

Rare California funk 45 sells to Japanese collector for \$2,650

Even though his command of English might not be scholarly, when it comes to his love of American funk, Japanese collector Ken Inoue knows no language barrier. "Why I love funk? Shake my heart too hot," he explained.

In the world of eBay, where money talks more than linguistic accuracy, the Chiba resident has become a regular among high-dollar, international collectors of rare American funk singles. In July, Inoue didn't think twice about spending \$1,525 for a single from the South Carolina-based Carleen And The Groovers, "Right On" (Music World 198/1971). "I am a space-high bidder," he admitted. However high other people bid, they can't win with me."

Although the amount paid for the single might be impressive, Inoue topped even himself when he discovered Leon Gardner's "Farm Song" (Igloo 163) being offered on eBay. "It's my top five wants," he said. When the auction ended, a final bid of \$2,650 secured his prized possession. "I'll keep this careful and enjoy as my treasure," he said.

Among the genre's collectors, "Farm Song" is often described as one of the rarest funk singles ever recorded. Very little is known about the song, let alone the artist, who was known for a babbling singing style, which many collectors claim makes him the first rap artist.

"I think it's an interesting record because although it is 'funky,' it's not your average piece of funk music with the usual changes and rhythm patterns," said Gerald Short (aka Jazzman Gerald) of Jazzman Records, London. "Rhythmically it's very complex, and every time I hear it I still have no idea what's going on and who is playing what and where, but somehow it fits together and it works! That's the beauty of funk in general — everyone doing their own rhythms but leaving enough gaps for everyone else to fit in so it all fits together."

According to Short, the record was pressed in a very small quantity and probably only given away when it was recorded in Los Angeles in the late 1960s, making the disc highly collectible. Gardner's association with another funk pioneer, Arthur Monday, makes his contribution to the genre legendary. (In 2002, Monday's 1969 release of "What Goes Around, Comes Around" sold on eBay for \$4,293.)

"It all has to do with supply and demand with any funk single," said Short. "As with Arthur Monday's 'What Goes Around Comes Around' and even 'Farm Song,' only a handful of copies are known to exist, and the lucky few who possess one do not want to sell." (On July



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20, 2005, Gardner's single, "Natural" [Calla C 163, arranged by Monday] sold for an equally impressive \$511.11 to a German funk collector.)

For anyone who doesn't have the funds to obtain "Farm Song," Short recently acquired, from Leon Gardner's relatives, the rights to use the record on an upcoming Jazzman funk compilation, *California Funk*. However, the elusive Gardner has made some parts of the production a bit difficult. "Even though we haven't been able to find Leon, I recently met Arthur Monday on a trip I made to the U.S., and he told us some stories from when he was working with him," he said. "We have a picture of Leon too, and if we cannot find him in time, which we will sooner or later — we always get our man, even if it takes years — we should be able to piece together some kind of history for the liner notes from those that knew him."

Funkmeisters and collectors all: Have you ever purchased a rare or unique record or found a much sought-after piece of your music collection on an online auction site? Whether you paid \$1 or \$10,000 (or more), I want to know about it. Contact me through my Web site at www.isleofwrite.com.

— Lisa Wheeler