1. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • 100 Years From Today**
(Young/Washington/Young) EMI Partnership Ltd./Anglo-Pic Music Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 102

2. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • Come Back Home**
(Wilton) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 102

3. **OLLIE "YUL" McCLAY AND THE MONDELLOS • Happiness Street**
(McClay/Barksdale) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 105

4. **OLLIE "YUL" McCLAY AND THE MONDELLOS • Over The Rainbow**
(Arlen/Harburg) EMI United Partnership Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 105

5. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • Daylight Saving Time**
(McClay/Barksdale) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 106

6. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • That's What I Call Love**
(Wilton/Barksdale) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 106

7. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • Happiness Street**
(Wolfson/White) EMI Music Publishing Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 109

8. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • Hard To Please**
(Brown) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1957 Rhythm 109

9. **RUDY LAMBERT AND THE MONDELLOS • My Heart**
(McClay/Wilton) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Rhythm 114

10. **RUDY LAMBERT AND THE MONDELLOS • That's What I Call Love**
(Wilton/Barksdale) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Rhythm 114

11. **THE MONDELLOS • You'll Never Know**
(McClay/Wilton) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Matrix No. 1037.
Recorded 1958 - Unissued at time of recording

12. **THE TEMPOS • Promise Me**
(The Tempos) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Rhythm 121

13. **THE TEMPOS • Never Let Me Go**
(The Tempos) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Rhythm 121

14. **THE TEMPOS • To Love Again**
(The Tempos) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Matrix No. 1065.
Recorded 1958 - UNISSUED AT TIME OF RECORDING

15. **THE TEMPOS • Patricia**
(Prado) Latin American Music Publishing Co. © 1958 Matrix No. 1066.
Recorded 1958 - UNISSUED AT TIME OF RECORDING

16. **BOB JEFFRIES AND THE MARCELS • Take Me Back**
(Jeffries/Morris) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Matrix No. 1050.
Recorded 1958 - UNISSUED AT TIME OF RECORDING

17. **THE MARCELS • Betty Lou**
(Carleton) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Matrix No. 1051.
Recorded 1958 - UNISSUED AT TIME OF RECORDING

18. **THE LYRICS • Every Night**
(Wigfall) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1959 Rhythm 127

19. **THE LYRICS • Come Back Baby**
(The Lyrics) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1959 Rhythm 127

20. **THE SPINNERS • Marvella**
(The Spinners) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Rhythm 125

21. **THE SPINNERS • My Love And Your Love**
(Brice/Joseph) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1958 Rhythm 125

22. **BOB JEFFRIES • Never Let Me Go**
(Scott) MCA Music Ltd © 1957 Rhythm 110

23. **RUDY LAMBERT • A Sunday Kind Of Love**
(Belle/Leonard/Prima/Rhodes) Peter Maurice Music Co. Ltd. © 1959 Rhythm 128

24. **RUDY LAMBERT • That Old Feeling**
(Fain/Brown) EMI United Partnership Ltd./Redwood Music Ltd. © 1959 Rhythm 128

25. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • 100 Years From Today (Alt. take)**
(Young/Washington/Young) EMI United Partnership Ltd./ Anglo-Pic Music Co. Ltd. © 1957 Alternate take of Rhythm 102

26. **ALICE JEAN AND THE MONDELLOS • Come Back Home (Alt. take)**
(Wilton) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1957 Alternate take of Rhythm 102

27. **THE LYRICS • Every Night (Alt. take)**
(Wigfall) I.Q. Music Ltd. © 1959 Alternate take of Rhythm 127

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(Please be aware that the original Rhythm mastertapes were long ago lost or destroyed. We have therefore assembled this package from the best available vinyl sources - some of which fall well below the standards we would have liked. We must thank Victor Pearlin for providing some of the best sources you'll hear, and Walter Devenne for cleaning up and transferring these and many others throughout this set. Extra thanks also go to Denis B. for performing further audio heroics in the remastering of this set and its companion volume "Rhythm...And Blues! (WESA 815)

Thanks to Marty Arbunich and Rico Tee at Solid Smoke Records

THE DON BARKSDALE MASTERS • VOL ONE

Rhythm ...AND ROCK!

50s DOO-WOP AND ROCK 'N' ROLL FROM RHYTHM RECORDS OF SAN FRANCISCO

FEATURING
THE MONDELLOS
THE TEMPOS
ALICE JEAN
BOB JEFFRIES
AND MORE

The story of the resurrected Rhythm label starts with Big Don Barksdale, NBA basketball star, disc jockey, night club owner, entrepreneur, record executive and, later on in life, philanthropist. Barksdale's parents, Argee and Desiree Barksdale, migrated to South Berkeley, California from Durant, Atlanta County, Mississippi shortly after World War II. Don, their second child, was born in 1924. Barksdale grew up in an environment almost devoid of African Americans. Few blacks had yet migrated from Texas and Louisiana. Argee helped organize the first all-black Pullman Porter Union, and his son usually came along to the meetings. Barksdale spent his play-time hours in San Pablo Park, between Russell and Ward Streets in Berkeley. It was there he began mastering the skills of basketball. Barksdale attended Berkeley High School where he met Johnny Otis, three years his senior.

Otis, more than Barksdale, was consumed by the popular jazz music going on around him. Oddly enough, it was a porter from Argee's union who turned Otis on to the down home sounds of the Delta blues. Six years later, in 1946, Otis, then headquartered in Los Angeles with his Orchestra, reworked a Buck Clayton arrangement and recorded it as a song entitled "Sgt. Barksdale, Parts 1 & 2," with James Von Streeter soloing on tenor sax. "Sgt. Barksdale" was of course a tribute to his old school-pal, Don Barksdale, with whom he shared his passion for swing.

Sadly, Berkeley High never afforded Barksdale a chance to pursue his all-absorbing interest, basketball. After graduation, Barksdale and classmate Emerson Chapman enrolled at Marin Junior College (now The College of Marin) where the pair lead the school's basketball team through two state championships. Barksdale was named the team's most valuable player. It was not long before he was offered a full scholarship to attend U.C.L.A. A recommendation from friend and mentor, the great Jackie Robinson, clinched the deal. Barksdale led the Bruins to

SGT. DON BARKSDALE

victory over the Trojans, a team they were previously unable to beat without Barksdale's help, during the course of thirty games.

Midway through his junior year, Barksdale was summoned to serve in the U.S. Military. The United States had just been drawn into World War II. Barksdale, now stationed at Camp Lee in Virginia, joined the basketball and track and field teams. He excelled in both. Later on, Barksdale had aspirations of competing on the 1948 Olympic track team, but the AAU-certified San Francisco Olympic Club did not permit blacks to play in international events, in spite of the fact that Barksdale, at one point, held the world record for the triple jump event.

When Sgt. Barksdale left the Service, he returned to U.C.L.A. With the money he was able to acquire through the G.I. Bill, he purchased a record store on Western Boulevard. An old friend of his from Berkeley, Bob Reid, managed Don's Record Store while Barksdale attended classes and periodically went out on the road to play hoops. The store sold mostly sepia jazz, blues and popular music. During the 1946-47 college basketball season, Barksdale's Bruins captured the Pacific Coast Conference Championships. He went on to become the first black player named to the NCAA All American Team.

In 1948, Barksdale was the first black picked to go to Great Britain to play in the Olympic Team. The All-American Olympic Basketball team won the finals, and Barksdale came home with a gold medal. After graduating from U.C.L.A., Barksdale sold his store and returned to the East Bay area where he signed on with the championship Oakland Bittners. Lee Hildebrand states in his September 1989 East Bay Express article on the history of KDIA that Barksdale got himself a record spinning job at KROW in Oakland and that his jazz program became so popular that Gerry Mulligan wrote, named and recorded a tune, "Barks For Barksdale," for him. Barksdale was the first black disc jockey in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Later in 1949, Barksdale set up one of the first black-owned beer distributorships on the West Coast. His company's blue and gold logo was used on the tops of his Post-Bittner AAU basketball team uniforms. Abe Saperstein, owner of The Harlem Globetrotters, tried repeatedly to get Barksdale on his team, as did other East Coast NBA teams. Barksdale opted to go with his lucrative business interests rather than the uncertainties of extremely competitive professional basketball. He finally decided to enter the NBA and signed a two-year contract with the Baltimore Bullets.

Other events dating back to 1949 included an all-music TV show. Barksdale was again one of the first blacks on the Sunshine Coast to host a

TV show, "Sepia Review," broadcast weekly over San Francisco's KRON, Channel 4.
The program featured musical film clips of celebrated black entertainers like Nat King Cole.

In 1951 Barksdale switched his radio show to KWBR (Warner Bros. Radio) where he became known as "Big Don Barksdale – the long, tall one." (Barksdale was six feet, eight inches tall.) KWBR later became KDIA, the most important black radio station in the Greater Bay Area. Barksdale's fellow disc jockeys were the colorful "Bouncin'" Bill Doubleday and "Jumpin'" George Oxford. His radio chores were sandwiched between his exploits in pro-basketball. He led the Bittners to a National Championship, served as basketball's goodwill ambassador while taking a lightning tour through Mexico, the Philippines and Hong Kong and helped guide the U.S. to the First Pan American Games in Buenos Aires where they won the gold.

In 1952, Barksdale joined the Boston Celtics. When on the road with the team he would mail his taped radio programs back to the station. "There wasn't enough money in jazz," recalled Barksdale in the September 1989 Express interview with Hildebrand. "Jazz was a tough thing to sell—it always has been. I saw the handwriting on the wall. If I wanted to stay in radio, I'd have to switch to the more popular R&B."

In 1953 Barksdale became the first black to play in an NBA All-Star game. He married Berkeley beauty queen Jewell Stanton, and they had two sons, Don Jnr. and Derrick. Barksdale quit pro-basketball and invested his NBA earnings in acquiring two popular Oakland night clubs, The Sportsman on Grove Street (Now M.L. King Way) and The Showcase on Telegraph Avenue. he also rented a booth at Radio Village to pre-record his KWBR programs. In early 1957, Barksdale set his mind on owning and operating a record label but did not want to go through the expense of starting from scratch. Through a deal he was able to make with his old friend, Oakland record label owner, promoter, blues pioneer, TV and auto radiator repairman (Robert) Bob Geddins, Barksdale secured the rights to the name and silver and navy logo of Rhythm Records.

Geddins was the most visible and important producer of blues music in the Bay Area during the 1940s and 1950s. Barksdale launched into vocal group doo-wop with his second release. He also changed his numbering system from a four digit to a three digit one. This was to avoid confusion with the 1000 master numbering series. The Pittsburg, California-based Mondellos were an extremely talented group that could almost pass as the West Coast equivalent of New York's Lillian Leach and The Mellows.

The Mondellos featured two strong leads, the fifteen-year-old soprano Alice Jean Wilton, who came from a San Francisco choir background, and basser Ollie "Yul" McClay, who shaved his head in the fashion of the then popular screen idol, Yul Brynner. Soldiers in support included Ron Lawson, tenor and bass, Charles Johnson, falsetto tenor, and Gary Williams, baritone. Barksdale could not want for a better vocal group.

The Mondellos cut ten songs under their own name, plus backgrounds for Rudy Lambert and Little Willie Littlefield plus Jackie Gotroe on the Vortex subsidiary.

The group's first outing was the enormously popular, gutsy blues ballad "100 Years From Today" which first saw the light in a sepia vocal version back in 1946 when The Jones Brothers cut it for Majestic in New York. Billboard Magazine for May 1957 gave the song only a two-star rating while the flip, "Come Back Baby," a torch ballad written by Wilton herself, was awarded three. "Come Back Baby" is a wailing doo-wop in the prevailing style of the day with gimmicky vocal chants and floating high tenor embellishments.

A publishing company was hurriedly formed, named Argee in honor of Barksdale's father, to take care of Wilton's publishing rights. The late Dr. David Antrell described the history of The Mondellos' first release as follows. "Barksdale, always the perfectionist in everything, was dissatisfied with the recording quality of the first pressing. There was an unusual, but distinctive, low pitched, thumping quality to the drums." Barksdale taped his talent in the tiny studio at KWBR and was always a little wary of how well his product would come out, given the technical limitations. Barksdale then re-recorded the two songs and aired them on his radio show to tap response. His response proved promising. Both pressings, however, went into commercial release. The first and rarest pressing differs only from the second in the Delta inscriptions. Monarch in Los Angeles took care of the limited pressings (Monarch pressed a minimum of

500), and Barksdale himself, in the role of traveling salesman, sold modest amounts of product by hand to local record stores. Very few recordings found their way outside the greater Bay Area.

Barksdale realized he was into a very competitive, sometimes underhanded, business and was always cautious with the investment end of his recording enterprise, which after two years, proved to work against him. Had he spent more on marketing, he would have found ample return in sales. Following releases by The Mondellos were headed by Rudy Lambert, and featured the gospel-sounding "Happiness Street," Judy Garland's theme, "Over The Rainbow," a dance vehicle "Daylight Savings Time," with its fine booting sax break, the "100 Years" clone "That's What I Call Love," the bluesy "Hard To Please," the doom-laden "Never Leave Me Alone," the wailing, driving ballad "My Heart" (released version included), and "While I'm Happy" (excluded from this set).

By the time "Over The Rainbow" was released, Barksdale had switched pressing plants. He now went with Allied, who offered a better deal than Monarch. He dropped navy in favor of black and adopted Flash lettering. An address, 270 6th Street, San Francisco, appeared as the label's H.Q. Argee was dropped, and Don Barksdale Publishing was set up. "That's What I

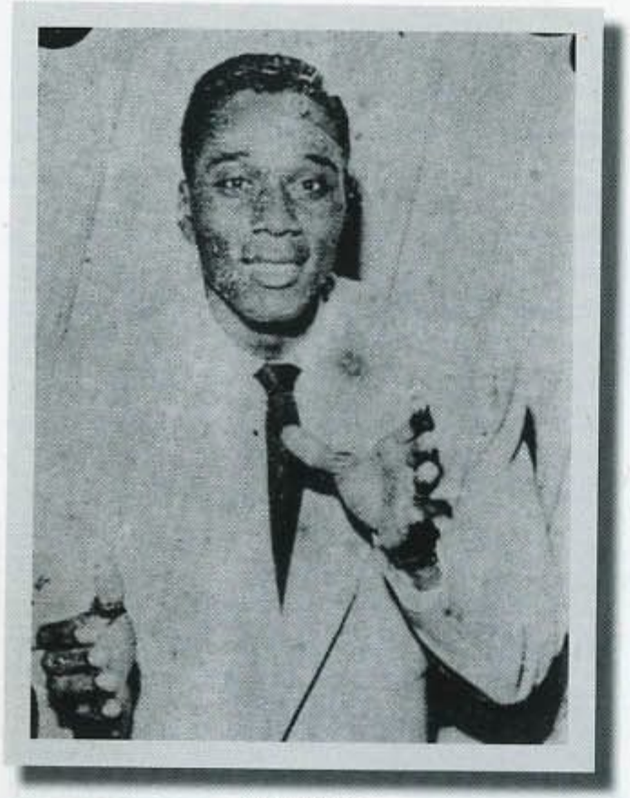
Call Love" was from The Mondellos' initial Rhythm session as was the previously unreleased "You'll Never Know" (included here). Also featured are both pressings of their first release.

By the time The Tempos signed with Rhythm in 1958, Barksdale was pressing his product locally to save money. He went to his old pal Bob Geddins who was still operating a small self-built plant in Oakland. This explains why the sound quality of his pressings suffered. Geddins utilized inferior plastic materials but could offer smaller press-runs.

For The Tempos story, we turn to Robert Pruter and his book, "Doo-Wop – The Chicago Scene" (University of Illinois Press, 1996). According to Pruter, The Tempos were the famous late 1950s, Pirkle Lee Moses-led, Chicago-based El Dorados who through complicated contractual disputes, split with Vee Jay Records in 1957. First tenor Jewel Jones, baritone and bass, James Maddox, and second tenor Louis Bradley, split from Moses and picked up new lead, ex-gospel warbler Marvin Smith. The four cut for Academy Records, billed as The 4 El Dorados. The group came out to San Francisco looking for a business contract, work and recording opportunities. Jewel had just married, and was fixing to settle in California anyway. The group hitched up with Barksdale and cut one session under the name Tempos. The result was the luscious string-laden ballad, "Promise Me" and the toe-tapping El Dorados-sounding "Never Let Me Go." The record should have taken off with all it had going for it, yet Barksdale failed to spend the necessary cash it took to launch it.

In all fairness, Barksdale had his hands full with his other enterprises and had to spread his time and resources over the well-being of all of them. Two previously unreleased songs, the extremely fine "To Love Again" and Perez Prado's "Patricia" (long thought to be by The Lyrics), are included here. The Tempos found work in the Bay Area scarce. Smith went to college, but the others, disheartened, returned to Chicago where they soon broke up.

The Marcels (not to be confused with the Pittsburgh, Pa. group of "Blue Moon" fame) came to Rhythm in 1959. Wanting to honor his secretary, Barksdale created the Jody label in her name. Bob Jeffries and The Marcels became the first of only two Jody releases. Barksdale kept with the ongoing Rhythm numbering series. The Marcels were Carlton Brown, lead tenor, Floyd White, tenor, Cedric Wilson,



BOB JEFFRIES

baritone, and George White, bass. Bob Jeffries led on the tear-stained ballad "Take Me Back," and the group (without Jeffries) wailed on the uptempo party classic "Betty Lou," first made nationally popular in a slightly different arrangement by Bobby Freeman under the title "Betty Lou's Got A New Pair Of Shoes." Cedric and Carlton had both sung in The Inspirations on the Lamp label. Herb Jeffries had sung in The Sharp Tones, a.k.a. Sharp Notes, a.k.a. Turbans alongside Harry "Little" Caesar (of "Lying Woman" fame), Andre Goodman and Burl Carpenter.

The Lyrics were composed of lead tenor, William Wigfall, James Shelbourne, Woodrow Blake and Ben Hamilton and were not the same group who recorded for Hy-Tone. The Lyrics enjoyed one session for Rhythm in early 1959 at which four songs were cut, the beautiful falsetto-driven "Every Night," and "Come Back Baby," plus two with Rudy Lambert, "A Sunday Kind Of Love" (a ballad first recorded by The Jubilaires on Queen in 1947 and since recorded with greater financial gain by a score of sepia artists) and Jane Froman's 1952 chestnut, "That Old Feeling."

Lambert first recorded blues for the obscure Oakland label, Ajax. Dr. Antrell wrote that The Lyrics' reading of "Every Night" so moved Barksdale he believed he had the winning formula and took the group down to Los Angeles to cut it again, thinking he could achieve a cleaner recording quality. Both versions are included here.

Of interest to collectors is the fact that the first pressing/release erroneously listed 126 as the record number (the number used for the Carol

THE LYRICS

Gray release) on the flipside of "Come Back Baby." The second pressing did not show this. All four songs fared poorly, and Wigfall went on to record with The Lyrics on Skylight. Alice Jean Wilton stated that The Mondellos backed Bob Jeffries on his vocal debut, "Never Let Me Go," in 1957 (one half of a single release with Roland Mitchell, — see Westside, WESA 815).

To my ear, the background vocals sound more like The Tempos. Alas, we will never know for sure. "Never Let Me Go" first hit the charts in 1954 when the late Johnny Ace had an enormous hit with it.

Our final group, The Spinners, also hailed from Pittsburg but were not related to the Detroit group of the same name. Some sources state that Barksdale himself led on the beautiful ballad "Marvella," but others disagree. Sadly, The Spinners only recorded two songs during one session conducted in late 1958. Members included Lawrence Brice, Gilbert Joseph, Robert Thomas and Maurice Allen. The beautiful mid-tempo "Marvella" received a fair amount of air play over KDIA. Fellow jocks Doubleday and Oxford gave it a whirl. The flip, "My Love And Your Love," is a touching ballad with all the right hitmaking ingredients, but success was not to be.

THE SPINNERS

In 1959, Rhythm closed its doors. Barksdale is quoted as saying that one of the reasons Rhythm went under was because he never was able to find the right sound. My contention is that if he had devoted more time and money to his record label, it would have flown. See Westside, WESA 815, "Rhythm . . . And Blues!", for more solid sounds and information on this legendary Bay Area entrepreneur and sports hero.

Opal Louis Nations, January 1999

With special thanks to Jacques Bronson, Lee Hildebrand, the late Dr. David Antrell and Robert Pruter