

Juveniles, Twilights and Embers:

The Story of How Five Teenagers from the Bronx Created a Legacy of Vocal Group Harmony

by Steven Kahn

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Above Photo Collage Created by Robert Citelli

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The Juveniles, shortly after they were signed to Mode Records.
L-R: Bobby Perryman, Indio Chenet, Marilyn Durant,
Larry Peters, Joe Durant

It's a familiar refrain: "Since you're gone, I spend each lonely night, dealing out the cards from left to right, and the queen of hearts is there to remind me, that I'm all alone just playing solitaire." The words are from a song called "Solitaire," and a group called the Embers took it to number nine on the charts in 1961. The group's rendition is powerful, emotional, seems to call out and almost grab you, and somehow gets better with repeated listening. Although it was a hit record, the group soon disappeared from the music business and little more was heard of its members. However, their story did not begin in 1961. To understand The Embers, we must go back to the streets of the Bronx in the early 1950's - a time and place when vocal group singing flourished. The members of a group called the "Juveniles" all grew up on these streets, became the best of friends and went on to create a legacy of vocal

group harmony.

The year was 1954 and the place was the schoolyard of P.S. 60, an all-girls junior high school in the South Bronx. There was an overhang in this schoolyard, which produced an echo that was great for singing. One night in the summer of 1954, three teenagers began harmonizing the standard "Pennies From Heaven" there: Claude Chenet, Marilyn Bishop and Joseph Durant. Claude was seventeen, of Haitian and French ethnicity and was nicknamed "Indio." He belonged to a local street gang called "The Dragons" and was best friends with Joe. Marilyn was fourteen years old, Jewish, and was the female president of a local street gang known as "The Lightnings." Musically inclined, she had been singing since fourth grade, sang in the junior high school band and also played violin. At twelve she even sang for the disabled veterans at Kingsbridge Hospital in the Bronx. Joseph was seventeen, Puerto Rican, the boyfriend of Marilyn and was the male president of "The Lightnings." All three grew up in the South Bronx and lived relatively close to the schoolyard.

Shortly after Claude, Marilyn and Joseph started harmonizing at the school, they were joined by Larry Peters. Larry was seventeen and friends with Indio and Joe. A few days later, Robert "Bobby" Perryman showed up at the schoolyard and began watching the four as they harmonized. Bobby lived across the street and attended St. Anthony of Padua's Catholic School in the Bronx along with the Chantels (he remembers them forming in the church choir). Indio, who acted as the group's arranger, fit the 13-year-old Bobby into the group. The group now consisted of **Marilyn Bishop** - lead, **Robert Perryman** - first tenor, **Claude "Indio" Chenet** - second tenor, **Joseph Durant** - baritone and **Larry Peters** - bass. The group was an excellent example of the racial diversity of their South Bronx neighborhood.

The five teens harmonized almost every day and needed a place to practice. Marilyn's mom worked

at a candy store on Prospect Avenue in the Bronx from 6am to 1pm, six days a week. Although the house was vacant, her mom was strict and did not allow strangers into her home. Joe Durant lived at home with his parents, but they worked long hours and their house was not available. Conveniently, Bobby lived right next door to the schoolyard. One day, the group decided to sing in Bobby's house in front of his mom, who was very accepting of them. Bobby's mom was raised in Cuba, and she bonded with Joe by speaking to him in Spanish. The group decided to practice at Bobby's house a few days each week. The rest of the week you could find them harmonizing at the schoolyard, in hallways, or at "Pops" candy store on 161st Street.

The group often went to Orchard Beach as well as to Crotona Park's Pool in the Bronx to swim and harmonize. At these locations their harmony drew large crowds, to the group's delight. Singing on tenement stoops in the Bronx, many would listen and some would even throw coins at them in tribute. While riding on the train the group often sang, to the delight of many other passengers. They thought that they were only harmonizing but others found them truly entertaining. Marilyn remembers the group as being multi-talented, saying "we wrote our songs – words and music, and we all could sing."

Around 1955 the five members decided to come up with a name for their group. After pondering different choices, they took a vote and decided to call themselves the "Juveniles." "Juveniles" seemed like a cute name; it fit well since three of their members had been

in street gangs – and the name stuck. In the summer of 1956 the Juveniles went to Coney Island to go on the rides and wound up singing to large crowds on the boardwalk. People were thrilled as the group performed songs which included "Blue Moon," "Pennies From Heaven," "Why Do Fools Fall In Love," "My Heart Belongs To Only You," and "Sh-Boom," all with Marilyn on lead. In addition, they also sang original songs such as "Tell It To The Angels," "Soda Pop," and "Beat In My Heart." "Soda Pop" was written by the group in tribute to the "Pops" candy store that they hung out in regularly.

New York State had allotted funds to build a youth center on Westchester Avenue in the Bronx in order to combat juvenile delinquency and teen gang violence. After the center was built the Juveniles started singing there and became very popular. They also sang at a popular hangout known as the 845 Club, which was located on Prospect Avenue. This club was often packed with people who would gather and watch as the group harmonized. The group also impressed at many parties as well as various "battles of the singing groups" that took place in the area. One of the groups they watched perform was from the Bronx River Parkway section - an unrecorded group called Timmy and the Rivertones. Bobby also recalls going to different shows to see Little Anthony and the Imperials, Roy Hamilton, as well as the Schoolboys at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. He remembers being in awe at how young and talented the Schoolboys were.

On Valentine's Day 1957, Marilyn Bishop married her longtime boyfriend Joseph Durant. Being only seventeen at the time, she was required to get her mother's signature for the marriage license. Shortly after the marriage, Marilyn became pregnant. When the group performed, she had almost always been the lead singer. Because of her condition, she suggested to the other members that they each learn a song to sing lead on. The other members took heed and began preparing their own songs.

Throughout 1957, the Juveniles practiced constantly at Marilyn and Joseph's apartment. One of the songs that the group often rehearsed was "Trickle, Trickle," with Indio singing lead. After many nights of rehearsals the group had become quite polished and one day a Milton Silverman approached the group and asked if they would be interested in cutting a record. Mr. Silverman was connected with Mode Records, which was an independent record company based in Hollywood, California. Mode's roster included jazz trombonist Bill Harris as well as a singer named Bob Manning. Morris Janov owned the label, its A&R chief was Red Clyde and they held recording sessions in New York. Mr. Silverman offered to pay for the Juveniles' entire recording session and to become their manager. The young group was anxious to make a record and the paperwork was signed to initiate the contract.

The recording session took place in late August or early September of 1957 at a studio in Manhattan. Al



Marilyn Bishop at 14 years old.

Mode Inks New Talent

HOLLYWOOD — Coast indie Mode Records added two more names to its growing talent roster last week, inking trombonist Bill Harris and singer Bob Manning to contracts.

Harris, a veteran jazz star and currently on tour with the Woody Herman band, has completed an LP in company with other ex-Herman band members featuring a collection of tunes long associated with the maestro. Personnel included vibist Terry Gibbs, pianist Lou Levy, bassist Red Mitchell and drummer Stan Levey.

Manning is to be recorded in New York shortly, with a.&c.r. chief Red Clyde and musical director Marty Paich due to fly in for the session.

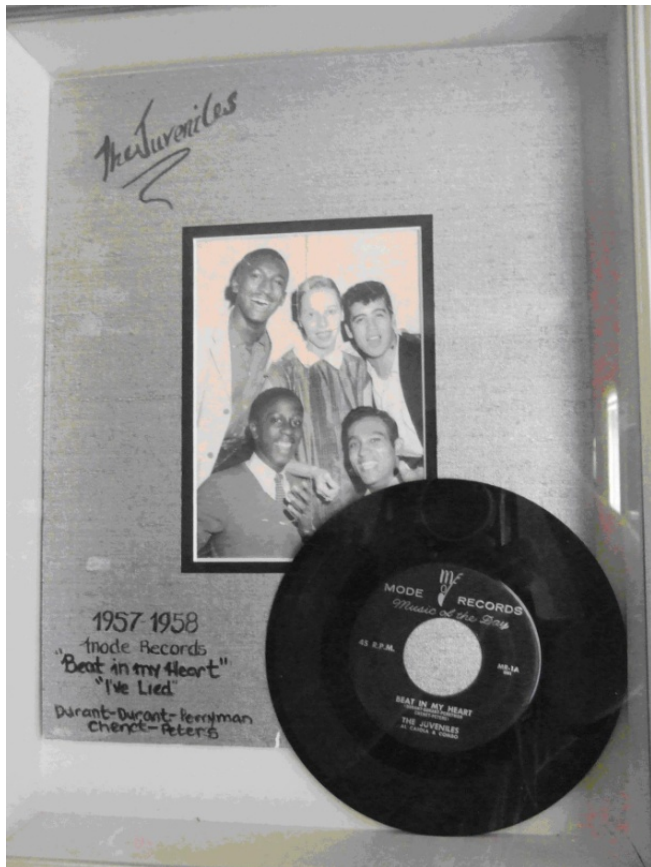
Clyde also disclosed the signing of the Juveniles, a new group who recently made their initial appearance on the "Wide, Wide World" teleshow.

A newspaper article announcing Mode's signing of The Juveniles.

Caiola, a guitarist from New Jersey, was considered a first rate session player and with his band provided the backup for the session. It was very exciting for the group as they had never sung with a band before. Marilyn was about seven months pregnant, was given a stool to sit on and sang on one microphone while the other four members sang on another. Caiola and band were in another part of the recording studio. Marilyn remembers the session being long and grueling, in fact, it lasted over three hours. The group recorded multiple takes of only two songs - "I've Lied" and "Beat In My Heart," both written by the entire group and featuring Marilyn on lead. When the session was over the record company was satisfied.

The songs were released on Mode Records in September of 1957. Initial pressings of the record did not list Al Caiola and his band on the label, but second pressings did. "Beat In My Heart" was the side that got most of the initial radio play. Then, in early 1958, disk jockeys flipped the record over and "I've Lied" suddenly got more play. The group was glad to have a record out and was excited when they first heard their songs played on the radio as well as on local jukeboxes at many candy stores.

The group was scheduled to appear on September 29 live on NBC TV on Dave Garroway's "Wide, Wide World." Prior to the performance, the group posed for a photo for photographer Maurice Seymour which was displayed on a poster advertising their upcoming performance. On television they sang both sides of their recent release live in acappella. The show was held indoors at the youth center. There was a huge crowd with cameras and lights everywhere. In October they performed on the "Bert Park Bandstand" show, at a studio



Rare picture sleeve to Mode record.



The group in February, 1958, at Joe and Marilyn's apartment in The Bronx, shortly after they renamed themselves "The Twilights."

in Manhattan, which was broadcast live on the radio. Once again they sang "I've Lied" and "Beat In My Heart" in acapella. The Juveniles also received publicity with write-ups in the World Telegram and Sun, the Daily News and the New York Post.

On November 24, 1957 Marilyn gave birth to a baby girl, Michelle. Frequent rehearsals continued and were held at Joey and Marilyn's apartment on Simpson Street in the Bronx. At one of these rehearsals, another neighborhood group, the Five Delights of "There'll Be No Goodbye" fame (later to become the Mood Makers on Bambi Records) came over to watch the group rehearse.

In early 1958, the Juveniles performed in Manhattan at Roy Campanella's Rehabilitation Center as well as at the Ampitheatre. The group's members felt that Mode Records was lacking in promotion and so they started to look for another record company where they might find success. At this time, feeling that they outgrew the name "the Juveniles," they decided to be known as "the Twilights."

Shortly after the name change, an A&R man and manager connected to the Shirelles was introduced to the group by Marilyn's mom. He brought with him a dub of "I Met Him On A Sunday" before the song's release, which he felt was ideal for Marilyn's lead vocal. He listened for an hour as the group practiced, and although he liked their sound, he made it clear that he was only interested in signing Marilyn as he felt that the makeup of the group would work against them. Marilyn adamantly refused the deal as she would not sing with anyone but her four friends.

The Twilights added two more songs to their repertoire, "Soda Pop" – an original written by the group and "My Heart Belongs To Only You" – an old standard that the group often sang. The group auditioned for Columbia Records, singing both songs acapella featuring Marilyn on lead. Columbia recorded both sides and the demo still exists today. Although the label agreed to sign the group as it was, the stipulation in the contract said that Marilyn would record and do live performances with four white singers backing her up. The group would not accept this and they walked out on Columbia Records.

Undeterred, the Twilights next auditioned for United Artists Records. They sang a number of songs which were recorded, including a version of "Pennies From Heaven" prior to the Skyliners' release. United Artists was also leery of signing the group due to the fact that it was a white girl singing lead with a minority mixed male backup group. United Artists Records offered the group the same deal that was offered by Columbia Records and once again the group walked out.

Shortly after these rejections, Marilyn and Joey Durant separated as man and wife but both decided to stay in the singing group. The Twilights soon signed with Finesse Records, a label owned by Gene Malis and his wife Jody Cameron - who also became their managers. However, the group was under a great deal of pressure as Joe and Marilyn were not getting along. Gene set up a meeting with the Twilights in order to discuss a recording session that was to take place in two weeks



THE TWILIGHTS FINESSE RECORDING ARTISTS
The "new" Twilights lineup - L-R: Pete Reyes, Joe Durant, Indio Chenet, Cal Washington, Bobby Perryman

for "My Heart Belongs To Only You" and "Soda Pop." This meeting was held at a loft on 52nd Street and Columbia Avenue in Manhattan, close to the recording studio used by the label. Gene, however, was unaware of the friction amongst the group's members. Marilyn came to the meeting by herself and the other members arrived separately. An argument broke out amongst the members and Marilyn walked out on the group. Gene warned Marilyn that she was under contract and if she left the group she would not be allowed to sing with anyone else. Marilyn took the train home, crying all the way. A few days later, bass singer Larry Peters, realizing that Marilyn was not coming back, also decided to walk out.

With Marilyn out of the group, Gene and Jody were left in a bind as a recording session was already booked. Robert Perryman, who was the first tenor, stepped up to become the new lead singer and Cal Washington was recruited by Indio to become the new first tenor. Cal had sung with a local street group, had a background in gospel and blues and also hung out with the Chords. Pete Reyes was recruited by Bobby to replace Larry Peters as the bass singer. The Twilights now consisted of **Robert Perryman** - lead, **Cal Washington** - first tenor, **Claude "Indio" Chenet** - second tenor, **Joseph Durant** - baritone and **Peter Reyes** - bass.

The Twilights recorded "My Heart Belongs To Only You" and "Oh Baby Love," with Bobby Perryman singing both leads, which came out on Finesse Records in November of 1959. The Twilights also backed up Maria Elena on "I Was Too Careful" and "Temptation," both of which weren't released until 1962 on Countess Records.

For publicity shots, the Twilights were photographed by Maurice Seymour at his Manhattan studio. They appeared at one of Clay Cole's shows in Palisades Park, New Jersey also starring the Drifters, Moonglows, Skyliners, Belmonts, Bobby Rydell and Neil Sedaka. The Twilights sang "My Heart Belongs To Only You" as well as "Oh Baby Love" and this performance was broadcast live on television. The Twilights also appeared at the RKO Franklin Theatre on Prospect Avenue in the Bronx where they also backed up Maria Elena

The Finesse label folded in late 1959 with the owners Jody and Gene Malis going on to form Valmor Records in 1960. Jody was looking to feature a distinctive female lead and tried to get in touch with Marilyn to see if she was interested in singing again. No one knew her whereabouts as Marilyn was remarried by then. With no luck in finding Marilyn, Valmor Records signed Cathy Jean. Valmor also had signed a male group, the Roommates, and used them to back up Cathy Jean on her records as well as recording by themselves. In fact, on the Roommates' second release they recorded "Oh Baby Love," which the Twilights previously recorded for Finesse Records.

The Twilights changed their name to the Embers and signed with Empress Records, also owned by Gene and Jody Malis, which was a subsidiary label (as was Valmor) under Countess International. The Embers had

been rehearsing an old standard ballad that Tony Bennett recorded named "Solitaire," a song that Jody wanted them to record because she felt it had hit potential. The Embers recorded "Solitaire" at a studio in Manhattan, with Bobby Perryman singing lead. The session lasted about four hours and Bobby remembers they needed about sixteen takes to get the song just right. The flipside, "I'm Feeling All Right Again," with Bobby and Cal doing alternating leads, was recorded the next day.

On the week of August 22, 1961, "Solitaire" reached number 9 on WABC's radio survey. It was also doing extremely well on Billboard's charts. Off their hit, they appeared at various locations throughout New York City and they even appeared at a German-owned club and restaurant in Brooklyn called Rathskellar's. "Solitaire" received a great deal of radio play in New Jersey and Pittsburgh, which led to many appearances throughout New Jersey and an appearance on Porky Chedwick's radio show in Pittsburgh. Even though the record was hot, the group wasn't receiving any compensation - not even expenses for outfits or transportation. The group ended up buying a car with their own money so they could travel to an appearance in Maryland. The group also made a promotional appearance on a boat. After this appearance they went to an amusement park,

MAY 15, 1961 BILLBOARD MUSIC WEEK 17

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The Embers performing "Abigail" at Karl Ehmer's Rathskellars in Brooklyn. Pete Reyes is on the left posed in his coat and wig. This was a comedy routine that the group did when performing "Abigail". Cal Washington is on right, singing lead

only to be told that Joe would be the only one allowed in. This was because Joe was light-skinned (and appeared white) and racial segregation was strong at the time. Jody Malis was neglecting the Embers as she was putting most of her attention on promoting Cathy Jean, who had recorded a hit single with The Roommates backing her called "Please Love Me Forever." The members of the Embers by this time were all married with children and facing the realities of life had to get real jobs to support their families. Although they would stay together for two more years, the hardships they faced ultimately led to their demise.

The Embers followed up "Solitaire"/"I'm Feeling All Right Again" in 1961 and 1962 with "I Won't Cry Anymore" (another old standard with Bobby on lead)/"I Was Too Careful" (Bobby on lead) and with "Abigail" (Cal Washington on lead)/"I Was Too Careful" (released again). "What A Surprise" (with Bobby on lead), although previously listed in discographies, we believe was never released on 45 RPM (if anyone has a copy of this supposed 45 RPM release please send proof to the publisher of this magazine). "What A Surprise" and "I Wish I Didn't Love You So" (Bobby on lead) were released years later on a Relic Records LP.

By mid 1963, the Embers were down to four members as Pete Reyes had left the group. The Embers were still under contract with Empress, which wasn't doing well at the time so Gene and Jody Malis sent them

to writer and record producer Wally Zober in order to see what he could do for them. Wally took them down to Odo Recording Studios on West 54th Street in Manhattan on August 1, 1963 where they recorded "But Beautiful" and "You've Been Away Too Long." A bass player, George Butcher, arranged the orchestra and the group arranged the vocals. "But Beautiful" was recorded first, with Robert Perryman singing lead. "You've Been Away Too Long" was a fast number that Jody had given to them but they did not care for. They recorded it with Cal singing lead. The session lasted for most of the day and the songs were released on Smash Records, a subsidiary of Mercury Records, in December of 1963 as by the "Four Embers."

By 1964, with the British Invasion underway, the Embers (without a hit record since 1961) broke up and decided to get on with their personal lives. Joe Durant, his wife Evelyn and their family moved to California. Robert Perryman stayed in the Bronx, became a dentist and eventually moved to New Jersey. Indio along with his wife and son Claude Ray Chenet, Jr. also moved to California. In the 1970's, Indio formed a salsa band called Sabu Y Su Salsa Caliente, which was very popular in the Los Angeles area and included Michelle (Marilyn and Joey's daughter) on lead vocals and Raymond (Indio's son) on trumpet and congas. Marilyn stayed in the Bronx but travelled to California many times to watch them perform in the salsa band. Around

1980, Indio formed a vocal group consisting of himself, his old singing partner Joe Durant, Raymond and Michelle. Two of the songs they performed were "My Heart Belongs To Only You" (with Michelle singing lead) and "Trickle, Trickle" (with Indio singing lead). They sang with Indio's salsa band on several occasions but the singing group did not last. Raymond went on to play bongos and trumpet for a Los Angeles-based rock band called the Shadow Minstrels, who released a mini-album in 1983 titled "Great Expectations."

Sadly, Claude "Indio" Chenet passed away on December 15, 1999. His son Raymond still lives in California, has two children, five grandchildren and is still involved with music. Bobby Perryman, lead singer of both the Twilights and Embers, currently lives in South Carolina where he works as a dentist. He is married and has six grown daughters, ranging in age from 19 to 48. He has fond recollections of his days performing in three vocal groups and especially cherishes his time with the Juveniles. Marilyn lives in Florida and has two children and six grandchildren. Michelle Durant Hunt lives in California and has four children. Joseph Durant also lives in California and has four children and fifteen grandchildren. Joe has fond recollections of his days in the vocal groups, noting that being in the Juveniles was one of the best times of his life. He says that it was a blessing when the Juveniles formed because it transitioned him from gang member into singer. Marilyn, Joseph and Bobby have remained close friends to this day. The whereabouts of Larry Peters, Pete Reyes and Cal Washington are not currently known but it is possible that they may still be living in the Bronx.

Steven Kahn, March 2010

I want to thank Marilyn Piekarski, Robert Perryman, Joseph Durant, Michelle Durant, PJ Noce, Wally Zober, Robert Ferlingere and Colton Thomas for their help with this article.

Special thanks to vocal group historian Bobby Diskin for all his advice and assistance.

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Relic's "The Golden Groups – Valmor Records" album. Original Record label scans – PJ Noce.



**First pressing of the Juveniles record on the Mode label.
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)**

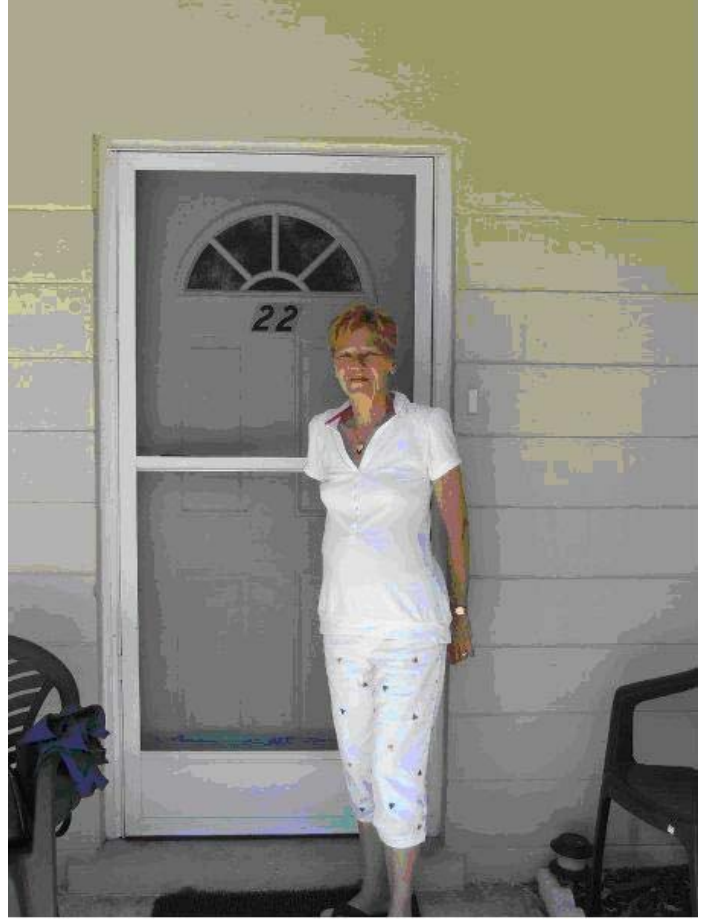


**The Twilights on the Finesse label.
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)**

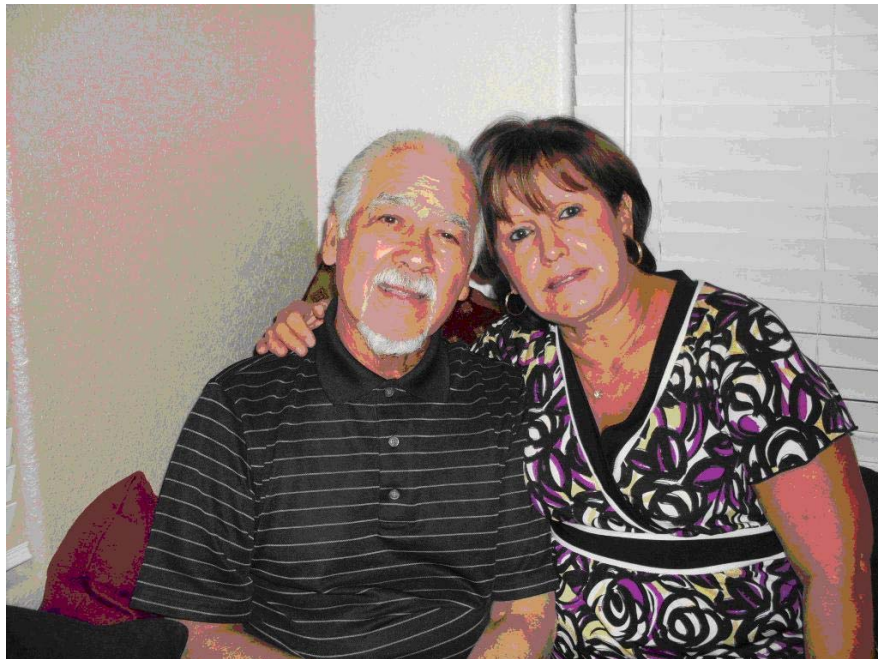
The Juveniles Today



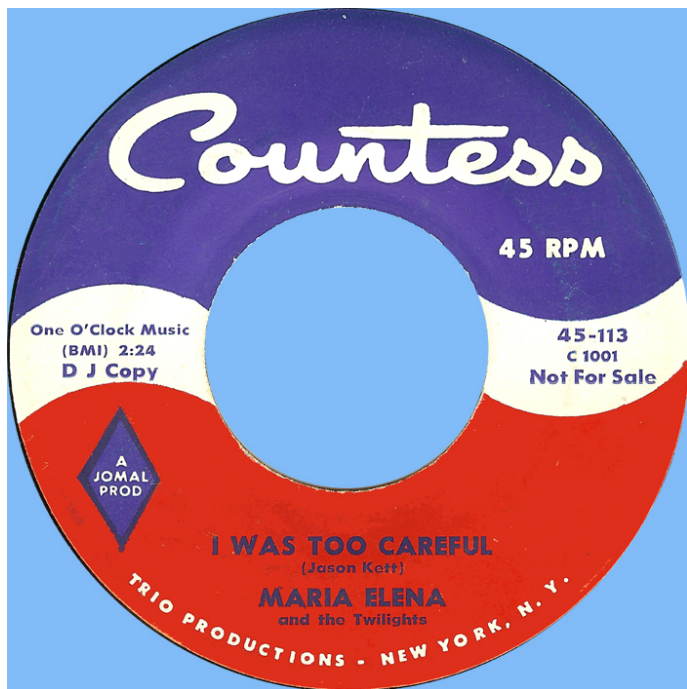
Bobby Perryman



Marilyn Piekarski



Joe and Evelyn Durant



Maria Elena & the Twilights
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)



Rare picture sleeve for Empress # 101
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)



First pressing of "Solitaire" on the Empress label.
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)



First pressing of "I Won't Cry Anymore"..
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)

Discography

Juveniles

Mode 1 Beat In My Heart / I've Lied 1957

Twilights

Demo Soda Pop / My Heart Belongs To Only You(acapella) 1958

Finesse 1717 My Heart Belongs To Only You / Oh Baby Love 1959

Countess 113 I Was Too Careful / Temptation (Maria Elena & the Twilights) 1962

Embers

Empress 101 Solitaire / I'm Feeling All Right Again 1961

Empress 104 I Won't Cry Anymore / I Was Too Careful 1961

Empress 107 Abigail / I Was Too Careful 1962

(Note: "Solitaire," "I Won't Cry Anymore" and "Abigail" were also released as one-sided promos).

Unreleased sides – "What A Surprise" and "I Wish I Didn't Love You So" were later released on Relic's "The Golden Groups – Valmor Records" album.

Four Embers

Smash 1846 But Beautiful / You've Been Away Too Long 1963



(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)



(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)