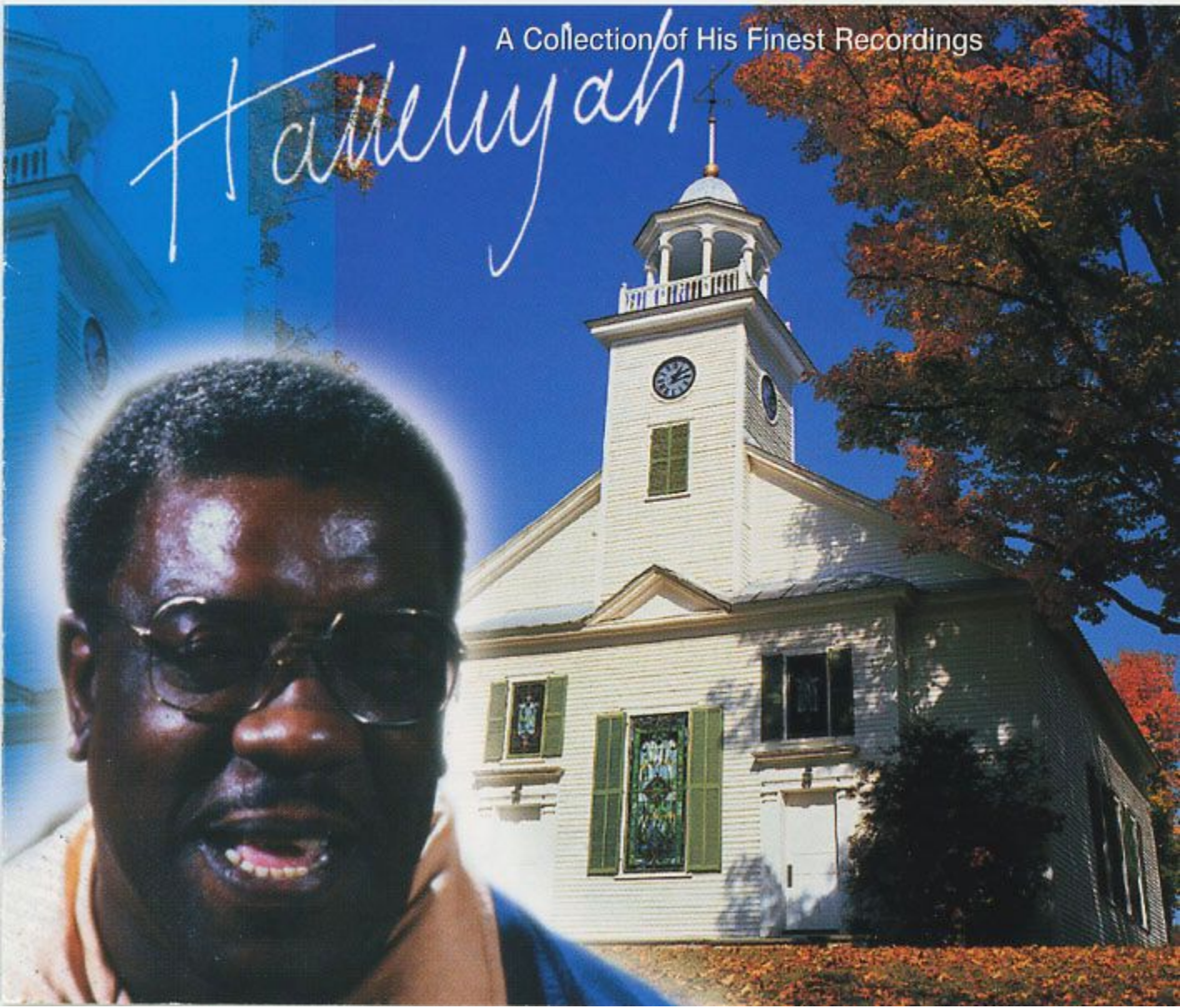


# The Reverend **James Cleveland**

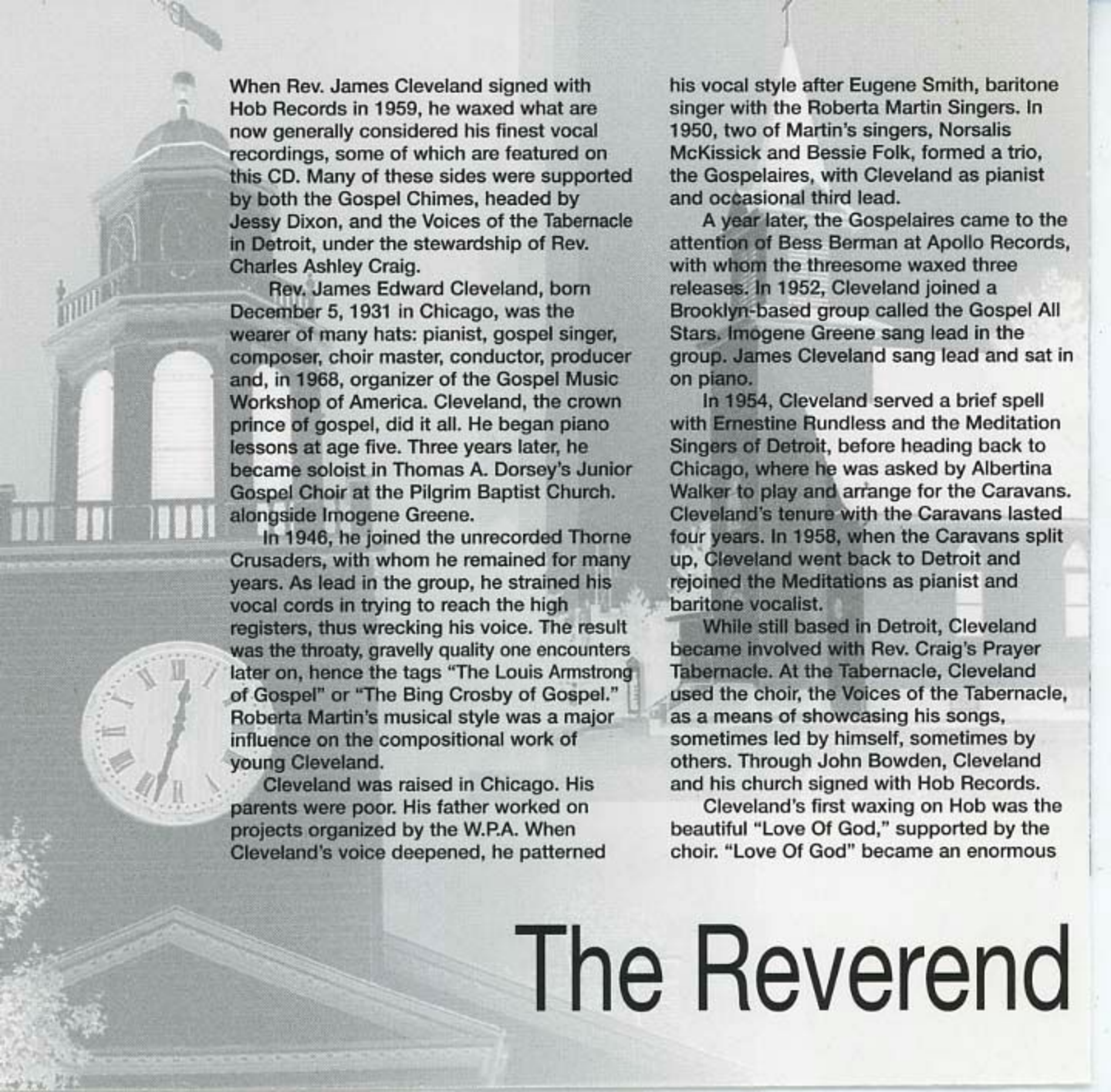


A Collection of His Finest Recordings

*Hallelujah*







When Rev. James Cleveland signed with Hob Records in 1959, he waxed what are now generally considered his finest vocal recordings, some of which are featured on this CD. Many of these sides were supported by both the Gospel Chimes, headed by Jessy Dixon, and the Voices of the Tabernacle in Detroit, under the stewardship of Rev. Charles Ashley Craig.

Rev. James Edward Cleveland, born December 5, 1931 in Chicago, was the wearer of many hats: pianist, gospel singer, composer, choir master, conductor, producer and, in 1968, organizer of the Gospel Music Workshop of America. Cleveland, the crown prince of gospel, did it all. He began piano lessons at age five. Three years later, he became soloist in Thomas A. Dorsey's Junior Gospel Choir at the Pilgrim Baptist Church, alongside Imogene Greene.

In 1946, he joined the unrecorded Thorne Crusaders, with whom he remained for many years. As lead in the group, he strained his vocal cords in trying to reach the high registers, thus wrecking his voice. The result was the throaty, gravelly quality one encounters later on, hence the tags "The Louis Armstrong of Gospel" or "The Bing Crosby of Gospel." Roberta Martin's musical style was a major influence on the compositional work of young Cleveland.

Cleveland was raised in Chicago. His parents were poor. His father worked on projects organized by the W.P.A. When Cleveland's voice deepened, he patterned

his vocal style after Eugene Smith, baritone singer with the Roberta Martin Singers. In 1950, two of Martin's singers, Norsalis McKissick and Bessie Folk, formed a trio, the Gospelaire, with Cleveland as pianist and occasional third lead.

A year later, the Gospelaire came to the attention of Bess Berman at Apollo Records, with whom the threesome waxed three releases. In 1952, Cleveland joined a Brooklyn-based group called the Gospel All Stars. Imogene Greene sang lead in the group. James Cleveland sang lead and sat in on piano.

In 1954, Cleveland served a brief spell with Ernestine Rundless and the Meditation Singers of Detroit, before heading back to Chicago, where he was asked by Albertina Walker to play and arrange for the Caravans. Cleveland's tenure with the Caravans lasted four years. In 1958, when the Caravans split up, Cleveland went back to Detroit and rejoined the Meditations as pianist and baritone vocalist.

While still based in Detroit, Cleveland became involved with Rev. Craig's Prayer Tabernacle. At the Tabernacle, Cleveland used the choir, the Voices of the Tabernacle, as a means of showcasing his songs, sometimes led by himself, sometimes by others. Through John Bowden, Cleveland and his church signed with Hob Records.

Cleveland's first waxing on Hob was the beautiful "Love Of God," supported by the choir. "Love Of God" became an enormous

# The Reverend

success. Cleveland put his heart and soul into these early Hob sides. His gruff squeals and growls and preacherly ways were enough to convince the listener of his faith.

Cleveland's second release from his first Hob session was the equally anguished "God Can Do Anything But Fail." Both "Love Of God" and "God Can Do Anything But Fail" are included on this CD. From Cleveland's first album with the choir we have picked out "I Know It Was The Blood," with Cleveland coming in with "Amazing Grace" midway through. The original Cleveland Singers were formed with Hulah Gene Dunklin, Richard Roquemore and Louise McCord. From Cleveland's second album with the Tabernacle Choir, we have chosen the striking duet "It Is Well (With My Soul)," on which Cleveland and Rev. Craig spar like rival sinners.

In 1960, Cleveland recorded an album at the King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit. Featured guests were Sallie Martin and the Original Gospel Chimes, composed of old pals Dorothy Norwood, Jessy Dixon and Imogene Greene. Cleveland-led songs from the album include "Good Enough For Me," "Try Jesus," "He's Got His Eyes On You," "You're Not Walking Alone" and "Who Will Answer." "Old Time Religion" and "Just When I Need Him Most" are from Cleveland's following album, cut in the studio with Jessy Dixon, Imogene Greene, Lee Charles Neely, and Claude O. Timmons comprising the Gospel Chimes.

Cleveland recorded exhaustively for Hob during this period. A total of eight albums was released in a little under a year's time. From his sixth release we have singled out the choir-supported "Something Got A Hold On Me" and "Greater Day." At the close of Cleveland's first stay with Hob Records, he recorded with his old friends the Meditation Singers, who were at that point also signed to Hob.

From Cleveland's eighth and last album, from 1960, we have chosen to include a duet with Louise McCord titled "He'll See You Through." In May 1960, under the close supervision of Rev. Lawrence Roberts, Cleveland signed with Herman Lubinsky's Savoy Records. On his first album, he was paired up with his old group, the Gospel All Stars, with, amazingly enough, almost the same group members as seven years before. After one album with the Gospel Chimes and a permanent move to Nutley, New Jersey, Cleveland was ensconced at the First Baptist Church, home of the famous Angelic Choir, directed by Lubinsky's gospel producer, Rev. Lawrence Roberts and Los Angeles veteran choir director Thurston Frazier. The young Billy Preston occupied the organ bench.

Cleveland cut three albums with the choir. He then recorded a solo album. A collection titled *The Sun Will Shine After Awhile*, with the Cleveland Singers (Preston sang baritone), followed shortly thereafter.

# James Cleveland



In September 1967, Cleveland recorded an album with the Angelic Choir, on which "Peace Be Still (Parts 1 and 2)" was recorded. Issued as a single, "Peace Be Still" became an enormous hit for Cleveland. Its success prompted *Billboard* Magazine to publish regular charts of gospel music sales and radio airplay. Both the single and album dominated the best-sellers list in January 1965. Cleveland became the most popular artist in gospel, earning respect and recognition everywhere.

A *James Cleveland Presents* album series was instigated. Cleveland continued to cut eight more albums for Savoy as soloist, teamed up with his constantly evolving singers, with the Angelic Choir, and fronting the Walter Arties Chorale.

By 1967, Cleveland was back temporarily with Hob Records and recorded again with the Rev. Ashley Craig and the Voices of The Tabernacle in Detroit. Of the two Cleveland albums recorded that year, we have selected one number from his first, "Lord Do It For Me." Months later, Cleveland was back on Savoy Records, recording with the Cleveland Singers and Angelic Choir in Nutley. In between times, both in 1968 and 1969, he was able to journey to Detroit and record with the Voices of the Tabernacle.

In August 1968, Cleveland put together the Gospel Music Workshop of America, an organization that grew into several hundred thousand by the mid-1980s. The GMWA, with chapters in many cities, was set up to allow Cleveland to come and visit so that new songs and techniques could be taught and work critiqued. A year later, he pulled up stakes and moved permanently to Los Angeles, where he became music master for the Southern California Community Choir. In

1970, he organized and became the pastor of the Cornerstone Institutional Baptist Church. He was awarded four Grammys and earned 15 gold records.

On August 12, 1981, Cleveland was awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, an honor bestowed upon very few in gospel. James Cleveland, "The Crown Prince of Gospel," died February 9, 1991. His albums continue to sell in impressive quantities, and the giant steps he made in the development of choral gospel music will live on in the choirs recording today and those of tomorrow.

### *Opal Louis Nations*

*Opal Nations, born in Brighton, England, is a music producer, writer of both fiction and music articles, and vocalist with 1960s groups Alexis Korner Band, The Frays, and The Ram Holder Group, as well as former KPFA (Berkeley) deejay.*

### *The Reverend James Cleveland*



- 1. You're Not Walking Alone**  
*(Cleveland) Copyright Control*
- 2. Who Will Answer**  
*(Cleveland) Copyright Control*
- 3. It Is Well (With My Soul)**  
*(Arr. Cleveland) Screen Gems  
EMI Music Inc. (BMI)*
- 4. Good Enough For Me**  
*(Cleveland) Martin & Morris Music Studios*
- 5. I Know It Was The Blood**  
*(Baker / Cleveland) Al Green Music (BMI)  
Butter Music (BMI)*
- 6. He'll See You Through**  
*(Cleveland) Copyright Control*
- 7. God Can Do Anything But Fail**  
*(Fielding) Copyright Control*
- 8. Love Of God**  
*(Lehman / Cleveland) Copyright Control*
- 9. Try Jesus**  
*(Cleveland) Screen Gems  
EMI Music Inc. (BMI)*
- 10. Something Got A Hold On Me**  
*(Woods / Arr. Cleveland) Copyright Control*
- 11. He's Got His Eyes On You**  
*(Trad.) Public Domain*
- 12. Greater Day**  
*(Cleveland) Copyright Control*
- 13. Lord Do It For Me**  
*(Cleveland) Screen Gems  
EMI Music Inc. (BMI)*
- 14. Just When I Need Him Most**  
*(Poole) Copyright Control*
- 15. Old Time Religion**  
*(Trad.) Public Domain*

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# James Cleveland