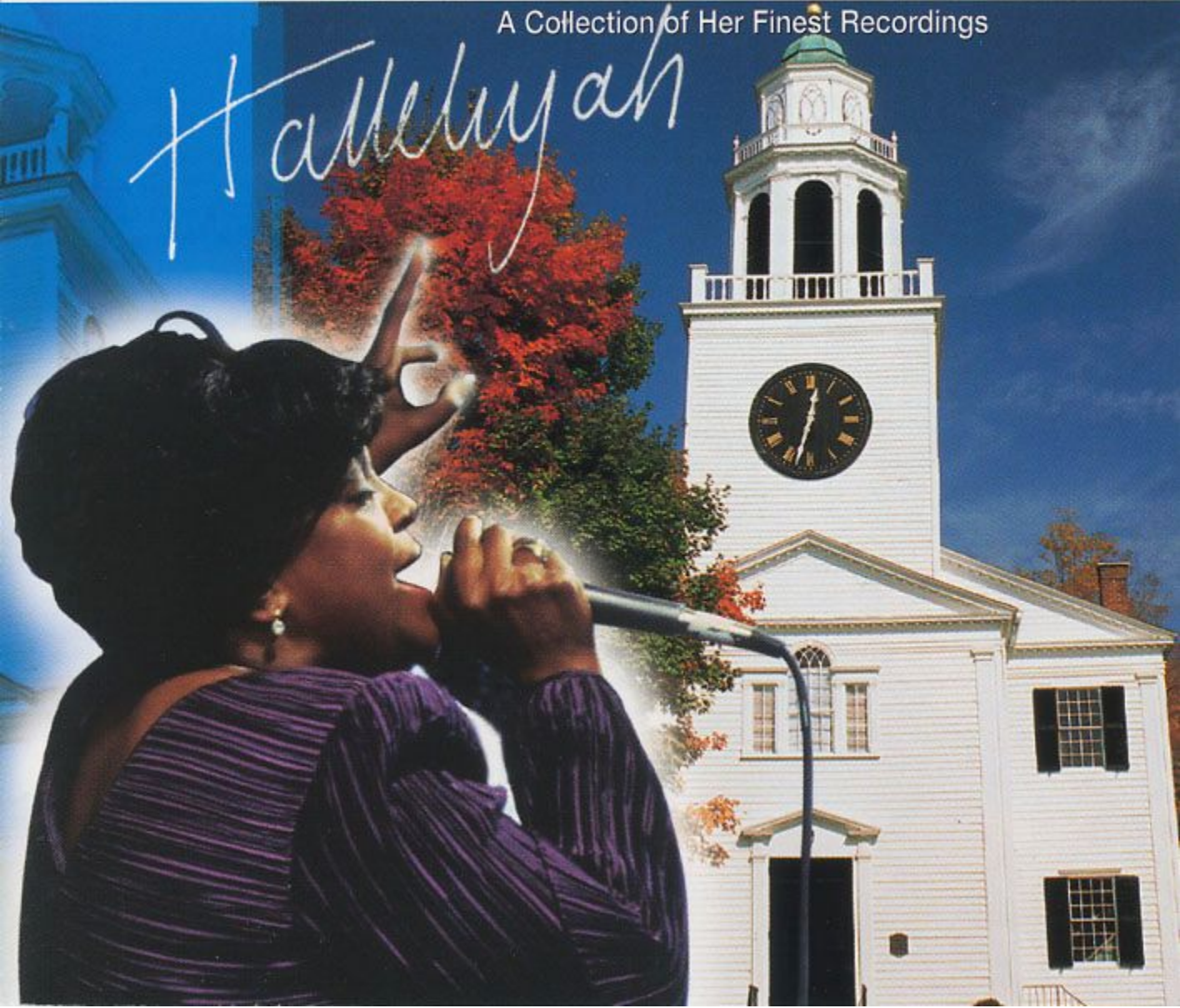


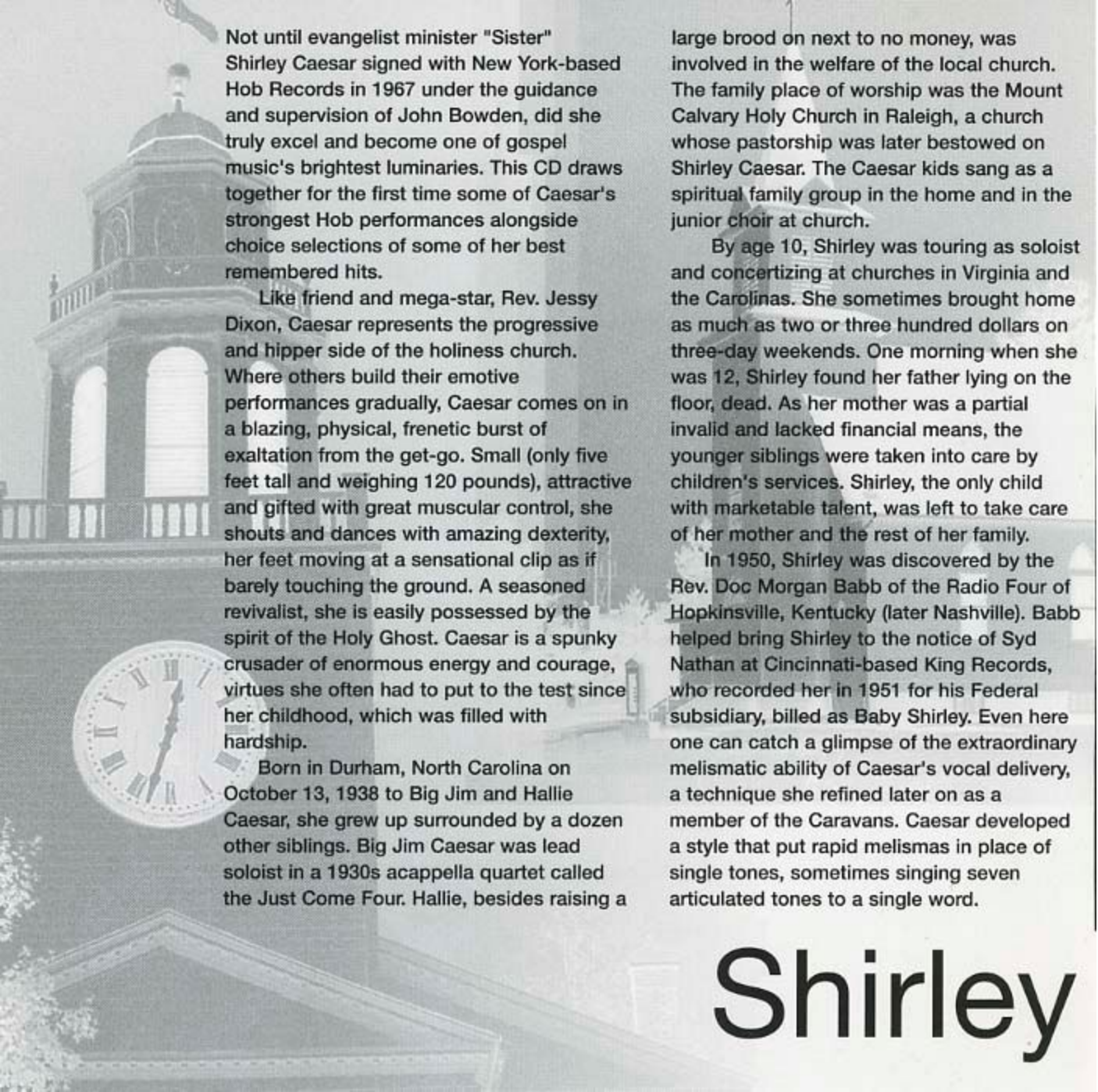


Shirley Caesar

A Collection of Her Finest Recordings

Hallelujah





Not until evangelist minister "Sister" Shirley Caesar signed with New York-based Hob Records in 1967 under the guidance and supervision of John Bowden, did she truly excel and become one of gospel music's brightest luminaries. This CD draws together for the first time some of Caesar's strongest Hob performances alongside choice selections of some of her best remembered hits.

Like friend and mega-star, Rev. Jessy Dixon, Caesar represents the progressive and hipper side of the holiness church. Where others build their emotive performances gradually, Caesar comes on in a blazing, physical, frenetic burst of exaltation from the get-go. Small (only five feet tall and weighing 120 pounds), attractive and gifted with great muscular control, she shouts and dances with amazing dexterity, her feet moving at a sensational clip as if barely touching the ground. A seasoned revivalist, she is easily possessed by the spirit of the Holy Ghost. Caesar is a spunky crusader of enormous energy and courage, virtues she often had to put to the test since her childhood, which was filled with hardship.

Born in Durham, North Carolina on October 13, 1938 to Big Jim and Hallie Caesar, she grew up surrounded by a dozen other siblings. Big Jim Caesar was lead soloist in a 1930s acappella quartet called the Just Come Four. Hallie, besides raising a

large brood on next to no money, was involved in the welfare of the local church. The family place of worship was the Mount Calvary Holy Church in Raleigh, a church whose pastarship was later bestowed on Shirley Caesar. The Caesar kids sang as a spiritual family group in the home and in the junior choir at church.

By age 10, Shirley was touring as soloist and concertizing at churches in Virginia and the Carolinas. She sometimes brought home as much as two or three hundred dollars on three-day weekends. One morning when she was 12, Shirley found her father lying on the floor, dead. As her mother was a partial invalid and lacked financial means, the younger siblings were taken into care by children's services. Shirley, the only child with marketable talent, was left to take care of her mother and the rest of her family.

In 1950, Shirley was discovered by the Rev. Doc Morgan Babb of the Radio Four of Hopkinsville, Kentucky (later Nashville). Babb helped bring Shirley to the notice of Syd Nathan at Cincinnati-based King Records, who recorded her in 1951 for his Federal subsidiary, billed as Baby Shirley. Even here one can catch a glimpse of the extraordinary melismatic ability of Caesar's vocal delivery, a technique she refined later on as a member of the Caravans. Caesar developed a style that put rapid melismas in place of single tones, sometimes singing seven articulated tones to a single word.

Shirley

In 1955, Caesar joined forces with Leroy Johnson, a peg-legged gospel preacher. The couple paid for time on a local TV show in Portsmouth, Virginia. A violent racist incident at a gas station en route to Bennettsville, South Carolina, in which Caesar barely escaped with her life, made her think again of the perils of being constantly on the road, particularly in the South.

Putting her singing career on hold, Caesar studied for two years at North Carolina State College, majoring in business education. She found a job as a stenographer. One night in the summer of 1958, the Caravans came to Raleigh to perform. Caesar went to see them. There were only three of them at the time: Albertina Walker, Inez Andrews and Sarah McKissick. Caesar told Dorothy Love Coates of the Gospel Harmonettes that she could sing and asked her to tell Albertina that she was free to audition. Caesar auditioned with the Caravans in Washington, D.C. and was hired immediately. A string of hits on the Gospel and Vee-Jay labels followed, starting with "Hallelujah, It's Done" on Gospel in 1961, followed by "No Coward Soldier" (1962) and "It Must Not Suffer Loss" (1963), among many for Vee-Jay.

The Caravans played the length and breadth of the nation and appeared frequently at the famous Apollo Theatre in Harlem. The group was made up of strong, dynamic soloists with equally powerful egos.

Internal strife took its toll, and the Caravans split up in 1966, leaving Walker the task of building a fresh outfit. Caesar, having now become a preacher, returned to the church. She recorded her first Hob album with the Young People's Choir of the Institutional C.O.G.I.C. of Brooklyn in 1967. A song from that album, "Don't Be Afraid," became one of the biggest gospel sellers of the year.

Other charts from the 1967 sessions include the sanctified "Till I Die," backed by the Choir of the Cornerstone Church in Philadelphia, a roots-oriented rendition of James Herndon's adaptation of "Jordan River (I'm Bound To Cross)" with Caesar and the Cornerstone Choir, ending out with the prerequisite humming chorus, "Tear Your Kingdom Down," sung likewise with Caesar and the Young People's Institutional Choir preaching, humming, and moaning along, and "My Testimony" with the same cast in song-sermon mode. The story line centers around two sons and the fate of their mother, the better off son rejecting his mother's pleas for her to live with him and the poorer one offering to find a home for her, no matter how lowly his place might be. "Don't Be Afraid" is a bass guitar-driven song-sermon concerning Christ's walk on the water and the call to his believers to follow after him.

Also in 1967, Caesar recorded briefly with the Caravans, then decided to go out as a duet with her sister, Ann Belle. In 1968, Caesar again had a hit with "Don't Drive Your Mama Away" (Parts 1 & 2), supported by the Caesar Singers, Ann Belle Caesar and Linda Martin, sopranos, and Dana Jones,



Caesar

contralto, plus the choir of the Progressive Baptist Church of St. Louis. It was clear by now that Caesar was searching her roots for a traditional means of musical expression. More and more, her performances resembled old-time revival services.

Caesar and the Progressive Baptist Church Choir of St. Louis cut "Loose That Man" and "I'm Getting Ready" at the Scepter Studios in New York in 1968. "Loose That Man" follows the same traditionally arranged pattern of her previous songs, except tambourines and spirited piano seem to add a greater heightened effect. The four recordings made in 1969 with the Caesar Singers include a slow, soulful reading of the Ward Singers' hit, "Packing Up And Getting Ready To Go," as well as a close choral rendering of "At The Cross," a song once made popular by Rev. Claude Jeter with the Swan Silvertones.

Rev. Jeter was indeed present on this session, as he added his vocal timbres to his old swan song, "Oh Mary Don't You Weep," which finds Caesar and Singers sparring on the choruses. The last is the song Rev. Samuel Kelsey scored big with in 1948 on MGM Records, "Little Boy, How Old Are You?" Caesar and her singers give the number a special swagger against strong bass and organ accompaniment.

In 1972, Caesar hit the big time again with "Put Your Hand In The Hand Of The Man From Galilee," a song for which she won a Grammy. We have chosen one standout song from this period, the cathartic "A Message To The Nation" (announcing the second coming of Christ), supported by the



Shirley Caesar

breath-note singing of the Caesar Singers.

In 1975, Caesar fared even better with her cover of country singer Melba Montgomery's "No Charge," the story of a devout mother's undying love for her children. This was followed by the extremely successful "A Man Called King Heroin," about the evils of drug addiction. Two years later, she was elected Top Female Gospel Singer by *Ebony* Magazine.

In 1977, she recorded "First Lady" for Roadshow Records. This led to the idea of her being bestowed with the title "First Lady of Gospel," an endearment that has lingered since in the hearts and minds of her many fans all over the world.

Opal Louis Nations

Opal Nations, born in Brighton, England, is a music producer, writer of both fiction and music articles, and vocalist with 1960s groups Alexis Korner Band, The Frays, and The Ram Holder Group, as well as former KPFA (Berkeley) deejay.

- 1. No Charge**
(Howard) Sony/ATV Songs (BMI)
- 2. Don't Drive Your Mama Away**
(Caesar) Regent Music Corp. (BMI)
- 3. A Man Called King Heroin**
(Hill) Copyright Control
- 4. Oh Mary Don't You Weep**
(Traditional) Public Domain
- 5. A Message To The Nation**
(Caesar) Regent Music Corp. (BMI)
- 6. I'm Getting Ready**
(Arr. Caesar) Regent Music Corp. (BMI)
- 7. 'Till I Die**
(Brown) Copyright Control
- 8. Jordan River**
(Herndon) Copyright Control
- 9. Loose That Man**
(Caesar) Regent Music Corp. (BMI)
- 10. Satan, We're Gonna Tear Your Kingdom Down**
*(Chisholm) Renteigh Music (BMI)
/ Careers BMG Music Publishing Inc. (BMI)*
- 11. My Testimony**
(Caesar) Renteigh Music (BMI)
- 12. Packing Up and Getting Ready To Go**
(Traditional Arr. Caesar) Regent Music Corp. (BMI)
- 13. At The Cross**
(Caesar) Regent Music Corp. (BMI)
- 14. Don't Be Afraid**
(Caesar) Copyright Control
- 15. Little Boy, How Old Are You?**
*(Traditional Arr. Caesar)
Regent Music Corp. (BMI)*

You might also enjoy these other Music Club albums:

QUEENS OF GOSPEL MUSIC 50094:

An uplifting collection of music featuring eight of the major female gospel groups, including The Caravans, The Clara Ward Specials, The Gospel Harmonettes, The Stars Of Faith and The Meditation Singers.

KINGS OF GOSPEL MUSIC 50093:

Close harmonies, swing leads and vocal dramatics are all featured on this hand-picked set of recordings. Featuring the talents of Mighty Clouds Of Joy, Brooklyn All Stars, Five Singing Stars and Dixie Hummingbirds.

MAHALIA JACKSON - QUEEN OF GOSPEL 50027:

Mahalia Jackson is a true legend of Gospel music and over twenty five years after her death, the intensity and passion of her performances is still unmatched. This collection features her greatest recordings, made for the Apollo label between 1947 and 1954.

For further information on the Music Club label write to:

MCI, PO Box 497, Hoboken, New Jersey 07030

or visit our website: www.musicclub.com

or email: JeffTamar@aol.com

Caesar