Success and Growth: Black Gospel Music Restoration Project

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OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Gospel's Got the Blues

By ROBERT DARDEN

Waco, Tex.

AT the Grammy awards on Sunday, viewers saw the marriage of old-time gospel and new: the classic artists Mavis Staples and the Blind Boys of Alabama performed a medley with a young musician, Kanye West, that included Mr. West's gospel-tinged hip-hop song, "Jesus Walks."

Blessed with a rock-solid foundation, contemporary gospel is thriving. In the past decade, new releases have been selling copies in the millions - a major milestone in a musical genre that emerged in the 1930's, when the songwriter Thomas Dorsey set the words of Sunday morning to the music of Saturday night. But the early gospel may soon be lost forever. Although albums by the legendary Mahalia Jackson are easy to find on CD, of the thousands of tracks recorded by less known greats like Clara Ward, the Sensational Nightingales, the Roberta Martin Singers, Sallie Martin, the Georgia Peach and the Spirit of Memphis, only a few are available.

Why is this music so difficult to find, or even hear, today? Although small gospel labels still release classics, and reissue labels like Document Records and Collectables have repackaged some Golden Age music, these companies don't have the wide distribution of the major labels and mostly depend on mail and Internet orders. In fact, catalogs of early gospel labels are mostly owned by the large corporations that dominate the music industry. For the most part, these companies have released only a few classic albums on compact disc.

For an unabashed fan like me, it's a painful situation. I realize that no corporation is going to put out albums just to please a few aficionados, but they may not realize that many people want to hear this music. Each time I do a radio interview and play a classic gospel song, the phone lines immediately light up. The callers need to discuss what this music has meant to them. They invariably ask where they can buy it and most of the time I have to tell them they can't.
Black Gospel Music Restoration Project

• Black gospel music – American treasure

• Foundation for:
  – Blues
  – Jazz
  – Ragtime
  – Rock and Roll
  – Country

• Vanishing – 75% of recordings lost
Black Gospel Music Restoration Project

• **Royce** gift – 2006
  – Music digitization person
  – Metadata librarian
  – Start-up equipment

• **Riley** gift – 2008
  – Construction of digitization center

• **Prichard** gift – 2009
  – Ongoing operations
2014 Pruitt Symposium

Invitation

• Come join in!

• “Marching to Zion: Celebrating and Preserving Black Sacred Music”

• October 23-25, 2014

• Baylor University, Waco
Smithsonian Institution

- National Museum of African American History and Culture, November 2011
  Robert Darden and Tim Logan
- Met with leaders & described collection and played samples
- Invited Dr. Dwandalyn Reece to attend 2013 symposium
- NMAAHC announced materials from BGMRP will be part of the museum starting in 2015
National Black History Museum to Include Baylor University Gospel Music Collection

by Ronald Roach

When the National Museum of African American History and Culture opens in 2015 on the National Mall in Washington, Baylor University will have made a valuable contribution to the new museum by allowing access to the school’s renowned Black Gospel Music Restoration Project.

This past December, the Smithsonian Institution announced that a significant portion of the Black Gospel Music Restoration Project’s digital collection will be included in the new museum’s Musical Crossroads exhibition, which will present the story of African-American music from the arrival of the first Africans in North America to the present day.

“As Darden and his team digitized and preserved the music, they produced a wealth of documentation about the songs and their authors, and this wealth will be available to researchers and to the museum visitors who come to see it,” said project director Robert Darden.

Project director Robert Darden says the four-decade period that the project covers is known as the “Golden Age of Gospel,” during which the music partly came under the influence of and reflected the American civil rights movement.
Gospel Numbers (Feb. 2014)

- 2,242 albums digitized (78s, 45s, 33s)
- 8,196 images
- 4,740 access files (tracks either online, or ready to go online this year)
- Digital archive size: 1.9TB
- Catalog backlog: 1,006
- Digitization Backlog: 349
THE MIGHTY WONDERS
of Aquasco, Maryland
Sidney Contee, Manager

MC-8991 A
(18940)

Side 1
Time 2:16

OLD SHIP OF ZION
(Spiritual)
John Stewart, Jr.,
Solo.st

Mark
custom records
Box 3671 / Arlington, Virginia 22203
Q & A

http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/
http://baylor.edu/lib/gospel/