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ECHOES OF THE PAST

The collage features several vinyl records and photographs. Records include 'Little Things Mean a Lot' by Gwen Porter on Chesapeake Records, 'I Wonder' by The Wonders on Chesapeake Records, 'Feel Like a Million' by Tyrone and the Nu-Ports on Darrow Records, and a portrait of Key Larsen. A central photograph shows four young men in striped shirts. A table of contents is located in the bottom left corner.

In This Issue:

- **Fantasys**
- **Tyrone & the Nu-Ports**
- **Val Shivley**
- **Doo Wop & Jazz Parallels**

Much more...

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Feel Like A Million: The Story of Tyrone & the Nu-Ports

by Charlie Horner
With contribution from Pamela Horner

Tyrone Herbert Johnson was born in Camden, NJ, on October 18, 1942. While he never lived to see his 43rd birthday, Tyrone accomplished more in his life than most people ever dream of. Tyrone and his vocal group, the Nu-Ports, had only two records under their own name; one a local and one a national hit. But the group was immensely popular in Philadelphia and surrounding areas, leading to work in the Catskills and eventually to an engagement in New York City's famed Carnegie Hall. Tyrone and the Nu-Ports burst onto the scene like a burning meteor in the early 1960's, before any members of the group were even twenty-years-old. Within two years, the groups' career had been extinguished, victim of a tragic accident. But for those of us who knew Tyrone and his group, or even for those who were familiar with their records, Tyrone & the Nu-Ports will forever be remembered.

South Jersey during the 1950's was a heterogeneous mix of inner city (Camden), working class communities and farmland. It also was home to a number of well-known African-American night spots, particularly in Lawnside (just east of Camden) and in the coastal resort of Atlantic City. At the time there was no Atlantic City Expressway, so the main routes connecting Philadelphia and Atlantic City were the White Horse and Black Horse Pikes.

When Tyrone Johnson was still a child, his parents moved to Chesilhurst, NJ. Chesilhurst was a small town along the White Horse Pike about halfway between Camden and Atlantic City. It housed a small black community. Tyrone's parents opened a night club along the White Horse Pike called Al's Little Click. "Many people that traveled the White Horse Pike would stop in to have some of mom's good old cooking and some of our country hospitality," recalled Tyrone. The club also had live entertainment.

Around 1956, Tyrone entered Lower Camden County's Overbrook High School in Pine Hill, NJ. There he joined the school choir and soon competed for and was named "All State Tenor." It was also in high school that Tyrone met four other students who shared his love of singing and they soon formed a vocal group. "We all met as freshmen in high school," recalled Tyrone. "We were all about fourteen years old." Initially the group was called the Deltones and they consisted of Tyrone Johnson (lead), Alex Lancaster (first tenor), Calvin McDonald (bass), Ronald Turner (second tenor) and a fifth fellow, whose name is not known to us, singing baritone. Ironically, Alex Lancaster and Tyrone Johnson had both been born at the same hospital in Camden in the same year on nearly the same day. Calvin McDonald had been born in Philadelphia while Ronald Turner was originally from Washington, DC. By the time they entered high school, all the group members were living around the Berlin, NJ, area.



**Tyrone Johnson, Lead of Tyrone & the Nu-Ports
(Photo from the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)**

"We used to sing at all of the school functions," remembered Tyrone. "If someone was having a party, we would entertain there. And then we would sing at my parents' place on the weekends."

By 1959 the group was finishing high school and the fifth member had left the group. The Deltones were looking for a new baritone. That's when Calvin Henderson entered the picture. Calvin was born in North Philadelphia and spent much of his youth there.

"My family moved to Williamstown (NJ) around 1959," said Calvin. "I was fourteen years old and much of South Jersey was really a country area at that point. And what happened was I was singing in school. Well I was always a singer. I learned to sing harmony when I was six years old. That goes back to all the old groups from New York and Philadelphia. Listening to [radio dee jay] Jocko Henderson. The Cletones and groups like that with 'Little Girl Of Mine'. It was just a thing of standing on the corner and one guy picking out a note and holding that note. And then constantly practicing until you become comfortable. Then when you could find three other guys or four other guys that you can blend with, you practiced and practiced until you came to really know when they're were going to make a

change... when you should make a change. That's what the practice was all about. That's what the harmony was all about. I knocked around with a few groups in the North Philadelphia area. When I got to Williamstown High School I used to sing in the lunch room. One of the guys that knew Tyrone told him about me. Apparently, they were looking for someone. So about ten o'clock one night, Calvin McDonald who was the bass of the group pulled up to my house in a '52 Chevy and he said, 'Is your name Calvin Henderson?' I said, 'Yes' and he said, "Hey we'd like you to sing with us." That's how it started. I went to Berlin [NJ] with Calvin and I met Tyrone, Alex and Ronald. It was an immediate thing. We just started singing and the blend was there. From there on we just practiced every night."

"We heard about Calvin Henderson," Tyrone added. "It really is a funny story because my parents had a club and we used to have entertainment there on the weekends. We used to use the bandstand and rehearse there under professional conditions. So when Calvin Henderson came in, Calvin our bass said, 'This is the new guy.' We all looked at him and I said, 'What do you sing?' He said, 'What do you want me to sing?' And we stopped right there because we knew. Most times when we would audition a guy and ask him that, he'd say, 'Well I sing baritone.' But when Calvin said, 'What ever you want me to sing, I'll sing,' we knew right there he was our guy. And the moment we hit a note, the harmony was there and we knew."

With the new baritone came a new name. "Originally we were just going to be called the Nu-Ports," said Tyrone. "We had played around with three or four names and I had thought of spelling it 'Nu-Ports'. The guys liked it and we were just the Nu-Ports. Later, when management came into our lives they suggested that I had a good commercial sound and that my name should be out front, much to my dismay. But the guys all agreed to it so we let it remain that way."

Even before the Nu-Ports recorded, they were getting plenty of work. Tyrone's cousin was Jackie Verdell of the Philadelphia gospel group, the Davis Sisters. Jackie was the second lead for the Davis Sisters between 1955 and 1960. As a side note, Aretha Franklin once called Jackie Verdell "...one of the best and most underrated female soul singers of all time." [3] By the late 1950's, Jackie was also doing background work for *Scepter Records*. Jackie Verdell helped get the Nu-Ports gigs in North Jersey.

"Jackie was very instrumental in keeping us and our ideas about singing going," said Tyrone. "All the guys were thinking about going to college but we stopped that after a year and said we're going to try to do something with this singing. We just waited for Calvin Henderson to finish school and we started. Calvin was like the big celebrity because when the record was out it was his last year. He was graduating and we used to come to get him at school in a limousine."

Before recording, the group also made appearances in Pennsylvania. "In those days the groups would all gather together and have little contests among each other," recalled Tyrone. "We'd go to Philly and compete."

"There was a place in Chester [PA], the Chester Drive-In, said Calvin Henderson. "They used to have gigantic record hops there and they used to have five or six or



Left to Right: Calvin Henderson, Tyrone Johnson (1980)
(From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)

groups in the area. By the way there was a guy, Oaky Miller a dj on WEEZ radio in Chester and we used to do a lot of acappella work with him."

Oaky Miller was a Philadelphia native who started moonlighting as a radio disk jockey while still attending Temple University. He soon found himself doing an immensely popular radio show out of Chester while also hosting a TV dance party out of Scranton. In addition, he was emceeding record hops at drive-ins, amusement parks and school auditoriums. Oaky cut short his radio career in 1963 when he left for Hollywood to become an actor. Last heard, he had become a successful talent broker in Los Angeles.

The Nu-Ports used to sing at all the local record hops in South Jersey. They played the Ice House in Cherry Hill and the Inferno in Hammonton among other venues.

High on the list of groups that influenced the Nu-Ports were the Flamingoes, Velours, the Four Freshmen and the Hi-Lo's. The group wrote a lot of their own material and putting together the harmony was always a group effort.

"It was a total group thing," reflected Tyrone. "All the guys had good ideas and everyone was musically astute so we never had any problems with a tune. We understood perfectly what each one's function was. To be complete, a group should consist of five: a lead singer, first and second tenors, a baritone and a bass. What a bass does is give the depth and body to the harmony. The baritone makes most of your intricate changes. The second tenor holds the harmony and the first tenor carries it. Whatever we wanted to do, the harmony was just there."

"We didn't really have much problem with the harmony," Calvin Henderson added. "It was the same thing with our dance routines. There was not one person who would orchestrate the whole thing. It was a collective group effort."

"Our choreography was really precise and on time too," said Tyrone. "We all started singing at an early age. In high school I was an All-State Tenor. They wanted me to sing opera but I didn't like it. The Nu-Ports had songs with an opera background. We used to sing Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake". We put a background to that. The guys knew what they were doing. Calvin used to play a little vibes when he was younger and I played a little B-Flat tenor. So we basi-

cally could sight-read. Other than a natural gift, we knew technically what we were doing.”

By 1962, Calvin Henderson was in his senior year at high school and the Nu-Ports were ready to start a recording career. The group was managed by Moon Rasso from Hammononton, NJ, who introduced them to Joe Ricci.

Joseph R. Ricci was a songwriter who'd penned some pretty big hits like “Just Ask Your Heart” for Frankie Avalon. He also had his own record label, *Darrow*, which he operated out of his two story brick row home at 950 Tree Street in South Philadelphia.

“Moon Rasso was our manager and he introduced us to Joe Ricci who heard us and liked us,” said Calvin. “So we used to go to 9th & Tree Streets. Right in his cellar, Joe had a lot of recording equipment there. Joe played guitar and we'd bring a bass player and a drummer. We would practice. We had already written numerous songs. So we practiced a few of them; “The Combination,” “Feel Like A Million,” “Look At Her Eyes,” and so forth. That's really how we got started. We first went and cut “The Combination” in a cellar in Upper Darby. They didn't like that cut. So we went to the Reco Arts Studio. about three weeks later and we recut it.” [Reco Arts is the legendary Philadelphia recording studios at 212 N. 12th Street that later became Sigma Sound Studios.]

“The Combination” was a teen dance number written by the group. “At that time there were two or three records out describing dances,” said Tyrone. “And we were thinking of something like an amalgam, a mixture of many of the dances. So each group member just contributed. Some lyrics would come out of Calvin, then Alex would say a line, and that's how we constructed the song. As much as people enjoyed the released version, they would have really loved the way we originally had it. Management commercialized it. Joe thought that the way we had it arranged originally wouldn't sell. So we changed the arrangement. The way we originally had it, we felt was even more infectious. The lyrics were the same but we were doing things with time changes and the harmony was even better. On the released arrangement, Joe wanted our bass to lay out more and they had a guy that played classical bass, Bill Richie, and they had him playing finger bass, the upright bass more. We think that musically took away from what we had intended it to be.”

Joe Ricci released “The Combination” on his *Darrow* label with “Look At Her Eyes” on the flip side. Tyrone Johnson was lead on “The Combination” while Calvin Henderson led “Look At Her Eyes,” a song the group had written about three years before recording it.

“We all felt strongest about ‘The Combination,’” said Tyrone, “But we enjoyed ‘Look At Her Eyes’ more. The truth about that record is, we always thought the group was better when Calvin Henderson was leading because personally I enjoyed background more. I sang second tenor when Calvin was leading and we could do more things and interchange on the leads.”

“The Combination” was released and got airplay from Oaky Miller on WEEZ, Jerry Blavat on WCAM and a few other stations. “The Combination” never got air play on WIBG [the main Philly Top-40 station]. Still, the group started singing at record hops for WIBG personalities Hy Lit, Joe Niagara and Jerry Stevens at that point as well as for Jerry Blavat. When making public appearances, Tyrone & the Nu-

Ports almost always used their own band.

“We carried a bass player, guitar player and a drummer, and we would blend in with the house band, per se,” said Calvin Henderson. “As long as we had the basic rhythm section we could do just about anything. A couple times we took brass with us, but basically it was two guitar players, the Macaluso Brothers, Lenny and Alan Macaluso. They were fantastic! They played guitar and bass. Once we did a gig in Delaware and they had a fourteen-piece band. We had our sheet music and we went into our own thing there. But we would always have our rhythm section with us.”

“The Combination” came out in the summer of 1962 and did well locally. The group was told that the record was only released locally but friends heard it on the radio in Chicago.”

“We received some royalties because we were all members of BMI and were all listed as writers,” recalled Tyrone. “We felt that with proper distribution and handling the song could have even done much better.”

“I'll never forget that time,” said Calvin Henderson. “For four months straight we were doing one-nighters like unbelievable. It's crazy. Record hops here, there, everywhere. In the Delaware Valley, Phoenixville, Allentown, Scranton, Wilkes Barre, the entire area.”

With “The Combination” attracting a lot of attention locally, Joe Ricci looked toward the Nu-Ports' next release, a catchy up-tempo number called “Feel Like A Million.” It was backed with “On Saturday Night.”

Tyrone and Calvin insisted that “Feel Like a Million” was written by the entire group, even though the label credits only Joe Ricci and his label's biggest attraction at that time, teen idol Dante Storage.

“We had to forego writer credits,” maintained Tyrone. “We were told, in order to have the record played nationally, they were trying to consolidate some kind of deal. We felt we were young and very alert and that we would write more hit records, so we said OK. Much to our dismay.”



From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives



Label photo courtesy of Val Shively.

Part of the deal might have been giving the publishing credits to Clic-Clac Publishing, a firm the Nu-Ports believed was owned in part by a prominent WIBG disk jockey. In fact, Top-40 giant WIBG, known for breaking scores of records nationally, wanted no part of the Nu-Port's earlier "Combination," but sure jumped on "Feel Like A Million!"

"The record was released on September 12, 1962," said Tyrone. "I remember very distinctly hearing the record while traveling home from Philadelphia and stopping on the highway to call up two other members. Calvin was in school at the time. They had told us the record's release date was going to be about September 25th or 26th and they released it about two weeks ahead of time. What ever deal they were trying to finalize probably happened before then and they released it. I remember the glee that had come into me and I jumped out of the car and tried to call everyone else. I said, 'Hey! I hear the record!' We were very ecstatic about it."

"Fell Like A Million" was a big record for the group. It never made *Billboard's* national charts, but then the "Hot R&B Singles" charts in 1962 only listed the top 30 songs. The Nu-Ports said they were told by their management that the record sold 50,000 to 75,000 copies, mostly locally. "We were told it was just a local hit, because on the WIBG Charts it made it to about #12," said Calvin.

"Yes, at the time we were paid a little better than \$10,000," added Tyrone. "It came out to about \$2100 per man. About eighteen months after that, one of the major record distributors in the area told us that we had sold better than a half million records! People told us they had heard the record [on the radio] in Chicago and various parts of the country. We were apprised as to our standing in Seattle, Washington. We knew we had the # 6 record there at the time. I was sent a chart telling us how well the record was doing there."

With a hit record, life changed dramatically for the better for the Nu-Ports. "We got to perform in New York and Delaware," recalled Calvin. "In North Jersey we did a Rutgers College weekend gig with Dickie Doo & the Don'ts."

"We traveled to California for a five day promotional thing," said Tyrone. "That was very impressive to us because we managed to see Grauman's Chinese Theater and where the stars had their names in cement. We had a very good time out there."

Tyrone and the Nu-Ports were even scheduled to make a January 1, 1963 appearance on Dick Clark's Bandstand TV show, filmed in West Philadelphia. For unknown reasons, the group never made that appearance.

Throughout the Fall of 1962 and all of 1963, the Nu-Ports played numerous shows with other Philadelphia artists. The group did a couple of shows with Leon Huff before he was well known. Huff was from Camden and at the time was with the Dynafloes who evolved into the Lavenders of "The Slide" fame. Tyrone & the Nu-Ports also did shows with the Philadelphians, Dreamlovers, Intruders and especially the Majors. They appeared on one show with the Duprees.

"We even did one of [WIBG dj] Hy Lit's dances at Philadelphia's Concord Ballroom along with Little Anthony & the Imperials," said Tyrone.

In the Summer of 1963, Goodwill Industries held a marathon benefit show one Sunday at the skating arena called the Ice House in Cherry Hill, NJ. To gain admission, all patrons had to do was bring an article of clothing and donate it to Goodwill. The Ice House was packed and the show went on for ten hours. Tyrone & the Nu-Ports performed as did numerous other local artists including the Dovells, the Orlons and Danny & the Juniors. The Crystals came down from New York to perform.

Because they could sing in almost any style, Joe Ricci was able to get Tyrone & the Nu-Ports work in the Catskill Mountain resorts during the summer of 1963.

"We did the Borscht Belt," said Tyrone. "Up at Grossinger's Country Club. Earl Wilson the noted syndicated columnist heard us sing there and liked us. We got a lot of work up in the Catskill Mountains and that area because of our sound. We were singing Rock & Roll but we had a repertoire which consisted of eight-hundred songs that we could run off. Many of them were songs for people of an older era. We believed in being able to adjust to any given situation and to just totally entertain."

"We also did a thing at the Notre Dame High School in Bethlehem, PA," recalled Tyrone. "At the time they were taping a TV show called *Hollywood And The Stars* and that night Fabian was there. They had a lot of TV cameras. The Dovells were there. Maureen Gray. The Crystals were there also. We were second headliners after Fabian. They were honoring Fabian and giving a capsuled forum as to how teenage stars are built. We got a little press coverage from that."

Footage from the Bethlehem concert was used for an episode of *Hollywood And The Stars* called *Teenage Idols (Part 2)* and was aired on TV, January 21, 1964. In it, Joseph Cotton narrated the story of the rise of teen idol, Fabian. It's not known if Tyrone & the Nu-Ports performance made it into the TV show.

Tyrone & the Nu-Ports also began working on enough songs for an album. The group recorded at least fifteen sides. One of the songs, "Crossfire," was written by Danny & the Juniors. "They didn't want to do it," recalled Calvin. "They knew about us and they gave the song to us but it was never released. On that we did get some co-writer

credits because we changed the bridge. When we went into the bridge, they had a set of lyrics but we had a set of lyrics they enjoyed more.”

Other songs recorded for the album included the original compositions “That’s Right,” “All That’s Good,” “Dream” and “No Greater Love.”

The album was to be entitled “Feel Like A Million.” “We had taken pictures for the album,” said Tyrone. “Standing in front of one of those banks down by Rittenhouse Square holding up some money. The album was just never released. We had some fantastic tunes.”

While waiting in vain for their album to come out, Tyrone & the Nu-Ports began doing backup studio work. The first artist they backed was Marc Tanno.

“Mark Tanno was originally a South Philadelphia native,” said Tyrone. “He was doing a lot of work in Las Vegas. He had flown in to do a recording and we were highly recommended to him by a guy named Dante. Dante [Storace] was himself a singer of some note during those days. Marc said, ‘Well I want a group to do background but just not a Rock & Roll group, but guys that are versatile.’ So Joe Ricci told him. ‘I have the guys for you.’ Meeting him, he was a very pleasant fellow. We had a good time with Mark. He was telling us about Vegas. He was trying to work out a deal to get us in his act out there. Something went awry there. I think the capital wasn’t enough for Joe or something. We said we would forego that for the exposure. But it never happened.”

The two sides with the Nu-Ports supplying background were “Too Many Times Before” (written by Joe Ricci and Dante) and “Someday” (also co-written by Joe Ricci). Both sides were issued on the *President* label, owned by for-



From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives

mer Four Aces’ lead, Al Alberts. Alberts also produced the sides. Bill Richie who played bass on “The Combination” helped arrange the two sides.

“I don’t think [Tyrone & the Nu-Ports] worked with me on anything else,” said Marc Tanno, who since 1970 has been known as Anthey Shane. “They were great and wonderful to work with.” Anthey Shane continues singing in Southern California and Las Vegas, where he is still quite popular. *[For More on Marc Tanno, see Sidebar on the Next Page]*

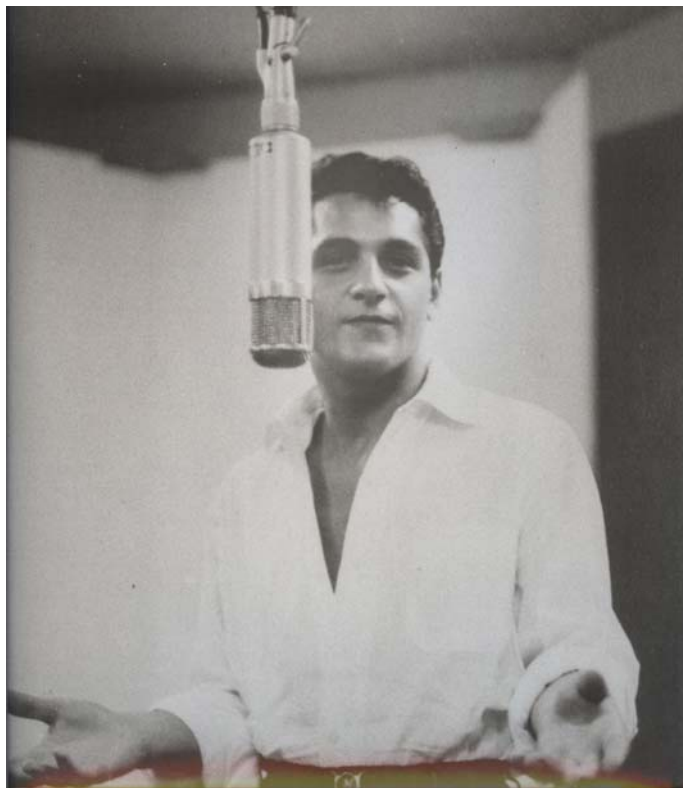
The recording session with Marc Tanno opened up a lot of other opportunities for studio work for the group. One session produced a nice doo wop record backing Al Belmont. “I Just Gotta Have You” b/w “Baby I Wanna Know.” The record was released on *Darrow*.

Tyrone & the Nu-Ports also backed Dante on some sides (titles unknown) as well as a girl who was a former Miss Atlantic City (possibly named Sheri Littlejohn). “We did background on few numbers for her,” said Tyrone. “None of her songs were released. We couldn’t comprehend that because she was recording for *Decca*. Her contract was with *Decca* so they were going to be released nationally. Something happened there and the songs were never released.”

“We enjoyed doing background,” Calvin added. “It gave us a lot of freedom. We could do a lot of things that you normally wouldn’t hear in the background of a record.”

“They would let us have total creative rights,” said Tyrone. “They’d bring in the song, we’d look at the charts, then listen to the music and then we give them the type of suggestions that we’d feel would be adequate for the song and not distract from the featured performer. We’d just try to blend it right in.”

One memorable session had Tyrone & the Nu-Ports backing Sylvanius Franklin and Ray Eskridge on a song called “Don’t Take a Chance.” Sylvanius, a singer from Chester, PA, had previously sung with the Five Lords [4] and



**Marc Tanno, ca. early 1960’s.
Photo courtesy of Anthey Shane, aka Marc Tanno.**

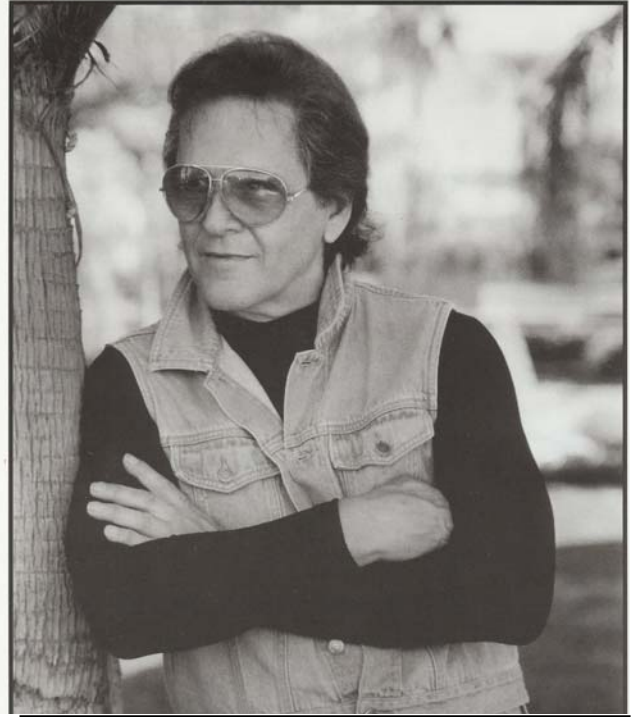
Marc Tanno/Antheny Shane

The story of Antheny Shane (Marc Tanno) is a fascinating one in itself. Born Joseph Pollizze in South Philadelphia, Antheny Shane used to accompany his older brother, who sang under the name Guy Tanno, to visit the offices of booking agents. On one such visit, a cigar smoking agent named Happy Burns offered fourteen-year-old Antheny a job for the next weekend, singing at a local Elks' club for ten dollars. Walking out of the office, Guy asked him, "When did you become a singer?" to which Antheny replied, "Since next Saturday!"

Taking the stage name Marc Tanno, Antheny worked local clubs like the Latin Casino, Sciolla's Lounge over the next few years. At the age of nineteen he moved to New York City and took a job as a burlesque announcer before resuming his career as a singer. During that time Antheny shared an apartment with Bobby Darin. Antheny was offered "Mack The Knife" by his record company but passed on the song, letting Bobby Darin record it. In 1960 *Twentieth Century Fox* (#185) released "First Love" b/w "One Moon One Sigh One Kiss." In 1961, he recorded "Angel" b/w "Dear Abby" for the *Whale* label (#501). The record has nice vocal group backing, though the names of the backup singers have long since been forgotten.

By the early 1960's, Antheny had moved to the West Coast, performing in Los Angeles, Beverley Hills and Las Vegas. In 1963, returning to Philadelphia, Antheny recorded "Too Many Times Before" b/w "Someday" for the *President* label (#718) backed by Tyrone & the Nu-Ports.

With 1970 came a name change from Marc Tanno, to Antheny Shane. Over the years, Antheny has made television appearances on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*, The Ed Sullivan Show, The Joey Bishop Show, The Art Linklet-



Antheny Shane

ter Show and the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. He's appeared at The Riviera, The Sahara and The Sands Hotel in Las Vegas and Tahoe. He's had extensive stays in San Diego and Palm Springs. In fact, in 1999 Antheny was given a star on the prestigious Palm Springs Walk of the Stars.

Living in Southern California, Antheny Shane continues performing and recording today.

Jimmy & the J's.[5]. Ray had previously sung with the Dials. [6] The session was arranged by Joe Ricci and released on the *Modern Artists* label.

The highlight of Tyrone & the Nu-Ports career came on June 9, 1964, when they performed at New York City's prestigious Carnegie Hall.

"Earl Wilson, the nationally syndicated columnist, was responsible for that," recalled Tyrone. "Because he had heard us sing at Grossinger's Country Club and had contacted us through BMI. I remember receiving a letter in the mail and telling the guys. We were just paid promotional money. I think we just got about \$250-300 per man. They were honoring Sammy Davis Jr. as the 'Showman of the Decade' and it was for the National Leukemia Society. Steve Lawrence and Edie Gorme were on the show. Myron Cohen. We were the first Rock & Roll group to ever appear there. The people really enjoyed us because we opened up with 'My Blue Heaven'. We also did an acappella song, 'Danny Boy.' We had a fantastic rendition of 'Danny Boy' that we did acappella."

As promising as things looked for Tyrone & the Nu-Ports in the early summer of 1964, their one-in-a-million rise to stardom was about to come crashing down.

"Most groups terminate because of differences," reflected Tyrone. "You know, differences mentally, but we

really had a true love for each other. That was primary before the singing. We had a camaraderie that we never saw exist with any other group. Other groups would even comment on that, on how close we were."

A short time after the Carnegie Hall performance, there was a horrible automobile accident involving four members of the group.

"The four of them were coming to my house for rehearsal," said Tyrone. "I knew something was wrong because we used to have rehearsal at seven o'clock and they were always very punctual. They would be there at 6:45. When they weren't there I called and discovered that there had been an accident."

As a result of the accident, the group's first tenor, Alex Lancaster, was paralyzed. Second tenor Ronald Turner was the most seriously injured. He later died. Calvin Henderson and Calvin McDonald were less seriously injured and did make complete recoveries. But the group just gave up singing after that.

"We just didn't want to sing with anyone else," said Tyrone. "We didn't even think about auditioning other guys."

"We were just so close that after the accident, I just didn't have the heart to sing anymore," added Calvin Henderson. "It took me a couple years just to get over the effect of the



From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives.



From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives.

accident.”

Manager, Joe Ricci apparently didn’t want to give up on “Feel Like A Million” having come so close to breaking the song nationally. Still working with Ray Eskridge (the “Del” from Slip & Del), Ricci took the Nu-Ports’ background track to “Feel Like A Million” and had Eskridge record a new lead track to the song. His intent was to issue the new version of the song on his *Pow* label as by the “Mystery Men”.[6]

There is some evidence that Ricci had conceived this plan even before the accident. Ricci’s relationship with Tyrone & the Nu-Ports was becoming strained and he might have reasoned that sending out any five masked guys called the Mystery Men to sing “Feel Like A Million” might solve the problem.

“We had done a TV program, the ‘Super Lou Show’,” recalled Tyrone. “And we were supposed to go on there as the Mystery Men. I declined to do so. So I imagine that’s where the idea had originated.”

Joe Ricci did finally issue “Feel Like A Million” on *Pow*, but the track he used turned out to be the exact same take as the Tyrone & Nu-Ports’ *Darrow* label.

* * * *

This article was written based on a February 16, 1980, interview with Tyrone Johnson and Calvin Henderson, broadcast over WXPB-FM radio in Philadelphia. No photo has ever surfaced of the entire group, Tyrone & the Nu-Ports. We know photos were taken for the intended “Feel Like A Million” album. The album to this day remains unreleased.

In 1991, “Just One Of Those Things” was released on the *Wax Trax* label, purported to be a previously unreleased side by Tyrone & the Nu-Ports. The song does sound like Tyrone and the group and may have come from an acetate uncovered at Philadelphia’s Reco-Arts Studios.

Calvin McDonald spent twenty years in the navy and then retired. We believe he and Calvin Henderson are still alive but their whereabouts are unknown to us. Alex Lancas-

ter is believed deceased, as is Joe Ricci.

Marc Tanno changed his name to Anthony Shane and continued in the music business. He now lives near Palm Springs and continues singing in California and Las Vegas. Currently he’s putting together a Salute to the Big Bands with his conductor. The band will do the first set and then Anthony will do a one hour or more show.

After his career as a singer, Tyrone became a disc



Blowing out the candles at his 42nd (and last) birthday. Tyrone with (l to r) Jaya, Tyya and Miya. (Photo courtesy of Jaya Johnson.)



Left to right: Calvin Henderson, Charlie Horner, Tyrone Johnson at WXPN Studios, 1980. (From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives)

jockey, working at several local radio stations. Tyrone Johnson died on October 16, 1985, two days short of his 43rd birthday. He was found shot to death by a single bullet to his chest. His murder was never solved. Tyrone's cousin, Jackie Verdell, sang at his funeral. Tyrone daughter, Jaya, has gone on to become a singer. The last four lines of his obituary read:

You're not forgotten
 Nor ever will you be;
 As long as life and memory last,
 We shall remember thee.

And Tyrone and his Nu-Ports will be remembered. Remembered by anyone who met Tyrone. By those of us who grew up in Philly or South Jersey in the early 1960. For all too short of a time, the music of Tyrone & the Nu-Ports made us "feel like a million"!

Notes and References

1. Based on Charlie Horner's interviews with Tyrone Johnson and Calvin Henderson (Feb. 16, 1980) and correspondences with Jaya Johnson and Anthony Shane.
2. Thanks also to Jaya Johnson, Anthony Shane and Val Shively for supplying photographs.
3. Aretha Franklin and David Ritz, *Aretha: From These Roots*, Villard (New York), (1999), p.51.
4. Robert Bosco, "Bunky & Slip." *Echoes of the Past*, No. 77 (2006), pp.4-9.
5. Robert Bosco, "Lounge Wizards," *Echoes of the Past*, No. 81 (2007), pp.4-11.
6. Robert Bosco, "Disconnected!." *Echoes of the Past*, No. 59 (2002), pp.13-18.
7. For more group profiles, photos, concert reviews and all things group harmony, visit our website...

www.ClassicUrbanHarmony.net

Pioneer groups, R&B, Doo Wop, Gospel and Soul Harmony through the eyes of Charlie & Pam Horner When it comes to Group Harmony, our net catches it all!!!

Tyrone & Nu-Ports Discography

As Tyrone & Nu-Ports (all recorded 1962-63)

<i>Darrow</i> 71	The Combination / Look At Her Eyes
<i>Darrow</i> 5-20	Feel Like A Million / On Saturday Night
unreleased	Crossfire
unreleased	That's Right
unreleased	All That's Good
unreleased	Dream
unreleased	No Greater Love
<i>Wax Trax</i> 501	Just One Of Those Things/

Uncredited Backup for Marc Tanno

<i>President</i> 718	Too Many Times Before / Someday
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Uncredited Backup for Al Belmont

<i>Darrow</i> ??	I Just Gotta have You / Baby I Wanna Know
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Uncredited Backup for Dante

unreleased	unknown titles
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Uncredited Backup for Sheri Littlejohn

unreleased	unknown titles
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Uncredited Backup for Slip & Dell

<i>Modern Artists</i> 100	Don't Take A Chance / Gotta Get Away
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As The Mystery Men

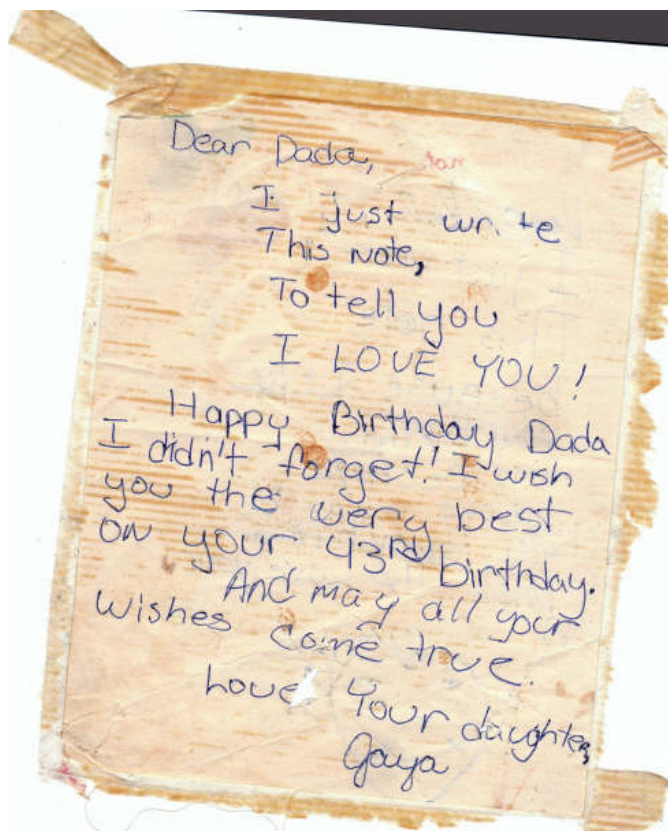
<i>Pow</i> 1001/1002	Feel Like A Million / On Saturday Night
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Tyrone Johnson with daughter, Jaya. (Photo courtesy of Jaya Johnson.)



Tyrone Johnson



Heartbreaking birthday note from seven-year-old Jaya Johnson to her father. Tyrone never received the note. He was murdered two days before his 43rd birthday.

Maple Shade man found shot to death in Camden

CAMDEN — A 43-year-old Maple Shade man was found shot to death early yesterday in North Camden.

The body of Tyrone Johnson, 43, of the Deerfield Apartments, was found at Fifth and York streets.

Camden Detective Sgt. A. Handy said police found Johnson's body lying on the street shortly after 5 a.m. when they responded to residents' reports of shots in the area.

Johnson was pronounced dead at the scene and his body was taken to the Camden County Morgue in Pennsauken, where an autopsy showed Johnson died of a single gunshot wound to the left side of the chest.

The body was identified by Johnson's girlfriend, police said.

Newspaper clipping of Tyrone Johnson's death, 1985.



Alternate pressing of "Feel Like A Million" on a red Darrow label. From the Classic Urban Harmony Archives.