

The Musical Legacy of Richard Barrett – Part 7

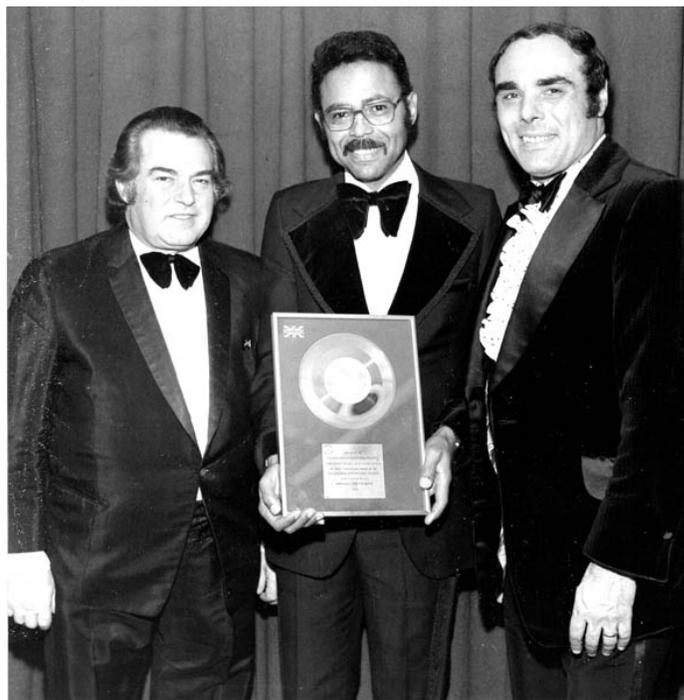
Return to Philly: The Three Degrees and Showmen

by Charlie Horner
With Contributions from
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By late 1963, Richard Barrett had tired of the New York City music scene. The George Goldner hit-making empire had been weakened by the payola hearings and George's gambling habit, to the point that Barrett had already left Goldner to produce artists himself out of 1650 Broadway. From his office on Broadway, Barrett worked as an independent to place his artists' records with different companies. But working as an independent in an extremely competitive market, he didn't have the control and power he wanted. He started getting homesick for his hometown of Philadelphia, where he still had music industry contacts and a lot of friends.

"During my days with *Gone/End* I worked with so many artists, so that often although I'd produce them or write for them, I had little control. Talents were being abused, everyone was getting ripped off," remembered Richard. "Eventually the wheeling and dealing got too much and I thought I'd move [back] to Philadelphia." [6]

Back in Philadelphia, Richard Barrett began looking for talent to produce. Working briefly with the *Landa* label (owned by *Jamie/Guyden*) in 1964, Barrett produced "Get Out"



Richard Barrett receiving a gold record the the U.K. for "When Will I See You Again". Courtesy of Julie Barrett.

b/w "You May Not Love Me" by Harold Melvin's re-formed Blue Notes (Harold Melvin, John Adkins, Larry Parks and Bernard Wilson). "Get Out" was a Barrett composition.

"We did this thing with Richard in 1964 called "Get Out" which sold a few," Harold Melvin once told an interviewer. "There had been some personnel changes in the [Blue Notes] and that was the first record we had out as Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. But really at that time records weren't the most important thing for the group. We were heavily into a cabaret thing. We weren't concentrating on records." [7]

Richard then auditioned a young singer from Germantown High School named Sheila Ferguson. Ferguson had previously recorded with the Kittens, a group of five girls from the Germantown section of Philadelphia that also included Jeanie Scott, older sister of future Three Degrees' Helen Scott. While Sheila only attests to being on one Kittens' record ("Count Every Star" b/w "I'm Worried", *Chestnut* #203), it is likely some aggregation of the group also backed Johnnie Alton on *Chestnut* and made two records for the *Don-El* label (see Discography). Sheila was recommended to Barrett by her high school teacher, Gene Harris. [9] After rehearsing, Barrett produced Sheila's first solo recording, "Little Red Riding Hood" b/w "How Did That Happen" on *Landa* #706.

The Swan Years

By the end of 1964, Barrett accepted a position as A&R man for *Swan Records*. *Swan* was formed in Philadelphia in December, 1957, by TV superstar Dick Clark, Tony Mamarella (*Bandstand's* producer) and Bernie Bennick. When the Payola scandal hit in November 1959, Clark was forced to divest all of his music company interests in order to remain on television. Tony Mamarella chose instead to quit *Bandstand* and he and Bennick became sole owners of *Swan*. [8] *Swan's* biggest success came in early 1964, with the master they'd purchased earlier of the Beatles' "She Loves You." Coincidentally, upon the Beatles' first trip to the United States that same year, when asked by

Murray the K, who some of their favorite American artists were, they'd named Richie Barrett! Barrett's 1962 recording of the Leiber-Stoller song, "Some Other Guy" (Atlantic) had been a huge hit in the British club scene.

Upon arriving in Philly, Richard Barrett set about trying to resurrect some the concepts he'd had earlier but not yet brought to fruition. One was to put together the quintessential vocal group and take them to superstardom. He'd come very close with the Teenagers, Imperials and Chantels, but that last step had eluded him. His success with the female group the Chantels, made him try that avenue again.

"The Degrees' is a vision I conceived in 1958 when there were five boys," Barrett once stated. "In 1963 I wound up with four girls; Linda Turner, Shirley Poole, Fayette Pinkney and Elaine Brister. Elaine Brister did not show up for the recording session, thus the Three Degrees." The "degrees concept" was simple yet brilliant. Richard Barrett would assemble and train the most talented singers he could find; three degrees of excellence!

Fayette Pinkney, Linda Turner and Shirley Poole attended Overbrook High School in West Philadelphia and knew each other well. They'd often sing together and ended up auditioning for Richard Barrett at one of the girl's homes. The Three Degrees' first record, "Gee Baby (I'm Sorry)" was released on *Swan* in late 1964. Fayette did the lead on this emotional ballad, written by Richard. The song's style was reminiscent of the Chantels. Released in March 1965, "Gee Baby" charted briefly (#80 on *Billboard* and #69 on *Cashbox* Pop Charts). Barrett used the single to get both the Three Degrees and Sheila Ferguson booked on Jocko's show at the Apollo Theater, headlined by Marvin Gaye and also featuring the Manhattans and Spinners.

The lack of success of the Three Degrees' first record disappointed Richard Barrett. He decided he didn't have the right mix of voices. He let Poole and Turner go and began auditioning new voices for the Three Degrees. The same teacher at Germantown High that introduced Barrett to Sheila Ferguson,



SHELIA FERGUSON



also recommended Helen Scott. Helen was born in Richmond, VA, and raised in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Through further auditions, Barrett added Janet Harmon to the group.

"The Three Degrees were something special to me," Richard Barrett once said. "I decided that I'd like to be their manager, their writer, their producer and ... their guardian angel. So from 1964 on, the Three Degrees story became my story. If they didn't eat, I didn't eat. I made a promise to get them off the ground, which I've done of course, but to also make them superstars." [6]

At *Swan's* rehearsal room in a building on the northwest corner of 8th and Fitzwater Streets, Barrett rehearsed the Three Degrees relentlessly. In view of Barrett's methods of teaching the Teenagers, Imperials and Chantels, this is not surprising. Barrett knew that to create perfection you had to work at it. Richard had the group rehearsing everyday after school until eight or nine at night and again on weekends. The rehearsal room had a large mirror where the group could go over choreography until Barrett had them moving together.

Over the next couple years, the Three Degrees would release seven more singles for *Swan* and Sheila Ferguson would release three. Sheila would add her voice to the background of all the Three Degrees' records while the Three Degrees would do the background on all the Sheila Ferguson recordings. Initially, the Three Degrees' appearances were mostly local. They did a lot of record hops to promote their records and Sheila Ferguson would usually accompany them.

General Norman Johnson & the Showmen

Barrett was not alone producing black acts at *Swan*. Also producing records at *Swan* were Gene Dozier, Leon Huff (pre Gamble & Huff) and General Norman Johnson. General Johnson was from Norfolk, VA, and had been singing since 1956. Together with the Showmen (General Norman Johnson, Gene Knight, Dorsey Knight, Leslie Felton and Milton Wells)



General Norman Johnson, 1980. Photo by Charlie Horner.

they'd had moderate hits in the early sixties with "It Will Stand" and "39-21-46" for *Minit Records*.

General Johnson explained what happened next. "We [the Showmen] had this long span of time when we were really inactive. We wrote some songs. We had no money. So I caught a bus and went to Philadelphia." Johnson was most proud of a song he'd written called "In Paradise". "I said I'm gonna peddle these songs so I went to Cameo Parkway. This guy kept saying, 'Play it again. Play it again.' And I said, 'Oh, no, no, no.'" Afraid Cameo Parkway was trying to steal the song, Johnson left and took it to Madera and White. "They took me to New York and different places. They wanted to do something with the song but they were between projects. So I took it to *Swan Records*. There was a guy there named Richard Barrett and he loved the song."

Barrett not only wanted the song, he signed the Showman to *Swan Records* and signed General Johnson as a writer.

"Norman [Johnson] has a passion when he sings," Barrett once said. "I was impressed to death with all five gentlemen. They could sing their cans off. Those moving, tight harmonies and unique passages. They had emotion in their harmonies like nobody I ever heard." [3]

"I worked for *Swan* as a writer and a 'learning producer' – learning from Richard Barrett," remembered the General. "It was quite a learning experience. I was with him about a year. Richard Barrett was so influential to my musical growth. When I went to *Swan* he was their A&R man. I learned so much from him. He taught me how to take something simple and make it into something grand. I remember the Showmen were booked into the Apollo Theatre and we were so broke, we couldn't afford uniforms. Richard took us to a store in Philly and bought us some rather plain suits. I said, 'We can't wear those, they're too plain.' But Richard said, 'Just wait.' He took the suits to a tailor and had the lapels embroidered so they looked great."

Growing up in Norfolk, one of the biggest influences on Johnson as a singer was Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, whom Barrett had discovered in 1955. "Richard Barrett was working on a song [at *Swan*] for the Three Degrees called 'Bongos On The Beach'," remembered Johnson. "He brought in

one of the original Teenagers to work on the side. He asked me if the Teenager could stay with me for a few days while he worked on it. He did and it was such a thrill to meet one of the original Teenagers." The song "Bongos On The Beach," however was never released by *Swan*. It came out years later on a CD.

Working with Richard Barrett, General Johnson and the Showmen recorded "In Paradise" b/w "Take It Baby" (*Swan* #4213). "Richard Rome from Philadelphia did the arrangements on it," recalled Johnson. Barrett overdubbed the voices twice to get a wall of sound. "We recorded that song and we were really excited about it but the recording company (*Swan*) was at an all time low and they couldn't get it off the ground. It got some play, especially in Philadelphia. We rocked in Philadelphia! But other than that, sparse."

General Johnson would play his compositions on the piano and Richard Barrett would select the ones he wanted to record. The group's second record, "Our Love Will Grow" was also written by General Norman Johnson and produced by Richard Barrett. "When I heard Johnson sing 'Our Love Will Grow' in a syncopated style," recalled Barrett. "I got the idea for the rhythm – a semi-Latin beat with a novelty Latin feel." [3] Again, the record sold in Philadelphia and the Carolinas but failed to breakout elsewhere.

"After about a year at *Swan*, I got sick," recalled General Johnson. "I was hospitalized with pneumonia. When I got out of the hospital, Richard gave me a song written by Leon Huff, 'Please Try To Understand'." Actually, "Please Try To Understand" was co-written by Leon Huff and Cindy Scott. Cindy Scott was the stage name of Sundray Tucker, daughter of famed Dixie Hummingbirds' lead, Ira Tucker, and a future member of the Three Degrees.

"I met Leon Huff through Alex Wilde, who was a member of Patty & the Emblems," Sundray said. "Alex asked me to go to a rehearsal with him one day and the rehearsal was at Leon's house. Leon and I became songwriting partners." [12]

General Johnson and Richard Barrett collaborated on "Just Right For Love," the next Three Degrees *Swan* release. It was backed with "I'm Gonna Need You". Meanwhile, Barrett had Sheila Ferguson record two songs she'd written, "I Weep For You" and "Don't Leave Me Lover."





The next Three Degrees release featured the group doing the old Five Keys standard, "Close Your Eyes." Following that, Barrett recycled two Chantels songs for the Three Degrees – "Look In My Eyes" and "Maybe." "Maybe" was given much different treatment than the Chantels version. Only "Look In My Eyes" charted briefly. Its flip side, "Drivin' Me Mad" was a collaboration between Richard Barrett and Leon Huff. All the Three Degrees songs were well received in Philadelphia. In particular, "Maybe" reached #60 on local radio station WIBG's play list in March of 1966. Meanwhile, General Johnson wrote both sides of the next Sheila Ferguson release, "And In Return" b/w "Are You Satisfied." Sheila's third and final record for *Swan* was "Heartbroken Memories" b/w "Signs Of Love." Both sides were written together by Richard Barrett and Leon Huff.

Not content with only the Three Degrees, Sheila Ferguson and the Showmen, Barrett produced the Modern Red Caps for *Swan*. Former lead of the Dreams, George Tindley, had joined Steve Gibson's famed Red Caps in 1957, splitting from the group to form his own Modern Red Caps in 1962. In forming the Modern Red Caps, Tindley assembled a group consisting of himself, his cousin George Grant (former lead of the Castelles), Sherman Marshall and Herb Manual.

Barrett recorded the Modern Red Caps doing "Never Too Young (To Fall In Love), a song cowritten by Barrett, Tindley and former Flamingos' lead, Terry Johnson. For the flip side, Barrett had the group redo the old Flamingos' standard, "Golden Teardrops." On this side he had George Grant do the lead. Former Castelles' Billy Taylor overdubbed the high floating tenor on the record and a young Teddy Pendergrass played drums.

The same team (General Johnson writing and Richard Barrett producing) was also responsible for a young soul singer from Vineland, NJ, named John Leach. Leach's "Put That Woman Down" (*Lawn* #256) was released in early March, 1966 and picked by the trade papers as likely to chart. It didn't. But the record has now become a Northern Soul standard. The Johnson – Barrett team also recorded Eddie Carlton's "Misery" (*Swan* #4218). With Leon Huff, Barrett co-wrote and produced "Make It Saturday Night" for the Locomotions (*Swan* #4237). Barrett and Huff also wrote (and Richard produced) "Get Back To You" in 1965 for the South Philly doo wop group, Anthony & the Sophomores, which they shopped to *ABC-Paramount*. Richard Barrett also found time to record himself, singing the Barrett – General Johnson composition, "I Will Love You" (*Swan* #4228).

One interesting record is "Let's Shindig" by the In-Crowd. Some sources report that the In-Crowd is a combination of the Three Degrees and the Showmen. "No, that's not the Showmen," General Johnson laughed when asked about it. "I wouldn't have done a record called 'Let's Shindig'." The female voices, however could very well be the Three Degrees.

Swan Song

After the Three Degrees recorded "Tales Are True" b/w "I Wanna Be Your Baby" in mid-1966, Helen Scott left the group to get married. At this point Sheila Ferguson was added to the Three Degrees. Sheila had previously filled in with the Degrees on at least one gig and was familiar with all their songs. The Three Degrees' last *Swan* record, "Love of My Life," was recorded by the combination of Fayette, Janet and Sheila.

"Bernie Bennick at *Swan* was just callin' all the shots," remembered Richard Barrett. "I discovered this really fine singer, Sheila Ferguson. After I'd cut her as a solo I put her with the Three Degrees. But all Bernie wanted me to do was copy the *Motown* sound. And people weren't buying copies... Who needed 'em? The last couple of Three Degrees records, 'Tales Are True' and 'Love Of My Life,' bombed out. Bernie had overextended himself and the company just folded up. That was that, *Swan* was finished." [7]

Some months later, *Swan Records* closed its doors for good.. General Johnson went on to superstardom with the Chairmen of the Board. Later, his *Surfside* label was to become a key part of the Carolina Beach Music scene. General Johnson & Chairmen of the Board continue performing Beach Music with one of the most exciting acts in the country. His schedule is detailed on his website, www.chairmenoftheboard.com

Leon Huff went on to form *Philadelphia International Records* with Kenny Gamble and revolutionize soul music. The experiences Huff and Johnson gained with Richard Barrett at *Swan* would be put to good use.

The Three Degrees – A New Beginning

After the last *Swan* recording, Janet Harmon left the Three Degrees. Richard replaced her with Sundray Tucker. Sundray came from a musical family. As mentioned earlier, her





Cindy Scott (Sundray Tucker)

father was Ira Tucker Sr., legendary lead of the Gospel group, the Dixie Hummingbirds. Sundray began singing as a teenager with the Ordettes, but dropped out of the group before they changed their name and recorded as Patti LaBelle & the Blue Belles. She'd already recorded for *Peacock* as Sandra Kay Tucker, and for *Veep* as Cindy Scott. [12].

Late in 1967, Sundray Tucker left the Three Degrees. Since the Three Degrees had nightclub bookings to honor, Richard Barrett put in a call to former Chantels' member, Sonia Goring.

"Richard just needed someone for awhile and I went," recalled Sonia. "I didn't record with them, just perform. I didn't stay with them very long."

Sonia filled in just long enough for Richard Barrett to find a permanent replacement. The group played some gigs in Rhode Island and then moved on to Boston, where they played an extended engagement at the Echo Lounge.

The newest Three Degree turned out to be Valerie Holiday. Valerie was born in Newark, NJ, but grew up in Jacksonville, GA. She began singing in church. Later her family moved to Dorchester, MA, near Boston. After graduating high school she entered a won a contest to become Miss Tan Boston. With that she began singing professionally in the Boston area. Valerie's keyboard player was Bernie Worrell, who would later find fame with George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic. Worrell was attending the New England Conservatory of Music while playing gigs on the side. Worrell knew Frank Hatchett, the legendary jazz dance teacher. When Hatchett came to see one of the sets Valerie and Bernie were doing, he told Valerie that Richard Barrett was looking for a replacement in the Three Degrees.

"I went to see their show and met them and their manager Richard Barrett," Valerie said in her web bio. "At that time it was Fayette, Sonia and Sheila. At first I was nervous and a little uncertain that I would fit in with the group. I knew it would be better than performing alone. We talked for a while and I mentioned the dancing they did. They showed me how to do the 'Philly Dog'. It was the base step of their routines and I could do it. This made me feel that it was not going to be so difficult after all. When it was time to decide whether to join or

not, I was frightened but excited about experiencing something new." [10]

The Three Degrees got a career break when they filled in for Wayne Newton at the major Boston nightclub, Blinstrub's. But much of the time in Boston was spent rehearsing. Finally Barrett and the Three Degrees returned to Philadelphia.

The Three Degrees were now versatile enough to sing sweet soul music or smooth classics. While the Three Degrees were at ease playing plush supper clubs, Barrett realized they needed a real hit record in order to reach superstardom. Barrett first took the Degrees to *ABC Records* where they recorded "Tear It Up" in late 1967. The record failed to chart so Barrett moved the group to *Warner Brothers* in 1968, for "Contact". "Contact" did little at the time but is now sought after as a "Northern Soul" classic. After two singles for *Metromedia*, Barrett signed a one-record deal locally with Gamble and Huff's *Neptune* label.

Barrett encouraged Gamble and Huff catch the Degrees singing at the Latin Casino (Cherry Hill, NJ) and they liked what they heard. But by the time the *Neptune* single, "What I See," failed to chart in 1970, Barrett was ready to move on. He approached his old boss from New York, Morris Levy, about signing the Three Degrees to *Roulette*.

The Roulette Years

On *Roulette*, the Three Degrees scored their first big record in 1970. Yet another remake of one of Barrett's most successful songs, "Maybe," this time the song featured a talking introduction and Valerie doing the lead. The record soared into the Top-40 on the Pop charts and #4 on the R&B Charts. It was followed up by "I Do Take You" which hit #7 on the R&B Charts. Three more chart records followed, the Sly Stone composition, "You're The One," "There's So Much Love All Around Me," and "Trade Winds." To assist with their move into the supper club venues, Barrett also had the Degrees record standards like "Stardust" and "Ebb Tide." The group's success on the charts helped Barrett get the group more exposure on other media. In 1970, the Three Degrees made two appearances on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* (June 5 and November 9). Later, on December 6, the group sang on *Ed Sullivan's Toast of the Town*. In 1971, film director William Friedkin was looking for a plush nightclub to shoot a scene for *The French Connection* in. He chose New York's Copacabana. Since the Three Degrees were playing there at the time of the filming, they were asked to appear in the film. The group is





THE THREE DEGREES



Personal Manager
Richard Barrett

seen in the movie singing "Everybody Gets To Go To The Moon."

The exposure the group got in *The French Connection* earned them a 28-city three-month tour with Englebert Humperdinck. The group also provided the background vocals for Humperdinck's "Live at the Riviera (Las Vegas)" LP.

The Sound Of Philadelphia

When the Three Degrees' contract with *Roulette* expired in 1972, Richard Barrett again decided to give Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff a chance to record the group. The group immediately recorded an album for *Philadelphia International Records (PIR)* and the first single, "Dirty Ol' Man" was released from it. "Dirty Ol' Man" was only a modest hit in the United States, but it was big overseas (except in the U.K. where it was at first banned by the BBC for its lyrics). This led to the Three Degrees first overseas tour where they stopped in Holland (the record was #1 there), Germany, Belgium and finally England, when the ban was lifted.

The Three Degrees' second single on *PIR*, "Year of Decision," failed to catch on. However, the group's fortunes were about to change. In 1973, when the Degrees were in Sigma Sound Studios working on their first *PIR* album, they were asked to sing background vocals on an instrumental being recorded by MFSB (Mothers, Fathers, Sisters, Brothers). MFSB were none other than the talented musicians that had been backing all the *PIR* artists recording at Philadelphia's legendary Sigma Sound Studios. The core of MFSB was Ronnie Baker (bass), Vince Montana (vibes), Bobby Eli, Roland Chambers and Norman Harris (guitars), Earl Young (drums), Larry Washington (percussion), Larry Pakula (organ), Leon Huff (piano) and Ron Kersey (keyboards). The horn section was headed by Leno Zach Zachery (alto saxophone). A massive string section was headed by violinist Don Renaldo and contained many members of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Don Cornelius was looking for a theme song for his popular *Soul Train* TV dance program. MFSB worked out a tune and Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff added lyrics to it for the Three Degrees to sing at the end. The lyrics were simple, "... Let's Get It On, It's Time To Get Down..." Gamble and Huff smartly named the tune "TSOP" ("The Sound Of Philadelphia"). "TSOP" zoomed to #1 on both the R&B and Pop Charts, listed as by "MFSB featuring the Three Degrees." Suddenly the Three Degrees were in huge demand. The group received a gold record and was recognized by the Mayor of Philadelphia.

With the Three Degrees rising quickly in popularity, the group starred in a 1973 episode of the popular TV comedy, *Sanford & Son*, singing "I Didn't Know" acappella to Redd Foxx.

As popular as the Three Degrees were in the United States, they were even more popular overseas. In 1973, Richard Barrett took the group to Japan to appear at the 3rd Tokyo Music Festival. There, they won first prize with a song off their first *PIR* album, "When Will I See You Again". The song became a huge hit in Japan. At home, *PIR* went back to the group's first album and quickly released "When Will I See You Again" as a single in the U.S. Released in the summer of 1974, it quickly sold a million copies in America, reaching # 2 on the Pop Charts and # 4 on the R&B Charts.

In 1975 *PIR* recorded and released two more albums by the Three Degrees. "The Three Degrees International" LP included "TSOP" to boost sales, but that probably wasn't necessary. Most of the songs on the album were Gamble & Huff compositions.

In 1975, the single "I Didn't Know" (the song written by Bunny Sigler and originally done acappella on *Sanford & Son*) reached #18 on the R&B Charts. Also in 1975, capitalizing on the success of the group, *Roulette* issued an album of previously recorded songs by the Three Degrees, entitled "So Much In Love". *PIR* countered with the release of a live album, "The Three Degrees Live." The album thought to capture some of the excitement the Three Degrees brought to their concerts. In addition to singing some of their own songs, the album contained the Degrees doing some of their label-mates' numbers like the O'Jay's "For The Love Of Money," and "Love Train."

Meanwhile, the Three Degrees continued to be popular overseas, leaving them a very full international tour schedule.



In the summer of 1975, "Take Good Care Of Yourself," reached #64 on the R&B Charts but went no higher. Richard Barrett was becoming skeptical of *PIR's* ability to keep his group on the charts and on September 15, 1975 he signed the Three Degrees to a three year contract with *CBS Records*.

In early 1976, Fayette Pinkney left the Three Degrees to continue her education. She did record one solo album called "One Degree" for *Chopper Records* in England. Fayette was replaced in the Three Degrees by the returning Helen Scott. Recording for *CBS's Epic* label, the Three Degrees recorded an album, "Standing Up For Love" in 1976. Two singles, "What I Did For Love," and "Standing Up For Love" had little action in the United States but the group remained popular in Europe and Japan.

When the *CBS* contract ran out, Barrett smartly signed the Three Degrees to a European label, *Ariola*. There, Richard Barrett turned production duties over to Giorgio Moroder, the famous producer who'd previously worked with Donna Summer and would soon produce David Bowie, Blondie, Cher, Freddy Mercury and Irene Cara. Moroder would also go on to write award winning songs for movies such as "Midnight Express," "American Gigolo," "Flashdance," "Electric Dreams," "Neverending Story," "Top Gun" and "Over The Top." Before the 1980's would end, Moroder would be called the "Father of Disco Music". The Three Degrees released three albums on *Ariola* resulting in four Top-10 records in the UK: "The Runner," "My Simple Heart," "Giving Up Giving In," and "Woman In Love." In the United States, only two of the singles even cracked the Top 40 R&B Charts; "Givin' Up Givin' In" (# 39) and "Woman In Live" (# 27).

In the U.K., the Three Degrees became favorites of Prince Charles who invited them to perform at Buckingham Palace for his 30th Birthday Party in November 1978. The British press promptly dubbed the group, "Charlie's Angels." Barrett and the Three Degrees were also invited guests at Prince Charles' wedding to Princess Diana in 1981. The group ended up filming their own television special at the Royal Albert Hall in London called "An Evening With The Three Degrees."

In 1981, following a tour of Bahrain, the Three Degrees split with Richard Barrett. A legal battle ensued with the courts finally deciding in 1989 that Richard Barrett and Three Degrees Enterprises owned the name and concept, "The Three Degrees." As a result, the group was only able to perform as the Three De-

The Three Degrees at the Clef Club, Philadelphia, 2008.

grees outside of the United States. The group continued to work and record, particularly in Europe and Japan where they remained extremely popular. The Three Degrees recorded two albums in 1985, "Album Of Love," and "Live In The U.K."

In 1986, Sheila Ferguson left the group to go solo. She now resides in the UK where she continues to be a huge celebrity. Sheila was initially replaced by Vera Brown, but by 1987 Rhea Harris took her place. In 1988, Victoria Wallace replaced Harris and the trio of Valeria, Helen and Victoria recorded an album and two singles for the *Ichiban* label. Later in 1989, Cynthia Garrison, a native Philadelphia, replaced Victoria Wallace. Garrison had previously sung background for Millie Jackson, Brandi Wells and Change. Her first tour with the group was to Japan in 1990.

In 1993, German singer-songwriter Thomas Anders recorded "When Will I See You Again" as the title track of his album. He recorded the song with the Three Degrees. It reached #37 on the German charts, making it a hit in Europe all over again. In 2007 the Black Entertainment and Music Association awarded the group its Unsung Heroes Award.

Epilog

In 2008, the legal issues were resolved between the group and Richard Barrett's wife, Julie, and Three Degrees Enterprises, Inc., again allowing the Three Degrees to perform in the United States. On Saturday May 10, 2008, the Three Degrees (Valerie, Helen and Cynthia) played Philadelphia's Clef Club to a wildly enthusiastic crowd. It was their first performance in their home town of Philadelphia in many years.

Today the Three Degrees hold the Guinness Book record for the Longest Running Female Vocal Trio. They continue to thrill audiences around the world with their recordings



Richard Barrett, the Three Degrees and Prince Charles, Scotland, November 1979. Courtesy of Julie Barrett.

and live performances. For news of the Three Degrees and a copy of their schedule, visit their website at www.threedegrees.com

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Richard Barrett's Musical Legacy – A Summary

This is the last in our series of articles about Richard Barrett. In seven detailed segments, we have only scratched the surface of Richard's enormous impact on the world's music. We did not even cover Richard's work with the Flamingos and Dubs. Indeed, much has been written on those groups but not enough emphasis has been placed on Richard Barrett producing their biggest hits. Before he passed, Richard worked on an autobiography. We hope someday that manuscript will be published and we'll hear his story in his own words. Until then, this series of articles and more importantly, the treasure chest of music he gave us, will serve as his legacy. We thought of ending this series with a discography of all the songs Richard had a hand in; as a singer, writer or producer. But to do that alone would fill this magazine. From the Valentines to the Teenagers to the Beatles to the Three Degrees, Richard Barrett shaped the songs we grew up with. It should suffice to say that without Richard Barrett, group harmony, rhythm & blues and even rock & roll music would have taken a much different course. We happened to like the way our music turned out. **Thank you, Richard!**



Wall of Richard Barrett Records and Memorabilia
Assembled by Val Shively for Richard's Memorial Service
October 14, 2006.

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Charlie & Pam Horner

Three Degrees and Related 7" U.S. Singles Discography

(The number of Three Degrees records released outside of the United States is staggering. In many cases singles had different flip sides and picture sleeves with great photos. LP's issued overseas often had additional cuts not released in the U.S. Some songs were only released in Japan or Europe. Some were sung in Japanese, French or Spanish. Space only permits us to list U.S. released singles here.)

7" Singles

- The Kittens (including Sheila Ferguson)**
Chestnut 203 - Count Every Star / I'm Worried 3/61
- Johnny Alton (probably Kittens, uncredited background)**
Chestnut 204 - Please Love Me / Glad That You're Mine 61
- The Kittens (probably including Sheila Ferguson)**
Don-El 122 - Walter / Light Bulb 62
Don-El 205 - I Need Your Love Tonight / Johnny's Place 62
- Sheila Ferguson**
Landa 706 - Little Red Riding Hood / How Did That Happen 64
- As the Three Degrees**
Swan 4197 - Gee Baby / Do What You're Supposed To Do 65
Swan 4214 - I'm Gonna Need You / Just Right For Love 65
Swan 4224 - Close Your Eyes / Gotta Draw The Line 65
Swan 4226 - Eve Of Tomorrow / Love Letters 65
Swan 4235 - Look In My Eyes / Drivin' Me Mad 65
Swan 4245 - Maybe / Yours 66
Swan 4253 - I Wanna Be Your Baby / Tales Are True 66
Swan 4267 - Love Of My Life / Are You Satisfied 66
- Sheila Ferguson (uncredited backup by Three Degrees)**
Swan 4217 - I'll Weep For You / Don't (Leave Me Lover) 65
Swan 4225 - And In Return / Are You Satisfied 65
Swan 4234 - Heartbroken Memories / Signs Of Love 65
- As the In-Crowd (probably including the Three Degrees)**
Swan 4204 - Let's Shindig / Klink 65
- As the Three Degrees**
ABC 10991 - Tear It Up (Part 1) / Tear It Up (Part 2) 66
Warner Bros 7198 - Contact / No No Not Again 68
Metromedia 109 - Down In The Boondocks / Warm Weather Music 69
Metromedia 128 - The Feeling Of Love / Warm Weather Music 69
Neptune 23 - What I See / [Instrumental] 70
Roulette 7072 - Melting Pot / The Grass Will Sing For You 70
Roulette 7079 - Maybe / Collage 70
Roulette 7079 - Maybe / Sugar On Sunday [alternate flip] 70
Roulette 7088 - I Do Take You / You're The Fool 70
Roulette 7097 - Stardust / You're The One 71
Roulette 7102 - Yours / There's So Much Love All Around Me 71
Roulette 7105 - Ebb Tide / Lowdown 71
Roulette 7117 - Trade Winds / I Turn To You 72

Roulette 7125 - Find My Way / I Wanna Be Your Baby	72
Roulette 7137 - I Won't Let You Go / Through Misty Eyes	72
PIR. 3534 - Dirty Ol' Man / Can't You See What You're Doing To Me	73
PIR 3539 - Year Of Decision / Woman Needs A Good Man	74
PIR 3550 - When Will I See You Again / Year Of Decision	74
PIR 3561 - I Didn't Know / Dirty Ol' Man	75
PIR 3568 - Take Good Care Of Yourself / Here I Am	75
PIR 3585 - Free Ride / Loving Cup	76

As MFSB (Featuring the Three Degrees)

PIR 354 - TSOP (The Sound Of Philadelphia) / Something For Nothing	74
PIR 3547 - Love Is The Message / My One And Only Love	74

As the Three Degrees

Epic 50283 - What I Did For Love / Macaroni Man	76
Epic 50330 - Standing Up For Love / In Love We Grow	76
Ariola 7721 - Giving Up Giving In / Woman In Love	78
Ariola 7742 - Out Of Love Again / Woman In Love	79
Ariola 7746 - The Runner / Out Of Love Again	79
Ariola 7776 - Jump The Gun / Falling In Love	79
Ariola 7801 - My Simple Heart / Hot Summer Night	80
Ichiban 167 - Tie U Up / ????	89
Ichiban 172 - Make It Easy On Yourself / Vital Signs	89

Richard Barrett Produced Singles Discography (includes only records referred to in this article)

Richie Barrett

Atlantic 2142 - Some Other Guy / Tricky Dicky	62
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Harold Melvin & Blue Notes

Landa 703 - Get Out (And Let Me Cry) / You May Not Love Me	64
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The Showmen

Swan 4213 - In Paradise / Take It Baby	65
Swan 4219 - Our Love Will Grow / You're Everything	65
Swan 4241 - Please Try To Understand / The Honey House	66

Anthony & the Sophomores

ABC-Par. 10770 - Get Back To You / Wild For Her	65
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Richie Barrett / 5 Guys From Uncle

Swan 4228 - I Will Love You / I Will Love You (Instr.)	65
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Modern Red Caps

Swan 4243 - Golden Teardrops / Never Too Young	66
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John Leach

Lawn 256 - Put That Woman Down / Love Oh Love	65
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The Locomotions

Swan 4237 - Make It Saturday Night / Weekend Workout	65
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Eddie Carlton

Swan 4218 - Misery / It Will Be Done	65
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Notes and References

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3. Emily Gaul, "General Johnson: The chairman of the Beach," Goldmine #468, 3 July 1998.
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5. Charlie Horner's 1978 interview with Modern Red Caps' George Tindley. Conversations with the Castelles' George Grant and Billy Taylor.
6. Tony Cummings, "Some Other Guy," *Black Music* [London: April 1974], pp. 62-63.
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12. Cindy Scott, "The Return of Cindy Scott." Publication by *Driving Wheel Records*, 1999.
13. General Norman Johnson & the Chairmen of the Board's official website, www.chairmenoftheboard.com
14. Charlie & Pamela Horner's website is www.ClassicUrbanHarmony.net



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