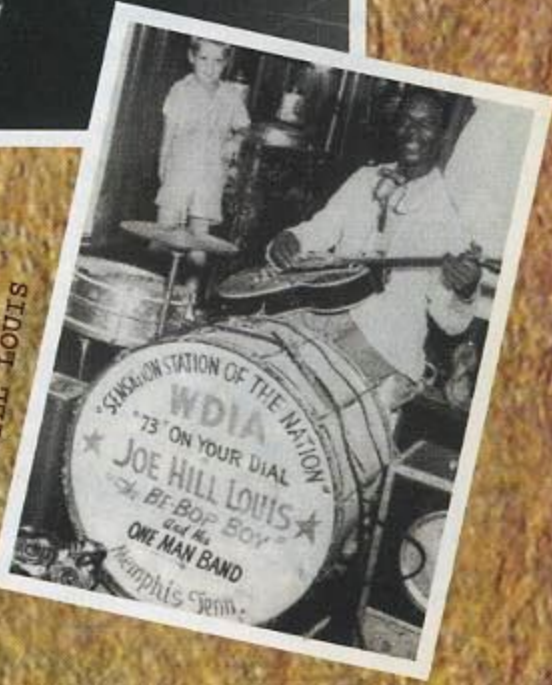




ACTRCD 9012

12 JOE HILL LOUIS



BOB GEDDINS' BIG TOWN RECORDS STORY



~ DISC 1 ~

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|------------|---|---------------------|
| 01. 6244 | Tin Pan Alley - Jimmy Wilson & His Band
(B. Geddis) | Big Town 101 (1953) |
| 02. 6245 | Big Town jump (inst.) - Jimmy Wilson & His Band
(J. Wilson) | Big Town 101 (1953) |
| 03. 6829 | Sending up my timber - Gospel Consolators
(Theodore R. Frye) | Big Town 125 (1955) |
| 04. 6831 | There's a God in Heaven - Gospel Consolators
(J. Dumas - H. Holmes) | Big Town 125 (1955) |
| 05. 6406 | The drunkard - Thrillers
(J. Murphy - R. Davis) | Big Town 109 (1953) |
| 06. 6407 | Mattie leave me alone - Thrillers
(J. Murphy - R. Davis) | Big Town 109 (1953) |
| 07. 6656 | Baptism of Christ - Loving Five Gospel Singers
(J. Dumas - H. Holmes) | Big Town 407 (1954) |
| 08. 6645 | Something happened to me one day - Loving Five Gospel Singers
(J. Dumas - H. Holmes) | Big Town 407 (1954) |
| 09. 6675 | Release me - Four Aces
(E. Miller - W.S. Stevenson) | Big Town 112 (1954) |
| 10. 6677 | Whose arms are you missing - Four Aces
(O. Jackson - G. Smith) | Big Town 112 (1954) |
| 11. 6481 | Peace in the land - Southern Travelers
(W. Howard - A. Battle) | Big Town 112 (1954) |
| 12. 6479 | He's my guiding light - Southern Travelers
(W. Howard - A. Battle) | Big Town 112 (1954) |
| 13. 6334 | Big eyes - Little Caesar
(H. Caesar) | Big Town 106 (1953) |
| 14. 6339 | Can't stand it all alone - Little Caesar
(H. Caesar) | Big Town 106 (1953) |
| 15. H412/3 | The Apostle Paul (Parts 1 & 2) - Rev. Landers
(Rev. Landers) | Big Town 402 (1954) |
| 16. 6683 | Memories of you - Ontarios w/ Frank Motley & His Motley Crew (M. Wright - C. Roberts - L. Claiborne) | Big Town 121 (1955) |

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|---------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 17. 6682 | Lover's mambo - Ontarios w/ Frank Motley & His Motley Crew (M. Wright - C. Roberts - L. Claiborne) | Big Town 121 (1955) |
| 18. APS 1049 | What about me - Rising Star Gospel Singers
(Marx-Foster-Rogers) | Big Town 2/1048 (1945) |
| 19. ARS 37948 | Brother Noah - Rising Star Gospel Singers
(Trad.) | Big Town 2/1048 (1945) |
| 20. 6392 | He's a real fine man - Fats Gaines / Rose Johnson
(F. Gaines - R. Johnson) | Big Town 108 (1953) |
| 21. 6390 | Home Work Blues - Fats Gaines & His Band
(F. Gaines) | Big Town 108 (1953) |
| 22. ? | I want to rest - Tommy Jenkins
(J. Sands - K. Morris) | Big Town 1067 (1946) |
| 23. ? | He knows how much we can bear - Tommy Jenkins (Robertta Martin) | Big Town 1067 (1946) |
| 24. 6594 | Mountain climber - Jimmy Wilson / Que Martin & His Band (J. Wilson) | Big Town 113 (1954) |
| 25. 6593 | Teardrops on my pillow - Jimmy Wilson / Que Martin & His Band (J. Wilson) | Big Town 113 (1954) |
| 26. ? | Bread of heaven - A.B. Strong
(A.B. Strong) | Strongs /
Big Town 102 (1945) |
| 27. ? | Jesus, I love you - A.B. Strong
(K. Morris) | Strongs /
Big Town 102 (1945) |



-DISC 2 -

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|--------------|--|----------------------|--------------|---|----------------------|
| 01. 6679 | Honkin' at midnight - Frank Motley / Lee Vernon & His Motley Crew (L. Vernon - F. Motley) | Big Town 119 (1954) | 18. 6409 | Things ain't what they used to be - James Reed (J. Reed) | Big Town 117 (1955) |
| 02. 6751 | Frantic love - Frank Motley / Lee Vernon & His Motley Crew (L. Vernon - F. Motley) | Big Town 119 (1954) | 19. APS 1065 | I've got an interest over there - Rising Star Gospel Singers (P. Foster - A. McDonald) | Big Town 1048 (1945) |
| 03. APS 1059 | Does Jesus care - Pilgrim Travelers (F.E. Graeff - J. Lincoln Hall)) | Big Town 1059 (1946) | 20. APS 1048 | I want wings - Rising Star Gospel Singers (Trad.) | Big Town 1049 (1945) |
| 04. APS 1065 | Witness for my Lord - Pilgrim Travelers (Arizona Dranes) | Big Town 1059 (1946) | 21. APS 1049 | Thou servant's prayer - Rising Star Gospel Singers (T.A. Dorsey) | Big Town 1049 (1945) |
| 05. 6710 | Snatch it - Frank Motley & His Motley Crew (F. Motley) | Big Town 116 (1955) | 22. ? | I'll tell it - Pilgrim Travelers (T.A. Dorsey) | Big Town 1061 (1946) |
| 06. 6709 | New hound dog - Frank Motley & His Motley Crew (F. Motley) | Big Town 116 (1955) | 23. ? | When they ring them golden bells - Pilgrim Travelers (Trad.) | Big Town 1061 (1946) |
| 07. 6248 | I'm sealed - Sister Foster (D.L. Coates) | Big Town 104 (1953) | 24. 6686 | Don't ever leave me again - Angel Face / Frank Motley & His Motley Crew (Angel Face) | Big Town 114 (1955) |
| 08. 6249 | What to do when trouble comes - Rev. O.P. Smith (Rev. O.P. Smith) | Big Town 104 (1953) | 25. 6689 | When the saints go marching in - Angel Face / Frank Motley & His Motley Crew (Trad.) | Big Town 114 (1955) |
| 09. H410 | Bad woman blues - Joe Hill Louis (Johnny Lewis) | Big Town 401 (1954) | 26. 6749 | Downward road - Gospel Consolators (W.C. Elkins) | Big Town 409 (1955) |
| 10. H411 | Hydromatic woman - Joe Hill Louis (Johnny Lewis) | Big Town 401 (1954) | 27. 6748 | God's tired - Gospel Consolators (J. Dumas - H. Holmes) | Big Town 409 (1955) |
| 11. 6851 | Jesus is with me - Gospel Consolators (J. Dumas - H. Holmes) | Big Town 126 (1955) | 28. 6758 | Don't know where I'm at - Al Harrison / Que Martin (A. Harrison - Q. Martin) | Big Town 122 (1955) |
| 12. 6852 | Joshua - Gospel Consolators (Trad.) | Big Town 126 (1955) | 29. ? | Does Jesus care - Velma Webster & Jean Johnson (Kenneth Morris) | Big Town 103 (1945) |
| 13. 6676 | You were my first affair - Four Aces (O. Jackson - G. Smith) | Big Town 118 (1955) | | | |
| 14. 6678 | I can see an angel walking (version #1) - Four Aces (O. Jackson - G. Smith) | Big Town 118 (1955) | | | |
| 15. ? | Jezebel - Pilgrim Travelers (Trad.) | Big Town 1060 (1946) | | | |
| 16. ? | My mother died and left me - Pilgrim Travelers (Blue Jay Singers) | Big Town 1060 (1946) | | | |
| 17. 6639 | You better hold me - James Reed (J. Reed) | Big Town 117 (1955) | | | |



- DISC 3 -

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|--------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------|---|----------------------|
| 01. 6262 | Call me a hound dog - Jimmy Wilson
(R. Geddins - J. Lieber - M. Stoller) | Big Town 103 (1953) | 18. 6265 | Operator 209 - Willie B. Huff
(Lightning Hopkins) | Big Town 105 (1953) |
| 02. 6253 | Instrumental jump - Jimmy Wilson
(J. Wilson - K. Soloman) | Big Town 103 (1953) | 19. 6702 | I found out - Jimmy Wilson
(J. Wilson) | Big Town 123 (1955) |
| 03. APS 1050 | Prodigal son - Rising Star Gospel Singers
(Trad.) | Big Town 1051 (1945) | 20. 6704 | Oh Red - Jimmy Wilson
(Rufus Perryman) | Big Town 123 (1955) |
| 04. APS 1051 | You got to move - Rising Star Gospel Singers
(C. Frazier) | Big Town 1051 (1945) | 21. ? | Oh Red (alt. version) - Jimmy Wilson
(Rufus Perryman)) | unreleased |
| 05. 6336 | Wonder why I'm leaving - Little Caesar
(H. Caesar) | Big Town 110 (1953) | 22. 6246 | Mean train - King Soloman Trio
(K. Soloman) | Big Town 102 (1953) |
| 06. 6341 | What kind of fool is he - Little Caesar
(Que Martin) | Big Town 110 (1953) | 23. 6247 | Baby, I'm cutting out - King Soloman Trio
(K. Soloman) | Big Town 102 (1953) |
| 07. ? | Traveling shoes (Part 1) - Tommy Jenkins / Mountain Stars (Trad.) | Big Town 1052 (1945) | 24. 6388 | A woman is to blame - Jimmy Wilson
(J. Wilson) | Big Town 107 (1953) |
| 08. ? | Traveling shoes (Part 2) - Tommy Jenkins / Mountain Stars (Trad.) | Big Town 1052 (1945) | 25. 6389 | Blues at sundown - Jimmy Wilson
(J. Wilson) | Big Town 107 (1953) |
| 09. ? | I'm gonna move - Ontarios
(M. Wright - C. Roberts) | Unreleased | 26. 6757 | Work with it - Que Martin
(Q. Martin) | Big Town 120 (1954) |
| 10. ? | I'll drink a toast - Ontarios
(M. Wright - C. Roberts) | Unreleased | 27. APS 1057 | Just a closer walk with Thee - Tommy Jenkins (Trad.) | Big Town 1065 (1946) |
| 11. ? | I know the Lord will make a way - A.B. Strong
(Eugene Smith) | Strongs /
Big Town 101 (1945) | 28. 6756 | Lovers rhapsody - Que Martin & His Band
(Q. Martin) | Big Town 120 (1954) |
| 12. ? | Deep river - A.B. Strong
(Trad.) | Strongs /
Big Town 101 (1945) | | | |
| 13. 6705 | Jumpin' from six to six - Jimmy Wilson & His Band
(J. Wilson) | Big Town 115 (1955) | | | |
| 14. 6703 | Trouble in my home - Jimmy Wilson & His Band
(J. Wilson) | Big Town 115 (1955) | | | |
| 15. APS 1055 | The Lord will make a way - Tommy Jenkins
(Eugene Smith) | Big Town 1055 (1945) | | | |
| 16. APS 1054 | If you just keep still - Tommy Jenkins
(Willie Mae Ford Smith) | Big Town 1055 (1945) | | | |
| 17. 6264 | I love you baby - Willie B. Huff
(W.B. Huff) | Big Town 105 (1953) | | | |

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Bob Gedkins was a gaunt, bespectacled, slightly built, witty, and charismatic man whose word was his bond. His habit of making handshake agreements often led to bitterness and betrayal, yet he survived for over four decades in the music business during which time he produced and recorded a string of fine down-home blues, gospel, R & B and popular records. Songwriter, promoter, blues-singer, cotton picker, welder, graphic artist, pipe fitter, photographer, press mechanic, radio, T.V., and car-radiator repairman all rolled into one, he was able to master almost anything that needed the use of his hands.



09 BOB GEDDINS

Born in Hybank, Texas February 6, 1913 on a large cotton plantation between Marlin and Waco along the snaking Brazos River, to cotton picker Azeline "Lena" Douglas, a strong-minded, ruggedly independent woman, young Gedkins learned the value of hard, grueling stoop labor at an early age. His parents were divorced before he was born, and as his mother had to move with the harvest, he only got to see his father, Johnnie Gedkins, once or twice. Raised up by a stern grandmother, young Gedkins was soon joined by a younger sister, Mattie and a brother, Turner Willis.

As a child in short pants, he picked cotton for a dollar a day. On occasion, he would surreptitiously sneak up river to his aunt's shack to

listen to Robert Johnson and Blind Lemon Jefferson records on a cranky wind-up Victrola. Gedkins fell in love with country and urban blues in an instant. He listened and listened and picking up the lyrics sang the songs to his laboring co-workers out in the fields under the sun. He learned to mimic most of the singing styles in a charismatic way pretty well, and people turned their heads to listen. He often had dreams of becoming an actor or comedian.

Gedkins started writing lyrics for songs in his early teens. At fifteen he ran away to join his mother, Mattie, and brother Turner in Abilene. He sought employment but without much success. His lack of skills and experience left him out in the cold. He befriended a boy named Chauncy who persuaded the impressionable Gedkins to ride freight with him out to the promised land, the golden hills of California. Along the way, at the town of Lordsburg, New Mexico, the pair was persuaded to drive a new 1932 Ford to Los Angeles. A free ride in exchange for driving the vehicle across state lines to avoid the shippers having to pay extra "towing charges" appealed to them. Having settled in Los Angeles for awhile, Gedkins picked cotton by following a harvest that moved from Fresno and Bakersfield south east into Imperial county.

After returning to Los Angeles, his back aching and his fingers almost numb, he swore he would never pick cotton again. He eventually found a job as a soda-jerk in a local drugstore. It was while fixing sodas he met and fell madly in love with Irma Jean Dyer, the woman who would soon become his wife. The Dyers were from Little Rock, Arkansas and were solidly middle class. Gedkins Jr. remembers his father telling him how he and Irma loved to ride out on a bicycle on the weekends. The couple rode a tandem which they pedalled over great distances. He also told of how his father would call on Irma secretly in the middle of the night, a

ploy he was strictly forbidden to do. The pair would tip-toe up the Dyer driveway, sneak into the garage, release the brake on the family Cadillac La Salle, push the car down to the street and drive off into the night. Geddings pulled pranks like this to niggle Irma's forthright parents who disapproved of Irma dating a man so much older than her. Irma was sixteen and Geddings twenty-six when they married. Geddings Jr. was born the first of thirteen children almost three months after his father's marriage.

Geddings worked awhile delivering ice cream on a bicycle, then switched to the Los Angeles Street Maintenance Department where he worked on a garbage truck hauling trash. It was wartime, and Geddings began hanging out in his off-hours in record stores that sold African American music. Not wanting to make garbage collection a profession, he attended The Frank Wiggins School to study electronics in the evenings. Impressed by the demand for black popular music, Geddings set up his first record store right next door to his grandmother's garage in South Central Los Angeles.

Irma managed the retail record business while her husband worked for the City. Geddings Jr. asserts that his father established contacts with major independent record companies during this time. Geddings made his first trip up to West Oakland in 1942. His mother had just moved to the area, and her son came up for a visit.

Oakland's Seventh Street club scene was alive and vibrant. Bustling with musical activity, a virtual oasis of talent existed. Oakland nighterries spotlighted black musicians who had migrated from Oklahoma, Louisiana and Mississippi and anywhere local newspaper ads proclaimed work aplenty for those willing to uproot and come to the Bay Area

shipyards. The Seventh Street neighborhood was studded with night spots like The Black Hawk (Story Club), the swank Slim Jenkins place that not only showcased major national talent but gave local acts a break. There was the Harlem Quarters at Seventh and Franklin and nighterries one block up on Eighth.

Geddings immediately observed the lack of down-home country blues. Apart from Ollie T. Hunt at Olliet Records on 2405 San Pablo Avenue in Oakland, no young enterprising soul was servicing the musical needs of the black immigrants from the rural South. Hunt had acquired portable metal-disk recording equipment which he hauled to an artist's location. His pressings were poor and distribution limited to "contacts" in the immediate Bay Area. Geddings was getting complaints from the locals about the scarcity of good blues and spiritual recordings. He vowed to do something about it.

Geddings' first move was to make arrangements with his mother to rent a room. He then found a job as a burner and welder at the Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond where he met an odd assortment of aspiring blues musicians. In the evenings he took training in radio repair at Laney College. After building a separate apartment unit in the basement of his mother's house, he brought his family up to Oakland. Geddings Jr. remembers his father trying all sorts of pursuits to raise spare cash. Principal of these was script-writing. Geddings wrote script outlines for movies he dreamed he would be able to shoot. Armed with a movie camera, Geddings picked up cinematic techniques and joined a camera club where he teamed up with black comedian Rochester to write an autobiographical script based on Geddings' life. It was obvious that Geddings saw himself as a comic figure. He had gone as far as sparking interest among members of a black film crew before he sadly lost his scripts in a house fire.

The idea of starting in the record manufacturing business continued to burn in his mind, but he lacked the cash to give him a start. In 1943, Jonas Williams had set up a record retail outlet on Seventh Street in Oakland called Wolf's Record Shop. Williams, not strictly a record dealer, proprietored a number of clothes cleaning businesses and needed a partner with sufficient savvy to build up his retail record store with the kind of music Geddins spent his spare time listening to at the nightclubs.

Geddins had learned that the foundation stones had been laid for popular blues in the Bay Area. San Francisco had adopted a soft, sophisticated, jazz-inflected type of blues as exemplified by Texas-born Ivory Joe Hunter who rose out of the Charles Brown cocktail blues tradition and suave, felt-pick guitar player Saunders King who was first recorded by Dave Rosenbaum in 1942 and enjoyed the Bay Area's first wartime blues hit "S.K. Blues." But no discernible East Bay or Oakland blues sound had emerged except for the rough and tumble barrelhouse type of music one heard around Richmond, California.

After a brief stint in radio repair, Geddins entered into a business partnership with Williams. Geddins made frequent trips to Los Angeles, the source of most West Coast "race music," to pick up product for the store.

At a time when few, if any, race music distributors operated out of the Northern California area, Williams and Geddins were buying records from L.A. distributors and while offering to represent their interests locally, catered to an eager local blues starved clientele. Geddins scoured the clubs for talent and toured the church circuit for promising gospel singers, all the time making friends and establishing contacts. He befriended John "Shot" Williams, a deejay at Berkeley's KRE. Williams hosted a daily two-hour blues and blues & rhythm show called "Open House" (3 p.m. through 5 p.m.)

Geddins, who wanted desperately to cut his own talent, found he could keep costs to a bare minimum if he rented a radio studio and recorded acappella gospel quartet. No studio overhead, no musicians to pay, no arranger, just studio rental and the cost of an engineer. With money borrowed from his father-in-law, Geddins cut an undetermined number of songs with Paul Foster Sr. and The Rising Stars (otherwise known as The Mountain Stars, but not to be confused with The Hollywood Rising Stars, a different quartet) at the KSJO studios in Berkeley in early 1944. Personnel included Paul Foster Snr., baritone lead, Andrew McDonald, tenor lead, Elbridge Vann, tenor, C.H. Henry, baritone, and Charlie Birch bass.

After the session was finished, Geddins had the engineer cut acetate dubs to premiere and generate advance sales at Wolf's. Just as soon as church folk heard "What about me" (the second in a batch of three 78 releases on the new Big Town imprint, all of which sported Geddins' hand-drawn blue and navy skyline design) Wolf could not keep The Rising Stars in stock. Sales looked so promising that RCA offered a good sum for the masters. But Geddins had a vision all of his own which did not include RCA, so he turned the offer down. According to Lee Hildebrand's excellent East Bay Express article of March 1991 entitled "A life in the blues," Geddins had the masters and stampers made locally, then to cut costs had Sid Talmadge at Globe / Premier Records on South Hoover Street in Los Angeles press 7,500 copies and use his own imprint on the shellac.

Unbeknownst to Geddins, Talmadge had cut deals with his own distributors across the country. The Rising Stars were selling heavily nationwide without Geddins' knowledge. Consequently, Geddins did not profit a red cent from all the out of state sales. Geddins, who foolishly always dealt with people on trust, learned his first tough lesson about the record business. Geddins was stunned but not disillusioned. He was

determined to keep from having this happen to him again. With encouragement from his friend Dave Rosenbaum, the fair-minded owner of The Rhythm Record Shop, Geddins thought seriously about building his own pressing plant. Rosenbaum was an excellent role model for Geddins as he had made a success out of recording Saunders King and Jack McVea.

Still lacking capital and unable to find plumbers with the right skills, Geddins went to Jack Gutshall, an old friend from Los Angeles, for advice. Gutshall helped Geddins draw up plans so that Geddins, with skills acquired from his tenure at Kaiser, could work on building a plant for himself. Renting a double garage space across the street from his mothers' at Eighth and Center Streets, Geddins set to work. Having borrowed \$3,000 from his stepfather, he built and installed a water tower, put in a boiler fireproofed with bricks, hooked up the necessary plumbing, had the Oakland Iron & Metal Company build and install presses from scrap, and after only two weeks of round-the-clock labor, had his plant up and running.

Geddins was now able to fill his own orders and commenced shipping records to Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and throughout California. He started taking on other label operators who needed records pressed. The first of these was pioneer Ollie Hunt of Olliet Records, a one-man living room recording operation, although, according to the Blues & Rhythm article on Jimmie Nelson, Hunt worked with his brother and rented studio space in San Francisco to record. Geddins had also come into contact with The Swinging Deacon who hosted a hot blues & rhythm record show that went out over KWBR on Franklin Street. Soon Geddins was hosting his own KWBR show out of Wolf's on a Saturday morning.

For eight years starting in 1945, Geddins held most of his recording sessions

either at KSJO in Berkeley or KSFO in San Francisco. Geddins Jr. says that his father, on the strength of his experience, also helped build the first Fantasy studios in the late 1940s. In 1945, Geddins lost the Rising Stars to Don Hambley and KRE. His relationship with the group was built on a "friendship" basis which did not hold up on paper. The group had quit its regular program over KSFO in San Francisco and had defected to KRE in Berkeley. Don Hambley, along with Ivory Joe Hunter, operated Pacific Records on South San Pablo Avenue in Berkeley which for the most part was a vehicle to showcase Hunter's recordings. Thus the Rising Stars label-hopped to Pacific Records.

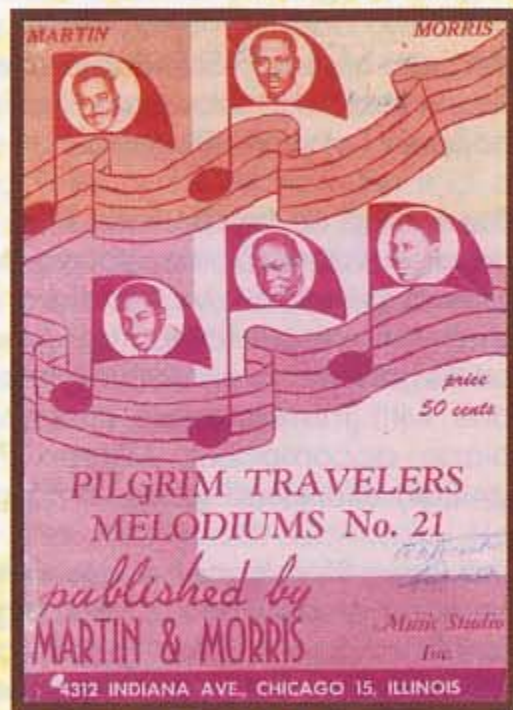
The line-up on Pacific found the great Tommy Jenkins (who is thought to have influenced the young teenaged Sam Cooke in his singing) replacing Andrew McDonald and the addition of Jimmy Wilson who we shall talk about later. The great ethereal tenor Tommy Jenkins was privileged with having three releases on Big Town under his own imprint, one with the Mountain (Rising) Stars and two with Mahalia Jackson's piano accompanist, Mildred Falls. Jenkins heralded the coming of soulfully expressed gospel singing.

The Rising Stars became a leading Bay Area group, battling against such heavy competition as the Pilgrim Travelers, Paramount Singers and Southern Travelers for Christian converts. As we well know, Tulsa-born Lowell Fulson cut his first recordings for Geddins. Information surrounding these as well as most of the actual late 1946 Big Town recordings is currently available on Chris Strachwitz' Arhoolie Records compilation (Arhoolie 443) and are consequently excluded from this 3-CD collection.

Fulson displayed a good deal of discontent when he found that his sides were not being seen or heard south of the Bay Area. After a second

unsatisfactory handshake deal, this time with Bill McCall at Gilt Edge, an "arrangement" was set up whereby Jack Lauderdale was able to lease recordings from Geddins so that he could issue them on his own, more widely available Down Beat and Swing time imprints. This practice continued into the early part of 1949.

On the spiritual side of the Big Town catalog, the Pilgrim Travelers ended up under a similar agreement. Nothing at all is known about Prof. A.B. Strong or the Smith Sisters. We can figure that Strong made a deal with Geddins to press and distribute his three known releases. Some were curiously put out stamped with Geddins' regular blue and silver Big Town label over which cheap looking white labels were pasted with the bold print – A.B. Strong. Although the numbering seems to conflict with other releases (Geddins made this mistake later on, too), he ignored possible confusion. I feel that the Prof. A.B. Strong releases are part of the Big Town picture.



02 PILGRIM TRAVELERS - SONGBOOK

The Geddins manufacturing plant operated at full steam, pressing three thousand records over a twenty-four hour period, divided into three shifts. Then sudden tragedy struck. Geddins' dyes started leaking water, and the oil-rings blew out. A man named Harry Leader came to the rescue, or so it seemed at the time. Leader was René La Marre's partner at the

Oakland-based Trilon label, a white-oriented, predominantly pop label with premises at 3123 San Pablo Avenue (please see our Trilon collection for more information - ACTRCD 9011 The Trilon Records Story.) Trilon was a slick operation with a bent for futurism. Its red futurist-looking label design grabbed attention and spurred sales.

Leader offered both to press and distribute Geddins' sides. He also wanted Geddins to rep for the firm. Having the burden of most of the problems lifted from his shoulders seemed attractive to Geddins who also enjoyed the thrill of traveling to fresh, new places. Leader promised to pay all of Geddins' domestic Oakland bills, plus a weekly check of \$200 to cover all expenses. Geddins with wife and at that point three kids in tow ended up in Big Spring, Texas. Big Spring was the focal point from which Geddins stuck out in all directions in a one hundred mile radius.

Geddins took orders from distributors, retail outlets, and jukebox operators. Eight months later, in the town of Hamlin, the checks started getting thin. Geddins was forced to take a job to feed his family. After saving for the return fare, the Geddins family headed back to Oakland. Rushing over to the Trilon offices, Geddins sought an explanation. It seems that Trilon, using lack of time as an excuse, had failed to pay Geddins' domestic bills. Things had come to a head, and creditors had seized all of Geddins' Big Town masters. Many of Geddins' masters were bought by Trilon, who ended up releasing the material over the ensuing months.

It is difficult to establish (as Geddins kept few records) the exact number and identity of masters acquired by Trilon and when they were acquired. We know that Chris Strachwitz through Lauderdale ended up with a good deal of Fulson material. We can establish that La Marre "inherited" Lowell Fulson, Jimmy McCracklin and the Rising Stars masters in 1947. A year

earlier (when Geddins was still a light in Trilon's eye), La Marre had reissued Big Town 1058 featuring Geddins' tribute to his wife, "Irma Jean," sandwiched with his brother singing a countrified "Reinlisted blues." (see the Trilon Collection for its inclusion). On these, Geddins played keyboard, Lafayette Thomas filled in on guitar and B. Bostic plucked bass.

It is interesting to note that Geddins, with financial assistance from Bill McCall of Four Star Records on Western Avenue in Los Angeles, bought Four Aces masters from La Marre when Trilon was winding down operations in late 1947. Geddins made handshake deals with Ollie Hunt at Scotty's Radio on Oakland's Third Street, Little Jesse Jaxyson at Jaxyson on Oakland's Seventh Street, Bill McCall at Gild Edge / Four Star, and later on Don Pierce at Hollywood on West Pico in L.A. and Dave Rosenbaum at Rhythm Records.

In 1946, Geddins recorded Kylo Turner and The Pilgrim Travelers for Big Town, as mentioned before. Under a deal with Jack Lauderdale, the sides were simultaneously issued on Lauderdale's Down Beat and Swing Time labels. The group was made up of Kylo Turner and James W. Alexander, tenor leads, Willie Davis and Issiah Robinson, baritones, and Raphael Taylor, bass. They cut three records for Big Town. Aside from Jack Lauderdale reissues, the first release showed up on L.A.'s Murray label in 1949. Murray probably had some arrangement with Mrs. Greenwood who took the group over when they moved down to Los Angeles in 1947.

At this point, Keith Barber had replaced baritone Willie Davis. When the group made it to Specialty Records in late 1947, Jessie Whitaker had replaced Issiah Robinson and this winning combination took the quartet to the top of the professionals' list with songs like "Mother bowed" and "Straight Street." They became the famous walking-in-rhythm group.

1947 seems to be the year Geddins was snowed under with domestic bills and reverted back to his radio repairman and occasional record retailing mode. Geddins seemed to be able to switch from one to the other at the drop of a hat. Jimmy McCracklin holds a very firm and biased remembrance of Geddins back in those days. He states "Geddins would press up a whole bunch of your records, take them down to Los Angeles and cut a cloak-and-dagger deal with the highest bidder. Geddins never wrote any songs, he didn't have a clue how to write."

1948 proved to be a busy and somewhat successful business year for Geddins, a year when he hurled himself into the production of music, determined to make a go of it and beat the rip-off artists he thought were stealing from him by constantly creating new labels. He became friends with a jeweler named Ted Willoughby who, fascinated by the thought of making records, wanted a stake in the industry. Geddins and Willoughby set up the Down Town label imprint and recorded Roy Hawkins. Geddins, having dropped the Big Town label for awhile, was now getting sides pressed in Los Angeles to keep up with supply and demand.

Geddins also recorded, appropriately enough, The Down Town Trio for Down Town. The Down Town Trio was composed of Lee Hamilton, vocals and piano, Ulysses James, guitar, and Floyd Montgomery on bass. The Down Town Trio was the Down Town house band. Cava-Tone was initially set up in 1948 to promote Bob Geddins and his singing (but sometimes instrumental) group, The Cavaliers, made up of Lafayette Thomas, guitar, Jimmy Wilson, lead vocals, B. Bostic, bass, G. Salter, baritone, Sherman Louis, piano, and V. Eldridge, tenor.

As it turned out, Geddins did not have the palm-greasing cash it would have taken to get his sides played by the major jocks or even by the ears

of staff writers at trade magazines like Cash Box and Billboard. Billboard gave Fulson's extremely successful "3 o'clock blues" scant notice when it hit the racks.

The Geddins enterprise started recording sides for lease to the Bihari Brothers at Modern Records in Los Angeles. Both Roy Hawkins and Jimmy McCracklin found themselves on Modern. Except for the odd release here and there, Geddins recorded little during 1949. But he did continue to write songs and produce work for others.

The most striking event for Geddins in 1950 was Roy Hawkins's chart-topping success with "Why do things happen to me," known also variously as "I wonder why" or "Why do everything happen to me." Geddins claimed to have written the song, had Hawkins record a demo, then leased it to the Bihari Brothers at Modern who issued it first on their parent label, then on the Flair subsidiary as by The Royal Hawk and his Orchestra. The tune, a typical doom-laden Geddins opus, shot up the Juke Box Hits chart, and after a nineteen week climb hit the number two position.

In 1951 Geddins attempted to reissue some of his 1948 Cava-Tone Cavaliers material on Bill McCall's Gilt Edge diskery. Focusing on Cava-Tone again, he issued sides by both Jimmy Wilson and the Rising Stars, sides he had kept in the can for awhile. During the summer of 1951, Roy Hawkins enjoyed his second chart success with "The thrill is gone," a song Geddins said he wrote but never recorded with Hawkins. Jimmy McCracklin adamantly asserts that he wrote the song and took Hawkins over to Bob De Sousa's



studio on Alcatraz and Adeline in Berkeley to record it. "The thrill is gone," yet another dirge of gloom and despair, was put out by Modern and never garnered much attention in the trade papers when it hit the streets.

In 1952, Geddins etched Sister Foster for later release on Big Town and Swing Time. Sales figures increased when Bob Chatton came into the picture. Chatton, who had started up in business after his discharge from the Service in 1946, was an ambitious Oakland distributor who got Geddins' product into the stores up and down the Western seaboard.

Bob Chatton remembers a meeting he held in his office in early 1953 with Geddins and Bill McCall who had formed some kind of alliance. Geddins and McCall (who had agreed to re-activate the Big Town label) wanted Chatton to handle the distribution. After entering into an equitable agreement, Chatton found that Geddins and McCall had made similar arrangements with every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the music business. "Geddins was personable," says Chatton, "but he lacked intelligence. He was always poor and never had any money."

In May, Bill McCall of Gilt Edge Records acquired the controlling interest in Big Town. Geddins retained the privilege of being able to scout talent and record promising acts for the label.

Geddins, inspired by a tune recorded in 1941 by Curtis Jones, wrote and recorded a song with Jimmy Wilson called "Tin Pan Alley" with Quedelle Martyn on tenor sax, Ellis "King Solomon" Walters on piano, and Lafayette Thomas on guitar. The Big Town

release soared up the charts and in one week reached the number ten position. "I recorded it for the first time in San Francisco at a two-story house on a PJ7 portable recorder using a single microphone," said Geddins. "Eldridge McCarthy played piano, Victor Green drums, Roland Mitchell, tenor sax, and Lafayette Thomas played guitar."

Geddins fooled around with the song for five years before the final version, using Thomas and a set of different musicians, finally came about. Geddins managed to secure the copyright to "Tin Pan Alley," an unusual, slow, deep blues with sparse, dramatic, distorted guitar effects far ahead of their time. Geddins stated that his wife Irma, who always preferred gospel over blues, really took to the song and thought it the only worthwhile blues her husband ever made (possibly because of its church-like, funereal effects.)



04 JIMMY WILSON

A June 1953 Billboard article described "Tin Pan Alley" as "a solid entry in the field." Another possible source for Geddins' "Tin Pan Alley" was "Ala Blues" recorded by R. (Slim) Green and Turner on the J & M Fulbright label in 1948.

Jimmy Wilson recorded five sessions for Geddins over a period of five years. He had a local hit in 1954 on the Rhythm subsidiary with "Strangest blues," backed by the Johnny Heartsman band who conducted many sessions for Geddins. Jimmy

Wilson's life is a sad story. He was born in 1923 and died penniless and forgotten in 1965. He toured the West Coast with the Pilgrim Travelers, the same original group heard here on Big Town. His first recordings with the Rising Star Gospel Singers were made by Bob Geddins at radio station KRE in Berkeley in 1946 and put out by Don Hemsby at Pacific Records in Berkeley.

As a solo, he recorded for Bob Geddins' Cava-Tone with Scatman Crothers and Lafayette Thomas in 1951. Half the session was issued by Geddins. All four recorded songs were leased to the Mesner Brothers and put out on their Aladdin imprint. Que Martyn supported this second 1952 Geddins session, the first from which also ended up on Aladdin. Back with Lafayette Thomas, Wilson recorded for the Mesner-Rudy Toombs subsidiary 7-10 Records. In 1956, Wilson waxed for Henry Stone's Chart label in Miami, then Eddie Shuler's Gold Band label in Lake Charles the following year. His final sides were cut in Houston for Don Robey's Duke label, in 1961.

The Four Aces of Berkeley evolved out of the Four Bunnies barbershop group in Fort Worth, Texas. Founding fellows were second tenor Algia Pickett who formerly sang with the Futuristic Four, guitarist and first tenor James Reuben Franks, George Smith, baritone, pianist and arranger, and Otha Jackson, bass and bass-fiddle. The outfit relocated to San Francisco



11 RISING STAR GOSPEL SINGERS

in the late 1930s and hooked up with Rene La Marre at Trilon where they cut, among others, Daryl Hutchins' "I wonder," the suggestive "Garbage man" and the answer record to Jack McVea's "Open the door, Richard," called "Richard ain't gonna open that door," perhaps their best remembered opus. By the time the Four Aces wound up on Big Town in 1954, their supper-club style of singing and jiving was on the way out.



05 FOUR ACES

The King Solomon Trio, of course, consisted of members of the Jimmy Wilson All Stars who included Lafayette Thomas on guitar and Ellis "King Solomon" Walters on piano, and possibly Ray Cotton on drums.

The down-home, sullen blues singer Willie B. Huff hailed from Louisiana and settled in Richmond, California. Supported by Johnny Fuller on guitar, R. Dixon on bass and Tommy Ramerson on drums, she cut two records for Geddins before fading into obscurity. In 1977 she was found and featured on Tom Mazzolini's San Francisco Blues Festival at McLaren Park.

Little Caesar's history is a long and fascinating one just waiting for the right movie script writer to adapt it to celluloid. Born in Pittsburg in 1928 he moved with his family in childhood to Youngstown, Ohio where he joined the Wolf gang. Tagged a holy terror going by the name of Kid Wolf, he

spent time in the slammer followed by a cleansing in the choir of The Tabernacle Baptist Church. After a stint teaching boxing he got into singing. During service in the army he sang in a regimental gospel group. After more gospel singing in Oakland when he got out he ended up with the Peter Rabbit Trio before hooking up with Que Martyn and later the Maxwell Davis Orchestra, both of which backed him on one of each of his two Big town releases. He also developed a comedy routine with Rusty Russell that matched the talents of Pigmeat Markham.



13 LITTLE CAESAR

Muni bus driver Fats Gaines hailed from San Francisco and at one time was managed by Brad Taylor of Bay-Tone Records on Filmore Street. At the start of his career in 1952, he supported Freddie Strong on the Aladdin label. He also featured three vocalists with his big band: Rose Johnson, or Rebecca Williams, Nap Henry and Mac Burney, the last of which sang with the Four Jacks on Aladdin and Hollywood (probably backed by Gaines). Gaines waxed two singles for Big Town and, in all likelihood, played behind a few of Dootsie Williams' vocal groups when he briefly



10 FATS GAINES BAND

recorded for him to launch his short-lived yellow 700 series Authentic subsidiary in 1956. Gaines also recorded later on for the Mesner Brothers and with Baby Jewel on Oakland's Boola Boola label.

Lester Hill, alias Joe Hill Louis, was born in Froggy Bottom, Tennessee on September 23rd, 1921. After frequent beatings at the hands of his stepmother, he ran away to Memphis and fell in with a well-to-do family. He first took up Jews harp, then switched to a combination of harmonica, guitar and high-hat cymbal. He busked on Memphis street corners before being signed to a 15-minute WDIA radio program contract plugging Pepticon as the Pepticon Boy. Columbia recorded Louis in Nashville in 1949. Sides on Modern, Checker and Sun followed. In 1953 Louis recorded "Automatic Woman" for Sun which he rearranged into a provocative car-song, "Hydromatic Woman," a year later when he waxed it in Memphis for Geddins on Big Town, accompanied by an unidentified vocal group and a five-piece band. His patron and manager Joe Canale recorded Louis for other small labels after the one-time Geddins leasing which sold very well throughout California.

According to Donn Fileti, the Thrillers were the same group who recorded "Lizabeth" for Al Silver's Herald label at 1697 Broadway in N.Y. in 1953. The Herald and Big Town sides were probably leased to McCall and Geddins by Joe Von Battle of Joe's Records in Detroit. Members included Joe Murphy, lead, Charles Wright, first tenor, Lawrence Payton, second tenor, John Raymond Dorsey, baritone, and Roquel "Billy" Davis, bass. Lawrence Payton became a founder member of The Four Tops whilst Billy Davis partnered Berry Gordy on a score of hit songs for Jackie Wilson before becoming an important member of the A&R team of Chess Records. In later years he worked in advertising and wrote the world-famous jingle, "I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing" for Coca-Cola. After some personnel shuffles,

the group changed names to the Five Jets and recorded for Sid Nathan's De Luxe label. The success of "Drunkard" in the Bay Area spawned the forever-remembered classic "W.P.L.J." (white port & lemon juice) by the 4 Deuces on Music City shortly thereafter.

The Southern Travelers were inspired by the Golden Gate Quartet. The Haynesville, Louisiana-born Abraham Battle first formed the Starlight Quartet at The Chapel Baptist Church in Oakland. After a stint in the Oakland Silvertones, Battle took over the management and training of the Southern Travelers who rose to become one of the Bay Area's most formidable wartime quartets. Battle went on to manage and advise other groups before helping to found the Standard Jubilee Singers Convention charter whose goal was financial equality for all amateur and professional quartets out on the road. All of this evolved into the founding of The National Quartet Convention.



The Southern Travelers, whose members included Woodrow Howard, lead, Frank Mobley, second lead, Jack Allen, tenor, James Powell, bass, and Abraham Battle, leader, recorded one release for Big Town in 1954 which was subsequently leased to Don Pierce who reissued the sides shortly thereafter on his Hollywood imprint.

Little is known about Angel Face except that she came from San Francisco and first recorded for Gem, the New York-based Gem Record

Company, on West 48th Street, quite possibly at a studio in Washington, D.C. She showed up again on Big Town in 1954 backed by journeyman dual-trumpet blaster from Cheraw, South Carolina - Frank Motley. Motley first recorded for Ivin Ballen's Gotham company in Philadelphia in 1951, then switched to Lillian Claiborne's discery in Philadelphia. Claiborne, who used Motley as her house band as well as support for her vocal groups, sold Motley's masters to Art Rupe at Specialty, Bill McCall and Bob Geddins, Gem Records, Jerry Blaine at Josie, Don Pierce, plus a multitude of cheap budget labels during the 1950s.



01 FRANK MOTLEY

Angel Face cut the house-wrecking "When the saints go marching in" with Motley whose band included King Herbert on tenor sax. She and Motley were leased to Okeh in 1956 and finally found herself backed by the Jimmy Davis Combo on Specialty in 1960. Frank Motley married and moved up to Toronto, Ontario in 1954 which may or may not explain why he ended up supporting the Ontarios vocal group on Big Town that same year.

Of all Lillian Claiborne's vocal groups, the least is known about the Ontarios whose only release was that of two charts leased by McCall and Geddins. Three other previously unreleased Claiborne titles showed up on three of Ron Bartolucci's Baron label singles released in 1973. These differ from the two unreleased titles leased to McCall and Geddins included on our collection. Two further previously unreleased songs, one an alternate of "Love me baby," appear on Eagle CD 90401 released in 1994.



14 QUE MARTYN

Tenor sax player, orchestra leader, writer and arranger Que (Quedellis) Martyn (or Martin) played in the U.S. Navy Pre-Flight Band at St. Mary's College in Moraga, California alongside Wilbert Baranco and Jack Kelso in 1943. He had started out in the Les Hite Band. After the Pre-Flight group he switched to the eight-member Rhythm Bombardiers in 1944. The Bombardiers were a scaled-down elite player version of the Pre-Flight group. As well as form his own group, Martyn played with Saunders King and the Emmanon Trio. Martyn and his band were used on many sessions for a number of local labels both in San Francisco and Los Angeles during the 1950s.

In 1948 he was featured behind pianist / vocalist Leona Gray at Rene La Marre's Trilon label. Three years later, while recording under his own name and the Clouds of Rhythm Orchestra, he supported Alvin Smith on John Dolphin's Recorded-In-Hollywood label on South Avalon in L.A. He also recorded for Dolphin behind Linda Hayes and Jimmy Grissom. Martyn ended up recording behind Dell Graham and Al Harrison for McCall and Geddins before switching to Ray Dobard's Delcro label on Alcatraz Avenue in Berkeley.

Pianist/vocalist James Reed was another artist who enjoyed Que Martyn's support when he cut at least four sides for Geddins who quickly leased them to the Bihari brothers' Flair subsidiary in L.A. in 1954. Geddins continued to record Reed, first on a cover of Jimmy Wilson's "Tin Pan Alley" (remember, this was Geddins' own song and he probably wanted to further capitalize on its success the year before) sandwiched with "I

wanna know" for his own Rhythm imprint. Then he leased two more songs to John Dolphin who put them out on his Money label. Reed's last release was his Big Town debut with "Things ain't what they used to be" in 1955.

The Loving Five started out around 1949 in Lubbock, Texas. They were founded by local businessman Robert H. Hood who brokered the group around Marshall and Richmond Cooper, Early Williams and Augusta Chisholm. They found work in surrounding counties but because of family commitments, only Marshall Cooper could travel. This split up the group so Hood formed a second group called the Gospel Consolators around Charles Johnson and Marshall Cooper. He added Haskell Holmes and Reo Watson. Additional fifth members moved in and out of the group, including Jesse Hill who is thought to have recorded with a second Gospel Consolators aggregation.



03 GOSPEL CONSOLATORS

In 1955 Robert H. Hood and Reo Watson formed the H&W record company to promote the new Loving Five group and the Gospel Consolators on record. At least six Gospel Consolators sides were leased to McCall and Geddins plus a couple by the new Loving Five. By now the Gospel Consolators were composed of Joseph Dumas, lead tenor, and Haskell Holmes, tenor, Robert H. Hood, baritone, and Reo Watson, bass. Charles Johnson was not present. The make-up of the Big Town Loving Five group remains unknown.

Dumas and Charles Johnson wrote most of the charts for the Gospel Consolators. After the three Big Town releases, the Gospel Consolators recorded for H&W with an enlarged line-up. Dumas, Hood, Watson and Haskell were all there with the addition of Charles Johnson, second lead tenor, and Oscar Cook, Sam Cooke's cousin. Hood, Dumas, Cook and Johnson with the addition of guitarist Leo Wallace and basso profundo Nathaniel Bills joined Don Robey's Peacock roster in Houston, Texas in late 1959.

Leo Wallace was a relative of Jo Jo Wallace, guitarist for the nationally celebrated Sensational Nightingales led by the earth-shaking pipes of Rev. Julius Cheeks. The two groups often traveled together on package tours. When Cheeks quit the 'Gales to form his own outfit—the Four Gospel Knights in 1962, Johnson took his place. This led to the breaking up of the Gospel Consolators. It is suspected that the personnel in the Big Town Loving Five were the same as the Big Town gospel Consolators group.

Curley Bridges was born in Fuquay Marina, North Carolina in 1934. During Curley's childhood, the Bridges family moved to Washington, D.C. In 1953, Curley's talents as a singer, pianist and occasional drummer came to the attention of Frank Motley who was putting together a small band to play dates lined up along the East Coast circuit that included Toronto and Montreal. His "New hound dog" was recorded in 1954 with Motley's band for Lillian Claiborne's D.C. Records in Washington and leased to McCall and Geddins. Rush-recorded to cash in on the Peacock release of Big Mama Thornton's "Hound Dog," "New hound dog" did not do so well for Motley and Bridges as did "Any other way" with the Motley band fronted by female impersonator Jackie Shane in the early 1960s.

Little is known about Sister Foster and Rev. O.P. Smith, except that both

were attached to The Bible Fellowship Choir and that both sides of the Big Town release were first issued by Jack Lauderdale on Swingtime in 1952. Even less is known about Rev. Landers, except that he preached in the San Francisco Bay Area.

We have excluded Big Town recordings by Ross Leonard, Odie Ervin, Buster Smith and "Ruff house Rose" by Fats Gaines as we have been unable to find good, clean copies of them. Space was also a problem.

Having set up his own publishing company, B-Flat Music, Geddins acquired the controlling interest in Rhythm Records from Dave Rosenbaum in 1954. Forging ahead on the manufacturing front, just after the Big Town revival, Geddins acquired a second pressing plant in Oakland at Fourteenth and Fifty-Second to handle 45 RPM production. He then moved his base of operations from 711 Seventh Street to the Bob Chatton Building on Thirty-fourth Street and San Pablo Avenue. Chris Strachwitz says that in all likelihood Geddins built the studio himself. After naming his new premises The Down Town Record Company, Geddins set about recording for his Rhythm catalog. Chris Strachwitz surmises Rhythm releases were probably financed by former proprietor Dave Rosenbaum.

In 1955, Geddins and his sons set up the Jumping label and recorded Lafayette Thomas, Roland Mitchell and Geddins and Sons.

Geddins Jr. started in the record business in 1954 when, at the age of sixteen, he helped his father at the Fifty-second Street pressing plant. "Me and my buddy Jimmy Cranson worked the night shift," he said. At Hamilton Junior High (now Calvin Simmons), Geddins Jr. organized a vocal group and sang Marvin and Johnny-type songs with Jimmy Cranson and James Given. He started scoring charts using what scant

knowledge he had learned from his father and little skill he had picked up at the piano. He rehearsed his songs in the studio at the Bob Chatton Building. Out of this came a demo called "This is my dream," cut at the KRE Studios in Berkeley. In addition, Jimmy McCracklin gave Geddins Jr. a few pointers on the piano.

In 1956, Geddins and Issac Neal Jr. set up the Irma (named after Geddins' wife) label at 1483 Twenty-Third Avenue in Oakland.

Geddins was getting increasing support from local disc jockeys. Principal among them was "Jumpin' George Oxford on KWBR in Oakland and Hunter Hancock on KFVD in Los Angeles. Scotty's Records on Third Street in San Francisco pushed Geddins' blues lines with much enthusiasm. Geddins started pressing sides for Ray Dobard, a one-time club owner and Berkeley activist. Dobard, who ran the Music City recording and retail outlet on Alcatraz Avenue above Martin Luther King Junior Way, was Geddins' only serious competition outside of the majors. Both Dobard and Geddins short-changed their artists in one way or another. The difference between them was that Geddins just could not afford to raise a large family, run a record pressing plant, pay all his bills, and take care of his talent. Geddins also pressed for Kappa Rex Records of Berkeley with whom he probably had made a partnership deal.

The one major highlight at this time was Geddins' own contribution to the slew of Johnny Ace memorial waxings being cut after the artist's tragic suicide. He had Johnny Fuller record a song he had written entitled "Johnny Ace's last letter." "Johnny Ace's last letter," issued on Rhythm, became a regional hit. But through circumstances beyond Geddins' control, Rosenbaum (who owned a piece of the action) lost ownership of the record to the Mesner Brothers in Los Angeles who reissued it on

Aladdin where it garnered broader attention.

Also in 1956, Geddins acquired leasing rights to the first of what would become two recording studios on Twenty-Third Avenue. The premises were large enough to accommodate a retail outlet. Bob Geddins Jr. remembers 1956 with a measure of pride. "That was when I first had the chance to show people how well I had mastered the piano," brags Geddins Jr. "My father put me in rehearsal-practice sessions with K.C. Douglas, and I wound up playing gigs out on the road with him for three months."

In 1957, Geddins secured the leasing rights to his second studio on Twenty-Third Avenue and cut a deal with Don Barksdale of KWBR in Oakland for the purchase of Rhythm Records. With general acceptance of the 45 rpm record, Geddins used the Monarch and Rainbow pressing plants in Los Angeles to fill his instant needs.

Geddins waxed Pee Wee Parham and Sugar Pie De Santo, alias Paliya & Alvin, for Don Barksdale's Jody Records in San Francisco. Jody was named after Don Barksdale's secretary. "In 1958," says Geddins Jr., "I made my recording debut behind Johnny Fuller on the "Haunted House" session. Johnny and I polished the song and cut the first version of it here in Oakland."

Geddins cut product for Don Barksdale at Rhythm on Pee Wee Parham and Sugar Pie De Santo plus stunning blues tunes by Roy Hawkins with Lafayette Thomas. This amicable arrangement with Barksdale continued for over two years.

"Also in 1958," says Geddins Jr., "my father decided to consolidate his studio space and move to a lease at 539 Eleventh Street in Oakland. This

would turn out to be his last studio." Chris Strachwitz asserts that Geddins was still renting studio space on San Pablo Avenue in the late 1950s. The Eleventh Street studio lasted until 1962, after which Geddins moved operations out to the Oakland Airport area. When the Oakland Airport situation ran out, he turned to his old friends to rent space. Bob De Sousa's studio at Alcatraz and Adeline in Berkeley and Wayne Fowler's in San Francisco picked up most of the slack.

In 1959, Geddins in partnership with Ronnie Badger came up with the Plaid label and kicked things off with a release by The Velvets. A half-hearted attempt to cash in on rockabilly's final fling was made with the creation of the short-lived Check label on which the under-recorded Bobby December showed his mettle. Ray Agee and his vocal group, The Four Kings, recorded the beautiful "Pray for me," supported by Geddins Jr. and Johnny Heartsman, for both the Plaid and Check labels.

At least four more short-lived labels were up and running in the Geddins stables during this time. These were Geddison, a joint partnership of Geddins senior and his sons, Vel and Veltone, both Geddins and Ronnie Badger proprietorships, and Wax, a label set up to cash in on the emerging soul record scene.

In June of 1959, Garrie Thompson Sr., who operated the Hush label along with his wife Clara, took Joe Simon, who the couple managed at the time, to Geddins' Eleventh Street studio to cut the delicately beautiful "Doreetha" and "Little Island Girl" for their Hush of Sunnyvale label.

Geddins had Agee cut sessions for Shirley and Veltone in Los Angeles, although they could have taken place in Oakland. Veltone was a venture entered into with Ronnie Badger and Jimmy McCracklin. Shirley was also

a label co-owned with Ronnie Badger who held the controlling interest. After Geddins release of Sugar Pie De Santo's enormously successful "I want to know" on Veltone, his wife Irma died while giving birth to the couple's thirteenth child. Sad and sick at heart, and not being in his usual state of mind, the grieving Geddins sold his De Santo contract and any rights to the Chess brothers in Chicago. In September 1960, "I want to know" ascended to the number four spot on the Billboard best sellers chart after a tenure of nine weeks.

1961 came to designate the year of Geddins' final chart breaker. Jimmy McCracklin waxed his unforgettable "Just got to know." Geddins always claimed to have written the song, yet McCracklin in the end fought and won copyright. "Just got to know," initially issued on Art Tone, rose steadily up the Billboard chart, and in October, after nineteen weeks, narrowly missed the winner's summit by coming to rest at second place.

Bob Geddins Jr., who produced the Art-Tone sessions, probably co-owned the label with his father. McCracklin used the Geddins Jr. house band as his touring unit. They also served as sessions musicians for the Irma, Geddison, Veltone, and Art-Tone recording dates. They used trumpeter Willie Pryer on some sessions and Lafayette Thomas filled in where required.

Al (King) & Nettie, Jimmy McCracklin, and Ella Thomas with The Starlets (Johnson Sisters) all made music for the Geddison label in 1961. Al & Nettie's records sold well and were switched to Art-Tone. The Fuller Bros. (Major and Erskine) recorded for yet another one-shot deal, the G.D. & L label in 1962. The Geddins Jr. Band accompanied Eddie Foster on his 1962 release of "I goofed" (Luck 104) for Fat Daddy Lyons in Oakland. Geddins stated emphatically that Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton cut "Ball and chain" for Brad Taylor's Bay Tone Records for the first time in 1962 at his

studios on Eleventh Street but it languished somewhere and was never released. Chris Strachwitz disagrees and asserts that the session took place at the San Pablo Avenue studio.

Geddins persuaded Vance "Tiny" Powell, a gospel quartet soloist from Warren, Arkansas who had waxed with The Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, to cross over and cut R & B. He was by now renting studios out near Oakland Airport where Powell worked as a sky cap. Geddins cut the deep-soul chart, "My time after while" with Powell and the Johnny Heartsman band and issued it on his Wax label offshoot. The record became a minor sensation in California as well as in the Southern states.

Geddins, who from time to time rented a studio on Seventy-Third Avenue, asked his son to join a band he pulled together expressly to fill engagements in The Philippines. The band was labeled, appropriately, The Bob Geddins Band. On his return, Geddins Jr. picked up The Family Four and recorded the tear jerking "Heart in pain" for his Bro-Tone label. Geddins produced the occasional single during the 1970s and 1980s and even took a role in recording Sugar Pie De Santo for James Moore's Jasmine Records.

Geddins continued to write songs and out of his East Oakland apartment tinkered around in T.V. and radio repair. Of the odd handful of releases, "Already been to the water" (Parts 1 and 2) seemed to be the most interesting one. "Already been to the water" was a country church-sounding choral chant recorded live at The Greater New Mt. Hermon Baptist Church with Rev. Ralph Davis and the Davis Family supported by the church choir. The record came out on the Carter label in 1975. Geddins' spiritual roots had now manifested themselves in his wife and son. His wife Irma had helped found the Good Hope Baptist Church on Foothill Boulevard in Oakland.

Geddins was a jovial man who put his wife and family needs first. As a business man, he certainly failed in economics and accounting. Lack of written records makes it difficult for anyone trying to piece together Bob Geddins' exploits to come up with a full and accurate picture without missing out on a few important events. One may ask why Geddins did not profit more from the Oakland blues scene. Why, during the Post-War years, did Geddins not capitalize a great deal more on a market starving for good, down-homey blues? One of the reasons might have been that black migrants wished to turn their backs on the hard times of the rural poverty most of them had experienced first-hand in the South. In California, they sought jobs and prosperity, hoping for a better life. They did not need to be reminded of how tough things could get in a place that lacked freedom and empowerment.


During a 1980 interview with Lee Hildebrand, Geddins contradicted all this by saying "I make everything I record sound as sad as possible. I could put a different arrangement to a tune and make it sound sadder. I want black folks to feel the troubles of old times. All the people that have had similar problems are the ones that's gonna buy those records. A lot of people make like they don't like the blues but sneak off and play them."

Some of Geddins' master tapes (as few as he had kept track of) had, due to lack of space, been stacked on his own front porch. Consequently, the weather destroyed many of them. To piece together a thorough discography, we have to go to those who diligently collected the records over the years. A full and accurate listing has yet to be written.

Bob Geddins died February 16, 1991 of liver cancer, a month after being stabbed by two teenagers during a robbery of one of his songwriting royalty checks. He was placed to rest in Oakland's Evergreen Cemetery.

08 BOB GEDDINS FUNERAL

IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE
OF
ROBERT LEE GEDDINS SR.



BORN, February 6, 1913
DEPARTED THIS LIFE, February 16, 1991

Place and Time of Service
GOOD HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH
8717 Powell Blvd.
Oakland, California

Thursday, February 21, 1991
at 11:00 A.M.

With
REVEREND J.H.L. SMITH
Officiating

A memorial service was held at the family church, The Good Hope Baptist. His obituary read: "Robert Geddins Sr., born Hybank, Texas, February 6, 1913 to Johnnie Geddins and Azeline Douglas. Mr. Geddins was baptized in church by Rev. West at The Good Hope Baptist. Out of union with Irma Jean Dyer (deceased) he bore 13 children. He departed this life leaving 44 grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren."

Although Geddins drew scant notice in the public print (just one-line mentions) he sure left his mark on the Oakland blues that never would have flourished without him.

— Opal Louis Nations May 1997 / March 2008

With thanks to Bob Geddins Jr., Jimmy McCracklin, Lee Hildebrand, Tom Mazzolini, Mike Paikos, Mark Carrodus, Bob Chatton, Dennis Leonis, Marc Ryan, and Chris Strachwitz.

Photo list:

01. Frank Motley – early 1950s – courtesy Galen Gart
 02. Pilgrim Travelers – songbook – mid-1950s – courtesy Bob Bell
 03. Gospel Consolators – circa 1955 – courtesy Charles Johnson
 04. Jimmy Wilson – mid-1950s – courtesy Charlie Lange
 05. Four Aces – early 1950s – courtesy Otha Jackson
 06. Southern Travelers – early 1950s – courtesy Abraham Battle
 07. Bob Geddins Snr. at 7th Street Studio – early 1960s – courtesy Chris Strachwitz
 08. Bob Geddins – funeral program, Feb. 21, 1991 – courtesy Bob Geddins Jr.
 09. Bob Geddins – at his radiator repair shop – early 1960s – courtesy Bob Geddins Jr.
 10. Fats Gaines Band with Rita Thomas – mid-1950s – courtesy Evette Monachino
 11. Rising Star Gospel Singers at KWBR, Berkeley – late 1940s – courtesy Ray Funk
 12. Joe Hill Louis early 1950s – courtesy Sun Records
 13. Little Caesar – a.k.a. Kid Wolf – early 1940s – courtesy Harry Caesar
 14. Que Martin – 1943 – courtesy Dick Goggin
- Label shots courtesy Ellen Nations