1. **GOLDEN EAGLE GOSPEL SINGERS** Tone The Bell
2. **GOLDEN EAGLE GOSPEL SINGERS** He's My Rock
3. **FAMOUS BLUE JAY SINGERS** I Must Tell Jesus
4. **FAMOUS BLUE JAY SINGERS** While The Blood Runs Warm In Your Veins
5. **FAMOUS BLUE JAY SINGERS** Open My Mouth To The Lord
6. **FAMOUS BLUE JAY SINGERS** Praising Jesus Ever More
7. **PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS** Happy In The Service Of The Lord
8. **PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS** Just A Walk With Thee
9. **NORFLEET BROS.** None But The Righteous
10. **NORFLEET BROS.** Jesus Is All The World To Me
11. **SEVEN MELODY MEN** Nobody Knows – Nobody Cares
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20. **MELODY JUBILEE SINGERS** Freedom Afterwhile
21. **KELLY BROS. SINGERS** I'll Be Ready
22. **KELLY BROS. SINGERS** Glad I Found The Lord

Gospel HERITAGE

HT CD 08

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GLAD I FOUND THE LORD

CHICAGO GOSPEL • 1937-1957

Chicago is the home of modern gospel music. The Original Soul Stirrers, Mahalia Jackson, Chicago's Queen of Gospel, the great Roberta Martin, and pioneer Robert Anderson all made their homes in the Windy City. In 1921, after several excursions into the music of the world, flesh, and the devil, Prof. Thomas A. Dorsey, fondly regarded as the father of gospel music, moved to Chicago and joined its Pilgrim Baptist Church under the auspices of which he helped develop the "call and response" technique first brought to the U.S. by African-American slaves. In 1931, Dorsey, alongside composer Theodore R. Frye, organized the first recorded gospel choir in a black church – The Ebenezer Baptist Church of Chicago. A year later Dorsey opened The Dorsey House of Music, the first independent publishing company operated in support of Black American gospel song writers.

Chicago was also the home of the Martin & Morris song publishing agency. Gospel pioneer Sallie Martin was president and Kenneth Morris treasurer. Together they published, arranged, and distributed the songs of James Cleveland, Alex Bradford and many other edifying African-American gospel songwriters. Jesse Dixon directs one of the nation's finest choirs in Chicago, The Community Choir. The Argo Singers, Spencer Taylor & The Highway QC's, Bill Moss & his Celestials, and Rev. Chas Watkins, director of the nationally famous Pentecostal Mass Choir, all put down roots in Chi Town.

One of the most imortant gospel singing groups to record in Chicago during the Pre- and Post-War period was *The Golden Eagle Gospel Singers* about which little is known. We do know that Thelma Byrd probably sang lead during the first session out of which a test pressing of "Tone the bell" is taken from May of 1937. Another interesting fact is that blues harmonica stylist Hammie Nixon played on the group's second and third Decca sessions of 1939 and '40. "He's my rock," a chant-like song in the public domain, is righteously accompanied by Hammie's extrovert harp licks. This group is not to be confused with the all-male Alabama Golden Eagles who recorded for Federal in 1951 & '52.

The Famous Blue Jay Singers originated in Brighton, Alabama in 1923, relocated to Dallas in 1937, then moved again up to Chicago in the early 40's. At this point the group members included Nathaniel Edmonds, bass, Charles Beal, baritone, Jimmie Hollingsworth, tenor, Charles Bridges, second lead, Rev. John R. Kellum, manager, and the legendary Silas Steele who later left to sing baritone and lead with The Spirit of Memphis in 1948. "I must tell Jesus" is from a 1947 Mayo Williams' Harlem session. Tight Jubilee singing and spirited lead work from Charlie Bridges make "While the blood runs warm in your veins" and "Open my mouth to the Lord" two finer sides by the group recorded in New York in September 1950. It is unfortunate that only five releases came out of the two Decca sessions. By this time Willie Rose had replaced Steele and Leandrew Wauford (who also played harmonica with the group) had taken over bass chores from Nathaniel Edmonds. "Praising Jesus ever more" was recorded between the Harlem and Decca sessions. The song starts in the almost uncompromising Jubilee style but breaks into a more impassioned approach, bridging the gap between the older, restrained and the fresher, more extrovert approach. The Blue Jays went from Decca to Trumpet in 1952.

The Pilgrim Jubilees, or Jubes as they are affectionately known, were formed in Chicago some time during the early 50's by Major Roberson, manager and lead. Seminal members included the Graham brothers, Clay and Cleve, who grew up amongst dire poverty in a three-room shack in Houston, Miss., Charles Green, Rev. Percy Clark, and Charlie Brown who later joined the Violinaires of Detroit. Rufus Crume of the Crume Bros. set of Soul Stirrers played guitar for the group as did soul artist Cash McCall (of "When you wake up" fame) during the early 60's. One of the aggregation's first waxings was for Art Sheridan's tiny Chance label at 2011 South Michigan Avenue in 1953 – "Happy in the service of the Lord" backed by "Just a walk with Thee" in the older Jubilee style fronted with impressive crooning sounds, quite different from later cleffings on Nashboro and the story-telling dramas of the Peacock repertoire.

According to Robert Pruter, *The Norfleet Bros.* were relatives of The Cheers, a group recorded by Richard Pegue for Penny and whose first record "Settle down" sold in excess of 40,000 copies around Chicago. The group also recorded some excellent gospel sides for Bandera and its subsidiary, Jerico Road. In all likelihood, The Norfleet Bros. were The Norfleet Cousins, a.k.a. Little Ben & The Cheers, who waxed the deep-soul ballad "Beggar Love" for Gemini Star in the mid-sixties. "None but the righteous" and "Jesus is all the world to me" are sung in an exciting, sanctified style bordering on early Chicago soul. In all probability the group consisted of John, Merlon, Frank and "Little Ben" Norfleet. Shortly after Rev. Martin Luther King Jnr's demise, The Norfleets recorded a fine, upbeat tribute – "Marching for Freedom" for Von-Trice, a record much coveted by gospel collectors.

The Seven Melody Men, a.k.a. The Four-A Melody Men, are from St. Louis and cut only four sides in Chicago during 1947. "Nobody knows, nobody cares" is a soulfully melodious tune sung in the style of the famous Selah Jubilees.

Another equally obscure outfit, *The Norfolk Singers*, sessioned just one platter in 1949. The songs here are not lead by Roscoe Robinson although he did briefly sing in the group at a later date. "By and by" is a different arrangement of the traditional hymn made popular nationwide by the legendary Rebert H. Harris at The Soul Stirrers' recording debut on Specialty in 1950. The Norfolk Singers' version features a convincingly anguished lead of close-to-equal accomplishment. "Dig a little deeper" is almost a carbon copy of that made by The Pilgrim Travelers in L.A. at about the same time, which proves more than anything that prevailing acappella quartets worked around set standard arrangements of Kenneth Morris tunes.

The Silver Quintettes' exciting recording of "Sinner's Crossroads" dates from September 1956. Its driving rhythm and hypnotic refrain remind one of similar efforts by Archie Brownlee and The Blind Boys of Miss. which probably explains why the five songs from a May 1957 session were kept from release. Referred to in some Vee Jay files as "The Silvertones," I doubt whether The Silver Quintette bore any connection with the famous Swans.

The stunning "God's Creation" by *The Gospel Songbirds*, recorded in the early 50's on the C.H. Brewer label is a shining example of the emerging "hard-singing" style made popular by Brownlee and The Rev. Julius Cheeks. The flip side, "When they ring those golden bells," a church-wrecking number, seems to have proven an extremely popular tune among Mid-Western quartets, as The Southern Tornadoes and Flying Clouds cut it for United and J.V.B. around the same time. The personnel of this group is not to be confused with the outfit of the same name who cut during the 60's for Nashboro featuring a young ex-Pilgrim Harmonizer by the name of Otis Clay.

Joe Brown and St. Louis Jimmy founded JOB Records around 1950 primarily as a Chicago blues label. Brown put out only three gospel records, as far as I know: the aforementioned Norfleet Bros. issue, plus one apiece by Joiners 5 Trumpets (1952) and *The Heavenly Kings* (1957). My guess is that The Heavenly Kings sides were acquired by Brown thru Joe Von Battle of Joe's Record Shop and J.V.B. record label in Detroit, as Brown had dealings with Battle over Gales/Violinaires releases. "Anyway you bless me Lord" with its strong throbbing bass and wild Brownlee-type lead is different from the later, more subdued version by The Bells of Joy on Chess. "Lord, free my soul" is a testimonial-type moan with touching call and response leads and is a fabulous example of the Claude Jeter school of gospel.

The Melody Jubilee Singers of Chicago are yet another unknown entity to this writer. "When the battle is over" with its hard lead and hypnotic rhythm must have wrecked many a concert appearance. "Freedom after while" with its swing-lead approach, builds and builds as each soloist comes on with renewed vigor until a heightened spiritual nirvana is achieved. This type of hard emotional approach sadly lacks attention by the quartets of today.

The Kelly Bros., Curtis, Andrew and Robert, first recorded in Chicago some time in 1954. Joe Brown (owner of J.O.B. Records), acting as producer and talent scout for Art Sheridan's tiny Chance label, recorded two songs by The Kellys but did not press to issue them. A year later the trio tried their luck with the Brewer label. Brewer issued one single with the splendid "Prayer for tomorrow" on one side. "Prayer for tomorrow" was picked up by the Carters and issued on Vee Jay with an alternate reverse entitled "God laid his hands on me." "Prayer for tomorrow" made a little noise around Chicago but nothing earth-shaking.

Sometime in 1957, then billed as The Kelly Bros. Singers, the group recorded for Shannon Williams at Nashboro. Their initial release (featured here), "I'll be ready"/ "Glad I found the Lord" keep to the tight sweet quartet sound so much a trademark of many early Vee Jay gospel releases. "Ready" builds to a rousing spirited climax with Robert piling on the fuel while "Glad" with its preaching and screaming throughout keeps well within the prevailing mode of the time. The Kellys recorded a second session at Nashboro, billed this time as The Kelly Bros., in 1959. Roscoe Robinson who warbled briefly in The Southern Sons and Norfolk Singers and who replaced Archie Brownlee in the Mississippi set of Blind Boys, had sung fleetingly with The Kellys.

In 1960, together with guitarist Offe Reece, The Kelly Bros. recorded their finest gospel material on a King album collection called "The Kelly Bros. sing a page of songs from the good book," a few tunes from which were later badly re-recorded and issued on Creed. In 1963, with the addition of Charles Lee, the Kellys crossed over into secular and recorded as The King Pins. Their King album, "It won't be this way always" is a collection of soul numbers issued as singles on the Federal affiliate. The King Pins recorded behind Freddy King and sang background behind the voice of Johnny Otis on "My baby's alright" (a blatant rip-off of "My Jesus is alright"). Shortly thereafter the group reverted back to using The Kelly Bros. moniker and cut a slew of singles and albums for Sims and Excello.

OPAL LOUIS NATIONS
November, 1991

FAMOUS BLUE JAY SINGERS OF BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

Silas Steele; Charles Bridges (lead vocals); Jimmie Hollingsworth (tenor); Charles Beal (baritone); Nathaniel Edmonds (bass). *Chicago, c. January 1947*

I must tell Jesus

Charles Bridges; Willie Rose (lead vocals); Jimmie Hollingsworth (tenor); Charles Beal (baritone); Leandrew Woffard (bass). *Probably Dallas, c. 1948/49*

Praising Jesus evermore

Add unknown drums –1. *New York, 14th September 1950*

While the blood runs warm in your veins
Open my mouth to the Lord –1

GOLDEN EAGLE GOSPEL SINGERS

Mixed vocal group including Thelma Byrd female lead, unknown violin, harmonica, guitar, tambourine. *Chicago, 11 May 1937*

Tone The Bell

Mixed vocal group, Hammie Nixon harmonica. *Chicago, 4 June 1940*

He's My Rock

GOSPEL SONGBIRDS

James Phelps (vocal); others unknown, with unknown organ; –1 chimes added. *Chicago, c. mid 1950's*

When they ring those golden bells –1
God's creation –JP

HEAVENLY KINGS

Male vocal group. Add unknown drums –1. *Chicago, c. January 1957*

Anyway you bless me Lord –1
Lord, free my soul

KELLY BROTHERS SINGERS

Offie Reece; T. C. Lee; Curtis Kelly; Andrew Kelly; Robert Kelly (vocals), with unknown bass, drums added. (See text for alternative personnel.) *c. September 1957*

Glad I found the Lord –TCL
I'll be ready –TCL

MELODY JUBILEE SINGERS OF CHICAGO

Male vocal group. *Chicago, c. late 1948*

Freedom Afterwhile [sic]
When The Battle Is Over

NORFLEET BROTHERS

Probably: Joseph; Junius; Arthur; Peter; Nathaniel; George Norfleet (vocals), with unknown piano; guitar. *c. July 1953*

Jesus is all the world to me
None but the righteous

NORFOLK SINGERS

George Croffett (bass); others unknown. *Chicago c. 1949*

By and by
Dig a little deeper

PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS

Theopilis Graham; Elgie C. B. Graham; Monroe Hatchit; Willis Johnson; Leonard Brownlee (vocals). *Chicago, January 1953*

Happy in the service of the Lord
Just a closer walk with Thee

SEVEN MELODY MEN

Tommie de Bruce; Darris L. Betts; James Williams; Herman B. McFadden; Rudolph Allen; Zack C. Swinney (vocals); Ernest J. Golden (manager), with unknown guitar. *?Chicago c. November 1947*

Nobody knows, nobody cares

NOTE: This group also recorded pre-war as "Mound City Jubilee Quartette".

SILVER QUINTETTE

Huey Brown; David Aron; Roscoe Robinson; Joe Henderson; Willis Williams (vocals), with unknown organ, drums. *Chicago, 11th September 1956*

Sinner's crossroads