DISCOGRAPHY

Track 1: LAFAYETTE THOMAS:
Lafayette Jerl Thomas –Guitar
Johnny Heartsman – Piano
Horace Hall – Bass
Ray Cotton – Drums
Oakland, 1957

Tracks 2, 3: THE MYSTERY MAN:
Bob Geddins – Vocal , Piano
Unknown acc.
Oakland, February 1954

Tracks 4, 5: PERCY MAYFIELD:
Percy Mayfield – Vocal
Unknown acc. (probably Johnnie Ingram's band)
Oakland, 1946

Tracks 6, 7: IVORY JOE HUNTER w. THE THREE BLAZERS:
Ivory Joe Hunter – Vocal
Charles Brown – Piano
Johnny Moore – Guitar
Eddie Williams – Bass
Los Angeles, 1945

Track 8: MARCELLUS THOMAS & HIS RHYTHMS OFF ROCKETTS:
Marcellus Thomas – Vocal, Guitar
Personnel unknown (prob. Rudy Lambert Band)
Oakland, 1954

Track 9: IVORY JOE HUNTER w/ THE THREE BLAZERS:
Ivory Joe Hunter – Vocal
Charles Brown – Piano
Johnny Moore – Guitar
Eddie Williams – Bass
Los Angeles, 1945

Tracks 10, 11: CRAYTON TRIO:
Pee Wee Crayton –Vocal, Guitar
David Lee Johnson – Piano
Joe Lee Alcarn – Bass
Oakland, 1947

Tracks 12, 13: JIMMIE NELSON & HIS BLUES:
Jimmy Nelson – Vocals
Personnel unknown (prob. Johnnie Ingram's Band)
Oakland, 1948

Track 14: LEON BRYANT & THE BAR-NONE ORCHESTRA:
Leon Bryant – Vocals
Personnel unknown
Oakland, 1952

Track 15: RUSTY CARLYLE & THE BAR-NONE ORCHESTRA:
Rusty Carlyle – Vocals
Personnel unknown
Oakland, 1952

Track 16: McVEA-BAILEY, INC.:
Betty Roche – Vocals
Buster Bailey – Clarinet
Jack McVea – Tenor sax
Ram Ramirez – Piano
Cappy Oliver – Trumpet
Raban L. (T)arrant – Drums
Frank Clarke – Bass
San Francisco, 1944

Track 17: NICK ESPOSITO & HIS BAND w. JOEY SANO (LITTLE Mr. DYNAMITE):
Joey Sano – Vocals
Nick Esposito – Guitar
Merle Howard – Tenor Sax
Barney Bigard – Clarinet
June Preston – Piano
Stan Ward – Drums
Bill Smith – Bass
Berkeley, 1947

Track 18: BOB GEDDINS CAVALIERS:
Sherman Louis – Piano, Vocal
Lafayette Thomas – Guitar, Vocal
B. Bostic – Bass, Vocal
Oakland, 1948

Track 19: BOB GEDDINS CAVALIERS:
Jimmy Wilson – Vocals
Sherman Louis – Piano, Vocal
Lafayette Thomas – Guitar, Vocal
B. Bostic – Bass, Vocal
Oakland, 1948

Tracks 20, 21: PERCY MAYFIELD:
Percy Mayfield – Vocal
Unknown acc. (probably Johnnie Ingram's band)
Oakland, 1946

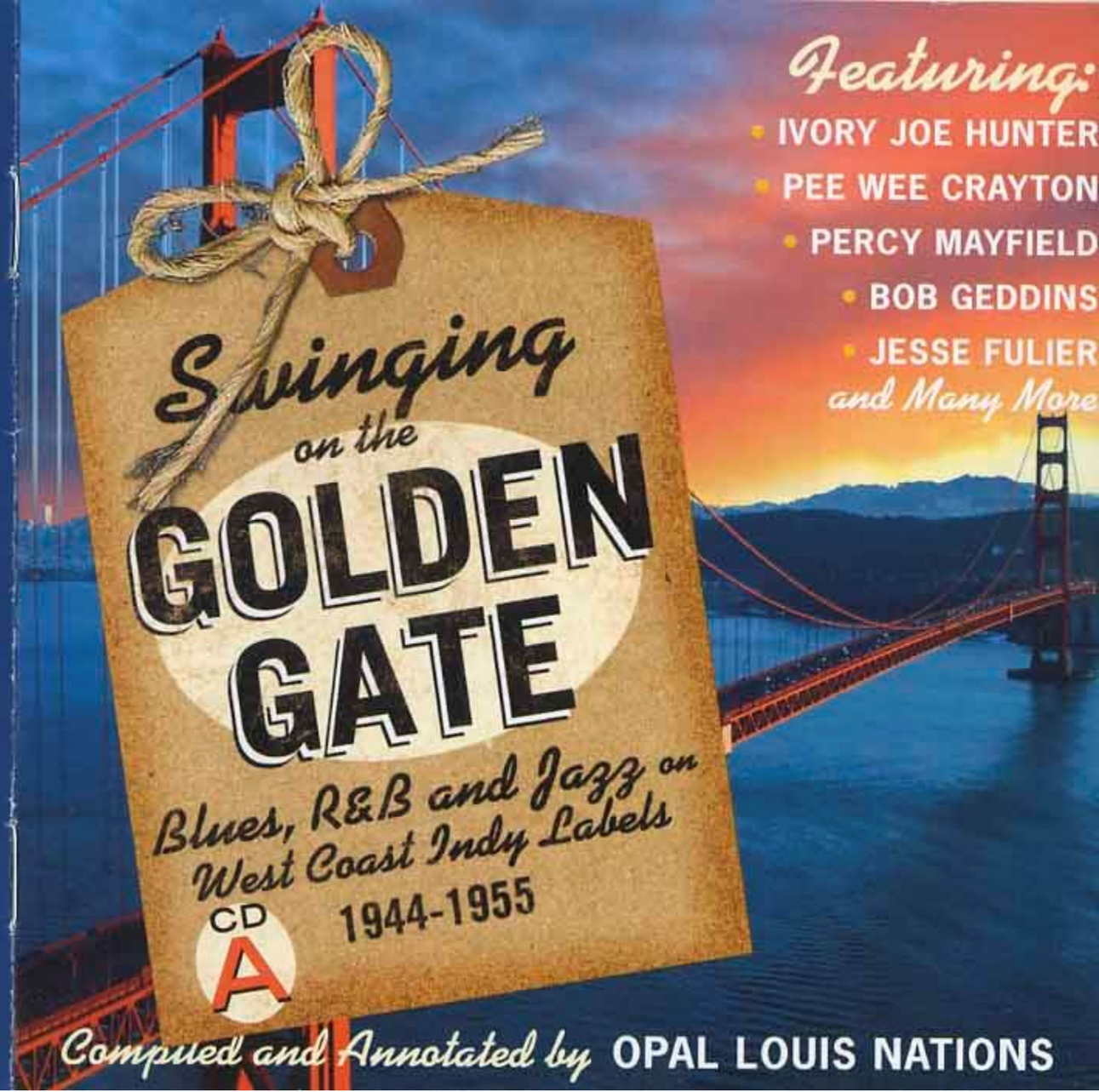
Track 22: JESSE FULLER – 'THE LONE CAT':
Jesse Fuller – Vocals, Harmonica, Kazoo, Guitar, Fotdella
El Cerrito, 1954

Track 23: CHICK MORRIS & HIS BAND:
Chick Morris – Piano
Al Joseph Harris – Vocals
T. Johnson – Alto Sax
M. Parks – Tenor Sax
Edward Wallace – Bass
R. Brown – Drums
Berkeley, 1954

TrackS 24, 25: IVORY JOE HUNTER & HIS BAND:
Ivory Joe Hunter – Vocal, Piano
Pee Wee Crayton – Guitar (on 25)
Ernie Royal – Trumpet
Baker Millian – Tenor Sax
John Patterson – Tenor Sax
Commodore Lark – Bass
Chuck Walker – Drums
San Francisco, February 1947

JSP Records PO Box 1584 London N3 3NW England

Sleeve Art: aitkendesign@mac.com



Swingin' On The Golden Gate

Blues, R&B, & Jazz on Independent Record Labels in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–1958

by Opal Louis Nations

The historical picture of black music in the San Francisco–Bay Area is a colorful one. Dixieland and Ragtime jazz has been a part of the musical fabric since it came to the Bay Area's Barbary Coast more than a century ago. Be-bop and Swing flourished on the metropolitan San Francisco night club scene for three decades at least. Local rock & roll and rockabilly, oddly enough, never really produced much significant national talent. Collectors, for the most part, turned to "star" performers from out of state. Gospel music sprang into being in the Twenties and Thirties and was mainly an East Bay phenomenon which thrived through the healthy growth of the church establishment.

The onset of World War II transformed the sound of the Bay Area blues completely. Migrant blue collar blacks from rural areas of Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Mississippi brought their earthier country style blues musics to the Bay Area and the focus of the blues moved across the Bay from San Francisco to Oakland and Richmond where there were well-paying jobs to be had on the docks and in rail yards and spare parts depots.

Although there were street corner harmonists clear across the Bay Area, doo-wop never really flourished as well as it did in Southern California. This was because few small indie record companies favored harmonic street music. Here again, because San Francisco always catered to those of a more sophisticated taste, the hallway harmonists were often left out in the cold. Those few with starry-eyed ambition headed south to audition at disceries in Los Angeles and Hollywood. Specialty, Dootone, Combo, Modern and others took in Bay Area talent and offered a chance at the golden ring. Berkeley's Music City was really the only well-connected label. But many feared to go there after hearing stories of false promises and payments unfulfilled.

Ollie T. Hunt's Olliet Records & Related Labels

Ollie T. Hunt was born June 21st, 1917 in L.A. He passed on July 5, 2001 somewhere in Los Angeles. Ed Carter, a.k.a. Buddha Kahn of the Shantones recorded on Hunt's Trilyte imprint told Steve Propes that in 1956 when he first encountered Hunt he found an extremely pleasant, short-haired, heavy-set African American of dark complexion with impressive connections to artists like Percy Mayfield and King Curtis who spent time hanging out at his L.A. studio.

An early version of the Trilyte logo

First evidence of Ollie Hunt's musical activity comes from Bob Geddins of Big Town Records. Geddins probably gave advice to Hunt and also might have conjured up mutual recording deals. It is likely that he pressed some of Hunt's early work. Geddins told Lee Hildebrand in an interview that Ollie T. Hunt was traveling around recording "people" and was out doing this before Geddins himself.

Hunt adapted portable equipment to suit his needs. He first traversed the Bay Area recording persons who would contact him to make home or "family" recordings and in addition record those wanting something more, like a demo. Ollie T. Hunt is listed as proprietor of Oliver Records of Oakland, Calif. with additional labels such as Oliver, State Negro Spirituals, Scotty's Radio, Trilyte and Olliet. The labels appear most unlike anything Geddins was able to press at his Big Town studio, having a rather more professional appearance.

Bob Geddins at the studio piano 1960

Hunt set up the Olliet (Ollie-t) and GruV-Tone imprint at 2405 San Pablo Avenue in Oakland and continued recording mostly local blues and gospel talent "for home use only." Hunt also opened up Scotty's Radio (Repair), label-copied as located at 5139 Third Street (probably his studio address) in San Francisco's Bayview District sometime around 1947. Lowell Fulson's *Scotty's Blues*, a promotional waxing, became Scotty's Radio first release.

During a long career in music, Hunt recorded Lafayette Thomas, Ray Agee, King Perry, Pee-Wee Crayton, Percy Mayfield and many gospel acts.

The Bob Geddins stable of labels:

Martin, Texas-born Robert Geddins Snr made his first trip up to West Oakland from Los Angeles in 1942. His mother had just relocated there and young Geddins had come up for a visit. A trip to Oakland's vibrant Seventh Street and the complaints from migrant workers concerning the lack of good down home blues and Southern gospel lead to his getting a job at Wolf Record Store, three doors down from the posh Slim Jenkins night spot.

Slim Jenkins Club, early 1960s

After scant training in welding at the Kaiser shipyards and radio repair at night school, Geddins (with help from pal Jack Gutshall and a loan from his stepfather) built his first record manufacturing plant on Eighth and Center Streets in two weeks utilizing around-the-clock labor. It was not long before Geddins found himself pressing sides for Dave Rosenbaum at Rhythm Records in San Francisco and Rene La Marre at Trilon in Oakland. Geddins befriended the Swinging Deacon who hosted a hot blues & rhythm record show over KWBR on Franklin. The friendship lead to Geddins hosting his own blues & gospel program over KWBR on Saturday mornings. The show was broadcast remotely from Wolf's Record Store, Geddins' sponsor.

During the spring of 1944, Geddins with help from Don Hemby at KRE recorded his first Big Town sides on the Rising Star Gospel Singers. Geddins' initial press run was emblazoned with a pale and navy label, with a hand-drawn navy Oakland skyline against a lighter blue background. Geddins magically thought that by constantly inventing labels he could avoid losing talent. These labels included Cavatone, Irma, Vel, Rhythm and Jumpin', all represented on this collection.

Brad Taylor (l) and brother Vic flank Alvin Thomas

Brad Taylor's Bay-Tone Records

One of the San Francisco Bay Area's most significant small indie record labels is Bay-Tone, with its attendant subsidiaries, Pam Mar (1962) and Soul Set (1973). Bay-Tone was founded during the summer of 1958 by Bradbury James Taylor who sadly passed away after a lengthy illness on August 24, 1999. (Brad) James Taylor was born on November 4, 1915 in Henderson, Kentucky. His parents, Mildred and Benjamin Taylor, were not much into music, but a brother, Vic, later founded the La Val label in Chicago after which an amiable business relationship was set up between the two brothers.

In 1945 Taylor moved to San Francisco. He set up the Bradley Booking Agency at 1509 Fillmore Street. What he did not know about the business he soon picked up.

Taylor connected with the San Francisco Bay Area scene which flourished with local talent. He also took referrals, organized concerts, scouted the clubs and socialized quite a bit. Not long after bringing Jimmy Witherspoon and the McShann Band out to play in Richmond he ventured into other facets of the music industry, publishing (setting up the Bay-Tone Music publishing company) producing and promotion.

Beginning in 1958, Taylor put out a small and steady number of 45 rpm records over a period of over thirty years. As a one-man operation, he often took his product by hand to retailers himself, sometimes including a small promotion package to give to stores for free. Taylor was remembered as a cool guy with a class act. Taylor's first release featured Baby Calloway and Roland Mitchell. The songs were leased from Bob Geddins who had previously recorded him.

Bobby Freeman & The Romancers

Other goodies followed from Bobby Freeman and the Romancers (a.k.a. the Bay Tones), the first original Fabulous Flames (after getting pink slips from James Brown), Robert "Stoop down" "Chick" Willis and Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton. As far as tiny 1950s-1960s independent record proprietors go, Bradbury Taylor was one of the few straight-shooters in the Greater Bay Area. Other label owners fleeced their artists and ripped off their copyrights. Taylor always took care of his talent and never made an enemy of anyone.

DISCOGRAPHY

Track 1: ROLAND MITCHEL(L):
Roland Mitchell – Tenor Sax
Lafayette Thomas – Guitar
Ray Cotton – Drums
San Francisco, 1957

Tracks 2, 3: ODIE ERVIN:
Odie Ervin – Vocals
Others unknown
San Francisco, 1954

Track 4: AL HARRIS & RUSTY CARLYLE & BAR-NONE ORCH:
Al Harris & Rusty Carlyle – Vocals
Personnel unknown
Oakland, 1952

Track 5: JESSE FULLER – 'THE LONE CAT':
Jesse Fuller – Vocals, Harmonica, Kazoo, Guitar, Fotdella
El Cerrito, 1954

Track 6: SHERMAN'S TRIO:
Sherman Louis – Piano
Lafayette Thomas – Guitar
B. Bostic – Bass
Oakland, 1948

Track 7: FLOYD WHITE & THE LYRICS*:
Floyd White – Lead Vocals
Plus vocal group Morry Williams & the Kids,
Personnel unknown
San Francisco, 1958

Tracks 8, 9: ODIE ERVIN:
Odie Ervin – Vocals
Others unknown
San Francisco, 1954

Track 10: CHICK MORRIS & HIS BAND w. AL JOSEPH HARRIS:
Chick Morris – Piano
Al Joseph Harris – Vocals
T. Johnson – Alto Sax
M. Parks – Tenor Sax
Edward Wallace – Bass
R. Brown – Drums
Berkeley, 1954

Track 11: THE FOUR ACES:
George Smith – Baritone, Piano
Algia Pickett – Second Tenor
James Reuben Franks – First Tenor, Guitar
Otha Jackson – Bass, Bass Fiddle
Oakland, December, 1946

Tracks 12, 13: LITTLE FRANCES:
Little Frances – Vocals
Johnny Heartsman – Guitar
Al Berry – Tenor Sax
Ray Cotton – Drums
Others – Unknown
Oakland, 1958

Tracks 14, 15: EARL 'GOOD ROCKING' BROWN & BAND:
Earl Brown – Vocal, Alto Sax
Johnny Heartsman – Guitar
Al Berry – Tenor Sax
Ray Cotton – Drums
Others – Unknown
Berkeley, 1958

Track 16: EL DOMINGOES:
Robert Troutt – Baritone
Lawrence Thompson – Lead, Second Tenor
Jay Vernon – Lead, Guitar
Curtis Stanton – Lead, Tenor
Berkeley, 1958

Track 17: MORRY & THE KIDS:
Morry Williams – Lead Tenor
Mel (Melvin) Scott – Tenor
'Woody' Woodrow Moseley – Bass
Leonard Charles or L.C. Jones – First Tenor
Walter Kidd – Baritone
San Francisco, 1958

Track 18: FABULOUS FLAMES:
Vocal group – Bill Holland, Louis Madison, Willie 'Snake' Johnson, Johnny Terry
Oakland, 1958

Tracks 19, 20: JOHNNIE FULLER (JOHNNY):
Johnny Fuller – Vocal, Guitar
Others – Unknown (probably Candy Man McGuirt's Band)
San Francisco, 1957

Track 21: BABY CALLOWAY:
Charles Baby Calloway – Vocal, Piano
Roland Mitchell – Tenor Sax
Napoleon Henry – Guitar
Johnny Preston – Bass
Poss Willie T. Walker – Drums
Oakland, 1958

Track 22: GLADYS PALMER & THE WILBERT BARANCO TRIO:
Gladys Palmer – Vocals
Wilbert Baranco – Piano
Jerome Richardson – Alto sax
Junior Raglan – Bass
San Francisco, Unknown date

Track 23, 24: ALEXANDER'S JAZZ BAND:
Bill Newman – Vocal / banjo
Pat O'Casey – Vocals (24)
Bob Scobey – Trumpet
Jack Buck – Trombone
Pat O'Casey – Clarinet
Burt Bales – Piano
Squire Girsback – Bass
Bill Dart – Drums
Oakland, 1948

Track 25: NICK ESPOSITO & HIS BAND:
Bill Smith – Vocals, Bass
Nick Esposito – Guitar
Merle Howard – Tenor Sax
Barney Bigard – Clarinet
June Preston – Piano
Stan Ward – Drums
Berkeley, 1946

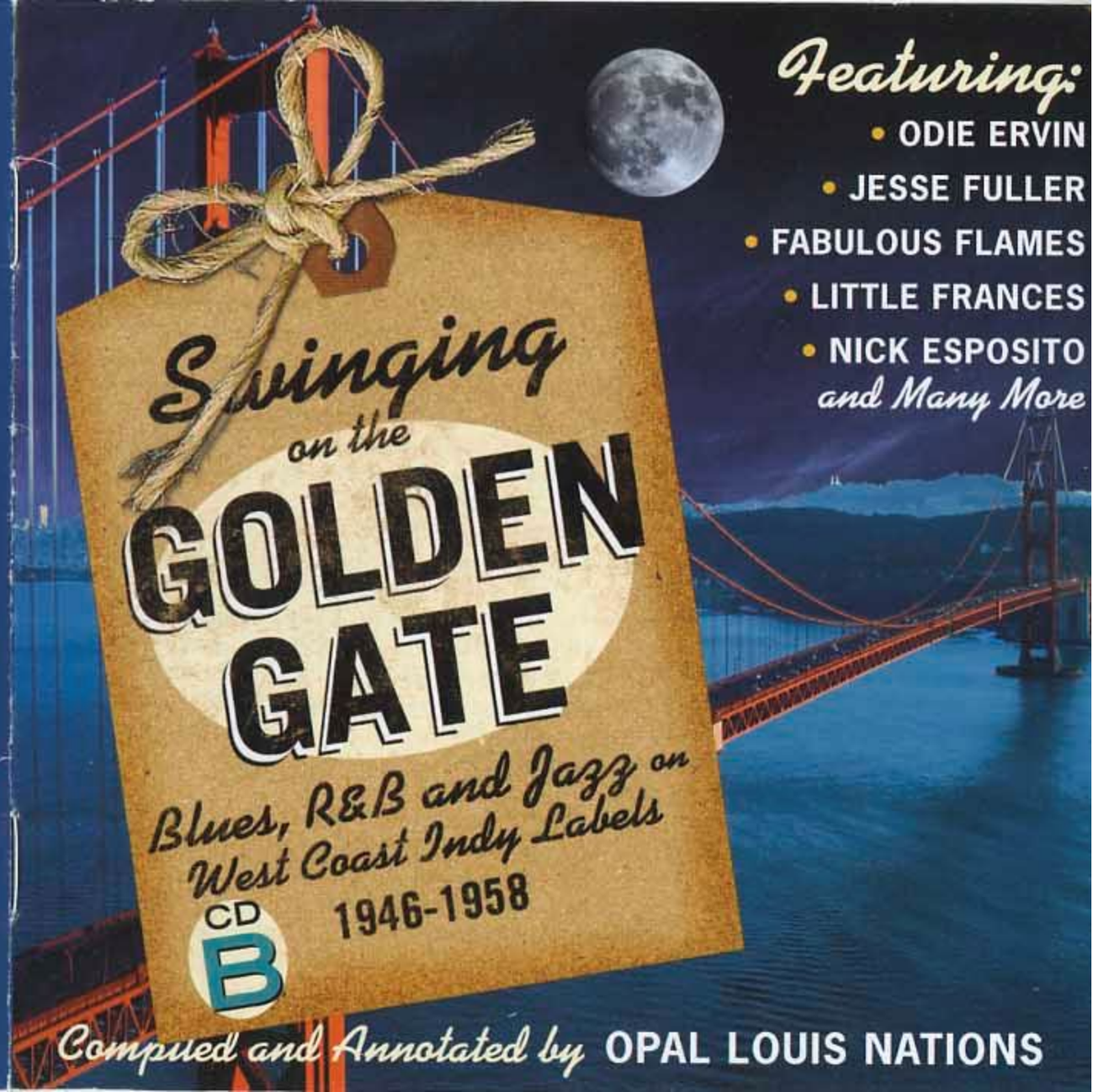
Track 26: FRISCO JAZZ BAND:
Red Gilham – Vocal
Ray Jahnigan – Piano
Bob Scobey or Eddie Smith – Trumpet
Pat Patton – Bass fiddle
Clancy Hayes – Banjo
Jack Buck – Trombone
Gordan Edwards – Drums
Jack Cronk – Clarinet
San Francisco, 1946

Track 27: FRISCO JAZZ BAND:
Clancy Hayes – Vocal
Ray Jahnigan – Piano
Bob Scobey or Eddie Smith – Trumpet
Pat Patton – Bass Fiddle
Jack Buck – Trombone
Gordan Edwards – Drums
Jack Cronk – Clarinet
San Francisco, 1946

*This track's label credit (Floyd White &The Lyrics) may be wrong. The compiler's research (including asking two former Lyrics) suggests it is more probably Morry Williams and The Kids – although possibly not track 17's personnel.

JSP Records PO Box 1584 London N3 3NW England

Sleeve Art: aitkendesign@mac.com



Rene T. LaMarre's Trilon Records:

Vaudevillian, theatre proprietor, business adventurer, speedway enthusiast, sportswriter, m.c. and co-owner of Trilon Records, Rene T. LaMarre was born on August 14, 1907. Little is known of LaMarre's formative years.

LaMarre decided to set up a record pressing and distributing company in January 1946. LaMarre saw, like others, how the independent could benefit big-time from the strikes suffered by the major companies due to unmet union demands. It would be much easier for a small independent to skirt all this. It was LaMarre's intention not to hire union musicians.

On January 24, 1946 the Oakland Tribune announced the grand opening of the Trilon Record Manufacturing Company at 3123 San Pablo Avenue. LaMarre and his partner Harry Leader set a goal of producing 250,000 phonograph records per week. Artists were signed and ready. A staff of ninety people was hired and twelve presses were planned to shortly run on a twenty-four hour basis. A full complement of twenty-two presses was envisaged.

LaMarre's previous links to the theatre world put him in touch with artists who would eventually record for Trilon. The most successful of these were the Vagabonds (with and without Raymond Manton). Trilon's second most successful act was the Four Aces, an integrated unit and a black counterpart to the Vagabonds in many respects.

After working for Trilon as a salesman to pay for Big Town pressings Trilon had to make when presses were down, Geddins found himself deeply in debt and had to sell many of his Big Town, Cava-Tone and Down Town masters to LaMarre to pay off his bills.

Because of Geddins' insurmountable problems, Trilon ended up with Lowell Fulson, Jimmy McCracklin, gospel masters and possibly more. The irony was that Trilon kicked off its 100 sepia series with Bob Geddins' & the Cavaliers *Irma Jean Blues*, a song he had initially released on his own Big Town label.

Trilon put out product by Lowell Fulson supported by the Ful-Tones, Dixieland trumpeter Bob Scoby with Alexander's Ragtime Band, singer/pianist Viviane Greene and others. Jimmy McCracklin's first Oakland recordings with the Blues Blasters wound up on Trilon Records in 1947 and 1948. By the end of 1948 LaMarre and Leader had sold the label lock, stock and barrel to Mercury Records for $250,000.

The Four Aces

Space permits only a few words on some of our artists.

"Soft" blues & boogie woogie pianist Ivory Joe Hunter had moved from Beaumont, Texas to San Francisco in the early 1940s. Hunter also brought with him his Texas style of "easy" blues. Hunter's initial vocal recordings were made for The Library of Congress in 1932 when he was just nineteen years old. His first commercial recording (vocal only - Charles Brown played piano) appeared in 1945 on his own Ivory vanity label pressing. Into this cocktail blues mix came Oscar (Nat King Cole's guitarist) and brother Johnny (Charles Brown's guitarist) Moore's light, fretted, jazz-inflected touches.

Ivory Joe Hunter

Texas-born T-Bone disciple Pee Wee Crayton traveled up from L.A. to the Bay Area for the first time in 1945 to play in the Ivory Joe Hunter Band. He came to stay in 1947, both to record for Gru-V-tone and take up permanent residence with Hunter's band. His Gru-V-tone sides are included here.

Georgia-born multi-instrumentalist and singer Jesse "Lone Cat" Fuller came to the Bay Area at the onset of World War II. In 1943, he worked with Leadbelly in Bay Area clubs. Some of his first locally produced recordings were issued on his self-designed World Song label.

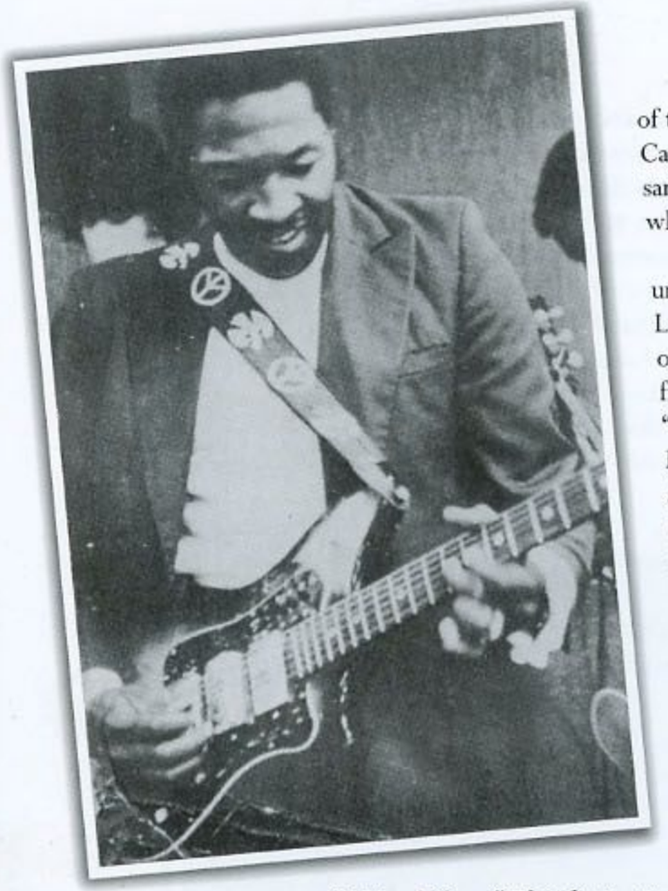
Mississippi-born singer/instrumentalist Johnny Fuller came to Vallejo in 1935. His first sides were cut for "Little" Jessie Jaxyson's Jaxyson label in 1948. He appeared on both KWBR and KRE radio in Berkeley during the late 1940s and frequently toured with Jimmy McCracklin later on.

Nothing is known of pianist/vocalist Odie Ervin, except for information gleaned by music historian Chris Bentley who states that Neil Slaven snagged a copy of Big Town 111 on E-Bay and that Presto acetates of the two unissued sides had fallen into the hands of collector Tim Healy who graciously allowed these gems to be spread among us.

Bob Geddins' Cavaliers were gathered from a motley of singers, some of whom sang in a gospel quartet by the name

Pee Wee Crayton

Jesse Fuller



Lafayette Thomas

of the unrecorded Jubilee Gospel Singers. The Cavaliers cut at least five songs. Jimmy Wilson sang lead momentarily with the group and guitar whiz Lafayette Thomas played in support.

The cornerstone of the Oakland blues is the underappreciated Shreveport-born guitar-slinger Lafayette Jerl "The Thing" Thomas who came out to San Francisco in 1945. He picked up his first guitar licks from his uncle, the noted Jesse "Baby Face" Thomas who recorded for Roy Milton's Miltone label in 1948. In 1949 he started working as a single, then joined Jimmy McCracklin's band, giving it the spice that added kick. Thomas's style of playing came from elements adopted by T-Bone Walker. He preferred working mainly as a sideman.

After recording once for Peacock, Modern, Hollywood and Trilyte, he waxed for "Jumpin'" George Oxford and Bob Geddins' short-lived Jumping label in 1957. Supported by the Johnny Heartsman Band, he cut the awesome instrumental "Cockroach run" which has since become "the anthem of the Oakland blues." This distinction makes it appropriate to open our collection with the song.

Jimmy Nelson was an important fixture around the Bay Area during the 1940s. Soon after recording two releases for Olliet in 1948, Jimmy Nelson played the Clef Club with the Peter Rabbit Trio in Oakland. It was here that Ollie Hunt recorded "T-99 Blues" which ended up at Modern Records and issued by them in 1951. "T-99" hit the top of Billboard's Juke Box charts in July at the same time it ascended to number five on the bestsellers' list.

Louisiana-born pianist and vocal stylist Percy Mayfield, lovingly remembered as "the poet of the blues," graced the Bay Area scene in 1946. We are honored to bring you the authentic versions of both his two first releases for Ollie T. Hunt's Gru-V Tone Records in 1947. Percy Mayfield moved on to greener pastures in L.A. in 1948.

Percy Mayfield

Guitarist Nick Esposito recorded impressive work for Don Hemby's Pacific Records with his own masterful band. We have included three of these.

Jesse Fuller's first recordings, his World song sides, are sampled on this collection. Notice that by this time his style had more or less gelled.

Bob Scobey is represented here with early, essential sides from the Ragtime label.

Enjoy this vintage Bay Area experience. Many of these seminal sides are reissued for the first time.

— Opal Louis Nations,
November 2009

With invaluable help from Dan Kochakian, Victor Pearlin, Mark Carrodus, Daniel Gugolz, John Broven, Lee Hildebrand, Bob Bell, Eric LeBlanc, Steve Propes, Chris Smith, Jonas Bernholm, Earl Watkins, Randy Tamberg, Chris Bentley, Dennis Leonis, Jim Dawson, Dick Bass, Steve LaVoie, Alec Palao, Kirk Roberts, Robert Stallworth, Tom Mazzolini and Chris Strachwitz.

Nick Esposito