

In The Spirit No. 1 and No. 2

NOTES BY
BERNARD
KLATZKO

a 2 volume
survey of
sanctified
& country
gospel music
featuring
32 rare,
vintage
recordings

**FOR LOANING US
RARE 78s
WE THANK:**

DOUG JYDSTRUP

PETE KAUFMAN

BERNARD KLATZKO

JAMES MCKUNE

WILLIAM THOMPSON

GAYLE DEAN WARDLOW

AND

JEFF TARRER
(2665 Vineville Avenue,
Macon, Georgia.)

Recordings selected by Mr. Klatzko

Production: Bill Givens

Design: Bill Givens and Pete Whelan

Cover Photo: Ann Charters

PIONEER COLLECTORS

I opened the door of my Brooklyn apartment. James McKune, ex-newspaper reporter and fiery individualist, stood in the frame on one leg, like an adult whooping crane.

Ignoring all the conventions of formal or informal greetings, he moved swiftly into the room, speaking non-stop all the way. Jim, the thinnest man I ever met, and nearing his 50th year, carried a load of records under his arm - Negro religious records circa 1929 from his own collection. These numbered about 25 and Jim left them with me to listen to at my leisure.

He showed up every week for the next six months bringing a few more records and taking home a few. With each visit, I was caught up more and more in Jim's enthusiasm for particular performances. Some of the music was immediately impressive while others didn't take hold until repeated listenings. I knew I was completely hooked when I began using superlatives and sweeping generalizations in describing my feelings toward the music. "'Fifty Miles of Elbow Room' by McGee is the greatest congregational record ever made! The best sanctified piano on record can be heard on McGee's 'He Is The Saviour For Me.' The finest country religious group is McIntorsh & Edwards, Only Elder Bryant's 'Watch Ye.....' surpasses McIntorsh & Edwards for sheer exuberance! The greatest vocal and guitar performer by far is Charlie Patton."

This resorting to hyperbole was entirely new for me. I was a jazz collector and although I had my preferences, I had never gone off at the deep end. To throw caution to the winds, to deride the taste-makers, to explode with a passion over music -- this was exhilarating!

McKune at my side, affected my sensory perception like a snort of LSD. The music was sharper, clearer. The wax mysteriously dropped from my ears.

McKune was never at a loss for words. His tongue was as quick as his mind and he talked incessantly during, between and instead of the music. His monologues invariably brought out many interesting and unknown facts. Jim was a jazz collector but unlike the many other jazz collectors, he started collecting religious and blues discs in the early 1940's. Although one of the pioneers in religious and blues collecting, he wasn't alone. He traded discs and information with Robert Waller of the west coast whose taste was first rate. Waller sold most of his collection in the early 1960's, parting with such gems as Patton's "When Your Way Gets Dark" and "Dry Well Blues" (both discs are only copies extant), and then disappeared in the country around Fresno. Other early collectors of blues and religious music were Ellis Horne, the famous clarinetist with Lu Watters Yerba Buena Jazz Band and Pete Kaufman, Art Hodes' barrelhouse-piano protege. Harry Smith too, collected all country music, White and Negro, and finally gave his collection to the New York Public Library. The highlights of this collection can be heard on "Anthology of American Folk Music", Folkway FP 253.

We owe the preservation of Negro "country" music to these pioneers, all non-conformists; a necessary attribute in the face of the overwhelming interest in jazz records and jazz history during those years.

HISTORY, Introduction

In making the selections for these albums, my objective was to choose the religious records that I liked the most, musically. My taste is Negro "country" oriented, and the best in this genre, blues and religious, were recorded "commercially" between 1926 and 1934. There are very few, if any, (perhaps Son House and Bukka White) field recordings that stand up to the commercial "race" records.

I purposely omitted several great records that have already been reissued. "Fifty Miles of Elbow Room" by McGee (Folkways FP 253) "Better Things For You" by Memphis Sanct, Singers (Folkways FP 253) "Let Your Light Shine On Me" by Blind Willie Johnson (Folkways RF 10).

While the selections were being made, a pattern was emerging. "My" best were always either solo and duet singing with guitar or group singing with instrumental accompaniment - but here's the rub - the groups (there are six) are all "sanctified." They all belong to the Church of God In Christ or Church of God, Holiness.

Although the records were chosen for their musical worth, ignoring completely historical significance, I found that the Church of God In Christ, by its ubiquitous presence, had made its historical importance felt.

The Pace, the Utica, the Fisk, all Jubilee (except Jubilee Gospel Team on Paramount Records); Rev. Gates and most others all pale before the pulsating rhythm of Church of God In Christ singers.

The Church of God In Christ deserves a more erudite historian and more tireless researcher than me.

But for what it's worth, what follows is an attempt to acquaint you somewhat with its origin.

HISTORY, Pre-Civil War

To begin to understand the formation of the Church of God In Christ, we must first have some knowledge of the history of the revivalist movements in the South.

"Dissenting" was a recurring phenomenon in English Protestant sects settled in America. The first wave of evangelist zeal, known historically as the "Great Awakening", raged intermittently through a long generation before the revolution and another generation after.⁵

Evangelist preachers held extravagantly emotional revivals and did everything possible to dissuade people from indulging in pride and fashions, vain talking and jesting, cursing, drunkenness, adultery, etc.⁵

It was mainly a movement in the lower classes against the upper and middle class establishment.⁵

In Kentucky, wandering preachers attracted such crowds from such distances and for such protracted periods that they had to bring food and camping equipment - thus "camp meeting."⁵

In the summer of 1801, in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, a camp meeting attracted an estimated crowd of 20,000. Eyewitnesses reported people in shouts of ecstasy, sobs, groans, etc.⁵

Camp meetings spread into North Carolina in 1802, Georgia in 1803, Mississippi in 1804 and then throughout the South.⁵

NEGROES IN THE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

The most startling contributions of the Old South to religion was the reconciliation of Christianity with slavery. During the early years of the Republic, Southern churches condemned slavery. The mood of the Southern churches, however, was reversed after cotton became profitable and after abolitionists started their agitation. Slavery in fact was declared to be a positive good with the sanction of Holy Writ.²

Slaveholders suppressed the independent African Methodist Church, founded probably before the Revolution, and believers in religious freedom were forced to move out of the South. Negro religious activities were placed directly under White control.²

Negroes were especially welcomed at camp meetings, which swept through the South between 1797 and 1805, since they were likely to respond most promptly to the challenge of the pulpit.²

The slaves were taught such scriptural injunctions as "Servant Obey Thy Master"; "Render Therefore Unto Caesar the Things Which Are Caesar's." They were also taught that it was the duty of the Christian to endure tribulations and trials of this world in order to await fulfillment in the world to come. As a reward, they were allowed to hold religious assemblies independent of those held under White supervision. Although these congregations were highly emotional, they gathered for the same purposes as Whites; to return to the Bible to discover salvation.²

POST-CIVIL WAR

The socially undistinguished, the poor and the illiterate, neglected by the more respectable sects, found refuge in premillennial cults. Despairing of the blessings in this world, they generally looked forward to a cosmic catalysm that would cast down the mighty and exalt the humble. Lumped together as "Holy Rollers" by "respectable" parishioners, they were given to uproarious practices that had characterized some of the older sects in their more primitive days. In the words of an official description of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, organized originally in the mill town of Anderson, S. Carolina in 1898, "Joyous demonstrations frequently characterize the services, and this to some extent disagreeable to persons accustomed to a quiet form of worship" (Bureau of Census, "Religious Bodies", 1916 Pt. 11, P. 543).¹

"Multiplying in Dixie with a rapidity unexampled since the early 19th century revivals" exhorters set up their tents in all Southern towns and cities. First of the White revivalists was Sam Jones who died in 1906. There were many imitators, foremost among them were Mordecai F. Ham of Kentucky, "Cyclone Mack" (Baxter McLendon) of So. Carolina and Billy Sunday of the Middle West.²

The Church of God in Christ was organized in Memphis in 1895 by the Negro Baptist Minister, C. H. Mason. Its first church was "set up in an old gin (house) on the banks of a little creek" near Lexington, Mississippi. (Census of Religious Bodies, 1926, 11, P. 381). Inspired by the pentecostal revival, which started at Los Angeles, Cal.

in 1906. It may be that the White group started in So. Carolia and the Negro in California. This is only a guess based on conversations with Rev. McGee who also referred to California).²

The Church of God In Christ encourage "the possibility of entire sanctification, in evidence of which they (the members) are given the power of speaking with new tongues and gifts of healing."²

My understanding of "sanctification" is to become "Christ-like."

The Church of God in Christ then is a primitivist "holiness" sect which was one of many premillennial churches organized at a time that a second "great awakening" was sweeping the country. The great difference this time though was the fact that Negroes were organizing their own churches for the very first time.

At the time of emancipation, Negro church members numbered around 600,000. In 1890, 2,671,000 (1,400,000 Baptists).⁵

Over half the churches in the rural south were located in the open country.³

SONGS

All British and American congregations sang psalms, that is, if they sang at all. The tunes had their base in German and French secular folk tunes. By the early 1700's, the psalms were sung at an incredibly slow gait, due to lining out (removing the difficult run of notes).⁵

The revivalists (1800) couldn't use these lethargic tunes for their brand of emotionalism. They used secular folk tunes and made their own words. Thus the "revival spiritual" was born, probably in Kentucky and spread after the first mass camp meetings.⁵

The revival spirituals were first published in the North in the 1840's, and antedated by 25 years the first collection of similar songs, indeed largely the same songs as sung by Southern Negroes and called first "slave songs", and "cabin and plantation songs" and more recently "Negro spirituals."⁵

Revival songs gave way to popular gospel hymns around 1860 and after. The popular gospel songs probably began in Tin Pan Alley in the 1850's.⁵

The old revival songs dating from 1800 are still sung in forgotten places - mill towns, mountain coves, city slums; and especially among Holiness sects and southern Negroes still unurbanized.⁵

There were also new songs composed with the old revivalist fervor by the preachers of the Holiness sects which sprang up at the turn of the 20th century.⁶

George Pullen Jackson made a study of many revival spirituals sung by Negroes and Whites and found 116 songs to be melodically the same. In perusing these, I found the following which I recognized as songs that are in my own collection of records:

SONG	ORIGINAL RECORD RELEASE	RE-ISSUED ON L.P.
Keep Your Lamps Trimmed	Blind Willie Johnson Co. 14425	Flkwys RF10
He Rose From The Dead	Rev. D. C. Rice VO 1520	None
Lonesome Valley	Rev. F. W. McGee VI 20858	None
Down By The Riverside (may be early popular gospel)	Bunk Johnson GTJ 63	GTJL 17
Bound For The Promised Land	Alfred Karnes VI 20840	OJL 12
In A My Heart (may be early popular gospel)	Sam Collins GE 6291	OJL 10

With so few songs definitely indentifiable, it is difficult to exact the source of the many songs to be heard in these albums, OJL 12 and 13.

An educated guess would be that they're predominantly "old" revival (1800), and "new" revival (1900) with possibly a sprinkling of popular gospel.

Probably, the best example of "1800" brand of revival spiritual is "Bound For The Promised Land", sung by Karnes, a White Kentuckian. Could this have been sung at the Cane Ridge camp meeting?

The best candidate for "1900" revivalist music is "1929 Flood", sung by McIntorsh & Edwards.

Among the songs in these albums, I can find no sure example of early popular gospel. "Rock of Ages" written by Thomas Hastings, is early popular gospel, but the version by Blind Willie Davis is entirely different melodically. Therefore, I hesitate to present you with this performance as an example of early popular gospel, although it very well may be.

However, a good example of an early popular gospel song is "Nearer My God To Thee" written by Lowell Mason and made famous by the doomed passengers of the Titanic who sang the hymn courageously as the ship slipped to its watery grave.

RHYTHM

As with blues and jazz, the most potent and attractive feature in Negro religious music, is the rhythm. It is also the most difficult to explain.

The concept of rhythm can be as simple as a drum beating regular time to an army marching drill of 120 paces to the minute, or as complex as an Elder Bryant performance where voices, string instruments and percussion are accenting and pulsating in a manner that defies description but can only be heard and felt. Then too, what adds to the complexity is the tone quality, density and dynamic use of musical sound.

There is an apparent vast gulf that separates the rhythmic music of the 1920's with that of the mid 1930's and the years that followed. Bessie Johnson sings "soulfully" and with "driving rhythm", but so does Mahalia Jackson or Bessie Griffith, and yet the difference can be heard, but really not adequately explained. Rev. D. C. Rice "swings" on "No Night There", but so does Count Basie, and yet the gulf is unbridgeable. Did you ever hear Johnny Dodd's 1938 recording

session with Charlie Shavers? This brought the archetype of each era playing together with some strange results.

After Recognizing the rhythmic gulf that separates all living generations, let's understand that my terms of reference in this study allude to the era that roughly runs from 1890 to 1934.

Though many of the songs in these albums are old (1800), the rhythm, as an expression of the last, and best phase of a style that had its origin in the 1890's, is comparatively new.

The rhythm which gave birth to piano ragtime (Joplin) and dance band ragtime (Bolden), were also used in the church on up-tempo tunes (McGee Interview) around the turn of the century. The still unanswered question is, where did the rhythms which brought on the ragtime era come from? To point future research in the right direction, let me pose these problems: What did the White revivalist tradition contribute to "syncopated rhythm? And what did Negro church music, prior to the 1890s, contribute?

We know that one tradition of White revivalist singing that has remained untainted by early popular gospel (1850) and new revivalist (1900) songs, is Sacred Harp singing! Some recorded examples can be heard on Harry Smith's "Anthology of American Folk Music" (Flkws FP 253). Sacred Harp singing is rendered in a polyrhythmic baroque style rather than the "ragged" beat that we are looking for.

There may, however, be another White revivalist tradition that was a forerunner of the "ragged" beat. How do we explain Phipps' "Shine On Me" (Flkws FP 253), a White holiness group very close to the Negro sanctified rhythm? Did they evolve out of their own tradition? This also opens up the whole question of the derivation of White country music within it's exaggerated "clipped" phrasing, which even persists into the present day. Did it come about as "ragtime" penetrating every nook and cranny of the backcountry over several decades? Or was White country music the catalyst which brought on the ragtime era? So far, there is no evidence for the latter supposition.

The "ragged" beat we are looking for is really a "dance" rhythm, and the Negroes have definitely handed down a tradition of "dance" rhythms in some of their sacred singing. The source for this statement is one of the earliest and most reliable eyewitness reports, Allen, Ware and Garrisons's "Slave Songs of the United States", published in 1847. The most important description from my point of view is the "shout" form of singing observed in South Carolina, "and probably confined to.....States south of it."⁷

"The benches are pushed back to the wall when the formal meeting is over and.....all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the 'sperichil' is struck up, begin first walking and, by and by, shuffling round, one after the other in a ring.....a band composed of some of the best singers and of tired shouters stand at the side of the room to 'base' the others, singing the body of the song and clapping their hands together or on the knees."⁷

Of course, we'll never know what the shout form actually sounded like at that time, but what is important is that the shout is a dance form and must have contained some aspect of the beat that was used on "up-tempo" tunes. Some of the questions that the foregoing

poses are: Why weren't Allen, Ware and Garrison struck by White rhythmic church singing in the south? Is it because they were blinded by their mission to follow only Negro forms of worship? Or is it because White rhythmic singing in a "dance" sense didn't exist? And lastly, was the "shout" the prime source of the "ragtime" beat? There are still many exciting discoveries to be made by the diligent researcher.

Although the origins of ragtime remain unanswered, we do know that the Holiness sects were founded at the time that ragtime was sweeping the country, and there is no doubt that the Church of God In Christ and the Church of God Holiness drew heavily from this rhythm.

Another important factor and one that might have established the direction and evolution of the beat was the musical contributions of the itinerate singer with guitar. Remember that these churches were formed mainly in the country. These singers drawing from the phrasing of the hollers and infant blues could have moved the rhythm away from the "clipped" phrasing instead of letting it become more exaggerated as in White country music.

In this connection, we mustn't overlook the fact that the Church of God In Christ was founded in Mississippi. And the first line western Mississippi blues singers were far removed from White country influence. This may be due to the overwhelming majority of Negroes in the area dating prior to the Civil War. They were so predominant, as a matter of fact, that immediately after the war, in order to restrict the number of Mississippi Negroes elected to office, the famous "shoestring" voting district was created. This ran from Tennessee to Louisiana along the Mississippi River, 300 miles long and scarcely 20 miles wide, which included all of the Delta and Natchez.⁴

Once an exciting rhythmic pattern had been established, it spread easily through the festivals in Memphis that C. H. Mason sponsored for all members of the Church of God In Christ throughout the country.⁶ By the time McGee joined the church in 1918, it was already the "swingingest" church around.

The Church of God In Christ, by their use of instruments to accompany the singing, and by attracting such great singing talent as McGee and Bessie Johnson, pioneered highly syncopated church music and directly and indirectly affected the use of rhythm in other churches.

The evolution of this rhythm by Negroes from 1900 through three decades was toward eliminating the jerky and loosening the clipped phrasing until the late 1920s and early 1930s when it reached its most interesting expression. At its best, the phrasing had an "unpredictability" as Pete Whelan puts it, which leads the listener through a constant flurry of surprises.

By the mid 1930's, a new rhythm, more direct and completely stripped of the ragged phrasing swept the country and ushered in a new era of popular music.

SOLO SINGING WITH GUITAR

Solo singing with guitar was born in the country. It was rough, unsophisticated and uninhibited. Rhythmically it is miles away from unaccompanied singing and ten times as interesting. Vocal and guitar effects were applied similarly to blues and religious songs.

The standout performances in these albums of Washington White, Skip James, Charley Patton and Bertha Lee make it evident that the early country blues greats could sing religious songs equally, if not better, than those devoted solely to religious singing. And I believe they must have exerted a great influence on the developing style of guitar accompaniment. What we hear in these albums is rather up-to-date (for the 20's) and we shouldn't imagine that solo and duet performances sounded like that at the turn of the 20th century.

There are two broad categories of guitar technique, picking and bottleneck (includes knife, etc.). In blues, both styles are employed equally with preferences varying between individuals, whereas in religious, bottleneck predominates. Bottleneck fits religious perfectly as its whining notes help create a sombre and reverent mood.

This same mood, produced by the same musical techniques, melodies, rhythms and changes exist on many great blues records, helping to indicate how closely allied the two traditions are. It is frequently difficult to distinguish the instrumental blues passage from a gospel one. Yet for some of the surviving country performers from the great era of the late 1920's, at least three of whom are now ordained ministers, "the blues" are out-of-bounds - a devil's music "offensive to the ears of God." The Blues Life is one thing, the Christian Life another, however strong the artistic bridge between them. On the one hand, the Rev. Robert Wilkens still sings and plays his old blues masterpiece "That No Way To Get Along" (OJL 5) with new, religious lyrics, but will not perform the original.

On the other hand, Skip James, a God-fearing man whose father was a preacher, today takes equal pride in recreating his old blues and his old gospel numbers. John Hurt still plays "Candy Man" and "Lonesome Valley" impartially. What this suggests and it deserves a study to itself, is the enormous, humanistic validity of both solo blues and solo gospel. A music must be a very powerful expression of man's basic yearnings and fantasies to be completely rejected as standing for something satanic in the eyes of many of those who helped develop it and whose mature temperament and belief now requires them to judge it thus. And it must be an even greater embodiment of the human condition when it can serve both the flesh and the spirit for other of its early exponents.

PIONEER PERFORMERS

In April 1964, four years after McKune's haunting visits, Jim and I undertook a pilgrimage to Chicago to see Bertha Lee, Charlie Patton's last wife. McKune and I left separately, he by train and I by plane.

I spent a pleasant Friday evening with Bertha Lee and her sister and nephews and nieces who remember Uncle Charley from their childhood in Lula, Miss. One niece, Mackey, was especially fascinated by the "Elder Green" track on the Patton reissue L.P. (OJL 1). Bertha Lee, tall, dark and good looking at age 62, was undoubtedly a knockout in her youth. She was born in Flora, Miss. Bertha Lee Pate moved to Lula at age five. She sang in Church but never in public until she met Patton in Lula at a dance about 1929. "I barely open my mouth when I sing" she said. This, according to Charters, is typical of Mississippi blues singers who "sing between clenched teeth." We played a dub of Bertha Lee's "Yellow Bee" and "Mind Reading Blues." "I took 'Yellow Bee' from a record (Memphis Minnie); 'Mind Reading Blues' I wrote myself.: She was quite pleased with her singing and called the neighbors in to listen.

Son House and Willie Brown stayed with her and Charlie a whole month in Holly Ridge (1933 or 1934).

Mr. Calloway, the A & R man for ARC in New York, came all the way to Mississippi to bring Bertha and Charlie back to New York for a recording date (1934).

"I was too nervous to sing and had to take whiskey to calm my nerves", she said referring to the recording session in New York.

Patton and Lee were in New York three weeks. Most of their recordings were never issued and the masters are missing from the Columbia vaults. (Columbia bought ARC).

"Oh Death", one of the high spots in the recording session and one of the best religious duets waxed, is in this album through the courtesy of Bill Thompson, who managed to tape the record from an anonymous west coast collector. The only other known copy is in the Library of Congress' collection.

On Saturday morning, McKune appeared at my room at the Chicago "Y" announcing his safe arrival. Then took to his heels for his own room claiming dire need of rest after a sleepless night on the train.

I had come to Chicago armed with a few promising telephone numbers that Pete Whelan and I had dug out of the Chicago telephone directory at the New York Public Library on a rainy afternoon. Mae Glover, Lena Kimbrough, S. James and Robert Wilkens were some of the enticing "blues" names.

The first name I tried, however, was Bishop F. W. McGee. To my surprise, it was "the" McGee, Victor recording star of the late 20's. He cordially invited me for an afternoon interview.

McGee lived in Chicago's southside. He was a giant of a man with a sweet disposition. He was quite proud of his recording career which began with Okeh records through Arizona Dranes' recommendation. Dranes, an Okeh artist, was a great sanctified piano player and singer. She was blind and originally from Dallas. His first, and only recording for Okeh, "Lion of The Tribe of Judah" was his own composition. He switched to Victor through Mr. Peer of Southern Music Co. (this company handled a lot of Negro talent), where he

recorded copiously. "Jonah In The Belly Of The Whale" Vi sold over 100,000 copies, a staggering volume for those days considering its limited market. Of the many titles recorded, only "Jesus The Lord Is My Savior" Vi (reissued Flkways) was his own invention.

Albert Fox played trombone on some sides, but we'll never know who blew that beautiful trumpet on some others. Rev. D. C. Williams was his pianist on many sides.

Ford Washington McGee, related to Booker T. Washington, and married to a very beautiful woman, was born in Winchester, Tenn. on October 5, 1890. They have nine children, five of whom are teachers, and a granddaughter attending Sarah Lawrence College.

His family moved to Hillsboro, Tex. (near Dallas) and McGee grew up there. He showed talent for performing as a young schoolboy. He was usually the lead in the plays performed for the school closing.

He was a teacher in the Oklahoma public school system and a pastor in the Methodist church in 1918, the year he switched to the Church of God in Christ. McGee pioneered the growth of his newly adopted church in Kansas and Iowa where he held one revival meeting after another.

He threw up a tent in Chicago in 1925 and took it by storm. His following was so strong, it was necessary to put up another tent the following year. McGee finally built his church in 1929 which stands at 4946 Vincennes, Chicago, where his son now leads the congregation.

Our conversation took many turns; his trip to Jerusalem, his stay in New York for several years, his duties as Bishop which entailed trips to Iowa, So. Carolina and New York once a year, Negroes rights to dignity. It was difficult to stick to the music.

I left with many questions unanswered, but my good friend Don Kent, a native Chicagoan and blues connoisseur, agreed to complete the interview for me. He did this in January 1966 and his letter to me describing the meat of their conversation was so interesting and so expertly disclosed, that I decided to print the following pertinent information as written:

"And now to the best news. I've interviewed McGee and I think I have all the information you want. It was a little discouraging, because I brought the tape recorder and tape but forgot the microphone, and I also brought a stack of good gospel items (Blind Joe Taggart, Roosevelt Graves, McIntosh and Edwards, some of his own Victors) but McGee's phonograph wasn't working!! All in all, I spent a very nice two hours with him and he said that I ought to come out to the church some Sunday and see him like you did. And I think I will. He's such a great guy.

"Here's the information I got from him which ought to cover most of the spots you mentioned, although some of the questions dealing with the music are still unanswered as I was unable to play any records for him. He says he didn't move to Hillsboro until he was 5½; his family moved to Honey Grove, Texas first where his father had a farm. You know that he was born in Tenn. when his mother came

up there on a visit. He first began teaching when he was about 21. I think he was already married - he got married in May 1910. He taught in Texas for a year, then moved to Oklahoma where he got in good with the Bishop there and taught both school and worked a parish at the same time up until 1920 when he found that he enjoyed preaching more than teaching. McGee says that they sang rhythmically in church when he was a boy, except that the music mood was somewhat slower. There were very few real fast moving spirituals altho' he says there were some. But nothing quite as demonstrative as the later singing in the Church of God In Christ. McGee says that different churches did have different styles! He couldn't explain this very well though. Some were slower, some faster, some clapped hands, some used instruments, some didn't. This was the attitude he gave. But he was quite definite in saying other churches had other styles. Whatever suited their gospel, I think he said. He didn't get to hear many churches besides the Methodist church sing. Mostly he stuck with them. He was somewhat vague here; I suppose it was hard to remember. He remembers seeing religious singers with guitars (he didn't say street singers), but doesn't remember what they sounded like and the name of Blind Willie Johnson didn't ring a bell. (I had a Blind Willie with me and was doubly sorry his machine was not working).

"McGee joined the Church of God In Christ in 1918. He says it was the religious teaching he liked, the interpretation of the Bible was clearer to him. From what I gathered, the CoGIC keeps very close to the literal meaning of the Bible....they take it word for word. He also admits that the music attracted him. The CoGIC was more lively, he said, and he thinks that singing helps make better people. I guess you can just as well take your choice here. Both were probably critical factors.

"CoGIC was founded in Lexington, Miss., by Charles H. Mason. Mason lived to be about 90, according to McGee and was much loved and respected, etc. As far as McGee knows, they always used the upbeat spiritual form. It was already developed when he joined, although the Church was just beginning to gain wider acceptance (proof of this was that they had a chapter in Oklahoma. McGee says they also had a chapter in Kansas City at this time but there wasn't much doing until he paved the way). McGee says all kinds of instruments were used in the church; drums, guitars, horns, violins (!!) you name it! The music of the CoGIC altered very little, says McGee. It was almost like dance music. McGee didn't remember whether or not D. C. Williams was the pianist on "He Is The Savior For me", he would have to hear the record (and I don't have it). McGee thinks that D. C. Williams is still alive (as he was a younger man than McGee), and the last McGee remembers of him, Williams was a Bishop somewhere in Indiana. McGee didn't remember being impressed with anyone else. As he says, he didn't go to any other churches once he became important in the CoGIC, and although there were other good singers, he was the best. He doesn't know whether Dranes is alive or not. Presumes she is. She used to come to the great congregation in Memphis, which is where (I think) McGee says he first met her and she got him the recording date with Okeh.

"One point that McGee was very emphatic about - the individual guitar players were older in style and development than group singing.

They preceded groups and influenced them. I asked him how he was sure since it would seem to me that they would be at least equal and I would think that the group singing would come first. McGee says that people played and sang by themselves before they started to congregate. From what I understood, in many of the churches (or all) but especially in the semi-rhythmic one, people would sing outside the church to themselves, one another, by themselves. There were traveling singers before there were fulltime churches, I guess.

"To explain the part about how gospel songs got around, I need to go into other background material. Mason, the founder of the Church, had a Big Congregation in Memphis every November around Thanksgiving wherein as many parishoners and priests as could, came for a gigantic blast lasting 20 days, singing and dancing, day and night. Originally, they had just a tabernacle but that burned down so they built a church. During the 20's, multitudes turned out every year (over 5,000. Do you think he's exaggerating?) (Ed. note: No!) (Since the 20's, the board of executives have shortened the period to only 14 days, and it starts earlier in November since most people like to be at home during Thanksgiving). Now here's the bit. I asked him about when they started to write songs in volume. He says he didn't know....many of them he thought were traditional, but the majority were picked up here and there. "They just went around." But here's the thing, when they had these giant conventions, groups from all over would bring their songs with them, usually new ones, and other groups would carry them back to their own parishes. Since this was a constant affair, I suppose it helps to explain the widespreadness of some songs.

"As to your last questions, here is what McGee has to say: he would think that it's pretty certain that the rhythm of the CoGIC (and this rhythm precedes the 20's, if McGee's memory serves him right) came from similar sources as ragtime. As he put it, the rhythm of the CoGIC is "quickening music...almost dance music." (True, n'est-ce-pas?) As for the change in style, McGee advances this theory; people lost much of their zealously during the depression and the movement slowed down very much. Then too McGee thinks that the novelty wore off and people sought a more solemn type of prayer music (the CoGIC music had a much longer history than its recording history, don't forget).

"I guess that about takes care of it. We talked about a lot more, but I didn't take notes on a lot of it. Much of it was general, or about McGee's life, or topics like "the spell of the Holy Spirit that makes people rejoice and dance." It was a fascinating afternoon. I learned much, and I hope that this commentary will prove useful. Although it took longer than I anticipated, I finally got it done. I'm still quite available and ready if you want me to do additional research on other topics, ok?"

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

by Gayle Dean Wardlow

ELDER CHARLES BECK

Played on Elder Curry's 1930 Jackson recordings. Considered by Elder Curry as best sanctified piano player in Miss. Was a member of Curry's church and then left for Memphis and later Chicago. Is presently serving in Africa in missionary capacity.

ELDER RICHARD BRYANT

A member of the Church of God in Christ in Mississippi. Recorded with both Bessie Johnson from Columbia, Miss. and Melinda Taylor from Forest, Miss. Bryant, who led various churches in the Delta is reported to have had churches in both Holandale and Moorehead, Miss. in the late 1920's.

ELDER CURRY

A preacher and elder in the Church of God In Christ since 1915. Curry has active churches in both Morton and Jackson, Miss. at the present. His recordings were made in December 1930 at the King Edward Hotel in Jackson. Jo Ann Williams is the lead singer of a group of seven and Curry is the guitar player. Elder Beck is the piano player.

BLIND WILLIE DAVIS

Probably from Bude, Miss. small south Miss. town in Lincoln County near McComb, where Sam Collins played and sang. Davis is reported to have been very scared that he would have to record more than sacred songs-blues and hesitated to make his first trip to Chicago, the first of three to record for the Paramount label. Has not been seen in a number of years. May be deceased or still living.

DUCKETT and NORWOOD

Both of these Jackson, Miss. area blues men who recorded for Okeh records in Jackson, Miss. in the King Edward Hotel in December 1930. Norwood who was known as "One Leg Sam" played extensively with Tommy Johnson. Duckett, who was Johnny Temple's stepfather, a Chicago blues man of the 1930's, played in Jackson with Rube Lacey and others.

SISTER CALL FANCY

No information available.

BLIND MAMIE FOREHAND

Played in Memphis on streets with husband who sang blues before becoming a Minister. May have come from South Mississippi originally. Probably died in Memphis in late 1930's or early '40's.

BLIND ROOSEVELT GRAVES

Sang and played in Hattiesburg, Miss. on the streets and in "juke joints." Played a 12 string guitar most of the time and traveled at times with his half brother Uaroy who played the tambourine and who was also blind in one eye himself. Lived mostly in an area near Taylorsville, Miss. which is about 60 miles from Jackson to the southeast toward Hattiesburg. Uaroy is deceased but it is reported that Roosevelt is still alive but in his late 60's. Cooney Vaughn, the piano player on the Mississippi Jook Band records is from Pinola, Miss.

HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED SINGERS

No information. May be Sister Cally Fancy Group.

SKIP JAMES

Born and raised at Bentonia, Miss. some 20 miles north of Jackson. Recorded these religious items at his only Paramount session. These reveal his strong religious background, a background of all great blues singers. James' father was a minister of a local Baptist congregation.

BESSIE JOHNSON

A member and layman preacher of the Church of God In Christ in Columbia, Miss. Reported to be in a northern city still active in church work. Considered one of the greatest of all women sanctified singers.

ALFRED KARNES

White country singer associated with area around Covington, Ky. Recorded in Bristol at the same session that the great country singer Jimmy Rodgers recorded his first songs. Victor advertised for artists in that area to try out which means Karnes probably just came into Bristol to record.

MOTHER MC COLLUM

No information available.

ELDER MC INTORSH and EDWARDS

Probably from Mississippi or Tennessee. No other information available.

WASHINGTON PHILLIPS

Reported to have been from South Texas. No other information known.

REV. D. C. RICE

Reported to have been from Alabama near Selma or Montgomery. Considered a major leader in the sanctified movement in Alabama. His records are considered to be some of the greatest of all Sanctified with an Alabama "jazz" sound with the cornet and trombone.

MELINDA TAYLOR

A member of the Church of God In Christ in Forest, Miss. Recorded with both Elders McIntorsh and Edwards, and Bessie Johnson as Memphis Sanctified Singers in 1929 in Memphis for Victor. Reported to have died in Forest in 1940's.

WASHINGTON WHITE

This is Bukka White who first recorded for Victor in Memphis in 1930. White is originally from Aberdeen, Miss. He learned his style of guitar from an old field hand at West Point, Miss. He was on Parchman Farm in 1937 and recorded again in 1940 for Okeh. He is presently living in Memphis, Tenn.

CHARLIE PATTON

Born in 1887 on a farm near Edwards, Miss., a few miles west of Jackson. About 1900, moved to Dockery's Plantation, near Cleveland, Miss. the heart of the Delta.

Patton undoubtedly picked up most of his repertoire of religious songs from his father who was a lay preacher. Patton, in manhood, was not religious and not a churchgoer. He was rather a creator of original blues lyrics and melodies and pioneered the highly volatile "delta" style blues.

He died in 1934 in Holly Ridge, Miss.

BERTHA LEE

See notes under PIONEER PERFORMERS.

BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON

Born about 1900 near Temple, Texas. He was blinded at the age of seven. Johnson was known to have sung secular songs but only recorded religious music and on this basis stands as the greatest itinerate singer of sacred music to come out of the East Texas area. He died in Beaumont, Texas in 1949.⁸

REV. F. W. MC GEE

See notes under PIONEER PERFORMERS.

FOOTNOTES

References

1. History of the South - Vol. 9 Stephenson & Coulter
2. South, Old and New Simkins
3. These My Brethren
A Study of 570 Negro Churches
In The Rural South Ralph A. Felton
4. History of Mississippi John K. Bettersworth
5. White and Negro Spirituals George Pullen Jackson
6. Surmised from interview with McGee. Songs disseminated
through meetings in Memphis. New ideas in rhythm undoubtedly
spread in like manner.
7. Slave Songs of the United States Allen, Ware & Garrison
8. Notes to Folkways Record Album
No. FG 3585 - Blind Willie Johnson Samuel B. Charters

DISCOGRAPHY

- BRYANT, Elder Richard's Sanctified Singers
one male and three female voices acc. by unknown
hca., gtr., jug, wbd. Memphis, 1928
How Much I Owe For Love Devine/ Watch Ye, Therefore,
You Know Not The Day.
- CURRY, Elder
unknown accompaniment Atlanta, 1930
Memphis Flu.
- DAVIS, Blind Willie
Unknown Guitar Chicago, 1928
Rock Of Ages.
- DUCKETT AND NORWOOD, Slim and Pig(R.D.)
Atlanta, 1930
I Want To Go Where Jesus Is.
- FANCY, Sister Cally
unknown harmonica Chicago, 1929
Hold To God's Unchanging Hand.
- FOREHAND, Blind Mamie(Mrs.)
accompanied by A.C. Forehand, Guitar, Memphis, 1927
Honey In The Rock.
- GRAVES, BLIND ROOSEVELT
accompanied by Uaroy Graves, Richmond, Ind., 1929
When I Lay My Burden Down.

- HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED SINGERS
personnel unknown Memphis, 1930
Thou Carest, Lord, For Me/ Sinner, I'd Make A Change.
- JAMES, Skip(Nehemia)
Own Guitar Grafton, Wisc., 1931
Jesus Is A Mighty Good Leader.
- JOHNSON, Blind Willie
New Orleans, 1929
Sweeter As The Years Roll By.
- KARNES, Alfred G.
Bristol, Tenn., 1928
I Am Bound For The Promised Land.
- McCOLLUM, Mother
Chicago, 1930
When I Take My Vacation In Heaven/ Jesus Is My
Air-O-Plane.
- McGEE, Rev. F.W.
acc. own piano, female voices, unk. instrumentalists.
He Is The Saviour For Me Chicago, 1927.
- McINTORSH AND EDWARDS
Elders Lonnie McIntorsh and Edwards assisted by Sisters
Johnson and Taylor, various instruments, Chicago, 1928
Take A Stand/ The 1927 Flood.
- PATTON, Charlie
own guitar Grafton, Wisc., 1929
You're Gonna Need Somebody When You Die/ Some Happy Day.
- PATTON AND LEE(Charlie and Bertha)
duet, guitar C. Patton New York, 1934
Oh Death/Troubled Bout My Mother.
- PHILLIPS, Washington
own dulceola
I Had A Good Father And Mother Dallas, 1929
Take Your Burden To The Lord And Leave It There
Dallas, 1927.
- RICE, Rev. D.C.
assisted by his congregation, unk. instrumentalists
Sure Foundation Chicago, 1928
I'm Pressing On/ No Night There Chicago, 1929.
- SMITH, William and Versey
duet, probably own gtr., tamb. Chicago, 1927
Sinners, You'll Need King Jesus When You Die.
- TAGGART, Blind Joe
own guitar New York, 1927
The Storm Is Passing Over.
- WHITE, Bukka(Booker Washington) with "Miss Minnie"
Memphis, 1930
I Am In The Heavenly Way/Promise True And Grand/
- Discographical information courtesy BLUES AND GOSPEL RECORDS
1902 to 1942, R.M.W. Dixon and J. Godrich.
- For Extended Biographies of some of the above performers
see OJL Supplement No. 1.

OJL-12

SIDE ONE:

BUKKA WHITE: I Am In The Heavenly Way
SKIP JAMES: Jesus Is A Mighty Good Leader
CHARLIE PATTON: You're Gonna Need Somebody When You Die
BLIND JOE TAGGART: The Storm Is Passing Over
PATTON & LEE: Oh Death
REV. D.C. RICE: No Night There
McINTORSH & EDWARDS: Take A Stand
ELDER RICHARD BRYANT: Watch Ye, Therefore, You Know
Not The Day

SIDE TWO:

REV. F.W. MCGEE: He Is The Saviour For Me
HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED SINGERS: Sinner, I'd Make A Change
REV. D.C. RICE: Sure Foundation
BLIND MAMIE FOREHAND: Honey In The Rock
DUCKETT & NORWOOD: I Want To Go Where Jesus Is
MOTHER McCOLLUM: When I Take My Vacation In Heaven
ALFRED G. KARNES: I Am Bound For The Promised Land
WASHINGTON PHILLIPS: I Had A Good Father And Mother

OJL-13

SIDE ONE:

BUKKA WHITE: Promise True And Grand
BLIND WILLIE DAVIS: Rock Of Ages
CHARLIE PATTON: Some Happy Day
SISTER CALLY FANCY: Hold To God's Unchanging Hand
PATTON & LEE: Troubled Bout My Mother
ELDER CURRY: Memphis Flu
ELDER RICHARD BRYANT: How Much I Owe For Love Devine
McINTORSH & EDWARDS: The Latter Rain Is Fall

SIDE TWO:

McINTORSH & EDWARDS: The 1927 Flood
REV. D.C. RICE: I'm Pressing On
HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED SINGERS: Thou Carest Lord For Me
BLIND ROOSEVELT GRAVES: When I Lay My Burden Down
MOTHER McCOLLUM: Jesus Is My Air-O-Plane
WILLIAM & VERSEY SMITH: Sinners You'll Need King Jesus
BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON: Sweeter As The Years Roll By
WASHINGTON PHILLIPS: Take Your Burden To The Lord
And Leave It There