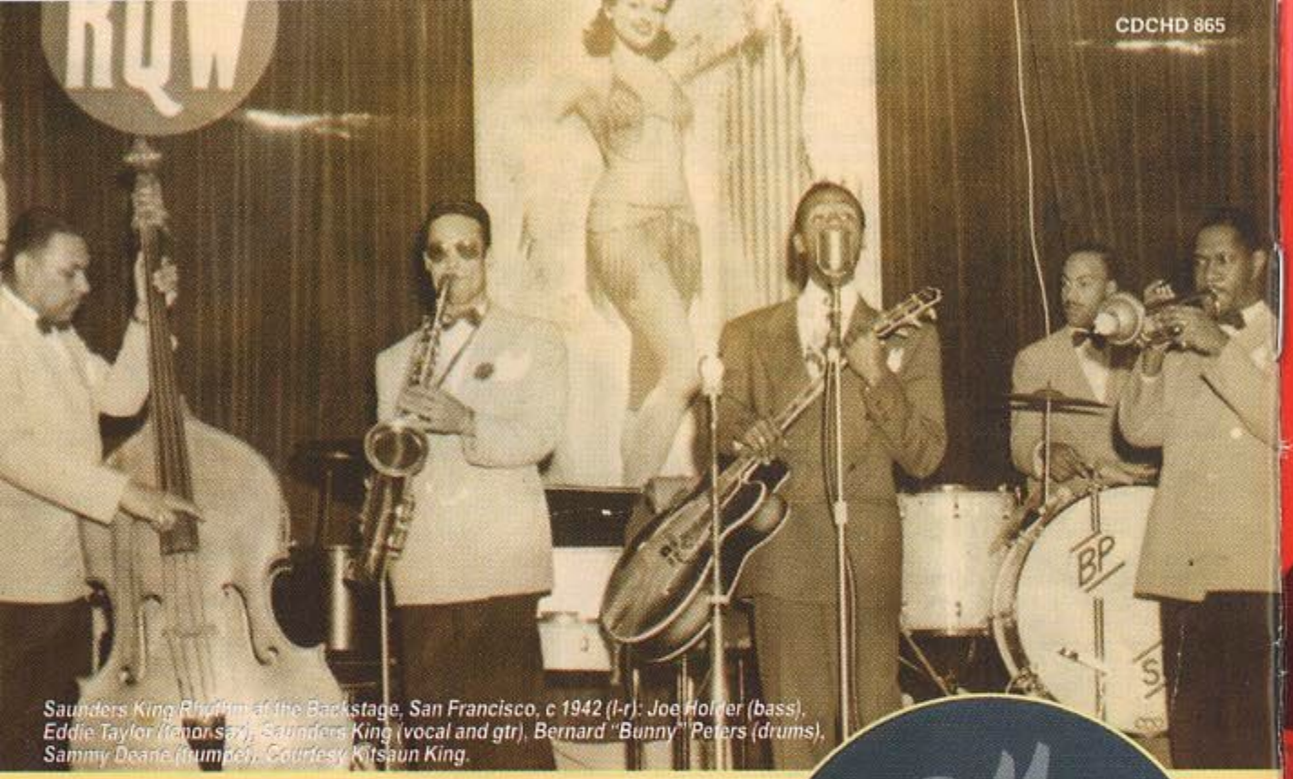
CDCHD 865



Saunders King Rhythm at the Backstage, San Francisco, c 1942 (l-r): Joe Holmes (bass), Eddie Taylor (tenor sax), Saunders King (vocal and gtr), Bernard "Bunny" Peters (drums), Sammy Deane (trumpet). Courtesy Kitsaun King.

OTHER WEST COAST CDS ON ace

HADDA BROOKS Romance In The Dark CDCHD 453
CHARLES BROWN WITH JOHNNY MOORE'S THREE BLAZERS Drifting And Dreaming CDCHD 589
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PEE WEE CRAYTON Blues Guitar Magic CDCHD 767
FLOYD DIXON Cow Town Blues CDCHD 740
ROY HAWKINS The Thrill Is Gone CDCHD 754
LITTLE WILLIE JACKSON Jazz Me Blues CDCHD 749
LITTLE WILLIE LITTLEFIELD Kat On The Keys CDCHD 736
JOE LUTCHER Jumping At The Mardi Gras CDCHD 753
JIMMY McCRACKLIN The Modern Recordings 1948-1950 CDCHD 720
GENE PHILLIPS Swinging The Blues CDCHD 746
JIMMY WITHERSPOON Blowin' In From Kansas City CDCHD 279

Label: Victor Pearlin

Modern

saunders king

Cool Blues, Jumps & Shuffles

ace

saunders king

1. S K BLUES Pt 1 aka NEW S K BLUES Pt 1
(Saunders King) Prestige Music Ltd (1942)

2. SWINGIN'
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1949)

3. WRITE ME A LETTER BLUES
(Saunders King) Bug Music Ltd (2002)

4. LAZY WOMAN BLUES aka LAZY WOMEN
(Que Martyn) Copyright Control (1947)

5. I'D CLIMB THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN
(Lew Brown, Sidney Clare) Francis Day And Hunter Ltd/Redwood Music Ltd (1947)

6. S K JUMPS Pt 1
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1946)

7. STAY GONE BLUES
(Brad Curtis) Copyright Control (1949)

8. 2:00 AM HOP
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1949)

9. EMPTY BEDROOM BLUES
(Saunders King) Careers BMG Music Pub Inc (1949)

10. IMAGINATION
(Saunders King) Careers BMG Music Pub Inc (1949)

11. S K JUMPS Pt 2 aka SUMMERTIME BOOGIE
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1946)

12. SOMETHING'S WORRYING ME
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1949)

13. READ THE GOOD BOOK
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1950)

14. DANNY BOY
(Trad, Fred Weatherly arr Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1950)

15. GOING MAD
(Saunders King, Joe Josea) Careers BMG Music Pub Inc (1954)

16. MY CLOSE FRIEND
(Saunders King, Joe Josea) Careers BMG Music Pub Inc (1954)

17. QUIT HANGIN' AROUND ME
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1954)

18. LONG LONG TIME
(Saunders King, Joe Josea) Careers BMG Music Pub Inc (1954)

19. SUMMERTIME
(George Gershwin, DuBose Heyward, Ira Gershwin, Dorothy Heyward) Warner/Chappell North America (1988)

20. GET YOURSELF ANOTHER FOOL
(Ernest Tucker, Frank Haywood) EMI United Partnership Ltd (1988)

21. WHEN I GOT HOME THIS MORNING aka I'M SO WORRIED
(Saunders King) Hornall Brothers Music Ltd (1988)

22. AUF WIEDERSEHN, MY DEAR
(Milton Ager, Al Goodhart, Al Hoffman, Ed Nelson) Lawrence Wright Music Co Ltd (2002)

23. EMPTY BEDROOM BLUES (Alt take)
(Saunders King) Careers BMG Music Pub Inc (2002)

24. WHAT'S YOUR STORY MORNING GLORY
(Mary Lou Williams, Jack Lawrence, Paul Francis Webster) Warner/Chappell North America (1942)

25. S K BLUES Pt 2 aka NEW S K BLUES Pt 2
(Saunders King) Prestige Music Ltd (1942)

Cool Blues, Jumps & Shuffles

INTRODUCTION

In 1942 Saunders King had one of the earliest "race" (R&B) hits with 'S K Blues' on Rhythm. He promptly scored with the compelling 'What's Your Story Morning Glory' when major label Decca Records became interested in his artistry. Prospects seemed unlimited. Yet Saunders King failed to consolidate upon this formidable beginning, so much so that his work as a R&B pioneer is often overlooked. His intriguing story, as told by Opal Nations, follows this piece.

Our Saunders King overview is drawn from his important recordings for Rhythm and the Modern group of labels from 1942-1954, mainly from the pre-tape era. The background here is that Modern acquired most (but not all) of the Saunders King masters from Rhythm in 1949. However, several of the acetates were delivered originally in an unmarked or mistitled state. In addition, a few acetates in the Ace vaults, attributed to King, were by other artists.

Therefore it was a case of going back to the drawing board, or more specifically to the standard Soul Bag discography. Even here I found there were certain inconsistencies that had been perpetuated through the years, despite the innovative research work done by renowned French discographer Kurt Mohr. Thankfully, the generous Victor Pearlin had many of the rare 78s in his collection and I was able to review both the discography and the acetates in conjunction with the original discs. There is some recording information extant on Saunders King in the Ace archives that I assimilated with relish, but there are still the inevitable debating points. For example, what was the exact date (or even year) of the errant Cava-Tone session? The lists of session men must be open to scrutiny, too, but the reconstructed discography will have to do for now.

For this set, the original acetates and tapes have been augmented by a handful of 78 rpm discs. While the sound is the best possible from essentially primary sources, allowance must be made for the extraneous surface noises from time to time. As ever, our policy is to use modern studio technology to favour the music, in preference to delivering a clean but lifeless sound.

In listening to the various takes of certain numbers, I was struck by their close similarity in performance. Only rarely were there false starts and false notes. This is a tribute to the quality of the musicianship - and the arrangements - of Saunders King and his band. The serene vocals and evolutionary guitar-playing of King are a joy, but listen also to the tenor sax work of Eddie Taylor which, surely, is a template for the booting tenor solos of the classic R&B era. It is small wonder that Eddie Taylor was named by Saunders King as his finest musician.

With this release, we have a chance to reassess the importance of the work of Saunders King. It is blues as interpreted by the sophisticated black audiences of the 1940s and early 1950s, not necessarily the perceived interpretation of blues by today's international audiences. But it is blues, nonetheless.

JOHN BROVEN

S K BLUES

Saunders King, the dark, dapper, handsome and always impeccably dressed bandleader, cut the first significant electric guitar blues record, the two-part 'S K Blues', for Dave Rosenbaum's Rhythm label in 1942. The record sold in impressive quantities, thus pointing the way ahead for pioneering blues singers/guitarists such as T-Bone Walker, Pee Wee Crayton, Lowell Fulson and B.B. King; blues stylists Ivory Joe Hunter, Charles Brown and Percy Mayfield; and the swinging blues combos led by Roy Milton and Joe Liggins.

Ad courtesy Colin Escott/Showtime Music Archives, Toronto

Saunders King's music was the music of the nightclubs and the after-hours clubs at a time when every city had its entertainment strip. To satisfy demanding middle-class audiences he came to develop a finely honed, tight little band known as Saunders King Rhythm. It was a time when musicians of every persuasion mingled with ease. Indeed, during his early career, Saunders King would meet many of the great names of the Golden Age of jazz including Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Lionel Hampton, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Art Tatum and Sarah Vaughan. The musical cross-fertilisation was awesome.

Saunders Samuel King was born 13 March 1909 in Staples, North Louisiana, a place no bigger than a backwoods rural junction, some 17 miles south of Shreveport. His hair was silky, hinting at distant Indian blood. In 1915 the King family, seeking a better life, moved to Los Angeles after living in Louisiana and Texas. Both parents were ministers and sang whenever the spirit took them. With such a background, it was unsurprising that Saunders became interested in music. In 1923 the family moved up to Oroville, north of Sacramento. Upon moving to Oakland his father, Reverend Judge King, who was later appointed a bishop, built the Christ Sanctified Holy Church at 1735 Seventh Street in Oakland. As it happened, Seventh Street was the hub of local black entertainment.

With parental encouragement, Saunders sang, played piano, and later the banjo and ukulele with the church choir. He also took violin lessons, for which his schoolmates ribbed him no end. But most importantly his mother approved of his singing. The church's calendar of activities was a full one, including Sunday school, Saints meetings, Praise and Saturday services. Saunders attended Prescott Elementary where he studied piano and voice under a Ms Forsythe, who provided a solid background in musicianship, and he sang at the school's assemblies. Saunders also had a penchant for boxing and spent several years in the ring before returning to his first love, singing.

GOSPEL TIMES IN THE 1930S

In 1934, Saunders ventured down to the NBC radio studio at 111 Sutter Street, San Francisco to audition for Dr Cross as a singer, with a view to getting his own radio show. A quartet, the Southern Harmony Four, was auditioning at the same time, but they were having problems as their tenor singer had gone hoarse. Saunders was asked to step into the breach. Thus began a four-year tenure with an extremely versatile quartet whose repertoire not only included gospel and spirituals but pop, minstrel music and calypso.

Southern Harmony Four
Top to bottom: Saunders King, Alvin Nurse, Willis Barber, Eugene Anderson. Courtesy Opal Nations

Aside from Saunders, membership included Eugene Wadsworth Anderson, a tenor from Dallas studying dentistry at the University of California; baritone Alvin David Nurse from Franklin, Louisiana, a one-time alumnus of U of C who had sold life insurance and had sung for three years with the Aeropagus Quartet, a faculty group; and basso Willis Wilson Barber from Lincoln, Nebraska. Barber, a qualified electrician, had considerable experience on the vaudeville circuit. Bringing this skill into the outfit, Barber created skits or dramatic vignettes for the group and Saunders often played a waterboy or muleskinner.

The Southern Harmony Four, now a very popular talent, was heard every day, except Sunday, over NBC networks, appearing Wednesdays on The Woman's Magazine Of The Air, Tuesdays and Fridays on Crosscuts From The Log O' The Day, and on their own recital programmes Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. When not singing, their publicity blurb stated the quartet played football and fours at tennis. Saunders married early but the union did not last. There were two sons, Gilbert King and Saunders "Sonny" King, Jr, a great tenor saxophonist in his own right.

HOT JAZZ COMBOS

By the end of the 1930s, jumping and jiving small combo "hot jazz" groups were coming to the fore. The popularity of Charlie Christian's seemingly endless after-hours guitar musings, coupled with local Bay Area sensations such as the John Kirby Band and Alvino Rey's debut at the Golden Gate Theatre had a profound influence on young Saunders King. Bass player/band leader John Kirby was born in Baltimore, and his sextet, formed in 1938, was

probably the most prominent small jazz ensemble playing the swing idiom around the San Francisco Bay Area.

Saunders' professional debut with a swing band came about in Oakland. Saunders sang 'Star Dust' at Sweets Ballroom on Fourteenth and Franklin with the Les Hite Orchestra. The local newspapers reported that the ballroom was jumping like mad that night.

Shortly after this debut King moved to San Francisco. He felt Oakland tended to be more blues-oriented, whereas San Francisco was more jazz and he was very definitely into small combo hot jazz. Oakland's principal "sepia music" promoter was Johnny A Burton, a heavy-set gentleman who staged shows at Sweets. In October 1938 (it is unclear whether Saunders had by then made the move to SF) Burton produced a powerhouse band called the Aristocrats Of Swing that included Saunders King.

The leader of the Aristocrats was cornetist/trumpeter Vernon "Jake" Porter, who ended up in Los Angeles – where he launched and ran his own label, Combo Records. At times the line-up included pianist Wesley Peoples, who had fronted his own band in the early 1930s, and Vernon Alley on bass, who also led his own combos and recorded for Rene Lamarre's Trilon Records. Then there was tenor sax and clarinet player Bob Barfield, who played in one of Vernon Alley's first trios alongside pianist Ernie Lewis; drummer Norvil Maxey; George Neely, tenor sax; Charlie Jacobs, trumpet; alto player Melvin Parks, who had headed his own outfit; trumpeter Isaac "Ike" Bell, who played in both Ben Watkins' and Lionel Hampton's bands; and alto player Jerome Richardson, who had wailed in the Ben Watkins' and Wilbert Baranco's aggregations.

In 1939 in Seattle, Saunders married his second wife, Margery Marston of San Diego. An attractive redhead, Margery was a graduate of Mills College in Oakland and the daughter of the owner of the famous U S Grant Hotel. The couple shared an apartment at 2350 California Street in San Francisco. Racial intolerance was more prevalent in the East Bay, and as they were a mixed-race couple, this may have influenced their decision to live in San Francisco.

According to Dr Willie R Collins, Saunders organised his first hot jazz combo, a modest trio, before moving to San Francisco. The little group consisted of Saunders, guitar and vocals, tenor saxophonist/clarinetist Bob Barfield, and bass player Vernon Alley. Vernon was the brother of Eddie Alley, a Pullman railway porter ("redcap") who also headed a four-piece band called Eddie Alley's Gentlemen Of Rhythm that played the luxury hotel circuit in San Francisco. Bob Barfield and Eddie Alley ended up in Lionel Hampton's bands.

Vernon Alley, who also had the privilege of playing in the Count Basie Big Band, was affectionately known as "Mr Music". "They called me "Mr Music" because, as music director, I started the jam sessions at the Blackhawk, Backstage and Facks clubs," he recalls.

Saunders, who had just adopted the guitar, was still picking up licks from Charlie Christian (as well as from Eddie Durham and Eddie Lang) and developing his own technique along the way. The trio played at social club dances and nightclubs. Jas Obrecht explains, in his excellent monograph on Saunders, that on record and on stage Saunders ran the gamut of musical styles from ballads to bebop to standards.

Seeking his own particular sound, Saunders tried all sorts of guitars, first an acoustic Epiphone, then an expensive electric Gibson 300 with a one-bar pick-up. He found his sound (a soft deep tone) by utilising short-lived felt picks and turning up the volume. On occasion, Saunders composed songs; the melodies of which he said came in flashes of inspiration.

Berkeley jazz critic and journalist Phil Elwood remembers taking a trip to San Francisco during the spring of 1942 to see King, who was playing with drummer Bunny Peters (who sat in on gigs from time to time). "He was playing at a little Aunt Jemima club in the Fillmore called Club Alabam," says Elwood. "Looking handsome and most attractive to the ladies, he played electric guitar in the Charlie Christian-Benny Goodman swing mode. I had never seen a musician do this kind of thing before."

At Commerce High School, Vernon Alley befriended David Rosenbaum, noted producer, historian and early purveyor of jazz recordings in San Francisco. After leaving the Army's air force division, Rosenbaum opened the Melrose Record Shop on Fillmore Street and Rhythm Records on Sutter Street - both stores were meccas for lovers of jazz and black spirituals. One of Rosenbaum's employees was Maya Angelou, soon to re-emerge as an exotic shake dancer and cabaret performer.

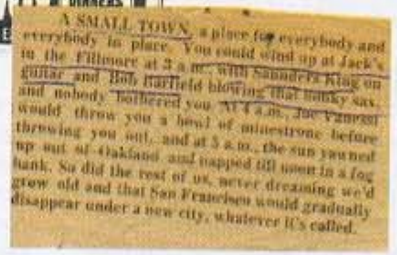
In early 1942, Vernon Alley introduced Dave Rosenbaum to Saunders King. Rosenbaum had been a fan of Saunders' music for some time. Clubs like the Savoy (where he enjoyed second billing under Billie Holiday with the proclamation of "the Red Hot Rhythms of Saunders King"), New Orleans Swing Club and Café Society were among the many venues at which the Saunders King combo often played. He also sat in at Jumbo's Bop City after-hours club next door to Peggy's Chicken Shack, where the food was good.

RHYTHM RECORDS

When Rosenbaum set up the Rhythm Record Company, it was one of the first indies on the West Coast. June 1942 marked Saunders King's first recording session cut at the Sherman Clay music store at Kearny and Sutter in San Francisco. 16" metal masters were cut at the upstairs recording studio. The combo featured Sammy Deane, an accomplished trumpeter, and Eddie Taylor - up from Los Angeles via Dallas - on tenor sax. The band also included Johnnie Cooper, a fine pianist (who had replaced Jack Boone), and Joe Holder, a bass player from Modesto who is described by Vernon Alley as a "fundamentalist, an ensemble man who could lay down a good walking bass - he had a great sense of rhythm and a good clean sound". The drummer, Bernard "Bunny" Peters, is described as exceptional, a man who idolised Buddy Rich. Peters was deaf in one ear, and played really loudly. Cedric Hayward, a Texan pianist, would write many of Saunders' charts. All could read music.

The etched charts included the often-requested 'Big Fat Butterfly', 'Ambling With Herb' (an opus dedicated to the late San Francisco columnist and humourist Herb Caen), the finger-snapping instrumental 'S K Groove', the magically beautiful 'What's Your Story Morning Glory' with Saunders' sweet-singing vocal timbres presented in a pleasing, relaxed ballad style, plus the hit-selling two-parter 'S K Blues' (later re-released as 'Saunders Blues' and 'New S K Blues').

'S K Blues' was concocted on the spur of the moment. Rosenbaum wanted one more song to finish the session. Fellow musicians wagered that Saunders could not play and sing a straight-ahead blues. Saunders proved them all wrong by waxing a blues that has remained a stand-out classic down the years, also recorded by Joe Turner (National, 1945), The Melody Masters (Apollo, 1947), Jimmy Witherspoon (Prestige, 1963 and Verve, 1967) and King Solomon (Kent, 1966). Saunders himself saw his signature song reissued on Rhythm in 1949, on RPM in 1952 and 1957; he recorded an updated version for Galaxy in 1961.


A SMALL TOWN, a place for everybody and everybody in place. You could wind up at Jack's in the Fillmore at 2 a.m. with Saunders King on guitar and Bob Barfield blowing that sunky sax, and nobody bothered you. At 4 a.m. Joe Tanner would throw you a bowl of minestrone before throwing you out, and at 5 a.m. the sun you met up out at Oakland and napped till noon in a fog bank. So did the rest of us, never dreaming we'd grow old and that San Francisco would gradually disappear under a new city, whatever it's called.

The American Federation of Musicians (AFM), led by James C Petrillo, called a recording strike on 31 July 1942 that lasted for almost two years. It was a very difficult time for fledgling indie labels such as Rhythm since, the union ban apart, shellac (the ingredient used for manufacturing 78s) was diverted for the war effort. As such, impure recycled shellac was used, making even brand new 78s noisy. Distribution in the San Francisco/Oakland/Bay Area was left largely to the regular redcap porters who worked primarily out of Oakland's Sixteenth Street station. The impeccably dressed redcaps bought boxes of 78s from the record companies and distributors and sold them for profit wherever the Southern Pacific Railroad took its passengers. The chugging train-like whistles and rhythms of 'S K Blues' made the record an easy sale for the porters.

SAUNDERS KING and his Orchestra
DECCA RECORDING ARTISTS

Tragedy stuck in October 1942 when Saunders' wife Margie committed suicide. She was in the middle of organising a November concert for her husband at the Veterans' Auditorium. Saunders was devastated. His life went into a downward spiral for a while.

In May 1943, in the wake of the 'S K Blues' hit, the American Forces Recording Service re-recorded 'Big Fat Butterfly' for distribution among fighting men overseas during World War II. Saunders cut two sessions for major label Decca Records, the first being in July 1944, the second in August 1945. Then Decca became embroiled in a copyright dispute with Rhythm and chose to hold the results in the can. It was a blow from which Saunders' recording career never fully recovered as Decca would have given him invaluable national exposure. The label, which was starting to get hot with Louis Jordan - a hero of King's - had gone as far as printing publicity photographs. Saunders continued working in music by performing for Special Services during the War.

His second Rhythm session took place in the spring of 1946, again at the Sherman Clay music store studio. This date netted one of Saunders' favourite records, 'Why Was I Born', which was arranged by tenor saxophonist/clarinettist Bob Barfield; there was also a remake of the 1941 Erskine Hawkins' hit, 'After Hours'. Barfield has been described as "far out in his approach but a quick learner, a person who could write arrangements in five minutes flat". Vernon Alley says he taught Barfield the way around a clarinet. After feeling homesick, Barfield quit and returned to Los Angeles.

In August 1946, King was invited to record again by Rosenbaum at a large studio situated in the Mark Hopkins Hotel. Rosenbaum was in the habit of saving money by restricting the number of takes for each song. The Mark Hopkins sessions resulted in the two-part 'S K Jumps', with its affectionate nod to Count Basie's 'One

O'Clock Jump', the shuffle of 'Lazy Woman Blues', and the standard 'I'd Climb The Highest Mountain', sung smoothly by Saunders in a gliding high tenor.

By now, Eddie Walker had replaced Sammy Deane on trumpet, and Douglas Kinnard had taken over from Joe Holder on upright bass. Johnnie Cooper was still occupying the piano stool and Eddie Taylor was continuing to take the tenor sax spot. This line-up on live gigs stayed more or less intact up to and through 1947. Various other musicians were sometimes brought in to fill session engagements.

Saunders King and his Rhythm was among the most polished units on the West Coast and regularly played all the best clubs in San Francisco and Hollywood. It also travelled as far afield as Chicago, Memphis, Nashville, Dallas and Toronto, but never quite got as far as New York and the East Coast.

In late September 1946, Saunders was shot in the stomach by his landlord, Eugene Rayford, at the door of his apartment at 1270 McAllister Street. Following a date at Jack's Tavern in the Fillmore, King and a musician friend were entertaining two women who happened to be Caucasian. The landlord asked that the women should leave, but after King replied they were guests, the landlord shot him right there. Fortunately, Saunders recovered. Rosenbaum continued to issue Saunders King sides. Among these was a session actually cut at Saunders' apartment that comprised the two-part 'Lonesome Pillow Blues' (later re-recorded as 'Empty Bedroom Blues' on Modern), the popular 'The Atom Leaps'and a Saunders King personal favourite, 'I've Had My Moments'.

A significant event in Saunders' life occurred when he met Jo Frances Willis at a club date at the Café Society in Chicago in 1947. They were married in California on 14 June 1948 and settled at Sacramento Street in San Francisco.

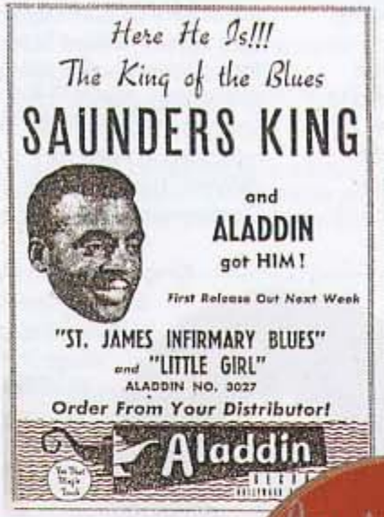
In 1948 there was a second AFM strike that effectively banned all recording for most of the year. Around this time, Saunders King moonlighted to Cava-Tone, a local label owned by Bob Geddins, for two singles. Phil Elwood recalls that King's records were often played on KRE's Open House programme, while Ted Lenz, host of Jive At 11 To 5, had Saunders as a guest. Lenz would invite to his shows 78 rpm collectors and enthusiasts, including Elwood.

MODERN RECORDS

On 5 February 1949, Billboard magazine carried a news item from the rapidly growing Modern label of Hollywood: "Continuing the drive to strengthen its stable of race artists, Modern Records topper Jules Bihari this week inked Joe Lutcher and Saunders King to exclusive disking pacts. Both were signed to three-year deals, with first sessions for next week."

The first Modern recording, 'Empty Bedroom Blues,' was advertised as by "the famous S K Blues Man". With Modern's excellent distribution

set-up, it became Saunders King's first chart hit, peaking at #9 on Billboard's Best Selling Retail Race Records list (it also made #11 Juke Box). Ironically, after waiting so long to break into the national charts, he had another entry on the same day, 19 March 1949, with 'Stay Gone Blues' on Rhythm (#14 on the Juke Box chart only). These were to be the extent of his official chart placings, which was extremely poor fare compared with other West Coast guitar stars such as T-Bone Walker and Pee Wee Crayton.



Ad courtesy Colin Escott/ Showtime Archives, Toronto

Whatever happened to Modern's 'exclusive' deal is not known, but following the two small hits, Saunders was promptly signed by Aladdin Records of Los Angeles. There were only two sessions for the Mesner brothers' label, on 4 April and 28 September in San Francisco. From the first date, the Aladdin recording of 'St James Infirmary Blues' is still remembered fondly by B.B. King. Incredibly, there was a further in-between session for Rhythm on 1 June that yielded 'Something's Worrying Me', '2:00 AM Hop' and two unreleased sides at the time, 'When I Got Home This Morning' and 'Auf Wiedersehn, My Dear' (all included here). Billboard was impressed with 'Something's Worrying Me' in a September, 1949 review: "King's heartfelt blues warble and topnotch 'lights out' band backing make this crying blues a standout." With all this bewildering label hopping, it is small wonder that Saunders had union problems during this period. Then the Bihari brothers, owners of Modern Records, brought him back exclusively into their fold. According to partner Joe Bihari, Modern also acquired many of the Rhythm masters in a deal negotiated by a young black attorney in Oakland named Thomas Berkley. The second Modern release came in early 1950. 'Read The Good Book' was a self-penned raunchy jump blues that belied its pious title, while the pop standard 'Danny Boy' was accorded a waltz-tempo treatment that would have gone down well in his club act (as would 'Summertime', another Saunders King evergreen).

Late 1950 was a time of personal upheaval following alleged drugs charges, and Saunders King was off the scene for two years. In 1951, though, Modern Records pulled two Rhythm masters from its vaults and issued 'Summertime Boogie' (originally 'S K Jumps Part 2') and 'Lazy Women' (originally 'Lazy Woman Blues') on the RPM subsidiary. Then in late 1952, RPM reissued the Rhythm recording of 'S K Blues' as 'New S K Blues'. On this occasion, Billboard magazine was not enthusiastic: "Saunders King

does a capable job on this two-sided blues effort, telling about his woman troubles in a 'St Louis Blues' format. However, the material here is too thin to hold interest thru both sides of the platter."

In 1954 Joe Bihari released two singles on Flair, the Modern subsidiary label: 'My Close Friend' / 'Going Mad' and 'Quit Hangin' Around Me' / 'Long Long Time'. Saunders told Jas Obrecht: "Joe was really nice. As far as the money was concerned, he was beautiful. He was great, anything I wanted. The only thing I didn't like about him was he wanted to compare me to B.B. King. He gave me a bunch of records and wanted me to listen to them and simulate them. But that wasn't my gig at all." Bihari was right to try to update him. Saunders King's style and sound were of another era, like so many contemporaries, and with his record sales declining, the Modern contract was not renewed. Probably due to persistent requests for the old hit record, another reissue of 'S K Blues' was made on RPM in 1957, but it stood no chance of bucking the rock'n'roll trend.

BACK TO THE CHURCH

Around the year 1955, Saunders revived his connection with the family church, Christ Holy Sanctified Memorial Tabernacle in Oakland. He would spend Sundays playing his guitar in services, as well as guiding young people who spoke with him about careers in the music industry and their struggles in life. Living in San Francisco, he and his wife Jo Frances raised two girls, Kitsaun and Deborah, with a strong faith in God and the dignity and perseverance to repel life's injustices.

Following a less than successful 45 rpm release in 1961, coupling new versions of 'S K Blues' and 'What's Your Story Morning Glory' on Galaxy (a subsidiary of Fantasy Records), Saunders King effectively retired from music but he still played the occasional club date. He made one last recording, guesting on his son-in-law Carlos Santana's Columbia album "Oneness", that was released in February 1979. Saunders sang and played rhythm guitar on the track 'Silver Dreams, Golden Smiles' with Carlos on lead guitar.

King would still play his guitar every day and enjoyed tennis until he was felled by a stroke in 1989. He died on 31 August 2000 at the grand age of 91 at the San Rafael home that he shared with his wife of 52 years, Jo Frances. A proud and dignified man, Saunders King had great strength of character and an impeccable sense of right and wrong. He often spoke of the racism endured by African Americans and how he had been harassed because he dressed sharply and spoke eloquently.

Musically, Saunders King was one of the great pioneers of electric guitar blues. His distinctive style of guitar playing and sweet, soul-based vocalising paved the way for rhythm and blues music and beyond. As he put it himself, "We played swing for four to eight bars, and then let a musician solo, afterwards coming back together in what we called the 'outchords'." This compilation, "Cool Blues, Jumps & Shuffles", is his charming legacy.

OPAL LOUIS NATIONS
with additional research by John Broven

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LP liner notes by Per Notini and Ray Topping.

Special thanks to the Saunders King family: Jo Frances King, Kitsaun King, Deborah Santana; and to Joe Bihari, Vernon Alley, Jas Obrecht, Phil Elwood, Kelly St John, Steve LaVoie and Dr Willie R Collins. Also to Victor Pearlin, Walter DeVenne, Peter Gibbon, Bob Dunham, Alan Warner, Colin Escott and Dave Booth (Showtime Archives).

Downbeat Chicago, August 15, 1942

Saunders King Sextet Beats Petrillo to Wax

San Francisco—Saunders King's sextet is shown above cutting eight sides here under a Rhythm Recordings label. The sides waxed are *Summertime*, *Ambling with Herb* (Herb Caen, terrific S.F. columnist for the *Chronicle*), *S.K. Blues* (two sides), *Jive at Eleven Five* (for a local record show), *Big Fat Butterfly*, *What's Your Story*, *Morning Glory*, and *Swinging Door Groove*. Shown above are, left to right, Joe Holder, bass; Saunders King, guitar "and vocals; Bernard Peters, drums; Eddie Taylor, tenor; Sammy Deane, trumpet (ex with Horace Henderson); and Johnnie Cooper, piano. Band is now at the Backstage in San Francisco.

DISCOGRAPHY

Updated by JOHN BROVEN with thanks to Peter Gibbon, Opal Nations, Victor Pearlin, Kirk Roberts, Jorge Santana and Les Fancourt ('Blues Records). Based on the 'Soul Bag' discography adapted by Jacques Perrin from the Kurt Mohr files. Acknowledgments to 'Blues Records 1943-1970' by Mike Leadbitter & Neil Slaven (R I S), 'The Aladdin/Imperial Labels' by Michel Ruppli (Greenwood Press); and to Ray Astbury, Per Notini, Ray Topping and the Ace Records Archives.

SAUNDERS KING RHYTHM: SAUNDERS KING, v-1/g; EDDIE TAYLOR, ts; SAMMY DEANE, tp; JOHNNIE COOPER, p; JOE HOLDER, b; BERNARD "BUNNY" PETERS, d; ensemble vcl -2.

Sherman Clay Music Store, San Francisco, June 1942

APS 382-1	**Ambling With Herb**	Rhythm 1
APS 383-1	**Big Fat Butterfly -2**	Rhythm 1
APS 384-3	**Summertime -1**	Rhythm 2
APS 385-8	**S K Groove**	Rhythm 2
APS 386-4	**S K Blues Part 1 -1**	Rhythm 3
APS 387-7	**S K Blues Part 2 -1**	Rhythm 3

Both parts of S K Blues reissued as 887-7A/B (sic): Saunders Blues - Rhythm 302. New S K Blues - RPM 375, S K Blues - RPM 497

APS 388-6	**What's Your Story Morning Glory -1, -2**	Rhythm 4
APS 389	**Jive At Eleven Five**	Rhythm 4

SIMILAR PERSONNEL.

Los Angeles, 31 May 1943

Big Fat Butterfly -2	AFRS Jubilee 27
B Flat Blues (Summertime)	AFRS Jubilee 27

SAUNDERS KING, v/g with rest unknown.

Los Angeles, 5 July 1944

L 3451	**S K Jump**	Decca unissued
L 3452	**S K Blues**	Decca unissued
L 3453	**Wednesday Night**	Decca unissued
L 3454	**I'll Be True**	Decca unissued

Los Angeles, 23 August 1945

L 3933	**B Flat Blues**	Decca unissued
L 3934	**S K Jump**	Decca unissued
L 3935	**Big Fat Butterfly**	Decca unissued
L 3936	**Wednesday Night**	Decca unissued

SAUNDERS KING RHYTHM: SAUNDERS KING, v-1/g; EDDIE TAYLOR, ts; BOB BARFIELD, cl/as; EDDIE WALKER, tp; TRAVIS WARREN, p; VERNON ALLEY, b; BILL DOUGLAS, d.

Sherman Clay Music Store, San Francisco, spring 1946

RM300AZ	**What A Life -1**	Rhythm 202
RM302AZ	**After Hours**	Rhythm 201
RM303AZ	**I'll Know Just What To Do -1**	Rhythm 202
RM304AZ	**Why Was I Born -1**	Rhythm 201

SAUNDERS KING RHYTHM: SAUNDERS KING, v/g with similar personnel; ensemble vcl-1.

Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco, 26 August 1946

RH-1069-1 **S K Jumps Part 1 -1** Rhythm 203
(reissued as S K Jumps - Rhythm 301)
RH-1069-2 **S K Jumps Part 2 -1** Rhythm 203
(reissued as MM-1697: Summertime Boogie - RPM 341)
RM 204AX **I'd Climb The Highest Mountain** Rhythm 204
RM 204AA, MM-1064-1 **Lazy Woman Blues** Rhythm 204
reissued as MM-1696: Lazy Women - RPM 341)

SAUNDERS KING RHYTHM: SAUNDERS KING, v-1/g; EDDIE TAYLOR, ts; BOB BARFIELD, cll; EDDIE WALKER, tp; JOHNNIE COOPER, p/cel -2; DOUGLAS KINNARD, b; BERNARD "BUNNY" PETERS, d.

prob Saunders King's apartment, San Francisco, 1947

RR-13155 **I've Had My Moments -1, -2** Rhythm 304/5
RR-13156 **The Atom Leaps** Rhythm 304/5
RR-13157 **Lonesome Pillow Blues Part 1 -1** Rhythm 302/3
RR-13158 **Lonesome Pillow Blues Part 2 -1** Rhythm 302/3

SAUNDERS KING AND HIS RHYTHM: SAUNDERS KING, v/g with prob EDDIE TAYLOR, ts; EDDIE WALKER, tp; CEDRIC HAYWOOD, p; VERNON ALLEY, b; BERNARD "BUNNY" PETERS, d, ensemble vcl - 1.

San Francisco, 30 December 1948

RH-1062-1 **Stay Gone Blues** Rhythm 207, 301
RH-1062-2 **Stay Gone Blues (I Had A Dream Last Night)** Ace LP CHD 248
RM 206A **Write Me A Letter Blues** Rhythm 206
RH-1063-1 **Write Me A Letter Blues** Ace CD CHD 865
RH-1063-? **Write Me A Letter Blues** Ace LP CHD 248
RM 206B **Swingin' -1** Rhythm 206

SAUNDERS KING: SAUNDERS KING, v/g with unk p, b, dms.

San Francisco, c 1948/1949

CAV-118	**September Song**	Cava-Tone 254
CAV-119	**Nobody Wants Me**	Cava-Tone 254
CAV-138	**When Your Lover Has Gone**	Cava-Tone 255
CAV-140	**Big Fat Butterfly**	Cava-Tone 255

SAUNDERS KING AND HIS ORCHESTRA: SAUNDERS KING, v/g with poss EDDIE TAYLOR, ts; EDDIE WALKER, tp; CEDRIC HAYWOOD, p; LAWRENCE CATO, b; BOBBY OSIBAN, d.

prob Los Angeles, February 1949

MM-984-14	**Imagination**	Modern 20-659
MM-985-10	**Empty Bedroom Blues**	Ace CDCHD 865
MM-985-9	**Empty Bedroom Blues**	Modern 20-659

SAUNDERS KING AND HIS ORCHESTRA: SAUNDERS KING, v/g; KERMIT SCOTT, ts; PONY POINDEXTER, as; ALLEN SMITH, tp; prob CEDRIC HAYWOOD, p; VERNON ALLEY, b; BERNARD "BUNNY" PETERS, d.

Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco, 4 April 1949

RR 680-2	**St James' Infirmary Blues**	Aladdin 3027
RR 681-2	**Little Girl**	Aladdin 3027
RR 682-2	**Misery Blues**	Aladdin 3046

SIMILAR PERSONNEL (no vocal –1).

San Francisco, 1 June 1949

RH-1091 **Something's Worrying Me** Rhythm 303
RH-1092 **When I Got Home This Morning (I'm So Worried)** Ace LP CHD 248
RH-1093 **Auf Wiedersehn, My Dear** Ace CDCHD 865
RH 1109-1 **2:00 AM Hop -1** Rhythm 303

SIMILAR PERSONNEL.

KSFO Studios, San Francisco, 28 September 1949

B-1	**Blues About Midnight**	Aladdin 3046
A-3	**Nobody Wants Me**	unissued
B-1	**Unfaithful Blues**	Aladdin 3040
A-3	**Stormy Night Blues**	Aladdin 3040

SAUNDERS KING AND HIS ORCHESTRA: SAUNDERS KING, v/g with unk ts, tp-1; poss BRAD CURTIS, p; b, d.

prob Los Angeles, 2 February 1950

MM-1308	**Danny Boy**	Modern 20-740
MM-1309	**Read The Good Book-1**	Modern 20-740, Ace LP CHD 248
MM-2005-2	**Get Yourself Another Fool**	Ace LP CHD 248
MM-2003-2	**Summertime**	Ace LP CHD 248

SAUNDERS KING AND HIS ORCHESTRA: SAUNDERS KING, v/g with prob JEROME RICHARDSON, ts; CURTIS LOWE, as; EDDIE WALKER, tp; CEDRIC HAYWOOD, p; ADDISON FARMER, b; EARL WATKINS, d.

San Francisco, February 1954.

FL-172	**My Close Friend**	Flair 1035
FL-173	**Going Mad**	Flair 1035
FL-192	**Quit Hangin' Around Me**	Flair 1045
FL-193	**Long Long Time**	Flair 1045

SAUNDERS KING, v/g with unk saxes, tp, p; g; b, d.

San Francisco, 1961

F-2187 **S K Blues** Galaxy 712
F-2188 **What's Your Story Morning Glory** Galaxy 712

DEVADIP CARLOS SANTANA, g; SAUNDERS KING, v/g; CLARE FISHER, kbd; DAVID MARGEN, b-g; GRAHAM LEAR, d.

The Automatt, San Francisco, prob late 1978

Silver Dreams, Golden Smiles Columbia JC-35686

Notes:

1. The following original titles were retitled (in brackets) for subsequent reissues, as shown:
Lazy Woman Blues (Lazy Women – RPM 341, Lazy Woman – Ace LP CHD 248)
Lonesome Pillow Blues (Empty Bedroom Blues – Modern 20-659: a re-recording)
Quit Hangin' Around Me (Quit Hangin' Around – Ace LP CHD 248)
S K Blues (Saunders Blues – Rhythm 302. New S K Blues – RPM 375, S K Blues – RPM 497)
S K Jumps Pt 1 (S K Jumps – Rhythm 301, Summertime Boogie Pt 1 – Ace LP CHD 248)
S K Jumps Pt 2 (Summertime Boogie – RPM 341, Summertime Boogie Pt 2 – Ace LP CHD 248)
Something's Worrying Me (Everynight About Midnight – Ace LP CHD 248)
Stay Gone Blues (I Had A Dream Last Night – Ace LP CHD 248)
When I Got Home This Morning (I'm So Worried – Ace LP CHD 248)
2. 'S K Blues' issued as Sander King (sic) on JRM 001 is actually by Jimmy Witherspoon and was credited to him on Specialty CD 2177