Golden Age Gospel Quartets

THE SOUL STIRRERS
THE CHOSEN GOSPEL SINGERS
THE PILGRIM TRAVELERS
THE PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS
THE ORIGINAL FIVE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA
THE GATE CITY SINGERS
THE CAPITOL CITY STARS
THE CLEFS OF CALVARY
THE GABLE-AIRS

Volume Two (1954-1963)

The majority of the 26 selections on *Golden Age Gospel Quartets, Volume One (1947-54)* (Specialty SPCD-7069-2) are performed entirely a cappella. With their roots in the older jubilee style where the bass singer provided the primary pulse, early gospel quartets either found no need for instrumentalists or used sparse guitar or piano chording to better register the voices in key.

On this companion volume covering the years 1954 through 1963, however, every one of the 27 vocal performances has instrumental backup, basic guitar or piano accompaniment in a few cases, full rhythm sections in most. Musical instruments were adopted as integral elements of the quartet style, in some cases with as much emphasis being placed on musical accompaniment as on finding the right blend of harmonies. Rhythm sections had become virtually obligatory, in the studio and increasingly on stage, a practice that by the mid-Fifties had all but obliterated the art of a cappella quartet singing.

If "Peace in the Valley," Sam Cooke's 1951 debut recording, found him still singing much in the manner of his predecessor, R.H. Harris, the two Soul Stirrers numbers that begin this disc reveal Cooke in full flower, his trademark yodels firmly in place and his turns of phrase ever so elegant. He takes the sole lead on the lovely "He'll Make a Way" from 1954 and trades off with partner Paul Foster on 1955's harder hitting "Be with Me Jesus."

Between November 11, 1952, when the Chosen Gospel Singers cut the two tunes that appear on volume 1, and April 28, 1954, when they made the three included here, the quartet underwent a complete personnel overhaul. While passing through Chicago, the Chosen picked up teenager Lou Rawls, formerly of the Holy Wonders and the Highway QC's. It is the unmistakable Rawls who sings the first lead on "What a Wonderful Sight" and the second lead on "The Lifeboat Is Coming," but the identity of the other lead vocalist on those two tracks, as well as on "Don't Worry About Me," remains a mystery. According to Rawls, it was E.J. Booker, but Joe Johnson, the group's manager, has insisted that Booker was never a member of the Chosen.

Although they were originally an a cappella group, the Southern California–based Pilgrim Travelers did an especially fine job of integrating vocals and instruments on their mid-Fifties Specialty recordings. Gwendolyn Cooper provides exceptional piano accompaniment on "Straight Street" and "Did You Stop to Pray This Morning?" The bluesy, richly melismatic tenor voice of Kylo Turner is featured on both 1955 selections, but George "Ooppee" McCurn, one of gospel's greatest bass singers, nearly steals the show on the former number. Turner and his cousin, Keith Barber, switch leads on "After While," a fever-pitched 1956 performance that contains some striking rhythm guitar work.

While attending the National Quartet Convention in Los Angeles (probably in August 1955), Chicago's Pilgrim Jubilee Singers were introduced to Specialty boss Art Rupe by the Soul Stirrers, their Windy City cohorts. Subtly accompanied by guitarist Arthur Crume (brother of Soul Stirrers' guitarist Leroy Crume), the Pilgrim Jubilees cut a demo for the label, four selections from which are issued here for the first time ever. This could have been the break the group—which was formed in Houston, Mississippi during the late Forties by brothers Elgie, Cleve, and

Clay Graham, relocated to Chicago in 1952, and the following year cut one single for Chance that went nowhere—had been waiting for. The Pilgrim Jubilees' passion-filled performances on the demo—with Elgie and Cleve trading leads on "What Do You Know (About Jesus)?," "Oh, Lord," and "Tell Jesus (What You Want)" and Cleve taking the solo helm of the haunting "Yesteryear"—impressed Rupe so much that he signed them. He insisted, however, that they change their name in order to avoid confusion with the Pilgrim Travelers, Specialty's longstanding breadwinners. The Jubilees refused and returned to Chicago, eventually scoring big with their 1964 Peacock waxing of "The Old Ship of Zion." The group, featuring Cleve and Clay Graham, remains a popular attraction on the quartet highway.

Clarence Fountain, leader of the Five Blind Boys of Alabama, was—and still is—one of gospel's preeminent housewreckers, a show-stopping firebrand who interjects one emotionally devastating scream after another into his urgent musical testimonies. Fountain is the sole lead on "Broken Heart of Mine" from 1956 and "Goodbye Mother" from '57, while Rev. Percell Perkins helps him drive home the message on 1957's "I've Been Born Again." Guitarist George Scott's bluesy leads and slashing rhythm parts are also notable on these tracks.

The Specialty part of this quartet anthology closes with three numbers by the Soul Stirrers. After coming aboard in late 1950, Sam Cooke took the venerable quartet to new levels of popularity with his innovative yet seemingly effortless vocal style and youthful good looks. "Were You There?," cut on April 19, 1957, is from Cooke's final session with the Soul Stirrers; before the year was out, he had left the group, gospel music, and Specialty Records and found himself at the top of both the pop and R&B charts with "You Send Me." Paul Foster, who is featured on the same session's "Sinner Run to Jesus," stood alone in the solo spotlight for a period until former Highway QC's member Johnnie Taylor, who splits the leads with Foster on 1958's "Out on a Hill," was recruited to fill Cooke's lead tenor role.

After one more sesson for Specialty, in February 1959 (from which nothing was issued at the time), the Soul Stirrers joined SAR Records, a new label that had been launched by Cooke in partnership with J.W. Alexander of the Pilgrim Travelers. Specialty itself downsized its operations not long thereafter, Art Rupe having become discouraged with the record business, due in part to the near-concurrent loss of his biggest pop star, Little Richard, to the world of religion and his biggest religious star, Cooke, to the pop realm.

Selections by the Gate City Singers, as well as those by Capitol City Stars and the Clefs of Calvary, were recorded for Tru-Sound, a short-lived subsidiary of Prestige Records, by Ozzie Cadena, a noted jazz producer whose considerable contributions to gospel music, particularly during his earlier association with Savoy Records, are less widely known. In *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (Limelight Editions, 1985), Anthony Heilbut writes of Cadena: "He is, with Art Rupe of Specialty..., probably the most gifted producer in gospel history."

The Gate City Singers of Philadelphia, who recorded "I Thank You Jesus" and "Peace in the Valley" in 1962 as part of a Tru-Sound LP, worked with Cadena four years earlier at Savoy. Little is known about this quartet, other than that its original

lead singer was Thomas Mobley, formerly of the Harmonizing Four and the Angelic Gospel Singers. Mobley was gone by the time of this session, however. Trading leads on the upbeat, jubilee-influenced "I Thank You Jesus" are Bernard Patton and Richard Henderson; the same two men solo in reverse order on "Peace in the Valley," rendered here in a waltz-tempo arrangement far different from Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers' version of the Thomas A. Dorsey standard that's included on volume 1.

The high, filagreed harmonies of the Capitol City Stars reflect the influence of Philadephia's Dixie Hummingbirds. After the 1962 Tru-Sound session from which "Friends Talk About Me" and "Jesus I Love to Call Your Name" was recorded, the Washington, D.C. quartet disappeared from vinyl for a dozen years, finally reemerging in 1974 with a Peacock album that was produced by Dixie Hummingbird honcho Ira Tucker and featured sometime Hummingbird Paul Owens as lead singer. The identity of the lead singers on the two tracks at hand is unfortunately unknown.

The Chicago-based Clefs of Calvary, who made two Tru-Sound albums, in 1962 and in '63, are the most modern of the quartets in this collection, their vocal style, as well as their instrumental accompaniment, owing a direct debt to Sam Cooke's pop-flavored productions for the Soul Stirrers and other artists, both spiritual and secular, at SAR Records. James Phelps, the Shreveport, Louisiana–born lead singer on "Troubles of This World" and "Miracle Temple," also displays a pronounced Cooke influence and in 1964 recorded one number with the Soul Stirrers for SAR, replacing Jimmy Outler (who had replaced Johnnie Taylor, who had replaced Sam Cooke, who had replaced R.H. Harris) in the Soul Stirrers' long line of distinguished leads. Phelps's tenure with the Soul Stirrers was brief, however, and by 1965 he was recording rhythm and blues for Argo.

Distinguished jazz producer Orrin Keepnews may not have known as much about gospel music as Ozzie Cadena, but he did know who to turn to for advice. Having signed the Staple Singers to Riverside Records in 1962, Keepnews brought Rev. Cleophus Robinson to the company's Battle subsidiary later that year on the recommendation of Roebuck Staples. In 1963, at Rev. Robinson's suggestion, Keepnews cut a Battle LP by the Gable-Airs, an obscure though first-rate Memphis quartet that would go on to record for the Song Bird, Gospel Express, and Michael labels. The raspy low tenor of Roscoe Lindsay is featured on "Move Upstairs" and "Oh, How I Love Jesus," while gravel-toned McKinley Kines takes the lead on "Travelin' Shoes." Formed in 1949, the Gable-Airs display a more traditional approach than do the three quartets who recorded for Tru-Sound, one closer to that of the Five Blind Boys of Alabama and others who recorded for Specialty in the mid-Fifties.

Some gospel quartets in recent years have moved their focus even further away from vocal harmonies, picking up synthesizers and other instrumental appendages. For every ultra-modern quartet, however, there remain others, like the Gable-Airs before them, who stick closer to the genre's roots and continue to attract audiences raised on good, old-fashioned, down-home singing.

—LEE HILDEBRAND AND OPAL NATIONS, 1997

The period from the mid-Forties through the Fifties has come to be regarded as the Golden Age of African-American gospel music. Specialty Records, founded in 1946 by Art Rupe, was one of the first companies to nurture this flowering of creativity and remained at the forefront of the genre for a decade and a half. The Pilgrim Travelers, the Soul Stirrers (featuring R.H. Harris, Sam Cooke, and Johnnie Taylor), Sister Wynona Carr, Brother Joe May, Dorothy Love Coates and the Original Gospel Harmonettes, the Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama, the Swan Silvertones, and Alex Bradford are only a few of the giants of gospel's Golden Age who were discovered and/or given wider exposure by Art Rupe. The Legends of Gospel Series salutes and celebrates some of these gospel stars who found their place in the history of American music at Specialty Records.

The Soul Stirrers:

1. HE'LL MAKE A WAY
   (SP 2128) March 2, 1954
   (C. Levert) ATV Music-BMI 2:36
   SOLOIST: **SAM COOKE**
2. BE WITH ME JESUS
   (SP 878) February 16, 1955
   (Sam Cooke) Abkco Music-BMI 2:25
   SOLOISTS: **COOKE, PAUL FOSTER**

The Chosen Gospel Singers:

3. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME
   (take 1—previously unissued alternate) April 28, 1954
   (trad.) P.D. 2:20
   SOLOIST: UNKNOWN
4. WHAT A WONDERFUL SIGHT
   (take 2-previously unissued alternate) April 28, 1954
   (writer unknown) publ. unknown 2:18
   SOLOISTS: **LOU RAWLS,** UNKNOWN
5. THE LIFEBOAT IS COMING
   (take 3—previously unissued alternate) April 28, 1954
   (trad.) P.D. 2:07
   SOLOISTS: UNKNOWN, **RAWLS**

The Pilgrim Travelers:

6. STRAIGHT STREET
   (take 1—previously unissued alternate)
   January 13, 1955
   (Jesse Whitaker-J.W. Alexander) ATV-BMI 2:11
   SOLOIST: **KYLO TURNER**
7. AFTER WHILE
   (take 8—previously unissued alternate) August 2, 1956
   (arr. Keith Barber) P.D. 2:33
   SOLOISTS: **TURNER, KEITH BARBER**

8. DID YOU STOP TO PRAY THIS MORNING?
(take 2—previously unissued alternate)
January 13, 1955
(R. Westmoreland) Rumbalero Music-BMI 2:26
SOLOIST: **TURNER**

The Pilgrim Jubilee Singers:

9. WHAT DO YOU KNOW (ABOUT JESUS)?
(take 2—previously unissued) 1956
(Wynona Carr) ATV-BMI 2:46
SOLOISTS: **ELGIE GRAHAM, CLEVE GRAHAM**

10. OH, LORD
(take 4—previously unissued) 1956 (trad.) P.D. 3:29
SOLOISTS: **ELGIE GRAHAM, CLEVE GRAHAM**

11. TELL JESUS (WHAT YOU WANT)
(take 5—previously unissued) 1956 (trad.) P.D. 2:33
SOLOISTS: **ELGIE GRAHAM, CLEVE GRAHAM**

12. YESTERYEAR
(take 4—previously unissued) 1956 (trad.) P.D. 2:26
SOLOIST: **CLEVE GRAHAM**

The Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama:

13. BROKEN HEART OF MINE
(take 2—previously unissued alternate)
February 3, 1956 (arr. Johnny Fields) ATV-BMI 2:29
SOLOIST: **CLARENCE FOUNTAIN**

14. GOODBYE MOTHER
(take 1—previously unissued alternate)
March 7 or 8, 1957 (Percell Perkins) ATV-BMI 2:37
SOLOIST: **FOUNTAIN**

15. I'VE BEEN BORN AGAIN
(take 5—previously unissued alternate)
March 7 or 8, 1957 2:47
(Johnny Fields) ATV-BMI
SOLOISTS: **FOUNTAIN, PERCELL PERKINS**

The Soul Stirrers:

16. WERE YOU THERE?
(SP 907) April 10, 1957
(arr. S.R. Crain) Sony/ATV Tunes LLC-ASCAP 2:27
SOLOIST: **COOKE**

17. SINNER RUN TO JESUS
(SP 907) April 10, 1957
(Willie Sheperd) publ. unknown 2:24
SOLOIST: **FOSTER**

18. OUT ON A HILL
(take 4—previously unissued alternate)
March 4, 1958
(Leroy Crume) ATV-BMI 2:37
SOLOISTS: **JOHNNIE TAYLOR, FOSTER**

The Gate City Singers:

19. I THANK YOU JESUS
(Tru-60002) April 7, 1962
(writer unknown) publ. unknown 3:15
SOLOISTS: **BERNARD PATTON, RICHARD HENDERSON**

20. PEACE IN THE VALLEY
(Tru-60002) May 30, 1962
(Thomas A. Dorsey) Warner-Tamerlane-BMI 5:40
SOLOISTS: **HENDERSON, PATTON**

The Capitol City Stars:

21. FRIENDS TALK ABOUT ME

(Tru-60003) May 3, 1962
(John Nobles) Prestige Music-BMI 2:31
SOLOIST: UNKNOWN

22. JESUS, I LIVE TO CALL YOUR NAME

(Tru-60003) May 3, 1962 (P. David)
Publ. unknown 4:37
SOLOISTS: UNKNOWN

The Clefs of Calvary:

23. TROUBLES OF THIS WORLD

(Tru-60001) May 18, 1962 (trad.) P.D. 3:06
SOLOIST: **JAMES PHELPS**

24. MIRACLE TEMPLE

(Tru-60007) January 5, 1963
(James Phelps) Pru Music-BMI 2:25
SOLOIST: **PHELPS**

The Gable Airs:

25. MOVE UPSTAIRS

(Battle 6141) September 26, 1963
(writer unknown) Publ. unknown 3:25
SOLOIST: **ROSCOE LINDSAY**

26. OH, HOW I LOVE JESUS

(Battle 6141) September 26, 1963
(Frederick Whitfield) P.D. 3:03
SOLOIST: **LINDSAY**

27. TRAVELIN' SHOES

(Battle 6141) September 26, 1963 (trad.) P.D. 1:57
SOLOIST: **McKINLEY KINES**

THE SOUL STIRRERS:

SAM COOKE—LEAD AND TENOR
(SELECTIONS #1, 2, AND 16 ONLY)
PAUL FOSTER—LEAD AND BARITONE
JOHNNIE TAYLOR—LEAD (#18 ONLY)
SENIOR ROY CRAIN—TENOR
(#1, 2, 16, AND 17 ONLY)
R.B. ROBINSON—BARITONE
BOB KING—BARITONE (#1 AND 2 ONLY)
LEROY CRUME—BARITONE AND GUITAR
(#16-18 ONLY)
JESSE J. FARLEY—BASS

MARCH 2, 1954
MASTER RECORDERS?, HOLLYWOOD
FAIDEST WAGONER—PIANO
A&R: **ART RUPE**
"HE'LL MAKE A WAY"

FEBRUARY 16, 1955
UNIVERSAL RECORDING STUDIOS, CHICAGO
EDWIN ROBINSON—PIANO
WILLIE WEBB—ORGAN
A&R: UNKNOWN
"BE WITH ME JESUS"

APRIL 19, 1957
UNIVERSAL RECORDING STUDIOS, CHICAGO
EVELYN GAY—PIANO
WILLIE WEBB—ORGAN
L.C. COOK—DRUMS
A&R: **S.R. CRAIN**
"WERE YOU THERE?,"
"SINNER RUN TO JESUS"

MARCH 4, 1958
RADIO RECORDERS, HOLLYWOOD
UNKNOWN—PIANO
A&R: **SONNY BONO**
"OUT ON A HILL"

THE CHOSEN GOSPEL SINGERS:

LOU RAWLS AND UNKNOWN—LEADS
PRESTON WHITTED, SAM THOMAS,
AND **RAEFORD BLAIR**—VOCALS
WITH UNKNOWN—PIANO

APRIL 28, 1954
UNIVERSAL RECORDING STUDIO, HOLLYWOOD
A&R: **ART RUPE**
"DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, "
"WHAT A WONDERFUL SIGHT,"
"THE LIFEBOAT IS COMING"

THE PILGRIM TRAVELERS:

KYLO TURNER AND **KEITH BARBER**—LEADS
J.W. ALEXANDER AND
WALTER BUDGETT—TENORS
JESSE WHITAKER—BARITONE
GEORGE McCURN—BASS

JANUARY 13, 1955
MASTER RECORDERS, HOLLYWOOD
GWENDOLYN COOPER—PIANO
UNKNOWN—BASS, DRUMS
(POSSIBLY **JAMES LEE** AND **RALPH WATSON)**
A&R: **ART RUPE**
"STRAIGHT STREET," "DID YOU STOP
TO PRAY THIS MORNING?"

AUGUST 2, 1956
PROBABLY RADIO RECORDERS, HOLLYWOOD
UNKNOWN—GUITAR, DRUMS
A&R: **ART RUPE**
"AFTER WHILE"

THE PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS:

ELGIE C.B. GRAHAM AND
CLEVE GRAHAM—LEADS
CLAY GRAHAM—TENOR
MAJOR ROBERSON—BARITONE
KENNY MADDEN—BASS
WITH **ARTHUR CRUME**—GUITAR

PROBABLY AUGUST 1955
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
A&R: UNKNOWN
"WHAT DO YOU KNOW (ABOUT JESUS)?," "OH,
LORD," "TELL JESUS (WHAT YOU WANT),"
"YESTERYEAR"

THE ORIGINAL FIVE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA:

CLARENCE FOUNTAIN—LEAD
PERCELL PERKINS—LEAD AND TENOR (#15
AND 16 ONLY)
GEORGE WARREN—TENOR (#14 ONLY)
GEORGE SCOTT—TENOR AND GUITAR
OLCIE THOMAS—BARITONE
JOHNNY FIELDS—BASS

FEBRUARY 3, 1956
ROY'S RECORD SHOP, HOLLYWOOD
GWENDOLYN COOPER—PIANO
ROY PORTER—DRUMS
A&R: **BUMPS BLACKWELL**
"BROKEN HEART OF MINE"

MARCH 7 OR 8, 1957
COSIMO RECORDING STUDIO, NEW ORLEANS
UNKNOWN—BASS, DRUMS
A&R: **BUMPS BLACKWELL**
"GOODBYE MOTHER," "I'VE BEEN BORN AGAIN"

THE GATE CITY SINGERS:

BERNARD PATTON AND
RICHARD HENDERSON—LEADS
JOSEPH DAVISON, LEROY GILLIGAN,
BENJAMIN MILES—VOCALS
NATHANIEL SANDORD—VOCALS AND GUITAR
WITH **ROBERT BANKS**—ORGAN
HERBIE LOVELLE—DRUMS

APRIL 7, 1962
VAN GELDER STUDIO,
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, NEW JERSEY
A&R: **OZZIE CADENA**
"I THANK YOU JESUS"

MAY 30, 1963
VAN GELDER STUDIO,
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, NEW JERSEY
A&R: **OZZIE CADENA**
"PEACE IN THE VALLEY"

THE CAPITOL CITY STARS:

JOHN NOBLE, ELLIOTT McILWAIN, WILLIAM JETER, WALTER MIKELL, EDWIN HALL, JR.— VOCALS
WITH **AMOS BELL**—PIANO
ROBERT BANKS—ORGAN

MAY 3, 1962
VAN GELDER STUDIO,
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, NEW JERSEY
A&R: **OZZIE CADENA**
"FRIENDS TALK ABOUT ME,"
"JESUS, I LIVE TO CALL YOUR NAME"

THE CLEFS OF CALVARY:

JAMES PHELPS—LEAD AND TENOR
CALVIN APRIL AND **EZELL WILKINS**—VOCALS
WILLIE HARRIS, LESTER EARL—VOCALS
(#23 ONLY)
PERCY CLARK AND UNKNOWN—VOCALS
(#24 AND 25 ONLY)
WITH **RICHARD FRANKLIN**—GUITAR

MAY 18, 1962
VAN GELDER STUDIO,
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, NEW JERSEY
LEO FARLEY—BASS
UNKNOWN—DRUMS
A&R: **OZZIE CADENA**
"TROUBLES OF THIS WORLD"

JANUARY 5, 1963
VAN GELDER STUDIO,
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, NEW JERSEY
EZELL WILKINS—PIANO
LEONARD GASKIN—BASS
HERBIE LOVELLE—DRUMS
A&R: **OZZIE CADENA**
"MIRACLE TEMPLE"

THE GABLE-AIRS:

ROSCOE LINDSAY, JR. AND
McKINLEY KINES—LEADS
ALBERT CRAFFENREED AND
CLEODIS COBURN—TENORS
ARTHUR CRUTCHER—BARITONE
JESSIE JAMES LEE—BASS
WITH UNKNOWN—GUITAR, PIANO,
BASS, DRUMS

SEPTEMBER 26, 1963
UNIVERSAL RECORDING STUDIOS, CHICAGO
A&R: **ORRIN KEEPNEWS**
"MOVE UPSTAIRS," "OH, HOW I LOVE JESUS,"
"TRAVELIN' SHOES"

DIGITAL TRANSFERS FROM ANALOG MASTER
TAPES BY **GORDON SKENE**

MASTERING, 1997—**KIRK FELTON**
(FANTASY STUDIOS, BERKELEY)

SERIES SUPERVISION BY **LEE HILDEBRAND**
AND **OPAL NATIONS**

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ORIGINAL SESSIONS PRODUCED BY
ART RUPE, S.R. CRAIN, SONNY BONO, BUMPS BLACKWELL, OZZIE CADENA, OR **ORRIN KEEPNEWS**

COMPILED AND PRODUCED FOR REISSUE BY
LEE HILDEBRAND AND **OPAL NATIONS**

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