



**THE STARS OF
BETHLEHEM**

ABOVE MY HEAD



The Stars of Bethlehem (Courtesy Mark Carrodus)



**RICHARD WALLACE
AND THE STARS OF BETHLEHEM
AND THE STARS OF BETHEL**

Our history of The Stars of Bethlehem is woven into the intricate fabric of the many significant quartets that emerged on the Los Angeles scene during the golden era of gospel music. We will focus on lead tenor, singer/guitarist Richard Edward Wallace (born June 9, 1940) who hails from Austin, Texas. Coming from a strongly religious family, Richard has sung gospel since early childhood. Sam Cooke caught the teenage Richard's soulfully charged voice in concert at The Doris Miller

Auditorium. "I was thrilled," says Richard, "after my hero sat me down on his knee and said I had a beautiful voice."

Like many aspiring singers, Richard used Sam Cooke as his role model and guiding light. He was soon "cooking." In Taylor, about twenty-five miles north of Austin, lived Richard's cousins, the Joneses - Willie, Roosevelt and Ollie - who had formed a singing group called The True Light Travelers. In 1951 the Joneses moved to Los Angeles. Taking on lead tenor Johnny Lamar Young, who had migrated from Memphis a year earlier, they went out as The Stars of Bethel (The name was lifted from the Star of Bethel as in Matthew 2, Verses 1-10.) The name was culled by Rev. J.E. Evans, pastor of The Metropolitan Baptist Church, which the group attended.

The Joneses came from a family filled with church ministers too numerous to mention. Whether directly or indirectly due to singer/deejay Brother Henderson's involvement, The Stars of Bethel recorded one single for Larry Goldberg and Al Schlesinger's tiny R & B label on Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood in October 1954. Henderson and his group, The Spiritual Lambs, were signed to the R & B label at the time.

The Stars of Bethel recorded William Cowper's morbidly beautiful **There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood** with Johnny Lamar Young's exquisitely touching lead vocals plus **He Walks With Me** (better known as "In The Garden") led by Willie Jones on the reverse. Young's now incredibly rare "Fountain" is a joy and a landmark in the development of soul-based gospel quartets, deserving of reissue.

Some time after this point Odell Thompson joined the group. This was followed, in 1956, by the coming aboard of Richard Wallace and his brother Lee O'Daniel who had moved out from Texas. Both Lee and Richard shared lead. Richard, who had mastered guitar and wrote arrangements, had the group relocate to his church, The Mt. Vernon Baptist under the pastorate of Rev. Roy Easley Jr. Although Rev. Easley cut records for Brother Henderson's Proverb label, The Stars of Bethel were never fortunate enough to have themselves included on any of Easley's sides. "The Stars of Bethel played top TV shows," recalls Richard. We played on bills with The Soul Stirrers, Pilgrim Travelers, original Five Blind Boys of Alabama, we did The Grand Old Opry and traveled out to Texas up through Maryland and Washington D.C."

In 1949 Montgomery, Alabama-born Bedile Goldsmith organized the first of a string of "Joy" quartets called The Flowers of Joy. Clay Hammond sang in the group. In late 1956 Hammond, who had moved out from Fort Worth, Texas, introduced Goldsmith to a bunch of gospel-singing children he later christened The Mighty (Mighty) Clouds of Joy. The Clouds rehearsed at Little Joe Ligon's parents' house. Joe, a background singer at first, later became the group's lead. Goldsmith, who modeled his quartet after The Flowers of Joy, brought the group along. Some of the kids dropped out, and Clay, Tony Harris, Ted Taylor and Johnny Young all sang in the group as it took shape over the formative years. Johnny Martin, who was in the group almost at the beginning, became a permanent member.

In 1957 The Clouds signed with Brother Henderson's Proverb label and recorded at Rev. T.M. Chamber's church on Eighty-Seventh and Broadway. Henderson also recorded The Clouds at Rev. Wesley's church in Watts and live at Will Rogers Park. (Henderson issued an extremely rare album on one of his many labels later on. This LP later resurfaced on Hob (Scepter) Records with overdubs.) The Mighty (Mighty) Clouds played on a program at

breakup, Johnny Lamar Young quit singing gospel, changed his name to Little Johnny Taylor (to capitalize on the success of namesake Ted Taylor) and started recording for Downey and Swingin with The Paul Clifton Band. In 1963 he scored a major hit with his second Galaxy single release, "Part Time Love," a song written by his buddy Clay Hammond. Richard himself was smitten by the crossover bug. Through Little Johnny (who had toured with the Otis band), Richard hitched up with Johnny Otis and recorded two beautiful, secular singles for Federal Records in L.A. in late January 1963. These were the hauntingly beautiful "Only Heaven Knows" and the plaintive sung song "Vernice" (a love song to his girlfriend.) But Richard failed to click in the commercial world and returned to The 'Clouds.

Gaynel Hodge kept an interest in arranging gospel songs by working with The Clouds whose current lineup includes only Richard Wallace and Little Joe Ligon from the original group.

Opal Louis Nations

Sources of information:

Opal Louis Nations:

Richard Wallace interview summer 1999

Gaynel Hodge interview spring 2002

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|--|--------------|
| 1 Above My Head 2'54 | (a) |
| <i>(Arr. Richard Wallace)</i> | |
| 2 Nobody Knows 2'01 | (a) |
| <i>(Traditional - Arr. Roosevelt Jones)</i> | |
| 3 Meet You In The Morning 3'19 | (a) |
| <i>(Arr. Willie Jones)</i> | |
| 4 Ev'ry Once in Awhile 2'07 | (a) |
| <i>(Richard Wallace)</i> | |
| 5 Trying to Live Right 4'02 | (a) |
| <i>(Ollie Jones)</i> | |
| 6 I Know Somebody 3'25 | (a) |
| <i>(Willie Jones)</i> | |
| 7 (The) Birds 2'45 | (a) |
| <i>(Richard Wallace)</i> | |
| 8 Jesus, Remember Me 4'31 | (a) |
| <i>(Arr. Richard Wallace)</i> | |
| 9 Family Prayer 4'16 | (a-1) |
| <i>(Arr. Roosevelt Jones)</i> | |
| 10 Gospel Train 3'09 | (a) |
| <i>(Arr. Willie Jones)</i> | |
| 11 The Minister 2'06 | (a) |
| <i>(Richard Wallace)</i> | |
| 12 Stranger 5'00 | (a) |
| <i>(Richard Wallace)</i> | |
| 13 There is a Fountain Filled with Blood 2'32 | (b) |
| <i>(William Cowper)</i> | |
| 14 He Walks With Me 2'32 | (b) |
| <i>(C. Austin Miles)</i> | |

Songs 1-12 (Hermosa Music - BMI)

Discography

(By Opal Louis Nations and Richard Wallace)

(a) The Stars of Bethlehem

Los Angeles, October 29 and
November 12, 1960.

Richard Wallace (*swing tenor lead – lead
on songs 1,2,4,7,8,9,11,12*),

Ollie Jones (*second lead, swing tenor –
lead on song 5*),

Willie Jones (*tenor – lead on songs 6,10*),

Nathaniel Green (*baritone*),

Odell Thompson (*baritone*),

Roosevelt Jones (*bass – lead on song 3*).

Richard Wallace (or Cliff White) (*guitar*),

Ernie Freeman (*piano*), Earl Palmer,

(*drums*). Arranged by Gaynel Hodge.

(a-1): omit (*piano*), (*drums*).

(b) The Stars of Bethel

Los Angeles October 1954

Willie Jones (*lead vocal on song 14*),

Johnny Lamar Young (a.k.a. Little Johnny

Taylor) (*2nd lead and lead vocal on song*

13), Roosevelt Jones (*bass*), Ollie Jones

(*tenor*), unknown (*percussion*).

Mastering: **Björn Almstedt**, Cutting
Room, Sweden and **Dennis Leonis**

Sleeve design: **John The Fisherman**

Logo design: **Morgan Dodge**

Album production: **Opal Louis Nations**

Song clearance through ncb

Booklet front cover photo

(courtesy Richard Wallace)

(The Stars of Bethlehem – Back row, left
to right: Roosevelt Jones, Ollie Jones.

Front row, left to right: "Nate" Nathaniel
Green, Richard Edward Wallace and Lee
O'Daniel Wallace).

Inlay photos:

Back: (The Stars of Bethlehem 1959 –
Back row, left to right: Roosevelt Jones,
"Nate" Nathaniel Green, Willie E. Jones.

Front row, left to right: Ollie Jones,
Richard Edward Wallace, Lee O'Daniel
Wallace).

Front: Little Johnny Taylor

(courtesy Ronn Records/Hans Schweitz)



Gospel Treasures Records

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18495 Ljusterö, Sweden



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In the same series

OLN-2001: **Louis "King" Narcisse**

It's So Nice To Be Nice



Gospel Treasures Records OLN 2000

Little Johnny Taylor (Courtesy Galaxy Records/Hans Schweitz)