CAVA-TONE

RECORDING

ACMCD4037

BOB GEDDINS' CAVA-TONE RECORDS STORY

Bob Geddins' Cava-Tone Records Story 1946-49

1 **Lowell Fulson Prison Bound**
(Cava-Tone 100)
(Leroy Carr)
Copyright Control Ⓟ 1946

2 **Lowell Fulson My Baby Left Me**
(Cava-Tone 100)
(Robert Geddins)
BMG Music Publishing Ltd Ⓟ 1946

3 **Bob Geddins' Cavaliers with Jimmy Wilson Nobody's Business**
(Cava-Tone 101)
(Porter Grainger - Everett Robbins)
EMI Music Publishing Ltd Ⓟ 1947

4 **Bob Geddins' Cavaliers with Jimmy Wilson Ghost Riders**
(Cava-Tone 101)
(Stan Jones)
Memory Lane Music Ltd Ⓟ 1948

5 **Jimmy McCracklin Bad Luck And Trouble**
(Cava-Tone 130)
(Jimmy McCracklin)
Bug Music Ltd (GB) Ⓟ 1948

6 **Jimmy McCracklin Railroad Blues**
(Cava-Tone 130)
(Jimmy McCracklin)
Bug Music Ltd (GB) Ⓟ 1948

7 **Ulysses James Poor Boy**
(Cava-Tone 250)
(Dorothy Hawkins - Jules Taub)
Universal Music Publishing MGB Ⓟ 1948

8 **Lowell Fulson Stormin' And Rainin'**
(Cava-Tone 250)
(Lowell Fulson)
EMI United Partnership Ltd Ⓟ 1948

9 **Jimmy McCracklin Jimmy's Blues**
(Cava-Tone 251)
(Jimmy McCracklin)
Bug Music Ltd Ⓟ 1948

10 **Emery Franklin Lonesome Blues**
(Cava-Tone 251)
(Emery Franklin)
Copyright Control Ⓟ 1948

11 **Jimmy Wilson with "Scatman" Crothers It's A Sin To Tell A Lie**
(Cava-Tone 252)
(Billy Mayhew)
Francis Day & Hunter Ltd Ⓟ 1949

12 **Jimmy Wilson Mistake In Life**
(Cava-Tone 252)
(Roosevelt Sykes)
MCA Music Ltd Ⓟ 1949

13 **Roy Hawkins & The Hawk's Men Ain't No Fault Of Mine**
(Cava-Tone 253)
(Roy Hawkins)
Copyright Control Ⓟ 1949

14 **Roy Hawkins & The Hawk's Men They Raided The Joint**
(Cava-Tone 253)
(Dan Burley - Louis Jordan)
Universal/MCA Music Ltd Ⓟ 1949

15 **Saunders King September Song**
(Cava-Tone 254)
(Kurt Weill - Maxwell Anderson)
Warner/Chappell North America Ⓟ 1949

16 **Saunders King Nobody Wants Me**
(Cava-Tone 254)
(Saunders King)
Copyright Control Ⓟ 1949

17 **Saunders King When Your Lover Has Gone**
(Cava-Tone 255)
(Einar Swan)
Francis Day & Hunter Ltd Ⓟ 1949

18 **Saunders King Big Fat Butterfly**
(Cava-Tone 255)
(Skeets Tolbert - Johnny Alston)
Universal Music Corp Ⓟ 1949

19 **Rising Star Gospel Singers Brother Moses**
(Cava-Tone 256)
(Traditional)
Public Domain Ⓟ 1949

20 **Rising Star Gospel Singers While The Blood Is Running Warm In Your Veins**
(Cava-Tone 256)
(Traditional)
Public Domain Ⓟ 1949

21 **Rising Star Gospel Singers I Trust In God**
(Cava-Tone 257)
(Kenneth Morris)
Unichappell Music Inc Ⓟ 1949

22 **Rising Star Gospel Singers Telephone Line**
(Cava-Tone 257)
(Unidentified)
Copyright Control Ⓟ 1949

23 **West Side Trio So Tired I Could Cry**
(Cava-Tone 102)
(W.S. Stevenson)
Acuff-Rose Music Ltd Ⓟ 1947

24 **West Side Trio West Side Jump**
(Cava-Tone 102)
(Sherman Louis - Elbridge Vann - Lafayatte Thomas)
Copyright Control Ⓟ 1947

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Bob Geddins departed this life on February 16th, 1991. It was during Grammy nomination week when two local Oakland artists were fortunate enough to win awards. The papers gave full notice to the event, but scant mention of the fact that Robert Lee Geddins Snr, the record producer and songwriter, who first put the city's black music on the national map over forty years ago, had passed. KGO-TV, a station that supported black music culture in the East Bay Area, committed to just a thirty second potted bio and the Oakland Tribune, the only paper to give Geddins a mention, thought not to print an obituary, just a paid-up funeral notice that stated simply "he originated the Oakland Blues."

The memorial notice at Oakland's Good Hope Baptist, at which the send-off service was given by Rev. Joe L. Smith, read that Robert Geddins Snr was born near Marlin, Texas on February 6th, 1913 to parents Johnnie Geddins and Azeline Douglas. He attended schools in Texas. He later met and married the late Irma Jean Dyer in Los Angeles on February 10th, 1938. The union bore eight sons and eight daughters (two deceased.) He then moved to Oakland where he started the B-Flat Music Company and became a successful blues writer. He left behind 44 grandchildren, 8 great grandchildren, his sons and daughters and numerous others.

Although Geddins was just an average singer and was not really that adept at the piano, he did indeed define the style that came to be known as the Oakland Blues. OK, so yes, the roots of the Oakland Blues can be defined as a folk music that borrowed heavily from the Texas and Louisiana styles that existed before it. But its laid-back character did convey the kind of easy lifestyle that prevailed in the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1940s and 1950s where under an ideal climate, there were jobs to be had for those who sought them. To this, Geddins in his songwriting added a doom-laden feeling, one which conveyed the kind of suffering and despair Geddins himself had experienced back in the cotton fields of Falls County, Texas.

So why did Geddins' passing draw scant notice? Was it because it had been more than a decade since he had retired from the record business, and that people tend to forget. Was it because of changing trends and lack of exposure to the music in schools and in the media, or was it the man himself, who had to put the needs of his large family before spending some serious time on making a permanent place for himself on the Bay Area's popular music scene?

Yet Geddins scored with five national best sellers. The first came in 1946 when Lowell Fulson hit with "Three O'Clock Blues" on Geddins' Down Town label. "Three O'Clock Blues" made it to No.6 on Billboard Magazine's "Most Played Juke Box Race Records" chart. Three years later, he hit pay dirt with Roy Hawkins who recorded "Why Do Everything Happen To Me." The song was originally recorded to be released on Cava-Tone but Geddins decided to lease it to Modern Records in Los Angeles where it was released in 1950. The song climbed to No.2 on both the Billboard "Juke Box" and "Best Sellers R&B" charts.

In 1953, Geddins issued Jimmy Wilson's "Tin Pan Alley" on his flagship Big Town imprint. It clambered up to No.10 on Billboard's "Most Played on Juke Box" chart. Both the Roy Hawkins and Jimmy Wilson charts were written by Geddins. He had to wait almost seven years before scoring again with Sugar Pie De Santo's "I Want To Know" on his freshly created Veltone label. "I Want To Know" climbed to No.4 on Billboard's "Hot R&B Sides" chart.

Last, but not least, Geddins made it big with Jimmy McCracklin's "Just Got To Know" a year later on yet another short-lived label, Art Tone. "Just Got To Know" peaked at No.3 on Billboard's R&B chart in October 1961. This gave McCracklin his second of three hits. You would think that with five major sellers under his belt, Geddins would have become a much sought-after R&B writer/producer and that major Indies like Chess and Atlantic would have come knocking at his door to have him work on a retainer for them.

The fact was that none of this happened. Geddins remained the little guy, on the wrong side of Hollywood, trying to make ends meet to keep hearth and home together. He found and promoted talent only to lose it to bigger fish because of his lack of funds. If Geddins could have been relied upon to cut a straight deal, a string of anxious wannabe investors would likely have cut a path to his door. Because he would make the exact same small deals with a number of people, sometimes at different times on the very same day, Geddins found himself in a tangle of financial problems brought about by the fact that deals were made with a handshake to satisfy his immediate problems with household debt.

Cava-Tone Records was set up some time in June 1946, not 1948 as stated elsewhere. Geddins used his artistic skills to design the label's logo which depicted a staff of music between a brace of chiming bells being rung by two saddled horsemen dressed as jockeys. Geddins, who enjoyed a day at the track, was perhaps celebrating the fact that he knew how to pick a winner, in more senses than one.

To kick off Cava-Tone, Geddins chose Lowell Fulson's plaintively mournful "(I'm) Prison Bound," a.k.a. "Doin' Time Blues" and the slightly more upbeat "My Baby Left Me," a.k.a. "Some Lonesome Day" or "Goodbye Goodbye" for the reverse. Fulson's only musical support here is his brother Martin on second guitar. Both songs are thought to be from his first Geddins' session of June 1946. "Prison Bound" later surfaced variously on Down Town, Colonial, RPM and Kent. "My Baby Left Me" also enjoyed re-release on the same labels, excluding Kent.

Lowell Fulson in 1982.

Fulson was born in Tulsa in 1921 and was raised by black Choctaw Indian parents. Although the Choctaw mainly inhabit southern states, they also dwell in Oklahoma where they quite often run their own affairs. This gave Fulson a measure of freedom not otherwise enjoyed by other blacks from the south. In his Southern California work we find a developing "full bodied" individuality that took in jazz and boogie and sometimes the more sophisticated smooth ballad. This was due in part to pianist/arranger/songwriter/talent scout Lloyd Glenn who joined Fulson as pianist around 1950. Ray Charles was extremely influenced by Fulson's early work. He even traveled with Fulson's road band in 1950 when Glenn did not want to travel or found

that his talent scouting duties for Jack Lauderdale got in the way. Not only did Ray Charles take on Glenn's piano playing duties, but he soon became Fulson's musical director.

In 1948 Geddins chose to release Fulson's slightly more distorted and stylized "Stormin' & Rainin'" which contains a few stock punctuations from out of the Lightning Hopkins songbook. Hopkins was waxing for Modern Records at the time. "Stormin' & Rainin'," also supported by Fulson's brother Martin, later wound up on Aladdin Records. The flip-side, "Poor Boy," was credited to whiz guitarist Ulysses (Ulyesseal) James with William Staples, tenor sax, Roy Hawkins, piano, Floyd Montgomery, bass, and Madison Little on drums.

Lafayette Thomas.

"Poor Boy," although in the Charles Brown mould, is a distinctively sweet blues with all the supper-club late-hours trimmings. Hawkins' piano tinkerings are particularly fine. James played guitar in Roy Hawkins' band and filled in with Jimmy Wilson before the great Lafayette Thomas came along. He preferred the session musician status as opposed to standing in the spotlight. James also played in support of Emery Franklin and Jimmy McCracklin on their Cava-Tone sides. He met with a fateful death in 1960 when he was shot on the bandstand by a girlfriend.

Although Bob Geddins' name appeared on the first record ascribed to him on Trilon in 1946, it is in fact his brother, Turner Willis who stood in the spotlight and sang on both the A and B sides, supported by the Pee Wee Crayton Trio. We had to wait until 1948 before we hear Bob Geddins' warbling almost inaudibly as ensemble vocalist with Bob Geddins Cavaliers on the haunting "Thinkin' and Thinkin'," (not featured in this collection)a nod to Chicago's Big Three Trio. Small singing and playing units, like Berkeley's Four Aces and Chicago's Big Three Trio with Willie Dixon, were all the rage during the Post-War period. They cost less to hire and could travel more economically than a larger aggregation. The Cavaliers were composed of Lafayette Thomas, guitar and vocals, Jimmy Wilson, tenor lead, B. Bostic, bass/bass vocals, G. Salter, baritone, Sherman Louis, piano, and Elbridge Vann, tenor sax. Sherman Louis, Elbridge Vann and Lafayette Thomas made up Sherman's Trio, the threesome on the flip with their rendition of the bopping "Jumping for Julia" (not featured in this collection). Elbridge Vann sang tenor in the Rising Star Gospel singers when Jimmy Wilson was with them.

Geddins must have had faith in the survival of the Cavaliers as he recorded three more releases on them, two of which surfaced on Cava-Tone. All three were later leased to Gilt Edge. The first of these was a send-up of Tommie Bradley's "Nobody's Business If I Do" with its savage lyrics centering on wife beating. The reverse, "Ghost Riders (In The Sky)", gave us a dutiful rendition of the Stan Jones song lead by B. Bostic.

The second release found the Cavaliers singing the beautiful "I'm (Just) A Stranger (Here)" backed with the trio's version of W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues." The Gilt Edge release gave us the Cavaliers singing "I'm So Tired I Could Cry" plus the Trio's "Boogie Boy Boogie." The Cavaliers were a fine vocal ensemble. They deserved wider exposure, however, Wilson (along with Vann) returned to the Rising Star Gospel Singers and Thomas to Jimmy McCracklin.

Bob Geddins did sing lead and play harmonium on a record ascribed to The Mystery Man in 1954 on his Rhythm label (see our Rhythm collection.) Assuming the part of a love-struck, jilted Italian lover, he recorded the humorous "Marie Blues" (Mar-rier) and the equally funny "Blues in Italy" (Loueggie Blues.) In fact, he recorded the songs twice using only the alternate titles ascribed in parenthesis in reissue. Geddins, who had been a close friend of comic Eddie "Rochester" Anderson back in 1942, appreciated the joys of a ready sense of humor.

Jimmy McCracklin

Jimmy McCracklin was born 4½ months after Fulson, on August 13, 1921 in Arkansas, not St. Louis (as many biographers have stated.) He was raised in St. Louis and entered the Navy in World War II, then settled in the Watts section of Los Angeles. As Jimmy Mackey, he worked as a professional boxer, and then retired after twenty-three bouts. In 1945 he took up with pianist Jimmy Nichols, a.k.a. J.D. Nicholson, although he only sang on his first three records for Globe, supported by Nicholson. He picked up more than a few pointers from Nicholson's piano style but continued to wait before sitting at the stool. After singing on one side of pianist David Blunston's blues release for Excelsior, he cut one record for W & W and J & M Fullbright. He moved from L.A. to Oakland and recorded two sessions for Geddins who ended up selling the masters to Rene La Marre at Trilon (See Acrobat ACTRCD 9011"The Trilon Records Story" for details.)

In 1948, McCracklin recorded a third session for Geddins' Cava-Tone label. Three songs ended up on the label, two of which later found their way to Aladdin. Cava-Tone 130

contained the doom-laden "Bad Luck and Trouble" plus the unhappy railroad worker opus "Railroad Blues" with its solemn Bob Kelton guitar break. "Jimmy's Blues" appeared on the topside of "Lonesome Blues" by Emery Franklin. "Jimmy's Blues" is yet another tear-stained, dragging blues punctuated by Kelton's lowdown, atmospheric tones. Little is known of vocalist Emery Franklin, except that his sulky "Lonesome Blues" is fringed with delightful jazz figures laid down by tenor saxman Charles Sutter.

Singer Jimmy Wilson, best known for his Big Town hit of July 1953, "Tin Pan Alley," was born in Houston in 1923. In league with Geddins, Wilson did much to develop the character of the East Bay blues. He started out singing in gospel groups around Houston, then moved to the Bay Area in 1946 and joined the Rising Star Gospel Singers, with whom he recorded as second lead off and on for Pacific, Trilon (whose sides were originally recorded for Geddins) and Cava-Tone. In 1949 he switched to blues and formed his "All Stars" which were of whoever session musicians were around in Geddins' studio at the time. These included Sherman Louis on piano, Lafayette Thomas on guitar and Elbridge Vann on tenor sax.

Jimmy Wilson's first secular session was for Cava-Tone. Four songs were recorded, two of which were issued on Cava-Tone. All four ended up on Aladdin. It seems that Geddins had set up a deal with the Mesner brothers at Aladdin, as many of the Cava-Tone masters wound up on the label. In 1949, Geddins issued the awesome "Mistake In Life," a powerful blues debut

for Wilson, with Thomas's striking T-Bone-inflected guitar and Wilson's pleading vocals.

The reverse, the plainly sung ballad "It's A Sin To Tell A Lie," was led by Scatman Crothers who enjoyed a long and interesting career. He is remembered for his lengthy acting career in films and on stage and T.V., but he had a second career in jazz, blues, R&B, rock & roll and popular music. He was born Benjamin Sherman Crothers in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1910. He began is career singing and drumming in roadhouses in the Mid West, then joined Montague's Kentucky Serenaders and toured the South's dancehalls and theaters. In 1943, he formed Scat Man's five-piece band and played Chicago clubs. He broadcast over W.I.N.D., performing bop to ballads and taking requests. He moved on to play drums for The Slim Gaillard Trio. His first recording was made for RCA Victor in 1948, "Chattanoogie Shoe Shine Boy." After a session for Capitol, he waxed the jumpin' "I Want To Rock & Roll" for Modern in 1948. After two more blues & rhythm sessions for Capitol he wound up on the one Cava-Tone side with Jimmy Wilson. He died November 22nd, 1986 from lung cancer.

Pianist Roy Hawkins was born in Texas on February 7th, 1904. At age forty-four he was discovered by Geddins at a nightclub in Oakland in 1948. His Cava-Tone band, the Hawk's Men, was made up of studio session regulars. These were William Staple, tenor sax, Ulysses James, guitar, Floyd Montgomery, bass, and Madison Little on drums. Little joined Hawkins in duet on the topside of his one Cava-Tone release of "Ain't No Fault But Mine," a jazzy jump in the Louis Jordan mould. The reverse, "They Raided The Joint," is a beautiful alley blues, in every way the match of Dallas Bartley's 1946 original. Hawkins continued to record for Geddins in San Francisco but leased his product to Jack Lauderdale at Down Town. He signed with Modern Records in late 1949.

Guitarist Saunders King, an exponent of the Charlie Christian school of fretboard, also enjoyed a long and distinguished career, being the first significant jazz and blues axeman on the Bay Area music scene. He was born Saunders Samuel King on March 13, 1909 in Staples, Louisiana. He is believed to have inherited Indian blood from his kin. He moved with his family to L.A. in 1915, after brief stays around Louisiana and Texas. His parents were ministers and their musical interests rubbed off on King. In 1923 the family moved to Sacramento, then back down to Oakland where Saunders' father was appointed ministerial head of the Sanctified Church on Seventh Street.

Saunders King

Saunders King first sang and played piano, banjo and ukulele for the church choir. He also enjoyed boxing and spent two years in the ring before switching permanently to music. In 1934 he auditioned for and won a place in NBC's Southern Harmony Four. King sang tenor for four years in the group. Their repertoire ran the gamut of popular race music, both American and Latin. The guitar styling of Charlie Christian much impressed King who dropped his violin lessons for the study of guitar. He made his debut (as did Jackie Kelso and Que Martin) with the Les Hite Orchestra in the late 1930s, shortly before moving to San Francisco and forming his first hot jazz combo with reed-man Bob Barfield and bassist Vernon Alley.

King cut his first recordings for Dave Rosenbaum's Rhythm label at The Sherman Clay Music Store in June 1942. Rosenbaum conducted at least eight sessions with King's rhythm units up to 1948. This writer believes that Geddins acquired King's masters from Rosenbaum

toward the end of the second AFM strike (which lasted from December 1947 to December 1948) that effectively banned all recording for most of that time. However we have no evidence to substantiate that. After the two Cava-Tone releases, Modern acquired King and signed him to a three-year contract. The first of the two King Cava-Tone releases gave us a pretty rendition of Kurt Weill's "September Song," sandwiched with a crooning, deep, bluesy reading of "Nobody Wants Me" (not the Helen Morgan song.) For the second platter, Geddins chose a remake of one of King's most requested happy-time jump songs, "Big Fat Butterfly," the tune that launched his recording career back in 1942. The topside gave us E.A. Swan's 1931 nugget "When Your Lover Has Gone," King's homage to Frank Sinatra. In all likelihood, King was supported by Cedric Haywood, piano, Vernon Alley, bass, and Bernard "Bunny" Peters on drums.

The Rising Star Gospel Singers were Geddins' first recording talent. Their initial session was conducted at Berkeley's KSJO studios during the spring of 1944 for Geddins' flagship Big Town label. Geddins launched Big Town in early 1945, only months before Cava-Tone. As with Cava-Tone, early Big Town releases, labeled in pale blue and navy, sported a hand-drawn logo of Oakland's supposed skyline. Some Cava-Tone releases were pressed with maroon labels upon which was laid a black script.

After recording for Big Town, Pacific and Trilon, the Rising Stars (billed as The Famous Rising Star Gospel Singers) cut one session for Cava-Tone. Four songs resulted, two of each were later reissued on both the Score (Imperial) and Hollywood labels. The first Cava-Tone release offered us the ethereal "Telephone Line," backed with Jimmy Wilson's exquisitely lead singing on the infectious "I'll Trust In God," sung slowly and in double tempo. For the second release, Geddins issued the boys singing "Brother Moses," a traditional rendering of a composite of various spirituals about Moses. The reverse featured a funereal rendition of the traditional "While The Blood Is Running Warm In Your Veins." This song also was lead by the soulful Jimmy Wilson.

Cava-Tone issued one record by the West Side Trio who were in fact The Sherman Trio composed of Sherman Louis, piano, Elbridge Vann, tenor sax, and Lafayette Thomas on guitar. Geddins dropped the Cava-Tone imprint in 1949 but continued to sporadically reissue Cava-Tone sides on 45 rpm single.

- Opal Louis Nations, June 2008

With assistance from Lee Hildebrand, Ray Topping, Victor Pearlin, Dan Kochakian and Scott Cokeley

Image credits

Photos: Lowell Fulson courtesy of Ellen Nations; Jimmy McCracklin courtesy of Howard DeWitt; Saunders King courtesy of Steve LaVoie; Bob Geddins courtesy of Pat Monaco; Lafayette Thomas courtesy of Living Blues Magazine

Vinyl singles courtesy of Opal Louis Nations
Jimmy McCracklin - Jimmy's Blues - Cava-Tone 251A
Rising Star Gospel Singers - While The Blood Is Running Warm In Your Veins - Cava-Tone 256A
Jimmy Wilson - Mistake In Life - Cava-Tone 252A
Bob Geddins Cavaliers - Nobody's Business - Cava-Tone 101B