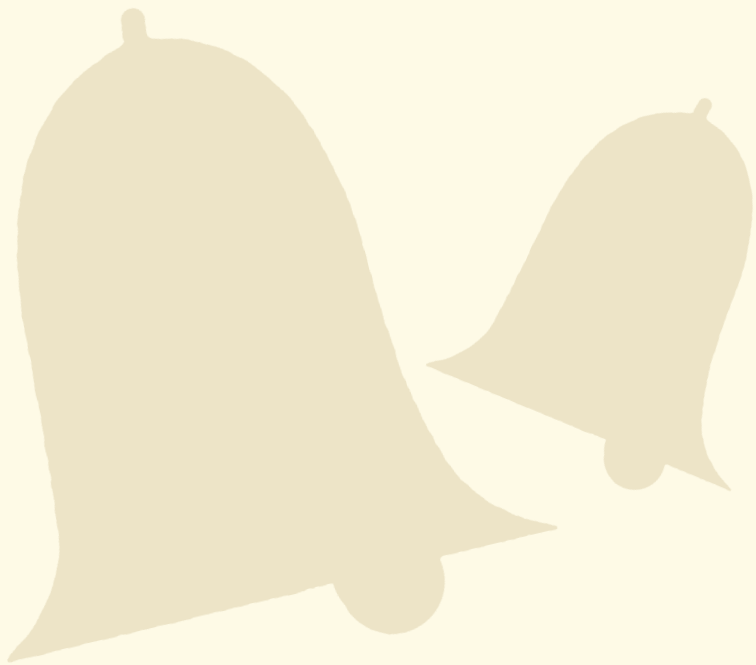


1956

Let The Bells Keep Ringing

by Bill Dahl





The rock and roll explosion didn't hamper activities at Bell Records in the slightest. Arthur Shimkin's New York-based label, bankrolled by the Simon and Schuster book publishing house, had thrived on well-produced covers since 1952. At the beginning, Bell focused primarily on pop material. Now there was a growing need for singers that could rock with reasonable efficiency.

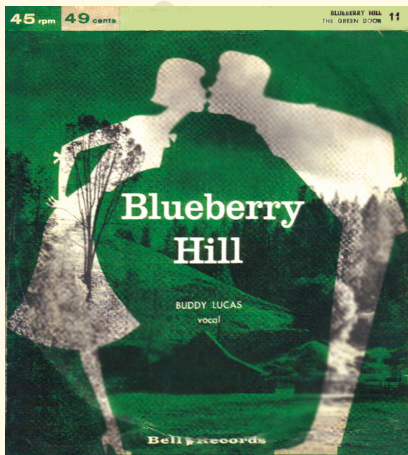
Bell's insistence on housing every release in a colorful picture sleeve enhanced its catalog (all the better to demand consumer attention in the unorthodox venues - drug



Buddy Lucas

stores, five-and-dimes, supermarkets - where the label placed its product), as did the attractive low list price (it rose in 1956 from 39 cents to a still reasonable 49 cents). Shimkin utilized his staff of arranger/orchestra leaders Jimmy Carroll, Michael Stewart, and Jimmy Leyden to crank out consistently competent covers that remained appealing to record buyers.

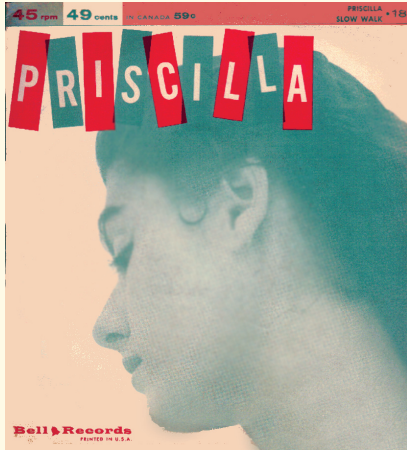
Particularly impressive was Bell's acquisition of veteran R&B tenor sax wailer Alonzo 'Buddy' Lucas. Born August 16, 1914 in Pritchard, Ala., Buddy was mostly raised in Stamford, Conn. Clarinet was his first instrument, but Lucas eventually switched to tenor sax and moved to New York City during the late '40s. By 1951,



Lucas was on Jerry Blaine's Jubilee label. He sailed to #2 on 'Billboard's' 'Juke Box' R&B chart in 1952 with his instrumental revival of the pop oldie *Diane*, its retro concept extending to several of his encores for the label.

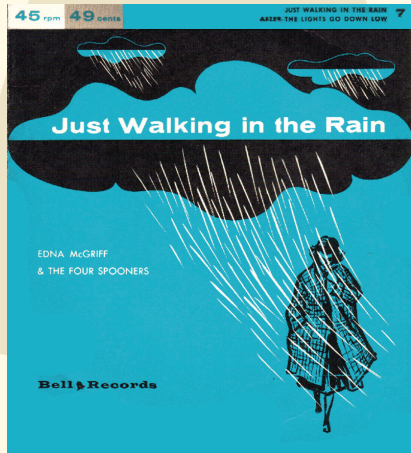
After moving to RCA in 1953, Buddy dug into bluesy vocal fare, sometimes duetting with Almeta Stewart. When RCA inaugurated its new Groove R&B subsidiary the next year, Lucas was one of its initial signings. He was also one of New York's most dependable

studio sidemen, doubling on harmonica. Buddy waxed a rocking two-sider for Savoy in 1955, then came to Bell, where he turned in brawny covers of the latest hits by Elvis and Fats Domino. The latter's '56 revival of *Blueberry Hill* was a monster on the Imperial label, and Buddy did it justice at Bell even without a Creole accent (ditto Fats' hit rendition of another oldie, *When My Dreamboat Comes Home*). New York R&B singer Eddie Cooley and The Dimples' catchy *Priscilla* was a hot pop item on the Royal Roost imprint in 1956; Buddy delivered a tasty cover of that one for Bell too.



Lucas and his Band of Tomorrow backed singer Edna McGriff on her 1952 R&B hit *Heavenly Father* for Jubilee, and they were reunited as labelmates at Bell in 1956. Edna had arrived on Shimkin's turf in '54, recording for his Favorite and New Disc logos before settling in at Bell. New

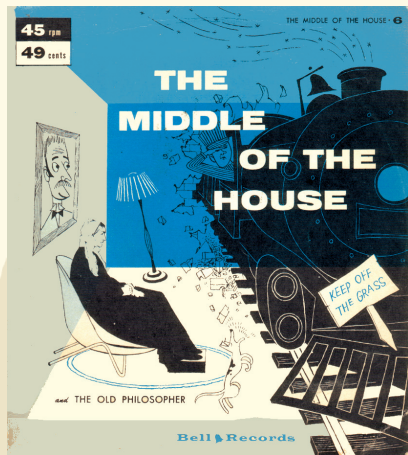
York deejay Jack Walker mentored the Harlem chanteuse, then got her a Jubilee contract in 1951 when Edna was only 16. McGriff's 1956 Bell assignments included a sweet treatment of Johnnie Ray's Columbia hit *Just Walking In The Rain*, first out by The Prisonaires on Sun in '53.





Edna McGriff

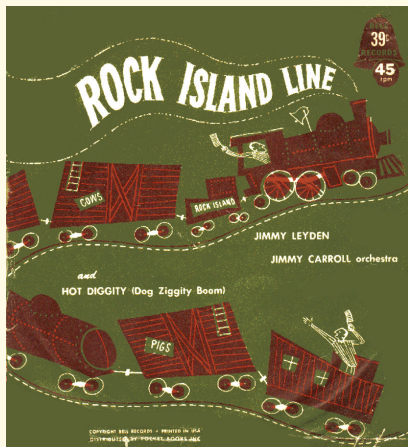
Long before he hosted the beloved TV game show ‘Hollywood Squares,’ Peter Marshall was half of a comedy act with Tommy Farrell that made a single for Bell: a cover of the *In The Middle Of The House*, a ’56 hit for Vaughn Monroe on RCA and Rusty Draper on Mercury. Farrell, born October 7, 1921 in Hollywood, was the son of actress Glenda Farrell and appeared in the films ‘Strangers on a Train’ and ‘Singin’ in the Rain’ as well as in many Westerns as a sidekick. He’d worked with other partners prior to teaming with Marshall, born March 30, 1926 in Huntington, W.V., in 1954. Actress Joanne Dru was Marshall’s older sister.



Marshall had previously worked with another comic foil too: Tommy Noonan. The pair came together during the late ‘40s and subsequently headlined nightclubs coast to coast. During the mid-‘50s, Marshall and new partner Farrell wowed crowds in New York, Chicago, Vegas, and L.A., but it wasn’t until Marshall went on his own that he was hired as host of ‘Hollywood Squares’ in 1966. For the next 15 years, the show was a sensation. After its cancellation, Marshall continued his successful acting career. Farrell died May 9, 2004 in Woodland Hills, Calif.



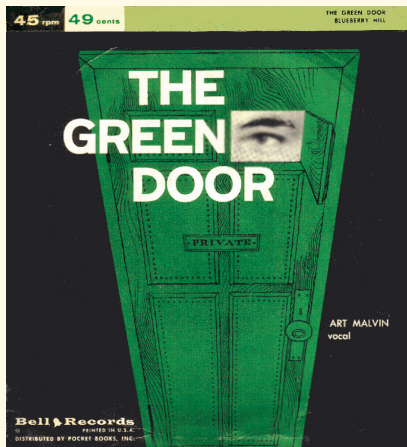
Peter Marshall and Tommy Noonan with Jayne Mansfield



Renowned in recent years as an Oregon winemaker, Jimmy Leyden was a prolific Bell artist who turned in a rousing reading of British skiffle pioneer Lonnie Donegan's 1956 hit *Rock Island Line* (out on Decca in the U.K. and London in the U.S.) as one of his 16 sides for Bell (Texas bluesman Lead Belly did the number first). Born in Springfield, Mass., Leyden had an older brother, Norman, who played clarinet in Glenn Miller's orchestra and helped reform the band after Miller's wartime death (Jimmy sang with the new incarnation). Jimmy found studio work as an orchestra leader during the early '50s before Bell hauled him in (Norman also ended up on the label). TV jingles were Jimmy's specialty later on. He'd settled into the life of a New York music teacher prior to relocating to Oregon in 1977.

Atlantic Records exec Jerry Wexler's recommendation got Barry Frank in at Bell in 1954, but the singer's versatility was what kept him around. Born in September of 1930, Frank apprenticed with Sammy Kaye's orchestra prior to going solo. As was often the case at Bell in 1956, Carroll led the band for Barry's rendition of The Flamingos' R&B hit

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I'll Be Home for Checker, authorship credited to wheelchair-bound Ferdinand 'Fats' Washington and Shreveport record shop owner Stan Lewis. Shimkin likely coveted the pop demographic that was gobbling up Pat Boone's cover of the wistful ballad on Dot more than doo-wop lovers.

Artie Malvin went all the way back to Bell's beginnings in 1952. Born July 7, 1922 in New York City, he'd sung with the orchestras of Claude Thornhill and Glenn Miller

during World War II. Like Frank, Malvin could handle any cover assignment Shimkin threw at him - including deejay Jim Lowe's loopy *The Green Door*, a '56 pop chart-topper on Dot. Malvin's later compositional triumphs included two Emmy Awards and a 1980 Tony Award nomination. He died June 16, 2006 in Century City, California.

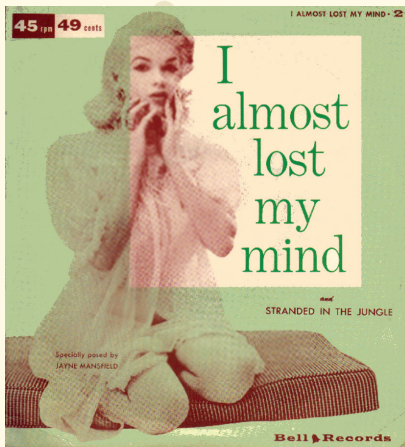
Guesting on 'The Colgate Comedy Hour' in 1954 and in an adaptation of 'Casey at the Bat' for 'Omnibus' the next year gave Elise Rhodes valuable television exposure, while her Bell rendition of Doris Day's '56 Columbia label juggernaut *Whatever Will Be, Will Be*



Be (*Que Sera, Sera*) with Carroll's orchestra gave her a profile on wax. Blues-rooted pianist Ivory Joe Hunter's original *I Almost Lost My Mind* paced the 1950 R&B hit parade on M-G-M, but it was Pat Boone's '56 Dot revival that inspired Dottie Evans' Bell cover. Dottie later made children's records with Tom Glazer.

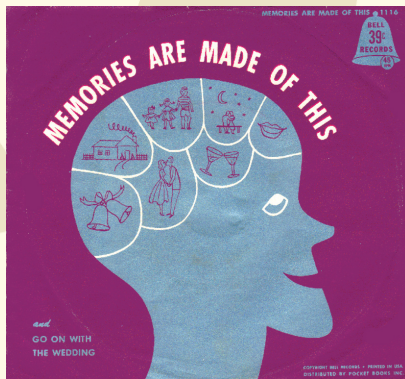
The duo of Ellie Russell and Michael Stewart were entrusted with covering Dean Martin's '56 Capitol pop chart-topper *Memories Are Made Of This*, one of 10 songs she waxed for the firm. Stewart led the band

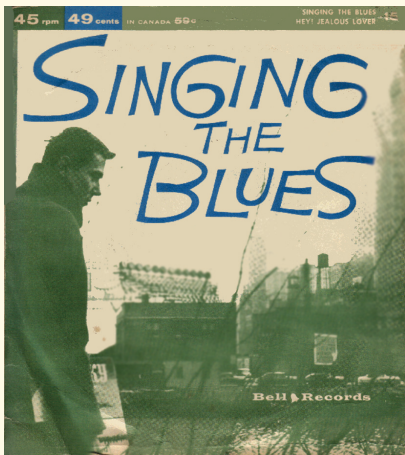
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behind Bruce Adams on his cover of the Melvin Endsley-penned *Singing The Blues*, which Columbia managed to wring 1956 #1 sellers out of for Guy Mitchell on the pop side and Marty Robbins in the country field. Stewart also waxed his own treatment of Johnny Cash's solemn Sun smash *I Walk The Line*, underscoring Shimkin's ability to pick a hit in any field.

Bill Dahl





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