

The Johnny Maestro Story

**By Charlie Horner & Todd Baptista
With Contributions from Pamela Horner**

(Based in part on separate interviews of Johnny Maestro by Todd R. Baptista and Matt the Cat and of J. T. Carter and Billy Dawn Smith by Charlie Horner)

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Johnny Maestro Special

= ECHOES = OF THE PAST =



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On March 24, 2010, one of the most endearing and recognizable voices in vocal harmony fell silent. For those who grew up in the 1950's or 1960's, Johnny Maestro's lead voice, both with the Crests and Brooklyn Bridge, has long been a part of our lives. While much has been written about Johnny Maestro since his passing, *Echoes of the Past* could not let this issue go by without our own tribute to this icon of our music.

John Peter Mastrangelo was born on the Lower East Side of Manhattan on May 7, 1939. He was raised on 9-11 Roosevelt Street in "Little Italy" until he was seventeen. Johnny's first interest in music came from radio. "I would listen to the radio every night," said Johnny. "I was fascinated by music. I enjoyed listening to people like Frankie Laine and Johnny Ray. Johnny Ray was one of my favorites. I tried emulating him when I was a little kid. I'd say he was one of the first white soul singers. He put a lot of feeling into his songs and just let it all hang out."

While in his mid-teens, Johnny Mastrangelo became interested in R&B vocal harmony. "I started listening to Alan Freed. That's when I got into harmonies, listening to the Flamingos, Harptones and Moonglows. It was such a great sound and I wanted to create that for myself."

By 1955, Johnny was trying to put together a vocal group. "I was very interested in harmony," recalled Johnny. "I wanted to form a group of my own. I started asking around the area where I lived but I was not too successful in recruiting singers."

At this point the story shifts to another emerging vocal group on the Lower East Side. "It actually started in the boys room in school," said J.T. Carter. "I heard these two guys singing and it sounded terrible so I tried to help. I don't know how I learned harmony or where it came from but I could always sing the note. So I took them and started correcting their harmony." This was the beginning of the group that would become the Crests. J.T. Carter was from Delancey Street while Talmadge "Tommie" Gough (first tenor) and Harold "Chico" Torres (second tenor) were from the Alfred E. Smith housing project. They soon added tenor Patricia Van Dross, also from the Alfred Smith Projects. All four were 13 or 14 years old and attending P.S. 160 junior high school. The yet unnamed group began singing at local school and church functions. A man remembered only as Mr. Morrow, took an interest in them and started teaching them harmony. Mr. Morrow's credentials have been clouded with time. J.T. remembers him as being connected to the Five Keys while other sources refer to him as a gospel singer.

How Johnny Mastrangelo came to join this group is also subject to different remembrances. J.T. Carter recalled it was Mr. Morrow who first heard about Johnny Mastrangelo and suggested him for an addition

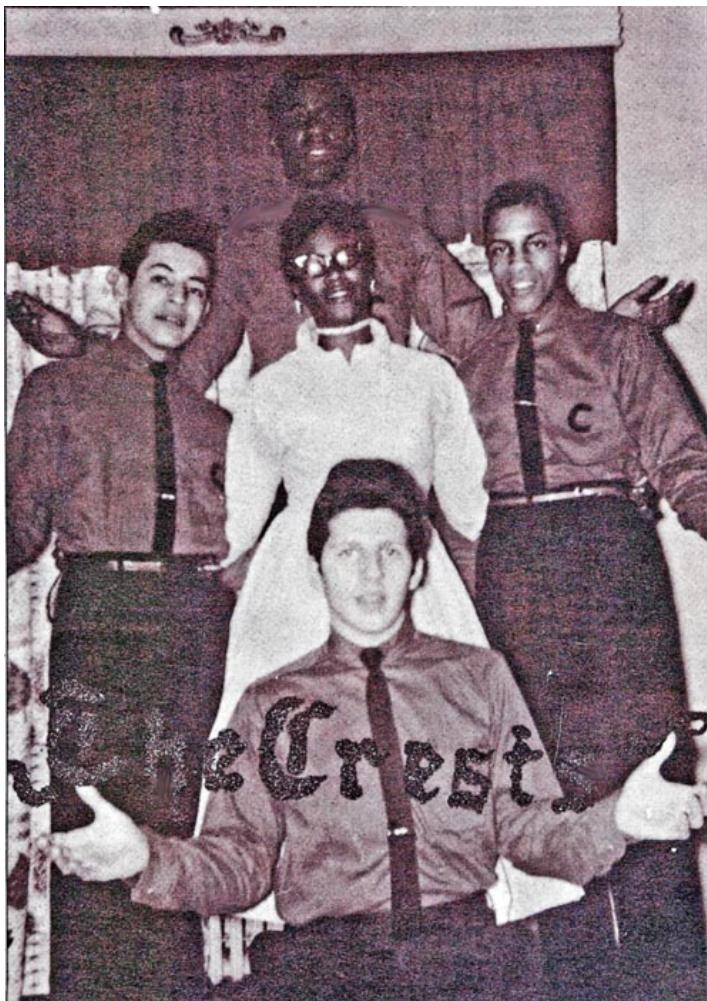


Johnny Maestro

to the group. "I guess word got around that I was looking to put together a group," remembered Johnny. "And these three guys approached me one day and said, 'Listen, we're just learning harmony. We're singing with a gentleman who's a gospel singer known as Mr. Morrow. Would you be interested in coming up and listening to us and maybe we can form a group.' I hadn't had any success in finding anyone so I said, 'Let's try it.' So I went up to his apartment and they showed me what they were doing. I was very impressed with the sound they were getting and we clicked immediately and started singing together."

Johnny became the new lead of the group, that by now J.T. Carter had named the Crests. "I would up sing bass because no one else could," J.T. recalled. The Crests began singing locally. Many of the group's rehearsals were held at Patricia Van Dross' home, a high rise apartment at 180 South Street in the Alfred E. Smith projects. Patricia had a younger brother called "Ronnie". Luther Ronzoni Van Dross would later find fame as the singer Luther Vandross, but at the time was only six years old.

"At the time, Luther was like up to our knee caps," laughed J. T. "He was a little guy and he would come in and try to shoot a pea shooter at us while we



Early photo of the Crests. Top: J.T. Carter; Middle row left to right: Harold Torres, Patricia Van Dross, Talmadge Gough; Bottom: Johnny Mastrangelo.

were singing. He'd interrupt by banging on the piano. We had to kick him in his butt to chase him out of the room." "[The Crests] used to rehearse in my living room when I was young," Luther Vandross confirmed in his biography. "I used to disturb their rehearsals and my sister would yell, 'Mama would you come and get him, please, and make him stop.'" [4]

One of the things that made the Crests unique was the fact that they were racially diverse. Johnny Mastrangelo was Italian, J. T. Carter, Talmadge Gough and Patricia Van Dross were black and Harold Torres was Hispanic. While this may have seemed unusual for a vocal group, it was not unusual for the Lower East Side during the mid-1950's. "Everything was integrated on the Lower East Side," said J. T. Carter. "In my building there were Jewish, Russian, Italian and African-Americans. We all got along together. We were forced together [by economic conditions]. It was where we lived and we were very happy together."

"It [racial diversity] wasn't even a thought," said Johnny. "We just worked well together. We sang well together and that was the main concern at the time. When we first formed the group we would sing anywhere we were. We'd be hanging out in the park and we'd sing there. We'd go to dances and we'd sing and anywhere we traveled, we'd sing. As a matter of



The original Crests. Left to right: Patricia Van Dross, Johnny Mastrangelo, Harold Torres, Talmadge Gough, J.T. Carter

fact, that's how we were discovered, traveling on a subway train. Going from the Brooklyn Bridge Station [of the Lexington IRT] going uptown."

"We jumped the turnstile because we didn't have any money to ride the train," J. T. recalled. "We were singing on the train." A woman on the train was impressed with the group's singing. She approached the group and gave them a business card. She said, "Please call this man. I think he may be able to help you." The business card belonged to Al Browne. While the woman never identified herself, the Crests believe she was Al Browne's wife.

Al Browne was a pianist and band leader from Brooklyn. Through much of the 1950's he was closely associated with singer and songwriter Billy Dawn Smith. Al had been a pianist with the Billy Dawn Quartet. When Billy Dawn Smith was co-owner of *Hull Records*, Al Browne was the band for recordings by groups like the Heartbeats.



Luther Vandross in later years.



Original First press of "My Juanita"
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)

In 1957, Al Browne began writing, arranging, producing and recording songs for the newly formed *Joyce* label, operated out of the back of a record store in Brooklyn. "Al brought us to the record company, we auditioned, they loved us and signed us immediately," said Johnny. The Crests recorded two songs at that first recording session, a ballad "Sweetest One" and an up-tempo side, "My Juanita." Johnny recalled the session being recorded in the back of the record store. Al Browne's combo provided the music.

Alan Freed was the first one to play "Sweetest One", said Johnny. "I can remember listening to the radio at my house. We were all sitting around or lying on the floor listening. We knew he was going to play it that evening. When he came on and mentioned our name ... Wow! What a thrill!" Alan Freed also started flipping the record over and playing "My Juanita".

The Crests first recording session took place early in 1957. By July 15, trade magazines were listing "Sweetest One" as #86 on the Pop Charts. The record must have been showing potential long before that because Al Browne rushed the Crests back into the studio on May 22, 1957 to record the group's second *Joyce* recording, "No One To Love" b/w "Wish She was Mine". The Crests performed wherever they could, the guys dressed in checkered jackets and Patricia in a fluffy prom dress.

Joyce Records didn't last very long (a total of five releases) before closing down. At the time Billy Dawn Smith was writing songs with George Paxton's publishing companies, Winneton Music and George Paxton Music. Billy Dawn Smith was aware of the Crests from the beginning. "I was there at the recording session when they did 'Sweetest One' and 'My Juanita'" recalled Billy. "There was no more *Joyce Records* and I wasn't going to let Johnny and the group be out there in the middle of the street."

Billy Dawn Smith suggested to George Paxton that they start their own record label to record the Crests. The owners of the new label, named "*Coed*" by George Paxton, were Smith, fellow songwriter Bert Keyes, Marvin Cane and George Paxton. "I just wanted to record the Crests," said Billy. "We weren't thinking about forming our own record label because we were doing alright in the publishing business. We were friends with Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé and Perry Como. We already had artists. We had the Ames Brothers. I was in with all the groups anyway. I'd already had *Hull Records*. I said, 'Let's start a record label. I've already got this group the Crests and they're not doing anything. Let's start off with the Crests.' George said it was a good idea."

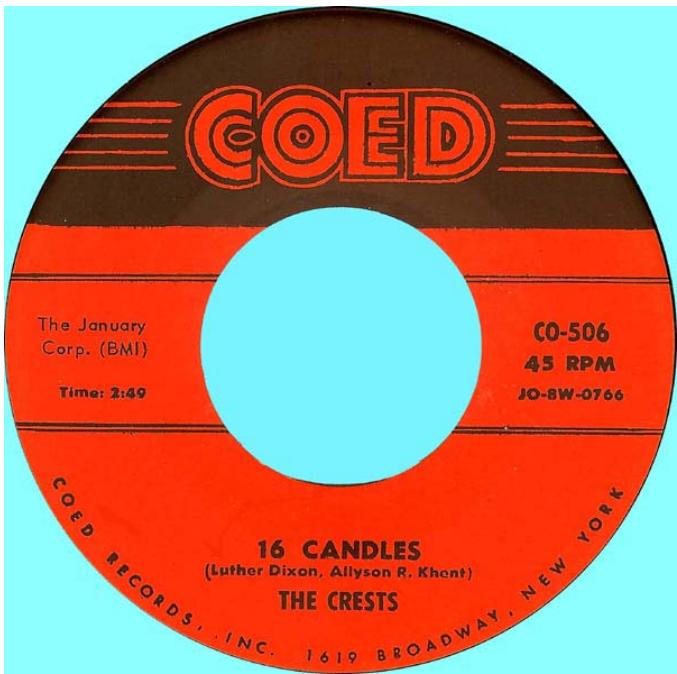
Prior to the Crests recording for *Coed*, Patricia Van Dross dropped out of the group. The group anticipated going on the road to promote records and Patricia Van Dross' mother didn't want her daughter touring with a bunch of older boys. Patricia was only 15 at the time and so the Crests decided to continue without her.

The Crests first *Coed* release (and the first record on *Coed*) was the Billy Dawn Smith composition, "I Thank The Moon" backed with the catchy up tempo, "Pretty Little Angel." Released in the summer of 1958, the record got some airplay locally but sales were pale compared to the group's second release.

The Billy Dawn Smith and Bert Keyes composition, "Beside You" was picked for the "A" side but it was actually the flip, "16 Candles" that ended up defining the Crests career. "16 Candles" was a smooth ballad led by Johnny, who had now shortened his professional



The Crests on *Coed*. Clockwise from left:
Talmadge Gough, J.T. Carter, Harold Torres, Johnny Mastrangelo.



name to "Johnny Mastro". It was written by Luther Dixon and Allyson R. Khent.

Asked about the rumor that "16 Candles" had originally been written as "21 Candles," Billy Dawn Smith replied, "That's true. First it was '21 Candles.' We changed it because it was logical. If you want to sell records you sell them to the sixteen-year-olds."

It was dee jay Alan Freed who first flipped the record over. "He said he'd rather play "16 Candles," said Billy. "He was right."

In addition to the four Crests singing on "16 Candles," three female voices can also be heard. They are the Miller Sisters, daughters of William Henry Miller, Billy Dawn Smith's partner at *Hull Records*. "The Miller Sister were my group, too," said Billy. "I wrote all of their stuff."

"16 Candles" debuted on the Billboard Pop Charts on November 24, 1958 and spent twenty-one weeks on the Charts, eventually reaching #2. It reached #4 on the R&B Charts.

With the popularity of "16 Candles," the Crests were invited to appear on Alan Freed's "Christmas Jubilee of Stars" stage show at the Manhattan Loews' State Theater at Times Square. The show opened on Christmas Day 1958. Also on the show were Chuck Berry, Ritchie Valens, Jackie Wilson, Jimmy Clanton, the Cadillacs, Eddie Cochran, the Moonglows, the Flamingos, Frankie Avalon, Dion & the Belmonts, the Royal Teens, Baby Washington, the Nu Tornadoes, Johnny Ray, the Everly Brothers, Bo Diddley and Ed Townsend.

"Our first big show was at the Loews' State Theater in Manhattan," recalled Johnny. "On that show was Ritchie Valens and the Everly Brothers and I think Dion's first performance was there too. We would do maybe five shows a day. They'd show a feature film in between and then we'd repeat all day long."

While appearing at the weeklong Freed stage show, the Crests were invited to perform on the December 27, 1958 episode of *Dick Clark Saturday Night Beechnut Show*. Also to be on the show were Ritchie Valens, Jackie Wilson, Jimmy Clanton, the [white] Dia-

monds and Jill Corey.

In late January 1959, it was announced that the Crests had signed on with Irvin Feld's "Biggest Show of 1959" six week package tour. It would eventually feature Clyde McPhatter, Bo Diddley, the Platters, Little Anthony & The Imperials, Jimmy Clanton, the Cadillacs, and the Buddy Johnson Orchestra with Ella Johnson. Initially, Bubby Holly and the Crickets and Ritchie Valens were supposed to be on the tour but Holly and Valens died in a plane crash in February.

The Feld tour was promoted with tie-ins to local TV and radio promotions. It may have been on this promotional show, that the Crests made their first excursion into the South to Washington, D.C. for a show connected with Milt Grant's WTTC-TV program.

"Our first time [experiencing racial prejudice] was when we first went on the road and we drove out of New York on our way to Washington," remembered Johnny. "We stopped in Baltimore on the way. Baltimore was segregated at that time but we didn't know that. We drove through the night to early morning and we were tired and hungry so we stopped at a diner. We stayed there quite a while wondering why everyone else was getting served. I walked up to the counter and said, 'Can we get a waitress here?' And [the guy said, looking over at the Crests,] 'I'm sorry, we don't serve colored here.'"

The bus tours through the South showed a side of America the Crests were not used to. "We [as an integrated group] were not accepted in the white areas back then," said Johnny. "I would have to stay in the black part [of the city] if I wanted to stay with the group. Some places we played, I would have to stand on the other side of the stage [than the rest of the Crests]. They would say, 'The white boy has to stand here.' Coming from New York we never saw that kind of thing. [In the South] we had colored bathrooms and colored water fountains and the audiences were also segregated."





Crests on stage. ca. 1959

"In Dallas, they had a rope down the center of the auditorium," said J. T. Carter. "The white folk would be on one side and the black folk would be on the other. One time we played to a double stage. There was a curtain blocking the middle of it. In this theater, on one side there were black people and on the other side there were white people and we played to the wings. Whenever we'd go to the black people they'd start cheering and then we'd sing to the white people and they'd start cheering. That felt kind of stupid but we went through it."

"This was one of the things that helped desegregate the hotels," J. T. reflected. "Because you couldn't have guys like Jackie Wilson sleeping in a flea bag hotel. So they [eventually] started letting us stay in the major hotels."

In February, 1959, Coed released the Crests' next record, "Six Nights A Week". It was a Billy Dawn Smith composition as was the flip, "I Do". "Six Nights A Week" quickly climbed to #28 on the Pop Charts. In May, "Flower of Love" came out, reaching #79. It too was co-written by Billy Dawn Smith.

The Crests were again booked on Dick Clark's May 2, 1959 *Saturday Night Beechnut Show*. This time the Crests were to lip-sync "Six Nights A Week". Also on the show were Bobby Darin, Connie Francis, Wilbert Harrison and the G-Notes. Dick Clark's Saturday night show was taped in front of a live audience on Saturday nights from the Little Theatre in New York City. Dick Clark commuted from Philadelphia to New York to do the "Beechnut" show, as he was still broadcasting his *American Bandstand Show* weekdays from Philadelphia. There was actually two shows done each Saturday the first being a dress rehearsal show. Because of the demand, Dick would allow a different audience in for the rehearsal than for the second show which was the one that was televised. The Crests showed up during the afternoon and were told they would be lip-syncing "Six Nights A Week" while sitting in a row boat on a phony lake setting. The group would be behind the curtain until Dick Clark gave the cue and then the curtain would open to the Crests singing. All went well during the rehearsal. When the curtain opened, the Crests sang "Six

Nights A Week" and received a thunderous applause. According Johnny Maestro, the Crests were told to return in an hour for the actual taping of the show before the next live audience. The Crests left for something to eat but were a half hour late getting back to the theater. In the meantime, the taping of the actual show started. This time Dick Clark introduced the Crests and the curtains opened revealing only an empty rowboat. The audience looked on in bewilderment for the next two-and-a-half minutes while an empty rowboat lip-synced "Six Nights A Week." The Crests finally arrived and the entire show had to be re-taped. [5]

Two days later, the Crests traveled to Philadelphia to appear on Clark's American Bandstand. There they lip-synced "Six Nights A Week" and the just released "Flower Of Love."

In July 1959, Coed issued "The Angels Listened In" by the Crest and it went to #22. The record was co-written by Billy Dawn Smith.

The Crests appeared on Alan Freed's 1959 Brooklyn Fox Labor Day Show. Also on the show were Jackie Wilson, Jimmy Clanton, Dion & the Belmonts, the Skyliners, the Mystics, Johnny Restivo, the Tempos, Ronnie Hawkins, Jo Ann Campbell, Bo Diddley, Valerie Carr and Bobby Lewis. The appearance was timed to coincide with the popularity of "The Angels Listened In."

By now the Crests were one of the hottest acts in the country and Johnny Mastro's lead voice was becoming one of the most recognizable around. Coed kept the hits coming with the October 1959 release of "A Year Ago Tonight", yet another Billy Dawn Smith co-written song. It would eventually reach #42 on the Charts.

To introduce the new song, the Crests made another (October 31, 1959) appearance on *Dick Clark's*



Billy Dawn Smith



The Crests

Saturday Night Beechnut Show. In addition to doing "A Year Ago Tonight," they also lip-synced "The Angels Listened In". Also on the show were Santo & Johnny, the Re-Vels, Carl Mann and Larry Hale.

The year 1960 started out strong for the Crests. In January, *Coed* released "Step By Step" (written by Ollie Jones and Billy Dawn Smith) and backed it with "Gee (But I'd Give The World)" (written by Billy Dawn Smith and Bert Keyes). "Step By Step" was a medium tempo side that reached #14, the Crests biggest hit since "Sixteen Candles". The flip, "Gee (But I'd Give The World" was a beautiful ballad that became a favorite in Philadelphia, eventually to be covered by the south Philly group, Anthony & the Sophomores.

On March 12, 1960, the Crests made yet another appearance on *Dick Clark's Saturday Night Beechnut Show*. Appearing along with Jackie Wilson, Santo & Johnny and Freddie Cannon, it's not known what song they did, but a good guess would be "Step By Step".

During this time, the Crests spent a good deal of the time on the road, performing. For instance, it's been reported that in May 1960 they were performing at the Tivoli theater in Chicago with Sam Cook and the Flamingos.

In May 1960, *Coed* released "Trouble In Paradise" a Billy Dawn Smith-Allyson Khent composition. Again the record clicked, hitting #20 on the Charts.

At this point, credit must be given to the Crests' songwriters. Operating out of offices in the Brill Building at 1619 Broadway, George Paxton had assembled some of the best around – Billy Dawn Smith, Bert Keyes, Luther Dixon, Ollie Jones, Allyson R. Khent. Yes, Johnny Mastro was an exceptional lead singer and yes, the Crests harmony was great. But to place the Crests first seven records on the Charts in eighteen months is quite an accomplishment. And these songwriters were

also writing for many other acts besides the Crests. Perhaps one of the greatest writers was Billy Dawn Smith, whose non-Crests credentials also include the Five Satin's "To The Aisle", the Passions' "This Is My Love" and over 700 other songs. Billy either wrote or co-wrote all the Crests hits except "16 Candles". Besides those, Billy is fond of three songs he wrote for the Crests that never got released, "Let Me Be The One," "Learning About Love" and "Let True Love Begin."

Billy Dawn Smith would have the songs all ready for the group by the time they got them. "Burt Keyes did the musical arrangements," said Billy. "But all the stuff was in there when I wrote the songs. Calling All Angels, Calling All Angels... I just put stuff like that in when I wrote the songs."

Billy Dawn Smith also had a lot of praise for Johnny Maestro as a singer. Billy would sit at a piano and run through how he wanted Johnny to sing his songs. "I loved the way Johnny sang," said Billy. I never had an argument with Johnny. Johnny Maestro was the easiest guy in the world to write a song for. He never said, 'I think it should go this way' or 'I think this should happen.'"

The Crests promoted "Trouble In Paradise" with a drive down to Philly to appear on American Bandstand on June 10, 1960. The next night they were back in New York City appearing on *Dick Clark's Saturday Night Beechnut Show* with Bobby Darin, the Fendermen, the Skyliners and Paul Evans. They would do Clark's Saturday TV night show one month later (July 23) again lip-syncing "Trouble In Paradise".

But with "Trouble In Paradise" still on the charts in the summer of 1960, things started changing at *Coed* for the Crests. From time to time, the group was billed as "The Crests with Johnny Mastro" but the groups' next record in August 1960 credited "The Crests featuring Johnny Mastro". In addition, *Coed* issued a solo effort by Johnny under the name Johnny Masters. The Crests began sensing that *Coed* was interested in separating Johnny from the group.

"I'm sorry in a way we did that because that's what broke up the Crests when they did break up," reflected Billy Dawn Smith. "Putting Johnny Maestro's name up there. Then George Paxton got scared that something was going to happen to Johnny. They went on a gig down South and George was afraid that there being one white guy and three black guys down there that there would be a whole lot of turmoil. Of course that wasn't true. There was nothing going to happen. They don't attack interracial groups on stage!"

There may also have been a concern at *Coed* about the racial make up of the group limiting their opportunities. "We were told we could not do national TV because of that," said Johnny Maestro. "We did do Bandstand. That was the only one we did. They told us the other major stations would not take us and because of that, record sales were going to diminish and we'd need to split the group up. They wanted me to go solo and I did for a while. I didn't enjoy it but being young we didn't understand business and we did what the record company told us. They said, 'We'll get another lead singer for the Crests and we'll put you out as a solo artist'."

"They told us we were racially mixed and that's



Johnny Maestro & Del Satins

"why we didn't get to do the Ed Sullivan Show," said J. T. Carter. At that point, former Willows' lead, Tony Middleton was brought in to replace Johnny Maestro who would now be recording on his own. "They wanted to give the group's name (the Crests) to Johnny and rename the other side the J-Tones to please me," said J. T. "They wanted to give Johnny the name "Johnny Maestro & the Crests" and leave us with no name and they tried to do it for awhile but we went to the union and we got them to stop doing that.

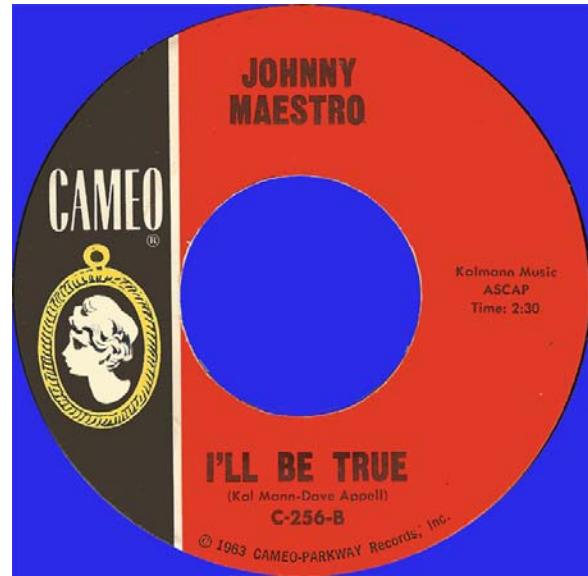
Amidst the turmoil, "Journey of Love" only charted at #81 and another release "Isn't It Amazing" only reached #100. Coed also issued two albums by the Crests, "The Crests Sing All the Biggies" and "The Best of the Crests: 16 Fabulous Hits". But from this point on Johnny began recording solo or with studio group backup. His subsequent releases on Coed credited either "Johnny **Mastro**, Voice of the Crests," "Johnny **Maestro**, Voice of the Crests," or finally just "Johnny Maestro". Johnny Maestro's last three solo recordings for Coed failed to chart, in spite of Johnny making a solo appearance on American Bandstand on April 25, 1961 to lip-sync "Model Girl" and "What A Surprise."

Tony Middleton took over the lead of the Crest for only one Coed release. He's leading "Little Miracles". After that Coed brought in James Ancrum to replace him. The Crests moved on to the Trans Atlas label in 1962 and then to the Selma label in 1963 where they recorded "Guilty."

Johnny Maestro also left the Coed label in 1962, recording a string of solo records for the Apt, Cameo, Scepter, Parkway and United Artists labels. Some of these recordings credited back up by the Crests but none contained any of the other original Crests.

"I did leave *Coed*," Johnny Maestro recalled. I was not happy with the material that they were giving me and I was not happy with how they were handling my career at that point. And I wasn't happy being a soloist. So I put together a band rather than a vocal group. A band of musicians that could sing. I started traveling around the country that way. I believe the first band was called Johnny Maestro & the Holidays. There were so many labels [that I recorded for]. I just started hopping back and forth.

One Johnny Maestro "solo" record deserves mention for fans of group harmony. Johnny Maestro's recording of "I'll Be True" for the *Cameo* label out of Philadelphia, features not only Johnny's great lead but some exceptional uncredited harmony by the Tymes. "The Tymes did the backup vocals on "I'll Be True" and it's flip, "Over The Weekend," said Tymes' Norman Burnett. We never saw Johnny during the recording. He had put down the lead track earlier and then *Cameo* brought us in to do the background." Norman's and



Johnny Maestro & Norman Burnett at the Vocal Group Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, 2005.
Photo courtesy of Norman & Peggy Burnett.

Johnny's paths would cross many times over the next forty-five years. When both the Brooklyn Bridge and the Tymes were inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame during the same year, Norman and Johnny talked about doing "I'll Be True" live on stage together, but it never came about.

In April 1968, Johnny Maestro took over as lead singer for the Del Satins. The Del Satins were a Manhattan vocal group that had first formed in 1958. By the time they made their first recording, the members included Stan Ziska (lead), Fred Ferrara (baritone), his brother Tom Ferrara (bass), Leslie Cauchi (first tenor), and Bobby Failla (second tenor). The Del Satins eventually joined Dion as his new backup group (replacing the Belmonts) though they never got label credit for songs like "Runarounds Sue" and "The Wanderer." By the time Johnny Maestro joined them, the Del Satins consisted of Mike Gregorio, Fred Ferrara and Richie Green. After a short time, Les Cauchi returned from the service and rejoined the group, replacing Richie Green.

"The Del Satins were the guys who did all the background for Dion as a solo artist," Johnny said. "They were performing around the country and we would cross paths many times when I had my band. They had been asking me for a few years to join their group. Every time we'd meet they'd ask again. I wasn't ready until about 1966. Their lead singer had left and I said, 'OK, I think I'll try something new.' So I joined the group and we started traveling around as the Del Satins featuring Johnny Maestro. We didn't put out any records but at the time Blood Sweat & Tears and Chicago were hot and we were just a vocal group with a guitar and drummer. So we held auditions at one of the local clubs on Long Island and we found a band called the Rhythm Method, a seven piece horn band. We thought we complimented each other very well. We approached them and had a meeting in our manager's office. We were there in the office and decided to form



Brooklyn Bridge, ca. 1970

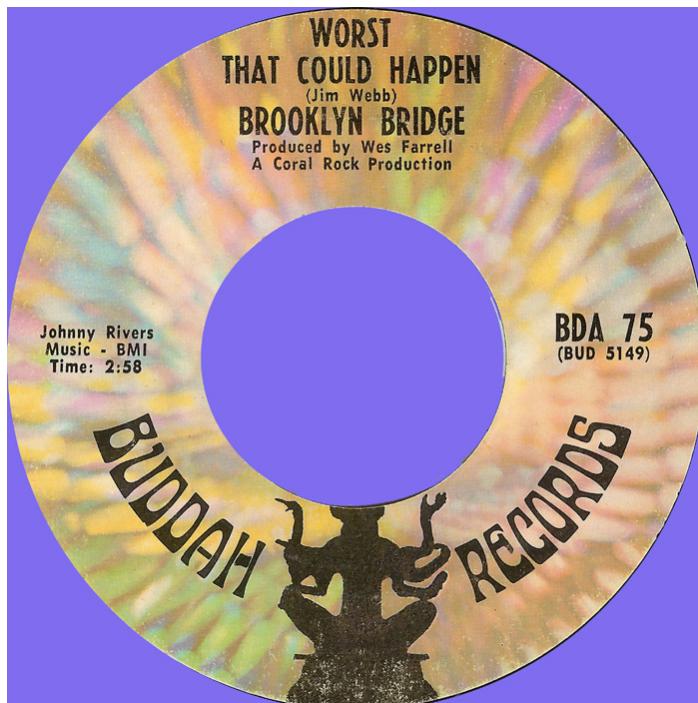
this eleven piece group. Someone in the office made a comment that it would be easier to sell the Brooklyn Bridge than to sell an act of that size. That's how the name 'Brooklyn Bridge' came about."

The Rhythm Method was a band led by saxophonist Tom Sullivan and included his wife Carolyn Wood (organ), Shelly Davis (trumpet), Jimmy Rosiera (bass), Richie Macioce (guitar), Artie Cantanzarita (drums) and Joe Ruvio (sax).

The Brooklyn Bridge performed locally at first and quickly gained in popularity. They were soon one of the hottest band in the NYC area. Brooklyn Bridge was signed to *Buddah Records* in 1968. "When we first signed with *Buddah* they were into 'bubblegum music,'" said Johnny. "Doing records by the Lemon Pipers and the 1910 Fruitgum Company. That's the type of songs they gave us to record."

The group's first release on *Buddah*, "Little Red Boat By The River" b/w "From My Window" failed to do anything. "We weren't very happy with the songs so I approached [label owner] Neil Bogart and said, 'Look, can we do just one more recording,' Johnny Maestro recalled. "Neil said, 'OK, we'll put you in the studio one more time and we'll see.' I had located the Jimmy Webb song, 'The Worst That Could Happen', and we put our own arrangement to it. We went into the studio with it and they were floored. They said, 'That's the style of music that you guys are best at so let's do it!'"

"The Worst That Could Happen" debuted in late 1968 and went to #3 on the Pop Charts. It sold well over a million copies. The follow up, "Welcome Me Love", and its flip side, "Blessed is the Rain" each broke into the Top 50 in 1969, as did their next record, "Your Husband – My Wife". The Brooklyn Bridge closed out the year with an emotional rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone." By 1972, the Brooklyn Bridge had sold over 10 million records, including LP sales. Brooklyn Bridge has played Las Vegas with Carol Channing and Danny Thomas and made appearances on Ed Sullivan's



From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

TV Show (1969) as well as countless others.

For more than forty years Johnny Maestro and Brooklyn Bridge continued thrilling audiences with their performances. When the oldies revival began in the 1970's Johnny was in demand for his hits with both the Crest and Brooklyn Bridge. The group has toured all over the country and abroad, visiting Great Britain and Germany. They've played Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden, Radio City Music Hall and more famous theaters than they can count. Johnny did many more recordings with the Brooklyn Bridge on LP's and CDs.

In 1991, Johnny Maestro assisted his friend Joel Katz in a CD by Joel & the Dymensions. The group consisted of Joel Katz, Johnny Maestro, Bobby Jay and several guest vocalists. Johnny Maestro was diagnosed with cancer in 2009 but continued performing as long as he could. Ironically, it is Joel Katz whom Johnny Maestro picked to take over lead of the Brooklyn Bridge when he became ill.

Johnny Maestro is gone but his music will live on in the hearts of vocal group harmony fans.

Notes and References

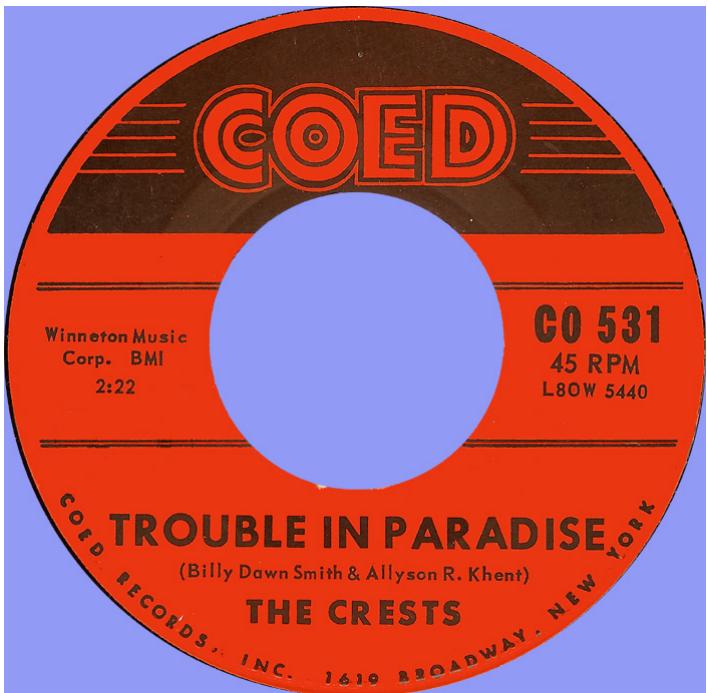
1. Based on Todd Baptista interview with Johnny Maestro (August 26, 1990) and subsequent conversations 1990—2007); Matt the Cat's satellite radio interview with Johnny Maestro (2006); Charlie Horner's interview with J. T. Carter (2009); Charlie Horner's interview with Billy Dawn Smith (April 29, 2010); Charlie Horner's conversations with Tymes' Norman Burnett (May 3, 2010).
2. The authors wish to thank Matt The Cat for permission to use his interview with Johnny Maestro. You can visit his website at www.matthewcat.com/
3. We also thank J.T. Carter, Billy Dawn Smith, Norman Burnett and Vic Donna for their help with this article.
4. Craig Seymour, *Luther: The Life And Longing of Luther Vandross*, Harper Entertainment, NYC (2004),
5. Our thanks to Lois Dixon, President of the Johnny Maestro Fan Club on Yahoo.com [http://
launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/
JohnnyMaestroFans/](http://launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/JohnnyMaestroFans/) for correcting the Dick Clark rowboat story.
6. Todd Baptista, "The Crests," U.G.H.A. 10th Annual Hall of Fame Awards Ceremony Booklet, (2000)
7. Ronnie Italiano, "The Crests Story," *Harmony Tymes*, Issue 1, (Autumn 1980), pp. 4-8.
8. Harvey Mandell, "Music Maestro Please: The Crests Story, Part 2 (Brooklyn Bridge)," *Harmony Tymes*, Issue 2, (Winter 1981), pp. 8-13.
9. Bob Belniak, "An Interview with J.T. Carter," *Echoes of the Past*, Issue 3, (Spring 1988), pp. 7-9.
10. "The Original Johnny Maestro Scrapbook," (1981)
11. "Johnny Maestro & Brooklyn Bridge Photo Album," (ca. late 1990's)
12. Visit the Brooklyn Bridge website at www.j-maestro-bklyn-bridge.com/
13. For more info on the group harmony scene, visit our website, www.classicurbanharmony.net



**Crests Second Record on Joyce
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)**



**Crests First Record on Coed
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)**



(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)

Johnny Maestro Vinyl Singles Discography

As the Crests:

Joyce 103	Sweetest One / My Juanita	57
Joyce 105	Wish She Was Mine/No One To Love	57
Coed 501	Pretty Little Angel/I Thank The Moon	58
Coed 506	Sixteen Candles / Beside You	58
Coed 509	Six Nights A Week / I Do	59
Coed 511	Flower Of Love / Molly Mae	59
Coed 515	The Angels Listened In/I Thank The Moon	59
Coed 521	A Year Ago Tonight / Paper Crown	59
Coed 525	Step By Step / Gee (But I'd Give The World)	60
Coed 531	Trouble In Paradise / Always You	60
Coed 535	Journey Of Love / If My Heart Could Write A Letter	60
Coed 537	Isn't It Amazing / Molly Mae	60
Coed 543	I Remember (In The Still Of The Night)/ Good Golly Miss Molly	60

As the Crests

King Tut 172	Tweedlee Dee / Earth Angel [from Coed LP]	78
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As Johnny Masters

Coed 527	The Great Physician / Say It Isn't So	60
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As Johnny Mastro, Voice of the Crests

Coed 545	Model Girl / We've Got To Tell Them	61
Coed 549	What A Surprise / The Warning Voice	61

As Johnny Maestro

Coed 552	My Happiness / Test Of Love	61
Coed 557	I. O. U./The Way You Look Tonight	61
Coed 562	Besame Baby / It Must Be Love	61
United Artists 474	Before I Loved Her / 50 Million Heartbeats	62
Cameo 256	I'll Be True / Over The Weekend	63
Cameo 305	Lean On Me / Make Up My Mind	64
APT 25075	Phone Booth On The Highway / She's Mine Alone	65

As Johnny Maestro & Crests

Scepter 12112	Afraid Of Love / I'm Stepping Out Of The Picture	65
Parkway 987	Heartburn / Try Me	66
Parkway 999	Come See Me / I Care About You	66
Parkway 118	My Time / Is It You	66

As The Brooklyn Bridge

Buddah 60	Little Red Boat By The River / From My Window	8/68
Buddah 75	Worst That Could Happen / Your Kite My Kite	10/68
Buddah 95	Welcome Me Love / Blessed Is The Rain	69
Buddah 126	Your Husband-My Wife / Everybody's Comin'	69
Buddah 126	Your Husband-My Wife / Upside Down [alt. flip]	69
Buddah 139	You'll Never Walk Alone/Father Paul	69
Buddah 139	You'll Never Walk Alone / Minstral Sun day [alt.flip]	69
Buddah 162	Free As The Wind / He's not A Happy Man	2/70
Buddah 179	Down By The River / Look Again	5/70
Buddah 193	Day Is Done / Opposites	8/70
Buddah 193	Day Is Done / Easy Way [Alt. flip]	70

As Johnny Maestro

Buddah 201	The Rain Came / Never Knew This Kind Of Hurt Before	11/70
Buddah 236	Yours Until Tomorrow / [flip by Brook lyn Bridge]	5/71

As The Brooklyn Bridge

Buddah 230	Wednesday In Your Garden/Cynthia	71
Buddah 236	Man In A Band/[flip by Johnny Maes tro]	5/71
Buddah 289 [dj]	Snow / [same]	
Buddah 293	Bruno's Place / Man In A Band	72

As The Bridge

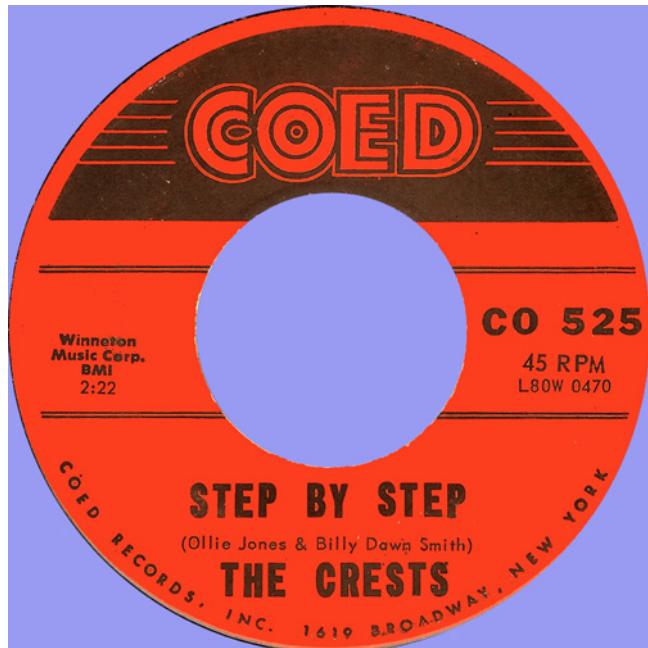
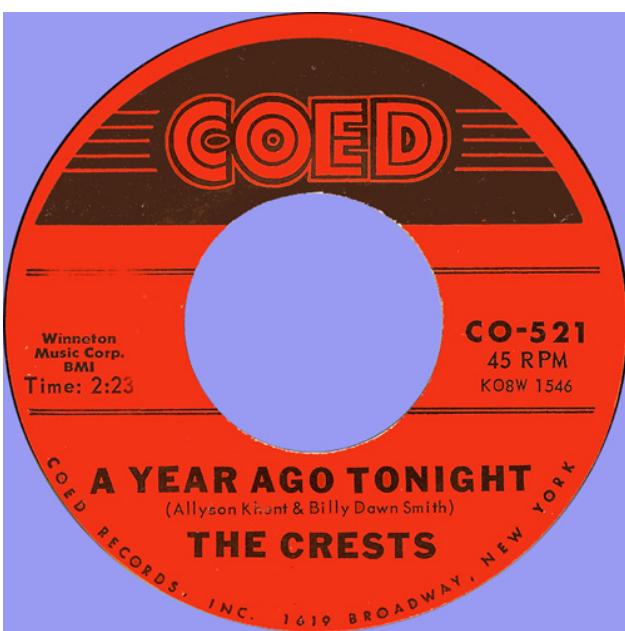
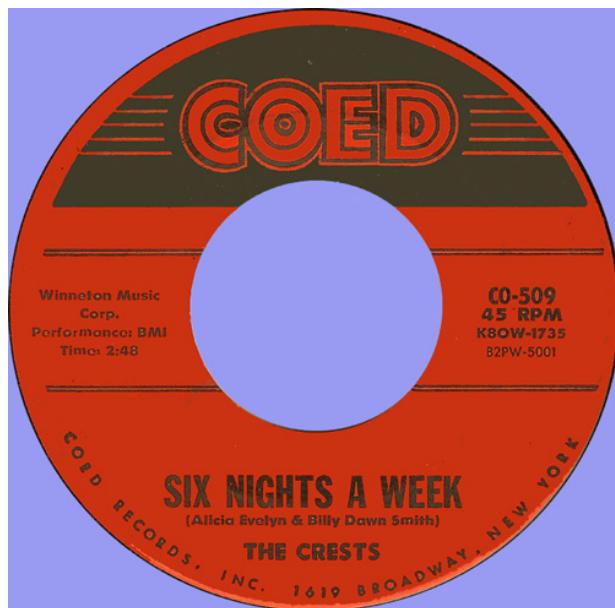
Buddah 317	I Feel Free / Man In A Band	8/72
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As Johnny Maestro & the Brooklyn Bridge

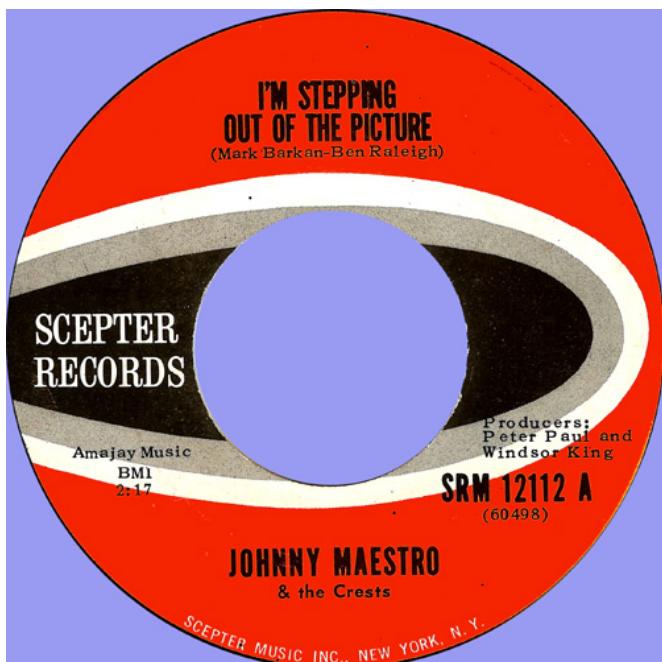
Harvey 500	Worst That Could Happen / Your Hus band-My Wife	81
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As Johnny Maestro & the Crests

Harvey 501	Sixteen Candles / My Juanita	81
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All label scans from the Classic Urban Harmony Archives, with the exception of *Coed 506* (78 RPM), *Cameo 305* and *APT 25075* which were provided by Dr Phil Schwartz. We'll keep adding to these label scans as time permits, until we have provided scans of all of Johnny Maestro's singles.