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Original doo-wop sound of the 50's, live in concert "The Mellows featuring Lillian Leach". 18 MP3 Songs

URBAN/R&B: R&B Pop Crossover, URBAN/R&B: Rhythm Blues Details: Biography by Bryan Thomas

Lillian Leach and her group, the Mellows, never scored any huge doo wop hits, despite solid efforts, but remain revered among fans of the vocal group genre. The foursome -- in addition to Leach, an excellent female lead singer, their lineup included Harold Johnson, Johnny Wilson, and Norman Brown -- began recording in 1954 for Jay Dee, a small New York-based label owned by Joe Davis. Davis was a popular figure in the R&B world; in addition to running his own labels (Beacon was another of his top-notch indie labels), he ran his own management company and even worked for MGM Records for a time. The Mellows recorded several songs for Jay Dee, including "How Sentimental Can I Be" in August 1954, "Smoke From Your Cigarette" in January 1955, and "I Still Care," issued in April 1955 and probably the high point of their career. They later moved over to Brooklyn's Celeste Records, covering classics like "Lucky Guy," "My Darling," "Sweet Lorraine" -- and a song called "I'm Gonna Pick Your Teeth With an Icepick" -- then moved over to Candlelight for one last single before disbanding a few years later.

MARV GOLDBERG'S R&B NOTEBOOKS The Arthur Crier Story By Marcia Vance Marv Goldberg Based on interviews with Arthur Crier and Gary Morrison 2004 by Marv Goldberg [NOTE: The world of R&B (and my world) became a lot poorer on July 22, 2004, when bass singer Arthur Griffin Lewis Crier, Jr. passed away at the age of 69. A beloved figure in the R&B world, he was directly responsible for the "Doo-Wop In D.C." tribute ceremonies held only a month earlier and the "Great Day In Harlem" ceremonies in 1999. Unlike most singers, he not only remembered his roots, he promoted the study and understanding of R&B. He will be sorely missed. This article originally appeared in the December 1977 issue of Yesterday's Memories and is reproduced here almost verbatim. There are a few cosmetic changes and some errors

were corrected.] By way of introduction, Arthur Crier was born in Manhattan, on April 1, 1935. By the time he was two, his family had moved to the Morrisania section of the Bronx. Arthur's father, a reporter, sang in a barbershop quartet that appeared on radio. He was briefly in the Marines in the early 50s, until, fortunately for the music world, an injury brought about his discharge. In terms of vocal groups, what Harlem was to Manhattan and Bedford-Stuyvesant was to Brooklyn, Morrisania was to the Bronx. During the 50s, one could walk the streets of Morrisania and find guys harmonizing on many street corners - groups such as the Chords, Crickets, Mellows, Cadillacs, Wrens. Carnations, and Diamonds. With the words "let's start a group" half-jokingly said by Gene Redd, Jr., yet another Morrisania vocal group was born. [The Chimes - 1953] John Murray (1st tenor, 2nd tenor and baritone), Gary Morrison (2nd tenor, baritone and bass) and Gene Redd Jr. (lead and baritone) were neighbors. Gary brought his friend, Arthur Crier (baritone and bass) into the group and the Gay Tones were in business. Unlike most other groups of that era, the Gay Tones had their own musical accompaniment, with Rupert Branker on string bass, Gene Redd on piano, and Al Cross on guitar. "We would rehearse from sun-up until we were just too tired to sing any more, and it was a labor of love," said Gary. "After a while, when our parents found out that we were serious, we would take our little money and chip in to buy food, which was cooked by one of the mothers, usually Gene's. After eating, we'd go back and rehearse some more. At that time, everybody stood on corners and sang, looking for the approval of their peer group. I can remember when two or three of us would be walking through the neighborhood, harmonizing. Then we'd meet another guy who was also just walking along. He'd join us and then we'd sing on the street for two or three hours. In the beginning, I don't think anyone ever thought that we were going to be stars. We just enjoyed singing." Said Arthur, "You can't sing together for as long as we did - on an everyday kind of basis - and not get to where a guy takes a breath, you breathe with him. He takes a deep breath and you're right there with him. It got to a point where somebody would hear something a little different after singing the same thing a thousand times - a minor inflection in what he was singing, and when it came time to do that part again, without one word being said, the entire group would sing that new little thing, it was just beautiful." Parties were the big thing in those days and many of the aforementioned groups would congregate and sing for each other - with members of one group often interchanging with others. "Everybody was easily able to do each other's material. In fact, for one recording session, the Crickets needed a man and someone at one of the parties filled in because he knew the song," said Gary. Practice sessions included many

Christmas carols and what Arthur and Gary said was the original group version of OVER THE RAINBOW. "We once had a 'sing out' against the Wrens at Community Center 99," said Arthur. "The bass of the Wrens challenged the Gay Tones and we told 'Satch,' the emcee to put them on right after us on the show. Our outfits consisted of army khakis with patch pockets and matching ties." Arthur, who had been wearing a suit, took off his jacket, pulled his shirt out of his pants and the group was outfitted and ready to go. "We stole the show," remembered Gary. "The Wrens came on right after us and couldn't get in tune. They kept stopping, and from then on, they didn't like us! At that show we did GLORIA, knowing that it had been recorded years ago by the Mills Brothers." Buddy McRae (of the Chords) had a club on Jackson Avenue where the groups would always go to sing. The Key Tones, a local group that did not record, used to sing there and they used to tear the place apart. "They always wiped us out," said Arthur. "For two weeks we crammed rehearsals so as to be ready for the next sing and this time we had our thing together. We were ready for them and blew them out. Not only did we blow them out, but we stole their girls from them." The girls were then known as the Key Hearts and after that night, they became known as the Gay Hearts. "Those girls, they really could sing." The Gay Hearts were Lily Mae, Renee, and Baby. Word spread fast throughout other neighborhoods about the singing of the girls and they were always being asked to sing for other groups. One guy who really liked them was Richard Barrett (of the Valentines) who immortalized one of the girls (Lily May Bell) with his song, LILY MAE BELLE. It was at this time that the Gay Tones first heard that the word "gay" meant a little more than having a good time and quickly set about changing the name of the group. They came up with the name "the Chimes" and it was ironic that when one of their records came out, they were listed as "the 5 Chimes" (even though there were only four singers). No explanation was ever given for this. Gene Redd Sr. was a saxophone player of some note - he would join the Red Caps in the mid-50s and knew many people in the music industry. He took the group to Teddy Reig, who owned Royal Roost Records with Jack Hook. The group was only together about two months before they went into the studio to record. Although the Chimes would have preferred cutting GLORIA, they instead did DEAREST DARLING, a tune that Gene sang lead on, and one which the other members of the group did not particularly like. All of their songs were done at one session and it was unusual in that the charts were written (by Gene Redd, Senior [who also played vibes on DEAREST DARLING]) rather than being the standard head arrangements which were common in those days. Two of their songs were released on Royal Roost (DEAREST DARLING and A FOOL WAS I)

and the other two were issued on its Betta subsidiary (ROSEMARIE and NEVER LOVE ANOTHER).

"One of our problems was that we were always told we were too good," said Gary. "The Hi-Los were our group. The kind of things that they did vocally were fantastic. They would do peal-offs and break into harmony two octaves above where they started. They really turned us on. We tried to incorporate a lot of their things in our singing, we always considered Rock and Roll to be Alan Freed's phrase, sort of like Bill Haley the Comets. We didn't relate to that type of music and liked Rhythm and Blues. We were listening to the Orioles, Ravens, and Swallows. We preferred the Mills Brothers over the Ink Spots because they had tighter harmony. I loved the Ravens - they were inventive, having their own sound, good harmony and the high tenor of Maithe Marshall. They had good solid harmony. The by-play between the bass and the high tenor was what I loved. They made beautiful changes." Their first gig was at the Rockland Palace, with the Solitaires, Velvets, Diamonds, Charlie Parker, and Lester Young. Other appearances included the Hunts Point Palace, the Audubon Ballroom and other New York spots. They also did the rounds of the amateur shows - P.S. 99, P.S. 120, etc. and had the distinction of never having lost a talent show. After the recordings, John Murray died [of spinal meningitis, at age 16] and was replaced by Bobby Spencer. The group went to see Jerry Blaine at Jubilee and were told that the label had too many groups. But after they sang OVER THE RAINBOW, Blaine went crazy and wanted them to come back the next day. Since Gary was seeing a girl in New Jersey and didn't have a car, he never made it to the studio and the group wasn't asked to come back again. Bobby Spencer was soon replaced by Jimmy Keyes (during a lull in the activities of the Chords) and finally by Waldo "Champ" Champen. The group stayed together for about two years after Murray died, "but it wasn't the same feeling," said Arthur, and in 1955 they drifted apart. Gene Redd went to the Fi-Tones and Arthur and Gary joined a group called the Hummers. [Bobby Spencer] [Buddy McRae] The Hummers consisted of Buddy McRae (just out of the Chords), Bobby Spencer, Harold Johnson, Al Springer, Arthur Crier, and Gary Morrison. "We did some real pretty things harmony-wise," said Gary. Harold had liked the Chimes' sound and had wanted to join them even while singing with the Crickets. Later on, after the first Crickets group had disbanded, Harold joined the Hummers. This group was started in a single day. By a fluke, all six guys were sitting in Gary's kitchen one morning about 9 A.M. and as was the case with the Chimes, one of the guys said "let's start a group." Bobby Spencer wrote a song on the spot, called GEE WHAT A GIRL, and the group started harmonizing. Within three hours, the guys had four songs down pat. Full of confidence, the Hummers went to audition

for Apollo Records, where they were told they were too good! Eventually the group recorded GEE WHAT A GIRL for Hy Weiss' Old Town label, but it was never released. They also waxed DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN and SO STRANGE. These songs were recorded at the same session at which the Royaltones did CRAZY LOVE. The group broke up in 1956, when Arthur, Gary, and Harold got together with Lillian Leach and first tenor John Wilson to become the second Mellows group. [Mellows, with David Levitt - 1956] [Mellows - 1956] This Mellows group was managed by David Levitt who owned the Celeste label. "Levitt really loved the group and tried hard for the Mellows, but unfortunately nothing much came of it. He was the type of guy who would take money out of his pocket and give it to us. If the group had made it, we would have gotten every penny we were entitled to. He was an honest guy," said Arthur. By 1957 they felt that although they liked Levitt, they'd never get anywhere with him. So they switched management to Sammy Lowe and Otis Pollard, who had the Candlelight label. Here they backed up Carl Spencer (Bobby's brother), who was also managed by Pollard. One of their favorite songs was the beautiful WHEN THE LIGHTS GO ON AGAIN, which they generally sang in the dark. One of the most unusual things they recorded was I'M GONNA PICK YOUR TEETH WITH AN ICE PICK. Gary had a thing for doing accents and was clowning around doing ICE PICK with a West Indian accent. They decided to record it. The Mellows did shows on the East Coast, but Arthur still found time to make appearances with the new Cadillacs, Pearls, and Chords. The final Mellows session took place, in 1957, for Apollo Records. The two songs recorded (SO STRANGE and BE MINE) were never released. The Mellows broke up because Lillian was married and didn't want to travel any more; also, Arthur and Harold were heavily into songwriting. [Arthur Carl Spencer] In 1960. Arthur Crier and Carl Spencer did a version of ALLEY OOP on the Edsel label, owned by Skip and Flip [Clyde Battin and Gary Paxton, who both did background vocals on the record]. Calling themselves the Pre-Historics, they were touted by booking agent Paul Levert, as appearing in bearskins and carrying clubs. The duo was booked into the Club Paddock in Yonkers, New York, but a hassle ensued when they found out how they were to be dressed. The Club Paddock became their only engagement. At any rate, according to Arthur, they bombed badly. [The Halos - 1961] [J.R. Bailey] Shortly after, Arthur formed another group, called the Halos. The original group consisted of J. R. Bailey (1st tenor), Harold Johnson (2nd tenor), Al Cleveland (baritone), and Arthur Crier (bass). Al Cleveland was from Pittsburgh and was in New York trying to make it as a singer. As fate would have it, he had been having absolutely no luck and was standing on Broadway waiting to catch a

bus to go back home. Arthur and Carl Spencer had been doing some demo work and needed a third voice. As they left the Brill Building, they saw Cleveland and asked him if he could sing! This Halos group recorded NAG [with J.R. Bailey doing the "nagging sounds"]. The flip, COPY CAT, was actually a previously-recorded duet between Arthur and Carl, which had been done for Morty Craft. J.R. Bailey decided that he didn't want to travel and was replaced by Phil Johnson, former lead of the Duvals on Kelit and Club. The Halos, besides doing their own material, became a very prolific backup group, interchanging members from session to session. The group often included Carl Spencer, Bobby Spencer, J.R. Bailey, and Gary Morrison. Some of their background work included Curtis Lee (PRETTY LITTLE ANGEL EYES). Barry Mann (WHO PUT THE BOMP), Ben E. King (DON'T PLAY THAT SONG), Connie Francis, Tommy Hunt, Bobby Vinton, the Coasters, Brian Hyland, Johnny Nash, Dion, Little Eva, Gene Pitney (EVERY BREATH I TAKE), Shirley and Lee, Johnny Mathis, and many others too numerous to mention. While the Halos were riding on the charts with NAG, Morty Craft decided to release two sides that the group had cut at the same session. L-O-V-E and HEARTBREAKING WORLD. However, since the group already had a record going for them, Craft decided to call them the Craftys. In 1961, Arthur Crier's sister, Shirley, was part of a group called the Rosettes. The other two members were Diane Christian and Gail Noble. They recorded one record for the Herald label - (YOU BROKE MY HEART/IT MUST BE LOVE), which was produced by Arthur. Morrisania may be a snail community, but in terms of pure talent, it certainly must rate right up there with any other area. Although many groups from Morrisania may not be household names, some of the songs that the various members of these groups wrote will last for a long time. Carl Spencer, who also recorded as a solo artist, wrote LET THE LITTLE GIRL DANCE for Billy Bland. J. R. Bailey was in the New Yorkers Five (GLORIA MY DARLING on Danice) after being in the Crickets and prior to his joining the Cadillacs. He later went on to become one of the foremost background singers in the music industry. His was the lead voice heard on RAINY DAY BELLS by the "Globetrotters." For the past few years, he has made a name for himself as a solo performer and top notch producer (EVERYBODY PLAYS THE FOOL by the Main Ingredient). Buddy McRae, after leaving the Chords, went on to become a producer/songwriter. Al Cleveland, who luckily never made it back to Pittsburgh is also still in the music industry. For five years he was associated with Motown Records, where he co-produced the Miracles with Smokey Robinson [and wrote I SECOND THAT EMOTION]. He has written tunes for motion pictures and has been nominated for the Grammy

award on a few occasions. Arthur Crier has had a career in every facet of the music industry - producing, writing, performing, and arranging. At the present time [this was in mid-1977], he is working with a group called Split Image. This group combines the old sound with the new, and is dynamite. We were privileged to sit in at a recent rehearsal and predict only good things for Split Image. At press time, Arthur informed us that the newest member of the group is Harold Johnson. UPDATES [Split Image] Since this article was printed, I've discovered that Arthur Crier, Buddy McRae, and Carl Spencer were part of the Star Steppers (as studio background singers). Arthur was in Little Guy the Giants on Lawn (Arthur Crier, Harold Johnson, Carl Spencer, and Al Cleveland), the Twisters on Capitol (Arthur Crier, Harold Johnson, Buddy McRae, Carl Spencer), the Cognacs on Roulette (same group as the Twisters, except that it was Bobby Spencer instead of Carl), Barbara English and the Fashions (as a studio background singer), the Gees (Arthur Crier, Gloria Douglas, Sandra James, Arnetta Livingston, and Al Springer), and Split Image (Arthur Crier, Harold Johnson, Booker T. Briggs, Arnetta Livingston, and Bill Reid). [The Mellows - 1983] [The Mellows - 1990] In 1968, Arthur followed Al Cleveland out to Detroit and, from 1968 to 1972, he was a songwriter / background singer / producer for Motown. In the 80s and 90s, he was part of a series of TV shows (with long-time friend and colleague Eugene Tompkins, of the Limelighters) called "Doo-Wop Is Alive," broadcast on public access stations. During this time, he also appeared, on stage, as part of Screamin' Jay Hawkins' backup group. In 1985, Arthur, Eugene Tompkins, Lillian Leach, and Gary Morrison coordinated the production of the "Don't Let Them Starve" recording (featuring dozens of R&B singers) to raise funds for famine victims in Ethiopia; Arthur was the song's author. Arthur was part of several incarnations of the Mellows over the years: in 1992, Arthur, Lillian Leach, Eugene Tompkins, and Sammy Fain recorded tracks as the Mellows; they were released on a Tri-Track CD in 2003. [The Morrisania Revue - 1994] [Arthur Crier - June 2004] In the 90s, Arthur was part of the Morrisania Revue, along with fellow Bronxites Lillian Leach, Eugene Tompkins, Dean Barlow, Waldo Champen, Bobby Mansfield, Sammy Fain, and Hal Keshner. Most recently, Arthur joined long-time friend Floyd "Buddy" McRae as part of his Chords group. REASONABLY COMPLETE ARTHUR CRIER DISCOGRAPHY (thanks to Ferdie Gonzalez) BETTA (5 Chimes) 2011 Rosemarie/Never Love Another - 53 ROYAL ROOST (Chimes) 577 A Fool Was I/Dearest Darling - 10/53 OLD TOWN (the Hummers - all unreleased; recorded 1/3/56) Do You Know What I Mean Gee, What A Girl So Strange CELESTE (the Mellows) 3002 Lucky Guy/My Darling - 56 3004 I'm Yours/Sweet Lorraine - 56 UNRELEASED CELESTE (all recorded

1956) You're Gone Ain't She Got Nerve When The Lights Go On Again I'm Gonna Pick Your Teeth With An Ice Pick I Call To You CANDLELIGHT (the Mellows) 1011 You've Gone/Moon Of Silver - 12/56 CANDLELIGHT (Carl Spencer, backed by the Mellows) 1012 Farewell, Farewell, Farewell/No More Loneliness - 56 EDSEL (Pre-Historics) 779 Alley Oop/Oh Blues - 60 AMY (the Star Steppers) 801 The First Sign Of Love/You're Gone [Arthur isn't on this side] - 5/60 LAWN (Little Guy and the Giants) 103 So Young/It's You - 9/60 CAPITOL (the Twisters) 4451 Turn The Page/Dancing Little Clown - 10/60 ROULETTE (the Cognacs) 4340 Charlena/Heaven Only Knows - 12/60 7 ARTS (the Craftys) 708 L-O-V-E/Heartbreaking World - 61 (also released on Lois 5000) 7 ARTS (the Halos) 709 Nag/Copy Cat - 6/61 720 Come On/What'd I Say - 61 WARWICK 2046 - The Halos - 61 Nag Your Precious Love Bird Dog I Went To A Party Copy Cat If I Had Known What'd I Say Mean Old World Down The Road Crazy Bells Oh What A Night Come On ELMOR (Cammy Carol Halos) 302 Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind/Until The Day I Die - mid-61 ELMOR (the Craftys) 310 I Went To A Party/Zoom Zoom Zoom - 3/62 TRANS-ATLAS (the Halos) 690 Mean Old World/Village Of Love - 3/62 ROULETTE (Barbara English Fashions) 4428 La-Ta-Tee-Ta-Ta/We Need Them [Arthur isn't on this side] - 5/62 DUNES (the Darlettes - a group with Arthur's sister, Shirley) 2016 The Wobble/Just You [Arthur isn't on this side] - 7/62 BELTONE (the Jive Five) 2030 Lily Marlene/Johnny Never Knew [Arthur isn't on this side] - 63 PORT (the Gees) 3011 Love Is A Beautiful Thing/It's All Over - 11/65 SPLIT IMAGE (Split Image) 555 Fool Of The Year/[Fool Of The Year - instrumental] - 78 VINTAGE ROCKER 101 - Voices: The Morrisania Revue) - 1994 Yesterday's Memories Dearest One If I Didn't Care Come Back My Love I'm Yours You're Mine Fine Brown Frame C'est La Vie White Cliffs Of Dover How Sentimental Can I Be? (Please Be) My Girlfriend I Will Wait Where Are You? Dearest Darling Nag TRI-TRACK TT-00001 - The Mellows: Live In Concert - 2003 (all tracks recorded 1992) Lovable Lily I Still Care When The Lights Go On Again Sweet Lorraine I Wanna Be Loved Moon Of Silver Be Mine I Was A Fool To Let You Go Pretty Baby, What's Your Name I'm Yours How Sentimental Can I Be Old Man River Nothin' To Do Smoke From Your Cigarette Sh-Boom If I Didn't Care Silent Night Unca Marvy's Home Page More Articles Spectropop remembers ARTHUR CRIER (1935 - 2004) Bronx Doo-Wop Veteran Singer-songwriter-producer Arthur Crier, a bass-singing veteran of the doo-wop era who sang on dozens of hit records for artists including Gene Pitney, Curtis Lee, Barry Mann, Ben E. King and the Halos, died at his home in Warsaw, North Carolina on Thursday, July 22 of an apparent heart attack. He was 69. Arthur Crier was born in Manhattan on April 1, 1935, and grew up

listening to the Ink Spots and the Mills Brothers in the early 1940s. A glee club singer by the first grade, he was performing gospel with a local amateur quintet called the Heavenly Five in the Morrisania section of the Bronx by age 15. In the winter of 1953, Arthur formed the Chimes with Gary Morrison, Gene Redd and John Murray. They recorded two singles, including 'Dearest Darling', for Royal Roost that year. In early 1956, he recorded several songs for Old Town Records with a group called the Hummers, although it would be decades before these would be released. That winter, he and Morrison joined original members Lillian Leach, John Wilson and Harold Johnson in the Mellows, replacing Norman Brown. The Mellows had first recorded for Jay-Dee in the summer of 1954, and had enjoyed an East Coast hit 'Smoke From Your Cigarette', but were without a contract when the new line-up was formed. The Mellows signed to Celeste Records in 1956 and recorded 'Lucky Guy' and the fine ballad 'I'm Yours', but lack of promotion doomed the sides to obscurity. In 1957, they recorded the haunting ballad 'Moon Of Silver', Crier's own personal favorite, for Candlelight Records. Following the break-up of the Mellows, Crier dove headfirst into songwriting, producing and managing. He also formed the Halos and recorded the Coasters-styled novelty 'Nag', which became a national hit in the summer of 1961. Crier's prominent bass voice, singing "oh, baby you're a nag" became the song's hook. As accomplished background singers, Crier and the members of the Halos were among the most recorded vocal groups of the early 1960s, backing artists including Tommy Hunt, Bobby Vinton, Johnny Nash, Little Eva, Johnny Mathis, Dion, the Coasters, Connie Francis, Brian Hyland and Ben E. King, among others. Crier's resonant bass voice was featured on Barry Mann's 'Who Put The Bomp' and the Phil Spector-produced 'Pretty Little Angel Eyes' by Curtis Lee and Gene Pitney's 'Every Breath I Take'. His songwriting, managing, and producing credits throughout the 1960s included work with the Four Tops, the Temptations, Thelma Houston, Savannah Smith, Baby Jane and the Rock-A-Byes, the Rosettes, the Darlettes and GQ, which included Arthur's son Keith. From 1968-1972, Arthur lived in Detroit and worked for Motown Records as a songwriter, producer, and background vocalist. In 1984, Crier reformed the Mellows and began performing again for devotees of 1950s R&B vocal group harmony music. Inspired by the 'We Are The World' project, Arthur undertook a similar effort featuring vocal group artists of the 1950s and 1960s called 'Don't Let Them Starve'. After a National Geographic Explorer cable television documentary on the vocal groups of the Bronx's Morrisania neighborhood, Crier and friends formed the Morrisania Revue, recording the critically acclaimed 'Voices of Doo Wop' CD in 1994. A champion of the music and fervent believer in its historical preservation, Crier

participated in a number of projects that broadened the horizons for vocal group pioneers. With friend and singing partner Eugene Tompkins and Beverly Lindsay-Johnson, he organized the 1999 Great Day in Harlem photo shoot at Shriver's Row in Harlem with several hundred vocal group pioneers. The official photo was unveiled at the Smithsonian Institution in February 2000. Briefly a touring member of the Chords during the 1950s, Crier joined forces with the group's lone surviving original member, Buddy McRae, for a PBS television appearance in 2002. Crier's rich musical history was chronicled in the 2001 book, *Group Harmony: Echoes of the Rhythm and Blues Era*. "People love this music," Crier told author Todd Baptista. "It's being ignored, but if you have the right exposure, everybody will love it. Not only collectors, everybody will love it, because the songs are great. I think the music is going to make some noise and find a niche, and be stronger than it is right now." Crier was instrumental in the production of *Doo Wop In DC*, a reunion tribute to the pioneers of rhythm and blues, rock roll and doo-wop music held in Washington last month, and gave his final performance that weekend. "He was so proud of the event, and it really was a wonderful send-off for him," Tompkins said Friday. "I had spoken to him in the morning (on the day he died), and he was in very good spirits, making plans for the all the things he wanted to do next." Throughout his half-century career as an entertainer, Crier never tired of singing, entertaining, and associating with fans. "The fans are like a drug to me," Crier stated. "The friendship, and the warmth that they show me wherever we work, that's my drug. I don't care how hard my day was. When I walk through the doors at any oldies show, it's like walking into heaven. It makes you feel good. The songs are standards now, and I'm glad, because I want us all to be known and be in the history books where we should be. Let them know that this music did exist." Survivors include his wife, Dorothy, six children, 19 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Willie C. - BeachMusicCafe.com Arthur Crier, singer/songwriter/producer: Born April 1, 1935 - died July 22, 2004

MARV GOLDBERG'S R&B NOTEBOOKS The Limelighters By Marv Goldberg Based on interviews with Eugene Tompkins 2002 by Marv Goldberg Did you ever wonder who sang the country's top hits for the "budget" labels? Probably no one important, you say. However, don't forget that the Lovenotes (of "Surrender Your Heart" fame) started their career like that. And here's another group, with nine released songs, only two of which were under their own name! The story begins in the Morrisania section of the Bronx, a neighborhood which boasted the Crickets, the Chords and the Wrens. In 1954, Eugene Tompkins sang with a group called the Royal Tones Tones (which included Leo Macedon, Henry Wilkerson, and Robert Carr, soon to be part of

Robert and Johnny). This group practiced until they felt they were ready to try their luck with Atlantic Records. Vice President Jerry Wexler told them to come back with their parents' consent and they'd get a recording session. The group immediately broke up when Leo's mother refused to sign. Eugene, a second tenor, then took up with some other guys he knew from the Washington Avenue area (second tenor Sammy Fain and baritone Henry Gunter) to form a trio called the Clefs. Eugene remembers the stores on Prospect Avenue where the Clefs, for a modest thirty-five cents a throw, could cram into a record-your-own-voice booth with the dream of immortalizing their sound. Soon the Clefs had added some more neighborhood friends: first tenor William "Dutch" Nadel and then bass Otis Anthony "Tony" Streeter. Then the first of their name changes occurred. (What's in a name? Keep reading!) Much has been written about the proliferation of "bird" groups and "car" groups; some names are less romantically derived. Henry Gunter was working in a shoe store and found a name that interested him on a shoebox: Limelighters. Unlike most groups of the day, the Limelighters tried to pattern themselves after their idols (the Chords, Flamingos and 5 Keys), but never succeeded in sounding much like any of them. They sang mostly ballads to practice, but oddly, ended up recording mostly jump tunes. Eugene remembers a talent show at Morris High School, where it was advertised that the winners would get uniforms. All the neighborhood groups entered, including Ruth McFadden and her unnamed backup group (which is where Eugene met the woman he was to marry). For some reason, Tony Streeter knew he couldn't make the show and the Wrens' George Magnezid introduced the guys to bass Arthur Crier, who filled in for him. "Throwing the fly" was a thing that groups used to do during the dance breaks in their songs. This consisted of one member pretending to have a fly in his fist and "throwing" it at the next member to do a dance routine. The Limelighters must have done it well; they won the show. Some people introduced them to music store owner Buddy Dunk, who became their manager. He took them to another Buddy - bandleader Buddy Walker - who became their musical director and coach. Dunk knew Maurice Wolsky, owner of Today's Items (one of those budget labels that covered hits) and a quick session was arranged. One day, in March 1956, they were given a bunch of current hit songs to learn by the following morning. These included: "The Magic Touch" (led by Eugene), "Long Tall Sally" (fronted by Sammy), "I Want You To Be My Girl" (Eugene), "Church Bells May Ring" (Sammy), "Little Girl Of Mine" (Sammy), and "Speedoo" (Sammy). The only song they hadn't had time to really practice was Bill Haley's "R-O-C-K." Fortunately bass Tony Streeter knew the words and did lead chores, with baritone Henry Gunter

switching down to bass. The session, in which they were backed by the Buddy Lucas Orchestra, started at 10:00AM and didn't wrap up until 1:00AM, 15 hours later. This must have made it rough going to school the next day (only Dutch Nadel had graduated). At least the guys received a spaghetti dinner for their trouble. Since there was some tape left on the reel, they also recorded two original tunes, "Cabin Hideaway" and "My Sweet Norma Lee." Both were written and led by Sammy Fain and then, as a technical trick, Eugene's voice was dubbed over "My Sweet Norma Lee" to make it a duet lead. These two songs were sold to Jubilee Records, which released them (in May) on their Josie subsidiary, under the group's real name. Meanwhile, what of the seven "hits of the day?" Well, in varying combinations, they found their way onto LPs, EPs and singles, with credit going to the "Rockets," "Teeners," "4 Blades," "4 Angels" (even though the group was a quintet), and even no credit at all! Should you find any of these records, none of the other songs listed as by any of these groups is actually by the Limelighters; they were catch-all names applied to several artists. It's impossible to get the order correct, but this is the fate of those nine sides, all released in 1956. Not only did Wolsky release them on his Today's Items label, but he leased them to other budget labels. o Wolsky's Today's Items label issued three LPs by the "4 Angels." All seven of the Limelighters songs are represented, along with many others, all credited to the "4 Angels" and done by Lord knows how many different groups. o Montgomery Delaney and Frank Gould's EP 4 Hits label (from New York) got "The Magic Touch" and "Long Tall Sally." Not good at camouflaging their artists, they simply released the songs with no artist credit whatever. o Henry Lapidus' Prom Records (out of Newark, New Jersey) had them on a couple of EPs. "Long Tall Sally" and "I Want You To Be My Girl" appeared on one (with the group billed as the "Rockets" on the former cut and the "Teeners" on the latter). The other one had "Church Bells May Ring" (as the Rockets) and "Little Girl Of Mine" (the Teeners again). o Cincinnati's Big 4 Hits label had "I Want You To Be My Girl" on an EP, crediting it to the "4 Blades." o The Gateway label (also out of Cincinnati) released a couple of singles, with "I Want You To Be My Girl" on one and "Church Bells May Ring" on the other. Once again, they were the "4 Blades." o Jerry Blaine's Josie label issued "My Sweet Norma Lee" and "Cabin Hideaway" in May 1956. [The Limelighters - May 1956] Buddy Dunk had known DJ Douglas "Jocko" Henderson in Philadelphia, and, when Jocko came to New York's WOV (around April, 1956), Buddy wasted no time in having the Limelighters appear as guests. This coincided with the release of the Josie sides, and helped stimulate sales a bit. Some time after this, they cut an a cappella demo at Dunk's music store. Called

"Talking To Myself," this Eugene Tompkins-led number (written by their musical director, Buddy Walker) remained hidden for 25 years. It first saw the light of day on their 1980 album and on it, you can hear the haunting background harmony of the Third Avenue El. Later in 1956, Dunk got the Limelighters together with Don Carter, A&R man for Rama's George Goldner. They recorded two sides ("Dreams" [led by Eugene] and "Love Conquers All" [with Sammy in front]) for Rama, but with all of the other group successes Rama and Gee were having, the masters got shelved. ["Love Conquers All" was finally released on a 1988 Murray Hill album: Come Dance With Me.] Don Carter then broke with Goldner and joined with Don Robey (owner of Duke and Peacock Records in Houston, Texas) in forming the Backbeat label. [The Limelighters - 1957] In early 1957, the Limelighters had their only personnel change when Tony Streeter went into the service. He was replaced by bass Willie Williams. Buddy Dunk also managed the Rob Roys and both groups recorded for Backbeat in 1957. Right after the session at which the Rob Roys recorded "Tell Me Why," the Limelighters did two Sammy Fain compositions (both led by Eugene), "I Owe My Life To You" and "Tangiers." Both the Rob Roys and the Limelighters were slated to be the first groups on Backbeat. However, when the tapes were sent to Robey in Houston, he shelved the Limelighters sides until the lyrics to "Tangiers" (which he didn't like) could be changed. Somehow, that never happened and another unreleased session was added to the Limelighters' resume. But somehow Carter got the Limelighters' tapes back (and offered to sell them to the guys for \$210) when he started Pet Records along with Robey. Although the group rehearsed every night (in the auditorium of P.S. 55), they never had any big appearances. They appeared locally at the Audubon Ballroom (with Buddy Walker's band and Diahann Carroll) and the Rockland Palace, but never on the Apollo Amateur Night. Around 1959, Henry Gunter went off to college and Sammy Fain got into gospel singing. They were all getting older and, with nothing happening, they needed a definite direction for their lives. Eugene became a corrections officer and occasionally sang with the Chords in their 1980 comeback. In that same year, he obtained the rights to the seven cover songs done at the Limelighters' first session and released them (along with "Talking To Myself") on an LP on his own Flyer label. Considering that the group worked with no notable success and with almost total anonymity, Eugene still feels that it's "great that after twenty-five years, someone is interested in our efforts." NOTE: This article was originally written in 1983, when Eugene became part of the re-formed Mellows with Lillian Leach, Arthur Crier, and Gary Morrison. Since then, both Eugene and Sammy have been part of the Morrisania Revue (with Dean Barlow, Lillian Leach,

Arthur Crier, Bobby Mansfield, and Waldo Champen. Eugene (one of the nicest people God has ever seen fit to put on this Earth) has moved to Atlanta, where he not only hosts an oldies radio show, but operates the Yesterday's Memories record store. Henry Gunter passed away in the late 80s, Dutch Nadel is still in the Bronx, and the whereabouts of Tony Streeter and Willie Williams is unknown.

LIMELIGHTERS DISCOGRAPHY NOTE: No other Limelighters, Rockets, Teeners, 4 Angels, or 4 Blades groups are related, even if on the same label. All these songs were recorded in March, 1956 and released on various labels, below: The Magic Touch (ET) Long Tall Sally (SF) I Want You To Be My Girl (ET) Church Bells May Ring (SF) Little Girl Of Mine (SF) Speedoo (SF) R-O-C-K (TS) Cabin Hideaway (SF) My Sweet Norma Lee (SF/ET) TODAY'S ITEMS (as 4 Angels) - all from 1956 NOTE: These are all LPs. All the songs on the LPs are by the "4 Angels", but only the ones listed here are by the Limelighters; the rest are by unknown other artists. 1910 The Magic Touch (ET)//Speedo (SF) 1911 I Want You To Be My Girl (ET)//Little Girl Of Mine (SF)//R-O-C-K (TS) 1912 Church Bells May Ring (SF)//Long Tall Sally (SF) EP 4 HITS - 1956 335 The Magic Touch (ET) - no artist credit Long Tall Sally (SF) - no artist credit [the other two uncredited songs are by other artists] PROM (EPs) - 1956 715 Long Tall Sally (SF) - as Rockets I Want You To Be My Girl (ET) - as Teeners [To Love Again - Maury Laws (instrumental)] [Ivory Tower - Laura Leslie] 716 Church Bells May Ring (SF) - as Rockets Little Girl Of Mine (SF) - as Teeners [Moonglow - Maury Laws (instrumental)] [Standing On The Corner - Herman The Boys] BIG 4 HITS - 1956 190 I Want You To Be My Girl (ET) - as 4 Blades [Can You Find It In Your Heart - Art Rouse] [The Wayward Wind - Eileen Scott] [I'm In Love Again - Clarence Cunningham] GATEWAY (as 4 Blades) - 1956 1170 I Want You To Be My Girl (ET)/[Can You Find It In Your Heart - Art Rouse] 1174 Church Bells May Ring (SF)/[Stardust - artist unknown] JOSIE (as Limelighters) - 5/56 795 Cabin Hideaway (SF)/My Sweet Norma Lee (SF, with ET overdubbed) RAMA UNRELEASED (as Limelighters) - recorded in 56 Dreams (ET) Love Conquers All (SF) BACKBEAT/PET UNRELEASED (as Limelighters) - recorded in 57 I Owe My Life To You (ET) Tangiers (ET) FLYER FL-1000 - The Limelighters - 1980 I Want You To Be My Girl (ET) (ET) Church Bells May Ring (SF) (SF) Rock (TS) Talking To Myself (ET) Little Girl Of Mine (SF) (SF) The Magic Touch (ET) (ET) Long Tall Sally (SF) (SF) Speedoo (SF) (SF) LEADS: ET = Eugene Tompkins; SF = Sammy Fain; TS = Tony Streeter Unca Marvy's Home Page More Articles

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