



# Johnny Lou W. Fulmer 1987

## JOHNNY LOU W. FULMER

Once upon a time, there lived a dear lady who instilled in her young daughter the love of music, song, and dance. That lady was my mother. Only 2 weeks ago I lost her; yet I am certain today is a special occasion for us both, as she was as pleased as I to learn recently that I had been selected for the Hall of Fame. So I am confident she would want me here in Greenville today, March 8, 1987, for this special recognition. I conjure up memories from the past and recall standing beside her (at age 3) as she taught me the art of tap-dance (I imagine a Shirley Temple thing) and accompanied me on piano with her renditions of Alexander's Rag-Time Band; Lulu's Back in town; St. Louis Blues or maybe her own special version of boogie-woogie. She was quite a dancer herself and a darn good musician. Having received her training quite young (no formal classical yet) she learned by ear such numbers as Stormy Weather or My Momma Done Told Me -- Blues in the Night from "Loyal", their houseboy. I am told she and "Loyal" wore a right bad spot in the rug under the piano, stomping their feet to the rhythm of the music.

During my early childhood, it was customary, especially in the summer months, to have an afternoon bath and don a fresh pinafore for a stroll with one's nurse to the drugstore for an ice cream treat and a trip to the park. I wonder how many parents knew that their children's nurses, while out with their young charges, often dropped by Fred Green's (a local "colored" dance hall) for a little socializing! It was fun -- They would play their music and as they danced, those of us who could walk at that time, and were not confined to strollers or carriages, would emulate their movements. I have no doubt that my baby brother -- still in diapers at the time -- was on his way to fast becoming the best "trucker" (as in dancing) in the entire town of Andrews, S.C. Thus my first live exposure to black rhythm and blues . . . the "colored nurses" with their "white chillun" . . . moving to and fro to the beat of the music.

Dancing in some form or fashion was a ritual in my house. I would turn up the record player and leap from chair to chair, dancing and singing with Mario Lonzo to those beautiful lyrics of "Be My Love". There were usually "taps" on at least one pair of my shoes. It wasn't long before my mom and I were a team, performing at school activities and other functions in the community when called upon for entertainment. I'll never forget our original creation of "Carmen" with her on piano and me doing the song and dance part. We made quite a duo. This short opera contained a jazzed up dance number incorporating a little Latin to "boogie"; but it seemed to please the audience. We even won a blue ribbon, not the kind you drink - no so bad for amateurs!

Pawleys Island goes way back to my roots. My mother spent most of her summers there with her family at their home on the creek in the early 1900's. She left nothing unexplored in and around that island, on land or at sea. In the early 30's Pawleys Pavilion was a popular spot for many dances attended by my kin. My parents, who also called their dance "shag", met there in the mid-30's and married shortly after. I spent many of my pre-adolescent vacations on "The Island" where I continued the tradition of going to the pavilion. I would watch intently from the sidelines the teenagers doing a shag. Bubba and Sissy Snow were among the best dancers. I was 10 years old . . . This, I think, was the beginning of my enchantment with the "real" shag and my interest never waned.

1950 - 1956: Now I was old enough for high school proms, then college dances, and eventually further up the strand discovered the favorite Myrtle Beach dance spots, and then on to O., D. and The Pad, observing and learning along the way new steps from those magnificent dancers who frequented the beaches during the summer.

Growing up in a small, mostly rural community, there were fewer opportunities to learn more sophisticated steps done by some whom I would classify as near professional. Consequently I never regarded myself as a mainstream "beach" shagger. And today I am quite surprised and delighted. But for some reason, possibly the way I came to know dance, I expect that I shall remain in a kind of fixed limbo -- caught "somewhere betwixt and between" the jitterbug and the shag, but it still brings the old joy I felt years ago. This recognition is also a tribute to my mother, who was the first to introduce me to music.