Title: Open the Door, Richard! : The Story of a Showbiz Phenomenon

Artists: Various

Label: Acrobat

Formats: CD, MP3

Release date: October 9, 2012

This fascinating compilation takes us on a journey from early 20th century vaudeville through the 1950s, while tracing the evolution of just one song. "Open the Door, Richard" originated on the minstrel circuit, most likely penned by Bob Russell, an early mentor of comedian Pigmeat Markham, who popularized the stage routine on which the song is based. This routine gained new life after a 1945 film short by director William Forest Crouch captured a performance by Dusty Fletcher, who is most often credited as the originator.

The following year, popular band leader Jack McVea became the first musician to record the song "Open the Door, Richard," which incorporates parts of the comedy routine. Released in 1946 on the Black & White label under the direction of producer Ralph Bass, the song became an instant jukebox sensation, setting off a flurry of cover versions by the likes of Louis Jordan, Hot Lips Page, The Three Flames, and Count Basie, who took it to the top of the charts: