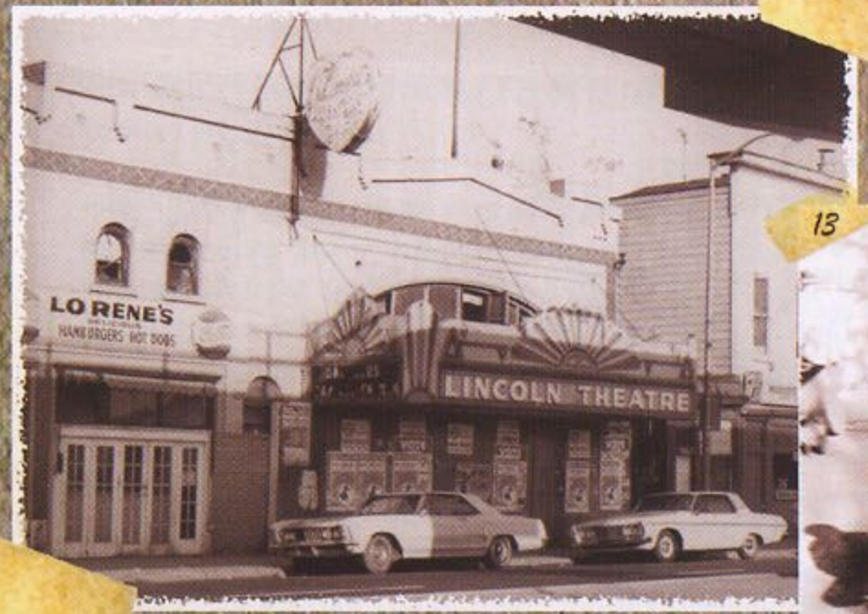

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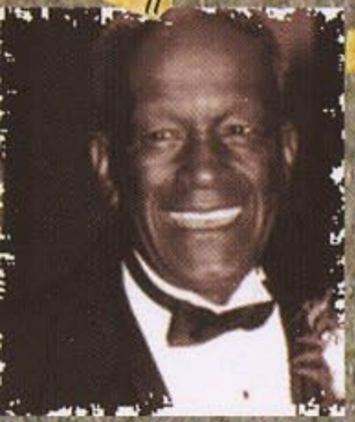

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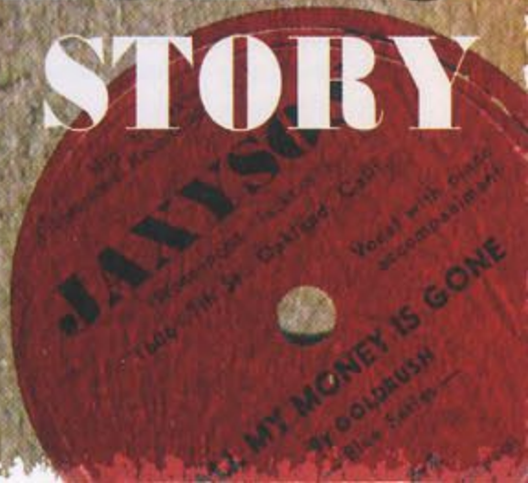
THE JAXYSON RECORDS STORY



1. Texas Blues (T.P. Railer) - Joseph Butler 1949
2. All My Money Is Gone - Goldrush (Jaxyson 6A) 1948
3. Lonesome Blues -Black Diamond (Jaxyson 50B) 1948
4. Hold That Train, Conductor - Goldrush 1948
5. From Bad To Worse (incomplete) - Johnny Fuller 1948
6. Goin' Back Down In Old Mobile - Unknown Artist 1948
7. Jaxyson's Scratch - Unknown Artist 1949
8. Weep Below, Children, (Weep No More) - Unknown Artist 1949
9. I'll Meet You in the Morning - Unknown Artist 1949
10. Stand By Me - Unknown Artist 1949
11. Hand Me Down My Silver Trumpet, Gabriel - Sister Rita 1948
12. Today - Rainbow Gospel Singers - 1949
13. On The Battlefield - Rainbow Gospel Singers 1949
14. Didn't It Rain - Charles White 1948
15. Stand By Me - Charles White (Jaxyson 5B) 1948
16. Say A Word - Unknown Artist 1949
17. Standing On Jordan - Unknown Artist 1949
18. Good Morning To Heaven - Gospel Trumpets (Jaxyson 159) 1949
19. Constantly Abiding - Gospel Trumpets (Jaxyson 159) 1949
20. How Long - Charlie White (Blind Street Singer) Jaxyson 23A) 1948
21. Well Done - Charlie White (Blind Street Singer) Jaxyson 41A) 1948
22. I Must Tell Jesus - Brother Johnny Fuller (Jaxyson 41B) 1948
23. What Could I Do - Rev.L.H.Narcisse (Jaxyson 105A) 1949
24. Singing In My Soul - Susan Bennett (Jaxyson 113A) 1949
25. I'm Going To Tell God - Rev.L.H.Narcisse (Jaxyson 122) 1949

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Like the Filmore and Tenderloin in San Francisco, Oakland's Seventh Street corridor was jumping during the better part of the 1940s, states Earl Watkins (long-standing jazz drummer and musician union executive) in a recent interview. Kaiser established its shipyards and, in support, munitions plants sprang up on both sides of the Bay. These industries recruited African Americans from the Southlands. On Seventh Street, continues Watkins, you had the Swing Club, Esther's Orbit Room, Club Villa and the swank suit-and-tie Slim Jenkins Place, a venue that brought in nationally recognized talent. Down the block you found John Singer's 49er Café and The Clef Club. Up on Eighth, the Elks and The North Pole (Colony Club).

Into this environment came Texas-born cotton-picker Bob Geddins who in 1942 after having fielded complaints saw the need to serve migrant workers who longed for good old down home Southern blues and gospel recordings. After scant training in welding at Kaiser and radio repair at night school, Geddins with help from L.A. friend Jack Gutshall and his stepfather built his first record manufacturing plant on Eighth and Center Streets. As well as creating his own product, Geddins started taking on small label operators such as Ollie Hunt at Olliet, Harry Leader at Trilon, A.B. Strong at Strong's and "Little" Jesse Jaxyson, who in 1948 set up the short-lived Jaxyson Record Company out of 1606 Seventh Street, adjacent to the Lincoln Theatre complex.

The Lincoln was built in 1919 by John Vaughn. First an amusement

company, then a black-serving vaudeville concert and movie venue, the Lincoln evolved into The Damascus Missionary Baptist Church in 1961. The diminutive Little Jesse C. Jaxyson (pronounced "Jackson") was born an only child on March 5, 1912 in Denver, Colorado. His mother Lulu was a skilled needlewoman and devout Baptist whose religion rubbed off on young Jesse. Lulu and Jesse moved to West Oakland during the 1930s. During his early years Jesse converted to Christian Science, becoming a member of The First Church of Religious Science on Clarewood Drive in Oakland. Following Mary Baker Eddy's somewhat Buddhist spiritual precepts, Jesse neither smoked, drank nor gave blood. He opted for a healthy diet, drank a regimen of fresh juice and when no longer able to drive rode around the streets of Oakland on his bicycle wearing a white hard-hat till well into his eighties. Jesse also became a conscientious objector and believed in diplomatic solutions as opposed to conflict.

In 1943 Jesse went to prison for three years for failing to enlist, an extremely courageous act at that time, particularly for an African American. Like Geddins, Jesse was clever with his hands and could fix anything mechanical. He was a "jack-of-all-trades." At his church Jesse became an accomplished keyboardist and played during worship service. Although described by some as cantankerous, others found him quite amusing with his witty quips and skill for one-liners. When asked after his health, he frequently responded "better than the weather.

He met Clarrissa Mayfield (Keil), a choir member at his church, and they married in 1948. Jesse and Clarrissa set up a radio repair shop at 1606 Seventh Street and Peralta which later evolved into an electrical repair business. His store is remembered by some as being a kind of "storage" space with ever-increasing mountains of audio equipment filling every square inch of space.

Out back he had a room converted into a makeshift recording studio. The purchase of portable recording equipment built for domestic use became a popular household luxury at the time. You could buy mikes, metal discs and portable recorders quite easily and at a reasonable cost. Jesse cut acetate-coated metal discs. He used Bob Geddins to master and press his recordings which in all likelihood were only available for sale over the counter of his repair shop. Later on he operated a side-line business in station wagon sound trucks which he used to promote local political candidates.

My sense is that Jesse learned a good deal about the independent record label business from Geddins who always sought to set up little business deals to pay off personal debt. Geddins certainly helped to supply artists, although walk-in-talent seems inevitable due to the store's location. Not long after setting up his studio Jesse started into the dry-cleaning business which he ran long after his recording operation ceased in 1951 or thereabouts. Jesse's fix-it man abilities led to a period where he taught college classes in TV and radio repair.

JAXYSON
RECORDING CO.
GOOD MORNING TO HEAVEN
THE GOSPEL TRUMPETS
DUODISC
DOWN ON MY KNEES
JAXYSON
RECORDING CO.
GOD'S WORD
NEW BETHEL ECHOES
155-B
DUODISC
JAXYSON
ALL MY MONEY IS G
JAXYSON
MY ETERNAL HOME
JAXYSON
5043
LONESOME BLUES
JAXYSON
RECORDING CO.
I HAVE TIME FOR JESUS
JEROME EVANS
155-A

Of the nine known Jaxyson releases, only two are blues. The same disproportion exists for the 17" "rescued" acetates which have an interesting history associated with them. A fellow by the name of Dan and a friend found them on a garbage dump in Martinez. The couple took the acetates to a swap-meet in Hayward where they were purchased by Dick Bass who had them remastered by Marc Ryan at his Bennett House Studios in North San Juan, Calif.

As you have probably already gathered, the degree of artistry on these recordings is superb, and it is with delight we come to offer these treasures on disc for the first time. Not only do we know next to nothing about many of the artists, we also sadly cannot confirm the exact number of Jaxyson releases and why the record numbering system makes no sense. For instance, the A-side of #32 was used for both Charles White's "Before this time another year" and for Brother Johnny Fuller's reading of "Poor pilgrim of sorrow."

The Jaxyson story is full of intriguing anomalies. Jesse's first release gives us Goldrush, a blues singer in the plaintive Texas tradition, sounding hauntingly similar to Mercy Dee without piano support. The flip, "T.P. Railer" (Texas & Pacific Railroad) by Black Diamond, is a lyric change of "Texas Blues" by Joseph Butler. Our third artist, the blind Charles White supported by Joseph Butler on guitar, is an interesting but unknown entity who had three songs etched on three releases, two with funnel and bucket accompaniment.

(Bro) Johnny Fuller was born in Edwards, Mississippi on April 20, 1929. His family moved to Vallejo in 1934. Inspired by his father, he taught himself country guitar by following an instruction book. He sang and played in local churches where he hooked up with The Golden West Quartet, formerly the Teenage Gospel Singers.

According to tenor singer Adell Lee, Fuller never gelled with the members in the group and was let go. He then cut his first side, the traditional "Poor pilgrim of sorrow," for Jaxyson in September 1948. On a second release he beautifully rendered Elisha A. Hoffman's "I must tell Jesus."

Rev. (a.k.a. Bishop) Louis H. Narcisse enjoyed two Jaxyson releases (three songs in all) and was probably the label's only respectable success, saleswise, due to Bay-wide popularity. Narcisse, a Creole, was born in Gretna, Louisiana on April 27, 1921. Steeping himself in Roman Catholic regalia and local voodooism, Narcisse moved to Vallejo in the late 1930s. During World War II he worked as a rigger before opening his first West Oakland storefront church. He sang baritone briefly in Oakland's Rising Star Gospel Singers but did not record with them.

"My eternal home," "Down on my knees" and "I'm going to tell God" are Narcisse's first 1949 waxings. Susan Bennett, the obscure artist on the underside of Narcisse's second release, warbles Dorsey's "Singing in my soul" in the muscular Sister Rosetta Tharpe tradition. Jaxyson 155 A/B –

New Bethel Echoes / Jerome Evans is not included here because of its inferior artistry.

Jesse's last known release was by San Francisco's Gospel Trumpets, a.k.a. the legendary Silver Trumpet Singers, who encountered few equally talented rivals in their time. Like the Soul Stirrers, the Trumpets set up a junior quartet, the Silver Trumpet Juniors. The two priceless songs included here, "Good morning to heaven" and the song made widely popular by Roscoe Robinson & the 5 Blind Boys of Mississippi in 1962 – "Constantly abiding" – constitute two of the finest Bay Area shout gospel performances on disc.

Jesse lived to the ripe old age of ninety-three and fathered three children. He died on October 20, 2005. A memorial service was held at the Colonial Chapel on High Street in Oakland attended by his two surviving daughters, Brenda and Barbara.

Opal Louis Nations

Thanks to Dick Bass for the use of his acetates and to Earl Watkins, Steve LaVoie at the History Room of The Oakland Library, Jesse's first wife Clarrissa Keil, and daughter Barbara Llarena