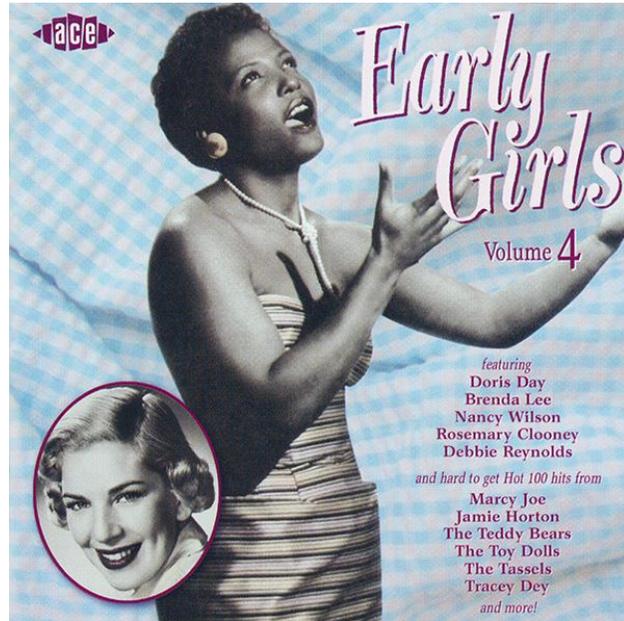


Mary Ann Fisher, The Songbird of the South

Mary Ann Fisher (1923-2004) was born in Henderson, KY. After her father's death in 1927, she and her eight siblings were spread between relatives and care facilities. Fisher spent time at the Kentucky Home Society for Colored Children in Louisville before being adopted by a family in Russellville, Ky.

After returning to Louisville in her teens, Fisher won a talent contest at the Lyric Theatre in 1941, kick-starting her singing career and earning her the title "Songbird of the South." Within three months of meeting Ray Charles at a USO club in Fort Knox, Fisher began touring with him as his first female backup singer, which developed into a female backup group, the Raelettes. In 1958, Fisher struck out on her own, performing in theaters with rhythm and blues greats like B.B. King, James Brown, Marvin Gaye and Dizzy Gillespie. Fisher returned to Louisville in 1967, where she continued to perform locally, but did not record her first solo album, "Song Bird of the South," until 2003. She was inducted into the Kentucky Music Hall of Fame in 2004, one month before her death. Russellville continues to pay tribute to their adopted daughter with the annual Mary Ann Fisher Summer Concert Series.

Oral histories with Mary Ann Fisher and other rhythm and blues musicians can be found at <http://passtheword.ky.gov>.



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