

The Sammy Strain Story: Part 1...

The Chips

“What Do You Want For Nothing? A Rubber Biscuit?”

By Charlie Horner & Steven Kahn

***With contributions from Pamela Horner, Lou Rallo,
Jim Bakay, Frank Chile and Bob Diskin***

How can we even begin to write about someone whose singing career spanned more than fifty years, playing key roles in the successes of R&B vocal groups from the Chips, Fantastics, Impacts, Blue Chips, Imperials and Little Anthony & the Imperials to the O’Jays? Someone who has been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame twice (with The O’Jays and with Little Anthony & the Imperials)! Someone who has excelled at singing, choreography and song writing and who in addition has retained almost total recall of events that have happened to him throughout his career. Sammy Strain was there when R&B vocal harmony entered its “Golden Age” and his stories of the times could easily fill a book. We don’t have a book’s worth of space in this issue of *Echoes*, but we can tell Sammy’s story, part by part. And Part 1 goes back to the beginning.

Samuel “Sammy” Strain Jr. was born in Brooklyn in 1939 to Margaret Mason and Sammy Strain. Sr. His first exposure to music was through the phonograph records his mother, aunts and uncles played around the house – songs by Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra and the Ink Spots. “I grew up around music,” recalled Sammy. “My mom was born in Wilmington, NC, so when she got to NYC and got off the subway at 42nd Street and saw all these vaudeville and movie theaters, The Roxy, The Capitol, Radio City Music Hall, she loved stage shows. In Brooklyn they also had a lot of vaudeville theaters but my first recollection of a show that I saw in a movie was at either the Roxy or the Capitol. It had the Andrews Sisters singing ‘Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy’ in an Abbott & Costello movie.” [*The film, “Buck Privates” came out in 1941 but being one of the top grossing movies of the year, it undoubtedly enjoyed second or third runs after that.—ed.*]

Sammy’s second recollection of a group’s performance was even more dramatic. “I had to be 4 or 5 years old. I got my first pair of long dress pants – grayish black flannel pants. I asked mother where we were going and she said, ‘We’re going to take the A-Train to the Apollo Theatre. We’re going to see the Ink Spots.’ It was the first time I took the A-Train to Harlem at 125th Street. I knew I was going to see the Ink Spots. My mom used to play their records. And I saw Bill Kenny with the Ink Spots. He was singing ‘If I Didn’t Care’. The Ink Spots had on their white suits and I remember the women screaming!”

Sammy Strain’s early years were spent living on Bergen Street in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, but his family soon moved to Fulton Street and St. James Place in the nearby Clinton Hills section. Sammy



**Photo of Sammy Strain at a young age.
(Photo courtesy of Sammy Strain)**

attended PS 45 until the end of 8th grade. From there he entered Alexander Hamilton High School at Bergen Street and Albany Avenue in Crown Heights.

“I wasn’t even thinking about singing at the time,” said Sammy. “I’d stand in line and go to shows to see the Harptones, Moonglows, Spaniels and Solitaires. But basically, it never entered my mind to sing.”

In spite of the fact that this area of Brooklyn was about to become a hotbed of vocal group harmony, there were not very many vocal groups in Sammy’s immediate area before he started high school.

“I’d go to a party and there’d be some guys from uptown and they would sing,” remembered Sammy. “But when I was in high school, Hamilton High, I would get on the train at Washington Avenue to go to school. And when I would get on the train, Ernest Wright and Tracy Lord [*future members of the Chesters and Imperials—ed.*] would be there but they weren’t even singing

then. We were freshmen at Alexander Hamilton High. I would see them on the train but I had no idea that they could sing.”

“At lunchtime there was a guy named Allan [Days]. They used to call him ‘Tombstone’. He sang with a group called the Avalons [*not the more famous group of the same name.* – ed.]. And we were harmonizing to songs like ‘Crazy For You’ by the Heartbeats. That’s the first time I sang in public. We called ourselves the Hamiltonians. A guy named Walter Moore sang bass, John Harris sang lead, Tombstone [Allan Days] and myself. I don’t remember the others [*possibly Horace Brooks* – ed.]. There were four or five of us. We started harmonizing. So one of the shop teachers said, ‘Would you guys like to sing in the auditorium?’ We’d be singing in the hallways in between classes. And we said yes. So we did a little rehearsal. We did ‘Crazy For You’ and we sounded pretty good.”

The Hamiltonians even cut a couple demos of “Crazy For You” and “Sugaree” (an original tune). “There was a neighborhood hustler and jack-of-all-trade named Cleo who lived on Fulton Street,” said Sammy. “He heard us sing and said he’d just acquired a record cutting machine and could record us. We cut a couple of acetates, like the kind you could have made in Coney Island. We paid him a couple bucks per side.”

Encouraged by their early results, Sammy asked Tombstone if the Hamiltonians could continue as a group. But Tombstone simply replied that he was not about to leave his other group, the Avalons.

“A short time later, my mom and dad had gone out to West Hampton or someplace for the weekend. I was home and the doorbell rang. It was Tombstone and he said, ‘Hey man, I got my group and we’re stopping up.’ So I said, ‘Come on up’. I lived on the top floor walk up. So they came in and started singing this song, ‘Oh Baby Be Mine’. My jaw hit the floor because these guys were really singing! And then they hit the second song which was ‘Dee I’. It was Billy Witt, “Chappy” [Harold Chapman], [Arthur Blackman], [Ronald Johnson] & Allan ‘Tombstone’ [Days] in my living room. I had never heard anything so beautiful in my life. Some time later they changed their name to the Rocketones.”

“Just after that, I had just turned 16 and got kicked out of school,” said Sammy. “I was looking for a job and wondering what was going to happen. Members of James Sutton’s family were the superintendents in my building. [*Sammy would later sing with James Sutton in the Fantastics, but that’s for Part 2.*—ed.] They lived on the first floor. There was a guy named Reggie who’d just come in from Detroit and was singing with James Sutton. Their group was walking down the street singing. I said, ‘Can I come to rehearsal?’ and they said, ‘No, only girls can come to rehearsal.’ So I was sitting on the stoop and my bubble was busted.”

“Just then, who turned the corner but Shedrick “Bubbie” Lincoln. It had to be May. The weather was beautiful. And he had a cart, a horse-pulled cart, with string beans, onions and potatoes. He was selling vegetables. The vendors did that in Brooklyn. He saw me sitting on the stoop and he said, ‘Hey, how are you do-



Charlie Horner, Sammy Strain and Pamela Horner at Pam & Charlie’s Celebration of Classic Urban Harmony, June 10, 2012, Morristown, NJ.

ing?’ I’d met Bubbie in my previous school, PS 45.”

At this point we should mention that PS 45 in Brooklyn provided early education for not only Sammy Strain but future members of the Chips, Shedrick “Bubbie” Lincoln and Charles Kinrod Johnson, and future Hurricanes’ lead Henry Alston.

“Shedrick said, ‘Hey didn’t you go to PS 45?’ and I said yeah. He said, ‘Do you know Paul Fulton and Teddy Black?’ and I said yeah. ‘Well we’ve starting a singing group and we need a first tenor. Can you sing first tenor?’ I said, ‘Yeah, I can sing first tenor.’ He said, ‘I’ll pick you up at 5 o’clock. We’ll have our first rehearsal.’”

“I think ‘Bubbie’ [Shedrick Lincoln] started the group,” said Paul Fulton. “I met Bubbie through my cousin and we just started sing. Then we got a hold of Theodore Black. He lived on the same block that I did.”

“Shedrick picked me up at 5 o’clock,” said Sammy Strain. “We went to Teddy Black’s house on Clinton Place. The song of the time was ‘Why Do Fools Fall In Love’ by the Teenagers. Teddy Black sang lead, Paul Fulton sang bass, Bubbie Lincoln sang second tenor and I sang first tenor. We started harmonizing and we sounded good. We sang a couple times and we went downstairs and started walking through the neighborhood singing. We got back to my neighborhood and James Sutton was there with his group. We lived in this double apartment complex. They were singing and people were sitting on the stoop saying how they sounded good. And I said to myself, ‘Oh man, we just had our first rehearsal and we sound better than these guys!’ Somebody saw me standing there and said, ‘Hey Sammy, where you been?’ I said, ‘I just came from rehearsal’ and then they said, ‘Get out of here, you can’t sing!’ And I said, ‘Hit it Paul... ‘Hey, Doom Boppa Doom Boppa Doom Boppa Do Do..’ They said, ‘What?!!!’ The rest is history.”

“We called ourselves the Chips,” said Sammy. “We made up the name right there in Teddy’s kitchen.” The name Chips seems to be a combination of how the group would soon be “in the chips” and the fact that one member happened to be snacking on potato chips at the

time.

"A couple of weeks later we were walking through the street singing and this guy Harry Austin had a car and asked us if we had a manager," said Sammy. "We said no, and he said 'I want to be your manager.' Harry became our manager because singing groups drew girls. So we hung out with him and we would get in the car. At that time it was just Teddy, Bubbie, Paul and myself." Sammy recalls Harry driving the group around Brooklyn so the group could get out of the car and start singing, drawing a crowd.

Still, the personnel of the Chips was far from set at the time. "I had heard about a job in Amityville, Long Island, and I went out there and applied," Sammy continued. "I had a friend whose grandmother had just built a house there. I didn't get the job because I was too young, but I was out there about a week. When I came back, Bubbie told me that Teddy Black had quit the group and they got this new guy Kinrod Johnson. When I saw him I went, 'Charles,' and he couldn't stand that name because we went to school together at PS 45 when he lived on Bergen Street." Through Kinrod Johnson, the Chips added another member, Nathaniel "Lil John" Epps.

The Origins of "Rubber Biscuit"

Growing up in Bedford Stuyvesant in the 1950's, rebellious youth like Charles Kinrod Johnson (born 1939) could easily find themselves headed for Warwick New York State School For Boys, as Kinrod did at the age of 15. Located in the upstate New York community of Goshen, Warwick was a minimum security yet military-like strictly disciplined institution. Young men were housed in cottages, 25-30 per building. Assigned to cottage D-1, Kinrod met and befriended 13-year-old Nathaniel "Lil John" Epps (born 1941), who'd already been in Warwick for several months.

Marches from building to building required two parallel lines of 12 young men each, with someone in the middle calling cadence. That job often fell to Kinrod.

Kinrod Johnson talked about this in a 1980 published interview. "We'd be on line, and in order to keep it straight, stay on the beat, I'd chant stuff like 'on the hubba wonda luva hubba hubba,' whatever came to mind. And when we were about to stop, I'd say, 'left foot stomp, right foot drag,' and everybody would stomp one foot and drag the other." [Ref. 2]

Kinrod Johnson served nine months at Warwick and then returned to Brooklyn. Lil John Epps had his term extended, mostly for getting into fights, but he too eventually returned to Brooklyn.

Epps was also from Brooklyn and prior to being sent to Warwick had been singing with a group called the Charmers [no recordings], forerunners of the Capitons on the *Pet* label.

When they joined the Chips, Kinrod and Lil John introduced the cadence to the group, who began working on it as a song. They called it "Cow Cow Oooh". "Kinrod Johnson had been incarcerated in a place called Warwick Correctional School for Boys," said Sammy. "When they would go from the barracks to the mess hall,

instead of saying 'left right, left right' they'd say things like 'Hi lovedova lovadue'. It was like a cadence that they walked to. But it wasn't as extensive as what we turned it into do. We started making up 'woody woody pecker pecker' and all kinds of crazy things like that. And then we started putting the breaks in it. We'd stop and then Kinrod would say 'The other day I had a cool water sandwich and a Sunday-go-to-meeting bun.' It was a novelty song and it was different."

One of the breaks had Kinrod saying, "The other day I ate a ricochet biscuit. Well that's the kind of biscuit that's supposed to bounce off the wall back in your mouth. If it don't bounce back...hmm-hmmm-hmm... You go hungry!"

The song ended with Kinrod inquiring, "What 'cha want for nothing? A rubber biscuit?" The line would later lead to the song's more well known title.

One day the group was riding around with Harry and he took them to the Elks Ballroom on Fulton Street where Duke Baldwin had a dance studio. Duke was a tap dancer and he taught kids how to dance."

At the time, the popular children's TV program on WOR was "The Merry Mailman," hosted by Ray Heatherton. Once a week, the show had a ten minute segment where Duke Baldwin would have his young students do a tap dance routine. Baldwin had a lot of rehearsal halls and started letting singing groups come by in the afternoon around three or four o'clock. Groups would take turns rehearsing in the rooms. Baldwin did not charge the groups for use of the rehearsal rooms and soon word got around. Besides the Chips, groups that rehearsed at Baldwin's hall included the Continentals and the DuPonts (featuring Anthony Gourdine).



Photo of the Chips, 1955
Left to right, top row: Nathaniel "Lil John" Epps (falsetto), Paul Fulton (bass), Sammy Strain (first tenor), Shedrick "Bubbie" Lincoln (second tenor). Bottom, center: Kinrod Johnson (lead, baritone). Taken at Paul's uncle's apartment. (Courtesy of Paul Fulton)

"We were one of the outstanding groups," recalled Sammy. "What made us stand out was our great harmony and by that time we had written 'Oh My Darling' and our standout song 'Cow Cow Oooh (Rubber Biscuit)'. Riding with Harry, we would pull up in front of a project or some neighborhood and we'd get out of the car and just start singing. We'd automatically draw a crowd. And by the time we got to 'Rubber Biscuit' people would say, 'Oh man. You guys should record that.'"

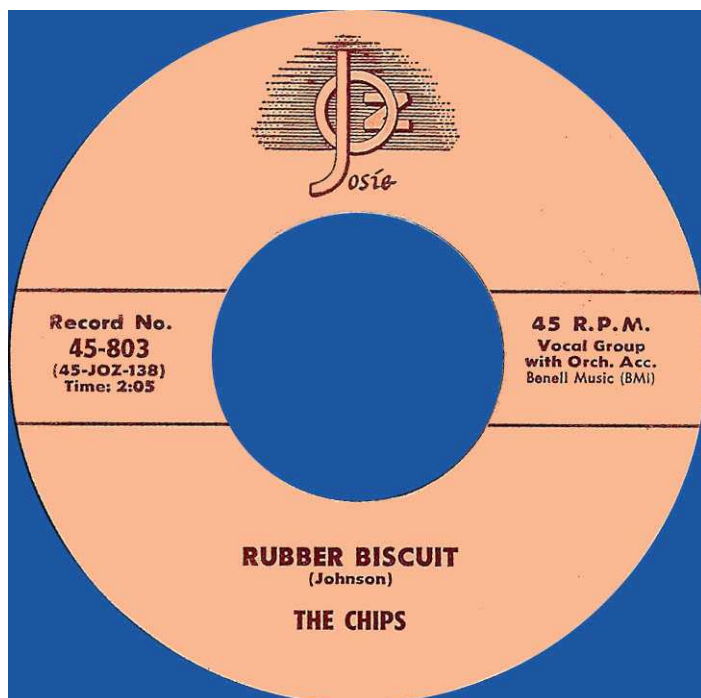
"When we started singing 'Rubber Biscuit,' Duke and Harry both wanted to manage us. Duke had more pull than Harry so they became co-managers.

Shedrick Lincoln went to 1650 Broadway to try to find someone to record the Chips, but the record companies would only deal with the Chips' managers. So the group returned with Duke and Harry.

"Duke and Harry took us to *Jubilee/Josie Records*," said Sammy. "And we sang 'Oh My Darling' first and when we sang 'Rubber Biscuit'. They loved 'Rubber Biscuit'. We were back in a couple days with our parents to sign the contracts because we were all under age. And then we went into the studio a couple days later."

On August 3, 1956, the Chips were taken to Manhattan's Belltone Studios to record.

"Ernie Hayes played piano, Panama Francis played drums, Mickey Baker played guitar and King Curtis was playing saxophone," said Sammy. "I can't remember the other musicians but there were five or six of them. We got by the piano for the ballad, they got the key and they wrote their little notes. We recorded 'Oh My Darling' first. We did it maybe two or three times. Then we got to 'Rubber Biscuit' and these guys fell on the floor. They were going crazy. They said we know that's a smash. And we recorded it and it came out."



**"Rubber Biscuit" (First press, 1956)
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)**



There were at least two takes of "Rubber Biscuit". *Jubilee Records* released one take on their *Josie* subsidiary (# 803). An alternate take came out years later on a *Collectables* label CD. [See the discography at the end of this article.]

"Rubber Biscuit" came out in September 1956 and started getting a lot of attention on New York City's black radio stations.

"One day I was outside the apartment," said Sammy. "And somebody came to the window and said 'Your record just came on the radio – your record is on!' Then I started hearing it every day. And one day I was listening to "Dr. Jive" (Tommy Smalls), and he said 'We're going to have a big show at the Apollo for Thanksgiving week. We're going to have the Heartbeats singing 'A Thousand Miles Away' and Screaming Jay Hawkins singing 'I Put A Spell On You' and the Dells singing 'Oh What A Night' and we're going to have the singing Chips doing 'Rubber Biscuit'!!!! I went 'What? I'm going to sing at the Apollo! Oh my goodness!'"

The Apollo show featured The Cadillacs, Bo Diddley, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, The Debutants, The Dells, The Schoolboys, The Heartbeats, The Chips, Ann Cole, Annie Alford, Robert & Johnny and Reuben Phillips' Band. Depending on who in the Chips you interview, the Apollo Theatre evokes different memories. One thing is certain. It was a learning experience for the group.

"We found out we were going to play the Apollo," said Sammy Strain. "They contacted Paul. Now we weren't professional. We'd never played any



**The Chips playing the Apollo Theatre, Nov. 1956.
(Photo courtesy of Sammy Strain)**

place with a stage. The morning of the show we got to rehearsal at 9 o'clock in the morning. The night before, Bubbie, Paul, Lil John and Kinrod all stayed at my house. They slept on the couches and early that morning we gathered our clothes and Duke and Harry picked us up. They took us to the Apollo and rehearsals were downstairs in the basement. They had those metal cellar doors that opened up in front of the building. We walked down the stairs and we could hear the band playing. They were down there rehearsing for the Dells and all those people. Now, I was starting to get nervous because this was for real. We were there rehearsing and I saw the Heartbeats. I saw Robert and Johnny. That was all cool. But while we were waiting to rehearse, I saw this tall dark-skinned cat, with this beautiful hair. He had on a bomber jacket and as he came downstairs he turned around and he had a gold crown or gold tooth. It was Harvey Fuqua of the Moonglows, one of my favorite groups! I just about fainted. I was like, 'Holy cow! There's Harvey Fuqua of the Moonglows'."

"We never had any arrangements so [house bandleader] Reuben Phillips said 'Look, these guys don't have any arrangements. They're only singing two songs, so we're going to scratch some chords out, you guys follow along.' So we got by the piano and started singing. They worked it out."

"We went to Reed's Cleaners because they rented tuxedos," Sammy remembered. "And we rented some Navy blue pants with burgundy tux jackets and white shirts. We also rented some patent leather shoes. Those were our first uniforms. They also sold us some mustard colored tuxedos. We had those with black shirts."

"I remember the first performance we goofed up," recalled Paul Fulton. "The band was playing so fast we couldn't keep up with them. People were laughing at

us. We were young. We had on these big tuxedos that were too big for us. But when we came out for the second show, everybody started clapping and we got a standing ovation."

In an earlier published story, Kinrod told of one of the first embarrassing mishaps. "We all went and had our hair processed and the process makes your hair brittle," said Kinrod. "Anyway, a fight broke out in the dressing room between Lil' John and Harry Austin, our part-time manager. Harry punched Lil' John in the eye and Lil' John threw a chair just as I was walking smartly through the door. The chair hit me in the side of the head and, with that brittle Konkoleen job, all the hair dispersed from that spot on my head – came right off the dome!. I went home and brushed it back a little and all that hair came off too! I knew we had to appear, so I got a little black shoe polish and polished up the side of my head in that missing area. And during that next show, I heard a girl say, 'Wow, look at him – look at them boss sideburns – he didn't have them on the last show!'" [Ref. 2]

"People just went crazy," Paul said. "Kinrod came out with uniform jacket turned inside out and his pants rolled up and those painted extra long sideburns on his face. The audience thought it was the funniest thing they'd ever seen. Dr. Jive thought we were *too* wild. He told us 'Don't ever come out like that again!'"

Sammy Strain felt the Chips were even more lacking in stage presence at that time. "We were in the wings because we came on second or third," said Sammy. "We didn't know how to come on stage. We didn't know how to come off stage. I wanted to quit show business. I've never been so embarrassed in my life. We were lousy. We didn't know how to bow. It was like we were on the corner doo wopping under the streetlight! We shared a dressing room with the Dells and the Schoolboys. When we came off stage and got to the dressing room, Honey Coles came in and said, 'Somebody help these kids! They don't even know how to bow!' He did everything but cuss us out and kick us off the show. The audience didn't boo us, they were polite. The applause was very polite. But that was the worst week of my entire career. I was going to quit show business as soon as that week was over. The Dells and the Schoolboys taught us how to back up together and look at each other out of the corners of our eyes and then bow. And we came on stage in a line. We got that right."

"During each show for the next six days, Paul Fulton and I would be standing in the wings," said Sammy. "The headliners of the show were The Cadillacs and Bo Diddley. There was nobody who could headline over Bo Diddley. He was the Pied Piper. He would have the entire theater up and dancing from the time he came on stage until the time he went off. Then there was the group, The Cadillacs. When those brothers hit the stage, I'd never seen synchronized choreography in my life. Not like that. They were awesome! They were doing spins and I said, 'Oh my goodness!' I asked the Cadillacs who helped them with their choreography and I heard the name Cholly Adkins. And they had just come out with two songs, 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer'

and 'The Girl I Love'. The saxophone; they had jazz. Listen to the arrangements. And then the Dells had a song called 'Jo Jo' and they had on red suits with white shoes. We had a hit record but we had no stage presence."

"Sammy and I always had the stage presence," Paul added. "But we didn't know. We had nobody to teach us. So we watched. We started stealing moves. We watched the other groups and we stole a few steps, or we tried to. We especially watched the Cadillacs because they were the top choreography group out there. We were young and we didn't have anything spectacular. But 'Rubber Biscuit' was a hit record."

Still, a week-long gig at the world-famous Apollo Theatre was quite an accomplishment for a group that had never appeared on stage before. But financially, it was a bust. The group had paid out money for uniforms, backstage food, a photography session, and commissions for their two managers.

"Before the last night's show," recalled Sammy, "They were going to take out money for food. And then the union man came in and said, 'Now you guys have to join the union.' He took \$20 per person and gave us a little card. We, as a group, weren't making but \$900 for the week (for about 25 shows) but that was all the money in the world to us. Duke and Harry started fighting because Duke thought that Harry shouldn't get a commission and Harry thought that Duke shouldn't get a commission. It was the worst week of my life. So, we finished the gig."

Paul said he made about \$35 for the week. Little John thought it was more like \$24.

Sammy told what happened with his entire pay for the week. "I ended up coming back over the next day to Florsheim Shoes. They had the most beautiful pair of green suede loafers I'd ever seen. That was what I bought with my pay from the Apollo. I wore these loafers every day for the next couple of weeks."

After the Apollo Theatre, Sammy and Paul decided the Chips next gig would run smoother.

"They informed us that we had another engagement in two weeks at the world famous State Theater in Hartford CT," said Sammy. "We had the mustard colored tuxedos we'd bought and we also bought some egg shell colored jackets with brown slacks and some brown and white oxford shoes with nice shirts and ties. With the mustard colored tuxedos, we had a black stripe put down the side and we wore a black shirt with a mustard colored tie to go with it. And we had black patent leather shoes. We were sharp. Paul and I rehearsed the group for about two weeks. We had some nice routines for 'Rubber Biscuit' and 'Oh My Darling' and we were the opening act."

"Sammy and I learned how to do the splits," recalled Paul. "And he and I were the ones to run to the front of the stage and do splits. I remember one time when we did the split we both busted our asses. But we got over with it."

On the Hartford show were the Moonglows, the Five Keys, Don Rondo and the Cleftones. We were there Friday Saturday and Sunday. The State Theatre had one of the biggest stages in the world. We went out there

and looked sharp, we bowed. The chicks started screaming and I said, "Show business is my life!"

After the Hartford gig, things slowed up for the Chips. They kept busy by working on choreography and a new song they'd written. It was an answer to "Rubber Biscuit" called "Tongue Tied Baby". The Chips next engagement didn't come until September 1957. It was a show at Brooklyn's Empire Theatre and also featured the Willows, Velours and The Duponts. Sammy knew Anthony Gouridine and the Duponts from Duke Baldwin's rehearsal hall. "This might have been the first show that Charles Moffit did with the Velours," recalled Sammy. "Because he didn't even have a matching uniform. We sang our new song 'Tongue Tied Baby'. We had some nice routines. We did splits and everything."

Josie Records never called about the another recording session and "Tongue Tied Baby" never made it to record. The Empire Theatre turned out to be the last gig for the Sammy Strain with the Chips. The group broke up shortly after that.

Kinrod Johnson sang briefly with the Platters (no recordings) and some other groups.

Lil' John Epps joined the Capitols on the *Pet* label. He's the lead on "Angel Of Love". Later he sang with a revived Paragons group that made a couple records for the *Starlight* label in 1984.

Shedrick "Bubbie" Johnson is believed to have sung with the soul group, the Invitations.

Paul Foster would go on to sing with the Impacts (*Carlton*) Blue Chips (*RCA*), the Velours (no recordings), the VIP (*Bigtop* label) and the Poets (on *Symbol* - "She Blew A Good Thing").

Sammy Strain went on to sing with the Fantastic, Blue Chips, Impacts, Imperials, Little Anthony & the Imperials and O'Jays. We'll pick up more of his story in Part 2.



**"Rubber Biscuit" by the Blues Brothers, 1978
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)**



The Chips, 1979.
Top row, left to right: Paul Fulton, Shedick Lincoln, Nathaniel Epps, Kinrod Johnson.
Bottom, center: Dave Eason.
(Photo courtesy of Paul Fulton)

The Chips Revived

In 1973, "Rubber Biscuit" received renewed attention when director Martin Scorsese included the soundtrack in his film "Mean Streets".

Then, in 1978, Dan Aykroyd was looking for material to include in an album with John Belushi as Saturday Night Live's Blues Brothers. In Aykroyd's substantial record collection was "Rubber Biscuit" by the Chips. The album was recorded live on September 9, 1978 at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles, and released on the *Atlantic* label in late November. It went double platinum and spun off two hit singles – "Soul Man" and "Rubber Biscuit". "Rubber Biscuit" by the Blues Brothers was released as a single in March of 1979 and reached # 37 on the Pop Charts.

"None of us knew about the Blues Brothers record and by then I was in prime time show business, singing with the O'Jays," recalled Sammy. "The O'Jays had a new record out. I was living in Los Angeles and I went to Tower Records and saw the Blues Brothers album. I saw them singing on Saturday Night Live. So I bought their album and I had the trades with me and I started reading the trades. I started seeing 'Blues Brothers LP Certified Gold'... 'Briefcase Full of Blues Certified Platinum'... 'Certified Double Platinum'!!! I said, 'These guy have got a smash'. One article said '... one of the standout songs on the album is 'Rubber Biscuit' originally done by the Chips'. On a double certified platinum album! I got home and called Paul Fulton."

"We weren't affiliated with anybody at the time," said Paul. "We had to go down to BMI and re-affiliate with them and we came to find that we had a lot of back money with BMI. We hired an attorney. That's why we still get royalties today."

"Rubber Biscuit" only had Kinrod Johnson as a songwriter but the group had it changed when the Blues Brothers released it. While Kinrod had come up with the original song, all four other members had input in writing it. So writer credits were changed to include all five names.

With renewed popularity in "Rubber Biscuit" in 1979, the Chips decided to reunite. "We came out of retirement after talking with (UGHA President) Ronnie I and did a couple of things with him," said Paul. "Ronnie I. helped us a lot!"

Four original members; Shedrick "Bubbie" Lincoln, Paul Fulton, Nathaniel "Lil' John" Epps and Kinrod Johnson started again. However, Sammy Strain was in the middle of a successful career with the O'Jays and not available. Thus, the reunited Chips replaced Sammy with Dave Eason, an experienced Gospel quartet singer with groups like the Israelites, the Sensational Canarians, the Brooklyn Skyways and the Spiritual Voices.

The Chips appeared on at least one of Ronnie I's United in Group Harmony Association shows in 1980 and also were guests on Ronnie's "Just For U" radio program. They also sang at a Long Island Rock and Roll Association meeting.

Twenty-four years after their first recording, the Chips were back in the studio recording. They recorded the Moonglows' "When I'm With You" b/w the Spaniels' "Everyone's Laughing" at Joel Katz' Broadway South Studios in Fairlawn, NJ. Both sides were recorded acapella and released as a single on Ronnie I's *Clifton* label.

The Chips second music career didn't go much longer than the first one, however, and the Chips are now a vocal group harmony memory.

Of the original Chips, only Sammy Strain and Paul Fulton are with us today. We'll continue their story in Part 2.



The Chips singing at UGHA, 1980.
Left to right: Lil John Epps, David Eason, Bubbie Lincoln, Paul Fulton. Kinrod Johnson is off camera. (Photo courtesy of Paul Fulton).



Sammy Strain talking with Charlie Horner at Classic Urban Harmony Headquarters, 30 June, 2012. (Photo by Pamela Horner)



The Chips, 1979. Top, left to right: Li' John Epps, Shedrick "Bubbie" Lincoln, David Eason, Kinrod Johnson. Seated: Paul Fulton. (Photo courtesy of Paul Fulton)

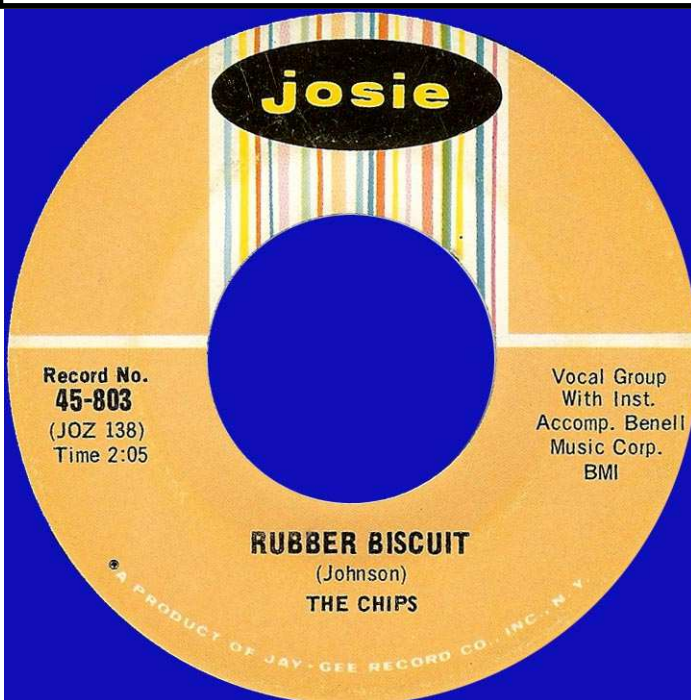
Notes and References

1. Detailed interviews with Sammy Strain and Paul Fulton by Charlie Horner and Steven Kahn.
2. Freddy Toscano & Ralph M. Newman, "Bouncin' Back with The Chips," *Time Barrier Express*, No. 27 (1980).
3. Freddy Toscano, "The Chips: The Rubber Biscuit Boys Bounce Back," *Midnight Express*, (Dec. 1979).
4. Lou Rallo's Radio Interview with Sammy Strain, WRSU's *Big Beat Show*, 12 May, 2011.
5. Lou Rallo's Radio Interview with Sammy Strain, WRSU's *Big Beat Show*, 19 May, 2011.
6. Jim Bakay's Radio Interview with Sammy Strain, WRDV's *Night Train Show*, 11 Feb, 1912.
7. For more info on vocal group harmony, visit Charlie & Pam Horner's website...

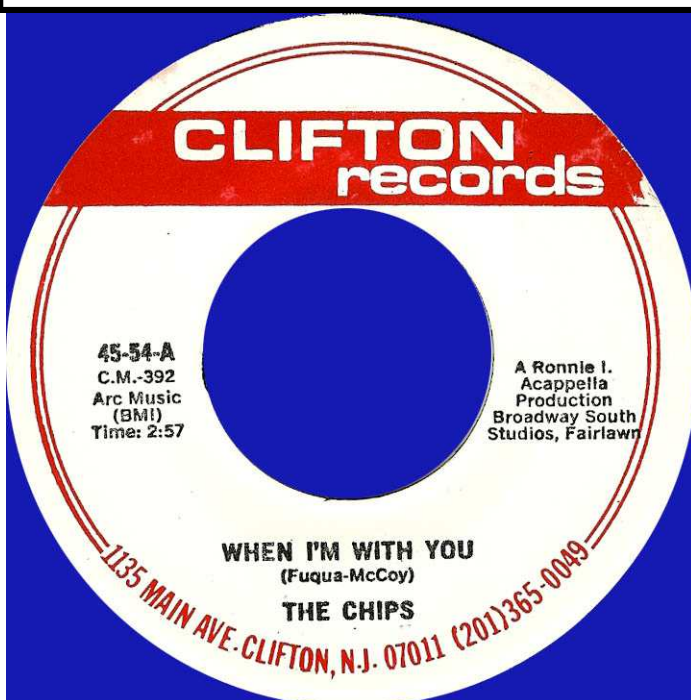
www.classicurbanharmony.net

Chips Discography

<i>Josie</i> 803	Rubber Biscuit Oh My Darling	rec. 1956
<i>Collectables</i> CD 5465	Rubber Biscuit (alt. take)	rec. 1956
<i>Clifton</i> 54	When I'm With You Everyone's Laughing	rec. 1980



Second press of "Rubber Biscuit, ca. 1960's (From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)



The Chips on the Clifton label, 1980. (From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)