

Cuca Records—New Acquisitions

Between 1959 and the early 1970s, Cuca Records of Sauk City, WI, was the most active independent record label in the Upper Midwest, releasing hundreds of polka, blues, country, gospel, rock, pop, surf, jazz, old-time, R&B, and ethnic music records. Most of the artists were from Wisconsin, and many of the original records are exceedingly rare and have become much-sought-after collectors' items. The Mills Music Library recently acquired more than 50 of the rarest and most collectible singles to add to the already extensive Cuca collection, gifted by record label founder and owner Jim Kirchstein. Among the newest additions are:

Nathan D. Gibson

Ethnic American Music

Curator, Mills Music Library

Lonnie Walker—Let's Talk About Us (1962)

Lonnie Walker was an African-American Elvis Presley imitator from Coahoma, MS. He died in Louisiana in 2008, but in the 1960s he was living in and performing around Madison, WI. According to *Goldmine* magazine he was known in the area as "King Creole" and "Black Elvis." On his sole Cuca release he is backed by Dave Kennedy and the Ambassadors from La Crosse, WI, who scored a local hit with "Wooden Heart" before it was covered by Joe Dowell for a much bigger national chart topper. Lonnie later fronted a band called The Hustlers before becoming a James Brown impersonator in Las Vegas. This is his first of only two known recorded efforts.

The Chieftones—Shouldn't Have Did What I Done (1966)

Billy Thundercloud & the Chieftones were from Edmonton, Alberta, but lived in Boaz, WI, for a while in the '60s, where they kept horses and a caged lion. All four members of the band (Vincent "Billy Thundercloud" Clifford, Jack Wolf, Barry Littlestar, and Richard Grayow) were members of the Tsimshian Indian Nation of Northwest British Columbia, Canada. It was later discovered that Thundercloud and Littlestar were brothers who had been separated as young kids. They formed the Chieftones and moved to Boaz, WI, in the '60s before moving to Nashville and later Boston. The Chieftones had five entries on the country charts in 1975-76. Their first release, "Shouldn't Have Did What I Done," is a great garage rock 45 and highly sought-after.

The Grand Prix – San Jose (1963)

Though surf music is most often associated with the West Coast, Cuca Records documented the Midwest's early and mid-'60s prolific instrumental rock scene, which included several surf releases. The Grand Prix (Rick Berkanovic, Kenny Knoll, Don Longhurst, Jeff Hammer, and Bruce Cole) from Greendale, WI (just outside of Milwaukee) only cut one record for Cuca's subsidiary Sara label, but it is one of the best and more sought-after examples of the Midwest surf genre. Bruce Cole went on to play in several more influential Milwaukee rock bands such as Invasion, the Ricochettes, the Savoy's, the Van-Tels, and the Triumphs.

