



Have I no shame, I was listening to a track '96 Tears' by *Question Mark and the Mysterians* (No I'm not kidding) I got to thinking, I wonder who else recorded this strange track, lo and behold - Big Maybelle – She was born in 1924. She was a Blues and R&B singer with a powerful voice and a huge stage presence.

Born Maybelle Louis Smith in Jackson, TN, to Frank Smith and Alice Easley, she grew up singing in Jackson's local Sanctified Church choir. Full-figured and commanding, 'Big' Maybelle sang the blues with controlled abandon and oh, such style. In 1932, she won first prize at the Cotton Carnival singing cabaret in Memphis, then toured with an all-female band called the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. They played at dances from Mississippi to Indiana.

From 1936 to 1940, she toured with the Christine Chatman Orchestra, and in 1944, she recorded with Christine on the Decca Label. During the 1950s, Maybelle sang with the Quincy Jones Orchestra, the Kelly Owens Orchestra, and the Danny Mendelsohn Orchestra. She appeared at the Apollo Theatre in NYC and the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival. Maybelle hit the charts in 1953 when 'Gabbin' Blues' hit number



three that year. Although she had several more chart hits, Maybelle could never achieve the stardom that her talent deserved.



She was so strong at her best that Billie Holiday once refused to follow her opening act. Maybelle struggled with a drug habit that later debilitated her. From the late 1960s, she performed sporadically. Big Maybelle died in 1971 of a diabetic coma.

PD Productions (Research file)