



*Faye
Adams*

**I'm
Goin'
To
Leave
You**

Faye Adams refuses to talk about her rhythm & blues years. We don't know whether this is because she rose from a strong religious background and thought she had turned her back on the righteous when she took up the devil's music, or that she was simply tired of arduous travel, crooked promoters, and the fast life. My guess is probably a combination of the two. From what scanty information we have to hand we know that she was born Fanny Scruggs in 1923 (later dates have also been given) in Montclair, a suburb of Newark, just five miles north up the New Jersey Turnpike. The middle-class urban environment in which Faye grew up during the 20's must have been very different from the strife-ridden no-man's land it was later to become.

"I started singing religious music when I was 5 years old," says Faye. "My parents used to stand me up on tables in church on Sundays. Later on, my three sisters and I formed a trio." (One would narrate, the other 3 sang). "In 1939, when I was 16, I sang with Doc Wheeler at the Apollo." This was, of course, done behind her parents' back. When her mother found out Faye had won first place on amateur talent night she would not let her accept the prize. Somewhere along the line Faye and her mother split up, mother packed and left for California, while Faye, having briefly enjoyed the sweet smell of success, spent almost a year tramping from one Broadway agent and record company office to another. "I got all sorts of promises", says Faye, "all sorts of encouraging words — but no work, no record releases." Then along came Joe Morris. "I was sitting in the office at Atlantic," says Herb Abramson, "when the door opened and a young girl came in. She said to me, 'Hello, I'm Fannie Scruggs and I have a gospel show in New Jersey.' I said, 'Well, Miss Scruggs, do you think you are ready to sing for Atlantic?' She said yes. I placed her with Joe Morris to help her gain experience." Fannie Scruggs became Fay Scruggs and cut one session for Atlantic on December 23, 1952. Four songs were taped on this session but only 3 were issued, I'M GOIN' TO LEAVE YOU and "That's What Makes My Baby Fat" (Atlantic 985), and SWEET TALK (Atlantic 1007), backed by "Watch Out I Told You" (recorded at a later session).

Abramson felt Faye had obvious potential but his intentions of developing her talent had to be deferred due to his being drafted into the Air Force. Assigned to Gunter Air Force Base near Morris' home town of Montgomery, Alabama, Abramson was pleasantly surprised to learn that Morris was planning to spend a few weeks at home. Rehearsal sessions were set up promptly in Montgomery, partly to help Abramson while away his leisure hours. Several new songs were given run-throughs, and one in particular appealed to both Abramson and Morris. This was SHAKE A HAND written by Morris and spotlighting a captivating slow beat and a generous dose of gospel. Abramson saw great potential in the tune but was shipped out to Germany before being able to draw up a contract. Morris was unable to interest anyone else at Atlantic in the song. His 3-year Atlantic contract having expired, Morris had to move elsewhere.

Enter one Al Silver. Al Silver's initiation to the music business came in 1947 with the purchase of his own pressing plant. He was doing work for several small Indie R & B labels. Silver felt that he could do as well, if not better, than the labels he pressed. Herald was founded by Fred Mendelsohn in 1950. Mendelsohn recorded blues by Little Walter and Eddie Boyd but met with little commercial success. Through lack of funds Mendelsohn had Silver join Herald as a partner. Soon thereafter Silver became sole owner. Silver was determined to make a major R & B label out of Herald. In the summer of 1953 songwriter Charlie Singleton took Silver to an audition of Joe Morris and his band. Although the band sounded good, Silver was not really excited since he was looking for vocal groups. "I was on my way out," says Silver, "when a girl came up from the back of the auditorium and began to sing. After hearing SHAKE A HAND I knew I had to sign her. Faye Scruggs — that was her name then — was about seventeen (provided her birthdate is correct — she must have kept her youth at 30). After Morris introduced me, she sang SHAKE A HAND without a mike in front of that big, blasting band — and I got goose pimples. I had contracts in my pocket. I ran across the street, got a bottle of whiskey, went up to Joe Morris' room, pulled out the contract, and signed him up. I never knew that Faye was still signed to Atlantic although Joe Morris' option had run out. I didn't find this out until a week after I had recorded her. Luckily, her Atlantic deal was about to end, and I was able to take her and Joe to Bell Sound to record." Six titles were taped: SHAKE A HAND / "I've Gotta Leave You" (Herald 416), I'LL BE TRUE / "Every Day" (Herald 419), and "Happiness To My Soul" / "Say A Prayer" (Herald 423).

SHAKE A HAND not only brought fame and fortune to Faye Adams but instant wealth to Al Silver. "That SHAKE A HAND broke wide open. I was taking a much needed vacation in the Catskills at the time and apart from advance copies, the record wasn't pressed yet." Silver's brother-in-law at the pressing plant called Al at his poolside. "We're getting orders from Cincinnati for ten thousand, from Chicago for twenty thousand." "The first 3 or 4 days we were back-ordered between three and four hundred thousand." SHAKE A HAND hit no. 1 on the Billboard charts on August 15, 1953, having sold over a million copies. The follow-up I'LL BE TRUE also topped the chart on December 5th. SHAKE A HAND became the second biggest R & B single in 1953 and was described in Billboard as having as its major strong point a New Orleans-influenced "wall of sound", the biggest booming full sound ever put on record up to that time.

SHAKE A HAND might just as well have been recorded in church so fervent was its emotional approach, so open-ended were its lyrics. Covered by country singer Red Foley at the

time and constantly revived over the years, the song has come by now to seem almost an emblem of the new secular humanism, and though it never actually entered into the pop charts, its dramatic symbolism and sound could be seen equally well as a representation of pop or of gospel.

Silver had Morris back Al Savage on a softer, more lightened-up version and retitled it "I Had a Notion" (Herald 417) which also netted impressive sales, riding on the crest of a wave to success. The overwhelming success of SHAKE A HAND led to nationwide touring. On one occasion, in the Midwest with the Morris Band, an argument involving two fellows at the bar, developed to the point where many tempers were aroused and for a terrifying few minutes it seemed like a riot would ensue. Above the confusion, Faye signalled the several musicians who were just returning to the bandstand and they began to play while she sang SHAKE A HAND. The result was phenomenal. Almost immediately some other folks picked it up and sang as loudly as they could. The attention of the fighters was distracted and drawn to the music. The fight stopped and all shook hands.

Faye's third major hit record came in November 1954 when IT HURTS ME TO MY HEART also soared to no. 1 on the Billboard charts. During the late 50's Faye Adams continued to make fine hard-edged R & B records, including the driving "Your Love (Has My Heart Burning)" (Herald 444). Her fine husky voice never failed to excite but could not bolster diminishing sales as R & B softened with the advent of "teen-sound" and elaborate orchestration.

In 1957 Faye switched recording companies, first to Lido, then Imperial where she cut a handful of impressive sides such as JOHNNY LEE (Imperial 5456) and KEEPER OF MY HEART (Imperial 5443) - a kind of SHAKE A HAND update. The Imperial sides were cut in New Orleans during April and May 1957. Crescent City legends Herb Hardesty played tenor and Edgar Blanchard sat in on guitar. Somehow the records didn't click and Faye faded from the scene for awhile.

In 1959 in New York, Faye worked two recording dates for Brunswick, on March 5th and March 20th. From this eight songs were recorded, but not a single one was issued. In 1960 Faye cut an album for Warwick (2031), on which old hits like SHAKE A HAND and I'LL BE



(Courtesy Michael Ochs Archives)

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TRUE TO YOU were rejuvenated with the addition of strings and girl choruses. In September 1961 Faye made an impressive comeback on Savoy with CRY YOU CRAZY HEART (Savoy 1606). Two songs from this session, "Sunset, Sunrise Or Midnight" and "It Hurts To Be In Love" remain unissued. In 1962 she recorded a modest rendition of Jesse Belvin's "Goodnight My Love" for Prestige (114). Although her powerhouse voice had remained, intact, the fires of early passion seemed quelled. Seemingly torn between heaven and hell, Faye chose the former and embarked on a series of gospel recordings for Savoy, and that's where we came in.

Both I'M GOIN' TO LEAVE YOU (Atlantic 985) and SWEET TALK (Atlantic 1007) are from Faye's first Joe Morris session recorded on Dec. 23rd, 1952. The Morris band included Maurice Simon on tenor sax and Percy Heath, who had joined the band in the late 40's, on bass. SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE, YOU AIN'T BEEN TRUE and MY GREATEST DESIRE are all from Faye's Herald sessions in 1954. SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE is reminiscent of one of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's gospel jump tunes and has a rhythmic vocal group background to add to this notion. YOU AIN'T BEEN TRUE with its Mickey Baker-type guitar licks and roaring sax riff is a reworking of her earlier I'LL BE TRUE (Herald 419), her second of three to hit the no. 1 spot on the Billboard charts in December 1953. The flip, MY GREATEST DESIRE, is a heavy-on-the beat blues ballad written by Clyde Otis who wrote many successful songs for the late Brook Benton during his earlier career. NO WAY OUT from the Herald sessions in 1955 is another mid-tempo song given the sanctified gospel treatment. Faye's strongest influences were La Vern Baker and Mahalia Jackson. Listening to her early Herald material gives one the sense that in her singing she reinvents La Vern's vibrato and projects Mahalia's robust approach to her music.

KEEPER OF MY HEART, YOU'RE CRAZY, JOHNNY LEE and SO MUCH are from Faye's first Imperial New Orleans session of April and May 1957. KEEPER OF MY HEART, written in part by bandleader / trumpeter / singer Dave Bartholomew, was arranged with commercial sales in mind, with its angelic chorus and smooth but solid feel. Herb Hardesty's modest but tough tenor break adds the needed grit. YOU'RE CRAZY is a Crescent City stomper of the Fats Domino kind with its solid Frank Fields bass and stabbing Hardesty tenor. JOHNNY LEE features some stinging guitar licks from Edgar Blanchard and wailing tenor from Hardesty against a solid beat laid down by Charles Williams. SO MUCH is a jumpin' "I'm Walkin'" Fats Domino type bouncer written by Faye herself with added choral background to increase marketplace potential. However, none of the fine 8 sides cut at Cosimo's made a dent in the charts.

CRY YOU CRAZY HEART and STEP UP AND RESCUE ME were cut in New York for Savoy on Sept. 20, 1961. CRY YOU CRAZY HEART is a steamy ballad with full-bodied sax section. Faye sings, chuckles and adds some Big Maybelle / Ruth Brown-type inflections while the band lopes along in easy time. STEP UP AND RESCUE ME is a jump with strong piano fills and good solid orchestral support. The remake of SHAKE A HAND first appeared on a Warwick single (590) and was later issued on Warwick LPs 2026 and 2031 as well as Music Tone 7001, Oldies 109 and Guest Star 1904. The remake offers a cleaner, better balanced sound which gains with vocal group support and only loses a little of the original's grit. The flip of Warwick 590 — IT HURTS ME TO MY HEART — is a red-blooded remake of her third major selling (no. 1 in the Billboard charts) success on Herald of August 1954.

THAT'S AW' RIGHT (THAT'S ALL RIGHT) is a strong ballad, overwhelmed somewhat in parts by a "heavenly chorus." However, Faye's strong pipes shine through. It was supposedly first put out in the late 50's on Lido (603) and reissued in 1961 on Warwick LP 2031, Almor LP 103 and Music Tone LP 7001. LOOK AROUND, a good tight ballad, was recorded for Warwick in 1960 (550) and also appeared on reissue albums. The flip, I'M SO HAPPY, is a bouncer with gospel-like female chorus and a solid beat, a secularized version of "Walk In Jerusalem, Just Like John," the traditional spiritual. I'LL BE TRUE TO YOU, IT MADE ME CRY, SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE & I DON'T WANT YOUR LOVE are all from the 1960 New York sessions that produced Warwick LP 2031. I'LL BE TRUE TO YOU is a wilder updated remake of Herald 419 (1953), her second single with The Joe Morris Orch., sung in jazz-swing fashion with passion. IT MADE ME CRY (also issued as Lido 603) is a solid blues ballad with chorus and appropriate one-note piano progressions, a song written by Dave Berry and Don Covey. SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE sounds very much like a booting remake of Herald 429, featured earlier on the album. This side really jumps and is interspersed with tasty sax licks over a solid percussive base. I DON'T WANT YOUR LOVE is another solid jumper with roaring sax and wailing vocal supported by stabbing embellishments of female vocal harmony over a solid orchestration.

Opal Louis Nations

Sources:

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SESSION DETAILS (From "Blues Records A-K" by Lead-bitter and Slaven, with additions and corrections from Dave Penny)

FAYE ADAMS, vocal on all tracks, with:

(a) New York City, December 23, 1952

JOE MORRIS BLUES CAVALCADE

Joe Morris (trumpet), unknown (alto sax), (tenor saxes), (baritone sax), (piano), (guitar), (bass), (drums). (a-1): add unknown (male voice), (tambourine).

(b) New York City, 1954

Same or similar to (a) except add unknown (vocal group/ensemble vocal), omit (guitar).

(c) New York City, 1954

Same or similar to (a), except omit (trumpet).

(d) New York City, 1954

Same or similar to (c).

(e) New York City, 1955

Same or similar to (c)?, except omit (alto sax), and double-tracked vocal.

(f) New Orleans, April/May 1957

Herb Hardesty (tenor sax), possibly Clarence Ford (baritone sax), Edward Frank (piano), Edgar Blanchard (guitar), Frank Fields (bass), Charles "Hungry" Williams (drums). (f-1): add unknown (2nd guitar), omit (baritone sax), (f-2): add unknown (vocal group/mixed choir), (f-3): as (f-1) but add unknown (vocal group/mixed choir), and Dave Bartholomew? (trumpet).



R&B-110 MONO

(g) New York City, 1960

Unknown (trumpets), (trombone(s)), (alto/tenor/baritone saxes), (piano), (guitar), (bass), (drums), (mixed choir).

(h) New York City, 1960

JIMMY MUNDY ORCHESTRA

Same or similar to (g). (h-1): omit choir.

(i) New York City, 1960

Same or similar to (g). (i-1): omit (guitar).

(j) New York City, September 20, 1961

Unknown (trombones), (tenor sax), (piano), (guitars), (bass), (drums).

Mastering: Björn Almstedt

Cover photo from the Michael Ochs Archives

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Song clearance through ncb

Album production: Jonas Bernholm

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