As the Years Go Passing By

Eric Clapton created some of greatest guitar riffs in rock, but he was stuck when he came to ‘Layla’. When Clapton told Allman of his dilemma, Duane went to work, soon coming up with the seven-notes phrase that is now one of the best-known guitar licks in the history of rock. It was exactly what ‘Layla’ needed. I would be some time before Clapton would find out that Allman’s brilliant line wasn’t entirely original. Duane had simply taken the first phrase from a blues ballad called ‘As The Years Go Passing By’.

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In point of fact, the true composer of ‘As the Years Go Passing By’ is open to debate. The song is credited to Deadric Malone – a pseudonym frequently used by Don Robey, owner of Duke and Peacock records label, upon having purchased a composition from a writer for a flat fee (see note: I Smell Truble blues).

As the Years Go Passing By was first cut in 1959 by blues singer-guitarist Fenton Robinson (the composer of ‘Loan Me a Dime’). According to blues expert Jim O’Neill, Robinson always claimed that the true author of ‘As the Years Go Passing By’ was another blues singer Peppermint Harris.
Harrison D. Nelson Jr. known as Peppermint Harris was born on July 17, 1925, in Texarkana, Texas. He kicked around the Texas music scene for a number of years before settling down in the city of Houston in 1943. By the time he was in his early twenties, Harrison Nelson, Jr. was lucky enough to have found a mentor and friend on the Houston blues front: Lightnin' Hopkins took an interest in the young man's musical development. When Harris was deemed ready, Lightnin' accompanied him to Houston's Gold Star Records. Nothing came of that jaunt, but Harris eventually recorded his debut 78 for the company in 1948 (as Peppermint Nelson).

By 1949 he had an opportunity to record again, this time for Bobby Shad’s Sittin In With label. He recorded with a quintet fronted by sax players Ed Wiley and Henry Hayes. The initial offering was ‘Raining In My Heart’ and ‘The Blues Moved And Rolled Away’. It was at this time as legend would have it that Bob Shad momentarily forgetting his blues man’s last name, quickly wrote down Peppermint “Harris” on outgoing orders. When the record began to gain hit status, Peppermint Harris it was for the rest of Nelson’s career. “Raining” was a hit in Los Angeles and in Harris home town of Houston, and soon started to sell well in Atlanta and Jacksonville. The success of his initial record for Sittin In With led to good name recognition and club dates and road tours came his way.
Albert King plays As the years go passing by

The first session by Harris with the Aladdin label was recorded with the Maxwell Davis combo. It produced 'I Got Loaded' and 'It's You Yes It's You'. 'Loaded' took off and became a major hit on the West coast and followed nationally and would become the signature hit for Harris and his biggest seller ever. This 1951 Aladdin release occupied a spot on the Billboard Top 10 for six months and decades later was re-recorded by British rock star Elvis Costello.

Peppermint Harris - I Got Loaded

Combination of self-motivated creativity and susceptibility to forces beyond his control in some ways characterized Nelson's career as a bluesman, which involved recordings on over a dozen labels (including Aladdin, Money, Dart, Duke, and Jewel) and authorship of countless songs. In 1997 Nelson released a Peppermint Harris CD called 'Penthouse in the Ghetto,' comprising various vintage tracks recorded in Houston in 1958, 1960, 1974, and 1975, with noted local musicians such as Clarence Green, Clarence Hollimon, Teddy Reynolds, and others.

Peppermint Harris - Penthouse in the Ghetto

Many of Peppermint's compositions were reportedly sold outright for instant cash and therefore never properly credited to him. Among the many songs to which Nelson retained his rights were 'Think It Over One More Time,' 'Whole Lot of Loving,' 'Stranded in St. Louis' and 'As the Years Go Passin' By'.

Peppermint Harris - As the years go passing by

There is nothing I can do
As you leave me here to cry
There is nothing I can do
As you leave me here to cry
You know my love will follow you
As the years go passing by
Give you all that I own
That's one thing you can't deny
Give you all that I own
That's one thing you can't deny
You know my love will follow you
As the years go passing by
Gonna leave it up to you
So long, so long, goodbye
Gonna leave it up to you
So long, so long, goodbye
You know my love will follow you
As the years go passing by
Gonna leave it up to you
So long, so long, goodbye
Gonna leave it up to you
So long, so long, goodbye
You know my love will follow you
As the years go passing by

Peppermint Harris in Sittin In With records