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1. *Merry Christmas*—The salem travelers (3:38)
(T. HOUSE) NASHBORO LP #7309
 2. *Had It Not Been For Love (There Would Be No Christmas)*—(3:12)
(W. JOHNSON)
 3. *White Christmas*—(5:13)
(I. BERLIN) IRVING BERLIN MUSIC CORPORATION (ASCAP)
 4. *Great King*—(4:58)
(W. YOUNGBLOOD)
 5. *Silent Night*—(4:26)
(P.D.)
 6. *O What A Night*—(4:44)
(W. JOHNSON)
 7. *The Christmas Song*—(3:48)
(M. TORME/B. WELLS) EDWIN H. MORRIS MUSIC CO. INC. (ASCAP)
 8. *Rise Up, Shepherd*—(5:00)
(W. YOUNGBLOOD)
 9. *Christmas Time*—(2:57)
(P. BEASLEY)
 10. *Merry Christmas*—sister LUCILLE POPE# (2:11)
(L. POPE) NASHBORO LP #7229
 11. *No Room At The Inn*—THE FAIRFIELD FOUR (2:48)
(S. PUGH) NASHBORO LP #7232
 12. *Joy To The World*—REVEREND CLEOPHUS ROBINSON (1:43)
(P.D.) NASHBORO LP #7089
 13. *The First Noel*—REVEREND CLEOPHUS ROBINSON* (3:14)
(P.D.) NASHBORO LP #7089
 14. *Silent Night*—sister LUCILLE POPE* (2:48)
(P.D.) NASHBORO LP #7229

*CD BONUS TRACKS

Nashboro

Nativity

CHRISTMAS WITH THE GOSPEL KEYNOTES
FEATURING SPECIAL GUESTS VOL. II

Nashboro

Nativity

vol. II

christmas with the
gospel keynotes featuring special guests
nashboro 4521-2

this is our second dip into santa's sack of golden gospel goodies out of the nashboro catalog. from the top of the heap come the salem travelers of chicago with a reprise of their 1968 hit recording for chess of " (every year we say) merry christmas," a sweet, sweeping soul song in the soul strickers sack, led by the pipe-bending antics of arthur davies.

next, our main attraction, the gospel keynotes, one of african american gospel's most popular, hard-singingest quartets in the nation. the keynotes are led by veteran troubadour, willie neal johnson.

johnson is not only a fearsome soloist but a true survivor. most fifty-nine-year-old hard-singing gospel minstrels have either burned out or sought retirement, but in johnson's case, the man and his reputation have just grown by the hour.

following the huge and unexpected success of our first cd reissue entitled "the best of willie neal johnson and the gospel keynotes," (nashboro 4501), we bring you "christmas with the gospel keynotes" (nashboro 7205), issued in 1979, re-released here in its entire original form. johnson tells me that the gospel keynotes' ruletide collection was one of the outfit's strongest albums, and i think when you listen you will agree with him.

willie neal johnson was born in smith county, texas among folks of the galilee community in 1936. growing up in nearby tyler, johnson

attended the spring hill church of god in christ of smith county. as a young teen, johnson sang in the family group, the johnson gospel singers, consisting of his parents, loreeta and nealus, plus children, willie, raymond, lee chester, loreta, and betty. some time around 1953, johnson joined the five ways of joy out of tyler, managed by his brother-in-law c.w. jackson. johnson can only remember his old friend ralph mcghee as being a member in the group. the five ways of joy idolized the swan silvertones and the dixie hummingbirds and tried to copy their songs and arrangements.

in 1958, johnson joined and sang lead in the travelingaires, yet another outfit out of tyler, consisting of johnson, ralph mcghee, archie b. mcghee, john jackson, alonzo jackson, and charles bailey. the travelingaires were organized and managed by johnson's mother, loreeta. the travelingaires played church venues in texas, oklahoma, and louisiana and even managed to acquire a fifteen-minute daily early morning slot over kzey on a program sponsored by ideal bread. johnson fondly remembers how he and the group sang bread jingles.

in 1962, the travelingaires were playing a little country church in grape land, texas, when they were discovered by edward james brumfield who was looking for a group to take to california in place of the chosen gospel singers, an aggregation in which he had sung off and on for ten years. brumfield who owned the rights to the chosen gospel singers' name wanted the travelingaires to become the new chosen gospel singers. an agreement was reached, and brumfield brought the group to los angeles.



THE ANGELIC GOSPEL SINGERS



THE PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS



brother Joe May

AS THE new chosen gospel singers, Brumfield and the quartet recorded four songs for Nashboro in 1963. But the group only stayed together for a year. Conflict of interest led to bickering and discontent.

In 1964, with the new chosen gospel singers still under contract to Nashboro, Ernie Young changed the outfit's name to The Gospel Keynotes and once again Willie Neal Johnson was able to take the helm. At this point, the Gospel Keynotes were comprised of Johnson, Bailey, The Rev. J.D. Talley, Archie B. and Ralph McGehee. Alonzo and John Jackson joined the group a little later on. By 1968, the dynamic Gospel Keynotes had become a supergroup and offered quite a challenge to other professional quartets out on the gospel highway. Group members at this time consisted of Johnson, first lead, awesome high tenor lead Paul Beasley, Lonnie Hill, Larry McCowan (who currently operates the M & J Gospel Booking Agency out of New Jersey), and Rev. J.D. Talley. This lineup lasted into the early 1970s and the release of "Wide River" (Nashboro LP 7095.) In 1972, Donnie Timmons signed up for a ten-year stint.



Of the eight songs from "Christmas with the Gospel Keynotes," we start with a lusty, full-throated rendition of "(Had it not been for love) There would be no Christmas," followed by a spacey version of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" written in 1942. First introduced by Bing Crosby and Marjorie Reynolds in the Academy Award winning 1942 movie, "Holiday Inn," the song went on to become a great favorite with members of the armed forces stationed in the snowless Pacific. Snowballing into the largest selling Christmas record of the twentieth century, "White Christmas" has been set to wax in dozens of languages. Crosby's record alone has sold thirty million

copies. "white christmas" was popularized in the nation's black neighborhoods when the ravens recorded a hip version in 1949.

"great king" is yet another long, spacey odyssey into the realms of contemporary gospel centering around the stable birth. "silent night" is sung with mighty pretty affectation and floats in a wash of wispy keyboarding. "o what a night" (not to be confused with the bells' opus) is a wildly mustered epic of the christmas story, sung at full lung capacity. paul beasley blows cool and easy on mel torme's "christmas song." "rise up shepherd (and follow)" is a disco-ized reinvention of H.A. Rodeheaver's composition of 1923. "christmas time" finds us fathoms deep in mouth-lathering soul as demonstrated by paul beasley with his men under tight rein.

The mood and tempo change with the switch to sister lucille pope and the pearly gates of atlanta and their glorious rendition of "merry christmas," one of nashboro's primo christmas releases and most certainly one of ms. pope's most outstanding down-homey blues-shaded gospel performances. listen to sam jennings' awesome bassing under sister pope's infectious rap. this record should have sold in much greater numbers than it did when it was released some two decades ago. fine acappella chanting in the golden gate quartet vein enchants us on a reading of "no room at the inn," written by sullivan pugh of the consolers and performed by the fairfield four in a 1950 lineup featuring the rev. sam mccrary, lead tenor, willie love, second tenor, clarence "baby" brooks, baritone, willie frank lewis, utility, and george "oopee" mcurrn, bass.

The song was originally issued on randy wood's dot label in 1951. rev. cleophus robinson's jolly and stylistically operatic rendering of "joy to the world," a lively tune dating back to G.F. Handel, can also be found as psalm number 98 in the isaac watts' hymnal.

rev. cleophus robinson also treats us to a finely orchestrated version of "The first Noel," an english carol with a long and interesting history dating back at least a decade before its first publication in sandy's christmas carols of 1833.



sister lucille pope's performance of "silent night" is one of the best blues and country-sounding versions of the song ever made. on this song cut in the early sixties, the pearly gates are in peak form.

nashboro nativity volume 2 attempts to touch all bases. although lacking in choral material, we have tried to make up by putting together a balance of groups and soloists from both traditional and contemporary streams. we hope you enjoy our selections.

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