

**Madame Edna Gallmon Cooke**



**THE GREATEST RECORDINGS OF  
MADAME EDNA GALLMON COOKE**

## THE BEST OF MADAME EDNA GALLMON COOKE

The late Mdm Edna Gallmon Cooke of Washington, D.C. was one of the most beloved of all gospel singer soloists. She was an adept practitioner of the song-sermonette, and her eery spirituals centering around sick rooms, omens, and death struck a supernatural chord. Her mournful mezzo soprano was exquisitely delicate and fragile. Mdm Cooke's untimely demise in 1970 drew thousands and thousands of devoted fans to Washington from virtually everywhere.

Born in Columbia, South Carolina and the daughter of a lecturn-bashing Baptist preacher, Rev. Eddie J. Gallmon, Edna grew up admiring the sanctified vocal strains of pioneer gospel diva Willie Mae Ford Smith of St. Louis. The term "Madame" was an honor bestowed upon her by her ministry, The Holiness Church. Billed as "The Sweetheart of the Potomac," Cooke toured the South Eastern states during the 1940s utilizing the spirituals and sermonettes of her impressive father.

Cooke's recording debut took place at The Springfield Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. as featured soloist with The Young People's Men's Choir

for the Braun brothers' De Luxe and Regal labels in April 1949. In 1950, after signing with the Gospel label, Cooke cut a series of recordings with The Young People's Men's Choir under the direction of Rev. J.J. Abney. These were transcriptions from live church services.

Cooke contracted with Bill Beasley's Republic Records during the fall of 1952. She waxed six extremely fine 78 releases during 1952-53 for Republic, with and without the harmonic support of The Radio Four (The Five Babbs Brothers.) By mid 1955, shortly before the sale of the Republic label to Nashboro Records, Cooke's contract was taken over by Ernie Young of the Excello/Nashboro conglomerate.

Preferring as before a quartet backing on her early Nashboro recordings, Cooke was placed with The Radio Four with whom she toured throughout the fifties. If The Radio Four were tied up and could not make studio sessions, Cooke would be supplied with the services of The Singing Sons, or failing this, The Sons of the South.

Most of Cooke's work centered around biblical stories or parables. Our compilation opens with the joyous burden-lifter "Heavy load." Mdm Cooke howls and wails through

this jubilant ode with vim and vigor. Tempting harmonies embrace a colorfully embroidered interpretation of "He'll fix it" on which Mdm Cooke utilizes her full vocal range. "Come home" is a touching rendition of "Softly and tenderly," Will L. Thompson's earnest spiritual about gathering shadows and impending death beds. Mdm Cooke opens her soul to the song.

The Radio Four join Mdm Cooke on the praiseful "Nobody but you, Lord." The song, the first recorded for Nashboro by Mdm Cooke in 1954, is carried over into the quartet tradition. Catch Mdm Cooke's short, unique, almost imperceptible single note embellishments near the close of the song. A prayer-like reading is given "Life's lonesome road" wherein Mdm Cooke is able to weep and moan, grabbing all the frills and flowers in the gospel repertoire.

The inclusion of Cooke's hit recording "Stop gambler" with its fervent narration and organ dramatization is an excellent example of what she does best: remonstration from the pulpit.

A personal favorite is "Lord when I get home." A wailing choral background adds pathos to this glorious traditional spiritual executed in its

original form. Mdm Cooke's soulful narration draws the salt from the eyes. Mdm Cooke again applies her brand of runs and curlicues to "Jesus will never say no." The song is punctuated with spoken asides to strengthen the message and catch the listener's attention. A sorrowful, blues-colored performance is given "The hammer rings," a gruesome, detailed description of impalement. Mdm Cooke wants you to feel the pain as the sound of the hammer rings out and the nails are driven through the flesh. The whole is orchestrated with tearful wails and moans.

"You members" is a musical remonstration leveled against those who stray from the fold. The New Singing Sons Quartet add depth to the otherwise thinly accompanied rendition. "I heard Jerusalem," another devil-bashing opus, draws from the Good Book. Great organ fills and able assistance are given by The New Singing Sons whose founding members (none of whom sing here) once formed the basis of the original Sensational Nightingales featuring Rev. Julius Cheeks of Spartanburg.

"Seven steps to hell" is a glorious, typically resolute Gallmon Cooke song whose beauty lies in its simplistic straight ahead sermonizing of passages quoted directly from The New

Testament. Cooke gives her all on "Got to go to judgement," and on "Got to love everybody" she stretches out on the final bars. Cooke tries to outdo herself with the use of vocal melismas on the beautiful "Without you Lord."

Both "Bottles of tears" and "The mule talked" utilize modern day folk tale idioms to tell how a slip from the straight and narrow can lead to a ticket to a very hot place.

Hope and joy are established on a perky reading of "At the gate." A strong, mixed vocal chorus mattress the song as Mdm Cooke asserts with purpose her impatience to touch down in the after-life. More sorrow is evoked on "Down on me." Mdm Cooke's dramatic performance of a sad song is unsurpassed. Her anguished voice, at times disturbing, seems to wring out every last vestige of emotion.

Researcher John Broven affirms that most of the Republic/Tennessee label masters have either been lost or destroyed, consequently, because it is felt that a good deal of Mdm Cooke's finest early work was recorded for the Republic label, we have taken the last five cuts directly from the original 78 rpm recordings.

Rev. Morgan Babb and The Radio Four energize Cooke's reading of "Somebody touched me" on which the lady herself in peak form personalizes the lyrics and seems uplifted in the process. "Somebody help me," a touching lyrical plea cut two years after "Somebody touched me" in 1955 finds Cooke at absolute melismatic perfection. "My journey home," a song inspired by Sister Wynona Carr's "The Ball Game" and backed by The Singing Sons, is perhaps one of Cooke's most complex compositions and oddly enough one of the few songs she really lets go and screams on.

"Higher ground" has the Cooke imprint stamped all over it. The song's moody simplicity and mournful, almost tearful, overture make this a classic along with the similarly executed "Evening sun."

Mdm Cooke remains one of the most important gospel divas of the post-war period, beloved today as when these priceless recordings were set to wax.

— Opal Louis Nations — April, 1995

STOP! — LOOK! — READ! — Then Follow The Crowd!

TO THE

DATE

1962 —

P. M.

(Rain or Shine)

# Mme. EDNA GALLMON COOKE

Of Washington, D. C.

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★ ★ ★



# PILGRIM JUBILEE SINGERS

Of Chicago, Ill.

SINGING — "WALK ON" and "STREACH OUT"

★ ★ ★

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Reissue produced by: Robert Y. Kim and Opal Louis Nations

Compiled by: Opal Louis Nations

Originally Produced by Shannon Williams

Art Direction/Design by: Mitchell Kanner

Liner notes by: Opal Louis Nations

Mastered by: Walter DeVenne

Original concert poster courtesy of: Mitch Diamond

Original photo courtesy of Ray Funk

Project Assistant: Michael Russell

Special Thanks:

Ray Funk, David Sanjek (B.M.I. Archives) and Shannon Williams



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