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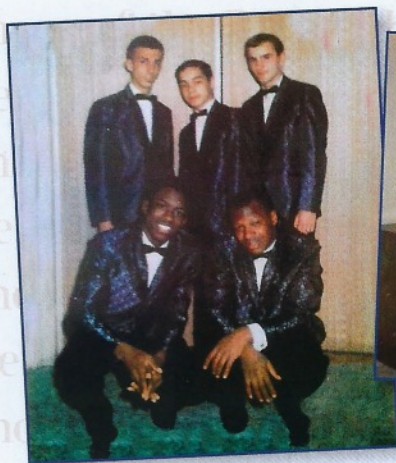
ECHOES OF THE PAST



DEL-CHORDS
CIRCA 1965



DEL-CHORDS



CHESSMEN



CHESSMEN



The Classmates Jack - Tony - Charlie - Joe



BOB DELANEY
WITH FRANK & GORDON



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The Chessmen: Acappella Trailblazers

by Charlie Horner
with contributions from Pamela Horner

The early- and mid-sixties brought the birth of the “acappella sound.” Sure, R&B vocal groups had been singing acappella on the corners for decades, but by the time those vocal groups made it to the studios, record companies added instrumental backing to make the records more commercial. In the early 1960s, Times Square Records began recording and releasing songs with just the vocals. Oblivious to what was happening at Times Square Records, a Washington Heights vocal group was content to harmonize acappella in the subway tunnels. James Myers, Ted Ziffer, Arthur Crank, Willie Ramirez, and Tommy Reyes made up one of the greatest groups of this “new” genre - the Chessmen.

Ted Ziffer was born and raised on Amsterdam Avenue, between 175th and 176th Streets in the Upper Manhattan neighborhood known as Washington Heights. Washington Heights was home to many legendary singers including Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers. Ted’s introduction to music came when his parents gave him a record player at the age of three. Listening to records and then radio, Ted imagined himself singing on the stage of Radio City Music Hall. Seated alphabetically in grammar school, Ted Ziffer was naturally in the back of the room. There, he occupied himself singing songs with lyrics he made up. Seeking to embarrass him, the teacher ordered Ted come to the front of the class and sing. Instead, the teacher was so impressed with Ted’s singing she suggested he join the school choir. He did.

Across Amsterdam Avenue from where Ted grew up was Highbridge Park. The Park extended from 196th Street down to 155th Street. Then, it wrapped around Edgecombe Avenue where Frankie Lymon lived. Ted remembered looking out his window one night to see the Teenagers practicing across the street. The Channels came practicing there, too. A guy in Ted’s building was cousin to one of the Elegants. They came over once and sang their hit song, “Little Star,” in the hallway. That inspired Ted to want to form a singing group.

By 1960, at the age of 14, Ted was singing with a couple of local guys. One day a group called the Sincerians came to Ted’s neighborhood. “They



had kid who sounded just like Frankie Lymon and they had a real deep bass singer,” said Ted. “His name was Arthur Crank and he eventually became the bass singer of our group.”

Arthur Crank grew up between Amsterdam and Edgecombe Avenues. Leslie Uggams was his neighbor and Jimmy Castor lived downstairs. Arthur used to hang out with members of the Teenagers including brothers Frankie and Louis Lymon. As a youngster, Arthur started singing with some friends who’d become the Sincerians. When his voice changed at age 12, one of his group members suggested he switch from tenor to bass singer. “I didn’t know anything about singing bass,” recalled Arthur, “So my friend gave me a copy of ‘Mother-In-Law’ by Ernie K-Doe to listen to. I went home and learned that record. Then, I used to hang with Teenagers’ bass Sherman Garnes, singing in the hallways. I listened to how he sang and just started adding my own little style to it.”

The Birth of the Chessmen

Meanwhile, Ted started assembling the Chessmen. Ted sang second tenor and got Willie Ramirez to sing first tenor. Willie and Ted lived on the same street and were close friends. They used to hang out on 177th street between Amsterdam and Audubon Avenues. Willie knew Tommy Reyes, who could sing baritone. They recruited

Freddie Puic to sing bass. The group only needed a lead singer. That turned out to be Ralph Colarte, who also lived on Ted's street. "Ralph was a blonde-haired young Cuban," said Ted. "A good-looking guy who wasn't the best lead around, but he was good enough."

"My neighborhood was a melting pot," recalled Ted, who is white. "My block had only two Black families but it had a whole lot of Hispanics. Willie and Tommy were both Puerto Rican."

Where did the name Chessmen come from? "Willie and I were watching the TV show, 'Have Gun Will Travel' starring Richard Boone as Paladin," Ted recalled. "Paladin, had a business card with a chess piece on it. That gave us the idea for the group's name. We didn't know at the time there were other groups called the Chessmen."

The Chessmen didn't all go to the same school. Ted went to Cardinal Hayes Catholic High School, in the Bronx. The others went to George Washington High Public School, with the exception of Willie Ramirez who was 3 years younger and was still in PS 115.

After a short while, Fred Puic was out as bass. He was replaced by Arthur Crank. "I got fed up with my old group, the Sincerians," recalled Arthur. "They would argue all the time about things like how the songs should go. Then I heard that Ted's group needed a bass singer. So I joined the Chessmen."

In the beginning, the Chessmen just sang at local parties. "We'd rehearse in hallways until we got thrown out," mused Ted. "Then we'd go sing in the subway tunnel. There was a subway station at Fort Washington Avenue and 173rd Street. It had a one-block tunnel where people bought the tokens. We'd stay at the end of that tunnel and sing in there for the echo. Once some guys from Fort Lee, New Jersey, came by, because the bus stop to New Jersey was on 179th Street. They liked our singing and the next thing we knew, we were singing at a Catholic high school in Fort Lee. We be-

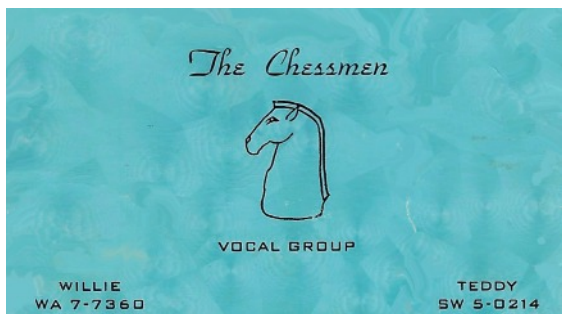


The first Chessmen. From left, Ralph Colarte, Willie Ramirez, Ted Ziffer, Tommy Reyes, Freddie Puic

came friends with the Monsignor and started singing there monthly at Friday night dances. We were paid \$50 a night and we'd sing two sets." The Chessmen also sang at the Palisades Amusement Park, a 38-acre amusement park in New Jersey, across the Hudson River from New York City.

The Lodi Armory Benefit Concert

Then, the Chessmen got a call from the Monsignor in Fort Lee who said he had a job for them, a charity show. The Essex of "Easier Said Than Done" had been hired but couldn't make it. The Chessmen were asked to fill in. The event was the February 1, 1964, Winter Wonderland Dance at the Lodi Armory, sponsored by the Bergen County CYO. Music was supplied by Rick Martin & the Showmen, a band that included Mark Stein (vocals and keyboard) and Tim Bogert (bass guitar). Mark Stein had previously sung with the doo wop group Mark Steven & the Charmers [see *Echoes of the Past* #117]. Stevens and Bogert would go on to form the group Vanilla Fudge a few years later. Newspapers advertised that the Dovells, Ruby and the Romantics and a group called the Colleagues would be stopping by, but Ted recalled the acts who actually appeared along with the Chessmen were the Tymes, Dovells, Four Seasons and Classics. The Chessmen were used to singing acappella but when they got to the Lodi Armory, they found



out that Rick Martin & the Showmen were going to back them instrumentally.

“When we arrived, we spent about 20 minutes working out our tunes with the band,” Ted said. “Then the Dovells showed up and kicked us off of the stage. When we began singing, the audience started screaming. People saw us performing with all of those name acts and must have thought we were big stars. When we finished, they started running at us. I turned to the first tenor and said, ‘Do we run or do we get our clothes ripped off?’ It was wild. That was the first big show that we did.”

Shortly after that concert, Ralph left the group and they needed a new lead. “One of the guys knew a singer, Billy Sims, from George Washington High School,” said Ted. “He became our new lead singer. Billy had a real smooth voice, a cross between Johnny Mathis and the Dreamlovers. We used to sing ‘I’m in the Mood For Love’ and the girls would swoon.” The Chessmen did record a demo of “I’m in the Mood For Love” to give to Decca Records. The flip side was recorded by the Sincerians (under the name the Yankee-tones). That record has since disappeared.

The Chessmen continued to sing over in Fort Lee. Some of the songs they were harmonizing to were “Your Way” by the Heartbeats, “Castle in the Sky” by the Bop Chords, and the up-tempo “The Closer You Are” by the Magnificent Four. At one point, they received a call from a fellow in the Bronx who was renovating a bowling alley to make into a nightclub. He was signing up groups to sing at his nightclub when it was finished. The Chessmen and their parents met with him and signed a contract, as did three or four other groups. That was the last anyone ever heard from him. After about 6 months, Ted called the Better Business Bureau and was told that if he hadn't done anything in that long, the contract was void.

Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour

In April, 1964, the Chessmen received a letter inviting them to audition for the TV show, *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour*. The show was a contest for amateur entertainers. The *Original Amateur Hour* began on radio in 1934 as *Major Bowes' Amateur Hour*. After Bowes' death in 1946, the program was revived on radio by Ted Mack who also took it to television in 1948. On TV, the *Original Amateur Hour* was the forerunner of shows like *American Idol* and *America's Got*



The Chessmen on the *Ted Mack Amateur Hour*,
From Left, Arthur Crank, Tommy Reyes,
Ted Ziffer, Willie Ramirez, Billy Sims.

Talent. Unlike similar modern-day programs, *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour* winners were determined by the TV audience voting through postcards, letters and phone calls.

Auditions for *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour* were held at the 1964 World's Fair, which first opened April 22 in Flushing Meadows Park, Queens, New York. The Chessmen took the subway there sometime in May. Auditions took place in the RCA Pavilion / Official Color TV Communications Center. The RCA Pavilion, looking like a cluster of circular white and copper drums, was the first structure seen upon entering the main fairgrounds gate. RCA was spotlighting their new “color” TV's and people entering the Pavilion walked by a camera and could see themselves in color on monitor sets. This was a thrill in 1964. Farther up the circular ramp led to the second floor where visitors could look down through a glass wall to the color television studio below. That's where the TV show auditions took place.

“I remember when we arrived, there was about an hour wait to get into the place,” said Ted. “We walked up front and somebody yelled, ‘Who the heck do you guys think you are to get in front of the line?’ We turned around and said, ‘We're the Beatles.’”

The Chessmen were notified that they passed the audition and were invited to the taping of an episode of the *Original Amateur Hour* on July 19, 1964. The actual taping took place at the Ed Sullivan Theatre at 53rd and Broadway in Manhattan. The Chessmen came prepared to sing the Marcels' arrangement of “Blue Moon.” They reported at Noon on the fifth floor of the Walter Scott Studios for rehearsals. Following that they moved downstairs to the CBS Studio #52 for camera run-

throughs and finally video taping in front of a live audience.

“Instead of us singing acappella, they had a band back us up,” said Ted. “They made us run through ‘Blue Moon’ about a dozen times. It was ‘stand here, no, stand over there.’ On top of that, the band speeded the song up and we had to follow the tempo. I guess because of TV they had to fit it into so many seconds. By the time we were done taping, I had a headache.” The whole ordeal took about ten hours.

The episode of *The Original Amateur Hour* aired on television Sunday July 26, 1964. The Chessmen competed against a violinist from Canada, an Irish tenor, a nine-girl dance group from Staten Island, a guitarist and several other contestants. Watching a YouTube video of the Chessmen’s appearance now [Google “Chessmen” + “Ted Mack”] it’s hard to believe they didn’t win. They were THAT GOOD!

“We lost,” lamented Ted. “I think we were beaten out by a bald-headed opera singer. I’m not sure. The funny thing is that we never even met Ted Mack. On the program he talked like he knew us. But when the show was assembled they just used previously taped videos.”

Shortly after the Ted Mack episode, Arthur Crank left the Chessmen to return to his previous vocal group. The Chessmen were looking for a new bass singer. Billy Sims said he knew a good singer named James Myers.

James Myers grew up in the Dyckman Street area, north of Washington Heights. “I never sang with a group before the Chessmen,” James said. “My only singing was in church, Mount Washington Presbyterian Church.”

James Myers had a high tenor falsetto voice but the group added him with the thought of shifting the parts around. Instead of adding a bass singer at the bottom of the harmony, they wanted to add a falsetto at the top.

It was then that the Chessmen were contacted by Sam Cooke’s manager. Sam had just been tragically shot and killed and his manager was looking to discover new talent. The Chessmen were asked to come and audition. The day of the audition, Billy Sims didn’t show up. Billy lived in the Inwood section of Manhattan, all the way up around 207th Street. The rest of the Chessmen walked all the way up to Billy’s home, a good 45-minute walk. They knocked on his door but Billy’s

mother said he’d played hooky the day before and she wouldn’t let him out. Needless to say, the group blew the audition and immediately fired Billy Sims.

The Chessmen still needed a lead singer and tried out Frankie Lymon’s younger brother, Timothy Lymon, on lead. Timmie sang with the Chessmen for about three weeks but it didn’t work out. Timmie’s voice had changed and he didn’t have much range so the group let him go.

The Chessmen did bring bass singer Bayo Pesante into the group. Bayo’s brother, Charles Pesante, was singing with the Denotations. The Denotations were one of the neighborhood groups that the Chessmen admired. The Denotations, who had recorded “The Lone Stranger” for the Lawn label, were from the area around 170th Street and Broadway. The Chessmen got into a singing contest with Arthur Crank’s group, the Sincerians, where the Denotations acted as judges. The contest was held in the subway tunnel at 173rd Street & Fort Washington Avenue. Arthur’s group was really talented but the Chessmen managed to edge them out, three songs to two. At that point Arthur Crank rejoined the Chessmen as bass singer.

Once, while singing on the street corner, the Chessmen heard a singer coming down the block singing a few bars of “I Apologize.” They took the phrase and composed their own original song called “I Apologize.” They gave the song to James Myers to lead and it sounded so good, James became the group’s new lead singer.

The Apollo Theatre

The Chessmen competed on Wednesday Night Amateur Hour at the Apollo Theatre. Rehearsals were held downstairs with just a pianist. Then, they were backed on stage by the Apollo’s house band. On the way to the stage, they failed to touch the “Tree of Hope,” the famous tree stump in the Apollo Theatre that entertainers rubbed for good luck. “We didn’t touch the dog gone stump for luck because we didn’t see the stump!” explained Art. “They made us go back and touch it.”

On stage, the piano player gave them the wrong note and the Chessmen struggled to find their key. “I don’t think he liked us,” said Arthur. “Our lead singer yelled, “Stop! Let’s try that again.” The Chessmen were afraid of the gentleman with the hook that pulled failing acts from the

stage but they actually did well, singing “I Apologize.” The main competition that night was a blind kid who played guitar and sang. The Applause Meter showed the two acts tied. After a run off, the Chessmen came in second.

While at the Apollo, the Chessmen were approached by Frankie Lymon. He told them he’d heard a lot about them (probably from his brother) and wanted to meet them. The Temptations manager was also in the audience that night and took an interest in the Chessmen. Since he was heading with the Temptations on a European tour, he left the Chessmen in the care of a manager in Harlem. That fellow wanted to split the group up but the Chessmen wouldn’t have it.

During this time, Ted listened to Danny Stiles’ Kit Kat Club on radio station WNJR, Newark, New Jersey. Stiles played his own selection of rhythm and blues and rock’n’roll records, many obscure sides from earlier years. WNJR was playing some of the acappella records coming out and indicated they could be purchased at two stores, Times Square Records in New York, and the Relic Rack in Hackensack, NJ. “To me, harmony was the thing,” said Ted. “I don’t know why, but my brain was wired for harmony. I started visiting these stores. I brought the group over to Hackensack by bus. We got out and sang a song outside of the Relic Rack. Relic Rack owner, Eddie Gries, heard our singing and asked us to come in. The bass singer from the Velvet Angels was there visiting the store at the time. So, we went inside and Eddie asked us to sing another song. While we were singing it, Eddie was booking studio time. We wound up recording for Relic Records. This was around the time that Eddie Gries and Donn Filetì purchased the legendary Times Square Records



The Chessmen: from left, Tommy Reyes Ted Ziffer, Willie Ramirez, Arthur Crank, James Myers

store, record label and radio show. Times Square Records had been the center of the 1960s acappella universe.

In December 1964, Eddie Gries began recording the Chessmen at Variety Studios, 225 West 46th Street, Manhattan. The group would record “I Apologize,” “Dance,” “Ways of Romance,” “Heavenly Father” and other songs like “That’s My Desire,” “Stars Fall,” “All Nite Long,” “Two Kinds of People,” and “For All We Know.” “We used three microphones,” recalled Ted. “One for the lead, one for the bass and one for the rest of the group. We’d run through about thirty seconds of each song and then sing the final take. That’s the way acappella songs were recorded in those days. I remember we started singing ‘That’s My Desire’ slow and Eddie said, ‘Make it into an up-tempo song.’ We did and it came out great. One time we were taking a break when the Statler Brothers song, ‘Counting Flowers On The Wall,’ came out. We started singing it just for fun and we didn’t know Eddie was recording it. It, along with all the studio chatter, found its way onto our album.”

Eddie Gries released the first of the Chessmen’s singles, “I Apologize” b/w “Dance” (#1015) and “Heavenly Father” b/w “Ways of Romance” (#1016) on his Relic label. All but “Heavenly Father” and “That’s My Desire” were original tunes written by the Chessmen. While many of the acappella groups of the time were covering existing 1950s vocal group recordings, the Chessmen were turning out original songs.

“We’d stand in the hallways and start singing and the songs would just come to us,” Ted recalled. “We’d say, ‘Let’s do it this way,’ and we’d work on it. The song would just come together. We never used a pitch pipe. We never knew that



pitch pipes existed back then. None of us had any musical training. We were all just singers and we just worked it out vocally. We all arranged the songs. We just put the songs together with no real hard effort.”

We did practice for a couple hours twice a week in the hallway,” said Ted. “We were diligent about that. One time we were practicing in the hallway and the cops came in asking us what we were doing there. We said, ‘We’re singers. We’re just practicing here.’ Apparently, they’d gotten a call about a burglary so we had to sing for them to prove who we were. They said, ‘Ok, you proved you can sing, now get out!’”

When Eddie Gries purchased Times Square Records, he also acquired the Times Square radio show, broadcast weekly over station WBNX 1380 AM. Eddie featured the Chessmen singing their first couple singles live on the Times Square radio program. The Chessmen were the first acappella group to appear live on the show and possibly the first sixties acappella group to ever sing live on the air.

As Eddie wrote in the liner notes to Relic CD #7019, “We sold a lot of Chessmen singles at the Relic Rack and at Times Square right over the counter. Fans of the soul groups and of the Motown sound who weren’t always tuned on to oldies even like the Chessmen.”

When Relic started issuing “Best of Acappella” vinyl albums, Chessmen cuts were included. Volume 1 contained “Heavenly Father,” “All Nite Long,” “Two Kinds of People,” and “For All We Know.” “Best of Acappella” Volume 2 and 5 contained additional Chessmen sides and a third single,



The Chessmen: from left, Arthur Crank, Tommy Reyes, Ted Ziffer, Willie Ramirez, James Myers.

“Stars Fall” b/w “That’s My Desire” (Relic #1017) was released.

Meanwhile, the Chessmen were making more public appearances. They opened for Len Barry at the famous Cafe Wha? music club in Greenwich Village. Barry had just recorded his hit song, “1-2-3.” “We sang at a place out in Amityville, Long Island, in Brooklyn, in The Hell’s Kitchen, and in Bayonne, New Jersey.” said Ted. “It was amazing. Once we started singing, the world opened up for us.”

The Chessmen were back in the recording studio in 1965 to record more songs in a four-hour session. This time, Ted recalled the studio being in Harrison, New Jersey, most likely at Joe Flis’ small studio (former home of Milo and Cool Records). Wayne Stierle was brought in to produce the session. At least 8 songs were recorded including “Don’t Have To Shop Around,” “When We’re So In Love,” “You Know My Heart Is Yours,” “Love Is What The World Is Made Of,” “There Goes My Baby,” “Dance Gypsy,” “Sandy,” and “I’m The One Love Forgot.”

Twenty Chessmen songs were combined in a Relic label (#106) vinyl album called “Acappella Showcase Presents by Popular Demand, The Chessmen.” The album was one of the first by an acappella group.

One of the most memorable shows the Chessmen did was a huge acappella contest in Hackensack. In 1966, concert promoter named Ron Luciano began doing acappella shows on Tuesday nights at the Fox Theater in Hackensack, New Jersey. Acappella was hot then and there was no shortage of performing acappella groups. Several such contests were held prior to the Tuesday evening, May 10, show. The Chessmen were invited

ACAPPELLA SHOW
THE CHESSMEN - THE NOTATIONS
THE VALIDS - THE DEL CHORDS
JOEL and THE CONCHORDS
 THE FIVE SHARKS - M.C. RON LUCIANO
 AND MANY SURPRISE GROUPS

GO-GO Girls **GO-GO Girls**

FOX THEATER 303 Main Street
 Hackensack, N. J.

TUES. NITE - MAY 10th
 SHOW STARTS 8:00

EVERYBODY WELCOME DONATION, \$2.00

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT: FOX BOX OFFICE
 Relic Rack, 136 Main Street, Hackensack, N. J.
 Times Square Records, New York City
 Park Records, 490 Park Place, Newark, N. J.

For men only. Hackensack, N. J., or send \$2.00 for each
 ticket to: Ron Luc. 3 Woodside Avenue, Hasbrouck Heights, N. J.

A RON LUCIANO PRODUCTION

to headline the contest that also featured the Notations, Valids, Del Chords, Joel Katz & the Conchords, the Five Sharks and others.

“We were the headliners and our name was first on the marquee,” recalled Ted. “I remember Dicky Harmon was there with the Notations and I thought he was a fabulous singer. They saved us for last. We tore the place up and won the contest. After the concert we went across the street to the Relic Rack and Eddie said, “Your prize for winning is you each can pick any album in the store. I believe I picked ‘Lee Andrews and The Hearts Greatest Hits.’”

The Chessmen tried auditioning for major record labels. At United Artists, they were told they were too late, as the label already had the Jive Five and Little Anthony & the Imperials. Other labels told them they were the embodiment of every oldies group and were just ten years too late.

By late 1966, the enthusiasm for acappella had slowed down. A lot of the young men who were singing and following acappella were getting drafted and heading to Viet Nam. In 1966, Ted was drafted and went into the service. Shortly thereafter, James was drafted. The Chessmen broke up. Arthur started singing with a new group handled by two arrangers who rehearsed them at a studio in the Ed Sullivan Theatre building.

“When I came home on leave, I went to hear Arthur singing at the studio,” recalled Ted. “Their new arrangers had written some really slick songs for them. They sounded like songs that would have come from Motown. I was really depressed because I felt Art’s new group was going to be famous without me.” It turned out, the arrangers were just using the group to cut demos to peddle their songs.



The Chessmen, ca. 1980s at UGHA. From left, James Myers, Bayo Pesante, Manny Giz, Richie ???, Arthur Crank.



The Chessmen. From left, top: Arthur Crank, Willie Ramirez, Ted Ziffer, bottom: James Myers, Tommy Reyes

Ted Ziffer got out of the Service in 1969, a little ahead of James Myers. They tried to put the Chessmen back together but without much success. In 1970, Ted moved to New Jersey where he sang with a rock group for four years. After an absence of singing for ten years, Ted got back into vocal harmony singing in 1984 with the Allures and after moving to the Philadelphia area, with 45 RPM, Relative By Appointment, and Nostalgia 5.

The Chessmen were inactive until 1974, when James Myers put together a new Chessmen including himself, Manny Giz, Richard Ferer, Tommy Grazione and former early Chessmen bass singer, Bayo Pesante. Bayo soon left the group to join the Endings and Arthur Crank rejoined the Chessmen. That Chessmen group performed at the Audubon Ballroom and at the Rhythm & Blues Society in Greenwich, Connecticut. After that group broke up, Manny Giz later sang with the Delmonicos.

In 1981, Robbie Dupree, who’d earlier scored a hit record with “Steal Away,” recorded an acappella version of the Chessmen’s “All Nite Long” on his “Street Corner Heroes” album. No one knows where he first heard the song.

In 1985, James Myers came to Joel Katz’ Broadway South Studio and said he wanted to record again. Joel put together a group to back him that included Bobby Leszczak and Tommy Vitale of the Infernos. Joel sang first tenor and Bobby sang second tenor, Tommy sang bass and James overdubbed the baritone. They cut two songs, the Five Stairsteps’ “World of Fantasy” and “Stardust.” Ronnie I issued “World Of Fantasy” in 1994 as a



The Chessmen, 2006. From left, Willie Ramirez, Red Ziffer, James Myers, Arthur Crank. Missing from the photo is James Curci.

45 on his Clifton label. “Stardust” wouldn’t come out until 1998 on the CD “Ronnie I’s Lost Tapes.”

During the mid-1980s, James Myers and Arthur Crank assembled a new Chessmen group to sing at UGHA. Also in the group were Bayo Pesante, Manny Giz and and a fellow remembered only as Richie. The group wasn’t together for long, as the acappella group, the Valentinos heard James sing and recruited him for their group. James sang with the Valentinos for the next 20 years and appeared on their second Clifton label album. Bayo Pesante also sang with the Valentinos for a time.

In 2006, forty years after the original group broke up, the Chessmen reunited in the studio after one rehearsal to redo some of their material. Arthur Crank and Willie Ramirez flew in from Texas and James Myers came down from New York. The four remaining Chessmen started rehearsing and within a half hour it sounded like the old times. At 4 Star Recording Studios they recut some of their old sides and some new ones. James Curci from Ted’s group, 45 RPM, filled on baritone for the missing Tommy Reyes. Some of the sides are now on Ted Ziffer’s YouTube page.

In 2022, Ted Ziffer’s group, Nostalgia 5 sang at Lead East in Parsippany, NJ. Tony Oetjen produced the acappella concert there and invited James Myers. Myers led the group in an acappella rendition of the Chessmen’s “All Night Long.”

Where are they now?

Ted Ziffer resides in the Philadelphia area and continues to sing with the vocal groups, Nostalgia 5, 45 RPM and Relatives By Appointment. James Myers lives in North Carolina and Arthur Crank lives in Texas. Neither sing with vocal groups now. The other members are either deceased or their whereabouts unknown.

Notes & Acknowledgements

- Based on the authors’ interviews with Ted Ziffer, Arthur Crank and James Myers
- All photos courtesy of Ted Ziffer.
- Special thanks to Val Shively, Srevie Dunham and Donn Fileti for their input.
- Captain, The, “The Chessmen,” *Time Barrier Express*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (1975), pp. 10 - 11.
- Gries, Edward, “Liner Notes,” Relic CD 7019, (1991)

Chessmen Discography

45 RPM Singles

- Relic 1015 - I Apologize / Dance
- Relic 1016 - Heavenly Father / Ways Of Romance
- Relic 1017 - Stars Fall / That’s My Desire
- Relic 1020 - Don’t Have To Shop Around / Love Is What The World Is Made Of

Vinyl LP’s

- Relic LP 106 - Acappella Showcase: The Chessmen
 - There Goes My Baby
 - Ways Of Romance
 - I’ve Been Good To You
 - All Nite Long
 - Dance
 - Don’t Have To Shop Around
 - My Desire
 - I Want To Dance
 - Flowers On The Wall (Splat) Part 1
 - You Know My Heart Is Yours
 - Love Is What The World Is Made Of
 - Stars Fall
 - For All We Know
 - Dance Gypsy
 - A Tear Fell From My Eyes
 - When We Were So In Love
 - Is Everybody Happy?
 - I Apologize
 - Flowers On The Wall (Splat) Part 2
 - The One Love Forgot
- Relic LP 101 - Best of Acappella
 - Heavenly Father
 - All Nite Long
 - Two Kinds of People
 - For All We Know
- Relic LP 102 - Best of Acappella Volume 2
 - I Want To Dance
 - Let Me Come Back
 - A Teardrop
 - Sentimental Reasons
 - Is Everybody Happy?
- Relic LP 105 - Best of Acappella Volume 5
 - Ooh Baby Baby
 - Danny Boy

CDs

- Relic 7019 The Chessmen: All Night Long
Contains 22 cuts, all previously on vinyl except “Sandy.”

Collecting the Chessmen 45s

We believe all four of the Chessmen 45’s were issued first on gold label Relic Gold Series. Relic #1015, 1016 and 1017 were pressed in black vinyl with a very few on blue vinyl. #1020 was pressed in black vinyl with very few on red vinyl. Red label copies of the 45s seem to be second presses.