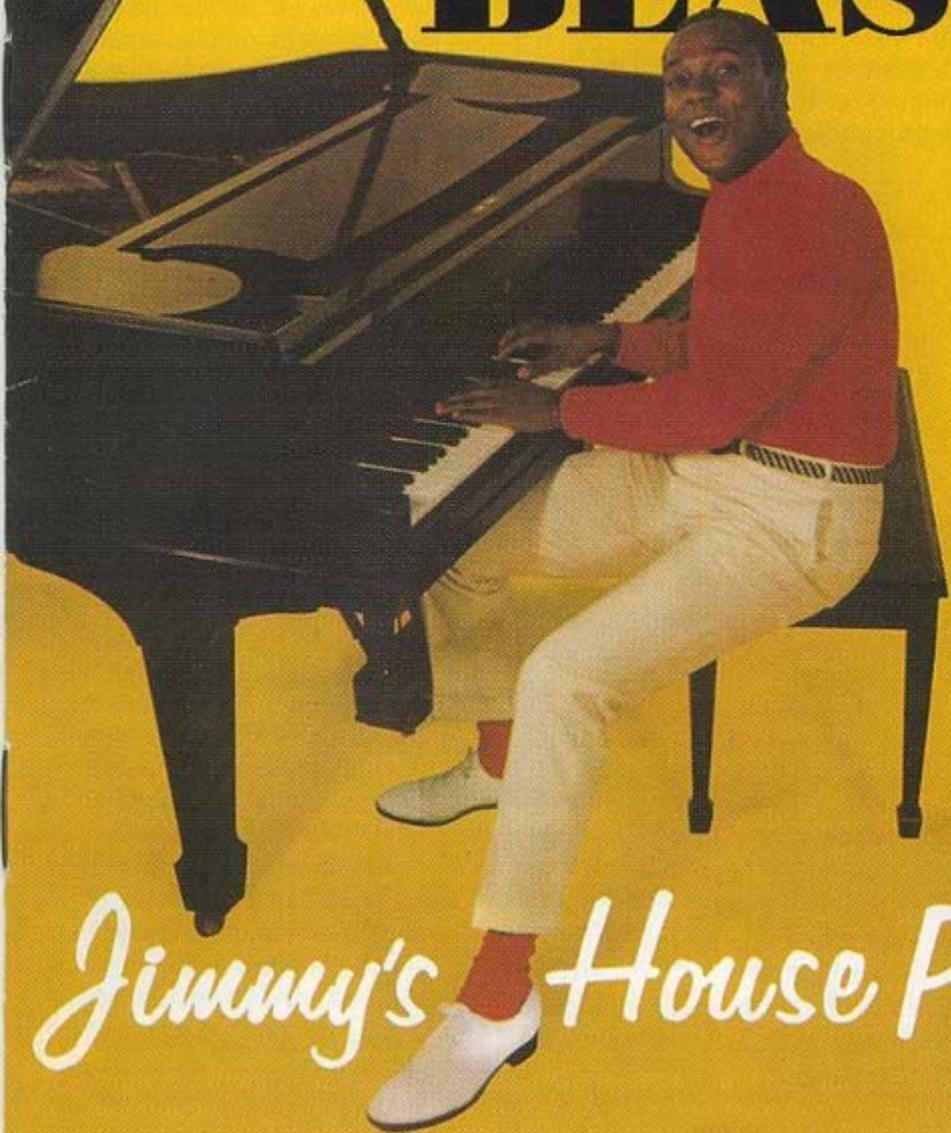


Modern
Jimmy
BEASLEY



Jimmy's House Party 

Jimmy BEASLEY *Jimmy's House Party*

1. **JOHNNY'S HOUSE PARTY Pts 1 & 2** (*Johnny Heartsman*) Gation Pub Co (1957)
2. **ELLA JANE** (*Jimmy Beasley, Maxwell Davis, Joe Josea*) Careers BMG Music Pub, Inc (1956)
3. **NO LOVE FOR ME** (*Jimmy Beasley, Maxwell Davis, Joe Josea*) BMG Music Pub Ltd (1956)
4. **COQUETTE** (*John Green, Gus Kahn, Carmen Lombardo*) EMI Music Pub/EMI United Partnership Ltd (1956)
5. **DON'T FEEL SORRY FOR ME** (*Jimmy Beasley, Maxwell Davis, Joe Josea*) Sparta-Florida Music Group Ltd (1956)
6. **MY HAPPINESS** (*Borney Bergentine, Betty Peterson*) Chappell Music Ltd (1957)
7. **I'M SO BLUE** (*Jimmy Beasley, Joe Josea*) Careers BMG Music Pub, Inc (1957)
8. **NEAR YOU** (*Francis Craig, Kermit Goell*) Warner Chappell Music Ltd (1957)
9. **THINKING OF YOU** (*Jimmy Beasley, Maxwell Davis, Joe Josea*) BMG Music Pub Ltd (1957)
10. **YOU WERE ONLY FOOLING (WHILE I WAS FALLING IN LOVE)** (*William Faber, Larry Fotin, Fred Meadows*) Francis Day & Hunter Ltd (1957)
11. **SHE'S GOOD TO ME** (*Jimmy Beasley*) Copyright Control (1957)
12. **DON'T BREAK THIS HEART OF MINE** (*Jimmy Beasley*) Copyright Control (1957)
13. **WE THREE (MY ECHO, MY SHADOW AND ME)** New Orleans version (*Dick Robertson, Nelson Cogane, Sammy Mysels*) Chappell-Morris Ltd (2002)
14. **GOOD LOVIN'** (*Jimmy Beasley*) Copyright Control (1957)
15. **ONCE MORE** (*Jimmy Beasley*) Copyright Control (1957)
16. **MOONLIGHT BAY** (*Percy Wenrich, Edward Madden*) Redwood Music Ltd (2002)
17. **I'M NOT FREE** (*Alan Blake, Charles Singleton, Rose Marie McCoy*) Campbell Connelly & Co Ltd (1957)
18. **HARBOR LIGHTS** (*Hugh Williams, James Kennedy*) Peter Maurice Music Ltd (1987)
19. **I WANT MY BABY (YEA, YEA, YEA, YEA, YEA)** (*Jimmy Beasley, Sam Ling*) Libijon Music Co/Gregmark Music Inc/ Careers BMG Pub Inc (2002)
20. **LONG GONE** (*Lewis Simpkins, Sonny Thompson*) Jewel Music Pub Inc (2002)
21. **THAT'S THE WAY IT'S GONNA BE** (*George Motola, Hal Winn*) Warner Chappell Music Ltd (2002)
22. **IN THE MORNING, IN THE EVENING** Copyright Control (2002)
23. **READY TO GO** (*Jimmy Beasley*) Copyright Control (1965)
24. **EARLY IN THE MORNING (PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME)** Copyright Control (2002)
25. **MY BABY'S GONE** (*Jimmy Beasley*) Copyright Control (1965)
26. **LISTEN HERE BIG BROWN EYES** Copyright Control (2002)
27. **RHUMBA ROCK** (*Jimmy Beasley, Joe Josea*) Modern Music Pub Co (1962)
28. **JAMBALAYA** (*Hank Williams*) Acuff Rose Music Ltd (1957)
29. **ROCK AND ROLL (NOTHING SEEMS RIGHT)** (*Obie Jessie*) BMG Music Pub Ltd (1962)
30. **WE THREE (MY ECHO, MY SHADOW AND ME)** Los Angeles version (*Dick Robertson, Nelson Cogane, Sammy Mysels*) Chappell-Morris Ltd (1957)
31. **RADIO ID** (Spoken Word) (2002)

Jimmy Beasley considers himself a well-rounded entertainer who, in his prime, could sing and play almost anything. "If I didn't know the song, I'd buy the guy a drink," he brags. Jimmy made sure he knew how to finger all the most requested country, blues, R&B and pop tunes of the day and how to put them over with what he calls his off-the-cuff routines, one liners and humorously manipulated "coloured lyrics".

Since I last spoke to Jimmy for Real Blues magazine in May 1998, his life has taken a few sharp turns. He became a fully-fledged Jehovah's Witness and, with his own money, bought Bob Lillie's Lama Club in Torrance, California. The publication of that article generated a few extra gigs at home and abroad. But after a few weekend gigs and some well received concerts in Amsterdam, Jimmy suffered a debilitating stroke. With the gradual deterioration of his health, he was forced into permanent retirement. He still sits occasionally at the piano to play a tune or two, but gone are the days when Jimmy pumped out good old funky Southern boogie woogie with his customary reckless abandon.

Jimmy was born on the last day of September 1929 in Kansas City, the first of seven children. His mother, Carrie Kenney, hailed from Kilgore, Texas; his father, Roy Beasley - a house painter and baseball fanatic - was from Tyler, Texas, but his family moved from Tyler to Kansas City the year Jimmy was born. Jimmy developed a natural interest for music, and listened to Nat King Cole and Charles Brown quite often. At Lincoln High, he sang in the Aces Quartet with friends Sonny Kenner on guitar, Larry Cummings and

Charles Rowan, but his real aspiration was to one day become an amateur prize-fighter.

At seventeen he married his childhood sweetheart, Geraldine (and they have stayed "an item" for over 55 years!) Geraldine encouraged Jimmy's interest in music but frowned on his pugilistic ventures. Nevertheless Jimmy entered Golden Glove amateur contests three years in a row (1948, 1949 and 1950), winning 59 fights out of 65.

The Aces evolved into the Sonny Kenner Trio with

Jimmy, Sonny, and Oscar Minor on bass. The group did well, and John Barrett, Jimmy's personal manager, had no trouble finding him work throughout the Midwest. Through Barrett's management know-how, the Trio ended up with a house band residency at the El Capitan on Eighteenth Street. Jimmy sang, learned to read music and fudged around on the piano. What he could not play very well on the keys, he covered with a clever skit or funny routine. At the El Capitan Jimmy played support to Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker. As Jimmy's family began to grow (he and Geraldine had seven children), he needed to find more, and

better paying, gigs. This led to a move to Los Angeles, California after John Barrett - who had ventured out before him - found Jimmy a job as the weekend pianist in the King Perry Band. Fortunately, his rollicking boogie woogie piano style was just what Perry was looking for, and Jimmy was soon able to send for his wife and family.

During the week Jimmy studied theology at Pepperdine College, but he lost interest and left at the end of his first year. Eventually club work thinned out, and he got a job



Courtesy Opal Louis Nations

painting houses with his father. He started writing songs in his spare time and showing them around. Meanwhile Perry signed a limited contract with Don Pierce's Hollywood Records, and a studio date was set up in December 1954 that included Jimmy on piano. Two singles were issued in early 1955, Jimmy's most notable contribution appearing on 'Pitching A Party' (Hollywood 1030). This, and two previously unissued songs from the session, surfaced on a Krazy Kat vinyl album some 15 years ago.

Some of Perry's band members also sat in on sessions for the Bihari brothers at Modern Records in Culver City. This led to Jimmy's introduction to both Johnny Otis and Modern's A&R whiz Maxwell Davis. Otis met Jimmy in the summer of 1955 and bestowed on him the sobriquet "Hurricane Edwards" because of his thunderous, punishing use of the piano. Otis took Jimmy with him to his studio in Los Angeles where, as a member of the Otis Band, Jimmy cut 'Butterball' / 'Sandy's Boogie' for Don Robey's Peacock Records in Houston, Texas. As "Hurricane Edwards", Jimmy also taped eight unissued piano instrumentals with the Otis Band in support. For reasons of his own, Robey decided to shelve the songs.

Jimmy became friends with Maxwell Davis, who at that time was doing most of his arranging at the piano and who encouraged the young songwriter to bring songs to him if he felt the label could use them. Out of financial necessity, Jimmy wrote and sold many charts to Davis (sometimes Modern paid \$50 for a song, sometimes twice that amount). In early 1956 Jimmy wrote a composition loosely dedicated to Ellen, an old flame. Jimmy took the song, titled 'Ella

Jane', to Davis, who got Jimmy to run through the melody in the studio. Davis thought he was the best man to record it, and set up a recording session where they also cut a second number, 'No Love For Me', for release as his first Modern 78 and 45 (#991).

The Biharis at Modern Records wanted a sound that reflected the chunky basics of Fats Domino's keyboard attack, and in Jimmy Beasley they had found just the man. Both songs met with a generous three-star rating in

Billboard's reviews of early June 1956, just as Beasley started knocking them dead at the Casino Club in Gardena. 'Ella Jane' was full of verve and sparkle,

'No Love For Me' was a solid, mid-tempo rocker. Early sales figures looked promising, but in the end the record did not quite hit the mark.

California's other R&B heavyweights, Specialty and Aladdin, also wanted to replicate the multi-million dollar Fats Domino sound. They bought masters from the Cosimo Studios in New

Orleans, or sent their artists down there to record on North Rampart Street. Modern packed off a number of artists, including Etta James and Jimmy Beasley, under Maxwell Davis' supervision. At Cosimo's the Modern talent was placed with members of the Dave

Bartholomew Band. Jimmy cut four songs on a July 1956 session: 'Don't Feel Sorry For Me' / 'Coquette', put out in August 1956 as Modern 996, and 'Jambalaya' / 'My Happiness', issued four months later as Modern 1009.

The first release garnered a double three-star rating in Billboard, a September issue of the magazine subsequently noting that 'Don't Feel Sorry For Me' was enjoying tremendous airplay by jocks in the LA area. Based loosely on Domino's 'Don't Blame It On Me' (Imperial 5375, 1955),



'Sorry' is a stomping opus anchored by Lee Allen's tough sax breaks and Jimmy's manic, one-note jabbings. 'Coquette' finds the tables reversed - it was Fats who covered Jimmy's version in July 1958. Jimmy's reading is extremely lively, with vocal shadings that are far less monotonous than those of Fats'. However, Domino's platter inevitably outsold Jimmy's, peaking at #26 on Billboard's R&B charts in January 1959.

The same can be said for the Hank Williams-penned 'Jambalaya', a hoedown hopper eventually recorded and issued by Domino on Imperial 5796 in 1961. Beasley's exceptional 'My Happiness' (awarded four stars in Billboard's pre-Christmas issue) generated much airplay, and was mistakenly considered a white recording by music people in Massachusetts. "When I toured the state," said Jimmy, "people were expecting to see a white guy come out and play it." Jimmy's interpretation, which carbon copies Domino's keyboard style down to the last note, was dutifully used intact on the Fat Man's cover of January 1957 (Imperial EP 147). But no one mistook Domino's limited vocal range on the lyrics.

Although Jimmy wanted to show his versatility in his live act, the crowds kept asking for that transposed, easy loping Crescent City sound. By this time Jimmy had his own band and worked in New York for Alan Freed, a gig that - by

popular demand - lasted for three years. He appeared alongside Ray Charles, Fats Domino, Elvis Presley, Ruth Brown and Big Jay McNeely, all the while writing for Domino and others. He also appeared on TV - on the Al Jarvis Show in LA, and on Steve Allen's Late Show in New York. He was able to find steady work; selling songs continued to be an ongoing necessity for Jimmy in those days as he was still trying to make a living out

of playing music. One day his car broke down half way to Culver City with wife and kids aboard. He had to walk the remaining distance to the studios, sell his songs, buy some gas, and find his family who, fortunately, had not been towed by the Highway Patrol. Tied down with a large family meant that Jimmy could not go away on long, extensive package tours and as a consequence could not effectively promote his recordings.

Jimmy's next LA-based Modern session came about in January 1957. Big Jim Wynn's band was hired to support him. Two singles releases emerged, 'Near You' / 'I'm So Blue' (Modern 1014) in February 1957 and 'Thinking Of You' / 'You Were Only Fooling (While I Was Falling In Love)' (Modern 1018) in May 1957. Francis Craig's 1947 million seller, 'Near You', was again given the Domino treatment. 'I'm So Blue', a self-penned number, is a bright, cheery, catchy little tune despite its melancholic title. 'Thinking Of You' is made of the right stuff and rocks out with lots of cymbals, solid drum patterns and tight sax riffs. 'You Were Only Fooling', a slow, back beat-driven vehicle, brings



together all the same spicy ingredients. (The latter song was also cut around the same time by fast-emerging popster Connie Francis, although it's doubtful whether Jimmy's version figured in Connie's A&R representative's decision to cut her on the song!)

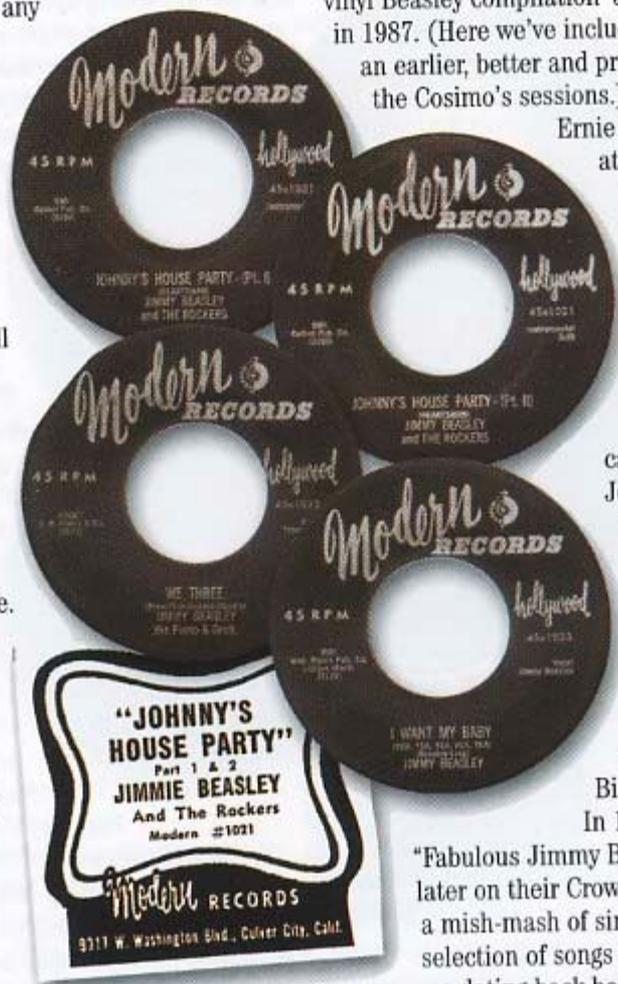
None of those four tunes do any justice to Jimmy's excitingly relentless boogie piano, or his organ playing, but that was to change. May 1957 saw the release and meteoric success of Johnny Heartsman's 'Johnny's House Party', a rug-cutting, two-part, party-prancing instrumental - itself more than slightly based on Bill Doggett's massive hit 'Honky Tonk' - that was issued on Berkeley's Music City label. Rapid sales spurred a rash of covers, and Jimmy's version - on Modern 1021 - was one of these, hitting the streets only weeks after the original release. Supported by Maxwell Davis' combo and with overdubbed party noises from vocal ensemble the Rockers, Jimmy wails on organ while session stalwart Plas Johnson strips paint with his tenor on a version that more than stands comparison with the Heartsman original.

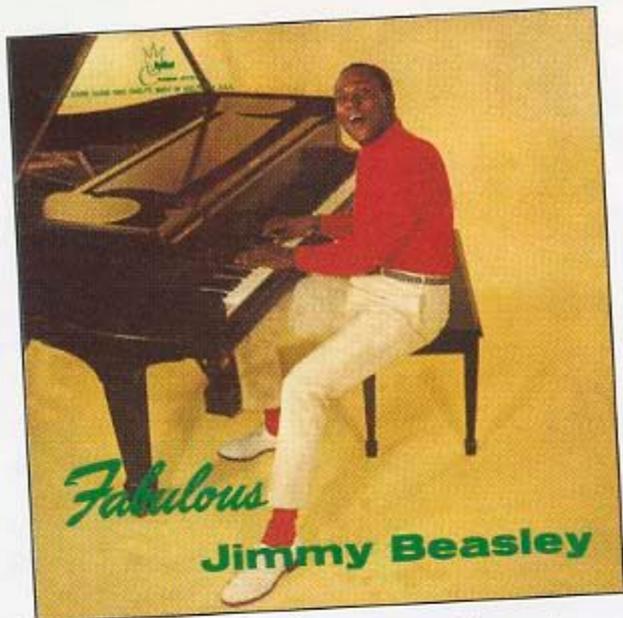
From the same session, Jimmy's follow-up, 'We Three (My Echo, My Shadow And Me)' / 'I Want My Baby (Yea, Yea, Yea, Yea, Yea)' (Modern 1023) came out hard on the heels of Johnny's House Party'.

Awarded four stars by Billboard, 'We Three' is given the Fats treatment, a world away from the Ink Spots' mellow reading of 1940. Jimmy had already attempted the song during his Cosimo's sessions. The version he cut in New Orleans was held back from release until Ace put out its vinyl Beasley compilation "Jimmy's House Party" (CH 190) in 1987. (Here we've included both the single version and an earlier, better and previously unreleased take from the Cosimo's sessions.) 'I Want My Baby' is a chirpy, Ernie K-Doe-sounding ditty, enlivened at the bridge with a fine booting sax. Take 9 was used for the final master, but CD compiler Tony Rounce has chosen the first rocking run-through - again previously unissued - for your listening and dancing pleasure.

Jimmy's next outing on wax came via a recommendation from Johnny Otis. Aladdin Records needed a good, solid, pumping piano player for their Thurston Harris cover of Bobby Day's 'Little Bitty Pretty One', and Jimmy obliged. The Bobby Day version failed to chart significantly, but Harris' peaked at #2 in October 1957's Billboard R&B chart.

In 1956 Modern put out the "Fabulous Jimmy Beasley" album, reissued a year later on their Crown subsidiary. This collection was a mish-mash of single As and Bs, along with a selection of songs from earlier sessions, including one dating back before the spring 1956 date - which leaves one to suppose that Beasley enjoyed a working relationship with Modern Records before the Otis/Peacock session. The set contained a number of gems, many of



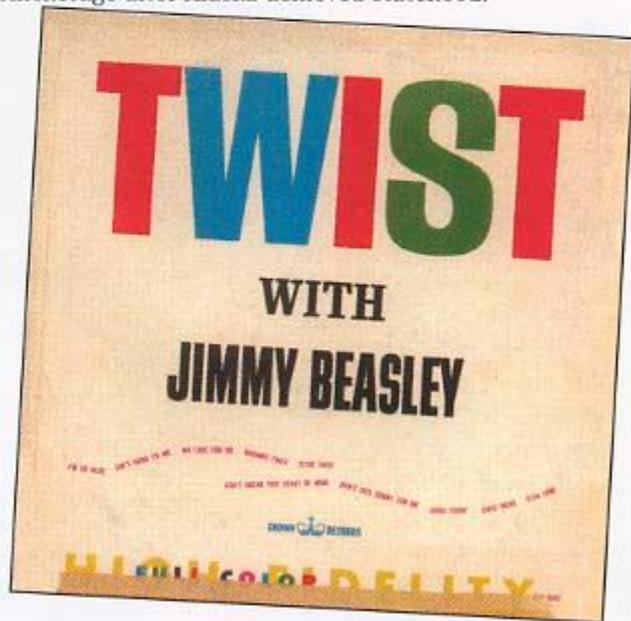


which outshone the selections on some of his previous singles releases, such as the mid-paced rocker 'She's Good To Me', the wailing 'Don't Break This Heart Of Mine' with Beasley's frantic finger thumping, a breakneck 'Good Lovin', the easy rocking 'Once More' and a soulfully plaintive 'I'm Not Free'.

In 1961 Modern repackaged the Modern/Crown album, re-titling it "Twist With Jimmy Beasley", to cash in on (then) current trends. This new configuration excluded Modern single 1009, and instead added two stunning, never-before-issued instrumentals. 'Rhumba Twist', a Professor Longhair-type toe-tapping ditty that, according to the Modern tape boxes, was originally called 'Rhumba Rock', and 'Slow Twist', originally logged as 'Rock And Roll'! This moody, 'down-in-the-alley' piece was also used as the backing track for Obediah "Young" Jessie's vocal arrangement of 'Nothing Seems Right' (Modern 973) - issued, would you believe, in November 1955, thus establishing the fact that Maxwell Davis was already buying and recording Jimmy's material at that time. Ace's vinyl Beasley album further augmented the

best of Jimmy's previously released single and album material with two further enjoyable Fatsalike versions of Tin Pan Alley standards. 'Moonlight Bay' and 'Harbor Lights' - both reprised here - were also recorded at Cosimo's, likely as not.

In 1960, through agent Johnny Coom, Jimmy got on the Airforce Military Base circuit, playing in canteens and officer's messes. After working bases in Oklahoma and Kansas City, Jimmy was sent off to play a string of gigs in Alaska, sometimes having to endure minus 64 degrees temperatures. Jimmy played two extremely successful six month residencies in Fairbanks and Anchorage after Alaska achieved statehood.



As part of his act, Jimmy dressed in drag. He slipped on a grass skirt and wig and, by raising his voice a few octaves, gave out with an effeminate version of Sue Thompson's golden novelty 'Norman'. The airmen went crazy over the skit and had Jimmy repeat this act out in Honolulu, Hawaii where he later added his impersonation of Don Ho singing 'Beyond The Reef'. He also came

up with his famous cowboy hat persona at this time. The air-conditioning in some clubs made him sick, and he claims that he could avoid headaches by wearing tall hats.

"The Biharis," says Jimmy, "always treated me right." In 1965, Modern Records re-signed Jimmy and issued 'Ready To Go' / 'My Baby's Gone' on 45 rpm, under its new United Modern imprint. 'Ready' is a beautiful rocking song with a good-time feel to it. 'Baby's Gone' is a soul-rooted blues ballad with stunning guitar licks and pretty chord changes, certainly one of Jimmy's best efforts. Several other songs were cut at this session, but 'In The Morning, In The Evening', 'Please Don't Leave Me' (not the Domino oldie) and the romping 'Listen Here Big Brown Eyes' have never seen the light of day until now.

The remaining unissued material here cannot be dated accurately, but it's fairly safe to assume that the excellent workout on Sonny Thompson's 'Long Gone' dates from Jimmy's earliest sessions for Modern, while the ultra-poppy 'That's The Way It's Gonna Be' is most probably from the late 1950s. (Group fans should note that the deep 'diddy-bops' on this track are provided by "Cornell", according to the pre-song chatter. Who'd bet against that being ex-Flair Cornell Gunter?)

Although he didn't record again for the Biharis, Jimmy Beasley continued to be a popular live draw

wherever he played, with or without a record to support. In 1970 he ventured onto the Nevada nightclub circuit, with its lure of gambling, easy living and glitzy nightlife. Jimmy played Reno and Vegas, interspersed with bookings at Tahoe and a nitery in Laughlin across from

Bullhead City, Arizona. However, Jimmy soon burned out on this fast-paced circuit and eventually wound up on the international blues festival scene, where he became a regular until his health gave out just a few years ago.

He's not been in the best of health in recent times, so everyone involved hopes that Jimmy is still around to read these liner notes and to hear again his great recordings in pristine, from-mastertape quality. "Never mind (if I don't)," he tells me, "as long as my 25 grand-kids and six great grand-kids get to read them, that's all that matters..."

Opal Louis Nations, 2002
(with invaluable help from Jimmy Beasley)



Record labels and "Jimmy's House Party" LP courtesy Tony Rounce. "Twist" LP sleeve & United Modern labels courtesy John Broven. Adverts courtesy "First Pressings: The History of R&B" Vols 6 & 7 - compiled & edited by Galen Gart (Big Nickel Publications)