

# GOLDEN GOOFERS



TIME  
LIFE  
MUSIC

*Tiny Tim*



## GOLDEN GOOFERS

One morning in March 1947 a group of talented musicians gathered in a Hollywood recording studio for the first session by a new Capitol act named Red Ingle and the Natural Seven. Ingle was a veteran saxophone player who had spent a couple of decades working with big bands like those of Jean Goldkette and Ted Weems, and in 1943 had joined the comedy outfit of Spike Jones.

Finding his *métier* through his penchant for comedy vocals and cornball patter, Ingle and fellow Jonesman Carling Washburne left to start their own band in 1947. They wanted to specialize in countrified takeoffs of pop songs, and for their very first record they had decided to mount an assault on the venerable 1933 movie song **Temptation**, which had recently been revived by Perry Como.

Everything was in place, except that Ingle's girl singer, who had the central part in the arrangement, hadn't shown up. Calls were made, and a sense of desperation mounted. By one of those fortunate coincidences that can sometimes result in comedy classics, one of Capitol's most talented young pop singers, Jo Stafford, was in the area. Having left the vocal group the Pied Pipers in 1944, Stafford had enjoyed several solo hits for Capitol, in styles ranging from jazz to folk. She also possessed a lively sense of humor and, feeling playful, she agreed to fill in for Ingle's missing singer.

The result was a wonderful Daisy Mae drawl and a saucy send-up subtitled *Tim-Tayshun*. The only problem arose when the Capitol bosses heard it and decided there was no way their star would have her name put on something so off-the-wall. Thus, when *Temptation* came

out, vocal credits read "Cinderella G. Stump"; according to Jo, the "G." stood for "Goofy." At the time, no one really expected the release to get to No. 1 on the charts, much less become a record that would be reissued again and again through the years.

This unlikely collaboration between an accomplished pop singer and a saxophone player whose résumé included performing with legendary cornetist Bix Beiderbecke (in the Goldkette band) illustrates one of the paradoxes of novelty records: some of the best and funniest were made by "serious" musicians with impeccable credentials. Another sax player, Freddy Martin, "Mr. Silvertone," led a sweet band that ranked behind only Guy Lombardo's in popularity and was known for its hit rendition of the Tchaikovsky *Piano Concerto in B Flat* (1941). Yet Martin's million-seller from 1949 was the squirrelly **I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts**. The vocalist was a young Merv Griffin, who in the 1970s and 1980s won far greater fame as a TV talk-show host.

Betty Johnson had an equally distinguished background, the well-known gospel-singing Johnson Family, who came out of the Charlotte, North Carolina, area to achieve national recognition in the late 1940s. At one of the group's RCA sessions, Betty met staff musician and composer Charlie Grean (who had written *The Thing* for Phil Harris); he soon became her manager and her husband, and helped her launch a solo career. By 1957 she was a regular on the Jack Paar television show and had a hit with **The Little Blue Man**. This science fiction parable owes equal parts to *Harvey* and *The Twilight Zone* and marks an appearance by TV personality Hugh

Downs as the Little Blue Man.

Then there was Jim Lowe, the former Springfield, Missouri, disc jockey who would create a national smash with the cryptic *Green Door* in 1956. But the year before that, he took an old children's playground song and created **Close the Door**, with a cute device borrowed from *The Thing* and a nod to the insect-ridden science fiction films of the day.

The Devotions, a six-man group that specialized in the "street-corner" style repopularized in the 1980s by Billy Joel, came out of Queens in New York in the early 1960s and made their way onto Delta Records. There they cut what they thought would be their best bet for a hit, *For Sentimental Reasons*, and backed it with an original, **Rip Van Winkle**. Unfortunately, another doo-wop group, the Clefstones, came out with a successful version of *For Sentimental Reasons*, and Delta began promoting the Devotions' B side—with little response. By 1964 Delta had sold the master tapes to Roulette, and it ended up on an oldies album. After some air play, however, demand for the song rose, and Roulette released *Rip Van Winkle* as a single. It never charted very high, but the record emerged as a classic of its style.

The team of Homer Haynes and Jethro Burns was another case where comic antics masked impressive musicianship. Though they had always had a penchant for humor, Homer and Jethro were known to their Nashville buddies as two of the most sophisticated musicians in town—much sought-after session men who were equally at home playing country, pop or jazz. But after their success with (*How Much Is*) *That Hound Dog in the Window* (1953), they turned to rustic lampoons of '50s hit parade fodder—from rock 'n' roll to country. One of their wittiest entries was **The Battle of Kookamonga** (1959), a retooling of folk singer Jimmy Driftwood's *The Battle of New Orleans*, a hit for Johnny Horton.

The mock-epic account of a group of boys sent to summer camp "to study nature's ways" was echoed a few years later in Allan Sherman's **Hello Mudduh, Hello**

other musical comedians deliberately set out to create sounds that nobody had ever heard before. The late Mel Blanc was the voice of Bugs Bunny, Tweety Bird, Sylvester the Cat, Yosemite Sam and dozens of other Warner Brothers cartoon characters. In 1951, though, his Tweety Bird catchphrase, **I Taut I Taw a Puddy Tat**, became so ubiquitous that he created a sort of aural cartoon around it, with both Tweety and Sylvester sharing the choruses.

Down in Nashville, one-hit wonder Leroy Pullins wrote and recorded **I'm a Nut** (1966), which featured the same marvelous brand of country scat singing that Roger Miller had popularized in the early '60s. And there's no way to really describe what is going on in Wally Cox's **There Is a Tavern in the Town** (1953). At the time of the recording, Cox was starring in a television series called *Mr. Peepers*, in which he played a mild-mannered science teacher, but the odd broken-field yodeling he does here dated from his earlier days as a variety comedian.

—Charles K. Wolfe



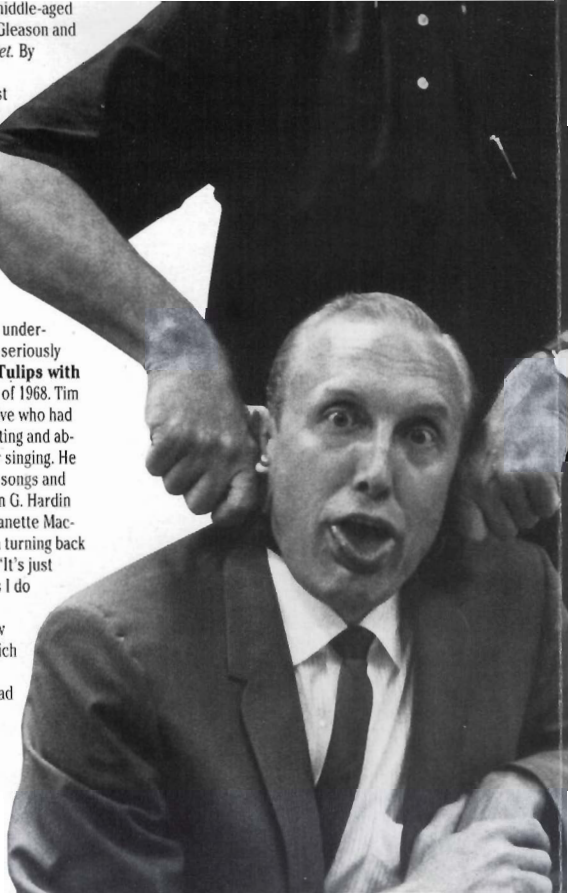
**Fadduh!** (1963). Sherman was actually a middle-aged comedy writer who had worked for Jackie Gleason and helped create the TV series *I've Got a Secret*. By 1963, he had gone out on his own and was recording for Warners. Working with pianist Lou Busch (a.k.a. Joe "Fingers" Carr), who adapted a music theme from Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours*, Sherman created a deadpan "letter from camp" along the lines of the kids' letters Art Linkletter used to feature regularly on his TV show. The upshot: a million-seller for Sherman and a Grammy for Best Comedy Performance in 1963.

One performer who never seemed to understand why audiences didn't take him more seriously was Tiny Tim, whose **Tip-Toe thru' the Tulips with Me** became a camp classic in the summer of 1968. Tim was really Herbert Khaury, a New York native who had spent many of his 38 years studying, collecting and absorbing the traditions of American popular singing. He could recite the histories of dozens of old songs and could do imitations of everyone from Byron G. Hardin ("Thomas Edison's favorite singer") to Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy. "I don't think I'm turning back the clock doing these old tunes," he said. "It's just that the spirits of the singers whose songs I do are living within me."

Tim spent years bouncing around New York clubs before he caught on in Greenwich Village in the mid-1960s and won spots on *Laugh-In* and *The Tonight Show*. *Tip-Toe* had originally been recorded by crooner Nick Lucas in 1929, and it came from the film musical *Gold Diggers of Broadway*.

While Tiny Tim's swooping falsetto had real links with old-time crooners,

*Homer and Jethro*



## DISCOGRAPHY

- 1. Temptation (Tim-Tayshun)** Red Ingle and the Natural Seven • *Music by Nacio Herb Brown, lyrics by Arthur Freed. Capitol 412 (1947). Vocals by "Cinderella G. Stump" (Jo Stafford) and Red Ingle. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 2. I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts** Freddy Martin and His Orchestra • *Music and lyrics by Fred Heatherton. RCA Victor 3554 (1949). Vocal by Merv Griffin. Courtesy of BMG Music/The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Direct Marketing, Inc.*
- 3. Cocktails for Two** Spike Jones and His City Slickers • *Music and lyrics by Arthur Johnston and Sam Coslow. Victor 1628 (1945). Vocal by Carl Grayson. Courtesy of BMG Music/The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Direct Marketing, Inc.*
- 4. There Is a Tavern in the Town** Wally Cox • *Anonymous. RCA Victor 5278 (1953). Courtesy of BMG Music/The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Direct Marketing, Inc.*
- 5. The Old Gray Mare Is Back Where She Used to Be** Carson Robison • *Music and lyrics by Carson Robison. Bluebird 0808 (1943). Courtesy of BMG Music/The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Direct Marketing, Inc.*
- 6. Oh! Susanna** The Singing Dogs • *Music and lyrics by Stephen Foster. RCA Victor 6344 (1955). Courtesy of BMG Music/The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Direct Marketing, Inc.*
- 7. I Taut I Taw a Puddy Tat** Mel Blanc • *Music and lyrics by Alan Livingston, Billy May and Warren Foster. Capitol 1360 (1951). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 8. Try** Stan Freberg • *Music and lyrics by Stan Freberg and Rubin Rakstin. Capitol 2029 (1952). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 9. Hot Rod Race** Tiny Hill and His Orchestra • *Music and lyrics by George Wilson. Mercury 5547 (1951). Vocal by Tiny Hill. Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.*
- 10. Close the Door** Jim Lowe • *Music and lyrics by Fred Ebb and Paul Klein. Dot 15381 (1955).*
- 11. The Little Blue Man** Betty Johnson • *Music and lyrics by Fred Ebb and Paul Klein. Atlantic 1169 (1958). Voice of Little Blue Man by Hugh Downs. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp.*
- 12. I Got a Wife** The Mark IV • *Music by Eddie Mascari, lyrics by Erwin Wenzlaff. Mercury 71403 (1959). Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.*
- 13. The Battle of Kookamonga** Homer and Jethro • *Music and lyrics by Jimmy Driftwood and J. J. Reynolds. RCA Victor 7585 (1959). Courtesy of BMG Music/The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Direct Marketing, Inc.*
- 14. Hello Mudduh, Hello Fadduh! (A Letter from Camp)** Allan Sherman • *Music by Lou Busch, lyrics by Allan Sherman. Based on Ponchielli's Dance of the Hours. Warner Bros. 5378 (1963). Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc.*
- 15. Ape Call Nervous Norvus** • *Music and lyrics by Jimmy Drake. Dot 15485 (1956). Ape calls by Red Blanchard.*
- 16. Downtown** Mrs. Miller • *Music and lyrics by Tony Hatch. Capitol 5640 (1966). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 17. Rip Van Winkle** The Devotions • *Music and lyrics by Raymond Sanchez. Roulette 4541 (1964). Produced under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Warner Special Products.*
- 18. The Old Philosopher** Eddie Lawrence • *Music and lyrics by Eddie Lawrence. Coral 61671 (1956).*

19. **I'm a Nut** Leroy Pullins • Music and lyrics by Leroy Pullins. Kapp 758 (1966).

20. **My Boyfriend Got a Beatle Hair-**

**cut** Donna Lynn • Music and lyrics by Jack Wolf and Bugs Bower. Capitol 5127 (1964). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.

21. **Pepino the Italian Mouse**

Lou Monte • Music and lyrics by Ray Allen and Wandra Merrell. Reprise 20106 (1963). Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc.

22. **I Love Onions**

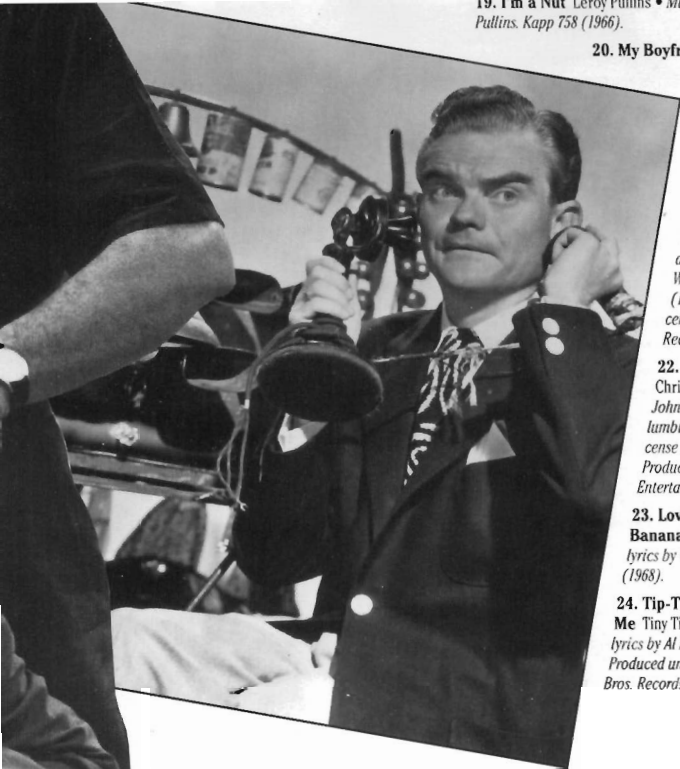
Susan Christie • Music and lyrics by John Hill and Don Cochrane. Columbia 43595 (1966). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

23. **Loving You Has Made Me Bananas**

Guy Marks • Music and lyrics by Guy Marks. ABC 11055 (1968).

24. **Tip-Toe thru' the Tulips with Me**

Tiny Tim • Music by Joe Burke, lyrics by Al Dubin. Reprise 0679 (1968). Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc.



*Spike Jones*

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- 23. Loving You Has Made Me Bananas** Guy Markes
- 24. Tip-Toe thru' the Tulips with Me** Tiny Tim



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