



“Voice Your Choice” The Radiants / Maurice & Mac

by Opal Louis Nations

When we discuss The Radiants, we are talking about two distinctly different vocal groups, The Radiants quartet, who recorded between May 1962 and December 1963, and The Radiants Trio and second quartet who waxed between January 1964 and June 1969. The first quartet, lead by high tenor/songwriter Maurice McAlister, was groomed as Chicago’s answer to Detroit’s Smokey Robinson & The Miracles. Maurice & The Radiants Trio, and later the group lead by Mitchell Bullock, were grounded in the funkier Chicago, Impressions-like sound that dominated the post-deep soul years. All three aggregations drew from gospel roots, all three strove to refine R & B.

The original Radiants came together in 1960. Key members were drawn from the Greater Harvest Baptist Church Youth Choir of Chicago pastored by Rev. Louis Boddie. Although not as widely popular as the Greater Harvest Baptist Church Choir of Newark, Rev. Boddie’s flock recorded for Herman Lubinsky’s Sharp label in 1962. First tenor lead, Maurice McAlister, was responsible for drawing the original ex-choir members together. They were Wallace Sampson, baritone, Jerome Brooks, second tenor, Elzie Butler, bass and Charles Washington, first tenor. The group, still supported and sponsored by the Baptist Church, sang gospel and modeled themselves after other notable Chicago quartets like The Soul Stirrers and The Highway Q C’s. Soon, with Washington replaced by Green McLauren, McAlister’s quartet crossed over to rhythm & blues and cut a demo to send to record companies in Chicago and Detroit.

Robert Pruter in his article on The Radiants (published in the book *Chicago Soul*, University of Illinois Press, 1991) states that the group tried every discery on

Chicago's "Record Row," but none were interested. The Radiants approached Chess Records four or five times, only to be told they were busy and were asked to just leave their tape. Fortunately, their manager, Lee Jackson, was a friend of Leonard Chess. Jackson, a meat packer, regularly took sausage sandwiches to Leonard Chess for his lunch. Jackson introduced the demo, and the group was signed in the spring of 1962.

The outfit's first release, "Father knows best" coupled with "One day I'll show you," came out in June. "Father knows best," with its intelligent lyrics and busy strings, was quite deliberately a Smokey Robinson "Shop around" variation. "One day I'll show you," a smoking, Smokey-like soul ballad, is to my mind the best Radiants song ever recorded. Its tight, lilting harmonies lift the refrain to a heavenly place. Two other songs from this session, "Tumbling tears" and "I can't believe it," remain unreleased on 45 rpm. "Father knows best" did fairly well in Chicago but never broke out.

"Heartbreak Society," backed with "Please don't leave me," emerged in the spring of 1963. "Heartbreak Society," a soul-wailing ballad with a great melody and strong tag-line, found the group in peak form. The song came from the group's January 1963 session. "Please don't leave me" is a gospel-inspired jump in a Latin mood. A rippling piano is utilized in place of the usual guitar part. The song is from a February 1963 session at which three other charts were taped but held from release.

February 1963 saw the group's third release, "I got a girl" sandwiched with "I'm in love." Both were from the January 1963 session. "I got a girl" was issued again in March 1965 when it turned up on the back of "It ain't no big thing." "I'm in love" was reissued on the group's next release. "I'm in love" is a strong blues-shaded ballad with a beautiful refrain. Both McAlister and the group sing with grit and conviction. "I got a girl" is a church-based stomper or dance work-out with McAlister testifying like never before. The overall sound is reminiscent of Bobby Womack's old group, The Valentinos.

Release number four, "I'm in love" undersided with "Shy guy," made a bit of local impact. "Shy guy," recorded in August 1963, introduces us to a slightly different Radiants. First tenor Frank McCollum replaced Green "Mac" McLauren who was called to serve in the Army. "Shy guy" is a cheerful dance vehicle with Motor City pretensions, a stunning guitar bridge and tight rhythm support. In Chicago, "Shy guy" hit the Top 40 lists at the radio stations and became a hit at dance halls, but failed to break nationally.

In a last ditch effort to get The Radiants off the ground, McAlister, who wrote most of the group's charts, opted to try them with novelty material. With the help of Terry Vail, the pair came up with "Noble the bargainman" sliced with "I gotta dance to keep my baby." This record, the group's fifth outing, surfaced in February 1964. "Noble" has a funky groove, great harmonies and guitar support. "I gotta dance to keep my baby" is for dancers only with its irresistible groove and elaborate changes. Dave Clowney, a.k.a. Dave "Baby" Cortez of "Happy Organ" fame, wrote the song and probably served as keyboardist at the session. At this point, The Radiants were experiencing internal strife. Conflict came to a peak and the group broke up. Only McAlister and Sampson remained. However, a fellow Harvest Baptist choir member and organist, Leonard Caston Jr., son of "Baby Doo" Caston of Willie Dixon's Big Three Trio, had just gotten out of the Army. The three got together and a Radiants trio came about.

Their first release in November 1964 was "Voice your choice" coupled with a song dating back to the original group's second session, "If I only had you." "If I only

had you” is a nice, perky song with a Motor-town feel and tough gospel harmonies. “Voice your choice,” penned by McAlister and Gene Chandler’s producer Gerald Sims, is a pretty Curtis Mayfield-like waxing with a shared lead and catchy hook. “Voice your choice” became number one in Chicago and peaked at number sixteen on the nation’s Billboard charts.

Two months later, the boys came out with “It ain’t no big thing” and “I got a girl.” “It ain’t no big thing,” with its pleasant balladry, shared lead and open-sounding harmony, fared even better on the national Billboard charts, climbing to the number fourteen slot in January 1965. Robert Pruter states that the vocal interplay on “It ain’t no big thing” was a technique later copied by progressive R&B groups of the 1970s like Earth Wind & Fire and Sly & the Family Stone.

In March 1965 The Radiants tried with a follow-up, “Whole lot of love” (Woman) flipped with “Tomorrow.” “Whole lot of love” (Woman) is caught in a mid-tempo groove and celebrates the finer points of womanhood in an idiom cool and funky. “Tomorrow” is an Impressions-inspired gospel-waltz lead by McAlister’s vocal ornamentation, reminiscent of some of Sam Cooke’s better moments. The record, with all it had going for it, just did not click.

In mid 1965 Caston Jnr. decided to leave The Radiants Trio in order to spend more time writing and producing for Chess Records. His place was taken by James Jameson, Fender bass ace with the “Funk Brothers” on Motown, which explains in part why The Radiants’ next release borrowed much from the Motor City’s discery. “Baby, I’ve got it” paired with “I want to thank you” surfaced in early 1966. Robert Pruter describes the release as Motownish, overproduced and not very good. McAlister left The Radiants at this point to go out as a soloist. A new Radiants group was formed around ex-Confessions lead singer Mitchell Bullock. Bullock’s gospel-tinged tenor sounded a lot like McAlister’s. Bullock was joined by Sampson, Jameson and Leonard Caston’s brother, Victor.

In early 1967 the quartet cut (Don’t it make you) “Feel kinda bad” (originally a Confessions record) coupled with “Anything you do is alright.” Before Chess released the single, the group split up. Most copies ended up on the shelf but not before the record had spent a fleeting two weeks on Billboard’s R&B chart at forty-seven. Meanwhile, Maurice McAlister had recorded “Baby hang on” matched with “I’d rather do it myself.” Nothing much happened with this either. Green “Mac” McLauren had returned from the Army. He hitched up with McAlister, and the pair formed a duet called Maurice & Mac. Maurice & Mac were Chicago’s answer to Memphis’s Sam & Dave who were riding high with “When something is wrong with my baby.”

In June 1967 the Chess brothers took Maurice & Mac to Rick Hall at Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Three sessions there netted the hard-driving “Try me,” the unreleased “See saw,” “Soul beat,” “Run to me” and “No brag, just fact,” the beautifully rendered soul ballad “You’re the one” with its catchy melody and strong guitar, the upbeat remake of Ben E. King’s “So much love,” the jumping “Love power,” the deep soul rendering of “Lean on me” plus an excellent cover of Barbara Lynn’s charts-topping “You left the water running” which hung around at the bottom of the Cash Box R&B chart for three weeks during the spring of 1968.

In August 1967 The Radiants came out with “Don’t take your love” backed with “The clown is clever.” The session included two unreleased songs, “Tears of joy” plus a remake of “Heartbreak Society.” This was followed by Leonard Caston and Bobby

Miller productions of "I'm glad I'm a loser" and "Hold me" which crept up to the number thirty-five spot on the Billboard chart where it hovered for seven weeks in March / April 1968. "I'm just a man" with a cover of Smokey's "Tears of a clown" followed, then in March 1969 came "Ida Mae Foster" reversed with "Choo choo." Two more singles releases with little to redeem them followed, "Book of love" married with "Another mule is kicking in your stall" issued in September 1969 and the re-release of "I'm so glad I'm the loser" (from 1967) with "Shadow of a doubt" from a 1968 session. All four of the last mentioned recordings after "Hold me" bombed miserably.

The Radiants disbanded for good in 1972. Maurice & Mac enjoyed two more sessions for Chess. The first, conducted in the spring of 1969, netted the wildly upbeat "Lay it on me" and "Oh, what a time" and the tearful, deep soul anthem "What am I going to do" which sounds like a solid Stax production. Maurice & Mac's last session included the oddly literate Sam & Dave-sounding mid-tempo "But you know I love you," the anguished domestically unreleased "I'm afraid to let you know" with its well-crafted rap, plus the toe-tapping anti-humane opus with a clever hook, "Kick my cat, I'll beat your dog."

Maurice & Mac were not able to repeat their initial success with "You left the water running" which when all else failed generated work throughout the Southlands for quite awhile. Maurice & Mac were a hard-singing, tough act to follow, in every way as exciting as Sam & Dave or The Simms Twins. Unfortunately, lady luck rarely smiled upon them. The duo broke up in 1972, a year after leaving Chess Records.

-- Opal Louis Nations
January 1999

The Radiants / Maurice & Mac Discography by Opal Louis Nations

The Radiants:

Maurice McAllister (first tenor lead), Green "Mac" McLauren (first tenor), Wallace Sampson (baritone), Jerome Brookes (second tenor) & Elzie Butler (bass)

Chicago, May 1962:

11604	Father knows best	Chess 1832, LP 1491
11605	I can't believe it	Chess 1904
11606	Tumbling tears	
11607	One day I'll show you	Chess 1832

Chicago, January 17, 1963:

12119	If I only had you	Chess (E) CBS 8002
12120	Heartbreak Society	Chess 1849
12121	I got a girl	Chess 1865, 1925
12122	I'm in love	Chess 1865, 1872

Chicago, February 4, 1963:

12164	Please don't leave me	Chess 1949
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12165 Hit it
12166 Joyce
12167 Father knows best

The Radiants:

Maurice McAllister (lead vocal), Wallace Sampson (baritone), Frank McCollum (first tenor), Jerome Brookes (second tenor) & Elzie Butler (bass)

Chicago, August 9, 1963:
Chess 1872

12636 Shy guy

Maurice Williams & The Radiants:

Maurice Williams

December 1963:
Chess 1887

12872 Noble the bargain man

12873 Now I know

The Radiants:

Maurice McAllister (lead tenor), Wallace Sampson (baritone), Leonard Caston Jnr. (tenor)

January 10, 1964
Chess 1887

12904 I got to dance to keep my baby

12905 Unknown title

The Radiants (same as Chess 1887):

13468 Voice your choice

Chess 1904, LP 1546, Checker LP

2995

13469 Don't let her go

The Radiants (same as Chess 1887):

13717 It ain't no big thing

February 16, 1965:
Chess 1925

The Radiants (same as Chess 1887):

13855 It's too much

13856 Feel kind of bad

Chess 1986

13957 Prove it

13958 Tomorrow

Chess 1939

13959 Whole lot of love

Chess 1939

13960 Mama told me

Maurice & The Radiants :

Maurice McAllister (tenor lead), Wallace Sampson (baritone) and James Jameson (tenor)

Chicago 1966?

14438 Baby I've got it

Chess 1954

14439 I want to thank you

Chess 1954

The Radiants:

Mitchell Bullock (lead tenor), Wallace Sampson (baritone), James Jameson (tenor) and Victor Caston (bass)

15355 Anything you do is alright Chess 1986
15356 Feel kind of bad Chess 1986

Maurice McAllister:

15543 Baby hang on Chess 1988

Maurice & Mac:

Maurice McAllister, Green "Mac" McLauren

15827 Try me
15828 See saw
15829 You're the one
15830 So much love

Muscle Shoals, Ala., June 10, 1967

Checker 1179

Checker 1197
Checker 1179

The Radiants (same as Chess 1986):

15967 Don't take your love Chess 2021
15968 Tears of joy
15969 The clown is clever Chess 2021

The Radiants (same as Chess 1986):

16350 Heartbreak

Maurice & Mac (same as Checker 1179):

16485 Love Power
16486 Soul beat
16487 Lean on me Checker 1206

The Radiants (same as Chess 1986):

16504 I'm glad I'm the loser Chess 2037, 2083
16505 Hold on Chess 2037

Maurice & Mac (same as Checker 1179):

16612 Why don't you try me
16613 You left the water running
16614 Run to me
16615 No brag - just fact

Muscle Shoals, Ala., 1968:

Checker 1206
Checker 1197

The Radiants (same as Chess 1986):

17251 Shadow of a doubt
17252 I'm just a man
17253 Tears of a clown

Chicago 1968:

Chess 2083
Chess 2057
Chess 2057

17600 Ida Mae Foster Chess 2066
17601 Choo choo Chess 2066
17602 Book of love Chess 2078

Maurice & Mac (same as Checker 1179):

17647 Lay it on me
17648 Oh what a time
17649 What am I gonna go
17650 You're the one

Checker 1218, Chess 2102
Checker 1224
Checker 1218
Checker 1224

The Radiants (same as Chess 1986):

17879 Sho is groovy
17880 Another mule is kicking in your stall

June 13, 1969

Chess 2078

Maurice & Mac (same as Checker 1179):

18683 But you know I love you
18684 I'm afraid to let you know
18685 Kick my cat, I'll beat your dog

Chicago, June 3, 1970:

Checker 1232

Checker 1232

18902 You can't say I didn't try

Chess 2102