

DAVE BARTHOLOMEW TRIBUTE

BY BILLY VERA



Fats Domino IMPERIAL RECORDS Artist with Dave Bartholomew

The city of New Orleans lost her most prolific and successful songwriter and record producer, Dave Bartholomew, on the morning of 23rd June; he died in hospital in Metairie, Louisiana. He was aged 100.

David Louis Bartholomew was born to Louis Bartholomew, a barber and bass player, and his wife Mary, on Christmas Eve, 1918 in Edgard, Louisiana, St. John the Baptist Parish. He was best known as Fats Domino's collaborator. But there is so much more.

BMI (Broadcast Music Inc.), the company which pays songwriters and music publishers for public performances of their songs, lists 462 Dave Bartholomew titles on its site. Unlike many other writers, and due to his power to choose material for the many artists he produced, a higher percentage of his songs were released to the public.

For Fats Domino alone, Dave's charted productions numbered 59 pop hits and 58 rhythm and blues hits. Of these, 39 made it to the Top Ten on the r&b chart. Although Fats never reached number one on the pop chart, he topped the r&b chart nine times under Bartholomew's baton. For perspective, Fats had more hits than Chuck Berry and Little Richard combined.

And that's just Dave's biggest artist. The songs he wrote and – or produced – for other Crescent City performers, Smiley Lewis, The Spiders, Lloyd Price, Shirley & Lee, Chris Kenner, Earl King, T-Bone Walker, Roy Brown, Pee Wee Crayton, Wee Willie Wayne, Earl King and others, although their popularity rarely spread beyond the city limits, often

found a national audience via cover versions by pop stars like Elvis Presley, Pat Boone, Ricky Nelson, John Lennon, Paul McCartney and many more.

Starting on the tuba, Bartholomew took up the trumpet at an early age, he played with New Orleans jazz greats Papa Celestin, Joe Robichaux and Fats Pichon, before joining the armed forces during World War Two. Upon his return, after a short stint with the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra, he formed his own band to play at the Dew Drop Inn in New Orleans. There, he encountered the Braun brothers, who were the first to successfully record New Orleans musicians, among them Paul Gayten, Annie Laurie, Roy Brown and Bartholomew's future protégé, Smiley Lewis. Dave first recorded for the Brauns' DeLuxe label in 1947, shortly before the American Federation of Musicians recording ban. When the ban lifted in 1949, he recorded for them again, for his only hit under his own name, 'Country Boy'.

During a gig at Don Robey's Bronze Peacock club in Houston, he met Lew Chudd, owner of Imperial Records, a label known mostly for Mexican records at the time. The two hit it off and Dave was hired as a talent scout and A&R man. His first productions for Lew Chudd were 'Shrewsbury Blues' by Tommy Ridgley and Jewel King's '3 x 7 = 21', which became a hit.

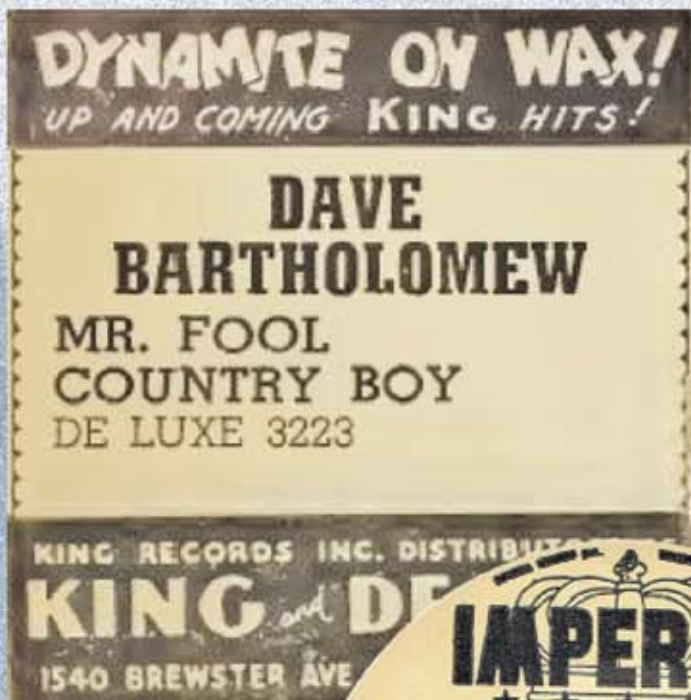
His next session, at Cosimo Matassa's J&M Music Shop studio in December 1949, was with Fats Domino's 'The Fat Man', an altered version of the city's traditional 'Junker's Blues', kicking off a career and a star.

I recall, many years ago, reading in The Cashbox, a list of artists with the most number one hits. At the top was Bing Crosby with 28; Elvis and the Beatles with 22 each and Fats was next, with 18.

Two of Dave's songs cut by Elvis were 'Witchcraft', originally recorded by The Spiders, and 'One Night', one of several tunes first recorded by Smiley Lewis to be covered by pop artists, including 'I Hear You Knocking', a smash by television star Gale Storm (and also by Dave Edmunds who hit number one in the U.K. with the song in 1970) and 'Blue Monday', which had to wait for

Fats to make it a hit. One of Dave's biggest disappointments was not being able to make Smiley a big-name act. A powerful singer, Lewis's voice struck many as too piercing to be pleasing to the average listener, like Domino's was.





A 1951 argument between Dave and Chudd caused him to seek employment elsewhere. For Specialty, he produced Lloyd Price's 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy', one of 1952's biggest records and 'I'm Gone', the first hit for Shirley & Lee on Aladdin. He also cut three sessions under his own name for King Records, including the original version of 'My Ding-a-Ling', years later appropriated by Chuck Berry, who claimed authorship for his only number one record.

These hits showed Chudd Dave Bartholomew's value, and he was soon back in the fold. By 1955, Dave and Fats found the formula for pop success with 'Ain't It A Shame', which hit number one pop by Pat Boone as 'Ain't That A Shame'. To further his appeal to the pop market, either Dave or Chudd came up with the idea to record standards, starting with 'My Blue Heaven', done up Domino style. This tactic reached its climax with 'Blueberry Hill', on the heels of Louis Armstrong's version. Dave made a fortune from pop versions of his tunes: 'I'm In Love Again' by the Fontane Sisters, 'Bo Weevil' by Teresa Brewer, even a ludicrously silly version of 'All By Myself' by crooner Vaughn Monroe. Dion and The Belmonts' follow-up to their first hit was a cover of Fats's 'I Can't Go On (Rosalee)'.

'I'm Walkin'" served as Ricky Nelson's first hit on Verve and he soon switched labels to Imperial. Fats told me later that he felt things became difficult at Imperial because: "Imperial was a two-artist label: me and Slim

Whitman. When Ricky came in, it was more than Lew could handle." Yet, Fats continued to chart into the early 1960s with Bartholomew-produced smashes like 'I'm Ready', 'Be My Guest', 'My Girl Josephine', 'Let The Four Winds Blow' and 'Walking To New Orleans', co-written with Bobby Charles.

I met Dave in 1972 when I was The Shirelles' conductor and his band backed us for a week's engagement in New Orleans. He told me Pearl King was his wife's name – I'd noticed he attached it to a number of his songs on later recordings.

Bartholomew often recycled his songs. One prime example is 'Let The Four Winds Blow'. It was recorded by Dave, Roy Brown and Bobby Charles before Fats got around to it in 1961. Another was 'Ain't Gonna Do It', with several attempts and Fats revived 'I'm Gonna Be A Wheel Someday', first recorded by Bobby Mitchell.

As the 1960s loomed, Dave cut some terrific artists who failed in the marketplace, but became legendary in later years, including Alvin Roberson, Earl King and Robert Parker. He also attempted to revive the recording careers of Shirley & Lee and Huey Smith, but to no avail.

He never stopped recording himself, but never charted. After the sale of Imperial, he formed his Broadmoor label with no success. He often appeared with Domino in later years. Dave Bartholomew was inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame in 1991 and the Songwriters' Hall of Fame.



Photos, labels shots and advert from the Billy Vera Collection

