

THE BEST OF THE BRIGHT STARS



FEATURING
STANDING IN THE SAFETY ZONE

THE BRIGHT STARS

THE BRIGHT STARS SIGNED WITH NASHBORO RECORDS AT AROUND THE TIME SHANNON WILLIAMS JOINED THE COMPANY IN 1960. SHANNON, WHO WAS ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT THE TIME, NEEDED A JOB TO SUPPLEMENT HIS STUDENT INCOME. ANSWERING AN AD IN THE CLASSIFIEDS, AND HAVING BEEN ACCEPTED FOR THE JOB, WILLIAMS WENT TO WORK AT ERNIE'S RECORD MART ON THIRD AVENUE NORTH IN NASHVILLE. ERNIE L. YOUNG, ALSO PRESIDENT OF THE NASHBORO RECORD COMPANY, IS FONDLY REMEMBERED AS A SOMEWHAT ECCENTRIC, KINDLY MAN (HE GAVE BONUSES TO EMPLOYEES WHEN THE BUSINESS TURNED A PROFIT AND MONEY TO A NEPHEW TO BUILD A RADIO STATION~WVOL), PUT WILLIAMS TO WORK IN THE FIRST FLOOR MAIL ORDER DIVISION WHERE HE QUICKLY LEARNED THE ROPES. AT ONE POINT, THE STORE MANAGER HAD A FALLING OUT WITH YOUNG AND WILLIAMS BECAME MANAGER OF THE STORE. DUTIES INCLUDED THE PULLING AND GATHERING OF PLAY MATERIAL FOR JOHN R (RICHBOURG) WHO PLUGGED YOUNG'S PRODUCT ON A DAILY BASIS OVER NASHVILLE'S MIGHTY WLAC.

ASIDE FROM R & B, JOHN R SPUN GOSPEL RECORDS, INCLUDING SIDES CUT BY THE BRIGHT STARS, A QUARTET OUT OF FLINT, BUT WHOSE HOME BASE WAS IN SAGINAW, MICHIGAN. WILLIE DAVIS, HIGH TENOR AND LONG~TIME MANAGER, FIRST GOT TOGETHER WITH THE GROUP IN 1958. "I HAD BEEN SINGING WITH THE EVER READY GOSPEL SINGERS OF LOUISVILLE AND HAD MOVED FROM LOUISVILLE TO FLINT WHERE I HITCHED UP WITH THESE GUYS~THEY HAD A REGULAR RADIO PROGRAM ON WFDL A.M. OUT OF FLINT." THE OUTFIT AT THIS JUNCTURE INCLUDED THE LATE REVEREND L. T. THOMPSON, BARITONE, WILLIAM JOHNSON, LEAD, THE

LATE (WILLIAM) FRANK BREWER, LEAD, JIM BRADLEY, BASS, AND WILLIE J. DAVIS, HIGH TENOR AND MANAGER.

BRADLEY LATER SWITCHED TO BARITONE AS WELL AS OCCASIONAL BASS WHEN THOMPSON LEFT THE GROUP TO TAKE UP PREACHING. DAVIS ASSERTS THAT JOHNSON, BREWER, BRADLEY, AND HIMSELF SUNG ON MOST OF THE GROUP'S THREE CREED LP SELECTIONS AND TWELVE NASHBORO SINGLES, THE FIRST OF THESE BEING THE SWANEE QUINTET~SOUNDING "DEEP IN MY HEART" ON WHICH ONE CAN ALMOST SWEAR THAT LITTLE JOHNNY JONES HAD TAKEN POSSESSION OF WILLIE DAVIS WHO DOES A MAGNIFICENT JOB WITH THE MATERIAL.

TURN THE PLATTER OVER AND WE FIND DAVIS WAILING AND COOKING ON "LOOK AT THE PROMISED LAND." DAVIS GETS DOWN AND TESTIFIES ON A RIGHTEOUS RUN~THROUGH OF "RAINBOW IN THE SKY." A SOLID RHYTHM SUPPORTS A TAUT READING OF "I FEEL THE FIRE BURNING," ON WHICH DAVIS SERMONIZES AND BARES HIS SOUL. "FAMILY PRAYER," A RAPID TEMPO CHANT IN THE HAPPINESS VEIN, WAS THE GROUP'S BEST SELLING RECORD. THE SUCCESS OF "FAMILY PRAYER" EARNED THE GROUP A GIG AT HARLEM'S APOLLO THEATER IN EARLY 1962, WHERE THEY LABORED AS THE OPENING ACT.

THE FLIP OF "FAMILY PRAYER" IS "SOMEONE'S WAITIN' FOR ME," A MID~TEMPO DIRGE PUNCTUATED WITH BRADLEY'S ILLUMINATING BASSO INTRUSIONS. DAVIS RASPS HIS WAY THROUGH A STANDARD PACING OF "HE RESCUED ME." "STANDING IN THE SAFETY ZONE" IS BEAUTIFULLY RENDERED WITH DAVIS LAYING ON THE PAIN, THE GROUP SINGING CLOSE AND BRADLEY ADDING BASEMENT MAGIC. THE SINGLE SURFACED AT THE TIME THE GROUP TOURED WITH LITTLE WILLIE JOE LIGON AND THE MIGHTY CLOUDS OF JOY OUT OF LOS ANGELES. "WE WERE THE

FIRST GROUP TO TOUR WITH THE CLOUDS, AND PEOPLE TOLD US WE WERE CRAZY 'CAUSE THE CLOUDS SANG SO HARD," SAYS DAVIS. WHAT HE MEANT WAS THE CLOUDS WOULD PUSH THE BRIGHT STARS WAY IN THE SHADE, BUT AS IT SO HAPPENED THE STARS GAVE THE CLOUDS A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY.

THE BRIGHT STARS TOURED ALL THROUGH THE WESTERN AND EASTERN STATES AND ALONG THE GULF COAST. THE RELEASE OF "JESUS KEEP YOUR ARMS AROUND ME" FINDS THE GROUP SUPPORTED BY A FANCY ORGAN AND A SWITCH OF LEAD. WILLIE JOHNSON TAKES THE HELM ON THIS HEART~SUNG GEM. AT THIS MIDPOINT IN THE GROUP'S NASHBORO TENURE, ERNIE YOUNG, NOW IN HIS SEVENTIES, MADE THE DECISION TO RETIRE AND QUIT THE MUSIC BUSINESS. THE ENTIRE NASHBORO ORGANIZATION WAS SOLD TO THE CRESCENT INVESTMENT COMPANY, OWNED BY THE WEALTHY SUDEKUM FAMILY WHO OWNED AMONG OTHER HOLDINGS A STRING OF THEATERS. IN 1967, THE CRESCENT~OWNED WOODLAND THEATER WAS CONVERTED INTO THE WOODLAND RECORDING STUDIOS AND STEREO FACILITIES WERE MADE AVAILABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE NASHBORO LABEL UNDER THE CREED/CRESCENT BANNER CONTINUED ON WITH WILLIAMS IN THE PILOT SEAT. THIS ALSO PUT HIM IN CONTROL OF STUDIO PRODUCTION.

OUR LAST FIVE BRIGHT STARS CUTS WERE RECORDED DURING AND AFTER THE LABEL'S CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP AND UPSCALE TRANSITION. "IF YOU MISS ME SINGING" IS BEAUTIFULLY RENDERED AND TENDERLY ACCOMPANED ON GUITAR. HYPNOTIC ORGAN AND PRECISION HARMONIES DECORATE A THROAT~TWISTING JOUST WITH "WHEN I'M GONE." "I'VE DONE THY WILL" IS A PERSONAL FAVORITE WITH ITS SWEEPING CURLIQUES AND FINE MELODIC CHORDINGS. THE SONG SHOULD HAVE GENERATED GREATER REVENUES FOR NASHBORO THAN IT DID.

WILLIE JOHNSON IS BACK AND IN TOP FORM

WITH EMOTION~DRENCHED INTERPRETATIONS OF "JUST LOOK AROUND YOU" AND "LET THY WILL BE DONE," A DOUBLE DEDICATION~IN~SONG TO THE BRIGHT STARS' GOSPEL HEROES~THE DIXIE HUMMINGBIRDS OF PHILADELPHIA. THE BRIGHT STARS UPDATED THEIR VOCAL SOUND AFTER "JUST LOOK AROUND YOU" AND, UNFORTUNATELY, THE END RESULT SHOWED US ONLY ANOTHER VIOLINAIRES CLONE. YET ALL TEN OF THE GROUP'S NASHBORO SINGLES RELEASES FROM WHICH THESE CUTS ARE DRAWN ARE OF EXCEPTIONAL MERIT AND SHOULD STAND THE TEST OF TIME.

AFTER LEAVING NASHBORO IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES, THE BRIGHT STARS JOINED THE CANTON SPIRITUALS ON THE J & B LABEL OUT OF JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI. TWO OR THREE ALBUMS LATER, THE GROUP GRADUALLY FELL APART.

SHANNON WILLIAMS STAYED WITH NASHBORO UNTIL 1981 WHEN CRESCENT RELINQUISHED THE COMPANY. WILLIE DAVIS ENDED UP IN ALABAMA WHERE ON WEEKENDS HE SOMETIMES TAKES A FRESHLY CULLED BRIGHT STARS GROUP OUT TO A PAYING GIG.

~ OPAL L. NATIONS ~ MAY, 1995.
WITH INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE FROM SHANNON WILLIAMS

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