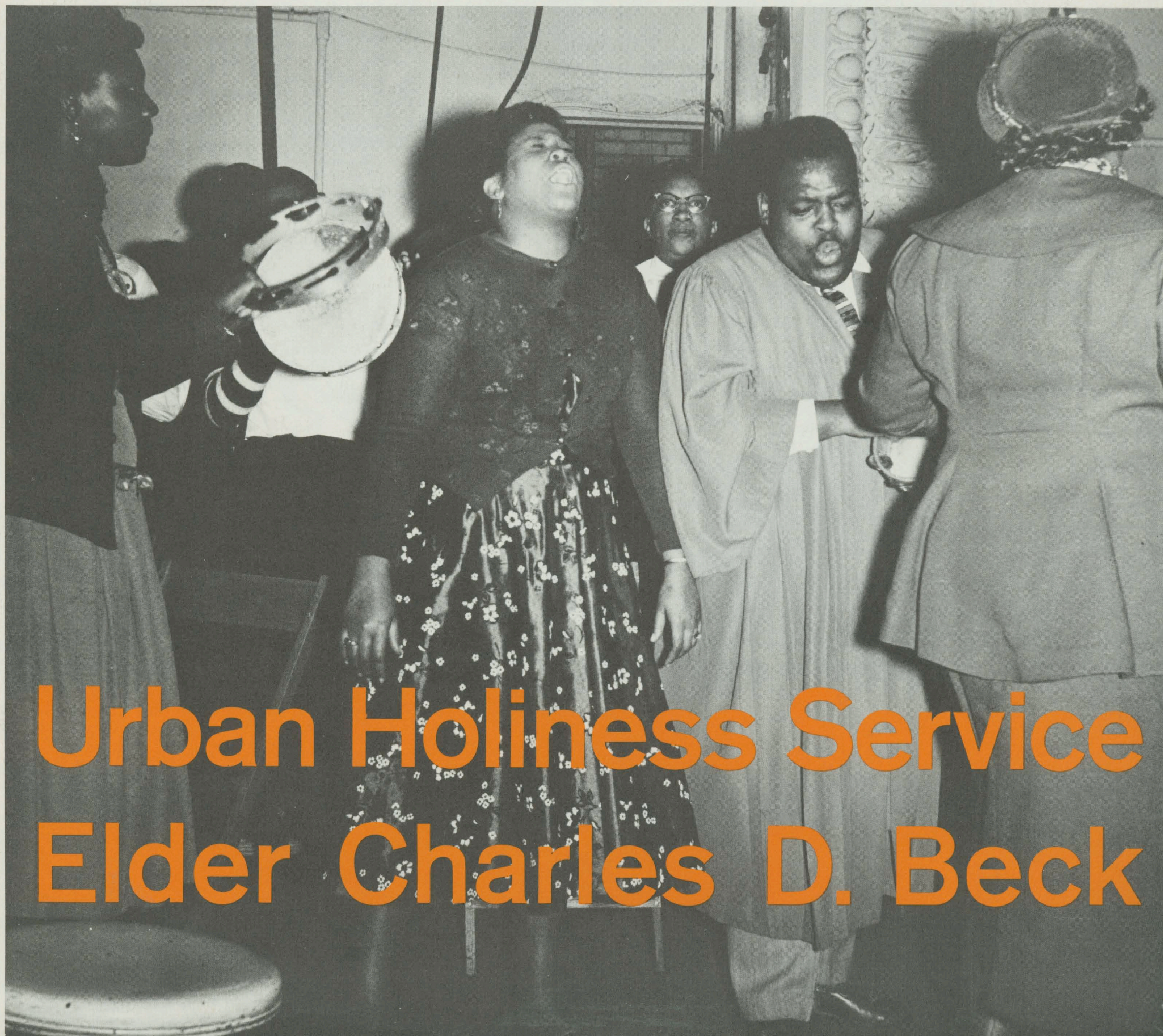


Recorded in Buffalo by W. H. Tallmadge

Ronald Clyne

FR 8901

Folkways Records and Service Corporation, NYC, USA



# Urban Holiness Service Elder Charles D. Beck

M  
2198  
U72  
1957

MUSIC LP



FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FR 8901

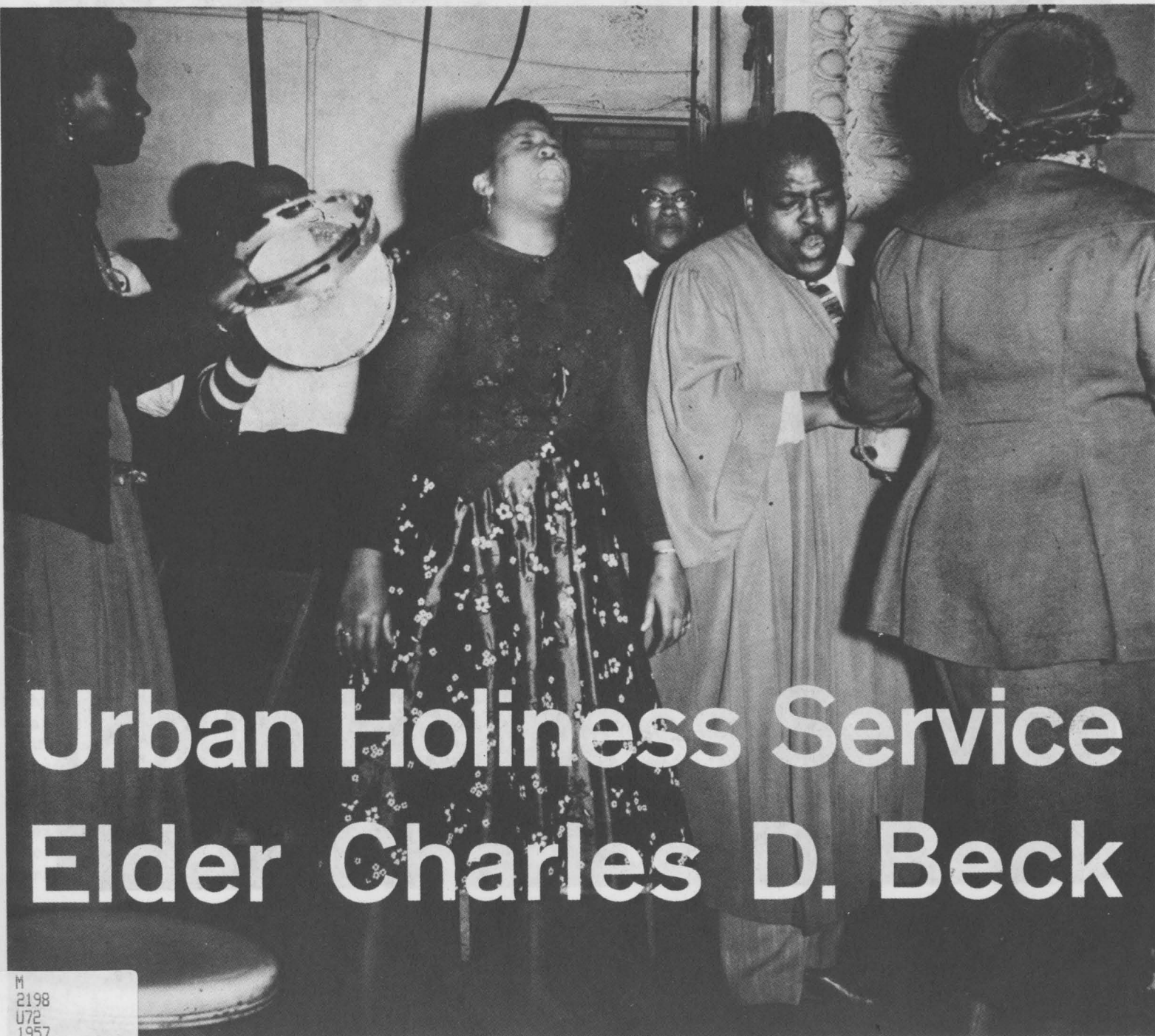
©1957 Folkways Records & Service Corp., 43 W. 61st St., N. Y. C., USA

Recorded in Buffalo by W. H. Tallmadge

Ronald Clyne

FR 8901

Folkways Records and Service Corporation, NYC, USA



# Urban Holiness Service Elder Charles D. Beck

M  
2198  
U72  
1957

MUSIC LP





Introduction and notes by  
William H. Tallmadge

In urban centers such as New York City, Chicago, and Buffalo, one finds considerable retention of Africanisms. This is particularly true of the religious worship of various Negro "Holiness" denominations. Here one finds religious music used as it is used in Africa or as it is used wherever Negroes carry on African cults in the New World that is, for the purpose of achieving "possession" by the Deity.

In order to bring on "possession," the hypnotic repetition of exciting rhythms on all kinds of musical instruments together with the continuous repetition of a short melodic phrase by a chorus and varied improvisations of a skilled leader or leaders are necessary. A single number may continue for an hour or more.

The best leaders in this type of religious service tend to gravitate to the large urban centers because that is where the most money is. This is true not only in the United States, but also in other countries.

Herskovits makes this point very clear.<sup>1</sup>

"Where the more dramatic African survivals, such as possession dances and other manifestations of religious belief and of magic, are concerned, it is essential that enough wealth be at hand to allow adequate support for the specialists who direct these rites and control the supernatural powers. This is strikingly exemplified by the situation in Trinidad, where the rites of the Yoruban Shango sect can only be found on the outskirts of the capital and principal seaport, Port-of-Spain. In the interior this cult is entirely absent. Folk living there are vague about its ritual or beliefs, because in these outlying districts there are not enough persons or enough wealth to support the extensive ceremonies. Analogous is the case of the 'shouting' churches of the United States, where the forms of spirit possession represent one of the most direct carry-overs to be encountered in this country. Though churches of this kind are numerous in the South, if one wishes to hear the 'hottest' preaching and to witness the greatest outbursts of hysteria, one must go to such great Negro centers as New York or Chicago or Detroit or Buffalo (my italics). Good preachers are in demand and, in accordance with the economic pattern of our culture, they accept calls where their services can be most adequately compensated. In the South, by and large, except the most populous Negro communities, congregations cannot meet the terms offered by the richer churches of the North."

There can be no doubt that the "shouting" services have had a long history in Africa. Miles Mark Fisher quotes from an old source.

"In Dahomey each deity was worshipped with special dances. This dancing and singing or shouting, as Capuchin monks described it in the seventeenth century, 'might be heard half a league off.'"<sup>2</sup>

John and Alan Lomax mention how the "Shout" was brought to the New World.

"The slave, therefore, took what he could learn of this new religion to the slave quarters and worshipped this new God in his own fashion--that is, by dancing, by song and by possession. He called these dancing meetings 'shouts', using the Arabic work 'Saut' current on the West Coast of Africa, which means to walk or run around the Kaaba."<sup>3</sup>

The "shout" is then described, and with the exception of point three, the description fits quite accurately the singing represented on this album.

"We have seen 'shouts' in Louisiana, in Texas, in Georgia, and in the Bahamas; we have seen vaudou dancing in Haiti; we have read accounts of similar rites in works upon Negro life in other parts of the Western Hemisphere. All share basic similarities: (1) the song is 'danced' with the whole body, with hands, feet, belly, and hips; (2) the worship is, basically, a dancing-singing phenomenon; (3) the dancers always move counter-clockwise around the ring; (4) the song has the leader-chorus form, with much repetition, with a focus on rhythm rather than on melody, that is, with a form that invites and ultimately enforces cooperative group activity; (5) the song continues to be repeated for sometimes more than an hour, steadily increasing in intensity and gradually accelerating, until a sort of mass hypnosis ensues."

"This 'shout pattern,' which involves all or most of the aforementioned characteristics wherever encountered, is demonstrably West African in origin."<sup>4</sup>

James Weldon Johnson extends the definition of the "shout" songs.

"These songs ('shout songs') are not true spirituals... in fact, they are not actually songs. They might be termed... semi-barbaric music. They once were used, and still are in a far less degree, in religious gatherings, but neither musically nor in the manner of their use do they fall in the category of Spirituals. This term 'shout songs' has no reference to the loud, jubilant Spirituals, which are often so termed by writers on Negro music; it has reference to the songs or, better, the chants used to accompany the 'ring shout.' The 'ring shout,' in truth, is nothing more or less than the survival of a primitive African dance, which in quite an understandable way attached itself in the early days to the Negro's Christian worship... The music, starting, perhaps, with a Spiritual, becomes a wild, monotonous chant. The same musical phrase is repeated over and over one, two, three, four, five hours. The very monotony of sound and motion produces an ecstatic state.... The more educated ministers and members, as fast as they were able to brave the primitive element in the churches, placed a ban on the 'ring shout.'"<sup>5</sup>

Odum and Johnson also mention how the conservative churches attempted to stamp out these African elements in Negro worship.



"The church branded the fiddle and the dance as instruments of the devil, and although the Negro was and is passionately fond of dancing, he was forbidden to do so. . . . Consequently, marching services were often instituted."

So dancing and shouting in the church went underground, but in the last twenty years they have come into the open as a principal part of the musical portion of the Holiness services. Furthermore, according to Mr. Henry Wood of Buffalo, who has had an intimate acquaintance with all kinds of Negro religious singing for the past thirty years, "the Holiness people are responsible for the shouting and jumping in Gospel music today. They started it about 1930."

To many observers it may seem that jazz influences outside of the church have been the prime movers in effecting this transformation. Certainly the blues style of singing and playing, the "hot" quality of performance, the syncopated drumming and tambourine playing, the off-beat clapping heard in this album do suggest the style of the New Orleans dance band.

Furthermore, we know that many jazz musicians have gone over to arranging and composing Gospels. Thomas "Barrel House" Dorsey of Atlanta, for one, did just that. Also many Gospel soloists sing "rhythm and blues" and "rock and roll."

Any generalization, however, that either the gospel style of singing, represented on this album by The Heavenly Gospel Singers, or the Holiness "shouts", such as "Drive Old Satan Away, Lord" or "Satisfied," derive from or are influenced to any great extent by secular jazz is incorrect. Both religious styles have had a long history of their own which can be documented by recordings, and neither owes any great debt to secular influences. Both Negro religious song and secular jazz may be classed as Afro-American music, and therefore a certain resemblance between the two would be inevitable. Actually, a strong case could be made for a direct influence in the other direction-- from "gospel" to "rock and roll." At the present time, for example, gospel songs, style and all, are being taken into the "rock and roll" literature with only a few changes in the lyrics. The old gospel song "Wonderful" is now played and sung by "rock and roll" groups as "Loveable."

"Rock and roll" groups have also taken from gospel singing the leader-chorus approach to performance.

1. Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past. Harper, N. Y. (1941 pp. 124 - 125).
2. Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Slave Songs in the United States. Cornell Un. Press (1953 p. 3).
3. Alan and John A. Lomax. Best Loved Am. Folk Songs, Grosset & Dunlap N. Y. (1947 p. 335).
4. Lomax p. 335

5. James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson, The Book of Am. Negro Spirituals. Viking Press (1940 p. 33).

6. Howard W. Odum, Guy B. Johnson, The Negro and His Songs, Chapel Hill (1925 p. 34).

#### SUPPORTING DOCUMENTARY RECORDINGS

The following recordings, which are available, will help the listener achieve an appreciation of the style and history of the Negro music represented on this album.

1. Folk Music of Liberia, Folkways P 465, Side 1, Band 3 and Side 2, Band 1.
2. Negro Folk Music of Africa and America, Folkways P 500, Nos. 1, 19, 23 and 24.
3. Bahutu Chant and Dances, The Belgian Congo Records. Commodore Album DL 30, 005.
4. Jamaica, Folkways P 461, Side 2, Bands 1, 2, 3 and 4.
5. Gospel Songs recorded in Nassau, Bahamas, Folkways FP 824.
6. Folk Music of Haiti, Folkways P 407 Pilet Pied'M.
7. Religious Songs and Drums in the Bahamas, Folkways P 440, Side 1, Bands 4, 5, 6.
8. Do Lord, Remember Me, Library of Congress, LC 603.
9. Run, Old Jeremiah, Library of Congress, LC 102 AAFS 12B.
10. I Can't Feel at Home in This World Any More, Folkways, Anthology of Jazz Vol. 1.
11. Music From The South, Vol. 8. Folkways FP 657, Side 1, Band 1, 6.
12. Music From The South Vol. 9. Folkways FP 658 Side 1, Band 5 and 6. Side 2, Band 5 and 6.



#### ELDER CHARLES D. BECK

Elder Charles "Your Man of Faith" Beck, the "Trumpet King of the Religious World" is pastor of The Way of the Cross Church of God in Christ at 447 Genesee St., Buffalo, N. Y. While this is his home church, his visits to it average little more than once a month, for his talents as minister, musician and faith healer take him to all parts of the United States. Early Monday morning from 12:30 to 2:00 A. M., his services are broadcast on a network of more than thirty radio stations. He was recently elected Bishop of the Holiness churches in Ghana, Africa, as a result of his interest in and close ties with this country and with Africa, the land where his parents were born.

His mother was from Ghana, and his father is at the present time Chief of the province of Ibadan, Eastern Nigeria.

Elder Charles D. Beck was born in Mobile, Alabama. He taught himself to play all musical instruments. He is outstanding on the drums, the trumpet, the "vibes," the piano, the organ and the saxophone. Many listeners would place his singing ability even above his instrumental accomplishments. Elder Beck uses all of these talents to the glory of his God, and it must be admitted that he is one of the outstanding faith healers in the country.

The church services in Buffalo take place in a reconverted theater building. Most of the action takes place on the stage, where the Elders, the Brothers, and the Sisters constitute the choir. The congregation takes little part in the service. Some, however, as the religious excitement heightens, move up onto the stage, where they participate in the dancing. Others will rise to dance in the aisles.



The entire service of Dec. 30 - 31, 1956 was recorded at The Church of God in Christ of Buffalo; then those sections presented on this record were selected with a view towards preserving the sequence of the service.

SIDE I, Band 1: STATEMENTS BY ELDER BECK

SIDE I, Band 2: DON'T YOU SEE

Elder Beck plays the "vibes", trumpet and sings. David Parker, from Pittsburgh, the regular organist for Elder Beck, plays the organ throughout the entire service.

This old spiritual, found in The Negro and His Songs<sup>7</sup> of Odum and Johnson and in a slightly different version in Newman White's American Negro Folk Songs,<sup>8</sup> is given a very blues-like treatment by Elder Beck and Dave Parker. The term modern gospel solo might be reserved as an appellation for a spiritual sung in this style.

This spiritual is also recorded in a harmonized gospel style by the Missionary Quintet in Nassau, Bahamas, Folkways, FP 824.

STATEMENTS BY ELDER BECK

"No use letting the Devil have all the good tunes. etc."

SIDE I, Band 3: DRIVE OLD SATAN AWAY, LORD

Elder Beck -- bongo drums, trumpet and "vibes." Dave Parker, organ. Various persons playing the piano and tambourines.

A typical improvised "holiness shout" which in style is similar to the "ring shout", and is probably derived from it.

Various members of the choir assume the function of leader, and improvise endlessly about a two-note phrase repeated over and over by the choir. Elder Beck preaches musically with his trumpet, which he plays pointed towards the heavens. Then to Elder Beck's outstanding drumming and encouragement with shouts of "go ahead", many members of the choir and congregation dance and go into trance. Those possessed by the Spirit are guarded by others to prevent injury.

At times the music seems to dissolve into pure rhythmic frenzy. A great part of the excitement seems to reside in the hypnotic effect of the length and repetition.

7. Howard W. Odum, Guy B. Howard op. cit.

8. Newman White, American Negro Folk Songs Cambridge Harvard Un. Press, (1928 p. 109).

SIDE II, Band 1: WALK IN THE LIGHT  
STATEMENTS BY ELDER BECK

"Walk in the Light", which serves as a background to the statements of Elder Beck, is the chorus part to the Baptist Gospel Hymn "Jesus the Light of the World." Brother Raymond Corbin, resident pastor, improvises a trombone-like counterpoint.

JOB

Sung by Sister Goldia Haynes from East St. Louis. Accompanied at the piano by Elder Nat Hollis from Pittsburgh and by David Parker at the organ. Sister Goldia was at Buffalo at this time to join Elder Beck for a tour to the southern churches where Elder Beck holds services. She sings the gospel solo "Job" with great conviction and with a steel-like voice, the counterpart of "Leadbelly."

SIDE II, Band 2: STATEMENTS BY DAVID BECK  
(age six)

SIDE II, Band 3: LET THE CHURCH SAY AMEN

Elder Beck and choir. Unidentified piano.

SIDE II, Band 4: I KNOW THE LORD; HE LAID HIS  
HAND ON ME

Sung by The Heavenly Gospel Singers of Buffalo.

The six singers were visiting the service and sang only this one number. The group is typical of the traveling groups of from four to eight men that sing arranged gospel songs.

The gospel songs sung by the Missionary Quintet of Nassau, Bahamas, recorded by Marshall Stearns, Folkways, FP 824, and the Starlight Gospel Singers on Music from the South, Vol. 8, recorded by Frederic Ramsey Jr., Folkways FP 657, document the same kind of gospel singing. Both recordings, however, document the style at an earlier stage of development.

SIDE II, Band 5: SEARCH ME LORD

Sung by Brother Raymond Corbin. A blues-like gospel solo in the sanctified-holiness tradition, accompanied by the regular stomping and off-beat clapping, tambourine, organ and unidentified piano.

SIDE II, Band 6: I'M A SOLDIER

A "holiness shout", The choir repeats a phrase from the song over and over. A "raggy" piano accompaniment is played by Goldia Haynes, who also sings the high contrapuntal lead.

SIDE II, Band 7: SATISFIED

(See notes to selection 2).

The time is 1:30 A.M. The number continued to 2:30 before the worshippers were really satisfied.

The remarks of Rudi Blesh, in describing the "ring shout" Run, Old Jeremiah,<sup>9</sup> in his book Shining Trumpets,<sup>10</sup> apply equally well in the present context.

"The evocation of the Dark Continent is profound and nocturnal. It is as if these people were lifted bodily . . . and deposited on an African plain or in an African forest, where, long ago and in just this way, their ancestors had danced and chanted, not to Jesus, but to Ogun or to Shango.

"Melody and harmony are things unheard of, things unneeded. Pure sound, spurting up out of unconscious life, capriciously consonant or fortuitously dissonant, seems to form a primordial, moving music enacted as mysteriously as the beginnings of man."

---

9. op. cit.

10. Rudi Blesh, Shining Trumpets, Alfred A. Knopf. (1935 p. 75).



I should like to thank Mr. Henry Wood of Buffalo, and Dr. Wilson B. Gragg, of State University of New York, College for Teachers at Buffalo, for their kind assistance in the preparation of the introduction and notes to the recordings.

W. H. T.

Photographs by Milton Rogovin  
Recorded by William H. Tallmadge,  
Edited and mastered by Mel Kaiser, Cue Recording Studios,  
Production director, Moses Asch