

The Extra: Somerset Run Biweekly Newsletter, Vol. III,
No. 9 (May 12, 2008), pp. 19-21
(Reprinted with permission of the author)

"Classic Urban Harmony" Program Will Delight Homeowners

In the still of the night

I held you, held you tight

Cause I love, love you so

Promise I'll never let you go

In the still of the night

In the still of the night

-The Five Satins-

By *Chris Retz*

Do you remember this Five Satins classic? Many of us danced to it on prom night, and if you love it today as much as yesterday, you are in for a great time on Thursday, May 22, when Sherwood Court resident Charlie Horner debuts his multimedia "Classic Urban Harmony" program at the Clubhouse at 7 p.m.

Dave and I entertained Pam and Charlie Horner the night they moved next door to us. Over a dinner of cold salads that hot evening late last July, they introduced us to their passion for doo wop music. It was an unforgettable, most enjoyable evening.

It was their mutual love of doo wop that brought Charlie and Pam together in 1997 at a meeting of the United Group Harmony Association (UGHA) in Clifton. Pam holds degrees in education, while Charlie has a PhD in organic chemistry from the University of Pennsylvania. But it's their shared fervor for doo wop that defines them as a happy couple. Charlie remembered, "Our wedding in New Hope, PA was quite memorable. The ceremony was held outdoors in a courtyard. Pam walked down the aisle to the tune of 'The Vow' by the Flamingos and the service concluded with 'Just To Be In Love' by the Haven Knights. In the middle of the service Milton Love and the Solitaires stood up and sang, 'The Wedding' a cappella. The reception featured concerts by both the Solitaires and the Deep River Quartet, who came all the way from Holland to perform. The Ecstasies also made their final public appearance there."

A Philadelphia native, Charlie said, "As long as I can remember, I've always loved music, especially phonograph records. By the time I hit high school I began listening to DJs Jerry Blavat (who is still on the air) and Ron Diamond. From this I caught 'collector's fever.' I worked in a gas station during college, which gave me a lot of time to listen to the radio. I listened to Black radio stations, which got me into soul groups like the

Dells, Ballads, and Bobby Taylor & the Vancouvers."

While pursuing his undergraduate degree in chemistry Charlie worked as a DJ at Drexel University's radio station, WXDT-AM. "One of the guys in my chem lab worked there and invited me to visit. There I saw a large box of promo 45s sent into the station (whose signal didn't carry farther than the dorms) for airplay review. My friend said, 'Take any of those records that you want. We get a couple hundred review records a week. We throw out what the staff doesn't take home.' At that point I decided to join the station to get in on the free records."

By the spring of 1970, the station had acquired a license to broadcast to Philadelphia on the FM band, under the call letters WKDU-FM. "We were only a 10-watt station and the signal was shaky but my professionalism and listening audience grew steadily. Soon thereafter I started interviewing vocal group singers. My first interview was with Fred Paris of the Five Satins. I also started writing about the groups I interviewed, and co-wrote the first definitive article about the Castelles for *Bim Bam Boom* magazine. That was the start of my writing career." Over the years, Charlie has interviewed many notable doo wop groups, including the Orioles, Dreamlovers, Belltones, and Keystoners, just to name a few. He has written liner notes for more than 40 albums.

Pam, too, is an author, being a semi-regular writer and concert reviewer for *Golden Oldies Forever* magazine as well as a writer for *Remembering The Mills Brothers* magazine, and contributor to *Echoes of the Past*. She also authored and produced a brochure on Philadelphia Vocal Group Harmony for the 2006 Philadelphia Doo Wop Festival, and contributed historic information to numerous group harmony Web sites. (At this same festival Charlie was given a Lifetime Achievement Award.)

From 1975-95 Charlie's show could be heard on WXPB-FM (88.9) in Philadelphia. "I had various time slots, usually on Saturday afternoons."

While many people go to Europe to see the sights, Pam and Charlie go to Holland and Austria to catch appearances by the Golden Gate Quartet and Deep River Quartet. "We've also traveled from Paris to the coast of Spain with the Golden Gate Quartet," Pam added.



Charlie retired from GAF last September as Research & Development Manager, which enabled the Horners to devote themselves full time to their love of doo wop. They have formed an LLC called "Classic Urban Harmony" (CUH). "I coined this term in November 1990 as it captures the essence of the total music genre. It also characterized the theme and mission of my radio show. Featuring black and white vocal groups, doo wop, acappella, beach music, and black Gospel music, the name was descriptive and accurate." CUH "strives to preserve a part of American culture that is otherwise in danger of being lost. While the legacies of other forms of American music such as Blues, Jazz, and Big Band Music have been relatively well documented, the history of early Rhythm & Blues and Rock & Roll music, particularly by vocal harmony groups, is less appreciated. CUH seeks to take 40 years of intense research in this field and present it by way of multimedia talks to interested audiences in an educational and entertaining way. The first step in appreciation is understanding."



My visit to Pam and Charlie's music filled home, along with EXTRA staff photographer Lauretta Camardelli (who also went to their storage facility in Somerset County) was a wonder. As a doo wop CD played softly in the background Charlie said, "I maintain one of the better group harmony archives around." Not only do the Horners have 50,000 records (yes, you read that number correctly) in storage, but also 10,000 CDs, all of which are neatly catalogued and filed for instant reference. They also maintain three file cabinets full of printed material. All of this is an invaluable resource for the serious music historian. Charlie adds, "I have Black vocal group recordings going back to wax cylinders (1890-1920). I also have songbooks from Black groups from 1872. I collect everything in harmony groups — pre 1950s' 78s, classic 1950s' urban harmony groups, soul vocal groups, a cappella groups, Gospel groups, early 'ska' and reggae groups, and South African Black quartets from the apartheid era." Their walls are filled with posters of everything from the Mills Brothers to the Deep River Boys, whose 1950s' show opened with a very young Petula Clark. They also have lobby cards, sheet music, and much, much more, some of which will be on display at the Clubhouse.

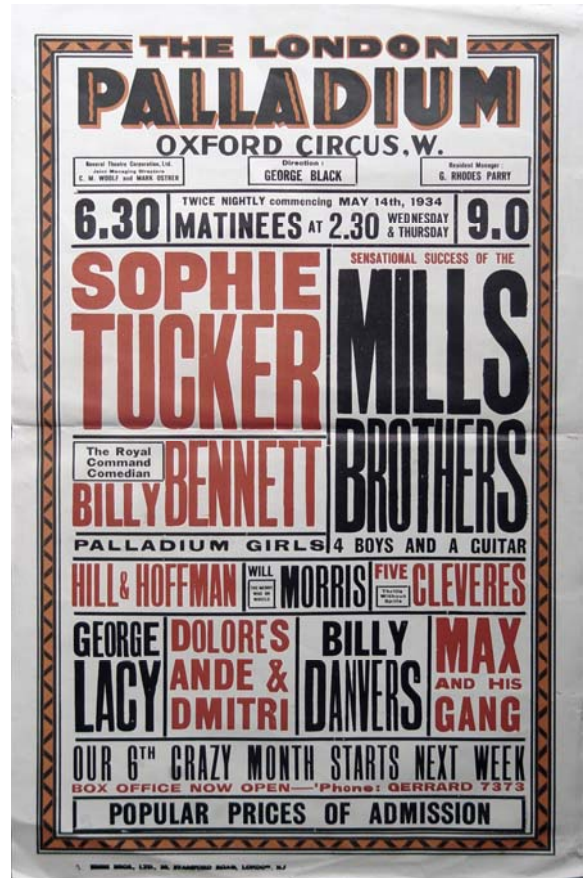
Charlie explained that doo wop evolved as part of the "call and response" system used in the antebellum slave era. "After the Civil War small groups would gather on street corners to sing. They couldn't afford instruments and thus sang in perfect harmony." Pam added, "They sang bass, tenor, lead, 2nd tenor, and baritone parts."



Pam noted that while doo wop has been around for more than half a century, its origins began in the 1930s with the Mills Brothers, who entertained at a "Command Performance" for King George V and Queen Mary on May 8, 1934, and continued to wax until the British invasion of the early 1960s brought about the waning of the coast-to-coast urban popularity of doo wop.



In preparation for their new business venture Charlie



took an intensive 7-week course entitled SEA (Self Employment Assistance) and Entrepreneurial Training Program sponsored by the NJ Department of Labor. His SEA sessions were held at Middlesex County College, where his instructor was Carla Fallone, daughter of SR resident Anna Marie Fallone.

While the multimedia, PowerPoint show at the Clubhouse is their debut venture, the Horners have exciting plans to take their show on the road to other adult communities along the eastern seaboard, as well as museums, libraries, cruise ships, etc. "People can play doo wop records or CDs. What makes Pam and me unique is that we know the *history*," Charlie said.

