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- 12. SOMETHING WITHIN ME (Lucie E Campbell) Screen Gems-EMI Music Ltd THE NIGHTINGALES (1949)
- 13. I'M USING MY BIBLE FOR A ROAD MAP (Don Reno, Charles Schroeder) Lark Music Ltd THE FOUR INTERNES (1953)
- 14. I WONDER WHO CARES (Joseph Von Battle) THE CUMBERLAND RIVER SINGERS (1953)
- 15. IN THAT GREAT REUNION (Alonzo Eubanks) THE FOUR INTERNES (1951)
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- 17. IT'S A HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN (Thomas A Dorsey, Mary Gardner) Warner Chappell Music Ltd THE NIGHTINGALES (1949)
- 18. TOO CLOSE TO HEAVEN (Alex Bradford) Carlin Music Corp THE CUMBERLAND RIVER SINGERS (1953)
- 19. GOING BACK TO JESUS (Alonzo Eubanks) THE FOUR INTERNES (1952)
- 20. LONG AGO (John Myles) SWAN'S SILVERTONE SINGERS (1950)
- 21. WHERE SHALL I GO (Joseph Johnson) THE TRUMPETEERS (1949)
- 22. THAT AWFUL DAY (Isaac Watts Arr Earl Malone) Lonat Music THE SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS QUARTET (1952)
- 23. JESUS IS ALL THE WORLD (TO ME) (Herbert Brewster) Copyright Control THE CUMBERLAND RIVER SINGERS (1953)
- 24. LORD JESUS Parts 1 & 2 (Wynona Carr) BMG Music Pub Ltd THE SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS QUARTET (1952)

All tracks Fort Knox Music Inc/Trio Music Co except where noted

Many moons have passed since we have seen any reissues of the King-Federal-De Luxe-Queen quartet material from gospel's Golden Age, approximately the two decades following World War II. This choice compilation serves as an enticing first dip into the seemingly boundless treasures of the King vaults. These waxings were masterminded by indie record mogul Syd Nathan out of Cincinnati, Ohio, the place of his birth in 1904. Nathan had tried his hand as a pawnshop and jewellery store salesman, park concession and shooting gallery operator, riveter, bus boy and wrestling promoter, spending a short time in Arizona to alleviate his asthma before returning to Cincinnati in 1932.

After a brief spell living with his brother in Florida while working as a photo finisher, Nathan again relocated to Cincinnati and opened a record shop at 1351 Central Avenue. He sold black music at first, then began adding hillbilly records due to increasing demand. Bountiful sales of product from jukebox operators led to larger second premises on West 5th Street. In 1943 Nathan, envisioning the lucrative prospects of cutting and marketing his own product, sold his retail store on Central to his brother, and announced the issue of his first two King hillbilly releases in November 1943. These were recorded at the Central Avenue store and manufactured in Dayton, Ohio.

With finance from relatives and friends, Nathan made the final step to gain complete autonomy and bought an old meat extract factory building at 1540 Brewster Street. He set up the plant to cover every aspect of production. It opened in 1944 and was devoted exclusively to the manufacture of country and western sides for his King imprint. In August 1945 Nathan founded the Queen subsidiary to cater to the rapidly

expanding R&B market. That month, he gingerly ventured into gospel and recorded Muriel Gaines and the Dixie-Aires for Queen and, ten months on, the Wings Over Jordan Choir plus lapsteel wizard Willie Eason with his outfit, the Gospel Trumpeters. Nathan had cautiously moved into gospel.

SWAN'S SILVERTONE SINGERS

In July 1946 Swan's Silvertone Singers made their recording debut for Queen, cutting at least eight known sides. Their evolution dates back to the mid-1930s when Claude Jeter, having finished high school in Kentucky, began labouring in the coal mines across the border in West Virginia. To provide entertainment for the work crews, who worked long, tedious shifts, Jeter organised the Four Harmony Kings, who, after some personnel shuffles, consisted of



Spiritual

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Jeter, his brother and two members of the work crew. The group developed a local reputation and became celebrated for their close, sweet singing. By the early 1940s, the Four Harmony Kings had sung themselves out of the mines and had relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee.

Having garnered a regular Sunday morning spot at Radio WDIR, they renamed themselves Swan's Silvertone Singers (later known as the Swan Silvertones). This name change was made because they both wanted to avoid confusion with the Four Kings of Harmony and elicit additional publicity for the Swan Bakery.

the outfit's on-air sponsor. By July 1946 the Swans were composed of Jeter, high tenor, lead and manager; Albert Reed, second lead tenor; Solomon Womack, baritone and lead; John Myles, baritone; and William Johnson, bass singer, guitarist, lead and arranger.

Syd Nathan then reluctantly waxed the excellent all-female Southern Harps of New Orleans, whose personnel included the youthful Bessie Griffin and Linda Hopkins after recording two jubilee quartets: the Harmoneers and the widely popular Jubalaires. Nathan rarely recorded female gospel aggregations during the early years, as the all-male quartets made him far more money. The Queen label was discontinued in August 1947 and its complete catalogue reissued on the King imprint. Shortly after this, Nathan purchased a large part of the De Luxe catalogue. De Luxe had been formed in 1944 by the Braun family out of Linden, New Jersey. In November 1948 Nathan reissued the Golden Echo Quartet from De Luxe masters, and others followed. After one release by Brother Joshua, Nathan started reissuing gospel product

purchased from other labels such as the Jewel Jubilees from JVB and the Jubalaires from Southern.

When Swan's Silvertone Singers recorded again for King in December 1947, Roosevelt Payne had replaced Albert Reed and Henry Bossard had stepped into William Johnson's shoes. Good, strong singing and swing lead work, mainly the alternating Payne and Womack, marked this period. Jeter's ethereal falsetto had not yet fully come to the fore. June 1949 saw the last

Swans' session as a quintet. It was not until 1950, when the rough-singing Reverend Percell Perkins came aboard, that the group started "stretching out" and began mining greater depths of emotion.

Our selections from their catalogue kick off with a powerpacked version of 'Toll The Bell', with leads by Perkins and Jeter from their May 1951 session. Perkins and Jeter also lead on the soul-searing 'All Aboard'. Then comes the traditional 'Live So God Can Use You', which builds excitingly

LORD JESUS (Part 2) THE SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS QUARTET **Spirit Of Memphis** NOT with Joe Walcott, FOR SALE circa 1952. The Quartet was first organized in 1945, and be-L to R: Theo Wade, gram at the Ellis Auditorium in Memphis. Their Fred Howard, Jersey Joe, concert tours take them to all parts of the Robert Reed, Earl Malone, Wilmer Broadnax, Spiritual 4576 Jethro Bledsoe, Silas Steele Courtesy of Mrs Essie Wade to a crescendo with Womack and Perkins trading licks, while the final track, 'Long Ago', finds Jeter and Womack trying to skilfully outdo each other. The group, with the Reverend Robert Crenshaw replacing Perkins, and with Payne gone, switched to Specialty Records in early 1952.

THE SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS QUARTET

In December 1949 Nathan had signed three more significant gospel quartets, the Spirit of Memphis, the Trumpeteers and the Nightingales, to his King label, although the Spirit of Memphis Quartet had one prior release on De Luxe earlier in the year.

The Spirit of Memphis' history dates to the late 1920s when quartet harmony and Sunday programmes blossomed around the Memphis area. Founding members included baritone James Darling, Burt Perkins, Arthur White and Arthur Wright. Most had sung in the TA&S Quartet (the name formed from the initials of the various churches to which the singers were affiliated). The Spirit of Memphis name was adopted in honour of Lindbergh's memorable trans-Atlantic flight of 1927. The group rehearsed at Perkins' house and performed around Memphis. They never recorded during the 1930s while enduring an almost continual change of personnel. The 1936 group included Freddie Johnson, Ramond Sanders, Herman Paul and Lewis White, plus three soldiers who became the core of the later recording group, tenor Robert Reed, basso Earl Malone and baritone Jethro "Jet" Bledsoe.



In early 1949, billed as the Memphis Gospel Singers, Reed, Malone and Bledsoe, plus baritones Silas Steele and James Darling, cut a vanity recording on the Hallelujah Spirituals label. This was followed by a second release on De Luxe with an alternate version of 'I'm Happy In The Service Of The Lord'. With the addition of lead tenor Willmer M Broadnax, aka "Little Axe", the group cut a number of demos for Radio WJLD before conducting its initial King session that yielded at least six issued songs. All were played regularly on the fledging megawatt Memphis radio station, WDIA, by "Highway To Heaven" jock Ford D Nelson. Strong sales generated through gigs and on-air promotion led to two more King sessions in 1950. Basso singer James Keels temporarily filled in for Earl Malone during this time.

Our Spirit of Memphis Quartet choices are drawn from three recording dates when baritone Fred Howard had replaced James Darling. Silas Steele and Jethro Bledsoe give the surrealistically magnificent 'The Atomic Telephone' from August 1951 a fine once-over, and the duo is also heard on 'That Awful Day' from the same session. Bledsoe gives 'Workin' 'Till The Day Is Done' from July 1952 a sanctified reading as he hollers his way into paradise. From the live concert at Memphis' Mason Temple on 7 October 1952, we have included the thrill-filled 'Lord Jesus', stretched to wring out the last vestige of emotional catharsis by "Jet" Bledsoe. It was presented in two parts on the original 78 rpm release, but here we have the unedited recording.

THE TRUMPETEERS of Maryland evolved from the Willing Four from Baltimore in 1946. Joseph E Johnson, who had served both in the Willing Four and the Golden Gate Quartet, put the original Trumpeteers group together with basso James Keels and tenor Raleigh Turnage (both Willing Four alumni), plus baritone Willie MacNair. The Trumpeteers, like so many others, adopted the jubilee style of the Golden Gate Quartet and broadcasted over WCAO in Baltimore, for which they cut jingles and transcriptions for a sponsoring shoe company. Soon the group was noticed by the CBS Radio Corporation, who offered a regular broadcast in place of the departing Jubalaires of New York. The show was picked up by the corporation's affiliates.

When Leo Mesner, co-owner and operator of Hollywood's Aladdin Records, visited Baltimore, he caught one of the Trumpeteers' on-air broadcasts and was greatly impressed by their signature tune, 'Milky White Way', a song penned by Lander Coleman of the Coleman Brothers. In fact, the Colemans



recorded the song for the Manor label in 1944. Five tunes, including 'Milky White Way', were transcribed at WCAO for Aladdin in September 1947. The Trumpeteers' 'Milky White Way' kicked off the Mesner brothers' new Score gospel imprint in May 1948 and caused a major sensation. Both Swan's Silvertone Singers and Spirit of Memphis later recorded the song with little alteration to the arrangement. The Trumpeteers' version ended up selling over a million copies, one of the first post-war gospel records to do so. They re-recorded it a number of times.

Joe Johnson (far left). Courtesy of Doug Seroff

To keep the Trumpeteers a financially viable asset, Aladdin Records had the group wax a secular session showcased as the Rockets, but the record, every bit a Trumpeteers-sounding effort, failed to ignite. Most of the Trumpeteers' seventeen Score singles releases, issued over a five-year period, sold in encouraging amounts. When the group came to King, they had found a new manager, Larry Leneiska, ex-executive of Universal Attractions booking agency. Between contracts with Aladdin, the Trumpeteers cut only two sessions for King, once in December 1949, then again in January 1950, netting the sum total of four singles plus one song which only saw album release. The group at this time was made up of Turnage, Keels and Johnson plus one new member, baritone singer Calvin Stewart, who took the group into the 1980s.

Our Trumpeteers' selection draws two songs from each of the two King sessions. Firstly, the traditional 'Nobody's Fault But Mine', sung in good, old, downhome field-song fashion, followed by the

> lilting, hypnotic 'Who Is Your Friend'. Secondly, the 'Milky White Way'-sounding clone 'Lay Down My Heavy Burden', with its pretty, harmonic patterns, and the group's pumping arrangement of Charles Price Jones' classic 'Where Shall I Be', here reinterpreted as 'Where Shall I Go'.

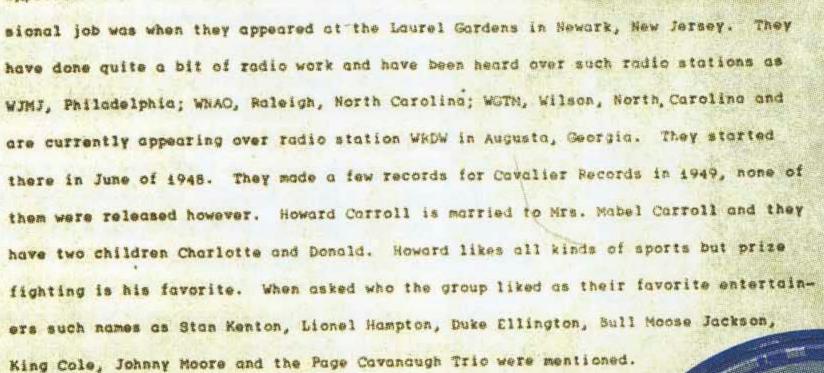
THE NIGHTINGALES were the brainchild of Barney Parks, then manager of the nationally acclaimed Dixie Hummingbirds of Philadelphia. Back in 1949, quartet "battles" were in full swing and usually drew vast crowds.

If one could go out on the road with two quartets, each competing against the other to curry the audiences' favours, chances were this type of entertainment would multiply ticket sales. With this view in mind, Parks took tenor Ben Joyner from the Harmonizing Four of Richmond, Virginia, baritone lead Paul Owens (who down the line made a name for himself in the Swan Silvertones), baritone Howard Carroll (who fared likewise when he switched to the Dixie Hummingbirds), plus basso William Henry to

MEET THE KING ARTISTS

THE NIGHTINGALES

The Nightingale Quartet is one of the newest Spiritual quartets to sign a King Recording contract. Their leader is Howard G. Carroll who was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The entire group learned music by themselves and gained recognition by minor appearances in local churches. Their first profes-



Howard Carroll (top left). Copied from King files by Bill Daniels make up his quartet. All were seasoned singers, and together they were christened with another avian sobriquet, the Nightingales.

In July 1949, Parks took the Nightingales to Lander "Bill" Coleman, second tenor with the Coleman Quartet. With his brothers Mel and Russell, Lander was co-proprietor of Coleman Records, situated in the basement of his Coleman Hotel on Court Street in Newark, New Jersey. Over its short solvency, Coleman Records released such prestigious talent as the Blind Boys - of Alabama and Mississippi - and the Harmonizing Four. A best of Coleman Records collection is sorely needed as nothing has come close to being reissued to this date.

Three moderately successful Coleman releases later, Parks took the Nightingales to the Beltone Studios in New York on 28 December 1949 to cut a session for King. All but one song, 'One Of These Days', is presented here.

SOMETHING WITHIN ME

THE NIGHTINGALES

What we have are four charts led by Owens. First the rousing 'My Life Is In His Hands', a song Owens lifted from

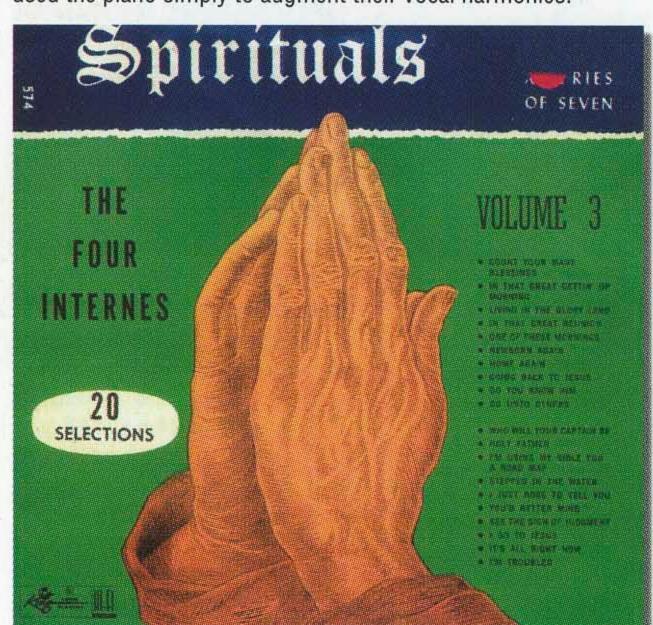
Little Axe and the

Golden Echoes of LA;

a fine chant-like version of Lucie Campbell's 'Something Within Me'; a rapid-fire rendition of Thomas A Dorsey's 'It's A Highway To Heaven'; plus a jazzy, jumping, good-time sounding 'Seek And Ye Shall Find', a song Owens later took to and recorded with the Swans.

Parks saw that these folksy, well-mannered King sides took the Nightingales down a path that did not lead the group forward. Searching for more grit and conviction, at a time when shout gospel was evolving, Parks found what he wanted in Julius Cheeks. The addition of Cheeks and a name change to the Sensational Nightingales brought a fiery brand of spirit-killing to the church, a kind of ecstasy-inducing state few other quartets could recreate at the time.

THE FOUR INTERNES came to King at a time of transition in late 1951. More and more quartets were adding instruments and moving away from the repetitively rehearsed a cappella style. This was a bonus for those groups possessing a lesser degree of vocal talent. Unlike the tell-all results of before, the addition of guitar and/or piano could sometimes hide off-key singing. But the Four Internes used the piano simply to augment their vocal harmonies.



Courtesy of Opal Louis Nations

The upbeat jubilee-sounding Four Internes came together in 1941 at the Duke Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina. Basso Raymond Davis, tenor and manager Theodore Freeland, tenor Mac Ferrill, and lead tenor [Eugene] Gene Mumford were four hospital interns who enjoyed harmonising in the restroom on their lunch breaks. They started singing in the labs, and the white folk, doctors and nurses, enjoyed listening. Mumford was the most renowned singer in the quartet, and went on to sing secular music in the Larks and Billy Ward's Dominoes (taking lead on the big hits 'Star Dust' and 'Deep Purple'). Freeland performed in a local big band called the Nighthawks; he later brought in Nighthawks' pianist Frank Eatman to arrange for and accompany the Four Internes, who were one of the first quartets to carry a pianist.

The group began appearing with established local Durham quartets in the early 1940s. In 1944 they won out over Jim Caesar's (Shirley Caesar's father) group, the Homecoming Four, in a competition to appear on a regular radio show over WDNC. This steady gig kept them busy Sunday afternoons for seventeen years. They booked their own venues and hired such stellar talent as the Golden Gate Quartet to close out their own radio programmes. In 1945 Mac Ferrill died in a farming accident, Eatman moved to New England and Gene Mumford, charged with unlawful entry, assault and rape, was sent to prison but was later pardoned.

By 1949, a fresh Four Internes line-up had been put in place. This included Freeland and Davis with the latter's younger brother, Joseph, a baritone; Alonzo Eubanks, lead tenor; Nick Allen, second lead tenor; and Harold White on piano. Although the group was in size a quintet, they stuck with the Four Internes moniker. With day jobs during the week, they struck out on touring engagements over the long weekends. In 1950, WTVD Channel 11 in Durham awarded the group a weekly TV show sponsored by Pool's Frozen Foods. The programme, called Club Eleven, lasted for two years. It was while doing their broadcasts they were noticed by an agent for King Records. Their first two sessions, one in November 1951, the other in May 1952, were conducted at radio station WDNC in Durham. Two more sessions followed at the King studios in Cincinnati in 1953.

We feature one song from each of the recording dates. Nick Allen, the group's striking tenor lead, was absent from the first session. They really tear it up on the opening track, 'It's All Right Now', a song later covered by the demon-chasing Reverend Julius Cheeks and the Sensational Nightingales during their glory days. Eubanks and Allen light fires with their lead singing while Raymond Davis pumps out the bass lines. The symbolic 'I'm Using My Bible For A Road Map' is rendered in Trumpeteers' fashion and has clever, thoughtful lyrics. The chart was first recorded by country act Reno and Smiley, who garnered much popular success with their original King recording. 'In That Great Reunion', rendered at first in waltz time, then midway in double time, gives us a glimpse of how tough quartet singing was becoming, a necessary strength when competing with other quartets on the road. 'Going Back To Jesus', in its second take, is a real rouser and is sung in a sepia version of basic barbershop harmony.

Switching names to the Interns, the group went on to record three singles for Chicago's Vee-Jay Records in 1958. Then, in the 1960s, as they tired of life on the road, the members quit to find day jobs.

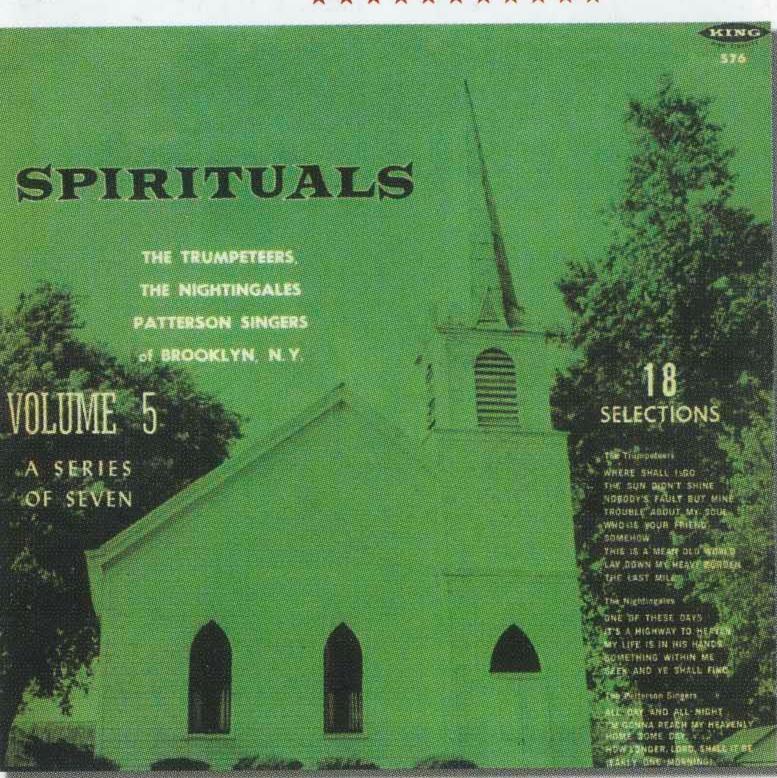
THE CUMBERLAND RIVER SINGERS were

formed in Detroit after World War II around lead tenors Earl Williams and Joe C Goldsmith (aka Gibson). Other core members included Edward Hayes, tenor, Earl Powers, baritone, and Willie Holmes, bass. Goldsmith also sang lead in Detroit's famous Flying Clouds, as did other members from time to time. The Evangelist Singers, aka the Detroiters, the Flying Clouds and the Cumberlands all interchanged personnel to fill last-minute engagements out of town and

formed a pool of those with fewer ties to home. The Cumberlands guested on the Flying Clouds' radio show over WJLB in Detroit but, unlike the others, never enjoyed a regular radio show.

In 1953 the Cumberland River Singers recorded twice for Joe Von Battle in the back of his record store on Hastings Street. Battle never released the results, which amounted to at least eight songs. Later in the year he sold the masters to

King Records, which issued half the recorded output on two singles for Nathan's De Luxe imprint. All are extremely fine and are reissued here for the very first time. Charts include the traditional 'Jesus Is A Rock', sung with daunting conviction. The song caught notice again a decade ago when it became a favourite with the Georgia Mass Choir. Herbert Brewster's 'Jesus Is All The World (To Me)' is done up in righteous fashion, rivalling even the Swan Silvertones' excellent live version on Specialty from around the same period in time. 'I Wonder Who Cares', with its ubiquitous "empty church pews" message, is one of the sanctified classics of the golden era which surely should have seen reissue long before now. We've also chosen their cover of Professor Alex Bradford's 'Too Close To Heaven', on which the dynamic Earl Williams screams and wails with extrovert abandon.



Courtesy of Opal Louis Nations

Syd Nathan continued to record gospel quartets into the late 1960s with significant groups like the Stars Of Virginia and the Mighty Clouds Of Harmony. After Nathan's death at Miami Beach in 1968, his family sold the King label and its considerable assets. Amidst various ownership shuffles, eventually the catalogue was transferred in 1973 to Gusto Records and, amongst the reissues, the new owners bravely released a

smattering of gospel LPs. Let us hope, with your help, that this long-awaited collection sells well enough to warrant further explorations into the treasures of the mighty King gospel catalogue.

Opal Louis Nations October 2002



Acknowledgements:

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Gospel Records 1943-1969, Vols 1 & 2, by Cedric J Hayes & Robert Laughton (Record Information Services, 1992)

Record Dating Guide, by Bill Daniels (Greenwood Press, 1985)

R&B Indies, Vols 1 & 2 by Bob McGrath (Eyeball Publications, 2000)

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Little Labels - Big Sound, by Rick Kennedy and Randy McNutt (Indiana University Press, 1999)

Religious Recordings - Phonolog - Muze Inc (1998)

Liner notes by Opal Louis Nations to "Testify" Gospel Box - Rhino Records (1999)

Liner notes by Ray Funk to "I'm Troubled" - The Four Internes (1985)

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Liner notes by Opal Louis Nations to "Milky White Way" - CBS Trumpeteers - AVI CD 4534 (1996)

Interview by Opal Louis Nations with John T Evans of the Flying Clouds of Detroit (March 2002)

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Spirit Of Memphis Quartet LP and Swan's Silvertone Singers in King bag, courtesy of Big Joe Louis
All Labels courtesy of Victor Pearlin and Big Joe Louis

SELECTED GOSPEL CDS AVAILABLE ON ACCEPT

Dorothy Love Coates CDCHD 343, CDCHD 412 Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers CDCHD 280, CDCHD 359

The Fairfield Four "The Bells Are Tolling" CDCHM 771

The Original Five Blind Boys Of Alabama CDCHD 341, CDCHD 479

The Soul Stirrers CDCHD 415, CDCHD 563

The Staple Singers "Great Day" CDCH 391

Swan Silvertones CDCHD 340, CDCHD 482

The Zion Travelers "The Dootone Masters" CDCHD 637

"The Best Of Excello Gospel" CDCHD 687

"Get On Board Little Children: The Modern Gospel Recordings" CDCHD 537

"The Best Of Nashboro Gospel" CDCHD 373

"Greatest Gospel Gems" (Specialty) CDCHD 344