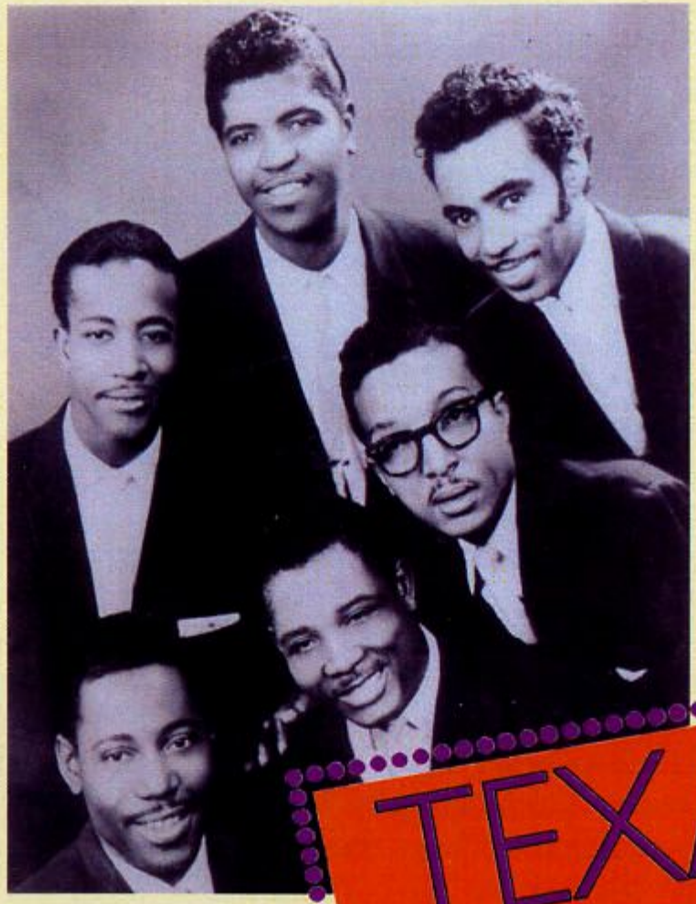
Blind Boys of Mississippi



TEXAS GOSPEL

I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA

VOLUMES 6 & 7

CD 1 – Volume 6 (1958)

1 Careless soul – Brooklyn All Star Singers Peacock 1782
2 A prayer for today – Brooklyn All Star Singers – Peacock 1782
3 Walls of Zion – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1783
4 Just a little while – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1783
5 Moaning in the morning – Rev. Cleophus Robinson – Peacock 1784
6 I can see so much – Rev. Cleophus Robinson w/ Sister Josephine James – Peacock 1784
7 Story of Jesus – Spirit of Memphis Quartet – Peacock 1785
8 The Lord loves me – Spirit of Memphis Quartet w/ Joe Hinton – Peacock 1785
9 It's a pity – Gospelaires of Dayton, Ohio – Peacock 1786
10 Let's pray – Gospelaires of Dayton, Ohio – Peacock 1786
11 That's Alright – Alpha & Omega Singers – Peacock 1787
12 I'm happy – Alpha & Omega Singers – Peacock 1787
13 I don't know why (I have to cry sometime) – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1788
14 Let's go out to the programs (#2) – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1788
15 I'm not tired yet – Rev. Cleophus Robinson w/ Sister Josephine James – Peacock 1789
16 You've got to move – Jessie Mae Renfro w/ Alpha Omega Gospel Singers – Peacock 1790
17 The Lord's Prayer – Jessie Mae Renfro w/ Alpha Omega Gospel Singers – Peacock 1790
18 Make one step – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1791
19 Come on and see about me – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1791
20 Meet me in Galilee – Brooklyn All Star Singers – Peacock 1792
21 Singing for the Lord – Brooklyn All Star Singers – Peacock 1792
22 Moving up – Gospelaires of Dayton, Ohio – Peacock 1793
23 I'll be so glad – Gospelaires of Dayton, Ohio – Peacock 1793
24 Can I count on you – Rev. Julius Cheeks & The Sensational Nightingales – Peacock 1794
25 A closer walk with Thee – Rev. Julius Cheeks & The Sensational Nightingales– Peacock 1794
26 Certainly Lord – Original Five Blind Boys – Peacock LP 102
27 That awful hour – Original Five Blind Boys – Peacock LP 102

CD 2 – Volume 7 (1958-1959)

1 I'm a weary traveler – Gospel Consolators – Peacock 1795
2 Hold on to God's hand – Gospel Consolators – Peacock 1795
3 Fire in my bones – Rev. Cleophus Robinson w/ Sister Josephine James – Peacock 1796
4 This old building – Rev. Cleophus Robinson w/ Sister Josephine James – Peacock 1796
5 You done what the doctor couldn't do – Original Five Blind Boys – Peacock 1797
6 Someone watches – Original Five Blind Boys – Peacock 1797
7 The great love – Spirit of Memphis Quartet – Peacock 1798
8 In the garden – Spirit of Memphis Quartet w/ Joe Hinton – Peacock 1798
9 Look to Jesus – Gospel Consolators – Peacock 1800
10 His precious blood – Gospel Consolators – Peacock 1800
11 When I rise – Gospelaires of Dayton, Ohio – Peacock 1801
12 He heard my cry– Gospelaires of Dayton, Ohio – Peacock 1801
13 He'll bring peace – Ever-Ready Gospel Singers – Peacock 1802
14 All my sins – Ever-Ready Gospel Singers – Peacock 1802
15 Nobody knows the trouble I see – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1803
16 The final edition – Dixie Hummingbirds – Peacock 1803
17 Morning train – Rev. Julius Cheeks & The Sensational Nightingales – Peacock 1804
18 Standing at the judgement – Rev. Julius Cheeks & The Sensational Nightingales – Peacock 1804
19 It won't be long now – Spirit of Memphis Quartet – Peacock 1805
20 Sinner, make a change – Spirit of Memphis Quartet – Peacock 1805
21 There is a man upstairs – Alpha Omega Singers – Peacock 1806
22 I am alpha and omega – Alpha Omega Singers – Peacock 1806
23 The same man – Rev. Cleophus Robinson w/ Sister Josephine James – Peacock 1807
24 His grace – Rev. Cleophus Robinson – Peacock 1807
25 Walk together children – Original Five Blind Boys – Peacock LP 102
26 Leaning on the everlasting arm – Original Five Blind Boys – Peacock LP 102

Blind Boys of Mississippi

Our ongoing Peacock gospel singles collection picks up in January 1958, when proprietor Don Robey proudly announced in Billboard Magazine that sales of Duke / Peacock product had advanced so well "it's been like Christmas all year." Apart from bumper sales generated by Little Junior Parker, Bobby Bland and the Casuals, on the gospel front leading spiritual acts had to compete more fiercely against the dominance in the market place of R&B and the blue-eyed pandemic of "teen idolship." The most significant pioneer R&B indies gave way to the larger, well-financed pop indies who generally promoted a softer, more acceptable sound. Soon this predominant bubble-gum tempered music would compete with a new emotional refrain pioneered by the likes of Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin and James and Nappy Brown, a music that came to be known as "deep soul" which, in a way, dethroned God and put the lovelorn mortal in his place. In the case of a few secular soul songs one could sometimes think that a change of lyric would seem quite unnecessary.

Spirit of Memphis

The coming of a spiritually aware folk music made this transition easier. It was almost as if God had left our world on the first U.S. earth satellite to go into orbit (Explorer 1 from Cape Canaveral) on January 31st. One of the first globally successful secular recordings to entirely embrace this church-inspired deep soul was Jerry Butler and the Impressions with the tearfully exquisite "For your precious love" released in May 1958. A February announcement in Billboard noted that Robey had set up an alliance with Dave Rolnick in New York to sell and promote Peacock product. The arrangement also included Robey's plans to issue long-play recordings by both the Dixie Hummingbirds and Sensational Nightingales, Robey's premier quartets. Robey also set up a similar deal with Le Roy Smith in Denver to handle the Rocky Mountain territory.

In November 1958 Robey was involved with a contractual misunderstanding with Herman Lubinsky at Savoy Records in Newark over an arrangement with Albertina Walker and the Caravans of Chicago. It seemed that the Caravans were under contract with Peacock and Savoy at once and both labels claimed representation. This whole business was resolved when Robey found out that Walker lied when she told him she had mailed his signed contract. This was not the first run-in Robey had had with Lubinsky.

Robey signed three new all-male gospel quartets to Peacock in 1958: The Gospel Consolators, Alpha-Omega Singers and Brooklyn All Star Singers.

Brooklyn All Stars

The Brooklyn All Stars

The Brooklyn All Stars were at this point the very embodiment of gospel's "deep-soul" style mentioned earlier. Their history dates back to 1945. They were formed by Brooklyn singer/furniture dealer Charlie Storey, born in Camoke, Georgia and raised in Zebulon, N.C. The Storey family relocated to Brooklyn in 1928. In Brooklyn, Charlie's father founded the Mt. Zion Pentecostal Church wherein Charlie sang as a child both as soloist and member of the Storey Family Singers. The Family group's jubilee singing reputation grew statewide. Storey took kudos from Thurman Ruth, a friend of long standing.

In 1942 Charlie Storey joined the Jubilee Stars of Brooklyn in place of Amos Staton who recorded for Haven. They broadcast over WLIB. When Staton returned to the group in 1945 Storey set about putting together his own quartet, variously known as the Charlie Storey All Stars or Brooklyn All Star Singers. One of the Brooklyn All Stars' early members was baritone singer Thomas Spann who after an argument with Storey switched to bass. Storey's tenure with WLIB continued for eighteen years. The group appeared with the Selah Jubilees on Channel 9 and later on T.V. Gospel Time. In 1956 Storey signed the rights to using the Brooklyn All Stars name to Thomas Spann. Storey needed more time to run his furniture business, and the sign-over gave him that.

Spann came to New York from South Carolina in 1940 at age five. Spann built the Brooklyn All Stars out of an old group he had managed called the Singing Stars of Louisburg, North Carolina who were brought up to New York by St. Marks Church on Fulton Street. Spann's first Brooklyn All Stars included the great lead, high tenor Hardie Clifton, his brother Maurice and tenor Nathaniel Cook. Clifton possessed tonal qualities that resembled those of Sam Cooke. Spann rehearsed his quartet in his basement for eighteen months. As the group came together Maurice Clifton was replaced by Herbert Robinson who Spann had met when singing briefly in the Chosen Gospel Singers. They took on Eddie Lester for guitar accompaniment.

The group auditioned and signed with Don Robey in late December 1957 and recorded three fine benchmark gospel soul singles. These included two of Hardie Clifton's unforgettably sublime lead masterpieces, "Careless soul" and "Singing for the Lord." In 1962 the group, with a modified line-up, signed with the Gospel Recordings label, and then switched to Ernie Young's Nashboro Records in 1967.

The Alpha-Omega Singers

According to Steven Shaw, the Alpha-Omega Singers were put together by Brother Cecil Shaw in Houston around 1952-1953. The group recorded behind Bro. Shaw and Sister Z.J. Rogers in 1953. Drummer Elmore Nixon accompanied the group who evolved around impressive tenor singer Ernest Booker who went on to sing in the Pilgrim Travelers on Andex in 1957 before returning for the Peacock session in June 1958. Other members on the Peacock session included C. Moore, G. Bland, A. Johnson, ___ Brock and Los Angeles Singer and guitarist Richard Wallace who went on to greater glory in the Stars of Bethlehem, Sensational Wonders and Mighty Clouds of Joy.

Standout cuts here include Booker leading on the aisle-stomping "That's alright" and Bland taking the helm on their signature song "I am Alpha and Omega."

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Gospel Consolators (1958-1959)

Gospel Consolators (1955)

The Gospel Consolators

The Gospel Consolators started as the Loving Five, formed by Robert H. Hood in Lubbock, Texas around 1949. Lead tenor Charles Johnson, who had moved from Shackelford County, Texas, joined around 1950. Besides Johnson, other members of the group included bass singer Marshall Cooper, his brother Richmond, Early Williams and Augusta Chisholm. When Hood decided to up-stakes for Pasadena, California, the group was asked to follow but not all could go due to family commitments. Only Johnson and Marshall Cooper signed up to go. In Pasadena the group reformed, adding Haskell Holmes and Rio Watson.

During a brief stay in Oakland, California, the Loving Five recorded "Baptism of Christ" for Bob Geddins' Big Town label. Once back in Pasadena, the group switched names to the Gospel Consolators and began playing local venues. During this period soldiers like Spencer Jackson came in and out of the group. On a second trip to Oakland, Joseph Dumas, Holmes, Hood and Watson recorded three releases for Bob Geddins at Big Town. These were pretty much in the prevailing traditional Texas style. In late 1955 Hood and Watson formed a record company, H & W Records. H & W was set up to promote on wax both themselves and their friends, the Golden Keys from Richmond, California. By now the group was composed of Dumas, Hood, Watson and Holmes with the addition of lead tenor Charles Johnson who updated the sound of the group's jubilee-based style to one that presented more spirit and dynamism. All three H & W releases were invested with an added spiritual quality.

As the outfit's reputation grew they found themselves on programs with fledgling quartets like the Mighty Clouds of Joy. In 1959 the group turned fully professional and through the efforts of Rev. Julius Cheeks of the Sensational Nightingales they secured a contract with Peacock Records where they recorded beautifully rendered songs like "His precious blood," "Who should remember" and "The last mile." The Peacock line-up included Hood, Dumas and Johnson with the addition of bass lead Nathaniel Bills and baritone Oscar Cook. Johnson became the group's principal songwriter.

The Gospel Consolators toured with Rev. Cheeks and the Sensational Nightingales and when Cheeks quit the 'Gales to form his own group, the Four Gospel Knights, in 1962, Johnson took his place. Otis Clay was first auditioned for the job but did not fit as well as Johnson who could sound like Cheeks at times. Eventually Johnson found his own style with the Nightingales, and a softer, more spiritual sound evolved.

The Gospel Consolators split up and Hood and Dumas headed back to Arkansas.

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Dixie Hummingbirds

Robey's biggest selling gospel single in 1958 was the Dixie Hummingbirds' novelty "Let's go out to the programs, #2." "Let's go out to the programs, #1" had proved so popular over the years on their shows it seemed like they should try another. The release helped sell records by other Peacock groups, too. In January-February 1959 Robey enjoyed some chart action with Sister Jessie Mae Renfro's "The Lord's Prayer." Stepping into pop territory, Robey set up the Back Beat label. But seeing he was better off territorially in soul music, Robey gradually turned Back Beat into a black-beat.

The focus was away from gospel singles and into albums. In June 1959 Robey's first long playing gospel release emerged, "A Christian Testimonial" by the Dixie Hummingbirds, but Robey was not around much to enjoy the success of its launch, having been hospitalized with ulcers.

Back in the saddle, in August Robey was effusively pleased with the reception of his second album, "Songs of Praise" by the Sensational Nightingales. By 1963 Robey had built an enormous and impressive gospel catalog. His artist list was so long that deejays began to complain that they had to play too many records to cover all his releases. It was then that he decided to form his Song Bird subsidiary. Despite this, his 1964 Peacock gospel singles releases still outnumbered those on Song Bird.

This double CD is the last in the Peacock gospel singles series. Historical background information on the remaining artists included on this volume can be found on the following releases:

The Dixie Hummingbirds, the Sensational Nightingales, Rev. Cleophus Robinson and Sister Josephine James, Sister Jessie Mae Renfro, and The Gospelaires of Dayton, Ohio: – "Texas Gospel, Vols. 3-5 – Devil Can't Harm a Praying Man" – Acrobat ACTRCD 9007 (2008)

Rev. Cleophus Robinson

Gospelaires

Original Five Blind Boys of Mississippi – Acrobat ADDCD 3003 (2006)

Spirit of Memphis Quartet – Acrobat ADDCD 3007 (2005)

Informational sources:

1. **The Alpha-Omega Singers** – Liner notes to Brother Cecil Shaw's "I Want to Know" by Opal Louis Nations – Acrobat CD 4200 (2006)

2. **Brooklyn all Star Singers** – Liner notes to "Best of the Brooklyn All Stars" by Opal Louis Nations – AVI Nashboro CD 4504 (1995)

The Gospel Consolators – article entitled "The Charles Johnson Story" by Opal Louis Nations – Real Blues Magazine #5 (British Columbia, 1993)

— Opal Louis Nations
May 2010

Don Robey, Pres., Peacock Records

Spirit of Memphis

SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS, TENN.

Booklet cover – Sensational Nightingales