

# THE ANGELIC GOSPEL SINGERS



THE BEST OF  
THE ANGELIC GOSPEL SINGERS

# The Angelic Gospel Singers

Margaret Allison and The Angelic Gospel Singers have enjoyed a long and distinguished career in post-war gospel singing. They are as popular today as they ever were. Under contract with Willy Leiser's Lausanne-based National Booking Agency in Switzerland, the group has made regular trips touring France, Germany, and Switzerland where they are welcomed with open arms. The trio has established itself on the European package tour circuit having just returned from a six concert venue in France. 1995 is going to be a busy year for them—they have arranged two European tours, another in France covering July and August and one in Switzerland in October.

Today's Angelics are made up of Margaret Allison, soprano lead and piano, Theresa Burton from Durham, North Carolina, high soprano (Theresa replaced Margaret's sister Josephine McDowell whose poor health does not permit her to travel), and Daryll Richmond from Danville, Virginia who sings alto and plays electric bass. The group carries two musicians, Francis Leggett from Raeford, North Carolina, guitar, and Mark Austin from Columbia, South Carolina who doubles on drums and rhythm guitar.

The Angelics' solid core of U.S. fans reside mainly in the East in Georgia, Virginia, and the Carolinas. The Angelic Gospel Singers unfortunately rarely visit the West Coast. The close "family around the piano" three-part harmony format has always been the Angelic trademark, and except for a more recent, updated musical sound with the addition of young musicians, the aggregation has retained a traditional down-home gospel feel.

The Angelics were formed in 1944 by Margaret Allison (now seventy-four years old) from McCormick, South Carolina. Founding members included her sister, Josephine, the late Lucille Sherd from Ashville, North Carolina, and the

late Ella Mae Norris from Greenville, South Carolina. The group traveled and played local churches around South Carolina for three years. In 1947, after the group had relocated to Philadelphia, singer/songwriter Otis Jackson who was then singing with The Evangelist Singers of Detroit before the formation of The Otis Jackson Quartet, introduced The Angelic Gospel Singers to Ivin Ballen of Gotham Records.

The group stayed with Gotham for six years where they cut their signature song, the best seller "Touch me Lord Jesus," a number that will always be associated with The Angelics. They also shared sessions dates with The Dixie Hummingbirds; out of these sessions came the unforgettable "Standing out on the highway," whereon Margaret, Ella Mae, and Ira Tucker, all trying to outdo each other, drive the song along to an ardent climax.

Paul Owens was with The Dixie Hummingbirds at this time. He joined The Angelics and Ira Tucker on "Today" ("Evening song"), backed by "One day," put out by Okeh Records. Between 1951 and 1955, the great soprano Bernice Cole also sang in the group. Later on, in 1975, she was asked to serve a second stint upon the passing of Geraldine Mars (who had only been with the singers for a year.)

Some time in 1955, Stan Lewis of Jewel/Paula Records, helped get the group signed with Chess Records in Chicago, but Nashboro's Ernie Young had always wanted the group on his label. He cut a deal with Chess and bought out their contract. The 1955 Angelic Gospel Singers were composed of Margaret and Josephine plus Thomas Mobley. Mobley had sung in The Harmonizing Four in 1954 on the Gotham label and can be heard carrying lead on "Stand by me." Thomas Mobley served in The Angelics off

and on throughout the sixties and seventies.

Nashboro sessions producer Shannon Williams recalls that organist Blind Jimmy and bassist Charlie Powell sat in on Angelics' dates when required. Recordings were made at Ernie Young's old mono studios at 177 - 3rd Avenue in Nashville throughout the fifties and early sixties.

The Angelics' first outing on Nashboro, "Jesus never fails (me)," is a rocking retool of Arthur A. Luther's baptist hymn of 1926. Jubilant singing and hand clapping add excitement to an otherwise very ordinary chart. "I'll be alright," the singles' reverse, is a beautiful rearrangement of "We shall overcome," admirably piped out by Blind Jimmy's organ support. Fine blues-colored piano playing and lead singing mark "I've weathered the storm," a number which could have well suited Bessie Smith or Lil Green. Turn the single over and we find "Every day," beautifully rendered by Josephine. This touching song, written by Margaret, demonstrates how well just three soloists can sound like five in the style of The Wards, or Davis Sisters, who would take hold of songs like "Every day" and fill them with vocal exaggerations..

Margaret's self-styled "All that I need" with Blind Jimmy's fine stabbing organ fills is a pretty praise song of ethereal quality. "Out of the depths" is a straight reading of Thelma Cross's beautiful hymn of 1943 and is perhaps the best recorded version, even though the third and final verse is cut from the song. "Touch me Lord Jesus" is a reworking of the group's best seller originally waxed for Gotham in 1949. Added pathos and fancy instrumentation distinguish it from the simple down-homey original.

The group's rendition of the traditional pentatonic hymn, "Nobody knows the trouble I've had," sounds remarkably "Wardish" in style and arrangement but comes across well with its touching warmth and heart-felt pleas. Joyous church-rocking is experienced on "Jesus is a

way-maker," evidence that The Angelics could stir a church and make people happy. "My sweet home" is sung in tight traditional format, with all voices at full throttle. The song is best remembered in the Reverend Cleophus Robinson / Sister Josephine James Peacock cover version of 1961.

"I'm getting nearer to my home" is a particular favorite with its wailing lead and tight sweeping vocal background in the mold of classic Staple Singers material. Part two proceeds in the same manner but breaks into double-time midway to add unexpected joy and excitement. "I'm getting nearer" was made widely popular in 1950 by the late Mahalia Jackson.

"Goin' over yonder" is a medium tempo praise song with a strong melody and catchy hook. On the bouncy "Everybody ought to pray," Thomas Mobley, although not taking lead, is quite solidly in evidence. Margaret howls and bellows and her piano figures rock along at the break.

One can never accuse The Angelic Gospel Singers of being overly morbid or reproachful. They are Christians and are glad about it. That is all that matters.

- Opal Louis Nations - February 1995

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Original record photos courtesy of:  
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Special Thanks:  
Ray Funk, David Sanjek  
- B.M.I. Archives