

Mighty Joe Houston

The Wild Man Of The Tenor Sax

By Steve Propes



Joe Houston circa mid 1950s. Courtesy Billy Vera.

In 1951 as greater Los Angeles was getting ready for the era of the honking saxophone, a 26-year-old Texas tenor sax player known variously as the 'Wild Man Of The Sax' and 'Mighty' Joe Houston arrived to kick-start the scene. Born in Austin, Texas on 12th July 1926, Joe recalled: "I don't remember when I didn't play the tenor sax. I lived in a neighbourhood of professional musicians in Austin, Texas. I started playing trumpet in a high school band for six months. I couldn't learn fast enough. So I got a saxophone. About nine months, I was playing saxophone. I started playing saxophone by the age of eleven and when I was fourteen, I was sitting in a club.

I was influenced by Eddie Cleanhead Vinson and Arnett Cobb, later I was influenced by Charlie Parker. Buster Smith was a man who influenced Charlie Parker; he influenced most people from Texas. He was with Count Basie during the 1930s.

My first professional engagement was in Chicago. I left Austin on the 27th October 1944 with the King Kolax band, a 22-piece band; my first date was 29th October. All the fellows said, 'don't go with the band, they're going to take you up north and strand you, man, you're not ready'.

Kolax had the house band at the Regal Theatre, that's where most of the groups would appear in the 1950s. The band I was with in Chicago broke up in Orlando, Florida, so I joined the band Ray Charles was playing with, Blue Mitchell, Cannonball Adderley and all those. Ray Charles and I was roommates and we stayed together until the next band came to town and I left. Gatemouth Moore that in the late 1940s made a record called 'I Ain't Mad At You Pretty Baby' and 'Did You Ever Love A Woman' – B.B. King recorded a lot of those records in the 1950s. Being with Gatemouth Moore was like leaving the minor leagues and joining the big leagues in baseball."

Joe Houston on Texas labels: Macy's, Freedom and Others

Joe backed Big Joe Turner on the one-off 'Wish I Had A Dollar' b/w 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Bunny' on Rouge (105) out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

"Joe Turner, that's how I started making records, with Joe Turner. I was a saxophone player in the house band, they sent for me from Texas to join Joe

Turner. They sent me a ticket, join a band to play sax, just in a house band in a new club opening; Joe Turner coming from Chicago, I'm coming from Texas. That's how we met each other. Freedom cut Joe Turner," Joe recalled.

"My first label was Freedom Records, Houston, Texas. I was living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at the time. I recorded 'Wee Wee Hours' b/w 'Waycross Mama' (Freedom 1525), must've been around 1949. It covered the south very much, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana."

The band on that session was Emery Thompson, trumpet; Auguste 'Dimes' Dupont, alto sax; Marian McKinley, piano; Goree Carter, guitar; Robert Gray, bass; Robert Byrd, drums and Julius Stewart, vocals.

With the same lineup, Houston recorded 'Jumpin' The Blues' b/w 'Your Little Girl Is Gone' (Freedom 1535; b-side reissued on Imperial 5183) and 'Ace of Clubs' (Imperial 5183). "I made a record named 'The Ace of Clubs' for the club. By the time I recorded this record the club was out of business".

In 1949, Joe also recorded 'Worry Worry Worry' b/w 'Hard Time Baby' for the little known Sphinx label (122) and was picked up by Mercury (8248), for whom it hit number two r&b on 23rd February 1952.

Houston's next stop was Macy's. "Macy's was owned by a Jewish woman named Macy Henry out of Houston." With Lois Butler on vocals, Houston recorded 'Combread And Cabbage Greens' b/w 'Pretty Dad-Dee' (5014).

Joe Houston on Modern

Houston's other Macy's release, 'Blow, Joe, Blow' b/w 'Come Back, Baby' (5017) – which Oscar McLollie replicated as 'Rain' – was acquired by Modern at a time that label began pressing Macy's records and was issued on Modern (830).

"Macy sold the song to Modern, because Modern had good distribution. I needed a car. I made enough to buy a limousine. I was sharp, I'm still sharp. After the limo, I got a Cadillac. I got that from Joe Turner".

When Joe arrived in Los Angeles in 1951 to compete against Big Jay McNeely, the main honking sax exponent to date, his band consisted of Rufus Anderson, guitar ("He was on 'All Night Long'"), Arthur Jefferson, bass and a drummer named Russell Lee ("He was sixteen") and Euell 'Bo' Rambo.

Joe recalled, except for Rambo: "I got them cats in Minnesota. When I was booked in Minneapolis, I had three saxophones; they wouldn't clown too much. I wasn't singing then, couldn't use no singer, found this guitar and bass player. Rambo was from my hometown, Austin. He was older than me. He used to write with me until the day he died. Bo played trumpet and saxophone. I must have kept them, they played with me a long time". When Rambo came to Los Angeles with Joe Houston, he hooked up with John Dolphin as Saxie Rambo on the instrumental, 'Tornado' b/w 'Sugar Cane' (229) in 1952.

About 'Have A Ball' b/w 'Houston's Hot House' on Modern (850), Joe recalled: "I think it was Joe and Jules Bihari and his sister at Modern that made 'Houston's Hot House' in my house. That's when they cut 'I'm In The Mood For Love' with John Lee Hooker. My record was number two". Elements of 'Have A Ball' showed up in Dennis Binder's 'Early Times' and Big Joe's 'Shake Rattle And Roll' in 1954.

Modern made the most out of this session, as the alternate take of 'Houston's Hot House' was speeded up slightly as 'Sand Storm' with some jazz noodling b/w 'Doin' The Lindy Hop' (863), which began like 'The Hucklebuck' by Paul Williams, then went into an entirely different honk.

Houston also re-did 'Houston's Hot House' as 'Earthquake' for Imperial. On 'Dig It' Houston recalled that John Rector and Rambo played sax, Luis Rivera was on piano, Chico Hamilton was on drums and Red Callender was on bass. On the flipside, 'Boogie Woogie Woman' (879), Lois Butler vocalised about herself ('I'm the boogie woogie woman...') with Joe wailin' away on the break. Titles for these Joe Houston sax workouts weren't difficult to come by, witness his final Modern issue, 'Blowin' Crazy' with band chants underneath b/w the slightly less rocking 'Goin' Crazy' (917).

Joe Houston on Imperial and Bayou

Since Houston's Macy titles sold well for Imperial, it wasn't surprising that label would want to record him more. 'Hurricane' on Imperial (5196) had an alternate take on its own flipside, 'Bobby Sox Rumble', changed to 'Chittlin' when reissued on the new Bayou label (012).

However, unlike what's noted in 'Blues Records', 'Earthquake' (b/w 'Trouble, Trouble, Trouble') on Imperial (5201) did not become 'Pig Tails' on Bayou (012), which has crowd sounds dubbed in.

'Atom Bomb' involved an all-star lineup of Wynton Kelly on piano and Chico Hamilton on drums. The flip, 'Windy City Hop' on Imperial (5213) was a variation on Joe Liggins' number one hit, 'Pink Champagne' from 1950.

The B-side on Houston's Bayou debut, 'Sabre Jet' (004) was reissued as 'Tough Enough' b/w 'Guided Missile' on Imperial (5334) in 1955. Houston's final Bayou, 'Scramble' b/w 'Landslide' (017) came out in 1953.



Joe Houston circa mid 1950s. Courtesy Billy Vera.

Joe Houston on Recorded In Hollywood and Lucky

Taking leave of Modern and Imperial, it was hello John Dolphin. Houston's only Recorded In Hollywood (RIH) issue was a redo of something he had done for Helen Macy's label. "I redid 'Cornbread' for Dolphin, I was mad at her". In this version of 'Cornbread And Cabbage Greens' on Recorded In Hollywood (423), Houston tipped his hat to his old bandleader, Gatemouth Moore with a riff straight out of 'I Ain't Mad At You', Moore's hit from 1945. The flip, 'Jay's Boogie' was a straight ahead sax workout with piano backing and slight band shout vocal support in a unit featuring Rambo and Bill Jones, tenor sax taking the lead on the first chorus; Jefferson, bass; Big Mitch, piano; George Jenkins, drums.

Though release dates or even titles are not clear, RIH also issued two long play albums with the following tracks: RIH (101) Red Callender 'Dolphin St. Boogie'/Pee Wee Crayton 'Lights Out'/Que Martyn 'Blue Evening'/Joe Houston 'Corn Pone'/Monroe Tucker 'Dim Lights'/Roland Mitchell 'One For the Road'/Red Callender 'Seven High'/Que Martyn 'House Party'.

RIH (106) Jimmy McCracklin 'Melancholy Evening'/Pee Wee Crayton 'Guitar After Hours'/Jimmy Wright 'Boogie All Night'/Red Callender 'Gin And Tonic' and 'Harlem Ave'/Lloyd Glenn 'Honky Tonk Rag'/Joe Houston 'Cat Bop'/Tiny Webb 'Tiny's Farewell'

After Joe's only Recorded In Hollywood (RIH) single, Dolphin quit using that name in 1954, opting instead for labels like Hollywood (a partnership with Don Pierce), Lucky, Money and Cash.

In perhaps his most active recording period, Joe Houston, recorded the exciting title variations, 'Go Joe Go' b/w 'Joe Go Go' on Lucky (004), which was also reissued on the Belgium based Ronnex label (1064), which reissued an assortment of US r&b and rock and roll discs, domestically and in Europe. The principals of Ronnex later began the Moonglow label, the earliest home of the Righteous Brothers.

Joe Houston on Combo - 1

Joe Houston started slowly on trumpet player and one-time musician's union official Jake Porter's Combo label, when he debuted with the jazz-influenced 'East Side' a reference that could have different interpretations depending on the group, backed by the quicker, but still jazzy honker 'Forest Fire' with a bit of Cole Porter's 'Let's Fall In Love' mixed in on Combo (6).

Mexican fans of Houston's tenor sax could have easily taken 'East Side' as a ode to the heavily Mexican East Los Angeles area, while black people thought of Central Avenue as the East Side.

To leave little doubt that he was talking about neighbourhoods, Houston's next, the slow blues instrumental, 'Cross The Tracks' brought that theme home. "I think that was my best stuff, Jake would help me arrange the records, he was a good musician. We would rehearse them, we'd stay all day and all night, cutting. I had the best sounding records I made with Jake. Everybody was trying to play like me. Jake Porter was good people. But he beat you out of money if he could, quietly".

Porter made a killing off 'Cross The Tracks' as recalled by Joe. "Jake gave me \$500, that was one day I wasn't thinking about it, he had sold it to Universal Studios for \$25,000 and they used it in a movie, 'Cheech & Chong, The Last Movie'." The B-side was the easygoing jazz instrumental, 'The Nipper' on Combo 8.

The rollicking 'Drunk' b/w 'Lightning' with a tad of 'Frankie And Johnny' was on Combo (18). As Houston recalled: "'Drunk' was the very first record I recorded for Combo. 'Drunk' was my piano player, Mitchell Lee, I used to call

him Big Mitch. I got that melody from an old record by Tony Pastor, used to be with Artie Shaw. That's why I was ahead of everybody; I listened to big bands and jazz. I think some of the fellows might've been drunk. Big Mitch who was singing was kind of tipsy at the time, so we called it 'Drunk'". The entire lyrical content was 'hey hey hey - ho ho ho'.

A honk similar to 'All Nite Long', 'Vino' b/w the even more energetic 'MM' (Combo 19) was based on the nickname 'Mr. Midnight' - DJ Bill Sampson - who used the Houston instrumental as a theme song. Those latter four sides were also released as Combo EP 3.

Houston ended 1953 with 'Drag Race', a worthy first (or second) try at creating what would later be known as 'All Nite Long' b/w the restrained 'Ninya' (Combo 54).

'Joe Houston', his first LP on Combo (100) included all the above tracks - except for 'Drag Race' and 'Ninya' and two Porter comps, the double time '10 35' and the high reaching 'Flyin' Tacos', released in album form only. From that album came the spectacular double-sided vocal, 'Rock That Boogie' b/w 'Baby', Combo (116) in 1956.

Joe Houston on Money and Cash

Dolphin quickly sold Hollywood, shut down Lucky and replaced both labels with Money in late 1954 and by Cash (co-owned with DJ Huggy Boy) in 1955. When Dolphin began Money and Cash, Houston deftly made that transition with his best known release and his biggest hit, the classic 'All Night Long', complete with a rocking band vocal assisted by Huggy Boy and in doing so, put down his best known and biggest selling hit.

Huggy Boy proved valuable to Dolphin. As late as the mid-1950s, Dolphin was charged with the crime of cohabitation, being alone with a woman to whom he was not married, in this case, a white woman. The case was taken to trial. According to Huggy Boy, who testified for Dolphin's defense, when the trial was over, Dolphin called him 'my white angel.' The crime of cohabitation was taken off the books in California in about 1959.

Backing tenor sax player Joe Houston on his first Money release, 'All Night Long' were Huggy Boy, vocals; Ira Allen, baritone sax; Rufus Anderson, guitar; Arthur Jefferson bass and "some friends that used to drink wine and they could dance good. I bought three quarts of wine, took them to the studio with me to clap hands and I said, 'When we get to the part, holler all night long!' It was a noisy record and we played for 45 minutes before the engineer said: 'Tell them to stop drinking, they're dropping the wine bottles'."

"Rusty Bryant had a record called 'All Night Long'", said Houston, who also referred to Lucky Millinder's 'Let It Roll' from 1947. "He was playing 'Night Train' and used a tag of Lucky Millinder's 'let it roll, let it roll, all night long.' I put 'Cornbread' on 'All Night Long,' that's where it started. Mine was the big record".

It also outshone Big Jay McNeely's similar band-chant, 'Nervous Man Nervous' b/w 'Rock Candy' (Federal 12141), which had come out in 1953 and Joe's earlier 'Drag Race'.

Explaining why he stuck with the label, Houston said: "John Dolphin had a nightly radio show (midnight to 5 a.m.) and he was the hottest person in Los Angeles. I knew I'd get some play on it. If I didn't get any money, I knew I'd get some gigs. I made four sides, gave him the tapes with 'Way Out', the B-side."

Despite Huggy Boy's vocal appearance, 'All Night Long' b/w 'Way Out', the third release on the new Money label (203) charted on Hunter Hancock's competing 'Harlem Matinee' programme at number eight on Halloween, 1954. "John Dolphin was a nice person to me", Joe continued. "He was a character, man. He'd get you a hit record, though, but it was Huggy Boy who made it as it was his sign-on and sign-off radio theme song".



Joe Houston LP and EP covers courtesy Victor Pearlman and B&R Archives.

JOE HOUSTON LABELS





Joe Houston, circa 1950s. Courtesy Billy Vera.

Also on the demo tape, a cover of Les Brown's 'Sentimental Journey' b/w 'Celebrity Club Stomp', a reference to a Bryant's Providence, Rhode Island club where Houston had also appeared, made up the next Money (207).

On the 25th November, 1954, the *California Eagle* proffered, 'Joe "saxologist" Houston opens at Oasis Friday' profile, 'born in Houston, Texas. Joe Houston began his musical career in his high school and within the short span of two years, has risen practically from the unknown ranks to a top box office attraction'.

The article continued, 'Houston, having a top record seller on the market. 'All Night Long' rated third in the *Cash Box* magazine and fourth in the musical bible, *Billboard* is one of the most discussed musicians of the decade. Recording on such labels as Modern, Specialty (sic) and Money Records, Houston has produced such hits as 'Blow Joe Blow', 'Earthquake' and 'Sabre Jet'.

Dolphin then switched Houston to the Cash label for the band chant, 'Troubles And Worries', redo of his hit band vocal blues with a restrained sax break, 'Worry Worry Worry' from 1952 b/w the energised honker, 'Rockin' And Boppin' (1018), which lived up to its title with an 'All Nite Long' ending signature to rock the bop and seal the deal.

Joe Houston on Crown and RPM

In September 1955, Joe Houston's band was appearing with The Drifters at the 5-4 at about the same time he returned to the Modern label, which had just started Crown, a low-output label on which Modern/RPM placed many of its jazz and r&b instrumentals by Vido Musso, Willard McDaniel, Lorenzo Holden and a few vocal groups like The Robins and The Drifters.

The Crown name was likely inspired by the success of King and operated as a singles label from 1954 until about 1957, when it became a strictly budget album label for Modern and RPM company product into the 1960s.

The Biharis tried making Houston into a dance band act on Crown with the jazz-influenced bass and piano based, 'Hum Bug' b/w the medium tempo 'There Is No Greater Love' (102). 'Houston's Boogie' b/w 'Dear Mom' was his final Crown (109).

Graduating to the RPM label, Houston blew on a version of 'Shtiggy Boom', a cover of Patti Anne on Aladdin, backed by the non-credited Platters b/w 'Joe's Gone' (426).

"Shtiggy Boom" was written by Al Jarvis who had the television show 'Make Believe Ballroom' and also the other writer was the great harmonica player Leo Diamond", Joe recalled. "I was on his show getting ready to push some record at the time. I had my band on the show, so I decided to record his record for him. At the time, The Platters and I was traveling together, so that's The Platters singing in the background. We had some manager, I didn't use their name".

Both sides of 'Candy Rock' – likely a spoof on Big Jay's earlier 'Rock Candy' b/w 'Riverside Rock' (427) also used what sounded like a vocal group chanting nonsense lyrics on the a-side ('let it rock roll' on the B-side) over a melody resembling Ray Anthony's recent hit, 'Bunny Hop'. "That was the bass player Al Weber singing on that", said Houston.

The first remake of his staggeringly major Money label hit, 'All Nite Long' b/w 'Way Out' appeared first on 'Joe Houston Blows All Nite Long', which began as an RPM label EP (200) with other tracks, 'Celebrity Club Stomp' and 'Blow Joe Blow' in 1956.

To compete with this skein of Crown/RPM releases, Imperial countered with a 1952 session for the topical 'Tough Enough' b/w 'Guided Missile' in 1955.

Joe Houston on Combo - 2

Joe Houston returned to Combo in early 1957 with 'Chicano Hop', likely a way of having his own version of Chuck Higgins' 'Pachuco Hop'-like honking anthem which was a big Combo label hit (12) in 1952 b/w the troublesome title, 'Bean Hop' (130), another honking jazzy effort, combining 'The Bunny Hop' with 'Worry Worry Worry' riffs and the super fast ensemble vocal on 'We're Gonna Rock N Roll' – the entirety of the Sherman Brooks vocals punctuated by a sax break (or was it the other way around?) b/w a Brooks vocal on the hard hitting remake of Guitar Slim's – with a slight title change – 'The Things We Use Ta Do' (136).

On 3rd October, 1957, the *California Eagle* noted, 'rock and roll star Joe Houston dropped by after his Eastern tour to tell us that he sings and whistles for the first time on his new recordings called 'Shucking and Jiving' and 'Rocking At the Drive-In'.

The striking 'Rocking At the Drive-In', Joe's second Combo label album (400) uses a cover photo of KPOP DJ Art LaBoe next to green-suited Joe; a banner advertising LaBoe's afternoon request show and some teens next to cool convertibles literally rocking at Scrivner's Drive-In – contained the previous two releases; a solid redo of 'All Nite Long' and two jazzy numbers, 'Lucky 30' and 'Chili' as well as two older Combo titles, 'Drag Race' and 'Ninya'.

LaBoe even wrote the liner notes, such as they were: 'His rockin' style stands out at his personal appearances. At our dances, the thousands who have seen and danced to Mighty Joe Houston are living proof that he can deliver music that is in direct agreement with the taste of the young adults who turn out by the thousands to see him and dance.' The screed ends with a 'long live Mighty Joe Houston.'

The album was promoted by release of 'Rocking At the Drive-In', a 'Honky Tonk'-like instro with a taste of 'I Ain't Mad At You' b/w a hot rockin' 'Joe's Hot House' (138) as a single.

As noted in the article, the whistling opening – á la Wee Willie Wayne's hit, 'Travelin' Mood' – vamp of the rocking vocal, 'Shuckin' N A Jivin' with a 'Night Train' break (142) set it apart from a bald rip on Little Richard's 'Slippin' And Slidin' b/w 'Strolling', an energetic 'Night Train' rip.

The *California Eagle* of 10th April 1958 noted a musical breakthrough, that of mixing gospel with r&b with Joe in the very middle. 'The Clara Ward gospel group will be double billed with rock and roll man Joe Houston at the downtown Paramount beginning April 23rd. Blues and gospel mixed? Had to happen sooner or later, we guess. Should be a shouting good time!'

Joe Houston's instrumental blues 'Home Boy' came out long before that term was in vogue b/w a 'Honky Tonk' riff on 'Get With It' (147). About 'Home Boy', Joe simply noted, "I was thinking different titles".

'Curfew' opened with 'holy mack'rel the police is here' b/w 'Cha Cha All Nite Long' (155), and is little more than his Money label hit from 1954 hidden in a cha-cha beat, which actually charted on border radio XEAK, 'the Mighty 690' Top 40 on 5th June, 1959.

On the remake of Gene and Eunice's major Combo hit, 'Ko Ko Mo', Joe was backed by The Medallions b/w Melvin Glass providing a scratchy guitar beat on an instrumental, 'The Hully' (157 – also on Kem 2761) with Boogie Daniels, tenor sax; Sherman Booker, piano; Reginald Jones, bass and Lee Johnson, drums. The rocking 'Hush Your Mouth' b/w another 'Honky Tonk' rip, 'Slip-N-Out' (164 – also on Kem 2762) were tough enough for 1961.

Joe Houston on Dooto

Speaking of The Medallions, as Mighty Joe Houston he recorded the Mexican folk dance about a cockroach, 'La Cucaracha Rock' b/w 'Shindig' on Dooto (439) in 1958.

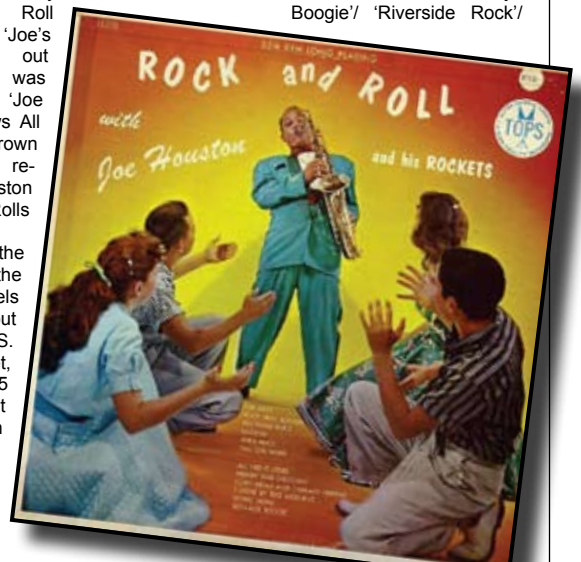
"I did that for Dootsie; that's all I had. Dootsie wanted me to do anything I wanted to do. All my things sound different. Some man in Mexico wrote that, couldn't find him or the publisher, so I claimed that." About 'Shindig', "I remember Dootsie wrote that, Bo Rambo wrote the arrangement, I had a little eight band on that."

Joe Houston's LPs on Tops, Crown and other labels.

Drawn from an EP on RPM with the same title, 'Joe Houston Blows All Nite Long' (Modern LP 1206), a compendium of earlier singles, some in remake form like 'All Nite Long'/'Celebrity Club Stomp'/'Candy Rock'/'Rockin' With Joe'/'Way Out'/'Crazy Sax'/'Blow Joe Blow'/'Sentimental Journey'/'Boogie'/'Riverside Rock'/'

'Earth Quake'/'Joe's Gone' came out in 1956 and was reissued as 'Joe Houston Blows All Nite Long' (Crown 5006), later re-titled 'Joe Houston Rocks And Rolls All Nite Long'.

Tops, by far the best known of the budget labels began in about 1949 at 4418 S. Hoover Street, then at 4705 S. Vermont Avenue. In 1959, Tops relocated to a brand new plant at 5810 S.





Husky Glamor: Billed as a "Half Ton of Glamor," the hefty comedy team of Jackson and Manning playfully test their strength by hoisting saxophonist Joe Houston into the air at Los Angeles' Club Oasis, where both acts are appearing.

Courtesy of Simon Evans.

Normandie Avenue with a complete operation: a recording studio, a pressing plant, a packing floor and a railroad spur from which to ship out product, which it later sold to Modern. As a result, much of this era's Tops product was very similar to that of Modern and Crown.

In about 1957, 'Rock And Roll With Joe Houston' (Tops LP 1518) broke out singles on the Spot label – Tops spelling backwards: a faster version of 'All Night Long' (a 45 on Spot 106), the fine wailer, 'Movin and Groovin,' a speedier 'Corn Bread And Cabbage Greens' (106); a vocal, 'I Woke Up This Morning', a super fast 'Flying Home' and 'Teen-Age Boogie'. The B-side starts with the frantic 'Off Beat' (104), a good remake of 'Rock That Boogie', a solid blues shuffle, 'No Name Rock', two blasters, 'Goofin' (104) and 'Joe's Rock' (107) ending with the subdued instrumental, 'Tall Gal Blues' (107). This album was reissued on Craftsmen (8033) and a double pocket Tops EP (601) at about the same time.

"Tops was owned by a man named Charles Doshay Doheny", said Joe. "Buck Ram took care of the business, used a lot of people on that record, Ira Allen, baritone sax, he made both of the records I did for Jake Porter. The kids that was on that record for Tops, that was Ralph, the daughter was on the cover".

When Tops went out of business in the very early 1960s and sold the Normandie Avenue plant, the Crown label continued to press up budget and custom albums, as well as full-price 45s on the Kent and Modern labels and various custom jobs and thus, Crown picked up where Tops left off.

On 'Wild Man Of The Tenor Sax' on (Crown 5203) in 1961, 'Joggin' Around' had some jazz qualities, 'Doing the Madison' was a dance tempo track, 'Hands Down' had a 'Bunny Hop' quality, 'Turn Around' and 'Joe's Lament' were crankers with band shouts. On the B-side, 'Time For The Blues' was a medium tempo shuffle, 'Yesiree' was another 'Bunny Hop'-style jazz piece with vibes as was 'Stompin' With Joy', 'Doggin' It' had a manic honking quality with more band shouts and 'Got the Blues After Hours' was a straight unison blues vocal ('I've got the blues after hours and I've got no place to go') with a nice piano break.

Opening the 'Doin' the Twist' album (Crown 246, stereo on Crown 248), Joe's understated 'Doing The Twist' was an instrumental take on Joe Turner's rocker, 'Corrine Corrina'. 'Twisting The Twist' was an instrumental take on Buster Brown's 'Fannie Mae' combined with the Royal Tones 'Poor Boy', 'Crazy Twist', a variation on 'All Night Long' the slower blues, 'White House Twist' and the variable twist beat with guitar, 'Chitlin's Twist'.

The B-side featured the nice shuffle, 'Rocking the Twist', similar to 'The Hucklebuck', the swinging 'Roy's Twist', the blues, 'Joe's Twist', the fast piano tinkler, 'Texas Twist' and steady-beat 'Casino Twist' with a nice solo by Joe. Issued in 1962, the back cover had lessons on how to twist complete with illustrations. Six of



From Billboard, 1952. from the Dan Kochakian Collection.

these tracks, 'Doin' The Twist', 'Rocking The Twist', 'Roy's Twist', 'Joe's Twist', 'Texas Twist', and 'Casino Twist' were reissued on a Gilmar album (94) with Teddy Reynolds on the B-side in 1962. 'Doing The Twist' b/w 'White House Twist' was then issued as a single on Kent (366) in 1962.

'Twisting In Orbit' (Crown LP 5252) starts with 'All Night Long Twist', a fast version of his hit with prominent guitar and sax and a 'twistin' all night long' band chant; 'Twistin' Time' features Joe's sped-up sax mixed with a piano; 'Jumpin' Twist' is an appealing medium guitar shuffle; 'Twistin' Shoes' is 'Rock That Boogie' with a new band chant, which then evolves into a new honk and a new ending chant; while 'Twisting In Orbit' is a 'Honky Tonk'-style shuffle. The B-side features only two sax tracks, 'Hangover Twist', another shuffle à la Sonny Thompson's 'Long Gone' and the uptempo rocker 'Houston's Twist'. The remainder of the cuts have no discernible sax: the distinctive guitar workout, 'Curtis Twist' – Galen Gart thinks it's a Pee Wee Crayton track – and the Mariachi horns on the trumpet-filled 'Mexican Twist' and 'La Paloma Twist', based on the Mexican folk song. All in all, not very twistable.

'Rockin N Rollin' With Joe Houston' (Crown LP 5273) contained rockers and blues instrumentals: 'Triple Jack Rock,' a sped up piano and sax-based shuffle, 'Shake It Up', a bit more melodic; two guitar and sax shuffles, 'Coffee Time' and 'Soft Shoe' while 'Rattle Snake' was pretty much a sax workout. On the B-side, 'Soul Blues' was a medium tempo shuffle, 'Funky Bus' was an uptempo sax workout, 'Mashed Potato Rock' was a heavy-duty sax solo as was 'Pickets'.

'Surf Rockin' (Crown LP 313) was a total redo of Joe's 'Doin' The Twist' album with freshly minted surf titles on old twist tracks. As an example, 'Wipe Out' was really 'Doing The Twist' from the previous 'Doing The Twist' album, an instrumental take on Joe Turner's rocker, 'Corrine Corrina'. 'Gremmie' was an instrumental take on Buster Brown's 'Fannie Mae' combined with the Royal Tones 'Poor Boy', 'Night Lamp', like 'Crazy Twist', was a variation on 'All Night Long', 'Dig' was a guitar-based blues shuffle à la 'Honky Tonk' and 'Ho Dads' was in fact, 'Chitlin's Twist' from the Twist album.

As to the B-side, titles of which were likely gleaned from a Bihari visit to the Hawaiian Isles – 'Haleiwa', 'Surf Rockin', 'Maile', 'Hocked' and 'Pupukea' – the strong suggestion is to listen to the B-side of 'Doin' The Twist'.

Joe Houston's 'Limbo' (Crown 5319) begins with 'Limbo World', a band shout take with organ on Chubby Checker's 'Limbo Rock', the honking 'Limbo Lou' the organ based, drum heavy, band shouting 'Rockin the Limbo' was based on 'The Hokey Pokey' the flute and drum based 'Out On A Limbo' was also based on 'Limbo Rock' and the A-side finished with the calypso beat 'Yellow Bird' influenced 'La La Limbo'. 'Everybody Limbo' was another rocking vocal based on 'Limbo Party', 'Limbo Stick' was a fast blues, 'Limbo Organ' was as the title suggested, 'Limbo And The Blues' was a nice sax blues and 'Limbo Baby' was a blues vocal about 'limbo to the east, limbo to the west'.

Joe Houston and 'All Night Long' in the 1960s.

Houston got renewed attention when 'All Night Long' was redone by both Paul Revere and The Raiders and by drummer Sandy Nelson with some success in 1960. The Modern label version of Houston's 'All Night Long' b/w 'Corn Bread And Cabbage Greens' came out on Spot (106) and 'All Nite Long' b/w 'Way Out' also appeared on Modern Oldies (16).

To counter all these new versions of 'All Night Long', Huggy Boy reissued the Joe Houston original from Dolphin's Cash label on the brand new Pico label (2800) b/w 'Birdland' by The Phantoms as well as creating the only Caddy label EP with Houston's 'All Nite Long' and Johnny Flamingo's 'So Long' b/w 'The Twilighters' 'Eternally' and 'The Dots' 'I Confess' (116). Huggy also was involved in Houston's next, the very obscure 'Midnight Blues' b/w 'All Day Long' on Emmo (3303) in 1963.

In about 1963, r&b DJ Hunter Hancock and his partner Roger Davenport began the Magnum label to supplement the earlier Swingin', with both labels producing a few hits. Joe's down home bluesy 'Hog Maws Part 1 and 2' on Magnum (723) fit the tenor of the day – pun intended – in 1964. "Hog Maws" sold in the jazz field, Frank Durham on organ, Hawkeye on guitar, recalled Joe. Other players were Reginald Jones, electric bass and Lee Johnson, drums. "I did the session on Sunset and Vine, Sandy was the engineer. I wanted a different sound, piano player played a thing like an organ; with a big band sound".

Joe's final Magnum and last 45 rpm release of the decade was the even funkier variation on a 'Honky Tonk' shuffle with predominant organ mixed with what sounds like a violin, 'Chicken Gravy Part 1 and Part 2' (729) in 1965.

In the heat of the disco era – about 1976 or 1977 – Joe returned to the Bihari's new Big Town label for his final known album, 'Kickin' Back' with ten tracks on Big Town (1004), but by that time, it was clear that honking sax and disco had little in common.

During most of his most successful period, Joe Houston lived in Long Beach and worked around the world. Fans still speak of his amazing concerts, including ones in Chicago that drew around 300,000 and to the rocking 'Louie Louie' cruise in Long Beach Harbor in August 1988.

Recently, Joe's health has been fading. At first, he entertained the staff in a nursing home in Bellflower, California, with his sax prowess, the music filtering down the halls. He's now confined to bed where he rests most of the time, his sax nowhere in sight, but a framed saxophone illustration graces the wall.

Label montage courtesy Victor Pearlina.



Joe Houston, Colne 1999. Photo: Brian Smith.