

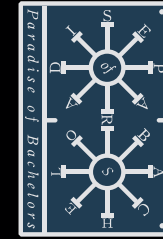


IQ OF GROVER, N. C.



David Lee and sons at home

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The Constellations: instrumentalists



The Constellations: vocalists



Joe Brown and the Singing Mellerairs



The Sensational Gates

Said I had a vision

I heard a knock upon my door: Introductions.

Come on in my kitchen, you may know that song. You may know this song already too, or one like it. Listen. All the best songs, all the best stories, sound some flush of the familiar, even those we have yet to hear. So this next song unfolds from a snug kitchen on a country-crooked Shady Lane, in a hamlet called Mooresboro, nestled at the cusp of the Western Piedmont and the Appalachian Foothills in Cleveland County, North Carolina, just down the road a piece from Shelby. Climb three cinderblock steps, knock twice on the white door, Number —. David Lee, whose elfin build and flashing eyes belie his seventy-four years, looks dapper as usual—black suit, black cowboy hat; silver hair, silver moustache. He greets you with a grin, a warm embrace, and a dulcet stream of grandfatherly words of worry and blessing: hey there, sir, hey hello, how was the drive, oh it's been too long, it sure is good to see you, anyway, I was just talking to so-and-so on the telephone, *ooh* let's get a hug, I hope you're hungry. *You've been gone too long*. A massive meal of fried chicken, greens, cake, and sweet tea awaits, prepared by Nellena, David's lovely wife of over fifty years. Then more songs, more stories, more records, more remembering.

In 2008 the venerable Shelby multi-instrumentalist, music teacher, raconteur, and local rhythm and blues and gospel legend Ray Harper—leader of the erstwhile Harper Brothers, veteran of “liquor house” bands, college roommate of Rev. Jesse Jackson and Maceo Parker, friend and sometime sideman to Marvin Gaye—directed us Bachelors both (albeit individually, initially) to David Lee's door and into his confidence and camaraderie. In turn, we Bachelors fostered our own friendship on the foundation of our mutual knowledge and appreciation of this shadowy set of songs and our desire to share this remarkable story and this body of music more broadly. So we established Paradise of Bachelors, which largely owes its existence to the artistic legacy of David Lee, a veritable impresario who has doggedly pursued a variety of roles over the last fifty years: songwriter, performer, producer, preacher, record label entrepreneur and record store owner, working man, family man. We can only hope that Paradise of Bachelors measures up to the inspiring example he has set with his own artistry and the Washington Sound axis. So here we are, back in his kitchen, ready to learn, ready to eat.

Here we are, about fifty secondary highway miles due west of Charlotte and just a few country miles north of the rolling North/South Carolina borderlands that are home to Washington Sound gospel singer and Mellerairs bandleader Joe Brown, whom we'll meet soon and whose property literally straddles the state line. This is a region rich in many musics, though perhaps most famous for its country and bluegrass pedigree—legendary banjo innovators Smith Hammett and Earl Scruggs, as well as the famed “Sad Poet” of Nashville, Don Gibson, all grew up in Cleveland County. But the rural border between the two Carolinas seems almost as arbitrary and artificial here as those unstable genre boundaries we carefully limn around and between songs, or between neighbors, between skins. David Lee, who is African American, has made it his life's work to traverse and transcend those borderlands—geographical, musical, cultural, racial—with grace and little regard for specious divisions and partitions imposed by others. Sacred and secular, country and soul,

black and white are not mutually exclusive categories in Mr. Lee's mind or music. To him these are not particularly useful binaries at all. *Let them talk, baby, if they want to.*

If his three record labels' small catalogue of sixteen mysterious and erratically numbered and named releases seems somewhat porous or diffuse as a result of their genre-skipping and scarcity, that has only magnified the essential (and unfortunate) obscurity of his music, which has been heard and collected all over the world—especially as recorded by Ann Sexton—without any contextual history or any meaningful attribution to David Lee. (He has never received his fair share of royalty checks either, but we'll get to that.) Precious few fans of rare Southern soul and gospel outside of his hometown know the true identity of the enigmatic David Lee, which is a situation we hope to rectify. This record represents the first compilation of his music and the first reissue in any format of any of these songs except the two Ann Sexton numbers, as well as the first attempt to historicize or recount his story beyond the pages of a few local papers.

Only You Can Make It Happen: Working, Listening, Writing.

Mr. Lee speaks of songwriting as “a lot of work, a lot of waiting, a lot of disappointments,” much like any other work, and he knows what it means to work. Born in Shelby in 1936—“fifth month, third day”—to John Leo and Mary Leslie Lee, David was raised on the Blanton and Yarborough family farms, where he was already working the land by age twelve, planting and cutting barley, wheat, corn, and cotton. His mother died when he was just six, and the rest of his family was not especially musical, though they were “yard singers” who likewise sang in church. So when he wasn't helping out on the farm or out rabbit-hunting, he took up guitar and piano under the instruction of neighbor Everett Freeman, who taught him that a simple harmonic foundation is the root of musical eloquence. At fourteen, Mr. Lee began writing poetry, a different sort of work, but he soon switched to songwriting when he realized that contemporary audiences were much more interested in music than unaccompanied verse.

Thereby inaugurated, his musical practice paralleled a series of strenuous and time-consuming day jobs. Starting at age eighteen, David worked for eight years hauling coal and ice at the Morgan Street ice plant and another two at Burlington Mills, one of many nearby textile factories. He kept his long-term job at North Lake Country Club for three decades, even through the period of his most critical musical renown, while writing and recording with Ann Sexton, her husband Melvin Burton, and DJ John R. in the early 1970s. From about 1967 through his retirement from the country club in 1997, he spent evenings and weekends presiding over his record shop and audio supply store Washington Sound, sometimes with help from Nellena and his four children. During those thirty years, David installed PAs in at least fifty area churches, according to his rather wistful estimation—it was the PA rental and installation business that triggered the financial difficulties leading to Washington Sound's demise. (And the ascendancy of CDs was “just too much”—“Automation automated me on out,” he states with a smile.) Today a convenience store has replaced the once thriving record store in the unassuming brick bungalow at 716 Buffalo St. in Shelby.

As a young man, Mr. Lee listened to the radio religiously, especially to Nashville's WSM and WLAC stations, on which in the mid-1950s he first heard the flamboyant and feverish ministrations of white r&b DJ “John R.” Richbourg, who would soon prove instrumental in shaping Lee's career after hearing the songs David wrote for Ann Sexton (who, like Richbourg himself, hailed from South Carolina.) Mr. Lee's early musical influences were as eclectic as his future labels would be and far from what we might consider orthodox in retrospect. However, upon closer examination, his catholic tastes reflect the often overlooked, but deeply ingrained process of cultural cross-pollination, hybridization, and synthesis that has defined Southern American vernacular music for over two centuries. Yes, he was into Joe Turner, Bo Diddley, Sam Cooke, “keen-voiced” Clyde McPhatter of the Drifters (a native of Creedmoor, NC), Otis Redding, and, of course, the mighty and ubiquitous James Brown, as might be expected. But he also enormously and unabashedly admired white musicians like Elvis Presley, Pat Boone, Ricky Nelson, and country musicians in particular. “Roy Acuff is my special—that's my man,” he declares, and he modeled much of his musical approach, particularly his vocal phrasing and inflections, on him, Hank Williams (“man, those old lonesome blues”), Ernest Tubb (“*ooh*, the way his voice trembled like that”), and Bill Monroe (“nothing can touch the Bluegrass Boys; he'd get that chill; he'd make that thing bellow, and the way he *sang*...”)

As the most visible African American country musician, Charley Pride was a special inspiration, and Lee “patterned” the structure and delivery of “I Can't Believe You Gone” on Pride's example. (When he visited DJ John R.'s house in Nashville, David remembers, “you could throw a rock to Charley Pride's place. I was shaking—Charley *Pride!*”) However, because of his diverse tastes and his own country style, David felt that he was not always “accepted as an African American” among his peers. “During that time, listening to country music wasn't acceptable with the people I lived with,” he explains. He occasionally performed his songs publicly, both solo and with pickup “fish fry” bands, but “I couldn't play all that. People only listened to their own type of music, their own artists.” Despite the disapproval of a segment of the African American community—which served to “push” him toward songwriting instead of performing, and convinced him to market his songs to black soul and gospel artists rather than to the “country field” that most attracted him—Mr. Lee forged on with his unique version of colorblind songwriting, to powerful effect.

All of David's employers lauded him for his tireless work ethic, and he relishes describing the analogous details and daily grind of the songwriting process and of finding his distinctive voice. He claims that the words of “You're Letting Me Down,” his breakthrough hit for Ann Sexton and the most-heard song of his career (later covered on Impel by white guitarist and singer Bill Allen in a decidedly different version), took the better part of a year to polish: “I know some people can write a song on the airplane and get an instant hit, but it took me eight months getting the words together, and only eight hours to write the music.” He attributes the longevity of his music to his patience and perfectionism, since “some songs might be an instant success and don't hold up long, but these songs held up for forty years.” He approaches songwriting as diligent work, a matter of dedicated hours laboring at piano and paper,

personal experience transposed by sweat equity, explaining that “you’ve got to stretch out those words, you have to live them before you put them on paper. Mainly that’s what happened with those songs... Things was happening, and it took that long to really put them together.” As David describes it, the practice of composition involves an arduous process of “exposing” himself, sometimes to the point of writing through the tears. “Sure, there’s a lot of heartache in those songs, but that’s what sells. It relates to people. If it don’t relate, they soon forget about it.”

Lee modestly recognizes his verbal gifts for parallelism, repetition, and unvarnished immediacy, relating these qualities to the ineffable movement of the Spirit he experiences in his more recent calling as a United Methodist lay preacher. When speaking in church, the Word flows through him, and he is able to preach like “the old prophets,” to “get into people’s minds.” Above all else, he understands the universal power of honest and direct delivery, and his songs do seem deceptively straightforward and unadorned at first listen, often lacking a conventional verse/chorus differentiation and instead relying on mantric melodic momentum. “If you get too deep,” he tells us, “then you’ll be too complicated for the singers. You need to be simple and plain, so people know exactly where you’re coming from.” Mr. Lee stresses the importance of repetition and adherence to the text, whether the Bible or the lyrics: “Preaching works the same way as music—you keep coming back to the top, to your subject, in parallelism.” (Interestingly, we found among David’s boxes of tapes a cassette containing a practice recording of him delivering a moving sermon which extrapolates a Christian message from the seemingly prosaic children’s song “Old MacDonald Had a Farm.”) “I wanted to sing like Otis Redding,” he says, or like Ernest Tubbs, “but then I found out I had to sing like David Lee.”

I’m Going to Keep on Trying: Of Air, Active, and the Ambassadors.

Mr. Lee’s first taste of success came somewhat suddenly and unexpectedly with a recording of his own voice. He finds a satisfying and bemusing symmetry in the fact that the very first and penultimate 45s he recorded (the two LPs came later)—“I’m Going to Keep on Trying,” which was released on Air, and “I’ll Never Get Over Losing You” b/w “Can’t Believe You Gone,” released in 1985 on his own SCOP label—are also the only vinyl releases that feature his own performances of his songs. The autobiographical song “I’m Going to Keep on Trying,” probably written in the late 1950s, ambiguously addressed both romantic heartbreak and multiple music publishers’ repeated rejections of his songs. (“I would get a letter from a publisher, sweat pouring off me, and there it was again: ‘reject.’”) In 1961 or 1962 the tune was finally picked up by publishing company Active and received broad regional airplay in seven states courtesy of Jack Curry’s Miami record label Air (coincidentally also rockabilly legend Hasil Adkins’ first label.) But David wasn’t satisfied—he still cringes when discussing his bare-bones vocals-piano-and-drums rendition of the song, which he intended strictly as a demo for some other artist, any other artist, and which he deemed ragged and “too country.” “I couldn’t come to grips with that, being so low in quality.” (Air 5053, a split 45, wedged the ballad between seemingly incompatible tracks by Roger Smith and Bill Burnham’s orchestras. “Keep on Trying” was later re-recorded by

Shelby’s own Ambassadors—rivals to original Impel act the Constellations—and Air released it c. 1962 as #6065 b/w “The Switch,” a dance tune Lee also wrote.) But undaunted, he maintained his workmanlike attitude towards making music: “You’ve got to work hard at it; you can’t quit; you can’t be no giver-upper; you got to hang in,” he says.

I need somebody / I found somebody: The Constellations.

And so he did. But with the notable exception of the clutch of songs he wrote for Ann Sexton—whose church-honeyed voice provided fallow soil for his miniature seeds of songs, which build upon elegantly spare melodies and spartan lyrics bored deep in their candid loss for words—hits proved elusive, although his patience and diligence never waned. *If everybody would love me like you do.* The story of David Lee’s songs and labels begins in earnest in the starry firmament, ironically, with Shelby high school combo the Constellations, before taking root in the earthy voice of Ann Sexton. David describes the Constellations as “way ahead of their time,” the first “salt and pepper”—i.e., interracial, mixed-band in the area, a phenomenon made possible by the musicians’ youth, their open-minded attitudes, their profound and abiding friendship, and their courageous refusal to obey the strictures of segregation while touring.

Today the surviving members still talk humorously and movingly about their brotherhood and their road-seasoned, brokedown-van adventures outrunning bigots, the police, and drunken sailors in the segregated Southeast. Born in 1958 or 1959 of a fortuitous union of former Flames drummer Harold Allen and saxophonist Max Philbeck with existing Constellations guitarist/songwriter Don Camp and Steve “Red” Shull (all of whom were white) and the three singing Guest brothers, Benjamin, Bryan (known as “Brownie”), and Sam (who later sang with SCOP gospel group the VocalAires), and previous Ambassadors member William “Butch” Mitchell (all of whom were African American), the Constellations battled entrenched racial divisions to become one of the premiere teenage r&b and rock groups in the region, touring the fraternity, high school, and club circuits from Virginia to Georgia.

Around 1960 David wrote the stately and airy romantic dialogue “If Everybody” for the group, playing piano with the piecemeal “fish fry” band on the original “dub” demo EP, a split with three other groups. As re-recorded and released on Impel, probably c. 1962, brothers Brownie and Benjamin Guest play hearts-a-bustin’ boy and girl parts, respectively;



Don Camp of the Constellations

the song shudders with the resonant, tunnel-vision devotion of a young man in love. “Hot dog, that was the big one,” David remembers. “Man, the girls would fall down on the floor when they’d hear that.” The Constellations specialized in originals, excelling at both hectic dance numbers like “The Frog” and what they deem their more enduring “love ballads,” most of which Lee wrote, as well as adept covers of the most recent soul hits. Before the Vietnam War separated them, the group recorded the first three 45s for David’s brand-new Impel label at Arthur Smith Studios in Charlotte, and they recorded at least two additional unreleased finished songs, plus assorted unreleased demos and alternate versions. For their ductile Guest-brother harmonies and the sheer vigor of instrumental attack they bring to the Impel catalog (e.g. Don Camp’s propulsive, studio-improvised Eddy-style surf jam “Dumb Dee Dumb”), as well as their singular position as cultural pioneers of Civil Rights-era North Carolina, the Constellations deserve rediscovery, respect, and special recognition among the Washington Sound roster.

Soul Night (Parts 1 and 2): The Record Labels and the Record Store.

Beginning with his fruitful relationship with the Constellations, Mr. Lee’s enterprising career in music leveraged his substantial songwriting achievements into the establishment of a conjoined trinity of independent record labels, vehicles for recording, producing, and releasing primarily his own songs as performed by ten other local artists (and in one case, by David himself): the Constellations, the Yakety Yaks, Ann Sexton and the Masters of Soul, the Gospel I.Q.’s, Bill Allen, the Relations Gospel Singers, Brown Sugar, Inc., the Sensational Gates, Joe Brown and the Singing Mellerairs, and Lola Dillingham and the VocalAires. Operated out of his Mooresboro home, a few area studios, and Washington Sound, his record shop and audio equipment and electronics store, these three labels represent a deeply personal project that Mr. Lee began in his mid-twenties and maintained through three decades. The three label names developed sequentially, although as Lee explains his own rationale, he employed them somewhat capriciously and erratically, assigning them on the basis of whim and circumstance as much as theme and content. Impel came first, a riff on Lew Chudd’s successful Los Angeles label famous for its New Orleans artists. “During that time,” David told us, “Fats Domino had such a good showing on Imperial. So I said, ‘I’ll do Impel.’ And I looked it up, and it means ‘push forward,’ so I said, ‘Sure, that’s right!’” The name stuck—David released ten records on the Impel imprint.

He named Washington Sound after his record shop and audio supply business, the best local source for African American music and a notable example of the profusion of black-owned record stores, studios, and independent labels throughout the Southeast during the classic soul era. Washington Sound, which he opened only after releasing the three Constellations 45s, sold his own records as well as other regional and national soul and gospel records. Lee remembers “times they was standing in line buying records—it was a bonanza! Mine was the main place to buy soul music really, I had to specialize in it. They’d come, and on Saturday you better have plenty records; they’d sell right out.” The Washington Sound moniker premiered shortly after David opened the store around 1967, with Spartanburg, South Carolina band the Yakety Yaks’ “Soul Night

(Parts One and Two),” (c. 1968-69), which one might hear driving around Cleveland County on Sundays in the late 1960s. The frenetic, elastic, obviously James Brown-influenced tune, as belted out by singer, emcee, and comedian Mr. Mule on “Part One,” once served as Washington Sound’s radio advertisement on venerable Shelby station WOHS. Although only one other record, Brown Sugar, Inc.’s second “Party Time” 45, which featured alternate versions of the original Impel “Party Time” 45 A-side, earned the Washington Sound banner, the label graced many of the releases as David’s in-house publishing and production company and serves as a convenient umbrella for all Lee-related productions.

Much of Mr. Lee’s 1980s output, and most of the CD demos and reissues he releases sporadically even today, appear with the SCOP or SCOP Gospel handle. Pronounced like “scope,” the label is an acronym for “Soul, Country, Opera, and Pop,” though he has apparently not yet revealed the opera part of the equation. SCOP has served as the brand of choice for David’s latter-day gospel releases, including both LPs (by Joe Brown and the Singing Mellerairs and the Iola Dillingham and the VocalAires), and for his sole vinyl release of his own performance on his labels, “I’ll Never Get Over Losing You” b/w “I Can’t Believe You Gone” (1985). The latter record, along with a few SCOP CDs released since then, follows David’s natural singing voice in its decidedly “country flavor,” as he puts it.

Over a period of approximately twenty-eight years—roughly 1960 through 1988, but the chronology of this one-man operation is slippery—he released a total of sixteen records on vinyl: fourteen 45s and two LPs, plus a handful of cassettes and CDs, mostly demos and repackaged recordings distributed locally in very limited numbers. He also had a hand in writing, recording, producing, and issuing several additional releases for other labels and publishers, notably Air and Seventy-Seven. Today, all those releases are difficult to find, prized by a select few collectors and unknown to most. In all but three cases, the master tapes no longer exist—he ran a shoestring business, and after paying hourly studio rental fees, he rarely paid the extra fee to purchase the tapes, and as was the common practice in those days, the studio technicians promptly recorded over and reused the masters. Sadly, both shady publishing outfits and unscrupulous reissue labels in both the U.S. and in Europe—where some of the artists he recorded have enjoyed a prolonged niche fame among collectors and Northern Soul aficionados—have absconded with the Ann Sexton master tapes that David legally owns. (The recordings on this compilation have been transferred from the most reliable—and in most cases, the only—existing sources, the original 45s.) Although David holds the copyrights and publishing credits to all his songs and releases, he has struggled to obtain royalties for his most popular songs or compensation for the stolen Sexton tapes (or as David calls them, “the phantoms.”)

The talk is out all over town: Ann Sexton, John R., and Seventy-Seven Records.

The biggest hits and definitive recordings of David’s career, and the sole reason diehard soul music fans (especially those in Europe) have heard of him, are the immortal songs he wrote for Greenville, South Carolina native Ann Sexton, the most recognizable tunes he ever wrote. After seeing a

striking twenty-one year-old woman named Mary Ann Burton perform in Shelby at Washington Center—he particularly recalls her singing “Who’s Lovin’ You?”—he approached her to ask if she would record his despondent plaint “You’re Letting Me Down.” “She was really gracious—she said you want *me* to sing your song?” Encouraged, he promptly booked her for a second engagement in Shelby the following week, though her promised demo took a while to arrive. “When I gave her my demo, it sounded a whole lot more country, and when she got through it, it was a different thing, sounded tremendous”—as articulated by a pleading, despairing Sexton (known then as Burton, her married name), the transformed song, spacious and blanketed with horns that to David sound as if “they’re blowing themselves,” chillingly distills the creeping, gossip-fueled revelation of a slowly dissolving romance.

Soon thereafter Lee recorded her version at Mark V studios in Greenville, backed by her husband Melvin Burton’s band the Masters of Soul. Lee gave her the stage name Mary Ann Sexton, shortly shortened to Ann Sexton (not to be confused with poet Anne Sexton)—he thought “it would be catching and easy to remember, thought of that with God’s help.” In collaboration with Melvin, David wrote “You’ve Been Gone Too Long,” the cuckolding-Jody B-side that has been his most lucrative composition: “‘Jody got your girl and gone, gone, gone; that goes way back, when you been let down for the heavy.’” The song, propelled by a buoyant bass and a delicate, burnished guitar riff, resurfaced later as a revival hit on the U.K. Northern Soul circuit and in Germany, where it remains popular as a soul dancefloor staple. Impel SS-AS-103, David’s fifth record, originally released in 1971 in an edition of 500, sold respectably in North and South Carolina, “burning up the jukeboxes,” and garnered a degree of regional radio play.

While selling some Impel 45s, including the Sexton single, to the Mangold-Bertos record one-stop in Charlotte, Mr. Lee learned that WLAC DJ John R. was visiting, and he nervously requested an introduction: “Chills came over me, and I was trembling.” Richbourg was “just as cool and conscious, leaning back in that backroom door,” but David mustered the courage to play the famous DJ his new Ann Sexton

record. The two got along famously, and John R. immediately liked the song, agreeing to “give it a spin” on WLAC. He enthusiastically broadcasted it for two or three weeks on his radio show, and then suddenly pulled the 45. David was so distraught that he drove out to Nashville to confront the DJ, who laughingly told him he was just waiting for David to sign a licensing and distribution contract. Reissued in two editions on John R.’s Seventy-Seven label, the song played nationally, “ringing all over the country,” rapidly selling more than 90,000 copies, and so began a productive working relationship. Finally here was the “instant hit” David had been waiting for, the promise of “I’m Going to Keep on Trying” fulfilled, and a tangible reason to persevere with his music career. David visited Richbourg again in Nashville and even announced his record live on the radio to eight million listeners, thanking Sexton’s fans and the folks back home in North Carolina, a thrilling experience he recounts with still-palpable awe and pride. “That song was just so true. It related to a lot of people. Man, people went wild over it.” On the drive home to Mooresboro, Nellena asked David how it felt knowing people around the United States were hearing his songs. “And I said, ‘I feel like a million.’”

Lee traveled to Memphis with Sexton, Burton, and John R. to produce three additional records, including the David Lee originals “Love, Love, Love (I Want to Be Loved)” and four Burton-Sexton compositions. With her records “flying off the shelves,” Sexton was now “wide open”—her recording of “You’re Gonna Miss Me” made the top 50 on the R&B charts in 1973, “Love, Love, Love” was gaining in popularity, and Sexton and Lee were poised for a national breakthrough. But the relationship soured somewhat after Sexton and Burton didn’t show for a Johnson City, Tennessee show that David had booked. “Young people wanted to see her real bad; they was screaming and hollering for ‘You’re Letting Me Down,’” but after an interminable wait, it became clear that the band wouldn’t make it—they were in Texas. Perhaps it was a case of too much too soon—Burton poorly managed his wife’s business affairs, John R. lost interest as a result, and Sexton’s career drifted “into a tailspin” thereafter. She soon stopped touring and recording (although recently she has begun performing again at the urging of the international soul fans to whom she is an icon.) Lee also regrets that Melvin and Ann chose to record “Loving You, Loving Me” instead of his own song “I Am in Love,” which he reckons would have produced another hit (unfortunately, she claimed she had “no feeling for that song.”) Still, he credits her with his success and speaks glowingly of her talent, her modesty, and her grace: “Lord, she was a real artist... I’m proud that I met her. If I hadn’t, these other songs wouldn’t have meant anything. Lots of times your life will lead you into things, and you got to have God.”

We are the Singing Mellerairs / We are from Gaffney, y’all, South Carolina / We been singing for a mighty long time / We still got heaven on our minds

Mr. Lee has always been a churchgoer and a man of faith, but following his recordings with Ann Sexton, he began writing and producing increasingly more gospel parallel to his secular oeuvre, beginning in the mid-1970s with the driving Gospel I.Q.’s record (the first gospel song David ever wrote), the otherworldly, ethereal Relations Gospel Singers tracks (recorded on location at Mice Creek Baptist Church outside Gaffney), and the Sensational Gates, whose loping,



bass-and-drum braided “Help Me to Understand” tears an unsteady, keening path towards spiritual enlightenment. But only after these three releases did Lee produce a record by the artist who, after the Constellations and Sexton, arguably represents the third defining artistic relationship of his career. David first met Joe Brown sometime in the 1960s, when he attended a performance by the Singing Mellerairs—originally known as the Melloaires and thereafter as the Exciting Singing Mellerairs or the Singing Melleraires—Joe Brown’s longtime gospel outfit, which he founded around 1953, when he was just fifteen. The Gaffney area group, which included two sets of brothers, the Wallaces and the Garnetts, as well as Brown and Robert Byers, quickly tired of singing exclusively traditional numbers and covers of songs by other contemporary bands like the Mighty Clouds of Joy and the Nightingales. Too often, during the course of an extensive bill at an all-day gospel sing, the other groups would perform well-known tunes from the Mellerairs’ set before they could get to them, and besides, they realized that in terms of recordings and royalties, originals offered the only viable way ahead.

Said I had a vision: Back in the Lee Kitchen.

After Lee and Joe Brown struck up a friendship, Lee began passing Brown demos of his compositions. The Mellerairs would arrange them and find the appropriate key, record their own demo, and return it to Lee for approval. This process continued casually for almost twenty years before Lee first recorded the Mellerairs for Impel, in the early 1980s. The collaboration resulted in two 45s and one Mellerairs LP, which featured alternate versions and additional songs written both by Brown and by Lee, including the numinous “Vision,” which lends its name to the Mellerairs LP and to this compilation. That song, like David’s love songs, wrings experience and emotion from minimal, almost terse, lyrical brevity and an apparently banal scene, using Joe Brown’s commanding voice to transfigure domestic space into a stage for mystical meditation and divine visitation:

So one morning / I had a vision that my soul left my body / and I sit here on the counter / just thinking, as plain as you see / Said that I had a vision.

I heard a knock upon my door / He said, “Won’t you let me come in?” / Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, You died for me / I need your help so desperately / Said that I had a vision.

Here we are, back in the kitchen, sitting “on the counter,” standing in the doorway, welcoming a Guest of a higher order than the Constellations’ Guest brothers. Such is the nature of David Lee’s artistic practice, which conveys a vision of Christ in his kitchen, the rhythms of thoroughgoing everydayness suffused with the extraordinary and the lyrical. A subjunctive mode and elegiac mood pervade his songs, which function as yearning expressions of loss, lack, revelations and enlightenments of orders both romantic and spiritual, ordinary and metaphysical. These are songs about having feelings, both interior and otherwise—I got a feeling you’re letting me down—and in some fundamental sense they may sound at initial listen typical, unremarkable, bland, generic and genre-locked, that first flush of the familiar. But there is something far more at work here, and it is work, craft actualized by experience. At their most basic,

telegraphic level, the songs address, through homespun diction with the transparent clarity of dreaming, what there is and what there is not in the realm of our subjective lived experience. They are not tainted by regret or overawed by the shifting sand of that existential opposition, but rather keyed in absence and a deep-seated doubt of its reversal; and yet there remains hope, and that hope is called grace. To David, his career in music has entailed “stepping out on faith,” and he attributes his tenacity and blessings entirely to divine grace: “The Lord brought me all the way.” *Ain’t it a shame we can’t stand a little pain?*

I’ll Never Get Over Losing You: Goodbyes.

In 1985, during the most active period of his collaboration with Joe Brown, David Lee, at forty-nine, finally felt the time was ripe to release his own performances of two of his songs. The result was one of the most compelling recordings in his catalogue and one of his and our personal favorites of the David Lee songbook, “I’ll Never Get Over Losing You.” Despite mutually respectful arguments with the eccentric and erratic guitarist, who “never played it the same way two times,” David remembers that when he left the studio session, the engineer was still singing the chorus. The song’s author was equally as enchanted with the result—“I played that thing when I got it over and over!”

In October 17th, 2009, in the Lee kitchen, we witnessed David, one hand over his heart, the other gripping the back of the chair, out-singing that scratchy 45 amplified by his antique portable turntable. Here is David’s aesthetic rendered with the most polish and the least emotional or dialectical distance, his own studio recording of his own heartbreaking composition, constructed of humble clay despite the slick mid-1980s production values, and rent with manifest grief regardless. Perhaps more succinctly than any other in his career, the title of this song provides the ultimate statement of his songwriting concerns. To this day he is still reworking updated versions of this and other previously released songs—some female vocalists here, some more pedal steel there, “got to work on my singing”—because those sentiments persist, and so his artistic practice persists too. Sadly, these recordings, so evocative of one man’s vision, have fallen out of print until now, but those feelings are chronic, universal, comprising love entire and actual. David Lee is a good man from Mooresboro, North Carolina, and this is his legacy in song. Do you know this one?



Joe Brown and the Singing Mellerairs

:::TRACK NOTES:::

1) Yakety Yaks (Washington Sound 8-9046)
Soul Night Pt. 1 (David Lee, Jack Dover; Active Music ASCAP)
 Recorded c. 1968-69, likely at Arthur Smith Studios, Charlotte, NC.

We could identify a kick-off track no more fitting for our David Lee long-player than “Soul Night,” a product of Upstate South Carolina legends the Yakety Yaks. Their tight, topical, late-1960s funk workout eventually became a radio advertisement/theme song for David Lee’s Washington Sound record and audio gear shop, on a day that for the group qualified as a long time coming. Founded in the first half of the decade, the large outfit drew on the deep talent pool of Spartanburg, South Carolina and surrounding towns like Cowpens and Pacolet Mills. When doo-wop was going out, and r&b was increasing in strength, they cut two obscure sides: “Apart,” a ballad, and “You, Ya, You,” an uptempo tune for contrast, which mysteriously came out on the Chicago imprint Scope and might well represent the debut on wax of one Rudolph “Rudy” Mockabee. Destined to become the most famous of their lead-men, this full-throated vocalist would eventually be featured under his own name on two excellent nationally-distributed 45s for Atco Records, including a rousing version of the Berns-Ragovoy delight “Piece of My Heart,” already popularized by Janis Joplin. In our minds, Mockabee counts as an unsung hero of Southern soul, and his early days were no doubt shaped by his experiences with the Yakety Yaks. (However, we must make clear that Mockabee does not actually grace the vocal leads on “Soul Night.”)

The group’s stage performances were memorable multi-part revues that also showcased fronting acts such as hype-man “Mr. Mule” and expertly-choreographed vocal group Charles Dawkins & the Fabulous Instigators. This combination no doubt attracted David Lee on one of their many gigs in Shelby, only about 45 miles from home base. The band itself, at times billed as an “orchestra,” swelled to more than a dozen members strong, and surely must be acknowledged for their part in forging the Carolina Soul tradition of carrying a large horn section. Finally, it is worth noting that members of outrageously named, exciting ‘70s-era groups like the Devil’s Pet Shop and Mongoose cut their teeth in the horn section of the Yakety Yaks, and likely for this reason, they were capable of carrying the mantle of South Carolina funkiness into a new decade.

2) Ann Sexton (Impel SS-AS-103)
You’re Letting Me Down (David M. Lee; Active Music ASCAP)
 Recorded 1971, Mark V Recording Studios, Greenville, SC.

If Rudy Mockabee qualifies as a hero of Southern Soul with only two solo 45s, then Ann Sexton must be one of its undisputed queens, with more than ten releases (including two albums) to her name, for the likes of Impel, Seventy-Seven, Dash, Sound Stage Seven, Monument, and Sound Plus. Born on February 5, 1950, and hailing from Greenville, South Carolina—from that same fertile musical region that gave us all of the r&b artists on this compilation, excepting the Constellations of Shelby, North Carolina—Sexton would cut her solo debut at age 21, at the Mark V Recording Studios in her hometown. That session may not have been Sexton’s

first visit to the South Carolina Upstate's busiest recording hub; she is the youthful yet accomplished vocalist billed as "Mary Sexton" on a late-1960s 45-rpm rarity by Elijah (Hawthorne) & The Ebonies (who in 1974 would have a breakthrough hit in the form of the funky instrumental "Hot Grits.") Titled "I Confess" (Gitana CR-3144), this early effort is an interesting snapshot of a soon-to-be regional sensation, just a few years before a string of hits that would be pivotal for the careers of both the vocalist and the behind-the-scenes songwriter/producer.

Fast forwarding to 1971, "You're Letting Me Down" represented the first and greatest taste of success for both Sexton and her new collaborator David Lee, who checked out a performance of hers in Shelby that year and was inspired to hand her a demo of his newly-drafted ballad. With help from husband Melvin Burton, leader of the Masters of Soul band, Sexton would effectively transform the composition from its country-leaning roots to an all-out soul masterpiece, coupling it with "You've Been Gone Too Long" for what would become the best-selling piece in the David Lee catalog. Another chance meeting, with producer and influential DJ John R., who was stopping in at the Mangold-Bertos record one-stop in Charlotte—where copies of the Impel 45 were moving swiftly—eventually led to a distribution deal that saw the tracks issued again, as #77-104 on Seventy-Seven Records out of Nashville, Tennessee. Listeners responded positively to the plaintive track, purchasing as many as 90,000 copies in the 1970s, first on the yellow-colored original Seventy-Seven label, and then on the slightly later multi-colored repress. Sexton would be the featured artist on five more 45-rpm efforts for the label as well as the mid-'70s long player "Loving You, Loving Me" (Seventy-Seven 77-107) that pulled together all of her cuts up to that point for John R. and David Lee. Among our personal favorites is "Love, Love, Love (I Want To Be Loved)," another memorable David Lee ballad, b/w "You're Losing Me," a healthy dose of mid-tempo funk penned by Sexton and Burton, released together as Seventy-Seven SV 900 in 1974.

3) The Constellations (Impel 4344)

If Everybody (David Lee; Active Music ASCAP)
Recorded c. 1961-62, Arthur Smith Studios, Charlotte, NC.

One might ask what would have become of David Lee's career in music had it not been for the Constellations, who released three different 45-rpm records in the first half of the 1960s, launching the Impel label and bringing both band and songwriter/producer some regional acclaim. And what if the Constellations had not been such a tight-knit bunch and instead had been prone to infighting in the manner of the Ambassadors, their cross-town rivals? Our research suggests that the Constellations and the Ambassadors may have been the only viable, active tickets for r&b in Shelby in the early 1960s, and David Lee did not waste any time in choosing to work with one of them to re-cut his demo of "I'm Going To Keep On Trying." Initially choosing the Ambassadors, Lee worked out a flip in the form of the danceable "The Switch," and Air Records, out of Miami, Florida, released the sides in the early 1960s, representing the group's first release and David Lee's first production of an artist other than himself. These tunes did not stick, at least as far as commercial success was concerned, and neither did the affiliation with the Ambassadors, who from then on went about their business under the direction of manager John L. Hardy,

producing one more record in 1964, "If There Is Anything" b/w "Apple Of My Eye" (Spyder SR 101-45), which featured vocalist Bobby London. London reminisced in an interview that he and bandleader Thomas "Bunny" Clyde could never see eye to eye on their musical arrangements, and such disagreements are ultimately what did the band in.

While the Ambassadors were not on the same page, unity and camaraderie are what kept the Constellations going strong. Their most long-lived line-up came together in the late 1950s, in the high school days of guitarist Don Camp, drummer Harold Allen, saxophonist Max Philbeck, and Steve "Red" Shull, all of whom were white. With a vision of more adept and non-instrumentalist r&b vocalists, plus expanded venue options for gigging, Camp and company deliberately sought out African American singers and found the Guest Brothers—Benjamin, Bryan aka "Brownie," and Sam, plus their friend William "Butch" Mitchell, formerly of the Ambassadors. Pioneering what many blue-eyed soul and white beach groups in the Carolinas would successfully attempt by the mid-1960s, they played behind black vocalists, offering what they considered a provisional union of two sonic worlds. Although this early move to multiracialism was risky for a touring band in the South, the music outshone the perceived shock value of white and black faces traveling and performing together, and the Constellations were soon picked up by the region's premiere booking agency, Ted Hall's Hit Attractions out of Charlotte, who signed them to an exclusive deal. David Lee had also recognized the group's potential and wrote or co-wrote at least six songs for them over a span of about a year in the early 1960s, producing them for issue as the first three releases on Impel. Perhaps our favorite by the Constellations is this romantic one, "If Everybody," which has shown some staying power, getting a spin as a slow-dance number at a David and Nellen Lee 50th anniversary party in late 2009.

4) Bill Allen (Impel 105)

The Party (David Lee, Bill Allen; Three Cheers ASCAP)
Recorded 1973, Mark V Recording Studios, Greenville, SC.

The Masters of Soul of Greenville were session musicians for several different vocalists—most notably Ann Sexton, former wife of their leader Melvin Burton—and we are fairly certain that all singers save one came out of an r&b bag. The anomaly is none other than native Shelby crooner Bill Allen, who when he met David in the early 1970s had already spent years playing guitar and singing in dance bands that favored pop and country repertoires. One crucial early moment in his musical development came about in the late 1950s, when he filled the "hillbilly" role and won a talent contest on a well-loved local radio show with legendary combo the Teen Timers (which also featured Shelby luminaries like trombonist Don Waldrop and banjoist Dan X. Padgett). Further honing his chops in the '60s, primarily through lounge gigs, many of which kept him away from the Carolinas, Allen would eventually tire of life on the road. He recalls one moment in particular, fresh from travels, that helped shift his thinking: "I got off the plane in Charlotte, and Bill and the older kids came up, and we hugged, and all but my youngest son stood back, because at that time I had changed—you know how you do when you get out in music, you go the route. But he didn't know me, and I got to thinking 'bout that down there, and I called the wife and said, 'You think it'd be okay if I come home and I get a job? I miss you

people.'"

Transforming himself into a family man, Allen still allowed for musical indulgences on a part-time basis, and a chance meeting with David Lee at Doug Brown's Stereotronics gear store in Shelby led to Allen's first and last 45-rpm record under his name, the fifth or sixth Impel release. The A-side is a self-described "white version" of Ann Sexton's smash "You're Letting Me Down," and it's slower, dreamier, and altogether quite different, despite instrumental support from the Masters of Soul, who likewise backed Ann Sexton on the original. This cover was David Lee's suggestion, but in need of a flip to brighten the proceedings, he charged Allen with composing an uptempo original, and the result was "The Party," a loose-limbed bit of country soul swagger that evokes Dan Penn, or perhaps a more subdued Tony Joe White or Larry Jon Wilson. Allen only met the band on the day of recording in '73, and he remembers being impressed with the efficiency of the session: "We just did about a one-shot deal there. One time through. It was amazing. I didn't know those guys, and they didn't know me. I kinda gave them a hand on how it went, and they just put it together."

5) The Singing Mellerairs (Impel WS 003)

Ain't It A Shame (David Lee; Washington Sound ASCAP)
Recorded c. 1978-85, likely at Mark V Recording Studios, Greenville, SC.

The Singing Mellerairs—originally known as the Melloaires and later as (The Exciting) Singing Mellerairs or Singing Melleraires—are a long-lived gospel act that came together in the early 1950s in Gaffney, South Carolina. Early members included Robert Byers, brothers Donnie Garnett (bass guitar) and James Douglas Garnett (guitar), and brothers June Wallace and P.J. Wallace. High school student Joe Brown entered the picture in 1953, traveling south from his long-time home on the border of the Carolinas in Earl, North Carolina, to a rehearsal at a church in Gaffney. Mr. Brown eventually assumed leadership, and he remains in the executive position to this day. He helmed a group vision based on original material (not necessarily to sell records, but rather so other groups wouldn't steal their thunder at live showcases), and the partnership with David Lee eventually yielded a string of remarkable compositions and recordings.

Although he had captured some home demos with reel-to-reel recorders over the years, it was nearly two decades after the founding of the Mellerairs that Mr. Brown finally produced their first proper recording (on their own Melleraires label #AR 2735), "Sinner Man," and its similarly-themed flip "You Can't Hide Sinner," both raw numbers whose sound belies their early-'70s release date. A second release, "Ain't It A Shame" b/w "Western Union Man," followed at the end of the decade, or perhaps in the early '80s. This 45 was issued both by Impel and by Mable, the Gray Court, South Carolina-based concern run by country musician M.D. "Tennessee" Ralph, which released a David Lee-esque variety, ranging from country and novelty to soul, disco, and gospel. "Ain't It A Shame," our selection here, credits personnel who date back to the Mellerairs' early days, with arrangement by Robert Byers and June Wallace, plus David Lee. Relative newcomer James Thompson provided the lead vocal. A different take can be found on the group's 1988 SCOP Gospel long-player *Vision*.

6) Gospel I.Q.'s (Impel, no catalog #)
Peace in the Land (David M. Lee, James Roberts)
Recorded c. 1970-75, location unknown.

Hailing from Grover, North Carolina, about 12 miles from Shelby, southeast down Highway 226 and very close to where I-85 crosses into South Carolina, the Gospel I.Q.'s (originally just "I-Q," short for "International Quartet") were yet another border-straddling gospel act produced by David Lee. Led by the Houze Brothers, these harmony specialists cut two 45-rpm records and an album for Hoyt Sullivan in Nashville, Tennessee in the 1970s. We are not certain of the chronology, but it's plausible that their only two Impel sides came first, meaning that David Lee may have given this great group their start on vinyl. We are also not certain in what position this release comes in the David Lee Impel catalog, but we suspect it is number 6 or 7, either just before or just after Bill Allen's 1974 single.

7) Brown Sugar Inc. (Impel 106)
Sweet Love of Mine (Allen Jones, Bill "Sugar Bear" Jones; Washington Sound ASCAP)
Recorded 1977, Reflection Sound Studios, Charlotte, NC.

On March 12, 1979, the Brown Sugar band became an official corporation in the state of South Carolina. Unlike many groups that appended "Inc." to their name—no doubt an entrepreneurial trend in the 1970s—this time the three letters really meant something. Manager Roy Graham worked as a music educator in the Greenville, South Carolina school system, and Brown Sugar represented his main extra-curricular activity, a serious aesthetic and business venture. His opinions on the mix-down of "Party Time," painstakingly completed at Reflection Sound in Charlotte, were not in alignment with David Lee's, and as if to please everyone, Mr. Lee released three different versions: one on the flip of "Sweet Love Of Mine" in 1977 (Impel 106), and two more in 1978, together on a 45 (Washington Sound WS002.) Unsurprisingly, given the philosophical differences between band manager and label owner, the intended full-length album *Party Time*—which was billed in the credits on the label of the group's 1977 release, and even assigned an Impel catalog number of 1414—was never realized and would not be mentioned again on the label of the 1978 follow-up. Its official incorporated status certainly set the group apart from most struggling soul acts of the day, but sadly, as many a collector has lamented over the years, it was par for the course that the forthcoming album, like so many plugged on the labels of independently-released 45s, never saw the light of day.

All parties must have been well pleased with "Sweet Love of Mine," which, as the title hints, falls into the sweet soul tradition. An excellent example of Brown Sugar's breathtaking ballad potential, this touching song owes a large debt to the endearingly intimate vocals of Bill and Allen Jones. Under the solo artist moniker Bill "Sugar Bear" Jones, the brothers headed up two more 45s in the 1980s for Greenville producer Liggon Young's Ne-Bo label. Despite liberal synthesized hand-claps and keyboard-generated horn stabs on these subsequent sides, the sound clearly descends from the Brown Sugar efforts. Whereas that 1970s outfit did not last as a viable business, and the Graham-Lee collaboration was not long-lived, the Jones Brothers continued to try their hands in other musical contexts, joining other stalwarts of

the regional soul scene and demonstrating an inspiring stick-to-it-iveness.

8) Relations Gospel Singers (Impel 105)
On My Way Up (Steve Allen; Washington Sound ASCAP)
Recorded c. 1975-80, Mice Creek Baptist Church, near Gaffney, SC.

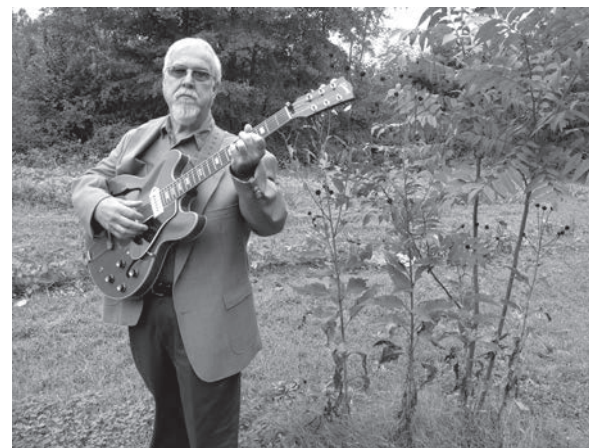
While David Lee had quite the knack for convincing local artists from the church, the nightclub, and the lounge to join him in recording studios in order to realize their joint visions, for this one Impel release by the Relations Gospel Singers, the tables were turned, with the recording engineer coming to church. Though likely dating to the mid-1970s, the session at Mice Creek Baptist Church, near Gaffney, South Carolina comes across as utterly out of time. Steve Allen and his choral group manifest some honest, deeply devout soulfulness over a simple backdrop of piano, delivering one of the most intimate and otherworldly performances in the David Lee catalog. It was a hard decision to choose this tune over its very similar flip "I Love God," and for this reason, a copy of the original 45 is worth tracking down.

9) Sensational Gates (Impel WSR-001)
Help Me to Understand (Joseph Parks)
Recorded c. 1970s, location unknown.

Managed for years by Joe Brown's brother, the late Hassie "Lee" Brown, the Sensational Gates were a popular gospel vocal group based in Shelby. We don't know if it came just before or just after the release contained herein, but we do want to mention the group's self-produced effort, cut at Mark V Studios in the late 1970s, which features Lee Brown's son Joe L. Brown on lead guitar and currently-active model and actor Terrell Phillips on high tenor. A lot of talent came through the Sensational Gates, and "Help Me to Understand" is some compelling gospel that ranks among Impel's most distinctive releases.

10) Ann Sexton (Impel SS-AS-103)
You've Been Gone Too Long (David M. Lee, Ann & Melvin Burton; Active Music ASCAP)
Recorded 1971, Mark V Recording Studios, Greenville, SC.

Whereas "You're Letting Me Down" was all the rage in the 1970s, its flip side "You've Been Gone Too Long" has kept Ann Sexton's debut release on turntables around the globe in the years since, thanks to adventurous overseas Northern Soul DJs who recognized its appeal for the dancefloor. DJs and collectors have sought out vintage copies (the Impel



Bill Allen, 2009

original is a needle in a haystack, but there are plenty of copies of the Seventy-Seven issues to go around) and have pushed it in their sets in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. Simple yet memorable, the tune must make any list of curious, "Jody" genre songs, for its reference to the archetypal male opportunist who, according to Vietnam-era folklore, would latch onto women whose husbands or boyfriends were serving overseas.

11) The Constellations (Impel 1102)
The Frog (David Lee, Sam Guest; Active Music ASCAP)
Recorded c. 1964-65, Arthur Smith Studios, Charlotte, NC.

"The Frog" proves that the Constellations could not only master what they call the "love ballad" but also had a taste for youth-oriented dance music of the day. Brownie Guest, the group's primary choreographer and most flamboyant performer, supposedly did dance the Frog onstage, but we have yet to see him demonstrate the steps, which we imagine must involve some hopping. And we can likewise only imagine what the Constellations' unreleased, and possibly lost, last effort "The Jerk" would have sounded and looked like. Along with its proposed flip, "Have You Seen My Baby," both tunes apparently showed an Impressions-esque flair, and they likely would have been released had it not been for the Vietnam War, which took the group in separate directions. However we continue to hold out hope that a tape of these songs will surface in due time.

12) Brown Sugar Inc. (Washington Sound WS002)
Party Time (Allen Jones, Bill Jones; Lee's Publishing ASCAP)
Recorded 1978, Reflection Sound Studios, Charlotte, NC.

Funk is sometimes best in small bursts, and with this in mind, we have selected the shortest, most concise and energetic take of "Party Time," which offers quite the counterpoint to the slow and intimate sounds of Brown Sugar's "Sweet Love Of Mine," heard on side A of this compilation.

13) Joe Brown & The Singing Mellerairs (SCOP Gospel 002)
Vision (David Lee, Maurice Lee; Washington Sound ASCAP)
Recorded 1987, Mark V Recording Studios, Greenville, SC.

The inspiration for our compilation title, this Lee family-penned gospel-soul cut—whose lyrical thrust we detail in the accompanying essay—occupies the A-side of the only 45-rpm release on David Lee's '80s imprint SCOP Gospel. That 45 was the group's last single release on vinyl, but an LP of the same title did follow in 1988 (SCOP Gospel 1001), as well as a cassette of the same (SCOP Gospel 1001-88). Still working with David Lee, Joe Brown and company have recently released this collection on CD.

14) David Lee (SCOP NO-001)
I'll Never Get Over Losing You (David Lee, Maurice Lee; Washington Sound ASCAP)
Recorded 1985, Mark V Recording Studios, Greenville, SC.

Just as we opened with some inspiring up-tempo funk, lyrically topical and of utility as a Washington Sound theme song—something that could only go in spot #1—we close with a track that could only come last. The second-most contemporary release on the compilation, the hardest to classify genre-wise, and from the only 45 credited to David Lee's name, we present "I'll Never Get Over Losing You."

∴45s∴

1) Impel 4344 (c. 1961-62)
The Constellations
A: *If Everybody* (David Lee)
B: *I Got A Woman That's Good To Me* (David Lee, Brownie Guest)
Published by: Active Music (ASCAP)

2) Impel R-2119 (c. 1963-64)
The Constellations
A: *Dumb Dee Dumb* (Lyle Lee [David Lee], Don Camp)
B: *How I Love My Baby* (Lyle Lee [David Lee], Brownie Guest)
Published by: Active Music (ASCAP)

3) Impel 1102 (c. 1964-65)
The Constellations
A: *Need Somebody* (David Lee, Benjamin Guest)
B: *The Frog* (David Lee, Sam Guest)
Published by: Active Music (ASCAP)

4) Washington Sound 8-9046 (c. 1968-69)
Yakety Yaks
A: *Soul Night (Part 1)* (David Lee, Jack Dover; Arranged by Alexander Nichols)
B: *Soul Night (Part 2)* (same)
Published by: Active Music (ASCAP)

5) Impel SS-AS-103 (1971)
Ann Sexton and the Masters of Soul
A: *You're Letting Me Down* (David M. Lee)
B: *You've Been Gone Too Long* (David M. Lee, Ann & Melvin Burton; Arranged by Austin Campbell)
Produced by: "A Product Of Washington Sound"; "A Washington Sound Production"
Published by: Active Music (ASCAP)

6) Impel [no catalogue #] (c. 1970-75)
The Gospel I.Q.'s
A: *I Pray The Lord* (David Lee)
B: *Peace In The Land* (David Lee, James Roberts)

7) Impel 105 (1974; recorded 1973)
Bill Allen
A: *The Party* (David Lee, Bill Allen)
B: *You're Letting Me Down* (David Lee)
Produced by: David Lee, Willie S. Walton; "A Product Of Washington Sound 1974"
Published by: Three Cheers (ASCAP)

8) Impel 105 [same catalog # as Bill Allen 45] (c. 1975-80)
Relations Gospel Singers
A: *On My Way Up* (Steve Allen)
B: *I Love God* (Steve Allen)
Published by: Washington Sound (ASCAP)

9) Impel 106 ("P1977 Impel Records")
Brown Sugar Inc.
A: *Party Time* (Allen Jones, Bill "Sugar Bear" Jones)
B: *Sweet Love Of Mine* (Allen Jones, Bill "Sugar Bear" Jones)
Produced by: David Lee, Roy Graham
Published by: Washington Sound (ASCAP)

10) Impel WSR-001 (c. 1970s)
The Sensational Gates
A: *Revival Time* (Paul Jackson)
B: *Help Me To Understand* (Joseph Parks)

11) Washington Sound WS002 ("P1978 Washington Sound")
Brown Sugar Band, Inc.
A: *Party Time (Short Version)* (Allen Jones, Bill Jones; Arranged by Allen Jones)
B: *Party Time (Long Version)* (Allen Jones, Bill Jones; Arranged by Allen Jones)
Produced by: David Lee, Roy Graham
Published by: Lee's Publishing (ASCAP)

12) Impel WS 003 (c. 1978-1985)
The Singing Melleraires
A: *Ain't It A Shame* (David Lee; Arranged by Lee, Robert, June; Lead: James Thompson)



David Lee at home, October 2009



The original sign for the Washington Sound record store



Joe Brown at home, January 2010

B: *Western Union Man* (Joe Brown; Arranged by Brown; Lead: Brown)
Produced by: Joe Brown, David Lee
Published by: Washington Sound (ASCAP)

13) SCOP NO-001 (U-13408 M; "P1985")
David Lee
A: *I'll Never Get Over Losing You* (David Lee, Maurice F. Lee; Arranged by William Card)
B: *I Can't Believe You Gone* (same)
Produced by: David Lee
Published by: Washington Sound (ASCAP)

14) SCOP Gospel 002 (U-18557 M; "P1987")
Joe Brown and The Singing Melleraires
A: *Vision* (David Lee, Maurice F. Lee; Arranged by Leroy Edwards and Rev. Alenzo Storxer)
B: *My God Is Real* (Joe Brown; Arranged by Robert Byers)
Produced by: David Lee
Published by: Washington Sound Records (ASCAP)

∴LPs∴

15) SCOP Gospel 1001 [cassette; "All Rights Reserved/Washington Sound Records"] (1988)
SCOP Gospel 1001-88 [LP; marked with date: "5-20-88"] (1988)
Joe Brown and The Singing Melleraires
Vision LP

:Side A:

1. *We Are the Melleraires*
2. *I'm Different*
3. *Sending Up for Jesus*
4. *Western Union Man*

:Side B:

1. *Vision*
2. *Ain't It a Shame*
3. *My God Is Real*
4. *I Want to Live*

16) SCOP Gospel 1002-88 (1988)
The VocalAires [Side A labeled "Lead: Iola Dillingham & The VocalAires"; Side B labeled "The VocalAires"]
Self-titled LP
Arranged by: Doug Cherry
Produced by: Louis Dillingham [Side B does not specify producer]
Published by: Washington Sound (ASCAP)
Featuring: Jesse Huddleston, Larry Smith, Larry Ross, Billy London

:Side A: Iola Dillingham & The VocalAires

1. *Must Be Born Again* (Iola Dillingham; Arranged by Iola Dillingham)
2. *Show Me* (David Lee, Maurice F. Lee; Lead: Iola Dillingham; Arranged by Iola Dillingham)
3. *If You Got Jesus in Your Life* (Sammy Guest; Lead: Sammy Guest)
4. *How I Love Jesus* (Public Domain; Lead: Sammy Guest)

:Side B: The VocalAires

1. *Stop By Here* (Jerome Williams; Lead: Sammy Guest)
2. *Jesus Running Your Life* (Doug Cherry; Lead: Sammy Guest, Doug Cherry)
3. *The Train* (Doug Cherry; Lead: Sammy Guest, Doug Cherry)
4. *I Know the Lord* (Jesse Huddleston; Lead: Hoover Wheeler)
5. *Love Lifted Me* (Public Domain; Lead: Hoover Wheeler)

∴ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS∴

For David, from your friends Brendan and Jason—it's about time.

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