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The DREAMERS

THEY SING LIKE ANGELS

THE STORY OF THE DREAMERS

In 1998 Darlene Love published her biography ("My Name Is Love") chronicling her musical involvement with the Playgirls, Crystals, Bob B Soxx and the Blue Jeans plus one of the nation's premier female back-up groups, the Blossoms. Of course, the Blossoms also cut sides under their own name for Capitol, Challenge, Reprise and a slew of other, less visible diskeries. In addition they recorded as the Playgirls, Crystals and the Blue Jeans, and also sang background vocals for artists that include Sam Cooke, Gene Autry, James Darren, Doris Day, Elvis Presley and Aretha Franklin, to name but a disparate few over the last forty-odd years.

The Blossoms' amazing and extensive history is pretty well documented. We have Jay Warner's concise monograph in his book "American Singing Groups, 1940-1990" but only recently have monographs been written about the Dreamers. John Clemente has written about them in "Girl Groups" and Steve Propes in his "LA Vocal Groups". The Dreamers were the former (and almost as impressive) Blossoms incarnation. This compilation covers records made by the the girls who made up the Dreamers, appearing both under their own and different group names. As the Modern Records group used the Dreamers name from time to time for other line-ups such as an all-male group, some related recordings have been included. These liner notes serve to tell the history of the group, circa 1954-1957, through the recollections of the four principal, long-standing and founding members: Gloria Jones, Fanita Barrett and twins Annette and Nannette Williams (maiden names).

Gloria Jones was born on 12 September 1938 in the city of Longview, east of Dallas, Texas. Her family moved out to the projects in Los Angeles in 1940. Jones' early musical experiences included singing in the Junior Choir of the Tabernacle Baptist Church on Hemlock Street and Central; she also often played the clown in church-related theatrical dramatisations. Her parents bought her a reel-to-reel tape recorder after a neighbour, Melba Jones (no relation), started coming over to play piano while she sang. "I was so jealous of Melba being able to play piano that I started taking piano lessons", says Jones. Gloria and Melba stuck pretty much to church music, especially as Melba's parents were staunch Christians.

Jones attended Edison Junior High where she befriended Fanita Barrett and Jewel Cobbs in the Glee Club class. The trio decided to form a vocal group and enlisted three girls Fanita had known and had heard sing Spanish songs as a trio at Russell Elementary School: Pat Howard; "Nana," or Nannette, Williams and her twin sister, Annette. Barrett says she would often sit in with the trio and back them. All six rehearsed for a while and began to get really close with their harmonies.

"Nannette was always the "proper" one", says Jones. "She enunciated her words and expected everyone else to do so even on parts of songs that didn't really come off that way. We loved singing together so much we sang on the public buses all the time. We would get on one end and sing 'till we got to the other. We got so wrapped up in our singing we wouldn't know to go home except to see how dark it was out the window." The group sang mainly spiritual songs as Cobbs and Howard came from families who disapproved of their daughters singing anything secular. This was to become a stumbling block that would hamper the Dreamers later on.

Annette and Nannette Williams were from Beeville, Texas, north of Corpus Christi in Bee County. As toddlers they were farmed out to their grandparents who worked on the Lazy "F" Ranch in Berclair, just north of Beeville. The ranch was owned by Steven Power Farrish, who was was related to screen actor Tyrone Power, and his family. An aunt of the twins cooked for the Farrish's. In his youth the former president George Bush visited and sampled the good food around the hunting season.

The Dreamers l-r: Annette, Nannette, Fanita, Gloria, Pat & Jewell with Johnny Otis
(courtesy Pat Howard & Jewell Cobbs)

As tots, the twins learned to harmonise quite naturally. They sang often and enjoyed it immensely. Soon the twins were asked to sing at ranch gatherings and this made them extremely popular around Berclair. The family did not have a strong church background, but Mrs Williams had high hopes for her twins in terms of getting them started in show biz. First she tried piano lessons, but that did not seem to work out. Then she tried tap dancing, which Annette seemed to take to quite naturally. Their teacher, Danny Alexander, was once a member of the Ken Murray Blackouts. Alexander put the twins with five tap dancing little fellows known as "Five Guys Named Moe" (after Louis Jordan's 1943 hit and subsequent stage play). All seven perfected a neat dance routine and were filmed by a TV talent show crew, the details of which have now been long forgotten. "All I remember", says Annette, "is that we were filming up to two or three in the morning". The twins next sang on a talent show held at the Self Realisation Church. "I'll always remember it", says Annette. "We sang 'Hawaiian War Chant' and I still can recall every word."

Fanita Barrett, originally from St Louis, Missouri, was born on 13 August 1938 to Ardentris and James A Barrett. She has two brothers, one currently residing in Hawaii, the other, Ron Barrett, once known as the Brown Beatle, became a drummer (more on him later.) Her father sang second tenor in the Smith Jubilee Singers who recorded for Sterling and Modern Records in the late 1940s. Gloria Jones remembers Fanita's father as a cool, smooth, handsome figure of a man. The Smith Jubilees, like the Dreamers who came after them, developed extremely precise, close harmonies.

The Barrett family lived at Thirty-Second and Central. Fanita briefly attended Wadsworth Elementary where she sang in a choir under a Mr Rhodes' direction, before moving over to Russell Elementary. She remembers singing 'Oh, Holy Night' at age ten with Jesse Belvin in front of the assembled congregation of the Baptist Church on Santa Barbara Street (now renamed Martin Luther King Junior Boulevard). "Jesse's mother directed the choir", says Barrett. The fledgling, then unnamed six-member vocal group moved on from Edison Junior High (where Barrett took a stab at drums and sang classical, popular and spiritual music under music teacher Mrs Smith) to Fremont High in 1953. At Fremont, Barrett encountered Mrs Abbott, a tough vocal coach who had her charges submit to rigorous fifteen-minute exercises each music period.

Barrett's brother Ron joined a male vocal trio called the Souvenirs. They were composed of Ron Barrett, tenor; Earl Jones, baritone and bass; and Don Julian, lead tenor and were coached by Cornell Gunter, the lead tenor in the Flairs. The Flairs were composed of Gunter; Thomas Fox, second tenor; Obediah "Young" Jessie, baritone; Richard Berry, bass; and first tenor Beverly Thompson - a key figure in the Dreamers saga. The Souvenirs, with additional personnel, went on to record as Don Julian & the Meadowlarks on RPM in 1954.

During the latter part of 1953 and early 1954, Jones, Howard, Cobbs, Barrett and the Williams twins entered talent shows fronted by KLAC's Gene Norman and KXLA's Art LaBoe. They also did some work for Huggy Boy for which they were never paid. "I'd like to

punch him out", says Jones adamantly. Jones remembers that it was Beverly Thompson of the Flairs who attended Fremont High and had heard them sing. He took the group to Richard Berry's house and introduced them to him. "Richard Berry heard us", says Jones, "and thought we sang like angels".

In an interview Richard Berry told Jim Dawson: "the Dreamers wanted to sing as a group but didn't really have a lead singer, so I started working with them, writing some songs, and I took them in to record with me. I was just leaving the Flairs and getting away to do my own thing." Berry's label insisted he did not need a group, but Berry always felt he came off best with one. "Richard Berry was a beautiful friend", says Jones. "He looked after us when we went out on the road and was like a mother to us. We used to share things with him that a daughter would only discuss with her parents", says Jones. "We owe so much to him." Preliminary rehearsals usually came about either at Berry's place or at the home of Eugene Church, as he had a piano. Church also worked out parts for the girls.

Through Dexter Tisby, tenor singer with the Penguins, the quintet was introduced to musician and composer Eddie Beal, who offered to coach and manage the group in place of Johnny Otis, who up to that point had promoted the girls by having them do regular guest spots on his KFOX radio show. Otis also found them a segment on his live gigs with the band and paid them each fifteen dollars a night.

By the autumn of 1954 the six-member group (through Berry's introduction) was signed to Flair, a Modern Records subsidiary who christened them "the Dreamers" as they sounded white. This is true in part as the girls both adored and emulated the McGuire Sisters on Coral Records. The Dreamers' first Richard Berry session was split with the Chimes, aka Flairs, Berry's outgoing male quartet with whom he recorded 'My Heart's Crying For You' and 'Love Me, Love

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RICHARD BERRY
and THE PHARAOHS
"YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE"
FLIP # 321 c/w
"LOUIE, LOUIE"

THE DREAMERS
"DO NOT FORGET"
FLIP # 319 c/w
"SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE"

THE SIX TEENS
"ONLY JIM"
FLIP # 320 c/w
"MY SPECIAL GUY"

JONATHAN CRAIG
with
THE COLBY-WOLF COMBO
"ROCK-A-BILLY GAL"
FLIP # 1001 c/w
"INSTRUMENTAL VERSION"

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Advertisement courtesy Galen Gart (ed) "First Pressings: The History Of Rhythm & Blues" (Vols 1-9) (Big Nickel, USA)

Me, Love Me'. The background singing on 'Love Me, Love Me, Love Me' (led by Shirley Gunter's brother, Cornell) sounds like the Dreamers and not the Chimes. After all Gunter was in the process of severing his ties with the Flairs at that time. The two songs credited to the Dreamers featuring Richard Berry's bass/baritone lead were the soulfully lilting 'At Last', a song first made popular by Arthur Prysock with the Buddy Johnson Orchestra in 1952, and the finger-

snapping 'Bye Bye (Baby)' with its tough sax break and Berry's "hamming" on the lyrics. As with all the Richard Berry and the Dreamers records, Berry worked out all the parts for all the singers separately by singing them all himself. Berry was able to hit high tenor down through bass. He would also work out arrangements on the piano, either alone or with the assistance of Maxwell Davis, who usually served as A&R man. The Dreamers were always paid scale, which amounted to $22.50 each per session.

After an appearance on the Johnny Otis Show at KFOX, the record began to make some local noise. This disturbed Bishop Cobbs, Jewell Cobbs' father, who instantly forbade his daughter to go out on the road to promote the devil's music. She was eventually pressurized into quitting the group. Then Pat Howard left for similar reasons, and so the Dreamers were reduced to four core members.

They continued to record, and their disc was announced in Billboard's September 1954 L.A. Confidential column as follows "New group, the Dreamers, have a solid deck with 'Bye Bye'. Tune has broken wide open in LA." October's LA Confidential then reviewed the first annual "Johnny Otis Hep Cat Ball at the Shrine Auditorium on West Jefferson Boulevard on October 2nd. Guest emcee/deejay Jackie Ford of San Francisco's KSAN flew down to host a galaxy of stars that included Chuck Higgins, the Medallions, the Platters, the

Penguins, Marvin & Johnny, plus Richard Berry & the Dreamers."

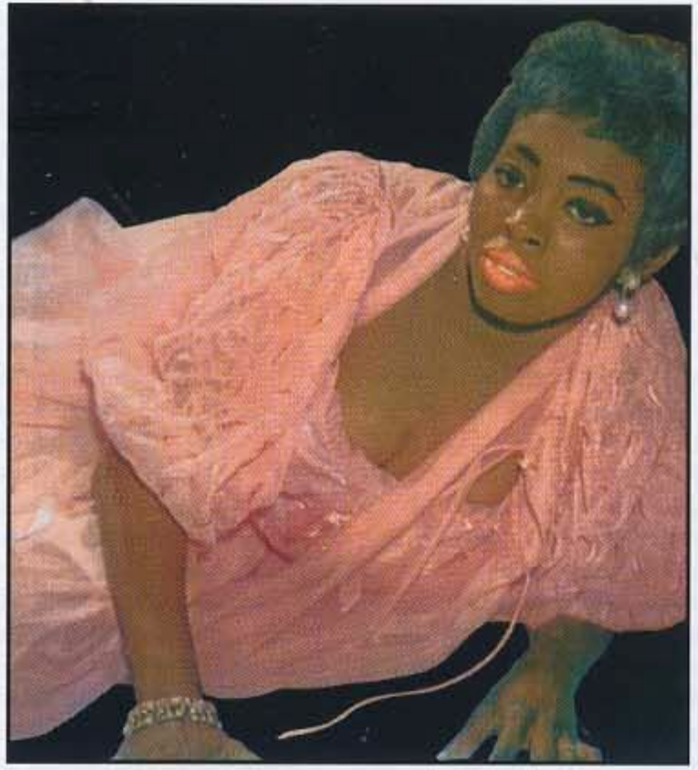
Gloria Jones tells how all the Dreamers fell in love with Johnny Otis' smooth, suave vocalist, Mel Williams, and how Williams, Berry and the Dreamers all hung out at her house for musical parties. To capitalise on the promising reception of their first release, Flair Records had Richard Berry and the Dreamers in for a second session in November. Out of this came the jumping 'Daddy Daddy' with Berry overdubbing the bass parts and Johnny Coleman of the 5 Hearts singing bass plus the requisite rapid-fire piano accompaniment. It was coupled with the bluesy ballad 'Baby Darling'. The Dreamers' chord-like background vocals on these discs certainly worked well as extra instrumentation but one wishes at times that Gloria Jones or Fanita Barrett (who both possessed outstanding voices) could have stepped forward now and again to take a chorus. Berry told Jim Dawson that he considered these sides his best work with the Dreamers.

Outside a handful of successful female quartets, girl groups were never fully understood as being able to cut it as well as their male contemporaries at that time. It took Motown Records to change all that. Billboard's February 1955 LA Confidential column mentions a "Rock & Roll Jamboree sponsored by Irving Granz on January 28 at the Shrine Auditorium. A throng of some 4,500 teenagers strong sat through a legion of star acts including Chuck Higgins, Joe Houston, the Dominoes, the Queens, the

Medallions, Richard Berry & the Dreamers, plus a slew of supporting talent. The proceedings were emceed by Hunter "Hunting with Hunter" Hancock of KFVD, Charles Trammell and Dick "Huggy Boy" Hugg of KRKD."

In July, Gloria Jones moonlighted on an Etta James session for the Bihari brothers' Modern imprint along with Ersel Anderson and Alma Jones. Jones and the girls cut 'Good Rockin' Daddy' backed with 'Crazy Feeling'.

Touring and promotion kept the Dreamers out of the studio, although it is probable that Johnny Otis had the girls record alongside Eloise Brooks and the Otis Band for the Mesner brothers' Aladdin label, resulting in the release of 'Charles My Darling'. One day in September 1955 Richard Berry and the Cadets/Jacks shared a session with Shirley Gunter and the Flairs that resulted in the hit release of Gunter's nonsense ditty 'Ipsy Opsie Ooh'. This session also produced Richard Berry and the Cadets/Jacks' single 'Jelly Roll' b/w 'Together', an angelic-sounding ballad with the group giving forth on a cascade of unusually complex vocal harmony patterns. On the single, 'Together', the artist was noted as Richard Berry & The



JENNELL HAWKINS (courtesy Peter Gibbon)

Dreamers because the record company thought this would loosen more wallets, but the other side is just credited to Richard Berry even though a vocal group is clearly present!

During this period, the Dreamers also cut two (or perhaps three) songs with Berry for an album released in 1963 entitled "Rock'n'Roll Hits Of The 50s." (Crown LP 5371). These were the wailing 'Good Love' and the poppy ballad 'Wait For Me'. Both were also released on an RPM single in November 1956. The album also included 'Please Tell Me', ascribed to the Dreamers but sounding more like a male aggregation. We have chosen to include the mislabelled, perhaps bogus, Dreamers cuts in this collection as we feel them to be sufficiently related.

The next mention of the Dreamers in the trades appeared in Billboard's November 1955 West Coastings column. "Hunter Hancock's second weekly TV stanza [variety show] reportedly all set to feature Oscar McLollie, Marvin &

Johnny and Richard Berry & The Dreamers." The Dreamers must have worked well for Hunter Hancock as a notice in the February 1956 Billboard attests. "Hunter Hancock and Dick Hugg will emcee shows for independent promoter Norman Granz, including the annual R & B Jubilee at the Shrine featuring B.B. King, Ernie Freeman, Paul Williams, Marie Knight, the Dreamers and others."

With the Flairs now working behind Shirley Gunter, and Richard Berry spending most of his time with his new group, the Pharaohs - composed of Goday Colbert, first tenor; Robert Harris, second tenor; and Noel Collins, baritone - the Dreamers were free to do a little moonlighting. Googie René, through Richard Berry, invited them to kick off his new 200 Class series in September 1956, billed as "the Rollettes" (Fanita Barrett, Gloria Jones, and Annette Williams), and they cut two records. The first release was 'Sad Fool', a pretty, lilting ballad in the 'Eddie My Love' idiom, first recorded by Johnny "Guitar" Watson on Federal Records in 1953. 'Sad Fool' was coupled with 'Wham Bam', a stomping piano instrumental with Googie René on keyboards. Why the record never sold in much greater numbers is a mystery. Gloria Jones told Steve Propes that Class Records president Leon Rene often came to her house to teach the group songs. The Rollettes' second waxing also emerged around September 1956. This was 'More Than You Realize' coupled with 'Kiss Me Benny'. The record's failure to ignite was probably due to poor promotion.

Back in March 1954, Richard Berry and Jennell Hawkins recorded 'This Time It's Real' and 'Each Step' for the Biharis at Modern Records. A little over two and a half years later, and three months before the Dreamers themselves signed with Max Freitag of Flip Records, Freitag issued the hauntingly beautiful 'Do Not Forget' backed with the equally pleasing 'Since You've Been Gone' with the label copy reading "The Dreamers" with no mention of Jennell Hawkins who sang the lead parts. This was put to rights when it was re-released as Flip 354 in 1961. Hawkins supposedly recorded with the Lockettes in 1958, as an ensemble member. The group included Hawkins, Ledoria Ann Knox, Belle Rhea Montgomery and Elaine Carol Brown.

Hawkins came into the spotlight again five years later with two charted records, 'Moments' and 'Money', on the Amazon label. Once with Flip, both Gloria Jones and/or Jennell Hawkins sang background vocals for Richard Berry and the Pharaohs. Jones added her voice into the mix on 'You Are My Sunshine', and 'Have Love Will Travel' and even claims to have been present on 'Louie Louie'. Hawkins plus the Pharaohs backed Richard Berry on his Flip release of 'The Mess Around' in 1958. None of the Dreamers were involved, and Hawkins herself does not remember any of the Lockettes being present on the session.

Just before leaving Flip, the Dreamers were alleged to have sung behind Richard Berry on 'Besame Mucho' and 'Do I, Do I, Do I'. None of the Dreamers I spoke with remember ever making this recording with Berry. My suspicion is that the Lockettes masqueraded as the Dreamers for this recording.

In September 1957 Eddie Beal took the Dreamers to Tom Morgan, A&R man for Capitol Records. Once signed to Capitol, the Dreamers recorded (with the brief return of the newly married Nannette Williams) as the Blossoms (Jones, alto; Barrett, soprano, Annette Williams, second tenor and Nannette Williams, alto) but they had to wait until May 1961 to enjoy their first sizable hit entitled 'Son-In-Law' on Challenge.

Nowadays Annette Williams is married, has had seven children (five now surviving) and is manager of an apartment complex in Los Angeles. She took a leave of absence from the Blossoms in 1963 when she was pregnant and Darlene Love was called in as her temporary replacement. Love describes the event in her autobiography "A girl I knew at the church [St Paul's Baptist], Dolores Ferguson, asked me to sing at her wedding. I didn't know that the wedding was also an audition. The bridal party included the Blossoms. As the girls walked down the aisle, they were also scouting me out. After the ceremony, I was introduced to the girls, who complimented me on my song. They invited me to audition at their manager's [Eddie Beal's] office."

Nannette Williams told me that when she had had her baby and was fixing to return to the group, the Blossoms took a vote as to whether to take Annette back or to stick with Love. Love won out by a show of hands - only Annette voted for her sister. Despite Annette's disappointment, she decided to stay with the Blossoms a short while. She married Al Lambert in 1988 after a whirlwind romance, which swept her off her feet. The couple has four children.

Fanita Barrett stayed with the Blossoms and made recordings with them for both Capitol and Challenge. She later joined Doris Jackson and the Shirelles, with whom she occasionally tours. Gloria Jones (after whom Richard Berry wrote the song 'Gloria', recorded by him with Arthur Lee Maye & the Crowns) also stayed with the Blossoms during the 1960s and later joined the Shirelles. However, she then quit show business, returned to college and earned a degree in social work. She now devotes her time to troubled children and has just opened a school to serve their special needs.
Every now and again the Dreamers get together at an oldies concert to relive the good old times when straight forward singing and close harmony was a joy and a soul-felt passion. Two years ago Jim Dawson got the Dreamers together (without Fanita Barrett) for a concert sponsored by the Southern California Doo Wop Society. They were very well received.

Opal Louis Nations
July 2001

With invaluable assistance from Gloria Jones, Fanita Barrett, Annette Williams, Nannette Williams, Jim Dawson and Steve Propes

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Steve Propes "LA Vocal Groups" (Big Nickel Press)

Thanks to John Clemente, Steve Propes and Patrick & Sarah Phelan for label scans and to Mick Patrick.

Other labels courtesy Peter Gibbon and Tony Rounce

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The DREAMERS

THEY SING LIKE ANGELS

1. DADDY DADDY (Richard Berry, Joe Josea) BMG Music Pub Ltd RICHARD BERRY & THE DREAMERS (1955)
2. BYE BYE (BABY) (Joe Josea) BMG Music Pub Ltd THE DREAMERS featuring RICHARD BERRY (1954)
3. JELLY ROLL (Richard Berry, Joe Josea) BMG Music Pub Ltd RICHARD BERRY (1955)
4. BABY DARLING (Richard Berry) BMG Music Pub Ltd RICHARD BERRY & THE DREAMERS (1955)
5. AT LAST (Mack Gordon, Harry Warren) EMI United Partnership Ltd THE DREAMERS featuring RICHARD BERRY (1954)
6. TOGETHER (Richard Berry, Joe Josea) Careers BMG Music Publishing Inc RICHARD BERRY & THE DREAMERS (1955)
7. GOOD LOVE (Richard Berry, Joe Josea) Careers BMG Music Publishing Inc RICHARD BERRY & THE DREAMERS (1956)
8. WAIT FOR ME (Richard Berry, Joe Josea) BMG Music Pub Ltd RICHARD BERRY & THE DREAMERS (1956)
9. PLEASE TELL ME (Richard Berry, Joe Josea) Modern Music Company RICHARD BERRY & THE DREAMERS (1963)
10. SAD FOOL (Johnny Watson, Mario Delagarde) Palan Music Publishing Ltd/Lark Music Ltd THE ROLLETTES (1956)
11. MORE THAN YOU REALIZE Copyright Control THE ROLLETTES (1957)
12. KISS ME BENNY Copyright Control THE ROLLETTES (1957) 13. DO NOT FORGET (Richard Berry) American Berry Music THE DREAMERS {later released as by Jennell Hawkins & The Dreamers} (1957)
14. SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE (Richard Berry) American Berry Music THE DREAMERS {later released as Jennell Hawkins & The Dreamers} (1957)
15. YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE (Jimmie Davis, Charles Mitchell) Peermusic (UK) Ltd RICHARD BERRY & THE PHARAOHS with GLORIA JONES (1957)
16. HAVE LOVE WILL TRAVEL (Richard Berry) American Berry Music RICHARD BERRY & THE PHARAOHS with GLORIA JONES (1959)
17. THE MESS AROUND (Richard Berry) American Berry Music JENNELL HAWKINS with RICHARD BERRY & THE LOCKETTES (1958)
18. BESAME MUCHO (Consuelo Velazquez, Sunny Skylar) Latin-American Music Publishiing Co Ltd RICHARD BERRY & THE PHAROAHS (1958)
19. DO I, DO I, DO I (Richard Berry) American Berry Music RICHARD BERRY & THE PHAROAHS (1958)
20. WHAM BAM [inst] (Rafael Rene) Rafael Music Publishers GOOGIE RENE & HIS WHAM BAMS (1956)

PERSONNEL

Tracks 1 & 4:
Richard Berry & The Dreamers: Richard Berry (lead) with Gloria Jones (tenor), Nannette Williams (tenor), Annette Williams (second tenor), Fanita Barrett, Jewell Cobb, Pat Howard and Johnny Coleman (bass) on 'Daddy Daddy'

Tracks 2 & 5:
Richard Berry & The Dreamers: Richard Berry (lead) with Gloria Jones (tenor), Nannette Williams (tenor), Annette Williams (second tenor), Fanita Barrett, and Pat Howard

Track 3:
Richard Berry probably with the Cadets/Jacks; Aaron Collins (tenor), Willie Davis (tenor), Ted Taylor (tenor), Lloyd McCraw (baritone), Will "Dub" Jones (bass)

Track 6:
Richard Berry & The Dreamers: Richard Berry (lead) with Gloria Jones (tenor), Nannette Williams (tenor), Annette Williams (second tenor), Fanita Barrett

Tracks 7 & 8:
Richard Berry & The Dreamers: Richard Berry (lead) with Gloria Jones (tenor), Nannette Williams (tenor), Annette Williams (second tenor) and Fanita Barrett, with possibly Johnny Coleman (bass)

Track 9:
Richard Berry probably with the Cadets/Jacks as in Track 3

Tracks 10-12:
The Rollettes: Gloria Jones (tenor), Annette Williams (second tenor) and Fanita Barrett

Tracks 13 & 14: Recorded 22 Feb 1957
Jennell Hawkins & The Dreamers: Gloria Jones (tenor), Nannette Williams (tenor), Annette Williams (second tenor) and Fanita Barrett, with Jennell Hawkins (lead)

Tracks 15 & 16: Recorded 16 March 1957 and 21 October 1959 respectively
Richard Berry & The Pharaohs with Gloria Jones: The Pharaohs: Goday Colbert (first tenor), Robert Harris (second tenor), Noel Collins (baritone), Richard Berry (lead & bass) with Gloria Jones (tenor)

Track 17: Recorded 7 July 1958
The Lockettes: Jennell Hawkins, Ann Knox and Elaine Brown, with Richard Berry (lead)

Tracks 18 & 19: Recorded 7 July 1958
Richard Berry & The Dreamers: Richard Berry (lead) with unknown female group - not the usual line-up [Gloria Jones (tenor), Nannette Williams (tenor), Annette Williams (second tenor) and Fanita Barrett] according to Gloria Jones. As these tracks were recorded on the same day as Track 17, it's quite possible that the line-up is the same.

Track 20:
The Rollettes with Googie Rene: Googie Rene (piano) with unknown instrumental group