



Traditional Country Musician

In 1980, a Louisiana Hayride promoter, Tillman Franks, heard Charles and brother Robert Whitstein sing. Fascinated by their amazing vocal harmony, Franks asked the brothers to make a demo tape of some of their songs. Encouraged by the response to this tape, Charles and Bob went to Nashville to put an album together. One veteran Nashville music critic said, "Upon hearing the album, they're gonna revolutionize the way people up here do harmony."

The brothers grew up around Colfax, Louisiana. Their father, Roy C. Whitstein, was a skilled guitar player, singer, and fiddler. On Sundays, Roy and his wife sang gospel music in various churches. Naturally, Robert and Charles, the oldest of nine children, were hooked by the sound. By age 11, Robert and Charles were playing mandolin, guitar, and singing on local television shows like "Search for Talent" and "Country Time." From these appearances, the young boys gained recognition and were able to make their first record, "Louisiana Woman" and "You Told Him," which was a regional hit.

Eventually, Nashville beckoned. Taking advantage of the popular shows *Hootnanny* of the '60s, Bob and Charles appeared three times on Grand Old Opry, toured with Faron Young, worked with Porter Wagoner and with the *Kitty Wells-Johnny Wright Show*. Unfortunately, the Vietnam War reared its head and the boys were drafted, and for ten years or more their careers were put on hold. Finally returning to Nashville in 1984, the brothers put together a successful album. This album pays tribute to some brother duos of the past--the Louvins, Blue Sky Boys, The Callahan Brothers, and The Del Brothers--while it adapts their duet style to more modern country songs.

Their sound is unique and pleasing to fans. They have been selected by Rounder records for five LP's, participated in repeated performances on the Grand Old Opry, and toured the United States, Japan, and Canada. They have appeared at art centers, folk festivals, and bluegrass festivals. They were Grammy finalists and top five in 1990.

Their album *Rose of My Heart* was voted by Library of Congress as album of the year. In 1991, Gov. Edwards and the state of Louisiana honored the Whitstein Brothers with a Special Recognition Award for their contribution to Louisiana's musical heritage.

The photograph appears courtesy of Rounder Records Corp. It is taken from Rounder Compact Disc 3719, *The Whitstein Brothers: Sweet Harmony*.