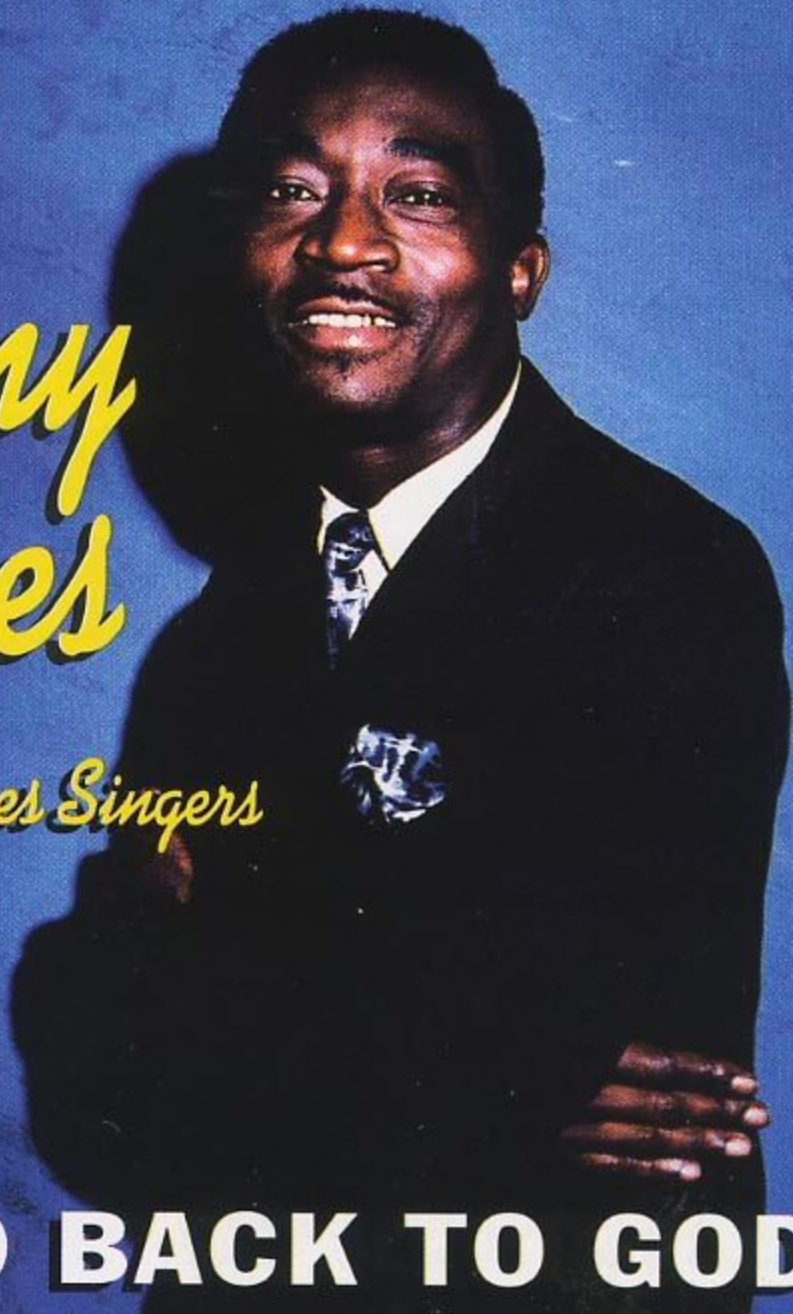


*Little
Johnny
Jones*

& The Johnny Jones Singers



LET'S GO BACK TO GOD

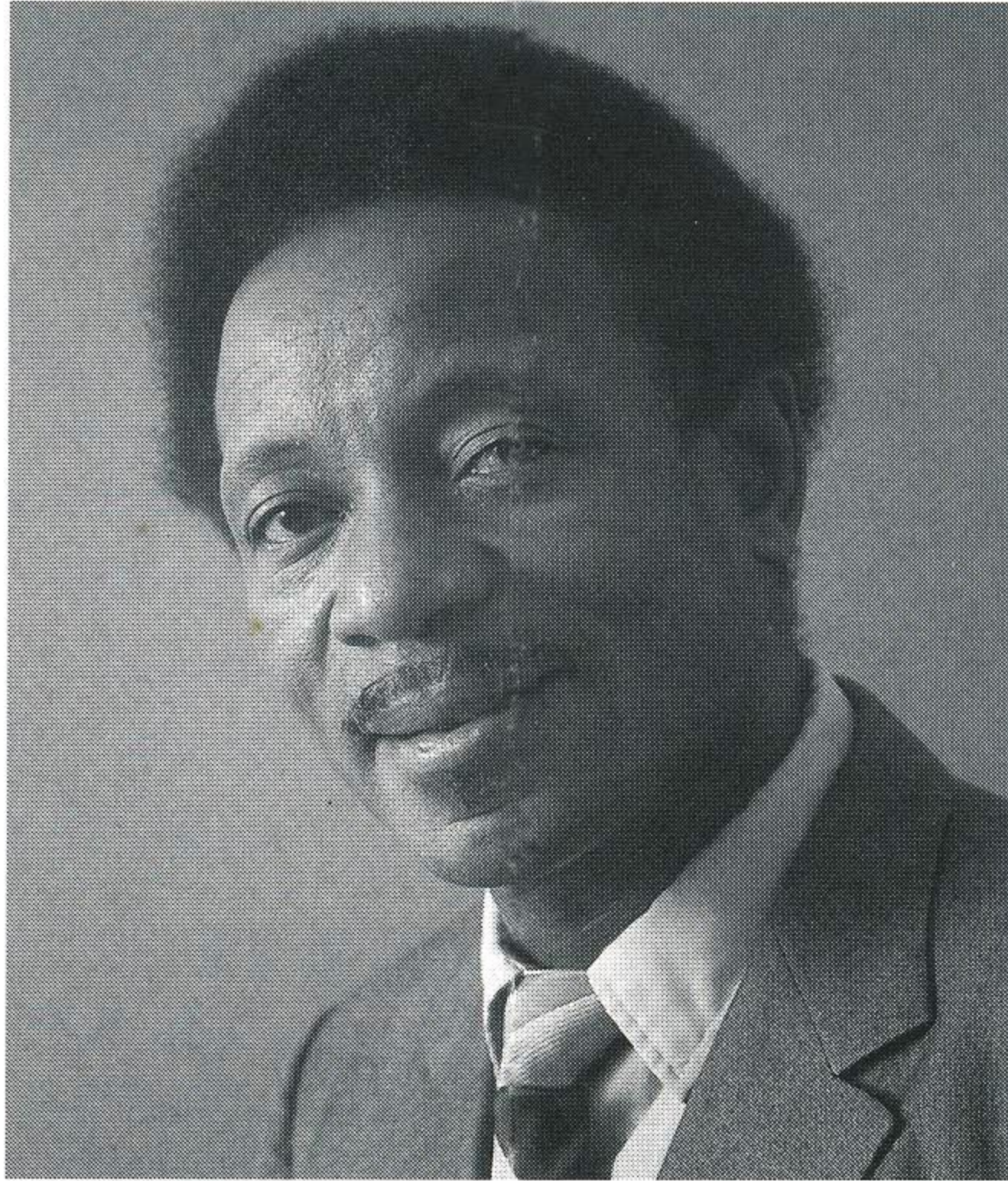
Little Johnny Jones & The Johnny Jones Singers

Little Johnny Jones' sweeping, high tenor melismas and uniquely personalized ornaments have never been matched by anyone, anywhere. Researcher Tony Heilbut describes Jones as possessing an extraordinary falsetto, probably the best in quartet since the Rev. Claude Jeter. Apart from his skills as a beautiful top tenor soloist, Jones is an artist in the true jazz vocal tradition. He can ad-lib endlessly on a single phrase. Jones likes to sing melody and not pop off into histrionics. "I'm not a hard singer, and never liked the screaming that much," states Jones.

Little Johnny Jones was born close to the Savannah River, among poor folk in Augusta, Georgia, on December 8, 1930. His father, the Rev. Benny Jones, was a holiness preacher who conducted sermons at the Watts Chapel Church. "My daddy would take me to church when I was six or seven years old and had me sing to kind of warm things up, and then he'd preach a little bit and get me to sing again. Every Sunday we'd work together, switching back and forth like that." In 1944, Jones got together with a bunch of local kids named The Daggerts (Jones has long forgotten how they used to spell their name). Bill, Joe, Richard and Willie James Daggert together with Jones formed a quartet variously known as The Daggert Brothers Quartet or The Daggert Boys. The Daggerts were invited to sing at church functions around the country and made quite a reputation for themselves.

Two years later, Jones was singing second lead with Andrew Johnson And The Southern Six out of South Carolina. Jones remembers the group as being made up of five singers plus a manager by the name of Cannon. The group's history on wax started in 1955 in L.A. when they recorded two singles for John Dolphin on his Hollywood label. Little seems to be known about the outfit from then on until they popped up again in 1963 on the Pitch label. It was probably while the group toured the Carolinas that Jones made an indelible impression on Barney L. Parks, manager of Mdme. Edna Gallmon Cooke and her touring backup group The Singing Sons who later evolved into The Florida Robins. (See "The Greatest Recording Of Mdme. Edna Gallmon Cooke," Nashboro CD/CS 4008 for further details on The Singing Sons.)

When Jones sang in The Singing Sons he was often called forward to sing one of his best rendered compositions, "God Will Bring Things Out Alright," a song he later re-recorded with The Swanee Quintet in 1966. Jones remembers Johnny Peoples being in the group at the time. Peoples went on to sing lead in The Brooklyn Skyways on Rae Cox and Peacock Records in Houston during the '60s. Jones had no problem singing the devil's music. It never bothered him to be singing for the Lord on Sunday and for the godless horde on Monday. Jones had befriended bass and baritone singer Bill Pinkney and guitarist Jimmy Oliver, both members of The Drifters. When Clyde McPhatter quit The Drifters to go out as a solo, he was temporarily replaced by Little David Baughn who quit The Checkers on King (remembered for their standout classic "House With No Windows") to go with the group.



The Drifters' manager, George Treadwell, was tiring of Baughn's constant bouts with the bottle and was looking for a more stable replacement. Between the ouster of Baughn and the hiring of Johnny Moore as a permanent replacement in the fall of 1955, Jones sang off-record with The Drifters. Upon Jones' return to home turf in early 1956, Rev. Ruben Willingham, lead singer of The Swanee Quintet introduced Jones as the group's second lead. The Swanee Quintet often toured and shared programs with Sam Cooke & The Soul Stirrers. Sam at this point was musing with the idea of crossing over into R&B and quitting gospel for more lucrative pastures for good.

"Sam and I became very close friends. He taught me how to carry myself and gave me a lot of advice about singing.

He would strum out a few chords on the guitar, and we would sing together. He was the first to appreciate that I was not trying to sing like him but had my own style. When Sam left The Soul Stirrers and Johnny Taylor was making ready to come in the group, I filled in for a while. Johnny Taylor was very nervous and it took him a long time to get up there and sing in front of a lot of people in Sam's place. But I didn't stay with The Soul Stirrers too long. It was too cold in Chicago during the winter, and I couldn't take it, so I quit and went home to Georgia. When I arrived in Augusta, all the radio stations announced my return. I realized I had a lot of fans back there and they were glad to see me back."

Jones rejoined The Swanee Quintet and sang off and on with the group until 1968. Jones cut approximately 21 singles and fifteen albums with The Swanees up until the time he was replaced by Clarence Murry. (See "The Best Of The Swanee Quintet, Nashboro CD/CS 4503 for further history on the group.)

Controversy surrounds the song "Only Right Will Win," recorded in 1965 and ascribed to The Gospel Keynotes. Willie Neal Johnson, lead singer for The Keynotes, asserts that Ralph

McGee sang lead on the tune, yet the unmistakable melismas and virtually one-of-a-kind phrasings are without a doubt those of Little Johnny Jones. In 1968, at age thirty-eight, Jones took a serious look at becoming a solo R&B item. Harlem music biz legend Bobby Robinson, who had been a fan of Jones with The Swanee Quintet for many years, took the cross-over singer into his studio to record Pee Wee King's 1949 chestnut "Tennessee Waltz," which was coupled with a cheery soul bouncer Jones had written himself entitled "I Find No Fault (In My Baby's Love)". Both

songs were issued on Robinson's Fury imprint. "Tennessee Waltz" made a lot of noise on the East Coast in July of 1968 and even dented the lower end of Billboard's R&B charts.

As was usually the case, Jones never saw a red cent in royalty payments. However, Fury Records folded shortly thereafter and Jones returned to Augusta where, to please his many legions of fans, he formed his own gospel outfit, The Johnny Jones Singers. Meanwhile, Jones worked off and on as a brick mason at Babcock & Wilcox while rehearsing the group. The Johnny Jones Singers were the Mimms brothers Augustus (Gus), Dennis and Johnny. (Incidentally, they are in no way related to soul artist Garnett Mimms.) Jones and his group cut a handful of singles and three albums for Creed Records, an affiliate of Nashboro, over the course of as many years. Little Johnny Jones' peerlessly pure falsetto scrolls and note-twisting melismas can be enjoyed on all three of these prime collections, "He Walks With Me" (Creed LP 3013), "Let's Go Back To God" (Creed LP 3018), and "A Long Way From Home" (Creed LP 3025).

When members of The Swanee Quintet passed away over the course of time, the Mimms brothers took their place, thus splitting up The Johnny Jones Singers. Today's Swanee Quintet is made up of the one single surviving original member, James "Big Red" Anderson plus Augustus and Johnny Mimms who double on guitar and bass, Percy Griffin, lead tenor, and sharing lead chores when the spirit takes him, the untouchable Johnny Jones.

—Opal Louis Nations - November 1995

Executive Producers

**Patti Drosins
and Rob Santos**

Original Sessions produced by
Shannon Williams

Art Direction/Design by
Mitchell Kanner

All Photos Courtesy of
AVI Archives

Compilation &
liner notes by
Opal Louis Nations

Mastered by
Walter DeVenne

Project Assistants
**Drew Jessel
and Stephanie Press**