HEAVEN BELONGS TO YOU

THE BEST OF *Jubilee* GOSPEL

Featuring: DELLA REESE & THE MEDITATION SINGERS • THE ORIOLES
THE TRAVELING INNERLIGHTS • EDNA McGRIFF • THE SELAH SINGERS
ALEX BRADFORD & THE ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH CHOIR

Jubilee Records' co-founder Jerry Blaine has a long and fascinating history, dating back to the mid 1920's when he and Buddy Rogers starred in long-forgotten silent pictures like "Salome Of The Tenements". During the big band era, he conducted his 12-piece Streamlined Rhythm orchestra, which often spotlighted vocal talents such as those of the Andrews Sisters, Dick Haymes and Helen Forrest (the late Glenn Miller was one of Blaine's arrangers). The Streamlined Rhythms recorded for American and Bluebird between 1932 and 1941 and built quite a sizeable following. When America came into WW2 and half his band enlisted, Blaine went to work for the Continental Music Company, a distributor for string and reed instruments. Continental set up the Music Appreciation record label, and Blaine hawked classical music by "nameless" artists to department stores.

THE ORIOLES

In 1942 Blaine joined the Cosmopolitan Record Company as VP of sales. This was where he picked up experience of dealing with jukebox, game and cigarette vending machine operators. When Cosmopolitan folded, Blaine went with National Records - again as VP of sales. At National Blaine met Herb Abramson, then a dental student and part-time A&R man for the label.

In 1946, Blaine started up the Cosnat Distributing Corporation with a $6000 loan from his brother Ben. Cosnat handled a host of small independent labels, including National. Some time during this period, Herb Abramson and Ahmet Ertegun started a label called Jubilee, with the firm intention of issuing Afro-American gospel music - as the name of the label would suggest. Jubilee put out a pair of singles by the Two Gospel Keys (Emma Daniels, vocals and guitar and Mother Sally Jones, vocal and tambourine) as well as two by the great Sister Ernestine Washington, and Blaine distributed these through Cosnat. The records sold poorly, and the rights were sold to Moses Asch of Folkways Records.

Blaine bought Jubilee from Abramson in 1947, and his first releases were extremely good sellers. Kermit Schafer's "Radio Bloopers" (in 78rpm album form) ended up in the 500,000+ sales range. Quite content with making money out of comedy, Blaine ventured into gospel and R&B only in a tentative manner. Sid De May, one of Blaine's founding partners at Cosnat and a former executive at National Records, had picked up a hot new Baltimore group called the Orioles. De May had bought the rights to a song written by Deborah Chessler called "It's Too Soon To Know", and the Orioles recording of it was issued by De May on It's A Natural, a label he had created especially for it. The record became a runaway best seller in 1948.

By October 1948, Blaine and Chessler were co-managing the Orioles. Blaine and De May set up the Jubilee Music Company and the Orioles were signed to a 5-year contract with It's A Natural. After National Records objected to "Natural" on the grounds that it was too close to their own trademark, the latter changed its logo and became Jubilee. De May remained with the label until June 1950 when he quit to form another, Uke Records, showcasing ukulele masters. Two months after that the Orioles - then comprising Earlington Carl "Sonny Til" Tilghman (lead), George Nelson (second lead), Alexander Sharp (tenor), Johnny Reed (bass) and Tommy Gaither (Guitar) - recorded seven songs, including a cover of the Cats And The Fiddle's 1940 smash "I Miss You So" (Bluebird) and the beautiful "Lord's Prayer" - the selection included here. "The Lord's Prayer" was originally set to music by Josephine Forsyth in 1929, and has seen many versions. Full details of the Orioles' history can be found in sleevenotes to the 6-CD set "The Orioles: The Jubilee Recordings" (Bear Family BCD 15682).

During the time that Blaine was moving steadily into the realms of pop music with signings such as the young Harry Belafonte, he also tried his luck at the burgeoning market of black gospel. One of the first groups to appear on Jubilee's freshly-created 3000 series was the Selah (Jubilee) Singers a.k.a. the Jubilators. Blaine probably acquired the Selah masters from Herb Abramson, who in all likelihood recorded them during the period of the Two Gospel Keys releases. Of the ten Selah masters featured here only two, "Why Not Today" and "Down Here I've Done My Best" saw commercial release at the time that Blaine acquired them.

The Selah Jubilee Six were organised by lead tenor Thurmon Ruth, around singers taken from St. Mark's Holy Church on New York's Fulton Street, around 1927. All came from the Pentecostal denomination, and stuck with jubilee acappella gospel In the vein of the Soul Stirrers, with whom the Selahs often battled and swapped material.

The Selahs were one of New York's premier groups. They first recorded in 1931 for Brunswick, but the session went unreleased. They subsequently waxed for Decca, Continental, Lenox, Mercury, Gotham, Arista, Atlantic, Capitol, Signature and Cross - using a slew of aliases - before they eventually wound up on Jubilee. The group at this point was comprised of lead, founder and Apollo gospel package MC Thermon Ruth along with Alden "Tarheel Slim" Bunn (lead and guitar), Eugene Mumford (lead), Hadie Rowe Jr. (baritone), Raymond "Pee Wee" Barnes (tenor) and David McNeil (bass). Bunn joined in 1949, and stayed for five years. Mumford enlisted around the time of these recordings and continued on through to the secular configuration of the group, the Larks, whose best uptempo Apollo recordings can be heard on a forthcoming Westside CD – "Up With The Larks" (WESM 593).

THE SELAH SINGERS A.K.A. THE JUBILATORS A.K.A. THE LARKS

"In My Heart" is a sweet song, put over with gusto and featuring almost the entire ensemble trading lead parts. One can only wonder why the beautiful "Your Family Prayer" never came out when originally committed to tape. Simple organ and Mumford's touching high tenor surround a narration in a formula lifted almost lock, stock and barrel from "World Prayer", a slightly-altered invocation waxed by Archie Brownlee and Reverend S.K. Lewis with the Five Blind Boys Of Mississippi for Peacock Records in 1952.

"Die Right" follows the same formula as "In My Heart". Kept on track by Bunn's rhythmic guitar, the song - on which Bunn and Ruth trade licks - builds to a climax, but sadly runs out of time before full spiritual nirvana is achieved (a part two, or lengthened version, might have seen a bit of wild extroversion!). David McNeil takes the helm on "Don't Drive Your Children Away", recorded at almost the same time as the Fairfield Four's release on Randy Wood's Dot Records but more lament-laden than the latter's perkier reading. (The Selahs' arrangement of "Tree Of Level" is definitely lifted from the Fairfield Four's waxing of the previous year). McNeil's impersonation of Isaac "Dickie" Freeman rich basso tones is almost perfectly conveyed.

Rhythmic joy is attained on "Downward Road", sung pretty much to the bright, Golden Gate Quartet formula, but one wishes for a strong tenor lead to possibly lift the song to greater heavenly heights nearer the close. The slow tempo'ed "Why Not Today" is the original, released master of a jubilee-scored song issued to launch the Jubilee label's short-lived 3000 series in 1950. The down-at-the-end-of-a-tunnel sound serves to distance the group from the listener, but the number is sung with boldness and vigour. "Down Here I've Done My Best" (or "I Wanna Go To Heaven And Rest") sticks to the basic, repetitive formula, the Selahs' reading sounding almost in the jump and jive bag as epitomised in the 1940's by the Spirits Of Rhythm. The Selah set closes with a high-spirited version of the traditional "I'm On My Way", a song filled with expectant hope and joy.

While the 3000 gospel series died an early death, the burgeoning Cosnat Distributing Corporation opened offices in three eastern cities. Law graduate brothers Ben and Elliott Blaine were taken on to handle the business and finance end, while son-in-law Irwin came on board to run the New York one-stop distributorship.

Jubilee enjoyed some minor success with discs by the Johnny Dee Trio and Buddy Lucas in 1952. The June 1951 issue of "Billboard" mentioned in a "talent topic" item that the 15-year-old, Harlem raised Little Edna McGriff had signed a long-term recording contract with Bess Berman's Apollo Records (based on new York's West 45th Street). The article goes on to say that "McGriff is a teenaged blues singer and student at Washington Irving High. She is an accomplished pianist and writes her own material. Backed by Budd Johnson, her first waxing session includes three self-penned compositions." Radical developments must have taken place between June and late summer, as Blaine issued two of the three McGriff compositions on Jubilee in late September. Either "Billboard" did not get their facts straight, or Berman sold Edna's contract to Blaine - which is extremely unlikely.

McGriff's second release of 1952 yielded "Heavenly Father", a prayerful ballad on which the singer was backed by Buddy Lucas and his Band Of Tomorrow. It stuck pay dirt, climbing to number four on "Billboard"s best-sellers chart and number five on the juke box listing in April of that year. (This, and other secular material by McGriff, can be found on other Westside CD's including WESM 539 - "Titanic" and WESD 207 - "The Jubilee Story"). "In The Chapel By The Road" was chosen as the follow up. It followed the same basic spiritual make-up as "Heavenly

EDNA McGRIFF

Father" but the tune did not loosen as many purse strings. Blaine did not worry too much abut this, as "Marie" an old Tommy Dorsey hit recorded by the Four Tunes, was by then blazing up the charts (it peaked at number seven on "Bilboard"s best sellers list, and number two on the Juke Box list). A year later the group scored again with "I Understand (Just How You Feel)" Jubilee's first million-seller.

R&B was by this time taking hold of the teenage imagination, and to meet the demand for this evolving trend Blaine created JO-Z - later Josie - named in memory of his mom. With his mind on capturing a corner of this promising market, Jerry Blaine turned his thoughts away from gospel for a while...

In 1956 the Cadillacs put out "Speedoo", the first of three major sellers for the group on Josie (see and hear WESM 528 - "The Fabulous Cadillacs"/"The Crazy Cadillacs" - for more on the group). 1957 was a bumper year for Cosnat Distributing - the company netted over five and a half million dollars in sales. This was the company's peak performance period, and Blaine's one-stops started to make real headway soon after. Blaine struck gold again in 1958 with Bobby Freeman's sock-hop opus (and one of the true anthems of the Rock 'n' Roll era) "Do You Wanna Dance". It was around this time that he was drawn by and to the talents of Detroit's Meditation Singers...

The Meditations were organised in the Motor City by Ernestine (Earnestine) Rundless in 1947. Rundless was born in Mt. Bayou, Ms., and grew up in Chicago where she met and married E.A. Rundless, lead vocalist and one of the original members of the Soul Stirrers of Trinity, Tx. The Meditations first recorded for DeLuxe in 1953. At the time they had one male baritone singer - Herbert Carson, who later joined the Stevens Singers - in the group. By 1954 Carson was gone, and they had become an all-female aggregation. They were soon to rival the Davis Sisters of Philadelphia and the Gospel Harmonettes of Birmingham, Alabama.

Between two contracts with Art Rupe's Specialty Records (1954 and 1959) the Meditations, with and without Della Reese leading them, cut material for Jubilee Records. It is also possible that Blaine bought some Specialty masters from Rupe, or that he had the group re-record material originally slated for Specialty release. The song "One River" a.k.a. "Only One River" (To Cross), was recorded for both labels, with the later Specialty version being the brighter of the two. At the time of the Jubilee sessions the group was comprised of Ernestine (Earnestine) Rundless (first lead contralto), her daughter - and later a noted soul singer - Laura Lee Rundless (second lead soprano), Dellillian Price (the sister of Della

Reese) and Marie Waters. Emory Radford and Kirk Stuart filled the organ and piano benches. "Certainly Lord", heard here in take four, really burns along, with Ernestine in top form belting out the lyrics against wailing voices and solid organ & piano accompaniment.

The aforementioned Della Reese (born Delloreese Patricia Early in 1932 in Detroit) attended Wayne State University to study psychology until she was recruited by the senior Rundless to join the Meditation Singers in 1950. Reese had previously soloed in church choirs, toured with Mahalia Jackson and had sung on and off with Beatrice Brown, Roberta Martin and Clara Ward. She signed with Jubilee as a solo act in 1954, and after four years of singing popular music (highlights of which can be found on WESM 513 - "The Jubilee Years" and WESM 514 - "At Mr. Kelly's"/"The Story Of The Blues") she re-teamed with the Meditations to present and guest on one album entitled "Amen" (Jubilee JGM 1083). One of its cuts "Hard To Get Along" is a beautifully-constructed, wholly passionate song with a strong blues feeling into which Reese, Rundless and Lee sink their sanctified teeth. The overall effect is both poignant and heartfelt. A totally different plateau is reached with "Jesus Will Answer Prayer", a rousing, joyous gospel song. It is also a hand-warming exercise and holiness dance vehicle. Finally the title track finds Reese at her glorious, most triumphant best. Her sheer earthiness and breathless vocal embellishments make for one of Della's finest spiritual moments.

Cosnat went public in May 1960. Suffering from too rapid an expansion and lack of capital to develop a vast number of public affiliates, Blaine was forced to take money out of production. To counter this, he met with Nate Du Roff of Monarch Pressing, who wanted to sell his plant and who had already been offered vast sums by Paramount and Dot records. Topping both Felix Valdera's and Randy Wood's offers, Blaine bought Monarch for one-and-a-quarter million dollars in the summer of 1960. Blaine then gathered up all his subsidiary labels and put them under one umbrella organisation that he called the Jay-Gee Record Company. "Now we are one complete organisation" said Blaine at the time. "Give us a tape or master and we can press, warehouse, ship and wholesale the product".

In 1965 Jerry Blaine handed over the controlling assets of his empire to his son Stephen. Nothing much happened on the gospel front for almost a decade, but in 1968 the younger Blaine started up the short-lived 6000 gospel album series. One of the few lucky groups to sign up was the (Traveling) Innerlights of New York City. Managed by Bill Seagal, the Innerlights first recorded in the mid-1960's for Sensational Sounds on 22nd Street. The quartet, a wild, extroverted, sanctified bunch, had strong talent and much grit. Their album (Jubilee 6022) was cut in 1968 at the Blue Bird Studios. Group members included J.C. Rachell (first tenor lead), Wayne Stovall of Oakland's own Stovall Singers, who recorded for Song Bird (second tenor lead), Mayfield Walker (tenor and guitar), Sonny Williams, Henry Farrell a.k.a. Farmer, James Hooten, "Gray Patch" and a singer/drummer remembered only as "Harold". Robert Dorsey was the session's organist.

"We had a 45 minute practice session out on the front steps of the studio building, and that was the only time we rehearsed and came up with arrangements" says Stovall. "Most of the songs were put down on the first take". The album passed almost unnoticed, except for sporadic sales in areas throughout the south. Four of the Innerlights have since become ministers. Surviving members of the group currently perform as the Mighty Quotations.

1969 was a rough year for singer-composer-talent

scout-actor Professor Alex Bradford. Having been dropped by Nashboro Records after a less-than-lucrative three-year contract, Bradford was floundering like a ship lost at sea. He had moved his A & A Music Enterprises - a company he kept alive for tax break purposes - from Chicago to Philadelphia, then finally to 149 S. 8th Street in Newark, New Jersey. Longing to return to theatrical work, where he could best use his wild extroversion and outrageous mannerisms, Bradford sought solace in directing his choral aggregation, the Abyssinian Baptist Church Choir of Newark, where he had served as minister of music for 10 years. Bradford, his singers, plus the 120-voice ABCC first recorded for Coulmbia in 1960. The net result was an extraordinary body of soul-lifting songs gathered on one album release "Shakin' The Rafters" (currently available on CD as Columbia 47335).

Bradford's return to the choir format on Jubilee Records in 1969 was again a joyous event. With additional guitars and a long reprise of his best, nationally-successful hit song (originally recorded for Specialty in 1953) "Too Close To Heaven" - divided into two parts on the Jubilee 45 single release - the album is a totally satisfactory body of work. On his remixed, alternate version of "I'm Too Close (Parts 1 & 2)", Bradford shouted out the lyrics as if his life depended on it. The choir's sweeping embrace of the melody beautifully offsets the hard sung lead, throbbing bass licks and stinging guitar meanderings.

During Bradford's recitation of "I Found A New Doctor" an unidentified female soloist is heard above the choral singing. This arrangement adds depth to the overall dynamic. Bradford howls, rasps and yodels, and the spirit of the church is lifted. This writer's personal favourite is "Get Your Heart Right With God", led by an unidentified female soloist who renders the opening passages with unfathomable determination. Bradford shares the lead work midway. With the choir's added vim, the song is carried home to glory.

Prof. Bradford died in February 1978, leaving a rich legacy built on almost thirty years of published songs, dramatisations and recordings. He started out as an accompanist for Mahalia Jackson (see and hear WESX 303 - ": The Apollo Recordings") and is today considered one of the cornerstones in the development of post-war gospel music. His flair, wit and flamboyance are all sorely missed.

The 6000 gospel album series lasted only eighteen months, and the CBS Trumpeteers' remake of "Milky White Way" in 1970 was Jubilee's last gospel 45. The Jay-Gee Record Company was by this time enjoying the wealth gained from the string of hits recorded on Josie by New Orleans funk combo the Meters - a string which ran from 1968 to 1971 when the production end of the company closed its doors for business. A handful of the one-stops carried on but Jerry Blaine - having survived his sixty eighth birthday - died in 1973.

Jubilee's gospel history, although relatively sparse, is filled with unexpected treasures and unforgettable moments. Here, reproduced from the original master tapes, are some of the very best of them...

OPAL LOUIS NATIONS
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA
AUGUST 1998

WESM 588

HEAVEN BELONGS TO YOU

THE BEST OF *Jubilee* GOSPEL

1. **THE ORIOLES • The Lord's Prayer**
(Malotte/Scripture) G. Schirmer Ltd. Ⓟ 1950 Jubilee 5045
2. **THE JUBILATORS (SELAH SINGERS) • In My Heart**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
3. **THE JUBILATORS (SELAH SINGERS) • Your Family Prayer**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
4. **THE SELAH SINGERS • (Die Right) Heaven Belongs To You**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
5. **THE SELAH SINGERS • Don't Drive Your Children Away**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
6. **THE SELAH SINGERS • Downward Road**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
7. **THE SELAH SINGERS • Tree Of Level (Tree Of Lebanon)**
(Thompson/Tucker/Davis/Bobo) Warner Chappell Music Ltd. Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
8. **THE SELAH SINGERS • Why Not Today?**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1950 Jubilee 3002
9. **THE SELAH SINGERS • All Right Now**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
10. **THE SELAH SINGERS • Down Here I've Done My Best (I Want To Go To Heaven And Rest)**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1950 Jubilee 3002
11. **THE SELAH SINGERS • I'm On My Way**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
12. **THE MEDITATION SINGERS • Certainly Lord**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
13. **THE MEDITATION SINGERS • Hard To Get Along**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1958 Jubilee LP 1083
14. **THE MEDITATION SINGERS • Jesus Will Answer Prayer**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1958 Jubilee LP 1083
15. **THE MEDITATION SINGERS • Amen**
(Unidentified) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1958 Jubilee LP 1083
16. **EDNA McGRIFF • In The Chapel By The Side Of The Road**
(Dale/Wayne) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1952 Jubilee 5089
17. **THE TRAVELING INNERLIGHTS • It Will Be Grand**
(Rachell) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1968 Jubilee LP 6002
18. **ALEX BRADFORD AND THE ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH CHOIR (VOCALIST UNIDENTIFIED) • Get Your Heart Right With God** 1969
(Bradford) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
19. **ALEX BRADFORD AND THE ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH CHOIR • I Found A New Doctor**
(Bradford) Copyright Control Ⓟ 1999 PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED
20. **ALEX BRADFORD AND THE ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH CHOIR • Too Close To Heaven Parts 1 & 2**
(Bradford) Carlin Music Corp. Ⓟ 1999
PREVIOUSLY UNISSUED ALTERNATE TAKE

ORIGINAL JUBILEE RECORDINGS LICENSED FROM EMI SPECIAL MARKETS. Ⓟ AS INDICATED EMI RECORDS (UK)
THIS COMPILATION Ⓟ 1999 WESTSIDE. THIS COMPILATION © 1999 WESTSIDE
COMPILATION AND ANNOTATION BY OPAL LOUIS NATIONS
FRONT COVER PHOTO: PROF. ALEX BRADFORD & THE BRADFORD SPECIALS • BACK COVER PHOTO: THE MEDITATION SINGERS FEATURING (2ND L) LAURA LEE • PHOTOGRAPHS AND EPHEMERA COURTESY OF OPAL LOUIS NATIONS, GILLES PETARD AND WESTSIDE
PACKAGE DESIGN BY BRIAN BURROWS

DIGITALLY REMASTERED FROM THE ORIGINAL 1/4 INCH MASTERTAPES BY ADAM SKEAPING AT SOUND MASTERING LTD, PARK ROYAL, LONDON, ENGLAND