DUSTY BROOKS

AN EBONY RECORD

LOS ANGELES
NO. 5375

Two Hearts to Beat Tonight
(Shelton Brooks, Sr.)
(Sheron Brooks, Jr.)

FOUR TONES
Johnny Porter-Dusty Brooks

Not Licensed for Radio Broadcast

100-B
Dusty Brooks & the Four Tones met as members of the CME Methodist Church and organized at Lane College, Jackson, Tenn.

In the mid-1930's, the group was Ira Hardin, lead tenor and guitarist, Leon Buck, tenor, Rudolph Hunter, baritone and drummer and Gillespie, a bass who was quickly replaced by Brooks. "The other guys they had singing bass was all right, but you see, I could do a lot of that Mills Brothers stuff," said Brooks. The group was soon featured on radio WTJS, Jackson, performing spirituals and pop.

The group went on the road in about 1936 and the group wound up at Hunter's home in Dallas where they met radio personality Art Linkletter at the Texas Centennial Celebration. At Linkletter's invitation, the group wound up in L.A. in 1937.

Heard on L.A.'s KFI, the group first recorded a series of transcription discs. At the Downbeat Club on Central Ave., they were approached about appearing in several sepia westerns like "Bronze Buckaroo" and "Two Gun Man From Harlem" starring Herb Jeffreys (his name was billed as Jeffries on the screen, Jeffries on disc).

The opening song of another Jeffries' flick "Harlem On The Prairie" was "I'm A Happy Cowboy" by Herb Jeffries & the Four Tones (J & S 153) in 1938. "That record is a bootleg," Jeffries said, referring to the very obscure release he states was taken from an on-screen performance by the group. The flip side, "Muffin With A Swing" did not feature Jeffries, who went on to have several hits for Excluive in the 1940's.

Brooks also appeared in two Mantan Moreland b-movies, "One Dark Night" and "Mantan Messes Up" in 1946.

Another limited-pressing Four Tones release was "The Jim Crow National Anthem," an Otis Rene composition noted in the California Eagle. The inflammatory lyrics centered around the theme of "you don't have to go south to find Dixie, James Crow is flying everywhere."

As early as 1939, the Eagle's headline led with "Rene record issued by Flash Studio" located on 988 E. Vernon. This disc, attributed to Otis Rene & the Four Tones was described as "What A Fool Was I" b/w "Haste Makes Waste."
After a southern tour with Jeffries, Ira Hardin was replaced by vocalist-guitarist Johnny Porter in 1939. In 1941, the Eagle reported on the founding of Rene's Ebony label with the release of the Four Tones' "What A Food Was I," written by Otis Rene and "Two Hearts Beat Tonight," written by Brooks on Ebony 101.

That same year, the Eagle noted release of "Someone's Rockin' My Dream Boat" on a label associated with KMPC disc jockey Al Jarvis (Make Believe Ballroom 02347), composed by Leon Rene, Emerson Scott and Otis Rene. The b-side was "Goodnight Baby, Goodnight," a Leon Rene composition. Both sides were either reissued or remade with label credit given to Eddie Beale Trio & the Four Tones (Bluebird 11408) in 1942.

What could have been the start-up of Leon Rene's Exclusive label was "Sweet Mint Julep Man" by the Four Tones and the Eddie Beale Trio (Exclusive no #) with an uptempo Amos N Andy-style rap ("he's sharp, aint's he man? tall, dark and handsome, the kind they hold for ran-

som") while the background voices chant out "candied yams, fried chicken, Memphis blues and Beale Street."

By 1945, both Hunter and Buck has been drafted. Hunter rejoined with Brooks and pianist Virgil Johnson, guitarist Arthur Maryand and lead singer Ray Wheaton who doubled on congas. They recorded "Hey What You Say" (Preview 666), "Satchelmouth Baby" (669), and "I'll Follow You" (A-1 1001, La Marr Starr 101). With additional releases on Checker and Memo, they recorded "Thank You For the Lies" b/w "Play Jackpot" (Memo 1001), pairing a sentimental ballad with an Ink Spots'-style spoken bridge spoken by Brooks, a novelty jump side.

In about 1948, pianist Johnny Harris joined the group, replacing Johnson who joined the Jackson Trio. Harris recalled that the group was singing to Jeffries and consisted of Brooks, Hunter, Joe Alexander, baritone, Al Mitchell, guitarist (and Louis Armstrong imitator), and "a girl named Doris."
Harris had been brought in to rehearse them out of their rough novelty image and into a Las Vegas showroom styled act. By the late 1940's, they were an established act at Club Alabam and had a Canadian-U.S. circuit they sporadically toured.

As a youngster, Fred Romain of the Native Boys / Ebbones recalled his family's connection to Dusty Brooks & the Four Tones. "My parents were close to Art Maryland because my mother was his cousin. My father worked in a couple of night spots on Central Avenue in Los Angeles during WWII and he had done the same type of work in Port Arthur Texas, my birth place, where he met a number of celebrities before the war."

"Art Maryland was also from Port Arthur. Because of the relation, they would come and stay at our home on their annual break, before or after their Hawaiian gigs. It was usually a two or three week stay."

"During the mid Forties and mid Fifties, we lived on the Eastside of L.A., on East 54th street and East 69th Streets. I remember a number of different musicians coming to the house to see Art while they were in town. Juanita Maryland (formerly Juanita Thomas) was singing with the group for a while at the time. I don't remember them playing at any clubs when they visited. Art would sometimes go and sit in with someone if he felt like it, but the visits to my home were usually rest times."

"I remember that Rudy's (Rudy Hunter and the Fabulous Tones) family was in L.A. and he would come by and visit my parents. All of the group would come by the house from time to time. I remember that Dusty and my father were friends."

In 1951, they cut Jesse Mae Robinson's "Once There Lived A Fool" (Columbia) and the truly embarrassing "Muse Around" b/w "Why Should I" (Kangaroos 1300) with the well-known character actor and songwriter Clarence

Muse. During this period, two male vocalists, Stanley Casey and Ruby Thrower joined the growing Four Tones who sometimes performed as the Sepia Boys.

In 1952, they recorded for two soon-to-be important regional labels, Sun out of Memphis, Tenn (their home state) and Dootone out of L.A. (their adopted city). "Chili Dogs" (Dootone 306) was a risqué "party" song of the kind that Dootsie Williams was famous. Female vocalist Juanita Thomas joined them for "Tears and Wine" b/w "Heaven On Fire" (Sun 182). After these unsuccessful singles, Maryland and Thomas we and worked together on the S.S. Catalina as the Shipmates, issuing at least on long play album which they sold to tourists as a supplement to their popular act.

After a falling out, Hunter took over the leadership of the group, which consisted of Alexander and Thrower. Joined by Alexander's brother, Norman, the group became Rudy Hunter & the Fabulous Tones with Brooks joining in as bass on occasion. This group issued 45's on the Rushmore in 1957 and George Garabedian's Mark 56 label in 1958. Garabedian would use the group to back demos that he contracted for songwriters and hopeful singing stars.

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DUSTY BROOKS and his FOUR TONES
SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY
(See story for some additions)

Muggin' With A Swing - Four Tones - D&S 153
I'm A Happy Cowboy [w/Herb Jeffrey] - D&S 154 [39]

Lullaby Of The Trail - Four Tones - D&S 158
I'm A Happy Cowboy [w/Herb Jeffrey] - D&S 154 [39]

What A Fool I Was - Four Tones - Ebony 100 [1/41]
Two Hearts To Beat Tonight

Someone's Rockin' My Dreamboat - Four Tones - Make Believe Ballroom 2357
Goodnight Baby Goodnight - Make Believe Ballroom 2358 [11/41]

Someone's Rockin' My Dreamboat - Four Tones - Bluebird 11408 [1/42]
Goodnight Baby Goodnight

Beyond The Stars - Four Tones - Exclusive [c/7/44]
Sweet Mint Julip Man

I'll Follow You - Four Tones - A-1 1001 [7/44]
Do, Do, Baby

Someone Over Here Loves Someone Over There - Four Tones - Preview 666
Hey, What You Say - Preview 667 [45]

Two Tears Met - Four Tones - Preview 668
Satchelmouth Baby - Preview 669 [45]

I'll Follow You - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Lamarrs Star 101 [45]
Do! Do! Baby

Seclusion - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Lamarrs Star 102 [45]
Thank You For The Lies

Little Chum - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Lamarrs Star 103 [45]
Play Jackpot

Play Jackpot - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Memo 1001 [45]
Thank You For The Lies

Little Chum - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Memo 1002 [45]
Uptown Rhythm

Please Don't Rush Me - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Memo 1003 [45]
Seclusion

Put Your Cards On The Table - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Memo 1005 [45]
Seclusion

Please Don't Rush Me - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Memo 7001 [3/48]
Put Your Cards On The Table
Why Should I - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Kangaroo 1300 [49]
Muse A While
You Told A Lie - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Kangaroo 1301 [49]
Bag Pipe Boogie
Old Man River - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Majestic 123 [3/50]
Cream Of Wheat
I Didn't Cry - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Majestic 127 [11/50]
Shuffleboard Boogie
Liddy - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Columbia 30230 [11/50]
Shoo Boogie Mama
Once There Lived A Fool - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Columbia 30236 [4/51]
Cryin' To Myself
I Ain't Gonna Worry No More - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Columbia 30241 [6/51]
Shadow Of The Blues
Chili Dogs
Chili Dogs - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Dootone 306 [2/52]
You Never Told A Lie
Genevieve - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Checker 700 [c/52]
The World Wasn't Made
Heartaches And Love - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Checker 701 [c/52]
Sugie
Heaven On Fire - Dusty Brooks & Four Tones - Sun182 [53]
Tears And Wine

Note: See story for some additions to this discography. Also, the Tones cut Radio Transcriptions for both Keystone and Standard in the 1940's.

This page only: Label graphics Bjorn Jentoft/Melody Lane Archives LLC. The flip on the above acetate is "Thank you for the lies".