THE SCAMPS

CDCHD 875

1. **CHICKA RIDDIE BOOGIE** Copyright Control (1948)
2. **I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS** (Isham Jones, Gus Kahn) EMI Music Pub Ltd (2002)
3. **I'LL NEVER SMILE AGAIN** (Ruth Lowe) Campbell Connelly And Co Ltd (1948)
4. **WORRY (OVER YOU LIKE I DO)** Copyright Control (1948)
5. **STORMY WEATHER** (Harold Arlen, Ted Koehler) Redwood Music (2002)
6. **DON'T BLAME ME** (Jimmy McHugh, Dorothy Fields) Campbell Connelly And Co Ltd (2002)
7. **THEY ALL SAY I'M THE BIGGEST FOOL** (Woodrow Johnson) Universal/MCA Music Ltd (1947)
8. **MORE THAN YOU KNOW** (Edward Eliscu, Billy Rose, Vincent Youmans) Campbell Connelly And Co Ltd/Warner Chappell Music Ltd (1947)
9. **IF I DIDN'T CARE** (Jack Lawrence) Chappell Music Ltd (2002)
10. **DON'T CRY BABY** (Bernice Saul, James P Johnson, Stella Unger) Warner/Chappell North America (1947)
11. **I WANT A LITTLE GIRL** (Murray Mencher, Billy Moll) Lawrence Wright Music Co Ltd (2002)
12. **STROLLIN' DOWN MEMORY LANE** (Ray Lee, Tommy Morrissey) Copyright Control (2002)
13. **I PUT A NICKEL IN THE SLOT** Copyright Control (2002)
14. **I'M FALLING FOR YOU** (Joe T Hubert, Clarence Williams, George Sanders) Universal/MCA Music Ltd (1947)
15. **SOLITUDE** (Edgar de Lange, Edward Kennedy Ellington, Irving Mills) Lafleur Music Ltd (1948)
16. **BABY DON'T YOU CRY** (Woodrow Johnson, Ned Washington) Universal/MCA Music Ltd (2002)
17. **SWEET SLUMBER** (Lucky Millinder, Al J Neiburg, Henri Woode) Warner/Chappell North America (1947)
18. **I WONDER, I WONDER, I WONDER** (Daryl Hutchins) EMI United Partnership Ltd (1947)
19. **WORRY** Copyright Control (2002)
20. **KNOCK ON WOOD** Copyright Control (2002)
21. **THAT'S MY DESIRE** (Helmy Kresa, Carroll Loveday) Redwood Music Ltd/B Feldman And Co Ltd (1947)
22. **WE'LL MEET AGAIN** (Hughie Charles, Ross Parker) Dash Music Co Ltd (2002)
23. **BYE BYE BOOGIE** Copyright Control (2002)

THE SCAMPS

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ace

THOSE RED HOT SCAMPS

THE STORY OF THE ORIGINAL FIVE SCAMPS OF KANSAS CITY

by Opal Louis Nations

The Five Scamps hold the illustrious designation of being the longest continuously active, fully "integrated" (ie they played the instruments as well as singing), black American jump & jive combo. They are also regarded as a musical treasure by the City Council of Kansas City, who allocate sums of money each year to help keep alive the memories of those musicians, like the Scamps, who contributed to what is now regarded as the Kansas City Sound.

Like all long-surviving musical aggregations, the Five Scamps have undergone many personnel changes over the course of the last 57 years. The name Scamps became more and more relevant as they adopted a roguish, playful and sometimes mischievous side to their act. Routines were developed into which they told jokes, mimicked stereotypes and created burlesque. Skits were enacted as they played and sang jazz, a little blues, blues & rhythm, country songs, polka, waltz, plus a good deal of the popular songs of the day.

According to Marv Goldberg in his excellent Discoveries Magazine article, the beginnings of the Scamps date back to the early 1930s and a CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camp in Parsons, Labette County. On work detail, workers Earl Robinson (from Kansas City) and James Whitcomb (from Baxter Springs), along with two others, entertained fellow workers with spiritual singing to lighten their day. A Mr Watson nicknamed them "The Scamps of CC Camp", and the nickname stuck. As time passed, the additional two singers, whose names can no longer be recalled, were replaced by Kansas City residents Wyatt Griffin and his brother Torrence.

The CCC or "Tree Army" employed three million workers during the Depression as part of Roosevelt's national reconstruction plan. But when war broke out, the camps were closed and their workforce found itself enlisted in the Armed Services. The Scamps split up when called to duty. Their

resurrection came about during the summer of 1946, when a young eighteen-year-old pianist, Rudy Massingale, freshman music student at the Hampton Institute, VA (now Hampton University) took a leave of absence to return home to Kansas City to undergo an appendectomy. Back in Virginia, Massingale not only played piano but doubled on saxophone in the Royal Hamptonians College Orchestra.

During convalescence he picked up a group who sang at local parties and dances that included Wyatt Griffin. Massingale asked the group to play at a wedding, but for some reason the guys would not commit to it, and annoyed, he dropped them. Next he considered launching himself with Griffin into the local popular music business as a two-man team. Griffin had different ideas and told Massingale about the singing Scamps' work detail he had toiled with on highway construction at the Corp. Massingale, who was interested in forming another singing outfit, had Griffin bring the group up to Kansas City.

First rehearsals took place at the Griffin household in Rosedale. None of the guys knew music, and Massingale had to teach them by humming notes so that the harmonies could be put together. Soon the beginnings of a quartet emerged with Rudy Massingale playing sax and piano (Massingale did background singing and also took charge of vocal training and wrote arrangements); Wyatt Griffin laid out the chords on guitar and sang second tenor; his brother Torrence Griffin, yet another tenor singer, worked up dance routines and helped on humorous skits; James Whitcomb sang pumping bass in the style of the Mills Brothers (further down the line the boys bought Whitcomb a German-made bass fiddle); and first tenor lead Earl Robinson who, as routines progressed, doubled on (congo) cocktail drum.

Griffin developed a guitar style the guys labelled "the devil's stroke". Robinson, beside vocal and congo duties, was required to brush the edge of his

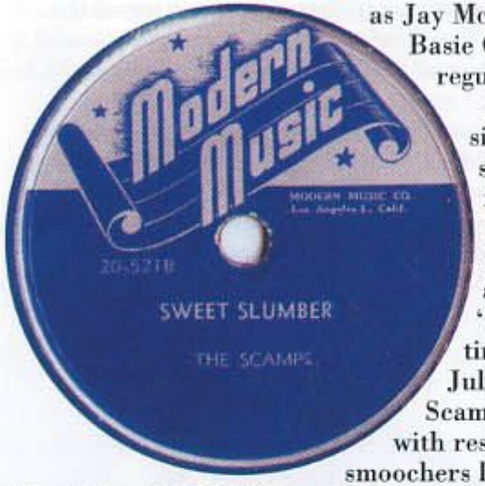
instrument so that it sounded as if a voice was whispering "Shoot the cow, shoot the cow". Group members were avid fans of the Ink Spots and Mills Brothers and were later on inspired by the antics of the Trenier Twins. Small, "integrated" swing units of musicians who could sing and play instruments were extremely popular during the 1930s and 1940s. Outfits like the Cats & the Fiddle, Five Red Caps and Spirits of Rhythm made a reasonable living out of the music.

Soon the Scamps drove over to the Damon Studios to make acetates of a bunch of songs that a friend, Maggie Stewart, had written. Griffin and Massingale then made the rounds of the Chicago record labels. After being turned down by labels like Brunswick, the Scamps felt so dejected that Griffin tossed the acetates into the river (fortunately copies were made beforehand). [It should be noted that Marv Goldberg insists that this event took place later on in the group's career.] When he returned home, Massingale was more determined than ever to get the outfit off the ground. Turning his back on a college education, he began rehearsals again, this time at his house. The group made a bunch of tapes which they hawked around. This got them a gig at Scotts Show Bar, where they were required to do a four-song, 15 minute set for a fee of $15 each. Things were fine for a while until certain group members started shuffling the numbers, causing a state of confusion.

Then, in November 1946, came their first significant break. The Scamps were asked to play the Sherman Bar at Ninth and Locust in KC for scale. This meant that they would be paid $32.50 each, per week, for working five nights. Although they were a little disappointed with the meagre pay, they did not have to wait long for a better deal. They were noticed by Bill Vaughan, owner of the prestigious Flamingo Club at 3821 Maine Street, who also ran other Flamingo clubs. Vaughan had the Scamps working five nights plus Saturday matinees for $150-$175 each per week. That was a great deal of money for a fledgling combo in those days.

Vaughan became a father-figure to the boys, treating them as if they were his own sons. He got the Scamps signed to Johnny Tumino, suspected racketeer and promotions manager for Jay McShann and Julia Lee and other major local performers. First and foremost, the Scamps were crowd-pleasers and played every type of music the club's patrons might ask to hear. "If you heard the cash registers ring, you knew the customers were happy," says Massingale. The Scamps, who followed prevailing trends, developed a skit around the 'Windshield Wiper Song' (a tune recorded at Columbia under the title 'It Beats Tic-A-Tac'.) It was never released. Griffin and Massingale sat at opposite ends of the bass fiddle, which rested on its edge on the floor. They traded jokes and slap stick back and forth as other members egged them on. The success of the skit lead to the addition of other, similar routines. Each member ended up with their own dramatized number on the show.

Kansas City teemed with night life. Clubs, dance halls and tiny hole-in-the-wall dives thrived everywhere. Everyone belonged to a club. Major talent such as Jay McShann, the Bennie Moten Band, Joe Turner, the Count Basie Orchestra, the Andy Kirk Orchestra and Julia Lee were regular fixtures on the local club and theatre circuit.



In February 1947 Johnny Tumino got the Scamps signed to Modern Music in Hollywood. Wyatt Griffin signed the contract. The group piled into Massingale's father's old, raggedy car and drove out to Southern California. During February and May, the Scamps recorded enough material at Modern for them to issue at least five releases over an eleven-month period. 'Open The Door, Richard' was the big record at this time, but ballads by Annie Laurie, the Ink Spots and Julia Lee were also popular, and the Scamps opted to follow this trend with respectable waxings of smoochers like James P Johnson's 'Don't Cry Baby', Vincent Youman's 'More Than You Know', Lucky Millinder's 'Sweet Slumber', Ellington's lovely 'Solitude', D Hutchins' 'I Wonder, I Wonder, I Wonder' – a song made widely popular in the San Francisco Bay Area by the Vagabonds and the Four Aces - and Ruth Lowe's 'I'll Never Smile Again'.

Other released songs included the group's homage to Ella Fitzgerald and the Ink Spots' 'Cow Cow Boogie' in the form of the like-sounding 'Chicka Biddie Boogie', plus similarly "Ink"-spotted 'I'm Falling For You' and 'Worry (Over You Like I Do)'. Our wealth of never-before-released songs include Herb Kenny-like renderings of 'I Want A Little Girl', 'If I Didn't Care', 'Don't Blame Me', 'They All Say I'm The Biggest Fool', 'We'll Meet Again' and 'Baby Don't You Cry'.

To spice things up a little we have added the lilting Red Caps-sounding 'Strollin' Down Memory Lane', with its clever light and tight top harmonies; the humorous 'Knock On Wood', with its "runaway" piano on the break; the clever,

comical 'I Put A Nickel In The Slot', with its cute skit and guitar trilling; an alternate of the infectious 'Worry'; an astounding rendering of 'Stormy Weather', with its pumping bass and caressing tenor lead; the solid, jivey finger-snapping cover of 'I'll See You In My Dreams'; plus the Scamps' own piano-pumping 'Bye Bye Boogie'.

The Johnny Tumino booking agency also had the Scamps sent up the coast to Oakland to play at the downtown white patronised-only Leon & Eddie's Club to appear along with the fabulous 4 Vs. The all-female 4 Vs (not to be confused with the 4 Bs) were once the 3 Vs of Los Angeles, Ivy, Vern and Vonn, who were featured with the Floyd Ray Band. A favourite at Sweets Ballroom, the gals added guitarist Willie Lee Floyd, who later joined the world-renowned all-girl International Sweethearts of Rhythm Swing Orchestra. Like the Scamps, the 4 Vs sang, danced and accompanied themselves with rhythm instruments. Massingale smiles when he remembers stealing one of the 4 Vs' most popular risquè ditties, 'Stick Out Your Can, Here Comes The Garbage Man', a song promptly added to the Scamps' concert repertoire.

The 5 Scamps, Columbia Records (probably 1951)
Left to right: Edward Stafford, James Whitemark, Earl Robinson, Rudy Massingale, Wyatt Griffin

As was common among musicians who had enjoyed some measure of success, certain members of the Scamps harboured wild ambitions of their own. This led to professional rivalry and habitual back-biting. In time this became a serious issue. On their return to Kansas City, the Scamps continued to work for Bill Vaughan at his numerous Flamingo establishments. The Flamingo, a white-owned operation, enjoyed a respectable reputation which rubbed off on the Scamps, who were always paid fairly and well looked after. This taught the Scamps that life could be much worse at juke joints and sleazy, low-looking dives.

The group was also fortunate enough to appear alongside LaVern Baker, Scatman Crothers and Charlie Parker at various times. Their closest rivals were the Five Aces. This group was composed of guitarist Clarence "Sonny" Kenner, who later on defected to the Scamps, as did alto saxophonist Eddie Saunders and bassist Oscar "Lucky" Wesley, one-time member of the Bob Wilson Band. Other Aces included pianist Larry Cummings, aka Luqman Hamza, and rhythm guitarist Rico Kent. Like the Scamps in the beginning, the boys played parties and private functions. They came together at the close of World War II and sadly never found a chance to record. As rivals, the Five Aces and Scamps battled it out for work and public acceptance. Some say the Aces copied the Scamps, others the Scamps based their sound on the Aces.

Further tours took the Scamps to Southern Kansas and Oklahoma. On the home front the Scamps played the Blue Note Club on East Armour Street at Troost, where they became extremely popular, returning time and time again. "We shared billing with Sam Alexander," says Massingale. "He would swing down from the ceiling on a rope held in one hand. He blew tenor sax with the other." Scamps appearances included a residency at Tootie's Mayfair Jazz Club out on the old 40 Highway, where they worked the crowd from 9 pm to 3 am. This lead to a gig at the neighbouring Half A Hill Club, named as such because it sat halfway up a slope.

Tumino sent the Scamps out on more tours. They performed gigs in Colorado and Montana. At the Rossonian Lounge in Denver they worked with the late Scatman Crothers, who became a close friend of the Scamps. The first change of personnel came about in late 1948 when Torrence Griffin was tragically killed in a hunting accident. The trumpet-playing tenor singer Edward Stafford, an old school buddy of Massingale's, took Griffin's place. With Tumino's insistence, Art Shallock, a rep from Columbia Records, came down to Kansas City from Chicago to catch the Scamps' act. The audition went well.

A March 1949 issue of Billboard Magazine announced the signing of the Scamps to Columbia, something of a triumph after their initial rejection three years earlier. The group cut three sessions at 410 N Michigan in Chicago. This resulted in six releases from two sessions issued over a 26 month period.

Choosing fewer ballads, the Scamps recorded more upbeat numbers such as 'Red Hot', a chart later culled by Billy "The Kid" Emerson in 1955 and white rockabilly artist Billy Riley in 1957. Both waxed for Sun Records. The wise-talking bragger 'Red Hot' became the Scamps' best-remembered composition and sold well enough to be reissued by the label's race subsidiary, Okeh, in November 1954. They also cut a worthwhile cover of 'Chicken Shack Boogie' after both Amos Milburn and Lionel Hampton had had a run with it.

They took some of their comic routines to Columbia too, by recording 'The Fishing Song' led by Evelyn Twine (more on her later), and the zany, long-unreleased 'Stuttering Blues'. Another outstanding, widely popular number was 'Fine Like Wine', released in July 1949. Apart from 'Stuttering Blues', three other songs from as many recording dates were held in the can. The comic 'It Beats Tic-A-Tac', aka the previously mentioned 'Windshield Wiper Song', 'Jukebox Jackson From Jacksonville' and the colourful 'Whistle-Stop, My Home Town'.

While in Chicago, the Scamps worked with Skippy Hall and Thelma Carpenter at the Brass Rail on State and Randolph Streets. They were treated well and received advances from Columbia. They garnered regular employment through Johnny Tumino's Consolidated Orchestras of America Booking Agency. The Scamps also felt lucky to have had records on the market during the second recording industry strike of 1948 despite the fact they lost their Modern Recording contract because of it. Few Kansas City artists were being recorded at the time.

Things finally came to a head in early 1951. Internal squabbles and dissension among the ranks led to a gradual breaking up of the original group in Sioux City, Iowa during a Midwestern tour. There, according to Marv Goldberg, the Scamps found themselves with a schedule which meant they would be working every day of the week. Griffin got homesick and decided to go home for a weekend. He had arranged for a local guitarist, Harold Slaughter, to fill in for him. This did not seem to present any problems, but Slaughter had brought his wife, Theresa, along to sing in the group, making them a sextet. The Italian-born owner of the club at which the Scamps were appearing was incensed by the fact that he had to pay for an additional member. The Musicians' Union threatened fines.

When Griffin returned from his weekend away, he found that the Scamps had been fired. Everyone vented their anger at Griffin, who had signed an exclusive contract with specific conditions which stated that no changes be made in the line-up. Things were made worse by the fact that Whitcomb had become an unmanageable alcoholic and that the group had hatched plans to be rid of him. Robinson, Whitcomb and Stafford announced their decision to quit. Massingale and Griffin, the group's leaders, talked things over and decided it best for Griffin to go elsewhere instead. The Scamps honoured the remainder of their touring contract with Harold Slaughter as fifth member. Theresa Slaughter didn't appear with them after Sioux City.

Following the tour Slaughter relocated to Kansas City to be with the group, and Whitcomb was let go. This outfit became known as the Red Hot Scamps. When Griffin returned to Kansas City, he formed his own group, Wyatt Griffin & the 5 Scamps. This unit featured Wyatt Griffin, second tenor and guitar; Arthur Jackson, tenor vocals, tenor, alto, and baritone sax and clarinet; Louis Wright, piano; Earl Garnett, lead vocals and cocktail drums; and Edwin Fontaine, basso and bassist.

Now there were two Scamps groups on the road: Griffin's and Massingale's. There was a legal battle in which Massingale was forced into dropping the 5 Scamps moniker. The arrangement seemed to work for awhile, with Griffin's group following Massingale's into Tootie's Jazz Club. Slaughter quit after a few months and was replaced by Clarence "Sonny" Kenner, second tenor and guitar. The Red Hot Scamps returned to the Flamingo Club in 1952, where they were joined by Massingale's sister-in-law, Columbia recording artist Evelyn Twine, a sultry blues ballad singer who had warbled with the 4 Winds and had rendered torch songs with the Bob Wilson Band. Twine replaced Stafford, who went off to seek greater fortune. This seemingly successful combination held together for a long while.

The Red Hot Scamps played Jimmy Jiggers and The Phoenix Bar & Grill. According to Marv Goldberg, Griffin left his 5 Scamps to return to Massingale's and Robinson's outfit, replacing rope-climbing Sam Alexander. By that time, Dusty Barron had quit and was replaced by saxophonist Walter Leonard, a temporary fill-in. He, in turn, was replaced by tenor and saxophonist Arthur Jackson, who crossed over from Wyatt's group.

In 1955 the Red Hot Scamps outfit recorded for Don Robey's Peacock label out of Houston. Only one release emerged. The excellent toe-tapping, jive-talking 'Waterproof', led by James Whitcomb (who had recovered from his alcoholism), with Massingale, Griffin, Robinson, Jackson and Bill Jones on drums, hit the streets in August. They also recorded 'Ain't Got Nobody', which remains unissued.

By now, the Scamps' brand of small combo comedy had become passè. The cats were now "wigging" to the fresh, hip sounds of Chuck Berry and Fats Domino. Beset by the changes in the music business and constant reshuffling of personnel, the Scamps failed to get a shot at making more records. Massingale quit the group in 1964 but returned now and again to be a part of various Scamps resurrections.

The Scamps' management during the 1970s and 1980s was left in the hands of lead tenor Earl Robinson, who contributed a great deal to the Scamps' lasting survival. Massingale went into temporary retirement and became a Jehovah's Witness. All-round dancer-vocalist Coots Daye, renowned around Kansas City for his rendering of 'Big Fat Mama' with the Scamps as backing group, came to prominence. Daye is fondly remembered by local jazz aficionados and those who turn out to see the current Five Scamps line-up. Members include Orestie "Rusty" Tucker from Independence, MO, trumpet, percussion and vocals; Arthur Jackson, tenor sax; Eddie Saunders, alto sax; Rudy Massingale, vocals and piano; and Oscar "Lucky" Wesley from Grand View, MO, vocal and bass. The Scamps continue to play a variety of venues, including the University of Missouri in Kansas City.

The most recent line-up cut a CD entitled "Swinging With The Scamps", currently available from Music Exchange in Kansas City. Charts include an updated rendering of Harold Arlen's 'Stormy Weather', Marty Symes' 1936 classic 'There Is No Greater Love', Billy Strayhorn's 'Take The A Train', Ellington's 'In A Mellow Tone', Billy Preston's touching 'You Are So Beautiful', Jimmy Forrest's old romper 'Night Train', James Primrose's 'St James Infirmary', plus a handful of standards.

True champions of the Kansas City Sound, the Five Scamps are asked back time and again to perform at the Johnson County Community College's annual Jazz Legends concerts and plan to fulfil the annual engagement for as long as they can.

Opal Louis Nations, October 2002
with invaluable assistance from Duane Gilley, Marv Goldberg, Peter Grendysa and George Moonoogian

Principal sources:
Telephone interviews with Rudy Massingale and Orestie "Rusty" Tucker
Discoveries Magazine, May 2002: "The Scamps"
Taped conversation with Rudy Massingale conducted by Duane Gilley
Kansas City & All That Jazz - KC Jazz Museum (Donna Martin Books, 1999)

Photographs courtesy Opal Louis Nations
Labels courtesy Richard Reicheg and Opal Louis Nations
Thanks to Chris Bentley, John Broven, Richard Reicheg and Billy Vera for their help in tracking down the more elusive Scamps recordings.

THE ORIGINAL SCAMPS DISCOGRAPHY in release order

as The Scamps		
MM 342/346	Don't Cry Baby / More Than You Know Released February 1947	Modern 512
MM 521-2/536	That's My Desire / I Wonder, I Wonder, I Wonder Released April 1947	Modern 516
MM 569/571	I'm Falling For You / Sweet Slumber Released May 1947	Modern 20-521
MM 648-6/649-6	Solitude / Chicka Biddie Boogie Released December 1947	Modern 550
MM 650-2/651-2	Worry / I'll Never Smile Again Released January 1948	Modern 561
as The Five Scamps		
CCO 5039	It Beats Tic-A-Tac ("The Windshield Wiper Song")	(unreleased)
CCO 5041/42	Chicken Shack Boogie / Gone Home Released April 1949	Columbia 30157
CCO 5036/5037	With All My Heart / Red Hot 1 Released May 1949	Columbia 30158
CCO 5035/5040	Fine Like Wine / How Nice Released July 1949	Columbia 30163
CO 40868/69	The Fishing Song / Good Lover Blues Released August 1949	Columbia 30168
CO 40870	Jukebox Jackson From Jacksonville	(unreleased)
CCO 5038/ CO 40871	I Love The Way You Walk / I'm Gonna Cry Released December 1949	Columbia 30177
as Wyatt Griffin & the 5 Scamps		
CO 45633/35	Dance Boogie / Gonna Buy Myself A Mule Released June 1951	Columbia 30242
CO 45634	Stuttering Blues (recorded March 1951)	Okeh Legacy CD E3K 48912 (1993)
CO 45636	Whistle-stop, My Home Town	(unreleased)
ZSP 34288/87	With All My Heart / Red Hot 2 Release of December 1954	Okeh 7049

by Opal Louis Nations {updated by Peter Gibbon}

ORIGINAL SCAMPS/ FIVE SCAMPS:
Rudy Massingale - tenor sax/piano/vocals
Wyatt Griffin - guitar/second tenor
Torrence Griffin - tenor
James Whitcomb - bass/vocals
Earl Robinson - lead tenor/ conga with snare

WYATT GRIFFIN & THE 5 SCAMPS:
Wyatt Griffin - guitar/second tenor
Arthur Jackson - tenor/tenor, alto and baritone sax/clarinet
Louis Wright - piano
Earl Garnett - lead vocal/ cocktail drums
Edwin Fontaine - basso/bassist