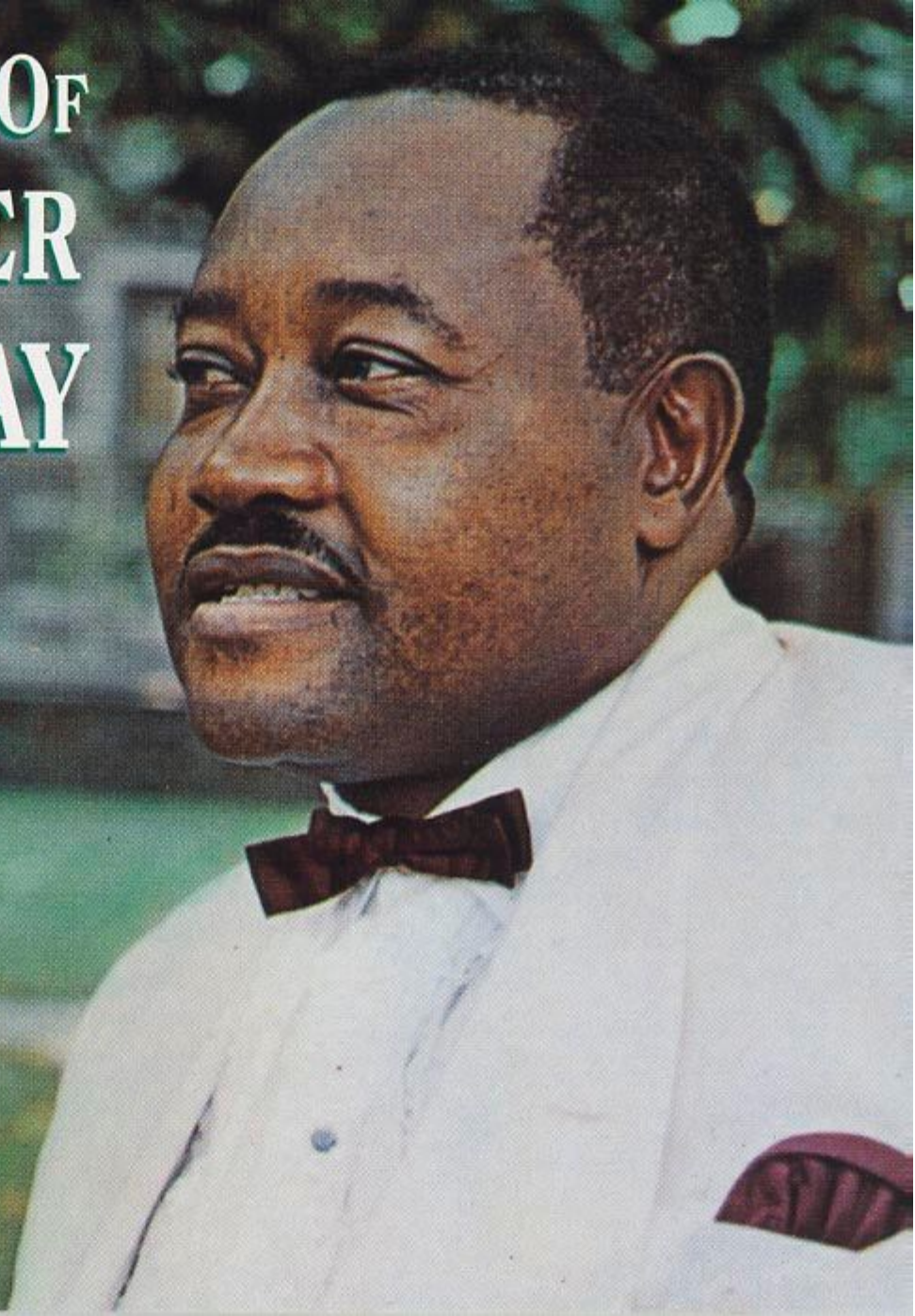


THE BEST OF
BROTHER
JOE MAY



The Best of Brother Joe May

Brother Joe reacher-showmen singer soloists of the Post-war era. May's recording career, spanning a twenty-three year period, covers studio and exceptionally volatile live recordings. Mike-pairings with Sister Wynona Carr, The Sallie Martin Singers, Rev. Cleophus Robinson, The Pilgrim Travellers, Annette May, Emma Tucker, and The Mayettes, as well as various choral ensembles, have been committed to wax.

Billed as the "Thunderbolt of the Middle West," the Macon, Mississippi-born "Caruso of gospel" got his start as student of the legendary Willie Mae Ford Smith in St. Louis. Smith popularized the compositions of Thomas A. Dorsey, and it was as guest on programs given by Dorsey's National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses that May built his reputation during the 1940s. May recorded for Specialty between 1949 and 1955. After one release on Avant in early 1958, he signed with Nashboro Records where he began recording his own compositions.

Our fourteen-song dip into May's awesome repertoire covers the first six years of his long association with Nashboro Records. "Mother's prayer answered" is a beautiful, touching song. May's at times almost whispered reading lends credence to an otherwise average song. An unidentified female soloist shares vocal chores on the midtempo "I'm going that way," an interpretation reminiscent of past pairings with Sister Wynona Carr.

On the rousing "Bye and bye, afterwhile," May is assisted by an unidentified male and female duo, possible his offspring Charles and Annette, both of whom built careers in the music business for themselves. On the upbeat "My time ain't long," May trades licks with an unidentified male soloist with inspired effect. Nothing gives one a notion of how powerful and dynamic May's vocal delivery was as demonstrated on his live recordings. "What is this," a booming live fragment from a service recorded in Nashville

during June of 1964, is a fine example.

"My mother prayed for me" is another example of May's cement-hardened singing strongly supported by a tight, solid rhythm section. Fancy organ and fine piano support May on "Going on a long journey afterwhile," a typical May mid-tempo chart recorded shortly before Christmas 1961. One of my favorite sides is "Walk on and talk on," a song on which May sings about back stabbers in a way which suggests a one-on-one conversation with the listener.

A rhythm and blues feel is evoked on May's October 1958 reading of "The Master is on our side." One of May's strongest sides is his pipe-stretching interpretation of "When the Lord gets ready (you've got to move,)" a foot-tapper that swings and jumps along supported (possibly) by the Mayettes. Rock and roll certainly comes to gospel on this bounce-number on which the backing combo just aches to play solo. This formula is repeated on "Hush, Somebody's calling my name," where the piano is allowed to rock a few bars. May deals with the situation in fine blues moaning

extroversion.

"Willing to run" is another mid-tempo blues-shaded opus backed by a tight rhythm section and unidentified female chorus. On "My conversion" May uses all the tricks in the book, moaning, pleading, and wailing his way through this spirit-moving testimony in story form drawn from personal experience. Nobody sings "Amazing Grace" like Brother Joe May who draws from it every vestige of emotion. On Part Two, May is joined by a truly righteous female chorus who help elevate the song to glorious heights.

It was while traveling to a program in Thomasville, Ga. that Brother Joe May died of a stroke on July 14, 1972. Gospel lost one of its leading lights.

— Opal L. Nations, December, 1994

Executive Producer:
Patti Drosins

Reissue produced by:
Bob Perry - Rob Santos

Compiled by: Bob Perry -
Matt Starr - Skippy White

Art Direction/Design by:
Mitchell Kanner

Liner notes by:
Opal Louis Nations

Project Assistants:
Robert Y. Kim -
Michael Russell

Special Thanks:
David Sanjek - B.M.I. Archives

Mastered by:
Jonathan Wyner at
M Works Cambridge MA.