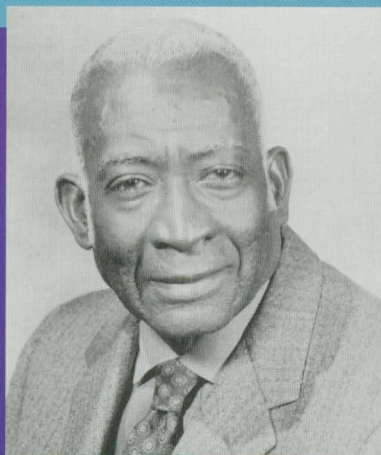




Top Left: Roberta Martin, gospel composer and singer.  
Photo by Eugene Smith.



Top Right: Thomas Dorsey, gospel composer and pianist.  
Photo courtesy the family of Thomas A. Dorsey.

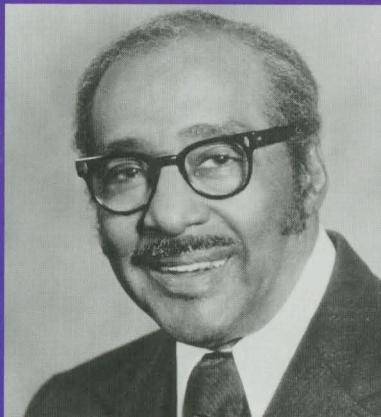
Right: Reverend William Herbert Brewster.  
Photo courtesy William H. Brewster.



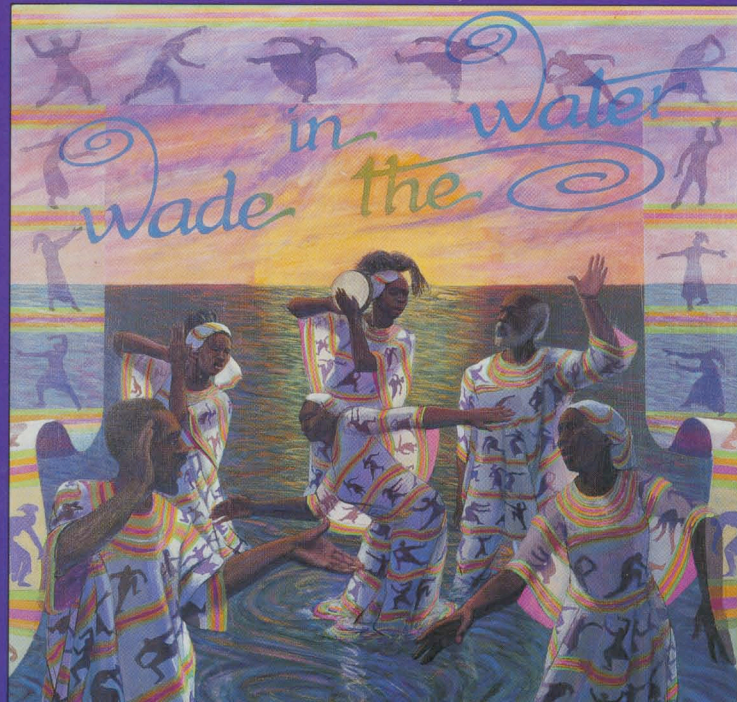
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Washington DC 20560

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# AFRICAN AMERICAN GOSPEL: THE PIONEERING COMPOSERS



MADE IN THE WATER

VOLUME III

# AFRICAN AMERICAN GOSPEL: THE PIONEERING COMPOSERS

*Conceived and compiled by Bernice Johnson Reagon*

*Annotated by Bernice Johnson Reagon, Pearl Williams-Jones, and Lisa Pertillar Brevard*

*Recorded 1992-1993, produced in collaboration with National Public Radio*

*The Pioneering Composers*  
celebrates the work and legacy of Charles Albert Tindley, Lucie Eddie Campbell, Thomas Andrew Dorsey, William Herbert Brewster, Roberta Martin, and Kenneth Morris. These composers helped create a new repertoire of sacred songs for the twentieth-century urban African American church.



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Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
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955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600, MRC 914  
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Washington DC 20560

1. Stand by Me **Lou Bell Johnson** 3:21
2. We'll Understand It Better By and By **Toshi Reagon** 2:57
3. What Are They Doing in Heaven Today? **Bernice Johnson Reagon, Yasmeen, and Michelle Lanchester** 5:43
4. Something Within **The Rev. Eugene Smallwood** 4:17
5. He'll Understand and Say Well Done **The Rev. Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation, Debbie Steele Hayden, solo lead** 3:23
6. Touch Me Lord Jesus **Michelle Lanchester, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Yasmeen** 3:03
7. It's a Highway to Heaven (Walking up the King's Highway) **The Rev. Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation** 1:43
8. Little Wooden Church on a Hill **The Rev. Eugene Smallwood** 5:04
9. I Was Standing by the Bedside of a Neighbor (If You See My Savior) **Michelle Lanchester with Sweet Honey In The Rock** 3:19
10. How I Got Over **The Richard Allen Singers** 3:03
11. Speak to Me Jesus **Sweet Honey In The Rock** trio Yasmeen, Evelyn Maria Harris, Aisha Kahlil 5:14
12. Does Jesus Care? **Horace C. Boyer, The Rev. Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation** 3:48
13. Just a Closer Walk with Thee **Sweet Honey In The Rock** 4:13
14. God Is Still on the Throne **The Rev. Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation with William Boyd** 5:43
15. God Specializes **Gloria Griffin, with The Rev. Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation** 7:16
16. Precious Lord **Carolyn Bolger-Payne of the Philadelphia Ambassadors** 3:50

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Lou Bell Johnson 3:21
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3. **What Are They Doing in Heaven Today?**  
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Bernice Johnson Reagon, Yasmeen, and Michelle Lanchester 5:43
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(Lucie E. Campbell/Warner/Chappell Music Inc., ASCAP)  
Rev. Eugene Smallwood 4:17
5. **He'll Understand and Say Well Done**  
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Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation, Debbie Steele Hayden, solo lead 3:23
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10. **How I Got Over**  
(William H. Brewster/Anna Lois Brooks)  
The Richard Allen Singers 3:03
11. **Speak to Me Jesus**  
(Brewster and Hoyle/Unichappell Music, BMI)  
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12. **Does Jesus Care?**  
(Kenneth Morris/Necie Morris, Chappell Music Inc., ASCAP) Horace C. Boyer, Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation 3:48
13. **Just a Closer Walk with Thee**  
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(Roberta Martin/Chappell & Co., Inc., ASCAP) Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation with William Boyd 5:43
15. **God Specializes**  
(Gloria Griffin, arranged by R. Martin/Studios Publishing)  
Gloria Griffin, with Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation 7:16
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(Thomas A. Dorsey/Unichappell Music, BMI)  
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## INTRODUCTION

*by Bernice Johnson Reagon, Pearl Williams-Jones, and Lisa Pertillar Brevard*

African American gospel music is a twentieth-century sacred music. It is an urban music born of a people who began to move from the rural South to cities across the nation at the turn of the century.

Into these new urban communities African Americans brought dreams of change. They also brought as much of the past as they could carry—traditions that continued to provide solid ground for uprooted families in strange, often cold, new environments. The music traditions of Black America expanded to embrace this migration. The new dimensions of this expansion are most evident in the development of the urban church music that became known as gospel.

The foundations of gospel music can be traced back to the nineteenth-century plantation slave community, whose culture was African in structure and process — the way and the why things were done — but whose ingredients were a blend with European expressions cauterized by the slave experience in the New World. The new music evolved from the African American repertoire and song style of the nineteenth century, which included spirituals, hymns, and

shape-note singing. It was a vocal style distinguished by a highly charged emotional sound. As African Americans embraced Christianity and began to build their churches and the communities that the churches served, they developed a new way of being and surviving that had a sound and function all its own. Gospel was only one expression of this culture that grew and developed through the twentieth century.

Gospel music supported and cushioned the new, growing, urban African American communities. For many, the churches that embraced the new gospel songs became the centers for migrant families; a kind of collective voice that grounded congregations formed by people in search of better opportunities.

Gospel music is a synthesis of West African and African American music, dance, poetry, oratory, and drama. A body of urban, contemporary Black religious music of rural folk origins, gospel is a celebration of the Christian experience of salvation and hope. It is at the same time a declaration of Black identity, which is expressed through the very personal medium of music. Having been for



most of its fifty years an underground, or counterculture, body of music, gospel is among the least known or understood of the many Black cultural expressions today.

Gospel is both a repertoire and a style of singing. Gospel can either be appropriated from a hymn or spiritual by a well-versed performer, or a composition can be originated as a gospel song and performed in a variety of styles.

Some facets of African musical practice are dominant in the gospel idiom. A case in point is the role and significance of accompaniment in gospel music. Traditional nineteenth-century spirituals were unaccompanied and limited in rhythmic accompaniment to swaying, footpatting, and handclapping. Instruments were generally either unavailable or forbidden. The tradition of non-instrumental accompaniment of spirituals—whether by choice, custom, or circumstance, singularly or combined—was continued after slavery and well into the period during which Blacks established their own churches. Instrumental as well as rhythmic accompaniment in gospel, with the rich use of the piano, organ, guitar, drums, and bass, is an integral part of the performance, just as in many forms of African music.

Horace Boyer, an authority on gospel music, points to the driving cultural force

developed in the new Pentecostal congregations, especially the rapidly expanding Church of God in Christ (COGIC), as the root of heightened energy in twentieth-century gospel music performance style. Shout songs like "I'm a Soldier in the Army of the Lord" and the reformulation of the spiritual "Soul Is a Witness for my Lord" into the overpowering shout "Witness" became staples in Pentecostal congregational song services. These songs, and this new style of singing with instrumental accompaniment, were a departure from the Methodist and Baptist congregational styles. With tambourines, washtub bass, and later piano and other instruments acting as percussive forces in the musical compositions, twentieth-century gospel music found its spiritual nurturing ground.

This recording presents gospel music through the work and legacy of six pioneering composers who, through personal experience, understood the plight of the average African American well enough to create a new repertoire of sacred songs: Rev. Charles Albert Tindley, Lucie Eddie (Elizabeth) Campbell, Thomas Andrew Dorsey, Rev. William Herbert Brewster, Roberta Martin, and Kenneth Morris. These pioneering composers were also publishers and organizers, developing a music literature that would

become an instrument of the African American oral transmission process. In this case, the printed score did not represent the composition at its fullest expression: this was left to the singers and to each performance. What the composers/publishers presented as scores were the song texts and a skeleton of melody and harmony expressed as accompaniment. Using these song-sheets as a guide, choir directors taught the new songs to their local choirs or singing groups. To be able to fully understand a composition, one needed the song-sheet and the experience of hearing it performed live or through recordings. Thus live concerts by performers trained by the composers served as the most important link between the sheet music and the growing enthusiastic constituency. The urge to learn to sing the songs for one's own worship services supported a new performance industry which embraced the twentieth-century technologies of information transmission, yet set its own rules as to function. Thus gospel music integrated radio, recordings, and, more recently, television, film, and video into its transmission process.

Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933), is the first of the twentieth-century composers of new sacred songs whose works entered the African American oral tradition and are still a part of the canon of African American sacred

music. His songs formed the base upon which the new African American gospel music was developed.

Charles Albert Tindley, whose beginnings in Eastern Shore Maryland during the 1850s exposed him to the severe hardship of that area during the final years of slavery, moved to Philadelphia in 1875 and became a Methodist minister. A brilliant, self-taught leader, his personal story covers post-slavery late nineteenth-century migration, and the flood of migrants during the first decades of the twentieth century who came from rural areas to find life and work in the urban cities. The people who came into Tindley's church in South Philadelphia provide a microcosm of African American migration during this period. Tindley's use of his compositions is an important aspect of the practical ministry he evolved to teach his people to survive in the new, hostile, urban environment. Using a blend of the Protestant hymn structure and the choral refrains of the spiritual, Tindley wove a new song for the new century. The poetry of his lyrics came straight out of the personal and collective testimonies of the people he ministered from his pulpit and in the streets and in the soup kitchens he organized. Songs he composed for his sermons, like "Stand by Me," "We'll Understand It Better By and By," "Someday," "Leave It There,"

"Let Jesus Fix For You," and "The Storm Is Passing Over, Hallelu," began to build what was to become the foundation of the gospel music canon—compositions that every gospel singer had in his or her repertoire and, true to the African American cultural tradition, performed in his or her own style.

Lucie Eddie Campbell of Memphis, Tennessee (1885-1963), was a highly community-oriented African American gospel music pioneer and the first woman to receive recognition in the field. During the years following World War I, Campbell, a music director, composer, and teacher, played an active role in a small but influential group of people who set a new standard for the performance of religious music in the African American Baptist Church. She was a leading figure in what became the largest Black organization in the world, The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A.

In 1916, a split in the National Baptist Convention resulted in a need for a publishing board. Among the members of the publishing committee were W.D. Isaac and a school teacher by the name of Lucie Eddie Campbell. Campbell served on the Convention's literature committee that in 1921 published a slim volume of songs still in print, *Gospel Pearls*. It was the first published collection with the term "gospel" in the title. Sever-

al songs composed by Charles Albert Tindley were included.

From 1919 to 1930 Campbell wrote many hymns now included in such popular hymn books as *Gospel Pearls*, *Spirituals Triumphant*, and *Inspirational Melodies*. Several of Campbell's songs have become gospel classics, including "In the Upper Room with Jesus," made famous by Mahalia Jackson, "Jesus Gave Me Water," by the Soul Stirrers, and "Touch Me Lord Jesus" by the Angelic Gospel Singers.

Many of Campbell's gospel songs were based upon situations she either experienced or witnessed. For example, her 1919 composition, "Something Within," was inspired by the blind African American street singer Connie Roseman. Roseman had been surrounded on Memphis's Beale Street by onlookers asking him to sing the blues. When Roseman refused even after being offered money, Campbell asked him how was he able to hold his ground. Roseman responded, "I don't know, Miss Campbell, there's just something within." When she presented this song at the 1919 Convention, it was introduced by Connie Roseman, whose story had inspired it.

A feisty, well-educated, and determined woman, Lucie E. Campbell became a cultural force within the Baptist church movement. For over forty years, through her role as music director within the National Baptist

Convention, U.S.A., she determined what songs would be sung during the national conventions and consequently often what songs would then be sung in the local churches throughout the nation. She also introduced William Herbert Brewster's songs and plays as well as those of other composers on this recording, including Thomas Dorsey, Roberta Martin, and Kenneth Morris. She was succeeded in her position by her protégé, baritone singer Robert Bradley; other singers who performed before the forum provided through Campbell's work with the National Baptist Convention included Mahalia Jackson, Robert Anderson, the Roberta Martin Singers, and Clara Ward and the Ward Singers.

William Herbert Brewster (ca. 1897-1987) was a gospel music composer who thoroughly understood the oral tradition and was also an avid student of Western European classical literature. The first song he remembered, when he was three or four years old, was from his grandmother. Brewster heard her singing with tears rolling down her face, "I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow." His father did shape-note singing, and in the evenings the family would gather to sing. Brewster eventually learned to read music and also to play songs by ear. He said he actually listened to music created by the birds, and his keen sense of hearing

enabled him to discern the individual notes of songbird melodies. Lucie E. Campbell and Brewster were both from Memphis and both lifetime members of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. For more than a quarter of a century Brewster served as the head of its Education Department. Many of his songs were introduced through the plays he presented before the conventions. His best-known compositions include "How Far Am I from Canaan?," introduced by the Chicago-based quartet, The Soul Stirrers, with Sam Cooke as lead singer; "Move On Up a Little Higher," performed by Mahalia Jackson on the Apollo label, the first gospel music recording to sell more than a million copies; "Lord I Tried" by the Five Blind Boys of Alabama; and "How I Got Over," "Let Us All Go Back to the Old Landmark," and "Surely God Is Able"—all recording successes for Clara Ward and the Ward Singers.

Although Brewster was formally educated (he studied theology, Shakespeare, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and law), he remained community-focused in principle and in action. He edited and published his own newspaper, and he also wrote and encouraged church members at the East Trigg Baptist Church he pastored in Memphis to act in religious plays.

Brewster also recognized the power of gospel music to serve as a means of political

expression for African American people. He said that his most popular gospel song, "Move On Up a Little Higher," was his way of speaking to his hometown of Memphis:

The lily white, the black, and the tan were locking horns; and the idea struck me that... we'll have to move in the field of education. Move into the professions and move into politics. Move in anything that any other race has to survive. That was a protest idea and inspiration. I was trying to inspire Black people to move up higher. Don't be satisfied with the mediocre... That was 1946, before the freedom fights started, before Martin Luther King days, I had to lead a lot of protest meetings. In order to get my message over, there were things that were almost dangerous to say, but you could sing it.

Brewster based his lyrics upon gospel text and called them "sermons set to music." His poetic lyricism and his use of the preaching ballad form in verses followed by a swinging, thundering chorus in the call-and-response tradition, transformed the classical gospel song genre. At the 1983 Smithsonian Institution national conference on his works, the composer told the audience, "I write these

songs for these common people who could not understand political language, common people who didn't know anything about economics. I had to write song after song, as the Lord would bring the inspiration to me. I am going to keep on doing that."

While Campbell and Brewster lived in Memphis, Tennessee, one of the strongest centers for gospel music developed around Thomas Andrew Dorsey (1899-1993) and the city of Chicago, Illinois. Born in Georgia, Dorsey migrated to Chicago during the twenties as a blues musician. He had been Ma Rainey's pianist and arranger, and had led his own band and recorded blues and jazz tunes. He converted back to the church after a serious illness and eventually focused solely on sacred music. As a sacred music songwriter, Dorsey adapted his secular blues and jazz rhythms to the writing of sacred verse, and coined the term "gospel" to differentiate the new song form from the then current sacred music.

By 1929 Dorsey had published the first gospel song in manuscript form, "If You See My Saviour." Together with Theodore R. Frye he formed the first gospel chorus at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. In 1932 Dorsey, Frye, and Magnolia Lewis Butts formed the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses — the model for all other gospel

music conventions. During the 1930s Dorsey became so famous that gospel songs of the period (whether or not he wrote them) became known as "dorseys."

Dorsey created a school of gospel music in Chicago. He formed the first gospel music publishing house and with Sallie Martin developed an aggressive marketing strategy to get his new songs heard and considered for worship within African American Baptist churches. Dorsey's songs are legend; "Peace in the Valley," "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," and "If You See My Savior Tell Him That You Saw Me" enlarged and deepened the canon of gospel songs. His music, and that of his protégés, created a bridge of cultural sound in Chicago churches that struggled with the expanding presence of African Americans moving in from the South who found little to comfort them in the more staid liturgies of the churches of the urban congregations.

Dorsey and the music he promoted were controversial. Some churches would not let him sing and called his new songs "devil songs," because the sound of the new gospel music had so much more rhythm and drive. It also invited emotion-driven performances and was performed to invite the spirit and to "stir up" the congregation.

Dorsey and the composers and singers of

the Chicago school shaped what is known as the classic gospel era. He spread his songs by using "demonstrators" to perform his songs: great singers like Sallie Martin, Mahalia Jackson, and Theodore Frye who worked with him at Ebenezer and took over when Dorsey went to Mt. Pilgrim to form the second gospel choir.

Sallie Martin (1895-1988) worked with Professor Dorsey as a demonstrator and a national organizer of choirs. She traveled the country teaching the songs to choirs and developing what became a network of agents who sold the latest gospel songs to their local church musicians. Martin left Dorsey and in 1940 joined Kenneth Morris to form the Martin and Morris Music Publishing Co., the largest and longest-running gospel publishing house (1940-1993). Sallie Martin moved to the West Coast of the United States during the 1940s and was an important link to expanding gospel music to that region.

Martin's partner was Kenneth Morris (1917-1988). Arranger, publisher, and gospel composer in his own right, Morris was born in New York and trained in Western classical and jazz piano. He came to Chicago with his jazz band in 1931 to perform in what was referred to as the "Chicago World's Fair." He stayed in Chicago, after becoming ill, and took a job as the gospel arranger with the

Bowles Publishing Company. Lillian Bowles, the owner, was white and basically published gospel music as a sideline to a church-based printing business. While working at Bowles Publishing Company as an arranger, Morris began to write his own compositions. His first, "I'll Be a Servant for the Lord," was recorded by the Wings Over Jordan choir.

Kenneth Morris became the Minister of Music of Reverend Clarence Cobb's Church of Deliverance in Chicago, where he helped expand Reverend Cobb's radio ministry through his leadership of the choir. Morris convinced Reverend Cobb to buy a Hammond electric organ for the church and transformed the sound of gospel music accompaniment. This was the first electric Hammond organ introduced into church services. Morris stated that while he was criticized as too worldly, people nevertheless flocked to the church to hear the new sound. Musicians were particularly taken with the versatility and rapid response of the Hammond, and it was adopted throughout the gospel world.

Though known for his longevity and success as a publisher, Kenneth Morris wrote songs that were deeply loved by gospel choirs organizing in local Black churches during the 1940s and 1950s. Among his songs that still can be heard throughout the gospel

community, Black and white are: "Does Jesus Care?" "Yes, God is Real," his arrangement of "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," and "Christ Is All." His compositions were recorded by major soloists, choirs, and quartets. His impact continues to be felt today whenever one enters a sanctuary and hears the sound of the gospel piano partnered with the Hammond organ.

Another member of the Chicago composer community was Roberta Martin (1907-1969). Born in Helena, Arkansas, she moved with her family to Chicago during the 1920s. Like her colleague, Kenneth Morris, Martin was trained in the Western classical tradition and her works as a composer would reshape the choral sound of gospel music. Like other gospel composers, Martin created songsheets; but to hear her compositions, one listened to her ensemble, the Roberta Martin Singers. Martin's choral sound was well-suited for female and male voices, and her arrangements were a departure from the *a cappella* quartet with its four-part harmony structures. She created a choral sound in her ensemble that provided the model for the community church gospel choir for more than thirty years.

With Thomas A. Dorsey as an early mentor, Martin excelled not only as musician — singer, pianist, composer, arranger, and orga-

nizer of groups and choirs — but she also founded the Roberta Martin Studios, an influential gospel music publishing house in Chicago. In 1932 she began to work with Mr. Dorsey, first playing piano for the gospel choir, and then with Theodore Frye, organizing the junior choir at Ebenezer Church. In 1932 a quartet of singers from the junior choir began to sing as the Martin and Frye Singers. By 1936 this ensemble had evolved into the Roberta Martin Singers — an ensemble of male and female singers.

The Roberta Martin sound defined an entire era. It was based on an innovative style of playing, singing, and arranging, which she achieved through the combination of male and female voicing in a powerful harmonic sound. The voices, timing, and phrasing (sometimes employing a European-style operatic delivery) resulted in a new and powerful gospel music style. The piano was the foundation of the vocal parts and underscored the group's rich harmonies. Having set the standard for gospel piano accompaniment, Martin took it far beyond the barrelhouse, blues, and boogie-woogie styles of the 1930s, making the piano a mainstay in African American gospel music performance.

The Roberta Martin singers, which served as a kind of "university" for talented young musicians coming through Chicago during

that period, embodied the choral and solo style for the classic era in gospel. Her singers set the model for the way their voices were to be performed in gospel choirs throughout the nation: Eugene Smith, tenor, and also narrator; Norsaleus McKissick, baritone; Deloris Barret Campbell, soprano; and Bessie Folk, Gloria Griffin, and Mrs. Martin herself, gospel altos. Many singers went through her group learning the basics of gospel performing, arranging, publishing, and directing. Among them were Robert Anderson, one of the early Chicago singers to spend some time on the West Coast during the 1930s; the late James Cleveland; Deloris Barrett Campbell of the Barrett Sisters; and the late Alex Bradford, who was among those who moved gospel to the Broadway stage via the works of Langston Hughes and Vonnegut Carroll. Roberta Martin also had Dinah Washington and Della Reese as singers in her group for a time, thus revealing a direct link between sacred and secular music.

## About the Songs

The performances on this recording celebrate the contributions of six of the composers who opened a way for great gospel song within American sacred music. The performers here include some singers who are community based, some nationally known, some new singers, and some elders in the field. Through their performances of this historic repertoire, contemporary singers join together to open a window to a world of wonderful music that sustained a community, as its members moved and developed through the twentieth century.

### Charles Albert Tindley

#### 1. Stand by Me

Performed a *cappella* by Lou Bell Johnson.

This composition of Charles Albert Tindley, copyrighted in 1905, is second only to Thomas Andrew Dorsey's "Precious Lord" in gospel music popularity. It is performed here in a slow, dramatic, powerful rendition by Lee Bell Johnson, using a freeform lining-hymn solo style. Johnson performs most of the song at the microphone in front of the gathered congregation, and one hears her finishing the song as she moves back to her

seat in the congregation. Recorded live for *Wade in the Water* at the 18th anniversary of the Gospel Harmonettes of Demopolis, Alabama, December, 1992.

When the storms of life are raging, stand by me  
When the world is tossing me, like a ship  
upon the sea  
Thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me.  
  
When I done the best I can, stand by me  
And my friends don't understand  
Thou who knowest all about me, stand by my side.

When I'm growing old and feeble, stay by my side  
When my life become a burden and I'm  
crossing chilly Jordan  
Thou who rulest the wind and water, come on  
and stay by my side.

#### 2. We'll Understand It Better By and By

Performed by Toshi Reagon, vocals and guitar.

Charles Albert Tindley copyrighted this song in 1905. Here it is performed in a relaxed country gospel style by Toshi Reagon, who accompanies herself on guitar.

#### Chorus:

By and by, when the morning comes  
All the saints are gone to gathering home  
We will tell the story of how we overcome  
And we'll understand it better by and by.

#### Verse:

We are tossed and driven on the restless sea  
of time  
Somber skies and howling tempest oft  
succeed a bright sunshine  
In the land of perfect day, when the mist has  
rolled away  
We will understand it better by and by.

We are often destitute of the things that life  
demands  
Want of shelter and of food, thirsty hills and  
barren land  
But we're trusting in the Lord, and according  
to His word  
We will understand it better, by and by.

#### 3. What Are They Doing in Heaven Today?

Performed by a Washington, D.C. trio especially formed for this recording: Bernice Johnson Reagon carries the melody, Yasmeeen performs the top harmony, and Michelle Lanchester completes the trio with a moving blues harmony line just above the melody. Guitar accompaniment by Toshi Reagon.

This composition was copyrighted in 1901 with Charles Albert Tindley's first group of songs and is most often performed as a funeral song.

I'm thinking of friends whom I used to know  
Who lived and suffered in this world below  
They gone up to heaven, and I want to know  
I want to know, what are they doing there  
now?

Wonder what are they doing in heaven today  
Where sins and sorrows are all done away  
Where peace abound like a river, they say  
I want to know, what are they doing there  
now?

There were some whose bodies were full of  
disease  
No medicine nor doctor could give them  
much ease  
Yeah, they suffered 'til death brought a final  
release  
But what are they doing there now?

There were some who were poor and often  
despised  
They looked up to heaven with tear-blinded  
eyes  
But people were heedless and cold to their  
cries



I want to know, what are they doing there  
now?

#### Lucie Eddie Campbell

##### 4. Something Within

Performed by Rev. Eugene Smallwood,  
accompanied by Gwendolyn Cooper Light-  
ner on piano.

Lucie Eddie Campbell introduced this  
gospel hymn at the 1919 National Baptist  
Convention, where it was performed by Con-  
nie Rosemond, for whom it was written. It is  
performed here by Los Angeles pioneer  
gospel hymnodist, Reverend Eugene Small-  
wood, in the traditional gospel performance  
style. As a young man Reverend Smallwood  
performed it for Lucie E. Campbell in 1939,  
accompanied by the composer herself. In this  
special Smithsonian performance, he is  
accompanied by Gwendolyn Cooper Light-  
ner, credited with bringing the Chicago style  
of gospel piano playing to Los Angeles dur-  
ing the 1940s.

Preachers and teachers, they would make  
their appeal  
Fighting like soldiers on the great battlefield  
When to their pleading, my poor heart would  
yield

All that I know, oh, God put a little something  
within.

Have you that something? It's just a little  
burning desire

Have you that something, oh! never will tire  
Then, if you have it, it's my God's heavenly  
fire,

Then why don't you let the whole world know,  
yeah! You've got something within.

I've got something, something within me,  
holding my reign

I've got something, something within me, it  
moves away all my pain

I've got something within me, oh, I wish I  
could explain

All that I know, yes, I got something within.

##### 5. He'll Understand and Say Well Done

Performed by Donald Vails and the Celebra-  
tion Delegation.

This song was originally written in 1933.  
In this performance by Reverend Donald  
Vails and the Celebration Delegation, a  
vibrant soprano lead by Debbie Steele Hay-  
den, accompanied by Vails's harp-style piano  
playing, expands into a gentle but full closing  
chorus by the entire choir.

If, when you've done the best of your service  
Telling the world that the Savior has come  
Be not dismayed when men don't believe you  
He'll understand and say, "Well done."

Oh, when I come to the end of my journey  
Weary of life and the battle is won  
Carrying the staff and the cross of  
redemption  
He'll understand and say, "Well done."

##### 6. Touch Me, Lord Jesus

Performed by Washington, D.C., trio,  
Michelle Lanchester on melody, Bernice  
Johnson Reagon on the lower line and Yas-  
meen on the high harmony line, accompa-  
nied by Gwendolyn Cooper Lightner.

Lucie E. Campbell's 1941 composition,  
"Touch Me, Lord Jesus," was made famous  
through the 1950s recording by the Angelic  
Gospel Singers from Philadelphia, Pennsylva-  
nia, arranged by their lead singer Margaret  
Allison. This performance captures the spirit  
of that 1950s arrangement.

Touch, touch me, Lord Jesus, with Thy hand  
of mercy  
Make each throbbing heartbeat, feel Thy  
pow'r divine  
Oh, take my will forever, I will doubt Thee  
never

Oh, cleanse, cleanse me, dear Savior, make  
me wholly Thine.

Guide, guide me, Jehovah, through this vale  
of sorrow

I am safe forever, trusting in Thy love  
Oh, bear me through the current; o'er the  
chilly Jordan  
Lead me, dear Master, to my home above.

#### Thomas Andrew Dorsey

##### 7. It's a Highway to Heaven

Performed by Reverend Donald Vails and the  
Celebration Delegation, Rev. Vails on lead,  
the choir accompanied by Donald Clements  
on the Hammond organ, Eric Taylor on  
drums, and Derrick Dilihunt on bass.

Thomas Andrew Dorsey's 1940s composi-  
tion is a popular choir processional, as it was  
for this 1993 performance at the Smithsonian  
Institution's National Museum of American  
History.

It's a highway to Heaven, oh, none can walk  
up there  
But the pure in heart. It's a highway to  
Heaven  
I am walking up the King's highway. [repeat  
twice]

*Solo:*

If you're not walking, start while I'm talking  
Walking up the King's highway.  
There's joy in knowing, with Him I'm going  
As I'm walking up the King's highway.  
[repeat chorus]

### 8. Little Wooden Church on a Hill

Performed by Rev. Eugene Smallwood,  
accompanied by Gwendolyn Cooper Light-  
ner.

Dorsey copyrighted this rarely performed  
gospel song in 1949. The lyrics, a nostalgic  
remembrance of old-time revival meetings,  
provide the perfect vehicle for his personal  
testimony of conversion at eight years of age,  
during a revival meeting on May 9, 1928, in  
Guthrie, Oklahoma's Mt. Zion Baptist  
Church.

It was in my childhood, 'twas many years ago  
With the spirit of the Saviour I was filled  
Oh, in an old revival meeting, the memories  
linger still  
Oh, in that little wooden church on the hill.

Oh, there were no fine-dressed people  
Talking about just plain folk everywhere  
With those plain old-fashioned ruffles, frocks  
and frills

But the people, yes, would be shouting  
"Praise God," I can hear them still  
In that little wooden church on the hill.

Every Sunday morning, we had our family  
prayer  
In that old country wagon, yes, we would fill!  
Oh, we would start out on our journey, going  
over rocks and reels  
To that little wooden church on the hill

Oh, you could hear the people singing  
Sometimes a half a mile away  
Yes, and your heart would begin to beat  
Yes, a sudden thrill  
Yes, it would start your, your body moving  
And you just couldn't, just couldn't keep still  
In that little wooden church on the hill.

Oh, you could hear the old-fashioned  
preacher  
When he gave out that meter hymn  
Many charged with the Holy Ghost would fill  
Yes! And the people would be shouting  
"Praise God," I can hear them still,  
In that little wooden church... mmmm...  
church on the hill.

### 9. I Was Standing by the Bedside of a Neighbor (If You See My Savior)

Performed by Michelle Lanchester, backed by  
Sweet Honey in the Rock, with Toshi Reagon  
on guitar.

Thomas Andrew Dorsey composed this  
song as he came out of a long illness, and it is  
a tribute to a friend he met in the hospital  
who passed away. Published in 1929, it was  
Dorsey's first major success as a gospel com-  
poser. It was a hit at the 1930 National Baptist  
Convention, the same year he organized the  
first gospel choir at the Ebenezer Baptist  
Church in Chicago, Illinois.

I was standing by the bedside of a neighbor  
Who was about to cross Jordan's swelling  
tides  
And I asked if him if he would do me a favor  
Kindly take this message to the other side.

If you see the Saviour, tell Him that you saw  
me  
When you saw me, I was on my way  
When you reach that golden city, think about  
me  
Oh, don't forget to tell the Saviour what I  
said.

Though you have to make this journey on  
without me

That's a debt sooner or later must be paid  
You may see some old friend who may ask  
about me  
Tell them that I'm coming home someday.

### William Herbert Brewster

#### 10. How I Got Over

William Herbert Brewster created a pro-  
fessional arrangement of one of his popular  
compositions, "How I Got Over." It is per-  
formed by the Richard Allen Singers, accom-  
panied on piano by director Evelyn Simpson  
Cureton.

How I got over  
How I got over, my Lord  
You know my soul looked back and wondered  
How I got over  
Soon as I can see Jesus  
The Man who made me free  
Man that bled and suffered  
Died for you and me  
I want to thank Him because he brought me  
I want to thank Him because he taught me  
I want to thank Him because he kept me  
I want to thank Him because he left me  
Yes, my soul looked back and wondered  
How I got over.

### 11. **Speak to Me Jesus**

Performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock trio, Yasmeeen on melody, Evelyn Maria Harris above the melody, and Aisha Kahlil on top.

Reverend William Herbert Brewster's composition is performed by members of the African American women quintet, Sweet Honey in the Rock. This ensemble collaborated with the composer in their performance of several of his compositions, both in their *a cappella* style and with piano accompaniment. Sweet Honey in the Rock creates the classic gospel trio sound for a "Speak to Me Jesus," with the late Pearl Williams-Jones on the piano. Recorded at the Smithsonian Institution's Baird Auditorium, December 1983, in a national conference on the work and music legacy of Reverend William Herbert Brewster.

Oh Lord and Master, Father and King  
Thou to whom Heaven praises doth sing  
Grant me a blessing, fresh from above  
Let me feel Thy burning love.

Speak to me Jesus, Tell me Thy will  
In that sweet voice so gentle and still  
While I am waiting here at the altar  
Give me that faith that never will falter  
Speak to me Jesus, speak to me now.

Lord I am pleading, humbly I bow  
Pour out Thy spirit on me just now,  
Then in that voice so tender and sweet  
Speak to me Jesus, here at Thy feet.

### **Kenneth Morris**

#### 12. **Does Jesus Care?**

Performed by Horace Clarence Boyer of the Boyer Brothers duo, backed by Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation.

Kenneth Morris's 1940 classic "Does Jesus Care?" introduced the repetitive vamp background "Yes, My Jesus Cares" to the gospel choir tradition.

*Solo:*

Does Jesus care, when I'm oppressed?  
I know my Jesus sees and cares  
Does Jesus care, when I'm oppressed?  
I know my Jesus, He sees and cares  
Well, oh, yes, I know He cares  
Oh, yes, I know my Jesus cares  
Oh, yes! I know He cares  
I know my Jesus, He sees and cares  
Does Jesus care, when I'm laid and down?  
I know my Jesus sees, and He cares  
Does Jesus care, when I'm almost to the ground?  
I know my Jesus, He sees and cares

Oh, yeah, I know, I know He cares.  
[repeated chorus background vamp]  
Yes, my Jesus cares, Yes, my Jesus cares  
Yes, my Jesus sees and cares.

#### 13. **Just a Closer Walk with Thee**

Performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock with Yasmeeen and Bernice Johnson Reagon trading high and low leads, with members Aisha Kahlil and Nitanju Bolade Casel singing Morris's repetitive vamp background.

This song was copyrighted in 1940, a banner year for Kenneth Morris. "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" is a Kenneth Morris arrangement of a song he learned from William R. Hurse. It was introduced at the 1944 National Baptist Convention to wide acclaim.

Just a closer walk with Thee  
Grant it, Jesus, if you please  
Daily walking close with Thee  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

I am weak but Thou art strong  
Jesus keep me from all wrong  
I'll be satisfied as long as I walk  
Let me walk close with Thee.

Through this world of toils and snares  
If I falter, Lord, who cares

Who with me my burdens shares, none but Thee  
Dear Lord, none but Thee.

When my feeble life is over  
Time for me won't be no more,  
Guide me gently, safely over,  
To Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore.

### **Roberta Martin**

#### 14. **God Is Still on the Throne**

Performed by Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation, with William Boyd, solo lead.

Roberta Martin recast an old hymn and created a new composition and a gospel standard with the Roberta Martin Singers rendering of "God Is Still on the Throne."

God is still on the throne  
Within your bosom you have the phone  
Where'er you walk, you're not walking alone  
Remember, God is still on the throne.

When you are distressed, oh, just call Him  
Oh, when you are oppressed, all you got to do is call Him  
When you, you get in doubt, and you can't find no way out  
Remember God is still on the throne.

### 15. God Specializes

Performed by composer Gloria Griffin, backed by Donald Vails and the Celebration Delegation.

In 1958, led by Gloria Griffin, the Roberta Martin Singers recorded Roberta Martin's arrangement of this work, and it took the gospel world by storm. More than three decades later, February 1993, Griffin revisited her composition and heightened her performance with a moving personal testimony about her struggles with cancer. She comes out of the testimony into a section where she and Donald Vails perform a call-and-response lead, backed by the Celebration Delegation.

#### *Chorus:*

God specializes and He will do what no other power can do.

#### *Solo:*

Have you any rivers that you think are uncrossable?

Have you any mountains that you can't tunnel through?

God specializes in things thought impossible  
And He will do what no other power—Holy  
Ghost power—can do.

Have you ever been on your bed of affliction

And the doctors, they have done all they  
could do?  
But you heard somebody say, "God, God,  
God, specializes  
In healing, in healing, in healing, all kinds of  
diseases."  
If you trust in Him, He'll do what no other  
doctor  
No other physician, mmmmm... can do.

But God, God, God, God specializes...  
everything...  
That I thought was impossible; oh, I got to  
trust in Him...  
But He will do... what no other power—Holy  
Ghost power—can do!

### 16. Precious Lord

Performed by Carolyn Bolger-Payne of the Philadelphia Ambassadors, directed by Evelyn Simpson Cureton.

Thomas Andrew Dorsey's most famous composition was published in 1932, composed as Dorsey struggled with the tragic loss of his wife and baby.

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let  
me stand  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn  
Through the storm, through the night, lead  
me on to the light

Take my hand, precious Lord, and lead me  
home.

When my way grows so drear', precious Lord,  
linger near  
Oh, when my life is almost gone  
At the river I stand, guide my feet and hold  
my trembling hand  
Take my hand, precious Lord, and I want You  
to lead me home.

### About the Artists

Horace Clarence Boyer, Ph.D. is a scholar, singer, composer, pianist, and Associate Professor of Music at the University of Massachusetts. As a gospel singer, he has performed with his brother, James Boyer, as the Boyer Brothers, with recordings on the Savoy and Nashboro record labels.

Gloria Griffin, gospel singer and songwriter, was a member of the world-famous Roberta Martin Singers.

Michelle Lanchester is a singer, songwriter, practicing Washington, D.C. attorney, and the former musical co-director of In Process..., a Washington, D.C.-based African American women's *a cappella* group.

Gwendolyn Cooper Lightner is an internationally renowned gospel pianist, teacher, and choral director, who introduced gospel piano to Los Angeles and served for a time as accompanist for Mahalia Jackson. She serves as pianist for the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A.

The Philadelphia Ambassadors Ensemble is a versatile choral ensemble, founded and directed by composer, singer, pianist, and organist, Evelyn Simpson Cureton.

Toshi Reagon is a contemporary songwriter, singer, guitarist, bassist, and producer, whose music has roots in the gospel, blues, and folk traditions. She resides in New York City where she leads her own postmodern, contemporary folk and rock and roll band.

Reverend Eugene Smallwood has been a pioneering gospel singer in Los Angeles, California since 1939. His work in gospel in California is legend. He is the surviving member of a trio of singers (with Reverend A. A. Peters and Reverend Earl Pleasant) who became known as the "Sons Of Thunder" during the 1940s, as gospel spread to the West Coast. At the time of the recording he continued to perform in Los Angeles and was pastor of the Opportunity Baptist Church, which he organized in 1946.



Sweet Honey in the Rock, a Washington, D.C.-based *a cappella* ensemble of African American women singers, was founded in 1973 by its artistic director, Bernice Johnson Reagon. The group has participated in several collaborations with the Smithsonian Institution, including the Bicentennial Festival of American Folklife, 1974-76, and the National Conference on the music of gospel composer The Reverend William Herbert Brewster. They performed on the Grammy Award-winning recording *Folkways: A Vision Shared*, a benefit album commemorating the songs of Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie.

Reverend Donald Vails is a native of Atlanta, Georgia, who directed his first choir as a twelve-year-old in the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. Rev. Vails is the national minister of music for the Gospel Music Workshop of America Mass Choir, founded by the late James Cleveland. He is also the director of church music at Ebenezer African Methodist Church in Fort Washington, Maryland.

Yasmeen is a Washington, D.C. native who is a soloist who also performs with her own trio. She is also a member of Sweet Honey in the Rock.

## Bibliography

Heilbut, Anthony. *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*. New York: Limelight Editions, [1971] 1989.

Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "We'll Understand It Better By and By": *Pioneering African American Gospel Composers*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. [1971] 1982.

## Selected Listening

If you want to hear more African American sacred music, here are a few suggestions:

### 1. Contemporary Gospel

If you have a local or regional radio station that plays gospel music, listen to it to learn which contemporary artists you particularly like. Then visit record stores in your community to find out which ones carry the best selection of African American sacred music, contemporary and historical. If you have an opportunity to travel to other cities, check out the gospel and sacred music sections of stores there.

### 2. Historical Recordings

Visit your local and regional record stores to find out which ones carry more traditional recordings of all kinds of music. Look for recordings of African American spirituals (sometimes found in the Classical or Vocal sections of the store). Check the Jazz and Folk Music sections for recordings by the artists you have heard on this recording. Many historical recordings are being reissued on CD. You might want to write to get on the mailing lists for the following catalogues:

Fantasy, Inc. This company is reissuing wonderful recordings from the Specialty Records archive: Tenth and Parker, Berkeley, CA 04710.

Malaco Music. This company now owns the Savoy Records catalogue. P.O. Box 9287, Jackson, MS 39286.

New World Records, 701 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10030.

Roots and Rhythm, 6921 Stockton Avenue, El Cerrito, CA 94530.

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, 414 Hungerford Drive, Suite 444, Rockville MD 20850.

### Selected Recordings of Classic Gospel Groups and Soloists:

The Caravans, *The Best of the Caravans*. Savoy Records (Malaco) 7012.

The Davis Sisters, *The Best of the Famous Davis Sisters of Philadelphia PA*. Savoy Records (Malaco) 7017.

Aretha Franklin, James Cleveland, and the Southern California Community Gospel Choir, *Amazing Grace*. Atlantic Records 1-906-2.

*The Gospel Sound of Spirit Feel*. Spirit Feel 1012.

*Gospel Warriors*. Spirit Feel 1003.

*The Great Gospel Women*. Shanachie 6004.

Mahalia Jackson, *Mahalia Jackson: Gospels, Spirituals and Hymns*, volumes 1-2. Columbia Records 47083, 48924.

*Jubilation! Great Gospel Performances*, volumes 1-3. Rhino Records 70288-70290.

Roberta Martin Singers, *The Best of the Roberta Martin Singers*. Savoy Records (Malaco) 7018.

Sallie Martin Singers/Cora Martin, *Throw Out the Lifeline*. SPCD 7043-2.

James Cleveland and the Southern California Community Choir, *Having Church*. Savoy Records (Malaco) 7099.

Sweet Honey in the Rock, *Feel Something Drawing Me On*. Flying Fish Records 375.

Clara Ward and the Ward Singers, *The Best of the Famous Ward Singers of Philadelphia, PA*. Savoy Records (Malaco) 7015.

#### **Credits:**

##### *Recording credits:*

Track 1, recorded December 13, 1992, by the National Public Radio *Wade in the Water* Production Team. Producer, Judi Moore Latta; engineers, Parris Morgan and Margo Kelly.

Track 2, recorded August, 1993, Water Front Studios, Hoboken, New Jersey. Producer, Toshi Reagon; engineer, Doug Conroy.

Track 3-4, 8-9, recorded February 6, 1993, Bias Studios, Springfield, Virginia. Producers, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Toshi Reagon; engineer, Mike Zook.

Track 5-7, 12, 14-15 recorded February 5, 1993, at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. Event producers, Niani Kilkenny and Lauren Rogers; recording producer, Judi Moore Latta; engineers, Art Steele, Renee Pringle, Parris Morgan.

Track 10 recorded October 26, 1993, Bias Studios, Springfield Virginia. Producer, Bernice Johnson Reagon; engineer, Bill McElroy.

Track 11 recorded December 17, 1982, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. Engineer, Art Steele.

Track 13 recorded February 6, 1993, Bias Studios, Springfield, Virginia. Producer, Bernice Johnson Reagon; mix producer, Toshi Reagon; engineer, Mike Zook.

Track 16 recorded February 4, 1993, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. Event producers, Niani Kilkenny and Lauren Rogers; recording producer, Judi Moore Latta; engineers, Art Steele, Renee Pringle, Parris Morgan.

Mastered by Airshow Inc., Springfield, Virginia. David Glasser, engineer.

Produced by Bernice Johnson Reagon and Toshi Reagon

Production coordinated by Matt Walters and Anthony Seeger

Cover painting by Al Smith

Cover design by Joan Wolbier

Design and layout by Carol Hardy.

*Wade in the Water*: A series on National Public Radio and four recordings on Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings:

#### **Volume I:**

### **African American Spirituals: The Concert Tradition**

#### **Volume II:**

### **African American Congregational Singing: Nineteenth-Century Roots**

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#### **Volume IV:**

### **African American Community Gospel**



# Smithsonian/Folkways

Folkways Records was founded by Moses Asch and Marian Distler in 1947 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In the ensuing decades, New York City-based Folkways became one of the largest independent record labels in the world, reaching a total of nearly 2,200 albums that were always kept in print.

The Smithsonian Institution acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987 to ensure that the sounds and genius of the artists would be preserved for future generations. All Folkways recordings are now available on high-quality audio cassettes, each packed in a special box along with the original LP liner notes.

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings was formed to continue the Folkways tradition of releasing significant recordings with high-quality documentation. It produces new titles, reissues of historic recordings from Folkways and other record labels, and in collaboration with other companies also produces instructional videotapes, recordings to accompa-

ny published books, and a variety of other educational projects.

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You can find Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings at your local record store. Smithsonian/Folkways, Folkways, Cook, and Paredon recordings are all available through Smithsonian/Folkways Mail Order, 414 Hungerford Drive, Suite 444, Rockville, MD 20850. Phone 301/443-2314; fax 301/443-1819 (Visa and MasterCard accepted).

For a free catalogue, write: The Whole Folkways Catalogue, Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, 955 L'Enfant Plaza Suite 2600, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560, phone 202/287-3262, or fax 202/287-3699.



*Top left: Lucie Eddie Campbell, gospel composer and singer. Photo by Luvenia George.*

*Top right: Reverend Charles Albert Tindley, gospel composer and singer. Photo courtesy of Tindley Temple.*



*Left: Kenneth Morris, gospel composer. Photo by Necie Morris.*