

**The Best of Sacred Steel**  
**Praise Music from African American Holiness-Pentecostal Churches**

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**Sonny Treadway** (from AR CD 450)
2. Call Him by His Name  
**Glenn Lee** (from AR CD 450)
3. Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Poor Man's Friend  
**Willie Eason** (from AR CD 450)
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**Darick Campbell** (from AR CD 461)
6. The Train  
**Ted Beard** (from AR CD 472)
7. Without God  
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12. Where Could I Go But to the Lord  
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Willie Eason

## The Best of Sacred Steel

Notes by Robert L. Stone

The plaintive voice of the steel guitar is most often heard in country and western music, and sometimes played in white gospel praise bands. But it is rarely heard in African American churches, with the notable exceptions of the House of God, Keith Dominion and the Church of the Living God, Jewell Dominion. In these two related Holiness-Pentecostal denominations steel

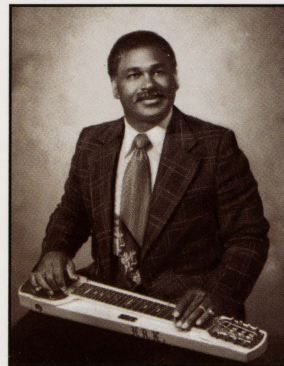
guitar is the dominant instrument that leads musical praises and holy dancing at some two hundred small churches nationwide. Known today as Sacred Steel, the Keith and Jewell Dominion traditions have their origins in the music of pioneers such as brothers Troman and Willie Eason, Fred Neal, and Bishop Lorenzo Harrison, all of whom took up the instrument during the Hawaiian music fad of the 1930s



Lee Boys

and 40s. Over the past seven decades, during much of which the steel guitarists were quite isolated from secular music, the musicians developed unique playing styles and repertoires.

**Willie Eason** (1921-2005) learned the rudiments of the lap-steel from his older brother Troman, who took lessons from a Hawaiian (most likely Jack Kahauolopua) whom he heard over a live radio broadcast in Philadelphia



Henry Nelson

circa 1937. A charismatic vocalist known as Little Willie and His Talking Guitar, Willie played and sang for worship services and street corner ministries from New York to Miami, and recorded seven 78 rpm records for the Queen, Aladdin, and Regent labels. His narrative "rap" of Franklin D. Roosevelt's life was one of his most popular numbers wherever he busked.

Ocala, Florida native **Henry Nelson** (1930-2001) was Willie Eason's nephew. Impressed by Eason's persona, flashy clothes, sharp cars, and passionate music, Nelson remembered he "wanted to do everything I saw." His father, Keith Dominion Bishop W.L. Nelson, anointed his son's hands with oil and told him

to keep his music within the church. Henry Nelson profoundly shaped the steel guitar music of the church for nearly six decades; his style of one-chord-drive praise music and manner of rendering hymns is echoed every Sunday at Keith Dominion churches across the nation. Nelson's son, **Aubrey Ghent**, was born and raised in Ft. Pierce, Florida. He built on his father's style to become one of the most expressive musicians of the genre on the six-string lap steel. He is also a talented, fiery preacher and sings with a soulful baritone.



Aubrey Ghent

Ft. Pierce resident Elder **Elton Noble** serves as pas-





Elton Noble

tor at the Keith Dominion church in West Palm Beach. In 1992, he studied lap-steel guitar with Aubrey Ghent under the Florida Folklife Apprenticeship Program. A dedicated, talented minister and church musician, he has organized three Sacred Steel Conventions to give younger musicians an opportunity to showcase their talents and learn from veteran steel guitarists.

**Glenn Lee** (1968-2000) was the son of Keith Dominion pastor Elder Robert E. Lee and the nephew of Jewell Dominion vice-president Bishop Lorenzo Harrison, who established the dominant steel guitar style in that denomination. An innovative multi-instrumentalist, he combined the styles of the Keith and Jewell Dominions with eclectic elements which included country and western, rock, blues, and jazz. He was one of the first sacred steel musicians in Florida to play pedal-steel. His life cut short by cancer, Glenn Lee's musical legacy is continued by the Lee Boys band, which comprises his brothers, guitarist Alvin, vocalists Derrick and Keith, and their three nephews, Alvin Cordy, Jr., electric bass; Earl Walker, drums; and the youngest, pedal-steel guitarist Roosevelt "The Doctor" Collier. They all grew up attending services at the Keith Dominion



Glenn Lee



The Campbell Brothers with Katie Jackson

church in Perrine, just south of Miami, which has a reputation for some of the most spirited, music-driven services in the denomination. Collier is a prodigious talent who has earned a reputation among his peers as one of the most skilled pedal-steel guitarists playing today.

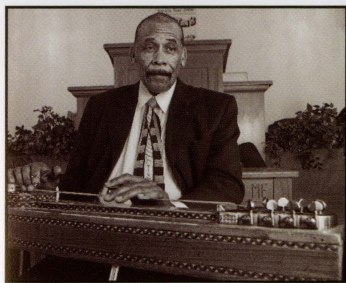
The **Campbell Brothers** band features two steel guitarists: pedal-steel wizard Chuck and his younger brother Darick on eight-string lap-steel. In 2004, Chuck was honored by the National Endowment for the Arts with the National Heritage Fellowship in recognition of his artistic excellence and innovations within the tradition. Darick takes the lead as Chuck provides chords and Theremin-like accompaniment using an E-Bow with his pedal-steel for a stunning instrumental interpretation of the gospel classic "End of My Journey," recorded as a tribute to Henry Nelson.

The Jewell Dominion is represented here by **Sonny Treadway** and **Reginald "Footie" Covington**. Both were strongly influenced by the music of Bishop Lorenzo Harrison; Treadway frequently accompanied him on rhythm guitar at



Darick Campbell



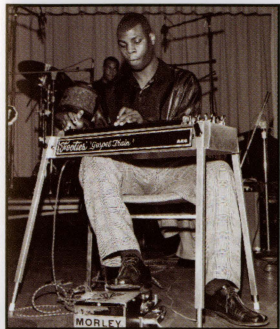


Sonny Treadway

assemblies throughout the geographic range of the church. Extensive use of the bass strings is one characteristic of Harrison's music, and is a technique Treadway employs beautifully in his evocative playing. Harrison also used a huge Morley Rotary Wah pedal as a tone control (as opposed to the often overdone wah-wah-wah effect), which is deftly demonstrated by Covington (thus the "Footie" moniker). When Footie included the Pink Panther theme in his showcase medley at the Second Sacred

Steel Convention he created a sensation; women squealed and young men shouted. Within a few days steel guitarists all over the country were playing it. "I got it from the cartoons," he quipped.

Elder **Maurice "Ted" Beard** and **Calvin Cooke** are talented senior steel guitarists from the Detroit area whose families were initially members of the Jewell Dominion, then switched to the Keith Dominion in the 1950s. Both acknowledge a musical debt to Lorenzo Harrison, and were influenced little by East Coast musicians such as Willie Eason and Henry Nelson. The train is a common theme in



Reginald "Footie" Covington

African American gospel music, and in skilled hands such as Beard's, the steel guitar is capable of producing a variety of train-like sounds. Beard's



Calvin Cooke and Jay Caver

colorfully spoken introduction presents a sample of his imagery-rich preaching style. Calvin Cooke is one of the few sacred steel guitarists who include singing as regular part of their performances. For five decades he traveled throughout the United States to play for large church assemblies. In recent years he has fronted the Sacred Steel Ensemble, thrilling festival and concert audiences throughout the U. S., as well as abroad.

**Bryan "Josh" Taylor** was born in Miami in 1979. His father, Elder Jerry Taylor, is pastor of the Delray Beach House of God and serves as a missionary in Haiti and Africa. The Taylor family is very musical: Josh's father and uncles performed as the

Untouchable Taylor Brothers gospel band for decades and most female relations are talented singers. His rendition of Thomas Dorsey's classic "Precious Lord Take My Hand" demonstrates an exceptionally sensitive touch and highly-accomplished improvisational skills for a young musician.



Ted (right) and Rico Beard



**Robert Randolph**, another prodigious young talent, is heard here playing at the dedication of the House of God in the Rochester suburb of Rush, New York in 1998. Just 22 years old at the time, his pyrotechnics brought the congregation to its feet. Two years later he signed a contract with Warner Bros. Today, Robert Randolph and the

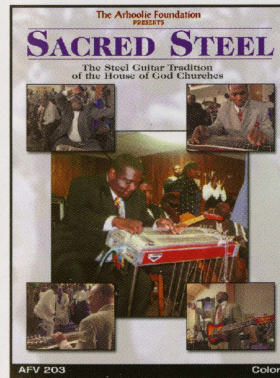


**Robert Randolph**



**Josh Taylor**

Family Band enjoy rock star status as they bring their inventive music to audiences worldwide through large concerts, network television appearances, and Warner Bros. recordings. Robert Randolph is a huge inspiration for young sacred steel guitarists and a source of pride for thousands of House of God members.

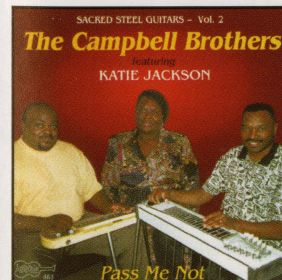


## CDs:

CD 450:

### "Sacred Steel"

Traditional Sacred African American Steel Guitar Music in Florida. With: Willie Eason, Sonny Treadway, Glenn Lee, Henry Nelson, and Aubrey Ghent.

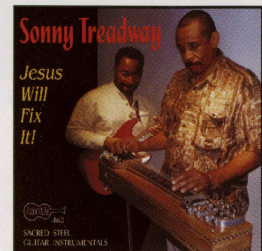
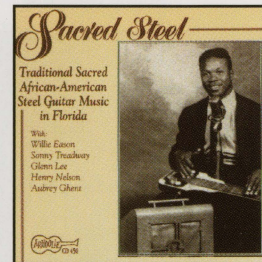


CD 461:

"Pass Me Not" The Campbell Brothers featuring Katie Jackson.

CD 462:

"Jesus Will Fix It" Sonny Treadway.



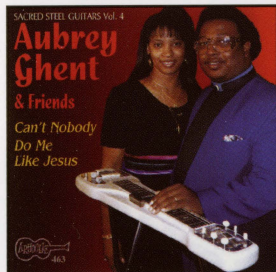
Also available from Arhoolie Records:

## DVD:

"Sacred Steel" – The Steel Guitar Tradition of the House of God Churches.

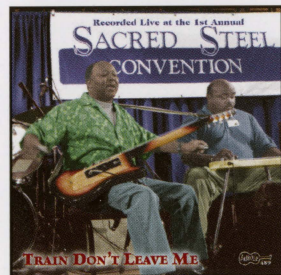
AFV DVD 203: This documentary was filmed on location at various churches and features: Elder Maurice "Ted" Beard, the Campbell Brothers with Katie Jackson, Calvin Cooke, Willie Eason, Elder Aubrey Ghent, Rev. Glenn Lee, Robert Randolph, historic footage of Henry Nelson, and much more. Time: 55 minutes





CD 463: **"Can't Nobody Do Me Like Jesus"**  
Aubrey Ghent & Friends.

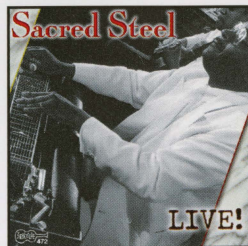
**"Leave Me"** Recorded LIVE at the First Annual Sacred Steel Convention in Florida – 2000, with Dante Harmon, Josh Taylor, Calvin Cooke, Aubrey Ghent, Glenn Lee,



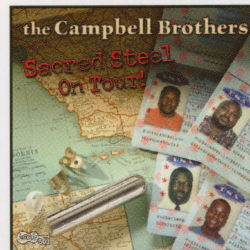
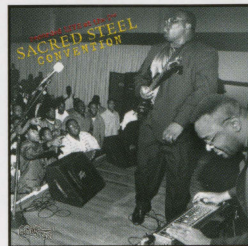
CD 489: **"Train Don't Leave Me"**  
Recorded LIVE at the First Annual Sacred Steel Convention in Florida – 2000, with Dante Harmon, Josh Taylor, Calvin Cooke, Aubrey Ghent, Glenn Lee, Lonnie Bennett, Ted Beard, Elton Noble, Robert Randolph, and the Campbell Brothers.

CD 502: **"Recorded Live At The Second Sacred Steel Convention"**

The Campbell Brothers, Robert Randolph, Elton Noble, Calvin Cooke, Lonnie Bennett, Dante Harmon, Lamar Nelson, "Footie" Covington, Darryl Blue, Rayfield Holloman, Lisa Lang, and Josh Taylor plus singers.



CD 472: **"Sacred Steel - Live!"**  
The Campbell Brothers with Katie Jackson and Denise Brown, Calvin Cooke, Ted Beard, Robert Randolph, Willie Eason, Elwood Haygood, Bishop Charles Campbell, and more.



CD 503: **"Sacred Steel On Tour"**  
The Campbell Brothers.

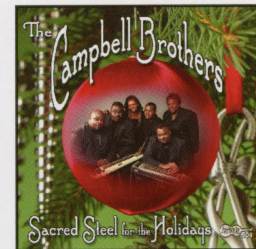


CD 516: **"Say Yes!"**  
The Lee Boys.

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Call or email for a free catalog, and visit [www.arhoolie.com](http://www.arhoolie.com) to sign up for our newsletter.

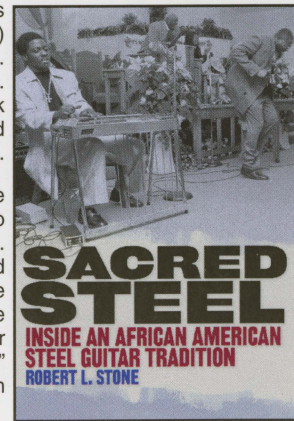
CD 504: **"Sacred Steel For The Holidays"**  
The Campbell Brothers.



**Book:**  
**Sacred Steel: Inside an African American Steel Guitar Tradition**  
By Robert L. Stone

University of Illinois Press (2010)  
320 pages.  
32 B/W photos.  
The first in-depth look at a unique sacred music tradition.

"This book honors the legacy of the men who paved my musical path. All of us in the Sacred Steel brotherhood owe Bob a debt of gratitude for documenting our musical tradition."  
– Robert Randolph





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