} and on November 29 the Hollywood Palace brought the Bettye Swann Review (sic) featuring the Soulful Brass Band and Show.\textsuperscript{161} Swann was, of course, born and raised in Shreveport, and her show was the last big concert event of the year.

**THE PORT CITY EXPRESS**

The Port City Express first appears in June of 1974, in connection with a “Cavalcade of Fashion” at the Shreveport Convention Center, sponsored by the Alpha Sigma chapter of Theta Nu Sigma national sorority on June 28. The band was under the leadership of saxophonist Tyrone Dotson, who had been a member of the African Music Machine.\textsuperscript{162} The Port City Express was scheduled to play at the free outdoor concert in David Raines Park in the Cooper Road on July 12, along with the Funk Factory, Orchestra Heavy, and the Peace and Love Band,\textsuperscript{163} and when the Magnolia State Peace Officers Association threw a Pre-Thanksgiving Dance at Club 51 on the Cooper Road, they booked the Port City Express.\textsuperscript{164} Finally, on November 22 and 23, the Port City Express Band was in Monroe at the Elite Lounge, 1207 Griffin Street, backing up the El Dorado, Arkansas, blues singer Blue Green and his Soul Revue.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{160} “The Payback Starring Mr. J.B.,” *Shreveport Sun*, October 31, 1974, 12.

\textsuperscript{161} “Hollywood Palace,” *Shreveport Sun*, November 28, 1974, 12.


\textsuperscript{163} “Free Concert at David Raines,” *Shreveport Sun*, July 11, 1974, 9.

\textsuperscript{164} “Rappin With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, October 31, 1974, 12.

\textsuperscript{165} “Dance and Show at the Elite Lounge,” *Monroe Free Press*, November 22, 1974, 3.
The Port City Express was still together in 1975, as they played for a party sponsored by the Royaletts Social Club at Club 51 on the Cooper Road in July,166 and seem to have existed for perhaps another two years.

**PEACE AND LOVE BAND**

Saxophonist Elgie Brown had put his first band together in the 1950s, and through most of the 1960s it was usually called the Down Beats, with the occasional mention of the Soul Brothers or the Soul Searchers. But by 1974, times had changed, and in keeping with the era, he changed the name of his group to the Peace and Love Band.

The new band is first mentioned in June of 1974 in connection with a concert they gave on the outdoor basketball courts of the Travis Street Center, a neighborhood community center in the Bottoms at 962 Travis Street,167 and the concert was ultimately described as a success:

Residents of the Travis Street area were treated to an outside concert by Peace and Love, a local group which volunteered its services for the evening. Between 800 and 900 inhabitants of the area jammed the outdoor basketball court of the Travis Street Center at 962 Travis to listen and groove to the soulful music of the band. Hundreds of passing motorists stopped to attend the concert. Numbers played by the band included: Who’s That Lady, Let’s Get It On, Ain’t No Sunshine and the Soul Train Theme.168

On July 12, Peace and Love was one of four bands chosen to perform at a Family Day held at David Raines Park in the Cooper Road,169 but when rain caused the concert to end early, community activist Joe Wills announced that another free concert would be held in

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166 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, July 10, 1975, 12.
167 “Band To Give Concert For Area Youths,” *Shreveport Sun*, June 20, 1974, 3.
the park on August 4, and would feature Peace and Love, as well as the First Production band, Orchestra Heavy and Abraham and the Casanovas.\textsuperscript{170} In the fall, when football season kicked off, Grambling State University scheduled a game with Northwestern State University to be played in Shreveport, and a pre-game dance was scheduled for September 18 at Club 51 in the Cooper Road, sponsored by the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity with music provided by the Peace and Love band.\textsuperscript{171}

In the new year of 1975, the band got a special mention from “Raye,” the \textit{Sun}’s entertainment editor: “Have you heard Shreveport’s own band ‘Peace and Love?’ They’re really something else with a new funky sound. If you don’t dance, you sho-nuff will when you hear them get down. The group blasted the walls of Flamingo Christmas Eve night and is playing every Monday at the Purple Front (Check ‘em out).”\textsuperscript{172}

In May of 1975 Peace and Love advertised a show at the Tip-In Lounge at 515 Western Avenue in the Allendale neighborhood, and since it was advertised as a “Return Engagement,” they had apparently played there before.\textsuperscript{173} A month later they were at the 2nd Annual Family Day Parade and Concert at David Raines Park in the Cooper Road, along with Geater Davis and the Ivory and Ebony Band,\textsuperscript{174} and on July 5 they were part of the Mark IV Social Club’s “Operation Get Down” event at the Captain Shreve Hotel.\textsuperscript{175} The next day the same bands from the June 29 show in the Cooper Road were

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{170} “Free Concert At David Raines,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, August 1, 1974, 3.
\textsuperscript{172} “Rappin’ With Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, January 2, 1975, 3.
\textsuperscript{174} “2nd Annual Family Day Parade and Concert,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, June 29, 1975, 7.
\end{footnotes}
back in David Raines Park again for another show and a baseball game, with the addition of the African Music Machine.\footnote{By Popular Demand!!!" \textit{Shreveport Sun}, July 3, 1975, 3.}

**THE FIRST PRODUCTION BAND**

Trombonist Justin Johnson had put together the Funk Factory in the wake of the breakup of the King Cobras, but at some point in August of 1974 the Funk Factory renamed itself the First Production Band. Under the new name the First Production Band became the premier Black band in Shreveport during the mid-1970s, in demand for all kinds of social events, dances, and parties. Their first club date under the new name would seem to be an appearance at Club 51 on the Cooper Road, where they performed on October 25,\footnote{“Rappin’ with Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, October 24, 1974, 14.} and on November 23 the Zodiac Social Club hired them for a dance at the Chita Chata at 4140 Hollywood Avenue in Mooretown.\footnote{“Rappin’ With Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, November 7, 1974, 10.} In November, the First Production Band sponsored an Anniversary Dance at Club 51 on the Cooper Road,\footnote{“Rappin’ With Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, November 14, 1974, 12.} and it was also scheduled at the Hollywood Palace for a party sponsored by the Royalettes Social Club.\footnote{“Rappin’ With Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, November 28, 1974, 12.}

In the new year of 1975, the band was keeping busy: “E. P. Jones, manager of the First Production, was checking out the Purple Front Saturday night. The popular band will be gigging Friday night at Fort Polk and Saturday in Leesville at Pearl Harbor Club.”\footnote{“Rappin’ With Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, February 27, 1975, 10.} A month later, the First Production was hired to perform at an Annual Easter
Benefit Show sponsored by the Mark IV Social Club at the Civic Center on the Riverfront; it would prove to be the beginning of a long relationship between the band and the social club.\(^{182}\) As the warm weather approached at the end of March, the First Production began a series of Sunday afternoon shows at A & B Landing on the far southwest side of Cross Lake;\(^{183}\) the events soon were getting a good review from the \textit{Sun}'s entertainment reporter:

> Blowing minds and driving the folk wild is the First Production every Sunday evening at A & B Landing. The message is readily getting across and is being termed as the place to be. Even more relaxing is packing a lunch, throwing on an old pair of jeans, and turning your ears to the sounds of the First Production.\(^{184}\)

By May, the crowds each Sunday at the Landing were approaching 350 people,\(^{185}\) and that same month the Mark IV sponsored another benefit dance at the Captain Shreve Hotel featuring the band and a dance group from Wiley College.\(^{186}\) By June, the First Production had a regular Monday night gig at the Purple Front,\(^{187}\) and in July the Marigold Social Club rented out the Progressive Men’s Club on Cross Lake for a breakfast dance played by the band.\(^{188}\) In August they were back at Club 51 for a dance sponsored by the Black Women’s League,\(^{189}\) and in September the Gayettes Social Club

\(^{182}\) “Mark IV Civic Club To Host Annual Easter Benefit Show,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, March 6, 1975, 3.


\(^{184}\) “Rappin’ With Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, April 27, 1975, 12.


\(^{189}\) “Rappin’ With Raye,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, August 14, 1975, 12.
had a breakfast dance at the Masonic Hall with First Production. The same month they were one of two featured bands at the final Family Day of the year in David Raines Park, along with the African Music Machine, and in October the First Production Band was the featured entertainment for a Western Dance sponsored by the Silhouette Social Club at Club 51. A Pre-Halloween Ball was organized by the Essence Social Club and played by the First Production band on October 30; it was clear that the band was the first call for most of the city’s social club functions and that Club 51 was the preferred venue.

THE EARL WHITE REVUE

The Earl White Revue was a Chicago-based touring soul group which traveled the country, first coming to Shreveport in October of 1974, when they were booked to perform at a Shreve Square nightclub called Salute. However, the entertainment writer for the *Shreveport Sun* did not name the group at first: “Let the music take your mind at Salute in Shreveport. There’s a soul band from the Windy City of Chicago playing Monday through the weekend—it’s too much.” A week later, Raye, the columnist, gave a detailed and enthusiastic review:

The place was Salute, Shreve Square. Event: Club Salute presented to Shreveporters Chicago’s Earl White Revue. This was a soul-out affair. Special stars were Miss Rachel, whose singing and dancing were terrific. She hypnotized every eye in the audience. Little Miss New York was also on the

193 “Pre-Halloween Ball,” *Shreveport Sun*, October 23, 1975, 8.
194 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, October 31, 1974, 12.
scene—her performance took the curl out of many a “fro.” Last, but not least, was the dynamite E. W. that drove the crowd completely wild. As Earl (M.C.) puts it, “The show is just like Brylcream—A little dab will do ya.” I rate it R for righteous.195

The enthusiasm which Shreveport showed for Earl White and his band led to the city becoming a sort of headquarters for them during the mid-1970s; although they continued to tour in other cities, they were frequently in Shreveport, and even recorded a couple of singles in the city. In December 1974, they were back for a week-long stay at the Hollywood Palace,196 and they were booked for an extended holiday season at the same venue from December 23, 1974, to January 5, 1975. Advertising at the time shows that White’s backing band was known as the H.N.I.C. Showband, and that White himself went by the nickname “Big Bossman.”197 After the holidays, the entertainment writer for the Sun continued her effusive praise: “If you didn’t see the show, you missed out on seeing one of the hottest bands that’s ever hit Shreveport—professionals in action.”198 Later in January, Earl White called the Sun to say that the band was on their way to Canada, and that their rehearsals had been held in Shreveport.199

By May 1975, they were back in Shreveport, this time at Club Reo, an Allendale club at 600 Pierre Avenue which was run by soul singer Eddie Giles; after three days in

196 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, December 12, 1974, 12.
197 “Big Show and Dance,” Shreveport Sun, December 19, 1974, 3.
198 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, January 9, 1975, 12.
199 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, January 23, 1975, 10.
Shreveport, they were headed to Wichita Falls and then to London, England. Their May 6-8 shows received another raving review from the *Sun*:

The Earl White Revue that was held at Club Reo, 600 Pierre Ave., May 6-8, made week nights in the Port town into a swinging weekend bash. Admirers came from all around to check them out. The Earl White Revue is probably one of the most dynamic groups to come to town in awhile. Jamming audiences with wild, electrifying entertainment, yet still maintaining a unique piece of class. The event was a sight to see, with most of the fans decked to kill. Their talent is phenomenal! Even after three hours of getting down, fans wanted more! The audience stomped and yelled with enthusiasm as they took part in sing alongs led by the group’s male vocal star “E. W.”........There were so many tunes that stole the show, but the ones I remember the most were Brand New Funk, Sweet Caroline and The Way We Were - sung by Ms. Rochell, the little lady from Paris, France......Fans, worry no more. They’ll be back again, May 28. Same place, Club Reo.

Earl White and his revue were indeed back in Shreveport from May 28 through May 31 at Club Reo before heading out on a cross-country tour. In her review of those performances, the entertainment writer Raye mentioned a band member named E. T. who was Earl Turner, a man who went on to have his own career in Shreveport and later Las Vegas.

Earl White and his band were out touring the country from June to November, and then they returned to Shreveport’s Club Reo on four nights around the Thanksgiving holiday. Later in December, they had another four nights at a different Shreveport club, Big Daddy’s Lounge at 7937 Line Avenue, which had been the Jazz Workshop back in

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204 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, November 27, 1975, 14.
1973 before a destructive fire.\textsuperscript{205} The club was owned by a Shreveport man named Russell Griffith, who had opened it in October.\textsuperscript{206} Unfortunately, Griffith had not bothered to get a city liquor permit when he applied for his state permit, so in early December he was arrested by the Organized Crime Unit of the Shreveport police for selling liquor without the necessary permits.\textsuperscript{207}

On October 16, 1976, Griffith’s body was found in the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area in Concordia Parish, about fifty miles south of Vidalia, Louisiana; he had been shot twice in the face with a shotgun, and had a map in his pocket showing him how to get to the scene of his own murder. Sheriff Fred Schiele told reporters that the killing had the mark of a professional hit, and the Baton Rouge police were investigating whether there was a connection to the shotgun slaying of Shreveport advertising executive Jim Leslie, who had been involved in the investigation of Police Commissioner George D’Artois. Griffin had operated the Inside Out club in Shreve Square and a club in Dallas, as well as a limousine service to take people from Dallas and Houston to the Louisiana Downs horse racing track, where he had once had a penthouse.\textsuperscript{208} Found in his car after his death were briefcases full of documents listing the names of prominent Shreveport residents, as well as the names of people thought to be involved in organized crime.\textsuperscript{209} In 1981, a man named Steven Simonaux was indicted by a Federal grand jury,


\textsuperscript{207} “Man Arrested,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, December 5, 1975, 5.

\textsuperscript{208} Henry Delahunt, “Man Led Local Man To Site of Murder,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, October 18, 1976, 1.

and pled guilty to the murder of Russell Griffith. Earl White and his band would remain a fixture on the Shreveport scene through 1977.

**TED TAYLOR, 1974-1975**

Ted Taylor was a frequent visitor to Shreveport long before he started recording in the city, and he also hired musicians who were from the area. But after he began recording at Sound City Recording Studio, he was in the city even more often than before. On November 14, 1974, he appeared in Shreveport at the Hollywood Palace nightclub, and on June 1, 1975, he was back for an appearance at the Afro-Cana in Bossier City, a club that usually featured only a DJ. That same year Taylor signed with the Alarm label at Sound City Recording Studios, becoming the biggest and best-known artist on the label. He recorded his first single, “Everybody’s Stealing” b/w “Caught Up In A Good Woman’s Love,” at Sound City, backed by what sounds like the African Music Machine. The A-side was co-written by Taylor himself, and the B-side by Alabama soul singer Sam Dees, and both sides had a typical Shreveport southern soul sound, the latter track with strings; Taylor would later say that he chose an all-male backing vocal group because everyone else was using female background singers. The single was released the same year as Alarm 110.

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211 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, November 14, 1974, 12.

In 1974, Police Commissioner George D’Artois was again up for re-election. His political odyssey had changed in weird ways since the turmoil of 1963 when he and his men violently broke up Black protests. At that time, he had commanded the nearly-unanimous support of white Shreveport residents, while being hated and feared by Black residents. But by 1970, that dynamic had started to change; white neighborhoods had voted against D’Artois that year, and his efforts to attract Black votes worked well enough to keep him in office. Oddly, the Black community began to split into pro-D’Artois and anti-D’Artois factions, and that dynamic remained in place as D’Artois began his re-election campaign in June of 1974 with a statement that Shreveport needed more Black police officers. Of course, reading between the lines, D’Artois seemed to be suggesting that Black officers would patrol Black neighborhoods, a sort of segregation within an integrated department, but he undoubtedly felt that a call to hire more Black officers would help him gain votes within the Black community. At the same time, he announced an “old-fashioned” political rally on the Shreveport riverfront on July 1, 1974, featuring music by Eddie Giles and the Jive Five and white (but soulful) rocker Bill Bush. The rally ended up attracting over five thousand attendees, and netted D’Artois an endorsement from Black community leader Jerry Tim Brooks, who accused people of attempting to “disrupt the city and cause discord.”

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214 “D’Artois To Have Public Rally July 1,” Shreveport Sun, June 27, 1974, 2.

215 “Rally For D’Artois Attracts Large Crowd; Brooks Announces His Endorsement,” Shreveport Sun, July 4, 1974, 1.
But other elements in the Black community could not forgive D’Artois’ actions during the summer of 1963. On July 4, a full-page advertisement appeared in the *Sun* by an organization called People Organized For the Defeat of George D’Artois (PODOG), which seems to have been organized by Dr. L. C. Pendleton and Black attorney Hilry Huckaby III. They set forth their position in clear terms:

The time for the fall of the D’Artois regime in Shreveport, Louisiana is long overdue. In the City Elections of 1970, the Caucasian citizens of Shreveport denounced the Gestapo tactics of this powerful regime by voting for its defeat. This powerful regime was re-instated, however, by the votes of the Black citizens of Shreveport. WHY?

Had the regime, prior to 1970, acted in the interest of Black people? Has the regime, since 1970, acted in the interest of Black people? Did the regime move to abolish crime or corruption in this city, or was the move initiated by other law enforcement agencies?

We are calling for the defeat of the D’Artois regime NOW! and Black people, the real victims of the regime, must lead the way. Black leaders are called upon to join with us, because any Shepherd who leads his sheep to the wolf or fails to lead his flock away from a known wolf is a TRAITOR! On August 17, 1974, vote to defeat the D’Artois regime.216

D’Artois’s opponent for the police commissioner position was a man named William “Bill” Kimball, but he was having his own difficulties with the Black community. One of his operatives, a man named Al Theriac, had been visiting the night clubs in Shreve Square seeking contributions from club owners. According to some of them, Theriac stated that “everybody” was donating, and that if Kimball won, they would be able to stay open until 4 AM and sell liquor on Sundays, and Levent Cakici, the owner of Salute’s, said he was told that Kimball could arrange it so that “Blacks would be kept

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out of Shreve Square.” Kimball denied the reports, saying, “Why would I want to keep the blacks out of the clubs when I have been campaigning in the black community for the last three weeks?”

When Kimball accused George D’Artois of having been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, D’Artois threatened to sue him for slander, yet the PODOG organization purchased a full-page advertisement in the Sun which seemed to reproduce a Klan application signed by D’Artois in 1958 at a time when he was a sheriff’s deputy, as well as a letter from the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan thanking D’Artois for his cooperation with them in August of 1973 during their demonstrations in Shreveport. Whether the documents were authentic or some sort of “deep fake” is unclear. Either way, the Black community voted for D’Artois in sufficient numbers for him to win re-election for a fourth term. In October, D’Artois brought suit against the Shreveport Sun, its editor M. L. Collins, Dr. L. C. Pendleton, and a man named David Wyandon for the advertisement that linked D’Artois to the KKK. However, the outcome of the suit is never mentioned in the Shreveport papers; it was likely either dismissed or the parties reached a settlement out of court.

Whether or not Kimball’s operative had promised to keep Blacks out of Shreve Square, the area did not have a welcoming reputation when it came to Black patrons. Complaints had been made from the Square’s opening that Blacks were being turned

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218 “D’Artois Denies Being Member of Klan,” Shreveport Sun, August 15, 1974, 1.
219 “People Organized For The Defeat of George D’Artois,” Shreveport Sun, August 15, 1974, 16.
220 “D’Artois Files Damage Suit For Political Advertisement,” Shreveport Sun, October 10, 1974, 1.
away from clubs like the Sports Page and T.G.I Friday’s, and when a restaurant called the Mississippi River Company opened in the district, it used the rather questionable slogan of “Old Times There Are Not Forgotten.” Shreveport’s inability to adjust to the modern era was again being displayed quite clearly.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1975**

Shreveport continued to be the scene of many concerts by nationally known acts in 1975, beginning with a February appearance of The Buddy Miles Express and Tyrone Davis at the Municipal Auditorium, sponsored by KOKA radio station and Volcanic Productions. Marvin Gaye and the band Bloodstone were scheduled on February 22, also at the Municipal Auditorium, but the event was cancelled and rescheduled for April 13.

On March 8 the band Blue Magic appeared on the Grambling State University campus, continuing a trend of on-campus shows by big-name national acts, and on March 14 white blues artist Johnny Winter came to the Hirsch Memorial Auditorium along with legendary blues harmonica player James Cotton. The review of the latter show in the *Shreveport Journal* complained about the “terrible acoustics” of Hirsch yet noted that Winter was forced to perform three encores by the cheering crowds.

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223 “Marvin Gaye To Appear Here on February 22,” *Shreveport Sun*, February 6, 1975, 3.
224 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, February 27, 1975, 10.
225 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*. March 6, 1975, 12.
concert by Earth, Wind and Fire was only mentioned after the fact, and apparently occurred on the Grambling campus in April. On June 6 Little Milton and his band came to Club 51 on the Cooper Road, probably the biggest artist ever to appear at that establishment, and on July 15, the Ohio Players came to Shreveport along with Major Harris and Bobby Womack. War and Funkadelic came to the city on July 27, and Earth, Wind and Fire came to the Hirsch Coliseum on August 10 along with The Main Ingredient.

When the Country and Western Palace at 601 Spring Street closed abruptly during the summer, it reopened as the Somewhere Else Club and booked New Orleans great Fats Domino for a two-night appearance on July 18 and July 19. The downtown club was said to be the largest in Shreveport, capable of seating twelve hundred people. Although the *Journal* mentioned an “enthusiastic crowd,” the show was marred by a malfunctioning sound system. A couple of weeks later, the jazz elder statesman Lionel Hampton appeared at the Sheraton Bossier Inn on July 29, and on August 8 and 9 the Somewhere Else club brought in Southern soul star Percy Sledge for a two-night appearance. The *Sun* reviewer noted that the crowd at Sledge’s appearance was nearly

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228 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, May 1, 1975, 13.
229 “Rappin’ With Raye,” *Shreveport Sun*, June 5, 1975, 12.
231 ibid.
all white, and that very few Shreveport Blacks attended. While it might have been due to the venue, the reviewer pointed out that Sledge’s vocal style was reminiscent of country music and suggested that as the reason for lack of Black support. Shreveport’s nightlife scene was still very segregated in 1975.237

The big-name shows continued, as Ray Charles came to the Somewhere Else club on August 27 and Kool and the Gang to the Hirsch Coliseum on August 29,238 followed by Brook Benton at the Somewhere Else club on October 10 & 11.239 The Drifters were at the Somewhere Else on Halloween night October 31 and November 1,240 and on New Year’s Eve the same club brought in The Platters for a special celebration to close out the year.241

UNITY

The vocal group Unity was fairly popular in Shreveport during 1975, first garnering attention at a Booker T. Washington High School talent show in January,242 but it was not until September that a Sun columnist gave a thorough description of the group:

Still going strong and getting even better is one of Shreveport’s new hottest groups, “Unity.” The group is put together by two sisters, Betty and Faye, and their brother, Jackie, who can tear an O’Jays number to pieces. Their tunes range from soul to rhythm and blues. Betty belts out soulful heart shaking tunes done by Millie Jackson, “If Loving You Is Wrong,” and Gwen McCrae’s “Rocking Chair.” Right now the group is doing lots of out-of-town


238 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, August 28, 1975, 12.


engagements and are getting more in demand! If you’re interested in catching their act, stop by the Tip-In Lounge on Western and check ’em out.243

It seems that Unity never recorded.

EDDIE GILES AND CLUB REO

By the early 1970s Shreveport was beginning to have a growing problem with crime and violence, and much of it seemed to be centered in the Allendale neighborhood. The Rex Key Club at 600 Pierre Avenue, the most recent attempt at a private membership club in Shreveport, had suffered from adverse publicity as a result, even though none of the violent incidents in the neighborhood had anything to do with the club. In February of 1975 it was acquired by soul singer Eddie Giles, who advertised six nights of live entertainment per week.244 “Raye,” the Sun’s entertainment editor, gave a detailed description of the grand opening of Club Reo:

Saturday, opening night, when I stepped into the doors of Club Reo, my first words were WOW! there were people, lots of people (if you know what I mean) and the atmosphere was entirely a different bag from the previous club. Two half-gallons of booze were given away as door prizes. Yours truly (Raye) drew the first lucky number. The Band was really righteous. These brothers can do anything from “git-down” instrumentals to funky vocals to mystic messages. There was a song to fit every mood and Eddie Giles made sure of that by doing a medley of songs. My favorite was “Jealous Kind of Fellow.” Rapping and charming the ladies was sexy Jimmy Jackson. Jimmy has the quality of a professional showman. His love of performing is obvious and his outgoing personality enables him to establish a quick contact with his audience.245

Raye continued her praise of the new establishment two weeks later:


244 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, February 27, 1975, 10.

245 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, March 6, 1975, 12.
“Club Reo,” 600 Pierre Avenue, is one of the most exciting and warmest spots in town….It was formerly the Rex Key Club and had been struggling under previous management and locked its doors because of customer apathy…..However, now it seems to be thriving on some new adrenalin juices…..Eddie Giles, popular recording artist, has opened the former place with a new name, “Club Reo,” and the action gets better and better every time. A great asset to the club is Tony Giles, the lovely better half of Eddie G., who meets and greets his clientele with the graciousness and elegance of any hostess….The weekend blast at the “REO” was the talk of the town, and the reason for all the gab was the new hot live wire group that appeared there—“The Ebony Spirit,” featuring lead singer Ms. Doris Grayson.246

Despite running a club, Giles was still occasionally traveling out of town to shows, such as a Fourth of July event in Monroe at Head’s Palladium, one of the two main Black clubs in the northeast Louisiana city east of Shreveport.247 Interestingly, the ad for that show listed the current members of the Jive Five, Chuck Lawrence, Cave Man, James Stewart, Willie James, and Dori Grayson.

But Giles’s main focus seemed to be on his club, which was still going strong in August: “The place was swinging as we rocked steady with Eddie and jammed to the music by the Jive Five playing a variety of tunes from jazz to rhythm and blues. Eddie and the guys were all decked in tails.”248

Giles ran the Club Reo until around November of 1976, when the building and club were taken over by community activist Joe Wills.249

246 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, March 20, 1975, 12.
248 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, August 14, 1975, 12.
THE UNCLE REMUS BAND

Grambling State University, as a fairly large Black college with a legendary band program, was unsurprisingly the place where a lot of new soul and funk bands were born. In October of 1975, a new band appeared from Grambling, called the Uncle Remus Band, advertised for an appearance at the Elite Lounge in Monroe, Louisiana.250 The same band was back at the Elite Lounge on December 5 and 6,251 and again on December 31, 1975, through January 3, 1976.252 Their last performance was on February 20 and 21, 1976, again at the Elite Lounge in Monroe. The Uncle Remus Band apparently did not record.

THE BLACK ICE BAND

Another band that appeared from Grambling around the same time as the Uncle Remus Band was the Black Ice Band, which first appeared at the Elite Lounge on November 21 and 22 in Monroe.253 This seems to have been their only advertised performance, and while there were a number of bands with the same name across the country, the Grambling band called Black Ice does not seem to have ever recorded.

FAILURE OF SHREVE SQUARE AND THE NIGHTCLUB RAIDS

From the outside looking in, Shreveport seemed to be booming in 1975. The city had an unprecedented number of Black-oriented live music concerts; the new Louisiana Downs racetrack was bringing racing fans in from many other states, and a new downtown club was open with a capacity to seat twelve-hundred patrons. The city had a

professional sports franchise, the Shreveport Steamer in the upstart World Football
League, and there were clubs nearly everywhere on both the Shreveport and Bossier City
sides of the Red River. But behind the scenes, all was not well.

In February, Joseph Henry Schaeffer, Jr., of Memphis, the largest stockholder in
Shreve Square Inc., filed for bankruptcy in what was described as the largest personal
bankruptcy in Memphis history. Although Shreve Square did not file for bankruptcy,
Schaeffer’s bankruptcy set off a chain reaction which led to businesses vacating the
downtown Shreveport district. Said one business owner, Alan Albis, when told about a
prospective buyer for the development, “I’d like to meet that individual. He must have
just gotten out of an insane asylum.”254 On February 25 a judge ordered all Shreve Square
properties sold at auction,255 and on May 9 the property was purchased by Bossier Bank
and Trust, the lien holder. Although there had been rumors of interested buyers, nobody
bid for the development except the bank.256 Although clubs would remain active in the
district as late as the 1980s, it never reached the potential its developers intended.

In June, Police and Fire Commissioner George D’Artois formed a “strike force”
and began raiding Black night clubs on weekends, looking for weapons. In the first
weekend of the raids, the Shreveport police seized eight guns and a knife; D’Artois stated
that the raids were done at the request of some in the Black community who were
complaining about the shootings and killings that were occurring in the bars and clubs,

254 Jua Nyla Hutcheson, “Top Shreve Square Stockholder Files $38 Million Bankruptcy,”

255 Wanda Warner, “Judge Orders Sales of Shreve Square Property,” Shreveport Journal, February
25, 1975, 1.

and that the practice would continue. A few weeks later twenty-one Black night clubs were raided, and seven guns were seized. Detective Sam Burns and Commissioner D’Artois warned the community that people who carried weapons into bars and night clubs would be prosecuted.

In July, Police Community Relations director Cleophus Banks claimed that a community survey found that 90% of Black community respondents supported the ongoing raids against Black night spots, but of course that survey was conducted by a unit of the Shreveport Police Department, so it has to be taken with a grain of salt. More than likely, the half of the Black community who had helped George D’Artois win reelection in 1974 had to see the raids as a betrayal; as events unfolded in following years, it would become clear that something other than concern about violence in Black clubs was at the back of D’Artois’s actions.

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259 “Citizens Here Show Favorable Attitude Toward Weapons Raids In Bars and Clubs,” Shreveport Sun, July 17, 1975, 1.
As the new year of 1976 opened, events were developing that would adversely affect both the recording and live music scenes in Shreveport. It was becoming evident that Shreveport’s growth was stagnating, and a recent consultant’s report had suggested that Shreveport was the least favorable place to live of the cities its size which were studied. Shreveport received low ratings in government, economics, health, environment, and social well-being. City officials tried to find fault with the report, naturally, but failed to address the issues it highlighted. High inflation and tight credit began to strangle Shreveport economically, and clubs began to shed live bands in favor of disc jockeys. As for the recording industry, only one studio, Sound City, was operating in Shreveport, and the Alarm Records label was the only functioning label with national distribution. Although Stan Lewis’s Jewel, Paula, and Ronn labels were still releasing product, all of that product was being recorded somewhere other than Shreveport.

THE EARL WHITE REVUE, 1976-1978

Earl White of Chicago remained popular in Shreveport in 1976 and for a couple of years thereafter in Shreveport. At the end of 1975 he had been resident at a new club called Big Daddy’s Lounge in the former Jazz Workshop location at 7937 Line Avenue in Cedar Grove. As “Raye,” the entertainment writer for the Sun put it:

The Earl White Revue started the season off with lots of yuletide wishes and cheer at Big Daddy’s, Shreveport’s newest night spot, formerly known as the Jazz Workshop, and located on Line Avenue in Cedar Grove. The cozy spot is

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managed by none other than the red-head Big Daddy himself—
all the waitresses are really together and super courteous. Check it out! The
atmosphere is just what you let it be…Speaking of atmosphere, Earl White
and his H.N.I.C.’s really made the night and there’s no doubt that they’re No. 1
in our city’s demand.³

In February Earl White was back at Eddie Giles’s Club Reo for a three-night
engagement, with his band under the direction of Earl Turner, and “wild lighting
effects.”⁴ Presumably the band was still touring across the country, but on June 26 and 27
they were back in the Shreveport area performing for the airmen at Barksdale Air Force
Base,⁵ and in late July, they were at Head’s Palladium in Monroe, Louisiana, for two
nights.⁶ In August they were back at Club Reo, and while there was no longer an
entertainment column in the Shreveport Sun, writer B. J. Mason gave a detailed account
of the show:

The Earl White Revue is hot buttered soul, poured in sizzling spoonfuls over a
capacity crowd at the local Club Reo on Pierre. White, a master showman
with a six-piece combo backing him up, spiked the two-hour gig with the kind
of down home funk that can make a good man lose his religion…White’s
professional-sounding rhythm sections explored such current hits as “Skin
Tight,” “Jive Turkey,” “Fire,” “Roller Coaster,” “Let’s Straighten It Out,” and
“Get Up Offa That Thing.” The group featured T.J. on congos (sic); Mark on
bass guitar; Curtis and Earth on drums, E. T. on lead guitar, and Cleo on tenor
sax. The Revue is now booked at the Time Out club on Line Ave. through this
Saturday.⁷

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² Rusty Griffith.
³ “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, January 1, 1976, 2.
⁴ “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, February 19, 1976, 10.
The Revue was back again in the area in November for another engagement on the Barksdale Air Force Base, and in December they appeared at the Stork Supper Club in Bossier City for a week, their last performance in the area for the year.

In January of 1977 Earl White was back at the Stork Club on the Bossier Strip, and a week later he was at the Players’ Choice on Travis Street in the Bottoms neighborhood. But a performance of the band on the Shreveport riverfront during the annual Holiday in Dixie event in April highlighted the serious racial divide that still existed in Shreveport when a racial brawl broke out after a white man threw a catfish onto the stage while the musicians were playing:

Joe Henderson, road manager and engineer for the popular entertainment group, told reporters that the heckler made a nuisance of himself by throwing a fish on the stage while the act was still in progress. Henderson said he asked the heckler to stop disturbing the show, and said that he was spat on when he urged the man to leave. “That made me mad,” Henderson said. “So I hit him and knocked him out. There were some ambulance attendants around, and they revived him. But then he got some of his buddies and came back looking for me. I knew they wanted to fight, so I just started slugging.” At that point, several members of the otherwise peaceful audience joined the skirmish, but no one was later reported injured. Police arrived at the scene minutes later, but no arrests were made. “There’s nothing funny about what the heckler did,” said Earl White, veteran stage artist and manager of the troupe. “But we’re professionals and we can take it all in stride. I think the guy was just having fun, but he was having fun at the wrong time.”

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About a year later, White and his band were back in Shreveport at a club called the Players’ Choice, although the Sun’s Andrew Harris noted that the band had only one original member left and in his opinion was not up to their previous standard.13

At some point in 1977, the Earl White band entered Sound City Recording Studio to record two singles on the Cygnet label, which was apparently their own imprint. The first single was by Rochelle Rabouin, the woman known as “Ms. Paris” in White’s show, consisting of “This Is My Year” b/w “Keep This In Mind.” The A-side has the typical disco/boogie feel of the era, while the slow ballad B-side has a southern soul feel. Both sides were produced by drummer James Stroud, who was becoming an important part of Malaco in Jackson, Mississippi. The second single was credited to Earl White himself, and consisted of “Never Fall In Love Again” b/w “Very Special Girl,” with the A-side as a slow ballad and the B-side having the disco/funk tempo. These were also produced by James Stroud, this time co-produced with Earl White, and recorded at Sound City in Shreveport and Malaco in Jackson, Mississippi, perhaps the latter studio being where strings and horns were added.

But in July 1978 the Earl White Revue found itself in a chaotic situation when they were scheduled to open up for Betty Wright at an outdoor concert in Shreveport’s fairly new Veterans’ Amphitheatre near the Red River. The concert was scheduled for July 30,14 and was to feature local Shreveport bands Backfire and the First Production as well as Wright. But as the Times reviewer noted, the concert was a complete disaster,

13 Andrew Harris, “Saturday Night Fever,” Shreveport Sun, April 6, 1978, 12.

triggered when Betty Wright sent a telegram to promoters Magnum Force Productions that she was unable to attend due to “difficulties” in Atlanta.\textsuperscript{15} When the promoters read her message to the crowd of six thousand and offered them a chance to leave and request a refund, more than half left. However, the rest of the lineup, including New Orleans band Chocolate Milk, went forward, and the review gave a good account of White’s performance:

Earl White followed with a slick, polished and generally professional act which was plagued by high winds which threatened to knock over the drummer’s cymbals. White, co-vocalist Rochelle Rabouin and the HNIC Showband opened with a medley of songs that followed the rhythm of Buddy Miles’ “Them Changes.” HNIC saxman Charles “Skeet” Shelton sang with “Groove With You” during the middle of White’s short set.\textsuperscript{16}

In the wake of Betty Wright’s cancelled appearance, Lee Nichols, the owner of Magnum Force Productions received threats against his life and the lives of family members and stated that he intended to file suit against Wright for cancelling the show six hours before she was to have appeared. He also stated that her cancellation caused a “near riot” at Veterans Park.\textsuperscript{17} Wright had claimed that several of her band members had been injured in Augusta, Georgia, and that she was “too distraught” to perform, but Nichols stated that authorities in Augusta stated that there had been only a minor scuffle at the show and that nobody had been hospitalized.


\textsuperscript{16} ibid.

The Earl White Revue appeared again in Shreveport during the annual Red River Revel on September 24, 1978, on the Red Stage. An anonymous caller to the *Shreveport Times* complained about their appearance:

> The entertainment Sunday night at the Red River Revel was poor taste (sic). The Earl White Revue from Chicago was not in good taste, or it was not the caliber of entertainment that represents the Revel. The jokes were out of place and the language was not for all ears.

Although the Earl White Revue had been a frequent presence in Shreveport for nearly four years, they seem to have left the area by 1979. White seems to have relocated to Las Vegas, as so many North Louisiana singers and musicians did.

**THE LAKESIDE POLYPHONICS**

Ernest Lampkins, the bass-playing son of Shreveport pianist Major Lampkins, had opened the city’s first Black-owned music school, the Lakeside School of Music, in the late 1960s, and out of faculty and students there formed one of Shreveport’s longest-lasting bands, the Lakeside Polyphonics, which still exists today as Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics.

When the Booker T. Washington High School Class of 1959 had their reunion at the Forty and Eight Club on the shores of Cross Lake in December 1975, they hired the Lakeside Polyphonics to play for it, and on October 9, during the Red River Revel in downtown Shreveport, the Polyphonics played a night show on the large stage.

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In July of 1978 the Lakeside Polyphonics was one of the bands chosen to perform in a series of downtown concerts on the Caddo Parish Courthouse square known as the Brown Bagger’s Bashes, with their performance featuring Ernest Lampkins’s father Major on piano.22 and the same meeting of father and son took place in September on the Blue Stage at the annual Red River Revel in downtown Shreveport.23 The newspaper article in the Journal pointed out that all members of the band were faculty members at the Lakeside School of Music and that many of them had played with well-known musicians including Ray Charles and Isaac Hayes. Bassist Melvin Landry and saxophonist Dorsey Summerfield were mentioned by name.

A year later, on October 3, 1979, the Lakeside Polyphonics were again on the Blue Stage of the Red River Revel downtown, although the Shreveport Journal for some reason labeled them a “choral group.”24 The Polyphonics remain an active band to this day.

THE FIRST PRODUCTION BAND, 1976-1979

By 1976, the First Production Band had arguably become the most popular group in Shreveport’s Black community, especially for social club dances and events. The Mark IV Civic Club, which was closely associated with the band, sponsored an Annual Awards and Achievement program during the Christmas season of 1975, at which the band played, and the Sun’s entertainment editor mentioned organist Freddie Pierson singing


24 “Wednesday, Oct. 3,” Shreveport Journal, September 26, 1979, 47.
“Merry Christmas Baby” as the highlight of the evening. On January 22 and 23, 1976, they were at Rusty Griffith’s Big Daddy Lounge in Cedar Grove, and on the 25th they were at Club 51 for a dance sponsored by the Brotherhood Social Club. While Shreveport did not have organizations called social aid and pleasure clubs as New Orleans did, the Black community had a number of social clubs that sponsored parties and events. On January 29, they were back at Big Daddy’s again, and on Valentine’s Night, the Mark IV hired First Production to play for their Miss Valentine Pageant and dance at Club 51 on the Cooper Road. On February 20 and 21, the First Production was at the Non-Commissioned Officers’ Club at Barksdale Air Force Base, and on March 6, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, a local voter registration organization, sponsored a Pre-Spring Dance at Club 51 with the band. On March 20, the First Production played for a dance by the Marigold Social Club, and the Sun’s reviewer mentioned a singer named Barlo with them singing Johnnie Taylor’s “Disco Lady.” They were at Eddie Giles’s Club Reo on March 26 and 27, and on April 10, they were at the Shreveport Convention Hall for the third annual Easter Benefit Show and Dance sponsored by the Mark IV Civic

27 “Rappin With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, January 22, 1976, 12.
29 “Rappin’ With Raye,” Shreveport Sun, February 12, 1976, 12.
33 ibid.
and Social Club. On May 22, the Mark IV Social Club sponsored their second annual scholarship show and benefit dance at Club 51 on the Cooper Road, and the First Production band provided the music as always.

By August of 1976, what had been Big Daddy’s Lounge had been renamed the Time Out Club, under new owners, Lynn Braggs and Count Alexander, who booked the First Production Band for a show that was reviewed by B. J. Mason in the Shreveport Sun:

Congo player-lead vocalist Vernon Pierson, backed by a swinging group of singing musicians, chimed his way through a thicket of hits that included such favorites as “Mister Dream Merchant,” “Hold On To What You Got,” “Everybody, Come Together,” and “Time,” a song made popular by the Commodores. Giving the audience more than it bargained for or expected, the combo romped through Ramsey Lewis’ “Sun Goddess” like it was theirs instead of his, then damned near upstaged the O’Jays on “You Are My Sunshine.” The rhythm section consisted of Donald Fuller on bass guitar, Raymond Alford on trumpet, Willie Moody on drums, sax man John Rochelle, Charles Player on some very hot keyboards, and Dell Douglas strumming a real mean lead guitar. This is a small band with a big band sound.

The First Production Band was back at the Time Out Club again on Christmas night for their last show of the year.

In the New Year of 1977, the Mark IV Social Club teamed up with the Magnificent Seven Social Club to hold a Miss Shreveport Valentine ’77 pageant at the Masonic Hall on February 12, where the First Production Band played, and in April, the band began another series of Sunday afternoon concerts at A & B Landing on Cross Lake,

34 “Civic Clubs Host Show,” Shreveport Journal, April 9, 1976, 27.
beginning on Easter Sunday. Eventually, however, the management of the landing seems to have begun switching up the local bands they booked on different weekends, including bands like Ten Degrees Below Funk and High Cotton. But on Mothers’ Day, May 8, the First Production was back at the landing again. On December 10, 1977, the Mark IV Social Club had their fifth anniversary dance, and had what they billed as the First Production Show Band to provide the music.

But in May of 1978, the First Production band suffered a tragedy: its trumpet player Glen Wattree drowned when he slipped off a bank while fishing at Caddo Lake, northwest of Shreveport. He had graduated from Bethune High School and had been a member of the marching band at Grambling State University before returning to Shreveport and joining the First Production band.

In July, they were part of the disastrous Veterans Park concert that fell apart when Betty Wright cancelled six hours before the show was to begin, yet they were given a fairly positive review by John Andrew Prime, the reviewer of the Times. By this point, the Shreveport daily papers were beginning to review Black concerts:

The First Production, a local group, opened at 7:40 PM with “Ain’t Gonna Hurt Nobody” and ended nearly an hour later with their seventh number. The band’s rhythm section carried all of their tunes. The vocals were good for the most part, with the best vocals and excellent drumming delivered by William Moody.

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39 “Mother’s Day (sic) at A & B Landing,” Shreveport Sun, May 9, 1977, 5.
40 “Mark IV Civic Club Achievement Award Program,” Shreveport Sun, December 8, 1977, 3.
41 “Member of Local Band Drowns Here,” Shreveport Sun, May 25, 1978, 1.
In August, Andrew Harris wrote a lengthy article about the group for the *Shreveport Sun* in which he gave something of the band’s history and a description of its sound and future plans:

Organized here in 1973, the First Production has weaved a musical trail that now has them just one step away from the recording studios….L. B. Jones, manager of the group which evolved from the breakup of the Funk Factory, said recently that the First Production expects to enter the recording field before the conclusion of this year….Only one member, drummer and vocalist Willie Moody, remains from the local group, and he too thinks that the First Production is just “one hit single” away from hitting the big time. Other members of the original group were Ronald Johnson, guitarist; Eddie Burden, bass; Freddie Pierson, keyboards; and Vernon Pierson, congas and vocals. The present aggregation consists of Moody, Dale Douglas on lead guitar; Ralph Young on bass; John Rochelle on saxophone and vocals, Darrell Mims on rhythm guitar and Uriel Royals on vocals. A seventh member, Glen Wattree, a trumpet player, was drowned in a fishing accident in April of this year….What makes the First Production special, if not number one, is a brand of music that the members describe simply as “funk.”……..They do approximately 100 to 125 gigs per year, and in 1977 played in nearly 150 events.\(^{43}\)

After a brief hiatus in activities, the Mark IV Civic Club resumed its activities in September with a reunion show and dance at the Masonic Hall on Murphy Street. As was usually the case with Mark IV events, the First Production band was on hand to provide the music.\(^{44}\) But when the band opened up for Con-Funk-Shun on the Friday night of a football weekend with Grambling playing Alcorn at State Fair Stadium, *Journal* reviewer Norman Provizer was less than pleased with them:

*First Production, an eight-member band with a trumpet and tenor front line, started things off a little before 8 PM. And the group’s half-hour set was*

\(^{43}\) Andrew Harris, “The First Production…..Number One and Kicking,” *Shreveport Sun*, August 24, 1978, 12.

\(^{44}\) “Mark IV Club Reunites,” *Shreveport Sun*, August 17, 1978, 2.
relatively undistinguished. Though it is a funk-disco kind of band, Production was never quite able to find the right rhythmic groove and was hampered throughout by a disturbingly thin sound.  

Later in September, the First Production was appearing at a new club called the Hollywood Play Pen at 5832 Linwood Avenue, which seems to have been their last show of the year.

On March 9 of the new year of 1979, the First Production band was back in action for a Mardi Gras dance sponsored by the students of Fair Park High School at the Progressive Men’s Club on Cross Lake, and on April 14, they played at the Masonic Hall for the Mark IV Civic Club’s sixth annual Easter show and dance, intended to benefit a family whose house had burned and who had lost all their possessions and a child in the fire. On May 26, the Mark IV gave a “We Thank You” Appreciation Show and Dance, and again the First Production band was the entertainment for the event which was held at the Masonic Hall. In August, the Mark IV decided to sponsor a series of “Sunday Nights of Live Entertainment” at Club 51 on the Cooper Road, and of course booked their favorite band for the events, and on October 4, they played their first Red River Revel on the Blue Stage. The First Production Band is not mentioned again after that appearance, although there may be a connection with that band and the subsequent


50 “Mark IV Club To Host Saturday Night Affairs,” Shreveport Sun, August 23, 1979, 9.
Universe Show Band, which was presented a trophy in November of 1980 by the Mark IV Civic Club for their “long years of service to the club.”51 Since the Universe Show Band does not appear anywhere before 1980, they could have “long years” of service to the Mark IV club only if they had been the First Production band before their name change in 1980.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1976**

The Shreveport concert year opened with a February 28 show featuring the O’Jays, the Commodores, and Blue Magic at the Hirsch Coliseum,52 and entertainment writer Raye’s review in the Sun indicated it was a sell-out and standing room only crowd.53 In April, Johnnie Taylor, Willie Hutch, and Jimmy Castor were in Shreveport at the same venue,54 and June 27 brought Parliament-Funkadelic, the Brothers Johnson, Candi Staton, and Bootsy’s Rubber Band to the Hirsch Coliseum.55 On August 18, the band Earth, Wind & Fire came to the coliseum, along with jazz musician Ramsey Lewis,56 and on September 30, the Isley Brothers, the white funk band Wild Cherry and a band called Black Smoke were at Hirsch.57 The latter concert garnered a review in the Shreveport Journal by John Andrew Prime, perhaps the first time a Black concert in Shreveport had gotten a review by either of the daily papers. Prime wrote, “In a word, it

was great. Black Smoke, Wild Cherry and the Isley Brothers shared the bill at Hirsch Coliseum and bowled over the crowd of 5000.”

B. J. Mason of the Sun was less pleased: “The only thing wrong with the rock concert held at the Hirsch Coliseum last week was the thing that has always been wrong with rock concerts held at the Hirsch Coliseum. The place is more suitable for cattle, really, than it is for rock show fans—although it is often hard to tell the difference between the two. Couple that with the fact that the acoustics there always sound like a thousand hyenas trapped in an echo canyon…” Mason’s complaint about Hirsch’s acoustics might have been the first, but certainly would not be the last, raising the question of why the Municipal Auditorium had been abandoned as the site of Black concerts in Shreveport. On November 10, Parliament and Funkadelic were back, along with Bootsy’s Rubber Band and Sly and the Family Stone, and on December 23, soul great Ted Taylor was at the Time Out Club in Cedar Grove, which had over the years been the Celebrity Show Club, the Jazz Workshop and Big Daddy’s Lounge. The year ended in a big way with the Memphis funk band the Bar-Kays and the local Shreveport band Ten Degrees Below Funk at Hirsch Memorial Coliseum on New Year’s Eve. The majority of shows in 1976 were sponsored by Lewis Grey Productions.

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60 “P-Funk Earth Show,” Shreveport Sun, October 28, 1976, 7.


A. D. HUDSON AND THE HURRICANES/GROOVE MAKERS

A. D. Hudson, a musician and night club owner who seems to have been from the Cooper Road community, first appears in the Shreveport newspapers in May of 1969, as the leader of a band called A. D. Hudson and the Entertainers. The band was engaged for a youth night sponsored by the Carver YMCA, and the band name raises the question as to whether this was the band that guitarist Adolph Washington would eventually put his name to. A month later, on June 23, an Afro and Pants Party at Club 51 in the Cooper Road featured “music by A. D. Hudson and the Hurricanes,” suggesting a name change to the band. There is no more mention of Hudson’s band until 1975. But in December of 1972, after Christmas, Hudson seems to have become the owner of a cafe called James Cafe at 135 Cadillac Street in the Agurs neighborhood, as he applied for a permit to sell “beverages of low alcoholic content,” presumably beer, at the location. There is no visible trace of a club at that location now, so it is unclear how big the place was, or whether it ever featured live music, as it is never mentioned in the Sun, but as Hudson was a bandleader, it seems likely that the place was at least used for rehearsals.

Hudson’s band suddenly is mentioned again in October of 1975, when they were engaged for a political rally at Linear Junior High School in the Cooper Road community. The band was now known as A. D. Hudson and the Groove Makers, with the event sponsored by the Cooper Road Citizens For Community Action, and this began a brief flurry of renewed activity for the group. In February of 1976, entertainment writer

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64 “Legals and Bids,” Shreveport Times, December 27, 1972, 29.
65 “Political Rally Set at Linear,” Shreveport Times, October 24, 1975, 12.
“Raye” wrote in her *Sun* column: “Tip ’N Lounge (sic) deals heavy with “Lively Night” on Fridays, as the AD Hell Makers, featuring FAB Adolph (Mr. Guitar himself), rock the house.” Nowhere else is this band ever referred to as the “Hell Makers,” so it is unclear whether this was a temporary name change, or simply the writer editorializing, but her mention of Adolph Washington makes it clear that it is A. D. Hudson’s band, as do subsequent advertisements for this ongoing event. The Tip-In Lounge was located at 515 Western Avenue in the Allendale neighborhood, which was the neighborhood where most of Shreveport’s Black night clubs were located in the early 1970s.

By February 12, the Tip-In Lounge ads were mentioning “A. D. Hudson featuring Adolph (Mr. Guitar) and the Groom Makers (sic).” This error recurs throughout all advertising in the *Sun* mentioning the band in 1976, which would normally suggest that this was indeed the name, were it not for the 1975 mention of “Groove Makers” in the *Times*, and the fact that “Groom Makers” does not make a lot of sense. Such misspellings and errors were common not only in the *Sun* but in both Shreveport dailies during this period; it is unclear if it was due to carelessness, or perhaps due to information delivered over the phone in which pronunciations confused newspaper staffers. Hudson is last advertised at the Tip-In Lounge on March 4, and the lounge’s ad on March 11 does not mention him at all. Yet by April 5, Hudson and his band had landed a new gig at a new club called the Cocoa Club at 404 Mary Street in the Bottoms, where they played every Thursday night. A. D. Hudson and the Groove Makers are never mentioned again, but


some obituaries in the 1990s mention a deceased Rev. A. D. Hudson. Whether that man was the musician or his father is unclear.

**REUBEN BELL, 1976-1980**

Although Reuben Bell performances were few and far between during the late 1970s in Shreveport, Bell was still fairly active, especially in the recording studio. When Floyd’s Bar-B-Q sponsored a Hustlers’ Ball at the Captain Shreve Hotel, the Reuben Bell Show was billed as the featured entertainment, along with a comedian named Fat Sam and a fashion show, and in September 1977, when a new club called the Cimmeron Strip opened at 823 1/2 Louisiana Avenue, Reuben Bell was performing there backed by Adolph and the Entertainers, which was undoubtedly something to see.

Bell had recorded one single for the Alarm label in 1975 and went back into the studio to record two more singles for Stewart Madison’s label in 1977. The first of these paired “Making Love to Funky Music” with a cover of New Orleans singer Danny White’s “Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye” and was released as Alarm 2118. The sides were cut at Sound City Recording Studio, likely with the African Music Machine (or what was left of it) as the backing musicians. “Making Love To Funky Music,” was a departure for Bell, a song seeking to take advantage of the funk trend in Black music at the time, which had hit a high point with the popularity of bands such as Parliament-Funkadelic, Brick, The Commodores, and Wild Cherry. The song was written by Jerry Strickland, Bell and New Orleans producer Wardell Quezergue. “Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye,” on the other

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hand, was credited to Al Reed, and had been recorded by Danny White for the Frisco label in New Orleans in 1962. It was a regional hit in Louisiana but was fifteen years old by the time Bell covered it in Shreveport at Sound City. Reuben Bell rarely recorded covers, preferring to sing his own compositions, but “Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye” was a very appropriate song, sticking to Bell’s formula of anguish over the betrayal or loss of a lover. The second single, also recorded in 1977, consisted of “One Sided Love Affair” b/w “Meet Me Halfway,” which were released as Alarm 2121. “One Sided Love Affair,” opening with a spoken introduction, furthers Bell’s preferred genre of break-up songs, this one written in collaboration with Jerry Strickland, while “Meet Me Half Way” is by far Bell’s most gospel-tinged recording. Horns and female vocals further the southern soul flavor of the track, and Bell sounds confident, taking full advantage of his extensive vocal range. These four tracks remained undeservedly obscure until they were reissued in 2013 by Gary Cape’s Soulscape label in the UK, licensed from Malaco, who had probably acquired them when Stewart Madison shut down in Shreveport and relocated to Jackson.

Copyright entries from 1976 suggest that Reuben Bell may have cut at least two other songs for Alarm, “You Got To Reap What You Sow” and “That’s Why I Sing My Song,” both written by Jerry Strickland, Ruben (sic) Bell, and Wardell Quezergue. They were never released, and it is not entirely clear whether they exist in Malaco’s vaults. Reuben Bell would not enter a recording studio again until 1981.
COLLECTOR’S ITEM (GRAMBLING)

The town of Grambling and the campus of Grambling State University produced a number of bands over the years, but perhaps no band as unusual as the band Collector’s Item, an integrated band consisting of students from Grambling State University in Grambling and Louisiana Tech University in Ruston. The band consisted of Steve Smith, keyboards and vocals; John Rogers, lead vocals and percussion; Lloyd Halsell, guitar and vocal; Leo Cole, bass guitar; David Smith, drums; and Xavier Williams, tenor sax.

As relations between Grambling and Louisiana Tech were fairly fraught, as were relations between residents of the towns of Grambling and Ruston, how the musicians came together must have been a fascinating story in its own right, but one that sadly was never mentioned in print. The band is first mentioned in the Monroe Free Press in June of 1976, when they played a two-night gig at the Elite Lounge on Griffin Street in Monroe; the ad stated that “the hottest band in the land from Grambling State University will land the Mother Ship at the Elite Lounge.” suggesting that Collector’s Item was a funk outfit, perhaps influenced by Parliament and Funkadelic. A month later, the Student Association of Louisiana Tech University sponsored a Summer Festival on campus at the Wilson Cafeteria Plaza, featuring “continuous music” by Collector’s Item and the Shreveport rock band Heart’s Island. The festival was held on July 22.

71 “Band To Perform At Student Night,” Ruston Daily Leader, September 17, 1976, 15.
72 “Band To Perform At Student Night,” Ruston Daily Leader, September 17, 1976, 15.
In September, the merchants of Ruston sponsored a Student Appreciation Day for students of Louisiana Tech and Grambling in Ruston’s Railroad Park, featuring the band Collector’s Item as well as a prize giveaway.\footnote{“Band To Perform Saturday Night,” \textit{Ruston Daily Leader}, September 17, 1976, 15.}

Collector’s Item was still together a year later when a new night club opened in Grambling called Jones Brothers Club at 110 S. Coleman Drive, which is now Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones Drive; the band was the featured entertainment on October 21 and 22, 1977, the club’s opening weekend, along with a singer named Prentiss Lewis.\footnote{“Grand Opening of the All New Jones Brothers Club,” \textit{Ruston Daily Leader}, October 21, 1977, 25.} The band does not seem to be mentioned after that, and they do not seem to have ever recorded.

\textbf{FREDDY PIERSO AND THE INTENSIVE CARE BAND}

Eddie Giles’s Club Reo operated from early 1976 until the end of September, when it came under new ownership. The new owners were singer and community activist Joe Wills and businessman Glenn Stroud, who changed the name of the club at 600 North Pierre Avenue to Li’l Joe and Stroud’s Place,\footnote{“Introducing Li’l Joe & Stroud’s Place,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, September 30, 1976, 4.} featuring a reception foyer, a picture gallery, a “private sports den” and an “intimate show bar and lounge.” Prominently advertised for the opening weekend was “live jazz nightly” by “The Intensive Care Ward” with vocalists Li’l Joe Wills and Nell Howard. A week or so after the grand opening, B. J. Mason reviewed the new club for readers of the \textit{Shreveport Sun}: “Owners Joe Wills and Glenn Stroud evidently went to a lot of trouble to remodel the old Club Reo

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into their own image and to create an atmosphere where night creatures can meet and
greet without wearing bullet-proof vests…….As for the combo, nobody in his right mind
would name a jazz group Intensive Care except musician Freddie Pierson. Pierson is to
an organ what red beans is to rice, and his approach to both is the same. Which is to say
he seasons his music well and dishes it out in filling dosages…”78 Pierson had been an
early member of the First Production Band.

In October of 1977, Li’l Joe and Stroud’s Place celebrated its first anniversary, and Sun writer Ann Monk wrote an extensive review of the club and a further description of the band:

The club’s band Intensive Care is a five member group with three vocalists, who wrap their audiences in an aura of pleasure so intense one feels as though he or she has lost something when it’s time to leave the warmth of Intensive Care and Joe & Stroud’s cocoon. The group’s members are: Daryl Mims, lead guitar; Donny Bedford, rhythm guitar; Calvin Haynes, alto saxophone; Ben Green, drums; and of course Freddie Pierson on organ……Intensive Care normally plays crowd pleasers or already established hits, although they have already produced originals like “Keeper of the Castle,” an afro-cuban beat; “It Grows on You,” sweet and slow; and “Place Where Louie Dwelled,” a tune with a moderate-funky tempo. Vocalist Betty Lewis’ rendition of “Back In Love By Monday” makes one want to float away in dreamland.79

Betty Lewis would go on to become one of Shreveport’s best-known and best-loved singers, and Li’l Joe and Stroud’s would remain open until 1982.

RAY CRUMLEY AND MERGING TRAFFIC

Soul singer Ray Crumley was born in Mobile County, Alabama, in 1953, most likely in the city of Prichard, but by 1974, he was living in Marshall, Texas, about thirty


miles west of Shreveport. There, he formed a band called Merging Traffic, which included students from Wiley College and which was first mentioned in an advertisement for Mahone’s Music Center in the Marshall News Messenger. The ad mentions Charles Allen on lead guitar, Gus Barkers on bass guitar, vocalists Ann Green, Chris Cooper and Ray Crumley, Eddie Robinson on drums, Darnell Bush on electric piano, manager Willie Knight, and assistant manager Willie Hudson. By May 10, 1974, they were engaged to play at the Paramount Theatre in Marshall, along with local bands Space and Jim Harris and The Company for the showing of the movies Superfly and Cleopatra Jones.

In September, when Merging Traffic was heading to Nacogdoches for an Omega Psi Phi party, they had a notably different lineup, including Anthony Parrish on drums, Gus Barkers on bass, singers Ray Crumley, Ann Hudson and Chris Barkers, Alvin Logan on saxophone, Darrell Bush on piano, assistant manager Alvin J. Lester, and manager Willie J. Hudson.

In December the band appeared on a local television show called Concerned ’74 in Marshall, and performed at the Dreamland Inn in Longview on December 1. On March 27, the Merging Traffic Orchestra and Merging Traffic Singers gave their spring concert at the City Hall Auditorium in Marshall, and then their First Anniversary Ball at the Longview, Texas Fairgrounds on June 7. By that point the band had added new

members, including Charles Manly on guitar, Ollie Boyd on saxophone, and Victor Williams on guitar.

The band’s first mention in Shreveport came in November of 1976, when they were booked to play the Time Out Cub at 7939 Line Avenue in Cedar Grove, but Ray Crumley had been recording at Sound City in Shreveport during the whole year. Three singles resulted from these sessions. The first paired a composition by Alabama soul singer Sam Dees called “Good Guys Don’t Always Win” with a disco-ish version of Jerry Strickland and Bobby Patterson’s “I Want To Be A Part Of You.” The A-side is as sophisticated as Shreveport soul ever got, with extensive string backgrounds, and Crumley’s accomplished voice in fine form, but the B-side, although competently performed, just does not work as well as Ted Taylor’s earlier reading of the song, primarily because of the effort to adjust the rhythm to the disco craze of the era. These sides were release as Alarm 113 in 1977. The second single was much less satisfying, as both “Uncanny,” a Hall & Oates cover, and “All The Way In Love With You,” a Jerry Strickland and Dino Zimmerman composition, were given the disco treatment of the times; the sides were released as Alarm 115, also in 1977. The final Ray Crumley single for Alarm Records was “Tell It Like It Is” b/w “She’s My Rock” on Alarm 2122, released in 1977; the A-side was a rendition of the Aaron Neville hit, which was undoubtedly remembered from Crumley’s boyhood in the Mobile area, while the B-side was a Frederick Knight composition.

On the last weekend of April 1977, the Merging Traffic band was back at the Time Out Club in Cedar Grove, and in the May 5 edition of the *Shreveport Sun*, B. J. Mason gave an extensive review of the performance:

Merging Traffic is a team of rock specialists from Marshall, Tex., and that has nothing at all to do with geology but with the fact that they stopped at the Time Out Club on Line Ave. long enough to prove that practice almost makes perfect. Composed of seven hard-working musicians from Wiley College, the band dished out 20 Top 20 releases and a set of originals to an audience that couldn’t stop dancing.87

By July of 1977, Merging Traffic was listed by the “Night Caps” column of the *Shreveport Times* as the regular band at the Time Out Club from Thursdays through Saturdays,88 and in April of 1978, a saxophone player named Theodore Arthur Jr. joined Merging Traffic as they played for a Needy Family Fund benefit at the Marshall Civic Center in Marshall, Texas.89

In late 1979, Ray Crumley, Theodore Arthur, and Merging Traffic entered Robin Hood Brians studio in Tyler, Texas, to record their only album, entitled *Love’s Traffic*, released on a Prichard, Alabama—based label called Castanet Records, which probably had ties to Theodore Arthur’s business operations. Alarm Records seems to have ended its operations around the time that Sound City Recording Studios changed its name to Southern Star in 1979. The renamed studio was run by George Clinton and Dino Zimmermann. Stewart Madison had departed for Jackson, Mississippi, and Malaco Records. *Love’s Traffic* made barely a ripple at the time, but has become something of a

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cult classic among collectors, with copies selling occasionally for upwards of $1,000. The album is remarkably diverse, with some tracks being funk, others disco, and still others smooth soul.

The release of the album occasioned another feature article about Merging Traffic in the *Shreveport Sun*, which mentioned that the band had been playing in Shreveport at Mr. Lee’s Disco on Marshall Street, the Afro-Cana club in Bossier City, and Betty’s Beef and Bottle. It also gave the 1980 iteration of the band as Rosendo Quinones, Jr., percussion; Bryante Perry, trombone; Byron Canida, rhythm guitar; Earl Clanton, trumpet; Archer Logan, alto saxophone; Gus Barker, bass guitar; Martin Fields, drums; Ronnie Allen, lead guitar; and Lewis Fluellen Jr., keyboards. When Shreveport promoter Lee Nichols started a Cablevision television show called *Traffic Jam* in April of 1980, Ray Crumley and Merging Traffic was the featured artist on the debut show. On June 14, 1980, Ray Crumley and Grace King were married at Mount Gideon Baptist Church in Longview, Texas, and Crumley taught in the Longview Independent School District, from which he has retired. He still resides in Longview.

**EDDIE GILES & CHOCOLATE UNLIMITED**

During most of 1976, Eddie Giles was involved in the operation of Club Reo in the former Rex Key Club at 600 Pierre Avenue in Allendale, although he did frequently perform there with his new band which he called Chocolate Unlimited. However, by the fall of 1976, growing scandals about liquor and beer licenses uncovered by the

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Shreveport newspapers as part of an ongoing investigation of Shreveport Public Safety Commissioner George D’Artois made it unlikely that Giles could get a license renewal, so in November he let Club Reo go, and it was acquired by Glenn Stroud and Joe Wills, who renamed it Li’l Joe & Stroud’s Place. Meanwhile, Giles went back into the studio, although under new owners who had renamed the building Southern Star. Giles’s producer and collaborator was a young white student at Louisiana State University Shreveport named Bill Wheat, who co-wrote the song “Sexy Lady” with Giles, and who wrote the B-side “Jelly Roll” by himself. Wardell Quezergue from New Orleans did horn and string arrangements, which were apparently cut at Malaco studios in Jackson, Mississippi.92 For whatever reason, Wheat, who put the single out on the Custom Sound label, dubbed Giles’s band The Numbers rather than Chocolate Unlimited. Giles did not recall ever using the name The Numbers, and could not understand why the record read as it did. “Sexy Lady” had a driving and upbeat sound with strings, not unlike the sound of Tyrone Davis’s popular hits at the time. “Jelly Roll” had more of the sound of Southern roots rock, but Giles does not sound out of place on the song. Both sides are high quality, but Custom Sound proved to have little distribution outside of Shreveport. These would prove to be Giles’s last secular recordings. A dramatic car crash which almost killed him convinced him to return to gospel music. In addition to being a gospel DJ on KOKA, Giles also was ordained as a pastor of a church, and in later years made an unsuccessful run for the Shreveport city council. Elbert Wiggins “Eddie” Giles died on February 5, 2019 in Shreveport.

The funk/disco band Freedom Machine, originally called Freedom Express, was based in Austin, Texas, and was popular there from late 1976 until 1980. Signed to Shreveport-based Alarm Records, they recorded four songs at Sound City Recording Studio in late 1976 and early 1977, all produced by Jerry Strickland and George Clinton, the Sound City engineer. “Bionic Booty” and “Give Up What You Got” were recorded at some point before December of 1976. The A-side is a fairly mediocre disco effort, although with some rather impressive horn work. The B-side, “Give Up What You Got,” is far better, although it too is dominated by a disco feel. These sides were released in December of 1976 as Alarm 116 and given a “recommended” listing in the December 11, 1976, issue of \textit{Billboard}. Two more songs, “Stop Doubting My Love” and “She Shakes For My Sake,” were released as Alarm 2120 in 1977. The A-side, the band’s only recorded ballad, is by far their very best recording. Full of strings and soulful vocals, it is a mellow and romantic ballad. Unfortunately, the B-side is another mediocre disco effort which undermines the quality of the record. Both singles were distributed by Henry Stone’s TK label in Miami but did not garner much attention.

While Freedom Machine was mentioned occasionally in the \textit{Austin American-Statesman}, and even photographed on one occasion in the paper, the members of the band were never named. But record credits help us identify some of the likely members, including Marvin Elam Jr., John Mills, Melvin Winn, Dexter Walker, and Tony Williams.

\textsuperscript{93} “Billboard’s Top Singles Picks,” \textit{Billboard}, December 11, 1976, 60.

\textsuperscript{94} “Fest Nights A Rainbow of Cultures,” \textit{Austin American-Statesman}, August 5, 1977, 26.
Texas newspapers do not mention the group after 1980, and it does not seem that they ever recorded again.

**TED TAYLOR, 1976-1978**

Longtime soul/blues singer Ted Taylor had signed with Shreveport-based Alarm Records in 1975, and continued to record at Sound City throughout 1976 and 1977. His first 1976 single for the label oddly combined two songs associated with Johnnie Taylor, who was immensely popular at the time for his hit “Disco Lady.” “Somebody’s Gettin’ It” had been recorded by Johnnie Taylor the same year that Ted Taylor recorded it in Shreveport, and “Steal Away,” a rhythm and blues classic, had been recorded by Johnnie Taylor at Stax a few years before. Ted Taylor’s versions were of course significantly different from Johnnie Taylor’s versions. For one thing, Ted Taylor preferred to use male background singers, and the Jackson Southernaires, a gospel group on Malaco Records in Jackson, Mississippi, seem to have been the background group he used. For another, Ted Taylor’s trademark high-falsetto voice was significantly different from Johnnie Taylor’s. But both sides are well-produced, “Somebody’s Gettin’ It” with a funky backing, and “Steal Away” with a piano-based traditional gospel sound that fits Ted Taylor’s gospel background perfectly. These sides were released as Alarm 112. Apparently, an alternate pressing of Alarm 112 exists with “You Make Loving You Easy,” a Reuben Bell and Jerry Strickland composition, as the B-side instead of “Steal Away.”

Two more songs, “I’m Gonna Hate Myself In The Morning,” written by Bettye Crutcher, Sam Dees and Frederick Knight, and “Stick By Me,” a song that Ted Taylor wrote himself, were issued as Alarm 114 in 1976. The A-side, another gospel-tinged
Southern soul ballad, features female background singers, including Dorothy Moore and Jewel Bass, two important Malaco Records artists of the day, as does the jauntier B-side. Both of the tracks show the beginnings of what would ultimately become a new genre, known as Southern Soul. Stan Lewis’s son Lenny Lewis claims to have invented the genre’s name, and in 2019, the issue of whether Shreveport or Jackson, Mississippi was the birthplace of the genre became fraught, with governmental bodies in both cities adopting resolutions proclaiming their city to be the place where the style started. The impossibility of solving the issue can in fact be seen through these sessions, where Ted Taylor, a man originally from Oklahoma, was cutting in Shreveport, backed by female background singers from Jackson, on a backing track with the rhythm section cut in Shreveport and the strings and horns at Malaco in Jackson. Like ragtime, blues, and jazz before it, Southern Soul was likely a tendency that was emerging across the Black South in the 1970s, particularly in rural areas. It was a rural reaction to the emergence of disco, in a similar way that funk was an urban reaction to disco. These two further Taylor sides were released in 1976 as Alarm 114.

All of the early single sides and more tracks were combined into an Alarm LP called 1976, but this album seems to have been issued in early 1977. In addition to the already released sides, the album included “Standing In the Wings Of Heartache,” “It Takes A Fool To Be A Fool Again,” “You Make Loving You So Easy,” and “High Heel Sneakers.” The female background singers were Dorothy Moore, Jeanette Williams, Jewel Bass, and Marquis Butler, the male background singers were The Jackson

Southernaires, and the backing musicians included Don Barrett and Vern Robbins on bass, James Stroud on drums and percussion, Dino Zimmermann on keyboards, the Muscle Shoals Horns, the Shreveport Horns (who are not further identified, sadly), and Carson Whitsett and Wardell Quezergue on keyboards.

Alarm continued to issue Ted Taylor singles after the album release. Alarm 117 consisted of “Ghetto Disco” b/w “You Can Make It If You Try,” two non-album tracks that were cut at Sound City and released in 1977. The song “Ghetto Disco” reflected the reality in Black neighborhoods in Shreveport and across America, as DJ culture and the playing of records began to replace live bands in the popular imagination. The B-side was Taylor’s gospel-infused reading of a classic rhythm and blues song. By this time, Alarm was being distributed by Henry Stone’s TK Records label, and that label released an extended version of “Ghetto Disco” with a Part I and a Part II on both sides. Two more songs, “Paying For My Love Mistakes” and “Two Minute Warning,” were released as Alarm 2119, both using what seems to be a Shreveport formula of metaphor and maxim. The A-side song is credited to writers Reuben Bell, Wardell Quezergue, Jerry Strickland, and Ted Taylor. Alarm 2123 consisted of “You Make Loving You Easy” and “Talk To Me,” the latter being yet another Taylor re-reading of a rhythm and blues classic. Taylor’s final single for Alarm was “Paying For My Love Mistakes” b/w “Spanish Harlem,” released in 1978 as Alarm 2124, and at least on some versions, the B-side was credited rather inexplicably to “The Taylors featuring Ted Taylor.” It is a dismal disco reading of the song, and a rather demoralizing end to Taylor’s recording career in Shreveport. However, British soul enthusiast and reissue researcher Garry Cape found an unreleased
jewel in Malaco’s vaults, a lovely soul ballad called “Looking Back,” with all the elements that made Shreveport soul what it was at its best: the influence of gospel, a solid rhythm section, and plenty of strings. Why such a successful track was never issued is unknown.

Although Ted Taylor never recorded again in Louisiana, he continued to frequent the South as a performer. He died near Lake Charles, Louisiana on October 23, 1987, when he crashed into the rear of an eighteen-wheel truck while driving back to California from an engagement in Baton Rouge.96

**TEN DEGREES BELOW FUNK**

According to Bobby Patterson, a falling out between drummer Louis Alcorn and bassist Louis Villery led to a break-up of the African Music Machine, the funk band which had served as one of the house bands for recordings made at Sound City Recording Studio. Although a version of the African Music Machine soldiered on without Alcorn for another half year or so into 1977, Alcorn formed a new band which he called Ten Degrees Below Funk, which was first mentioned in the *Shreveport Sun* in December of 1976, when the band was engaged to play at the Time Out Club in Cedar Grove.97 On New Year’s Eve, they were introduced to a wider audience when they opened up for Brick and the Bar-Kays at the Hirsch Coliseum.98 The emergence of this band, the first Shreveport band to have the word “funk” in its name, showed the degree to which funk

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music was becoming popular in not only Shreveport but Black communities around the country.

Funk music, an evolution of soul and eventually a reaction to disco music, had at least two distinct stylistic periods. Early funk, from about 1967 to 1972, was almost a kind of Black garage band music, centered around instrumental bands with large horn sections and sophisticated drummers, largely under the influence of James Brown. This stylistic period has largely been the focus of the funk revival DJs and record labels today. About 1973, a new style of funk appeared, largely shaped by bands like Parliament-Funkadelic and the Ohio Players. Horns, although still present, became less prominent, and the emphasis shifted to drums, percussion, bass, and guitar, and perhaps synthesizers and other kinds of electronic keyboards. Vocals were added, and bands became elaborate revues, often with significant costuming and staging. Most Black bands in Shreveport from 1976 on were influenced in some way by this national trend in Black music.

On the weekend of January 28 and 29, 1977, Ten Degrees Below Funk played for the NCO Club at Barksdale Air Force Base ⁹⁹ and on April 24, the band was photographed by B. J. Mason of the Sun while they were playing an outdoor gig at A & B Landing on the western end of Cross Lake.¹⁰⁰ On April 29, the freshman and sophomore classes of Southern University Shreveport Bossier campus sponsored a Masquerade Ball, with Ten Degrees Below Funk as the featured band,¹⁰¹ and on May 1, a company called Heritage Productions sponsored the first May Day Festival at the Masonic Lodge on

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¹⁰¹ “Masquerade Ball,” Shreveport Sun, April 28, 1977, 7.
Jefferson-Paige Road, featuring not only Ten Degrees Below Funk, but also Freddie Pierson’s band Intensive Care and an otherwise obscure band called African Heritage. Although that festival was to have been an annual event, it does not seem to have been held again after its 1977 debut. On the weekend of June 17, the band was back at the Barksdale NCO club, but after that they rapidly disappeared from public view.

According to guitarist Ron Johnson, bandleader Louis Alcorn made the decision to rename the band Scotland Yard, which mystified the other band members. This band name is never mentioned in the Shreveport press, but presumably after a brief period under the new name, the band ceased to exist altogether.

**THE FALL OF GEORGE D’ARTOIS**

After his re-election as Shreveport Public Safety Commissioner in 1974, George D’Artois was arguably the most powerful political figure in Shreveport, but revelations of shocking corruption and even murder would shake the city of to its foundations, even affecting the local nightclub and music scene.

George D’Artois’s campaign for re-election had operated smoothly, and that was not surprising, since he had hired Shreveport advertising executive Jim Leslie, a former Times reporter, to manage his campaign. But when D’Artois was re-elected, and Leslie

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104 Two books about George D’Artois and the murder of Shreveport advertising executive Jim Leslie have been published. Bill Keith’s The Commissioner: A True Story of Deceit, Dishonor and Death (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2009) is an account from one of the Shreveport Times reporters who covered the story, while Jere Joiner’s Badge of Dishonor: A True Story of Police Racism, Brutality and Murder in a Deep South City (Colorado Springs, CO: KPB Publishing, 2013) is a memoir by a former Shreveport police officer who flew charter planes for Commissioner D’Artois. My summary of the events of D’Artois’ fall is largely taken from these sources except where footnoted otherwise.
sent him a bill for his services, D’Artois twice tried to pay Leslie with a check drawn on funds from the City of Shreveport. On the second attempt, Leslie found that his invoice had been altered to make it appear that he was being paid for work he did for the police department, and not for D’Artois’s personal campaign for re-election. These facts came to light in April of 1976, around the same time it was becoming clear that D’Artois had a significant gambling habit, had been flying at public expense to Las Vegas and Hot Springs to gamble, had been taking bribes from gamblers in Shreveport to allow their games to continue, had been fixing tickets, and had been stealing (or allowing others to steal) money and evidence from the evidence room of the police department.

In May of 1976, *Times* reporter Lynn Stewart uncovered the fact that D’Artois personally approved the liquor and beer licenses for night club owners who did not meet the legal requirements for them. These included Joe Anthony Catanese, a man with a criminal record which included gambling, who nevertheless got a permit for the Hollywood Palace club in the Hollywood neighborhood of Shreveport. Paperwork for Linda Kay Stills’s application for the licenses for the Hollywood Palace was marked “No certificate of occupancy—Approved by Commissioner,” and listed Joe Catanese as the “manager.” Yet singer Reuben Bell stated that it was common knowledge that “the Cataneses” owned the Hollywood Palace.

Likewise, D’Artois personally made sure that Eddie Giles got liquor licenses for his Club Reo, despite the fact that Giles had no certificate of occupancy for the building.

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106 Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.
as required by Louisiana law. Perhaps coincidentally, Giles had played for D’Artois’s big
re-election rally on the riverfront in the summer of 1974.

Clubs that worked with D’Artois had certain advantages; they were not going to
be raided by the police looking for guns or gambling, and the laws requiring them to
close at 2 AM or to not sell liquor on Sunday were not enforced. But they of course
would be visited by a Black police detective named Leemon Brown every Monday to
collect their payments to the commissioner. Those who quit paying were soon targeted
for a “weapons raid,” or might find that police kept their cars with lights flashing in front
the establishments until business fell off to nothing.

D’Artois also cultivated his relationship with shady club owners who lived on the
fringes of the law. These men figured heavily in the events that would unfold throughout
1976 and 1977. On July 9, 1976, Shreveport advertising executive Jim Leslie was shot
from ambush in the parking lot of the Prince Murat Inn in Baton Rouge, having returned
to the hotel from a legislative session which he was observing as a political consultant for
the supporters of a statewide right-to-work law. While it was initially theorized that
someone in organized labor might have killed Leslie, Baton Rouge authorities soon found
links to Shreveport. It eventually became clear that Shreveport club owner Rusty Griffith,
who owned Big Daddy’s Club on Line Avenue in Cedar Grove, had been one of the men
who shot Leslie from ambush that night. Griffith’s body was eventually found in rural
Concordia Parish, fifty miles south of Vidalia in October of 1976. He had been lured to
his death thinking he was attending a meeting with people who wanted to buy tapes in his
possession that linked powerful Shreveport politicians with organized crime. Throughout
this period, there were rumors that D’Artois had ties with New Orleans Mafia don Carlos Marcello. Reuben Bell in fact recalled singing Marcello’s favorite song for him on multiple occasions, and Marcello putting $500 in his hand. Bell also stated that Marcello had an office in a Bossier City motel.\textsuperscript{107}

Grand jury indictments kept piling up for D’Artois, and authorities in Caddo Parish, Concordia Parish, and East Baton Rouge Parish continued investigating. Eventually a link was proven between the Jim Leslie and Rusty Griffith murders, and on April 20, 1977, sheriff’s deputies from Caddo Parish and East Baton Rouge Parish converged on George D’Artois’s home to make an arrest. But D’Artois was nowhere to be found; deputies soon found evidence he was hiding in the attic. When discovered, he agreed to come down only if he was allowed to go into his bathroom with a typewriter and lock the door. Threatening to kill himself, he typed out a rambling eight-page document, intended for his wife, sliding it under the door page by page. In it, he listed the men he wanted to serve as his pallbearers in the event of his death. The first man he listed was Stan Lewis, the owner of Stan’s Record Shops. D’Artois eventually surrendered and was taken to jail in Baton Rouge; he later made bail and returned to Shreveport.

However, D’Artois’s heart condition had become serious, and he flew to Houston for surgery from which he never recovered. He died on June 11, 1977 in Texas.

There were other mysterious murders that occurred during the years that George D’Artois was police commissioner, and most were never solved. Perhaps the last was the disappearance of Georgia Maguire Gardner, the operator of The Purple Front, a Black

\textsuperscript{107} Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.
nightclub in downtown Shreveport, who was reported missing when she failed to show up at the club on December 19, 1976. Her body was found February 9, 1977, on a dirt road near Center, Texas, and her car had been found at the Shreveport Regional Airport the day she was reported missing. Her murder was never solved, and no arrests were ever made. However, because D’Artois was so involved in enabling disqualified bar owners to get liquor licenses, and because he was also involved in shaking down Black bars and nightclubs, it seems possible that Gardner’s death could have been intended to keep her silent about things she knew that could have been damning to D’Artois.  

The mystery of why Commissioner D’Artois became so corrupt in his last two terms of office has never been solved. Some suggested that he suffered a series of strokes; others that he had a serious gambling addiction which required money far above his salary to support. Yet others suggested that he had been cooperating with members of the Mafia, especially Carlos Marcello and/or the Dixie Mafia for many years. Bill Keith, a reporter for the *Shreveport Times*, suggested that D’Artois was drunk on power and influence. Regardless, his removal from the political scene caused drastic changes in the nightlife of Shreveport; once nightclubs were held to the strict letter of the law, they became less profitable and began to close, particularly in Black neighborhoods.

**BOB HINES & THE MALIBUS**

The fallout from much of the corruption scandal in Shreveport had effects on the Bossier City side of the river as well; many realized that the New Orleans mob had come

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close to gaining a foothold in Shreveport and Bossier City. Furthermore, the famed Bossier Strip had become somewhat seedy by the 1970s, and Barksdale Air Force Base began declaring many of the clubs off-limits to military personnel. The coming of Louisiana Downs horse racing track, and the opening of the Haystack USA country music show and studios in Bossier City brought an older and more sophisticated audience to the city, and some of the city’s night life venues began catering to that older audience.

The Royal Room of Beaudean’s Revana Restaurant was one establishment that sought a more sophisticated crowd by booking a Black band on the fringes of blues and jazz called Bob Hines and the Malibus. Colletti wrote: “They provide a blues-type after hours music. The kind you expect to find in a small smoke-filled bar, except the Royal Room isn’t smoke-filled. There’s some sultry saxophone music, a drummer with soul, and some fine organ playing by Hines.” The trio consisted of Bob Hines, Johnnie Johnson, and Jerry Mumford, and they played regularly at the Revana until May of 1977; they were last mentioned as Bob Hines Jazz band when they played for the Officers Club at Barksdale Air Force Base in July.

**WILDFIRE**

The Shreveport band Wildfire first appeared in March of 1977, when they were engaged to play for a dance sponsored by the 1960 Senior Class of Booker T. Washington

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109 Around this time, a group of New Orleans investors attempted to buy the downtown Shreve Square district from its Fort Worth, Texas-based owner. Shreveport newspapers revealed that the New Orleans investors had ties to organized crime.


111 Ibid.


High School at Club 51 on the Cooper Road. The article stated: “Music for the event will be furnished by Wildfire, a local aggregation headed by saxophonist Purvis Milner. The newly formed group specializes in soul, disco and dazz (sic) and promises to become one of the hottest nightclub acts in the city.” In July, they were back at Club 51 playing for a benefit dance for the Abdul Temple No. 94 Shriners, and on August 13, they were at the 40 and 8 Club on Cross Lake for the BTW 1960 Class Reunion dance. They are not mentioned after that, and it is not clear why a band that started off with so much promise and acclaim simply disappeared.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1977**

Shreveport’s Black concert scene in 1977 started with a Rufus and Chaka Khan show at the Hirsch Coliseum, along with the Brothers Johnson, the Bar-Kays, and the Gap Band on April 23. On July 8, the Commodores, The Emotions, and Maze came to Hirsch Coliseum, and on July 31, the O’Jays, the Whispers, and Johnny “Guitar” Watson came to Shreveport to the same venue. On Thursday, September 1, the Isley Brothers, Graham Central Station, and Bohannon came to the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum, and on October 1, Shreveport welcomed Parliament-Funkadelic, along with

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Mother’s Finest and CJ & Company. In November, Marvin Gaye and Brick came to the coliseum, and on Saturday December 3, Con-Funk-Shun and the Bar-Kays were in Shreveport, along with Rose Royce and LTD, for what was the last big show of the year.

JOY

The Afro-Scene was a club at 1050 Texas Avenue which had been active from late 1972, primarily as a DJ-based club. When it came under new management in 1977, it began having regular live music on Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, featuring a house band called Joy. Unfortunately, the band is not mentioned in any other context, but seems to have played for at least a month at the Afro-Scene.

THE ALLENDALE RAIDS

Blacks in Shreveport who had hoped that the end of George D’Artois’s rule as Public Safety Commissioner would lead to a reduction in police repression were sadly mistaken. In August, under the direction of the new police Chief Kenneth Lanigan, the Shreveport Police Department began making mass arrests on the sidewalks outside Black night clubs in the Allendale neighborhood and downtown. The arrests led to a series of complaints against the department made to the NAACP, whose president accused police of trying to force some of the Black clubs to close. Lanigan denied the charge, saying that his department was simply “trying to make the streets safe to walk.” Nevertheless, in a

second weekend of raids, two paddy wagons were filled with twenty-five to thirty people taken into custody at the Purple Front and Twenty Grand Lounges on North Market Street in downtown Shreveport. Complaints said that men and women were transported to jail together, and that many of them were pulled from inside the clubs. Further complaints said that some parents arriving at the club to get their young people were also arrested, and that others were verbally abused by officers when they asked why they were being arrested.¹²⁵

Chief Lanigan responded that he had warned the police to use better judgment in deciding who to arrest, but declined to end the crackdowns, which he said resulted from the shooting of a fifteen-year-old boy in late July at the intersection of Pierre and Milam, where police said large groups of people routinely gathered on the sidewalks. Lanigan stated that his officers were tired of working homicides in Allendale and that “we’re serving notice to the thugs and punks that no segment of Shreveport society is going to be abused.”¹²⁶ In reality, it seems likely that Lanigan’s raids were aimed against clubs that had been paying off D’Artois before his fall from grace; whether the new police regime was trying to take over and continue the shakedown operation, or punish the clubs that had paid D’Artois to show the city of Shreveport that the police were now “clean” is unclear. It is also likely that Shreveport whites resented the presence of Black clubs in the downtown area and would have liked to see them gone. D’Artois’s racial views had not been the cause of racism in Shreveport, but had rather reflected a broad consensus of the


city’s white community. Lanigan, only a few months into his tenure, was likely trying to please the people he was working for.

The arrest flooded the local courts with more than 107 Black residents who were charged with obstructing a public street. Court appearances and legal wrangling in the cases continued for months, before most of the cases were apparently dismissed in 1978. Yet some of the Black residents arrested ended up with criminal records because they missed court appearances in the incidents. Even after George D’Artois’s death, the powers that be in Shreveport expected the police to keep Black residents in check.

THE RISE OF DISCO

As the year of 1978 opened in Shreveport, the Shreveport Times published an article entitled “Discomania,” highlighting the new local club scene in which disc jockeys replaced live band music. Of course this was a national trend, but its resurgence in the late 1970s spelled trouble for live musicians, particularly in the Black community. As the article put it, “the younger set—from college age into the 30s—has latched on to discos as the place to go to be seen, to meet people.” One club manager was quoted as saying “You can have the world’s finest music night after night” while Fischer and Griffith wrote “any band—no matter how good—is limited in the tunes it knows and the different styles of music it offers.” A hundred miles east of Shreveport in Monroe, the clubs had begun ditching bands for disc jockeys as early as 1970. Shreveport was about eight years behind Monroe, but by 1978 discos were becoming ascendant. Several Shreveport songs


reflected the trend, including Reuben Bell’s “Superjock” and Ted Taylor’s “Ghetto Disco.” Even former Shreveporter Geater Davis recorded a dreadful song called “Disco Music,” trying to capitalize on the trend that was displacing soul, funk, and blues wholesale.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1978**

Shreveport’s concert years of 1978 started in March when the jazz-fusion drummer Billy Cobham gave a workshop and performance at the Shreveport Music Company on Kings Highway on a Sunday evening. Cobham was a former member of the Mahavishnu Orchestra and was one of the most popular jazz drummers of the era. A little over a week later, the Bar-Kays and Con-Funk-Shun appeared, not in Shreveport, but at the Wilson Evans Coliseum on the campus of Northeast Louisiana University in Monroe, yet the event was promoted to the Shreveport market. On April 2, Shreveport had their first big show at the Hirsch Coliseum, featuring Detroit band Enchantment, Birmingham-based Brick, and Frankie Beverly and Maze, and later that same month, Rufus featuring Chaka Khan, Heatwave, and Stargard were at the Hirsch Coliseum. On June 4, 1978, Magnum Force Productions brought a new concept to Shreveport, a Funk Festival outdoors in State Fair Stadium featuring B. T. Express, Faze-O, Boiling Point, and The Family Players Band. The concept was one which B. J. Mason had suggested.

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in a Sun review of a Hirsch Coliseum concert; Mason was a consistent critic of the
acoustics of the Coliseum.

Yet a couple of weeks after the outdoor concert, Faze-O was back in Shreveport
again with the O’Jays and Con-Funk-Shun, this time at the Hirsch Coliseum, for a show
which the Journal’s Norman Provizer called “super-packed,”134 but the Times’s John
Andrew Prime echoed B. J. Mason’s earlier complaints about Hirsch: “There’s so much
low end rumble, he (Dee Clark) said, referring to the bad bass sound Hirsch is famous for
—I call it Hirsch’s Curse.”135 Another attempt at an outdoor concert, with Betty Wright
and Chocolate Milk, this time at the Veterans’ Amphitheater on July 30,136 proved to be a
disaster when Wright canceled six hours before the concert was to start. A “near riot”
situation developed at the venue after the crowd became aware that Wright would not
appear,137 and the situation ended in a lawsuit filed against White by the promoter.138 But
concerts continued to come to Shreveport. Millie Jackson and The Moments were at the
Municipal Auditorium on August 17,139 and James Brown, the Manhattans, and the
Fatback Band were at Hirsch Coliseum on August 26.140 On September 8 at Hirsch, Con-
Funk-Shun was back, along with Cameo, Sun, and Shreveport’s local First Production


band,\textsuperscript{141} and on October 19, Parliament-Funkadelic were back in Shreveport at the Municipal Auditorium for a rather sparsely-attended Thursday night show.\textsuperscript{142} November 4, Natalie Cole, Ashford and Simpson, and Michael Henderson came to the Hirsch Coliseum,\textsuperscript{143} and on December 1, Teddy Pendergrass with Betty Wright and Lenny Williams.\textsuperscript{144} Thus the Shreveport concert year ended with a high note.

**BACKFIRE**

When Magnum Force Productions announced a Betty Wright concert at the Veterans’ Amphitheater near the Red River in Shreveport, one of the opening acts announced for the event was a new band named Backfire,\textsuperscript{145} and although the show proved to be something of a disaster when Betty Wright failed to appear, it was more of a success for the local Shreveport group, as John Andrew Prime wrote a positive review for the fledgling group:

Backfire, another local group, gave an excellent performance next. This twelve-member band performed eight original songs and one cover tune for their set. “Feelings,” the one number not written by them, was the second number on their playlist. Bassist Kirk Carter, percussionists Otis Drayden and Melvin Mims and vocalists Fred Allen and Mary Addison, backed by the harmony vocals of the rest of the group and their tight playing, worked the crowd to a fever pitch. The crowd was still dancing at 9:30 PM when the band retired.\textsuperscript{146}

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\textsuperscript{142}John Andrew Prime, “Crowd Boggies (sic) With Funkadelic (sic),” *Shreveport Times*, October 20, 1978, 55.
\textsuperscript{144}“In Concert Teddy Pendergrass,” *Shreveport Sun*, November 22, 1978, 3.
\textsuperscript{145}“Betty Wright To Headline Soul Concert,” *Shreveport Times*, July 26, 1978, 15.
\end{flushright}
In September, Prime wrote a feature on the band, complete with photograph, for the *Shreveport Times*. It was apparently the first time a local Black band had been featured in the city’s daily morning paper:

Backfire has eleven members. Malcolm Spencer (trumpet, flugelhorn and vocals), Raymond Alford (trumpet, flugelhorn, congas, bass and vocals), Larry Pannell (tenor saxophone, flute and vocals) and Charles Lacy (trombone and vocals) are the brass section of the group. Alford teams up with rhythm section members Steve Smith (keyboards and vocals), Kirk Carter (bass), Melvin Mims and Otis Drayton (both percussion), while lead guitarist Johnny Addison teams up with his vocalist wife Mary and vocalist Fred Allen….Backfire can play popular music and disco, but tends to have a jazzier sound with much percussion work.147

Of further interest, however, was the band’s comment that they intended to travel to Jackson, Mississippi, to record their original material. There is no evidence that they ever did. That they would consider it necessary to travel out of town to record shows the way in which Shreveport’s recording scene was beginning to unravel after Sound City’s acquisition by George Clinton and its renaming as Southern Star. The emphasis had shifted largely from Black music to country and from being a recording studio of national scale and scope to one strictly for local use. While that may have made sense from a business standpoint, it did not bode well for the future of Shreveport as a music city. The center of attention had clearly shifted to Jackson, Mississippi, where Malaco was becoming an important home for the kind of blues and Southern soul which did not fit into the major labels’ business model.

On September 15, Backfire made their first appearance at the Oak Room on Barksdale Air Force Base, and were described by the base newspaper as “a local group

that has made a good impression around town.” A week later they were featured in the

*Shreveport Sun* with an article that mentioned their upcoming recording session in

Jackson, Mississippi, not for Malaco, but rather for Harrin Griffin’s Talk of the Town

Label at 408 West Pascagoula Street. The article even listed the songs to be recorded:

“Blow Your Horn,” “Fuggish Funk,” “Time,” “Lost in Love,” “Just Can’t Leave You

Alone,” “Dump With The Funk,” “Don’t It Feel Good,” and “Look Into The Future.”

There is no evidence however that the album was ever released.

Backfire was not mentioned again until July 3, 1979, when they were part of an

outdoor concert at Veterans’ Park Amphitheatre, headlined by Tyrone Davis and

Stephanie Mills. Peculiarly, the show did not receive reviews in any of the local

newspapers. After that concert, Backfire is not mentioned again in the Shreveport

newspapers. Apparently the group broke up at some point in late 1979.

**EARL TURNER**

Keyboard player Earl Turner first came to Shreveport as a member of the Earl

White Revue, for whom he was a keyboardist and music director for five years, but he

ultimately decided to leave the revue and live in Shreveport permanently. Beginning in

1978, he went to work with Jimmy and Miki Honeycutt at the Circle in the Square in

Shreve Square, before joining the pop-rock band the Vann Company, which was playing a

regular gig at the Lost and Found on Greenwood Road.

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At some point in 1979 or possibly 1980, Turner entered Southern Star Recording Studio and recorded two funk/disco songs for the De-Pact label, which from its 3721 Greenwood Road address must have been owned by the Lost and Found club. The upbeat funk dancer “Sport City Rock” is juxtaposed with the mellow ballad “Sunshine,” and both tracks are well produced. The single has become something of a collector’s item, routinely selling for more than $150. Turner’s long-term goal was to get to Las Vegas, which he ultimately did. He remains a celebrated performer there.

**RAYMOND BLAKES**

Blues musician Raymond E. Blakes was born in Mira, Louisiana, in Caddo Parish on March 10, 1934. Initially he was reluctant to leave the Shreveport area, and when Albert King asked Blakes to go on the road with him, Blakes refused. However, later Blakes spent time in Osceola, Arkansas, playing a duo gig with his wife Ernestine backing him on drums at a club called the El Morocco. At some point Blakes and his wife returned to Shreveport, and by 1978, he had formed a band called the Mark IV, which was garnering a certain amount of attention locally after they began playing at a Shreve Square club called Humphreys with a local rock band called the Caddo Band. Although Blakes does not seem to have ever recorded, he remained a fixture in the Shreveport area until at least 2011, after which he seems to have moved to California. Blakes had a profound impact on the local music scene and beyond. His influence must have affected Bruce and Buddy Flett, who have been a major part of Shreveport’s music scene since the

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late 1970s, and Blakes was also recalled by East Nashville musician and producer John McMahon.154

BIG CONCERTS, 1979

In 1979 Shreveport’s concert season started with a Bar-Kays show in March, which also involved Evelyn “Champagne” King and Lakeside, at the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum.155 Norman Provizer of the Journal gave a rather devastating review of the concert, feeling that there were too many acts for one night, as the Fatback Band, though not advertised, was one of four acts to perform on the Hirsch stage.156 The Times’s John Andrew Prime disagreed with Provizer (which was often the case), calling the show “memorable,” and putting the attendance at an amazing 8,350.157 Unfortunately, Prime left before the Bar-Kays took the stage in order to meet his story deadline from the paper.

May 4 brought Diana Ross to the Hirsch Coliseum,158 and the Jacksons, Sister Sledge, and Foxy came on May 28.159 On June 17, a promoter called Concerts Unlimited organized a Rock Freak Festival at Veteran’s Park Amphitheatre, featuring G.Q., Denise LaSalle, and the Jackson, Mississippi-based funk band Freedom, which recorded for Malaco Records.160 The amphitheatre was again the the scene for a July 3 concert with

158 “Diana Ross,” Shreveport Sun, April 12, 1979, 11.
160 “Concerts Unlimited Presents Rock Freak Festival,” Shreveport Sun, June 7, 1979, 8.
Tyrone Davis, Stephanie Mills, and the local band Backfire, and yet again for a concert on July 15 with Mass Production, Instant Funk, and Freedom. But a review of the latter show highlighted one of the major problems with the Veterans’ Park Amphitheatre, namely that it was vulnerable to changing weather conditions, including wind and rain, which might explain why it was eventually abandoned.

On July 22, Con-Funk-Shun, the Gap Band, McFadden and Whitehead, and Anita Ward were at the Hirsch Coliseum, and on August 3, Maze, Teddy Pendergrass, and Alton McClain and Destiny performed at the same venue. On September 21, Natalie Cole came to the Coliseum for a show sponsored by the Grambling State University Foundation, along with opening acts Lenny Williams and the Jackson, Mississippi, funk band Wyndchymes, but only about five hundred people attended the concert, which John Andrew Prime stated was marred by sound distortion. The Jacksons returned to Hirsch Memorial Coliseum on October 4, this time along with LTD and the Five Specials, a show which attracted almost seven thousand people. The final big

161 “Fas Productions Presents Tyrone Davis,” Shreveport Sun, June 21, 1979, 3.
162 “Funk, Blues To Play In Veterans Park,” Shreveport Times, July 6, 1979, 43.
166 “Cole Show Is Sept. 21,” Shreveport Times, September 1, 1979, 23.
concert of 1979 in Shreveport was by Parliament-Funkadelic and the Sugar Hill Gang. P-Funk was the most popular funk band in America that year, but Sugar Hill Gang was something altogether different, one of the first nationally-popular rap groups. Rap, part of a larger New York City-based urban culture called hip-hop, was a new style of spoken word music, performed over the percussive breaks of hit records manipulated by a DJ using twin copies of records and twin turntables. By constantly cueing up the break section of the record back to back on both copies, he could extend the record’s “break,” the section that had no lyrics, creating an instrumental backing for “emcees” to rhyme their lyrics. The genre, although new, had antecedents in Black culture, including long epic anonymous poems called “toasts,” the rhyming banter of Black radio station disc jockeys, and the toasting of Jamaican DJs brought to New York from the Caribbean. As unlikely as it would seem, rap would become more and more widespread, until by 1989 it was surpassing R & B and funk as the preferred genre in Black neighborhoods, particularly among younger people. It was a successful way to end the year, and a harbinger of things to come.

**BLUES FEST, 1979**

On June 2, 1979, Southern University Shreveport, Community Services, the Shreveport Regional Arts Council, the American Federation of Musicians Performance Trust Fund, and the Shreveport Convention and Visitors Bureau sponsored a Blues Fest at the Veterans Memorial Amphitheatre in Veterans Park. Headlined by the Neville

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170 “Join Uncle Jam’s Army,” *Shreveport Sun*, December 6, 1979, 3.

Brothers, the event also included appearances by Calvin Haynes, Abraham and the Casanovas, Earl Carter, Songbird and Mark Durham, Shakey Jake, Dale Jackson, Raymond Blakes and the Mark IVs, Willie and Edward Shields, Lewis Adams and Alligator Slim, Howard Hollins, the Save The Youth Choir, the Herman Finley Ensemble, A-Train, and Alex “Snook” Jones and the Night Hawks. The actual schedule showed other artists, including jazz group the Four Gents, Freddie Pearson, Johnny “Slim” Campbell, Jesse Thomas and the Clicks, James Richmond, Tit Wells, and the Stoner Hill Community Gospel Choir with the Swann Brothers. Unfortunately, despite the great line-up and good prospects, BluesFest proved to be something of a disaster. The event had to be moved at the last minute from the Veterans Park Amphitheatre to the inadequate Municipal Auditorium due to rain, and attendance was sparse. Peculiarly, Andrew Harris of the Sun noted that the meager crowd was almost all white, while the performing line-up was overwhelmingly Black.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1980**

Shreveport’s concert season for 1980 kicked off with a big show at the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum on January 25, featuring the O’Jays, Cameo, Phyllis Hyman, and Slave, which was attended by about 6500 people, and on February 23, Rick James,

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172 Andrew Harris, “1st Annual Bluesfest To Be Held at Veterans’ Park Saturday,” *Shreveport Sun*, May 31, 1979, 9.

173 “Neville Brothers At 1st Annual BluesFest,” *Shreveport Journal*, June 1, 1979, 36.


175 Andrew Harris, “BluesFest ’79: The Blues Got Its Dues,” *Shreveport Sun*, June 7, 1979, 12.

Prince, and Instant Funk were at the same venue.¹⁷⁷ This show, attended by about eight thousand fans, created a certain amount of controversy, as James seemed to smoke a joint of marijuana on stage.¹⁷⁸ For a couple of weeks afterward, the Sun received letters both for and against the artists and concert. Many complained about Prince having a female band member rub all over him on stage, and about Rick James’s joint-smoking episode, pointing out that there had been no age limit for the show. Others defended the performance and called Shreveport “behind the times.”¹⁷⁹

Rufus and Chaka Khan came to the Hirsch Coliseum on March 22, along with The Brothers Johnson and Narada Michael Walden, but the event was poorly attended, and Prime of the Times gave a devastating critique, not so much of the performers, but of the venue itself: “The sheer noise was compounded by Hirsch Coliseum’s inherent ability to make any noise sound louder, muddier and worse than it actually is, in a minimize-the-positive, maximize the negative fashion.”¹⁸⁰ On April 18, the Whispers, Shalamar, Lakeside, and Dynasty came to the Hirsch Coliseum,¹⁸¹ and on May 14, Bobby “Blue” Bland, Tyrone Davis, and B. B. King played to a crowd of nearly four thousand people at the Coliseum.¹⁸² Con-Funk-Shun, The Gap Band and the Fatback Band were in

¹⁷⁹ “Sun Readers Express Opinions on Rick James-Prince Concert,” Shreveport Sun, March 6, 1980, 5.
Shreveport on June 7,183 and the Commodores and Patti LaBelle came on June 27.184 On July 20, it was Kool and the Gang, The Brothers Johnson, Cameo, and Family,185 and on September 13, the Bar-Kays were nearby at the Louisiana Tech University campus in Ruston.186 An October 3 LTD, Maze, Larry Graham, and Dynasty show received a scathing review from the Journal’s Norman Provizer, who felt that the lackluster show ran entirely too long,187 but on December 13, The Bar-Kays, Cameo, Switch, and Zapp came to the Coliseum,188 in the last major concert of the year.

By 1980, although Shreveport was a destination for most of the nation’s touring Black bands, the local music scene was in the doldrums, with few bands recording and only one recording studio operating. More and more clubs and events were choosing disc jockeys rather than bands for their entertainment.

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Despite a traditionalist outlook and a serious resistance to change, Shreveport had managed to come through the turbulent 1960s and 1970s relatively unscathed. The economy remained relatively stable, and the city was considered relatively safe. There was a serious divide between the Black and white communities, but if there was little rapport, there was also little overt hostility. But things began to change after 1980. Shreveport was heavily dependent on the oil sector for its prosperity, and otherwise on manufacturing; the oil bust of the 1980s took a heavy toll, as did the outsourcing of manufacturing to the developing world. Ironically, the right to work laws the late Jim Leslie had campaigned for were supposed to make it easier for Louisiana communities to land manufacturing jobs, but they instead had the opposite effect. Jobs left the state, factories laid off employees, and the new employers who did come did not offer the kind of wages or benefits that unions had negotiated for their members. Factory closures and layoffs led to a serious economic decline in Shreveport. Like Memphis, which experienced similar issues, the city officials in Shreveport even visited Japan, hoping to convince a Japanese firm to locate in the city, but to no avail. Also like Memphis, Shreveport put a certain amount of hope in tourism, but as both cities found out, tourism is seasonal and does not create enough well-paying jobs to prevent the rise of crime and despair. With the growing economic problems came gangs and drugs, as well as a hardening of racial tensions. The election of a conservative mayor, John Hussey, did
nothing to help the situation. As the city entered the new decade, the local recording industry was basically dead, and the live Black music scene in serious decline.

UNIVERSE SHOW BAND

The Universe Show Band was first mentioned in November of 1980, when they were given an honor for their “long years of service” to the Mark IV Civic Club at a club function.1 Yet the Universe Band had never been mentioned in print before, so the club’s honor suggests that the band now called the Universe Band had once been called something else, and articles about the many Mark IV Civic Club functions before 1980 show that the band they featured at those events was called the First Production Show Band. So it seems most likely that the Universe Show Band was merely a new name for the First Production Show Band.

The Universe Show Band was on hand on February 7, 1981, for a Valentine’s Pageant sponsored by the Mark IV club at the Shreveport Convention Center,2 and on July 25, 1981, for a fashion show sponsored by Ms. Vera Moore at the Esquire Room at 1040 Texas Avenue.3 In August, the Mark IV planned a dance and show at the General Exhibition Building on the Louisiana State Fairgrounds, to take place after the Red River Classic football game between Grambling and Alcorn, and again the Universe Show Band was engaged, along with a DJ,4 and in April of 1981, the Mark IV’s Easter Benefit

1 “Epps, Tarver Are Honored,” Shreveport Sun, November 27, 1980, 22.
Show and Dance at the Union Masonic Hall featured the Universe Show Band. The group’s final performance mentioned in print was for a July 4 event by the Mark IV Social Club held at the Union Masonic Hall at the corner of Allen Avenue and Murphy Street. The band is not mentioned again after June of 1982, and subsequent Mark IV events advertised disc jockeys rather than live bands.

SOUTHERN STAR RELOCATION

By 1981 Shreveport’s recording scene was limited and strictly local. George Clinton’s Southern Star studio was not drawing the kind of nationally known acts that its predecessor Sound City had attracted, and Clinton’s business did not need all the space of 3316 Line Avenue, so the studio relocated to a former La-Z-Boy Showcase Shoppe at 6105 Youree Drive in an area of Shreveport that was seeing rapid expansion. Moving into the facility with the studio were two related businesses, Custom Sound Inc., which designed, installed and serviced sound systems for homes and businesses, and Audio Fidelity, which sold audio equipment. The building was named Audio Village.

SHOWCASE BAND

One of Shreveport’s more active funk-disco bands of the 1980s was the Showcase Band, which is first mentioned in February of 1981 in connection with a benefit to raise money for the Cooper Road Neighborhood Watch; the concert was held at 1251 Cooper Road. They were again on hand in May when the First Annual All-City Junior-Senior

5 “Mark IV Social Club To Sponsor Easter Benefit Show-Dance,” Shreveport Sun, April 1, 1982, 2.

6 “Mark IV To Sponsor July Fourth Celebration,” Shreveport Sun, June 24, 1982, 16.


Prom was held at the Shreveport Civic Center providing live music, contrasted with KDKS’s DJ Ubatu who spun records. A couple of weeks later, Showcase was the central attraction for a Juneteenth event at The Room at 1040 Texas Avenue, sponsored by Linda Logan, the Southern Rose, featuring the Southern Rose Dancers and a fashion show, and in November, the band was chosen as an opening act for the big Brick, Slave, Roger, and Cameo show at the Hirsch Coliseum. In January of 1982 the band made their debut at the NCO Club on the Barksdale Air Force Base, and on March 20 they were back on the base again for a return engagement. The busy Memorial Day weekend found them in Veterans Park Amphitheatre for an outdoor show, which they shared with the Jackson/Atlanta band Sho-Nuff and the integrated Shreveport reggae band the Killer Bees.

It was not until July of 1982 when Showcase garnered a full article in the *Shreveport Sun*, complete with photograph, discussing the band, its current single “Call On Me,” and its forthcoming album *Sexy Eyes*, which does not seem to have actually ever been released. The band’s leader, John Rochelle, described the group as “a mix between rhythm and blues and punk funk,” the latter being the term Rick James used for his music at the time. Members at the time included Rochelle on saxophone and keyboards, Don

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Chism on drums, keyboards and lead vocals, Marvin Green on lead guitar and lead vocals, Eric Johnson on bass guitar and bass synthesizer, Ron Johnson on rhythm guitar, keyboards and saxophone, Geraldine Walker on drums, vocals and keyboards, Patrick Roque on keyboards, Myron Mack on lead vocals and keyboards, and William Fair on lead vocals and keyboards. Fair replaced Frankie Dean, a band member who left to join the Air Force.¹⁶

Showcase’s first single was recorded for the Southern Star label, affiliated with the studio, and must have been recorded at some point prior to 1981, as the 3316 Line Avenue address appears on it. The single consists of “If You Feel The Groove,” a Ron Johnson composition, backed by “I Want You,” credited to guitarist Marvin Green. The sound of the A-side is well-produced funk, if somewhat typical for the era, but the song is marred by weak, tentative and sometimes out-of-tune vocals. These sides were released as Southern Star 352.

The second single was “She’s A Freak” b/w “Call On Me,” released on the band’s own Jamm label, although the release number, SS-376, fits into the release sequence for Southern Star and Custom Sound, showing that the record was cut there. The listed publisher, Queen of Hearts Music, was Southern Star’s in-house music publisher. Both of these sides are far superior to the first two. The band tracks are tight on both, but the vocals are stronger and more confident on the second single. The A-side “She’s A Freak,” has the typical “electro-funk” sound of the era, which was exemplified by Memphis bands like the Bar-Kays and Ebonee Webb. The B-side “Call on Me” is similarly...

uptempo. The Sun article mentioned at least two other songs intended for the Sexy Eyes album, including the title track “Sexy Eyes” and a song called “Icy Hot.” “Sexy Eyes” ultimately saw release as part of the Budweiser Showcase band competition in 1983, which in Shreveport was co-sponsored by KDKS radio station. Whether the version released on the Budweiser Showcase single as BS1018 was the version originally cut at Southern Star is unclear, but the horns sound brighter and more forward than on the previous singles. The song shows the influence of the Bar-Kays and also the Atlanta band Cameo. The B-side of the 45 consisted of station IDs for various KDKS personalities and a Budweiser beer advertisement. It is not clear whether these singles were given away by the radio station or whether they were available in local stores, but they have become collectable. As for “Icy Hot” or any other songs from the Sexy Eyes album, nothing seems to be extant, and it is questionable how much of the album was recorded.

In August of 1983 Showcase was booked as an opening act for an outdoor concert at Chennault Park in Monroe, Louisiana, featuring Lakeside, The Bar-Kays, Starpoint, New Edition, and the Jonzun Crew. The article in the Shreveport Sun referred to a “revamped” band and listed the current members as Marvin Green, lead guitar and vocals, Don Chisum, drums and lead vocals, Robert Hadnot, drums, and Don Warren, bass and background vocals.17 On February 25, 1984, they were the main attraction for a “Spring Show & Dance Extravaganza” at the Shreveport Convention Center, along with another local band called Touch.18 Of particular interest is the mention in the ad of

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Showcase being the “1983 winners of the Budweiser Showcase Band Recording Contest.” They were certainly not the national winners of that contest, but it is entirely possible that they won at the regional level. Showcase is never mentioned in the Shreveport press again after that event, and presumably the band broke up at some point in 1984.

**CLEVELAND WILLIAMS AND THE DREAD-BEATS**

Shreveport was very much a conservative town, and there was generally little musical innovation; residents were generally familiar with blues, rhythm and blues, soul, rock and roll, gospel, and country. But in May of 1981 Shreveport was exposed to a new form of music, reggae, a Jamaican style of music which had been largely made popular in the United States by Bob Marley. Shreveport’s first reggae band was known as Cleveland Williams and the Dread-beats, and it made its public debut at an outdoor Shreve Square concert called “Celebration in the Sun,” sponsored by the Safe Energy Alliance of Shreveport. The Alliance sponsored the concert to raise awareness about the danger of nuclear energy. Not much is known about the Dread-Beats, who are never mentioned again. An integrated reggae band called the Killer Bees would become far more popular in Shreveport, although they later relocated to Austin, Texas. But Cleveland Williams and his band was almost certainly the first reggae band in Shreveport history.

**DORSEY SUMMERFIELD & THE POLYPHONICS**

Saxophonist Dorsey Summerfield left Ray Charles and the road because he wanted to be a music educator, and he did just that, returning to Shreveport, where he

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shaped the lives of many young musicians, both in the Caddo Parish School District and in the Lakeside School of Music, an institution set up by fellow music educator Ernest Lampkins. His band, known as the Polyphonics, had originally been founded by Lampkins as the Lakeside Polyphonics, but by the 1980s Lampkins was working more in a trio format, and the bigger band was now known as Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics. Under Summerfield’s leadership, they became the best-known Black band in Shreveport.

The Polyphonics were in demand for all kinds of functions, such as a Black nursing scholarship dance at the Shreveport Convention Center, or one of the weekly Brown Baggers’ Bashes sponsored by the Shreveport Regional Arts Council at the old Shreve Memorial Library on Edwards Street. The Polyphonics in 1982 consisted of Debra Hill, Melvin Landry, Leroy Hawthorne, Keith Hawthorne and Jordan “Chuck” Edwards, and in July they began a long residency at a new Black-owned restaurant on legendary Texas Avenue called Booker’s. On October 2 the Polyphonics were booked on the Louisiana Downs Stage of the massive Red River Revel event downtown, and again at the end of the month for a “Benefit Western Dance” held as a fundraiser for Councilman Hilry Huckaby III, who was running for a municipal judgeship.

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December, Huckaby sponsored another holiday affair at the Shreveport Civic Center, featuring both Ernest Lampkins and Dorsey Summerfield.26

On February 26, 1983, The Polyphonics were the featured band at Future Trend’s Spring and Summer Fashion Extravaganza and Dance at Shreveport’s Convention Hall,27 and on Sunday May 15, they were booked for an outdoor show at the Veterans Park Amphitheatre, along with the country band The Crawdads.28 The ill-fated show was postponed by rain twice and cancelled on the 15th and 22nd before finally happening on May 29.29

In April of 1984 a Shreveport attorney named Ed Dixon joined with Ernest Lampkins, Dorsey Summerfield and others to set up an organization called the Left Bank Jazz Society. The organizational meeting was held at Booker’s Restaurant, and Summerfield and the Polyphonics played for the occasion.30 Although there were several attempts over the years at forming an organization to promote jazz in the Shreveport area, not much ever came of the efforts. In September of 1984 the old historic home at 728 Austin Place reopened as The Florentine Club, and the owner of Booker’s Restaurant was made the executive chef at the club. With affiliation between the restaurant and the club, Dorsey Summerfield was soon being booked at The Florentine on Friday nights before

playing his regular Saturday nights at Booker’s on the Avenue.\textsuperscript{31} Booker’s arrangement with the Florentine did not last long. The partnership dissolved, and the two establishments went their separate ways.

Summerfield was also in demand from city government and local non-profits. When the Red River Revel sponsored a series of springtime concerts in Shreveport in 1985, the Polyphonics were booked to play in Municipal Plaza on May 19 and in Ford Park at Cross Lake on May 26.\textsuperscript{32} In June, they were featured at the Grand Reunion of all classes of the old Central High School, which had been the first Black high school in Shreveport. The reunion was held at the Sheraton Pierremont Hotel on 70th Street in the far southern suburbs of the city.\textsuperscript{33} By September, the Polyphonics were playing regularly at two different Shreveport establishments. The Edwards Street Grocery was a downtown club that catered to a predominantly-white clientele, while the Mercedes Club on Market Street was a club favored by Black patrons.\textsuperscript{34} Somehow, Summerfield managed to balance these regular gigs with the various parties and special events for which his band was in demand.

In January of 1986 Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics went into the studio to begin recording an album. The studio was Custom Sound, the former Southern Star studio out on Youree Drive. The record was produced by jazz fusion trumpeter Tom Browne, who had become aware of the group when he was in Shreveport for a

\begin{thebibliography}{100}

\item ``The Florentine Supper Club,’’ \textit{Shreveport Journal}, September 14, 1984, 52.
\item ``Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics,’’ \textit{Shreveport Times}, May 10, 1985, 46.
\item ``Summerfield and Polyphonics To Play For Centralites,’’ \textit{Shreveport Sun}, May 30, 1985, 5.
\item ``Live Music,’’ \textit{Shreveport Journal}, September 27, 1985, 37.

\end{thebibliography}
performance in November of 1985. Invited to Edwards Street Grocery to hear the Polyphonics, he ended up playing nearly their whole set with them. Although the album was still being discussed in the local newspapers in March, peculiarly it seems to have never been released for reasons that are not at all clear. It would in fact be 2002 before a commercially available Polyphonics record was released.

On May 25, 1986, there was a Memorial Day Barbecue, sponsored by the Shreveport Sesquicentennial Commission at the Fair Grounds Field baseball park. While most of the performers were country artists like Nat Stuckey and Joe Stampley, the event also featured Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics. Shreveport had in fact celebrated its 150th year as a city in 1985, and the barbecue was just one of a number of activities associated with the milestone.

In July of 1986, Cowboys Club and Restaurant in Shreveport sponsored an event called A Midsummer Night’s Magic, featuring arguably the two most popular bands in Shreveport at the time, A-Train, a diverse rock/blues/jazz band, and the Polyphonics. A few weeks later, on August 8 and 9, a jazz festival was held by KDAQ radio station in conjunction with the opening of the Towne Oak Square shopping center. Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics were one of the groups who played the two-day free festival, whose beverage sales benefitted the public radio station.


The Polyphonics remain one of Shreveport’s longest-lived bands and retain a degree of popularity around the city, although their appearances today are rarer. Dorsey Summerfield occasionally appears as a solo performer at The Green Room Lounge on Line Avenue, a bar associated with Chianti Restaurant.

**BLUESFEST II**

Shreveport’s first BluesFest had taken place in 1979. It was planned as a gala outdoor event at the Veterans Park Amphitheatre to last half a day, but rains derailed the plans. The event was moved into the Municipal Auditorium and was sparsely attended. No event was held in 1980 at all.

However, in March of 1981 an announcement was made regarding BluesFest II, an event to be held April 4 and 5 at the Hirsch Coliseum, headlined by Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker. Early announced performers included Raymond Blakes and the Shreveport Homewreckers, the Texas Street Blues Band, Jesse Thomas and the Clicks, Johnny “Slim” Campbell (who had been mentored by Parker Bledsoe), Alligator Slim, and Snook Jones. The second day was devoted to gospel music, and Inez Andrews, the Williams Brothers, and the Herman Finley Singers were scheduled to appear. A subsequent announcement added Highlight, Save the Youth Choir, and the Rufus Robinson Singers to the gospel line-up. Yet another article mentioned the local Shreveport group the Echoes of Zion.

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41”Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker To Headline BluesFest ’81,” *Shreveport Sun*, April 2, 1981, 12.

Unfortunately, the *Times* review of the first day’s events revealed that fewer than eight hundred people attended the first day of BluesFest II. While the low attendance at the previous festival had been blamed on bad weather and the last-minute relocation to the Auditorium, this year’s event had featured two of the biggest living bluesmen in the world, along with every major important blues and gospel act in Shreveport, yet with the same disappointing outcome.43 Norman Provizer of the afternoon *Journal* perhaps hit upon one reason for the poor attendance when he complained about the poor sound quality within Hirsch Coliseum, but of course that was a known issue with the venue. Perhaps due to the likelihood of “April showers,” the organizers opted for an indoor venue instead of using the obviously-superior Veterans Amphitheatre. But as Provizer wistfully put it, “The only thing missing was the audience……..Looking around, it was hard not to get the blues.”44

LEE NICHOLS

Shreveporter Lee Nichols had been active as a concert promoter and disc jockey in the city, and by the late 1970s he had begun opening venues, such as the The Plush Pup, a disco which opened in 1981. But he also recorded a rap album in Los Angeles at Maxi Studios titled “It’s A Groove,” which was intended to be released on Believe In A Dream Records, a label owned by Russell Timmons, a former Shreveporter active in the

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While it seems that the album never came out, it is likely that Nichols was the first Shreveporter to record a rap album.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1981**

Shreveport continued to see many national touring acts during the year of 1981, beginning with the February visit of Houston’s Kashmere Stage Band, under the direction of Sylvester “Stank” LeBlanc, to Shreveport’s Fair Park High School for a concert. The Kashmere Stage Band had been founded by Professor Conrad Johnson in 1969 at Kashmere High School in the Fifth Ward of Houston, but it was no ordinary high school stage band. The Kashmere band became well-known for its funk proclivities, and by 1981 it had released twelve albums, mostly on its own record label. Like Shreveport funk bands such as the Road Runners and the King Cobras, the Kashmere Stage Band was rediscovered by funk revivalist DJs and researchers, which ultimately culminated in reissues of the albums and a documentary film called *Texas Thunder Soul*.

Con Funk Shun, Slave, and T. S. Monk, the latter group led by jazz musician Thelonious Monk’s son, came to the Municipal Auditorium in El Dorado, Arkansas, in March, yet the concert was heavily promoted to the Shreveport area, and on March 29 The Whispers, Lakeside, and Shalamar came to Hirsch Coliseum, along with special guest Carrie Lucas. On May 23 Shreveport witnessed “The Battle of the Blues,” a Municipal Auditorium show featuring two of the biggest bluesmen of the era, B. B. King

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46 “Kashmere Stage Band To Play Here Friday Night At Fair Park,” *Shreveport Sun*, February 26, 1981, 2.


and Bobby “Blue” Bland, and on June 19 and 20 the soul group Sister Sledge appeared at the Celebrity Theatre at the LeBossier Hotel in Bossier City, an upscale venue which usually appealed to an older audience.

On July 18 self-proclaimed “punk-funk” exponent Rick James and the Stone City Band came to Hirsch Coliseum, along with the Atlanta-based funk band Cameo and early rapper Frankie Smith, riding his hit “Double Dutch Bus,” and on the following Monday, July 20, the Chicago blues great Son Seals was the headliner at Steamboat Annie’s, a club in the Shreve Square district downtown; the opening act was the Texas Street Blues Band. His appearance garnered a rare review from the *Times* for a night club date in Shreveport. Seals, who was born in the back of an Osceola, Arkansas juke joint called the Dipsey Doodle, gave the *Times*’ Steve Smith some pointed comments on the blues: “Younger blacks think the blues is too ‘Uncle Tom.’ They’re too cool to listen to the blues. Some of them think it reflects back to the slavery days—well, it does, but there’s a whole lot more to the music than that. But they just say they don’t want to be reminded of the slavery days.” Interestingly, Raymond Blakes had briefly spent time in Osceola, Arkansas, and Son Seals’ brother Marvin would become a fixture in the Shreveport music scene by the mid-1980s.

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New Orleans funk band The Meters also came to Shreveport on the weekend of July 17 and 18, performing both nights at Humpfrees-in-the-Square, another Shreve Square establishment. The trend toward using smaller club venues rather than the Coliseum and Auditorium may have been a response to smaller concert crowds, or perhaps it represented a desire for better acoustics and sound. But on August 20 Frankie Beverly and Maze were at the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum, along with Carl Carlton, the SOS Band, and Clique, and on November 6 Brick, Slave, Zapp featuring Roger, and Cameo were at the Hirsch Coliseum for the final show of the year, for which Shreveport band Showcase was the opening act.

LOITERING CRACKDOWN

The warmer weather months generally occasioned an increase in violent crime in Shreveport, which many attributed to public gambling outdoors and the tendency of young men to gather on street corners in the city’s Black neighborhoods. To counteract this effect, in May of 1981, the Shreveport Police Department started a crackdown on street corner loitering and blocking of public sidewalks. Most of the arrests were for public drunkenness. By August more than 79 people had been arrested, almost all of them Black. Almost all enforcement was in Black neighborhoods, although Police Chief Cliff Heap stated that enforcement was taking place in white neighborhoods too. But the

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56 “Showcase To Be Lead Act On Last Concert Of The Year,” Shreveport Sun, November 5, 1981, 8.

Black community was losing patience with the round-ups, and Heap admitted that “the violent crimes are continuing,” suggesting that the street-corner arrests were not having the positive impact that was supposedly intended. Even four years after the fall of George D’Artois, Shreveport’s policing was largely based on white ideals of suppressing the Black community and keeping it under control.

**REUBEN BELL**

Shreveport songwriter and soul singer Reuben Bell had not recorded since 1977, and the world of music had changed drastically during his five-year hiatus. Soul had given way to funk and disco, live music had given way to disc jockeys, and traditional instruments were beginning to be replaced by electronics, synthesizers and drum machines. Yet Bell saw at least one last opportunity to do his kind of music and in 1982 signed with Roy Mahoney’s Port City Records label to cut new material, recording in a style that struck a defiant note against the current of the times.

Bell’s first new single was released in late 1982, consisting of “Wait It Out (And May The Best Man Win),” b/w “All The Time,” the latter a remake of the lovely ballad Bell had recorded for the Deluxe label back in 1973. The A-side was a Chuck Jackson and Marvin Yancey composition which had been recorded in 1972 by Memphis singer Ollie Hoskins, better known as Ollie Nightingale. He had recorded the song at Jerry and Billy Butler’s Universal Recording Studios in Memphis for the Memphis label in 1972. When that label failed, the recordings were picked up by a Los Angeles-based label

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called Pride, and were released in 1973 as the album *Sweet Surrender*. It is not clear whether Bell was familiar with Hoskins’s version, but it is worth noting that both recordings were in the same key. Even so, Bell’s version is superior in every way. His voice is still in good form, and his reading of the song is full of gospel influence. The initial single was apparently released on the Port City Label, although the label actually read “Ruben Bell Session” with the year 1982 underneath. Elsewhere it said it was “Distributed by Portcity (sic).” Eventually, the song was cut by Lynn White and J. Blackfoot in Memphis as a duet. Originally on the Basix label which belonged to Select-O-Hits Music Distribution, it was eventually acquired by Malaco Records in Jackson, Mississippi.

Another single, “A Sexual Affair” b/w “We’re Gonna Make It,” was released as Port City 103 in 1982, contrasting a Reuben Bell original with a Little Milton cover on the flip side. Port City Records owner Roy Mahoney was fairly upbeat about Bell’s potential: “I think Reuben Bell has been grossly neglected. There is no end to what he can do. He’s a great writer, a good producer, a great singer and a great performer. How far he goes depends on him. I believe in him.” Ultimately, a seven-song album was recorded and released under the title *Blues Get Off My Shoulder* in 1983. It was Bell’s only album and his last recording project.

Things soon soured between Bell and Mahoney. “That man (Mahoney) wanted total control. Something had gone on at a rehearsal that I had not been at. Roy said that my drummer had tried to talk to his wife, and he demanded that I fire the drummer. I told

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60 “Reuben Bell Feels A New Music Birth,” *Shreveport Sun*, December 16, 1982, 1.
him I didn’t intend to fire my drummer because of something that I didn’t know about that he said had happened. And he got mad. So when people called from overseas to book me, he told them I was dead.\textsuperscript{61} Whether that is actually what happened is unclear, but it is certain that people in Europe were convinced that Reuben Bell was deceased. His rediscovery in 2000 was largely due to record store owner and promoter Garland Jones, who kept in touch with him and arranged for him to open for artists at the Ebony Multi-Center in Cedar Grove. Despite a resurgence of interest in Bell due to the re-release of the Murco singles in Europe, he did not record again and died of cancer in 2003.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1982**

While Shreveport had always had a vast number of concerts by Black artists every year, in 1982 there was not a single Black-oriented major concert between January and the end of June. People noticed, and the *Shreveport Sun* discussed the situation in an article. Local promoters Lee Nichols and Sunrose “Gay Poppa” Rutledge stated that promoters did not have the money to bring big name entertainment to the city anymore and that people did not have money to go to such shows because of unemployment and layoffs in Shreveport. They also pointed out that the last several big shows in Shreveport in 1981 had lost money.\textsuperscript{62}

Shreveport’s first big show of the year was not until August 21, when Millie Jackson brought her ribald style of soul to the Municipal Auditorium.\textsuperscript{63} A couple of months later, on November 17, the Port City Jazz Society brought the pop-jazz group

\textsuperscript{61} Interview with the author, February 5, 2000.


Pieces of a Dream to the Celebrity Theatre at the Le’Bossier Hotel in Bossier City.\textsuperscript{64} Lou Rawls and Robert Flack were at the Municipal Auditorium on December 2, 1982,\textsuperscript{65} and a Bobby “Blue” Bland appearance at the Plush Pup at 3825 Hollywood Avenue in Hollywood on December 22 closed out a dismal concert year for Shreveport.\textsuperscript{66}

**SHREVE SQUARE SECURITY CONCERNS**

As conditions deteriorated economically in Shreveport, things also deteriorated for the Shreve Square district downtown, where rowdyism, drunkenness and fights became common. In May of 1982 the Square management hired four security guards to patrol the area, fearing that incidents might ramp up with the coming of the warm weather season. One of the Square’s owners, John Walcott, stated that there had been no particular incident leading to the decision but that the hiring of security was intended to prevent disturbances before they occurred.\textsuperscript{67}

**LOU WELLS AND THE SHREVEPORT REGIONAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE**

Although jazz had a limited audience in Shreveport, there were several different musicians in the Black community who did their best to promote the genre, both to fans and to younger musicians, among whom was Lou Wells, the conductor of the Shreveport Regional Jazz Ensemble. The SRJE was an 18-piece big band, primarily made up of band directors in the Caddo Parish School District, which was first mentioned in the newspapers in February of 1983, when it sponsored a Winter Blues-Jazz Serenade at the

\textsuperscript{64} “Port City Jazz Society Presents Pieces Of A Dream,” *Shreveport Sun*, November 11, 1982, 2.

\textsuperscript{65} “Rawls, Flack Team Up,” *Shreveport Journal*, November 23, ’81, 11.

\textsuperscript{66} “Bobby Blue Bland Due Here on December 22,” *Shreveport Times*, December 19, 1982, 123.

Celebrity Theatre of the Le’Bossier Hotel in Bossier City. A few months later on May 15, it sponsored a Spring Concert at Fair Park High School, paid for by the Recording Fund of the American Federation of Musicians. By July of 1984 Lou Wells was performing regularly with a smaller combo at a new club called the Glass Hat on Texas Avenue. The club had been opened by the son of gospel singer and disc jockey Willie Caston Sr. as part of an effort to redevelop the historic Texas Avenue Black entertainment district.

On July 13, 1986, Lou Wells brought his Shreveport Regional Jazz Ensemble to Municipal Plaza in downtown Shreveport for an event called Jazz in the Plaza, sponsored by the Shreveport Arts Council and the Musicians’ Performance Trust Fund, and he continued his regular combo performances at the Glass Hat until that club closed in December of 1987 due to the construction of Interstate 49.

In addition to performing at civic festivals like the Red River Revel and the Black Arts/Let The Good Times Roll Festival, Wells and the Shreveport Regional Jazz Ensemble continue to present occasional concerts in the city.

WILLIE MOODY AND THE SPLURGES

For many years, the Mark IV Social Club in Shreveport had hired the First Production Show Band and its successor the Universal Show Band for its events, but by

69 “Jazz Ensemble To Perform Here Sunday,” Shreveport Sun, May 12, 1983, 2.
March of 1983 the Universal Band seems to have disappeared. When the Mark IV club sponsored its annual Easter Fashion Show, the primary entertainment advertised was a disc jockey, but an “extra added attraction” was music by Willie Moody and the Splurges.  

Almost all mentions of The Splurges are in connection with this Mark IV event, with the exception of an April 14 mention of them playing at Booker’s Seafood and Steak House on Texas Avenue. Who the members of The Splurges were is unclear, and they are not mentioned after April of 1983.

**PRECIOUS**

In the spring of 1983 Shreveport guitarist Ron Johnson formed a new funk-oriented musical group called Precious, consisting of himself, Phyllis Turner, Alethea “Toadie” Chase, and Ron “Slack” Jefferson. All of the members were from Shreveport, and their first single, also entitled “Precious,” gained a certain degree of popularity in Shreveport, Alexandria, Tyler and Lafayette. Johnson described the music as “disco, party-down jamming music with a touch of rock and funk.” But even though all the media publicity at the time referred to the group as “Precious,” the single has the group name as Mellou Inc. instead. The single consists of “Precious” b/w “Garfield,” with the B-side sounding like an instrumental of the A-side. The two sides were released on the Jamm label, which had also released the Showcase band’s second single, but the single peculiarly had no release number. Its publisher is Queen of Hearts Music, which shows

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75 Mary Sharon Thomas, “Precious Takes Its First Shot At The Top,” *Shreveport Sun*, April 28, 1983, 3.

76 Ibid.
that Southern Star/Custom Sound was involved in some way, and the label says the songs are taken from the album *Precious I*, but, just as was the case with the Showcase album, there is no evidence that an album was ever released. Johnson at the time suggested the album would be called *Jammin’ All Weekend*, but it does not seem to have come out under either title. The group was only mentioned on one other occasion, when it performed at the new Three Dimension Club in Allendale in August of 1983. After that, the group seems to have disappeared.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1983**

The year 1983 proved to be a better one for Shreveport concerts than the previous year had been, and it started fairly early, with a Z. Z. Hill and Reuben Bell show at the Municipal Auditorium in February. For the Mother’s Day weekend on May 8, Marvin Gaye, Con-Funk-Shun and Debarge were at the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum, and according to the *Journal*’s reviewer, 7700 people attended. John Andrew Prime of the *Times* put the crowd at 7678, and concurred with Provizer in his enjoyment of the show, but complained about the “boorish” behavior of the audience for stacking chairs and standing on them in order to see better. Furthermore, his mention of Santana in his review elicited an angry response from a *Sun* reader, who stated: “Nothing galls me more than to read a review of a black concert by a white writer…..Marvin Gaye was a full-

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79 “Marvin Gaye, Con-Funk-Shun and Debarge,” *Shreveport Times*, April 24, 1983, 114.
bloomed legend even before Santana came on the scene….White folks, no matter how they try, just can’t see black music and enjoy it with the same feeling as blacks.”82 On August 6, BluesFest III was announced, but unlike the previous two efforts, this one was basically just a concert at the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum featuring B. B. King, Bobby “Blue” Bland, Millie Jackson, and Z. Z. Hill.83 This time there was no effort to include any local artists or groups, no effort to include gospel music, and in the aftermath there were complaints about the heavy-handed police behavior at the show. Concert advertising had not stated clearly that alcohol could not be brought into the coliseum; presumably Shreveport residents knew that to be the case, but the B. B. King and Bobby “Blue” Bland show had brought a lot of out-of-town people to the venue, who did not know the policy. The police searched people, seized their bottles, and discarded the liquor. A complainant to the Shreveport Sun pointed out that had the promoters advertised clearly that bottles could not be brought in, people would have left them at home or in their cars.84 On August 27, Hirsch played host to Gladys Knight and the Pips, Peabo Bryson and New Edition,85 and on Sunday, September 4, Chaz Summer Fest was held at the Independence Bowl stadium, featuring local band Precious, singer G. C. Cameron, the Bar-Kays, and Midnight Star, a marathon event that did not end until 2 AM.86 Yet not everyone was pleased. The Sun reviewer had noted that a member of the Bar-Kays had

84 “Concert,” Shreveport Sun, August 11, 1983, 3.
“exhibited the behavior of a freak” during the song “Freaky Behavior,” and at least one concert-goer complained to the Sun:

I think something should be done about the conduct of entertainers who come here to perform at concerts. I lost a lot of respect for the Bar-Kays when they performed here Sunday night—and they were one of my favorite groups. I was shocked when the Bar-Kays’ man indecently exposed himself, just blatantly exposed himself. What’s worse about it is that police officers stood there and watched the whole act. I think there should be more respect for women and children, even if the artists don’t respect themselves. I was really shocked that the Bar-Kays would do this.87

The Bar-Kays’ likely seemed tame in comparison to Rick James, who came to the Hirsch Coliseum on November 6 with the S.O.S. Band, The Stone City Band, and the Mary Jane Girls. As Annette Caramia of the Journal put it, “James did everything but copulate on stage, although he did come close to even that at one point.”88 A little more than a week later, Shreveporters had the opportunity to catch Jeffrey Osborne and Atlantic Starr on the Grambling State University campus on November 15,89 and on December 11 Hirsch hosted the final show of the year, featuring the Gap Band, along with Clique and Midnight Star.90

THE THREE DIMENSION CLUB

In late May of 1983 Sunrose “Gay Poppa” Rutledge of KOKA and Bill Brewer opened a new and different kind of nightclub in the Allendale neighborhood of

Shreveport.91 Early on, the address was given as 617 Western Avenue,92 but by July the address was being given as 1328 Jewell Street.93 The building seems to have been located on the corner of the two streets. The club was massive by Shreveport standards, with the capability to seat twelve hundred patrons, and a plan to offer “strictly adult” entertainment, largely based around live bands, at a time when the trend in the Black community was toward DJ-based clubs.94 The 3-D, as it was fondly known, would be the most important night club in the city for about five years.

The first official event at the new club was an appearance of Louisiana native Joe Simon, from Simmesport, who appeared in both Shreveport and Grambling fairly often over the years. Simon performed a free show on Thursday June 16, with a mandatory three-drink minimum. On the following Friday and Saturday nights, he performed two shows per night, at 8 PM and 11 PM.95 The drink minimums led to some complaints phoned in to the Sun the following week, suggesting that Shreveporters were not used to the practice, but drink minimums at least during a free show seem utterly reasonable. On the July 4 weekend, Memphis saxophonist Hank Crawford came to the Three Dimension, and while the show was not well advertised in advance, it received an endorsement from

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95 “Joe Simon To Appear At 3-Dimension,” Shreveport Sun, June 16, 1983, 5.
a patron afterwards, who told the Sun “It was a musical experience. I would like to thank the people at 3-D for bringing Shreveport up to date.”

On August 19, blues diva Denise LaSalle came to the 3-D, and again, Shreveport residents who attended were thrilled. One attendee told the Sun “I just want to say that the Denise LaSalle show at the 3-Dimension was really good. It’s the kind of entertainment that Shreveport needs.” On September 23, the club had Louisiana singer Margie Joseph, and in October, Tyrone Davis appeared, although the late start time for the event angered some patrons. The end of 3-D’s first year came on December 30, 1983, with a show featuring J. Blackfoot from Memphis and Dallas bluesman R. L. Griffin.

On January 21, 1984, the Dazz Band, famous for their song “Let It Whip,” came to the 3-D for a show, along with the local Shreveport band Precious, and on February 25, 1984, Z. Z. Hill was scheduled to perform at the club, but a broken leg he suffered in a car wreck forced him to cancel his appearance. Although Johnny Gipson of Chaz Entertainment stated that an effort would be made to bring Hill back as soon as possible, Hill never again performed in Shreveport, as he died on April 27, 1984, of a heart attack.

102 “The Dazz Band,” Shreveport Sun, January 19, 1984, 8.
103 “Injury Forces Hill Cancellation,” Shreveport Times, February 17, 1984, 42.
He was buried at Hughes Springs, Texas, not far from Jefferson, Texas, and Shreveport.\textsuperscript{104}

On March 23, 1984, Denise LaSalle made a return visit to the Three Dimension in Shreveport, and a week later, on March 30, Joe Simon, who had opened the club the year before, returned.\textsuperscript{105} A few months later, on June 2, the Manhattans and the Staple Singers came to the club, with both groups performing two shows, one at 9 PM and one at 11 PM,\textsuperscript{106} and Latimore was there June 16 promoting his new album \textit{I’ll Do Anything For You} on Malaco Records.\textsuperscript{107} On June 23, Zapp featuring Roger came to the 3-D,\textsuperscript{108} and on July 5, the Three Dimension began advertising a weekly Blue Monday event every Monday night, featuring jazz and blues from a live band, although the announcement did not name what live band they were going to hire.\textsuperscript{109} In November, the Ohio Players came to the Dimension on November 10, Little Milton was there on November 16 and 17, and Millie Jackson on Thanksgiving Eve, November 21, opened up for by the local Shreveport band Touch.\textsuperscript{110} The club’s final show of 1984 was on December 28, featuring Bobby “Blue” Bland performing two sets of his biggest hits with a nine-piece band. Not

\textsuperscript{104} Andrew Harris, “It Was A Down Home Funeral For Blues Singer Z. Z. Hill,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, May 10, 1983, 3.

\textsuperscript{105} “Denise LaSalle and Joe Simon To Appear At Three-D,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, March 22, 1984, 6.


\textsuperscript{107} “Latimore at 3-D Saturday,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, June 14, 1984, 8.


since the days of the Palace Park had a Black nightclub brought so many national acts to Shreveport.

On February 2, 1985, Memphis soul singer Shirley Brown opened the new year at the 3-D, and on February 23 Johnnie Taylor came from Dallas for two sets, as he was promoting his new Malaco release *This Is Your Night*. The Three Dimension’s policy of having two sets but allowing people who paid for the first set to stay for the second proved popular with Shreveport audiences. Local Shreveport band The Touch appeared at the club on March 8, and on March 30 the Bar-Kays came for two shows. On May 11, Memphis native Hank Crawford was back at the 3-D, but there were no further advertised shows in 1985.

On February 1, 1986, the First Annual Goose and Gander Blues Festival was advertised as taking place at the Three-Dimension Club, featuring the great Louisiana bluesman Bobby Rush. Opening up for him was Son Seals’s brother Marvelous Marvin Seals, who would be a fixture on the Shreveport scene in the mid-to-late 1980s. On March 1, 1986, Clarence Carter came to the 3-D, and on June 21 Denise LaSalle was back at the club where she always had been well received. On August 11 Bobby “Blue”

Bland was back,119 and Joe Simon returned on August 22.120 On September 26 and 27 Shirley Murdock came to the Three-Dimension, riding her national hit “As We Lay,” which catapulted her to sudden fame,121 and on October 11 Betty Wright came to the 3-D for the first time, promoting her hot new single “No Pain, No Gain.”122 For the first time, a Three Dimension show was reviewed, by John Andrew Prime of the *Shreveport Times*, and he had only positive words, and that despite the fact that Wright did not come on stage until midnight, following behind a local Shreveport band called the Gigolos and a set by Wright’s own musicians, the Tallahassee Band. Of the show Prime wrote, “the intimate atmosphere, the size of the crowd, the size of the hall, and the high quality of the sound system made for an excellent concert.”123 Prime was also highly enthusiastic about the Gigolos, a band that seems to have been led by Louis Alcorn, formerly of African Music Machine and Ten Degrees Below Funk. The band had two percussionists, Alcorn and Gerald Scott, guitarist Ted Hansen, bassist Stanley Robinson, drummer T. Jones and keyboardist William Fair.124

Things did not go quite as well for Pieces of a Dream, the Philadelphia jazz group, which came to the Three Dimension for an October 17 show. Problems with the monitors for the musicians caused the first set to be cancelled, as well as the opening

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120 Ibid.
122 “Betty Wright at 3-D Saturday,” *Shreveport Sun*, October 9, 1986, 9.
124 Ibid.
band, Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics. At least four hundred people attended the show to see the band, whose single “Say La La” was riding the jazz charts that year.125

Tyrone Davis came to Shreveport and the 3-D on November 7,126 and Lattimore on November 21.127 Bobby Bland, touring behind his successful Malaco album Members Only came to the Three Dimension on December 13, where about four hundred people gathered to hear opening act the Marvin Seals Connection, and Bland, whose band contained Louis Villery, a former member of the African Music Machine.128 The 3-D stayed busy throughout the holiday season, with Little Milton and Cadillac Jack appearing on December 20, Marvin Seals on Christmas night, and singer Beau Williams on New Year’s Eve.129

In the new year of 1987 the Ohio Players came to Shreveport, doing an autograph session at the Session and Session Motel on Lakeshore Drive on Thursday January 1 before appearing at the 3-D Club on Friday, January 2.130 The Times review noted that only a hundred people attended the Ohio Players show, for which the local band Synclair

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had been the opening act. In a January 17 article, John Andrew Prime for the first time
gave a description of what was arguably Shreveport’s most popular Black nightclub:

If you’ve ever hesitated when asked to visit the 3D Club, you’ve missed out on one of Shreveport’s nightspot delicacies. Now don’t get this wrong. Don’t expect to find satin or frills if you go there tonight for Millie Jackson’s two shows. It looks a lot like what it once was: A former Moore’s Firestone outlet at 617 Western Ave. The upper level, where tires and other automotive paraphernalia were once stored, still sports its chain-link fence appearance, and there is the boxy, rectangular, concrete vastness that speaks of the Warehouse Modern school of design. But the marriage of lights, a good sound system and appreciative selection of nationally known headliners and hopeful local openers provides a major source of nighttime thrills.

On March 27, Johnnie Taylor, who was immensely popular in Shreveport, returned to the Three Dimension club to perform two shows. He was on tour promoting his new Malaco album Lover Boy. Blues legend Bobby “Blue” Bland came to the 3-D on April 24, and B. B. King was scheduled for a Three Dimension date on May 9, but demand exceeded the venue’s capacity and the event ended up being moved to Hirsch Memorial Coliseum. On May 15 the band Lakeside came to Shreveport and performed

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133 Ibid.
135 “Johnnie Taylor At 3-D Club For Two Big Shows,” Shreveport Sun, March 26, 1987, 5.
137 “King Concert Changes Site,” Shreveport Times, April 24, 1987, 55.
at the Three Dimension, and on July 10 Denise LaSalle was back, promoting her newest album *It’s Lying Time Again.*

September 3 was the weekend of the annual Red River Classic football game at the Louisiana State Fairgrounds, and after it, 3D sponsored a “Blues Throw Down” featuring Baton Rouge bluesman Big Lucius Brown, another Baton Rouge group named Big Bo Melvin and the Night Hawks, Gene Fairchild, Floyd Patterson, and Ms. Sharon Henderson, billed as the “New Orleans Queen of Soul.” On September 19 soul singer Jesse James came to Shreveport, touring behind the sudden success of his single “I Can Do Bad By Myself,” which catapulted him to a brief level of prominence, and Memphis-based singer Lynn White was at the Three Dimension a week later for a show. In October, the O’Jays were in town for a show on the 15th, which would seem to have been the last 3-D show of the year.

For the Three Dimension the new year began with a Bobby “Blue” Bland appearance on January 8, for which Marvin Seals was the opening act, and Johnnie Taylor came on February 6, performing only one set instead of the 3D’s usual two. On February 19 Bobby “Blue” Bland was back for another performance, having released *You

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Got Me Loving You on the MCA label, successor to ABC which had bought out Don Robey’s Duke and Peacock labels in Houston, and Millie Jackson was in Shreveport on March 4 for two sets at the club. For the first time the 3-D advertised a dual pricing structure, where the lower price admitted to one set and the higher to both sets. Malaco Records artists The Rose Brothers came in April for a Friday and Saturday night of shows, but no mention was made of any further shows until October.

By then Shreveport was in the throes of both economic collapse and racial unrest. Layoffs and financial uncertainty, the growing problem of gangs and drug dealing, and the Cedar Grove riot in September made people less likely to venture out at night. Bluesman Little Milton came to the Three Dimension on October 14 and Clarence Carter on October 21. The club is never mentioned again in the Shreveport press after that, and it must have closed that year.

Sadly, today, the site where the Three Dimension stood is a vacant lot, as is so much of Allendale. “Redevelopment” and the abortive plans for the north leg of Interstate 49 led to mass demolitions. There is nothing except a slab foundation to mark the place that was so important to Black Shreveport in the 1980s for an adult night out on the town. Its closing truly marked the end of an era.

147 “Millie Jackson To Bring Spirited Style To The 3-D,” Shreveport Times, March 4, 1988, 45.
148 “Rose Brothers To Perform In Concert For Friday and Saturday Shows,” Shreveport Times, April 15, 1988, 45.
RACISM AT THE RED RIVER REVEL

The week-long Red River Revel in downtown Shreveport was by 1983 the city’s largest festival. Billed as a festival of the arts, it comprised a week of music performances, art demonstrations, exhibits, and food, but while the event bragged that it had “something for everyone,” at least some in Shreveport’s Black community disagreed.\(^\text{150}\) One resident complained:

If you listen to radio and TV announcements about the Revel, you hear things like the Revel has something for everybody. But this is not true. The Revel only offers events for whites. I find that very strange because it is billed as a celebration of the arts. Who better than blacks have a rich tradition in the arts? Shame on you, Shreveport.\(^\text{151}\)

Another Shreveport resident agreed:

It disappoints me that our black councilmen would approve some $30,000 of the city’s money for the Revel, which does not give blacks anything to participate in. It amazes me that these three men would just sit there and say nothing and just let SPAR (Shreveport Parks and Recreation) people give the whites everything, including free police protection.\(^\text{152}\)

Of course the Revel booked some Black artists, but they tended to be older artists like Jesse Thomas and Alex “Snook” Jones, who appealed to a white audience.

NIGHTCLUB SEARCHES, PART II

Nor were race relations in Shreveport helped by the rumor that Shreveport police were raiding Black nightclubs again, searching every patron for weapons and drugs. While the Sun newspaper claimed to have looked into it after a reader’s complaint and was told by a local ranking police official that nothing of the sort was going on, it had

\(^\text{150}\) “Red River Revel,” Shreveport Sun, October 6, 1983, 3.

\(^\text{151}\) “Red River Revel,” Shreveport Sun, October 6, 1983, 3.

\(^\text{152}\) Ibid.
gone on in the past, and it is hard to see how such a rumor got started unless the police had raided at least one Black Shreveport nightclub in that way.\textsuperscript{153}

\textbf{THE BLACK ARTS FESTIVAL, 1983}

Because Shreveport’s major festivals tended to marginalize the city’s Black residents, in 1983 the local Black theatre company known as the Theatre of the Performing Arts organized a Black Arts Festival in Shreveport, which took place at the Louisiana State Exhibit Building at the State Fairgrounds on February 25-27.\textsuperscript{154} The festival, which was intended to highlight all aspects of Black Art in Shreveport, featured performances by Freddie Pierson and his band Intensive Care, as well as Alex “Snook” Jones. The festival continued for several years under the name Black Arts Festival, although the name caused controversy in a city as conservative as Shreveport. Some Black church members said that the term “Black Arts” suggested witchcraft and evil magic. Taken up by different sponsors, the event moved to the Juneteenth weekend and was renamed “Let The Good Times Roll.”

\textbf{THE LONG SLOW DEATH OF STAN’S RECORD SHOPS}

From a modest beginning in 1948, Stan Lewis had built a record empire in Shreveport which seemed impregnable. He owned multiple retail stores, a record distributor, a one-stop, a record promotion firm, and several record labels, and in the early 1970s, he had greatly expanded his flagship store downtown at 728 Texas Street. Known as “Stan the Record Man,” he enjoyed a prominent reputation in the music


\textsuperscript{154} “Black Arts Festival To Be Held Here,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, February 24, 1983, 13.
business not only locally but also nationally. However, Lewis was unprepared for industry changes, including the consolidation of the record business into the hands of the major labels and their distributors, and also the drastic collapse of Louisiana’s oil-based economy during the 1980s. The October 8, 1983, edition of Billboard revealed that P & S Enterprises of Shreveport, umbrella for Stan Lewis’s businesses, had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on September 19.\(^{155}\) The news broke locally on October 28, with the Journal noting that the “wholesale and mail order operation sections of Stan’s had been hard hit by decreased sales, sources said. It had been forced to lay off employees from its wholesale operation. Much of the decrease in volume was traced to a decision by Motown and Arista records not to use independent distributors to place records in record shops, radio stations and juke boxes.\(^{156}\)

The labels’ decision to change to major label distribution was probably not the only issue. Steve Timmons, who ran the smaller but popular SOOTO chain (the name stood for Something Out of the Ordinary), told Billboard that no sooner had he expanded with a second store than the large Western Electric telephone plant had shut down for an entire calendar year.\(^ {157}\) Details from the P & S bankruptcy showed a drastic decline in gross profits during the years 1979 to 1981, which by the latter year had dwindled to only 13.6% of sales. The firm listed assets of $3,411,695 and debts of $5,232,666, with the largest debtors being Pioneer Bank and Columbia Broadcast System.\(^ {158}\)

\(^{155}\) “Inside Track,” Billboard, October 8, 1983, 88.


Lewis continued to operate his stores, and Pioneer Bank offered a $50,000 loan to keep the business functioning during the bankruptcy. The court appointed a creditors’ committee which included representatives of WEA, CBS, Malaco, PolyGram, Motown and the Pioneer Bank.\textsuperscript{159} By February of 1984, Pioneer had offered Lewis a million-dollar line of credit, which Lewis stated would allow his businesses to continue on an “almost normal footing.”\textsuperscript{160} In April, a majority of the secured and unsecured creditors agreed to a reorganization plan that would give them repayment from 70% of the net cash flow from P & S Enterprises over the next decade.\textsuperscript{161}

Lewis seems to have decided at this point to change Stan’s Record Shops into more of a franchise operation, and on July 9, 1984, a new Stan’s Record Shop opened in the Westwood Shopping Center at Jewella Avenue and Greenwood Road, with Laverne Smith listed as the “owner-manager.”\textsuperscript{162} Smith was one of the Black employees Lewis hired back in 1968 when he had been picketed by B. J. Mason, Larry “Boo-Ga-Loo” Cooper, and the Shreveport NAACP. The Stan’s Record Shop in Shreve City closed in October of 1984. Its owner, A. J. “Ace” Lewis, renamed the store The Music Shoppe and relocated to Bossier City. He told the \textit{Journal} that Shreve City was a bad location. “Business was declining. It was time to make a move.”\textsuperscript{163} The Shreve City shopping center was beginning to empty out, in part because of the opening of Pierre Bossier Mall


\textsuperscript{160} “Stan Lewis Gets Million-Dollar Line of Credit,” \textit{Billboard}, February 25, 1984, 3.


in Bossier City, and also because of the beginnings of a migration of Shreveport’s white community across the Red River to Bossier City.

In June of 1985, the First Methodist Church in downtown Shreveport purchased four blocks on Texas Street, including lots on the south side of the street and also the building that contained Stan’s Record Shop’s flagship location. Pat Nelson, the church’s business manager, said that the record store would remain, but would not disclose plans for the rest of the acquired land and buildings. An advertisement that month shows that there were four remaining Stan’s locations: the big downtown store, the new Westwood store, a store at the Mall St. Vincent and the Eastgate store on East 70th street.

In July of 1985, it was rumored that Don Gillespie of Jem Inc. in Grand Prairie, Texas was negotiating to acquire Lewis’s one-stop and distribution business, leaving the retail and label operations in Lewis’s hands. But either the negotiations failed, or the rumor was never true to begin with. And in July the AT&T plant in Shreveport (formerly Western Electric) laid off hundreds of workers permanently, leaving them searching for jobs that, at least in Shreveport and Bossier City, did not exist. In September, Stan’s one-stop operations were spun-off into Frankie’s One-Stop, owned by Francis Patrick Spano. A one-stop was a kind of record distributor that sold both major and independent label products to small retail stores, also selling such necessary items as

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165 “Stan’s-Four Convenient Locations,” *Shreveport Sun*, June 20, 1985, 11.
166 “Inside Track,” *Billboard*, July 6, 1985, 82.
display cases, divider cards, diamond needles for turntables, and any other things someone would need to open a record shop.

On June 13, 1986, New York rap artists Run-DMC, touring behind their popular *Raising Hell* album, visited the legendary downtown location of Stan’s Record Shop at 728 Texas Street to sign autographs before their Friday night concert. Among those getting to meet them was a two-year-old boy named Justin Ellis, who needed a liver transplant, and his family. Ellis’s situation was a rallying point for Shreveport’s Black community at that time. The Run-DMC visit was a last hurrah for the legendary downtown store.

But the decline of both the Stan’s chain and Shreveport’s downtown was inexorable, and in March 1987 the inevitable happened. The First United Methodist church decided to move forward with its plans for the buildings it had purchased in 1985, and Lenny Lewis, Stan’s son, who now ran the downtown store, announced that it would be closing. Instead, he would be opening a new Stan’s location in the heart of Cedar Grove at Linwood Avenue and 77th Street; Lewis’s decision seemed predicated on the idea that by 1987 Stan’s customer base was primarily African-American. Lewis’s sister Susan Garriga owned the other remaining Stan’s in Eastgate, which had resulted from the closure of Shreve City and the relocation of the Southfield store. She chose to carry primarily sheet music as well as jazz and classical recordings, conceding the rock and pop markets to Timmons’s Sooto chain. The former Stan’s in Westwood had been

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renamed Laverne’s Records by its manager and owner. Record collectors from around the world visited the legendary downtown store in its last days, buying vast amounts of 45 RPM singles from a number of labels, including Lewis’s own Jewel/Paula/Ronn family, the Shreveport-based Murco imprint, and Don Logan’s Faces/Cal/Brother/Memorial complex. First United Methodist Church had discussed building new office and classroom space on the site, but ultimately it never did. Instead, they merely demolished the historic building and built a parking lot. While the Stan’s name would survive a few more years in Cedar Grove, and the elder Lewis would run a revamped Southern Soul label called Susie Q, it was truly the end of an era. Eventually the last Stan’s was acquired by Garland Jones, its last manager, and was operated as Garland’s Super Sounds for many years, closing at some point around 2015. By then, the store sold little other than rap, R & B and Black gospel.

**THE XANADU**

The club at 3721 Greenwood Road in Shreveport had originally been called the Lost and Found Club, but by January of 1984 it had been renamed the Xanadu, owned by Joe Rinaldi. It soon became a haven for jazz and blues through the efforts of a former Shreveporter in Los Angeles named Percy Smalley, who found on a 1983 visit to his hometown that there was really no outlet for live jazz at all in the city. He convinced Rinaldi to allow a series of jazz jam sessions on Wednesdays beginning in December of 1983, and by January of 1984, public response was positive. Smalley told the *Shreveport Sun* “We have let our music die. I felt it would be a great thing to get it started again,
since it is the greatest of black art forms." The jam sessions were anchored by the house band, known as I.R.S., consisting of Albert Lattier on keyboard, George Chaney on trumpet, Dunny Gilyard on trombone, Marvin Seals on drums, and Darryl Mims on guitar and flute. Vocalists included Mims, Dorie Dean, formerly of the Billy Williams Quartet, and Seals,

Jazz did not last long at Xanadu, because in March of 1984 the club suffered a mysterious fire, which did severe damage to the back of the building, yet by December 29 an article about happy hours mentioned Buddy Lacour as the bartender of Xanadu, so evidently the club had been rebuilt and reopened. However on September 25, 1985, a reported trash fire behind the Xanadu Club spread to the building itself and completely destroyed it. This was the second mysterious fire to strike the club in two years. The Journal reported that the building belonged to Joe Rinaldi, but that the club business belonged to a Las Vegas man named Tony Aldeitti. By January of 1986 the fire had been ruled arson, and a $1000 reward was being offered for information about who might be responsible. Perhaps not surprisingly, no information was forthcoming. The person or people responsible for burning the Xanadu intentionally were never caught or punished.

171 Andrew Harris, “Jazz Music Gets Revived Here,” Shreveport Sun, January 5, 1984, 8.
172 Ibid.
174 Mary Sharon Thomas, “View Here Split On Texas’ 2-For-1 Ban,” Shreveport Times, January 29, 1984, 10.
TOUCH

In February of 1984, when TFT Promotions announced a Spring Show and Dance Extravaganza at the Shreveport Convention Center, the announcement mentioned a “fiery mystery group called Touch.” Touch was yet another group being produced and molded by Shreveport guitarist Ron Johnson, who was seemingly involved in some way with nearly every Shreveport Black music venture after 1970. On June 10 Touch was one of several local acts chosen to open for Bobby Womack’s show at the Municipal Auditorium, but there was little description of the band beforehand and no mention of their performance afterwards. The Touch finally garnered a feature in the Shreveport Sun in March of 1985, when they were booked to appear at the Three Dimension Club in Allendale. The article listed the band members as Eric Johnson, keyboards, bass; Byron Mac Steel, lead guitar, vocals; Jeff Smith, keyboards, drums; Rodney Jones, lead guitar, bass; Wilbert Hatter, drummer; Victor Clayburn, bass, keyboards; Terry Emerson, lead singer, lead guitar; and Ron Jefferson, drums and band leader. They had been recording at Custom Sound, but it does not appear that anything ever came out. A month later in April of 1985 came something of a shake-up: a photograph and short article in the Sun of April 4 indicated that a member had left the group and that the band was under new management. At this point the band was said to consist of vocalists Terry Anderson and Myron Mack, keyboardist and bassist Eric Johnson, drummer Wilbert Hadnott (sic),

177 “Spring Show and Dance Slated February 25,” Shreveport Sun, February 23, 1984, 8.
179 Probably a misprint; the drummer’s name elsewhere was listed as Wilbert Hudnott.
180 “The Touch At The 3-Dimensional Friday,” Shreveport Sun, March 7, 1985, 6.
keyboardist and guitarist Rodney Jones, and keyboardist and guitarist Jeffrey Smith.

Victor Claiborne was the group’s manager. On June 15 Touch was the featured band at the Black Arts Festival in downtown Shreveport, playing from 6 to 10 PM, and this time they were pictured in the *Shreveport Journal*. But, despite their local popularity, Touch found better success in Japan, where they were booked for a six-month tour. While Shreveport’s economy was in free-fall, Japan’s industrial economy was booming, and the country had a notable desire for American culture in general and Black culture in particular. The band Touch is never mentioned again in Shreveport. Presumably after the Japanese tour, it broke up.

**SOUTHERN STAR BECOMES CUSTOM SOUND**

By 1984 George Clinton was ready to leave Shreveport and his Southern Star studio behind. Shreveport’s economy was in decline and musically had lost the battle to Jackson, Mississippi. Furthermore, his heart was in country music, and Shreveport was becoming a Black majority city. What little recording jobs there might be beyond commercial advertising were likely to be in funk, rap, or Black gospel music. Clinton ultimately departed for Nashville.

Bill Moseley already owned a sound system firm called Custom Sound Inc. and had shared a building on Youree Drive with Southern Star, so it is not surprising that he, along with M. Lewis Norton, chose to acquire the studio and keep it open, renaming it Custom Sound. Since Sound City and Southern Star had both operated a label called

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Custom Sound, it was not an unfamiliar name to Shreveporters. The new studio formally opened on May 1, 1984, and Governor Edwin Edwards was invited, but did not attend the opening.184

BIG CONCERTS, 1984

By 1984, Shreveport and Bossier City had an exceptional number of venues for acts of national importance. Not only were there the Municipal Auditorium and the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum in Shreveport, but also the Three Dimension Club in Shreveport and the Celebrity Theatre of the Le’Bossier Hotel in Bossier City. Ironically, at a time when Shreveport’s economy was being buffeted by low oil prices and factory layoffs, there had never been more options for local entertainment.

The concert year began with a February 4 appearance of jazz group the Nat Adderley Quintet at the Celebrity Theatre in Bossier City, sponsored by Shreveport’s Theatre of the Performing Arts for Afro-American Heritage Month.185 Although jazz was not immensely popular in Shreveport, the Adderley group came at a time when local residents were making something of an effort to rebuild a jazz scene in the city.

On March 2 Luther Vandross came to the Hirsch Coliseum for a show, along with rising stars DeBarge and The Deele,186 and on April 28 the Left Bank Jazz Society brought the fusion jazz group Pieces of a Dream back to the Shreveport area, with two performances at the Celebrity Theatre at the Le’Bossier Hotel.187 A May 4 concert billed

185 “Nat Adderley Quintet To Perform At The LeBossier On February 4,” Shreveport Sun, January 12, 1984, 8.
as “A Night With Johnnie” brought Johnnie Taylor to the Municipal Auditorium, along with Miami soul singer C. L. Blast and a group called Eclipz, and on June 10 Bobby Womack brought his tour to the Municipal Auditorium, with Sly Stone, Doran, and Just Us. Also on the bill was Shreveport’s local soul star Reuben Bell, who was still promoting his 1983 album *Blues Get Off My Shoulders*, recorded for the Port City label. On June 28, 29 and 30, the Celebrity Theatre in Bossier City brought in The Supremes featuring Mary Wilson, which was typical of the kind of nostalgic shows that venue tended to book for their older audience; in September an event called “New Orleans North” was held at the Louisiana State Fairgrounds with Fats Domino, who also appealed to an older crowd. This show was also taken to Natchitoches and Monroe on subsequent dates. The final big show of the year was also something rather unusual, a December 28 Willie Nelson concert featuring B. B. King at the Shreveport Civic Center. Integrated concerts were not at all common in Shreveport, which was a fairly racially-polarized city. Nor did Nelson and King have a lot in common musically. Yet Nelson had always been an outlaw willing to take chances, and the show was a well-attended end to the year.

**SYNCLAIR**

When the Shreveport band Synclair was first mentioned in the *Shreveport Sun* in December of 1985, the article stated that the band was five months old, so it formed

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apparently in July of that year. By the time of the article, the band was planning to go into a studio in Dallas to record their first single, consisting of the songs “Shakin’” and “Ready When Love Comes.” However, as with so many Shreveport bands, there is no evidence that the recorded songs were ever released. The band consisted of Terry Millhouse on keyboards, Kirk Carter on bass, singer Janice Walker, Don Warren on keyboards, and Eric Johnson on drums. Originally named Sinclair (because it was thought to sound sophisticated), Janice Walker suggested changing the spelling to Synclair, suggesting that they did not want the band to be associated with “sin.” On February 14, 1986, the band was booked to perform at the Progressive Men’s Club on Cross Lake for a scholarship dance sponsored by the Shreveport Black Nurses Association, and at the Black Festival in downtown Shreveport on June 19 and 20, 1987, Synclair was one of the featured bands. On August 16, 1987, Synclair was part of the First Annual Ark-La-Tex Musical Talent Festival, held on the lawn of the Western Sky club on Lynwood Avenue. The mammoth show of local bands lasted from noon to 10 PM and was intended to raise money for the Christian Services programs in Shreveport. Synclair also played for the Labor Day Block Party sponsored by the Patzman Street Civic Club, and in December had a regular gig at the Shreveport Motor Inn, the former Sheraton Shreveporter on Greenwood Road just past Fair Park High School.

192 “Local Band To Record Single In January,” Shreveport Sun, December 26, 1985, 6.
band’s last publicized performance was at Hamel’s Amusement Park on June 19, 1988, the day of a Juneteenth Celebration which attracted over five thousand attendees. Synclaire is not mentioned after that in the Shreveport newspapers, and probably broke up at some point in the latter half of 1988.

BLACK ARTS FESTIVAL, 1985

The Theatre of the Performing Arts, the Black theatre troop which had put on the Black Arts Festivals in 1983 and 1984, did so again in 1985, with Downtown Shreveport Unlimited and Budweiser as co-sponsors. The event, scheduled for June 14 and 15 downtown, announced a music line-up which included Raymond Blakes and the Untouchables, Touch, Windstorm, Rufus Robinson, Donnell Hickman, and the Rufus Robinson Community Choir. The Times reported that about six thousand people attended the two-day event, which also included majorette groups, dancers, artists, and food vendors.

WINDSTORM

A new band first mentioned in conjunction with the 1985 Black Arts Festival was Windstorm, a group which would prove to be the most enduring Shreveport Black band of the 1980s and afterward. Shortly after their Black Arts Festival debut, they were playing at Cat Daddy’s Lounge at 3825 Hollywood (the old Hollywood Palace) on July 1987.

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198 “Black Arts Festival June 14-15,” Shreveport Sun, June 6, 1985, 1.

and on September 27, at the Municipal Auditorium, they were one of the opening acts for Alexander O’Neal.

By May of 1986, Windstorm was featured in a *Sun* article, which noted that the band’s leader and guitarist was Ron Johnson, who was almost single-handedly responsible for most of Shreveport’s non-rap or non-gospel Black music in the 1980s. Having signed with a major label offshoot run by former Shreveporter Russell Timmons III (no kin to SOOTO Records’ Steve Timmons), the band planned on recording their album at a studio in Texarkana, Arkansas, which shows the extent to which recording had declined within Shreveport. While no album seems to have come out, a couple of 12-inch singles did in 1987. One was entitled “Cutie Pie” and bore no label other than the band name. Another contained three songs on the Lil Walter label, which were “Life Without You,” “Love For Granted,” and “Juke Box.” The latter song was also issued on a Budweiser Showdown 12-inch single co-labeled with KDKS D’Kiss 92 radio station in Shreveport, but strangely the band was named Shyy rather than Windstorm. Ron Johnson stated that the band Windstorm was signed to a recording contract, so that name could not be used in the contest.

The members of Windstorm, besides Johnson, were drummer Ron “Slack” Jefferson, keyboardist Arsdale Harris III, bassist Paul Wright, keyboardist Stanley

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200 “Nightcaps,” *Shreveport Times*, July 5, 1985, 44.
201 “Concerts,” *Shreveport Times*, September 20, 1985, 42.
203 Telephone conversation with the author, March 5, 2024.
Robinson, keyboardist and guitarist Rodney Jones, and vocalists Patrick and Ricky Harris, who were brothers and from Natchitoches.

June of 1986 found Windstorm playing for a Sickle Cell Anemia fundraiser at the Shreveport Convention Hall,\textsuperscript{204} and the annual Juneteenth celebration which KDKS radio station sponsored at Hamel’s Amusement Park,\textsuperscript{205} and a year later, in June of 1987, they were one of the featured bands at the Black Cultural Arts Festival in downtown Shreveport.\textsuperscript{206}

In December, the band, now consisting only of Ronald Jefferson, Ronald Johnson, Reginald Atkins and Cedric Story, announced that they had signed to California-based Eclipse Records (whose A & R vice-president was a former Shreveporter, Donald Sanders) and would shortly begin work on their debut album \textit{Undercover Lover}.\textsuperscript{207} Sanders had arranged for Eclipse Records to give away food, toys and clothing at the Christmas season to help needy Shreveport families. But once again, as was almost always the case with Black bands in Shreveport, the album was never completed or released. No song called “Undercover Lover” is extant, but the other song mentioned in the article, “Life Without You,” is in fact one of the three released on one of the band’s 12-inch singles. As was typical of the era, Windstorm had a fairly electronic funk sound, with lots of synthesizers.

\textsuperscript{204}“Windstorm To Play For Sickle Cell Dance,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, June 19, 1983, 3.


Shreveport was a very racially-torn city, and it was somewhat unusual for Black bands to be popular in the white community, but Windstorm was something of an exception. By June of 1988 they had landed a regular gig at the Centenary Oyster House near the Centenary College campus off of Kings Highway, where they remained a regular weekend feature until August of 1989. By the time the band received its first feature article in the morning Times, it was still searching for an opportunity to break into the big time, recording a single consisting of songs called “Time For Love” and “Over and Over.” But as had happened so often before, the single does not seem to have ever come out, and the “big break” they had been seeking never came. Yet what Windstorm did gain was something no other Shreveport band except for the Polyphonics could, which was longevity and local popularity. Out of the many Black bands that existed in Shreveport over the years, Windstorm is one of the few that has survived, and still exists today.

THE SESQUICENTENNIAL

The year 1985 was celebrated as Shreveport’s Sesquicentennial, and on the weekend following the Fourth of July, the city sponsored two days of live music concerts on the riverfront as part of the celebration. A number of Black and white musicians were called upon to be a part of the festivities, but given the realities of Shreveport in 1985 for African-Americans, the Black community saw little to celebrate. For one thing the economic situation had been deteriorating since the beginning of the decade, with plant

closures, layoffs, and low oil prices. For another, the 1982 election of conservative John Hussey as mayor led to a dynamic of ever-increasing racial polarization throughout his two four-year terms. Racism in Shreveport had changed shape by 1985, but it was far from gone. The Sesquicentennial music bookings were a case in point. Although many Black musicians were included in the performances, including Darryl Mims, Jesse Thomas, Raymond Blakes, Marvin Seals, Purvis Milner, George Hancock, and Louis Wells, nearly all of them were included in scheduled “jams” with white artists. Only Raymond Blakes and the Untouchables were given a set of their own on the schedule. All the other featured bands for both days of the event were white. Furthermore, the kind of Black artists the city chose to include were almost exclusively blues and jazz performers who had a certain degree of popularity with whites. Bands like Windstorm, Touch, Synclair or Showcase, which were popular with Black audiences were not programmed. Even soul stars such as Reuben Bell were not booked, nor were any of the city’s various Black gospel groups or choirs. The city’s goal seemingly was to discourage large groups of Blacks from coming downtown. That dynamic had been evident as early as the opening of Shreve Square in 1972 and would continue to be a factor even after John Elkington began redeveloping the Texas Street District much later.

BIG CONCERTS, 1985

While most of the blues and Southern soul shows now took place at the Three-Dimension, there were still some bigger concerts that took place at Hirsch Coliseum or the Auditorium. The first big show of the season brought Billy Ocean and the Pointer

211 “Music At Riverfront For Sesquicentennial,” Shreveport Times, July 5, 1985, 44.
Sisters to the Hirsch Coliseum, drawing a crowd of about 7400 people, and, incredibly, the Journal’s reviewer was actually satisfied with the sound quality in Hirsch, which was not usually the case. But a “Party in the Park” at Veterans Park on Sunday March 24 was a very different affair indeed. Sponsored by Disc Jockeys Unlimited, the organization of Shreveport DJs which had been formed earlier, it featured a DJ battle between Shreveport disc jockeys Jabberjaws and Funk and Company, as well as rap performances by Juberry and Lee Nichols. Rap was the new music, popular with Shreveport young people, and rappers and DJs were gradually supplanting bands as a form of entertainment. On Thursday March 28 Midnight Star, Shalamar, and Klymaxx came to the Thomas Assembly Center on the Louisiana Tech University campus in Ruston, but tickets were sold in Shreveport and the show advertised in local media. Diana Ross came to the Hirsch Coliseum on April 13, where she performed “in the round,” and on April 11 Jesse Johnson, New Edition, and the rap group UTFO were at the Coliseum. Perhaps the biggest show of the year came on June 16, when B. B. King, Bobby “Blue” Bland, Dennis Edwards, and Millie Jackson all came to the Hirsch Coliseum, and five days later, on June 21, the Left Bank Jazz Society brought jazz organist Jimmy Smith to the Sheraton-Pierremont Hotel in southern Shreveport.

216 “3 Groups To Perform At April 28 Concert,” Shreveport Times, April 11, 1985, 21.
July 13 was the date for Rockfest ’85, a concert at Hirsch Coliseum that featured Con-Funk-Shun, Ready For The World, and The Deele, and on August 23, Frankie Beverly and Maze and the Jesse Johnson Revue were at Hirsch. About 10,000 people attended the Maze show, and Roderick Foppe of the Sun was so impressed with the Friday show that he drove to the Civic Center in Monroe the following night to see them again.

On September 6 the Left Bank Jazz Society sponsored another jazz performance, this time bringing Harry “Sweets” Edison and Buddy Tate to the Strand Theatre downtown, and on September 13 soul great Bobby Womack and the Manhattans were at Hirsch Coliseum. On September 21 the Preservation Hall Jazz Band from New Orleans was at the Strand, and on September 27 singers Alexander O’Neal and Steve Arrington were scheduled at the Municipal Auditorium, along with the local band Windstorm and DJ Jabber Jaws with rapper Juberry, yet the show was plagued with problems, as Arrington and O’Neal did not appear on stage. Two days later, on September 29, Shreveport had its first all-rap concert at Hirsch Coliseum featuring The Real Roxanne, The Rapping Duke, Rock Master Scott and the Dynamic Three, The Force

220 “Shreveport To Get Taste of Superfest,” Shreveport Sun, August 22, 1985, 6.
222 “Legends In Jazz To Play Here Sept, 6 At Strand Theatre,” Shreveport Sun, August 29, 1985, 5.
MDs, The Wreckin’ Cru, The Boogie Boys, and Perfect Timing.\textsuperscript{226} The Modern Jazz Quartet came to the Strand Theatre on October 12 and 13,\textsuperscript{227} and saxophonist George Howard was at the Strand on October 25.\textsuperscript{228} On November 21 the Port City Jazz Society and KDKS radio station brought fusion jazz musicians Roy Ayers and Tom Browne to the Shreveport Civic Theatre along with vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater.\textsuperscript{229} An afterparty featuring Ayers and Bridgewater was held at a new club called 728 Austin Place, which had formerly been The Florentine Club.\textsuperscript{230}

By 1985, the Shreveport City Council had passed an ordinance which renamed the Bottoms neighborhood Ledbetter Heights in honor of musician Huddie Ledbetter. Besides the geographic anomaly (the area was a ravine and lowland, not a hill), Black residents of Shreveport rightly pointed out that no name change would address the very real problems that residents of the area faced. But a venture of the Junior League of Shreveport called the LightHouse attempted to work with children of the neighborhood, and on November 23 it sponsored a Get Acquainted Party at the SPAR Gym at 926 Travis Street, at which a number of local rappers and DJs performed, including Jabber Jaws, Juberry, Don Juan, and Kool Aid.\textsuperscript{231} It was perhaps the last notable show of the year and a sign of things to come.

\textsuperscript{227} “Concerts,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, September 20, 1985, 42.
\textsuperscript{228} “George Howard To Appear In Concert At Strand,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, October 24, 1985, 6.
\textsuperscript{229} “Roy Ayers, Tom Browne Here Thursday For Jazz Concert,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, November 21, 1985, 6.
\textsuperscript{230} “728 Austin Place….Alive And Swinging,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, November 28, 1985, 6.
THE MERCEDES LOUNGE

The success of the Three Dimension club with live music made other Shreveport club owners believe that there was a niche market in the city for this kind of venue. The building at 115 North Market Street downtown had been a restaurant called the Hasty-Tasty from the early 1970s, and it happened to be located just across the street from other downtown clubs, such as the Purple Front. In 1984, Clarence Speed Jr. took over the location and opened a club called Speed’s Zebra Room, but despite the legacy name of one of Shreveport’s legendary night clubs, the lounge did not make much of an impression on the city’s scene, perhaps because it was not located in the building on Texas Avenue where the old Zebra Room had been. But all that changed when the location was acquired by David Lewis and Charlie Allums and renamed the Mercedes Lounge. The address now read 115-119 Market Street, indicating that the space had been enlarged, and by February of 1985 the new club was advertising for bartenders and waitresses. Open from 5 PM to 2 AM, the Mercedes Lounge was a place requiring appropriate dress, featuring the jazz sounds of Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics on weekends. It carried on in this fairly low-key fashion for the remainder of that year, but in January of 1986 the club was purchased by James Parnell. By March of 1986, when the club was featured in the Shreveport Sun, James Parnell and his brother Larry

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232 “Legals & Bids,” Shreveport Times, April 13, 1972, 64.
had taken steps to make the Mercedes one of the most happening venues in the city. The club had live music on a near-daily basis, with Jesse Thomas and Leon Sterling and the Sterling Silver Band on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, Freddie Pierson and Intensive Care on Wednesday and Thursday nights, and Calama, a band led by Larry Pannell, on Friday and Saturday nights.\(^{238}\) In a March 1987 *Times* article, a description of the Mercedes Lounge was given:

First, some nightclubs serve as neighborhood bars until late. Mercedes Lounge on Market Street has the feel of a neighborhood bar—quiet—during the hours after work, when it serves as a rendezvous spot for black professionals and other downtown workers who want a drink or a game of pool. One recent weekday night, a handful of customers lined the bar. One or two sat at small tables and sipped drinks. Two more shot pool. “You go where you know people,” one customer said. Donald Brossett, one of the pool players, said “I don’t like to be anywhere there might be trouble.” Later in the evening—say 10—the club cranks into higher gear, the music starts in earnest and the atmosphere changes, regular customers said.\(^{239}\)

On September 24, 1987, the Mercedes was the scene of an appearance by jazz saxophonist Hank Crawford, who had played at the 3-D Club in 1985. Crawford played two sets at 7 PM and 10 PM, but customers were required to buy a second ticket if they wanted to stay for the second set.\(^{240}\) As late as January of 1988 the Mercedes was featuring people like bluesman Marvin Seals,\(^{241}\) but its days were numbered. Last mentioned in June, the Mercedes must have closed at some point in the summer of 1988.

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\(^{241}\) “Nightcaps,” *Shreveport Times*, January 22, 1988, 41.
EBONY SPIRIT

Although the musical trends were changing in Shreveport and Black America as a whole, new bands continued to be formed. Ebony Spirit was a four-man group, which had originally been formed in 1974 but disbanded for a period before coming back together. The group was centered around three brothers, Dwight, Dewayne and Darnell Palmer, who played keyboard, guitar, and drums respectively. The fourth musician was trumpeter Robert Stewart, and the band featured long-time Shreveport vocalist Dori Grayson. In March of 1986 they were playing at the Solid Gold at 600 Pierre Avenue in Allendale, yet another club in the building that had housed the Rex Key Club, Club Reo, and Lil Joe and Stroud’s Place.242

On November 22, 1986, the Security National Bank, Shreveport’s Black-owned bank, sponsored Bankfest ’86, a day-long festival on the grounds of the bank’s headquarters at 2800 Hearne Avenue, featuring a number of gospel groups, community majorettes and drumlines, and band performances, which included Ebony Spirit as well as Windstorm and Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics.243

On the weekend of June 19, 1987, Shreveport’s Black Festival (formerly the Black Arts Festival) was held in downtown Shreveport, featuring performances by Ebony Spirit as well as a number of other Black Shreveport bands, including Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics, Windstorm, Elgie Brown and the Glass Hat Connection, Betty Lewis and the Executives, Marvin Seals, Synclair, a band called


Beyond the Shadow of Doubt, jazz trumpeter Tom Brown, and New Orleans soul diva Irma Thomas. Unfortunately the festival was marred by a police sting that resulted in citations against two festival volunteers for allegedly selling beer to minors. Willie Critton, the director of the Black Festival, said, “If they do not want us to have festivals in this city, they should say so. Don’t try to discourage people from having festivals with these kinds of tactics.” Even the city attorney Charles Grubb called it “unfortunate” that festival volunteers were cited, suggesting that it would cause potential volunteers to rethink getting involved with the festivals. However, Shreveport Police Chief Charles Gruber said that police organized “sting” operations to make sure juveniles did not get access to beer, and that such tactics would continue. Ebony Spirit apparently broke up at some point in late 1987.

BETTY LEWIS

Shreveport singer Betty Lewis began pursuing a singing career in 1985 but had performed earlier than that with Freddie Pearson and Intensive Care. By 1986 she had gone to A & J Recording Studios in Beaumont, Texas, to record a single, which consisted of “Do You Know How I Feel” b/w “The Thought Of Your Love.” However, as was so often the case with Shreveport artists and bands, there is no indication that the single was ever released. By April of 1987, she was performing with the band Windstorm on Thursday nights at the Solid Gold. In August, when residents of Mooretown kicked off

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244 Ann Matthews, “Good Times To Roll At City Black Festival,” June 5, 1987, 10.
246 Ibid.
their “Clean Community Campaign” on August 16, Lewis was one of the performers chosen to appear, along with Judy Ballard, Windstorm, Horace Ellis, TAO, and Fresh Edition.248 On the weekend of April 4 and 5, 1987, she was one of the performers included on the River City Blues Festival in Baton Rouge,249 and in June was one of the performers on the annual downtown Black Festival in Shreveport.250

On June 10, 1987, John Andrew Prime of the Times gave her and her new band, the Executives, a feature article. The band, consisting of keyboardist Bob Sibley, drummer Andy Sibley, and guitarist Dannie Opperman, was unusual in being a white band backing a Black singer. Such integrated bands were the exception in Shreveport, and Betty Lewis and the Executives were also somewhat unique in that all of them had other occupations besides music. Lewis was an electronics technician at AT&T Consumer Products and an Air Force veteran, Andy Sibley was a medical supplies representative, Bob Sibley an oil company employee, and Opperman the manager of Competition Light and Sound.251

On the Labor Day weekend, on Saturday September 5, 1987, the Shreveport Journal chose to sponsor a Labor Saturday concert at Hamel’s Amusement Park, featuring a “supergroup” consisting of horn players Jimmy Honeycutt, Pat Anders, George Hancock, Lou Wells, and Bill Causey Jr, with a rhythm section comprised of Bill Bush, Bill Parish, Charles Teague, and Chris Michaels. The band was chosen by

American Federation of Musicians Local 166 president Gene Thompson and backed three
singers, Marvin Seals, Miki Honeycutt, and Betty Lewis.252

By January 20, 1988, Betty Lewis and her band The Executives were playing at
the Centenary Oyster House, opening up for the band Roomful of Blues,253 but
Shreveport’s growing racial divide was taking a toll on the city in many ways. When the
Fifteenth Annual Holy Cross Episcopal Church Mardi Gras Dance was held at Bill
Bush’s Moulin Rouge nightclub at 624 Commerce Street downtown, Bush expressed a
hope that people from both the white and Black communities would come. One of the
city’s Black council members, Joe Shyne, was chosen as King of the ball, and the
Northwest Louisiana Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation was chosen as the year’s recipient
of the funds.254 Towards the same goal of inclusion, Bill Bush’s Combo and Betty Lewis
and the Executives were chosen as the entertainment for the evening.255 But one night of
entertainment and charity could not overcome the deterioration in race relations brought
on by economic distress and the growing divide between the Black community and a
conservative white mayor.

On March 25, 1988, Betty Lewis and the Executives competed in the Budweiser
Showdown, an annual national band competition sponsored by the beer company and
local radio stations. Shreveport’s event was co-sponsored by KDKS radio station and
held at the 3-D night club. Lewis and her band competed against Day and Night, Ronald

252 Robert Trudeau, “Supergroup,” Shreveport Sun, September 3,
254 “Benefit Mardi Gras Dance Set For Moulin Rouge,” Shreveport Journal, February 11, 1988,
255 Ibid.
Lee, Cat Daddy, CKwence, The Cut, and Miranda and John. Ultimately, Lewis and her band did not win the contest, but time has proven the Budweiser Showdown wrong: Lewis and her band the Executives remain popular today in Shreveport, while the other bands she competed against have been largely forgotten. By June of 1988 she was performing at Chuck Falco’s Riverboat Lounge as part of a weekly Blue Monday blues event, and in late July, Lewis and her band competed in the Delta Blues Showcase Showdown in Jackson, Mississippi.

While Lewis remains popular in Shreveport even today, for some reason she never got the opportunity to sign with a major label, and she never gained the national and international reputation of other Southern female stars such as Shirley Brown or Dorothy Moore. She continues to perform locally, while bitterly complaining about Shreveport’s legacy of racism that she says has led her to be excluded from many important local festivals and events.

CAT DADDY’S LOUNGE ANNIVERSARY

On April 19, 1986, more than five hundred people turned out for the first anniversary of a new night club in Shreveport, Cat Daddy’s, which was located in the former Hollywood Palace building in the Hollywood neighborhood. Clarence Spurs, known to all as “Cat Daddy,” had a difficult problem awaiting him in building a clientele for his new establishment, in that the building had a reputation for fights and violence.

259 Interview with the author, October 14, 2023.
His solution was to use promotions and giveaways, as well as live remote radio broadcasts from his club, as well as featuring both live bands and DJ events. The anniversary event was played by the Windstorm Band and was remotely broadcast over KDKS radio. Cat Daddy was also a performer, having competed in the Budweiser Showdown, releasing a single called “Ya’ll Lazy,” which is extremely rare. His club remained open in one form or another for many years.

BLACK ARTS FESTIVAL, 1986

The second annual Black Arts Festival took place in downtown Shreveport on June 13 and 14, 1986, kicking off on a Friday morning with an appearance by former NFL player L. C. Greenwood, followed by afternoon performances by Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics, Windstorm, and Malaco recording artists Freedom from Jackson, Mississippi. The following day featured gospel music from Donnell Hickman and the River City Delegation, followed by the Shreveport Ethnic Drum Ensemble, a dance troupe, a local poet, and a youthful drummer, Jamos Jackson Williams. The final performance was by a Mobile, Alabama, band called Redd Alert, which closed out the final night of the festival with a four-hour set.

JUNETEENTH AT HAMEL’S, 1986

In 1986 KDKS radio station partnered with Hamel’s Amusement Park on East 70th Street to put on Juneteenth ’86, a large festival on the amusement park grounds, featuring bands which donated their appearances, including Lamborghini, N.R.G.,

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260 Andrew Harris, “Cat Daddy’s Anniversary Bash Was A Smashing Success,” Shreveport Sun, April 24, 1986, 6.

Windstorm, Synclair, and Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics, with a special performance by New York trumpeter Tom Browne to close out the evening. The event was held after the actual day of Juneteenth, on June 22, but was well attended despite the extreme heat.262 Although Juneteenth today is celebrated in Black communities nationwide, it was originally primarily celebrated only in Texas; its celebration in Shreveport likely is evidence of the strong Texas influence on the city throughout its existence. Although Black communities in every state celebrated Emancipation, there was no agreement on which day it was celebrated. Many Emancipation Day celebrations in Tennessee were celebrated in August, and others on January 1. Juneteenth has become the standard day, perhaps because of the migration of Black Texans to all parts of the country.

**TOWNE OAK JAZZ FEST**

Few new shopping centers celebrate their grand opening with a jazz festival, but Shreveport’s new Towne Oak Jazz Fest did in August of 1986, in conjunction with the local National Public Radio affiliate KDAQ-FM, which was based at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. Two days of jazz were performed in the shopping center’s parking lot on August 8 and 9, featuring Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics, Chris Belleau and Friends, and Chuck Rainey and the Original Cowboy Funk Band, and all free to the public.263

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263 “Get Ready For KDAQ And All That Jazz,” *Shreveport Times*, August 8, 1986, 25.
The concert year started off with a Valentine’s Day performance by jazz great Lionel Hampton at the Strand Theatre, sponsored by the Port City Jazz Society, one of two Shreveport organizations trying to promote jazz in the city.\textsuperscript{264} The first big Hirsch Coliseum show of the year took place on March 8 when Starpoint, Isley/Jasper/Isley, and Luther Vandross came to Shreveport;\textsuperscript{265} Norman Provizer of the \textit{Journal} put the attendance at 10,200, one of the largest crowds ever mentioned at Hirsch, and joking on the fact that sex therapist Dr. Ruth had spoken in Shreveport the day before, referred to Luther Vandross as “another kind of sex therapist,” calling him “Dr. Luth.”\textsuperscript{266} The \textit{Sun’s} Andrew Harris called it “the most thrilling night of music ever at Hirsch Coliseum.”\textsuperscript{267} Unfortunately, he also noted that arguments and near-fights occurred because the promoters had sold reserved seats, and when people arrived, they found others in their reserved seating. Harris rightly pointed out that with an “in-the-round” concept and a rotating stage, there were no “better seats” anyway, and it made no sense to sell reserved seating.

On May 17 New Edition came to town with opening act Cherelle for a Hirsch Coliseum engagement,\textsuperscript{268} and on June 13 some of the hottest rap groups in the country came to Shreveport, Run D.M.C., L. L. Cool J, and Whodini, also at Hirsch.\textsuperscript{269} Stevie

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\textsuperscript{265} “Hot Performers Give Concert Here,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, February 8, 1986, 15.
\textsuperscript{267} Andrew Harris, “Vandross Was Simply Superb!” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, March 13, 1986, 5.
\end{flushright}
Wonder came to Hirsch Coliseum on July 10, but only about four thousand people turned out to see him perform. Mayor John Hussey gave Wonder a key to the city prior to the concert. Writing more than a week afterward, John Andrew Prime of the Times asked the question why more did not come to see Stevie Wonder: “Why didn’t Stevie Wonder draw more than 3,720 people to Hirsch Coliseum last Thursday? Well, there could be any number of reasons. Poor advance publicity could be one….The $18.50 ticket price could have been another factor. Times are tough in Shreveport…Yet another factor could have been the lack of an opening act.” Nevertheless, big acts continued to try their luck in Shreveport. Frankie Beverly and Maze came on August 16, along with the S.O.S. Band and Skyy, and on September 27, fusion jazz musician Larry Carlton was brought to the Strand Theater by the Port City Jazz Society, with Freddie Pierson and Intensive Care as the opening act. On Thanksgiving night, November 27, Freedom was back from Jackson, Mississippi performing at the Mercedes Lounge as part of a fashion show, and on December 5 Freddie Jackson, Me’lisa Morgan and Levert were at

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Hirsch. It was Denise LaSalle who had the last show of the year, at the Mercedes on December 11.

**THE BLACK COALITION AND SHREVEPORT’S DETERIORATING RACE RELATIONS**

It could plausibly be argued that Shreveport never enjoyed good race relations. The city had always had its Southern mythos, and segregation had long been both law and custom. The best description of race relations in the city after 1968 was probably an uneasy truce. But things began to deteriorate rapidly in the 1980s, at least in part because of the city’s sudden and rapid economic decline, brought on by the oil recession and also the offshoring of American industrial jobs. Shreveport had long enjoyed the reputation of being an industrial powerhouse, and Blacks had been attracted to the city because it was possible to get a good job and work one’s way out of poverty. But by 1982 that was simply no longer the case. City government was faced with fiscal austerity precisely at the time that poverty, particularly in the Black community, deepened. Crime rose, and an uneasy and bitter white community elected more conservative officials. The election of John Hussey as mayor caused a worsening divide between the city’s white and Black communities. Although nominally a Democrat, Hussey opposed minority set-asides for city business, and quickly came under fire from the Black community.

Yet what brought on a full-blown crisis in 1986 came not from the city government, but rather from the Caddo Parish School Board, whose members decided to ask the Federal courts for unitary status, a designation that would remove them from

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Federal oversight with regard to racial integration of students and faculty. The Black community responded with rage, particularly as the district had maintained a pattern of hiring many more white teachers than Black, despite the district having a majority-Black student population. In response to the board’s action, State Senator Alphonse Jackson Jr. and pastor Dr. E. Edward Jones of Galilee Baptist Church organized a march against the school board on April 2, 1986, which they hoped would convince the board to rethink its actions. Meanwhile, the protesters, organizing as the Coalition of Concerned Citizens, vowed to seek the recall of five school board members that they felt were unresponsive to the needs of the Black community. Ultimately, only about 400 marchers met at the fairgrounds on April 2 to march to the board offices on Midway Avenue. The school board had decided to move their meeting to the Exposition Hall downtown, and an elderly white man yelled “Alligator bait! You’re all alligator bait!” at the marchers as they passed him on a corner. After the march buses transported people to the Expo Hall for the board meeting. That the articles about the school board protests shared space with national headlines about oil falling below $10 a barrel and General Motors cutting production (GM had a plant in Shreveport) highlighting the economic misery that added to Black frustration in the city.

Nor was Mayor Hussey’s police chief Cliff Heap doing much to ease the frustration. Young people with nothing to do had started gathering in the parking lot of

Veterans Park near the riverfront on Friday and Saturday nights, but on April 4 police
appeared and wrote citations for drugs and alcohol. Lt. N. W. Daniels said, “It’s a
problem area. Every summer there are fights, shootings and stabbings here.”\textsuperscript{281} The
problem owas the general lack of wholesome recreation for young people in Shreveport.

By May the Coalition had turned its anger toward the city government in
Shreveport and planned a march on City Hall to occur on May 14.\textsuperscript{282} On that day
protesters marched to the City Hall and presented the City Council with seven demands,
including the resignation of the city’s Chief Accounting Officer. A Coalition leader, the
Rev. Evelyn Updite, was quoted as saying, “We are angry today….Black Shreveporters
want justice. We want fair treatment for city workers and our children.”\textsuperscript{283} On June 10,
the Coalition staged another march from the Municipal Auditorium to City Hall to let the
city council know their displeasure with the way Shreveport was being run.\textsuperscript{284} By this
point the primary demand was for the city to agree to a one-for-one hiring quota between
whites and Blacks in city government. By June 19 the Coalition of Concerned Citizens
began threatening “confrontations” with the city of Shreveport including picketing and
the boycotts of certain businesses.\textsuperscript{285} What had begun as a school controversy had
morphed into a large outpouring of Black frustration with Shreveport in general.

\textsuperscript{282} “City Hall Next March Target,” \textit{Shreveport Sun}, May 8, 1986, 1.
\textsuperscript{284} “Coalition To Again March On City Hall,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, June 10, 1986, 16.
Problems in city parks continued as well, with Barksdale Air Force Base declaring Veterans Park off-limits to servicemen because five of them had been assaulted there on June 7. Shreveport Police said that the park was an ongoing problem because of people staying there until 5 AM. Major Tabor of SPD told the Times that “they drink, smoke, talk, listen to music and watch each other’s vehicles cruise by, mainly for lack of anything better to do.” Shreveport Parks and Recreation had discussed setting a closing time for the parks, but Tabor pointed out that when forced to leave the park, the young people tended to gather at the Expo Hall lot downtown. Prior to that, they had been gathering at the K-Mart parking lot on Mansfield Road, until the owners put in speed bumps to discourage the parties. Again, the problem was lack of wholesome recreation for young people, especially during the summer. As the afternoon Journal pointed out editorially, “the essential problem is boredom.” The editors suggested night concerts sponsored by SPAR and curated by the teenagers themselves, a wonderful idea that would have both helped solve the problem and perhaps grown Shreveport’s local music scene, but was evidently never considered by city officials. Instead the city considered an ordinance to place a curfew on certain city parks. Although the coalition protests had fizzled by the end of the summer, the angry mood and divisions in Shreveport continued.

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287 Ibid.


289 “Should City Parks Have Curfew?” Shreveport Sun, August 28, 1986, 1.
DOROTHY PRIME

Shreveport singer Dorothy Prime was originally from Columbus, Ohio, but in 1987 she came to public attention when she and her band the Zillionaires were chosen to perform at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival.\textsuperscript{290} She had been performing locally at the Centenary Oyster House and at the 3-D Club, and had in 1971 recorded two songs, “This Time” and “I’ll Never Forget Him.” As was almost always the case when it came to Shreveport artists, it does not seem that those songs were ever released,\textsuperscript{291} yet Prime remained a popular performer in Shreveport for a number of years.

NU-TECH

By 1987, when it came to young people, bands were largely out, and rap and DJ crews were largely in. Lee Nichols had really been the first Shreveporter to record rap songs, although he did so out in California. He was soon joined by Jabberjaws and Juberry, an early Shreveport DJ and rapper group. By 1987, yet another Shreveport group had arrived, called Nu-Tech, which managed to get a photograph in the \textit{Shreveport Times} when they were engaged to play the Black Festival in downtown Shreveport. Consisting of Trajik Majik, The Maestro, and Doc Cane, Nu-Tech was the first rap group invited to perform on the annual Black Festival, but it does not seem to have ever recorded.

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
LAKESIDE ROCK

Lakeside Rock was another Shreveport rap group which was also on the Black Festival lineup, and on July 17, 1987, they received a feature article from John Andrew Prime of the *Shreveport Times*. Lakeside Rock consisted of Jazzy Jeff, Doc Cooly, and Jam Master Dee, whose real names were Jeffrey Clark, Reginald Russell, and Dewarrent Bradley. Although Prime mentioned some of the negative opinions about rap in his article, Jeffrey Clark stated that while he had been into fighting, rap had really been his salvation. Clark proved to be a decent prophet, telling Prime “I think it’s going to go far in this world. I don’t think it’s going to ever end.” Later, in August, Lakeside Rock was the only rap act which performed at the Ark-La-Tex Musical Talent Festival at the Western Sky club, intended to raise funds for Christian Services of Shreveport. By December the group was in the process of recording their first single, “Puttin’ It On Wax,” which actually did get released on a San Francisco label called JDC Records. Newspaper articles and scheduled events continue to mention Lakeside Rock until 1992, which apparently is when the group broke up.

BIG CONCERTS, 1987

New Orleans soul diva Irma Thomas kicked off the new year with a concert at the Municipal Auditorium on January 10, followed by Bobby Brown, Club Nouveau (the

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293 Ibid.


former Timex Social Club), and Ready For The World, who came to Hirsch Memorial Coliseum on January 28. Luther Vandross was back, along with Shirley Murdock, at Hirsch on April 11, and Tyrone Davis and B. B. King played at the Expo Hall on the riverfront on May 9, a show that had to be relocated from the 3-D club after advance ticket sales exceeded the building’s capacity. Kool and the Gang, Club Nouveau, and Klymaxx were at the Hirsch Coliseum on May 30, along with late addition The System, which was riding the popularity of their single “Don’t Disturb This Groove.” Jazz organist Jimmy Smith came to Shreveport for a June 25 performance at the Shreveport Convention Center, for which Dorsey Summerfield and the Herman Jackson Quartet opened, and Johnnie Taylor came to Hirsch on August 14, along with The Whispers and the Rose Brothers. The O’Jays and Freedom came to Expo Hall downtown on September 10, and a rap concert featuring the Fat Boys, Salt-N-Pepa, and Heavy D was held at the Hirsch Coliseum on September 24. An October 10 show at Hirsch featured the Force MD’s with Alexander O’Neal, Lillo Thomas and Regina


Blues singer Joe Williams appeared on the Grambling campus on November 17, and Yarborough and Peoples were at the Mercedes Lounge on November 19. The last big show of the year belonged to soul singer Lynn White, who appeared at the Phantasy Club at 2601 Hollywood Avenue on Christmas Eve.

**A YEAR OF LOSS**

Despite the shows and festivals, 1987 was a year of steep declines in Shreveport. The city’s legacy Black radio station KOKA announced the change to an all-gospel format in February, and Stan Lewis’s legendary downtown record store closed in March. December brought more bad news. Willie Caston Jr. decided to close The Glass Hat, a Black establishment which, along with Booker’s Restaurant, had been a hopeful anchor for the redevelopment of the historic Texas Avenue Black business district. Like many parts of Shreveport south of I-20, the Glass Hat was in the way of the Interstate 49 right-of-way. Its loss robbed Shreveport of its best place to catch blues and jazz on a regular basis.

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306 Ibid.
310 “KOKA to Change To All-Gospel on March 1,” *Shreveport Sun*, February 26, 1987, 1.
Worse, Shreveport continued to have racial problems. A February *Shreveport Sun* editorial stated bluntly “What we have here is a failure to communicate,” and that was nowhere more evident than in July, when the Caddo Parish School Board’s white majority voted again to seek release from a Federal consent decree regarding school integration, the same action which had triggered the racial protests of the previous summer. This time the NAACP organized a July 15 march to the school board offices on Midway Avenue, and a week later on July 22 they held a rally on the school board steps. NAACP President Larry English called on Black residents to fill the school board meeting on August 5 and make demands.

Not that everything was a total loss in 1987. Robert Trudeau of the *Journal*, still in mourning over the impending loss of his beloved Glass Hat, stumbled onto the Night Shift Cocktail Lounge, a blues-drenched out of the way spot where DJ Humma Lumma and occasionally Marvin Seals entertained an older Black crowd. Located at Douglas and Travis and owned by Ben Banks of Banks Barbecue, the place was what its owner called a “blues nightclub.” Not far away, but firmly in downtown, Trudeau made his way to Club Mercedes, where he came upon Cleveland Ware singing with Dunny Gilyard, Elgie Brown and Albert Lattier. Marvin Seals, as it turned out, performed at both clubs from time to time. Trudeau was capturing the last vestiges of a Shreveport Black blues

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313 “What We Have Here Is A Failure To Communicate,” *Shreveport Sun*, February 12, 1987, 4.


317 Ibid.
culture that was dying with the bulldozers of road construction and urban development. Unfortunately, the news media, as in many other cities, was far more liberal than white Shreveport residents, and reconciliation was nowhere in sight.

**BIG CONCERTS, 1988**

The new year of concerts started in Bossier City in January when the Theatre of the Performing Arts brought blues singer Jimmy Witherspoon to the Bossier City Civic Center auditorium. Witherspoon was backed by Dorsey Summerfield’s Polyphonics, but only one hundred and fifty people attended the show, which was intended to raise funds for the theatre group. On April 9, 1988, the Force MDs and Keith Sweat performed on the Grambling campus, and on April 22 the O’Jays and Levert came to the Hirsch Coliseum. Run DMC, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince, EPMD, Public Enemy, the 2 Live Crew, and J. J. Fad were all in Shreveport at Hirsch Coliseum on July 15 before a crowd of about 7,500, but the *Journal*’s reviewer Graham Baker trashed the show, referring to it as “four hours of pounding bass and a lot of distorted gibberish,” and the *Times*’ Larry Burton was much happier with Gladys Knight’s July 21 show, even though she only drew 1,571 people to the same venue. An August 26 show brought Keith Sweat, Salt N Pepa, and Johnny Kemp to Hirsch, but by then a combination of gang violence and urban decay had made it difficult for some artists to perform.

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319 “Force MDs, Keith Sweat To Perform At Grambling,” *Shreveport Times*, April 8, 1988, 43.

320 “Pro-Line Present The Family Reunion Concert Tour,” *Shreveport Times*, April 17, 1988, 86.


warfare and racial tension had brought Shreveport to the breaking point. The city would soon make national headlines for all the wrong reasons.

**LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL FESTIVAL, 1988**

The former Black Arts Festival or Black Festival was in 1988 renamed Let The Good Times Roll, which had been its slogan from the beginning, and took place in downtown Shreveport on June 17 and 18. On the Friday the funk-jazz bands Calama and Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics performed, and on Saturday attendees saw the Shreveport-Bossier Community Mass Choir, the Bright Star Male Chorus, Andrew Lewis and Supreme Voices of Faith, M. J. Rasool and the Rap Court, Alex “Snook” Jones, whose career had spanned nearly the entire 40 years from 1948 to 1988, and James Williams and the East Texas All-Star Blues Bland. A jam session was also held in honor of the late Major Lampkins, featuring Bill Bush, Ernest Lampkins, Lou Wells, Donald Aytch, and Isaac Graggs, who was the band director at Southern University in Baton Rouge.

**JUNETEENTH AT HAMEL’S PARK, 1988**

On June 19 about five thousand people turned out for KDKS radio station’s annual celebration of Juneteenth at Hamel’s Amusement Park on East 70th Street near the Red River. Unlike previous years, the 1988 version of the celebration had two major label headliners, Will Downing and M. C. Lyte. Local artists also performed, including Synclaire, C-Kwence, Kerwin Anderson, Lakeside Rock, and Dorsey Summerfield.

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324 “Good Times Festival To Lead In Juneteenth,” *Shreveport Times*, June 15, 1988, 36.

Despite the heat and large crowds, there were no incidents. Jerry Lundquist, the general manager of KDKS said, “Whenever you can get this many people out in this heat and don’t have any problems, it’s dynamite.”

**A RACIAL IMPASSE, THE HOT BISCUIT INCIDENT, AND THE CEDAR GROVE RIOT**

Throughout the 1980s, as Shreveport’s economic situation worsened, so did the relationship between the white and Black communities. The increase of poverty caused by joblessness and factory layoffs led to an increase in crime, as well as the rise of gangs imported from California, such as the Crips and the Bloods. Many African-Americans from the Shreveport area had moved to the West Coast over the years, and many Shreveport families had relatives in Los Angeles or Las Vegas. When some of these west coast families sent their children to Louisiana to live with relatives to “keep them out of trouble,” the California gangs began to emerge in Shreveport, along with the street selling of drugs, which was how they largely made their money. Shreveport gradually began to become more violent.

Black Shreveporters were incensed by the flying of a Confederate flag over the Confederate monument on the Caddo Parish Courthouse grounds, and the employing of security officers to guard the monument, at considerable expense to the taxpayers during a time of severe economic distress. When ArtBreak, a downtown festival intended to highlight the artistic achievement of Caddo Parish School District students came in May,

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a closing street dance near the Municipal Auditorium was marred by fighting which took 13 Shreveport officers to break up. A 17-year-old was arrested.\textsuperscript{328}

Milling crowds in Black neighborhoods were becoming the rule and not the exception, especially as the weather grew warmer. The shooting of a young man at the corner of Milam Street and Pierre Avenue in front of such a crowd led Police Chief Charles Gruber to bring back a street crime unit intended to crack down on corner loiterers.\textsuperscript{329} But Gruber had been hired from the North and was not aware of Shreveport’s fraught racial history. Crackdowns on street corner loitering had been one of the most frequent sources of tension between Black residents and the police. Reactivating the street corner crime unit only served to worsen relations between the Shreveport police and the Black community.

Shreveport had a Black/White Communications Task Force, formed by Mayor Hussey during the Futurescape initiatives he put together during the 1985 Sesquicentennial, but in a poignant example of the city’s problems, the whites and Blacks on the task force could not even get along with each other. When a white executive director was chosen for the organization in early April, the five Black members resigned en masse. This incident led the Journal editor Matthew J. Jacobs to ask aloud in an editorial whether Shreveport was headed for racial violence. While he basically took the Black community to task for refusing to reconcile with whites, he also pointed out some grim facts, such as nearly 50% youth unemployment in the Black community. Quite

\textsuperscript{328} “Street Fights Close Down ArtBreak Dance Festival,” \textit{Shreveport Journal}, May 2, 1988, 8.

prophetically, Jacobs stated, “Shreveport cops aren’t the same as they were in 1968, but all it would take is an incident like the one a year ago, when Edward Henry McCarr, a naked black man police said was on drugs, died in custody under highly suspicious circumstances.”

The incident ultimately came not from police but from a group of five white men who on August 4, 1988 shot 17-year-old Darren Martin in the parking lot of the Hot Biscuit restaurant on West 70th Street not far from Cedar Grove. The shooting death followed an earlier racial disturbance inside the restaurant involving the same five white men. In the wake of the incident, many in the community pleaded for calm, but pastor A. L. Jackson of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church said, “Our young people are restless. They’re ready for war.”

Shreveport’s Black community tensely waited until arrests were made on August 6. The shooter was a seventeen-year old white youth named Jason Willis, whose father James Willis was also arrested, as well as three other young white men charged as accessories to murder.

On August 22 a violent shoot-out between Crips and Bloods broke out on the parking lot of a Whataburger restaurant on Jewella Avenue near Greenwood Road, which left one youth near death. Police soon arrested ten young men in connection with the

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incident, and Police Chief Charles Gruber told Shreveporters that he now had conclusive proof that gangs were in Shreveport.\footnote{Gary Hines, “10 Arrested, One Near Death In Parking Lot Gun Battle,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, August 27, 1988, 1 & 2.} The teen shot in the gang fight ultimately died.\footnote{Gary Hines, “Teen Shot In Gang Fight Dies,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, August 28, 1988, 1.}

In a September 19 speech civic activist Neil Erwin warned Downtown Shreveport Unlimited that the city had a “racial logjam” and that a bridge had to be built between the city’s white and Black communities.\footnote{Don Walker, “Speaker: Racial Logjam Exists,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, September 20, 1988, 3.} But Erwin’s words came too late.

On the very afternoon that the \textit{Times} quoted Erwin’s plea for a bridge between the races, two young white girls drove into A. B. Palmer Park in the Cedar Grove neighborhood. Young Black men hung out in the park every day, and it was a known place where drugs could be purchased.\footnote{My summary of the events of the Cedar Grove riot comes from Ronald C, Sloan’s \textit{The Cedar Grove Riot} (Washington, D.C.: Police Executive Research Forum, 1994) and Laura Thompson’s “The Night A Race Riot Erupted in Louisiana,” \url{https://www.fenixjournalism.com/2019/11/22/the-night-a-race-riot-erupted-in-louisiana/} unless otherwise indicated.} But the girls had no money. Their goal was to grab a bag of crack and then drive off without paying for it. They might have succeeded except that their car stalled. When the dealer attempted to grab one of the girls in the car, the other pulled out a gun and shot into the crowd, striking a young man. For the second time in a little more than a month, white people had shot Blacks in Shreveport. The crowd grew angrier and menacing. The girls managed to get inside the Sack-N-Pack store near the park, whose owner gave them shelter from the growing mob. But the young man they had shot was popular in Cedar Grove, and the store owner’s willingness to harbor the shooters further enraged the crowd, which soon grew to hundreds. The police at first were doing their best to investigate the shooting, but the mob’s anger soon made that

\footnote{335 Gary Hines, “Teen Shot In Gang Fight Dies,” \textit{Shreveport Times}, August 28, 1988, 1.}  
impossible. Chief Gruber had arrived, believing that he might be able to persuade the crowd to disperse, but he later recalled that drug dealers were going through the park stirring people up. The girls were taken out of the store in handcuffs and loaded into a paddy wagon, but that did nothing to calm the hundreds that were in the park. Many of them began chanting “Hot Biscuit” and “just another nigga dead.” Mayor Hussey also entered the disturbance area, but his car was bricked, and Chief Gruber was struck in the leg with a thrown rock. Fires had been set in Palmer Park, and when the fire trucks came to put them out, the trucks were attacked with rocks and bottles. Gruber then controversially ordered his men to withdraw from the area and seal off all streets leading into it. Within the zone, however, things turned from bad to worse. Young men were heard by reporters to yell, “He’s white, get him,” and a news car from KTBS Channel 3 television was set on fire. Soon the Sack-N-Pack grocery on Line Avenue and the Pel-State Fina store across the street were looted and set on fire. As reporters attempted to enter the area, a Black woman near the Sack-N-Pack store warned them “Be careful! You’re the wrong color!”

In the crowd of angry Black men that night in A. B. Palmer Park was soul singer Reuben Bell. He stated that the riot started because the people in the park believed that Sam Digliormo, the owner of the Sack-N-Pack was trying to not only protect the girls who shot Derrick McKinney in the park, but also help them hide evidence. According to

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340 A number of white Shreveporters showed evident disgust toward Reuben Bell for having participated in the Cedar Grove riot when I spoke with them. Like other Black singers and musicians, he had formerly enjoyed a good relationship with white fans.
Bell, Digliormo had exited the store with something and threw it into a disused cooler behind the store, and it was this that pushed the crowd over the edge. Bell, who had lived in Cedar Grove most of his life, felt that Blacks had to show the white community that the Black community had taken all it was going to take.341

After the stores were burned, the first night of rioting gradually died out. Gruber’s strategy of pulling back to perimeters was widely disparaged by white residents, but his prediction that the rioters would vent their rage on buildings and not people largely proved true. Although there were some rock-throwing incidents for a second night on September 21, things largely began to calm down. Incredibly, Shreveport’s mayor, John Hussey, attempted to argue that the rioting had little to do with race and primarily resulted from widespread drinking and drug use. On the other hand, Black community leaders said it was never a matter of whether there would be a riot, but simply when.342

When Mayor John Hussey convened a meeting with Blacks in the Cedar Grove community at A. B. Palmer Park, on the very spot where the riot began, the mayor continued his tone-deaf manner: “We are going to do the best we can, because we are all in the same boat.” But the Rev. Danny Mitchell replied, “We are not all in the same boat. You are in the boat, and we are drowning.”343 In Mitchell’s words was the sum of the Black experience in Shreveport. There had never really been one city. Blacks lived in different neighborhoods, went to different schools, hung out in different bars, listened to

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different music. And worse, in Shreveport, there seemed to be a limit to Black achievement. That fact had led to the large communities of former Shreveporters in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and the one that was growing now in Dallas. The ambition of many young Shreveporters, especially Black ones, was to leave.

After the Cedar Grove riot, white Shreveporters could not claim that everything was all right, although at least one wag called the *Times* to propose a new bumper sticker that would read “Shreveport—It’s a Riot!” The poor race relations and bad economic conditions would lead to a smaller but significant riot in the Lakeview neighborhood in 1992, which was caused by an Arab convenience store clerk shooting and killing a Black man who entered the store after having been previously told he was barred. With efforts at finding new industries floundering, Shreveport would eventually decide to legalize casino gambling. The coming of casinos did provide jobs and tourism growth, but they also hurt local restaurants and night clubs. It soon became hard to find live bands outside of the casinos. Most recording being done in Shreveport by the 1990s was of rap and hip-hop groups. The opening of Blade Studios and the shooting of some films in Shreveport gave hope that the city might have a new entertainment renaissance, but Blade studios shut down abruptly, and the film industry left Shreveport as suddenly as it came. The rapper 50 Cent has recently leased the building that Millennium Film Studios vacated in what was once the Bottoms neighborhood, but it remains to be seen if his gambit will bring movie-making or music recording back to the city. The streets today are strangely vacant and empty, both in downtown and in nearby neighborhoods such as Allendale and

Queensborough. All the various clubs where so much great music took place are vacant lots or ruins. Texas Avenue was never redeveloped and is a collapsing, crumbling eyesore. But the music that was recorded in Shreveport lives on. Perhaps it will motivate a future generation to preserve and restore the legacy.
By and large, the Shreveport chronicled in detail in the previous pages is not the city that exists today. Pierre Avenue is an endless street of vacant lots. Nothing remains of The Bottoms neighborhood, which has been renamed Ledbetter Heights, now dominated by the building that Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson has leased from the city. The Texas Avenue Historic District is blocks of ruins and abandoned buildings. The Palace Park was demolished to build high-rise apartments for the elderly. Stan’s Records was demolished to build a church parking lot. Shreve Square for the most part has burned or collapsed. What remains is mostly vacant. The 3-D Club is merely a slab, the old Mercedes Lounge a memory buried under the new Hilton Hotel. Sound City Recording Studios is now a law office. The Veterans’ Park Amphitheatre is a ruin. The building which housed the Celebrity Supper Club, Jazz Workshop, Big Daddy’s, and the Time Out Club is now a Pentecostal church. The Washington Youree Hotel, Captain Shreve Hotel and Shreveport Motor Inn have all been demolished. Hamel’s Amusement Park closed and was abandoned. Club 51 became a daycare center. There is no trace of A & B Landing on Cross Lake, where Black people used to gather on Sunday afternoons to hear the city’s best Black bands. The Lake Cliff is no more, and nothing remains of El Grotto or the Congo Club. Anyone looking for landmarks of Shreveport’s Black musical past will find little.

Why did Shreveport fail as a music industry city? The answers are not easy to find. On paper, Memphis and Shreveport would seem remarkably similar. Both are cities built on rivers; they each adjoin two other states and serve as a market hub for a portion
of all three states. Both had large Black communities and a long history of racial conflict. Both were surrounded by rural towns and plantations. If Memphis had Beale Street, Shreveport had Texas Avenue. If Memphis had its innovative businessman in Clarence Saunders, Shreveport had William K. Henderson. If Sam Phillips was the innovator to record Black music and rockabilly in Memphis, Mira Smith did the same in Shreveport. If Memphis had Poplar Tunes record shop, Shreveport had Stan’s. And if Memphis had Stax Records, Shreveport had Jewel, Paula and Ronn records, and Sound City studios. Both cities had bluesmen and a rich tradition of Black gospel music. Yet Memphis eclipsed Shreveport as a recording city before 1975, and still today has a healthier recording scene than Shreveport. For one thing, Memphis had a relatively large number of recording studios compared to Shreveport, which generally only had one studio at any given time in its history. Similarly, Memphis always had more functioning record labels than Shreveport, and some of these labels, such as Sun, Hi and Stax had bigger hits than anything which came out of Shreveport. These hits were important, because they provided the funding that allowed the labels to expand and sign more artists or to build newer and better studios or facilities.

Shreveport also suffered from poor leadership. At a time when the Louisiana Hayride had made the city a center for country music, city officials allegedly discouraged Mercury Records from building studios or offices in Shreveport, fearing that entertainment executives, producers and musicians, as part of “show business” would bring liberal viewpoints and libertine lifestyles that Shreveporters did not want in their
city. Likewise, many years later, in the early 1970s, soul and funk producer Bobby Patterson chose to leave Shreveport because he chafed at its backwardness, particularly on issues of race. Nor was the poor leadership or lack of planning just on the part of city officials. Stan Lewis, having created one of the largest record store chains, distributors, and one-stops in the South, finally decided to launch a record label in 1964. Yet he never built a recording studio, although he discussed doing it several times. His label rarely signed anyone from the Ark-La-Tex region, and even when it did, the tendency was to use studios in Tyler, Texas, or in Muscle Shoals, Alabama to record. A state of the art studio eventually was built in Shreveport, Sound City, but it was not active until early 1969. Stan Lewis began to use Sound City once it was there, but the relationship between the record label owner and the studio owners became strained. Sound City ultimately formed its own record label, Alarm.

But if Shreveport lost out to Memphis as a recording city, it also ultimately lost out to Jackson, Mississippi. Much of the sound of what would become known as Southern Soul was born at Sound City in Shreveport, but Stewart Madison ultimately made the decision to leave Shreveport and become part of Malaco’s growing empire. By 1986, not only was the Shreveport Sun running articles about Malaco Records and its role in the resurgence of blues, but Malaco artists were visiting Shreveport monthly to perform at venues like the Three Dimension.

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345 This story is an oft-repeated piece of Shreveport folklore or oral tradition. Whether Mercury Records ever really intended to build a massive complex in Shreveport was not something I could find anything in print about. What lends credence to the story is the fact that Shelby Singleton, a native Shreveporter, was hired as an A & R director for Mercury Records; certainly men like Clyde Fant and Earl Downs or George D’Artois would have resisted having entertainment executives moving into their insular, religious city.
Perhaps the biggest factor in Shreveport’s demise was money. Extant recordings show that there was no shortage of talent in and around Shreveport, yet the vast majority of Black bands and singers never recorded at all. Of those who did manage to make it into a recording studio, the vast majority of these recordings never came out. Of those that did come out, most were singles or 12-inch singles on relatively obscure labels. All of that reflects a harsh reality—it took (and still takes) money to make a recording, and even more money to get it made into a record or a compact disc, and few in Shreveport had that kind of money, particularly in the Black community. Stan Lewis did, of course, but for some strange reason he was not interested in pursuing bands like Dorsey Summerfield and the Polyphonics, or Betty Lewis and the Executives, or Ten Degrees Below Funk, or Showcase. What if he had? How might the city’s music history have changed? Lewis was, at the end of the day, a businessman. He probably thought that recording these new and unproven local bands would be a risky venture, and why take risk if sure artists were available?

Shreveport’s inability to get past the issue of race was also undoubtedly a factor in its failure to thrive, both in and out of music. Of course, that was not a problem unique to Shreveport, and to some extent the same issues were faced by Memphis and Jackson. But in the latter two cities, there was less division within the music community. Certainly, there were Shreveport white musicians who respected Black musicians and even jammed with them; but altogether the city was just more segregated than even Memphis or Jackson. Shreveport’s inability to keep up with the modern era was one of the motivating factors leading a lot of younger Blacks to leave the city for other parts of the country.
This issue was not really addressed by anyone in the city until the administration of Keith Hightower as mayor during the late 1990s and early 2000s, who tried to motivate local young people to remain in Shreveport instead of moving away.

So when it comes to music, is Shreveport a failure? And of course the answer is that records capture a moment in time. They comprise a body of work which tells a city’s story. And when the records that were made in Shreveport are listened to, it is impossible to call the city a failure. Bluesmen like Country Jim Bledsoe and David “Pete” McKinley exhibit a style that influenced John Lee Hooker. Mira Smith became one of the first pioneering female record label owners and sound engineers in America. Not only did she defy norms of what a woman could do in a Southern city, but she broke social norms in recording Black artists in her studio. With her friend Margaret Lewis Warwick, she wrote a number of great songs, including the country and soul classic “Reconsider Me.” Stan Lewis not only built one of the largest record store and music distribution firms in the United States, but through his paid radio broadcasts shaped the early career of Bob Dylan. Lewis also helped launch the careers of Dale Hawkins, Wolfman Jack, John Fred and Joe Stampley. Eddie Giles’s song “Losing Boy” has had a life far beyond his career. Covered domestically by L. C. Steels, it has since been covered by Nick Lowe, Primal Scream and Paul Weller, and has also more recently been covered by fellow Shreveporter Buddy Flett. The African Music Machine’s song “Black Water Gold” was covered by K.C. and the Sunshine Band. Bobby Patterson and Jerry Strickland’s lovely soul ballad “She Don’t Have To See You” was picked up by alternative rock band Golden Smog. Not to mention the popularity overseas for Shreveport artists like Eddie Giles, Reuben Bell,
Dori Grayson, Charles Pennywell and the Fairlanes, or Abraham and the Casanovas.

Truly Shreveport has made its mark on the world of music, even if it never produced the kinds of chart hits that Memphis or Muscle Shoals did. It is a legacy worth commemorating and preserving.
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