

THE U.K. SUN KING

THE 'OTHER' LARRY WILLIAMS

By Lyle Ferbrache



Larry with a test pressing of Rufus Thomas' 'Tiger Man'. Photo: Lyle Ferbrache.

Most readers of *B&R* magazine have a serious interest in music, be it listening, playing or sharing, but for others, it might be collecting. Ah yes, the 'collectors!' Most of us are happy with the tremendous amount of music available to us, along with all the information that is readily available now on the internet. But for some people, they want to seek out the original recordings. They want to touch and see the media used for music, they want the 'visual' version. They are the 'collectors'. Their thrill is not only hearing the music, but the excitement of searching, finding and seeing the actual original recordings.

One of these 'collectors' is Larry Williams from the U.K. Larry extended an invitation to come for a visit him at his home, a short train ride outside London. Larry and I had been emailing one another for several years. We initially connected through an eBay record auction. He eventually shared with me the passion he has had in collecting records released on Sun Records. He revealed to me that he had a full run of the label – I was excited to learn more. But then when he revealed that he had done this twice, I was stunned! Larry had achieved what very few record collectors succeed in doing. This is a significant accomplishment; and he is one of the few I know of that have been able to do so.

Other collectors in the same league include Jim Coulter, Jay Monroe and Chris Bentley (who although not running the complete label, has a nice stash of the early Sun blues records).

Upon our arrival it wasn't long before I was in the 'Sun King's' record room, in total awe of what I saw. It was an entire room full of blues and rock'n'roll memorabilia, floor to ceiling.

At the top of Larry's collection are the early Sun blues numbers: Joe Hill Louis, Doctor Ross, Willie Nix, Little Junior Parker, Little Milton, Hot Shot Love and many more. Most of us have had the privilege of hearing these amazing records, but to see them and hold them in your hands – now that is a thrill. Dominating one wall was a Rufus Thomas collage that included an autographed sleeve, a test pressing and a very rare stamper.

The records that I found amazing were Larry's collection of 'white label with red lettering' of some of the classic Sun blues records, including a beautiful copy of Sun 193, Dr. Ross, and an amazing white label with red lettering of the ultra-rare Jimmy Deberry. Where do people find such records? I needed to sit down with Larry and ask some questions about how he accumulated such things.

I asked Larry how he got started: "I started collecting records in 1954 or 1955 always over the counter and initially nearly all 78s – we were some time behind your 45s as an option. I bought 'Under The Bridges Of Paris' by Eartha Kitt and 'Rockin' Through The Rye' by Bill Haley. I was lucky that in St. Albans (where I attended senior school) there were two wonderful record shops.

I asked him did he recall the the first of the Sun blues records he acquired? "Hmmmmm, difficult one – possibly one of Little Junior's singles. But if you count it as blues, maybe The Prisonaires, 'Just Walkin' In The Rain' which I have only recently obtained on red vinyl. Whichever, it wasn't until November 1999 that I bought my first Sun record namely #286-45 Warren Smith's 'Got Love If You Want It', but it was autographed. Apart from my regular collection, I now have nearly 200 individual Sun/Flip/Phillips International signed discs.

So what were the hardest blues records to acquire? Larry told me "The hardest to find has to be #183 by D.A. Hunt, followed by the first four releases: namely #175 Johnny London; #177 Handy Jackson; #178 Joe Hill Louis and #179 Willie Nix plus #184 by Big Memphis Ma Rainey.

Among his favourites are #180 Jimmy and Walter's 'Easy' ("What a haunting sound, one of my funeral choices in fact). However, I also enjoy #179 'Baker Shop Boogie' by Willie Nix (full of innuendo) and #178 'We All Gotta Go Sometime' by Joe Hill Louis. Doctor Ross is also one of my favourites – #193 (both sides) and #212 (both sides too). Being an Elvis fan too I enjoy 'Tiger Man' #188 by Rufus Thomas. I also have memorabilia pieces of the song, namely acetates, stampers, signed 78, etc. Elvis used to sing it in his Las Vegas shows. Otherwise, it would hardly have been known outside Memphis. The Rufus Thomas sleeve was already signed when I bought it.

I asked Larry what were the most expensive copies? Several have cost me £4000 plus – at a variety of exchange rates dollar wise. I paid \$8500 for one of my D.A. Hunt #183 78 copies as the most expensive one.

What about other autographed copies that you have? I asked: "I have about 200 Sun/Phillips International/Flip releases signed of which only about a dozen are by blues artists. However, the first Sun release by Johnny London #175 I do have autographed on a 45, though of course it is a repro as it only came out on a 78.

How rare are the White Label promos? Would you rather have the 45 or the 78 copy? "Probably the first fifteen actual single releases came out as white label promo 78s. They are very difficult to find – I have only a handful. Expensive too, start at \$1000 and go on from there. If you are after early blues issues you are just thankful that you found one in either format. There is no question that the 78s sound infinitely better which is as it should be since a 78 stylus was used to record them initially. About six only came out on 78, #175 #177 #178 #179 #190 #213. However, this list occasionally shrinks as for instance when John Tefeller managed to buy the #183 D A Hunt on a 45. There is something more 'historic' about a 78 somehow.

Larry went onto list the twelve rarest and hardest to find records on the label, blues or otherwise in numerical order:

175	Johnny London	Drivin' Slow
177	Handy Jackson	Got My Application Baby
179	Willie Nix	Baker Shop Boogie
182	Dusty Brooks	Heaven Or Fire
183	D.A. Hunt	Lonesome Old Jail
184	Big Memphis Ma Rainey	Call Me Anything, But Call Me
186	Prisonaires	Just Walkin' In The Rain
<i>(red vinyl) as a promo only</i>		
190	Ripley Cotton Choppers	Blues Waltz
205	Harmonica Frank	Rockin' Chair Daddy
207	Prisonaires	There Is Love In You

213 Jones Bros Look To Jesus
 369 Bobby Wood. Human Emotions
(only 99 pressed as a promo plus handful of test pressings)

These are based on my own experience and general availability. I fully accept that other collectors' experiences differ and therefore their lists will not be the same. I could also add any of the following:

215 Elvis Presley Milkcow Blues Boogie
(Elvis Presley as sole credit, may or may not have Hillbilly stamped on label.)
 191 Prisonaires A Prisoner's Prayer (red vinyl)
Only one roused to exist.
 385 Linda Gail Lewis Nothin' Shakin'
(I have a test pressing – possibly unique?)
 PILP 1975 Frank Frost Hey, Boss Man! LP
(if you include Phillips International)

I asked: "Every collector has at least one record that is always just out of reach. What were the records that you needed to close out your run of your first Sun collection?"

"I remember needing six to complete my Sun collection; and to get three of those I went out overnight to Boston in late 2002, leaving three to get. I can remember two of these: 205 Harmonica Frank's 'Rockin' Chair Daddy' and the very last one, surprisingly; 213 Jones Brothers 'Look To Jesus' (on eBay) – I can't remember the third one. However, I have since added the following: 369-45 Bobby Wood – 'Human Emotions' WLP (only 99 promos pressed); 186-45 Prisonaires – 'Just Walkin' In The Rain' (only a handful pressed on red vinyl); 385-78 Linda Gail Lewis – 'Nothin' Shakin' – acetate (only a handful pressed)

The above three of course strictly speaking are not regular releases but there sure ain't many around.

What has record collecting meant to you and what effect has it had on your life? "As far back as I can remember, I have always collected something though obviously not spending as much money as I have with the records and memorabilia, or as seriously. I think I started off – like most boys did – with stamps, matchbox labels, comics and (yeah I'm afraid so) birds eggs. Also thrown in would have been lists of buses and as exciting as any, locomotive numbers and names. Then in the mid 1950s along came – rock'n'roll. This changed everything including my whole life. Lunch money and pocket money were spent on 78s which soon became 45s. Not too many LPs for obvious reasons. Everything purchased was a U.K. release because U.S. issues were simply not available. I think the only places over here that they surfaced were around ports through which American sailors passed and in USAF bases with U.S. servicemen bringing in their own copies. Even though they were British pressings they still would carry info with regard to the original release label. Hence the magic words Sun – Memphis – Phillips International suddenly lodged themselves in my mind, particularly as they issued such great stuff. To own an actual Sun record was not really considered an option. I was at school with important exams taking place, lying in bed 4000 miles from the States listening on the radio to these amazing records made by artists I never guessed I would ever meet or indeed become friends with. Or actually visit Memphis! It was not until the end of 1999 that I stumbled across a Sun 45 and the collection started big time. The rest is history.

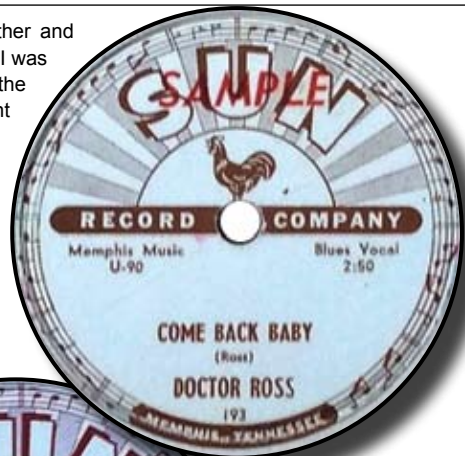
The memorabilia bits and pieces were really an add-on and a natural progression. The diversity of it surprises me at times. People ask me



Larry's record room. Photo: Lyle Ferbrache.

how I put it all together and all I ever say is "Well I was just lucky and was in the right place at the right time." Of course I kept my eyes open too.

To have items signed by or previously owned by the artist (particularly Elvis) is the closest one can be to



having part of that hero. And each represents a huge chunk of social and popular music history. Again I point especially at Elvis pieces and my Buddy Holly acetates cut originally to obtain his first recording contract. I still enjoy them for what they are, a feeling matched when people like yourself visit 'the room' and I hear them shout 'Wow!'.

Thanks to Larry and his wife Mockie. It was a pleasure to spend time with them. I truly enjoyed our day at the Record Fair ('swap-meet' as we say in California) and being able to experience all the enthusiasm with U.K. record collectors. It gives me real hope for the future of record collecting. *Label shots courtesy Larry Williams.*

COMPETITION

Courtesy of Discovery Records, B&R has two copies of

CHARLEY PATTON – Down The Dirt Road Blues

Two readers can win a copy of this CD, just answer the following two easy questions:

1. What is the name of Patton's wife ?
2. What is the title of Calt & Wardlow's Patton biography ?

Email your competition entries to philipwright@mac.com, to arrive no later than 30th December. Put 'CHARLEY PATTON COMPETITION' in the subject line of your email, if you don't your email may be deleted unread.

If you can't send an email you can still mail your entry on a postcard to Phil Wight's address (see page three).

PLEASE remember to include your name and address !

