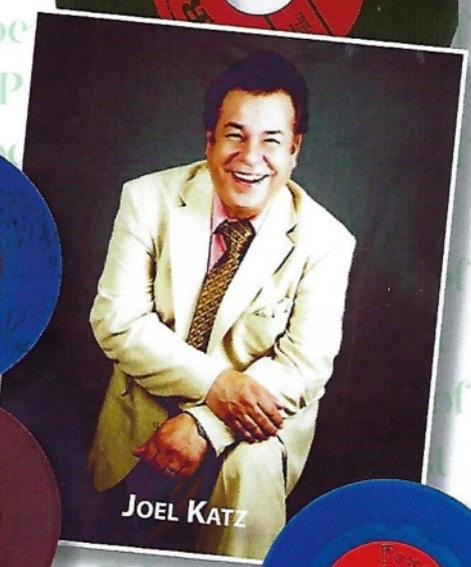
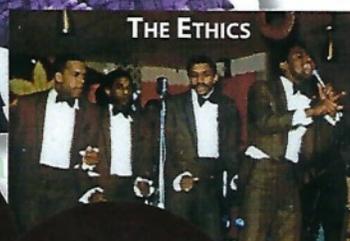
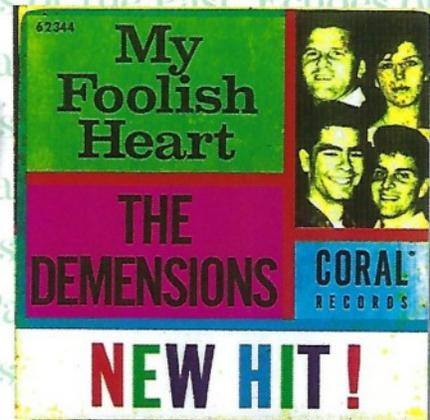


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ECHOES OF THE PAST



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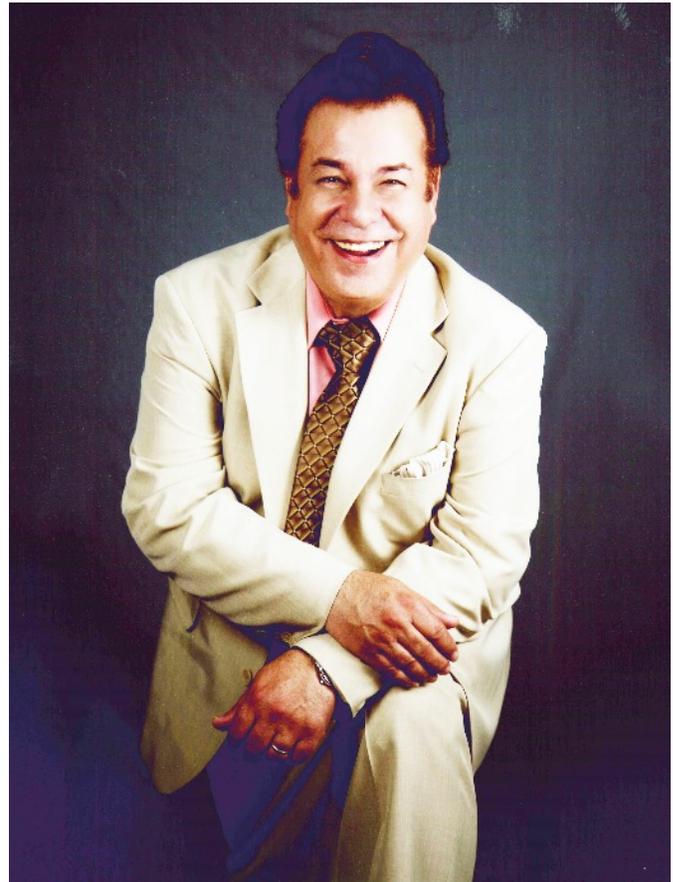
“Joel Katz”
“The Voice Of Jersey Doo Wop”
Part 1: The 1960’s
By Charlie Horner

With contributions from Pamela Horner

When writing about someone in the entertainment field, it’s become a cliché to say that someone has “done it all”. But never has this been more true than when writing about the music career of Joel Katz. As a singer, Joel has sung for more than fifty years, leading and recording with such doo wop groups as the Joel & the Connotations, the Autumns, Joel & the Conchords, Joel & the Rondells, the Platinums, the Wizards, Twilight, the Cliftonaires, Joel & the Blue Stars, Joel & the Dymensions, the Glows, Autumn Spectrum, Santa’s Doo Wop Helpers and Joel & the Dynamics. At other times, he’s sung with established groups like the Emotions, the Five Discs, Brooklyn Bridge, the Impalas, the Ad Libs and many others. On CD, he’s backed Aaron Neville, Gene Pitt, Gloria Gainor, George Kerr and countless others. But Joel’s talents don’t stop there. He builds and repairs recording studios and equipment; owns and operates a recording studio; and arranges, mixes, and engineers recordings. Over the years, Joel has owned the record labels of many of his groups’ recordings. Being a record collector, he wisely knew to press all of his records in extremely limited amounts in colored vinyl besides the commonly distributed black vinyl copies. And if that wasn’t enough, Joel’s was the voice of the dancing bear on some of the later Captain Kangaroo TV shows.

Recovering from a serious illness, Joel has now put together a new Joel & the Dynamics group and is back singing. He’s also begun producing his own doo wop concerts and will be playing the part of record company owner, Jerry Blaine in the musical *Soul Harmony*. [See the article on *Soul Harmony*, this issue] It’s no wonder, then, that covering Joel Katz’ career will take more than one installment. But, let’s start at the beginning.

Joel Katz was born in the Bronx, NY, but moved to Washington Heights when he was a



Joel Katz, 2017

year old. Joel’s mother was a record collector and Joel began singing along with the records before he learned to talk. While neither of his parents sang, he did have cousins who sang opera the Met and Radio City Music Hall. By the age of seven, Joel and his family moved out of New York to Saddle Brook, NJ. By eighth grade, Joel Katz was singing doo wop.

Joel became a record collector. He loved listening to records by the Heartbeats, Rudy West leading the Five Keys and Pookie Hudson & the Spaniels. “And of course, Johnny Maestro of the Crests,” Joel added. “Johnny was one of the great lead singers out there. I loved his song



The Belvederes, 1963. Left to right, top row: Barry Greene, Larry Gold, George Corradino, Joel Katz, Dave Fabian, Jerry Pulwer. Bottom row: Mike Martin, Bruce Paterson, Bill Gorton. Photo courtesy of Joel Katz.



The Belvederes, 1963. Bottom: Joel Katz. Left to right, top: Jerry Pulwer. Dave Fabian, Peter Machdemes, George Corradino, Larry Gold, Barry Greene. Photo courtesy of Joel Katz.

styling and I tried to emulate him as a singer when I was young.”

“I used to hang with some of the older guys,” recalled Joel. “There were guys singing on the street corner and in the hallways in school. I just started listening to and singing with them. I actually started singing background. I began singing baritone.”

Within a short time, Joel was singing with three different groups at the same time – Joel & the Conchords, the Belvederes and the Butanes.

Joel Katz started Joel & the Conchords around in the early 1960’s. “I didn’t know who could sing so I started auditioning everybody, even the teachers,” said Joel. “I managed to cobble a group together and I named them Joel & the Conchords, ‘...chords,’ not like the Concord grape.” Joel sang lead.

The Belvederes and Butanes

Within a couple months, Joel was also singing lead with the Belvederes. “They were a group from Fair Lawn, NJ, that sort of acquired me,” recalled Joel. “They were more of a band / vocal group. They were good but never really got off the ground.” The Belvederes, consisting of Joel Katz (lead), Dave Fabian, George Corra-

dino, and Larry Gold. Jerry Pulwer managed the group with Barry Greene the assistant manager. Peter Machdemes might have sung with the group on occasion. The Belvederes were self-contained and had a band consisting of Mike Martin and Bruce Paterson on guitar and Bill Gorton, drums. The group sang locally and even auditioned for a New York radio station in January 1963, trying to get a recording contract. They didn’t get it. As a preview of Joel’s future career as a recording engineer, began recording the groups he sang with on tape as well as taking them to demo studios to record. Joel did record a demo of the Belvederes singing “Once In A Lifetime” but it has long since been lost.

After that Joel also joined an acappella group called the Butanes. “They were from Passaic and Lodi, NJ,” said Joel. “The lead singer of the Butanes was Hank Grimaldi who later recorded with the acappella group, the Valids (*Amber* label). Hank was the main lead singer in the Butanes. I was the second lead.” At that time, Joel had built a little home studio and recorded tapes of a lot of the Butanes’ songs but nothing became of them. One of the songs Hank led on was “Mommy And Daddy” (Students). “I did some leads with the Butanes but I actually came into that group as a baritone. That’s when I really started getting into background work.

Joel & the Conchords

The first generation of Joel and the Conchords was most likely Joel Katz (lead), Barry Skolachi, Bill Bolgner (bass) and Joel Sweitzer. Joel made a number of acappella demo recordings with them around 1964, although none were released to the public at that time. The first demos they recorded were “Gloria,” “For All We Know,” “One Summer Night” and “Lovers Quarrel”. “I was going around to different studios at that time,” said Joel.

By the time Joel & the Conchords recorded a demo of “Moonlight In Vermont” and “Hurry Home” (the Cadillac song) they were already on the third generation of the group. “I started changing out singers and kept trying to find better singers,” remembered Joel. “They were all non-professional singers but I tried to get as much out of them as I could. My lead singing was rough around the edges, just like they were. We were just beginning.” None of the Joel & the Conchords records came out in 1964, but the acappella scene in northern New Jersey was heating up and most would find their way to vinyl within three or four years.

Joel and the Conchords did get to sing on Jocko Henderson’s radio show.

The Autumns

Later, Joel and the Conchords were singing outside of the Relic Rack record store in Hackensack, NJ, when Joel was approached by



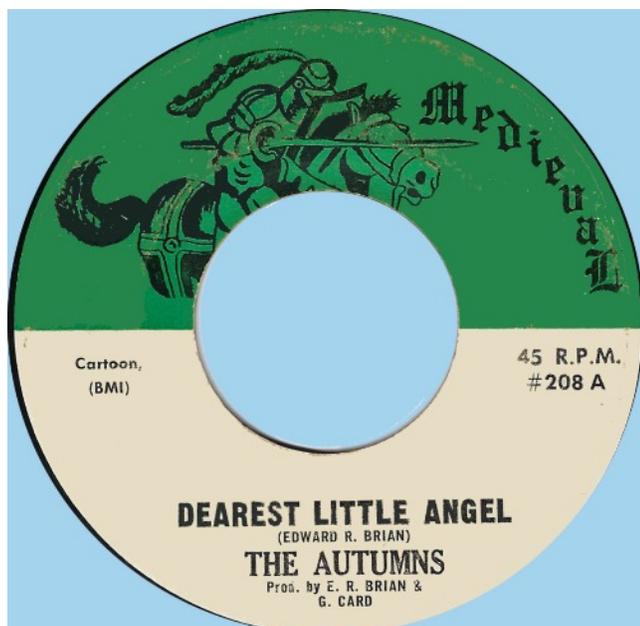
The Autumns singing at Palisades Amusement Park, 1965. Photo courtesy of Joel Katz.

Eddie Brian. Eddie had previously recorded “I’m So Happy” with the Ducanes (produced by Phil Spector) in 1961. He was putting together a new vocal group called the Viceroyes with his brother Bobby Brian (baritone), Bill Paquin (second tenor), and Joe Simone (bass) and they needed a lead singer.

Eddie was ready to make a record and wanted Joel as lead. “I thought Eddie was going to record my whole group but he just wanted me as lead singer,” said Joel. “The Conchords said, ‘Go ahead and do it,’ because they didn’t want to hold me back. The next thing I knew, I was over Eddie Brian’s house rehearsing with the group and Eddie playing acoustic guitar on ‘Maureen’ and ‘Dearest Little Angel’”.

On October 22, 1964, the Viceroyes went into Variety Studios in New York City and recorded “Maureen” b/w “Dearest Little Angel” with the backing of a band. Before the record was issued, though, the group’s name was changed to the Autumns. It came out on Eddie Gries’ *Medieval* label. Some sources list the release date as late 1964, though Joel feels it came out in 1965.

“Maureen” and “Dearest Little Angel” gave the Autumns recognition. After appearing in a 1965 talent contest called “Steps To Stardom” sponsored by Valley Fair Discount Department Stores, they were invited to sing on one of disc jockey Murray The K’s stage shows. “We did the smaller stage at Palisades Amusement Park and then we did the bigger show for Murray The K” said Joel. “There I was on stage





The Autumns performing in the Steps to Stardom competition, 1965. Left to right: Bobby Brian, Joe Simone, Bill Paquin, Joel Katz. Courtesy of Joel Katz.

at Palisades Amusement Park with the Autumns singing “Dearest Little Angel” and “Maureen”.

The Autumns also appeared on a stage show with Chubby Checker, the Dovells, Ebonies and a Fairlawn group called Little Willie & the Sparkles. The show took place at the Paterson Armory on September 10, 1965 and was emceed by Jerry Pulwer.

The Autumns had a second recording session at Variety Studios, where they recorded “You Took My Love” and “Hen-Pecked Guy”. Before the record could be released, the master tapes were destroyed in a fire at Variety.

The Acappella Scene Heats Up

By the mid-1960’s the Jersey acappella scene was in full swing. “It was exploding!” said Joel. “It started right around that time. Relic Rack started spawning a lot of these acappella groups. You had groups like the Camelots. They did ‘Don’t Leave Me Baby’. And of course, the Nutmegs. That’s what triggered the whole thing when they found those acappella demos by the Nutmegs. Originally *Times Square* put them out but *Relic* got into the act. Then there were tons and tons of acappella groups, some good, some bad. The whole scene kind of exploded around ’64, ’65. The Chessmen were

one of *Relic*’s bigger acts. Then in ’66 or ’67 they started doing acappella shows at the Fox Theatre in Hackensack, NJ. That started bring in groups from Jersey City.

Local independent record labels started springing up to meet the demand for acappella 45’s and LP’s. Labels like Stan Krause’ *Catamount* were recording new acappella groups. Other labels were grabbing acappella demos that were floating around by various groups and putting them out. Amateur acappella groups often would record demonstration acetates of themselves singing for auditions. These demos were suddenly in hot demand for small record companies who didn’t need to pay for studio time.

One of those labels, *Amber*, picked up and issued the demo of Joel & the Conchords’ “Moonlight In Vermont” b/w “Hurry Home”. It came out as *Amber* 850. Since acappella 45’s were primarily aimed at the record collectors market, these records were pressed in very limited runs of colored vinyl as well as the larger runs of black vinyl. *Amber* 850 was pressed in

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The Autumns opening for Chubby Checker at the Paterson Armory, September 10, 1965. Courtesy of Joel Katz.

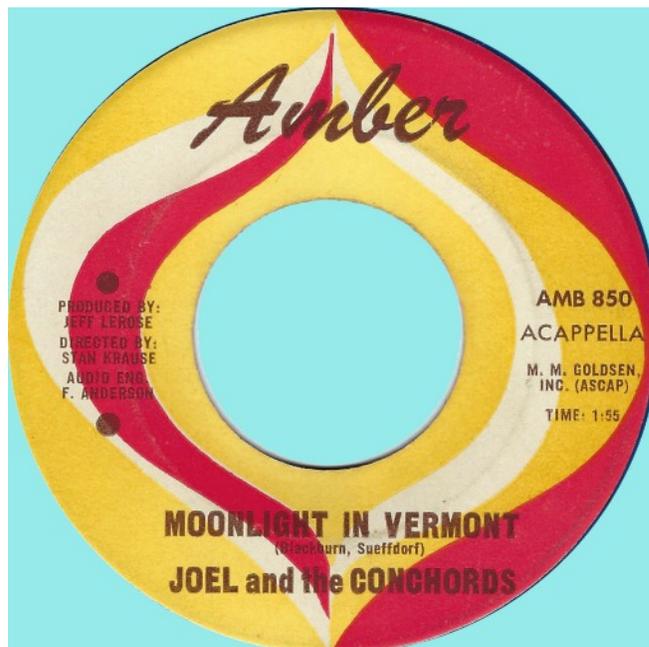
red and blue vinyl as well as black. *Amber Records* was owned by Jeff LeRose and distributed by his friend, Stan Krause.

“A lot of Joel & the Conchords stuff started showing up in a lot of places,” said Joel. “Those records were really just demos that I cut.”

Two acappella albums on Wayne Stierle’s *Snowflake* label also contained Joel & the Conchords sides. “Stars of Acappella Vol. 2” (*Snowflake* 1002) contained Joel & the Conchords singing “Lovers Quarrel” and “One Summer Night”. It also has a cut of Joel singing “Lorraine” with the Autumns.

“Acappella Battle of the Groups, Vol. 1” (*Snowflake* 1004) has the Autumns singing “Over The Rainbow”. It also lists the Conchords singing “It Happened Today” but Joel said that is actually the Autumns singing. The album also has an acappella rendition of “Maureen” (the song recorded by the Autumns for *Medieval*) done by Joel (Katz) and the Rondells. The Rondells were a female group that Joel had recorded a demo with. They would later record “My Prayer” on their own for a *Relic* label LP.

The increased exposure of the Joel & the Conchords songs led to Joel reactivating the group and performing with them. Joel was now singing with both the Conchords and the Autumns.



On January 10, 1966, Jerry Pulwer took the Autumns into Bell Studios in New York City to record their second 45. Pulwer had previously managed Joel Katz’ group, the Belvederes. Pulwer started his own record label, *Power*, to record the Autumns. The group recorded “Never” (the Earls song) and “Exodus,” both acappella. The record was pressed in limited quantity blue vinyl as well as black. Eddie Brian did not sing on the record. Jaki Davis was brought in to sing bass. [Davis had previously sung with Eddie Brian in the Connotations (Joe Frank Pascuzzo, Henry Richard “Dickie” Harmon, Eddie R. Brian, Clinton “Jaki” Davis and Westley Cook) when they recorded “Two Hearts Fall In Love” b/w “Before I Go” for the *Technichord* label. By 1966, Davis and Harmon were recording for *Relic Records* with a Connotations spin-off group called the Notations (Dickie Harmon, Arnie Roth, Ed Roth and Jaki Davis).] This began a long association of Joel Katz with the Connotations, which we’ll explore in Part 2.

Later in 1966, “Never” b/w “Exodus” was picked up and issued on the *Amber* label (*Amber* 856). It was pressed in limited quantity in red and blue vinyl as well as black.

Meanwhile, Joel Katz was becoming serious about becoming a recording engineer and even owning his own recording studio. Since he started singing, he’d been taping the groups he was with and taking them to demo studios. But



Joel & the Conchords, 1967. Courtesy of Joel Katz

when Joel first saw a real recording studio, he was hooked.

“It goes back to when I recorded ‘Dearest Little Angel’ with the Autumns,” reflected Joel. “I was a young kid and they brought us to a real recording studio, not just a demo room. It was Variety Studios [225 West 46th Street in New York City]. Variety was right above what was then the Peppermint Lounge. We were rehears-

ing with the band, getting ready to record. That was the way they used to record. We’d be singing and if the band made a mistake we’d have to stop, and vice versa. Well we took a break and they couldn’t find me. I was in the control room talking to the engineer and looking at the recording machines. I said, ‘Someday I’m going to have a studio of my own.’”

“So, then I started buying smaller tape recorders. I used to fix radios at eight years old, so I knew how to repair machines. Somebody gave me an old Ampex model 350 recorder really cheap because it didn’t work. I fixed it. I played around with it and used it, and then I sold it for quite a bit of money. I took that money and bought a two-track Ampex 351 recorder. This was acquired from Bob Lifton’s Regent Recording Studio. That was the studio that recorded all the Johnny Maestro & the Crests recordings for *Coed Records*, though I didn’t know it at the time. By the time I finished parlaying it into my first studio I had a four-track, a couple of two’s and a mono. From there I bought a brand new eight-track and then a sixteen-track.”

Joel was working as a senior field engineer for Ampex in Hackensack NJ.. During that time he installed a brand new MM-1200 24-



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A RON LUCIANO - JOE TONZOLA PRODUCTION

February 21, 1967. One of six acappella shows at Hackensack's Fox Theatre that Joel & the Conchords were on.
 Courtesy of Joel Katz

track in a studio in Bedford-Stuyvesant in the 1970's . This machine cost the studio \$40,000. When they didn't need it anymore, they offered it to Joel for half of what it was worth. He sold his 16-track to afford it. That was the start of Joel Katz' Broadway South Recording Studio.

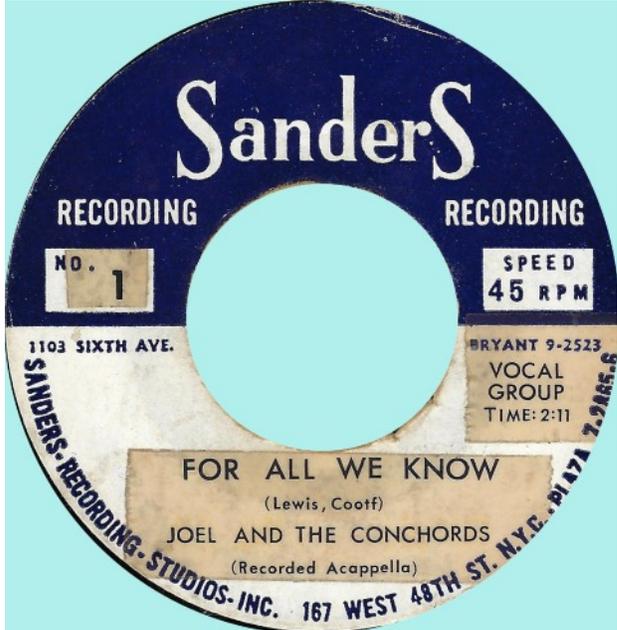
1967 saw Joel singing with a third or fourth generation of Joel and the Conchords. Of the earlier Conchords, only Joel and Bill Bogner remained. Two of the guys, Pete and John, were policeman in Patterson NJ. The group was pretty active, often singing at The Chriscarol Club, a teenage go go nightspot, at the corner of Pennsylvania and Alabama Avenues in Paterson, NJ. Joel & the Conchords also took part in some of the big acappella concerts at the Fox Theatre in Hackensack, NJ.

Acappella remained big through 1968. "Between 1969 and 1970, [the popularity of] acappella just dropped like a rock," recalled Joel. There was a big lag. All the acappella groups seemed to disappear. Ronnie I had not come onto the scene, yet. *Times Square Re-*

cards was gone. Just about the only one still puttering around in it was Stan Krause in Jersey City. Then he seemed to drop out of the acappella scene.

It was 1970 and doo wop acappella singing was hibernating. But Joel Katz' music career was just beginning.

..... CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE.



Acetate to an unreleased acappella rendition of "For All We Know" - Joel & the Conchords Courtesy of Joel Katz



Original acetate of "Never" by the Autumns Courtesy of Joel Katz