

Asbury Park's West Side Vocal Groups Part 1 (1948 – 1958)

Bobby Thomas & Vibranaires, Lenny Welch & Mar-Keys, and More
by Charlie Horner
With contributions from Pamela Horner

Mention Asbury Park, New Jersey, and most outsiders think of the once thriving beach resort that fell onto hard times after the 1970 riots, only to give rise to music icons like Bruce Springsteen, Southside Johnny & the Asbury Jukes and Jon Bon Jovi. Yet there's another side to Asbury Park, a side that is culturally and historically just as important. That is Asbury Park's West Side. For much of its history, Asbury Park has been a segregated city. Now, most northern cities have ethnic separation – it's called *de facto* segregation. But Asbury Park was legally segregated up until the late 1940's.

From the city's birth in the 1870's, there were always two Asbury Parks. The area to the east that bordered the Atlantic Ocean with its boardwalks and sandy beaches was the area pictured on all the pretty postcards. To the southwest, across the railroad tracks and south of Asbury Avenue was the West Side, initially inhabited by immigrant Italians, Jewish people and people of color who built and worked the seaside resort but otherwise were not allowed to be there. While Asbury Park's seaside maintained its squeaky clean image, the West Side thrived with its own business and entertainment zone, a bustling street called Springwood Avenue. As the West Side became more African American, jazz clubs sprang up on Springwood Avenue. In 1913, fourteen-year-old Duke Ellington and his family spent some time in Asbury Park's West Side and it was the ragtime music on Springwood Avenue that gave Duke his first inspiration to become a musician. By the mid-1920's, a young Count Basie, who grew up in nearby Red Bank, NJ, was hanging out at Brown's Pool Hall on the West Side and learning from stride piano great, Willie Gant.

By the war years of the 1940's, the West Side had become predominately African American. Segregation became ever more racial in nature. By law, blacks were not allowed on the boardwalk and were prohibited from using the beach, except for one small area called "the Mud Hole". That was the area of the ocean where the city sewer lines emptied. Schools, such as the West Side's Bangs Avenue School had separate entrances, classrooms and teachers for black and white students. School segregation remained in Asbury Park until 1947, when state law forbade it. After that, white flight left some schools like the Bangs Avenue School predominately black anyway.

Compared to the beachfront areas of Asbury Park, the West Side was overcrowded and impoverished. Yet, despite the evils of segregation, separate societies did create areas where ethnic culture, especially entertainment, thrived. Black areas in New York City (Harlem), Baltimore (Pennsylvania Avenue), Los Angeles (Central Avenue) and elsewhere developed the styles of music that would later become the mainstays



Springwood Avenue, Asbury Park, NJ ca. 1950's
Photographer, Joseph A. Carter (1917–1980) [Ref. 7]

of American Pop music. Asbury Park's West Side had Springwood Avenue, and it was jumping.

Springwood Avenue of the late 1940's and 1950's was a busy business thoroughfare but of special interest to us were the night clubs. Clubs like Cuba's, Leo Karp's Turf Club, the Madonna Club, Odyssey Moore's Orchid Club and (in 1959) Big Bills, formed the basis of black entertainment in Asbury Park. The black community of the West Side, was almost completely ignored by the white mainstream local newspapers, making historical research very difficult. The black clubs of Springwood Avenue were not mentioned in area newspapers and depended solely on local flyers and word of mouth to advertize their entertainment until the Central Jersey Post/News started in the 1960's.

Gospel Quartets

Long before there were R&B vocal groups, there were Gospel groups. Gospel quartet singing was always important to the black community but hit its peak in the 1940's, thanks to groups like the Golden Gate Quartet, Dixie Hummingbirds, Swan Silvertones and others. [Quartet style singing refers to the genre not the number of singers in a group. Hence, Gospel quartets often had five, six, seven or more members.] Asbury Park's West Side had its share of Gospel quartets. Two of the better known were the Golden Harmonaires and the Missionary Jubilaires.

The Golden Harmonaires were firmly established by the late-1940's and sang for more than twenty years. As far as we know, they never released a re-



**Golden Harmonaires, Arthur Morris bottom row center.
Photographer, Joseph A. Carter (1917—1980) [Ref. 7]**

cord. A group with that name did record "I Need The Lord" and "When The Roll Is Called" in New York City for *Decca Records* on June 8, 1953, but the sides were never released. Yet the Golden Harmonaires were well known in their home town of Asbury Park. Their lead singer, Arthur Morris, also did a very popular weekly Gospel radio show every Sunday morning called "The Gospel Train" on WJLK-AM in Asbury Park and the Golden Harmonaires would sing live on it. Arthur Morris is the unsung hero of vocal harmony in Asbury Park. In addition to inspiring other singers with his Gospel singing, he also helped younger groups like the Vibranares, Mar-Keys and Juveniles with their harmonies, promotion and bookings.

The Missionary Jubilaires began in Asbury Park as a five man group in the Spring of 1948. The Missionary Jubilaires continued singing well into the 1970's with two original members, Deacon Ellis Brooks and Bro. James Burks. Willie Morris, who sang with a later incarnation of the Vibranares, spent a short time with the Missionary Jubilaires in the 1950's. The Missionary Jubilaires recorded an album for the *Locus* label in the 1970's as well as two 45's for the Newark-based *Richburgh* label and its subsidiary *New Day*. By then they were led by Ted Jones and Sam Murphy.

R&B Group Harmony Comes to the West Side: Bobby Thomas & the Vibranares

When the Orioles changed the face of American music in the summer of 1948 with the unique sounding Deborah Chessler-penned tune, "It's Too Soon To Know," thirteen year old Bobby Thomas was listening. Bobby Thomas was born in Point Pleasant, NJ, and moved with his family to Asbury Park's West Side when he was two. Living on the West Side he attended elementary school at the racially segregated Bangs Avenue School. Bobby and the rest of the black children had to enter the South door of the school and had black teachers. Whites entered the North door and had white teachers. When Bobby's family later moved to nearby Neptune, he still returned to Asbury Park to hang out

and sing with his friends.

Bobby still remembers the first time he heard "It's Too Soon To Know". It was in August of 1948. Bobby didn't have much interest in music and didn't listen to much radio.

"I started singing way back when I was thirteen years old," recalled Bobby. "My mother told my brothers and sisters to go outside, but I hung around because she was baking a cake with chocolate icing and I wanted to lick the pan. After that I grabbed my football and was headed outside when I heard something on the radio that stopped me dead in my tracks. I'd heard all the Gospel groups like the Dixie Hummingbirds. I'd heard the Charioteers, Delta Rhythm Boys, Ink Spots and Mills Brothers but this was like no other sound I'd ever heard. We had a big floor radio and I walked over to it. The song played and I listened to it. It sounded beautiful! But they never said what the song was. I found myself listening to the radio the next day until that song came back on. This time they said it was a new group called the Orioles and the song was 'It's Too Soon To Know'. I started listening to the radio every day and began singing 'It's Too Soon To Know'. My sister was singing before I ever did. She had a voice like Dinah Washington. One day while I was singing, my sister was standing behind the door listening. When I finished, she started applauding and I was so embarrassed. She said, 'I didn't know you could sing like that! You sound just like that guy [Sonny Til].' That planted the seed for me to form a group."

The Orioles became a huge sensation in the black community and were mobbed by their fans where ever they went. When the Orioles played the Apollo in Harlem, lines stretched around the block and the group was held over another week to accommodate everyone wanting to see them. In 1948, the Orioles played Asbury Park as part of an East Coast swing of one-nighters. Needing a sizable venue to hold the crowds expected for an Orioles performance, the Asbury Park Amory was selected.

The Asbury Park Amory, located at Lake and Bond Streets, just across the railroad tracks from the



**Bobby Thomas (center) with the Orioles at the Asbury Park Armory, 1951. Around Bobby, clockwise from top: Alex Sharp, Sonny Til, Charlie Harris, Ralph Williams.
(Courtesy of Bobby Thomas)**

West Side, had been used for major entertainers and large dances for some time. Dizzy Gillespie and Billy Eckstine had played dances there in the 1940's and a trade magazine reported that Jimmy Lunsford's Orchestra had packed in 1844 fans there in 1946. Needless to say, the venue was again crowded, but Bobby Thomas was able to see Sonny Til and the Orioles perform live for the first time.

Inspired, Bobby Thomas went around the neighborhood and assembled a singing group from his Asbury Park friends. He named the group the Crooners, and it is likely the Crooners were the first West Side R&B vocal group. Originally, the group consisted of Bobby Thomas (lead tenor), Ulysses Jackson (first tenor), Albert Smith (second tenor), Herbie Cole (baritone) and Willie Busby (bass). Herb Cole was the nephew of the famous drummer Cozy Cole. Initially the Crooners sang on the Springwood Avenue street corners, but later they became popular enough to begin singing in local clubs.

By 1950, Ulysses Jackson, Albert Smith and Willie Busby dropped out of the group. Their replacements were Mike Robinson (second tenor), Roosevelt McDuffie (first tenor) and Jimmy Roache (bass). Robinson and Roache were natives of Asbury Park. McDuffie had just moved into town from South Carolina. The biggest change in the group's sound came about with Jimmy Roache's bass voice, a definite positive addition to the group. Roache's voice sounded as deep as that of the Ravens' Jimmy Ricks. One of the biggest breaks for the group came when Arthur Morris invited them to sing live on his Gospel radio show.

"Arthur Morris had us come up to WJLK and he encouraged us as young guys who got together harmonizing like the Golden Harmonaires, even though they were older men," said Bobby. "They thought it was cute to have young guys doing the same things they were. We said, 'We're not singing Gospel.' He said that was OK. There were no bad lyrics or anything. We went up there to sing. Arthur told us to just be calm and we took the microphone. Even though people couldn't see us, we were nervous because we knew people were listening. Arthur calmed us down. He told us to just sing as though we were practicing and there was nobody around. We did it and had fun."

With the new personnel and increased exposure, the Crooners wanted a name change. People kept telling Bobby Thomas that his bass singer's voice was so deep it vibrated the speakers. Bobby at first wanted to call the group the Vibrations but in honor of the Golden Harmonaires who'd helped them, Bobby took the first part of VIBRations and the last part of HarmonAIRES and came up with "Vibranaires". Little did the group know at that time, that their idols, the Orioles had started out under the same name.

The Vibranaires continued singing locally for a couple years, attracting a lot of attention. In 1953, they ventured into New York City and auditioned for Esther Navarro. Navarro had been a secretary with the Shaw Artists Corporation. Shaw Artists Corporation was a booking agency formed by Billy Shaw in 1949 when he left the Gale Agency and took their biggest client, the Orioles with him. Esther Navarro had aspirations to further her career in the music business and from the Shaw agency she already had contacts with record la-



Vibranaires / Vibes, ca. 1954. Clockwise from top: Bobby Thomas, Herb Cole, Roosevelt McDuffie, Mike Robinson, Jimmy Roache. (Courtesy of Bobby Thomas).

bels like *Jubilee/Josie*.

"We were introduced to Esther Navarro and she liked our sound," recalled Bobby Thomas. "The five of us were sitting in her office in Manhattan, and she liked the audition that we did. She didn't like the name Vibranaires and so we were trying to think of a new name. She had another guy in the office. We were on the 5th floor and I was by the window looking down when I saw this great big pink Cadillac convertible. This car came around the corner and I got excited and I said, 'Look at this car!' And they all came to the window. I said that would be a good name for the group, Cadillacs. Esther liked the idea. The other gentleman in the office with her said, 'Well I like the name Sportsmen.' I said, 'No, we don't want the name, Sportsmen.' So I said to Esther, 'Maybe you should call General Motors to get permission.' She called somebody to authorize permission and they told her by phone that she could use the name as long as it's not involved with cars. After she hung up I said, 'Don't you think you should get that in writing?' So she called back and they said they'd put it in writing. After Esther got written permission, she arranged a contract with us using the name the Cadillacs. We were so young, we had to go back to New Jersey and have our parents sign the contract for us. Each one of us had our parents sign the contract and then we took the contract back to Esther. This was October 1953."

Esther must have had her own management and booking agency by then and was working with bandleader Jesse Powell. "She took us into the studio

with his band," said Bobby. "We recorded two songs in the studio with Jesse Powell backing us up but I can't recall the songs. They were both Esther Navarro compositions."

Esther Navarro took test pressings of the Cadillacs record around to radio stations but was told repeatedly that the group sounded too much like the Orioles. In fact, Bobby Thomas' voice did indeed sound like Sonny Til's and the similar sound was intentional.

To see how her new group was accepted by a live audience, Esther Navarro booked Bobby Thomas and the Cadillacs on a stage show in upstate New York. "Esther arranged it to see how the audience liked us," said Bobby. "I think, Little Dave Baughan from the Drifters was on the bill along with another group that had already recorded [the Checkers? - ed.]. We were on the show. People loved us. Jesse Powell backed us up. But Esther was taking too much time for us. We came back to Jersey and said, 'What's the hold up?' We wanted to be stars overnight. So we waited and waited and waited and finally said, 'She's not doing anything. We'll get our contract back and get somebody else.' She kept telling us over the phone to be patient and we kept bugging her and finally she let us go."

Esther Navarro had General Motors' permission to use the name Cadillacs, but didn't have a vocal group. She soon was introduced to Earl Carroll and his Harlem based group, the Carnations, whom she promptly renamed the Cadillacs. By July of 1954, the (new) Cadillacs had released "Gloria" on *Josie Records*.

Meanwhile, Bobby Thomas and his group resumed being the Vibranaires and continued working around Asbury Park and nearby shore towns. When bigger named groups played the Asbury Park Amory, the Vibranaires would often open up for them. At various times, they opened for the Vocaleers, DuDroppers, Five Keys and Solitaires. "We were doing pretty good for a group without a hit record," Bobby recalled.

While singing at a club in Somerville, NJ, called the Three Towers Inn, the Vibranaires were approached by WOV-AM (NYC) disc jockey Joel Turnero. "Joe Turnero came and introduced himself and said he was from New York," said Bobby. He told them he liked the group. "He looked kind of distinguished. His hair was processed. He was neatly dressed. He said, 'How would you guys like to record?'" Turnero told the Vibranaires he had a demo he'd like them to listen to. He gave them a demo of "Doll Face" done by a solo singer.

"We rehearsed it," said Bobby Thomas. "I didn't like the way the singer did it so we did it smoother."

The Vibranaires also had some other original songs they wanted to record, including a beautiful ballad called "Stop Torturing Me". That was a song Bobby Thomas wrote while in his bathtub. "I was always singing wherever I was," said Bobby. "And I was taking a bath and I said, I'd better write this down so I wrote it on toilet paper."

Joel Turnero was a former tap dancer, Cashbox columnist, songwriter and producer who had previously managed the Mellomoods. He arranged for the Vibranaires to record for Lexy "Flap" Hanford's *After Hours* label. Hanford owned the After Hours Record Bar, a record store in Harlem for which the record label was named. The After Hours Record Bar was located at 2100 7th Avenue, just a few doors down 125th Street

from the Apollo Theatre. Joel Turnero would broadcast his WOV radio program, "Your Home Boy," from the window of Hanford's store from 8 to 9 PM.

On the day the Vibranaires were scheduled to record, though, they lost the use of their baritone, Herbie Cole.

"We did a show at the Asbury Park Armory and the band left their instruments behind because they had another night's gig there," said Bobby Thomas. "We didn't know that Herbie went back and told the people that he's come back for his bass fiddle. He took the bass fiddle and the next day he pawned it using his real name. The day after that we were ready to go up to New York to record. The police all knew us because we were pretty popular and they came up and tapped on the car window as we were leaving. They said, 'Herb Cole, would you step out of the car?' I said, 'Why do you want Herbie to get out of the car?' They said because he stole a bass fiddle and pawned it at the pawn shop. They took him out of the car and we said, 'Oh, no, what are we gonna do now?' We already had the appointment at the studio. On the way up there we had to change the harmony now that one voice was missing. So it wasn't really done the way I wanted it to be. We got in the studio and there were no musical charts. Mickey Baker and those guys came in and we had no charts to go by. When it came time to record, I sang it, but I wasn't pleased with the background. We had a lot of compliments on the final recording but I wasn't pleased with it. Of course, in Asbury Park and the immediate area, they had it on the juke boxes and everybody was so happy."

The recording session was done at Mastertone Recording Studios at 709 8th Avenue in New York City. Backed by Eddie Schubert Swanston and his Quintet, that included guitarist Mickey Baker, the Vibranaires recorded four songs: "Doll Face," "I Feel So Good," "Stop Torturing Me" and "Stop Jiving Baby". "Doll Face" b/w "I Feel So Good" was released on Hanford's *After Hours* label (#103) in July of 1954. It received little national promotion, but made the Vibranaires even bigger stars in Asbury Park's West Side. "We were well known in Asbury Park," recalled Bobby Thomas. "Locally, we were like the 'Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers' of our time."

By the time the next two Vibranaires sides were released on record, the group's name was shortened to the Vibes. "Stop Torturing Me" b/w "Stop Jiving Me Baby" [should have read "Jiving"] were released on the *Chariot* label, a subsidiary of *After Hours*. I ("Doll Face" may have been also issued on *Chariot* at this time.)

The prevailing thought was that the name Vibranaires was too long or too hard to spell, so the group began singing as the Vibes. The label of "Stop Torturing Me" listed "the Vibes (formerly the Vibranaires)".

With the recordings, the Vibes signed with a new promoter, Bobby McNeil. McNeil got the group on the Chitlin' Circuit, playing major black entertainment venues like the Howard Theatre in Washington DC, the Regal Theatre in Chicago, the Rockland Palace and Audubon Ballroom in New York and the Royal Theatre in Baltimore. They also opened for the Five Keys at Convention Hall on the Boardwalk of Asbury Park. "Bobby McNeil did a lot for us to give us exposure," Bobby remembered.



Test pressing of Vibarnaires' "Doll Face"
(Courtesy of Bobby Leszczak)

Group Harmony Thrives on the West Side

The year was 1954 and black radio was saturated with R&B vocal groups like the Flamingos, Moon-glows, Spaniels, Five Keys, Clovers, Drifters and Dominoes. On the West Side, the Vibes were local heroes, having moved from the street corner to the recording studio and on to playing major venues.

With interest high in singing vocal harmony, black teenagers in Asbury Park were inspired by the Vibes. They saw no reason why, with practice, they couldn't also become singing stars.

At Asbury Park High School, bass singer Joe Major tried to organize his friends into an R&B vocal group. One of the voices he wanted in his group was that of Lenny Welch.

Leon Welch (the "Lenny" would come later) was born in New York City. He moved with his family to Asbury Park in 1954 when he was 13 or 14.

"There was this fellow [Joe Major] that wanted to start a group," Lenny told interviewer Gary James. "I didn't know him at the time. He used to see me walk down the main street there. One day he stopped me and said 'Hey, I'm going to start a singing group. I want you to be in it.' I said, 'Yeah.' I didn't tell him I'm not into it. I thought, 'Is he crazy? How does he even know that I can even sing?' I never sang anywhere. The only thing I can think of is maybe he heard me singing by myself walking up the street. I'd duck behind a building because I knew he was gonna ask me to sing and I wasn't interested."

But one day, Lenny saw Joe Major and some others singing and drawing a crowd in the high school gymnasium.

"I went over and joined the crowd and then Joe motioned me to join in," Lenny recently told Don Stine. "And I did. He held auditions at his house that night and me, William Penha, who was my best buddy from high school, and Raymond Morris made the group. We



78 of Vibes' "Stop Torturing Me"
(Courtesy of Tony Fournier)

were all high school pals around 1954 to 1956."

The group, called the Mar-Keys, never made any recordings but sang at school proms and variety shows and even appeared at the Savoy Theatre on Asbury Park's Mattison Avenue along with Little Richard and the Cadillacs. Arthur Morris is said to have helped the Mar-Keys with their harmony and get booked on some shows. The Mar-Keys also tried out for the Apollo Theatre's Wednesday Amateur Night, but didn't win.

Some of the other groups that formed on the West Side in the mid-1950's were the Delco's (including future Vibranares' Willie Morris) and the Juveniles (featuring Arthur Morris' son, Caleb Morris).

We were definitely inspired by Bobby Thomas and the Vibranares and the Mar-Keys," recalled Caleb Morris. "I remember the Vibranares had Mike Robinson and they used to sing on the corner. There was a corner store and they used to sing outside the store all the time. We were just kids in elementary school and we used to sit there near the corner and listen to them sing. We'd say, 'Oh man, we'd like to do that.' Those guys could really sing!"

A couple years later, Caleb and his friends would listen to Lenny Welch and his group, the Mar-Keys, rehearse in a house near where he lived. "They used to practice in that house and we'd be outside listening. They were amazing. Lenny Welch used to sing 'Ruby Ruby' and man, he could sing that song! He sounded better than the record."

Meanwhile, the Vibes had to make some personnel changes. By 1956, bass Jimmy Roache was drafted, while Herb Cole and Mike Robinson left the group. Their replacements were Joe Major, William Penha and Lenny Welch from the Mar-Keys. The new Vibes line up consisted of Bobby Thomas, Roosevelt McDuffie, Joe Major, William Penha and Lenny Welch.

By the summer of 1956, the music world was drastically changing. Earlier in the year, Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers had become a national sensation



The Mar-Keys, ca. 1956. Clockwise from Top Left: William Penha, Raymond Morris, Joe Major, Lenny Welch.
(Courtesy of Lenny Welch)

with their recording of "Why Do Fools Fall In Love". It was a song sung by teenagers, for teenagers. And radio personalities like Alan Freed had made the music acceptable to white as well as black youngsters. While Freed's stage shows had already alarmed some with their huge crowds of black and white teenagers, Asbury Park felt they could control the situation. On June 30, 1956, Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers were to perform at Convention Hall, the main venue on the Asbury Park boardwalk.

Some twenty-seven hundred teenagers of all races packed Convention Hall that night, supervised by only five private security policemen, with the normal three city police officers outside on the boardwalk. By the second Teenagers number, some fighting broke out in the audience but police were able to restore order and the concert went on. But shortly after that, more fighting broke out and the concert was shut down. Now 2700 teenagers were told to go home, without really getting to see the act they came to see. Even more fighting broke out on the boardwalk and spread to the streets. Police were called from neighboring communities and it took an hour and a half to restore order.

One of the youngsters in the audience was 14-year old Tim Hauser from nearby Belmar, NJ, who had gone to see the Teenagers with some of his friends. When the fighting started he climbed onto the stage and made his way to the backstage hallway. There he helped Frankie Lymon find the safety of the group's dressing room and was invited in. While the disturbance raged outside, Tim sat and listened to the Teen-

agers harmonizing. It was a turning point in his life, as a year later, so inspired, he formed the vocal group, the Criterions with some of his friends from Belmar and nearby Neptune. After a couple of records for the *Cecilia* label in 1959, Tim Hauser went on to much greater fame with Manhattan Transfer.

In the end, about twenty-five people were injured, though only three were hospitalized. Scores of teenagers were taken into custody but only eight were ever booked. City council's response was to try to ban Rock & Roll from Asbury Park. It got the city national attention but little changed in the West Side. In the fall of 1957, Lenny Welch dropped out of high school at the beginning of his senior year and moved to New York City with a friend. There he met Golden Gloves boxer and later actor Coley Wallace, and he became Welch's manager. Wallace was managing other acts and took Lenny along to a *Decca Records* audition. *Decca* changed his name from "Leon" to "Lenny" and recorded two sides, "Rocket To The Moon" and "My One Sincere". Lenny remembers the back up on the records as being a studio group, but Stoney Jackson, a former member of Paul Himmelstein's Heartbreakers, believes his group, the Tru-Tones, are also voices are on "My One Sincere".

Stoney Jackson would later become a part of Asbury Park's V-Eights, but that's for the next part of the story.

Meanwhile, the next generation of Asbury Park vocal harmony groups was staking shape. Arthur Morris' son Caleb was starting his own singing group, the Juveniles.

"We started singing about 1957, our freshmen year in Asbury Park High School," said Caleb. "We started sing with myself, Billy Johnson, Duke Manual,

CONVENTION HALL

BOARDWALK - ASBURY PARK, N.J.

NEW JERSEY'S LARGEST DANCE FLOOR

3000 COMFORTABLE SEATS

DANCE & SHOW

SAT. JUNE 30

FRANKIE LYMON

and The

TEENAGERS

AND DIRECT FROM HOLLYWOOD

The New Recording Sensation

FREDDY PRICE

and His Entire Orch.

ADM. \$1.80 TAX INCL. 8:PM. to 1:AM.

Rufus Edwards, Pops Robinson, and Nelson Saddies. We sang at all the student variety shows at Asbury Park High School, they used to have one every year. At every get together they had at the school, we were asked to sing. My father, Arthur Morris, used to promote shows in the Asbury area, at the Armory and Convention Hall. We were able to sing with some of the top entertainers in the country like the Cadillacs, the Paragons and the Dubs at the Armory and Convention Hall. My father ran maintenance at Convention Hall and he used to have access to most of the people promoting shows. We'd sing one song and things like that. We'd sing at Bangs Avenue School and once or twice at the skating rink. There was a place in Keyport called Majors Lounge. We used to sing there too and a couple other places in Long Branch and Red Bank with Little Anthony & the Imperials. It was really a wonderful thing."

Though the Juveniles made no recordings they were still a very respected group in Asbury Park and surrounding communities.

The Juveniles consisted of Rufus Edwards (lead) Billy Johnson (bass), Duke Manual (baritone), Caleb Morris (first tenor) and Pop Robinson (second tenor). Later Nelson Saddies replaced Pop Robinson. (Later members included Charlie Jones and Donald Scott.)

"We'd solicit anyone who would help us with our background," said Caleb. "We used to sing in the hallways of school. We used to go to the public housing and they had a top floor with little apartments up there.



The Vibes, ca. 1956. Top Left to Right: Roosevelt McDuffie, Bobby Thomas, Lenny Welch. Bottom Left to Right: William Penha, Joe Major. (Courtesy of Bobby Thomas)



The Vibes, ca. 1956. Left to Right: Bobby Thomas, Lenny Welch, Joe Major, William Penha (Courtesy of Bobby Thomas)

We were on the steps and people said, 'You can come up and practice and sing as long as you can sing.' We used to practice up there because of the echo. We won a recording contract in our senior year at Asbury Park High School but what happened was I won a track scholarship and one young man was drafted in the service, two got married and then the other two went to college. I told my father I wanted to be a singer. He told me, 'You've got a scholarship for college, you're going to college!' After we went to college we split up and by the time we got out of college we didn't have the group any longer."

Duke Manual went into the Special forces as a paratrooper and was killed his first day in Viet Nam. Rufus Edwards continued singing, eventually joining the Darchaes. That's also a later story.

Bobby Thomas entered the service in 1958, effectively breaking up the Vibes. He sang at USO shows in Germany, with a group that included "Carnation" Charlie Hughes of the Drifters and DuDroppers. Bobby returned in 1960 to join the Asbury Park group, the V-Eights.

Meanwhile, Asbury Park High School, as one of the only high schools in the area, was an integrated school. By the late 1950's, white teenagers were picking up on R&B vocal harmony.

Nicky Addeo was born in Newark but moved to Asbury Park in the mid 1950's. "I thought I came to Paradise when I came to Asbury Park," recalled Nicky. "Where I lived the music was black Gospel and R&B mixed in with popular Italian ballads. Gospel groups like Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers, the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Five Blind Boys would come to perform at the Armory. R&B groups like the Heartbeats, the Kodaks and Frankie Lyman & the Teenagers would sing at Convention Hall. The local groups like the [Vibes], the Blenders and the Juveniles used to sing in the stairways of Boston Way on the third floor. Every week I would go there and some black group was singing. Guys from Neptune and Asbury Park. I was in grammar school at Our Lady of Mount Carmel when I first became aware of the music. When I got into high school



The Juveniles (Photo courtesy of Caleb Morris)

and found my voice, they took me under their wing. Joe Major – now there was a bass singer! He sang with the [Vibes]. Raymond Morris, Bobby Young, Michael Carnegie, Raymond Nolan, Ronnie Coleman, Billy Brown and others would add the leads and harmony. I remember one of my early experiences with 'the music' was in high school listening to some guys who were older, singing in the gym. The song was called 'When You Dance'. Five black guys, maybe juniors in high school. And they were dancing and singing." [10]

Nicky Addeo, by his own account, lived in awe of some of the black vocal groups, lending his voice when ever they needed one. He would not record until the 1960's when he was asked to join the Darchaes and the Uniques.

The Darchaes origins can be traced back to the Siciliano home on the 1400 block of Asbury Avenue, the upper boundary of the West Side. Brothers Sam, Danny and Patsy Siciliano were laying the roots for one of Asbury Park's finest vocal harmony groups. In fact, Johnny Petillo, an Asbury Park native who later sang with Danny & The Juniors and The Duprees, once referred to the Siciliano home as "doo wop boot camp". Sam Siciliano started the Ebb Chords, who, with the addition of Ray Dahrouge, would evolve into Ray & the Darchaes. Ray Dahrouge would also go on to become a talented and noted songwriter and producer.

Joe Major would join West Side singers Ron Coleman, Leon Trent and Billy Brown of the Uniques to form the Broadways in the 1960's. Billy Brown would later become a vital part of the Moments and Ray, Goodman & Brown.

Eventually the Shore area would get its own record labels like Gervis "Gus" Tillman's *Vibro* label (Belmar, NJ) and Norman Seldin's *Selsom* label (Red Bank, NJ) to record local groups.

Bobby Thomas would return to Asbury Park in 1960 to join the V-Eights and then reunite the Vibes. Bobby Thomas and members of the Vibes would eventually become the Orioles, backing Sonny Til. But all that's for the next installment.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Notes & References

1. Interview (Jan. 2012) and numerous conversations over the past 25 years with The Vibranaires' Bobby Thomas.
2. Interview with The Juveniles' Caleb Morris (Jan. 2012).
3. Correspondences and/or conversations with Lenny Welch, Stoney Jackson, Willie Morris, Nicky Addeo, Ron Coleman, Sam Siciliano and Ray Dahrouge.
4. Special thanks to Bobby Leszczak and Tony Fournier for their label scans.
5. Thanks to Don Stine, the Asbury Park Historical Society.
6. Special thanks to Madonna Carter Jackson for supplying photos taken by her father, West Side photographer Joseph A. Carter Sr. [See References 7 & 8]
7. Madonna Carter Jackson, *Asbury Park: A West Side Story, A Pictorial Journey Through The Eyes of Joseph A. Carter, Sr.*, Outskirts Press Inc., Denver, CO, (2007)
8. Madonna Carter Jackson, *Asbury Park: A West Side Story—Second Edition, A Pictorial Journey Through The Eyes of Joseph A. Carter, Sr.*, Outskirts Press Inc., Denver, CO, (2011)
9. Daniel Wolff, *4th of July, Asbury Park*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York (2005).
10. Nicky Addeo, "The Real Music of Asbury Park," from Helen-Chantal Pike, *Asbury Park's Glory Days*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ (2005).
11. Patsy Siciliano, "Sound of Asbury Park," from Helen-Chantal Pike ed., *Asbury Park Where Music Lives*, Clayton Press, Asbury Park, NJ (2011).
12. Gary James, "Interview with Lenny Welch," www.classicbands.com
13. Don Stine's Interview with Lenny Welch, (2011).
14. Marv Goldberg, "The Vibranaires," Marv Goldberg's R&B Notebooks website.
15. Jay Warner, "The Criterions," The Billboard Book of American Singing Groups, Billboard Books, New York (1992), p. 133
16. For more articles, concert reviews, live events and news about vocal group harmony, visit our website.

www.classicurbanharmony.net

Discography of Related 45's

The Golden Harmonaires (1953)

Decca (unrel.) I Need The Lord / When the Roll Is Called

The Missionary Jubilaires (1970's)

Richburgh 111 Savior Bless Me / Look To Jesus

New Day 118 Church Bells Toning / What You Going To Do

The Vibranaires

After Hours 103 Doll Face / Ooh I Feel So Good 7/54

The Vibes

Chariot 105 Stop Torturing Me / Stop Jibing Baby 10/54

Lenny Welch (and male group) (1958)

Decca 30637 My One Sincere

The Criterions (1959)

Cecilia 1208 I Remain Truly Yours / You Just You

Cecilia 1010 Don't Say Goodbye / Crying The Blues Over Me