

## DESTINATION: PHILADELPHIA, PA

*A Tribute to Philadelphia's Pied Pipers of Radio ..... Part 3 The conclusion .*

By George L. Frunzi, Ed.D

Almost universally, record collectors and avid music enthusiasts will admit that a radio disc jockey probably had something to do with nurturing their passionate interest in music. The great disc jockeys from the golden era of 1950s radio were able to mysteriously capture the mind and hearts of teenagers across the country with the special sounds of rock n' roll and the top 40. They all had magnetic AM voices, talked their jive, and generated a popularity never before witnessed in radio broadcasting. It was magical. They penetrated the imaginations of teens---cleverly sold a new form of music---and provided an eager and hungry market with a music they could call their own. It changed the world of music---and it changed our culture and society.

Alan Freed is unquestionably the prime mover. He was first to introduce a new musical form to teenage America: he named the new sound "rock and roll," and introduced it on his famous "Moondog Matinee" radio show in Cleveland, Ohio. There is no way he could know the magnitude of what he was about to start. Nor could he imagine---in his wildest dreams---the popularity he would generate along with the tremendous fame and power that would follow. Because of Freed, (the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is located in Cleveland) a meteoric rise of teenage "race" music experienced quick, upward momentum, teenagers were mesmerized---and the music world has not been the same.

As the seeds of rock and roll sprouted ..... the "Freed Factor" placed new life and meaning on the radio---as a broadcast medium. Teenagers carried radios around---in transistor form---everywhere they went. It was almost as if the transistor was a natural extension of their bodies. Teenager did not want to stray too far from their music.

Without Alan Freed, there would be no "Cousin Bruce" and WABC in New York City, Wolfman Jack, Murray the "K," Don Imus and Howard Stern. It's very likely that the pied pipers of Philadelphia radio might have pursued careers selling cars instead of spreading the musical word in the City of Brotherly Love. Plus, all those musical enthusiasts would be passionate about something else, and I might be collecting coins instead of records! Wow .....that makes me shudder! They look nice, but they sure don't sound as good as records .....oh well....

### THE PHILADELPHIA RADIO SCENE

The radio scene in Philadelphia during the 1950s and 1960s was out of sight! It was something special. With *American Bandstand* located in Philadelphia, there was a musical presence in the city that was simply---unmatched. Because of Freed's bold musical initiatives in Cleveland, WIBG---a small 25-watt religious station in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania,---just outside the city limits--- decided to become the first station locally (and one

of the first stations nationally) to fill the entire broadcast day with local deejays---like Joe Niagara, "the Rockin' Bird." Slowly "the Rockin' Bird" began to "slip in" some "race" music rock and roll on his play list by Fats Domino, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Frankie Lymon and the' Teenagers, etc ... and before long, the face and sound of Philadelphia radio changed. Joined by Hy Lit, "Hyski" and "the Rockin Bird" controlled Philadelphia radio ratings---and WIBG became a radio giant in Philadelphia.

Teenagers were entertained and controlled by WIBG, (Niagara and Lit)---and their musical roots were formed. Soon, the Philadelphia teenage music market was hypnotized by the pied pipers of top 40 radio at WIBG Niagara and Lit could make or break a record based on "heavy" air play .... and in conjunction with *American Bandstand*, Philadelphia was in the driver's seat in terms of being a teenage musical Mecca. All three hosts (Clark, Niagara and Lit) are legends ... all three did their share to popularize the music ... and they all share in shaping the interests of music enthusiasts and record collectors in Philadelphia. The experience was the start of the musical education process. It represented the formal high school education of music knowledge. It was how the Philadelphia market---to include records collectors and music enthusiasts---became educated in the basics of the "new music"

Hy Lit went on to establish an unprecedented popularity in Philadelphia---achieving the highest ratings in Philadelphia history with a 71 market share of all listeners in the city. His storied radio and television ride as a deejay lasted more than 50 years ... ending suddenly with his unexpected passing in late 2007. Niagara passed away several years ago, and Clark is still alive---although a stroke sidelines him from his previously ultra-heavy schedule. All three share in the musical development of most Philadelphia area baby-boomers---who grew up during the Clark-Niagara-Lit era of musical--media dominance.

The teenage music market in the 1950s---like now---is characterized by the 75% who are perfectly happy and content to stay exactly where they are "musically," and the 25% who want to move forward and "learn more." As top 40 radio became commonplace, and the music was played everywhere, complacency began to set in---except among the 25%. They were eager and ready--- they wanted something "new" and "different" from a musical perspective. Hy Lit was quietly---perhaps unintentionally--- making an appeal to the 25% who were seeking something different. On his Hall of Fame Radio Show on Sunday evenings, Lit was playing oldies (moldy oldies as he called them)---but he also featured some old vocal group sounds that didn't gain popularity when they were originally released. Songs like "In the Still Of The Night" by the Five Satins and "Could This Be Magic" by the Dubs were featured on the Hall of Fame Show. The 25% were beginning to identify with the black vocal

group sound---and somehow it was obvious that something was going to happen. Lit was helpful to the 25% ---but he didn't provide them with the musical deliverance they were seeking. You could almost "see" and "hear" the storm clouds off in the distance---something was bound to happen.

The "calm before the storm" in the mid 1950s brought Alan Freed. The "calm before the storm" in Philadelphia in 1961 brought Jerry Blavat to satisfy the musical growth of the 25%. He hit the Philadelphia radio market in storm-like fashion in 1961. ... he is still on the radio today ... and his popularity is as strong as ever. The "Geator with the Heater"--the "Boss With The Hot Sauce" is a true Philadelphia icon.

## JERRY BLAVAT

Gaining popularity at the early age of 13 as a smooth dancer, Blavat became a "regular" on Bob Horn's *American Bandstand*---and was seen daily jitterbugging and dancing "live" on the television screen. After high school, Blavat slowly migrated through several music and show business related jobs, eventually landing at WCAM (1310 AM) in Camden, New Jersey. There---on a small AM station, Blavat's broadcast beamed across the Delaware River into Philadelphia and provided that 25% of the music market just what they were looking for---and more! The musical influence and cultural effect of Blavat's presence on WCAM established an immediate "cult" following. He played music that no one knew---but everyone loved---as soon as they heard it! He featured records from the late 1950s that received little-to-no air play at the time they were released. He featured sounds like "Shadows" by the Five Satins, "Please Don't Ask Me To Be Lonely" by the Dubs, "Long Tall Girl" by the Carnations and releases by Eddie and the Starlites, the Metalics, the Cufflinks, the Students and the Chesters. Blavat's ear for music is excellent---and his ability to determine the musical likes and dislikes of his audience has always been his strong suit. He knows the sound of Philadelphia---and he played it nightly on WCAM. As he introduced this "new" music, record collectors were running every which way trying to find and buy copies of the records Blavat was playing. All of a sudden, our high school education was complete---and our collegiate musical education was underway.

It's now 48 years later, and Blavat is still on the air---everyday---playing those same songs. He is an institution in the city of Philadelphia. He did it his way ... and he still does. I suspect he always will! His following is still "cult-like"---and his contribution to the musical education of Philadelphia record collectors and music enthusiasts is virtually indescribable. He answered the cravings of the 25 %,--- and he continues to live his radio show sign-off message: "Keep on Rockin' Cause You Only Rock Once."

In the meantime, that ever-evasive, hard-to-please 25% was looking for more. It took two New York City boys to provide the next level of musical education in Philadelphia. Bronx born Joe Marchesani and Tom Luciani provided the curriculum for the Master's degree. Long time advocates of the black vocal group sound, they hosted a show at Fordham University in the Bronx called the *Time Capsule Show* that featured very obscure, very scarce and very rare vocal group recordings---primarily by black artists---from the 1950s. In addition to featuring the original never-before heard vocal group recordings, the hosts also provided a unique historical perspective by identifying the name of the lead singer and other group members, the neighborhood or home town location of the group, record label information, the year of release, and other pertinent information.

Joe Marchesani applied for--- was offered---and accepted---a full-time position at Temple University in Philadelphia. Marchesani worked in Philadelphia during the week and returned to the Bronx every weekend and continued to co-host the *Time Capsule Show* with Luciani at Fordham. Eventually,

weekend returns to the Bronx became cumbersome---especially after marriage and the start of his family. Marchesani approached Temple University about broadcasting his half of the show from Philadelphia over the University's radio station, WRTI. He convinced the station to air the show in Philadelphia---and on July 19, 1969, as a summer entry program, the *Time Capsule Show* aired at Temple University.

The show was done by tape exchange, with Luciani taping his share of the show at Fordham and Marchesani taping his portion of the show at Temple.

At last, the 25% had a vehicle to take them to the next educational level. They were about to embark on their Master's degree---it's just that they didn't know it. At the *Time Capsule Show* in Philadelphia, listeners were introduced to "My Reverie" by the Larks, "Are You Sorry" by the Whispers and "Life of Ease" by the Imperials. They heard rare, original group recordings on Chance and Parrot from Chicago, Gotham and Grand from Philadelphia, and Old Town and Apollo from New York City. The 25% were now on "cloud nine." For many, it was like the "second coming." Now, the real enthusiast experienced recordings never before heard---and received a complete researched run down of information about the group, its members, the record label, and more.

The *Time Capsule Show* aired at Temple for a little more than three years---until Marchesani left his staff position at Temple and accepted a position at the University of Northern Iowa. Time and distance prevented Marchesani and Luciani from continuing their long-distance, co-hosted radio show. *TCS* departed from the airwaves at Temple University in August, 1972---and from Fordham University in December, 1977. Its pinnacle influence and effect on vocal group harmony is simply unparalleled. The show set the standard for vocal group harmony radio shows, and the approach Marchesani and Luciani used, started a nationwide in-depth learning process about vocal group harmony. The duo provided the 25% with much more than they could have ever expected .

## **BUT. .... THEY WANTED MORE!**

The 25% were still not satisfied ..... totally! They believed there was more to learn .... more records to be found ... and more groups to be located. Having successfully completed Master's Degree study under the careful musical tutelage of Professors Marchesani and Luciani, they were ready to begin doctoral study. As luck would have it, a gentleman from Philadelphia was about to enter the vocal group harmony radio scene who would have profound impact on the genre. He would be on the radio for nearly three decades---and like a true teacher, he learned along with his students. As a matter of fact, he is still learning. The 25% was ready to learn more ..... and Dr. Horner was ready for the process to begin.

## **CHARLIE HORNER, Ph.D**

Charlie Horner was born on November 26, 1949, in Philadelphia and raised in the northeast section of the city. His attachment to music---and phonograph records in particular---dates back to as far as he can remember. In a baby book kept by his mother, she noted that as early as two years old, he already had numerous records. She commented, "He was able to name them after playing two notes. Even though he couldn't read, he recognized the records by the label." Hmmmmm.....

Horner recalls being fascinated by flipping through his parents' collection of big band 78s---and learning very quickly "how brittle and breakable they were." One of his early childhood favorites was "Comin' In On A Wing And A Prayer" by the Four Vagabonds. At age five he was asking his parents to buy

him records. His first record was a 78 RPM recording of the "Ballad of Davy Crockett." The inspiring piece of information to extract from this peril relates to the fact that three different versions of the song appeared in the top 10 during the week of April 23, 1955. The version by Bill Hayes on Cadence was #1, with Fess Parker's release on Columbia at # 6, and Tennessee Ernie Ford's entry on Capital at #7---but Horner had the recording by the Sons of the Pioneers. Wow ..... even at five years old--- Charlie preferred vocal group recordings over single- artists! Wow!

By the time Horner was ten, he had already accumulated a stack of 45s---mostly from his aunt and uncle. Even at that early age, his collection included vocal group treasures consisting of "Sindy" by the Squires on Mambo and "Why Did I Fall In Love" by the Jacks on the RPM record label. His early love for the music was quickly expanded to include the radio---and by age 10 or 11---he was listening to the top 40 on WIBG in Philadelphia. He vividly remembers listening to Joe Niagara .~ and he never missed Hy Lit's Sunday night Hall Of Fame Show.



**Charlie Horner spinning the 45s**

By the time he started high school, he was listening to Jerry Blavat on a regular basis. It's amazing how Horner's music and radio interests follow the pattern and sequence of parts 1 and 2 of the articles in this series. (As you'll see, this pattern will continue). He wrote down the records that Blavat played (just like the rest of us) and would scour the area flea markets and garage sales, trying to find original copies. He recalls regular trips with his friend "Record Ron" Greilich---taking the Frankford Elevated train (Frankford El) to Kensington (area of the city) to search and rummage through thrift shops for records on their way to center city Philadelphia to visit *Penn Records* and the *Record Museum*. At the *Record Museum* and *Penn Records*, thrift store costs and flea-market prices of pennies per record gave way to upscale pricing of records in the \$2 - \$25 range. As Horner reflects, "Wow ... there they were--in plain sight--original recordings of the records that Blavat featured on the radio--- hanging right there on the wall for sale!" By this time, as you can tell, Horner had caught the "record collectors' fever." He was captured by the records played by the "Geator with the Heater," the "Boss with the Hot Sauce" ---because Blavat featured obscure R & B vocal 45s that never charted---and were, therefore,---not previously heard on the air. Plus, it's pretty obvious that Horner was in the upper quintile of the 25%! Hence, since they were not played on top 40 radio at the time of their original release,---Blavat was exposing the 25% to a totally new musical experience .. All of a sudden, Blavat---with his fabulous ear for music---featured these incredible vocal group

sounds nightly on WCAM-AM---and captured the 25% of the market looking for more, lock---stock---and barrel. Blavat took no prisoners. Horner was among the captured! Horner remembers, "Blavat played records I couldn't hear anywhere else at that time---songs like "To Make A Long Story Short" by Eddie and the Starlites, "They Say" by the Rainbows and "Long Tall Girl" by the Carnations. I was---and I remain--- a big fan of Jerry Blavat He opened up a whole new world of music for me!" Believe me, you're not alone, Charlie!

## ***THE BLAVAT EFFECT***

Horner's music education was progressing very quickly. The "new world of music" that Blavat exposed to Horner shifted his interest and "taste" to the black vocal group sound. He jump-started his thirst for more by listening to the black radio stations in Philadelphia. During summers, he worked in a gas station where the radio played in the background all day long. He listened to WHAT-FM and WDAS-FM all day---and became acquainted with black dee-jays like Sonny Hopson (The Mighty Burner) who solidified his love and interest in groups such as the Dells, Ballads, and Bobby Taylor and the Vancouvers.

By the late 60s, "Record Ron" Greilich and Horner held record swap meets to trade duplicate records and increase their personal record collection holdings. During this very same time period, Horner's life was about to be altered in a drastic---yet positive manner by two individuals---Joe Marchasani and Val Shively. Joe Marchasani was taping and broadcasting half of the *Time Capsule Show* from Temple University---while Tom Luciani was broadcasting and taping his half from Fordham. The broadcast started to air in Philadelphia on July 19, 1969, as an entry for summer programming. It aired on Saturdays and Tuesdays from 5:30 to 7 p.m. "Joe Marchasani gave me my first introduction to the early 50s vocal groups like the Orioles, Ravens, Four Buddies and the early Aladdin sides from the Five Keys."

Simultaneously, Horner started to visit Val Shively to buy records. Shively did not have a store yet---he operated from inside a record distribution warehouse, and "we had to climb over boxes of new records to get to the catwalk where the good stuff was located." Horner had just begun his undergraduate collegiate education at Drexel University, (as a chemistry major) and as a full-time student without a job, he had limited resources with which to buy records. "I had to pass on the big money records and concentrate on the group sounds priced in the \$2 - 5 range." Interestingly enough, "most of those records priced in the \$2 to 5 range have become 'money' records, today." Horner credits Shively for teaching him "what was a good record, versus what wasn't." It was an interesting time. "I was receiving two educations at the time---one at Drexel in chemistry---and the other with Val." By rights, "I should have been thrown out of his place---I didn't have a great deal of money to spend. He must have taken a liking to me, and we remain good friends today."

By now, Horner's life was evenly split between listening, studying and buying. "As I listened to Joe and Tom do the *Time Capsule Show*, I didn't realize it, but I was receiving a musical education in black vocal group harmony. It required complete attention and concentration---because---unlike other radio programs . which I listened to in the background as I read and studied, I couldn't do that while the *Time Capsule Show* was on. I listened with pen and paper in hand, writing down every song they played, as well as every word they said. I loved Marchasani's portion of the show because he played more sides from the early 50s---many on 78s---and I was (and still remain) partial to those. I remember when he played "Don't Let The Sun Catch You Crying" by the Gales on JVB and saying to myself: I'll bet I never see an original of that record during my lifetime, and so far, I've

been right." Hang in there Charlie, you still have time.... how-ever---I've never seen it either!

## **WXDT-AM - DREXEL UNIVERSITY RADIO**

Soon, Horner became aware that Drexel University had a student radio station. A fellow student in the chemistry lab worked at the station,---and he invited Horner to visit. WXDT-AM was a small carrier current station, with a radio signal piped to a small transmitter located about two blocks away. Radio listenership was extremely limited--- "about the only people who could pick up WXDT-AM were students in the dorms and record collector Steve Applebaum---who worked in the Food Fair, Inc. offices across the street." Horner had little interest in joining the staff at the radio station until he noticed a large box of promo 45s sent to the station for air play review. Horner's friend quickly noticed how Horner's attention became transfixed on the records. He commented that several hundred review records arrive weekly---and after all the radio staff reviewed the records, the station discarded what the staff didn't take home. At that point, Horner reflects, "I decided to join the staff in order to get in on the free records."

Horner became an official member of the radio staff of WXDT-FM in late 1969---and hosted his first radio program in early 1970. Like all new radio hosts, Horner had to develop his own style. It takes awhile. Also, like all radio hosts, he admitted he was not happy with the sound he was personally projecting over the airways. "It was embarrassing to listen to tapes of my old shows now. I'd go from Little Richard to the Medallions on Essex. On the positive side---I had very few listeners--- so I guess it didn't matter." The learning curve was Horner's friend as he quickly shifted his musical play list to include 100% of R & B vocal group selections.

By the spring of 1970, the station acquired a license to broadcast to Philadelphia on the FM band, under the station's new call letters of WKDU. It was only a ten-watt station, "but my professionalism grew steady---along with the listening audience." Life at WKDU was not always smooth. The four semester system at Drexel University seemed to result in Horner's schedule being changed almost every semester. His time slot would shift from Tuesday morning to Sunday afternoon to Saturday morning. Also, Horner was a one-man band while on the air because he engineered his own show, took phone calls, and was required to do news and weather breaks on the hour. Additionally, he was charged with pulling news stories off the teletype machine, then write and deliver on-air newscasts. To off set some of the rigor and demand, Horner invited friends along to help. "Record Ron" Greilich helped out---as did Alan Lee. Lee joined the show to read the news---then later became the co-host with Horner. He later became a well-known Baltimore dee-jay on WQSR before assuming ownership of the Roadhouse Record store.

Horner believed that many of his listeners knew more about the music than he did---especially in the early days. He did his best to correct this "exaggerated" situation by reading as much material on the subject as possible. He read every book and magazine he could find---subscribing to and digesting the cover-to-cover contents of the *Big Town Review*, *Bim Bam Boom*, the *Record Exchanger* and *Yesterdays Memories*. Then, he decided to promote learning on a first-hand basis by interviewing lead singers and vocal group members for presentation on his radio show. His first experience at interviewing was with Fred Paris and the Five Satins from a taped interview at the Five Satins' hotel room in between performances at a local club. The new experience caused Horner to be a bit edgy and feel somewhat in awe in the presence of the Five Satins, and he recalls "fumbling through his questions so nervously" that Paris finally asked, "You don't in-

terview people very often, do you?" But Horner learned fast---plus he stayed with it. His next interview was on the air at WXPB with Georgie Grant and the Castelles, and---as a result of the information learned from that interview--- Steve Applebaum and Horner wrote the first definitive article about the Castelles for *Bim Bam Boom* magazine. The article demonstrates the role that Horner would play in R & B vocal group harmony for the next several decades because Horner continued his personal vocal group education through interviews and playing rare, unknown and obscure records, and his listeners learned along with him. As can be imagined, the 25% were starting their doctoral study---in R & B vocal group harmony. It was a true growth experience for everyone involved.

## **WXPB-FM - THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA RADIO**

In 1972, Horner completed his undergraduate studies in chemistry and began working on his doctorate in organic chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania. He continued doing his radio show from near-by Drexel University but had to surrender his show in 1973 when Drexel students sought the time slot. He explored the possibility of joining the radio station at the University of Pennsylvania---but it took until February 1975, before Horner was able to air his first show from the studios of WXPB-FM on the Penn campus.

At the start, the show was called "The Rhythm & Blues Show" even though he was exclusively playing R & B vocal groups. Nearly all the records he featured were recordings by black groups because Horner firmly believed (s) "this music is primarily an African American art form." He did receive threats and complaints for not playing more (some) white group records---but "I wasn't to be deterred." As time went on, Horner did mix in some white group vocal group sounds, but only if "they were good vocal group recordings with an authentic sound."

During the first year at WXPB-FM, Horner was assisted by Steve Applebaum---who answered the phone and took requests. Then Don Leins joined The Rhythm & Blues Show and served as co-host with Horner for the next six years. Slowly, but very methodically, Leins and Horner began to expand the genre of music presented on the show to include related group harmony. They went on extended record buying excursions---including a visit to the Carolinas every summer. "That's how I got into Carolina Beach Music---I used to bring back the latest Beach Music records by the Poor Souls, Catalinas, Embers and Tams to play on the air." Now, Horner was providing the 25% with advanced course work in vocal group harmony. The education continued as Horner enriched his music base to include other related forms within the group harmony genre.

In late 1978, Horner taped a performance of the Ecstasies singing live acappella in the radio studio. Joe Grimaldi, from the Ecstasies, told Horner about the United Group in Harmony Association, and he started to attend UGHA shows in 1979. Quickly, Horner sensed the growing "rebirth" of popularity in acappella music ... and began to provide a taste of acappella for the 25%. Further, he and Leins, in April 1979, decided to produce the first major acappella concert held in Philadelphia since the 1960s. It was held at the International House in West Philadelphia,---and it was considered to be a start at building a foundation and a following for acappella and vocal group harmony .. Horner and Leins were overwhelmed when a crowd of more than 700 attended the concert. Eight different groups performed, including five groups from Philadelphia and three more UGHA groups that Ronnie I brought down from New York and New Jersey---along with a busload of additional attendees. The concert was a sterling success. It ended about midnight, and Leins and Horner remained inside to help clean up the establishment. They left the facility at 2 a.m.---went outside---only to discover that no

one had left. Everyone was standing in the street singing in small groups---sort of competing with each other. That's when Horner realized "how hungry Philadelphia was for group harmony." Now, the 25% was doing more than listening and learning---they were participating. Wow....

Horner had acappella groups sing live in the studio on a regular basis---plus he would present in-studio live interviews with black vocal group lead singers and members. Then--- as a result of hearing the Gospel Nobeles sing at a 1979 concert, Horner became fascinated with black, vocal group, gospel music. He became good friends with the Gospel Nobeles---and soon started to serve as master of ceremonies for gospel group concerts held in some of the neighborhood, black churches. He also started to play a "Gospel Record of the Week" on his show---a feature that many shows include now, but Horner was one of the first to introduce the concept. He was expanding his personal music base by including all types of vocal group harmony by featuring the music that could easily be traced as an artifact of the African American art form. The 25% must have thought that this was the beginning of the second coming! Now, weekly episodes of musical education occurred on the air and live and in person, involving black vocal groups, white vocal groups, black and white acappella groups, beach music, and black gospel groups. You couldn't ask for more!

### **EXPANDING HORIZONS - HELPING OTHERS**

In 1979-1980, Horner began helping local singing groups get established. By design and personal decision, he never formally managed any of the groups because that would be a conflict of interest. Featuring groups he managed on the air might be considered a form of payola. Horner's interest was that of the true teacher and the true educator: to help other students of the music through radio exposure to get hooked up and connected for performing gigs around the city. Some of the early groups that Horner was associated with included the Ecstasies, Silhouettes, Spontaneous Combustion, Foundation, the Silveraires (Gospel group), New Emage, and Neighbors Complaint. Horner was especially fond of Neighbors Complaint because they had outstanding dual lead singers in Bob Murphy and Harry "Golden Voice" Schmidt---plus they sang songs that typified Philadelphia vocal group harmony. They performed music by Georgie Grant and the Castelles, Sonny Gordon and the Angels, Lee Andrews and the Hearts. Horner was able to connect Neighbors Complaint with Jerry Greene which led to their very successful album on *Collectibles*. Horner started to write liner notes for *Collectibles* and a few other labels---preparing notes for about forty different albums. Horner and Leins also edited some unreleased material from the Gotham record label in Philadelphia---which included some sides by the Capris and Lee Andrews and the Hearts. The material led to the release of an historic album of the Capris material on *Collectibles*---and several powerful red wax 45 releases by Lee Andrews and the Hearts. Horner's efforts and contributions are now being felt in all music markets---concerts, records, magazines and journals---as well as the radio.

When Don Leins left the show, John Moore became the new co-host. Moore and Horner became the best of friends and traveled nationwide looking for records. They even went to England! Moore opened a record store" in Philadelphia called *Middle Room Records* --- and it became vocal group headquarters on Friday evenings for singers and group members---who would congregate at Moore's store to sing, harmonize and talk about the music.

In 1980, Horner received his Ph.D in organic chemistry from the University of Pennsylvania and started living and working in northern New Jersey, although he returned to Philadelphia every weekend to do the radio show at WXPN. Moore and

Horner became even more involved with the local acappella scene---and in 1982---they brought groups to northeast Philadelphia for concerts and shows at the Belle Casa Ristorante on a weekly basis. Moore produced and ran a series of record conventions at the Golden Horse Inn which also featured vocal group performances. Horner emceed the shows which featured groups like Reminiscence, Street Corner Five, Five Grand, the original Cherokees, Omega Five Maestros, Acappella Gold, Silhouettes, Ecstasies, and Neighbors Complaint. Horner and Moore also produced three vocal group shows staged at the Golden Horse Inn---each having numerous groups perform---along with a headliner group. One show featured the return of the Keystoneers---who got back together as a result of an interview appearance on Horner's radio show. On another, the Lydells were reunited, while the third show featured Bobby Thomas' Orioles. What more could the 25% ask for?

Over time, Horner coined the phrase "Classic Urban Harmony" because it captured the essence of the total music genre---plus it characterized the theme and mission of his radio show. Featuring black and white vocal groups, white and black acappella, beach music, and black gospel music, the name was more descriptive and more accurate---therefore, the name of Horner's radio show changed accordingly. Some regular listeners credit Horner---and his show---as major contributing factors in their personal development and some in their professional development in radio careers. They include Felix Hernandez (WBGO-FM in Newark, New Jersey and KISS-FM in NYC) and Cool Bobby B (XM Satellite Radio).

Bill Keith replaced Moore as the co-host in the late 1980s. Keith was a member of Philadelphia's Blendtones and met Horner while being interviewed on the radio program. Keith later sang with the (Philadelphia) Students on Red Top as well as Moments Pleasure. Horner's final co-host was Charles Anderson---who succeeded in spurring Horner's interest in vocal groups on film. Another integral part of the show was Lenny Sanchez, who answered the phones, took requests, and provided vital help and assistance behind the scenes, allowing the show to go on.

Horner's "Classic Urban Harmony" was simulcast from WXPN-FM and heard on KALX-FM in Berkeley, California, and WKHS-FM in Worten, Maryland. Now, Horner was beginning to reach some of the 25% outside of the Philadelphia area!

### **SUDDEN ENDINGS - BUT NEW BEGINNINGS .....**

All of a sudden, without warning, WXPN decided to cancel "Classic Group Harmony" in January 1995---just a few weeks short of its twentieth anniversary. It's hard to imagine Philadelphia radio without Horner and *Classic Urban Harmony*. It represents the final piece of the musical progression taking the Philadelphia radio market from top 40 "race" music rock and roll---to classic vocal group harmony. Music enthusiasts and record collectors in the Philadelphia area traveled with Niagara and Lit through the hay-day of WIBG to the dominance and prominence of the Geater with the Heater. Marchesani and Luciani creatively nurtured our desire for more musical knowledge by starting the process of recognizing and appreciating vocal group harmony in a musical, as well as educational, manner. Along came Charlie Horner---and the music advanced to a new pinnacle. Horner taught listeners to enjoy and understand why vocal group harmony is a true American art form -plus he expanded understanding of the total genre by linking beach music, acappella, black and white vocal group harmony and gospel music. The 25% of the Philadelphia music market engaging in musical doctoral study under Dr. Horner received a quality education---and became connoisseurs of the greatest music ever produced. They also know "why" it is the best. They are informed of its history, and they fully understand the boundaries and beauty of the genre. They know how to enjoy the "true essence" of vocal group har-

mony. .... They have a wonderful teacher!

Without question, the radio show provided unparalleled excellence in R & B vocal group harmony. Horner's powerful contributions to the musical education of the 25% cannot be defined in total - nor can his meaningful, timely and unending supply of vocal group harmony information be properly described. His helpful, behind-the-scenes advice and counsel to countless vocal groups cannot be ignored. He has dedicated himself to the preservation of vocal group harmony, and his relentless efforts have truly earned him the title of Dr. Horner---not just in chemistry as his earned degree suggests---but also of "classic urban harmony" as his hard work and superior contributions warrant.

The good news is he is still hard at work advancing the music. Quite frankly, he never stopped. He was heavily involved with the UGHA Hall of Fame, traveled with his wife Pam to Europe, and spent time with the Golden Gate and Deep River Quartets. He was instrumental in bringing the Golden Gate Quartet to the United States for their landmark UGHA Hall of Fame appearance---their first performance in the United States since 1958. He was presented with the Lifetime Achievement award from The Philadelphia Group Harmony Association in 1995 and a Lifetime Achievement Award at the first ever Philadelphia Doo-Wop Festival in 2006.

Now that he has formally retired from his work in the chemical field, he will have more time to devote to vocal group harmony. Recently, he has initiated a unique project which spreads the word about vocal group harmony through an informational lecture series which he provides to libraries, museums, and adult- community groups. It is part of *Classic Urban Harmony, LLC*---which traces the beginnings of the classic urban harmony movement by introducing the audience to the Mills Brothers, the Ink Spots, the Ravens and the Orioles---and their role in the early development of the music. Horner shares pictures of the groups, information about where they originated from---plus other pertinent facts along with film and sound to truly capture the contributions and history of classic urban harmony. The evolution of the music from the late 1940s through the early, mid and late 1950s helps to capture the excitement of the genre by learning its origins. As you can see, Horner continues his relentless efforts to keep the "music alive" by appealing to more audiences to teach them about a true American art form.

He writes for *Echoes of the Past* and makes occasional "guest" appearances on radio shows featuring vocal group harmony---including an upcoming scheduled visit on *Down-on -the-Streetcorner*.

Together with Pam, Horner helped to reassemble some of the original members of the Plainfield, New Jersey, group, the Del Larks ("I Never Will Forget" - Ea-jay Records) for their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary UGHA concert appearance in November of 2006.

Horner actively maintains his impressive vocal group archive which includes rare, original vocal group recordings on 45 and 78 RPM wax cylinders dating back to 1890-1920, and other artifacts of the genre. He continues to add to his collection ...

## CONCLUDING ANECDOTES

In October 2005, Horner and his beautiful bride Pamela were married. His forty-year involvement with the music has had a major influence on his life---a fact that can be easily recognized and appreciated with a description of their wedding ceremony. First, Horner met Pam at UGHA. Their wedding ceremony included the playing of "The Vow" by the Flamingos as Pam walked down the aisle---and it concluded with the playing of "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" acappella. Ronnie I emceed the reception which included a concert featuring the Solitaires and the Deep River Quartet (from Holland). The Ecstasies also made their final public appearance with Bill Keith (lead), Joe Grimaldi, Darrall Campbell (formerly of New Emage) and Jim Bakay (of the Street Comer Five). As you can see, vocal group harmony and Charlie Horner are inseparable!

During his illustrious radio career, Horner interviewed several hundred singers for airing on *Classic Urban Harmony*. Space limitations prevent a complete listing of all the groups. Some of the notable groups interviewed included the Orioles (Sonny Til), Silhouettes, Wrens, Sensations, Crickets, Cardinals, Swallows, Red Caps, Blue Notes, Tymes, Cherokees, Castelles, Turbans, Capris, Dreamlovers, Majors, Belltones, Dreams, Keystoners, and more.

An article about the many stories, reflections, and outtakes resulting from Horner's numerous radio interviews will appear in a future issue of *Echoes of the Past*. The idea for the article stems from a question I asked Horner about the most interesting group/lead singer he had the privilege of interviewing. He quickly answered, "Sonny Til." He indicated that meeting and interviewing Sonny Til was a special experience "to interview the man that started it all is an honor and a privilege---simply impossible to describe." He said, "What is particularly interesting about that interview is what happened the night before---and the afternoon after Til's appearance on my show." Horner arranged the interview with Sonny Til and the Orioles in conjunction with a scheduled appearance at a local club. A few days before the interview, Horner called Til to check and make sure everything was set for the interview, and Til reported that the club appearance in Philadelphia had been canceled. Horner was disappointed---and asked if any future appearances in Philadelphia were scheduled so another interview date could be established. Til then informed Horner he was coming up for the interview anyway and intended to appear on Horner's show---as scheduled. He was driving up the night before---and would return to Maryland---after the show.

True to his word, he drove up to Philadelphia the night before and stayed in a motel in South Philadelphia. When Til awoke the next morning, he was unable to drive to the studio because someone had stolen his car battery during the night. Horner picked him up---took him to the studio---and the show went on as scheduled. During the show, Horner expressed his disappointment with the battery incident --- and Til commented over the air, "Whoever may have stolen my battery, I hope that God may bless them." Horner emphasized to me how he could tell that Til "really meant what he said."

Horner drove Til to a car repair shop and wanted to pay for the battery---feeling partly responsible. Til was out of cash, but wouldn't hear of it. He wired the money to Horner immediately upon his return to Maryland. "He was a class act...and a class individual!" This anecdote reveals why the future article needs to be done. The doctoral program isn't over... Horner has more to teach to the 25% .

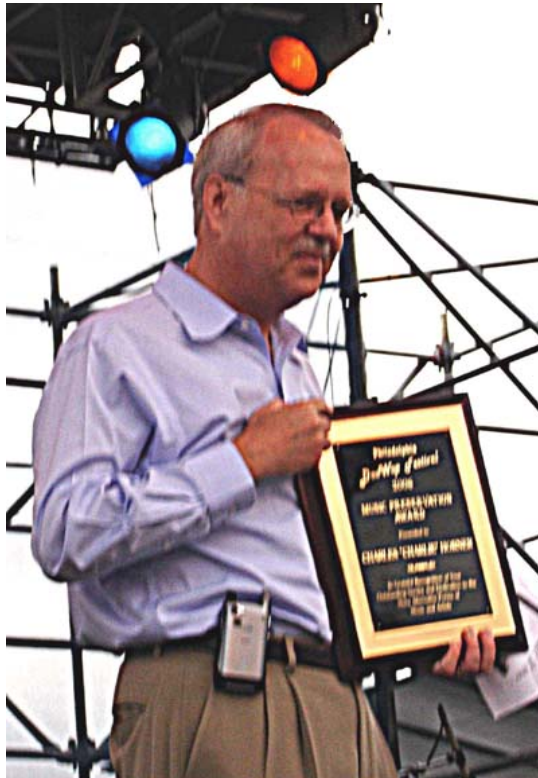
## EPILOGUE

The true impact of Horner's contributions can best be captured by asking the people who were influenced by his efforts. I took it upon myself to talk to a few members of the 25% .

Ron Lockwood is a long-time, noted record collector and music enthusiast from Baltimore, Maryland. He is the weekly radio host of the *Thrill of the Night* (Monday's - 5 p.m.-7 p.m.) heard on WKHS-FM in Worten, Baltimore. Although Ron is outside the limits of the Philadelphia radio market, he was able to listen to "Classic Urban Harmony" because it was simulcast on WKHS. As Lockwood reflected: "Charlie Horner was the first in-depth authority on vocal group harmony that I ever heard on the

radio. Other shows and other hosts simply played the music--Horner provided comprehensive background information that added to the beauty and quality of the music. He was (and is) a breath of fresh air who opened my eyes to a whole new world of vocal group harmony. Thanks, Charlie."

Carl Tancredi is a charter member in good standing of the 25% in Philadelphia. He is an established writer, noted record collector and co-host with Jim Bakay of *Work With Me Annie* heard on Gold Radio every Thursday evening. Tancredi indicates he was a serious record collector and music enthusiast before he met Horner.



**Charlie Horner Receiving his Plaque at the 2006 Doo Wop Festival in Philadelphia, PA**

As a matter of fact, at the on-set, as Horner entered the scene at Drexel radio, "I may have informed or advised Charlie about some records and some groups or other information as he was starting his quest to grasp and learn the vocal group harmony genre. Over the years, the tables have turned completely. His relentless effort to keep learning about the music by keeping it alive and preserving vocal group harmony for its obvious American art form value advances him as a true authority on the subject. He is a friend, an expert, and a resource. He commands my highest respect. I often check with Charlie about his point of view when I'm writing or researching something about the music."

Further, as Tancredi states, "Although on a smaller scale, I think Charlie's efforts compare to UGHA. Unlike UGHA, which is regional and national, Charlie provided the Philadelphia market with "total" vocal group knowledge and entertainment--often times in partnership with Ronnie and UGHA. No matter what, we always had *Classic Urban Harmony* on the radio--and Charlie, to turn to--to learn more about the music. His efforts to bring vocal group concerts to Philadelphia cannot be overlooked. The vocal group music genre has benefited from Charlie's work and contributions. Vocal group harmony is better because of Charlie. So is Philadelphia."

We owe a debt of gratitude to Horner for his insatiable

desire to bring vocal group harmony to the forefront. He uniquely positioned himself as the final piece of the radio music progression in Philadelphia. One thing for sure, it's a radio progression that stands tall -- and takes a back seat to no one! The radio market went from Hy Lit and Joe Niagara at WIBG to Jerry Blavat at WCAM. From there, the journey led us to Joe Marchesani and Tom Luciani at Temple University (and Fordham) for the start of our graduate study in vocal group harmony. Finally, Charlie Horner took us on a radio-based educational study of the vocal group genre for more than two decades. The study included field trips, concerts, interviews and other experiences. Fortunately, the educational experience is still on-going. The 25% is still matriculated and ready to learn. We're registered, and we're ready for our next lesson, Charlie!

Thanks ..... for everything!

## **AND FINALLY. ....**

A road trip to Philadelphia and a visit with Charlie Horner would not be complete if I didn't put Charlie on the spot and ask him to reveal his favorite vocal group harmony records. In posing the question, he was quick to mention what a difficult task it was--but nonetheless--advanced the following top 10 list:

- My Saddest Hour - The Five Keys - Aladdin 3214
- Please Remember My Heart - The Solitaires - Old Town 1006/7
- Hopefully Yours - The Larks - Apollo 1180
- It's Funny But It's True - Groove 0174
- Dare To Dream - The Orioles - Jubilee 5001
- My Fragile Heart - The Five Embers - Royce 0006
- Dear Ruth - The Buccaneers - Southern 101
- Honey - The Ravens - Hub 3030
- If I Can't Have You - The Flamingos - Chance 1133
- Dream My Darling Dream - Sound 135

..... Wow! What an impressive list. What else would you expect--- Charlie is an impressive individual!

The author wishes to thank Charlie Horner for his help and assistance with this article. Our conversations were interesting and exciting--and it was a true privilege getting to know him better. His quick wit, sharp awareness and detailed command of past events is amazing. His love, interest and passion for the music is intense ..... and getting stronger. The mere mention of a vocal group puts a smile on Charlie's face and excitement in his voice. Charlie, you're one of a kind. Thank you for all your hard work --- past --- present --- and future----- The author expresses sincere appreciation to good mends, record collectors, music enthusiasts, group harmony experts, and radio show hosts Ron Lockwood (Baltimore, Maryland) and Carl Tancredi (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

The author can be heard on internet radio from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. every Sunday evening on *Down-on-the-Streetcorner* on GOLD RADIO at [www.goldoldies.com](http://www.goldoldies.com)

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