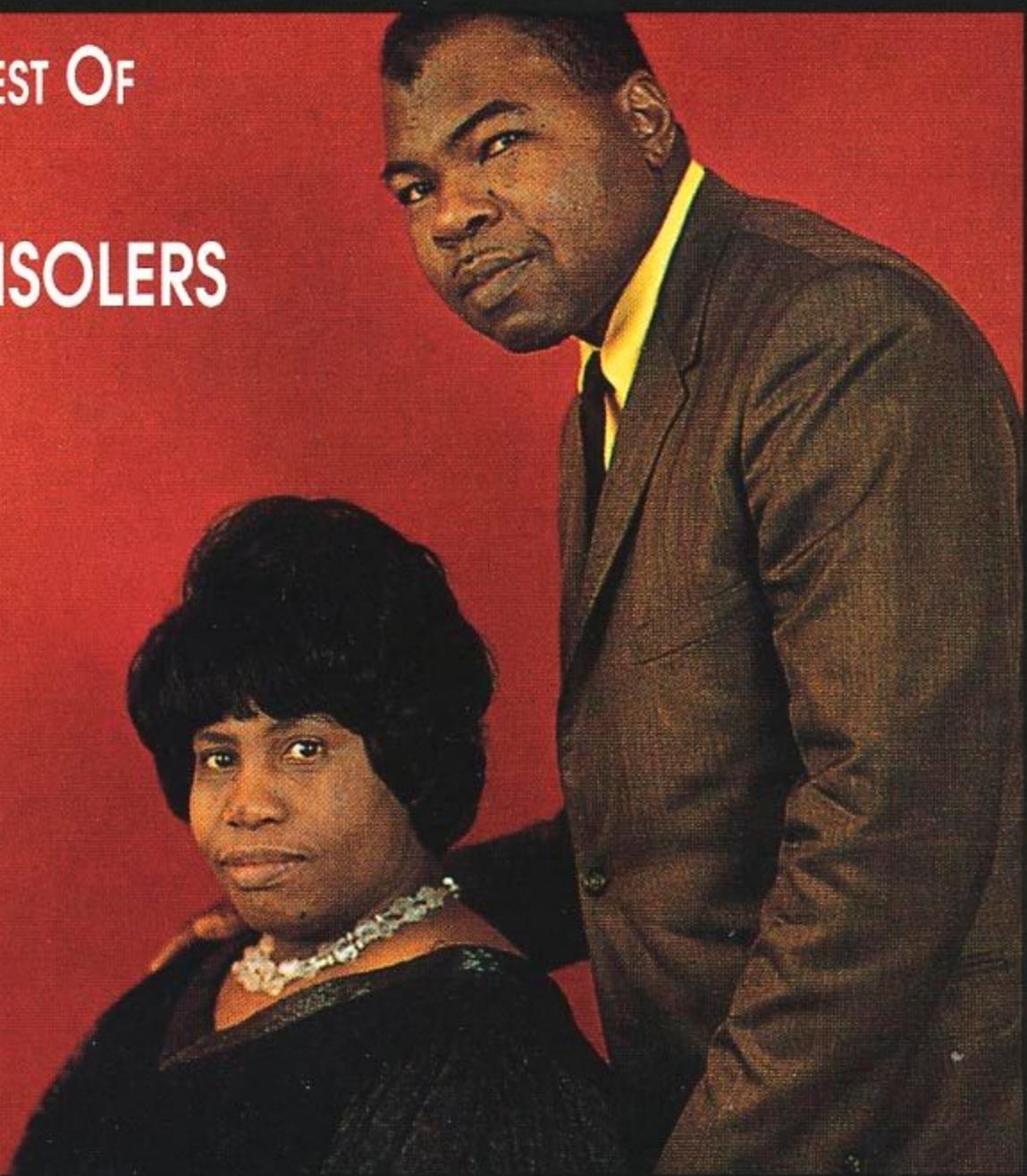


THE BEST OF
THE
CONSOLERS



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The death of Iola Pugh in October 1994 marked the end of one of the nation's finest gospel singing husband and wife teams — The Consolers of Miami, Florida. Over a period of forty years Iola and Sullivan Pugh cut many fine singles and albums (approximately twenty-five on Nashboro alone.) They have fans world over, and their records have been constant major sellers on the gospel market. The Consolers live in concert were a power to be reckoned with, while their studio recordings, a mixture of blues moans and sanctified church, impress one with a sense of strong and steadfast Christian conviction. The Consolers moved audiences and changed ordinary people. The couple had very deep religious roots. Sullivan started out as a child soloist in his church, The First Born Church of the Living God in Miami (of which, he told me, he is a member still.

Sullivan's wife Iola sang in a local choir called The Miami Gospel Singers when the two first met. In 1952, the pair decided to form a gospel trio with Pearl Nance-Rayford, calling themselves The Miami Soul Stirrers. Although influenced by The Soul Stirrers of Chicago (from whom the threesome took their name), the trio drew inspiration from the little known and under-recorded National Gospel Twins of Delray Beach, Florida

(Brother and Sister Quince.) In fact, the two groups recorded for the Glory and De-Luxe labels around this same period. In 1953, the Pughs dropped Rayford, became a duet, and changed their name to The Spiritual Consolers.

Switching from the Glory label to De-Luxe, the couple waxed a series of 78 releases which heralded an approach to gospel, strengthened and modified on later sides. Record sales were moderate at best, and the label dropped the artists. A year later, in 1955, Iola and Sullivan had themselves signed to Nashboro and their name shortened to The Consolers. The duet's first Nashboro release was "Give me my flowers" (included in this collection.) The song became the couple's longest lasting and best selling success. "Flowers" forged the unmistakable trademark that became The Consolers' sound. Sullivan's heart-aching, raspy vocals and plaintive bluesy guitar and Iola's fervent singing and plain down home straight talk say it all. "Give me my flowers" was from that day on The Consolers' opener.

In 1954, the duo cut "Every Christian Mother," one of the best of many mother songs popular among gospel groups during the 50s. Four years later the pair cut "Over yonder," one of the couple's most intense studio recordings. The urgency in Sullivan's voice sends chills down the spine. That same year the duo cut the driving "Won't it be grand" a song

heightened by Iola's wild hollers accompanied by tasteful piano and hand clapping. "Waiting for my child to come home," etched a year later, became a major selling record for the Pughs and one of their most touching. The song spawned a slew of mother-son recordings. Most frequently, the denied mother and neglectful son motif best exemplified in narratives set in wax by Dorothy Norwood.

"Somewhere around God's throne" is yet another story of Christians gone on to glory sung in plain country-gospel style. "His child is aboard," backed by "Too late," surfaced as a single release in 1966. "His child" related in narrative/parable mode by Iola tells of an air passenger's religious conviction in a time of probable disaster—a theme used over and over in gospel music. "Too late" is a touching, sorrowful song which tells of being a little overdue with one's respects. "Lord bring me down," waxed in 1967, is a typical example of Consolers' sentiment. Again Iola's sheer vocal conviction carries the song. On "Lord bring me down," Sullivan stays a little back and as usual picks out the just adequate guitar chording.

Jumping forward to 1969, we come upon "Thank God things are as well as they are" and "Together we will stand." "Thank God" is a pretty melody marked by gospel moans, plaintive pleas, and heavy organ accompaniment. "Together," recorded for the sake of convenience at

Miami's Criteria Studios, is another Consolers story in song, conveyed in simple layman's terms. "May the work I've done speak for me" and "Since the Lord laid his hands on me" came out as a double sided best selling single in 1969. "Work I've done" is one of the finest examples of The Consolers' plain, old fashioned approach to gospel. "Since the Lord" is sung to heightened effect with the addition of a prominently sounding organ and drums.

"Don't let nothing shake your faith" is from the duo's eleventh album and is as strong vocally as earlier material which just goes to show how consistently good The Consolers were both on the road and in the studio. The Consolers had a front porch gospel style of their own, honest, direct, simple, and strong.

This CD is just a sample from a vast body of work examples from which I hope will follow on the heels of this retrospective collection.

- Opal Louis Nations
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