

THE BEST OF
DOROTHY LOVE-COATES
& THE GOSPEL HARMONETTES



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ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC.

NASHBORO
Records

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Dorothy Love-Coates & The Gospel Harmonettes

The Gospel Harmonettes are right up there with the top flight Post-war female aggregations of all time. Led by the strongly persuasive and anguished, ragged pipes of Dorothy Love-Coates, the sextet tore up black churches from Bangor to Chula Vista with a fervent firebrand-type of gospel full of jubilation and joy.

In the beginning, the Birmingham, Alabama-based Harmonettes modeled themselves after The Roberta Martin Singers and took as their mentors Robert Anderson and the Rev. W. Herbert Brewster. The group was first called the Harmonees, a name changed to the Lee Harmonees after they started to tour with Georgia Lee Stafford. In the spring of 1949, the group now billing themselves as The Gospel Harmonettes, appeared on Arthur Godfrey's "Talent Scouts" program and won a recording contract with RCA Victor.

The Gospel Harmonettes, now renamed The Original Gospel Harmonettes to distinguish themselves from would-be copyists, committed themselves to two recording sessions at RCA's New York studios. These were

held on June 21, 1949. Eight songs were cut. All were issued and reissued by Victor over a period of approximately four years, but none solicited strong sales.

Professor Alex Bradford, singer, composer, and gospel talent scout for Art Rupe, had the group signed to Specialty Records in the spring of 1951. A string of major-selling records spanning a five year period ensued. The Gospel Harmonettes recorded briefly for Andex in 1958, followed by a four-year stint with Savoy, a single cut for Motown and a three and a half year stint with Vee Jay Records of Chicago. Then followed an album for both Hob and Okeh before the group signed with Nashboro in 1968.

The Gospel Harmonettes at this point included Dorothy Love-Coates, lead, Mildred Miller Howard, lead, Lillian McGriff, Cleo Kennedy and Willie Mae Newberry Garth. The Reverend Charles Kemp accompanied the group on piano on later Nashboro recordings.

This CD selection includes most of the material contained on LP 7065, "Til my change comes" and LP 7071 "Separation Line." We kick off to a rockin' start with "Heaven, I've heard so much" with its solid rhythm background and group singing at fever

pitch, a perfect warm-up number. This is followed by the pounding Harmonettes' standard "I won't let go." Impressive organ figures lift this momentous stomper to ever dizzying heights. The Gospel Harmonettes get down in the alley on their soulful rendition of "I'm on my way," a melancholy dirge augmented with stinging blues guitar runs. Dorothy comes through and testifies on "He's got everything," a mid-tempo devil chasing refrain.

"Til my change comes" is dusted off and given a cheerful, updated arrangement. The group sings this praise-song with flair and gusto. "Every day will be Sunday," "The Chariot," and: Come and go with me" get the members out of their pews and into the aisles with the groups breakneck-paced action and lively excitement very much in The Harmonettes tradition.

"You don't know" is given the slow, long, and easy treatment. Dorothy uses the extra time to stretch out and get her message across. The group's closely warbled harmonic chanting adds a sense of sorcery. "Separation line" is given an even and formal treatment. The Reverend Kemp joins the ensemble on a zealous rendition of "So many falling by the wayside," a soul-purging mid-tempo tune which sadly

finishes before the anticipated climax. The crucifixion is finely described and furiously implied on the groups reading of "Dark day in Jerusalem."

Dorothy gives a tortured, almost agonized coloring to the introduction of "God shall wipe away all tears," a song dramatized with staccato embellishment.

The set concludes with Mildred "busting" her pipes on "Lord tell me when."

This CD is perfect both for those wishing to complete their collections of The Harmonettes at their zenith and for would-be collectors exposed to The Gospel Harmonettes for the first time.

- Opal Louis Nations, December 1994

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