The Ink Spots Encyclopedia Article

The Ink Spots

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The Ink Spots

With their wistful, plangent, sentimental love songs, the Ink Spots are redolent of the 1940s, when their music provided a romantic backdrop to lovers throughout the years of World War II and beyond. They had their first and greatest hit, the million-seller "If I Didn't Care" in 1939, while among the best and most enduring of the many that followed were "My Prayer"; "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire"; "To Each His Own"; "Maybe"; "Java Jive"; "Prisoner of Love"; "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie"; and "I'll Never Smile Again."

The group was formed in Indianapolis in 1932, initially calling themselves the Riff Brothers, then the Percolating Puppies. The original members were tenor and lead vocalist Jerry Daniels; Ivory Watson, baritone vocals and guitar; Charles Fuqua, tenor vocals, guitar and ukulele; and Orville "Hoppy" Jones, bass vocals and guitar. In 1934, the quartet settled on calling themselves the Ink Spots, and Bill Kenny eventually replaced Jerry Daniels. It was Jones who conjured up their trademark "talking chorus" in which the lead singer speaks, rather than sings, for added dramatic effect. Across the decades, the Ink Spots underwent numerous personnel changes. Perhaps the most significant came in 1945, when Bill Kenny was replaced by Jim Nabbie, who led the group until his death in 1992.

All the popular black vocal "doo-wop" groups of the early rock 'n' roll years owed a supreme debt to the Ink Spots. Their soft, smooth, group harmonizing, backing the steady, silky-throated vocalizing of their lead singers, inspired a generation of adolescents who started out singing on urban street corners in the early 1950s, some of whom went on to score some of rock 'n' roll's earliest hits. Nobody, however, quite succeeded in emulating the unique sound of the Ink Spots, whose high delicate tenors seemed almost to have originated from classical music's counter-tenor tradition. The Ink Spots were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1989 and, extraordinarily, although they had long been superseded in the charts, and their original members were no more, the Ink Spots were still touring the country in the 1990s, a nostalgic throwback to a gentler past.

Further Reading:

Goldberg, Marv. *More Than Words Can Say: The Ink Spots and Their Music.* Lanham, Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 1998.

Watson, Deek, with Lee Stephenson. *The Story of the "Ink Spots."* New York, Vantage Press, 1967.