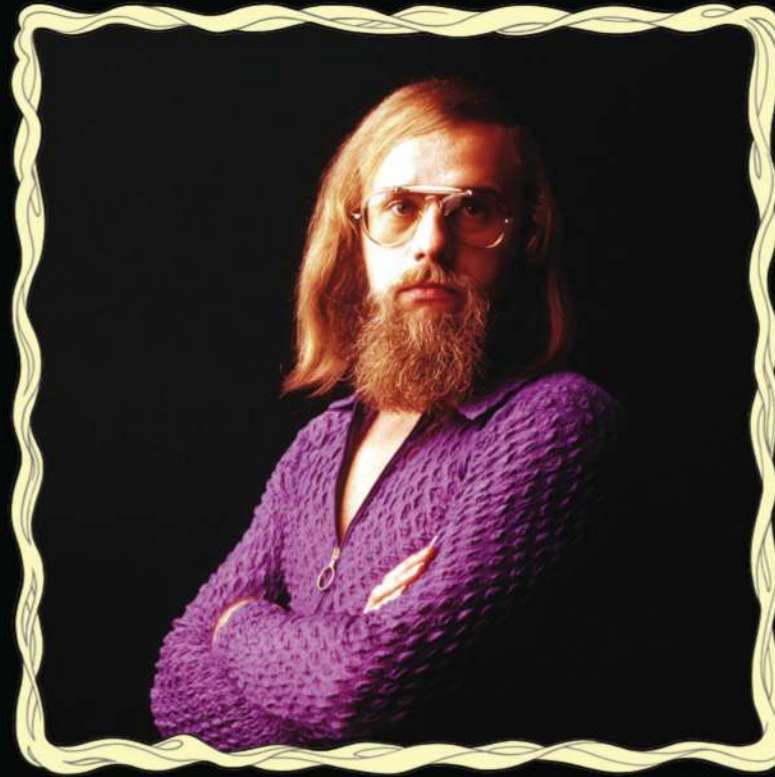


2^xHD

DENNIS COFFEY

HOT COFFEY
IN THE D

LIVE AT MOREY BAKER'S SHOWPLACE LOUNGE



DENNIS COFFEY Guitar **LYMAN WOODARD** Hammond B-3 organ **MELVIN DAVIS** Drums
Recorded in 1968 at Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge, Detroit, Michigan.

- 1. FUZZ** (8:17) **2. BY THE TIME I GET TO PHOENIX** (7:09)
3. THE LOOK OF LOVE (11:45) **4. MAIDEN VOYAGE** (7:06) **5. THE BIG D** (4:13)
6. CASANOVA (Your Playing Days Are Over) (7:04) **7. WADE IN THE WATER** (7:52)

Produced for release by ZEV FELDMAN and KEVIN GOINS
Executive Producer: GEORGE KLABIN | Associate Producer: ZAK SHELBY-SZYSZKO
Original recordings produced by DENNIS COFFEY and MIKE THEODORE

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(HCD-2024) Visit us online at www.resonancerecords.org. Find out more about Dennis Coffey at www.denniscoffey.com.

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EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS TO

Dennis Coffey, Melvin Davis and Mike Theodore

DEDICATED TO

The memory of LYMAN WOODARD



Celebrating an Unsung Guitar Hero

Back in February of 2016, my longtime friend and colleague Kevin Goins called me. Kevin is a record producer, radio host and journalist; an industry veteran. He told me he'd been in touch with guitar legend and Motown "Funk Brother" Dennis Coffey. Dennis had tapes recorded in 1968 live at a local Detroit club, Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge. The tapes featured Dennis with a soul jazz trio with organist Lyman Woodard and drummer Melvin Davis. Dennis was looking for a home for these recordings. My interest was piqued immediately, since I was already a Dennis Coffey fan.

For me, Dennis Coffey is one of the unsung heroes of the guitar in popular music. He is different from a lot of jazz and rock guitarists; he does his own thing and he has his very own sound. He's featured in the Grammy®-winning¹ 2004 feature-length documentary film, *Standing in The Shadows of Motown*, which tells the story of the brilliant but largely unsung session players, the Funk Brothers, who played on the famous Motown hits. Dennis even appeared on the iconic soul music television show, *Soul Train*, to support his own million-seller instrumental hit "Scorpio."

In my estimation, Dennis is one of the baddest cats ever; he just hasn't gotten his due as a soloist—until now. We've all been exposed to Dennis's guitar playing on a succession of timeless hits by immortals from the Temptations to Diana Ross & the Supremes to Edwin Starr to Freda Payne. And he had his own hit records. But he was mostly known by industry insiders because of his status as a Funk Brother playing in support of the biggest stars in the soul music arena.

In fact, Dennis has continued to play. But he's also been busy making music over the years in capacities other than as just a nonpareil guitar player. Dennis and his producing partner Mike Theodore discovered and produced the now-legendary Sixto Rodriguez, who has been immortalized in the 2012 Oscar®-winning documentary feature film, *Searching For Sugar Man*. And beginning in the mid- to late-'60s, Dennis and Mike, through their Theo-Coff Productions, produced and created arrangements for numerous soul, funk, rock and other popular music recordings for different labels in the decades since the heyday of Motown when it was still in Detroit.

Around 2010, at my other job at the late Fuel 2000 Records Inc., we began working with music business legend Clarence Avant to reissue a number of albums from his Sussex Records catalog. Among these were masters by Dennis Coffey. We released the album *Absolutely The Best of Dennis Coffey* in 2011. The album sold well. That album really made me a fan and helped me to recognize Dennis Coffey as the guitar genius he really is. And he has a history to share. I wanted to cast a light on that history here.

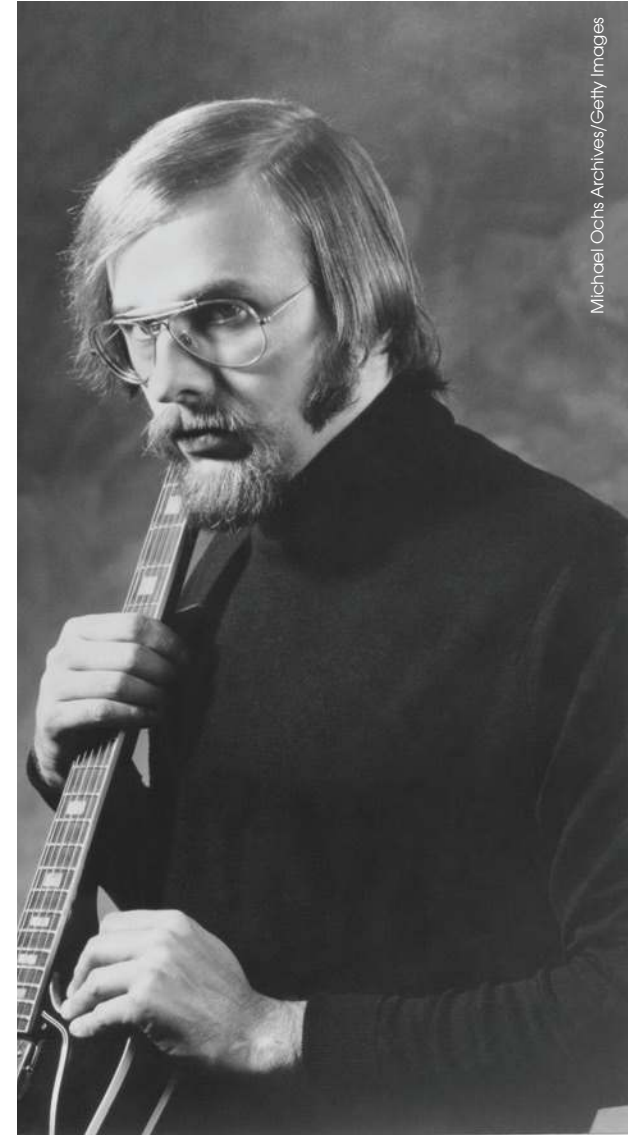
For this album, we've assembled a cast of voices to help tell Dennis's story and the story of his jazz/funk recordings, which you hear here. And I wanted the album package to be one of the most comprehensive collections of written and graphic material about Dennis that's ever been assembled. In this package, we're presenting essays by my fellow producer Kevin Goins and interviews that Kevin conducted with Mike Theodore, Dennis and Melvin Davis. We were also fortunate that associate producer and Detroit native Zak Shelby-Szysko was able to interview Detroit soul icon Bettye LaVette, who shares her recollections of the Detroit club scene in the late '60s, the era when this album was recorded at Detroit's Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge. Finally, I'm very pleased that we were able to sit down with the former chairman of Sussex Records, Clarence Avant, widely regarded as one of the fathers of black American music with a legendary 60-year career reaching into music, film (and even politics), and have him expound on Dennis and the Detroit music business in the '60s. This package also contains a number of rare photographs, including a couple by the acclaimed Detroit photographer and political activist, Leni Sinclair.

Very special thanks to Dennis, Mike Theodore and Melvin Davis for all of their time and support of this release. Lastly, I'd like to thank cartoonist Bill Morrison for designing this album's incredible cover art which we all collaborated on.

ZEVE FELDMAN

Los Angeles, September 2016

¹ The soundtrack album won the Grammy® Award for best Compilation Soundtrack Album.



Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

The Motor City's Premier Funk/Jazz Trio

Years before he set foot in the studios of Motown Records as a session player on several Temptations hits produced by Norman Whitfield ("Cloud Nine", "I Can't Get Next To You", "Just My Imagination"), as well as his own successful run as an artist/producer/arranger (the 1971 Top 10 smash, "Scorpio"), funk guitarist *par excellence* Dennis Coffey would be found gigging at Detroit's Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge with the Lyman Woodard Trio, which was comprised of Coffey, Woodard on Hammond B-3 organ and Melvin Davis—a songwriter and singer himself—on drums. This live collection, recorded at the venue in 1968, captured the trio on a funk/soul/rock tear with a jazz improv sensibility.

Dennis Coffey's history with Lyman Woodard begins in 1966 when Coffey was doing recording sessions with his colleague, guitarist and producer Don Davis, who would later helm several classics by the Dramatics, among others. Dennis remembers, "I was at Ed Wingate's Golden World label and ran into Don in their studio¹. Don was also a session guitarist and he had invited me to sit in with him, Lyman Woodard and George McGregor (Lyman's drummer at the time) at this club called the Frolic Show Bar. So Mike Theodore and I went there and I played with them. After the gig, Don told me he was leaving the trio to focus more on production work and offered me his spot, which I accepted immediately. The reason for the quick decision—which Lyman then approved—was the atmosphere of the venue. The Frolic wasn't a big place for dancing, but folks were there to just listen—which was rare. In fact, I had quit playing with Top 40 bands because I was tired of playing for people who were there just to dance and that would be it. So playing the Frolic provided an opportunity for us to do our funk thing for an audience who listened and appreciated our performances."

Mike Theodore chimes in, "Dennis was in a good spot at the time: the work we did together as Theo-Coff Productions, doing sessions for various producers and labels plus the gigs with the Lyman Woodard Trio at the Frolic, where they played four nights a week. It was at a time in Detroit when a musician could pay their rent, bills and even support a family on the money they earned working the recording studios and venues here in Detroit. There was also a great degree of fan loyalty as well—folks didn't just jump from band to band. Once an audience discovered a band they

liked, they'd come to see them regularly. This was the case with the trio."

As for Lyman Woodard, the Owosso, Michigan-born keyboardist was a child prodigy who attended jazz great Oscar Peterson's Advanced School of Contemporary Music. Peterson invited Lyman after the piano legend heard the young man perform in Detroit. By the early 1960s Woodard was drawn to the Hammond B-3 organ and thus embarked on woodshedding at clubs in the Flint and Jackson area before moving to the Motor City in 1965.

Months after Dennis Coffey joined the trio, drummer George McGregor left the group to focus on studio work in Detroit and was replaced by Melvin Davis, long a stalwart of the Motor City music scene. Melvin recalls, "I had recorded and written music for labels such as Fortune, Groovesville and others, as well as being a drummer. So when McGregor went on to do session production, I jumped at the chance to play with Dennis and Lyman. What I liked about being with the trio was Dennis is a tremendous guitarist and Woodard was an organist who came from a jazz sensibility like Jimmy Smith. So the three of us doing funk with the jazz vibe was very unique at the time."

The trio of Woodard, Coffey and Davis held their spot at the Frolic Show Bar until 1967, when they decided to look for another venue. Dennis remembers, "We wanted to move on from the Frolic to play in a different atmosphere and discovered Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge on Livernois Avenue in Detroit. Morey was a longtime owner of many clubs before he opened this place. The lounge was more suited for listening to music than dancing, which was fine with us. The stage was set up like a piano bar, except there wasn't a piano. But it was perfect for our trio. So Lyman set his organ and Melvin had his drums on stage, whereas I sat on a chair with my amplifier at my side. We played there once a week and always packed the house. Much of our audience were middle- to upper-class folks—judges, attorneys, businessmen and women—who just loved listening to our brand of funk, jazz, rock and soul. I even hooked up a strobe light to the stage and would hit the switch that shut off the main lights. The strobe would go off while we'd jam on stage. It blew their minds!"

Melvin adds, "Morey Baker was one of many club owners who not only hired us, but provided an opportunity for

many other musicians to play at venues, a tradition that continues to this day, especially in Detroit. What made the music industry thrive in the city wasn't just the various record labels that existed, but the clubs that were there where bands had the opportunity to present their music to loyal fans." Dennis recalls that "[t]he club scene was indeed the 'first line of defense' for a lot of us who played in that arena. Motown founder Berry Gordy even admitted to me some time ago that he believes that the label could not have been launched in any other city in the country, thanks to the several musicians he had met in the clubs and venues here in Detroit."

In 1968, the trio decided to record their live sets at Morey Baker's with the help of Mike Theodore and studio engineer Brian Dombrowski. Theodore explains, "The lounge was not far from Tera Shirma Studios where Dennis and I conducted recording sessions for our company, so Dombrowski agreed to do a live remote setup and record the trio. He used a half-inch four-track machine to capture all the instruments and later mixed the multitrack down to quarter-inch tape."

As for the song selections, two of them, "Fuzz" and "The Big D," were trio originals. Dennis remembers, "I played a Gibson Birdland guitar at that gig, which I still own today! I patched my guitar through a Vox Tone Bender fuzzbox and a Dunlop Cry Baby wah-wah pedal to get that tone you hear on both songs."



Lyman Woodard. ©Leni Sinclair

Jimmy Webb's "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" takes a different turn through the trio's filter. Whereas artists generally stayed true to the classic's original vibe as a ballad, Dennis, Lyman and Melvin create an uptempo, mellow vibe. As with the Bacharach/David gem, "The Look of Love," the interplay between Dennis and Lyman took the song to a whole other level. As Dennis explained, "What I did was, once I started playing with Lyman and Melvin, I'd go to the record store to seek out the most popular singles of the day. I'd listen to the 45s, create the chord sheets for Lyman and Melvin, since I'd already memorized the melody lines. Then we'd count off each tune and jump in. We did not rehearse the songs, which resulted in some solid soloing and improvisation work from all of us. That's why our repertoire and our arrangements were very unique and folks dug what we were doing."

While the group had taken Top 40 hits and turned them over on their heads, with Herbie Hancock's classic, "Maiden Voyage," the team stayed true to the composer's original arrangement. "That was one song which allowed us to lay out in a jazz vibe," explained Dennis. "I carried the melody with Lyman vamping on the organ and Melvin keeping the groove steady. Same with 'Wade in the Water.' Folks such as Ramsey Lewis made this spiritual a jazz hit and was another tune we kept in the jazz bag."

If there is one tune on this set that is the standout for me, it's "Casanova (Your Playing Days Are Over)," a Top 10 R&B smash from late 1967 for the Chicago-based Ruby Andrews, who had cut the song in Detroit with producer/arranger Mike Terry at Tera Shirma Studios. "That was one of the several records I had played on when I was doing session work," explained Dennis, "so I knew the song inside and out. Between Lyman and me, we soloed back and forth while Melvin held down the beat, which went from slow to funky depending on that part of the song."

The trio's live recordings from Morey Baker's helped the group and their colleague Mike Theodore land more work in the studios as well as garnering a record deal. "The group was signed to a label called Maverick Records that was run by music manager, Clarence Avant²," remembers Mike Theodore. "We recorded an album, *Hair and Thangs*, which I produced, and had a minor hit with our version of the Isley Brothers' iconic 'It's Your Thing.' After Maverick's parent company, MGM Records, shut down the label's operations, Avant hired Dennis and me to work for his then-new label, Sussex Records. We cut the hit, 'Scorpio' and we produced the band, Gallery³ for Sussex, as well."

Davis also benefited from his association with the trio and these live recordings. Melvin recalled, "Mike and Dennis produced some of my vocal work for Amy/Mala/Bell Records—'This Love Was Meant to Be' and 'Love Bug Got a Bear Hug.' Both singles were number one tunes on Detroit radio. I also wrote songs for some of the artists they produced, artists such as Lonette McKee. Dennis and I went on to do some work for the Invictus/Hot Wax label⁴. He played on the sessions while I sang lead on the 8th Day hit, 'You Got to Crawl Before You Walk.'"

As for Lyman Woodard, he moved on from working with Theodore, Coffey and Davis to form a new group, the Lyman Woodard Organization, which, in 1975, cut an excellent album, *Saturday Night Special*, for the Detroit-based jazz label, Strata Records. In addition, he served as a musical director for various Motown acts such as Martha Reeves & the Vandellas. Lyman continued to record as a jazz artist until his death in 2009. After his passing, the Lyman Woodard Organization of the Arts was launched in his honor to help preserve the great works he had created.

Both Dennis and Melvin continued their studio work and gigs until the 1980s, when the studio scene transitioned toward more keyboard- and drum-machine-driven music. Both men got day jobs—Dennis at the Ford Motor Company and Melvin with the U.S. Postal Service. But in the years to come, musicians began to experience a resurgence of live gigs in clubs and venues around Detroit. This resurgence was accompanied by—and fueled by—a rediscovery of Dennis's and Lyman's earlier recordings engendered by the CD reissue boom of the 1990s, which resulted in massive interest in their work in the U.K. via the Northern Soul scene, a very influential movement in the U.K. from the '60s on.

Today, both men have retired from their non-music jobs and have devoted their time to creating music again. In the last several years, Dennis has performed regularly at a number of Detroit venues, including the legendary Baker's Keyboard Lounge⁵. These days, he holds a weekly residency at Detroit's Northern Lights Lounge every Tuesday night. In addition, he's made appearances at national festivals such as the Texas-based SXSW (South by Southwest). He and Mike Theodore also continue to write and record new music via their Theo-Coff Production Company. As for Melvin, he launched the Rock Mill label and has released albums independently. He also fronts a rock and soul band and tours, as well.

All three men—Dennis, Melvin and Mike—look back fondly to the trio years. "It was a great time for us to be able to not only play what we enjoyed, but to see audiences come and listen intently," said Dennis. "That is something I will always remember." Melvin remembers, "All of us—Dennis, Mike, Lyman and myself—had benefited from working together in many forms and collaborations. That is something which lasted for several years, even when Lyman went on and brought in new players for the trio after Dennis and I became more focused on making records." Mike added, "It was great to observe the trio, gigging in clubs such as Morey Baker's. They always had a packed audience who appreciated the music they were playing. Dennis, Melvin and Lyman had a great time doing what they loved."

The live set here is a great example of the energy and vibe that prevailed when the Messrs. Coffey, Woodard and Davis held forth at Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge back in the '60s, as described by all three men in these notes. It is indeed a funky brew that came steaming out of the Motor City thanks to Dennis Coffey, Lyman Woodard and Melvin Davis.

KEVIN L. GOINS

July 12, 2016, New York City

The writer thanks Dennis, Mike, Melvin, and everyone at Resonance.

KEVIN L. GOINS is a music journalist/executive. He has authored liner notes for Earth Wind & Fire, Nancy Wilson, Melba Moore and more. Kevin also hosts the Internet radio series, "Soulful Conversations."

1 Golden World Records and their facilities were later acquired by Motown.

2 Clarence Avant is a well-known record executive, radio station owner and film producer. For many years, he has been known informally in the music industry as the godfather of black music.

3 Gallery was a Detroit-based '70s soft-rock outfit known best for their 1972 million-seller single, "Nice To Be With You," which was produced by Dennis Coffey and Mike Theodore.

4 Invictus/Hot Wax was owned by the songwriting powerhouse trio, Holland-Dozier-Holland.

5 No relation to Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge, where these recordings were made.

Dennis Coffey Reminisces with Kevin Goins

KEVIN GOINS: Describe Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge. Where was it? How long was it in business? What do you remember about it?

DENNIS COFFEY: The only thing I know about it is that it was located on Livernois in Detroit between 6 and 7 Mile. Lyman Woodard, Melvin Davis and I had decided we were going to leave the Frolic and look for another place to play. Morey Baker's was like a piano bar, so we went up there and played one night for an hour. Morey hired us on the spot. And Baker's Keyboard Lounge was down closer to 8 Mile and Livernois so you had Baker's Keyboard and then a mile and a half down you had Morey Baker's. Sometimes they would get confused—the different places.

So Morey Baker was no relation to the Baker's who ran Baker's Keyboard Lounge?

Correct—as far as I know, anyway.

Who was Morey Baker?

I'd heard he owned a club earlier, but I heard that after-the-fact just the other day. So other than the fact that he was a bar owner, I don't know much about him. Morey's was an interesting venue, though. Among the clientele were a lot of upscale folks: judges, lawyers and what have you. And back in those days, if you went another mile and a half down the road you'd be outside of the city of Detroit. Morey was there every night and he was fine to work for. That's what I remember. We used to do all kinds of things to make the show exciting. We were set up in what had been a piano bar. I rigged the stage so I had a strobe light with a footswitch to turn the house lights off. We'd be in the middle of a psychedelic funk thing and I'd turn the lights off and turn the strobe light on and we were rocking. The people went crazy. They didn't know what the hell that was!

In general, what was the Detroit club scene like in the mid-to-late 1960s? I know, for every legal club there were hundreds of after-hours joints.

Usually the after-hours joints were after the legal joints closed, at least the ones I went to. Some of them were quite elaborate. They had gambling and all kinds of stuff in the after-hours clubs. But Detroit is still the same way. It's always been a tremendous music town and I'm referring to a music scene where the musicians focus on playing the music for the audiences to listen to. The musicians weren't

there to provide background music. And the audiences came to listen and support the music. So it's always been a tremendous music town. And I know Berry Gordy told me himself a couple of years ago that he could not have started Motown in any other city but Detroit because of the talent he found here.

Absolutely. And never mind the dozens of record labels that existed, which is another story altogether. How did the trio come together?

Back in the day I was doing a lot of sessions at Golden World and other studios. One day at Golden World, I ran into Don Davis, a studio guitar player, and Mike Theodore and I used Don on some of the sessions we were producing. I ran into Don at a session one day and he invited me to come down to the Frolic. He said, "Why don't you come down and sit in?" So Mike Theodore and I went down there and I sat in with the band. At the time the band was made up of George McGregor on drums and Lyman Woodard on keyboards. The room was packed and the crowd really liked what I was doing. So Don said, "Hey, I'm leaving the band to devote more time to production, so maybe I'll ask Lyman if he's interested and if you'd be interested in being picked up for the gig." So he talked to Lyman. It wasn't a big money gig. But that wasn't the point of it all. I was just fascinated by what we could do. I had quit Top 40 bands because I was tired of doing cover after cover. People didn't care anyway. Amazingly, the Frolic was just a club that wasn't that big and there was no dance floor. But the people were really listening. You played funk and they liked it. I said, "Wow! To actually be able to be creative and do instrumentals would be a great shot." So I agreed to do the gig. It was four nights a week and that's how that all started at the Frolic.

And the Frolic; was that a club that Don Davis owned?

No. That was a club owned by Bennie Gastman and his brother Hyman. They also owned another Frolic in a different location, too.

That is indeed unique because of what you mentioned with folks just being able to sit and listen to live music because at that time, the requirement for most bands was that you had to A) know a good bit of R&B music, and B) be able to get people dancing. If you didn't have either one, you weren't gonna get the gig.

Right. That was true even for the Top 40 bands. This was the first time where I looked around and I said, "Wow! This is amazing!" I used to go down to the 'Drome [the Hippodrome Club] and hear Wes Montgomery. The 'Drome was a few miles down. And I got to know Pat Martino. I went to see him at the 'Drome. So that thing was just happening; music being played just for listening. And back then they also had the Minor Key, which was an after-hours place, doing jazz.

You're mentioning these clubs I've never heard of before. Of course, I've heard of the 20 Grand. I've heard of the Flame Show Bar. And through you, Morey Baker's and, of course, Baker's Keyboard. But these other places are just new to me.

There were a lot of different clubs like that. What's interesting is I'm playing at the Frolic Show Bar in the middle of the summer and they didn't have air conditioning back then. So on the breaks we're standing out on the street. And here's my cousin, Doug Stewart, playing guitar with the Red Dawson Trio at the next bar down the street from me! So we're out there talking on our break. And it's funny because I taught my cousin how to play guitar back in the day and we used to play together. And here I am playing in an organ trio at this particular location and then I look out the door and here he is playing about three or four doors down playing with an organ trio as well.

So it was Lyman Woodard on organ, you on guitar, when did Melvin Davis come into the picture?

After about a month or two with George McGregor, for whatever reason he left. And Melvin came on board. I think maybe Lyman had known Melvin from before. And also Melvin could sing a few songs each night, you know he's a really good singer. In fact, he's out singing now. So that added a whole other dimension to it. But he was just such a funky drummer. Man, it was amazing.

You ain't lying! For a gig recorded at a club, what equipment did you use, because these recordings sound pristine.

We used a sound engineer who came in and recorded those on a four-track recorder. Brian Dombrowski was a sound engineer and we hired him to bring his gear in and record us.

It sounds like it may have been cut on maybe an Ampex or another reel-to-reel machine. And it was well-miked.

Yeah, it was a reel-to-reel. Brian had to wheel it in. And at the time we met him, I believe he was working at Tera Shirma Studios.

So was he one of Ralph Terrana's [owner of Tera Shirma Studios] **guys?**

I know he knew him. But Milan Bogdan was Ralph's main guy back in the day. I thought I met Brian there, but I don't know if he actually worked for the studio or not. But I think that's where we met him.

Let's talk a little bit about the songs. One of them was called "Fuzz." Here you are wailing on the lead! Was that an original?

Yes. That was written by Melvin, Lyman and myself.

What guitar did you use? You used mostly Gibsons at the time, right?

Here's what's interesting. The Gibson Birdland that I bought new in 1963 is what I used on that album and I am playing every Tuesday night with that same guitar at the Northern Lights Lounge. Been there for seven years. Same guitar. It's got so much funk baked into it, it almost plays itself! And you look at the guitar, you can see that the finish has all these hairline cracks in it and everything, so all that bar smoke is all embedded in there. But what a tone!

You're almost afraid to restore it because it may take all the funk away!

Yeah, but what I had to do was—pickups degrade because they have magnets in them. So about six or seven years ago, I replaced them with '57 Humbuckers. That's what Gibson uses now. So the pickups have been replaced to bring it back to its original sound.

Let's talk about that song in particular, "Fuzz." In your auto-biography *Guitars, Bars and Motown Superstars*, you talked about toys. So what was the toy that you used to get that "Fuzz" sound?

I believe that was probably a Vox Tone Bender, which was the first fuzztone I used. Plus a Dunlop Cry-Baby wah-wah pedal. And the other thing I used back in those days on sessions, but not on gigs, was the Echoplex. You can hear that on "In the Rain" with the Dramatics. That was the Echoplex.

The other tune on here is called "The Big D." Was that another original as well?

Yes.

Okay, so two originals. I look at the songs, "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" and "The Look of Love," which were hits at the time. Of course, you play the hits of the day. But what I liked about what you did with these particular songs is the three of you made them your own. It's like "By the Time I Get to Phoenix"—you've always heard it as a ballad; very down-tempo. Sometimes, it's even depressing. In fact, the only uptempo version I ever heard until I heard yours was from the late Billy Stewart. Billy cut it maybe three or four months before he died. But nonetheless, what I liked about your version is that you kept it uptempo. Almost light. But you still stayed within the melody line.

You see, how that group operated—once I got in with the band and started doing their stuff and then brought things of my own—is basically I would go and get the records of the songs I wanted to do. And I'd do arrangements. I'd give Lyman and Melvin chord sheets—I would already have memorized the melodies—and we'd just count it off and go. We never rehearsed. That's why those songs became so unique to our sound, because that's what we did. That was the whole thing of the group. When you're talking about a group, we were playing back in the day, on the edge of that psychedelic thing because of the fuzz tone and wah-wah pedal. Plus we were doing "Maiden Voyage," which was a jazz thing. And we had the funk thing. And we also opened up at the Grande Ballroom for the MC5—me, Lyman and Melvin.

Kick out the jams!

Yeah, I had to go out in the parking lot it was so damn loud. But we started off with "A Day in the Life" by the Beatles—the Wes Montgomery approach—and they went crazy for it. They liked it.

Of course that whole *A Day in the Life* album by Wes is just, it's a masterpiece.

I got to know Wes personally. I used to go see him all the time and talk to him. What a great guy and just an amazing player.

And left us way too damn soon.

He sure did.

You mention about "Maiden Voyage," which again,

stayed true to Herbie Hancock's arrangement, but done your own way. But I have to tell you, the one song I always zeroed in on was "Casanova (Your Playing Days Are Over)."

Okay.

I know that was a huge hit on the R&B charts back in the 1960s.

Not my version, but the vocal version.

Yeah, Ruby Andrews.

I did sessions for Ruby, so I might have even played on the session because I think George McGregor might have been involved in that, I'm not sure.

It was cut in Detroit at Tera Shirma Studios.

I very possibly was on the original session. It was funny because there was another thing we used to play "Gotta Pay the Price" by Al Kent. And that was me playing the melody on the original session. So when I would play it at the club and they heard that, right away they knew that was me on that record.

Right. But getting to "Casanova," this was one of those songs that became a top record in major cities, but it wasn't all at the same time. It was like first it became a hit in Detroit, then in Chicago, then in Memphis. It was like it traveled. So what inspired you guys to pick that tune to do the jam on? I always loved it. That's the one song I have on repeat.

I was the guy who played the lead on most of the songs. Lyman played a few things that he already had. But most of the newer stuff I ended up picking the songs that I liked and that was one of them. We ended up doing that because if I was going to learn the melody, I had to at least like the song. Anyway, we didn't have anybody telling us what to do. We didn't tell ourselves what to do. We just did it.

I'll tell you, the breakdown where it goes "It's all over, Casanova," which you guys kind of held back until the last minute of the song...you guys could have just looped this sucker for another 5 minutes!

We always believed in these recordings. It was how we played then. It was just like the Sixto Rodriguez thing. We believed in that from the beginning. And that's from the same time period.



Lyman Woodard at Cobb's Corner in Detroit, MI (1979).
Photo by David A. Franklin/davidfranklinphoto.com

Back in 2003 when you gave me these recordings, I gave my CD to Joshie Armstead, who wrote “Casanova.” And I’ll tell you this: Joshie heard it and she loved it. She absolutely loved what you guys did.

That’s cool. That was such a crowd pleaser. Once we got into that tune it was all over, man. I mean, they just loved that one.

Well, Joshie lives in New York City; Upper West Side. Back in the late ‘90s and early 2000s is when we first used to hang out. And when I played your CD in my office, she just kind of gave me that look. So I’m like, “Just take the CD. Just take it!”

Guilty you into giving her the CD, which is what happened when I played on the Jimmy Fallon Show with the Roots band. My wife guilted the NBC guy into giving her his actual corporate badge—the peacock badge.

So how long did the trio stay together?

We were at the Frolic for a year or two and we were at Morey Baker’s for a few years. Then there were also spin-offs, where Mike Theodore and I recorded stuff with Melvin. We also recorded stuff Lyman had written for Lonette McKee. So we were trying to use the guys, you know. We produced Melvin Davis doing “Love Bug” for Bell Records’s subsidiary, Mala. So we were trying to spread it around. I mean, they were our buddies. It just ran its course at Morey Baker’s. The guys got other things to do. For a while, I was at Morey Baker’s with two other guys, but it wasn’t really the same.

So what year would you say you started at Morey Baker’s and what year would you say you all just drifted into other things?

I’m thinking we probably started in 1967 through 1968-69.

That sounds about right because 1969 was when you guys started working with Clarence Avant so that would make sense. But Morey Baker’s was a piano bar that turned into a funk palace. Who knew?

Yeah, you’d go into the parking lot of Morey Baker’s and it was nothing but Continentals and Cadillacs in that parking lot. When you went in the front door they had a hat check person there and everything. And the piano bar was all the way in the back of the place. There was a piano bar

up there, without a piano, but it was a piano bar setup. Lyman put his organ on that stage and I’d put my amp on a chair on that stage. I sat down to play and then Melvin was behind us playing.

You and Mike Theodore were very busy with Theo-Coff Productions, especially with the record that became an important Northern Soul classic “Dearly Beloved” by Jack Montgomery. Can you give me a brief history behind that session?

Here’s the backstory to it. I was working in Golden World’s studio. Mike Theodore was hanging around there too. Don Davis had a song by the Holidays, “I’ll Love You Forever.” Joe Hunter had done the rhythm tracks and somehow I was talking to Don and he wanted to put strings on it. I was attending Wayne State University majoring in music harmony and theory, so I wrote the string parts out and brought in some students I knew from Wayne to do the string parts. So I’m doing this strings session and we got the thing done and overdubbed. It came out on the record and the strings on it were Wayne State University students. Mike Theodore sees me do that and Don Mancha approached Mike and said he had this deal with Scepter to do this “Dearly Beloved” thing and he wanted the whole orchestra. Mike Theodore had done rhythm sections. I had done rhythm sections and Mike did a lot of writing for horn sections, as well. So he sees me doing this string date and he says to me, “Man, maybe we oughtta partner up on this thing and you can do the strings and I can do the horns, and I know you can do the rhythm and everything.” And I said “yeah, I can do strings, I’m an expert.” I’d only done one! [Laughs] So that became our journey and our approach to the whole arranging thing Mike and I used to do. He lived in Highland Park and we used to go over to his house. He had an old piano and I would bring my guitar and we’d have these big score pads and we would score horns and strings and rhythm and all of that. And we would hand them off to copyists. That’s how we operated back in those days.

Wow. And as a result, a great record that came out on Scepter. And whether it charted or not, who knows, but thanks to our friends across the pond, it’s what they call a Northern Soul classic.

Like “Open the Door to Your Heart” by Darrell Banks. I played on that record. What a classic that was over there!

What are you up to today?

The current part of this whole story is that two miles away from Motown, I’m now working at Northern Lights Lounge and we’re packing the place every Tuesday night. It’s my home base. I’ve got guest singers three nights a month and then I do my regular thing. My organ player just bought a brand new B-3, so he’s up there three nights a month it’s like the trio with Drew Schultz on drums, who was on the road with The Four Tops. I’ve got Phil Winfield from Windsor on organ with the B-3 and myself on guitar. And three times a month we have different singers. Then the fourth time, it’s just me and the band. I pound away with Facebook and my website and Twitter and all the other stuff. We’re getting good crowds all the time. It’s been 7 years.

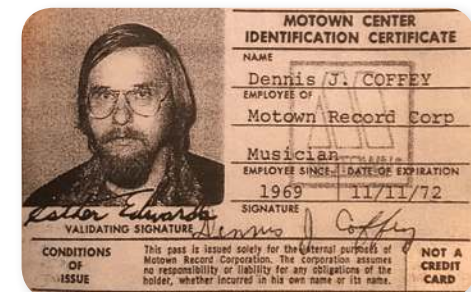
I’ll tell you this, when Drew announced that he was playing with you, he was so geeked out... I mean, he was just over the moon.

And he listens. Because I was the one who said, “Drew, you’ve got three years of college at N.Y.U. You’ve gotta finish that or it’ll do you no good. But that’s a good back up thing you have to do.” And he listened to me and went back up to New York and got his degree.

One last question I was going to ask you is, during the Morey Baker’s period, did any of your compadres from The Funk Brothers ever come by to jam?

Only one time. When Lyman couldn’t make it. So I was mentioning it to my buddy James Jamerson and he said, “Well, I’ll come in and play bass and we’ll get it done.” And he did. Jamerson had a little dinky tape recorder sitting in the back of the stage, but that was the only time, when Jamerson came and played with us.

Dennis Coffey and Kevin Goins recorded this interview on July 7, 2016.



Courtesy of Dennis Coffey

Talking about the D with Mike Theodore

KEVIN GOINS: Describe what the Detroit club scene was like during the mid- to late-1960s from your perspective?

MIKE THEODORE: At that time it seemed to me that musicians could generally make a living working in a club. Because many of the bands at that time, who were good bands, successful, they would book into a club for months at a time. It was unlike today where a band is lucky to get one night and some of them even have to pay to play, you know what I mean? So the good bands were working all the time. It was a steady job. They could raise a family. People would go back to the clubs repeatedly. They didn't demand a new band every night. In fact, they preferred to go see their favorite band over and over again. So that's the way it was.

At that time, Dennis had been playing guitar around town forever; he'd been in bands since he was a kid. The two guys who were with him—Melvin Davis and Lyman Woodard—were people that we worked with in the studios. As a matter of fact, Dennis and I produced some music on Melvin, who was a really good singer.

Morey Baker's was close to the studio that we hung out at, Tera Shirma. It was really just down the street, which was convenient when we were working in the studio. When Dennis and the guys would play at Morey Baker's they would draw really good crowds every night there. It seemed like there was some buzz about the live performances they were doing, which was what inspired us to go ahead and do some live recording there. So towards that end, we had gotten a half-inch four-track recorder. The engineer we had was Brian Dombrowski. He was one of the guys who brought the remote gear. Brian was a local musician and engineer around here in those days. He went on to become an attorney and I haven't talked to him in a while. But that was the main thing that prompted us to start recording the group—there was something happening at the club. The people were interested and the music was great. And it was an inspirational kind of a set; you'd go in there and have a good time. And it was the kind of club you didn't dance in. You just listened. He had an audience that was captivated and just came to hear him play. They weren't coming there to dance, they were coming there to hear you. That was the thing.

That's what Dennis said. It was kind of unique,

because he was used to being in bands where the number one priority was to get people dancing, whereas with Morey Baker's, it was really not set up that way, but rather to see that folks were coming there to listen to him and Lyman and Melvin. Now when you say there was quite a buzz going, do you think it was because of the trio and the music they were bringing to the stage?

Absolutely. Whatever the magic was at the moment, it was drawing people in. So the audience grew by word of mouth. More and more people would tell other people and they would come. That's basically it. There wasn't any big advertising campaign. There was no radio. Just people were drawn. So we just decided to record the group and that was kind of a jumping-off point and later on that became a demo to get a recording, which led to our doing that first album, *Hair and Thangs*.

Yep. On the Maverick label.

Right. That was kind of a demo in a broad way because it gave us a vehicle to show us what was going on, you know what I mean? So let's say that inspired the first real album with a major label.

What I said to Dennis is that I was so amazed with the overall sound quality of the live tapes. The way the instruments were miked, the way it was mixed. This was a live album. Ya'll could have put it out in the 1960s.

It didn't draw any attention then. But it had served as a demo. And we got a deal out of that. One of the key tunes we had recorded back then was "It's Your Thing," which was redone in the studio and that became the first single for Dennis. So this was really the springboard to that. And it sat in our archive, if you will; on our shelves. These tapes that we've moved across the country back and forth all over the place. These tapes were still here and one day recently we decided to play them and we said, "My God, let's see if anybody's interested," because it's a time capsule with really good music.

Now when you say the tapes, are they the half-inch 4-track?

We had both, the half-inch four-tracks and the quarter-inch

mix-downs. So for some reason, those tapes hung around. So much has been lost over the last 50 years, I couldn't even begin to tell you. As far as tapes and scores and you name it. A lot of that stuff has just disappeared in moves. Who knows where it ended up?

But it's great that you guys hung on to these tapes, because they're gems.

I've always had faith in it over a lot of years. A little bit earlier when I was living in New Jersey and I had a studio in New York, we tried to kind of bring them up to date a little; to do a little bit of a new mix and digitize them and what have you. And that was what I guess got the ball rolling with Zev.

Well, when Zev Feldman and I—we've known each other well over 20 years—and when Dennis came to me when I had been hired and promoted to be a vice president of an indie label here, and Dennis said "Kev, you think you could help me find somebody who would be interested in the stuff that Melvin Davis and Lyman Woodard and I did?" And the label I thought of immediately was Resonance, where Zev is a producer and executive. So I called Zev up and said Dennis Coffey is interested and connected the two and here we are!

Okay, well, thank you!

Mike Theodore and Kevin Goins recorded this interview on July 8, 2016.



Dennis Coffey and Mike Theodore



Melvin Davis

Being There at the Birth of Detroit Soul

KEVIN GOINS: Describe what the scene was like back then with you and Dennis and Lyman jamming at Morey Baker's? What was the atmosphere like?

MELVIN DAVIS: Oh, it was great. Actually Lyman is probably one of the better organists that came out of the city of Detroit; he played a Hammond B-3. Of course, Dennis is a very accomplished guitar player. And I was an accomplished drummer and singer. So we made a great trio. And we had packed houses every night. We played every weekend to a packed house. From the Frolic Show Bar to Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge to Cobb's Corner. We worked together for several years and we always had a packed house.

That's amazing. Because Mike Theodore said that a musician could actually earn a living, support a family, pay the bills, just from doing gigs in the Detroit area.

Well, I don't know if that's true or not. [Laughs] I mean, you're making what, 30 or 40 bucks a night, working three or four nights a week.

I was thinking, yeah, you might have to have a salary job somewhere, either within the automotive industry, or if you happen to luck out and get hired by Berry Gordy, or in your circumstance, the late great Mike Hanks of D-Town Records, whose catalog I've always admired and respected.

Well I was also with Fortune. I was with Groovesville. I was with Golden World. And of course with Dennis Coffey and Mike Theodore. But then I went on to be with Invictus and was the lead singer with a group called 8th Day. I've always been a writer and a recording artist as well as a drummer with several situations. I was a Motown staff drummer. I was Smokey Robinson's personal drummer for two and a half years and played with many, many Motown acts. I was the Temptations' first drummer. I played with Martha Reeves & the Vandellas. So I've been a drummer in many different situations, but at the same time I was always writing and singing and recording. There were many other artists I wrote for like Lonette McKee on her very first recording that Mike Theodore and Dennis Coffey produced called "Stop! Don't Worry About It." And of course I have the

songs—"This Love Was Meant to Be" and "(Save It) Never Too Late"—both of which went to number one in the city of Detroit, one on one station and one on the other station. And then I had "Love Bug Got a Bear Hug" and "Faith Is the Answer" that I recorded with Mike and Dennis.

So the collaboration you've had with Dennis and Lyman went beyond just doing the gigs at Morey Baker's and other places?

I had a relationship with Dennis that extended to doing professional recordings in other venues. Not just the jazz venues, but also the rhythm and blues genre of the city of Detroit. So our relationship was rather intensive; more than just being the drummer for the Lyman Woodard Trio. I think that would be important to mention that the depth of our relationship extended beyond this trio. That Detroit was like a melting pot and we all had participation in the creation of this great music known as the Motor City and Motown.

Absolutely. Did anybody know who Morey Baker was?

Yeah. Morey Baker was a club owner in Detroit like many others were. We worked with Bennie Gastman who, with his brother Hyman, ran the Frolic. We also worked with Henry Normile, the owner of Cobb's Corner Jazz Bar in Detroit. We worked at different clubs. And actually the club scene is a very important part of the development of this music, I would call the capital. Because people know what happened. But how it happened and why it happened is what I'm going to be talking about in a documentary that I'm going to be doing. Because without the clubs and the DJs, the music business would have never survived like it did. The clubs are the first line of presentation where a person of talent has the ability to go before the public and see if you're acceptable. So clubs are a very important part of a music scene, as it develops as a capital or center of innovation.

So Morey was just one of many who operated a club like that.

One of many who provided an opportunity, because I'll say this: Without that kind of opportunity, Detroit would have never become, well, any city, would never become what-

ever it develops into without the opportunity to do so. So Morey was one of those people who provided an opportunity for musicians to come before the public and present their talents and abilities.

And I think Dennis said that what was really amazing to him was that Morey Baker's was set up almost like a piano bar except there was no piano. But the thing was—what really amazed Dennis—was the fact that people came there to listen to music as opposed to just dance.

Absolutely. And there were many clubs like that; clubs that were listening clubs to hear musicians really express themselves rather than necessarily to put on a show. See I do both. Right now I'm a front-man for a ten-piece band that I have. So now I'm a front-man. But those clubs that Dennis is talking about such as Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge, such as Baker's Keyboard Lounge, such as the Frolic, such as the Hippodrome; there were many clubs in Detroit where people just came to listen to the ability that musicians could exhibit. That's different from putting on a show, so to speak.

Honestly, you could hear it in the recordings that you guys did at Morey Baker's with Lyman and Dennis. Could you give me some insight regarding Lyman Woodard and who he was?

Lyman Woodard was one of the premier organists to come out of the East Coast. He was a very accomplished musician. He was a person with a very extensive following in the city of Detroit. He was really an excellent organist, possibly one of the best to come out of Detroit. There was Rudy Robinson, I worked with him and the Hungry Five—that was Mike Hanks's favorite keyboard player. There were others too. Lyman didn't do a lot of recordings on rhythm and blues music because he was primarily a jazz musician.

Of course, and I could hear it in the recordings. That he really, to me, he was shooting for Jimmy Smith territory.

Absolutely. And he had knowledge of his instrument that exceeded the needs of R&B music. You know, R&B music is basically simplified music, because that's how it becomes

very popular music. It's not like a specific genre, like jazz where you really go beyond the simple chord structure and the melodic structure of simple popular songs. You really go to the point to where you explore the instrument to its fullest and Lyman was very good at that.

So how long did all of you stay together—you, Dennis, Lyman and Mike Theodore? It must have been several years.

Oh, it was at least 3 or 4 years. Because Lyman used other guitar players...like the guitar player I saw last night, my cousin Leroy Emmanuel with his group, LMT. He worked with us for a number of years also. It was a situation where Dennis played with us for a long period of time. Leroy played with us for a long period of time—at least a couple of years on and off. And also Ron English was another guitar player who played with him. So Lyman changed the trio up basically quite a bit. But I was one of his main drummers other than Leonard King—he worked with another drummer named Leonard King—and a couple of other drummers. But I was one of the main drummers who worked with Lyman throughout his career before Dennis got there and after Dennis got there.

Right, because Dennis stressed that when he met Lyman, George McGregor was there. Then George left and you came in. But when he came in, I think he was taking Don Davis's place?

Yes he was. Because it was a trio that Don Davis had working at the Frolic that Lyman became a part of. And then after Don Davis became very successful in the music business, he stopped playing guitar and that's when Dennis took over. And then when George McGregor stopped playing drums with the group, that's when I took over. But we sort of took over the spot that Don Davis was holding down, so to speak. We were like the next phase that came in. Like there's a new phase in now, and there'll be a phase after us. We were like the next generation after Don Davis. They were a little bit older because they've all passed away now. George is gone. Don is gone. The other organist, Clarence, who was also known as Peekaboo, is gone. Of course all of the original Funk Brothers are gone except maybe one. I think Jack Ashford is still living. But all of the keyboard players are gone. All the drummers are gone. All the bass players are gone. James Jamerson passed away. Tony Newton is a bass player that still remains and did a lot of Motown sessions. But the two main bass players are

of course James Jamerson—the greatest bass player of all time—and Bob Babbitt, who I played with extensively. He played on many of my recordings and he was playing in my band from time to time. And we also did two weeks together with Chuck Berry at Club Gay Haven, a popular supper club in the city of Dearborn that burned down. That was a great gig. It was so funny because Chuck never talked to us. It was crazy. Two weeks straight and he never...He would do his show; he wouldn't say anything to us. He would come in with his guitar...

Melvin, I've seen that for myself. When he played my hometown of Rochester, New York in 1985. He got out of his Ford LTD, grabbed his guitar, went in to the trailer, got out of the trailer with a briefcase. We knew what was in the briefcase. He locked it in the trunk, looked over at one of the guards saying, "If anyone goes near the trunk, shoot to kill." He goes on stage, plugs in, does his show, unplugs, no encore, walks off. I'm trying to get an interview with him for a radio station and he says, "Not now, son. I've gotta get to the next gig." Gets in his car, drives away.

Yep. We were there every night for two weeks doing two shows and he would smile when he came out. He was solemn when he came in. He would bow his head to me and Babbitt and at rehearsal he told me, "I don't want any pickups." [Sings]. One night I got a little excited, 'cause of course me and Babbitt were excited to be playing with this guy. He's a legend. So one night I got excited and did a [vocalizes a drum part] and he turned around and wagged his finger at me, like "No, no, no!" Me and Babbitt were looking at each other like, "What the fuck's going on?" When they would give him a standing ovation, he would come out with a big smile and take a bow, walk off the stage. The smile would disappear. Then he'd take his guitar off, wipe the strings off, put it in the case, cover it with towel, close the case, out the side door and that was it. No "Good show, fellas," no smile, no handshake, nothing.

I was told by my boss, "You're lucky he said something to you. He doesn't usually talk."

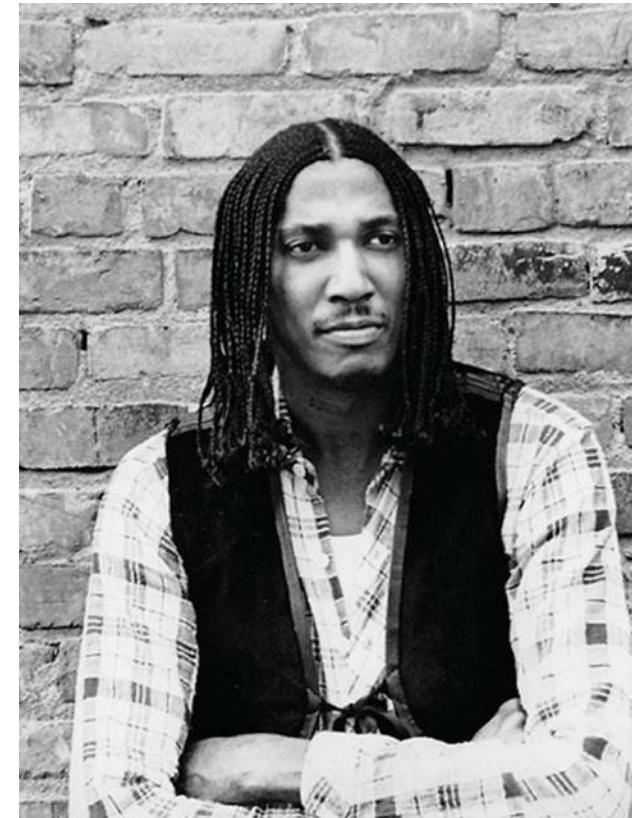
He travels without a band. Always has. Well anybody can learn his stuff, there's only three changes. I went to see a show with Chuck Berry and Little Richard. I mean, Little Richard kicked his ass. I mean, Chuck had these great tunes, but Little Richard's band, he had two drummers,

two bass players, five horns and him on that damn piano. These two—I guess they were like male dancers—climbing these pylons and shit. I mean the crowd was going nuts. Then Chuck's band tried to follow Little Richard and they couldn't do it.

Little Richard put on a show.

Unbelievable. I'm screaming because I was born 30 miles from where Little Richard, James Brown and Otis Redding were born. I was born in Milledgeville, Georgia they were born 20 miles away in Macon, Georgia.

Melvin Davis and Kevin Goins recorded this interview on July 10, 2016.



Melvin Davis. ©Leni Sincalir

Bettye LaVette on the '60s Detroit Club Scene

BETTYE LAVETTE: Dennis Coffey, Lyman Woodard and Melvin Davis! All of them have been my musical director at one point or another! [Laughs] Because that's what you wanted to be. And that's probably the reason that even as small as my aggregation is, the title "music director" was such a prized thing to be able to say and to have. Rudy Robinson was my keyboard player and music director for 30 years and I fired him every six months. That's how Lyman Woodard, Melvin Davis and everybody else got to be my music director; because I'd fire Rudy and I'd have to have somebody really smart come in really fast.

ZAK SHELBY-SZYSZKO: What can you tell me about Morey Baker and his club, Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge?



I can't believe you even know about Morey Baker's! Morey had two places on Joy Road between Livernois and whatever the next street is that comes after that. He had a place called the Grand. There had already been the 20 Grand and then he opened his place. It wasn't open that long, but it was open long enough for Dennis Edwards to be the keyboard player there and for the Temptations to come in there and find him. Jim Lewis, who was with the musicians union, was my manager. And he and Morey Baker were great friends. Morey Baker was really involved with the mafia. [Detroit organized crime figure] Anthony Giacalone had a son who played drums—or wanted to play drums—and he was working at Morey Baker's. And a man had come in and tried to kind of undercut Giacalone's son's band. This guy brought his band in, and set up on the bandstand. Jim went to defend Giacalone's son's band. He took the new guy's band's gear out and set it up in the middle of Livernois and that's how he became best buddies with Giacalone. After that—because Jim was protected now—I performed at everything that was big in Detroit.

In those days, we only had like 12 Italians. They were all named Giacalone and we all knew where they lived. There were always rumors they killed Jimmy Hoffa! In those days in Detroit — right or wrong — people assumed if you were Italian, you were in the mafia. That's what people thought, anyway. There used to be like eight or nine Italian restaurants right there on the other side of Eastern Market. That was a whole little Italian area. And Jim became fast friends with all of them because he was the music man. But Morey was a great friend of his and he liked me. Morey was ... well I thought he was handsome. But I mean, he was just an older white man that I thought was really sexy and he really liked me an awful lot. But if Morey had any designs, he wouldn't advance them past Jim Lewis because everybody was afraid of Jim. He had those "friends." We knew exactly where they lived and we knew that they were all named Giacalone. [Laughs] Like these New Jersey 85-year-old gangsters. Morey was just like them. Him and Mr. Baker who owned Baker's Keyboard Lounge, they were like slick older white guys, slick older mafioso-type guys. You know, that dressed like black guys in mohair suits and leather jackets. I mean tai-

lored leather jackets, not like motorcycle jackets. You know what Morey Baker's is now, right?

Now it's called The Locker Room, right?

And you know that's where I hung out, me and my little troop. When the 20 Grand started to go down, everybody who worked at the 20 Grand came to the Locker Room. We all migrated there. All the Temptations that were left, all the Spinners that were left, everybody. The remaining Temptations—and all those people—knew Morey Baker. Everybody hung there ... not really *hung* there, but everybody knew Morey Baker's. A lot of people went over to Baker's Keyboard Lounge, which was kind of a pricey place for blacks. But when Morey opened the Grand on Joy Road, that's where all the blacks went.

So the Grand was after Morey Baker's then? That was in the '70s?

Yeah, well whenever Dennis Edwards joined the Temptations, it was some time before that, actually.

I had been with Calla Records in New York, which was also owned by the mafia and the people in Philadelphia who owned Cameo-Parkway. So when Motown started to get really big they called me into the office and the heads of the mafia from Philadelphia came in and said, "Tell us everything you know about this guy Berry Gordy." And I said "I don't know anything about him! Other than he's Berry Gordy." But it was breaking so big and everybody was so unprepared for it. It was like Barack Obama becoming president. Everybody was so unprepared for Berry Gordy to have this success the way he did. When people ask me, "Why weren't you with Motown," I always reply, "Because Berry Gordy wanted to be where I was at the time" and that was with Atlantic.

And when the people at Motown started to get really big, they would not have worked at a Morey Baker's. They had just been invented and had become stars. So none of them worked there. I had my first "little-big" record; then I had to come back to Detroit. That's why I know of that period, but everybody else had gone on.

Dennis and Lyman Woodard and Melvin Davis had just left the Frolic and moved to Morey Baker's.

God! When have I even heard that word, the Frolic? Anyway, Morey Baker's... the only reason I happened to go in there was because I was with a union man and he had to go everywhere where there was music and keep tabs on what was going on business-wise. If it was in Wayne County and you were playing music, you had to go through the Local 5. And so that's the reason I went there.

So you never actually played at Morey Baker's in the late '60s?

I did not. I was bigger than it was when it opened. And when I came back and needed that kind of gig, it was gone! When it first happened, I had a hit record so I didn't need that place.

What do you remember about Lyman Woodard?

For whatever reason, Lyman never became...I mean, he never became *the* person. But over time, most everybody left Detroit and became big. So there was nobody in Detroit but him, pretty much. Then he hired Norma Bell, who was the only female saxophone player that anybody had ever seen. When I left, female saxophone players, they just didn't exist. Norma Bell had a little band and Jim Lewis had been trying to help her and she had been playing on a few of my shows. I left town for a while and when I came back, the whole scene was being run by Lyman Woodard and Norma Bell. And I left again and came back and there was no Lyman Woodard; Norma Bell was running the entire city. Every time I left and came back, the whole scene changed.

What was your relationship with Melvin like over the years?

[Laughs] When I had been Bettye LaVette for like a month, two months, I had gone on this like all-over-the-country tour with Clyde McPhatter and a whole bunch of really big people. And when I came back it was like coming back to nothing. I mean, the record stopped selling. I didn't have a manager. I didn't have an agent. And I got this gig in my hometown of Muskegon, Michigan. First time I ever got a chance to work there after I had become Bettye LaVette instead of Betty Jo Haskins. I met Melvin in one of the clubs—probably on the West Side, because at one point the West Side and the East Side really didn't congeal together. Anyway, I had this gig. I liked the way he sang and I sat in with him singing something. We fell in love for a whole two months! [Laughs] And Steve Mancha—whose name was Clyde at the time—he was the guitar player. And we had a bass player, too. Anyway, we all went to Muskegon to do

this gig; we all stayed at my Aunt's house. And when I see Melvin today, we started a little joke there because my Aunt was so southern, and everything that she said just tickled him to death. I was asleep and she had told Melvin, "When Betty Jo wakes up, tell her I've gone to make the groceries and I'll be back." Meaning she went to the grocery store. And that tickled Melvin so much. It is kind of funny. That's how we greet each other—with something that my Aunt said.

One interesting fact is that one of the co-writers of your record, "Only Your Love Can Save Me," along with Ashford and Simpson, was Joshie Armstead; she was the one who wrote "Casanova (Your Playing Days Are Over)," which is on this album.

Her name is Joshie. Joshie Jo.

Did you know her at the time?

I knew her before I knew Ashford and Simpson. She was Chuck Jackson's opening singer. So I met her when she came to Detroit to the 20 Grand and we became immediate and fast friends. By the time I left Detroit and came to New York and did "Let Me Down Easy" and "Only Love Can Save Me," I already knew Jos. She introduced me to Ashford and Simpson. And I pride myself in telling—well, both of them before, but now, of course, just Valerie—"You know you wrote my first fucking swamp record." [Laughs]

But like I say, the first time I heard Joshie sing was with Chuck Jackson when she came to the 20 Grand. I just thought her voice was so unique. She still sounds different than any woman I've ever heard. I became friends with her because I'd just never heard anybody sing like that.

This has been so wonderful talking to you, it's been a real pleasure.

It's wonderful to talk to you, I'm so glad that you're doing this. Please tell Dennis thank you so much for playing on everything he played for me and my guitarists are trying to live up to it.

Bettye LaVette and Zak Shelby-Szyszkowski spoke on August 30, 2016.

The Way I Think

*Zev Feldman Interviews
Industry Legend Clarence Avant*

ZEV FELDMAN: How did you first meet Dennis Coffey?

CLARENCE AVANT: I had told Quincy Jones I'd never live in California. Period. And I'll never get married. But I was back the next year. I met a guy called Mickey Stevenson. He had just left Motown. And when you said Motown to a white person they all jumped because Motown was so hot. Mickey used to run A&R at Motown. So Quincy and I met him at a hotel here. Mickey was telling me he wanted a label. So I said, "Well, let me see what I can do." I go back to New York, and went to see Ben Melniker and Arnold Maxin. Arnold ran MGM/Verve and Ben Melniker was the general counsel. So they said, "We're interested on one condition, you have to go to California and help run it." What the fuck did I know about running a record company? I had not one clue. But I never owned any of it. Mickey Stevenson owned it. And I think that's where I met Dennis.

Do you recall how you first heard about Dennis?

Through Venture Records. That was a label that was financed by MGM, the motion picture company and record label. And that's when I first met him.

There were a lot of guitar players around the end of the 1960s. What was it about Dennis that caught your attention and made him stand out to you?

He was talented and I liked him. And I met his partner, Mike Theodore. And here's something probably nobody has ever told you: When I started Sussex Records—and Dennis was one of the first artists that I signed—I had those guys, both Mike Theodore and Dennis Coffey, move to California. I had Sussex Records at the time. Dennis was just a good guy and a talented guy.

Can you tell us a little bit about what was going on in your career at the time Dennis signed to Sussex?

I think I was probably the only African-American guy who had a label and I went in a different direction. I signed a lot of white artists. And through Mike Theodore's and Dennis Coffey's group, Gallery, we had a hit: "It's So Nice to Be With You." In fact, we had a whole lot of other white acts, too.

What inspired you to move from artist management,

with Avant Garde Management, to label ownership and music publishing?

After that Venture Records thing, I decided, “What the hell, I’m gonna take a gamble.” And I had a couple of dollars, so I started Sussex Records. And in the beginning, it was distributed by Buddha Records. Neil Bogart and I got into a huge argument. He said, “Why are you signing white acts?” I said, “Well, you have Gladys Knight, the Isley Brothers and so-and-so and so-and-so. They’re black. What the fuck’s the difference? I want to sign who I want to sign.” So we fell out, and I went independent with Sussex Records. And boy did I learn. I didn’t know much about distributing or anything. I went all around to distributors in New York, Detroit, Baltimore, Washington—the Schwartz Brothers—and you name it. I didn’t know what returns even meant! [Laughs] So I thought I was gonna collect \$300,000 and I collected less than \$40,000. So I was gone after a while.

This Dennis Coffey album was captured live in a small club setting in 1968, just a few years before recording on your label. Can you talk about Dennis’s style and how it might have changed over the years?

I don’t know how it changed. I’m not a musician. I hear things and I sign artists by if they can come in and tell me they can write. I don’t produce records. I’m not interested in take nine or 29. That’s a bunch of bullshit to me. So I don’t get involved with studios. I hate studios. ‘Cause I don’t like to sit there and listen to somebody doing this and doing that [mimics twisting dials]. So I never got involved with Dennis in the studio. What he did ... He came to me and said, “I want to do this.” And I said, “you got it. Go in the studio. Send me the bills. I pay for it.”

What a nice boss.

Well, that’s the way I think. And all during my record career, even with other artists I did the same exact thing. Mike Theodore and Dennis Coffey brought me, I would say, at least eight or nine white acts. I don’t know who the fuck they are, they didn’t sell any records anyway, most of them didn’t, except for Gallery, so it didn’t mean nothing to me. But I was giving those guys a shot. The only thing I totally ever regretted was I had them to move to California. That bothered me after I went under. But I remained friends with them. I haven’t talked to Dennis in maybe three or four years. But I have talked to Mike, though. I talk to him at least three or four times a year. Good guy.

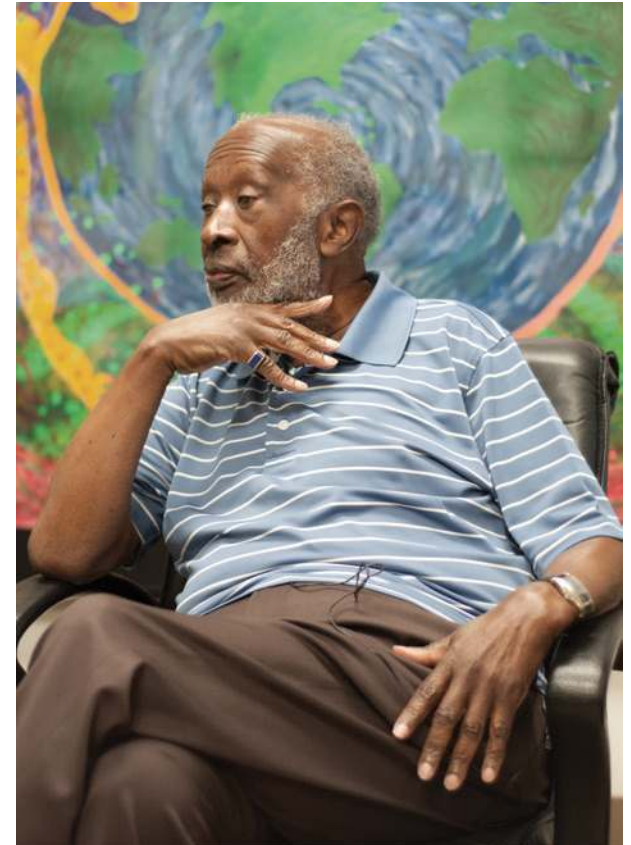
Dennis has always had strong ties to Detroit. Had you spent much time in and around Detroit back in the ‘60s and ‘70s? If so, how would you describe the music and cultural scene there at that time?

I went to the club to hear Dennis, but I don’t hang out that much. It’s just not my life. But in the ‘60s and ‘70s you had a lot of clubs. One of the guys they brought me was a guy up there, Rodriguez. Sixto Rodriguez [the subject of the Oscar®-winning documentary feature, *Searching for Sugar Man*, in which Dennis Coffey and Mike Theodore appear onscreen]. Couldn’t give him away. Period. Brilliant songwriter. Nobody could hear it then. And let me kindly say something a little different here: Wasn’t no label in the industry signing a Mexican artist. The only one that signed one that I remember was Clive Davis with Santana. Other than that? But my attitude about it was that a world without music doesn’t exist as far as I’m concerned. So you take shots. Like anything else in life. You either win some or you lose some. So what. That’s part of the game. If everybody went to a goddamn baseball game and won every time, it wouldn’t be no fun. Or football, or basketball. That’s just the way I think. A little nutty, but that’s just me. [Laughs]

What made Dennis Coffey able to fit into so many different musical contexts from Del Shannon and all the classic Motown hits to his own million-seller instrumental hit, “Scorpio?”

You mention Motown—and Dennis played on big Motown sessions. Motown was hot. That’s one of the reasons I went into the business. But I didn’t just want to go in the direction of anybody else. That’s why I said earlier that I decided to go with Mike Theodore and Dennis Coffey in terms of bringing me acts. They knew the field. They knew black music. They knew white music. They had Rodriguez. So they knew what was good no matter what the category was. They weren’t just stuck in one area. And I like that. I wouldn’t let nobody tell me what I could do, cause people would say, “You sign these white acts?” I said, “What the fuck? If somebody is signing black acts, Let ‘em. I can sign what I want to sign.” That’s the way I think.

Zev Feldman interviewed Clarence Avant on August 5, 2016



Clarence Avant. ©Zak Shelby-Szysko

DENNIS COFFEY *Guitar* | **LYMAN WOODARD** *Hammond B-3 organ* | **MELVIN DAVIS** *Drums*



1. FUZZ (8:17)

D. Coffey, M. Davis, L. Woodard/Mike Theodore Music/7th Scorpio Music (BMI)

2. BY THE TIME I GET TO PHOENIX (7:09)

J. Webb/EMI Sosaha Music Inc./R2M Music/Songs of Lastrada (ASCAP)

3. THE LOOK OF LOVE (11:45)

B. Bacharach, H. David/Colgems EMI Music Inc. (ASCAP)

4. MAIDEN VOYAGE (7:06)

H. Hancock/Hancock Music (BMI)

5. THE BIG D (4:13)

D. Coffey, M. Davis, L. Woodard/Mike Theodore Music/7th Scorpio Music (BMI)

6. CASANOVA (Your Playing Days Are Over) (7:04)

J. Armstead, M. Middlebrook/Dust Index/EMI Blackwood Music Inc./
Jerry Williams Music/Josteady Music (BMI)

7. WADE IN THE WATER (7:52)

Traditional

Recorded in 1968 at Morey Baker's Showplace Lounge, Detroit, Michigan.





THE 2xHD FUSION MASTERING SYSTEM



In the constant evolution of its proprietary mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.

The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original ¼" 15 ips NAB master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired from the playback head directly to a Telefunken EF806 tube, using OCC silver cable. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.

The resulting signal is then transformed into high resolution formats by recording it in DSD11.2kHz using a Merging Technologies' Horus A to D converter. All analog and digital cables that are used are state of the art. The 2xHD FUSION mastering system is powered by a super capacitor power supply, using a new technology that lowers the digital noise found in the lowest level of the spectrum. A vacuum tube NAGRA HDdac (DSD) is used as a reference digital playback converter in order to A and B with the original analog master tape, permitting the fusion of the warmth of analog with the refinement of digital.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audio-ophile sound engineer René Laflamme.

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