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ECHOES OF THE PAST



In This Issue: Neighbor's Complaint, Capris, Clusters, La La Brooks and Much More.....

Philadelphia's Original Capris

by Charlie Horner

With contributions from Pamela Horner

Over the years, bits and pieces have been written about Philadelphia's Capris, most of them adding more confusion than fact to the group's history. Since this is a group that I've had a personal connection to, I felt it was time to set the record straight about one of Philadelphia's most seminal 1950's R&B vocal groups.

First of all, I'm referring to the African-American West Philly group that recorded "God Only Knows" and three other singles for the *Gotham* label and its subsidiary, *20th Century*, between 1954 and 1958. I'm not referring to the white group from Queens that sang "There's A Moon Out Tonight". Nor am I writing about the West Coast group that sang with Jesse Belvin nor the Capris on the *Lifetime* label. Those are all different groups.

While the Capris are known for having one of the first female leads in Philadelphia R&B history (Rená Hinton), the group started out as an all male band in the early 1950's called the Uniques. In the band were Ruben Wright (piano), Harrison Scott (alto sax), Robert "Bobby" Smart (guitar), Gus Crawford (drums), a bass player remembered only as Jerome and a long forgotten male singer.

All of the band members were from the same West Philadelphia neighborhood, just north of Market Street between North 52nd and North 60th Streets. "I believe we met in school," remembered Harrison Scott. [The band probably got its start in Shoemaker Junior High and continued into Bartram High School.] I started playing sax on talent shows and word got around that I played alto. I started singing and playing plus I did tap dancing too. Eddie Warner and I used to get in the street and do a little tap dancing.

This general area of West Philly was saturated with singers, including members of the Castelles, Dreams, Dreamers, Sonny Gordon & the Angels, Cherokees and future music standouts Lee Andrews and Weldon McDougal.

"I think there was a singing group on just about every corner," recalled Harrison Scott. With that kind of neighborhood influence, it appeared natural that the band would eventually gravitate toward a singing group.

By 1953, the Uniques added key member and vocalist, Eddie Warner. Born and raised in South Philadelphia, Eddie Warner had been singing since the age of three. "It just seems like I've been singing all my life" said Eddie.

In the late 1940's at the age of ten, Eddie got his first taste of the entertainment business when he appeared in the Parisian Tailor Kiddie Hour radio program. The WPEN-AM amateur hour for black children started the careers of many a Philadelphia vocal group singer. In this case, Eddie was singing with a quartet called the Warners, made up of himself, his two brothers and a cousin. Eddie's aunt, Dot Green, was an orchestra leader and helped the Warners get an audition. Winning the Saturday auditions meant a chance to sing over the radio on Sunday.

When Eddie Warner was twelve, his family moved to Atlantic City, where he formed another vocal group called the Indiana Express, named for his junior high school. Moving back to Philadelphia around 1953, Eddie then lived on the 1800 block of West Erie Avenue, in North Philadelphia. In a



The Capris

Exclusive  Recordings

Capris photo card from the Classic Urban Harmony Archives. Front: Ruben Wright. Top row, left to right: Harrison Scott, Bobby Smart, Eddie Warner, Rená Hinton.

chance meeting with Ruben Wright, the two sang together in street corner combinations. Ruben was ready to incorporate group singing into the Uniques and realized that his band members could sing as well as they played instruments. Eddie also invited his friend, Charlie Stroud, to try out for the Uniques as a singer.

Charlie Stroud lived on Peach Street between 53rd and 54th Streets, in the same general area as the Uniques. Charlie had attended Sulzberger Junior High in the 1949-1950 time period, along with members of the Castelles, Dreams, Dreamers and Sonny Gordon's Angels and Lee Andrews. "I was singing all my life," said Charlie Stroud. "You know, spirituals, gospel, on the corner, in school. That was our past time. We'd sing on the corners, even in the school bathroom when we were supposed to be doing math. We'd sneak into the bathroom and try to harmonize. Sonny Til of the Orioles used to come down [to Sulzberger] when he came to town. He used to sit out there and sing with us, get us to sing his songs like 'At Night' and things like that. That was an inspiration to me. We were always singing. I didn't know Ruben before that but Eddie and I became good friends and we used to sing to jukeboxes."

"The band pretty much started dissolving then, because we started paying more attention to the singing," said

Eddie Warner. By now the vocal and instrumental group consisted of Charlie Stroud (lead, tenor), Harrison Scott (first tenor, alto sax, played bass), Eddie Warner (second tenor, drums), Ruben Wright (baritone, second lead, piano), and Bobby Smart (bass singer, guitar)..

As a self contained vocal group and band, the Uniques began playing clubs. They played Reynolds Hall, the Met, the Mercantile Hall, Town Hall as well as a number of clubs, cabarets, talent shows and recreation centers. Since Eddie's aunt was in the business she helped get them gigs in South Philly, too, like at the Hotel Brotherhood. The Uniques home base was the Haddington Recreation Center on Haverford Avenue between North 57th and North 58th Streets, but they didn't do that much singing there.

When not playing clubs, the Uniques enjoyed their new craft, singing R&B songs acappella on the street corner with all of the other group singers in the area. One particular location for harmonizing was the corner of 54th and Race, where all the groups would hang out in front of the drug store and sing all night. "The Castelles, Dreams, Lee Andrews & the Hearts. Sonny Gordon & the Angels, they'd all sing there." recalled Charlie Stroud. "A couple guys from the Sensations, Alphonso Howell and Roosevelt Simmons used to come up and sing. You know, at 54th & Race they used to pick guys and make up different groups. There used to be 12 to 15 guys out there and we'd pick four guys for one group and four guys for another. We used to do that all night long. The cops used to come out to chase us and ended up listening to us." Sometimes groups would sing against one another in competition. Sometimes they'd all sing together in super groups. Many times, new groups would form just by selecting voices off of the corner.

Since all the street corner groups worked on the same songs together, similarities of sounds developed. Competition for which groups had the best tenors and basses was brutal. As the groups sang songs by their idols, the Orioles, the competition for best West Philly tenors took Orioles' floating tenor Alex Sharp's part to extremes. Thus the "Philly Sound" took shape. Because all of the singers knew each others' songs, it became easy for singers to switch groups or even fill in for absent members in other groups. Thus the Castelles' Billy Taylor ended up also recording with the Dreams while the Uniques' Harrison Scott also recorded with the Medallions (*Essex* label) in the summer of 1954 [*See Medallions article, Echoes of the Past #91*]. "I was singing with the Medallions. I sang with many groups. I was freelancing," said Harrison.



Corner of 54th & Race (West Philly), today.

With all the talent on the corner of 54th and Race Streets, we'd like to think all got to record, but that wasn't the case. Many great singers (and vocal groups) from the area never got to put their voices on vinyl. The Uniques fondly remembered a group called the Starlings (including lead William Moore, bass Muzzy Murray and Russell Henderson) whose vocal contributions are now lost forever. Another group led by outstanding singer Bobby Baron ended up recording as a gospel group.

To celebrate their new sound, the Capris began looking for a new name. "Ruben and I were sitting on the steps watching cars go by and a brand new Lincoln Capri came by," said Eddie. [The Lincoln Capri was a full size luxury car introduced for the 1952 model year.] "It looked nice and we said, 'That's the name of the group!'"

Sometime late in 1953, the Capris ended up with a manager, Sid Goldstein. "Sid had a bar," said Charlie Stroud. "He was remodeling the bar and we walked in to try to get the band in there. Sid told us to come back Friday,"

"Back then, most of our singing was done for fun anyway," recalled Eddie. "We had the idea of making money but it wasn't like we're going charge anyone to sing there. We just wanted the chance to sing. So we went back Friday and Sid said, 'Get up and let's see what you can do.' We sang and everybody liked it. We used to sing and pass the hat."

Once Sid Goldstein became the group's manager, he wanted to record them. Sid's initial thought was to have the Capris audition for a group of music industry moguls.

"We went down on Broad Street and they were sitting there with those big stinking cigars and we were living clean and everything!" recalled Charlie Stroud with some sarcasm. "We went to audition and they asked us if we knew Ray Charles' 'Drown In My Own Tears'. That's when I said, 'Hey, Marine Corp! That's it!'"

Charlie Stroud had been with the group for eight months but felt they were going nowhere. Distrustful of the way the music industry chewed up teenage black singing groups, he joined the Marines. The group was now faced with the task of finding a new lead singer at the same time Sid Goldstein continued looking for a label to record them.

The Capris tried out a few male leads but were not happy with any of the singers they auditioned. They then heard a group of girl singers by the name of the Larays. The Capris were particularly impressed with the voice of the lead singer, Rená Hinton.

"Rená had a group of her own called the Larays," said Eddie Warner. "I had heard them sing. We all knew each other. It was an all girl group of Dee Dee Christmas, Annette Dickerson, Marsha Ward and Rená Hinton. They sounded good. I think they got a little peeved at us because we talked Rená into leaving them. She came to a couple rehearsals and it worked out."

Rená was born and raised in Philadelphia and grew up in the same West Philly neighborhood, residing on the 400 block of North 61st Street, near Callowhill Street. Her first experiences singing were in church. As a youngster she also sang on the Parisian Tailor Kiddie Hour with her all girl group (then a quintet), the Five Larays.

While in Shoemaker Junior High (5301 Media Street), Rená continued singing with her group. When the Larays sang at Haddington Recreation Center, the Capris were listening. Younger than the rest of the Capris, Rená was likely only about 14 when she joined the Capris in 1954.

For a male R&B groups to have a female lead was unusual and in Philadelphia, the Capris were one of the first. "I just thought it would be different," said Eddie Warner. "And I liked the way she sang. We needed a lead and Charlie had a high voice. We wanted a lead close to Charlie's voice."



RECORD CORP.

1626-32 FEDERAL ST. — PHILADELPHIA 46, PA. — DEwey 4-1115

AGREEMENT: Between Sidney Goldstein and Gotham Record Corp. Sidney Goldstein hereby represents that he is the Manager of a vocal group consisting of Bobby Small, Ruben Wright, Harrison Scott, Eddie Warner, and Rena Hinton. Goldstein hereby agrees that Gotham Record Corp. is to have the exclusive right to make and sell recordings by this group for a period of six (6) months from this date, and is to have the option of extending this agreement for an additional period of one (1) year, upon giving to Goldstein notice in writing, 15 days before the expiration of the six months.

It is agreed that Goldstein is to receive, for the group, a royalty of two (2) cents per double faced record on 90% of records manufactured and sold from original recordings made by the group. Royalty is to be paid quarterly, 45 days after the close of each calendar quarter.

It is further agreed that Goldstein shall pay to Gotham Record Corp. the sum of \$200.00, upon signing this agreement, to defray part of the promotion expenses on the first record released by Gotham.

Goldstein hereby warrants that he has the right to enter into this agreement.

Signed this _____ day of June, 1954

Accepted by:
GOTHAM RECORD CORP.
Ivin Ballen

Capris contract with Gotham Records, June 28, 1954. Courtesy of Jerry Greene of Collectables Records.

The Capris already had a large repertoire prior to Rená joining the group. "I was the first one to sing 'God Only Knows'," said Charlie Stroud, "And I didn't like it. We gave it to Ruben to lead and Ruben gave it to Rená." "Once we decided Rená would be the group's regular lead," added Eddie Warner, "We gave it to her. When it had been just the five fellows, we'd each do some leads." Actually the primary leads had been Charlie Stroud, Ruben Wright and Eddie Warner.

Other songs the Capris would later come to record also came from the pre-Rená era. "You're Mine Again" was a song that Charlie Stroud had led. "Too Poor to Love," "It's A Miracle," and "That's What You're Doing To Me" (the Dominoes' tune) were also in the group's repertoire.

Rená was only with the Capris for a matter of months before they got an opportunity to record. One of the outcomes of the Broad Street meeting was a contact with Matty Singer. Matty "Humdinger" Singer would later become known as one of Philadelphia's more colorful record industry promoters, but this was still early in his career. Through his and Sid Goldstein's connections the group was signed to record for *Gotham Records*.

By the summer of 1954, most of the Capris (with the exception of Rená) were out of school. With their career as entertainers sputtering, some of the guys decided to follow Charlie Stroud's lead and enlist in the service. Five friends made arrangements to enter the Air Force at the same time, hoping to be kept together. The five were Ruben Wright, Eddie Warner, Bobby Smart, Marty Hinton (Rená's brother) and friend Freddie Hale.

"At the time we'd already made a commitment to go into the service," said Eddie. "We didn't know we were going

to record. We told Sid we were going into the service and he said, 'Well why don't you record a record before you go in?' So that's they way it was. By the time the record hit big, we were in the service."

"The recording session came about because of Sid Goldstein and Matty Singer," said Rená. "At that time *Gotham* was in South Philly. It was pretty close to get to, otherwise we would have had to go to New York. The studio was on 17th & Federal [1626-32 Federal Street]."

On June 28th, 1954, Sid Goldstein, representing the Capris, signed a contract with Ivin Ballen's *Gotham Records*, giving *Gotham* the exclusive rights to record the group for the next six months, with an option to extend the contract another one year at the end of that time. The contract stated that Goldstein would receive, for the group, a royalty of two cents per record on 90% of the records sold. The contract also stated that Goldstein had to pay, up front, a sum of \$200 to *Gotham* to "defray part of the promotional expenses on the first record released by *Gotham*." \$200 in 1954 was a huge amount of money for a group to pay up front for the *privilege* of recording. While such practices as billing an artist for studio time and promotion costs were not unheard of at the time, they practically insured that the Capris would make little or no money at *Gotham*, even after "God Only Knows" became a hit.

"Sid made all the arrangements with *Gotham*," said Eddie. "So we went down there. In fact, we had use of the studio for a day to get the feel of it. Then we went back the

Original blue label 45 of "God Only Knows" from Classic Urban Harmony Archives. Background the original sheet music (courtesy of Jerry Greene of Collectables Records).

next day for the recording session."

Our best estimate for the date of the first recording session was June 29, 1954, the day after *Gotham* had Ruben sign over the copyrights to "God Only Knows" and "Too Poor To Love". For instrumentation, only Ruben's piano was used on this session. "God Only Knows" opened with Ruben's piano and the group came in strong before Rená's mournful voice.

"I remember singing "God Only Knows" over and over again," recalled Rená. It took a lot of takes. When I was good, the background was wrong and when the background was good, I was wrong."

After finally getting a good take of "God Only Knows," the Capris were told they needed an up-tempo flip side. The Capris had Ruben Wight's "Too Poor To Love Ready" and most likely recorded it at that session, complete with Ruben's dazzling boogie piano intro and bridge (Ruben also sang lead). For some reason, *Gotham* wanted something more traditional and held "Too Poor To Love" for a future release. All of the guys were huge Dominoes fans and had been singing "That's What You're Doing To Me" for a long time. But Rená was more of a Harptones fan and didn't know the lyrics. The Capris quickly scrawled the lyrics on a lead sheet and Rená read them for the first time as she sang. In the first take, Rená sang the words like the Dominoes did, "Lord won't you tell me, why I love that **woman** so..." The mistake was quickly caught and in all other takes Rená sang "... how I love that **man** so..." However, in *Gotham*'s rush to issue the record, they inadvertently picked Take 1, causing some confusion among the record buying public as to whether Rená was a young woman or a young man with a high voice. The confusion was compounded by the unusual spelling of Rená [pronounced Re-Nay']. *Gotham* must have realized this as they wasted no time in releasing a professional photo of the group, a practice they didn't follow with future groups like the Gazelles or Whispers.

Gotham released "God Only Knows" b/w "That's What You're Doing To Me" (*Gotham* #7304) as the Capris' first single in August 1954. By the end of the year, *Gotham*'s pressing figures indicated that they'd pressed 56,000 45's and 18,000 78's. The 45's were pressed on blue, red and later yellow labels. There's been a long standing record collectors'

argument as to whether the blue labels or red labels were pressed first. *Gotham* kept a label book, with labels from both sides of every release as it came out. The 45 RPM labels for "God Only Knows" in the *Gotham* label book are blue, indicating it was the first pressing. [Thanks goodness, because our copy in the Classic Urban Harmony Archives is blue!]

Naturally, "God Only Knows" broke first in Philly. By August 28, 1954, it was #6 on Philly's regional R&B Charts. Since the group was not yet in the service, *Gotham* had them on every black radio and TV show in the area.

"God Only Knows" did beautifully," recalled Rená. "Every street I walked down I could hear it. They played it on the radio quite often." Randy Dixon had the Capris on his radio show for an interview when he played the record. The Capris also sang "God Only Know" on Mitch Thomas' TV dance program on Channel 12. Mitch Thomas, a cousin of Philly deejay Kae Williams, hosted the black equivalent of *Bandstand* from nearby Wilmington, DE.

The Capris did manage a few more live appearances before entering the service. They played a major show at the Town Hall Theater (150 N. Broad Street) with Lee Andrews & the Hearts and Charlie & Ray. Fourteen-year-old Rená was so shy and nervous in front of the large audience that she spent the entire time in the dressing room. The group had to literally drag her out to the stage to perform. Still Rená did fine.

"God Only Knows" stayed in Philly's Top Ten R&B Charts for 9 weeks. In the meantime, it caught on in the Baltimore/Washington area where it became #9 on their R&B Charts on October 9, remaining in the Top Ten through the week of December 25. By late November, "God Only Knows" had entered the New York City territorial charts.

Stationed by the Marines in California, Charlie Stroud heard the record there too. By December 11, 1954, "God Only Knows" was #10 on the regional R&B charts of Cincinnati, a fact not lost on the management of the city's *King/DeLuxe* record label. By the Fall of 1954, the label's owner, Syd Nathan had become successful having his black artists (like Otis Williams & the Charms) cover other black artists. On December 15, 1954, Nathan rushed a male group, the Crystals, into the studio to cover "God Only Knows". It was released a week later (*DeLuxe* #6077) but there's no indications of how much it cut into the Capris' sales.

Eddie Warner recalled only two *Gotham* recording sessions, but we believe there were three. Anxious to capitalize on the success of "God Only Knows," *Gotham* quickly brought the Capris back to record again before three of their members entered the Air Force. We believe that session took place on July 28, 1954, based on copyright release dates. Again, the only instrumentation used was Ruben's piano. The group recorded "It Was Moonglow," a song written by Rená with uncredited help from Ruben and Eddie. "Moonglow" was a ballad very much in the style of "God Only Knows". The group also recorded two versions of a song they'd been singing for years, the Eddie Warner composition, "She Still Loves Me". In one version Ruben sings lead. In the other version, Rená does lead, changing the words to "He Still Loves Me". Neither version was released until years later. *Gotham* instead chose the up tempo "Too Poor To Love" as the flip of "It Was Moonglow," the Capris second release (*Gotham* #7306).

"It Was Moonglow" was released on October, 1954. The song received some airplay but never caught on. One reason may have been that radio disc jockeys thought the record was too long. In an era where most singles lasted 3 minutes or less, "God Only Knows" was 3:17 minutes long, while "Moonglow" finished up at 3:37, a good 20 seconds longer. "[Radio personality] Georgie Woods used to say he could go downstairs and park his car and come back and the record would still be on," lamented Rená. Even so, *Gotham* pressed



The Capris second record, "It Was Moonglow" released only on yellow label. (Classic Urban Harmony Archives)



The Capris third record, "It's A Miracle" released only on yellow label. From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives.

39,000 copies of the record, though the number sold is unknown.

The Capris had one final *Gotham* recording session. From dated copyright release forms, we believe the session took place on December 29, 1954. While some songs have only Ruben's piano as instrumentation, others have what we believe to be Harrison's alto sax and drums (Eddie?). The session could have been in NYC, but we think it took place at *Gotham*, possibly while Ruben, Eddie and Bobby were home from the service on leave. *Gotham* had already extended the Capris' contract for another year on December 13 and apparently tried to squeeze in as many songs as they could before three key members were shipped overseas. The Capris recorded the Rená led ballads "Please Believe Me," "You're Mine Again," "It's a Miracle," and "Just A Fool". In addition they recorded the calypso flavored up-tempo sides, "How Long (Ruben lead) and "Let's Linger Awhile" (Rená lead). It's also possible "Milk And Gin" (Rená lead) came from this session.

"It's A Miracle" b/w "Let's Linger Awhile" (*Gotham* #7308) became the Capris final release on *Gotham*. "It's A Miracle" was originally titled "The Miracle" and was written by the group back when Charlie Stroud had been a member. *Gotham* obviously learned its lesson regarding song length as the ballad is only 2:41 minutes long. Released in April of 1955, "Miracle" did little without the group around to promote it.

With members entering the Air Force together, the Capris tried to stay together. "We did sing in basic training," said Eddie Warner. "Five of us went into the service together: Ruben Wright, Bobby Smart, myself, Rená's brother (Marty Hinton) and Freddie Hale. [Fred Hale's connection to the Capris would resurface once the group came out of the service.] As long as we were together in the service, we sang together. We did USO shows and whatnot until we got split up. After that, being in different places, we all had our own groups. I had a group where I was. We did TV shows. I know Ruben had a group where he was in French Morocco " [It's been reported elsewhere that Ruben Wright and Eddie Warner sang with Stoney Dimbo in a later version of the Master-Tones while stationed in North Africa.]

With three group members in the service, the Capris became inactive. Harrison Scott, who'd already recorded with the Medallions on *Essex* remained with the group as they evolved into the instrumental group, the Manhattans.

Gotham wanted Rená to record solo but she preferred to wait on the group's return. "I was singing and pursuing my dancing career," she said. "I love dancing better than singing but I sang with a couple of girls groups. One was called Rene & the Larays. And the Laviettes. We would do mostly cabarets.

By April 1958, the Capris were out of the service and ready to resume their singing career. On April 1, 1958, the Capris, signed over copyrights to *Gotham* for several songs and on April 9, *Gotham* made the arrangement official with a six-month contract.

A single recording session was held, most likely in New York City. This time more instrumentation was used, probably by studio musicians. The group now consisted of Rená Hinton, Ruben Wright, Bobby Smart, Eddie Warner and Frederick Hale, who had sung with the group in the service. Fred brought with him a song called "My Weakness" which Rená led. Rená also led a version of "Bless You" and "I Miss Your Love". Ruben led a song called "Yes My Baby Please" in which parts of his song styling seemed straight from Sam Cooke.

"My Weakness" b/w "Yes My Baby Please" was issued on the *Gotham* subsidiary, *20th Century* (#1201). When the record failed to click, though, *Gotham* didn't extend the contract and the Capris went their separate ways.

Rená went back to dancing professionally and singing with her all female groups.

Later in 1958, Ruben Wright recorded solo on the *Wynne* label. One side, "Love Is Gone" was written by Eddie Warner and features male and female voices, probably including some of the Capris. Ruben's next recording for the *Lancer*

Second Capris contract with *Gotham Records*, dated April 9, 1958. Courtesy of Jerry Greene of *Collectables Records*.



The reunited Capris recorded one final record in 1958.
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)

label is strictly solo, using only a female chorus on one side.

In the early 1960's "God Only Knows" by the Capris enjoyed a resurgence of popularity when it was reissued on the *Lost-Nite* label.

In 1963, a version of "God Only Knows" retitled "Heaven Only Knows" was released on Philadelphia's *Cameo* label by an artist called Little Cheryl. The record featured a female lead whose voice was similar to Rená Hinton and had strong male group backup.

"Neither Ruben Wright nor the Capris had anything to that recording," said music genius Billy Jackson who pro-

duced it and hundreds of other great recordings. "Cheryl's vocal sound and my admiration for the song were really my reasoning for the coupling. Cheryl's last name was Springfield and she was Buddy Dee's wife. Buddy Dee was the son of WHAT Radio's Mary Dee. I believe she passed after a brilliant career at *Bell Records*. It was the Tymes in the background. I used them quite often!"

In the mid-1960's Ruben Wright had five singles released by *Capitol Records*. Most if not all were products of *Harthon Productions*, the creation of Weldon McDougal, Luther Randolph and Johnny Stiles. Of course, Weldon McDougal was a cousin of Harrison Scott and product of the Capris' West Philadelphia neighborhood as was Johnny Stiles who had been part of the Medallions and Manhattans groups with Harrison.

The biggest success Ruben Wright had was with "I'm Walking Out On You" (*Capitol* #5588) which was a Top-30 regional hit in the Baltimore area in 1966. The song was arranged by Luther Randolph and produced by Marvin Holtzman. Ruben Wright continued to write most of his own songs. He published them through *Liberty-Belle Music*, a firm run by former Capris manager Sid Goldstein.

Ruben Wright's last record was "La-La-La," recorded for *Virtue Records* in the early 1970's. The rhythm arrangement was done by Johnny Stiles. At that point, Ruben continued to play piano and entertain at clubs and private parties.

In the late 1970's, I became close friends with Charlie Stroud, who was a regular listener to my WXPB weekly radio program. Charlie contacted Rená Hinton, whom I interviewed on the air on February 2, 1980. At the time, Rená was singing with an all female acappella group called the Bronze Velvets.

When *Collectables Records*' Jerry Greene purchased *Gotham Records*, he allowed Don Leins and me to thumb through *Gotham's* paperwork, reading contracts, copyrights, correspondences and hand written sheet music, photocopying the most important documents for historic preservation. What we found in the way of documentation on the Capris was staggering. We were really amazed when Jerry pointed to a wall with rows of boxes of reel-to-reel tapes, all from *Gotham Records* in the 1950's. All Don and I could think of were the many titles of Capris' songs that Rená Hinton had told us of, that were never issued by *Gotham*. We asked Jerry if he intended to issue any of the unreleased *Gotham* sides and he said if Don and I were willing to do the work, he'd pay the expenses to put them out. Jerry booked time with an engineer at *Disk Makers*, and we grabbed boxes of tapes marked "Capris" and "Lee Andrews & the Hearts". Down at *Disk Makers*, we started going through the tape boxes marked "Capris". There were thirteen reels of Capris tapes, all in their original boxes. Some had not been opened in almost thirty years. One tape disintegrated from age when we tried to play it. The other twelve boxes, however, provided a fascinating glimpse back in time to when the Capris crowded around a couple of microphones at 17th & Federal Streets in 1954. There was studio chatter, false starts, and the usual "Let's try it again, Take 4". But mostly there was music, Rená's timid voice growing stronger with each take, paired with Ruben's sometimes trickling and sometimes pounding piano. And always there was harmony, the Capris' teenage voices blending as they had on the corner of 54th and Race, outside the drugstore, on a warm summer night. Don and I picked the best cuts from each of the unreleased songs and fashioned the 1981 LP, "*Gotham Recording Stars, The Capris*" (*Collectables* 5000).

Charlie Stroud and I stayed in touch and in April 1984, my then co-host, John Moore and I got to interview three more members of the Capris on the radio – Charlie Stroud, Eddie Warner and Harrison Scott. Ruben Wright even



Ruben Wright charted regionally with the 1966 soul hit, "I'm Walking Out On You". Above, Ruben Wright's business card. Both from the Classic Urban Harmony Archives



**Top: Rená Hinton and Charlie Horner at WXPB in 1980.
Bottom: Rená Hinton rehearsing for 1986 Black Swan Concert. Both photos from Classic Urban Harmony.**

dropped down to the radio station once to say hello. Over the next few years, Charlie Stroud began singing with an R&B acappella group called Omega 5 Maestros, a group that also included John Jones, formerly of Neighbors Complaint. Omega 5 Maestros evolved into the acappella group, A Moment's Pleasure. I would sometimes run into Eddie Warner in Philly clubs where groups were singing. It seemed he was getting back into the music – or perhaps he never left it.

In April of 1985, Charlie Stroud dropped me a note saying the Capris were back together, with Fred Hale replacing Harrison Scott and Dwight Jones (of Omega 5 Maestros) replacing Bobby Smart. What seemed for a moment to be the rebirth of the Capris did not last long. By 1986, Eddie Warner had developed cancer and his health deteriorated quickly. Charlie Stroud and I visited him in his home a few days before he passed. Meanwhile, Charlie Stroud had encouraged the sixties soul group, the Agents, to reunite and was helping them with their harmony. Charlie Stroud died suddenly of a massive stroke in January of 1987. It was one of the sadder days of my life.

I did see Rená Hinton a few more times. In 1986, Rená Hinton sang "God Only Knows" at the *Black Swan Soci-*



**Top: Omega 5 Maestros with Charlie Stroud (top center).
Bottom: The band, the Mannhattans with Harrison Scott on left. From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives.**

ety group harmony concert at the Black History Museum in Philadelphia. In September 1991, she also made a singing appearance at Ronnie I's *United in Group Harmony Association*. Rená is believed to be still in Philadelphia, singing in church.

Years ago, I first heard songs by the Castelles, Dreams, Dreamers and Cherokees and I began a quest to find out how the "Philly Sound" came about. My search brought me in contact with numerous singers and many became my friends. The Capris were never just a subject to write about. The Capris and their music were part of my life. Charlie, Eddie, Rená and Harrison gave me insight into our music that I use every time I write about it. I like to think that my role in saving their unreleased songs and telling their story will help the world appreciate them. It's the least I could do.

For more vocal group articles, photos, videos, news, concert reviews, events and everything group harmony related visit Charlie & Pam's www.classicurbanharmony.net



The Capris at Charlie Horner's radio program on WXPB, 1980.

Left to right: Ruben Wright, Harrison Scott, Charlie Stroud and Eddie Warner. Charlie Stroud is holding the Capris Gotham Recordings LP that Charlie Horner helped produce.

The Capris at Charlie Horner's radio program on WXPB, 1980.

Top, Left to right: Eddie Warner, Harrison Scott, Charlie Horner (wearing a Gotham T-shirt), Ruben Wright. Bottom: Charlie Stroud





The Capris' lead, Rene' Hinton on Charlie Horner's radio program on WXPB, February 1980.

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The Capris at Charlie Horner's radio program on WXPB, 1980.

Top, Left to right: Eddie Warner, Harrison Scott, Charlie Stroud and Ruben Wright.



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Ruben Wright Singles.

**From the Classic Urban
Harmony Archives**

Notes & References

1. Charlie Horner's interview with Rene Hinton, 2 Feb 1980.
2. Charlie Horner & John Moore's interview with Charlie Stroud, Eddie Warner and Harrison Scott, 16 June, 1984.
3. Charlie Horner's numerous conversations with Charlie Stroud and Eddie Warner 1979—1987.
4. Thanks to Jerry Greene (*Collectables Records*) for access to *Gotham's* files and tapes (19 81).
5. Correspondences with Billy Jackson (2011).
6. Jay Warner, "The Capris (Philadelphia)," *American Singing Groups*, Billboard Books (NYC), 1992, p. 92-93.
7. Jerry Skokandich, "Lost Legends of Rhythm & Blues: The Master-tones and Swans."
8. Thanks also to Don Leins, John Moore, John Jones and Bill Keith.
9. Special thanks to Carole Applebaum for supplying Steve Applebaum's tapes of all the WXPB interviews.
10. Charlie Horner, "Gotham Recording Stars The Capris," Liner notes to *Collectables* LP 5000 (1981).
11. G. A. Moonoogian, "Capris," Liner notes to *Flyright* CD 56, (1993).
12. Charlie Horner, "Early Philly Rhythm & Blues: Johnny Stiles ...," *Echoes of the Past*, #91 (2010), pp.10-14.



Top: 1981 Capris LP assembled by Charlie Horner & Don Leins. Bottom: "Heaven Only Knows" - Little Cheryl.

Capris Related Discography

Capris Singles

<i>Gotham</i> 7304	God Only Knows	54
	That's What you're Doing To Me	
<i>Gotham</i> 7306	It Was Moonglow	54
	Too Poor To Love	
<i>Gotham</i> 7308	It's A Miracle	55
	Let's Linger Awhile	
<i>20th Century</i> 1201	My Weakness	58
	Yes My baby Please	

Additional Capris sides released later on LP's & CD's

Collectables 5000 (only listing cuts not previously released)

That's What You're doing To Me (out take #1)	
He Still Loves Me	
She Still Loves Me	
It Was Moonglow (out take #1)	
Please Believe Me	
How Long	
You're Mine Again	
Just A Fool	
Let's Linger Awhile (out take #1)	
My Weakness (out take #1)	[1958 session]
I Miss your Love	[1958 session]
Bless You	[1958 session]

Flyright CD 56 (only listing cuts not previously released)

He Still Loves Me (alt. take)	
She Still Loves me (alt. take with a cough in intro)	
How long (alt. take)	
You're Mine Again (alt. take reversed words in bridge)	
Just A Fool (alt. take)	
Let's Linger Awhile (out take #1)	
Milk And Gin	
My Weakness (out take #2)	[1958 session]
Yes My Baby Please (with studio chatter)	[1958]
I Miss your Love (alt. take)	[1958 session]

Singles by Ruben Wright

<i>Wynne</i> 119	Love Is Gone	58
	Girls make me nervous	
<i>Lancer</i> 101	To You	58
	Bye Bye	
<i>Capitol</i> 5317	Where Was I	64
	Bye Bye	
<i>Capitol</i> 5588	I'm Walking Out On You	66
	Hey Girl	
<i>Capitol</i> 5686	Crazy Baby	66
	Everybody Needs Somebody	
<i>Capitol</i> 5835	I'll Be There	67
	You've Done Me Wrong	
<i>Capitol</i> 2045	Let Me Go Loves	67
	When the World Is Ready	
<i>Virtue</i> 2505	La La La	ca. 1970
	I'm Gonna Have My Day	

For Singles by the Medallions and Manhattans containing Harrison Scott, see *Echoes of the Past* #91.

Covers of "God Only Knows"

<i>DeLuxe</i> 6077 by the Crystals	1954
<i>Cameo</i> 270 by Little Cheryl (background by the Tymes)	1963