

Billy Guy

Billy Guy is best known as one of the lead singers of the legendary doo-wop band The Coasters. His unmistakable baritone propelled that group to international stardom, and their timeless hits include "Searchin'," "Yakety Yak," "Charlie Brown," and "Along Came Jones."



Born Frank Phillips, Jr., in Itasca, Texas in 1936, Guy moved to California as a teenager, and formed a duo called Bip and Bop. After recording with moderate success for the Aladdin label, Guy heard that two members of the popular group the Robins, Carl Gardner and Bobby Nunn, had left to start a new group. Guy joined the pair, along with Leon Hughes and guitarist Adolph Jacobs, to form The Coasters in October of 1955. Famed songsmiths Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller wrote material for many groups, but made the Coasters a pet project, producing their records and penning songs to suit their energetic, comedic style.

In 1957, the group released the single "Young Blood," but it was the record's b-side that catapulted Guy into the limelight. "Searchin'," became a surprise million-selling hit, establishing Guy's baritone and almost comedic timing as a central element of the band's sound.

Although the members of the Coasters changed, Guy remained loyal to Carl Gardner as well as Lieber and Stoller, and sang on the major hits from their glory era of 1957 to 1959. Doo-wop as a genre began to suffer a decline in the early 1960s, and Lieber and Stoller looked to other projects. Although the hits dried up, Guy and Gardner continued to perform as The Coasters, singing their classics to enthusiastic audiences.

Guy left Gardner in 1973 to pursue a solo career, releasing soul and funk singles such as "If You Wanna Get Ahead, Shake a Leg" on the Verve label. He also developed a risqué comedy act that he performed in nightclubs. The Coasters' popularity, although not what it had been, proved enduring, and he joined another ex-Coaster, Will Jones (who had replaced Bobby Nunn) to form a version of the band called the World Famous Coasters.

In 1987 Guy joined Gardner, Gunter, and Jones, and the Coasters became the first vocal group to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame. A year later, they played at Madison Square Garden to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Atlantic Records. In 1994, Guy and the Coasters received the Pioneer Award from the Rhythm and Blues Foundation.

Guy moved to Las Vegas in 1998, where he tried to assemble a separate group called Billy Guy's Coasters. Guy died suddenly of heart disease on November 5, 2002.