



Contact: Sandy Bynum, Tourism Division
sbynum@mississippi.org

601.359.3297

JACKSON UNVEILS ITS SEVENTH MARKER ON THE BLUES TRAIL

Jackson, Mississippi (September 30, 2009) – The Mississippi Blues Trail salutes the musical legacy of Jackson’s Ace Records and its owner Johnny Vincent (Imbragulo) on Monday, October 5, at 3:30 p.m., with the dedication of the trail’s 87th historical marker. The unveiling will take place at the former site of Ace’s headquarters on the 200 block of West Capitol Street, between the Mayflower restaurant and the King Edward Hotel.

“When you review the famous names that came through Mississippi and Ace Records in particular, you get a better understanding of how Mississippi earned the name ‘The Birthplace of America’s Music,’” Governor Haley Barbour said.

Ace Records was founded in 1955 by Mississippi native John Vincent Imbragulo (1925-2000), better known as “Johnny Vincent,” and was once Mississippi’s most successful record company. Vincent first developed an interest in blues via the jukebox in his parents’ restaurant in Laurel. He later moved into record distribution and opened a record shop at 241 North Farish Street, a block away from Trumpet Records. In the early ’50s Vincent founded the Champion label, on which he recorded local country and blues artists; the latter included Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup of Forest. In 1953 Vincent signed on as a talent agent with the Los Angeles-based Specialty Records and among his achievements there was producing Guitar Slim’s massive hit “The Things I Used to Do,” which featured Ray Charles on piano.

In 1955 Vincent started Ace Records, using Trumpet’s Diamond Recording Studio and, mostly, Cosimo Matassa’s studio in New Orleans. Ace scored national hits with New Orleans-based rhythm and blues acts including Frankie Ford, Huey Smith and the Clowns, and Earl King, and had his greatest success with “teen idol” Jimmy Clanton. Although Vincent recorded Jackson artists including Sam Myers, Ace is widely considered as the first major “local” New Orleans label. In the ’50s and early ’60s Ace and its subsidiary labels Vin and Teem issued records by a wide variety of country, rock’n’roll, and rockabilly acts, as well blues/R&B artists including James Booker, Mac Rebennack (later Dr. John), and Lightnin’ Hopkins. This era ended in 1965 following the bankruptcy of Chicago-based Vee-Jay Records, which was in partnership with Ace.

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Ace returned to business in the 1970s, when Vincent recorded many soul artists as well as local Jackson bluesmen including Sam Myers, King Edward, and Big Bad Smitty. In the early 1990s Vincent reoriented Ace as a “soul/blues” label, finding success with artists including Willie Clayton, Pat Brown, Frank O Johnson, Robert “Duke” Tillman, Bobby Jonz, and Ronnie Lovejoy. In 1997 Vincent sold Ace to a British company, and started a new company, Avanti Records, which he operated until his death in early 2000.

The Ace Records unveiling will be Jackson’s 7th historic blues marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail. Entertainment will be provided by a blues quartet during the ceremony. For more information contact the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau Communications and Public Relations Manager, Kelly Bilbo, 601-960-1891 or online at www.visitjackson.com.

The Mississippi Blues Trail markers are funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by support from the Jackson Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Delta State University and the Mississippi Development Authority.

Mississippi is a destination for music lovers. Gov. Haley Barbour created the Mississippi Blues Trail to recognize the talents of the state’s countless musicians in the Birthplace of America’s Music. Since December 11, 2006, the Mississippi Blues Commission and the Mississippi Development Authority have erected and celebrated the heritage of over 80 sites around the state.

For information on the Mississippi Blues Trail visit the internet at www.msbluestrail.org or the official Mississippi Development Authority Tourism site www.visitmississippi.org. To contact the MDA Tourism Blues Trail office in Jackson, contact Alex Thomas (601-359-3297, athomas@mississippi.org) or Leigh Portwood (601-359-3061, lportwood@mississippi.org). For more information on the musicians and promoters honored by the Mississippi Blues Trail, or to submit information on blues artists, contact: Jim O’Neal, Mississippi Blues Trail Research Director (816-931-0383, bluesoterica@aol.com).

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