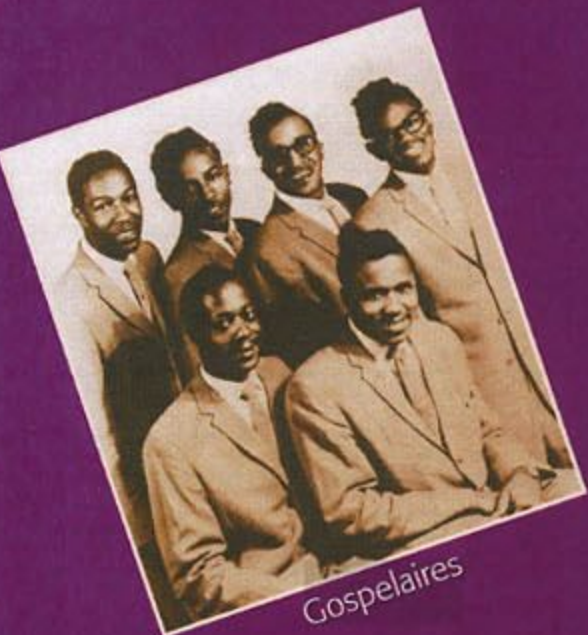


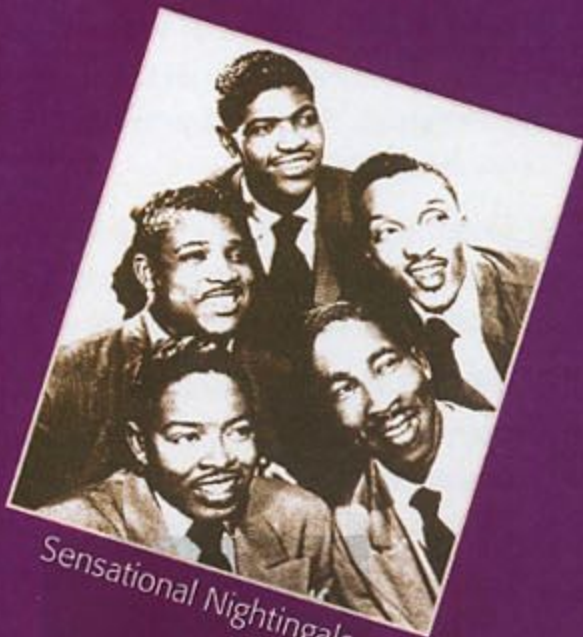
Texas Gospel

Volumes 8 & 9

Pay Day 1955 — 1960



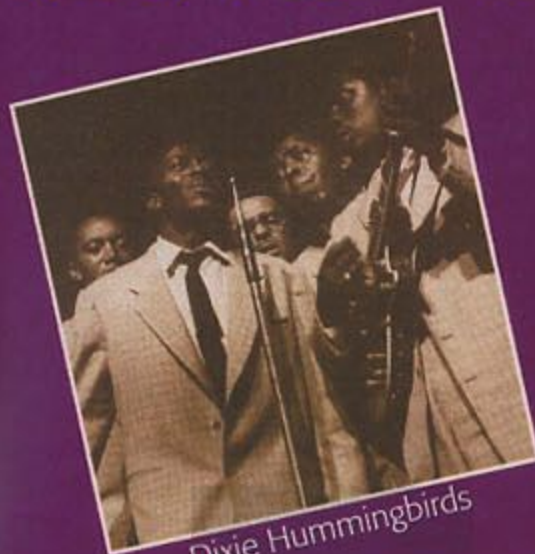
Gospelaire



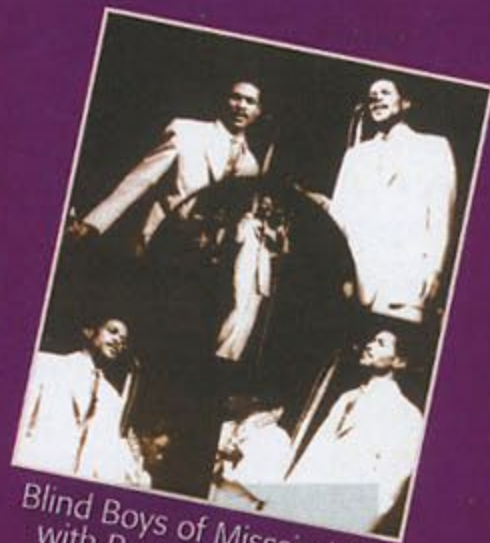
Sensational Nightingales



Ward Singers



Dixie Hummingbirds



Blind Boys of Mississippi
with Roscoe Robinson



Mighty Clouds of Joy

TEXAS GOSPEL – “PAY DAY” – VOLS. 8 & 9 (1955 – 1960)

by Opal Louis Nations

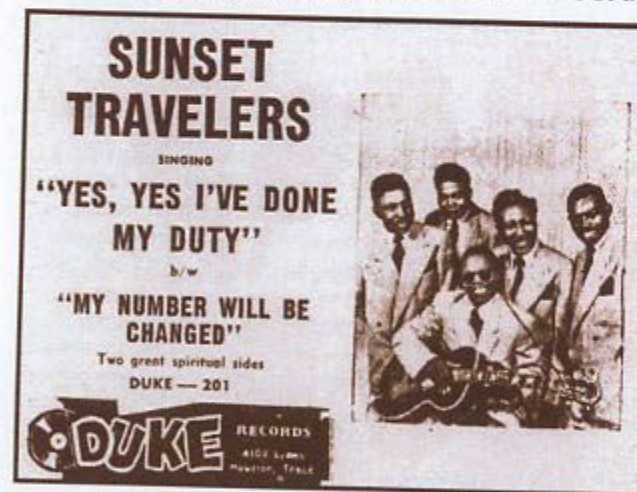
By the close of 1959 Duke / Peacock head honcho Don Robey was not only enjoying handsome sales of Bobby Bland's "Is it real" (Duke 310) but was also overjoyed with the retail sales receipts from three gospel best-seller entries. These were "All my sins" by The Ever Ready Gospel Singers (Peacock 1802), "When I rise" by The Gospelairees (Peacock 1801) and "His precious blood" by The Gospel Consolators (Peacock 1800.) But this was not all. Robey's second album release, "Songs of Praise" by The Sensational Nightingales (Peacock PLP 101), started selling like a single. Two songs, those mostly played by the gospel jocks, "Standing at the judgement" and "Morning train," were released as a single.

This first-time event lead Robey into thinking about the recent changes in the music business, one being that sales of gospel albums were taking off. His next step was the release of "Just Faith" by The Gospelairees (Peacock PLP 102) on the strength of healthy sales of "When I rise." Robey's first move of 1960 was to counter the increasing demand for sermons by releasing revivalist Rev. William C. Trammell's "Handwriting on the wall," recorded in front of a lively congregation. This was a bold move. Up until now only Checker, for the most part, had profited from an ongoing series of sermons and these being almost solely by the indefatigable Rev. C.L. Franklin. The industry was changing. The live recording was on its way. Trammell was just the first of nine sermon albums issued in the Peacock series and other Indies quickly followed suit.

Nothing substantial is known about the Chora'leers (or Choraleeters), except that they were a female group whose entire recording output consisted of one record on Duke. The same is true of The Baltimore Echoes, except they were a mixed outfit, probably church-affiliated as they were at one time associated with Rev. S.A. Henry. They cut one record each for three or 4 different labels, including Peacock. A Baltimore Echoes aggregation with Rev. S.A. Henry also recorded in the late 1960s for Golgotha. This group consisted of Henry plus four females – T. Harris, H. Marring, Gloria Garville and Becky Carlton.

Sister Barbara Jones also cut one single for Peacock. She is said to have been supported by The Dixie Hummingbirds on "Be ready," despite the fact that Jerry Zolten gives no mention of the fact in his book about The 'Birds. She also sang with The Morning Star Singers and later sang with The Holy Cross Celestials on the Rowe label.

The Mighty Clouds of Joy started out as the Mighty Mighty Clouds of Joy, organized by Bedile Goldsmith in the mid-Fifties. They were a teenage group. They split up around 1958. Soon after this Ermant Franklin and Joe Ligon organized the Sensational Clouds of Joy who recorded for Elko and then as the Sensational Wonders recorded for Fabor. Members at this time included Ermant Franklin, Joe Ligon, Elmer Franklin, Leon Polk, David Walker and Richard Wallace from The Stars of Bethlehem on Ensign who doubled on guitar. With the addition of Johnny Martin who once sang in Bedile Goldsmith's outfit, they changed names to the Mighty Clouds of Joy and signed with Peacock Records during the fall of 1960. Their first single release is included here. The Mighty Clouds turned out to be the last major quartet to be signed to Peacock, despite the signing of the Highway Q C's in 1964 whose glory days had passed. After the release of The Mighty Clouds' first album, "Family Circle" in 1962, they skyrocketed to national stardom, peaking in 1967 after the release of their sensational "Live at the Music Hall" collection.



The Sunset Travelers were formed in 1950 by baritone Grover Blake who picked up singers he found on the streets of Memphis. Travelers included lead tenor Sammy Lee Dortch, formerly of The Southern Wonders, baritone McKinney Jones, tenor Sylvester Ward, baritone Rev. Willie James Lumpkin and basso Robert Lewis. This group recorded one session on January 20, 1953 for Duke Records. Two singles surfaced but nothing clicked and the group never recorded commercially for more than six years.

Enter Overton Vertis (O.V.) Wright. Born in Leno, Tenn. In 1939, O.V. was a child prodigy who first sang professionally at the age of six. At twelve he was soloing at the Golden Leaf Baptist, pastored by Rev. Hamblin. With Hamblin and his mother's support, he hooked up with The Five Harmonaires, a local outfit that included his brother Eddie Lewis. In 1956, while attending Mt. Pisgah High, he met Grover Blake who started the original Sunset Travelers. The group had fallen apart, apparently because lead singer Sammy Lee Dortch had too many home commitments to tour.

Blake built a new group around O.V. and himself. Original members included Tommy Tucker, tenor, Sylvester Ward, tenor, Elijah "Junior" Franklin, bass and McKinney Jones, guitar. With Blake's help the young O.V. whose idols were Sam Cooke and Rev. Morgan Babb, developed a style all his own. On May 16, 1957, O.V. and the group cut a test pressing acetate at WDIA in Memphis (See Rounder LP 2063.) O.V. then went back to finish his education. He graduated from Mt. Pisgah and spent a year at S.A. Owens Junior College in Memphis. During this time he sang as utility in local gospel groups around the city including the celebrated Spirit of Memphis and Highway Q C's.

He became a fully fledged member of The Sunset Travelers in 1960 at the age of twenty-one. His first record, the beautiful "Lazarus" (included here) emerged in late spring and did very well for the group, as did the three ensuing singles he sang lead on. In 1964 he recorded the highly prized "On Jesus Program" album (Peacock 122) which was reissued on CD in 1996 as one of three albums (the other two were by The Rev. Julius Cheeks and The Swan Silvertones.) The set was called "Raising the Roof" (MCA / Mobile Fidelity, 2-760.)

At this point the group line-up included Tucker, Wright and Blake with Johnny Frierson, tenor, Robert Lewis, basso, Rev. Jeff Brown, second lead tenor and Daniel Scott with Frierson doubling on guitar. Rev. Jeff Brown was quite a singer. He exhibited a strong, sanctified style which must have given O.V. a good deal of competition. O.V. sang lead on at least eight songs with The Sunset Travelers before quitting them around 1964.

Two years earlier he had met up with songwriter Roosevelt Jamison. The pair wrote and arranged songs together. O.V. sang with two local, unrecorded Memphis groups, The Jubilee Hummingbirds and The Harmony Echoes in which James Carr was a member. But the thought of making much more money than a gospel quartet singer could ever imagine, coupled with the persuasive powers of Don Robey, Roosevelt Jamison and James Carr drew O.V. over into the more seductive field of soul music. Jamison took O.V.'s demos to Quinton Claunch at Goldwax Records who lifted "That's how strong my love is" for release in 1964 while O.V. was still under contract with Don Robey.

Otis Redding picked up the song and by January 1965 had taken it up to the number six spot on the Billboard R&B charts. Robey sued Goldwax but Goldwax wound up owning the song-rights, but Robey retained O.V. Wright's contract. O.V. switched to soul and enjoyed a dozen hits on Robey's Back Beat

subsidiary before going over to Hi Records in 1976. O.V. planned to return to gospel music in 1980 and hooked up with James Lockett and The Lockett Brothers of Milwaukee who eventually became O.V.'s road band. They cut an album together, "4 & 20 Elders" for Nashboro in Nashville. O.V. sang lead on four of the songs. Suddenly and before a second career in gospel could get underway, O.V. Wright died of a heart condition at the Providence Hospital in Mobile on Sunday, November 16, 1980.

Peacock Records was always considered the gold standard of Post-War gospel. Many of these recordings are rare. Two, Duke 209 and 210, were impossible to find and we apologize for not being able to find them. Post-War gospel music has become increasingly collectable and most importantly crucial to tracing the roots of African American music. The seeds of Soul, R&B and Rock can be directly traced to many pioneering gospel artists such as those on this collection. They are of important historical significance.

— *Opal Louis Nations, February 2012*



Rev. Cleophus Robinson



Sister Josephine James

For discographical information and more musical examples of many of the artists on this collection, please see the following:

THE PARAMOUNT GOSPEL SINGERS OF SAN FRANCISCO

"Work & Pray On" – Arhoolie 382 (1992)

Acappella lead by founder Archie Reynolds & Joe Dean

"The Tiny Powell Gospel Collection" – Withasongtoo (1992)

Dubs, acetates and released originals by Tiny with and without The Paramounts (1947-1952). Both available from www.arhoolie.com

THE WARD SINGERS OF PHILADELPHIA

"The Golden Gospel Gals" – JSP 77145 (2011)

Selected sides covering two discs of this 4-CD boxed set, circa 1949–1959, some live with Sam Whinham on lap-steep guitar. Available from www.jsprecords.com

THE DIXIE HUMMINGBIRDS OF PHILADELPHIA

"Devil Can't Harm a Praying Man" – Texas Gospel. Vols. 3-5 (1951-1957) – Acrobat 9007.

Mixed Peacock artists collection with 60-page booklet released in 2008. Available from www.pewburner.com

BROOKLYN ALL STAR SINGERS

"Best of the Brooklyn all Stars" – AVI Nashboro CD 4504 (1995)

Although out of print, copies can sometimes be found on the Internet

ORIGINAL FIVE BLIND BOYS OF MISSISSIPPI

Acrobat 3003 (2006), a double CD of their hard-to-find earliest work covering 1947 through 1950 with the legendary Archie Brownlee. Available from www.pewburner.com

THE GOSPELAIRES OF DAYTON, OHIO

As with The Dixie Hummingbirds, go to www.pewburner.com for Acrobat 9007

THE GOSPEL CONSOLATORS OF PASADENA, CA.

This group was lead by Charles Johnson who went on to The Sensational Nightingales. His wonderful autobiography, **"Another River to Cross,"** Treasure House Books (2002) can be had from www.destinyimage.com

THE SENSATIONAL NIGHTINGALES OF NORTH CAROLINA

As with The Dixie Hummingbirds, go to www.pewburner.com for Acrobat 9007. A 12-page history is included in the extensive booklet.

THE SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS QUARTET

"Happy in the Service of the Lord" – Acrobat 3007 (2005).

This is an extensive 2-CD collection covering their 1949 through 1954 period with detailed notes and photos. Available from www.pewburner.com

THE PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS OF CHICAGO

As with the Brooklyn All Stars, The Pilgrims' best and out-of-print collection is **"Homecoming – Live at Wendell Phillip High in 1979"** – AVI Nashboro 4510 (1995). Never a more exciting set available. Although out of print, copies can sometimes be found on the Internet

REV. CLEOPHUS ROBINSON & SISTER JOSEPHINE JAMES OF ST. LOUIS

Again, see Acrobat 9007 for extensive details – or check the Internet for an out-of-print copy of **"Someone to Care"** – Specialty (Fantasy CD 7044, 1994) to find detailed biographical information

TOMMY ELLISON & THE FIVE SINGING STARS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

"The Best of Tommy Ellison & The Five Singing Stars of S. Carolina" – AVI Nashboro CD 4512 (1995). Highly recommended and out of print. Look for a copy on the Internet. Liner notes are taken from a personal interview with Tommy and the music comes from the zenith of his long career.