

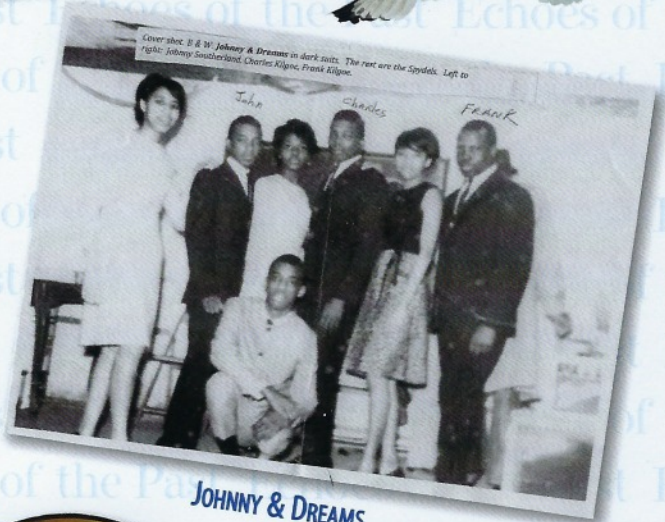
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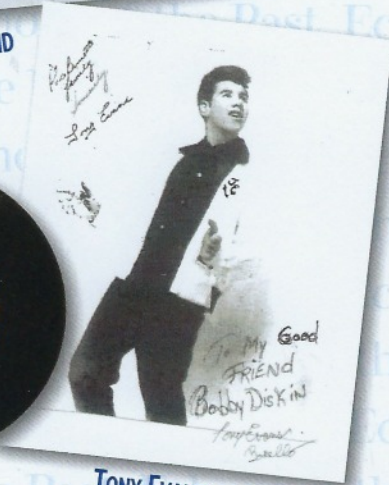
ECHOES OF THE PAST



Cover photo, color: **Supers Band**, CA 1968; left to right: James Southerland, nephew Stanley, Johnny Southerland singing at Sweeties Bar, Penns Grove, NJ.



JOHNNY & DREAMS



TONY EVANS



PICTURE DISCS



LOLA & THE SAINTS



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NAY NASSAR

&

LARRY STIDOM



Collecting R&B Group Picture Discs

By Charlie Horner

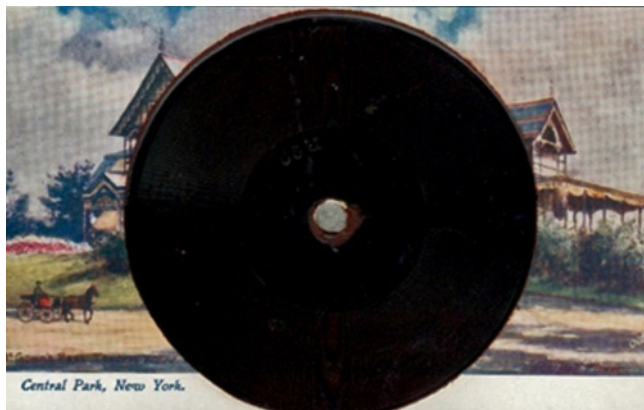
With contributions from Pamela Horner

One of the joys of collecting vinyl records is that each record is a visual as well as an audio work of art. Many of our fellow record collectors specialize in R&B and Doo Wop vocal groups. One often overlooked sub-category of this is collecting R&B vocal groups on picture discs. In spite of the fact that most were made in very limited quantities, they seem to still be out there at reasonable prices and there aren't very many different ones. So, you can complete your collection relatively easily. Unlike streamed or downloaded songs, you can hold picture discs in your hand and look at them and even play them (though we don't recommend that as picture disks wear out faster than regular vinyl records). Anyway, let me give you a primer on what's out there.

A Short History of Picture Discs

The concept of picture discs (playable phonograph records with the grooves over a photograph) goes back a long time. I started collecting records as a two-year-old (I'm not joking) and some of my first childrens records were picture discs. But picture discs go much further back than that.

The forerunners of picture discs were not discs at all but rectangular picture postcards. These had their origin prior to 1910. Called gramophone postcards, they were single-sided miniature disc records glued onto postcards with a center hole punched through both the card and disc. Because the normal shellac material used for 78's at the time would have been too heavy when glued to a postcard, manufacturers of these "talking postcards" used celluloid, an early plastic. At first, the celluloid mini records were black or opaque brown until



Early gramophone postcard of Central Park, NYC
Opaque record completely obscures the photo.
<http://www.lotz-verlag.de/Online-Disco>

someone realized the record completely obscured the picture on the postcard (see above). Then they switched to a semi-clear translucent celluloid record. Now the photo could be seen beneath it.

A few years later, the technology advanced to where record grooves were pressed into a transparent coatings that covered the entire picture side of the postcard. Sound quality of these early talking postcards was not very good and they tended to get brittle and crack with age. They would have not fared well with modern post office mail sorting machines but even hand stamping techniques in the 1910's were brutal on them. Our Classic Urban Harmony Archives does not have any of these, which does not bother us, as there are no picture postcard records with vocal groups, that we know of.

This concept of making phonograph picture discs came along in the 1930's by using clear



Vogue Picture Disc of Clyde McCoy & Orchestra's "Basin Street Blues."
From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

shellac or plastic coating over cardboard printed photos with a stiffer material core.

This same technique has existed through recent times, resulting on records on the backs of cereal boxes. Motown did a series of these on Post cereal boxes in the late 60's. Our CUH Archives does archive these (see farther in this article) but they are not as prized as our true picture discs.

Vogue Picture Discs

While true picture discs, 78 RPM's, originated in the 1930's, their peak came in 1945 when Tom Saffady, inventor and owner of Sav-Way Industries in Detroit, pioneered the modern picture disc by using the new durable vinyl to produce picture discs for Vogue and Mercury records.

The Vogue picture discs were a well-made product, produced using a complicated process whereby a central core aluminum disc was sandwiched between the paper illustrations and vinyl. Saffady and his engineers spent several months perfecting the process that often

resulted in torn or dislodged paper illustrations before it was perfected.

The Vogue artwork was done in the styles typical of 1940's illustration art and usually reflected a scene from the song's lyrics. The audio quality was very good and they featured professional talent, though not well known names. Vogue records sold for fifty percent more than ordinary 78 rpm records. The colorful discs attracted interest at first, but success proved elusive and Vogue went out of business in 1947 after issuing only 74 10-inch 78 RPM picture discs. Most, if not all of the Vogue artists were white. An interesting Vogue recording from our Archives, Clyde McCoy's "Basin Street Blues" is shown here. The rarest of the Vogue recordings are ones by Kenny Roberts & the Downhomers. As young Bill Haley played with this group in the 1940's, rumors persist that he is the guitarist on these recordings. The general consensus now is that Haley is not on the record. Still, this remains the most sought after and highest priced Vogue record among collectors.

At the same time, Sav-Way Industries also pressed 14 picture discs for Mercury Records. Most were white artists like Frankie Laine and Vic Damone with the exception of one record by Albert Ammons. The Mercury picture discs as a rule did not show a photo of the artist. They had a brief bio of the artist and a drawing of the Mercury mascot, Eddie the Mercury Man. The Mercury Sav-Way 10-inch 78's are all very collectable.

Sadly Tom Saffady, "Father of Modern Picture Discs," died in 1954 at age 37 following a battle with leukemia.

The Maybellene label 7" picture discs

Probably the most prolific of the picture disc labels was Maybellene out of Denmark. In 1987, Maybellene pressed 101 different 7" 45 RPM picture discs, mostly of 1950's and early 1960 popular recording artists. Most releases can still be found on EBay and other sources for very reasonable prices. It's surprising because Maybellene only pressed 1000 copies of each in



Maybellene Picture Discs: Clockwise from upper left, Platters, Drifters, Dion & Belmonts, Frankie Lymon. From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives.

limited edition runs. Maybellene discs have a photo of the artist on at least one side. Their picture discs include releases by Paul Anka, the Beach Boys, Chuck Berry, Sam Cooke, Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, Johnny Otis, Little Richard, Jackie Wilson and many others. Of interest to vocal group collectors are the following:

008 – Danny & the Juniors – At The Hop / Rock & Roll Is Here To Stay

011 – Drifters – Save The Last Dance For Me / There Goes My Baby

024 – Frankie Lymon – Why Do Fools Fall In Love / Jailhouse Rock

031 – Platters – Great Pretender / Twilight Time

040 – Shirelles – Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow / Dedicated To The One I Love

074 – Platters – Only You / My Prayer

099 – Dion & Belmonts – Teenager In Love / I Wonder Why



The Drifters picture disc on Lightning and the Crystalaires on Part
From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

The Lightning label 7" picture discs

Perhaps not as exciting as some other 7" 45 RPM picture discs, the series on the Lightning Records label featured the word "Cruisin" along with the record titles on a light blue background on one side and the photo of an antique car on the flip side. I say not as exciting, as I would have preferred a photo of the artist somewhere on the picture disc. That said, I'll only show the Cruisin' side of one Lightning picture disc here, the Drifters one. These came out in 1979 from the U.K. We know of 10 Lightning picture discs, including:

- 9012 – Casinos – Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye
- 9013 – Del Vikings – Come Go With Me / Whispering Bells
- 9014 – Drifters – Save The Last Dance For Me / When My Little Girl Is Smiling
- 9019 – Earls – Remember Then

Crystalaires 7" picture disc single

Here's an interesting 7" doo wop picture disc single. The Crystalaires are a doo wop group out of Germany. They've been singing since 1988.

We had a chance to see them in one of their rare visits to the U.S. I believe it was at UGHA in the early 2000's. In 2001, the Crystalaires released a 7" picture disc of the single, "Love You Too Much" / "Winter On Kanada." It came out on the Part label from Germany but was distributed by Crystal Ball Records in the United States.

Collectables label 12" picture disc albums

Until now I've just been covering picture disc singles. But there a number of great picture disc albums. Back in 1982, I was writing liner notes for a number of albums Jerry Greene was issuing on his Collectables label. Jerry decided to press a limited number of picture discs on a few of the albums. The picture on the 12" discs was the same as the album cover. Released were picture discs on both Del Vikings albums (#5001 and #5010), the Duprees (#5008), the Crests (#5009), Shangra-Las (#5011) and the Castelles (#5002). All have group photos on them except the Castelles disc. That's because no photo exists of the original Castelles group. At the time, I was also helping promote the acappella group, Neighbor's Complaint. (They made me and my co-host, Don Leins, honorary



Collectables picture disc albums of the Crests and Neighbor's Complaint
From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

members of the group. I still have my Neighbor's Complaint jacket.) Anyway, Collectables released an album on Neighbor's Complaint and ran a limited number of copies of a picture disc of it (#5013). To the best of my knowledge, it's the only picture disc of an acappella group.

Another interesting 12" album picture disc is this one on the Mills Brothers. It was released on the ATP label out of Germany in 1981. The album is called "Memories of the Mills Brothers." We don't know of any other picture discs released by this short-lived label.

Mills Brothers 12" album picture disc

The Golden Gate Quartet 12" album picture disc



Mills Brothers ATP Picture disc
From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

Golden Gate Quartet 12" picture disc album
From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives



The Platters NCB 12" picture disc album. On left is the first press with no group credit or track listing. If you have the one on the right, you have a second press but at least you know who the group is. The track listing is on the reverse side. From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

Members of the Golden Gate Quartet are close friends of ours and Pam and I are fortunate to have been invited on a couple of their tours in France and Spain. The group traces its origins to the early 1930's in Norfolk, Virginia, though they now are based in Paris. The Golden Gate Quartet 12" album picture disc was manufactured by the Music Dist. label out of Hamburg, Germany. [Some people say that Music Dist. is a subsidiary of Happy Bird Records and we wouldn't doubt it because the number series is the same as a regular vinyl Golden Gate Quartet album that we have.] We believe this record was issued in 1984, as the members seen pictured on the record are Orlandus Wilson, Clyde Riddick, Paul Brembly and Calvin Williams. The Gates are still going strong under the direction of Paul Brembly.

The Platters 12" album picture disc

This is an interesting one. It's a 12" picture disc album out of Denmark in 1982. It was released by the NCB label without any mention of who the group was or what the song titles were. This must have really hurt sales, so the picture disc was reissued the next year with the word

"Platters" and the song titles listed on one side. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only picture disc that has been reissued.

Cereal Box Records

Cereal manufacturers have been offering prizes to youngsters for many decades. These have included secret decoder rings and baking soda powered plastic frogmen buried inside the box with the cereal. Records on the back of cereal boxes have been around for a while, too. These were almost always cheaply made phonograph records of plastic-coated thin cardboard. These discs were usually small, had poor audio quality compared to vinyl discs, and would often warp a couple weeks after you cut them off of the cereal box.

As a child record collector I used to have a copy of "On Top Of Old Smokey" that I cut off of a box of Wheaties. I must have been four or five years old so it was in the mid-1950's. I wasn't a fan of Wheaties so I'm sure my parents ate the cereal for me. The cardboard record was about five inches in diameter and was by an uncredited vocal group. I'd like to say it was by



Jackson Five cereal box record
From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

a great R&B group, but I'd be lying. It was actually by a group trying to sound like the Weavers, only not a polished.

The Jackson Five records on the back of Post Cereal boxes

I don't value cereal box records the same way I do other picture discs but we do file a few in our

Classic Urban Harmony Archives. During the early 1970's Post Cereals had the Motown group, the Jackson 5 on the back of Alpha Bits, Super Sugar Crisp and Frosted Rice Krinkles cereals. You could cut them out with a scissors and have the Jackson 5's hits like "ABC", "I'll Be There" and "Never Can Say Goodbye." There were eleven different ones and though all the boxes listed numerous recordings you only got the one cooresponding to the number in the circle. I had to pull a lot of cereal boxes off of the supermarket shelf before I found one I was missing. We have copies of "ABC," "Sugar Daddy," "I Want You Back" and "Never Can Say Goodbye." At the time, the Jackson 5 appeared in commercials for Alpha Bits.

Group Pictures on Labels

Let me digress from the picture disc topic slightly and mention something visually related. In the early 1940's, Brunswick Records in the U.K. released a series of 78 rpm picture label special souvenir records of famous film stars and their songs. Brunswick was the U.K. version of what in the U.S. was Decca Records. So the photos were of artists on their label. Of course, they did Bing Crosby, Jimmy Dorsey, Fred Astaire and others but of interest to us are picture labels of records by the Mills Brothers and Ink Spots.



Brunswick U.K. 78 RPM picture labels of the Mills Brothers and Ink Spots
From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

I started collecting all of these some time back but got side-tracked with other collections. Hey, I can't collect everything! Anyway, there's at least one Mills Brothers record and eight by the Ink Spots. There may be more but the odd ones don't turn up that often. Our Classic Urban Harmony Archives has "Delilah" by the Mills Brothers and "Maybe" and "Do I Worry" by the Ink Spots. Here are the ones I know exist.

Ink Spots

- Brunswick 03075 Maybe
 Whispering Grass
- Brunswick 03081 I'll Never Smile Again
 My Greatest Mistake
- Brunswick 03095 Stop Pretending
 You're Breaking My Heart All Over Again
- Brunswick 03109 We Three
 I Could Make You Care
- Brunswick 03173 So Sorry
 Ring Telephone Ring
- Brunswick 03197 Java Jive
 Do I Worry
- Brunswick 03260 Hey Doc
 I Don't Want To Set The World On Fire
- Brunswick 03314 Nothin'
 Someone's Rocking My Dreamboat

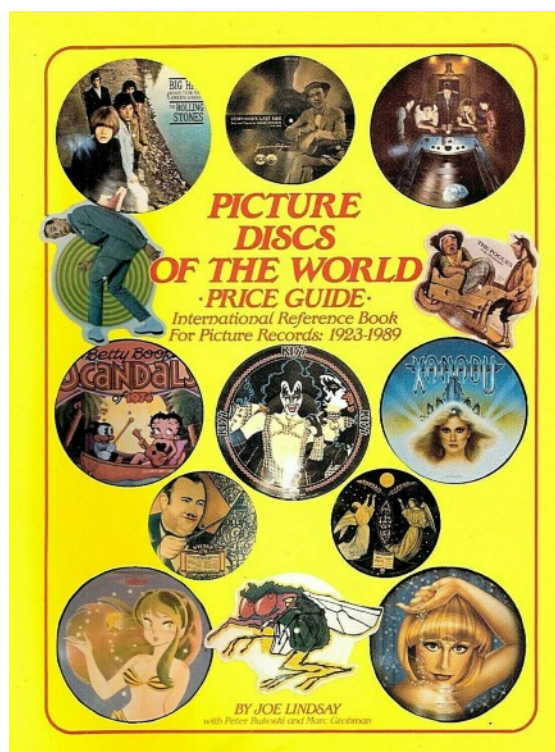
Mills Brothers

- Brunswick 03304 Delilah
 Window Washer Man

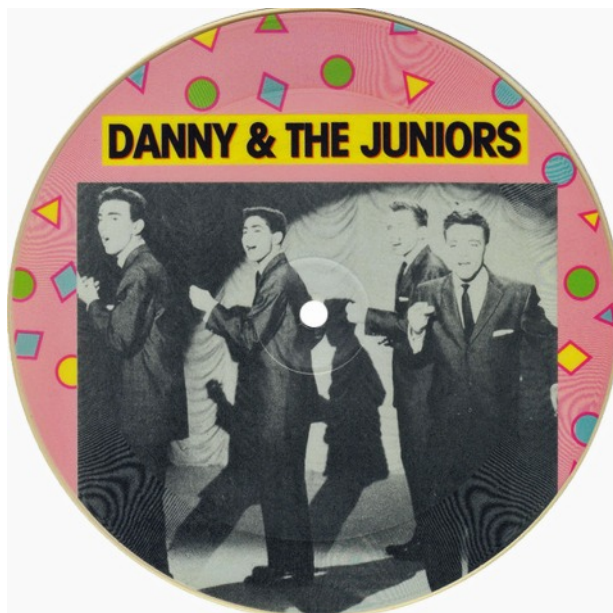
For those interested in learning more about picture discs in general, here is one source of information. In 1990, Joe Lindsay published "Picture Discs of the World Price Guide." It's a soft cover 8 1/2" X 11" book of over 200 pages of small print. Granted, as a price guide it's out of date, but it's also a wealth of information about picture discs from 1923 to 1989. The book is now long out of print and commanding prices of around \$75 on rare book sites, but you can sometimes snare one on EBay for about \$20. I've had mine since it came out.

* * *

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to it by sending your name and email to **CUH@att.net**. The newsletter contains all the latest news about R&B, Doo Wop, Soul and Gospel music and as I said, the newsletter is completely free. Don't forget to check out our website **www.ClassicUrbanHarmony.net**



Danny & the Juniors Maybellene picture disc