THE BEST OF

MAGGIE INGRAM

Maggie Ingram

When one listens to Maggie Ingram's early records with The Silver Stars, Six Trumpets, and seminal Ingramettes singles releases, one is immediately moved by a soulfully blessed, soft and tender vocal lead possessing lilting qualities reminiscent of the late Mdm. Edna Gallmon Cooke. This might have something to do with the fact that Mdm. Cooke, along with Mahalia Jackson, were Ingram's two major sources of devotional inspiration. Born by midwife on the Mulholland plantation in Ambrose, Georgia, Maggie Dixon grew up in a deeply religious family stretching back over many generations. Ingram's folks all attended the tiny local Friendship Baptist Church. "My sister Fannie," asserts Ingram, "had a fine, powerful voice and when she sang, the whole congregation swelled to join her. It was Fannie who really got me into thinking about singing the gospel."

At age sixteen, Maggie Dixon married Thomas Ingram and was blessed with five children, daughters Almeta ("Meta") and Christine and sons John, Lucius, and Thomas. Some time during the late Fifties, the Ingram family moved to Miami, Florida. In Miami, Maggie Ingram met up with The Six Trumpets, an all male gospel-singing quartet with whom she became the featured soloist. Ingram shared the group's first Nashboro session. Two of the songs the group ran through with Ingram as lead were "Something's gotta hold on me" and "A ship without a sail." ("A ship without a sail" was later re-recorded by Ingram and the family group.) Neither of the two rehearsed songs was committed to wax.

Ingram's first recording hit the streets in 1961. This was the release of the hauntingly beautiful "Jesus Christ, the baby" paired with the equally well rendered "My Jesus, he's pleased" whereon one experiences a vocal style already polished and clear as a bell.

Raising five children and singing the gospel did not always mix. One of Ingram's three sons had contracted a rheumatic heart condition and, due to poor climate and the non-existence of appropriate medical treatment, the family was forced to move to Richmond, Virginia where conditions were more favorable.

In Richmond, Ingram hooked up with the acclaimed Silver Stars Quartet who harkened back to the old jubilee-style singing area. In 1952, The Silver Stars recorded for Hi-Lo and a year later for Chess. When Ingram met The Silver Stars in 1961, they were still essentially an

acappella quartet. Members at this juncture were Wesley Harvey, lead, James Bland, baritone, and Harold Bates, bass. Ingram and The Silver Stars sang together and recorded for Nashboro from 1962 through the spring of 1964.

The story of the birth of The Ingramettes is an extremely interesting one. One day in 1962, Maggie Ingram and her family were attending a PTA meeting when, at an unforeseen moment, her offspring in perfect five-part harmony broke into The Caravans' arrangement of "Wanted to serve the Lord." Ingram was dumbfounded. Her kids had practiced and practiced behind her back and had surprised her with a perfectly rendered arrangement of one of her favorite recordings. From then on, Ingram schooled her brood until they were ready to perform professionally in public. The Ingramettes' debut came about at The Harmonizing Four's thirty-fifth anniversary concert in Richmond. Ingram and her new family act opened the show and were well received.

In 1964, Maggie Ingram and The Ingramettes signed a five-year pact with Nashboro records. Sadly, none of Maggie Ingram's Nashboro records sold in appreciable amounts and their contract was not renewed. For all this, Ingram's Nashboro sides stand out as being some of the most inherently moving performances ever to grace the emerald green label. We have chosen Maggie Ingram's most exquisite waxings and have ignored those that do not highlight her vocal qualities to the fullest.

"The Silver Stars, one of Maggie Ingrams' backup groups

The collection opens with Ingram's first waxing supported by The Six Trumpets, "Jesus Christ, the baby," a Christmas song on which Ingram's silvery tones caress the song with warmth and pliancy as the group chants along regimentally. Ingram made three extraordinary Christmas songs. Two of these colorfully subtle, seasonal renderings are included on the Nashboro Christmas collection. More spiritual charm awaits us on "My Jesus, he's pleased," the flip of "Jesus Christ, the baby." Ingram's angelic voice flirts with the melody and tempers it sweetly.

A strident rhythm section supports Ingram on a forthright interpretation of "A child of the King." Here we catch the first glimpse of Ingram in a feisty mood. An almost country-bluegrass feel is evoked on the touching execution of "The only way home," engagingly supported by the unobtrusive Silver Stars. A delicious melody line runs through the beautiful "Let Jesus come into your life." Ingram gives the song such awesome grace one longs for extension. The luscious sweetness Ingram evokes to interpret the gospel ballad brings to mind some of The Swanee Quintet lead Little Johnny Jones' luminous qualities. "My friend Jesus" finds Ingram at her best. Her soft, mournful, melismatic mannerisms delicately sweeten the song and take it to the upper reaches of soulville.

In the lyric to the tune, Ingram declares that one can use Jesus as a hypodermic needle and can transfuse oneself with His Grace, a concept we can so easily misconstrue in this day and age. More melodic enchantment confronts us with a touching animation of "God's wonderful love," yet one more hypnotic, structurally hymn-like tune sung by all with almost frail simplicity.

Maggie Ingram reaches a peak of perfection on "I'm not uneasy," a semi-sermon-like tune sung with gritty determination. Ingram utilizes an approach one could so readily associate with Aretha Franklin. "A plea for man," a doomsday song, entreats God to not readily wipe man and all his sin from the face of the earth. Ingram softly and tenderly tries to humor the Man in the Big House with cries for compassion.

A mid-tempo reading of "Got a mind to serve the Lord" finds Ingram wailing, moaning, and pleading for the sick and shut-in who wish to seek out the master and find redemption. "This is that" from Maggie Ingram's only Nashboro album release (Nashboro 7051) is offered here in an alternate version which differs from the original in respect to being less lavish on instrumentation.

As usual, a simple, pretty melody is used to carry the song, which delivers its message quite clearly enough.

Ingram wails with joy on a cheery, loping run-through of "Everything God made is good" with The Silver Stars chanting in happy harmony. The version here differs from that included on the album package.

The previously unreleased "When Jesus comes" (available on CD only) has a haunting spiritual quality, which lies in the clever rearrangement of the song first made popular by The Rev. Claude Jeter & The Swan Silvertones. Ingram gives the tune a bright, soulful, sunny character. The CD configuration also embraces the mournfully melodious "Land of peace," a song yet again built around a simple, touching refrain reinforced with restrained organ and piano accompaniment.

For the past decade, Maggie Ingram and The Ingramettes have been signed with Atlanta International (Air Records.) Although Air issues her records, the actual studio work takes place at Alpha Audio in Richmond, Virginia where Ingram produces her own material.

Today's line-up includes Maggie Ingram, daughters Almeta and Christine, cousin Carrie (tambourine), sons Tommy (drums) and Lucius (organ, piano, and Fender-Rhodes), with additional support from June Morrow (guitar) and Pierce "Baby Bro" Williams on bass.

Maggie Ingram and The Ingramettes hold to the old ways of singing gospel and are in every respect as exciting today in revival meetings as they were when these recordings were made.

— Opal L. Nations - May, 1995

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Reissue produced by
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Originally produced by
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Compiled by
Opal Louis Nations

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Liner notes by
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Mastered by
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Original photos courtesy of
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Special Thanks
Otis Clay, Ray Funk and Shannon Williams

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ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC.

NASH4516-2 Printed in U.S.A.
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