

# ON THE BATTLEFIELD...

*Great Gospel Quartets*



*featuring* SOUTHERN TORNADOES + VETERAN SINGERS  
SPIRITUALAIRES + JOINER'S FIVE TRUMPETS

760



## DURING THE WAR YEARS AN EXODUS

of African Americans from the Southern states sought work and a better life in the more commercially viable cities surrounding the Great Lakes. Many found employment in the factories, meat packing plants and auto assembly lines of Cleveland, Chicago and Detroit. The early quartet traditions, those which had found roots in focal points like Bessemer, Richmond and Nashville, suddenly sprang up in the North and Mid-West, where the new migrants, desperate for "homegrown" church music, sought to nurture them.

Small, independent record companies, like United founded by Leonard Allen and Lew Simpkins in 1951, set themselves up on Chicago's "Record Row" (South Cottage Grove) to meet the burgeoning demand for recorded gospel product. While Leonard Allen, for the most part, put up the money, it was Lew, an experienced record man, who dealt with the label's talent.

In May 1953, when, after a fatal illness, Simpkins passed away, Sam "Smitty" South, Allen's nephew by marriage, masterminded the A & R chores for both the secular and religious quartet output. The label's initial venture into gospel music recording came in March 1952 when the firm waxed Rev. Robert Anderson from Chicago plus the Southern Tornadoes from Detroit. Two months later, shortly after founding the States subsidiary, the company released sides by both the Caravans of Chicago and Veteran Singers (who had shared the earlier United sessions with the Southern Tornadoes.)

By 1952, a harder edged, more dramatic "shout" type

of gospel singing had taken the place of the more staid and conservative stand-on-a-dime jubilee tradition. The introduction of the knee-drop, ad-lib, preacherly interjections, swing-lead and exaggerated vocal ornamentation had taken hold of black quartet. This was due in part to the influence of major touring groups like the Soul Stirrers and Swan Silvertones who added slick moves and "aisle creeps" to their acts.

**THE SOUTHERN TORNADES**, in all likelihood, came to Lew Simpkins' attention through Al Benson, Chicago's most powerful and influential disc jockey who became the Windy City's most dominant radio personality during the Post War years. His radio career began with a Sunday evening gospel show on WGES. Although he switched to jazz and R & B later on, he never lost his love for gospel music which he both promoted and recorded throughout gospel's Golden Era.

The Southern Tornadoes are thought to be made up of various soldiers from the Veteran Singers. Internal strife lead to a constant change in quartet personnel. Some stayed in the Veterans, others moved on. To distance themselves from the former, they adopted a different name.

**THE VETERANS'** history stretches back before World War II. The group had a very powerful lead, Rev. Glover, who at one time sang with the Flying Clouds of Detroit. In fact, it was John T. Evans, the Flying Clouds' lead tenor, who brought Glover to Detroit from Chicago to sing in his group. Glover also often sang duets with lead Joe Union of the Flying Clouds. Later, after the Veterans split up in the mid 1950s, he pastored a church on Detroit's Dexter Street and took up singing duet with a deacon from the same church.

After one release on States, the Veterans went on to record for Al Benson's Parrot imprint in 1954.

The Southern Tornadoes played church venues around Michigan but rarely ventured out of the state. This was probably due to family and work-related commitments. They did, however, enjoy local radio appearances. While the Southern Tornadoes' sound is sanctified with emphasis on tenor-laden harmony, the former Veteran Singers were distinctly more well-seasoned and make delightful use of a good pumping-bass singer.

**JOINER'S FIVE TRUMPETS** were founded in the early 1940s in Gary, Indiana by the legendary Roscoe Robinson. Roscoe sang in the group during the War years and left to join the Royal Quartet of Chicago in 1945. Lee Sims, James Cochrane, George Dowell, Walter Ford and Larry Bride were mainstays of Joiner's Five Trumpets during the 1950s. The quartet's first session was cut for Joe Brown's J.O.B. label on

South Ellis Avenue. Joe, who had business ties with a handful of small Chi-City indies, cut four songs on the group. J.O.B. 121 was issued in July 1952.

Disappointed by poor sales results, Brown steered clear of gospel for five years. Joiner's Five Trumpets were a magnificent, sweet-singing soul-gospel outfit in the style of the famous Soul Stirrers. In 1953 the group recorded for Hi-Hat Records in Gary, Indiana. A scattering of releases appeared on various indies thereafter.

The history of the **SPIRITUALAIRES** starts with Carolina deejay and all-round music business promoter Charles Derrick who in July 1954 joined WOIC in Columbia, South Carolina. His radio program, "Wings of Faith," showcased current gospel releases between 10 a.m. and 12 noon on Sundays. Through contacts made at the station, Derrick formed a gospel group called the Spiritualaires. Early membership was fluid. Pass-through members included baritone Milton Mack and lead singer Rev. James "Skeet" Taylor.

WOIC also hosted a gospel program presented by Rev. William McKinley Bowman.

In early 1955 Bowman sponsored the Spiritualaires' first recording (on Bowman Records), cut at the WOIC studios with Derrick on drums (a beat-up trash can found on site.) The group recorded their interpretation of Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers' arrangement of the old hymn "Last Mile Of The Way," sandwiched with the fiery chant "Lay This Body Down."

Membership at the time included Jimmy

Foster, lead, Fred Davis, tenor, "Sonny Boy," high tenor Johnny ? from Florida, second lead, plus Sergeant Rose on guitar and Derrick on bass vocals and "drum." Rose was an outstanding guitarist. Derrick had caught Rose's concerts at Fort Jackson and immediately hired him. Sales of the Bowman release were mainly generated through plugs over WOIC by Derrick and Bowman.

Encouraged by favorable results, Derrick taped more Spir-



itualaires demos at WOIC with (Mr.) Marion Parker on piano. Parker also played piano for the Jewel Gospel Singers. One such tape landed on Leonard Allen's desk and although the Spiritualaires recorded for United at Universal Studios in Chicago nothing was ever issued.

Meanwhile, Spiritualaires personnel had changed to include lead tenor Louis Johnson from the Brown Brothers (who later went on to share lead with Claude Jeter and the Swan Silvertones), tenor Joseph Hollis, bass Charles Gavis (Derrick), second lead Johnny ? from Florida, baritone Bernard Caldwell with utility Norris Turner. A Mr. Kimpson sat in on guitar. Bernard Caldwell was still in school so Derrick had to solicit parental consent.

Demos were sent to Vee Jay Records who issued the first of three singles releases in April 1956. A month earlier Derrick organized a gospel extravaganza at the Coliseum Theatre in Chicago. The Spiritualaires opened for the Swan Silvertones, Soul Stirrers and Swanee Quintet.

By September 1956, the Spiritualaires had made minor personnel changes. Johnson, Hollis, Derrick, Caldwell and Turner were still in place but second lead tenor A.J. Thompson and guitar whiz Frank "Drink" Small were added. Small went on to win Metron Magazine's best gospel guitarist award for 1957 and switching to R&B recorded for Sharp and Bishopville Records as "The Blues Doctor."

John Myles, founding soldier and baritone with the Swan Silvertones, began taking a patronly interest in the Spiritualaires. Soon "The Swans" were taking the Spiritualaires out on the road with them. Myles thought the group

an excellent house-warming act. The two outfits played Philadelphia's Laurel Gardens then toured on a package that ended in New Orleans. The Spiritualaires were making good money. They opened for the Staple Singers at Du Sable High in Chicago which did not turn out too well. After the show, the group found their brand new Buick up on cinder blocks, tires gone.

Work poured in, so both Hollis and Derrick handled managerial affairs. The Spiritualaires played the Apollo in June 1957 on Thurman Ruth's gospel extravaganza alongside the Skylights and Maceo Wood Singers. By now petty differences were keeping the Spiritualaires from making joint decisions. Things began to fall apart. Derrick quit the group in favor of building Kip Anderson's promising career, and the Spiritualaires disbanded. The Spiritualaires were an extremely talented group, with the necessary soul and sanctification to make them winning national stars. The seven exquisite tracks included here are issued for the first time, as are all but eight cuts by the other three stellar aggregations. The spread of Post-war gospel quartet throughout the Great Lakes area was due in part to the widely touring Soul Stirrers who were one of the first groups to enjoy a weekly Sunday morning radio show over WIND lasting ten years. There is a little bit of "stirring" in most of the best Windy City groups and some of the proof is right here.

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OPAL LOUIS NATIONS, July 2002

Principal sources from unpublished interviews with  
John T. Evans and Charles Derrick

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## JOINER'S FIVE TRUMPETS

1. Just Tell Me Jesus 2:49 (50-183-1)
2. Where Can I Go 2:54 (50-186-2)  
(Myrtle Jackson) JOB 121
3. This Changing World 3:22 (50-184-1)  
(Rachael Yancey) JOB 121
4. Freedom After Awhile 3:01 (50-185-1)  
(Josephine James, Screen Gems-EMI Music, BMI)

## SOUTHERN TORNADOES

5. When They Ring The Golden Bells 3:16  
(1082-1) U-117 (Alex Johnson, Conrad Music, BMI)
6. Satisfied 3:29 (1083-1) U-117
7. Another Building 2:28 (1090-3)
8. Toll The Bell Easy 2:35 (1091-1) U-123  
(Earle Malone, Fort Knox Music Inc./Trio Music Co. Inc., BMI)
9. How About You 2:44 (1092-1) U-123  
(Thomas Dorsey, Warner-Tamerlane Publ. Co., BMI)
10. Will The Circle Be Unbroken 2:30 (1093-1)
11. All I Need 2:25 (1094-1)
12. Precious Memories 2:36 (1095-1)  
(J. B. F. Wright, Bridge Building Music Inc., BMI)

## VETERAN SINGERS

13. Glory To His Name 2:38 (1096-2)
14. Leaning On Jesus 2:55 (1097-1)
15. He'll Never Let Go 2:33 (1098-1)
16. How Much More 2:49 (1099-1)
17. Lord Is Riding 2:49 (1100-1) S-105
18. On The Battlefield 2:56 (1101-2) S-105

## SPIRITUALAIRES

19. Lay Down My Burden 2:17 (1491-3)
20. Love Of Jesus In My Heart 2:21 (1493-4)
21. Heaven How Do You Do 2:48 (1495-2)
22. Our Prayer 3:16 (1494-1)
23. He's So Good To Me (AUDITION) 2:28
24. Heaven How Do You Do (AUDITION) 2:49
25. Lay Down My Burden (AUDITION) 1:49

SONGS NOT LISTING COMPOSER/PUBLISHER  
ARE TRADITIONAL, P.D.

1082, 1083 - MARCH 10, 1952

1090 THRU 1101 - MARCH 21, 1952

1491 THRU 1495 - OCTOBER 14, 1954

JOINER'S FIVE TRUMPETS AND SPIRITUALAIRES  
AUDITION DATES UNKNOWN.

Album Production: ROBERT G. KOESTER and STEVE WAGNER Supervision: LEONARD ALLEN, LEW SIMPKINS and SAM SOUTH

Spiritualaires photo courtesy of KIP ANDERSON Design: AL BRANDTNER

Special thanks to GEORGE PAULUS and RICHARD REICHEG for providing the 78s used to research the music enclosed.