

The Musical Legacy of Richard Barrett – Pt. 5

The Lewis Lymon & Jimmy Castor Stories

by Charlie Horner

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Richard Barrett
(Photo courtesy of Julie Barrett)

It's hard to imagine what

rock & roll history would have been like, had it not been for Richard Barrett and some youngsters from Washington Heights. To continue the story of Richard Barrett's legacy, we must return to the upper Manhattan neighborhood and the Lymon family that provided Barrett his biggest success thus far.

When Richard Barrett moved into that second floor apartment on the northeast corner of 165th and Amsterdam Avenue overtop of a grocery store, he was only partially cognizant of the neighborhood talent that surrounded him. Barrett was well aware of established groups like the Velvets (from the Sugar Hill area, just south of Washington Heights). But a new generation of Washington Heights youngsters would sneak into Stitt Jr. High School just to catch a glimpse of their idols, the Valentines, rehearsing. Those kids included a 12-year-old who worked in the Trio Food Market beneath where Barrett lived. His name was Frankie Lymon.

"Frankie and I were in awe of him," Jimmy Castor remembered. "I mean, this was Richard Barrett, the same



Richard Barrett's apartment over the Trio Food Market where Frankie Lymon worked. Store was owned by three friends, Bill, John & Paul. (Photo courtesy of Julie Barrett)

guy we saw at the Apollo doing 'Woo Woo Train' with all the [marcelled] hair and the white suits and stuff. It was unbelievable. But we really didn't [dare] talk to him then. Because Richard was... you know, he only talked when he wanted to."

Barrett would soon turn five of the youngsters, Frankie Lymon, Jimmy Merchant, Herman Santiago, Joe Negroni and Sherman Garnes, into one of the biggest music phenomena the world had ever seen. And before the door of opportunity closed, several other kids from Washington Heights would also get their shot at stardom.

Lewis Lymon & The Teenchords

With the phenomenal success of Frankie Lymon, it was logical to look within the Lymon family for the next super singing sensation. Frankie, in fact, had three brothers who sang; Howie, Lewis (Louie) and Timmie.

"My father [Howard Lymon] drove a flower truck but he had his own singing group called the Harlemaires," recalled Lewis. "Strictly Gospel. We all sang Gospel. Me, Frankie and our brother Howard had a group we called the Harlemaires Juniors. We sang all the old standards plus two or three originals. Howard was the oldest at nine, Frankie was seven and I was five. There was another brother, Timothy, but he was just born at the time. I was always in the background. Frankie and Howard sang lead."¹ The Harlemaires Juniors performed in churches in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and once even in a church in Newark, NJ.⁴

When his brother Frankie found success singing R&B with the Teenagers, Lewis Lymon joined a neighborhood singing group, the Teenchords. The Lymon family lived at 470 W. 165th St. Lyndon Harold lived down the block at #476. Rossilio Rocca and David Little lived around the corner at 164th Street. Lewis (then 12 years old) sang lead while Rossilio (19) sang tenor, Lyndon Harold (15) sang baritone and David Little (17) sang bass. One evening in 1956, while brother Frankie was singing at the Apollo Theater, the Teenchords were hanging out behind the theater on West 126th Street. They were looking for a fifth member, a first tenor, and fifteen-year-old Ralph Vaughn was auditioning for them. A member of the Velvets who knew Ralph happened along and asked Ralph if this was his group. Upon learning that the Velvets manager, Bobby Robinson, was looking for talent to record, the Teenchords looked at each



The Teenchords (1957).

Back row (l to r): Lyndon Harold, Rossilio Rocca, David Little. Center: Ralph Vaughn. Front: Lewis Lymon.

other and said, "Yeah. Yeah. He's in the group." Ralph Vaughn became an instant Teenchord.^{1, 10}

Born in Union, South Carolina, in 1917, Morgan C. "Bobby" Robinson moved to New York City in 1946, where he opened "Bobby's Record Shop" (later called "Bobby's Happy House") on the corner of 125th Street and 8th Avenue. It was the first black-owned business on Harlem's famed 125th Street. In 1951, Robinson started the *Robin* (later changed to *Red Robin*) record label and began recording the Mellomoods, Velvets, Du Droppers and Vocaleers. In 1956 he started the *Whirlin' Disc* label and recorded the Channels.

The Teenchords went to Bobby Robinson's record store and auditioned with a Teenagers' song, "Who Can Explain?". "They walked into the record shop one Sunday," remembered Bobby Robinson. "One of the guys said, 'This is Frankie Lymon's kid brother'. Well, I thought they were just kidding so I asked him if he was Frankie Lymon's younger brother. He said, 'Yes, sir.' I asked him his name and he said, 'Lewis.' He was just a little kid with a high pitched voice. So I said, 'Do you sing too?' He said, 'Yes sir.' Then I told them to close the door. They got around in a circle and started to sing for me, right there in the middle of the floor. Naturally I was eager to cash in on anything that had the Lymon name since Frankie was so hot. I signed them up immediately. The same afternoon I went to meet his mother."⁵ Robinson began rehearsing the group with a song he'd written called "I'm So Happy". Lewis had also written a song "Lydia" that the group was working on, about a girl he knew in school. Robinson took the Teenchords into the studio in May of 1956, then prepared them for their first live performances once the record was released. He had the group fitted for uniforms and had professional photographs taken. He also had the group take choreography lessons from a woman named Mrs. Parks.¹

Billed as "Lewis Lymon and the Teenchords", the group's first release, "Lydia" b/w "I'm So Happy" became the first release on Robinson's new record label, *Fury*, in December 1956. In January 1957, the Teenchords made their debut appearance at the Apollo Theater, performing for a week with Clyde McPhatter, Mickey & Sylvia, the Channels, the Heartbeats, Jesse Belvin and Clarence Henry. They made quite an appearance dressed in white shirts with black bow ties, black pants and white buck shoes and red sweaters with the word "Teenchords" on them.

"I've never been so nervous in all my life," remembered Lewis. "This was the Apollo Theater, our first gig, with

[dee jay] Jocko [Henderson]. ... I was fine until ten seconds before the guy said, 'Louie Lymon and the Teenchords.' Then I got really scared. I was thinking, 'What am I doing here? I should be out playing ball somewhere. Because the first show was 12:45 or something on a Friday. I should be in school somewhere. But once you get out there it just changes. All of the sudden you're just where you want to be. We did two songs and we were very good. Personally and professionally we were that good. Everyone wanted more. We were certainly ready, though. We went into the studio in May and all we did from May to December was rehearse those two songs, 'I'm So Happy' and 'Lydia'."¹

From the Apollo, the Teenchords moved to the Empire Theater in Brooklyn on February 8, 1957 for a weeklong engagement with the Heartbeats, Channels, Richard Barrett's Valentines and Bull Moose Jackson's Band. They followed that by returning to the Apollo on February 22 for another week with WWRL's Dr. Jive Show, also featuring Chuck Willis, the Flamingos and the Drifters.

Both sides of the Teenchords' second record on *Fury* (released in March 1957) were written and arranged by Richard Barrett. Lewis Lymon met Richard Barrett through his brother, Frankie. Somehow, Robinson brought in Barrett to work with the Teenchords in 1957, while Richard was working for competitor George Goldner. When asked how this happened, Lewis Lymon replied, "That's I good question. I don't know the answer." Jimmy Castor, a sometimes stand-in for Frankie Lymon and later Teenchord member, offered an explanation. "Richard Barrett always had other deals going on," remembered Jimmy. "He didn't just work for Goldner."

Writer credits to "Please Tell The Angels" (originally titled "You Are An Angel") are listed on the record as Richard Barrett, Lewis Lymon and Bobby Robinson, though Lymon said it was pretty much all Barrett's song. Lewis just made a few lyric changes. Barrett also wrote the "A" side of the Teenchords' second *Fury* release, "Honey Honey". Lewis believed "Honey Honey" was a revised version of an unrecorded Valentines' street song, and indeed the song bears some similarities to "Lily Mae Belle". "That's not true," Barrett told historian Todd Baptista in 1995. "'Lily Mae Belle', that was a street song. 'Honey Honey' was something that we came up with in the studio."¹⁰ The similarities between "Lily Mae Belle" and "Honey Honey" are because Richard Barrett's songs have the common basis of being written in the same key. "Just about anything that I wrote had the same identical chords," Barrett





**Bobby Robinson in front of his record store.
(Photo courtesy of Julie Barrett)**

once told Charlie Horner. “ABC’s of Love’, ‘Maybe’, ‘The Plea’ ... All of them had the same chords. I could not read music. I knew the chords that I played and that’s it. [Writing’s] a feeling. Something that you feel.”

On April 19, the Teenchords joined a one week gig at Loew’s State Theater on Broadway. The stage show was again run by Jocko Henderson and also featured the Clovers, Jive Bombers, Paragons, Jo Ann Campbell, the Diamonds (“Little Darling” group), the Heartbeats, Ella and Buddy Johnson and Orchestra, and Googie Rene’s Orchestra. The Teenchords followed this up with another week at the Apollo beginning May 10, in WLIB’s Hal Jackson Show with the Pearls, Cellos and Cleftones.

Shortly after that, in June, trade papers announced that Lewis Lymon and the Teenchords would be appearing in a new Rock & Roll movie called “The Hit Record” [title later changed to “Jamboree”]. Produced by Vanguard Productions the feature length film would also star Fats Domino, Little Richard, Count Basie and his Orchestra, Carl Perkins, the Four Coins, Charlie Gracie, Buddy Knox, Jodie Sands, Martha Lou Harp, Ron Coby, Jackie Dee, Ivy Ellen and Slim Whitman. Production was scheduled to begin the week of July 22.

July 1957 was a busy month for the Teenchords. They began with a week at the New York Paramount as part of Alan Freed’s Summer Festival Show. It was the first time Lewis’ Teenchords shared the stage with Frankie and the Teenagers. It was also the last big show that Frankie did before splitting with the Teenagers to go solo. On the show were Chuck Berry, Screamin’ Jay Hawkins, the Dubs, the Everly Brothers and Jodie Sands.

On July 22, Bobby Robinson took the group into Bel-tone Studios for a mammoth recording session that produced the songs, “I’m Not Too Young To Fall In Love”, “Falling In Love”, “Your Last Chance”, “Too Young” and “Dance Girl”.² “Dance Girl” was written by Robinson’s associate Leslie Cooper (member of the Empires and Whirlers) and the song would later be a hit for the Charts. The Teenchords recorded it first but circumstances didn’t allow for its release at that time.

Sometime during the week of July 22, the Teenchords also filmed their cameo appearance in the movie, “Jamboree”. It was shot in a studio in New York City with the group having little or no contact with the rest of the movie’s production. The group sang “Your Last Chance” in striped jackets and white pants. “We filmed our scene and Fats [Domino] came in

and filmed his,” remembered Lewis. “It was Jerry Lee Lewis first, we were second and Fats Domino was third. But that was all in one day – 57th Street Studios.”⁴ The appearance can now be viewed on Youtube.

The Teenchords finished out July with a one week engagement at the Apollo, beginning on the 26th. Also on the show were Lloyd Price, the Moonglows, Lee Andrews & the Hearts, Otis Rush and comedian George Kirby.

The Teenchords’ third and final *Fury* release (#1006) was “I’m Not Too Young To Fall In Love” b/w “Falling In Love”, which was issued quietly with very little promotion. This could have been because Bobby Robinson was already talking to George Goldner about a deal that would move the Teenchords over to Goldner’s *End* label. Details of the deal have been obscured by time, but it is known that the Teenchords were unhappy with Robinson’s management and wanted to get under George Goldner’s umbrella. Also about that time, David Little and Harold Lyndon were picked up by the police while sitting in a stolen car. Lyndon got off, being a juvenile, but Little was arrested. Lewis Lymon’s mother didn’t want him singing in the group with Little anymore, so Little was expelled from the group just as they were preparing to make a tour of the British West Indies.¹

In September 1957, the Teenchords left for a ten day tour of the West Indies along with Clarence “Frogman” Henry and Bull Moose Jackson. But without David Little, they were missing a bass singer. Since the Teenagers were still reeling from the loss of Frankie Lymon going solo, the Teenchords thought about asking Sherman Garnes to fill in with them.

“The Teenchords initially wanted Sherman to fill in for David Little,” remembered Teenager Jimmy Merchant. “But Sherman [being tall] couldn’t fit into David Little’s uniforms. At some point I must have told Lewis that I knew how to sing bass – that I’d made up a lot of the bass parts that the Teenagers had on their records. So they had Bobby Robinson’s office call to ask if I’d be interested in going to the West Indies on a ten day trip, and I said, ‘Sure.’ For me it was a reprieve. My spirit was somewhat lifted. And so I went. For me, their songs were not a problem. In spite of not being able to rehearse, I jumped on it. The group was all the originals except David Little. We played Jamaica. Although the business end was very shaky concerning money, the experience was interesting. And I went down in history as the sixth Teenchord. Like with my own group, the people went wild over Lewis and the group. I too was impressed not only with Lewis’ performing skills, but with the way he carried himself overall. It ended up being a one shot deal. When I got back, that was the end of my singing with the Teenchords.”

On Sept 14, 1957, the trade magazines announced that George Goldner had signed Teenchords and that their first release would be “Your Last Chance” b/w “Too Young” (*End 1003*). Both sides had been recorded by Bobby Robinson. Obviously the deal sent Goldner not only the Teenchords, but some unreleased masters. Lewis Lymon maintained that the deal also allowed Robinson to keep any money (royalties) the Teenchords had earned on the *Fury* releases. But the Teenchords were so happy to get away from Robinson so they agreed to it.⁴ Why Bobby Robinson would give up the master to “Your Last Chance” after he’d worked to get it inserted in the movie, *Jamboree*, is less understood.

By then, Lyndon Harold had also left the group. Owen Hightower and Eddie Pellegrino were added as new members. This group (Lymon, Rocca, Vaughn, Hightower and Pellegrino) made the group’s first true recording for *End Records*, “I Found Out Why” b/w “Tell Me Love”.

“Richard Barrett rehearsed us,” Lewis stated. “He didn’t produce the record. He was Goldner’s A&R man.” “I



Teenchords arrive in Kingston, Jamaica (Aug 1957). Bottom right, Lewis Lymon. Directly behind him, Ralph Vaughn, Rossilio Rocca, Lyndon Harold, Jimmy Merchant and the group's road manager. Bottom left is Clarence Henry. Behind him is Bullmoose Jackson and his band members. (Photo courtesy of the Todd Baptista Collection)

Found Out Why" was an answer record to brother Frankie's "Why Do Fools Fall In Love". The other side, "Tell Me Love" was a catchy up tempo tune, penned by Lou Stallman and Walt Phillips. Stallman, who would eventually go on to write almost six hundred songs including *Treasure Of Love* (Clyde McPhatter), "One Love" (Cardinals), "Don't Pity Me" (Dion & Belmonts), "It's Gonna Take A Miracle" (Roylettes), "Round And Round" (Perry Como), "Diamonds and Pearls" (Paradons), "Anniversary Of Love" (Caslons), "I've Come Of Age" (Billy Storm) and "If You Don't Want My Love" (Robert John), was working for Monument Music (publishers) at the time in 1650 Broadway.

"1650 was one of three buildings that were the music business in the fifties," remembered Lou Stallman. "It housed music publishers, record companies, managers, agencies, publicists, etc. My partner and I went to play our songs for publisher Larry Uttal, owner of Monument Music. Monument Music was on the 12th floor of 1650 Broadway. The building was frequented by songwriters every hour of the day. Writers would meet on the street and talk, share and trade at certain eating places. You often would meet recording artists, Don Kirshner or a famous record producer on the elevator. It was a collage of creativity. That's why we would write ten songs a week. You never knew when someone would say 'Do you have a song for Frankie Avalon or Bobby Darin or Connie Francis?' It was exciting, dynamic and there will never be an era like that in the business again. At that time, most song writers played the piano. I wrote songs on the guitar. My first hit was 'Treasure of Love' by Clyde McPhatter on *Atlantic*. George

Goldner knew that. The office of Monument Music, publisher of 'Treasure of Love,' was two doors away from *Gone* and *End Records*. George Goldner walked in and told me that Lewis Lymon needed a song and he was recording the following Friday. I'm a very fast songwriter. So in two hours I wrote 'Tell Me Love'. Goldner loved it and recorded it the following Friday. I never met Lewis Lymon, but was thrilled to get the song recorded and so happy with his singing."

Regarding Barrett, Stallman recalled, "Ritchie Barrett and I met [later] on a tour. I produced a record called 'Ambrose - Part 5' by Linda Laurie (*Glory* #290, 1959). It became a hit so we toured together. I recall Ritchie to be very helpful to Linda and I."

On January 17, 1958, the Teenchords again began a week long gig at the Apollo Theater. Also on the bill were LaVern Baker, Little Joe Cook and the Silhouettes. By now, though the group began to change personnel. Jimmy Castor and Johnny Pruitt were added to the group as other members dropped out. Eventually the group became Lewis Lymon, Eddie Pellegrino, Jimmy Castor and Johnny Pruitt. It was this group that did the Teenchords final appearance at the Apollo from October 31 to November 7, 1958 with Larry Williams, Joan Shaw, the Pastels, John Bubbles and Ed Townsend. [More on Jimmy Castor in the next section.]

Some controversy surrounds the Teenchords' final release for George Goldner. "Dance Girl" b/w "Them There Eyes" was released on Goldner's *Juanita* label late in 1958. The tune "Dance Girl" was definitely associated with Bobby Robinson. Louie Lymon has said that Goldner used a Teenchords demo of "Dance Girl" from their last session with Robinson while "Them There Eyes" was recorded new by Goldner.³ But Jimmy Castor clearly refuted this. "We recorded "Dance Girl" and "Them There Eyes," said Jimmy. "That was the last record the Teenchords did for George Goldner. I wasn't part of the business side of that. I just know Louie brought it to us, we did it and that was it. I wasn't going to get into [the business aspect] too heavy. It wasn't my group. I just went along with Louie because I was a fan of Louie Lymon. Louie's a great entertainer."

In 1959, the Teenchords broke up. Lewis Lymon then replaced Bobby Rivera in the Townsman (other members included Ralph Ramos and Louie Vasquez and McDuffy Swagart). They recorded "I Can't Go On" for the PJ label.



Jimmy Castor's Early Career

While Richard Barrett never produced a hit record for Jimmy Castor, the careers of these two superstars crossed paths many times in the early days and they became good friends.

Jimmy Castor grew up in the same Washington Heights neighborhood of Harlem as the Lymon brothers. He attended P.S. 169 and J.H.S. 164 (Stitt Jr. High). Jimmy was friends with the Teenagers and watched their rise to stardom.

"I was the head of my class and was just getting ready to enter the High School of Music and Arts to study music," recalled Castor. "Everyone wanted to be Frankie Lymon including me. The Teenagers - I used to see them every day. I saw them go from sneakers to suits. The transformation was just unbelievable. Everyone wanted that. I used to go to rehearsals with them at Stitt Junior High School and the Valentines were the first people to rehearse there. Frankie and I were just in awe of Richard Barrett. And the Teenagers, when they got popular, they started rehearsing at Stitt. I just wanted to be with the Teenagers because I was with them all the time. I was back stage. Sherman [Garnes] was my best friend. I was at the New York Paramount, the Brooklyn Paramount, the Fox Theater. It was just incredible to see the Cleftones going on... the Willows... to see these great groups... Little Richard. I had to have a group."

"So I put a group together," Jimmy Castor continued. "It was two guys from the neighborhood and one guy (Orton Graves) from downtown Harlem. The first group of Jimmy Castor and the Juniors was myself (lead and first tenor), Orton Graves (baritone), Johnny Williams (2nd tenor) and Al Casey (bass). Johnny Williams later became the bass player (John B. Williams) on the *Johnny Carson Show*. We went with Bill Buchanan and Dickie Goodman."

On May 26 1956, *Billboard* magazine carried the announcement that Bill Buchanan was leaving Larry Uttal at Monument Music to team up with Dickie Goodman. The two would start a firm to manage and publish music by teenage artists. Buchanan and Goodman had just signed two promising new young vocal groups. The first was the Sonnets from Baltimore who Buchanan and Goodman had just signed to a three year pact with *Herald* records. The Sonnets' first release, "Why Should We Break Up" b/w "Please Won't You Call Me" was being readied for release. The article stated, "Also signed to personal management are Jimmy Castor and the Juniors, New York vocal group. Lead voice Jimmy Castor is a twelve-year-old prodigy who plays clarinet, sax, drums and piano, and also composes. He not only wrote the melody of one of the songs, but also made the arrangements for the group's first record session."¹²

Jimmy Castor had written a song called "I Promise" which he began singing in "Teenagers' style" with his group, the Juniors. The group auditioned for Buchanan and Goodman who promptly became their managers. Castor related, "Buchanan and Goodman said, 'Where did you get this?' And I said I wrote it. Dickie Goodman wrote the other side, 'I Know The Meaning Of Love.'" Buchanan and Goodman got the Juniors signed to *Mercury* records who issued the record on their *Wing* subsidiary on May 17, though it wasn't reviewed until June 9, 1956.

In the meantime, Buchanan and Goodman were busy with another project. They came up with the idea of producing a cut-in record, a novelty story interspersed with samples of the day's current R&B records. They made a demo of their "Flying Saucer" record and took it around to numerous labels without getting any response. Finally, after Alan Freed played it and people started requesting the record, George Goldner took an interest in it. Goldner is said to have formed a part-



Jimmy Castor & Juniors
(left to right): Herbie Greaves, Jimmy Castor, Al Casey Jr., Kenny Bobo (Photo courtesy of Jimmy Castor)

nership with Buchanan and Goodman, setting up the *Universe* label (soon changed to the *Luniverse* label) for them to run.¹¹ Once the record hit big and law suits started flying about the sampling used in the record, Goldner denied any connection to the disc.

Since "The Flying Saucer" record didn't become well known until late June (after the Juniors' record came out), Castor and his group may not have known about the Buchanan & Goodman - George Goldner connection at first. They were soon to find out.

"Alan Freed (a close confidant of George Goldner) started playing "I Know The Meaning of Love" instead of "I Promise," Jimmy Castor recalled. "I wanted him to turn it over, but he wouldn't because he already knew that Goldner was planning to put out the Teenagers version of that song. When I got my thing together and was discovered by Buchanan and Goodman and the record came out, George Goldner got wind of it. He said, 'Wait a minute. Frankie has to do this.' It was too close [to Frankie's sound]. See, Richard was going to have the Teenagers issue 'ABC's of Love' before [he and Goldner] heard my record. They loved my song. And it hurt me. Sherman told me the Teenagers were rehearsing my song and I was heartbroken. And I [had it out first] on a bigger label. *Wing* was a subsidiary of *Mercury*. But these guys, the Teenagers, were the first super group. There was no getting around it. They came out with it and Frankie did such a fantastic job with it that I gave in."

You must remember that Frankie Lymon was a natural singer. I was learning how to sing. What I've learned -



how to breath, to talk and to sing - Frankie could do that at the age of eleven.

Castor's suspicion that Buchanan and Goodman slipped a demo "I Promise" to their partner George Goldner has plenty of merit. *Billboard* magazine claims the Juniors' record "I Promise" was released May 17, while the teenagers recorded their cover of the record on May 15. Alan Freed continued playing the "I Know the Meaning Of Love" side of the Juniors' record but jumped on the Teenagers' cover of "I Promise to Remember" immediately. The Teenagers version was reviewed in the trade magazines on July 7, with an accompanying ad stating that their version had already shipped 200,000 copies in the first week!

Jimmy Castor's musical talents and friendship with the Teenagers eventually paid off, though. In late September, 1956, when Frankie Lymon could not be found at the start of a major tour, the Teenagers recommended Castor be brought in as a stand-in and understudy to Frankie.

"They wanted someone close to him. I don't know why they thought I was that close to him," reflected Castor. "I knew all the guys so I started traveling with them only on the weekends. My mother wanted me to stay in school. I knew the Teenagers stage routines from watching them. That was the greatest thing of all to see these guys on stage at the Apollo. I'd stand right there in the wings. I knew their routines, but then I really had to learn them." [By Jimmy's account, he sang with the Teenagers five times, culminating in his eventually leading the Teenagers for a short time in the 1990's.] "The Teenagers' stardom lasted only eighteen months, so I was out on my own," recalled Castor. "I couldn't stay with them. I just wanted to play my horn and study. So that's what I did."

Jimmy Castor's school work and activities with the Teenagers did not mean the end of the Juniors, though the group did change personnel. Early in 1957 Orton Graves and Johnny Williams left the group.

"We left *Wing*, went with another label, and got two new members," remembered Jimmy. "Herbie Greaves and Howard Kenny Bobo took Orton Graves and Johnny Williams' places. Graves and Williams weren't happy because we weren't happening."

Early in 1957, the new Juniors lineup signed with Stephen Hodge, a New York juke box operator who wanted to start his own label, *Atomic*. "We got our sweaters with the 'J' and the 'Juniors' and we started singing modern harmony," said Jimmy. We did 'This Girl Of Mine' and

'Somebody Mentioned Your Name'. 'Somebody Mentioned Your Name' was like a pop standard we got from the Brill Building. I wrote a song called 'This Girl Of Mine' but it didn't happen."

At about this time, Jimmy Castor started writing songs with his long-time friend, Johnny Pruitt. Pruitt lived on Amsterdam Avenue between 164th and 165th Streets. "I knew him from elementary school. Johnny was an English major," said Castor. "He taught me English [grammar] because even in high school I had run on sentences. When we got together he started doing lyrics and I said listen to these melodies. We started writing together."

In late 1958, Jimmy Castor joined Louie Lymon's Teenchords. "Louie asked me," said Castor. "He had a gig at the Apollo. At the time I was still just getting my little band together. We were playing 'Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom Time'. We hadn't played professionally but we were practicing to do weddings, Bar Mitzvah's and Elks things when Louie asked me to join the Teenchords. That was a big theater for Louie - the Apollo. I remember when I first saw the Teenchords at Loew's State with Jocko [April 1957], I couldn't believe it. Those great records of 'I'm So Happy' and 'Honey Honey'. So I just jumped in to take Ralph's place at first tenor."

The Teenchords also needed a bass so Castor persuaded his friend Johnny Pruitt to sing bass with the group. "Johnny Pruitt didn't sing before that," said Jimmy. "He just watched me. I had to bring it out of him. He just didn't want to do it. I said, 'Hey man, you have a bass voice.' When writing together he started moving and I said, 'Hey man, you can dance.' So I twisted his arm to do that and then he began to like it. And the Teenchords were successful then because Louie and I did the splits together, imitating the Teenagers of course. I sang with them then and a few gigs after that. But I just had to go into studying hard, academically and musically, so I left after that. I was into the High School of Music and Arts for an academic and music degree. I learned all the classics and was playing saxophone."

Castor continued to maintain contact with the Teenagers' mentor, Richard Barrett. On March 17, 1959, Barrett held a recording session with the Chantels and several other artists. The Chantels who all played instruments were recorded doing two instrumentals, "Peruvian Wedding Song"



Label photo courtesy of Val Shively.



Jimmy Castor and Lewis Lymon on stage at the Apollo (1958). (Photo courtesy of Jimmy Castor)

and "Chantel Rock". Jimmy Castor's Juniors by now had evolved into the trio of Jimmy Castor, Herbie Greaves and Kenny Bobo and were calling themselves the Triols. The Triols recorded one song at the session, backed up vocally by some or all of the Chantels. The song, "Two Loving Hearts", was released years later on the Chantels' *Murray Hill* album box set. Credited only as an "unknown male vocal group," the Triols cut was also made available on the *Collectables* CD, "The Chantels For Collectors Only".

Meanwhile, the connections between Jimmy Castor's Juniors and the Teenagers continued. After Frankie Lymon left the Teenagers in mid 1957, he was first replaced on record by Billy Lobrano. However, by the Teenagers' March 30, 1960 recording session with *End*, the Teenagers' lead was former Junior, Kenny Bobo. He led the group on "Tonight's The Night" (*End* # 1071).

By the Spring of 1961, the Teenagers were down to a quartet (Jimmy Merchant, Herman Santiago, Joe Negroni and Sherman Garnes). Jimmy Castor and Johnny Pruitt organized and arranged the Teenagers sessions for *Columbia Records*. They wrote "Long Lasting Romance", "What's On Your Mind", and "Love Me Long" for the Teenagers. Only "What's On Your Mind" was issued by *Columbia* in 1961, as the flip of "The Draw". The other two songs were released years later on the Teenagers' *Murray Hill* label album box set. The band on the sessions was also Castor's.

By the early 1960's Castor and Pruitt were getting quite proficient at song writing. "Johnny and I started [seriously] writing together in the early sixties," said Jimmy. "We bought a little upright piano from Paul Winley and we started writing on it. We took it upstairs and everything."

One of their first writing assignments was for a very young vocal group called the Clintonian Cubs. "The Clintonian Cubs were just some kids from the Lincoln Projects [135th St. and 5th Avenue in Harlem] managed by a guy named Mr. Johnson," recalled Jimmy Castor. "He was the father of two of the kids and they needed a song. We wrote that song, 'She's Just My Size' for them. They were little guys." The song was issued on the tiny *My Brother's* label. Just how many copies the record sold is unknown, but the Cubs were popular enough

to appear on the Dr. Jive show at the Apollo in August 1959, along with the Cadillacs, Skyliners, Clickettes, Little Anthony & the Imperials, Eugene church and Liz Lands.

By the early 1960's, Richard Barrett had left George Goldner but was still managing the Chantels, Imperials and several other acts as well as singing himself. One of the acts Barrett was managing was the Casals, a rock & roll vocal duet consisting of Jimmy Castor and Tony Salveggi (CASTor and SALveggi). Barrett got himself signed to the *Seville* label (owned by Murray Sporn and Danny Kessler) and took the Casals along with him. Richard Barrett recorded "I Am Yours" b/w "Dream On" for *Seville*. For backup, he used a vocal group from 125th Street and Lenox Avenue in Harlem and promptly named them the Sevilles, after the label.

"Richard managed the Casals and made the label deal for us," said Jimmy Castor. He got us on *Seville*. And he was on *Seville*. He didn't produce or write the songs. The songs were written by yours truly and John Pruitt." We did "Eight O' Clock Scene" and "Teacher Crush" for *Seville*. Our recording session and Richard Barrett & the Sevilles' session were done separately," in spite of the fact that both records are sequential in record number. "The Casals were Tony Salveggi and myself. It was great but it never took off. See, there was a metamorphosis. It was changing constantly."

"Richard took an interest in me because he knew I was anxious to learn," remembered Jimmy Castor. "I was just being around him at the time, learning. I began to get close to Barrett. When he was living on the Grand Concourse, he spent a lot of time with me and my mom and my sister, because things weren't going that well for him in 1959 and 1960. He would come up to the house to eat, to 166th street. He was almost like family then. I had a day job then with Union Carbide, the second largest chemical corporation in America. And from there on I went to being a junior accountant. Things were happening so fast. I was going into college and I was with Richard and I was able to do a lot of things with him."

Castor also spent time in the studio, recording with former Valentines' Dave Baby [Clowney] Cortez. Castor's tenor sax can be heard on the 1962 hit, "Rinky Dink".

Castor and Barrett connected again in 1962 when Richard was looking for songs for the Imperials to record. "Barrett was trying to do his own thing up in the Pocono's and the Catskills," said Castor. He said, 'I'm looking for material,'



Label photo courtesy of Val Shively.



Clintonian Cubs on stage at the Apollo (1959). Photo from the collection of Trudy McCartney Cunningham of the Clickettes. (Courtesy of John Clemente)



Teenagers in 1990's: (left to right) Jimmy Merchant, Bobby Jay, Herman Santiago, Lewis Lymon, Jimmy Castor. (Photo courtesy of Jimmy Merchant)

and I said listen to this. [Little] Anthony was going to leave the group then and George Kerr was taking over." Castor and Pruitt wrote a song called "Where Will You Be" and gave it to Barrett. Richard had the Imperials record the song for the *Newtime* label. "Sammy Strain sang lead on that one," said Jimmy. "And I thought it was great."

Of course, Jimmy Castor would go on the form the Jimmy Castor Bunch and over the next thirty years score with sixteen chart records, including "Hey Leroy Your Mama's Callin' You," "Troglodyte," "The Bertha Butt Boogie," and "King Kong," just to name a few.

In the 1970's when Castor was hot with "The Bertha Butt Boogie" and Barrett was on top with the Three Degrees, their paths crossed again. "I went on tour in England with the Spinners, the Jimmy Castor Bunch, Sister Sledge and Ben E. King," recalled Jimmy. "When we got to London, the Three Degrees were very hot there. They were like royalty because they were friends of Prince Charles. They were called Charles' Angels. So Richard came to see me only, with his cape on and the three girls. When he walked in, Ben E. King was on. This was at the Palladium, I think. The lights came up to give respect to the Three Degrees and Richard. They sat them down and the lights went down. Ben E. King finished his set and then I came on. At the time, my "Bertha Butt" LP was huge, with "Bertha Butt," "He-Man Boogie," "You Make Me Feel Brand New". The Detroit Spinners were headlining. That's what they called the Spinners there. Well, I finished and got a standing ovation. And then Barrett got up and left. The Three Degrees left. The lights came on. People applauded them and they left. Boy, were the Spinners angry. And Pervis [Jackson], he wanted to fight. The Spinners, with all their hits like "Mighty Love," but Barrett only came to see me."

In the 1990's Jimmy Castor and Louie Lymon both joined the Teenagers briefly. "When we got the Teenagers back together in the nineties, it was Louie, myself, Jimmy Merchant and Herman Santiago, and Bobby Jay," said Jimmy. "Oh Louie Lymon can dance. Louie is great. We used to kill them, man! Louie would do a set which would give my voice a break, because doing eight or ten songs of Frankie Lymon's, which is just amazing. Frankie couldn't do *that*. Don't forget, back then it was two or three songs and you were off stage. When you have to do 'I'm Not A Know it All' and 'I Want You

To Be My Girl', I mean it takes [a lot out of your voice]. So Louie would come out and he'd do 'Please Tell The Angels,' 'I'm So Happy,' 'Lonely Teardrops' or 'Shout'. We went to Europe and he was great."

Jimmy Castor's career has now gone from doo wop to Latin soul to jazz to R&B soul to funk to hip hop. Over three thousand people have now sampled his work, including Christina Aguilera. Jimmy Castor's talents as a singer, songwriter, musician, actor (he was in the TV miniseries *The Jacksons: An American Dream*, 1992 on ABC), and performer have earned him the name, "The Everything Man". In his latest single, "Give Me Your Love," Castor recaptures some of the retro harmonies of his earlier days with an outstanding high tenor led ballad. It's available from his website, www.jimmycastor.com.

Jimmy Castor and Louie Lymon now each reside and perform in Las Vegas. At the 2007 Cool Bobby B Doo Wop Convention in Las Vegas, both recreated the magic of the 1950's. Lymon performed Teenchords standards "I'm So Happy" and "Honey Honey" along with his brother's "Why Do Fools Fall In Love", using the instrumental breaks to show he can still dance as well as ever. Jimmy Castor gave exciting performances on both nights; doing Frankie Lymon favorites, "I Want You To Be My Girl" and "Creation Of Love" backed by the group the Doo Wop Daddies on Friday night and "Goody



Jimmy Castor at Cool Bobby B's Doo Wop Convention, Las Vegas, Nov 19, 2007. (Photo by Pamela Horner)

Goody," "Paper Castles," and "I Promise" on Saturday night, backed by a full band with brass section.

Meanwhile, it's nice to see our friend Jimmy Merchant still excelling as both a singer and an artist. Jimmy's been getting some great reviews lately, performing both as Jimmy Merchant & the Teenagers and with the Peninsulaires Barbershop Chorus. For a schedule of Jimmy's appearances and to check out his art work, see www.theteenagers.com.

For a fascinating glimpse into the career of songwriter, Lou Stallman, see <http://loustallmanworld.com>.

Richard Barrett's Musical Legacy continues in Part 6.

Lewis Lymon & Teenchords Discography (1956-1958)

Fury 1000	Lydia/I'm So Happy	1956
Fury 1003	Honey Honey/Please Tell The Angels	1957
Fury 1006	I'm Not Too Young To Fall In Love/ Falling In Love	1957
End 1003	Your Last Chance/Too Young	1957
End 1007	Tell Me Love/I Found Out Why	1957
Juanita 101	Dance Girl/Them There Eyes	1958

Jimmy Castor & Juniors

Wing 90078	I Promise/I Know the meaning Of Love	1956
Atomic 100	This Girl Of Mine/ Somebody Mentioned Your Name	1957

Jimmy Castor w/ Triols

Murray Hill LP000385	Two Loving Hearts	rec. 1959
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Jimmy Castor w/ Casals

Seville 105	Eight O'Clock Scene/Teacher Crush	1960
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Jimmy Castor additional titles as songwriter

Teenagers

Gee 1018	I Promise To Remember	1956
Columbia 4-42054	What's On Your Mind	1961
Murray Hill LP000148	Long Lasting Romance	rec. 1961
Murray Hill LP000148	Love Me Long	rec. 1961

The Clintonian Cubs

My Brother's 508	She's Just My Size	1959
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The Imperials

Newtime 503	Where Will You Be	1962
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Richard Barrett & Seattles

Seville 104	Dream On/I Am Yours	1960
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Lewis Lymon at Cool Bobby B's Doo Wop Convention, Las Vegas, Nov 19, 2007. (Photo by Pamela Horner)



Jimmy Castor, Charlie & Pamela Horner at the Soul Patrol Convention in West Philadelphia, May 26, 2007.

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