

MILLS BROTHERS



C. 1932 omkring en mikrofon fra Columbia Radio Newwork

Except for Brian Rust's Complete Entertainment Discography 1989 (which is, however, incomplete and with unlisted personnels), the vocal group Mills Brothers has been omitted from all discographies, jazz as well as popular music.

This is quite illogical, not to say unfair, since other vocal groups - the Three Boswell Sisters for instance - are nearly always squeezed in; usually under the banner that rhythmic instrumental solos are often featured.

Since the Mills Brothers was backed by the most vital one-man rhythm section ever, namely John Mills Jr., singing bass and playing tenor (four string) guitar, the abovementioned neglect needs to be remedied as to the early fully jazz/swing influenced period.

Mills Brothers' later recordings are, however, also belonging among top professional artists' output and often being supported by jazz, or jazz inspired, bands. Mills Brothers were never less than magnificent, swinging, joyful, and supremely entertaining.

The highly outstanding and honourable British musician (alto sax/trombone/cornet), discographer, record collector, record producer (Ristic/Jazz Oracle), researcher, wizard sound specialist, and raconteur 'John R. T.' Davies (John Ross Twiston "Ristic" Davies, 1927-2004) had the following to say about Mills Brothers:

"THERE HAVE been, since the advent of Hot Discography, omissions from listings of Jazz Records – and conversely insertions of matter which must be considered alien by graduate students of Le Hot.

While the publication of ANY Discographical matter must necessarily be advantageous, frequently it may be seen (and heard) that entire sections are omitted from Discographical works simply because an artist or group does not appear, in the eyes of the compiler, to fulfil the basic requirements for inclusion.

Many Jazz enthusiasts have become aware at one time or another when listening to the Mills Brothers and Duke Ellington's Orchestra in their fortunately fairly readily available recording of "Diga Diga Doo" that as Mills take over from Duke and vice versa there is no let-down . . . unless perhaps on the Ellington side. There is ample confirmation of the driving power of Mills Brothers throughout their records of this period – and not just driving power, but also the inventiveness expected of any self-respecting jazz musicians.

Not only as soloists do they leave nothing to be desired, but without a great deal of searching, examples can be found of arrangement and ensembles which in spite of limited numbers still contrive to produce a sound which can be compared (if you must) DIRECTLY with McKinney's Cotton Pickers . . . or half a decade later, the Basie Orchestra. In "The Old Man of the Mountain" it all happens – hot lead, hot support to lead, light and rhythmic reed and brass sections (yes, sections!), all this and a bouncing bubbling rhythm section too. To say that here is an imitation of a ten-piece orchestra in full cry would be a poor comparison and an understatement only to be considered if instrumental jazz must be used as the yardstick.

The Mills Brothers, at least in their earlier days, could manifestly lay claim to inclusion in any reference work concerned with jazz. If the instrumentation was unusual, and even if later recordings display a tendency to be tailored to public demand and the quest of a living (they were not alone in this), there is every reason why the earlier recordings of the Mills Brothers should be accorded a place – indeed, a place of honour – in a jazz discography."

MILLS BROTHERS BIOGRAPHY

The four Mills Brothers (all born in Piqua, Ohio) started singing in 1922 and as a quartet turned professionals in 1925:

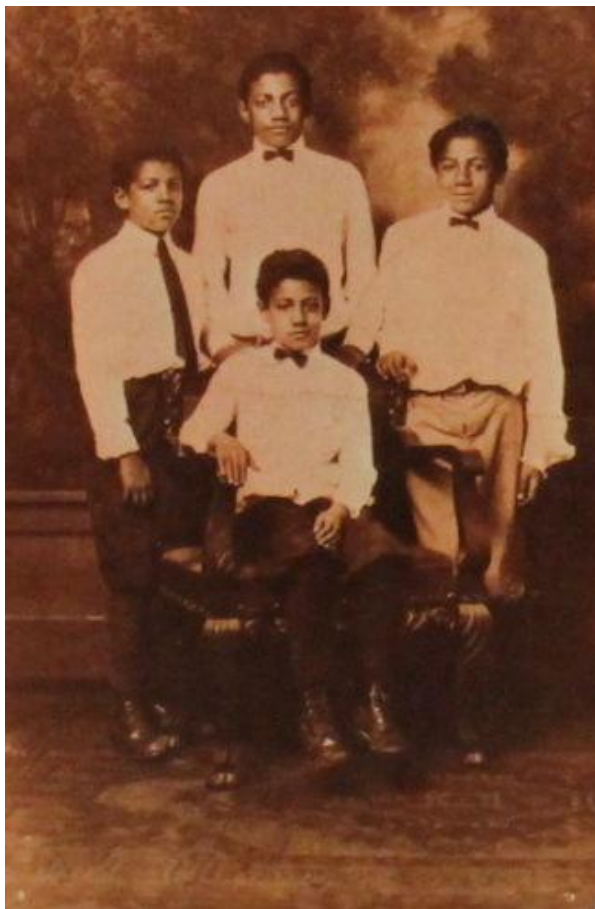
John Charles Jr., bass voice/tenor guitar	19 October 1910 - 23 January 1936, Bellefontaine, Ohio.
Herbert Bowles, tenor voice	2 April 1912 - 12 April 1989, Las Vegas, Nevada.
Harry Flood, baritone voice	19 August 1913 - 28 June 1982, Los Angeles, California.
Donald Friedlich, tenor voice	29 April 1915 - 13 November 1999, Los Angeles, California.
Parents Eathel (Harrington) and John Sr., bass voice, Bellefonte, Penn. (married 1905, moved to Piqua 1907, divorced c. 1930).	11 February 1882 - 8 December 1967, Bellefontaine, Ohio

Eathel Mills gave birth to further three children (girls, older than the boys), not known to be singers. Date of death for Harry Mills also given as January 1982.

The following biography part is a combination of information (not double checked) from Wikipedia, Geoff Milne's booklet notes to the JSP CD series, interview John R. T. Davies, Storyville magazine/Laurie Wright, interview Donald Mills, and some minor sources:

BOYHOOD AND EARLY YEARS

The boys were taught to sing by their parents. Their mother sang light opera, sometimes even in the radio. Their father John Hutchinson Sr., who owned a barber shop, had, as was customary in those days, a so-called barber shop quartet named "The Four Kings of Harmony", so there was always plenty of good music around on which the four boys could model themselves, and singers from whom they could learn the intricacies of close harmony.



The Mills Brothers, in an early portrait.
From left: John, Herbert, Harry & Donald

As the boys grew older, they began singing in the choir of the Cyrene African Methodist Episcopal Church and in the Park Avenue Baptist Church in Piqua. After their lessons at the Spring Street Grammar School, they would gather in front of their father's barbershop on Public Square or at the corner of Greene and Main to sing and play the kazoo to passersby. One source (see below) has it that the brothers first publicly performed on October 28, 1924, at May's Opera House in Piqua, where they came to entertain during the intermissions of *Rin-Tin-Tin* for a fee of four dollars a night. The boys, aged nine to fourteen, suffered opening-night jitters, and that fateful night, Harry even discovered he had forgotten to

bring his kazoo. The resourceful Harry cupped his hands over his mouth to imitate the missing instrument, "...and lo and behold, out came the sound of a trumpet." The Brothers were quick to realize what happened, so the other three joined in, John Charles Jr., imitating a tuba, Herbert a second trumpet, and Donald (lead voice) taking a trombone line.

According to the *Piqua Daily Call*, "They made a big hit... The lads have natural talent and appear like veterans of the stage." The appearance, a fresh new sound, altered their musical style and eventually catapulted them to unprecedented acclaim. First, John accompanied the four-part harmony with a ukulele - later on he used a four-string guitar. The brothers practiced imitating orchestras they heard on the radio.

They entertained on the Midwest theater circuit, at house parties, tent shows, music halls and supper clubs throughout the area and became well known for their close harmonies, mastery of scat singing, and their amazing ability to imitate musical instruments with their voices. Then in 1928, after playing May's Opera House in Piqua between *Rin-Tin-Tin* features (another source has it), they accompanied the Harold Greenameyer Band to Cincinnati for an audition with radio station WLW. The Band was not hired, but the Mills brothers were. With the help of Seger Ellis, WLW Cincinnati DJ and a music legend of the '20s, they quickly became local radio stars (regular broadcasts over a ten-month period) and got their major break when Duke Ellington and his Orchestra played a date in Cincinnati. When the youngsters sang for Duke, he was so impressed that he called Tommy Rockwell (of the famous Rockwell-O'Keefe Agency) at Okeh Records who signed them and brought the group to New York.

ACCLAIM

In September 1930, Ralph Wonders urged broadcasting executive William S. Paley, at CBS Radio in New York, to turn on his office speaker and listen to an audition of four young men. For the audition they were "The Mills Brothers", but they had been known by many other names. They were billed as "The Steamboat Four" when they sang for Sohio. They had been called "Four Boys and a Guitar" on their Sunday shows. When Paley heard their performance, he immediately went downstairs and put them on CBS radio that very same evening. The next day, the Mills Brothers signed a three-year contract and became the first African-Americans to have a network show on radio.

Their very first record made for Brunswick, a cover of the ODJB standard "Tiger Rag", became a nationwide seller. Other hits quickly followed. "Goodbye Blues", their theme song; "You're Nobody's Sweetheart Now", "Old Rockin' Chair", "Lazy River", "How'm I Doin', Hey Hey", and others . . . cementing them in the minds of the nation and making them national stars.





All above pictures from the same photo studio session, apparently 1929



Original photo produced 1929, this copy autographed in 1941

The Mills Brothers, Lionel Hampton and Les Hite, 1931 (*Courtesy Les Hite*)



Mills Brothers with Les Hite Orchestra in Los Angeles early April 1931.
Les Hite's band included a.o. Lionel Hampton (behind Harry Mills), Harvey Brooks, and Marshall Royal (far right).



Photo autographed by Mills Brothers for "Dansk Privat Hot Club", Denmark





J. Lee Denmon
Best regards
Sincerely
Mike Denmon



Where They Began

The Mills Brothers, four boys and a guitar, also presenting their own mimicked tuba, saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, bassoon, trombone and oboe, are back at the Buffalo. To meet numerous enquiries, these bits of data are set down:

Piqua, O., is the home town. John was a bank janitor. He's the one who was ill for so many weeks recently. Herbert was an apprentice barber.

Piqua, O., is the home town. John was a bank janitor. He's the one who was ill for so many weeks recently. Herbert was an apprentice barber. Harry donated to the family expense account by shining shoes, and later from earnings as ballyhoo boy for a parking lot—one of those "drive right in here" chaps. Donald,—well, he's the youngest, and he admits—that going to school wasn't exactly a pleasure.

Evenings brought vocal practice. The tuba, which is John's forte, was the first instrumental imitation. Others were added as time passed. That guitar came from a mail order house. It cost less than \$7. The boys wouldn't part with it for any money. They even had it insured.

WSAI, a former Cincinnati radio station, was first to put them on the air. John was only twelve then. And now look at the quartet!

Buffalo Courier October 15, 1933

IMITATING BANDS GAINED THEM FAME

Mills Brothers Started by Mimicking Instruments on Sunday Afternoons

Four colored boys in a small town in Ohio used to attend local band concerts on Sunday afternoons and, having nothing better to do, they started to imitate the various brass and wind instruments. It was a good idea for it opened the road to fame and fortune and the quartette of Ohio lads are now the celebrated Mills Brothers, radio and film stars.

This is the gist of the story as it was told to The Gazette representative by John Mills, the human euphonium of the quartette, while he was lounging in his dressing room between acts at the Capitol Theatre where the quartette is making a personal appearance this week.

John is a very simple, unspooled chap. He is not dazzled by the above mentioned fame and fortune. To him it is all in a day's work. He was quite willing to tell his life story, his only regret being that there was nothing sensational about it. He and his brothers feel they owe everything to their father and mother who were singers themselves.

The parents being musical thought it would be an excellent idea to have a male quartette in their own house as well as hearing one in church or at the local theatre. Harry, Donald, Herbert and John were thereupon impressed into service. They sang "straight" at first, popular tunes, hymns and so forth. Then they took to going to the band concerts on Sunday afternoons.

After they had fooled about, imitating instruments for some time, a vaudeville man heard them. Soon they found themselves doing "small time stuff" in vaudeville houses in the neighborhood of Cincinnati. "We weren't on any circuit," explained John. "We just picked up what we could get."

Then WLW, the first enterprising radio station, opened. This was the long awaited chance of Harry, Donald, Herbert and John. They sang over WLW for a year or so. Then they went to New York with a contract in their common pocket from the Columbia Broadcasting Corporation. And there you are.

The Mills boys have no secrets to reveal concerning their technique. Its just practice, they said. A schoolboy can and often does imitate musical instruments. But a school boy does not spend hours and days and weeks and months trying to perfect his little stunt so that it really sounds like an instrument with the added beauty of the human voice.

**Montreal Gazette
November 20, 1933**

They remained on with Brunswick until late 1934, when they signed with Decca, where they stayed well into the 1950s. On all of their Brunswick records, as well as the early Decca's, the label always stated: "No musical instruments or mechanical devices used in this recording other than one guitar".

It was not a publicity stunt or ploy to induce record sales, but considered necessary to convince the purchaser that there were, in fact, no other musicians present. How necessary was amply illustrated by a report in the 'Melody Maker' (commenting upon the arrival of the first Mills Brothers records in England in 1932) that "everyone swears the tuba is played by Adrian Rollini". But no, all the sounds on each and every recording, except the guitar played by John, emanated from the throats of the quartet who must still rank as unique in the annals of show business. Of course, there have been many imitators, but the subtle harmonies and instrumental impressions put the Mills quartet into a class totally of their own making, head and shoulders (and larynxes) above all those who sought not only better them but even trying to reach the pinnacle of 'vocalese' produced so expertly by the four boys.

They were constantly in demand for radio and performed on this medium as frequently as possible, for that was really the passport to nationwide fame in the USA. Their schedule was so tight that they often had to rehearse in the taxis, much to the delight of the drivers taking them from one engagement to another.

They were a sensation on CBS in 1930-1931. They had their own popular radio series in 1932-1933, one of the earliest built around a black act, billed as the "Four Boys and a Guitar". Before their show announcers commonly explained to listeners that the only music instrument used was a guitar.

The Mills Brothers were sponsored by some of the largest advertisers in early radio: Standard Oil, Procter & Gamble, Crisco, and Crosley Radio. They began appearing in films. Their first, "The Big Broadcast" (Paramount Pictures 1932), was an all-star radio revue that included Bing Crosby, Cab Calloway, and the Boswell Sisters.

Geoff Milne: Busy touring and playing radio dates, disaster struck in Chicago in April 1933. John was taken very ill with pneumonia. Their intricate harmonies, so meticulously rehearsed, depended on four voices, so rather than try and make it as a trio, they cancelled all future engagements. John became so ill that there were moments when it looked doubtful if he'd pull through, but great relief came in August when he was well enough to rejoin his three brothers. A big boost to their career came in November when they guested on the influential "Fleischmann Yeast Hour" radio show hosted by

Rudy Vallee. This had become a major source of promotion for up-and-coming performers – not that the Mills Brothers were exactly up-and-coming – they already had!

In fact, by 1933 the Mills Brothers had already influenced groups like the Four Blackbirds, the Four Southern Singers, the Three peppers (disbanded 1935) and even the Spirits of Rhythm – though none of them were as adept in achieving this specialist style of interpretation as the originators who were left the clear leaders in their field. In 1933, also in the movie "Operator 13". Watch: "Jungle Fever" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH1e6G0K3Pk



Even though the boys had a very hectic schedule they still found time to come home and spend Christmas with their mother in 1933

In 1934, the Brothers starred with Crosby for Woodbury Soap, and recorded their classics "Lazy Bones", "Sweet Sue", "Lulu's Back in Town", "Bye Bye Blackbird", "Sleepy Head", and "Shoe Shine Boy". Their west coast film appearances included "Twenty Million Sweethearts" (Warner Brothers, 1934) and "Broadway Gondolier" (Warner Brothers, 1935).

Geoff Milne: In March 1934, the Brothers moved up the coast to San Francisco for more radio dates. Their fame had spread to Europe.



This photo c. 1930. See further pictures from this session under Mills Brothers' first recording date October 1931 in the discography

Be sure to watch: "Tiger Rag" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui_icfQoAeU



Be sure to watch: "The Old Man of the Mountain" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0ngRaUyXvE



Be sure to watch: "How'm I doin', Hey Hey" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_Knzwe15PY
 "I Heard" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtqpyMvl3D4



With Dick Powell
 Be sure to watch: "Out For No Good" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVlyfF-80gk





Be sure to watch: "Goodbye Blues/Some of These Days/Tiger Rag/Ain't Got Nobody" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2hg0EWCu9s

By now the brothers were highly successful and recognized all over the world. In 1934, The Mills Brothers became the first African-Americans to give a command performance before British royalty. They performed at the Regal Theatre for a special audience: King George V, Queen Mary, and their mother.



1934 at the London Palladium appearance



From the movie 'Operator 13', singing "Jungle Fever", 1934 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omZ1Ay7Fwgs&list=RDomZ1Ay7Fwgs&start_radio=1

Geoff Milne: In the summer of 1934, they were invited to England to top the bill at the London Palladium. Also appeared at a Royal Command Performance. Their records had been selling in enormous quantities in Britain on the Brunswick label, so it was not surprising for the company (DECCA) to persuade them to visit their studios in London.



May 15, 1934

While in England, John Jr. became ill again. It took him months to recover from battling pneumonia. Before he was completely well, the brothers returned to England. John Jr. once again became sick. He travelled all the way back to Bellefontaine where he died January 23, 1936. Thereby the world lost the greatest single handed rhythm section – John Mills playing four string guitar and humming the corresponding bass part.



Unknown occasion. Seemingly appearing in some Parlophone premises (England).



From "Strictly Dynamite" 1934.



Jimmy Durante, Lupe Velez, and Mills Brothers in the movie "Strictly Dynamite" 1934
 Be sure to watch: "Swing It, Sister" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li1dtJ6jC4w



Another (deleted scene from "The Broadway Gondolier") movie still c. 1934



April 1934

NEW
125th
STREET

APOLLO

**AMERICA'S
SMARTEST
COLORED
SHOWS!!**

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195th STREET
NEAR 8th AV.
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BEGINNING FRIDAY, APRIL 26 — COLOSSAL STAGE SHOW!

4 MILLS BROS.

IN PERSON

Mills Bros. will appear for
7 full days, beginning Sat., April 27

**LAST AND ONLY N. Y. APPEARANCE
BEFORE EUROPEAN TOUR**

RALPH COOPER and HIS GANG OF MELODY MAKERS

ALMA SMITH	TAPS MILLER	Pigmeat Markham	Jimmie Baskette
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MONDAY NIGHT
AUDITIONS
CASH PRIZES

Tues. Night — Swing
the Lindy (white teams)
CASH PRIZES

THURSDAY NIGHT
OL' NAGI LINDY HOP
CASH PRIZES

WEDNESDAY 11 P. M. to Midnight—Broadcast
direct from stage over WMCA

The one and only original **AMATEUR NIGHT IN HARLEM**
with RALPH COOPER (Now in its 27th Week)

Box Office Opens
Daily 9 A. M.

Last Stage Show
At 9:45 P. M.

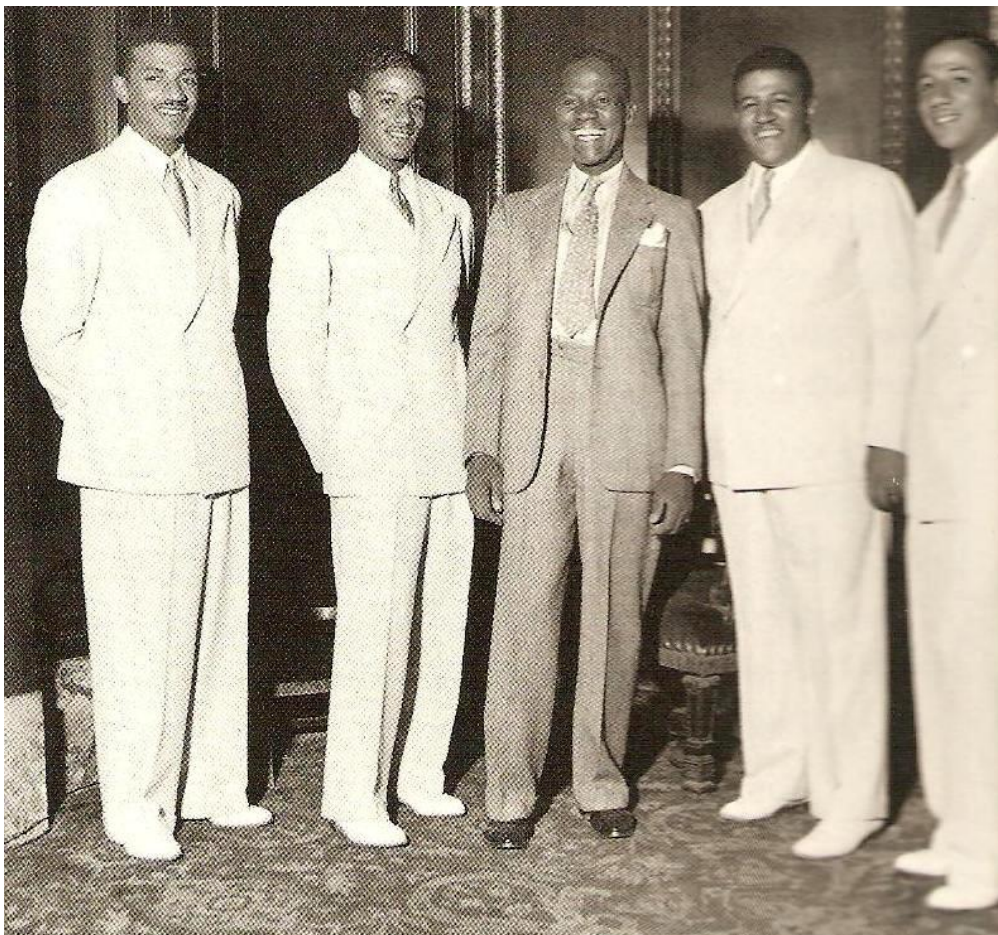
**NO INCREASE
IN PRICES**

— ON SCREEN —
STRANGE WIVES
With
ROGER PRYOR

27. april 1935, appearing one week (New York Age)



Be sure to listen to: Duke Ellington & Mills Brothers "Diga Diga Doo" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=1orLPFS36DI



John Jnr., Donald, Harry and Herbert with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson

The father of the Mills Brothers, John H. Mills, stepped in for his oldest son John Charles Jr.



This was a difficult time for the remaining brothers. They considered breaking up the quartet - then their mother told them that John Jr. would want them to continue. They followed her suggestion and their father, John Sr., replaced John Jr., as the bass and tuba singer. He was not up to the standard of John Jr., however, he did very well with the bass part and it was a perfect solution in regard to continuing under the family name. As a singer, John Sr. was (quite naturally) a bit more old-fashioned - yet the group managed to adjust to the general public standard picture, still on a second-to-none level.



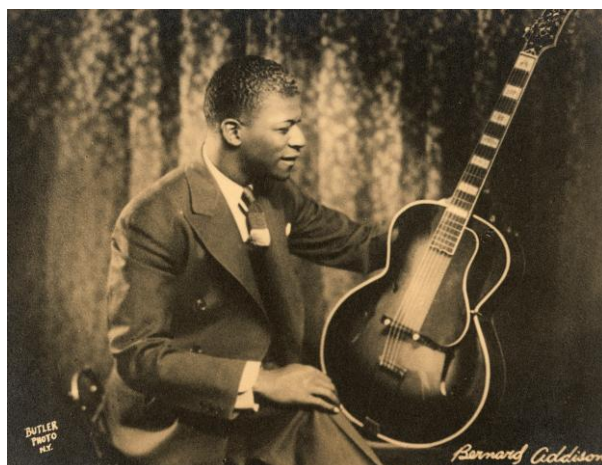
Recording with Louis Armstrong 1937 and 1938

Be sure to listen to: "The Old Folks at Home/Way Down upon the Swanee River" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=iybPQ5sB-L4
"Marie" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKznpWGTnIM



Autographed for the Danish critic Svend Kragh-Jacobsen

At first, Bernard Addison stepped in as guitarist, but Addison felt ignored and in fact did not get along too well with the Mills family. From around July 1937 Allen Norman Brown, recommended by the great rhythm guitarist Freddie Green (of Count Basie fame), joined the Brothers as their guitar player and stayed on until he died in 1969.



Be sure to watch this (from 1937 with Bernard Addison on guitar): "Nagasaki" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPSyv8R3wzk



Mills Brothers singing "Nagasaki" accompanied by Bernard Addison on guitar 1937.

GILIA-KERSTDAG met het COTTINGER orkest en BOBBY MARTIN Een WERELDPROGRAMMA met TAPDANCERS, NIEUWJANSGROEPEN, ATTRACTIES!!! Amusement in de meest verrassende vorm!	NED. JAZZ LIGA 2de KERST-DAG CHRISTMAS NIGHT IN DEN DIERENTUIN van 8-4 UUR CHRISTMAS NIGHT IN HARLEM	HET WERELDBEKEND LANKWARTET FOUR BOYS AND A GUITAR MILLS BROTHERS HET GEHELE ONDER LEIDING VAN H. STERNFELD Pianospeler: Walter Hartman NA AFLOOP H.T.M. ROSEN NAAR ALLE RECHTOEGANGEN
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A Christmas night in Harlem

Succesvol optreden van „The Mills Brothers” en Bobby Martin and his coloured Swing-band

De door de afd. Den Haag der N.J.L. op den Tweeden Kerstavond georganiseerde feestavond, welke onder den naam „Christmas night in Harlem” gehouden werd, is een ongekennd succes geworden. Een 2500-koppig publiek heeft aan den oproep der Ned. Jazz Liga, om naar den Dierentuin te komen, gehoor gegeven en de twee groote attracties van dezen avond uitbundig toegejuicht. Het bal duurde onafgebroken voort tot 4 uur in den nacht, onderbroken door het optreden van diverse dansgroepen, welke hier optraden onder auspiciën van het dansinstituut B. Sternfeld, in samenwerking waarmede de Haagsche Liga deze feestavonden georganiseerd heeft. Wij zagen een drietal vlotte tapdancers van het gekleurde ras en een aardig Russisch danspaar. Om ongeveer 11 uur popelde de zaal van verlangen naar het optreden van de meesterlijke negerzangers The Mills Brothers, welke in twee series hun ongeëvenaarde orkestimitaties brachten. De N.J.L., die dit kwartet in de Residentie lanceerde, deed hiermede een goede keuze. Het publiek toonde zich dankbaar en opgetogen over de vocale prestaties, die soms aan het wonderbaarlijke grenzen.

Wanneer men het niet voor zijn oogen zag gebeuren, zou men af en toe weigeren te gelooven, dat slechts een gitaar de zangers begeleidt en dat de trompet-, trombone- en saxofoongeluiden met den mond worden voortgebracht. En zulks met een timbre en een intonatie, waar menige instrumentalist jaloersch op zou kunnen zijn! Na enkele uren dansmuziek van het zeer goede dansorkest The Plaza Swingers, welke er toe medewerkten de „Harlem”-sfeer te handhaven, werd tegen twee uur de tweede clou van den avond aangekondigd: Bobby Martin met zijn Nieuw Yorksch orkest. Van dat moment af waande men zich volkomen in Nieuw Yorks negerwijk Harlem, daar zooiets maar zelden in ons land te hooren is en dus nog alle bekoring van het nieuwe en exotische bezit. Er werd door Martin en zijn vaardige instrumentalisten, waaronder speciaal de slagwerker Kaiser Marshall, de bassist Bass Hill en de altsaxofonist Glyn Pacque opvielen, met een uitbundigheid en een levensvreugde gemusiceerd, dat de dansers ophielden met hun eigen vermaak en rond het podium bleven staan, onbeweeglijk, tien rijen dik, met oogen en ooren in de ban van het orkest.

Men zegt weleens, dat de jazzmuziek de menigte tot danswoede en andere excessen opzweept, doch hier werd bewezen, dat authentieke jazzmuziek in al haar oprechtheid en spontane belevenis de menschen aan den grond nagelt en ademloos doet luisteren. Aan het gejuich tusschen de programmanummers kwam schier geen einde. Na zoo'n avond betreurt men het slechts, dat slechts zoo weinig authentieke jazzmuziek ons land bereikt en dat wij ons met zooveel ergerlijke, laag bij de grondsche nabootsing tevreden moeten stellen. In dit verband moge het optreden van de Savoy-Band als een teleurstelling genoemd worden.



This band made up the backing group for Mills Bros., while they toured Denmark in 1938. From left: Knut Knutssøn, clarinet and saxes. Niels Foss, bass. Svend Hauberg, guitar. Svend Asmussen, violin. Børge Roger Henrichsen, piano. Erik Parker, trumpet.



From left: Herbert Mills directing, Norman Brown kneeling, Asmussen, Hauberg, Roger Henrichsen, Harry playing Asmussen's violin, Foss, Donald playing Foss's bass, John Mills Snr.

MUSIK **AMINA** RADIO

FOTO

HØR DE PRÆGTFULDE
MELODIER FRA
FILMEN
**BROADWAY
MELODY
1938**

YOURS AND MINE
I'M FEELING LIKE A MILLION
SHARE HANDS WITH A MILLION
YOUR BROADWAY
AND
-vi har
I DE BEDSTE
INDSPILNINGE

**MILLS
BROTHERS**
We present
Seven of their new
Tiger Rag
Mills' Broadway
Melody
Theater Box - 1st Act
St. Louis Blues
The old man of the woods
Lullaby Blues
The new
Little old lady
BRUNSWICK

K KØBENHAVNS
museum
museum of
COPENHAGEN

AMINA Radio-, Grammofon-, Foto- & Musikinstrumenthandel v/E. Wang Christensen, Amagerbrogade 7, Copenhagen, advertises Mills Brothers in 1938



At 'National Scala', Copenhagen, 1938 with Norman Brown, guitar



At 'National Scala', Copenhagen, 1938 with Norman Brown, guitar





Prob. at World's Fair, New York, 1939-40, with Gabriel Heatter (1890-1972, radio journalist) center.

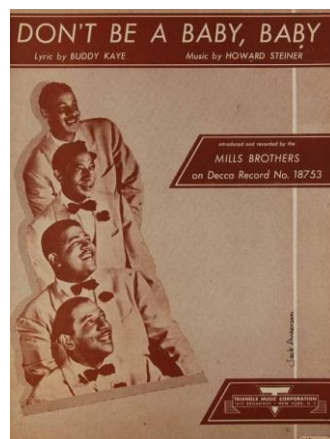
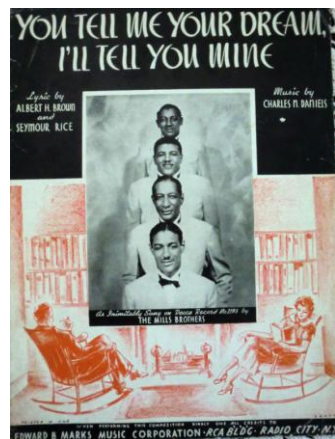
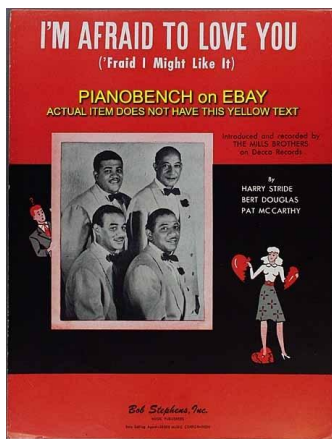
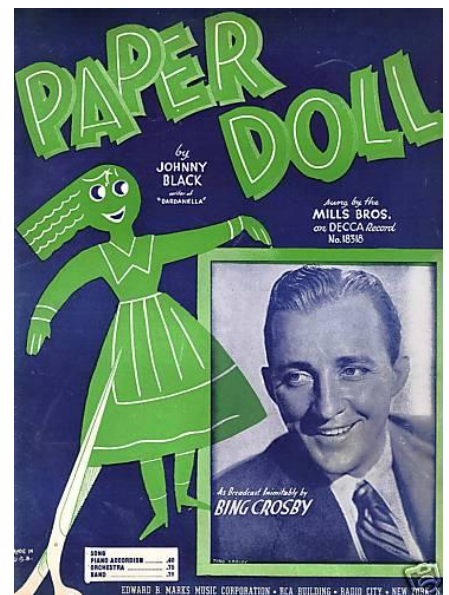
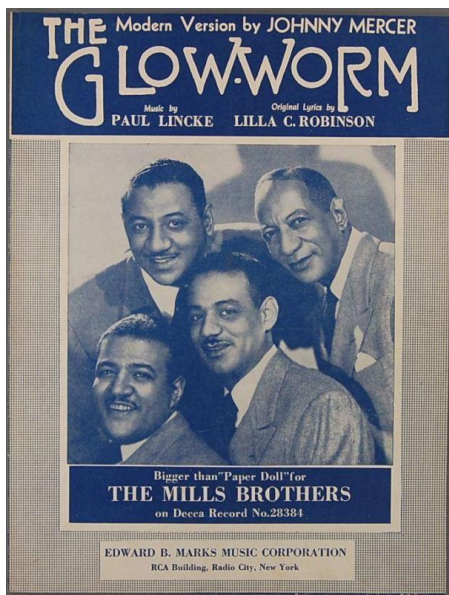


Buffalo Courier Express, January 14, 1942



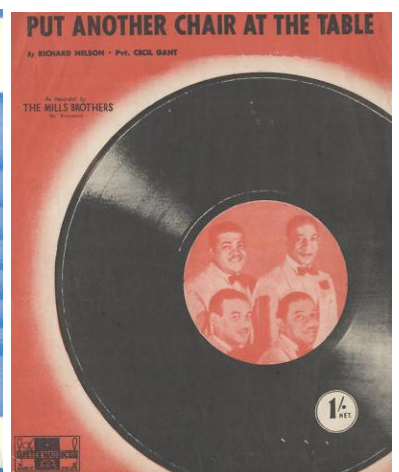
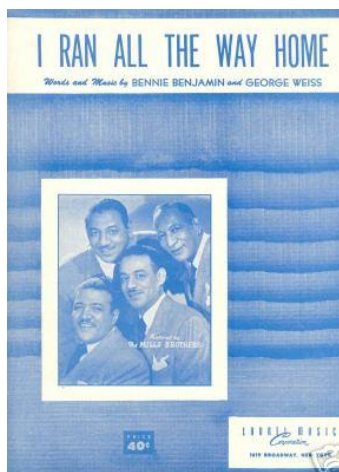
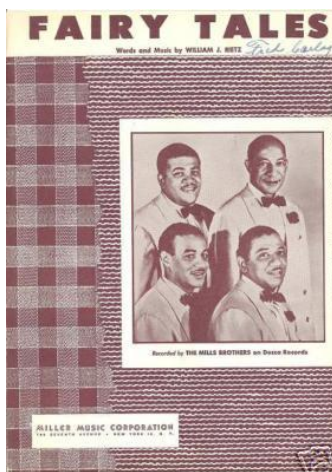
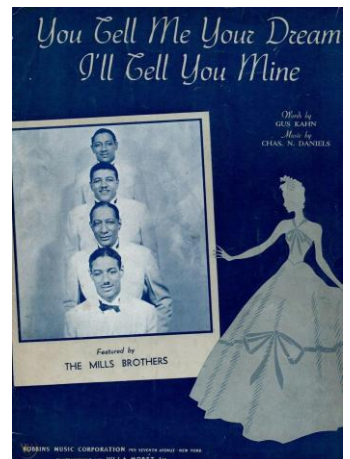
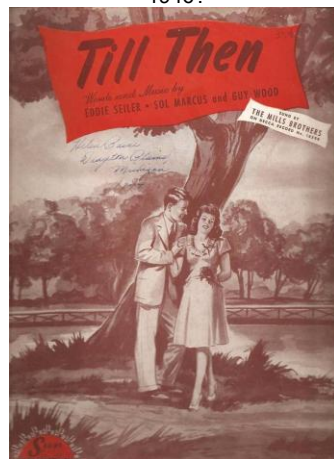
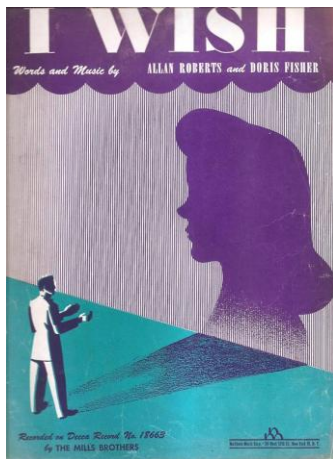
C. 1943 (guitarist Norman Brown)

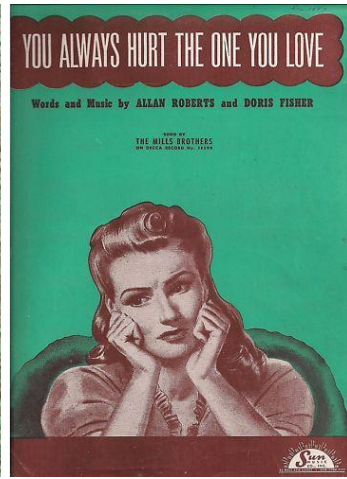
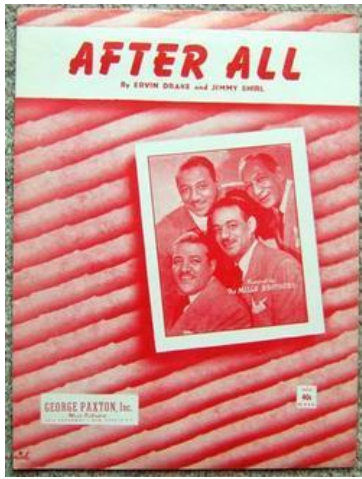




1946?

1946





THE WAR YEARS

Soon they were back in Europe. Through 1939, they enjoyed remarkable success in Europe. Herbert recalls, "We left England for the last time just three days before war was declared on Germany and the only boat we could get was to Australia. We were overseas from then on except for two months in 1940 and then we went back to South America. We didn't get back until 1941. In the meantime, the Ink Spots were coming up and people had sort of forgotten us."

In the period between John Jr.'s death and their return to the States, they re-recorded "Lazy River". It was followed by "Someday You'll Want Me to Want You", "Swing Is the Thing", "Long About Midnight", "Organ Grinders Swing", and "The Song Is Ended". They honored Duke Ellington with a swing version of "Caravan", and then produced a series of classic recordings: "South of the Border", which they performed in a tour of South America, along with "Ain't Misbehavin'", "It Don't Mean a Thing", "Jeepers Creepers", "Three Little Fishes", and "Basin Street Blues".

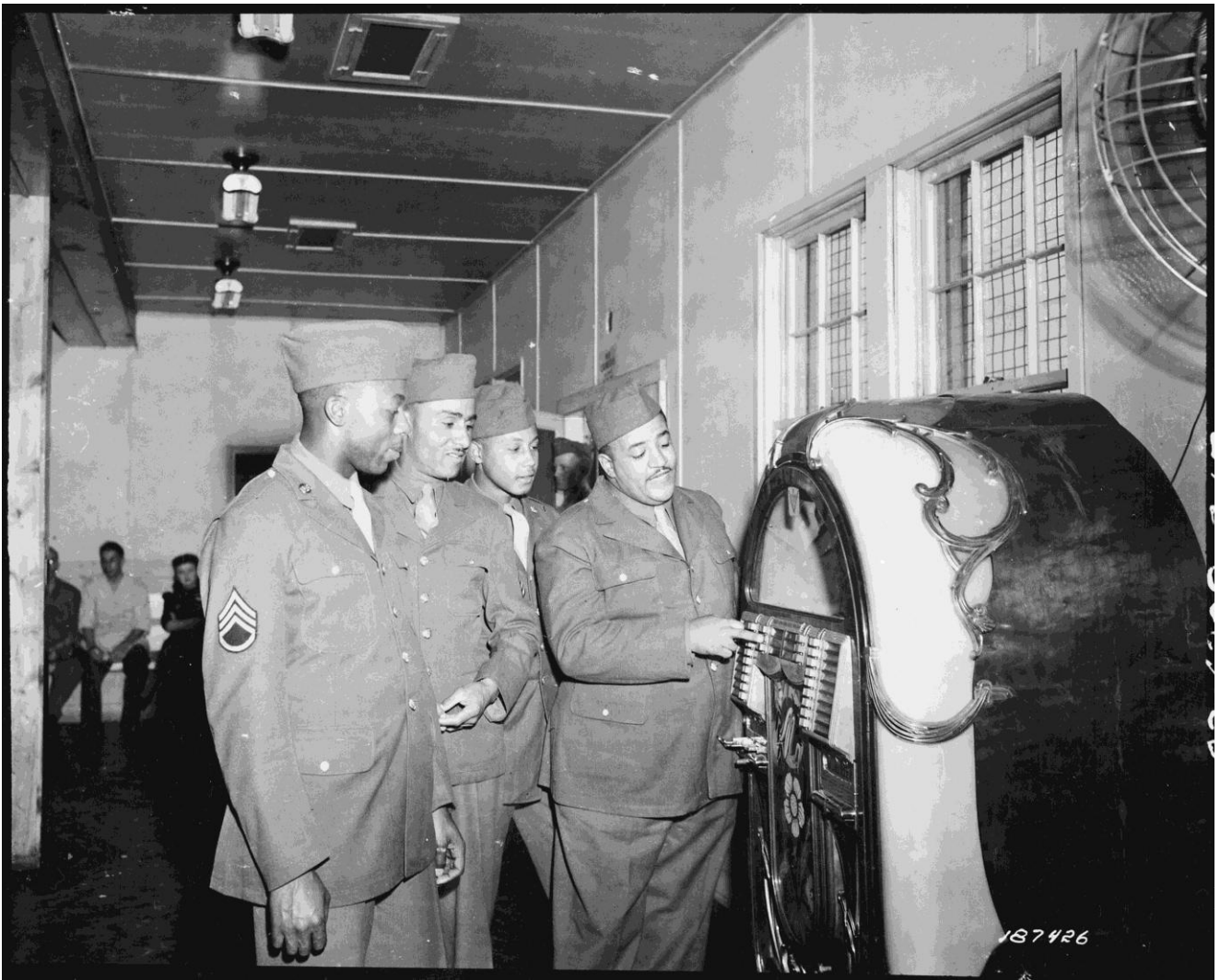
During this era, there was also a brief time when the group performed with a non-family singer. Gene Smith served as a stand-in for one year when Harry was drafted into the Army. Although Smith's solo singing did not particularly resemble the group's usual sound, he was able to harmonize well in Harry's stead until the fourth brother's return. Smith is very noticeable in a number of the Mills Brothers' film appearances.

Harry Mills was, however, sometimes allowed time off from his service for recordings, movie shooting etc.

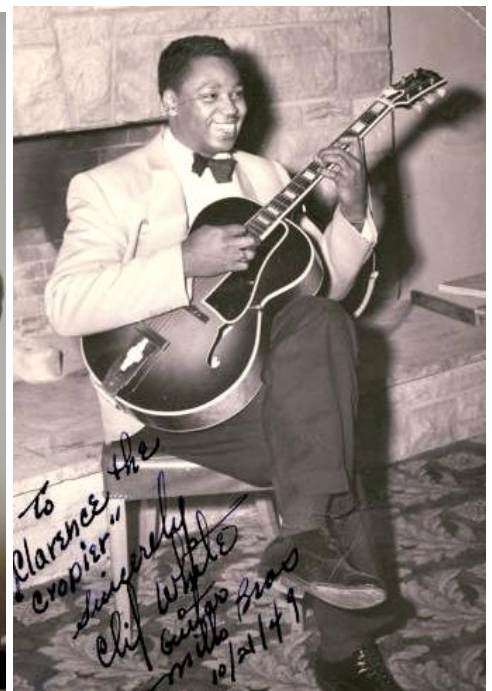


Gene Smith

Watch this one: "Up the Lazy River" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH1e6G0K3Pk



"First of the famous Mills Brothers quartet to enter Army service, Pvt. Harry Mills stops at the jukebox in the Reception Center PX to hear how he sounds on one of the latest Mills Brothers recordings. Left to right: S/Sgt. Arthur Whyte, Sgt. Robert Seymour, Pfc. George Blair, and Pvt. Harry Mills. Fort Custer, MI."



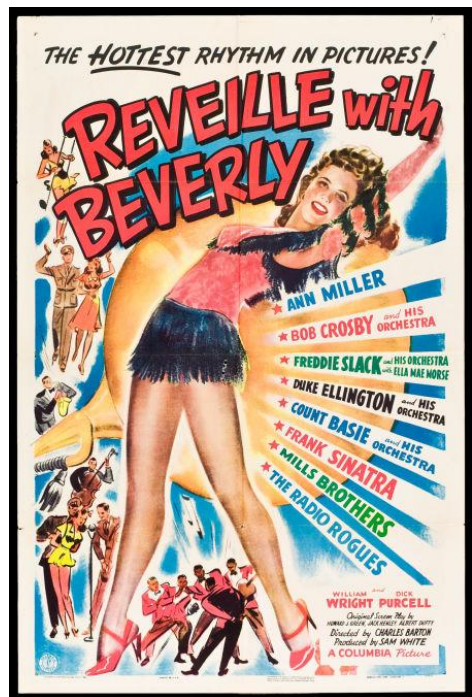
A publicity still for the 1943 film "He's My Guy." CLIFTON 'CLIF' WHITE (died 1998) is the guitar player (recommended by Louis Armstrong).

The extremely excellent White was with MB while Norman Brown served with the US Navy most of WW2

Be sure to listen to the magnificent "Sweet Lucy Brown" from 1943: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqM968QQ66Q>



The movie "Reveille with Beverly" 1943



Be sure to watch: "Sweet Lucy Brown" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=toJR-vmlwdA or www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8jK978n4xl
 "Cielito Lindo" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=yS6AFUDwxCw



From the movie "Cowboy Canteen" 1944



Clif White with Donald Mills, John Mills Snr., and Herbert Mills. Photo by Nat Singerman, occasion unknown. Clif White (1922-98) joined Mills Brothers in 1940 when he was 18 years old, due to Norman Brown being drafted for service. White was a most excellent guitar player. Inscription reads "This was a great idea" – unfortunately, the nature of the idea is not revealed. This photo may be from the period when Harry Mills was drafted as well.



c. 1945-46

THE POST WAR YEARS

Returning to the states, the Brothers were anxious for a hit. They recorded "I'll Be Around". Donald Mills chose "Paper Doll" as the B-side of the record. "I'll Be Around" became a popular hit, then a disk jockey turned the record over. "Paper Doll", recorded in just fifteen minutes, sold six million copies and became the group's biggest hit.

The rise of rock and roll in the early fifties did little to decrease the Mills Brothers popularity. "Glow Worm" jumped to number one on the pop charts in 1952. "Opus One", an updated version to the Tommy Dorsey hit, was soon on the charts as well, followed by "You're Nobody 'til Somebody Loves You", "Yellow Bird", "Standing on the Corner", and "If I Had My Way".



Night club flyer, late 40'ties



January 31st, 1952, Sacramento, California



C. 1946



Taken c. January 31st, 1953. Right: Norman Brown, also 1953 (looks rather like Clifton White).



The Mills Brothers

HITCH HIKERS OF THE WEEK. The touring Four Ink Spots quartet were driving through Indiana on their way to make a train connection so they could keep an important booking. At 1:30 a.m. their car came to a halt several miles outside Lebanon on the route to Indianapolis and refused to move. The singers spent an hour and a half trying to flag passing motorists for a lift. Just when the quartet was about to give up, a car came down the road, slowed to a stop. In it were the Four Mills Brothers. The Ink Spots made their train on time.

Jet Magazine, January 1st, 1953

MR. & MRS.

English Wife Plans To Divorce Don Mills

Auburn-haired Wylvia Mills, wife of Donald Mills of the Mills Brothers quartet, has retained Attorneys Seyinour Lazar and Paul Caruso of Beverly Hills and plans to sue her singer husband for a divorce. The action by Mrs. Mills, who met her husband in England, put an end to long-circulated rumors in Los Angeles about the couple's split. They have four children ranging from 10 to 18 in age.



Mr. and Mrs. Don Mills
put an end to long-circulated rumors in Los Angeles about the couple's split. They have four children ranging from 10 to 18 in age.

Jet Magazine, February 17th, 1955

Mills Brothers Tenor Faces Bigamy Charges

Bigamy charges loomed against lead tenor Don Mills of the famed Mills Brothers Quartet as a Santa Monica Superior Court ordered him to answer a claim that he married a white Hollywood secretary while already wed to another woman. The secretary, Mrs. Jean Phillips Mills, said she joined Mills as housekeeper, traveling companion, and social secretary in 1952, and the following year they entered into a "valid marriage relationship." Mills introduced her to friends and business associates as his wife, she said. The woman alleged in an affidavit that she expects to file for divorce if legally married, and if not, for payments for services rendered as Mills' employee. Mills, ordered to answer her charges by April 1, is legally married to England-born Sylvia Mills, they are parents of four children. At week's end, Mills said in Salt Lake City he knew nothing of the charges and, when asked if he had married the secretary, replied: "No comment."

Jet Magazine, March 31st, 1955



Sometimes these pictures have been categorized as taken during the 1970'ties - which can not be correct since John Mills Sr. is still with the group



With Peggy Lee around 1956-57

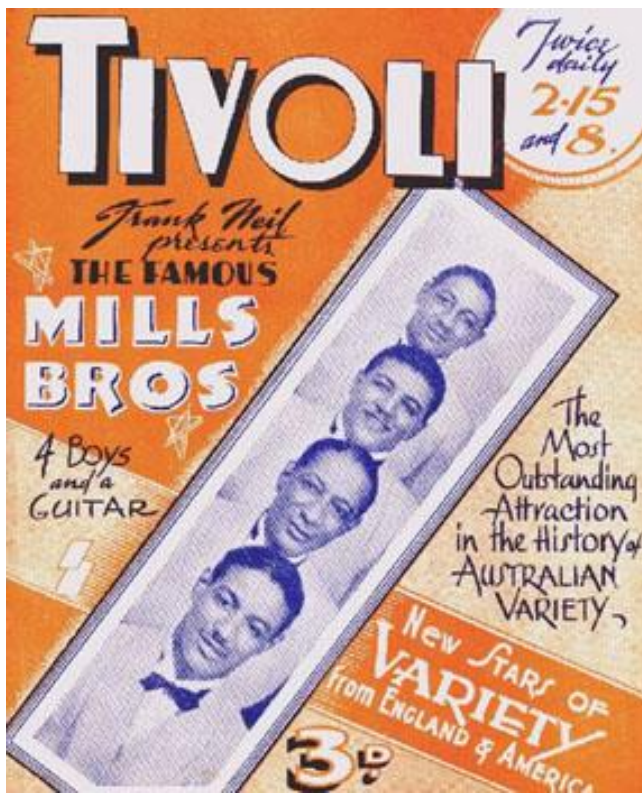


In 1956-57, John Sr. reluctantly stopped touring with the group. He was sixty-eight, but his retirement did not stop the Brothers. As a trio, the Mills Brothers recorded for Dot Records and were frequent guests on The Jack Benny Show, The Perry Como Show, The Tonight Show and The Hollywood Palace etc. They played theatres and clubs, touring up to forty weeks a year.

The move from Decca to Dot Records brought a moderate 1958 hit, a cover of the Silhouettes' "Get a Job" that made explicit the considerable influence on doo-wop that the early Mills Brothers records had exerted. The Mills Brothers charted "Yellow Bird" two years prior to Arthur Lyman's Top Ten hit remake. "Cab Driver", recorded in 1968, was their last great hit (#23 pop, #3 easy listening).



John Snr. at hospital 1956, one of his three daughters visiting. This photo indicates that Mills Snr. stopped due to bad health setting in.



Touring Australia 1939



Dorothy Dandridge and Donald Mills



With Dean Martin

Be sure to watch: "You're Nobody 'til somebody Loves You" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9FAGoDcrp0
 "Paper Doll" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWKKG6TQDzk>
 "Up the Lazy River" - www.youtube.com/watch?v=9k6lrZ6ITyE



Donald Mills 1966



Herbert Mills 1966



Harry Mills 1966



Allen Norman Brown 1966

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Mills Brothers & Norman Brown in Copenhagen 1966
(in the background Ib Glindemann, dir., Niels Henning Orsted Pedersen, bass, and Allan Botschinsky, trumpet)



Ib Glindemann on fire directing "Glow Worm" – apparently to The Brothers' utmost satisfaction

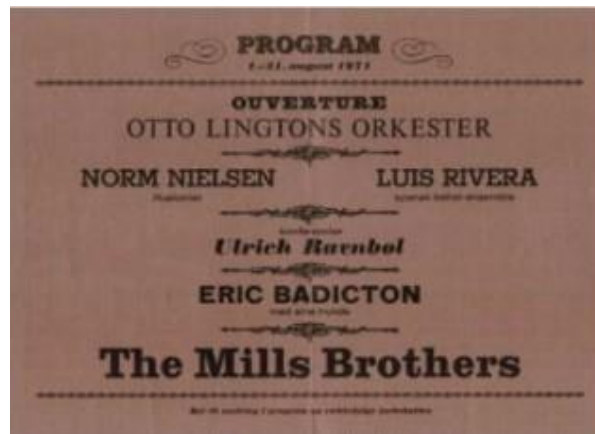




At Bellevue Strand, on the coast North of Copenhagen



During 1960'ties



Tivoli, Copenhagen 1971



Los Angeles, California, February 23rd, 1978, attending Grammy Awards

THE LATER YEARS

Their fiftieth anniversary in show business was celebrated in 1976 at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles. Bing Crosby hosted this nostalgic tribute. Few in the audience realized that Harry was now almost blind because of diabetes.

As a trio, Herbert, Harry, and Donald continued performing on the oldies circuit until Harry's death in 1982. Herbert and Donald continued until Herbert's death in 1989. Then, Donald began performing with the third generation of the family – his son, John III. In 1998, the Recording Academy recognized the Mills family's contributions to popular music when it presented Donald, as the surviving member, with a Grammy Award for Lifetime Achievement. Donald died from pneumonia on November 13, 1999.

Also, there were a Mills Brothers Circus Co., a Mills Brothers Furniture Co., a Mills Brothers Model Engineering Co., and other Mills Brothers vocal groups of various combinations, all of no relation to THE Mills Brothers vocal quartet.

Sources/credits:

It is highly recommended to study Daniel R. Clemson's very interesting Mills Brothers biography accessible at Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission website

www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/winter/20625/mills_brothers/1058707

Allen Norman Brown, Brunswick Records, Daniel R. Clemson, Columbia Pictures, Danmarks Radio DR, Decca Records, Ed Crommelin <http://www.crommelin.org/history/Biographies/1914Edward/Jazz/JazzInHolland.htm>, Dot Records, Calisphere University of California/LAPub.Libr, Nat Singerman, Ib Glindemann, Les Hite, Jet Magazine, JSP Records, Svend Kragh-Jacobsen, Københavns Bymuseum, Donald Mills, Fraser MacPherson Estate, Helge Mass Foto, Mills Brothers, Geoff Millne, Paramount Pictures, RKO Pictures, Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Robbins Music Corporation, Berthel Skjoldborg, Storyville Records, Vapex, Various internet photos of no specified origin, Vocal Group Hall of Fame Foundation, <http://www.vocalgroupharmony.com>, Warner Brothers Pictures.



Recommended reading: http://www.vocalgroup.org/inductees/mills_brothers.html