



**THE BEST OF**

**THE BROOKLYN  
ALL STARS**

# THE BROOKLYN ALL STARS

The saga of the legendary Brooklyn All Stars begins with veteran Brooklyn quartet singer and furniture dealer Charlie Storey. Storey was born in Camoke, Georgia and raised in Zebelon, North Carolina. The Storey family moved to Brooklyn in 1928.

In Brooklyn, Storey's father, a Pentecostal minister, founded the Mt. Zion Pentecostal Church. Storey sang in his father's church as a child and both as soloist and group singer in the family unit, billed simply as the Storey Family Singers.

By the 1930s, Storey and the Storey Family Singers (three brothers and two sisters) were well enough along to appear at afternoon and evening weekend services in neighboring Brooklyn Pentecostal churches.

The group's vocal style favored the popular jubilee quartet approach of the day. Old friend Thurman Ruth and his Selah Jubilee Singers were particular favorites.

In 1942 Storey joined The Jubilee Stars of Brooklyn (the same group that recorded for Haven in 1945-46.) Storey took the place of tenor Amos Staton who was drafted into military service. The Jubilee Stars, made up of singers from the Pentecostal denomination, appeared regularly on Joe Bostic's weekly gospel program aired over WLIB.

Bostic's show was syndicated and could be heard over WHBI in Newark on Sunday afternoons. When, in 1945, at the end of World War II, Staton returned to The Jubilee Stars, Storey set about planning the formation of his own outfit. The quartet became variously known as The Charlie Storey All Stars or The Brooklyn All Stars Singers.

Initial members included Johnny Moore, Jesse Veloton, and baritone-bass wizard Thomas Spann. Spann had always sung baritone and was persuaded by Storey (with much trepidation on Spann's part) to switch to bass.

Storey kept his radio spot with Joe Bostic, a tenureship which was to last eighteen years. The All Stars frequently appeared on Thurman Ruth's gospel program on Channel 9 and were regularly presented on Professor Alfred Miller's gospel broadcast on Channel 13. Miller had a long and extensive career in gospel music, having served as pivotal member of The Three Professors of Gospel, produced the 15

minute weekly TV Gospel Time, and had time left over to direct The Angelic Choir of Washington Temple Church. Storey's All Stars sang in competition with his former group, The Jubilee Stars, and beat them out.

Some time around 1956, Storey relinquished the rights to the use of the Brooklyn All Stars name by signing them over to bass singer Thomas Spann.

Storey found he needed to spend more time on the building up of his furniture business, which had fallen by the wayside in favor of the time-consuming semi-professional duties of gospel singer and manager.

Storey has since kept up quartet involvement. He currently sings and performs with the latest set of Charlie Storey All Stars. The group appears regularly in New York on weekend programs. (See Ray Allen's history of New York gospel quartets, "Singing in the spirit," University of Pennsylvania Press.)

Thomas Spann was born in South Carolina in 1935 and migrated to New York in 1940, where along with family members attended St. Mark's Holy Church on Fulton Street. Spann sang in Charlie Storey's All Stars from 1945 to 1955, after which he sang for a brief spell alongside Tommy Ellison in The Chosen Gospel Singers on Nashboro. Spann can be heard taking second lead on "When the saints go marching in" (Nashboro 567.) Around this period, having secured control of The Brooklyn All Stars signature, Spann actively sought recruits for his own quartet.

The Singing Stars of Louisburg, North Carolina came to the Big Apple to sing at the behest of St. Mark's on Fulton Street. The group included three promising young teenage singers, Hardie Clifton, lead tenor, his brother Maurice, and Nathaniel Cook, tenor. Spann took Nathaniel, Maurice, and Hardie out of the Louisburg group and rehearsed them in the basement of his home for a period of eighteen months. "Hardie had great potential," said Spann. "I made him into one of the greatest high tenor leads in gospel," he further asserts. Hardie possessed a soft, smokey, soulful voice resembling that of his idol Sam Cooke and could use his talent to its best possible advantage.

By 1958, Maurice had gone and was replaced by baritone Herbert Robinson who had served alongside Spann in

The Chosen Gospel Singers. Eddie Lester was taken on to fulfill guitar accompaniment. Signed with Don Robey's Peacock Records, this lineup recorded three fine singles including Hardie's unforgettable masterworks "Careless soul" and "Singing for the Lord," benchmarks in the history of late fifties gospel-soul music. In 1959, Herbert Robinson left to join The Sensational Nightingales and was replaced for a short while by Paul Owens, who after serving with The Nightingales and Dixie Hummingbirds had just quit The Swan Silvertones.

Some time around 1962 Spann befriended Harold Austin, proprietor of The Gospel Bookstore of Brooklyn, situated in Charlie Storey's furniture store neighborhood. Austin and Spann set up the Gospel Recording label which put out singles on many East Coast gospel artists including The Brooklyn All Stars. In 1964, The Brooklyn All Stars were comprised of Hardie and Paul Owens plus two tenor singers from the old Charlie Storey All Stars when Spann sang in the group, Sam Thomas, and Johnny Moore.

Five singles appeared on The Gospel Recording label plus one leased by Austin to Silver Cross. With little money to promote product, the records went nowhere and the label soon folded. In 1967, old friend Sullivan Pugh of Miami's famous Consolers man and wife team introduced The Brooklyn All Stars to Ernie Young of Nashboro Records who signed the group to a three year contract. By now the makeup of the group had changed significantly. Owens, Thomas, and Moore were gone and had been replaced by Jimmy Lee, a pseudonym for the great Jimmy Outler who had once served in The Soul Stirrers as Johnnie Taylor's replacement and was now hiding out under an assumed name. (Outler had an irascible temper and ended his days the victim in a knife fight.) For all this, Outler possessed a beautifully subtle high tenor voice whose likeness to Sam Cooke's was uncanny.

Replacement baritone Robert Martin lacked a glamorous past but with the taking aboard of guitarist Reverend Sam Butler, The All Stars had acquired the services of a star sideman and defector from The Five Blind Boys of Mississippi. The Brooklyn All Stars cut three albums and many singles for Nashboro.

The collection opens with the soulfully anguished rendition of "How long has it been" with Jimmy Outler putting on his "thing" and sounding remarkably like Tommy Ellison. "Walk in Jerusalem (I want to be ready)" introduces us to the soaring, rough-edged falsetto of the late Hardie Clifton who lifts

the song into lilting realms of absolute bliss. "Jesus loves me" is given the Hardie treatment. I am sure William B. Bradbury, the originator of this score, would have found great joy in Mr. Clifton's liberating arrangement.

Outler really "Cookees" on "I need the Lord," a tender tune set to waltz time. "Brightly beams" is based on Philip P. Bliss's "Let the lower lights be burning," a baptist hymn analogy of a soul lost at sea. Clifton gives the song some mighty mettlesome licks. The Clifton interpretation of "Family Prayer" is undoubtedly one of the group's strongest efforts. "Lord, I'm coming home" rocks and rolls along with Clifton's high tenor soaring all over the chart like an endangered swallow.

"Take Him with you" is based on "Take the Lord with you," a song made popular by The Kindly Shepherds who also recorded for Nashboro. The Brooklyn All Stars sing a more R & B oriented version. The beautiful "Soldier's Prayer" is based on The Dixie Hummingbirds' cleffing of "Prayer for peace" and is rendered in deep-soul fashion. "No cross, no crown" is enlivened with equal grace and passion. Clifton screams and hollers in jubilant glee on "Lord, search my heart" and really delivers the goods on "This old soul of mine."

Newfound soulful highpoints are reached on the group's spellbinding "Nobody's fault but mine." More rapturous feeling is evoked on "Since Jesus made things right."

In the 1970s, the group switched to Jewel out of Shreveport, and then to AIR of Atlanta in the 1980s. Thomas Spann and the guys are still on the road and optimistically looking for a label on which to press their current self-produced recordings.

— Opal Louis Nations - March, 1995

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