# the paschall brothers

## on the right road now

1. Ease My Troublin' Mind 4:36
2. Last Days 5:17
3. Joy 2:01
4. Remember Me 5:37
5. Jesus Gave Me Water (Lucie E. Campbell / Screen Gems EMI Music Inc., BMI) 3:30
6. Automobile (J. Archie / Songs of Universal Inc., BMI) 4:21
7. Final Edition (Ira Tucker / Songs of Universal Inc., BMI) 3:38
8. Rugged Cross (George Bennard) 5:14
9. I'll Be Satisfied 1:51
10. The Lord's Prayer (arr. Albert Hay Malotte / G. Schirmer Inc., ASCAP) 3:46
11. Church Folk (The Rev. Frank Paschall Sr.) 6:21
12. God Said He Would Move / On The Right Road Now 5:39
13. I Want to See Jesus 3:24

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

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**SFW CD 40176** 

# The Paschall Brothers: On The Right Road Now

*Joyce Marie Jackson*

The Paschall Brothers, a vocal quartet based in Hampton Roads, Virginia, celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary in 2006. They come from a long line of harmonizing songsters in the Tidewater tradition. Their CD *Paschall Brothers: Songs for Our Father* (2003) documented a quarter-century of performing sacred music. This new recording, *The Paschall Brothers: On The Right Road Now*, illustrates the group's ability to create lyrics and arrangements in carrying on a dynamic tradition.

## Definitions: From Four on the Floor to Five or More

As a subgenre of gospel music, African-American quartet music has a distinct history, performance style, and cultural and social roles. It developed in the 20th century from roots that reach back to the decades immediately after the Civil War. Redefined by popular culture in the 1930s and 1940s, it has returned to folk culture, as exemplified in groups like the Paschall Brothers.

Many vocal quartets evolved on the periphery of black churches, and they have continuously provided a conceptual and behavioral framework for religious ensembles of today. The earliest quartets were known as jubilee quartets; they consisted mostly of men. Unlike the practice of the world at large, where a musical quartet is an ensemble of four members or a musical composition for four voices or instruments, an African-American musical quartet is an ensemble of four to six or more voices, which sing four-part harmony unaccompanied or with limited instrumentation (i.e., guitar, bass, and drums). Such an ensemble can set a lead singer against four-part background harmony, or feature two lead singers, who alternate against a four-part background harmony.

Vocal quartet music is a distinct artistic form with a unique history and aesthetic. It grew out of the African-American university-singing movement, the minstrelsy tradition, and American sacred and secular music. Primary historical sources—newspapers, program notes, advertising print media, oral histories—illustrate and document the pervasiveness of the tradition, not only in African-American culture, but in American culture as a whole.

## Early Quartet Heritage: Universities, Minstrels, Barbershops

African-American quartet singing sprang up and proliferated from several hubs in the South. After the Civil War, Emancipation, and migration from rural to urban spaces, these hubs attracted black populations and provided space for the development of black culture. The main centers, most of which supported black institutions of higher learning, were Birmingham, Alabama; New Orleans, Louisiana; Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee; and Tidewater, Virginia—the southeastern tip of Virginia, where the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Elizabeth, James, and Nansemond rivers meet. The Tidewater area supports a complex mix of cultures and official jurisdictions.

Part of the challenge of Reconstruction was to help blacks participate in the postwar economy. The university-singing movement emerged when the Freedman's Bureau and several missionary societies established educational institutions for newly emancipated slaves. Most of these institutions were in the South. Many still thrive, including Fisk University in Nashville; Atlanta University, now Clark Atlanta University, in Georgia;

Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, now Hampton University, in Virginia; and Dillard, Xavier, and Southern Universities in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The American Missionary Association founded Fisk University in 1865 and the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868, and their immediate problem was how to obtain funds for new buildings, equipment, and instructors. At Fisk University in 1870, professor George L. White, university treasurer and choir director, decided to let a mixed ensemble of nine students, all of whom were former slaves, try to earn money for the university by performing in front of paying audiences. Beginning in 1871 under his direction, this company—later named the Fisk Jubilee Singers—made concert tours, not only in America, but also in Europe, starting in 1873 (Lovell [1972] 1986; Marsh [1880] 1971; Ward 2000). Following White's model, Hampton Institute in 1873 developed its own mixed ensemble, The Hampton Jubilee Singers, organized under the tutelage of Thomas P. Fenner, director of the institute's music department. Both ensembles presented programs dominated by spirituals. The success of their musical campaigns provided a financial cushion for the universities and brought fame to the singers and their conception of spirituals. The ensembles themselves became prototypes that influenced musical groups from other black educational institutions and communities.

By the 1890s, a second singing-tradition had developed in African-American colleges. Male jubilee quartets had become featured groups within choirs, and some stood out from the larger ensembles as the popularly favored group. The jubilee quartet-singing movement reached its zenith during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when most black colleges and normal and industrial schools organized to promote it. Newspaper clippings and concert programs of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in the Fisk University Archives show "that as early as 1873 a male quartet and a mixed quartet were extracted from the nine-member choir to present certain selections and medleys" (Ward 2000:92). From



1916 to 1925, the university sometimes sent two fundraising jubilee groups on tour: a quartet and a student choir (Richardson 1980:81).

In the late 1870s, Hampton Institute began sending out its own musical ambassadors, as evidenced in its archive's holdings of photographs of the Hampton Institute Quartette from the middle 1880s. In the early 20th century, after Dr. R. Nathaniel Dett had become the institute's musical director, its quartet was in such demand that the institute began hiring alumni to perform extensively on tour. During his time there, singing in four-part harmony was so popular on campus that two other student groups formed: the Junior Quartette sang on a weekly radio program in Newport News, and the Armstrong Quartette met the demand for church and civic programs. After graduation, members of one quartet remained and went on to become nationally famous on radio broadcasts and recordings as the Deep River Boys (Webb 2002:102). The Hampton Institute Quartette left an indelible legacy, including cylinder recordings of performances dating from about 1898.

In 1893, the Hampton Folk-Lore Society was established at Hampton Institute. Through this organization, the institute became one of the first in the United States to focus on preserving African-American traditional culture. Its collection of music, programs, songbooks, and related items documents the musical activities, performing groups, and performance practices before the recording era. The Hampton Institute Quartette's recordings from the 1930s and 1940s hint at what quartets sounded like before the advent of audio recordings:

> Between 1935 and 1937, Walter Garwick recorded fifteen superb renditions by the quartet, now housed in the Archive of Folk Song, part of the Archive of Folk Culture in the Library of Congress. Also, there are several performances dated between 1937 and 1942, by a Hampton Institute Sextette, which may have included the quartet. In April 1941, the Hampton Institute Quartette recorded nine songs for the Victor label,

> eight of which were placed in a four-record set entitled *Swing Low Spirituals*. They soon released *Favorite Negro Spirituals*, a five-record set on the Musicraft label. As always, the group held steadfastly to the material and style it had sung for decades. (Webb 2002:102)

Other jubilee quartets reinforced the popularity of the genre. These ensembles included quartets sponsored by Straight University (now Dillard University) in New Orleans; Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia; Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama; Utica Institute in Utica, Mississippi; and Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio. These quartets were the forerunners of 20th-century gospel quartets.

## Musical Style and Repertoire

The musical arrangements sung by jubilee quartets combined three musical sources: harmonized Western-influenced ensemble singing of jubilee choirs, barbershop quartet-singing, and call-and-response forms of African-American spirituals and worksongs. Usually the full group sang the chorus in harmony, and then the lead singer sang the verse against the group's repeated harmonized phrases. The emphasis was on well-blended ensemble singing with no instrumental accompaniment.

Most jubilee quartets performed in an unaccompanied folk-style but maintained harmonic simplicity, mixing African-American folk elements with those of the Western-European musical tradition. Most songs in their repertories were strophic, following the original forms of the folk versions. The calls and responses in their arrangements were sometimes short-phrased and sometimes long-phrased. The quartets greatly influenced the gospel quartets that ensued: "'Their renditions of 'Little David Play on Your Harp' and 'Poor Mourner Got a Home at Last' presaged the improvisation of such great gospel performers as the Soul Stirrers, the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama, and the Swan Silvertones" (Ward 2000:405). In achieving worldwide recognition, the jubilee quartets found a means of profiting in the segregated entertainment world of the 19th century.

In addition to the jubilee quartets, minstrel quartets contributed to the foundation of 20th-century black quartets. Minstrel shows, developed in the 1840s as entertainment by and for whites, fed Northern curiosity by creating and disseminating stereotypes of Southern blacks. They used African-American dances, songs, and routines, and employed characteristically African-American folk elements and forms. African Americans, restricted from performing in white shows, formed minstrel troops of their own. Companies with all-black casts appeared as early as the mid-1850s, but did not become widely popular until the 1870s, during Reconstruction and after the Fisk Jubilee Singers had launched their first campaigns (Toll 1974:195, 198).

During the 1870s, when minstrelsy was experiencing its greatest success, black and white troops competed to present the most "authentic" renditions of black life. As a result, attention became focused on religion, which until this time had not figured in the shows (Webb 2002:273). New musical collections, including *Slave Songs of the United States* (Allen, Ware, and Garrison 1867) and *Army Life in A Black Regiment* (Higginson 1870), sparked interest in black religious songs. Enterprising black minstrels and their managers introduced sacred jubilee music into their shows, as did Callendar's Georgia Minstrels in 1876 (Webb 2002:273). These performers' portrayals of slave life and plantations had a tremendous effect: from then on, black minstrel troupes always featured jubilee-singing quartets, which sang not only jubilees and spirituals, but also popular tunes of the day, novelty (comedy) songs, and plantation melodies.

Many African-American musicians found employment as minstrel-show quartet singers. Tom Fletcher, a singer and comedian, made his debut in show business in a fourteen-member minstrel troupe, which included the Bayou Quartett (Webb 2002:10). Composer W. C. Handy, the self-proclaimed father of the blues, recalled that he entered show business at the age of fifteen as the first tenor of a Mississippi quartet that performed in a minstrel troupe (Handy 1972:17–19). Similarly, in the early 1890s, ragtime composer Scott Joplin sang for a time in his home state of Missouri with a minstrel-show quartet (Schafer and Riedel 1973:180). Details in these accounts imply that many famous early black musicians launched their careers in minstrel-show quartets.

By 1900, black minstrelsy had developed shows that were more sophisticated, merging with tent shows, vaudeville, and black musical comedy. In these shows, quartets heard and gained firsthand familiarity with music in many places. Work was plentiful, and they used this medium to their advantage: they gained recognition, income, entertainment skills, and business acumen, all of which were otherwise unavailable to blacks of the time. While winning favor among black and white audiences, they integrated an entertainment world previously reserved for whites.

The pervasiveness of the jubilee quartet in minstrelsy and the importance of minstrelsy in the development of the entertainment business show why some present-day community jubilee and gospel quartets are associated with the more secular world. University jubilee quartets provided the model for close four-part harmony, an unaccompanied singing-style, and a sacred repertoire. The minstrel tradition provided the model for showmanship, humor, and entertainment. Community-based jubilee and gospel quartets combined practices from both traditions, to produce aesthetic criteria that often still characterize quartet singing today.

A minor antecedent of the gospel quartet tradition was shape-note singing (also



called sacred harp singing and fasola singing), in which four shapes designate the musical syllables *fa*, *sol*, *la* and *mi*, but this method of notating and "reading" music was not widespread among African Americans: in Louisiana and Mississippi, it prevailed only in the Mississippi Delta, and elsewhere it was vibrant only in parts of Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. It grew out of the New England singing-school movement and the Great Awakening, but it was not influential in the Tidewater area.

An antecedent of the gospel quartet tradition that has permeated both black and white communities is barbershop harmony singing. Recent scholarship (Abbott 1992; Henry 2001) has demonstrated that African-American communities have a much larger and more widespread barbershop tradition than previously thought. Several well-known black sacred and secular quartets—including the Mills Brothers, the New Orleans Humming Four, the Southern Stars, and the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartette—were established in neighborhood barbershops (Abbott 1992:291–292).

Early musicians associated barbershop music with blacks, and the earliest known reference to barbershop music, from 1900, is associated with black quartets (Abbott 1992:290–291). Since the 1880s and 1890s, blacks, including black minstrel-show troupes, harmonized spirituals, folksongs, and popular songs recreationally, and certain long-standing idiosyncrasies of the sound were emulated by white minstrel performers; however, because recordings of the white groups singing the barbershop style proliferated, the world at large came to associate the sound with white quartets. In Tulsa in 1938, the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement for Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Inc. (SPEBSQSA), was formed, and it excluded blacks until 1963 (Henry 2001:15).

Quartets developed their sound by singing in churches and singing recreationally outside of churches—in barbershops and community centers, in front of businesses, and literally on the streets. Henry Nellum, of the Peerless Four Quartet, spoke of his initial

exposure to quartet singing: "That's the way I started singing myself. . . . Yeah, you could always find a bunch on a street corner singing. You could meet them sometimes walking down the street singing, and they sounded so good, there'd be two or three dozen people strung up behind them" (Webb 2002:104). In 1934, the white bandleader Chick Ciccone was fascinated by the Four Pennies, a quartet consisting of boys aged eleven to fourteen, when he heard them performing on the streets in the heart of Norfolk's black commercial district. He adopted them, got them engagements in New York clubs, and sent them on a European singing tour (Webb 2002:104). Other venues for singing were radio stations, ferry boats, furniture stores, hotels, fairs, and community-center talent shows. Many talent shows were singing competitions among quartets—fierce and intense "song battles," which brought the best groups respect and identity.

Community-based quartets proliferated in the Tidewater region:

> At least 200 Hampton Roads quartets are known to have performed between World War I and the 1950s, many with poetic and descriptive names such as the Pearly Gates Quartet, the Heavenly Light Quartet, the Supreme Four, the Harmony Four, the Melody Quartet, the Watermelon Four, the Silver Moon Quartet, the Sons of Norfolk, and the Suffolk Jubilee Quartet. Men composed the membership of most of the quartets, although some groups had female members or were made up exclusively of women, such as the World's Best Female Quartet. (Webb 2002:103)

## Recordings, Broadcasts, Tours

By the 1930s, radio broadcasts, commercial recordings, and touring influenced the development and popularization of community quartets. The launching of race series and the acceleration of live radio broadcasts, often featuring black performers, exposed quartet singers to an audience beyond local communities.

In 1895, Columbia recorded on cylinder the first black group, the Standard Negro Quartette of Chicago. Victor Record Company recorded the first black sacred quartet on discs in 1902 (six single-sided discs of spirituals by the Dinwiddie Colored Quartet), but record companies did not record sacred male quartets again until the early 1920s, when the race labels discovered their market potential (Dixon, Goodrich, and Rye 1997:215). By the late 1920s, every "race record"—performed by blacks and marketed primarily or exclusively to black consumers—featured one or more jubilee quartets; during the 1930s, most sacred race records featured them (Dixon, Goodrich, and Rye 1997:215).

In the Tidewater area, in 1921, the Southland Jubilee Singers recorded four sacred songs for the OKeh label (based in New York City) and it was OKeh's first release of a record by an African-American quartet. In the 1924 session, the ensemble released one more sacred song, its last recording. Melvin Smith, of the Silver Leaf Quartet of Norfolk, composed and the quartet recorded "Sleep on, Mother" in 1928. From 1928 to 1931, the Southland Jubilee Singers recorded a dozen more sacred songs for OKeh, some of which they composed. Several Tidewater groups participated in Richman OKeh recording sessions in October 1929. Notably, the Golden Crown Quartet made four recordings, of which two were released; in 1949, the Golden Crowns signed with Aladdin and then recorded for them four times a year in New York (Webb 2002:104–106, 108).

The Golden Gate Quartet was preeminent on the East Coast during the golden years of jubilee quartet singing. In its vocal style, performance strategy, repertoire, productivity, and longevity, it set high standards, and its performances left a deep impression on many groups in and out of the Tidewater area. Its recording career in the United States lasted about fifteen years, starting with Victor's Bluebird label in August 1937 (Webb 2002:104–106, 108). After the late 1950s, when the golden age of quartets was ending, the ensemble

moved to France; it gave many performances and recorded many albums in Europe.

While under contract to one recording company, a quartet could record for another company only under a different name. Between 1921 and 1940, one quartet recorded more than 130 studio performances: while performing and recording sacred music, it was known as the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet; when recording secular music, it was known as the Norfolk Jazz Quartet. It was the most prolific group in commercial recordings from the Hampton Roads area before World War II (Webb 2002:110–111).

Record companies encountered steep competition from radio stations in the 1930s, mainly because of the single investment price and sometimes better fidelity. During that decade, some stations began devoting a few hours a day to black programming (Barlow 1999:51, 53; Rubman 1980:36). The Southernaires, said to be the first community-based African-American religious quartet to broadcast on radio, performed on a Sunday morning NBC network show for more than eleven years, perhaps starting in 1935 (there is disagreement about the year). This is in contrast to the university-affiliated Utica Institute Jubilee Quartet that had begun broadcasting earlier, in 1927, on an NBC network in New York, and was probably the first quartet to broadcast live (Funk 1985:24; Lornell 1995:21; Rubman 1980:39; Williams-Jones 1975:251). In Roanoke, Virginia, The N&W (Norfolk and Western Railroad) Imperial Quartet was broadcasting as early as 1928 over WDBJ. The Silver Leaf Quartette and the Golden Crown Quartet, both of Norfolk, were beginning their featured programs in radio broadcasting around the same time (Lornell 1995:20). By the late 1940s, many Hampton Roads quartets had appeared on fifteen-minute broadcasts on local stations such as WLPM and WLOW (Webb 2002:106–107).

During the war, decreased production of automobiles, gasoline rationing, and a shortage of rubber for tires, inhibited touring. A dispute between the musician's union and the record companies in 1944 and 1945 and the shortage of shellac basically shut the recording



industry down (Lornell 1995:25), and radiobroadcasting was the only unaffected aspect of quartet singing. According to the Reverend Samuel McCrary, The Fairfield Four, a quartet based in Nashville, Tennessee, broadcasted on WLAC for Sunway Vitamins from 1939 to 1956 (interview with author, Nashville, 18 July 1985; McCrary led the group). At the same time, the Four Harmony Kings, formed in West Virginia in 1938, began broadcasting on Sundays in Knoxville at WNOX; it changed its name to the Swan Silvertone Singers when the Swan Bread Company began sponsoring its show (Rubman 1980:88). In Louisiana, the Soproco Spiritual Singers signed a contract in 1940 to broadcast for the Soproco Soap Company on WWL in New Orleans, and the Zion Harmonizers broadcasted for a shoe store. Some successful groups had no corporate sponsor. According to the Reverend Burnell J. Offlee, The Zion Travelers Spiritual Singers in Baton Rouge are the oldest group still on the air, performing every Sunday morning since 1946 at WIBR, a station that normally targets white audiences (Offlee, interview with author, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 15 September 1983; Washington, interview with author, New Orleans, 28 April 2006).

Female quartets also went on the air. The Harps of Melody, based in Memphis, had radio spots in the 1950s at WDIA, in the 1960s at WLOK, in the 1970s at KWAM, and in the 1980s at WSMS, the radio station of the University of Memphis (Clara Anderson, interview with author, 20 July 1985; Bowman 1998).

The organization of these community quartets depended on family, religious, occupational, and social affiliations. Teachers or students at African-American educational institutions trained many community quartets. Some quartets had a designated trainer in the group, and others imitated groups heard on radio and commercial recordings. Most community-based groups consisted of singers that did not have any former training in Western European musical concepts. For more on the creation of quartets and the training process, see Jackson 1988.

Many other professional and amateur quartets have performed on radio, further popularizing the jubilee quartet tradition in America and Europe. The rise of gospel radio programming and the commercial recording industry in the first half of the 20th century propelled quartet singing into a new era of popular culture. The "touring circuit" eased this process. It was formed in several ways, including arrangements by relatives and other associates, singing organizations, and promoters.

Many quartet members considered themselves Christian evangelists, and not all were performing just to entertain and be compensated; however, most performances aimed to evoke emotional responses from audiences. To remain successful and compete for public praise, quartets over time made drastic changes in their styles. Some added instrumental accompaniments. When they performed in secular contexts for white audiences, they employed secular songs, humor, variety, and showmanship. All these influences gave rise to new directions in the development of the tradition.

Quartets declined in the 1950s. The crossover phenomenon of sacred soloists, and the fact that entire groups switched to popular music, were among the primary factors that led to the decline. African-American popular styles were highly influenced by sacred quartet styles. Consequently, sacred singers who crossed over had minimal adjustments to make.

Other factors that caused the decline of quartet performances were radio broadcasts and commercial recordings, questionable lifestyles, failure to adapt to current performance styles, and competition from new gospel groups and choirs. Some of the factors that had popularized the quartets contributed to their decline. A handful of gifted groups are determined to continue the tradition. One notable group is Hampton Roads's own, the Paschall Brothers.



## The Paschall Brothers

The source of much of the authority radiated by the Paschall Brothers remains with the group: Their spiritual mentor and musical source, the Reverend Frank Paschall Sr., died in 1999, but the quartet continues his legacy. On this CD, you can hear the foundation of harmony singing, technique, and style born of a lifetime of experience, which the Paschall patriarch instilled in his progeny.

The Reverend Frank Paschall Sr., born in 1923, was from Henderson, North Carolina. In 1942, at the age of nineteen, he moved to Tidewater, Virginia. He had already been performing with quartets. The early 1940s was the golden era of quartet singing. Many groups were active, though wartime shortages of vehicles and rubber hampered their touring; however, quartets performed locally and some toured by train. The Reverend Frank Paschall Sr. had played a part in this history, so when he arrived in the Tidewater area, it was a logical progression for him to continue. In the ensuing years, he performed with several quartets, including the Somocs, the Keys of Harmony, and the Gospel Vocalaires. In 1953, while he was a member, the Gospel Vocalaires recorded "I'll Be Satisfied" and "Call Me Anytime" on the Gotham label.

The Reverend Frank Paschall Sr. served as lead and background singer in other groups, but his greatest contribution to the Tidewater quartet legacy was to train his sons. He established the Paschall Brothers in 1981 with five of his sons: Frank Jr., the Reverend Tarrence Paschall Sr., Wendell, Dwight, and William. After he died, the lead vocal position went primarily to Tarrence. Several brothers left the group, and two remained. The five members of the group at present are the Reverend Tarrence Paschall Sr., Tarrence Paschall Jr., Frank Paschall Jr., Renard Freeman Sr., and Renard Freeman Jr. As in many quartets, these singers are versatile: as "utility singers," each can sing any of several parts. The two

youngest, Tarrence Jr. and Renard Jr., were musically active before joining the group. Tarrence Jr. played keyboards, and Renard Jr. played keyboards and drums in high school; and they both played keyboards in their church, an African Methodist Episcopal Church. One of them usually gives the pitch to start a song in performances. In a phone interview, Tarrence Sr. stated, "They are usually very accurate. . . . *A cappella* singing is very hard, and some people and groups will slide up or down off pitch, but we usually end up on it." He reminisced: "Coming up, we had to learn everybody's part. That was the way our father taught us. Different songs have different flavors, but you try to use someone who was good and comfortable at a particular pitch, but you still had to know the other parts and what was going on around you. That makes a good singer, and that was the way we were taught."

Major influences on the Paschall Brothers have been The Temptations, the Swan Silvertones, Sam Cooke and The Soul Stirrers, and the Street Corner Symphony, better known as the Persuasions. When the boys first came to sing for their father to show him that they were ready as a performing group, they sang the Persuasions' arrangements of "Buffalo Soldier" and the "Lord's Prayer." They impressed him by performing almost exact renditions of these arrangements.

The Paschall Brothers broke out of the mold of the typical Hampton Roads church-scene quartet. In addition to performing at churches, they perform at schools, community centers, social and family gatherings, and festivals in the Tidewater area and elsewhere. Some of these venues include the Tidewater Gospel Festival at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, and the National Folk Festival in Richmond, Virginia. The group has performed at the Lowell Folk Festival and the Roots of American Music Festival at Lincoln Center. It has been featured at the Kennedy Center for the Homegrown (a concert series) and at the Library of Congress in the American Folklife Center's annual concert series.

As the inheritor of one of the richest regional quartet sounds, the Paschall Brothers have a strong commitment to the unaccompanied-harmony aesthetic. Rochelle Walke, a member of the Peerless Four Quartet of Norfolk for more than fifty years, explained the reason for their longevity: "They [the Peerless Four] learned to sing both styles, the old style and the new style. . . . They can sing either one. On programs you probably start off with the old style; then you change to the new style. You sing classic, you sing jubilee, you sing spirituals, and you sing gospel. You sing semiclassic. It depends on where you singing at" (Webb 2002:111). This observation clearly explains why the Paschall Brothers will be around for a long time, because they perform in the old and the new styles, although still without instruments.

The older Paschall brothers have worked with Jon Lohman, Folklife Director of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, in its apprentice program, through which they have continued doing what they do while teaching it to others—their sons and other young people. The students, Tarrence Jr. and Renard Freeman Jr., with other apprentices in the program, learned more jubilee songs and their arrangements—basically what their grandfather had taught their fathers. The Reverend Tarrence Paschall Sr. recalls: "Our father, now our missing link, rehearsed three to four hours sometimes over the phone when he was singing with groups. Sometimes the other fellows would call him just to get a pitch. If you can find someone with the same passion and ability, you can do anything." In a time when the overwhelming trend is away from traditional sacred musical forms and toward more contemporary gospel music, the Paschall Brothers' commitment to traditionally based unaccompanied gospel quartet singing is a remarkable ability and a passion—and it is extraordinary.

# The Paschall Brothers: On The Right Road Now

*An appreciation by Jon Lohman*

The Paschalls are firmly rooted in a long tradition of fine Tidewater quartets, beginning with the Hampton Institute Quartette and followed by countless others, including the Silver Leaf Quartet, the Four Pennies, the Golden Crown Quartet, and perhaps most famously the Golden Gate Quartet. This illustrious history has long attracted attention from gospel fans, rare-record collectors, and music historians. The work of these giants has greatly influenced the Paschall Brothers, but the Paschalls attribute their style to the man they call simply "the Reverend"—their father, the Reverend Frank Paschall Sr., who, from the 1940s on, sang in several Tidewater quartets, including the Singing Somocs and the Keys of Harmony. In 1953, his Gospel Vocalaires recorded "I'll Be Satisfied," which the current group revives on this recording. In 1981, he formed a group, The Paschalls, with his sons, Frank Jr., Tarrence, and Billy, who backed him up until he passed away in 1999. Several years later, they decided to re-form as the Paschall Brothers. "Our father would have wanted us to carry on," Tarrence told me, "and that's exactly what we're going to do."

I met the Paschalls during their rebirth, and together we produced their first CD, *Songs for Our Father*. A great challenge of the project was identifying the sources of the arrangements, for in nearly every case, the Paschalls had learned their music arrangements from their father, and they were unaware of how he had learned them. After extensive research employing the services of Kip Lornell, Vaughan Webb, and other authorities on the genre, we were pleasantly surprised to discover that in nearly every case, the arrangement was, in fact, the Reverend Mr. Paschall's own, and that he had even penned a few classic originals, including "Church Folk," which appears on this recording.

Three original members of the Paschall Brothers—the Reverend Tarrence K. Paschall Sr., Frank Paschall Jr., and Tarrence's brother-in-law, Renard Freeman—are now joined by two "apprentices," Renard Jr. and Tarrence Jr., whose bass parts particularly shine on this recording. Together, they continue a tradition that has long flourished in Hampton Roads. While audiences continue to marvel at the intricate harmonies and often fast-paced arrangements, the Paschalls will be the first to remind them that at its core, this music is about "lifting up the Lord," using nothing other than the instrument that he gave us: the human voice. "Now, drums, pianos, guitars, we don't have as of yet," Tarrence Sr. likes to joke on stage, "so tonight what you see is what you get. Can I get an amen?"

* * * * *

I had not yet met the Paschall Brothers when I knocked on the Reverend Tarrence Paschall's door in Chesapeake, Virginia, one summer evening in 2002. The Virginia Folklife Program was about to embark on its Apprenticeship Program, and I wanted it to include a modern-day Tidewater gospel quartet. The Tidewater area had produced more than two hundred unaccompanied gospel quartets in the century since the Civil War. Many of them had enjoyed international acclaim, yet only a handful of Tidewater quartets are singing today.

The Reverend Tarrence Paschall Sr. opened the door with a welcoming smile that has become familiar to me in the years since, and led me and my summer intern to the room where the five members of the Paschall Brothers and five "apprentices" were

waiting. I began to outline the details of the Apprenticeship Program, only to realize that the apprenticeship had, in many ways, already begun. "What's your pitch?" Tarrence would call out to each teenager. "That's what our dad used to say," he later explained; "it didn't matter what you were doing, whether you were eating dinner, in the shower, or what have you, you'd better know your pitch." Meanwhile, I had finished my own pitch to get them to participate in the program, and figured it was probably time for us to leave. "Wait," Tarrence stopped us as we started up from our chairs, "You guys have driven a long way. Let's sing them one or two."

In my tenure as Director of the Virginia Folklife Program, and in my previous years of living in such musical hotbeds as New Orleans and Chicago, I've had the pleasure of witnessing many memorable performances in concert halls, festival stages, and other venues, large and small, but I may never have witnessed a more scintillating performance than the one the Paschalls put on for us that evening. I'd later learn to expect as much from them, having watched them sing with the same level of intensity whether they were performing in front of large crowds at such esteemed venues as Lincoln Center, the National Folk Festival, and the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, or in front of a handful of elementary-school teachers at a Saturday afternoon workshop. Regardless of the venue or the situation, the Paschalls are unflappable. Watching them perform, one can see that they attend to their craft with joy and exuberance, and that they are clearly singing to a greater, higher audience.



# Track notes

*by Jon Lohman and Joyce Marie Jackson*

### 1. Ease My Troublin' Mind

"Oh, this is one that we used to sing in the church choir, back when we were just little bitty boys," the Reverend Tarrence Sr. remembers. He sings the lead on this call-and-response number, which the quartet added to its regular repertoire in 2004, after giving it a new arrangement. "We slowed it down a lot from the old choir version," Frank Jr. adds; "you know, so these young fellas can keep up!"

This is a traditional gospel song in simple quadruple time, with an introduction, a call-and-response section, and a unison section, and it all ends in G minor. The lead singer is the first tenor, whose part recalls the hard gospel-shouting or preaching style. The song starts with a short nontextual line performed solo by the first tenor, after which the others enter to complete the nontextual solo phrase. The choral responses are often harmonized, but unison singing is occasionally employed. The tempo is moderate, reflecting the texts and the mood.

### 2. Last Days

"Last Days" was in the Paschalls' original repertoire, led by their father. "This was one of the very first songs our father taught us," Tarrence remembers; "it's something he used to say: that we're living in the last days." Tarrence, now a minister himself, sings the lead in place of his father. Like many songs in the Tidewater quartet tradition, the main chorus of this song comes directly from the Bible, in this case from the second book of Timothy: "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come."

The lead tenor sings in gospel-shouting style. Prominent overlapping of solo and background lines gives the music a contrapuntal feel. In some sections, solo and background parts are of equal impor-

tance; in others, the lead singer sings the text while the background supports with nontextual lines. Melodic phrases are short, but are repeated with variation. The music ends with all five voices in unison.

### 3. Joy

The Paschalls learned this song from a recording by one of their favorite performers, Sam Cooke, and his Soul Stirrers. As with all the Paschall Brothers' Sam Cooke–inspired numbers, the lead is sung by Renard Freeman, whose voice is remarkably similar to Cooke's. "I've always tried to emulate Sam Cooke," Renard explains: "he's just always inspired me."

A notable feature in this arrangement is that the bass line is clear and distinct, sometimes using the traditional "pumping" or "walking bass" style. In the background, the first tenor and baritone move in note-against-note harmonies, while the bass line has rhythmic and melodic independence. Four-part counterpoint results when the lead and the background lines overlap. The music ends with a unison section.

### 4. Remember Me

This is a hymn that is usually sung in Baptist churches as a long-meter song, a surge, or a lining-out song. The Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet recorded it twice (in 1938 for Bluebird and 1943 for Thesaurus), and Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers recorded it in 1957 (for Specialty). The Paschalls know it as an altar call, a song that members of the congregation sing on their way to the altar.

It is also called a harmony song because the rhythm is slow, the syllables are drawn-out, the melody is melismatic (with many notes to one syllable), and most chords are held for a long time. In harmony songs, the lead and background singers demonstrate their breath-control during chordal changes and in the precision of their harmonizing. Here, the solo part is in free rhythm (a singing-speaking style), and the choral section is in a stricter meter. The slowness of the tempo makes the music solemn and prayerful. The chorus is partly nontextual, with just humming; this call-and-response section is followed by a unison *amen*, which ends each verse.



### 5. Jesus Gave Me Water

This is an arrangement of a song performed by Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers, and it was the title song of one of their albums. (Also, the Pilgrim Travelers recorded it in 1949 for Specialty.) According to the Paschalls, most groups avoid singing arrangements of it because of their difficulty. The Paschalls first introduced their Sam Cooke–inspired numbers into their sets, as Renard put it, "to fill in the gaps." Tarrence explains: "When we needed a song, I'd just say 'Renard, lead us on one of those Sam Cookes,' and he could do it."

This is a lively piece in A-flat and in simple quadruple time. The background plays a subordinate role, and the solo verses reiterate the same melody with little variation. A striking feature is the syncopated four-part harmony that terminates each verse. Verses vary in text, tonal structure, background repetition of "He gave me water," and vocables (nonsense syllables), here sounding like horns. Many quartets use background sounds to imitate instruments including accelerating locomotives, church bells, brass-band instruments, and boat and train whistles. These effects add intensity, texture, and contrast.

### 6. Automobile

This song, also known as "Christian Automobile," is a Dixie Hummingbird arrangement and one of the Paschall Brothers' signature songs, but it is here performed in a slower tempo than most recordings. It is another song that the Paschalls sang with their father. It is now led by Tarrence.

This arrangement is in A minor, simple quadruple time, and ABA form. The metaphors in the lyrics are striking. The lead and the background complement each other: in the first section, background lines are longer than the lead, and are simply a completion of the lead's phrase; in the second section, the solo line becomes prominent, as the soloist uses rhythmic and melodic improvisation to narrate the story, while the background adds interjections in harmony. The lead joins the background to end the piece in four-part harmony in C minor. Interesting features are the lead's improvisation and the background's sup-

porting and punctuating chords. This track is a great example of a jubilee-style novelty song, and young audiences love it.

### 7. Final Edition

Like track 6, this song is based on a Dixie Hummingbird arrangement, one of only two songs released by them in 1959 on Peacock. It is a novelty allegory in praise of the Bible.

The performance is in a moderate tempo in 6/8 time. The arrangement features the soulful lead vocals of the oldest Paschall brother, Frank Jr., and a nice feature is the lowered third in the background harmony. The "doowops" in the background are from the classic jubilee style.

### 8. Rugged Cross

This is a standard hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross," which here receives a refreshing interpretation within the traditional style. The Reverend Tarrence Paschall Sr. called it a prayer-meeting song. Renard Freeman sings lead.

The song, in compound duple time, starts with a slow but strictly metered introduction, performed by the lead singer. This is followed by a section performed by all singers in homophony with one part dominating: the lead singer gives out the main melody, supported with nontextual lines by the others. While two parts (first tenor and baritone) move in note-against-note harmonies, the other two parts (lead voice and bass) have rhythmic and melodic independence. The result is the impression of contrapuntal texture. Where the four parts have equal roles, the result sounds like a chorale.

### 9. I'll Be Satisfied

The Paschalls added this song to their repertoire after hearing an early 1950s recording of their father singing it with the Gospel Vocalaires. "Vaughan Webb, from Ferrum College, gave us the recording," Tarrence explains, "and we hadn't ever sung it with him before. It's truly been a blessing to get to sing it now."

The joy and liveliness of this piece depicts the title. The music is in a simple duple time and in G major, with the background rhythmic *wop-wop-wop* in the classic jubilee style. Its form is ABAB'AB"A. Unlike the other pieces, it starts with a refrain (A) involving all parts, though the first tenor sings the first note. The parts are of equal strength, and there are noticeable contrapuntal entries of voices. The verses (B) are performed solo, after which all singers join in the refrain.

### 10. The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer was the first song that the Paschalls worked on when they reconvened their group after their father's passing. This arrangement had been made and recorded by one of the Paschalls' influential groups—the Persuasions. Other quartets have given it a similar treatment on their recordings: the Heavenly Gospel singers (in 1937 for Bluebird), the Pilgrim Jubilee Singers (in 1927 for Vocalion), and the Southernaires (in 1941 for Decca).

The Paschall Brothers perform the prayer in free rhythm, in a moderate and then extremely slow tempo. A solo nontextual line attracts a background response that is also nontextual. Phrases are shared between the lead and the background singers. The "amen" is shared in the same way, with the lead singer sounding the first syllable and the chorus responding with "men" to complete the word. The text and tempo set up a prayerful mood.

### 11. Church Folk

"We call this our backdoor song," Tarrence jokes, "'cuz you know you're probably going to offend *somebody*." This song is a commentary on the modern-day church and church members. "Our father had a great sense of humor," Frank Jr. remembers, "and he used to say, 'we're not trying to judge: we're just being observant!'" The Paschalls often end their sets with this number, which they can stretch to twenty minutes if necessary. "There are many more verses to this song," Tarrence Jr. reports; "our father observed quite a few things!"

This song serves for comic relief and variety. It is similar to "The People Don't Do Like They Used to Do," recorded by First Revolution based in New Orleans for Laser Light (1997). It is a lively piece, in which the lead singer and the other

four parts are quite distinct. The solo line, in a song-speech style in free rhythm, is performed over background harmonies in strict rhythm using nontextual lines. Melodic and rhythmic independence in the voices make the music sound contrapuntal. A striking feature is the lead singer's narrative message, performed over the background response.

### 12. God Said He Would Move / On The Right Road Now

"God Said He Would Move" and "On The Right Road Now" have similar tempos, rhythmic structures, and positive messages, so the Paschalls decided to sing them together one evening on a program. Now, they always perform them together. They provide a nice stylistic contrast between the lead vocals of Frank Jr. and Reverend Tarrence, and they invite audience participation. The arrangement is in B minor, and has a narrow range, revolving around three tones.

### 13. I Want to See Jesus

The Paschalls first heard this song from one of their father's gospel records, featuring Robert Blair and the Violinaires out of Detroit. This song was recorded by other quartets, including the Tidewater's own Golden Gates Quartet. This arrangement features the bass work of one of the "next generation" of Paschalls—Tarrence Jr.

This is the only track on this compact disc in simple triple time. The lead singer is followed by a background entry that alternates between unison and harmonies. The four parts are distinct, and the arrangement is in G minor with a narrow range, revolving around four notes.



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## About the Authors

**Joyce Marie Jackson,** folklorist and ethnomusicologist, is an associate professor in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, and has written extensively on African-American sacred quartets.

**Jon Lohman** is the Director of the Virginia Folklife Program at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, which documents, presents, and supports the state's cultural traditions. Recordings he has produced for the VFH include the Paschall Brothers' first release, *Songs for Our Father*, and bluegrass, old-time, and gospel recordings as part of its Crooked Road Series.

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