

The Musical Legacy of Richard Barrett – Part 2

Richard Barrett and the Teenagers

by Charlie Horner

With Contributions from Pamela Horner and Val Shively

Even as the Valentines concentrated on singing, Richard Barrett applied his talents on the other side of the microphone. By early 1955, the Valentines were discouraged with *Old Town* records and looking for a new label. At an aborted recording session, the Valentines were approached by George Goldner who lured them to his *Rama* label. Throughout the summer of 1955, the Valentines played locally and rehearsed for their upcoming recording session with *Rama*. Richard Barrett lived in a second floor apartment on the northeast corner of 165th and Amsterdam Avenue in the Washington Heights section of Harlem. The apartment was directly above a black owned grocery.

"The Valentines were working the Apollo quite often," Richard related. "I used to arrive home dead beat, like I mean *tired*. This bunch of kids, like street kids, ruffians, they used to come and sing outside my window. It was flattering to me, you know, but it was annoying too, because I was tired.[4]

The kids singing outside Barrett's window were the Ermines; Herman Santiago (lead), Joe Negroni (baritone, second lead), Jimmy Merchant (first tenor) and Sherman

Garnes (bass). [Ed. Note: Other names reportedly used by the group include the *Earth Angels* and *Coupe De Villes*.][13] In the grocery store worked a twelve-year-old named Frankie Lymon.

"We learned that Richard Barrett of the Valentines, had moved into the neighborhood," remembered Jimmy Merchant. "This was our opportunity to do our best to get into Richard's path. We would do anything we could, to do that. We were already singing there on the corner, right underneath his window. Frankie was working in the grocery store as a clerk. Frankie was not yet in the group, at all."

Jimmy took us back to the beginnings of the group. "Sherman Garnes and I met in September 1954 and became good friends. By 1955, we were already in cahoots, musically speaking, with Joe Negroni and Herman Santiago. I was introduced to Joe and Herman by Sherman. The four of us formed a group somewhere around May. We called ourselves the Ermines. We also learned that [Barrett] was looking for a place to rehearse [the Valentines] and found it in the school that we attended, Edward W. Stitt Junior High School. The school sits on 165th Street and Edgecomb Avenue. Barrett was on the corner of Amsterdam, so all he had to do was walk one block west. He began rehearsing at that school with the Valentines in the evenings during the Spring of 1955. I was rehearsing there with the Ermines." Stitt Junior High was open at night to local youth for \$2 per year per person and the music room had a piano.[5]

"We mostly rehearsed at Bowmans," recalled Valentines' tenor Eddie Edgehill. "That's also where groups like the Solitaires, Velvets and Capitols [no recordings] rehearsed. But we did rehearse at Stitt a few times."

The Ermines also had the beginnings of an original song that would revolutionize pop music. "Let me take you back to May of 1955," said Jimmy Merchant, "Before Frankie [Lymon] got into the group. On the corner opposite Stitt Junior High was 631 Edgecomb Avenue, where Sherman Garnes lived on the third floor. But in the ground floor of that building, a big brother type gave us a bunch of letters. Those letters ended up in my hands. From those letters came the ideas for "Why Do Fools Fall In Love?"

The Ermines used to practice in the hallways of that apartment building. In the oft retold story, Richard White, resident of the 631 Edgecomb building, handed the group some poetic love letters given to him by his girlfriend. One of them began, "Why do birds sing so gay..." It became the inspiration for "Why Do Fools Fall In Love?"

"The reason why he gave us these love letters," explained Jimmy, "Was that he was tired of us singing in front of his door in the hallway, and singing the same songs over and over again. He said, 'Take my letters and write something original.' The song 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love?' was [originally] called 'Why Do Birds Sing So Gay?' That was the first title of it."

Frankie Lymon was two years younger than the



Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers

GEE
RECORDS

(Photo Courtesy of Val Shively.)

members of the Ermines, who initially didn't want the youngster in their group. "Frankie was following [us] around," remembered Jimmy, "Whenever he got the chance, sticking his nose into our business, physically speaking. He would throw his voice in, he would try to harmonize. We didn't care to have him in the group, but he made it his business to be around us anyway."

"The point where Barrett came into the picture was the talent show that Edward W. Stitt had annually. We joined that talent show to sing. Frankie [also] joined that talent show. He had a band [the Esquires]. It was Frankie, his brother Howard and one other individual. Frankie played bongo drums, his brother played conga, and another kid played sticks. [Earlier] they had been on a talent show on TV. A black, Dick Clark-type guy. Frankie did that TV show. [Ed. Note: There is also a report that Frankie appeared with the Esquires on an Apollo Theater Amateur Night.[6]] At the dress rehearsals for the talent show, Frankie would run into our dressing room which was basically one of the school rooms and hang out with us. Barrett was rehearsing and learned about us and we got into a verbal contest with Barrett and he said, 'OK I'll listen to you'. He listened to us and he saw us on the talent show. He saw both Frankie and the Ermines, and he saw Frankie hang out with us. Then he told us that George Goldner was looking for talent down at Rama records, which was located at 220 W. 42nd St., between Broadway and 8th Avenue." From that point on Frankie Lymon started singing harmony in the group. As a quintet, the Ermines changed their name to the Premiers.

"I was kind of intrigued with their sound," Barrett recounted. "Like they were singing rock and roll but they [had] Puerto Rican kids and their leader Herman Santiago had a Spanish accent which made their sound really different. So I took them to George [Goldner]."[4]

Over the course of time, details of the Premiers audition with Rama/Gee Records are remembered slightly differently by various participants.

"From my point of view," Jimmy Merchant said, "Barrett told us that George Goldner was looking for people for both Rama Records and Tico Records, the Spanish label that George owned. But since we had two Spanish guys in the group, he thought that he could get George to give us an audi-

tion [in spite of] the fact that we were children. Richard Barrett saw the talent in us and wanted to get George Goldner to listen to us. But just to get us in George Goldner's office, he would tell George that we were Spanish and we had Spanish guys in the group, and maybe George might be interested. Because George not only was married to a Spanish lady but had a Spanish label, Tico Records. From the rhythm & blues side, George Goldner was forming another record company subsidiary, Gee. He was already rehearsing a group for the second or third time by the time we got there, a group called the Cleftones."

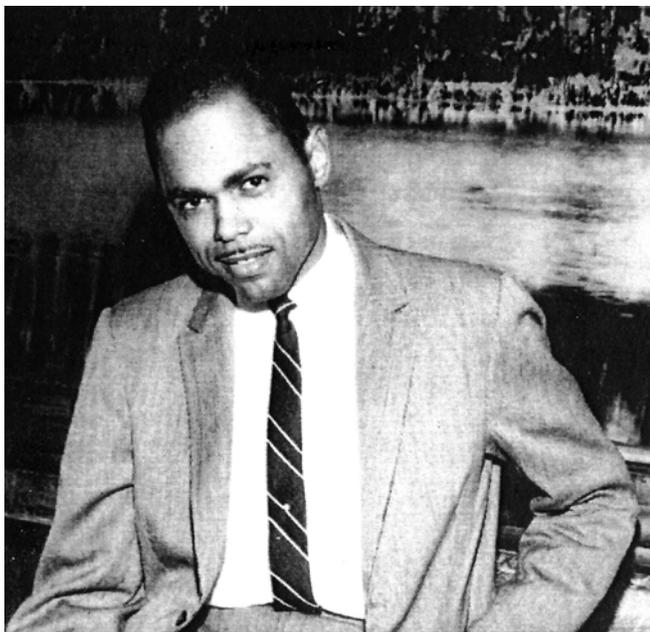
Jimmy Merchant's concerns that George Goldner would not want to record the Premiers because of their youth were well founded.

Barrett recalled, "I asked [George], I said, 'I want to you to record these kids for me.' He said, 'No kids! I don't want no problems with the school board and all that.' I said, 'I can understand.' I walked away and got back uptown. I thought, 'How can I tell these kids he doesn't want to record them because they're too young? They sing. They're in show business.' As far as I was concerned they had talent. Then we made a deal. I said, 'I'll rehearse your group [Five Crowns], George, if you'll record mine!'"[7]

"Going back to that audition day in September 1955 at 220 W. 42nd Street," Jimmy Merchant recalled, "Barrett was there. The Cleftones were there. Herb Cox was right in the room where we were giving the live audition. We were in front of George Goldner, and George listened to our repertoire. We had maybe ten songs. The repertoire was basically the songs that were out at that time. 'Goodnight Sweetheart' [Spaniels], 'That's What You're Doing To Me' [Dominoes], 'Why Don't You Write Me' [Jacks]. We auditioned with those and maybe two others. George said, 'Do you have any originals? We told him we were working on three or four songs: 'Why Do Birds Sing So Gay,' 'Come On Baby' (I Want You To Be My Girl)', 'Please Be Mine' and a song called 'Am I Fooling Myself Again'. Herman was the lead at that time. Frankie Lymon was in the background. Joe [Negroni] was the second lead. Sherman Garnes was the bass and I sang first tenor. When we started to talk to George about originals, we told him we were working on some songs. But they were not complete, so he said, 'Well give me an idea.' We sang 'I Want You To Be My Girl'. That was the one song that we had Frankie singing the lead. It was probably the only one that was complete. We sang a little bit of 'Please Be Mine'. Goldner said, 'Do you have anything else?' I said, 'Well, there's another song that we've been working on before Frankie came into the group. The song is called, 'Why Do Birds Sing So Gay?' He asked how it went and I gave him an idea. George Goldner, after he heard Herman sing four, five, six, songs, said, 'Anybody else sing lead in the group? What about you, young fella?' pointing to Frankie. Frankie was in the background singing. You couldn't miss him with the high tenor. He was short. He was bold. He was fast. He was mature for his age. And he was alert. So Frankie said, 'Yeah. I can sing whatever you'd like me to sing, Mr. Goldner.' He gave a little bit of an interpretation of 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love?' and 'Please Be Mine'. And he [Goldner] told Richard Barrett, 'This is the one I want to sing lead from now on. Go rehearse them and bring them back in a week.'"

"[Frankie Lymon] was only twelve and for legal reasons he gained another birthday!" Barrett recalled.[4]

"Frankie now became the lead singer from that point in September," stated Merchant. "We began to work with Richard Barrett at a particular location downtown, one of the rehearsal studios. By now, we we're back in school. Sherman Garnes, Joe Negroni, Herman Santiago and I were in high school, George Washington High School up on 193rd and Audubon Avenue. Frankie was still attending Stitt Junior



(Photo courtesy of Mrs. Julie Barrett)

High School. It was difficult to get Frankie to rehearse with us all the time because he was a little younger and his mother was a little strict with him. But we were able to get rehearsals in and we also sang on another talent show down around the 130's on Amsterdam Avenue, at PS 43. The Cadillacs were guests that night at the talent show. Everybody wanted to be next to the Cadillacs because they were a real recording group. They had gone to school there but came back for a guest appearance. When they saw us sing on that talent show, they said, "You guys are going to be stars." When they came over to us and told us that, that's when we began signing autographs. I'll never forget that. We hadn't even recorded yet. It was just a talent show. The Cadillacs were guests. Speedo [Earl Carroll], Bobby [Phillips], [Buddy] Brooks and Earl Wade. They told us we were going to be stars and all the kids there wanted us to sign autographs."

Over the next two months, Richard Barrett rehearsed the Premiers on their original material, songs that would make up the group's first recordings.

"I had already written 'Please Be Mine', the music to it," remembered Jimmy Merchant. "Frankie had words. He liked what I was writing and said, 'Let me help you with that.' So Frankie and I wrote 'Please Be Mine'. We had started on 'Am I Fooling Myself Again'. The third song was 'Come On Baby' which [became] 'I Want You To Be My Girl'. 'Why Do Birds Sing So Gay' was incomplete. That's the song we concentrated on with Richard Barrett. Because 'I Want You To Be My Girl,' 'Please Be Mine,' and 'Am I Fooling Myself Again' were already done. 'Why Do Birds Sing So Gay' was the one song that we began working on back then in September. In October and November, Richard took this song and he helped us to shape it into a song that made a lot of sense. When I wrote it, I wrote it as a slow song, a ballad. Richard could write slow songs but he said that fast songs were better for us. Remember, he had "Lily Mae" out. He was a balladeer himself, but he said that the song wasn't going to be strong as a ballad. It was Richard Barrett that shaped that song very close to that phenomenal song that we did."

The group's first recording session took place the first week of December, 1955. The studio musicians of saxophonist Jimmy Wright's band were the same band that had backed the Valentines. Wright suggested the group's name change to the Teenagers. Jimmy Wright's band was an integral part of the

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*Why do
fools fall
in love*



Rama/Gee sound. Wright was born in Atlanta and once relocating to New York City, lent his talents to the bands of Banjo Bernie, Fletcher Henderson, Cab Calloway and Louis Jordan.[8] At that session, the Teenagers recorded "Please Be Mine" and "Why Do Fools Fall In Love".

"In the studio it was George Goldner that drove ['Why Do Fools Fall In Love'] to the next level," Merchant remembered. "Many takes. I said it was in the twenties. Maybe it wasn't that many but there were a lot of takes. I had a tendency to say there were 26 takes, because we were there all night long, doing it over and over and over again. [Goldner] finally pushed Frankie until Frankie began to adlib the song — when he started to sing "Tell me Why-OH-OH-Why...". Frankie was pushed to the degree that he started adlibbing that part of the song. The rest is history."

"Why Do Fools Fall In Love" was released on New Years Eve," said Jimmy Merchant. "By January 3rd it was a smash hit. In the first two or three weeks of 1956, we were doing record hops, bandstand type TV shows where we would lip sync. They took us shopping for the sweaters. They took the pictures. We did interviews with *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, the *Daily News*. We were on the cover of *Cashbox* magazine. They took us out of public school and by February we were in a private school, Quintano's School for Young Professionals, located in midtown. When we were in town, we





attended Quintano's. When we were out of town, we did correspondence and had a private tutor. Richard Barrett was our road manager. The first [stage] show that we did, Richard Barrett took us there. It was at the State Theater in Hartford, Connecticut, on Valentines Day weekend, 1956. The Cadillacs were on that show. Fats Domino was on that show. We were now doing a show, where we were performing with the very guys that we used to hear in the radio. And our billing was very high there, over Fats Domino."

Also on the Hartford show were the Valentines, the Turbans, the Harptones, the Bonnie Sisters and Jesse Powell's Band. Following that show, the Teenagers were off to Detroit (Robin Seymour of WKMH's R&B stage show, the Riviera, Feb. 20 and 27) and Cleveland (Phil McLeon of WERE's R&B stage show, at Keith's 105th St. Theater, Feb. 21 and 25) for a show with the Five Keys, Bob Crewe, the Bonnie Sisters, the Jewels, Ernie Freeman, the Teen Queens and Ivory Joe Hunter.[9]

"Why Do Fools Fall In Love?" first hit the national R&B charts in February 1955, eventually reaching #1. By March it had crossed over to the Pop Charts, reaching #6.

From the beginning, Barrett was conscious of the Teenagers' image. The style for black entertainers of the day included straightened, wavy (marcelled) hair. Popular figures like Nat King Cole, Sugar Ray Robinson and Sammy Davis, Jr. all had the "do". The process for straightening hair was a

gruesome method that used a mixture of lye and potatoes for straightening that if not done carefully could lead to scorched hair and third degree burns of the scalp. By the 1950's, commercial chemicals had replaced the lye, but they were nearly as caustic. "We five brand new recording artists were being readied-up for one of our first gigs by getting our hair marcelled," recalled Jimmy Merchant. "Something that members of all black vocal groups did as soon as they became famous. Getting your 'mop' done was a must...or you weren't show biz. So Richard Barrett said, 'Hey, you guys are going into the Apollo, you've gotta have your hair done. Come up to my place, I'm gonna do it tonight.' We said, 'We'll come right after school.' It was actually one of the first weekends we were performing. One by one, he started out by greasing the hair down. Petroleum jelly was used to grease the scalp, before the solution was combed through the hair. You comb this white stuff through and it straightens the hair. The mixture was called kocommine, and this white paste was a mixture of lye and potatoes. It had an awful smell. The company's label was Jaybra. The chemicals in the solution start to attack the scalp and burn it. If you don't get it out it will actually burn you. He did Sherman first. And he did Frankie. And then he did me. Now, my hair was the most coarse of the three. Frankie's hair was a little softer. Sherman's hair wasn't as coarse as mine. Mine was very coarse and he had to keep the Jaybra mixture in my hair a little longer. I said, 'When you gonna take this out, man?'"

When you gonna take this out? It's burning me!' And Barrett kept saying, 'One more minute. One more minute.' I said, 'A minutes is already gone. When you gonna take it out?' He said, 'Not long. Not long.' It was a funny scene when I look back on it. It burned. And we began to realize there were barber shops up and down Lenox and 7th Avenue where you could go get your hair done. So we [later] used to go to Sugar Ray Robinson's barber shop and get our hair done."

"Richard had worked as a barber in a shop on Amsterdam Avenue," said the Valentines' Eddie Edgehill. "That was while we were rehearsing and playing local gigs, waiting to record for *Rama* [1955]. Richard used to do the Valentines' hair, too. He did mine and Pops Briggs' hair."

For choreography, Goldner and Barrett hired Cholly Adkins to work with both the Teenagers and the Clefones. Adkins, formerly of the dance team Coles & Adkins, had previously taught dance steps to the Cadillacs. He would later train the Temptations and dozens of other groups. Probably the most remembered of the Teenagers' uniforms were the white sweaters with the large red "T"'s on them. "That was a good idea from George Goldner," remembered Jimmy. "I think he might have gotten the idea from the Colts. The Colts had a button down with the letter C on it. It's strictly high a school-college look. It's the award sweater with the letter T. That white sweater with the red T's was just an idea to help us look scholastic."

Even as the Teenagers' first record exploded in popularity, the group went back to the studio to cut their next hits. Two recording sessions in February produced "Love Is A Clown," and "Am I Fooling Myself Again," which would not come out until later and the group's next release, "I Want You To Be My Girl" b/w "I'm Not A Know-It-All".[10]

The first huge show of the Teenagers' young career was Alan Freed's ten-day "Easter Jubilee of Stars" at the Brooklyn Paramount Theater. Freed's local (WINS) "Rock 'n' Roll Party" and nationally syndicated Camel Rock and Roll Party radio shows were instrumental in bringing black music to white teenagers. The main stream media's campaign to discredit rock & roll through associating it with violence led to increased security with over a hundred special police patrolling inside and outside the theater. Flashlight equipped uniformed and non-uniformed police roamed the aisles. Outside, block-long ticket lines caused police to suspend and reroute traffic around the theater. Besides the Teenagers, the show included the Platters, the Valentines, the Clefones, the Willows, the Royaltones, Ruth McPhadden, the Rover Boys, the Jodimars, Cindy & Lindy, Dori Ann Gray and the Alan Freed Orchestra. The marquee gave the Teenagers second billing, just after the Platters. Freed often insisted that groups performing on his stage shows have a hot record out that he could play on the air prior to the show. By the time of the Easter show, the Teenagers had two songs out, both of which Freed was playing heavily. But the Valentines hadn't had a hot record in a few months. Freed reportedly told Barrett he'd better write a new hit song in a hurry or the Valentines wouldn't be on the show.[11] Barrett already had the song "Why" recorded earlier, but needed a flip side. He called Jimmy Wright and told him to get his band together because they were doing a session in twenty-five minutes. The Valentines rushed down to the studio and put together "Woo Woo Train" in the men's room (natural echo) in a few minutes. It was done in a couple of takes. After all, it was just supposed to be a flip side. Freed started playing "Woo Woo Train," and that was the side that took off. The Valentines and Teenagers both made Freed's Easter Show line up.[5]

From the beginning Richard Barrett was very protective of his young stars. He traveled with and looked after the Teenagers, a fact made a little easier when the Teenagers and

Valentines were on the same shows. Barrett took his job as chaperone seriously, a behavior that would continue later when he would lock the Chantels and Imperials in their hotel rooms to keep them out of trouble.

"Richard was mean!" Jimmy Merchant laughed. "He was mean that way. He was overly protective. He was strict, a real strict guy. When he said something, you'd better obey!"

On one occasion, Frankie Lymon had laryngitis and couldn't perform. Not wanting to disappoint a sold out audience, Barrett donned Lymon's white sweater with the red "T" and took his place. No doubt Barrett could pull off the impersonation vocally, but the sight of a tall man in his mid twenties with a mustache, squeezed into a small thirteen-year-old's sweater must have raised some eyebrows. "I'll never forget that, Jimmy Merchant chuckled. "We were doing a couple of shows up in Boston. And Frankie's voice had gone. He had gotten hoarse. Richard Barrett put on Frankie Lymon's sweater, can you imagine, and sang lead! With a mustache!"

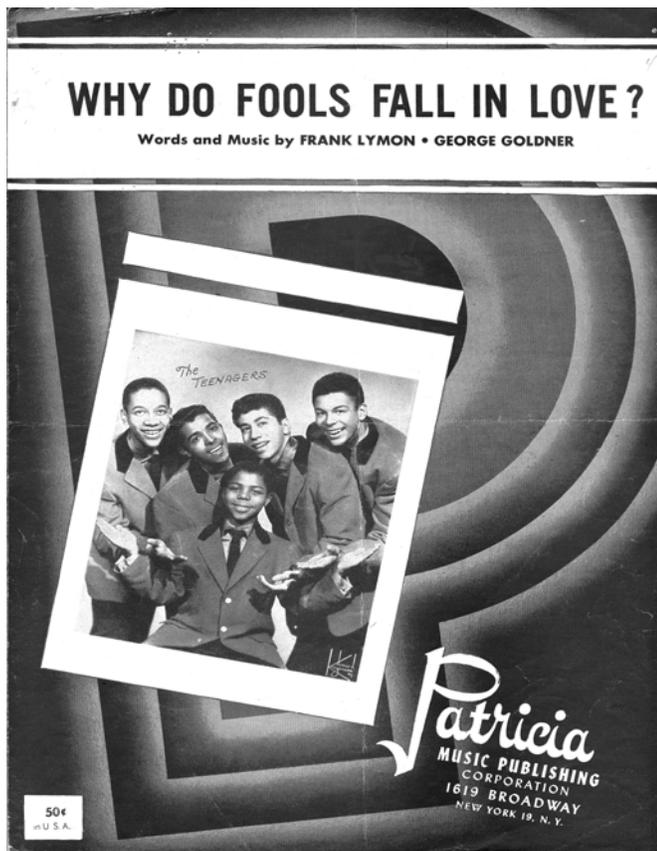
"I Want You To Be My Girl" hit the national R&B charts in early May and peaked at #3. It also went to #13 on the Pop charts. May also saw the Teenagers in the studio again for two more recording sessions. Goldner got wind of a new release by a group called the Juniors on the *Mercury* subsidiary, *Wing*, that sounded a lot like the Teenagers. The Teenagers were rushed into the studio on May 15 to cover the recording, titled "I Promise To Remember". This was two days before the Juniors' record was released (according to the trade magazines)[9] so Goldner must have gotten an advanced copy



Rare photo of the Teenagers listening to a test pressing of one of their recordings at a *Gee* recording session. Photo courtesy of Val Shively.



Teenagers at the Apollo



and acted quickly. Ironically, the writer and lead singer of the Juniors was a classmate and friend of the Teenagers from Stitt Junior High School named Jimmy Castor.[12] Both "I Promise," and its flip, "Who Can Explain" were again hit records for the Teenagers. "Who Can Explain" reached #7 on the R&B charts. "I Promise" reached #10 on the R&B charts and #57 on the Pop charts.

On August 28, Alan Freed held his Second Anniversary Rock and Roll stage show at the Brooklyn Paramount. The Teenagers were becoming mainstays on the Freed shows. This time they shared the stage with Fats Domino, Joe Turner, the Cletones, the Harptones, the Penguins, Mabel King, Jimmy Cavallo's Houserockers, Jean Chapel and the Alan Freed R&R Band which included Jimmy Wright as well as Al Sears.[9]

At first, the Teenagers performances were limited to weekends. As their popularity soared, they were pulled out on the road for strings of thirty, forty and even sixty one-night shows. Traveling by bus with numerous other acts was grueling for experienced performers, let alone high school and junior high kids. Each day consisted of endless hours of sitting on a bus, followed by a night of singing. The next morning they were on their way to the next city, with very few, if any, days off. In the South, eating and sleeping accommodations were segregated, as was the seating of the audience at the shows. "We got on tour and Rock & Roll was not readily accepted in the South," remembered Jimmy Merchant. "You could be the star in a show where white folks attended but you couldn't stay in the same hotel. We went through all of that. We were performing at a location in Alabama on tour. On that tour were the Drifters, the Spaniels, The Platters and others. We all traveled by bus. We could only stay in black hotels. The area was white. We had two white bus drivers. Our bus driver was Harry and he'd say we're going to make a pit stop, at say a Howard Johnson. He'd say, you guys have got to give me your quarters because, as you know, you guys can't go in. He un-

derstood that he was white and he was the only one who could go in to buy us food on the road. They had picket lines around some of these venues in like Alabama where we performed. The signs would say things like 'These Black N***** Are Coming Here to Perform with their Music and their [wavy] Hair to Steal Our White Girls'. But then there were children, both black and white, with picket signs in another location saying 'Rock & Roll is Here to Stay'. That was a reality."

"Whites would be on one side and blacks would be on the other. There was one [outdoor] location, it could have been in Virginia, where they took the back curtain down on the stage and placed the black audience on the other side, behind where the curtain had been. So when we came on stage performing, the black folks were behind our backs. We could face either one side or the other, but they had all the mikes where the white folks were. So what Frankie did, instead of facing the white folks, he took the mike out of the stand and faced the black folks. When we did that, everybody else in the show did it. Being teenagers, we had that kind of mindset, where we didn't care about much."

One extended tour began on September 28 in Hersey, Pennsylvania and ended on November 18 in Wichita, KS. In between were thirty-eight one-nighters in Canada, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, New York, Indiana, Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma.[8] The show featured the Platters, Flairs, Clovers and numerous other acts. It almost didn't feature Frankie Lymon.

"Something happened going on tour and Frankie couldn't be found," remembered Merchant. "I called up George Goldner and said we can't find Frankie. He asked if we know of anybody else who could sing lead. We contacted Jimmy Castor's mother and she OK'd us to take him with us. We took him out of public school and on the road with us but he never actually made it to the stage. Frankie showed up by the first day of the road trip. But Jimmy stayed on the road with us for three or four days and then we sent him back home."

With the start of the long tours, the Teenagers lost their road manager and protector. "Barrett was our road manager for awhile and afterwards they separated us from Richard Barrett and gave us [another] road manager," remembered Merchant, "Because we started doing a lot of traveling and doing a lot of tours and Richard was busy with his own life. We started going on 60 and 90 one-nighter tours and he started out on one of those tours with us, but then he had to leave to come back to New York City to record and do a couple of gigs himself."

But Richard Barrett continued working with the Teenagers in the studio. Barrett wrote a song for the group called, "ABC's of Love" which they recorded in August 1956 with its flip side, "Share". "ABC's" hit #8 on the R&B charts and #77 on the Pop charts. The groups' first four recordings had now all cracked Top Ten of the R&B charts and all crossed over onto the Pop charts. The Teenagers were hot.

Partway through another cross-country tour in early October, the Teenagers took time out to record four new songs, "I'm Not A Juvenile Delinquent," "Baby Baby," "Paper Castles," and "Teenage Love". The first two were recorded for the upcoming Alan Freed movie, "Rock, Rock, Rock". Also in the film were Alan Freed, Chuck Berry, the Moonglows, the Flamingos and Lavern Baker. The Teenagers looked forward to their acting debut, but had to settle for lip syncing their two songs in a studio in the Bronx in front of just the cameramen. In fact, the entire movie was filmed in New York in just two weeks. "Rock, Rock, Rock" opened in seventy theaters in New York simultaneously on December 5. Freed owned 10% of the film and played the songs in it heavily on his radio show lead-

ing up to its opening. Freed also appeared on stage at most of the theaters in New York City during its run.[9]

As 1956 ended, *Gee* records released an LP combining all of the Teenagers' singles plus a few tunes that had not yet seen release. The Teenagers were still on top, anticipating tours of Panama and England and a new Alan Freed movie, "Mr. Rock and Roll". Unknown to them, their fortunes were about to change for the worse. With Richard Barrett no longer involved with the Teenagers' career, the group's management was preparing to split Frankie Lymon off as a solo act.

"The group split up in England in 1957," Jimmy Merchant remembered. "It began with them recording Frankie Lymon for an [solo] album called 'Frankie Lymon at the London Palladium'. They started to record Frankie in England while we were together. We had a fit. We didn't know we were in our last days. So the group actually broke up right there in England. We came back from England in June, 1957. We went there in March and came back in June, three months later. Frankie was largely considered on his own. We had two contracts to fulfill; the movie, "Mr. Rock & Roll" and an Easter show at the New York Paramount. And that was it. It was only about eighteen months."

Ironically, the last single by Frankie Lymon & Teenagers on *Gee*, didn't have the Teenagers on it at all. "Creation Of Love," the song written by Richard Barrett and sold to Morris Levi before Richard ever sang with the Valentines was finally recorded by Frankie Lymon. While the label said the Teenagers, the group actually backing him was the Ray Charles Singers.

"[Frankie] was just a natural born talent," Richard



Frankie Lymon pulls a 78 RPM Teenagers record from the *Gee* stockroom. Photo courtesy of Val Shively.



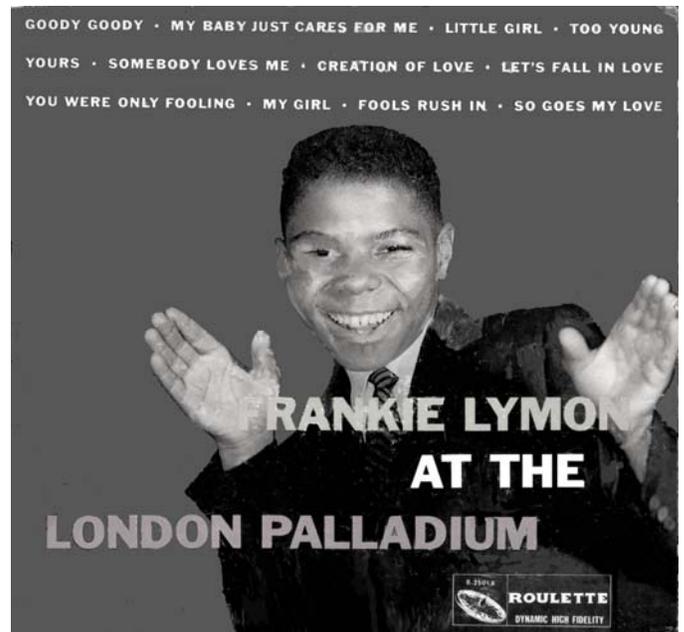
Teenagers leaving for London on Pan American Airlines. Photo courtesy of Val Shively.

Barrett once lamented. "He was born to sing. It only lasted a short time, which will plague me for the rest of my life." [7]

"Why Do Fools Fall In Love?" was the song that broke wide open the field of youth in the recording industry, commented Jimmy Merchant. "The Back Street Boys, NSYNC, Boyz II Men, the New Edition, the Jacksons – it all started with Frankie Lymon & Teenagers. It was 'Move over adults, young people are now on the scene'. And what was it was that one song."

"Why Do Fools Fall In Love?" was one of the most influential songs of all time. It defined the whole Rock & Roll era. Many believe the acceptance of black music by white teenagers set the stage for the Civil Rights Era of the sixties. "We raised hell for eighteen months and then it was over," Jimmy Merchant reflected.

But those eighteen months somehow changed the world. And for the Teenagers' mentor, Richard Barrett, the legacy was just beginning. More in Part 3.



Notes & References:

1. For "Richard Barrett's Musical Legacy: Part 1" see *Echoes of the Past*, No. 78, (Winter 2006)
2. Charlie & Pamela Horner's interviews with Jimmy Merchant, January 20 and February 3, 2007.
3. Jimmy Merchant, founding member of the world famous Teenagers resides in Virginia where continues as a performer and a talented artist. See his website: <http://www.jimmymerchant.com/> and advertisement elsewhere in this issue.
4. Charlie Horner's interviews and conversations over the past thirty years with Richard Barrett and Eddie Edgehill.
5. Tony Cummings, "Some Other Guy," *Black Music* [London], April 1974, pp. 62-63.
6. Marcia Vance and Little Walter, "Richard Barrett Remembers," *Bim Bam Boom*, Vol. 1, Issue 4 (1972), pp. 31-32.
7. Ted Fox, *Showtime At The Apollo*, (Holt, Rinehart & Winston: New York, 1983), p. 116
8. "Matters of Life & Death: I Promise To Remember – Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers," TV Program, © Pacific Street Film Projects Inc., 1983.
9. Phil Groia, "The Teenagers," *Bim Bam Boom*, Issue # 12, 1974, pp. 9-18.
10. *First Pressings*: Vol. 6, 1956, Ed. Galen Gart (Big Nickel Pub., Milford, NH: 1991).
11. "Frankie Lymon – Teenagers: A Recording History," Booklet included in Murray Hill 000148, Box LP Set (1986).
12. John A. Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, (Schirmer Books: New York, 1991), pp. pp.131-135.
13. Phil Groia, "Jimmy Castor," , " *Bim Bam Boom*, Issue # 8, 1972, pp. 10-12.
14. Phil Groia, *They All Sang On The Corner*, Phillie Dee Enterprises, Inc., NY, 1983.
15. Dennis Duka, "Teenagers: From the Beginning" *Harmony Tymes*, No. 3 (1987)
16. Marv Goldberg, "Marv Goldberg's R&B Notebooks: The Teenagers,"
17. <http://home.att.net/~marvy42/Teenagers/teenagers.html>
18. Wayne Jones, "The Teenagers," *Goldmine*, #70, (1982) pp.17-18.
19. Thanks to Mrs. Julie Barrett.

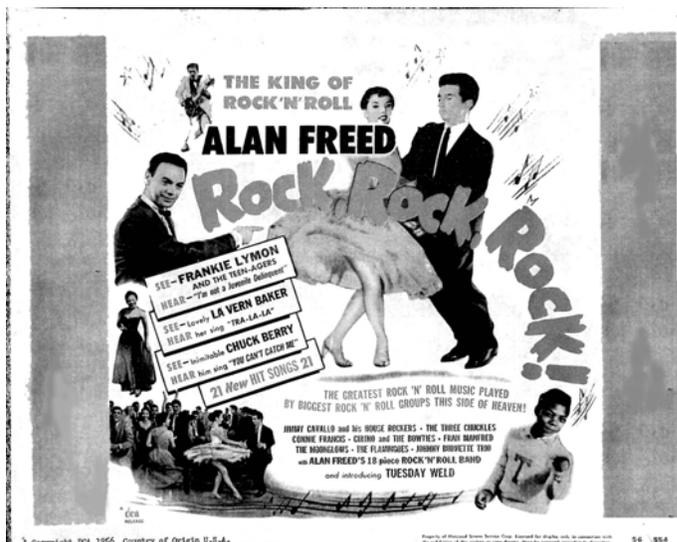
Frankie Lymon & Teenagers Singles Discography (1955-1957)

Gee 1002	Why Do Fools Fall In Love? Please Be Mine	12/31/55
Gee 1012	I Want You To Be My Girl I'm Not A Know It All	3/56
Gee 1018	I Promise To Remember Who Can Explain?	6/56
Gee 1022	ABC's Of Love Share	9/56
Gee 1026	I'm Not A Juvenile Delinquent Baby Baby	11/56
Gee 1032	Teenage Love Paper Castles	2/57
Gee 1035*	Love Is A Clown Am I Fooling Myself Again?	3/57
Gee 1036	Out In The Cold Again Miracle In The Rain**	4/57
Gee 1039	Creation Of Love*** Goody Goody***	6/57

*Gee 1035 may have been a scheduled release but to date no original copies have surfaced. The only known copies of this single are bootlegs. Both sides were issued on Gee EP601.

** Label lists the Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers but is actually just by Frankie Lymon

*** Label lists the Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers but is actually by Frankie Lymon and the Ray Charles Singers.



Lobby Cards from the movie "Rock Rock Rock".