



# Daddy Grace

By Opal Louis Nations

At first listen to the extravagantly celebratory shout bands of the United House of Prayer, one is made instantly aware of the similarities to those of the second line street bands native to New Orleans. Indeed, both have drawn from Caribbean, African and European cultural references and both provide music for Sunday service, parades, special convocations and funerals. The two are dissimilar in part by the political and spiritual influences of one Marcelino Manoel de Graco, a.k.a. Charles Manuel (or Emmanuel) Grace, a.k.a. (Sweet) Daddy Grace, born January 25, 1881 on the miniscule island of Brava in the Cape Verde Islands. Brava is situated at the southern tip of the chain of tiny islands in the Atlantic due west of Dakar, Senegal. The son of a stone cutter, young Marcelino and his family fled the islands by ship via West Africa when the lad was twenty-one years old.

Throughout the Nineteenth century a steady flow of Cape Verdeans escaped economic poverty by fleeing to New England in U.S. whaling ships. The trickle became a gush so that later large numbers ventured abroad. Sizeable communities sprang up in Hawaii, California and parts of New England. Today there are more Cape Verdeans and people of Cape Verdean descent living in the U.S. than on the islands. The Cape Verdeans took their music culture with them. For Marcelino, this meant the Morna (minor key melodies of varying tempos sung in Kriolu, a Creole language) and the Catholic Saints Day processions with bands and feasting.

The immigrant string bands assimilated well. Later, the Cape Verdean immigrants put together large dance bands who contributed to the popularity of the Big Band Era. It is likely that early on some of the Big Band musicians also practiced their skills in shout bands at ecstatic worship services. Marcelino first came to the fishing town of New Bedford, Mass. where he developed a sizeable reputation with his Sunday sermonizing. He came to be called a "fisher of men." While working as a short order cook on the Southern Railway as well as times spent as a salesman and grocery clerk, Marcelino was drawn to the prevailing Holiness revival movement of the era (namely that expounded by the Reverend Charles Parham and his Pentecostal fervor) to build his first ministry in West Wareham, Mass.

Utilizing the routes of the Southern Railway, the charismatic Marcelino laid the groundwork for a revival circuit. His first successful revival tents were set up farther south in Newport News, Virginia and in Charlotte, North Carolina (where R.C.A. later recorded under Elder Otis Jones' direction six titles with the house shout band on June 19, 1936.) Thus the foundation was formed for the United House of Prayer for All People in 1921.

During this formative period, Marcelino was very much influenced by the work of his brother, Pastor Joseph de Graco's ministry. Pastor Joseph established the Harwick Mass Church of the Nazarene in direct response to racial discrimination suffered by church-going Cape Verdeans in the Cape Cod area. Marcelino, taking up the challenge himself, became determined in his fight to break the color bar. While working on the railway Marcelino met and married Jennie J. Combard, but the relationship lasted less than a decade. Marcelino was more interested in establishing his church than in cultivating a normal family life.

In 1923 he made a pilgrimage to Egypt and established a House of Prayer there. He was "called to preach" in 1925 and proclaimed himself a bishop. This ploy helped him to establish his chain of ministries. Strangely, although descended from Portuguese and African ancestry, Marcelino never admitted to being a Negro. During this period, he relocated to Newark, New Jersey and befriended the Reverend C. H. Mason who had attended the groundbreaking Azusa Street revival meetings in Los Angeles, at which "holy rolling" and speaking in tongues were the order of the day. Marcelino and Mason shared and exchanged ideas but in the end parted ways over Marcelino's schemes to line his pockets and finance special rallies. Today, the denomination has 135 churches nationwide with a patronage of over three million souls. The church's "cult" status gradually withered under reform after Marcelino's death.

Realizing his ministry was not reaching enough members of the underclass, namely black people, and that Cape Verdean immigrants no longer took notice of his ministry, Marcelino, now widely known as Daddy Grace, established himself in Harlem. Harlem was a perfect location, rife with all kinds of colorful, religious cults and ministries, including that of Evangelist Rosa Artemius Horne, a.k.a. Mother Horne, the "Pray-for-me Priestess" who claimed to have raised thousands from the dead. Daddy Grace's services sometimes drew as many as twenty thousand people every night.

In October 1926, billing himself as Bishop Grace From The Holy Land, he recorded two sermons, "You may be healed" and "Resurrection of the friend," at the Paramount Records' studio in New York (Paramount 12397) only weeks before the company closed it down and relocated. Both sermons were delivered in an even tone with little drama or extemporization. One would not think that his sermons were ever filled with fire and brimstone. His congregants called him Sweet Daddy Grace. His services included bible readings, interspersed with testimonials in praise of Daddy Grace himself, exhortations on the power of healing, brass bands and shouting. Baptisms were said to be conducted under the fire hose as many of his makeshift early church buildings did not house a pool. Street parades were common. Daddy Grace wearing his expensive cut-back suits represented the personification of the resurrected Jesus Christ. Many believed that the son of God had returned in his likeness.

He grew long, curly, Christ-like locks, fingernails painted red, white and blue, and had his image framed and hung in his churches to the greatest advantage. Daddy Grace himself would sit in a chair like a self-styled potentate, draped with red fabric, in the sanctuary. As his flock prayed for salvation, he would rise, pull off his coat and walk to where a line of sinners had assembled to receive his blessings. He would place both hands on each supplicant. Most would fall to their knees on the wood shavings strewn about and rise up again speaking in tongues. Often denounced by other African-American clerics, Daddy Grace was criticized for his fancy, expensive automobiles, militaristic uniforms, and the hierarchical ranks of leadership.

He was condemned by the white establishment in the South for his rigid support of desegregation for which he was arrested many times. Many admonished him for his line of wonderful, healing products ranging from soaps and cookies and toothpaste to tea and imported coffee beans, pine soap, and a multitude of beauty products including cold cream. His church publication, the Grace Magazine, was touted as having healing powers when placed over the body. He created offices for a quarter of his followers to help in giving them a sense of importance. Among the General Council laws were rules laid out for parishioners divided into clubs. The members' chief function was to raise money to buy fancy automobiles for Sweet Daddy Grace. This created social rivalry. King and queen contests were set up to compete for the honor of representing their church at a special event. Contest winners dressed as royalty stood at the head of the welcome committee.

Sweet Daddy Grace's Columbia, South Carolina affiliate was sued for creating a public nuisance and ordered closed. Wild dancing, extraordinary sounds, loud music, shouting and foot stomping indicated that all hell had broken loose. Sometimes the words to old hymns would be tampered with to improve upon Daddy Grace's majesty. "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound who saved a wretch like me" was changed to "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound his Grace is sufficient for me." The creed included virtues like the chastity of women, to refrain from worldly lust. Men were taught to honor and respect women.

Rose petals and dollar bills were often showered over Daddy Grace. It was also his intention to take in anyone focusing on the poorest and giving them hope. He created insurance companies and burial societies and low and middle income housing. He offered hot, subsidized, cafeteria meals at lunch rooms set up at his establishments and endeavored to satisfy economically, culturally and spiritually the needs of the local community.

The shout tradition of The House of Prayer Church is similar to that practiced by other black holiness denominations. The tradition was carried by the blacks of the West African coast to the new world for the purpose of achieving "possession of the deity."

Elder Charles Beck of Buffalo's Way of The Cross C.O.G.I.C. for instance shouts and dances his church and, like any good one-man band, keeps heated passions afire by simultaneously playing the trumpet, drums, organ, vibes, saxophone and other musical instruments. Daddy Grace's flamboyance and worldly extravagance have certainly been matched throughout the course of the Twentieth Century by such celebrated spiritual figures as the Reverend James Cleveland and the Reverend C.L. Franklin of Detroit. Daddy Grace's creation of a rich, bejeweled, worldly realm has been carbon copied by spiritualists such as Oakland, California's King Louis Narcisse. Shout band music has driven The United House of Prayer services since the 1920s and it is simply a wonder why enterprising record companies did not capitalize on this spirit-lifting genre by committing such activity to wax.

Besides the steady flow of income generated through the sale of emblems, badges, buttons, banners, uniforms, swords, walking sticks and other ephemera, Daddy Grace, self-described as "the boyfriend of the world," amassed six million dollars. Legend has it that back in the 1950s he owned a fleet of gold-plated Cadillacs, farms in Cuba and coffee plantations in Brazil, had acquired the tallest apartment building in the world, purchased hotels, mansions and castles, and had operated the factories which produced his many products.

He died at his eighty-five room mansion in Los Angeles on January 12, 1960. He was buried at his estate built by a whaling magnate in New Bedford. The Daddy Grace empire came crashing down a decade later when the I.R.S., claiming that he owed back taxes for the years 1945 through 1956, gobbled up all of his remaining accumulated assets.

-- Opal Louis Nations,  
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Daddy Grace and his "House Of Prayer For All People," was located on the famed corner of 125th Street and 8th Avenue in New York City, on the second floor. For those lucky enough to have passed this intersection, they would have been blessed with hearing the sounds blasting from this ancient building. Trombones, tubas, mandolins, percussion and virtually anything else that could be utilized was employed. There were no rules, no musical restrictions and the invitation extended was for one and all to join in and become part of the experience.

The music tendered was loosely aligned with the trombone shout bands found on the East Coast of the US, as well as the New Orleans brass bands of Louisiana. The music fairly swaggered and strutted, being unbelievably infectious.

These recordings were available in limited form during the mid-1950s. It has been generally assumed that no more than 500-1,000 LPs were ever pressed and it has been out-of-print, completely unavailable, since the late 1950s. Information concerning the original label is nowhere to be found and it is sincerely hoped that this effort will provide a listen to one of the rarest items ever recorded.

-Lawrence Cohn

*Daddy Grace, vcl on 2, 10*  
*Grace Heavenly Band on 1, 6, 10*  
*Grace Emmanuel Singers (12 voices) on 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9*  
*unknown pno on 3, 7; organ on 4, 5; tamps on 4, 7, 9*  
*Charles Anderson (music director), Willie Williams (band leader)*  
*Rec. corner 8th St. off 125th St., Harlem, NYC, c. 1955*