“I Sing Because I’m Free”: Developing a Systematic Vocal Pedagogy for the Modern Gospel Singer

D. M. A. Document

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By

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Abstract

"I Sing Because I’m Free":

Developing a Systematic Vocal Pedagogy for the Modern Gospel Singer

With roots in the early songs and Spirituals of the African American slave, and influenced by American Jazz and Blues, Gospel music holds a significant place in the music history of the United States. Whether as a choral or solo composition, Gospel music is accompanied song, and its rhythms, textures, and vocal styles have become infused into most of today’s popular music, as well as in much of the music of the evangelical Christian church. For well over a century voice teachers and voice scientists have studied thoroughly the Classical singing voice. The past fifty years have seen an explosion of research aimed at understanding Classical singing vocal function, ways of building efficient and flexible Classical singing voices, and maintaining vocal health care; more recently these studies have been extended to Pop and Musical Theater voices. Surprisingly, to date almost no studies have been done on the voice of the Gospel singer. Despite its growth in popularity, a thorough exploration of the vocal requirements of singing Gospel, developed through years of unique tradition and by hundreds of noted Gospel artists, is virtually non-existent. This document seeks to begin filling that void.
Important aspects of the history and development of Gospel singing will be examined, along with the individual singers, composers, and songs that created that history, and how that history has influenced the sounds and performance practice of the Gospel voice. A pedagogical analysis of Gospel vocal style following current established pedagogical parameters of respiration, phonation, registration, articulation, and resonance will be conducted in light of the core spiritual and emotional expectations required by both the Gospel singer and his/her audience. Information gained through interviews with contemporary historians, performers, and healthcare professionals actively engaged with the Gospel music industry will be synthesized to further understand the lifestyle and performance demands of the Gospel singer’s career. Finally, the document will suggest essential principals and strategies of voice training as well as health and wellness regimens which will point towards a comprehensive pedagogy for the Gospel voice, based on latest scientific and medical practices. It is expected that this document will provide the framework for developing a resource for voice teachers, Gospel singers, and all those interested in improving and preserving the art and craft of Gospel singing.
Dedication

Dedicated to my father the late Rev. Eli J. Sellers, mother Virgilene Y. Sellers, brother Rev. Wesley L. Sellers, and sisters Tiffany R. Sellers & Paula A. Sellers
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the OSU Graduate School Alumni Grants for Graduate Research and Scholarship for the funding to produce this document. I would also like to thank the following persons for their time in research:

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Martha Munizzi
Nissi Walls Allen
Pastor LaRue Howard
Erik Dillard
Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith
Dr. Karen Alsbrooks
Dr. Mark Williams

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Loretta Robinson for allowing me to study an area of sincere interest to me even if it was a little different.

Thank you to the remainder of my committee, Dr. Karen Peeler and Dr. C.
Patrick Woliver for seeing the validity and importance of completing this research.

Lastly, thanks to my family especially my mother for being my biggest cheerleader, copy editor and motivator to getting this document completed.
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Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. ii
Dedication ........................................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................. v
Vita ...................................................................................................................................... vii
List of Tables ................................................................................................................... ix
Chapter 1 – Introduction: “I sing because I’m happy” – But is my voice free? ...... 1
Chapter 2 – The History and Development of the modern Gospel voice .......... 5
What is Gospel Music? ................................................................................................. 5
Eras of Gospel Music ..................................................................................................... 9
Influential Figures in Gospel Singing ............................................................................. 16
Chapter 3 – Developing a systematic pedagogy for the modern Gospel voice .... 37
Respiration: Managing Breath for Gospel singing ..................................................... 39
Phonation: Vocal tone for Gospel singing ................................................................. 43
Registration: Managing vocal range and tessitura for Gospel singing ................. 46
Articulation: Clarity and ease of diction for Gospel singing ..................................... 49
Resonance: Enhancing tone quality for Gospel singing ............................................. 51
Chapter 4 – Health & Wellness for the modern Gospel voice ................................. 54
The Solo and Choral Singer Demands and Challenges ............................................. 54
Important performance practice traditions for modern Gospel singing .......... 57
Health and Wellness suggestions ............................................................................... 65
Issues of vocal health care within the Gospel singing community ........................ 69
Chapter 5 – Conclusion: Towards vocal freedom for the modern Gospel singer 74
Appendix A: Interview Transcript with Dr. Mark Williams ...................................... 76
Appendix B: Interview Transcript with Erik Dillard ..................................................... 87
Appendix C: Interview Transcript with Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith .............................. 96
Appendix D: Interview Transcript with Martha Munizzi .......................................... 104
Appendix E: Interview Transcript with Dr. Karen Alsbrooks ................................. 111
Appendix F: Interview Transcript with Nissi Walls-Allen ......................................... 116
Appendix G: Interview Transcript with Pastor LaRue Howard ............................... 123
Appendix H: Glossary of relevant terms .................................................................... 132
Appendix I: Compendium of relevant Gospel recordings ........................................ 136
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 139
List of Tables

Table 2.1 – The Congregational Era................................................................. 10
Table 2.2 – The Traditional Era – “The Golden Age of Gospel”...................... 11
Table 2.3 – The Contemporary Era .................................................................. 12
Table 2.4 – The Word/Ministry Era - Contemporary Blues and Jazz................ 13
Table 2.5 – The Word/Ministry Era - Inspirational Gospel .............................. 14
Table 2.6 – The Word/Ministry Era - Praise and Worship............................... 15
Table 2.7 – The Urban Crossover Era................................................................. 16
Table 3.1 – Voice Ranges for Gospel Singers.................................................... 47
Table 3.2 – Voice Ranges with Passaggio Points ............................................. 49
Chapter 1: Introduction – “I sing because I’m happy” – But am I vocally free?

“I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free. His eye is on the Sparrow and I know He watches me”¹

Gospel music is a significant part of the musical history of the United States. Prior to the start of the twentieth century, many African Americans, both enslaved and free, used hymn-like spirituals as their source of hope and escape from their circumstances. At the turn of the century many African Americans began to shed the influence of spirituals in search of a new music that was not connected to the oppression of slavery. This music needed to address their new role in society while still offering praise and thanksgiving to God, a significant difference between their Gospel and the Gospel of their white counterparts.² This music was a fusion of hymns heard in the “white” churches with Jazz and Blues music heard in the nightclubs and marked the beginning of Gospel music.

African American singers, whether classically trained or working in the popular music arena, often trace their musical roots to singing Gospel music. In

¹ Written by poet Civilla Martin (1866-1948) and composer Charles Gabriel (1856-1932) in 1905

the past fifty years a considerable amount of scientific and medical research has documented improved practices for the training, care, and healthy maintenance of the classically trained singer. However, there has been limited research or published work focusing on the best practices for the training and/or care of the Gospel singing voice. My intent with this document is to lay the framework for the creation of a methodology for the training and vocal healthcare of the Gospel singer.

Like most African American musicians, Gospel music significantly influenced my childhood and my understanding and appreciation for music. I began singing Gospel music at the age of three at Holy Temple Church of God in Columbus, Ohio, where my father was pastor. As a pastor’s daughter and a member of a musical family, my earliest singing experiences involved singing with my father and siblings in concerts around Columbus. Throughout my early singing career I experienced firsthand, and observed in others, the harmful effects of lack of training and/or improper vocal hygiene on the singing voice. These harmful aspects included singing in an incorrect vocal range, lack of vocal warm-ups, cool-downs or any voice building exercises, vocal muscle strain and fatigue, dehydration, and poor nutrition and lifestyle habits.

During my undergraduate studies as a music major I was often told that I had to make a choice between singing Gospel or Classical music. If I continued to sing Gospel I was told I would “ruin my voice” and that my voice would remain healthy only if I restricted myself to a western Classical singing style. However,
this was not a viable choice for me since Gospel music was, and continues to be, an essential part of who I am. Confronted with this choice, I continued to struggle with finding a way to sing Gospel music with a healthy voice. I soon realized that many other African American classical singers faced the same dilemma.

I began my quest to find resources and/or persons that could aid me in developing a healthy vocal technique versatile enough to allow me to sing both Gospel and other vocal styles. Despite continuous research I was unsuccessful in finding resources that addressed a healthy technique for Gospel singing that also allowed the singer to maintain the ever important spiritual connection that is at the core of Gospel singing. In fact there were very few resources on Gospel singing to be found at all. During my explorations I was also approached by many singers who, like myself, were seeking solutions to some of their vocal health and technical concerns. Through my continued research and pedagogical studies at The Ohio State University I realized that a systematic pedagogy for the Gospel singer was desperately needed.

After over 100 years of development and increased popularity, Gospel music is here to stay. Because of its strong influence on the development of many popular musical styles, Gospel is becoming even more integrated into mainstream media today. Always a mainstay of African American culture and spirituality, Gospel music is now being performed and studied globally. It is crucial that the most up-to-date vocal health practices become a prominent part
of the education of today’s Gospel singers and those who teach them, especially now that more singers are exploring this genre. It is through such education that Gospel singers can truly learn both the physical and spiritual benefits of taking care of “the voice God gave them.”

This document is a response to the need for a more thorough examination of the vocal requirements for teaching Gospel singing. In addition, several of the historical figures in Gospel music are studied in order to shed light on how they have individually and collectively influenced the Gospel singing style. The research and suggestions put forth here are based upon existing Gospel music history as well as information gained from interviews with performers and health care professionals actively engaged with the Gospel music industry. These interviews included topics such as current and historical performance practice traditions, teaching styles and career demands, and proper vocal health techniques for the amateur and professional Gospel singer. Full transcripts of these interviews are included in the appendix of this document. It is my hope that this document will serve as the basis for the development of a much needed resource for voice teachers, Gospel singers, and all who are interested in learning more about the art and craft of Gospel singing. It is also intended to provide an objective understanding of the Gospel singing voice and best practices for its training and healthy maintenance.
CHAPTER 2: The History and Development of the Modern Gospel Voice

What is Gospel Music?

“There is no music like that music, no drama like the drama of the saints rejoicing, the sinners moaning, the tambourines racing, and all those voices coming together and crying holy unto the Lord.”

- *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin

Gospel music as it is known and practiced in the 21st century has many definitions. At times it is considered to be a sort of African American folk music with a religious basis, the “good news” based on the New Testament of the Bible or updated spirituals. Jerma Jackson in *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* defines it “as a style of sacred singing marked by an upbeat tempo and by intense rhythms generated through percussive instrumental

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accompaniment."\(^4\) This definition however, only partially defines the breadth and depth of Gospel music.

A more complete definition can be found in the New World Encyclopedia which defines Gospel as “a genre of mostly American music characterized by dominant vocals (often with a strong use of harmony) drawn from Christian worship and often featuring Christian evangelical lyrics. It is composed and performed for many purposes; however, a common theme is praise and thanks to God and/or Christ."\(^5\)

The music that has become known as Gospel started its journey in the African American church at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century. According to Dr. Raymond Wise in his dissertation *Defining African American Gospel Music by Tracing its Historical and Musical Development from 1900 to 2000*, the early musical styles that influenced Gospel were Blues, Jazz, white hymnody, black hymnody and spirituals.\(^6\) Prior to this time in history, the music of the African American church service was largely reminiscent of the music of the “white” church. Anthems were performed by choir members as well as hymns or spirituals sung by the congregation just like their white counterparts.

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\(^5\) The New World Encyclopedia, 1996, s. v. “Gospel music”

In the late 19th and early 20th century, Christian churches underwent a split in which newly freed African Americans began to feel that the congregations where they once gathered with whites were not providing them with fair treatment. After being freed, many were still required to maintain their place in the back of the church, were not allowed to participate in the service, and were expected to refrain from emotional expressions of worship. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church founded by Richard Allen in 1815, sought to provide blacks an opportunity to not only participate, but in fact have control over the service. The AME church soon became the prominent place of worship for educated freed slaves, yet was not always welcoming to their lesser educated counterparts who desired the freedom to be more expressive with their worship. Not surprisingly, the music of the AME church was similar to that of the white Methodist church and included anthems, hymns and liturgical responses. The lesser educated blacks were not able to participate fully in the services because of their inability to read and they were forced to learn the music by rote or not participate at all.

Some of the illiterate African Americans also found the structure of the AME service restricting. These were former slaves who still felt connected to their tribal roots and desired ways to express certain vocalizing, movement, dance and emotional expressions as part of their newly acquired Christian faith. The new American Episcopal, Anglican and Methodist churches were based on more formal liturgies in which the congregation was less active and subservient to the priests. These demonstrative expressions were not accepted in any
church at the time, either black or white. For this reason, a new movement of “holiness” or “sanctified” churches began to emerge out of tent revivals and camp meetings. In these churches, congregations were free to express their emotions physically and the music was less audience observed and more audience inclusive. The purpose of this music was not only praise to God but quickly became a message of hope as the worshippers transitioned into a new life as freed individuals.

The earliest form of Gospel music is known as congregational music. This music was composed so that everyone could participate in the church service. The music still followed the verse/refrain structure of earlier hymns, but the lyrics changed to address the needs and concerns felt by the people at that time, which were unfair treatment, scorn, ridicule and survival. The music also provided a soundtrack to an energetic, participatory worship. The leading composers of this music were three ministers: Charles Tindley of the United Methodist Church, as well as Charles Price Jones and Charles Mason, co-founders of the earliest and largest of the Pentecostal denominations, The Church of God in Christ. Some of their most noted compositions were “We’ll Understand it Better By and By”, “Stand by Me,” and “I Shall Overcome”, which inspired the Civil Rights anthem “We Shall Overcome”. These compositions were the foundation of what would later become Gospel music.
Eras in Gospel Music

As is often the case with musical genre, as Gospel music developed over the 20th century it can be broken down into distinctive musical eras. The progression of these eras has also directly impacted the evolution of the Gospel singing style. As the social climate changed for African Americans the music also adapted to those changes.

According to Dr. Raymond Wise, a noted expert in Gospel music history, the five Gospel musical eras are the Congregational era (1900s-1920s), the Traditional era (1920s-1960s), the Contemporary era (1960s-1970s), the Word/Ministry era (1980s-1990s) and the Urban Crossover era (1990s-2000s). The time frames encompass when the eras began and progresses into the years of their highest popularity. However, each era may also be extended to the present day, because music from each of these eras is still composed and performed frequently.

The Congregational Era (1900s-1920s)

The music of the Congregational era began at the turn of the 20th century as a direct response to freed African American slaves branching out on their own both in church and society. The music was similar to that found in the churches of their white counterparts but often contained lyrics that expressed their personal concerns.

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7 Ibid, 246.
Table 2.1 – The Congregational Era (1900s-1920s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Figures</th>
<th>Charles Mason, Charles Price Jones &amp; Charles Price Tindley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Influence</td>
<td>Spirituals, White Hymns &amp; Baptist Lining Hymns(^8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Influence</td>
<td>Blues, Jazz &amp; Ragtime(^9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Components</td>
<td>• Yells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Moans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Traditional Era (1920s-1960s)

The Traditional era, also known as the “Golden Age of Gospel”, was the period when African American Christian music was first called “Gospel music”. Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993), known as the “Father of Gospel Music”, coined that term to describe music that was a fusion of congregational music and African American spirituals combined with elements of Blues and Jazz. It was during this time that Gospel music became more popular to the masses, and the vocal sound and styles most commonly associated with Gospel music were established.

During the Traditional era, America was dealing with social issues stemming from the Great Depression, World War II, and the beginning of the Civil Rights movement. Music was becoming a compelling force in how people dealt

\(^8\) Ibid., 360

\(^9\) Ibid., 360
with the challenges of everyday life, and Gospel music gained increased importance during this difficult time in history.

Table 2.2 – The Traditional Era (1920s-1960s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Figures</th>
<th>Thomas Dorsey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Influence</td>
<td>Spirituals, white hymns, black hymns and Baptist lining hymns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Influence</td>
<td>Blues, Jazz and Classical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singers Past</td>
<td>Mahalia Jackson, Rosetta Tharpe, Clara Ward, Willie Mae Ford Smith, James Cleveland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singers Present</td>
<td>Shirley Caesar, Dorothy Norwood, Lee Williams, Dottie Peoples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Vocal Components | • Yells  
| | • Shouts  
| | • Moans  
| | • Transitions between speech and singing  
| | • Vibrato manipulations  
| | • Bluesy vocal passages |

The Contemporary Era (1960s-1970s)

The Contemporary era began with the release of “Oh Happy Day” by Edwin Hawkins. This single song bridged the gap between the Traditional and Contemporary Gospel music eras by becoming less Blues-based and increasingly more Pop music and R&B based. New harmonies and rhythms were introduced into this style, and as a result the vocal style became less bluesy.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\text{Ibid., 361}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Ibid., 361}\]
and more like Pop music. There were two closely related subgenres that emerged out of this era – Classical Gospel, heavily influenced by western art music, and contemporary Gospel, which incorporated more Pop style into the idiom.

Table 2.3 – The Contemporary Era (1960s-1970s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Figures</th>
<th>Edwin Hawkins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Influence</td>
<td>Traditional Gospel and white hymnody&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Influence</td>
<td>Blues, Jazz, Classical and Pop&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Leaders</td>
<td>Walter Hawkins, Richard Smallwood, Bobby Jones and Raymond Wise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Vocal Components | • Reduced use of yells and shouts  
|                  | • Delayed vibrato on solo singing  
|                  | • Exaggerated or eliminated vibrato in choral singing  
|                  | • R&B style vocal passages  
|                  | • Vowel modification  
|                  | • Increased use of head voice and/or falsetto |

The Word/Ministry Era (1980s-1990s)

The Word/Ministry era was a time when Gospel music was based on bible scriptures and stories. In previous eras, Gospel music was used for praise to God but was based on a message of hope for better times and equal treatment for the African American community. As this era begins, black Americans are

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 362  
<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 362
beginning to believe in the possibility of equal rights and their music reflects this belief.

This era split into three distinct subgenres but all were rooted in the same principle of bible based compositions. These subgenres were contemporary Blues and Jazz, Inspirational music, and Praise and Worship.

*Contemporary Blues and Jazz*

Contemporary Blues and Jazz incorporated Jazz vocal elements into the singing style such as scat, improvisation and highly melismatic vocal passages; the accompaniment introduced Jazz chords that had not been used in Gospel music prior to this time.

Table 2.4 – The Word/Ministry Era – Contemporary Blues and Jazz

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Figures</th>
<th>The Clark Sisters and Thomas Whitfield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Influences</td>
<td>Traditional and contemporary Gospel(^{14})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Influences</td>
<td>Blues and Jazz(^{15})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Leaders</td>
<td>Daryl Coley, Kim Burrell and Donald Lawrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Components</td>
<td>• Highly melismatic singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Eliminated vibrato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of scat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of cadenza</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 363

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 363
**Inspirational Gospel**

Inspirational Gospel was composed to provide music that could “crossover” to the secular radio stations. The message became ambiguous by using pronouns like He, Him and You that could be used to describe either God or a loved one, for example, Yolanda Adams’ “Open My Heart” lyrics – “Alone in a Room/It’s just me and you/I feel so alone/I don’t know what to do.”

Table 2.5 – The Word Ministry Era – Inspirational Gospel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Figures</th>
<th>Andrae Crouch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Influences</td>
<td>Traditional Gospel, contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gospel and contemporary Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>music¹⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Influences</td>
<td>R&amp;B, Pop and Reggae¹⁷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Leaders</td>
<td>BeBe and CeCe Winans and Yolanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Components</td>
<td>• R&amp;B style vocal passages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Delayed vibrato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pop music vocal passages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Praise and Worship**

Praise and Worship music, used in white churches as congregational music, became more accepted in the black church. Some of the songs that were popular in the white church were adapted for use in the black church by adding rhythmic intensity, Gospel style chords and new vocal trends. “Friend of God”,

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¹⁶ Ibid., 363

¹⁷ Ibid., 363
originally recorded by white contemporary Christian artists and later recorded in more of a Gospel style by Israel Houghton, is a prime example of this Praise and Worship style.

Table 2.6 – The Word/Ministry Era – Praise and Worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Figures</th>
<th>Andrae Crouch, Ron Kenoly and Patrick Henderson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Influences</td>
<td>Traditional Gospel, contemporary Christian music, praise and worship(^\text{18})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Influences</td>
<td>Jazz, Blues, R&amp;B, Reggae and Pop(^\text{19})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Leaders</td>
<td>Israel Houghton, Martha Munizzi and Judith Christie McAllister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Components</td>
<td>• Vibrato manipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pop music influences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Urban Crossover Era (1990s-2000s)**

The Urban Crossover era shifted from a focus on vocal style towards greater emphasis on the musical accompaniment. These accompaniments, borrowed from secular popular styles such as Rap, Hip-Hop, and R&B, made Gospel music more accessible to young people, and suitable for radio air play on both Gospel and secular stations.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 363

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 363
Table 2.7 – The Urban Crossover Era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Figures</th>
<th>John P. Kee and Kirk Franklin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Influence</td>
<td>Contemporary Gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Influence</td>
<td>Hip-hop, R&amp;B, Pop and rap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Leaders</td>
<td>J Moss, Tye Tribbett, Mary Mary and Trinitee 5:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Components</td>
<td>• Exaggerated vibrato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vowel modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transitions between speech and singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High Belting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High tessitura in choral singing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To fully understand the vocal demands of Gospel singing, it is helpful to examine more closely the style of compositions and singing of some significant Gospel performers.

**Influential Figures in Gospel Singing**

The development of Gospel singing has been influenced by many Gospel performers, composers and teachers. Each has brought something individual and unique, since that is the essence of Gospel performance. Selected here are seventeen individuals or groups that have made significant and long-lasting contributions to the Gospel singing style. They are listed in order of the musical era in which they were most influential. A more comprehensive list of Gospel performers and composers are available in the appendix of this document.

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20 Ibid., 364

21 Ibid., 364
The Traditional Era – “Golden Age of Gospel” (1920s-1960s)

Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993)

Thomas Dorsey, who is often called the “Father of Gospel music,”\(^{22}\) is noted for coining the term “Gospel” to define the type of African American sacred music being composed at the time. Gospel literally means “good news” and has been used for centuries to define the message for Christians in the New Testament. Although he was a singer himself, Dorsey’s contributions to Gospel singing spring from the compositions he wrote both solo and choral. Professor Dorsey, as he was often called, was a prolific composer of over 800 compositions, a publisher, educator, and choir director.

Dorsey gained early prominence as a Blues and Jazz pianist. These musical genres greatly influenced his compositional style. He composed for his choir at Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago which was known for its reserved form of worship. His early sacred compositions for his choir were considered too secular for sacred use. Soon his infusion of Blues style piano accompaniments and upbeat rhythmic music normally found in the sanctified or holiness churches slowly became more accepted. As a reflection of his Blues and Jazz musical style, Dorsey also began to incorporate the use of improvisation into his musical performances within the church.

Along with Sallie Martin and Willie Mae Ford Smith, he founded the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses (NCGCC) in 1931. This organization provided a meeting ground for choirs and soloists from around the country to learn about, exchange ideas and further perfect the Gospel singing style. The NCGCC helped to create a uniform sound associated with Gospel singing. During this time music was primarily distributed as sheet music rather than through recordings. This convention provided composers with an opportunity to distribute their music on a greater scale as well as a place to have their say in how it was to be performed. Many choirs and groups left the convention with this new music.

Some of his most noted compositions such as “Remember Me”, “The Lord will Make a Way Somehow”, “I Will Trust in the Lord”, “Precious Lord” and “When I’ve Done My Best” have been recorded by Gospel and secular artists like Elvis Presley and Mahalia Jackson.

**Mahalia Jackson (1911-1972)**

Mahalia Jackson was the first Gospel superstar and established a standard for the Gospel singing style. With newly incorporated Blues and Jazz elements in the accompaniment brought by Dorsey as inspiration, Mahalia Jackson was the first to incorporate Blues style singing into the Gospel idiom. Her vocal style was comparable to that of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, who were famous Blues singers at the time. Though frequently urged to enter the secular Blues and Jazz concert market and despite large monetary enticements,
Jackson’s Christian faith compelled her to make her career solely as a Gospel talent.

Mahalia’s specific contribution to the Gospel singing world can be heard on her recording of any live performance of “Move on Up A Little Higher”. Since Gospel music at the time told a story just like Blues music, she incorporated the Blues style runs, shouts and moans into the song. Growing up she lived down the street from a “sanctified” church even though she attended a Baptist church. She loved the rhythmic intensity and reflection back to the music of the slave rows and African traditions in the sanctified services. When performing one would often find her clapping her hands, stomping her feet and swaying her hips to the music, which some in the church considered worldly, but she considered it to be sanctified.

She once stated that “Gospel music is good news and good tidings and not entertainment.” However, she became the first Gospel singer ever featured on *The Ed Sullivan Show, The Tonight Show* and many other radio and television broadcasts. Through these vehicles she was able to develop a following among whites in the country who helped her career to remain successful after the black community began to reject her in her later years. They felt that she was abandoning her church roots by her willingness to perform in secular environments and because her later recordings included orchestral

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23 See appendix I

accompaniment and background singers which to members of the church sounded too white and too secular.²⁵

Despite the powerful intensity of Jackson’s long performing career, none of her many biographies even mention vocal problems. Her death in 1972 was from complications with high blood pressure and heart issues.

Clara Ward (1924-1973)

Clara Ward and the Ward Singers were the first to bring a sense of glamour to Gospel singing. They abandoned singing in robes and long dresses and incorporated sequins and extravagant hairstyles to their wardrobe. Along with their new fashion sense, their singing style incorporated the bluesy and jazzy style associated with the time, but also included Pop music elements. These new elements contained dance-like rhythms and made use of new chords not typical in Gospel music.

Their major contribution was their ability to bring Gospel music to those outside of the church setting. Most of the Ward Singers’ appearances were on television shows, in concert halls and even in Las Vegas, which caused a lot of criticism in the church. Under the fierce management of Clara’s mother, much time was spent finding as many opportunities as possible to perform and earn lots of money.²⁶


Clara Ward’s singing style influenced the likes of Aretha Franklin. She incorporated the sound of the moans and shouts of Gospel singing, but also used a softer timbre, reminiscent of Pop singing. She went on to record several Pop songs that acquired moderate success. However, the constant battle with her mother to remain the lead singer of the group caused her to go back to Gospel singing full time until her death.

She wrote many songs that are still popular in the Gospel music repertoire to this day, “How I Got Over”, “Packing Up” and “Surely God is Able”.

**Rosetta Tharpe (1915-1973)**

Rosetta Tharpe began singing and accompanying herself on guitar at the age of six. Her playing of the electric guitar along with her animated performances were considered her major contribution to Gospel music. Prior to Ms. Tharpe, women were not known to play electric guitar for any style of music other than Blues. The most noted female Blues guitarist at that time was Memphis Minnie.27

Rosetta was equally at home singing in the churches, concerts halls and in the Cotton Club with Cab Calloway’s orchestra. She almost always accompanied her performances with her guitar. Her playing and performance styles is said to have influenced Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley, however, her singing style was unique. She had, for many years into her

adulthood, a childlike quality to her voice that began to mature rather late. Her singing style then became more declamatory or statement driven, and less melodic, somewhat like recitative. When she began her collaboration with Marie Knight, a Gospel singer who joined her on some of her later recordings, many believed that it was a great pairing because of Marie’s more melodic style singing coupled with Rosetta’s declarations.\textsuperscript{28}

Rosetta became a superstar in her own right. She toured around the US and Europe singing in such venues as the Apollo Theater and the Newport Jazz Festival, and made appearances with the Benny Goodman Orchestra. One of her most heralded musical performances occurred on her wedding day to her second husband Russell Morrison. The ceremony took place in Griffith Stadium in New York where well over 25,000 paying “guests” attended the ceremony, complete with a full Gospel concert in which Rosetta sang and played the guitar in her wedding dress.

Gayle Wald states that “Tharpe’s role was not only as a deeply influential musician but as one who redefined the spaces between sacred and secular, black and white, traditional and commercial and male and female.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 406

\textsuperscript{29} Gayle Wald, \textit{Shout, Sister, Shout: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe} (Beacon Press, 2007)
Willie Mae Ford Smith (1904-1994)

The style of Gospel singing most associated with the Traditional era of Gospel music can be attributed to Willie Mae Ford Smith. Along with Thomas Dorsey, she created the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses; her primary function was to host soloist workshops where she taught singers the important aspects of Gospel singing. She encouraged singers to use the Blues style runs, shouts, yells and moans to embellish their singing. In her own singing she often abandoned the time signature of a hymn to add emphasis to a particular passage, and she encouraged her students and singers that she mentored, like Mahalia Jackson, to do the same.  

Ford felt it was important to help the audience not only feel the music, but also to understand the story behind the song. For this reason, she was the first to incorporate the “sermonette” (see appendix G) or testimony into song. This involved breaking away from singing and including a personal or bible story to enhance the message of the song.

Although Willie Mae Ford Smith never attained the stardom and fame of many of her protégées, she was still very popular among the singers of that time. She is featured with Dorsey on the George Nierenberg documentary Say Amen, Somebody, a documentary that highlighted just how influential she was in the development of Gospel music.

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James Cleveland (1932-1991)

Rev. James Cleveland assumed the legacy of Thomas Dorsey, his childhood mentor and teacher. Like Dorsey, he was a choir director, composer and also the founder in 1968 of a Gospel music organization, the Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA).

One of Cleveland’s great contributions to Gospel singing was his development of the chorus as a major performance force, especially in recordings. He was one of the first to do so since the start of Gospel music. He used his chorus to advance the drama of the biblical story he was telling in his compositions. One of his most noted songs, “Peace Be Still” is based on the story of Jesus is crossing the sea of Galilee on a ship and a storm starts to rage. His disciples are in panic as Jesus sleeps in the back of the ship in the deadly storm. Cleveland and the choir retell this story through his use of imagery. The choir becomes increasingly more “agitated”, rising to higher and higher pitches and volume as the storm worsens, but quickly in responds to Jesus’ command for calm by returning back to their middle voice range. Some of his other compositions are “He Shall Feed His Flock” and “Jesus is the Best Thing that Ever Happened to Me”, a Gospel remake of the Gladys Knight hit, “You are the Best Thing that Ever Happened to Me”.

Cleveland’s gravelly baritone voice is easily identified in recordings. He grew up as a boy soprano but as he matured and due to some of his unhealthy
vocal and life practices, his voice became low and hoarse. He was a long time smoker and in combination with his excessive use of growls, yells and shouts by the time of his death he suffered severe vocal damage that resulted in significant voice loss.

The Contemporary Era (1960s-1970s)

Edwin Hawkins (b. 1943)

The Contemporary era of Gospel music started with one specific song – “Oh Happy Day”, an arrangement by The Edwin Hawkins Singers of an old Baptist hymn. This song originally recorded by a group of young people raising money for their church, got into the hands of rock station DJs and was played all over the country on secular stations. The song went to the top of the Billboard Pop charts in both the US and abroad and remains today the most famous Gospel song of all time.32

“Oh Happy Day” brought Gospel music to the masses; it embodied a new style that appealed to young people. It created a style of music similar to dance music through the connection of the text with the musical rhythms of traditional Gospel music and contemporary Gospel with its contemporary musical accompaniment. Dorothy Morrison, the soloist on the song, sounded like the Pop singer Mavis Staples, and collectively they inspired many young women with

low voices to seek a solo career. Morrison’s frequent use of phrases like “Oh Good God” or “My Lord” as a part of her ad-lib at the vamp or repeated section of the song caused quite a stir. The use of these phrases on this “worldly” song was considered a sacrilege since she was using the Lord’s name in vain, especially on what was considered to be a “dance song”.

Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, pastor of Advent United Church of Christ in Columbus, Ohio cites “Oh Happy Day” as her introduction to Gospel music. “One day I heard ‘Oh Happy Day’ on the radio. I didn’t know it was a Gospel song so I started dancing to it. My mother stopped me and told me not to dance to church music. From then on I was really curious about this music.” Her curiosity summarizes the prevailing feeling of the time - many did not know what to do with this song, sing it in church or dance to it.

The popularity of “Oh Happy Day” as a dance and party song provided the group with many opportunities to perform in secular venues. They served as an opening act to many secular artists like the Isley Brothers, and sang in Las Vegas casinos and on tour as part of the Playboy circuit. Just like their predecessors, they were criticized about their performances outside of the church building.

Another of Edwin’s compositions “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing” was featured on Coca-Cola commercials in the ‘80s. He has won several Grammys

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33 Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith (pastor and worship leader), in discussion with the author, March 2009.
and continues to record with his brother and sister-in-law, Walter and Tramaine Hawkins.

Richard Smallwood

Richard Smallwood has actively participated in the types of music associated with all of the eras that we have discussed, but has also created his own niche. He has brought an element of Classical music to Gospel. He uses traditional style of Gospel singing but incorporates it with orchestration and encourages his singers to use head voice and falsetto singing, both elements of traditional Classical vocalism.

He received a degree in music from Howard University and was one of the founding members of the Howard Gospel choir. He went on to teach music at the University of Maryland.

The Word/Ministry Era (1980s-1990s)

Andrae Crouch (b. 1942)

As a singer, composer, arranger and producer, Andrae Crouch’s contributions to music are numerous and far reaching. He discovered many noted artists in Gospel, he composed or arranged music sung both in and out of the church, and composed music for motion pictures and television. His earliest composition dates back to when he was fourteen years old with the Gospel classic “The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power”. His immense output of songs include such a list of Gospel classics like “Take Me Back”, “My Tribute (To God
be the Glory‖, “I Don’t Know Why Jesus Loves Me‖, “Oh It is Jesus‖, and
“Through it All‖. His songs embody a unique vocal arrangement style that is
considered to have sparked the Jesus Movement\textsuperscript{34} – a simple faith response to
the political upheaval of the 1960’s, and an active body of pop sacred music
called Contemporary Christian music (CCM).

Those distinctive vocal arrangements did not go unnoticed outside of the
church as well. Artists such as Michael Jackson, Madonna, Quincy Jones, Diana
Ross and Elton John requested his assistance with vocal arrangements. His
most controversial collaboration occurred when his choir performed background
vocals for Madonna’s “Like a Prayer‖. Her controversial depiction of the
crucifixion in the music video sparked debate in and out of the church and most
of his followers felt that Crouch should have not been involved.\textsuperscript{35} He also
provided vocal arrangements for Michael Jackson’s “Man in the Mirror‖ and for all
of the songs on his 1991 \textit{Invincible} album.\textsuperscript{36}

Andrae Crouch also provided music for several motion pictures, the
famous scene from \textit{The Color Purple} – “Maybe God’s Trying to Tell You
Something‖ and music for \textit{Free Willy}, \textit{The Lion King} and \textit{Once Upon a Forest}.
His music, originally accepted by white Americans only, sparked the start of the
Praise and Worship movement which helped his music become better accepted

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\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 108.
\item \textsuperscript{36} www.andraecrouch.com
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in the black church and around the world. His music has been translated into over 20 different languages.

**The Winans**

Ronald, Marvin, Carvin and Michael Winans were part of one of Gospel music’s largest family dynasties. The four brothers born to Mom and Pop Winans (also Gospel artists) were actively involved in Gospel music with their six other siblings until their discovery as a quartet by Andrae Crouch. Crouch influenced the group to create a new sound for the Gospel quartet. Prior to their emergence, Gospel quartets like the Soul Stirrers and Dixie Hummingbirds utilized harmonies similar to barbershop quartets. The Winans brought the harmonic structure and R&B style of The Commodores into Gospel music.

Their vocal style, a fusion of Jazz and R&B style harmonies, was easily accepted in secular music. Their sound was a composite of Marvin who had a mellow baritone voice, Carvin who used lots of falsetto, and Ronald who embodied the traditional Gospel sound in the group.

The Winans were the first Gospel artists signed by Quincy Jones’ label and were the first to have major concerts with lighting shows, stage effects and a large band on stage. They recorded several songs that received equal play both on the R&B as well as Gospel stations and collaborated with R&B stars Anita Baker and Teddy Riley. They had several singles on the top of the Billboard Hot 100, R&B and Contemporary Christian Music charts.
The Clark Sisters

Beginning in the 1980’s, The Clark Sisters – Elbernita (Twinkie), Dorinda, Karen and Jacky were the most prominent female Gospel group. Their unique vocal style was a contemporary Gospel sound with melismas or vocal runs, yells, shouts and scatting or singing on nonsense syllables. One of their major contributions can be called the “Gospel cadenza”. They would often sing the penultimate chord and, before resolving to the final chord, would indulge in a long melismatic cadenza that at times would be traded off among the four singers. The group is best known for their vocal acrobatics and extensive use of melismas. Each of the singers in their respective solo careers still maintains a high sense of showmanship and virtuosic vocal agility to this day.

Their music, often written or arranged by their mother Mattie Moss Clark or Elbernita “Twinkie” Clark, was clearly influenced by Blues, Jazz, Classical, Swing and Disco music.\(^\text{37}\)

BeBe and CeCe Winans

BeBe and CeCe Winans, one of the first male/female duos in Gospel music, were the creators of what can be referred to as the “Gospel Love Song”. This style of song had lyrics expressing deep love for Christ but used pronouns like him, you and he so that the lyrics could be addressed to a loved one. In their song “Addictive Love”, which received significant air time on the R&B stations,

the lyrics include “Time we should admit it/I’m so addicted, yeah/You see He’s taken my heart/And showed me the right way/No doubt about it/See I’m lost without it, yeah/You see this love takes me higher/I don’t know why then/I found it was addictive love.” The style and lyrics of their music often caused people to mistake them for husband and wife when they were indeed brother and sister.

They were discovered while singing background vocals for the television show Praise the Lord (PTL) with Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. Their singing of “Lord Lift Us Up Where We Belong” together on the show launched their career as a duo. Clever marketing of their Gospel love songs provided them opportunities to be heard on secular radio stations because of their pop music/adult listening singing style. When CeCe started her solo career she started to include elements of Gospel singing such as high belts, yet she also used a mixed head and chest voice in most of her singing. BeBe’s soft baritone is equally accepted on a Gospel song as it is on some of the smooth R&B or Jazz compositions which he has recorded.

BeBe continues to work in Gospel music as a producer for other Gospel artists. CeCe is actively involved in her own recording label and career. She became the first African American singer to earn the ‘Female Vocalist of the Year’ Dove Award which is awarded to contemporary Christian artists by the recording industry.

**Kim Burrell (b. 1973)**

Kim Burrell brought Jazz into Gospel music not only with her vocal ability but also with the use of Jazz harmonies. Her highly melismatic singing was influenced by the likes of Vanessa Bell Armstrong, The Clark Sisters and Daryl Coley. She also incorporates Jazz scat like Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. She is known as the “musician’s singer” because of her strength in creating new and interesting chord structures that are helping the Gospel music genre evolve. Along with her innovations in harmony, she also uses Jazz with the traditional style Gospel belts in what is called the vamp of the song.

Some of today’s most noted Pop singers who consider her an influence are Jessica Simpson, Beyoncé Knowles, Faith Evans and Mariah Carey. She has also collaborated with Chaka Khan, Stevie Wonder, Harry Connick Jr. and Gospel singers Shirley Caesar, Albertina Walker and Yolanda Adams.39

**Martha Munizzi (b. 1968)**

Martha Munizzi, although white, has been readily accepted in the black church because when many hear her sing, they think she is a black woman. She started her career singing with her family who specialized in Southern Gospel; later she went on to start a group with her sister Mary Alessi (another noted gospel singer) called Testament which then caused her to move into more Contemporary Christian music. After having listened to a Gospel CD while

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39 www.kbcrew.net
working at a Christian magazine, she began listening to more and more CDs and became interested in Gospel music, especially the music of Andrae Crouch.

As she transitioned from singing Southern Gospel into Praise and Worship music, she felt that she:

“always had this emotional or soul style of singing, key changes, arrangements, but it wasn’t the same sort of soul style you get in Gospel singing. So through listening to Gospel artists and some secular artists I learned the style. I never said I wanted to sound like a black singer. I just wanted to be the best singer I could be. But I would stretch myself and listen to artists and followed many of my influences to the point where many would say that ‘she sounds like an African-American woman’. I appreciated it. It wasn’t something that I intended to do.”

She went on to become the first non-African American to win a Best New Artist Stellar Award in 2005.

**Israel Houghton (b. 1971)**

Israel Houghton has introduced much of the Praise and Worship music that was sung in the white churches into the black churches. Many of the songs he has either written or arranged have been sung in white churches for many

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40 Martha Munizzi (Gospel singer), in discussion with the author, January 2009.

41 See Appendix H

42 www.marthamunizzi.com
years, however, Israel incorporated more soulful or Gospel elements into the songs so that they are now acceptable in the black church. He created a new performance force of a smaller background group called the Praise and Worship team. This group is usually a selected group of skilled singers who lead the music for the service and has become increasingly more popular in the church today.

**Donald Lawrence**

Donald Lawrence composed and produced many bible-based compositions for Gospel artists. His compositions are fairly challenging for both singer and musician. Vocal lines are often high in tessitura and require singers with extended vocal ranges. Many of his compositions start in middle voice but typically move into extremes of the range in the repeated portions of the song. Lawrence was familiar with the voice through his voice studies at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and therefore encourages use of vowel modifications in the extremes of the range and other Classical vocal techniques.

**The Urban Crossover Era (1990s-2000s)**

**Kirk Franklin (b. 1970)**

Kirk Franklin is largely known for incorporating musical samples from older R&B hit songs to make new Gospel songs. Not only does he incorporate the music but he also revises the words, especially the pronouns that we discussed.

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43 He received a BFA in Musical Theater
earlier, to make a Gospel song. For example, he took the Bill Withers hit of 1978 “Lovely Day”, the artist also known for recording “Just the Two of Us”, and creates his own version titled “Gonna Be a Lovely Day”.

He is successful in bringing more of a Gospel feeling to the song by using Gospel style ad-libs at the end of the song. He also creates a vamp that has Gospel style ad-libs over the choral repetition.

I personally consider him to be the Gospel hype man. In Hip-Hop music there is always a person on stage whose sole responsibility is to hype the crowd for the major performer. One can hear throughout his music his use of shouts of phrases in order to hype the crowd.

Now that we have examined more closely those that have contributed to the development of gospel singing, we can now begin to lay the framework for the development of a vocal pedagogy for gospel singers.
Chapter 3: Developing a Systematic Pedagogy for the Modern Gospel Singer

Isolating fundamental and specific principles of Gospel style and creating a logical methodology for teaching Gospel singing is problematic in light of the historical evolution of Gospel music, and those who are “called” to sing it. Since its inception, Gospel singing has been a self-taught or acquired talent, and is regarded by its followers as a “natural gift” from God. Surrounded and nurtured by a sacred and highly-emotional environment, those who could sing were deemed “anointed” by God and for this reason they saw little need for training or improvement by outside instruction. Since relatively few of the earliest practitioners could read music, for many years, learning Gospel music was accomplished through rote repetition and emulation of experienced singers. Even today, very few Gospel singers seek voice training or style instruction until late in their careers, or until they have developed a vocal injury or functional problem.

Although there are some voice teachers and vocal coaches in the 21st century who are at last beginning to specialize in teaching Gospel singing style,
there is still no unified teaching method for the Gospel voice, either technically and/or stylistically. As popular styles of singing (Pop, R&B, Broadway, Jazz, Gospel, etc.) surpass the interest in classical singing (opera, art song, oratorio, etc.), classically trained teachers specializing in classical modes of voice training find themselves more frequently asked to help singers perfect popular singing styles. As recently as twenty-five years ago, there were limited pedagogical resources for training the Broadway voice; due to increased demand, however, resources for teaching Pop singing and the “belt voice” are in great abundance today. So it is with Gospel singing; no systematic pedagogical approach exists for teaching the vocal style and sound required for success as a Gospel singer. The demand is great: a vocal pedagogy for Gospel singing must be developed.

A primary goal is to analyze the vocal requirements of Gospel singing in light of pedagogical principles that have proven successful in teaching other vocal styles, and to apply (and in many cases, amend) those principles to the training of the Gospel singer in a systematic way. The author will explore five major parameters of singing: respiration, phonation, registration, articulation, and resonance, and how these may be taught in a healthy, yet viable way to the singer who wants a career in Gospel music. Although detailing a comprehensive and thorough pedagogical study is beyond the scope of this paper, the intention is to provide fundamental core principles and guidelines for such a pedagogical resource.
Respiration: Managing Breath for Gospel Singing

As the power system of sound production, management of breath flow is an essential part of singing, however, its level of importance in a given pedagogy depends upon the singing genre being performed. There are three main types of breath management used for singing: clavicular, costal and diaphragmatic. In essence these terms indicate where there is expansion in the thorax due to the depth of air exchange in the lungs, and may be categorized as high, medium, and low breath respectively.

Clavicular (high) breathing, involves the shoulders and upper chest, and is characterized by a rapid rise and fall of the clavicles. It is a shallow breath that encourages the rapid exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide within the lungs, and for this reason is often called the “breath of exhaustion”. In addition to fatigue, clavicular breathing is also associated with intense crying, fear, or anxiety, and other highly emotional events. The larynx rests high in the pharynx during clavicular breathing. Although high clavicular breathing is perhaps essential for high states of emotion, it is generally considered an inefficient use of the respiratory system for sustained or high intensity singing or speaking.

Costal (medium) breathing, involves a lateral expansion of the rib cage, and is closely related to the breathing used in normal respiration for speech. It allows for a medium to low laryngeal position, and is useful for singing styles that require more of a speech-like quality. This type of breath management is also used by bel canto coloratura voices because it enables them to achieve a
focused legato sound primarily in light mechanism or head voice, which is desired for agility and high frequency passages that occur in the vocal literature of Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, and other eighteenth and nineteenth century bel canto composers. Although costal breathing is not the most powerful or efficient use of the respiratory system, still regardless of vocal genre, it is helpful for sopranos when they attempt extremely high notes or rapid melismatic passages in their performances.

Diaphragmatic (low) breathing, engages the low abdominal muscles and full descent of the diaphragm, and is widely taught in the classical singing community, because it encourages a low laryngeal position, which in turn creates a larger resonance space in the pharynx. This lower larynx, and the resulting longer vocal tract, and increased sub-glottal pressure made possible with diaphragmatic breathing also produces greater vocal intensity or loudness of tone for the singer without electronic amplification. Diaphramatic breathing (and its closely related Italian method of appoggio – “development of a coordinated, dynamic balance among the processes of respiration, phonation and resonation in singing”44) allows for maximum volume and control of air in the lungs to create wide vocal ranges and the subtleties of dynamics and legato phrasing that are a major component of classical singing.

In Gospel singing, clavicular breathing is most commonly used for several reasons. First of all, it lends itself favorably to the highly emotional state of the

music, text, and performance values. Gospel music by its nature is used to express charismatic states of emotion and belief; it is composed to express and convey those heightened emotions through quick tempos, rhythmic patterns and loud dynamics that rely on the singer’s ability to breathe rapidly and “ecstatically”. The high laryngeal position is generally favored and necessary to enable the Gospel singer to produce rapid, clear, speech-like sung text, often in a high tessitura, with the loudness deemed essential to the musical style. Finally, clavicular breathing makes the rapid, dancelike movements and gestures which accompany Gospel performance easier and more natural to accomplish.

A keen understanding of the respiratory system and how to manage breath flow is the most important element of traditional classical voice instruction that Gospel singers need to acquire if they are to enjoy healthy and effective singing voices over a lifetime. While intellectual understanding of the physical processes of singing does not necessarily ensure one can master them, it provides the singer an awareness of the various ways his/her body can function to produce a given sound result. Understanding how the vocal instrument functions and practice in executing the techniques provides one with freedom of choice (and therefore flexibility) in creating his/her sound. Such understanding and exploration of one’s voice is learned behavior, and it is for this reason that one seeks a voice teacher or coach to study singing. Such study does not “ruin” a natural or “God-given” voice or cause one to abandon spirituality in singing, but in fact, helps to free the singer to make aesthetic musical and performance
choices, to practice healthy singing habits, and to realize fullest use of his/her instrument.

Teaching the singer the correct use of breath management usually takes months to a couple of years of study. The teacher, coach or choir director should focus first on teaching the four steps of the breath cycle: inhalation – suspension – exhalation – recovery, and the variety of sounds that result from different applications of the cycle. In doing so the singer will feel what is occurring in his/her body as he/she inhales various amounts of air, how the air flow may be controlled as he/she is singing, various degrees of sub-glottal pressure and its effect on the larynx and sound, and finally, the release of remaining air and preparation for the next breath.

Once the breath cycle is understood, it is important that the singer explore the three main styles of breathing and be able to recreate them. Once these styles are learned they can be stored in an arsenal of various vocal tools that the singer can choose from when appropriate. There will be occasions in Gospel singing when a lower diaphragmatic breath is needed because the music calls for a richer, legato western Classical style. At other times, a mix of costal and clavicular breathing may be used for a gentle, conversational sung phrase. Although clavicular breath may be the predominant breath process used, the constant state of high laryngeal position, incomplete breath cycle, and small amounts of air intake that accompanies clavicular breathing results in an increasingly tense vocal mechanism and can be extremely fatiguing and
Phonation: Vocal tone for Gospel Singing

Of the five aspects of singing addressed in this chapter, phonation is one of the most important to Gospel singers. A specific quality of vocal tone and how to achieve it is the goal of most Gospel singers. Since Gospel singing is primarily learned by imitation and emulation, the focus is usually placed on how to recreate a desired sound, whether or not that sound is natural or easy for one’s voice. In fact, singing in a range and with a vocal tone inappropriate for one’s natural vocal instrument is a prime cause for vocal abuse and dysfunction among all singers.

Phonation is the vibration (opening and closing) of the vocal folds to produce a sound wave, interpreted by our ears as pitch. Phonation consists of three components; onset, sustained tone, and offset. Onset refers to how one starts the tone, sustained tone refers to the perceived quality of the sung tone, and offset relates to how the singer releases or stops the tone. Obviously there are various ways one can phonate and understanding these, along with which type of phonation to use for a given vocal tone is another aspect of learned behavior though vocal study.

There are four types of pitch onset: breathy, balanced, glottal, and pressed. These four onsets range from the most inefficient or hypofunctional use
of the laryngeal mechanism (breathy) to the most muscular and fatiguing or hyperfunctional onset (pressed). Breathy or aspirate onset occurs when there is a weak adduction or closure of the vocal folds, and air escapes as a part of the tone. A glottal onset results in air bursting through tightly adducted vocal folds resulting in a sound that is similar to a pop or catch. Pressed onset is also a highly muscular event, in which the vocal folds are adducted rigidly and remain held in that position throughout the sung tone. Balanced onset is the “middle ground” among the previously mentioned onsets. It occurs when the vocal folds adduct just as the air reaches the glottis (opening between the vocal folds) and results in a coordinated and relatively tension-free vocal tone.

Ending or release of the vocal tone, usually termed offsets, may be executed in similar ways as the onsets. There are three types: breathy, balanced, and glottal. The breathy or aspirate offset results from a weak adduction of the vocal folds or their inability to remain adducted as the urge to exhale overpowers them (passive forces of exhalation). There is an audible noise or “gasp” as the tone ends. The glottal offset a result of high subglottal pressure bursting through strongly adducted vocal folds, resulting in a choked or gulping sound at the end of the tone. This style is common in Gospel singing due to the high laryngeal position, strong subglottal pressure, and resulting laryngeal tension that occurs during phonation. The heightened emotional content of the Gospel song may also be a contributor to the sob or choke often heard at the end of a phrase or tone. The balanced offset, most commonly used in Classical singing, involves a coordination of release of the tone with breath flow to ensure there is silence at
the end of a phrase or tone. Balanced offset assures that the next breath taken will be silent and efficient, a goal in Classical singing, but not necessarily a goal for the intense and emotional quality sought in Gospel. A good example of breathy pitch onset and offset in Gospel singing may be heard as Dorothy Combs Morrison, the lead vocalist on The Edwin Hawkins Singers, sings “Oh Happy Day”. The glottal onset and offset sound may be heard at the end of Mary Mary’s “I Cried My Last Tear Yesterday”. Use of balanced onset and offsets can be heard in Mahalia Jackson’s recording of “Trouble of this World” or Tramaine Hawkins’ version of “What Shall I Do”.

Classical singing styles employ a variety of tone qualities that are used for affect both dynamically and dramatically. Gospel singing, however, primarily employs a pressed tone and frequent use of the glottal onset and offset for emotional affects and to achieve a loud and often yell-like tone. Not surprisingly, one’s constant highly muscular use of the larynx very often results in vocal fatigue and vocal disorders. Gospel dynamics range from mezzo forte to fortissimo throughout most of Gospel singing, and while amplification is helpful for the listener, the Gospel singer still uses his/her voice most of the time at maximum levels of loudness, energy, and effort. A variety of dynamics and the practice of other vocal tools may be able to assist in reducing the amount of pressurized singing in the Gospel community.

Vocal techniques such as legato or connected tone, marcato or strongly accented tones, and staccato, a quick, detached tone best learned through
consistent voice study. Practicing these varieties of pitch onset would free and strengthen the laryngeal mechanism for phonation, and if brought into one’s singing style, could allow for emphasis to be brought to particular words or phrases without the natural urge to just sing louder. Subtle alternatives to pressurized loud phonation would help ensure a healthier voice for the Gospel singer, as well as provide freedom of choice for his/her depiction of the text and musical ideas of the Gospel song.

**Registration: Managing Vocal Range and Tessitura in Gospel Singing**

The different vocal registers so important to classically-trained voices are typically not explored in Gospel singing, especially in the choral tradition. Many singers choose, or are selected, to sing particular voice parts or in certain ranges out of necessity or desire. The ability to decipher and sing harmonies accurately typically designates who sings alto and tenor. However, it is important that a singer discover the easiest and most comfortable area or tessitura of their voice and use it as much as possible—otherwise vocal problems eventually occur.

Eustace Dixon in his book *Gospel Music: Vocal Folds and Related Issues* discusses what is the optimum range for each voice part as listed in Table 3.1.45:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sopranos</th>
<th>C4</th>
<th>A5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altos</td>
<td>G3</td>
<td>E5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenors</td>
<td>F3</td>
<td>D5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basses</td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>C4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In recent years, Gospel compositions for both solo and choral singers have been written with a high tessitura. Sopranos are frequently required to sing A5 and B5 with a loud belted sound. Consequently the tenor line has become higher and higher in tessitura, and many females are joining the tenor sections to accommodate this change.

In order to appreciate registers and their importance for singing and vocal health, Gospel singers need to gain a basic understanding of how various pitches are created and how strengthening and balancing the various registers of the voice can help maintain vocal health. Pitches are created by changes in the mass (thickness) and length of the vocal folds. For low pitches the vocal folds are short in length and thicker in mass; conversely high pitches are created by long, thin vocal folds. Vocal registers can be divided into many segments, but the principle ones needed for Gospel singing are “chest” or modal voice, “head voice”, and “falsetto”. Chest voice is the register in which we speak and the one most frequently used in Pop and Gospel singing; the vocal folds are thick in mass, close firmly, and make a strong, clear sound if the voice is healthy. Falsetto register, in which the vocal folds are long, very thin, and often do not close completely is used by male singers to achieve a light, but ringing high voice; women do not have a falsetto register. Head voice, is a type of middle register, in which the vocal folds achieve varying lengths and thickness responded to the pitch being sung. Both genders can and should develop their head voice register, however, this requires a sophisticated flexibility of the small vocal muscles (particularly crico-thyroid and thyro-arytenoid muscles) which once
again, is best mastered through study and practice. Women also have an extreme high vocal extension called “whistle” register which is rarely used in Gospel singing (although a fine example may be heard in the singing of Mariah Carey at the end of the song, “Dream Lover”).

Singers often speak of having a “break” in the voice. This abrupt stop or change in vocal registers is a direct result of a lack of coordination of transitions from one register to another in a singer’s vocal range. These transition points are called “passaggi”, using the Italian term, and while seamless transition points are not as important in Gospel singing style as in Classical, still learning to sing through the “passaggio” with ease ensures more freedom for the voice, more choices for the singer, and a healthier use of the entire range of one’s voice. Table 3.2 illustrates the main vocal registers for each voice type, along with the passaggi, or transition points46.

### Table 3.2 – Voice Ranges with Passaggio Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Part</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>1st Passaggio Point</th>
<th>2nd Passaggio Point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>C4-C6</td>
<td>Eb4-G4</td>
<td>Eb5-G5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto</td>
<td>G3-E5</td>
<td>G4</td>
<td>D5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenors</td>
<td>F3-D5</td>
<td>D4</td>
<td>G4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basses</td>
<td>E2-C4</td>
<td>Bb4</td>
<td>Eb5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strength and ease of a particular area or register of one’s voice usually determines his or her voice type. It does not necessarily mean that

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because one can sing in the tenor range, it is the best or strongest area within that voice. Due to the necessity of section balance in Gospel choirs, there are many women singing tenor; equally troubling are baritone voices struggling to sing high tenor parts due to a lack of tenors in the choir, or because the singers simply want to sing high notes. Most Gospel choral music is composed in three-part harmony and the need to cover all three parts usually supersedes the vocal balance or health of the choir members. Ideally, teachers and choral directors should work with singers individually to discover their best vocal range and despite the urge to do otherwise, have their singers sing in the appropriate section of the choir.

**Articulation: Clarity and Ease of Diction for Gospel Singing**

Gospel like many other popular musical styles has a strong emphasis on the words. The words of Gospel songs are very important not only because of the important message of the text, but also because much of the singing style is adapted to convey the text, and emphasizes sharp, often percussive consonants. Classical vocal instruction stresses freedom of the articulators – jaw, lips, vellum (soft palate and uvula), tongue, larynx, and pharynx to emphasize the vowel and seamless legato phrasing. Due to the rhythmic intensity of the music, legato singing is simply not normally a requirement of Gospel. The energetic, explosive treatment of words that is a mainstay of Gospel style allows little time for easy breath, and can be tense. It is gratifying to note, however, that some contemporary Gospel composers like Richard Smallwood and Dr. Raymond
Wise are incorporating more Classical vocal elements like legato, line and full use of vocal registers into their Gospel compositions.

Clarity of diction (the ability for the audience to understand the words), is also not as important in Gospel singing as in Classical or even Broadway singing. Due to the pervasive use of powerful amplification, the natural speech-like diction used, and the repetitive nature of Gospel lyrics, the audience usually grasps the text.

As one who has studied Classical and Gospel singing for many years, I believe it would be helpful for Gospel singers to learn the feeling and freedom of singing achieved when their articulation system is functioning with ease. Much of Gospel singing employs small pharyngeal and mouth space, which can lead to jaw tension. This small resonance space, prized for its naturalness also leads to the need to belt for higher pitches---a phenomenon that actually equals screaming. The muscle tension and resulting fatigue of constant high-pitch belting will damage a voice tremendously over time, leaving a shortened vocal range, huskiness, and often vocal nodules (calluses on the vocal folds). Therefore, learning through consistent voice study the skill of vowel modification and creating more vertical space both in the front and back of the mouth can create an ease of production in the upper register of the voice that would be immensely beneficial to Gospel singers.
Resonance: Enhancing Tone Quality for Gospel Singing

Resonance is defined by Dr. Clifton Ware in his book, *The Basics of Vocal Pedagogy*, as “spontaneous reinforcement and amplification of tonal vibrations (energy) occurring whenever a cavity is tuned to the natural frequency of the fundamental pitch sounded”. 47 *Random House Dictionary* offers another definition: “amplification of the range of audibility of any source of speech sounds, especially of phonation, by various couplings of the cavities of the mouth, nose, sinuses, larynx, pharynx, and upper thorax, and, to some extent, by the skeletal structure of the head and upper chest”. 48 In short, it is the ability of the singer to enhance the loudness and quality of their tone through the way they shape their vocal tract---much like a filtering system, a sound system which boosts certain parts of the sound, while damping others. Classically trained singers spend years finding and developing the resonance of their voices, not only to project their vocal tone more loudly, but also to do so with ease and finesse.

Obviously there is a significantly reduced need for this natural resonance in Gospel singing because it is most often performed with the aid of strong amplification. In Classical singing there is a need to project the voice naturally over orchestras and in large theatres with little or no amplification. Gospel

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singers in some ways “dull” or negate the resonator by lowering the vellum, raising the larynx, and relaxing the pharynx, thus letting the amplification do the projecting. It is a matter of artistic choice, and audience expectation when singing Gospel. Furthermore, if a Gospel artist performed with full-blown classical resonance, the microphone would be unnecessary and if used could cause a great amount of distortion when not adjusted by the sound engineer.

The benefits of vocal instruction to the beauty, health, and freedom of the singing voice cannot be overstated. A Gospel singer who is interested in improving their craft and vocal longevity should consider studying singing throughout their careers from someone who knows Classical training but is also knowledgeable about Gospel singing style demands. The number of instructors who fall into this category is limited but is increasing rapidly. As further study and understanding of Gospel vocal style requirements become more widely known, and a systematic pedagogy unfolds to train that singing style, it will become easier to find teachers and coaches who may not have direct connection to Gospel singing, but possess the skill and desire to help emerging Gospel artists.

Moreover, it is beneficial for singers steeped in Gospel singing style and traditions to also explore other styles of sacred music. There are a myriad of ways to express praise which may touch the heart of the listener if well sung; Contemporary Christian music and Classical sacred music are at least two of those alternative styles. These songs in their own way, may also contain the message of hope and spiritual fervor so central to the Gospel mission, and with
the artistry of a skilled Gospel singer, they may take on an even more unique message. Above all, the contemporary Gospel singer must be able to maintain the beauty and integrity of their God-given voice through all styles they sing. It is the pressing duty of vocal pedagogues to at last develop a focused and well-thought-out system of training for the Gospel voice that enhances its Gospel style and message. It is equally important that Gospel singers no longer mistrust voice study, but actively seek and embrace it, if they are to realize fully and adequately care for their “natural” gift from God.
Chapter 4: Health and Wellness for the Modern Gospel Voice

The Solo and Choral Gospel Singer Demands and Challenges

In order to understand the best practices for teaching and coaching the Gospel singer, it is necessary to know the vocal demands placed on them by their careers. Extended worship services and lengthy concerts can lead to some of the vocal injuries or dysfunction common to this singing community.

The Gospel singer is often both a soloist and a choral singer. There are stylistic similarities and some differences between the vocal production of the soloist and that of the choral singer that challenges those who sing in both categories. It is imperative that voice teachers, vocal coaches, and health care professionals be aware of the performance practices of both groups.

The Gospel solo singer must bring to their ministry the ability to singlehandedly move those in the audience or congregations. The audience expects skillful singing, spirit and showmanship. The show must continue regardless of fatigue or any other vocal or physical issue being experienced by the singer. Cognizant of audience expectations, the Gospel singer prays for
divine intervention to take care of them so that they can make it through the performance, often at the detriment of their vocal health.

The schedule of a professional solo singer can be daunting and creates challenges to remaining healthy. During my interviews with Martha Munizzi, LaRue Howard and Nissi Walls Allen, I realized just how much frequent travel and recording and promotional schedules can take a toll on vocal health.

The rehearsal schedule for professional Gospel singers can be grueling especially in preparation for a new recording or concert tour. Martha Munizzi and other artists follow a schedule that involves several days of intense rehearsal in preparation for a new show or performance. “If we are working on a new show or arrangement, we work in Detroit. We [work] for two or three days for several hours a day and work with a small band. Then we bring up the background vocalists for the last couple of days. We will work with them and make a rehearsal track before they leave. We send it with them and tell them they are expected to have this learned when we get back together.”

Once the rehearsals are complete, the touring begins and it is typical for an artist to attend promotional events leading up to the concert(s). This can be difficult because if not scheduled properly one can be participating in a CD signing or television show appearance directly before they sing a sound check and the concert later that evening. Nissi Walls Allen reflects on that time when

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49 Martha Munizzi (Gospel singer), in discussion with the author, January 2009.

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she toured with the group *Anointed*, "some days were difficult and exhausting…but rewarding."50

The sound check before a performance is a critical part of preparation for the concert. It is a time when the soloist becomes familiar with the acoustical space in which they will sing. The success of the performance and how well the singer's voice holds up can be partially attributed to how well the sound and monitoring systems are being operated by the engineer traveling with the artist or provided by the venue. If a singer cannot hear themselves the tendency is to push or sing louder which can lead to vocal fatigue during the performance.

Following a one or two hour performance, the artist often goes out and receives the audience and works at a promotional table without an opportunity to cool down or rest the voice. At a time when the vocal folds may be most vulnerable, the singer is often required to do more loud talking in a crowded reception area or as they board a tour bus or plane for travel to the next city. Often the next concert may be as soon as the following day. Unlike Classical singing, where the norm is several days of rest in between performances, the Gospel singer is expected to be ready to perform after only several hours of rest.

The Gospel choir singer faces the same challenges as the solo singer but also faces additional challenges as well - the most daunting of which is that many choral singers are not placed within a proper vocal tessitura. Females with lower

50 Nissi Walls Allen (Gospel singer), in discussion with the author, February 2009.
voices often sing tenor and some sopranos sing alto because they can harmonize. This can cause problems for the singers because prolonged singing in the incorrect vocal range can lead to vocal injury or damage.

Members of the church gospel choir face challenges when they are required to sing several consecutive services with the same vigor and excitement as in the first. Gospel choir directors must be careful not to program too many songs in one service, particularly if the service is repeated numerous times. It is important that the singer and director be aware that a series of warm-ups are necessary before the choir begins to sing.

**Important Performance Practice Traditions for Modern Gospel Singing**

As we look at the traditions associated with Gospel music, it is necessary to understand aspects of this style other than the music and method of singing. Ministry, defined as “the act of providing care, aid or service as to address the needs or wants of those being helped” is the main focus of Gospel music and is what most Gospel singers try to accomplish. They desire to help the members of the audience or congregants of the church escape the stress of their lives and embrace the hope that is deeply rooted in this music. Audiences of Gospel concerts expect a “delivery” that combines singing, physical movement, and a significant expression of spirituality. The term “performance” is not used to describe a Gospel experience due to the strong belief that this concept

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diminishes the ministry. In fact many people feel that there is no such thing as a Gospel performance, but only an opportunity for ministry, to share the good news of Jesus.

The debate about ministry versus performance is ongoing. Due to the limited written information on this aspect of Gospel music, I interviewed four Gospel recording artists, a leading Gospel choral conductor, and a Gospel historian about their opinions.

Pastor LaRue Howard, worship pastor of Faithworld Church in Orlando, Florida and the 2009 Dove Award winner for Contemporary Gospel Recorded Song had this to say about what constitutes the difference between a performance and a ministry opportunity:

I guess one would say musical content or the people that were there. However, I always say that no matter where you are singing or who you are singing for it should be the same. There are several corporations that bring their major conferences here to Orlando so even if I am singing “You Raise Me Up” or “Ain’t No Stopping Us Now”, my intent is to always acknowledge God in my personal time before going on stage and just say God let the sound of my voice reach them in a way that they will know that there is something different or something that they have never experienced before. If I am singing “Respect” whatever, I want them to feel something different. So for me there is never really a difference in my intent in singing inside or outside of the church.52

52 LaRue Howard (worship pastor of Faithworld Church and Gospel singer), in discussion with the author, February 2009.
Martha Munizzi, multiple Dove Award winner and the first non African-American winner of a Stellar Award believes:

I think that they both go hand in hand. I certainly don’t want to be in a situation where it is totally performance. To be realistic there are some places where you have 10 minutes to sing one song, so you don’t have the opportunity to really get into the ministry aspect of it. So if you are doing a showcase you want to bring something that is entertaining to the people, but at the same time they are being uplifted, they are being encouraged. You can always have an opportunity to minister to people. They don’t have to be on their faces crying. You can encourage or uplift someone no matter how much time you have to minister. All of that is ministry. And I present myself with my singers and my band with the level of ministry that I am able to bring to the performance, ministry is very important to bring to the table. There is a level of performance, excellence and quality that is engaging to the crowd, that gets their attention. But at the same time they are being uplifted, they are being challenged. The Holy Spirit can do so much that I can’t do. So I do my part and the Holy Spirit does the rest. Now I’ve seen the extreme where it was such a performance that you felt like the Holy Spirit was off drinking coffee somewhere. That’s a sad situation. I think a lot of times that’s attributed to someone’s life or lifestyle where they have lost touch. I try not to judge but I say for my life I want to stay connected so that there is a performance aspect but also the Holy Spirit is doing its work.

Dr. Karen Alsbrooks, a Columbus, Ohio based singer who has recorded with Raise Mass Choir thinks of it this way:

I think a better word would be ministry. If you define ministry as serving, then you are serving that congregation. It is not a one way street you are also serving those that are in ministry. It has a multifaceted event. It is to go out but also to come back to the performers as well.

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53 See Appendix H
54 See Appendix H
55 Martha Munizzi (Gospel singer), in discussion with the author, January 2009
56 Dr. Karen Alsbrooks (member of Raise Choir), in discussion with the author, June 2009
Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, pastor and worship leader of Advent United Church of Christ of Columbus, Ohio explains that her choir understands the difference because “It was never about the singing. It was always about the spirit. I often encourage them to close their eyes and give it to God.”

Dr. Raymond Wise, Gospel composer, historian and conductor of Raise Mass Choir of Columbus, Ohio says:

The primary difference between performance and ministry is the intent. The intent of performance is to entertain. The intent of ministry is to inspire and edify both the performer and the listener. Performances may be entertaining but they may not inspire and ministry may or may not be entertaining but it will definitely end with inspiration, edification or transformation. This difference can also be distinguished by the three phases of music:

Level I: Music
Level II: Polished Music, and
Level III: Anointed Polished Music.

Level One and Two is the goal of the Gospel performer. Level Three is the goal of the Gospel Music minister. Performing Gospel music at the Level I or II aims to add a sense of sorrow or emotion. However, ministering Gospel music at Level III aims to add a sense of Spirit. This spirit comes from singing out of conviction and belief in the God of the Gospel. Performers can sing with emotion but not from conviction and belief. The intent of ministry is to reach the level of spirit so that both listener and performer are transformed by the presentation. The goal of performance is to create an emotional affect but not necessarily to promote spiritual transformation.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{57}\) Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith (pastor and music minister at Advent United Church of Christ), in discussion with the author, April 2009.

\(^{58}\) Dr. Raymond Wise (Gospel historian and Raise Choir founder), in discussion with the author, July 2009.
There seems to be a consensus that singing Gospel music requires much more than just vocal and performing ability. One must have a spiritual relationship with God and a desire to reveal this without inhibition.

Physical expressions of religious euphoria date back to West African religious and tribal traditions brought to America by slaves. Religious or tribal ceremonies were often accompanied with rhythmic drumming and dancing. When the slaves converted to Christianity, they naturally maintained that tradition.

In the West African tradition, music was composed for movement. It was not audience observed, it was all-inclusive, and therefore everyone had the opportunity to participate. Once this tradition arrived in the US it became a part of the slave row gatherings called “praise houses”. These gatherings provided the slaves with an opportunity to express their faith through the animated movement with which they were accustomed.

When slaves were allowed to attend white protestant churches they were told that this animated expression was barbaric and should not be used in church. Some slaves moved away from these expressions while others held to this tradition.

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Toward the end of the Congregational era and at the beginning of the Traditional era of Gospel music, movement while singing became increasingly more accepted. Both hand clapping and foot stomps became popular. Mahalia Jackson was often criticized for the way she swayed her hips which some considered to be too sexual or as it was called in the church community, “too worldly”. Today, more and more black and white singers are engaging in this demonstrative type of expression.

Movement, as an emotional and spiritual expression, has special importance to healthy singing because of its impact on body alignment and posture. In the Classical singing tradition, posture and alignment are considered important to overall proper vocal function and singing ease. Posture is rarely addressed in Gospel singing.

Gospel singers are usually encouraged to sing with their heads tilted back. There are two main reasons for this head position. Solo and choral singers are expected to sing to “God” and, therefore, often sing up toward heaven. The second reason is specific to choral singing. The microphones used for choral concerts are typically overhead, and the choral directors and sound engineers encourage singers to sing up towards these microphones in order to record or amplify the fullest sound possible. This causes a tension in the neck that can lead to vocal strain.

Proper alignment of the head and neck has been repeatedly shown to be an essential element of maintaining ease in function throughout the body.
Principles of the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method (preferred systems of body work widely used by singers, dancers, and actors) emphasize the need for a lengthened and vertical alignment of the atlas-occipital (AO) joint – the joint between the head and neck. Collapsing of the neck by bending the head backward or jutting the neck forward compromises AO joint alignment, and very rapidly produces strain in the rest of the body.

The synergy between the audience and performer is also of upmost importance. The performers elicit an audience response which in turn inspires the presentation. Ultimately the audience is the final judge of the validity and success of a performance. The audience evaluates whether the group or soloists moved them enough and whether it was spirit inspired. For this reason, many singers are pressured into making choices of body alignment and movement which can be detrimental to their vocal health.

Gospel music is intended to evoke responses from the audience, often including “amens”, shouts, and movement. This expectation can present challenges to the performer in several ways. There is motivation to sing to one’s vocal limit, resulting in fatigue if not injury. Some singers also choose to sing songs unsuitable for their specific vocal ability in order to gain a desired audience response.

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In the last four decades, there has been a belief that vocal agility and a full, belted vocal sound was the only style of singing acceptable in Gospel music. The use of belt voice in the upper range by both women and men was not only accepted, but expected as a performance practice. The yells, moans and shouts of the early Gospel singers are still requirements for “true” Gospel singing today. Performers continue to sing in this style because it moves the audience. The louder, higher and fuller one sings, the more intense the response.

Gospel songs are typically learned by rote and the singer endeavors to perform it as close to the original recording as possible. Every melisma, moan or manipulation of vibrato is important to be emulated. For this reason, some singers choose a song that inspires them or they believe will inspire others. The choice is often not made based on voice type, as it is in the Classical singing tradition, so one may attempt a song that is either too high, too low, or just outside of the scope of their vocal ability.

Repetitive vocalizing in an uncomfortable area of the voice can lead to pushing or tension which then leads to vocal injury. It is important for the singer to be aware of their optimum range and select songs that are appropriate and healthy for their instruments. Repertory selections should not be made just because someone else sang it and elicited a great response from the listeners.
As Dr. Wise stated “the intent of ministry is to inspire and edify both the performer and the listener.”

**Health and Wellness Suggestions**

**Hydration and Diet**

In American culture a great emphasis is placed on diet and proper nutrition. This matter is important to one’s overall health and it can have a significant impact on the singing voice. Certain foods high in salt and fat content as well as spicy foods can increase the amount of acid production in the stomach which leads to acid reflux, and if not treated can lead to vocal injury or dysfunction.

It is imperative for singers to have adequate hydration to maintain a healthy mucosal covering of the vocal folds. If this covering is not present, there is more friction between the folds which can cause damage or reduced vocal ability. Experts suggest drinking at least sixty-four to eighty ounces of water daily.

The following tips for diet may be found in *The Performer’s Voice* by Michael Benninger and Thomas Murry:

1. Reduce or eliminate coffee and caffeinated beverages – coffee, teas, colas and so forth.

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Dr. Raymond Wise (Gospel historian and Raise Choir founder), in discussion with the author, July 2009.
2. Eat a balanced diet. Avoid crash diets. They may contain substances that change the way you feel and produce voice.

3. Examine the details of food supplements. Excessive vitamin E may cause blood vessels in the vocal folds and other parts of the body to rupture.

4. Eat light meals with plenty of water before rehearsals and performances. Some medications can also cause dehydration. It is therefore important for singers to have an awareness of medications they take and their effects on the voice. Medications for cold and sinus problems, treatment of emotional disorders, allergies, and asthma are most commonly drying and can have detrimental effects on the voice. The National Center for Voice and Speech has compiled a list of over 200 frequently prescribed medications and their effects on the voice. This list can be found at http://www.ncvs.org/e-learning/rx2.html.

Body alignment and posture, is important to the overall effectiveness and functioning of the vocal apparatus. Since Gospel singing requires lots of body movement, it is important that the singer be aware of their body alignment while in motion so as not to impede the desired result. It is important for healthy blood flow to keep the knees buoyant, and to be aware of the neck tension that may result from misalignment of the atlas - occipital joint.

Exercise can be very useful to the singer when working with breath management, endurance and overall health. However, it is important to lift small

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weights and not to strive for power lifting; lifting heavy weight may cause laryngeal strain which can then lead to tension or vocal dysfunction. It is better to swim or exercise with light cardio programs.

An instrumentalist controls the environment of their instrument by placing it into a case when not in use. Vocalists cannot place their instruments in a case per se, however, they can try to control their environments in other ways. Singers should avoid loud and/or smoky environments which can cause dryness and overuse of the vocal folds. Another instance where this issue occurs is on airplanes and tour buses, due to ambient noise, recycled dry air, germs, fumes, etc.

It is common practice after a successful concert or church service that a large group of singers will want to socialize. They often will go to a noisy restaurant and talk loudly. This excessive volume can cause additional stress on a voice that may already be vulnerable after the great amount of use during a concert or church service. Dr. Mark Williams, an otolaryngologist that works with Gospel and contemporary Christian singers in the Nashville area likens this phenomenon to the Lombard Effect.

We usually will advise singers who are frequently on buses when they travel. Tour buses can be pretty loud and one of the things people like to do on tour buses is to converse and sing while they are in route and some with their guitars will even start playing on the bus. What happens is that there is a lot of ambient noise on the bus. So in order for you to hear yourself you subconsciously raise the level of your voice and start speaking and/or singing a lot louder than you ordinarily would. That causes injury to the voice. I advise patients/singers when you are on your
bus, don’t sing, don’t speak. If you have to talk be mindful that you are using your voice at a normal volume level. Because if you are not cognizant of it you will start to speak louder as the ambient noise rises. This is the same process for airplanes, bars, restaurants and other areas. The other thing that happens before they go out to perform they interact and mingle with their audiences which is good from a PR standpoint. You will see a lot of promoters asking singers to work the crowd before they get on stage to sing and afterwards as well. From a PR standpoint that is great but from a voice standpoint a singer is working his or her voice more than they really should before and after performing. It might impact your performance and your vocal health overall. So those are a couple of things that some singers don’t really pay attention to.63

Dr. Williams also provides this suggestion when travelling on airplanes:

There was an interesting study that showed that on a transcontinental flight (the worst form because of the length of time in flight) if a patient uses a nasal saline spray used every so often while in flight, it helps to flush the mucosa and those people are less likely to catch an upper respiratory infection. So just carry a bottle of nasal saline spray, use it every hour or so and that should help to flush out some of the germs. That is perhaps one that has a scientific foundation to some degree. When you are on flights, it is a great time to bring your headphones and just put your headphones on and bring a book. Even if you are not listening to anything, even if you are not really reading the book, what it tells people sitting next to you is that you are not going to talk. It says it in a polite way. Most people will not disturb you if you have your headphones on. If you are just sitting there on the plane, they feel more comfortable with striking up.64

It is important that singers maintain a relationship with an otolaryngologist, speech-language pathologist, singing health specialist, voice teacher or vocal coach. This team of individuals will help the singer to monitor the progress of

63 Dr. Mark Williams (otolaryngologist), in discussion with the author, February 2009.
64 Ibid.
their voice and assist them in determining and treating a vocal injury or dysfunction.

Finally, it would be beneficial for the singer to obtain base-line photographs and videostroboscopy of their vocal folds in a healthy state early in their career as a reference resource if/when a problem occurs. This information can be especially useful in negotiations with a new recording or management contract so the singer has proof of good vocal health and are worth the financial investment.

**Issues of Vocal Health Care within the Gospel singing community**

The major issues of vocal health care among the African American Gospel singing community are 1) resistance to trusting medical professionals; 2) lack of health insurance benefits that will pay for vocal health services; 3) lack of access to observe through endoscopy vocally damaging behaviors; and 4) reliance on divine intervention to rectify a recurring self-inflicted vocal problem.

For many years there has been a level of distrust that some African Americans have towards healthcare professionals of all sorts. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study is one example of how medical professionals took advantage of African Americans because of their race. This historical event and other racially motivated experiments in healthcare have led to feelings of trepidation towards healthcare providers. Inadequate services due to a lack of healthcare for this community also contribute to this issue.
Another circumstance that leads to mistrust among Gospel singers is a lack of healthcare professional and singing health specialists from their minority group. In Bernice Kennedy’s paper “African Americans and Their Distrust of the Healthcare System: Healthcare for Diverse Populations”, she states that “patients that see physicians of their own race, rate the care that they receive higher than when they see a physician from another race or ethnic group.”  

Some singers feel that only a voice professional from their race and cultural background will understand their specific vocal needs and will find a solution that accommodates that need.

Due to the specific nature of Gospel singing, being “spirit inspired”, Gospel singers are often not willing to change their singing habits. Therefore, healthcare professionals sometimes consider the Gospel singer as a non-compliant patient who will return with the same problem at some future time.

This same non-compliance issue is also encountered with Gospel singers interested in formal vocal training. Many have encountered teachers that are only willing to teach Classical or Musical Theater styles of singing. Some teachers do not consider Gospel singing a legitimate style and therefore refuse to teach anyone interested in it. For this reason, some Gospel singers are resistant to receiving vocal instruction.

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The major issues of vocal healthcare among the African American Gospel singing community are not easily rectified. However, there are some suggestions that can improve the situation. Information of better vocal health care should be disseminated at workshops and demonstrations for Gospel church choirs and individual singers.

Otolaryngologists and other singing health specialists should attend a performance and potentially scope just before and immediately after the performance to gather evidence of vocal malfunction. This may require special circumstances such as having a doctor on hand (if nasendoscopy is being used), carrying a mobile unit to the performance site, etc. This could potentially be offered as a clinic for Gospel singers where they could come for help in an environment that is most comfortable. This way the dangerous behavior can be addressed at the time of the problem, not weeks later after the problem as escalated.

Another suggestion is to work with the musical director to provide vocal alternatives to bad behaviors. This job could be one for the singing health specialist on the healthcare team. Once performances have been observed and singers have been examined, vocally healthy alternatives can be offered. This way there is a concerted effort among the entire group, to not only support the vocal improvement of the singer but also to prevent future problems. Suggestions should also include adequate warm-ups and cool-downs (a rarity in Gospel music
rehearsals), advising singers to perform in the correct vocal range, and proper use of amplification and monitoring systems.

A larger and more difficult issue is the lack of health insurance benefits and therefore lack of access to healthcare for many African Americans. It is well known that African Americans are disproportionately underinsured. They lack primary care physicians and rely on emergency services to assist with their healthcare needs. This holds true for vocal health issues. Many suffer from some sort of vocal health problem, and many go undiagnosed. It is often not until the vocal issue interrupts the patient’s way of life or affects their means of employment that a singer consults an otolaryngologist or speech language pathologist for assistance.

Access to healthcare for everyone has been a major talking point of several federal administrations and epidemiologists all over the country. African Americans account for approximately 13% of the U. S. Population and are less likely to have private or employment based insurance.\textsuperscript{66} Not only must we find ways to access and cover costs of healthcare for all Americans, but patients also should receive equal treatment. A person on public-assisted healthcare should receive no less care than those on privately funded services. This will not only help alleviate distrust among patients and healthcare providers, but will also lead to an overall healthier country.

When Gospel singers, have a health problem, they often rely on divine intervention to correct it, rather than seeking professional help. Gospel music by the very nature of its development and message is a very spiritually charged musical event. Many singers feel that if they lose or damage their voices during a performance, they are using what God has given them to its ultimate level. Therefore, they will pray and ask God to heal their damaged voices so that they may be able to sing again and repeat the same behavior.

Some Gospel singers quote the biblical passage from Job 1:21b “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” — out of context to mean that if they do not use what the Lord has given them, they feel that the Lord will take it away from them. These singers often continue to abuse their voices under the pretense that they are “protected” by God.

One biblical passage, II Timothy 2:15a – “Study to show thyself approved unto God” might show that the best way to improve behavior is to learn more about the voice and how to properly take care of it. Christianity deals with acknowledging that the body belongs to God and that it is to be used for the aid of others. Knowledge of the body and the vocal mechanism and how it works is the surest way of showing “thyself approved unto God”. A healthy temple can best glorify God!

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67 Job 1:21b (KJV)

68 II Timothy 2:15a (KJV)
Chapter 5 – Conclusion: Towards Vocal Freedom for the Modern Gospel Singer

As we look forward to what is next in Gospel singing, it is important that we look back from whence we have come, learn from the triumphs and mistakes of the past, and move towards a better future. A clear understanding of the history and performance practice of Gospel music is essential if we are to develop a helpful and efficient pedagogy for teaching Gospel singers. Education is the key to developing effective change. Efforts must be made to instruct the Gospel singer and all who are involved in this ministry on how to sing with healthy vocal production as well as optimal methods for maintaining the singing instrument.

As the African proverb states “It takes a village to raise a child”, it can also be said that “it takes a village to promote and maintain healthy gospel singing”. Individual singers, healthcare professionals, choir directors, pastors and congregations must all be enlightened to the importance of protecting our “God given” talents in order to improve and preserve them.
With knowledge comes empowerment to make choices. It will still be a matter of individual choice as to how a Gospel singer elects to use his/her instrument, but it must be an informed choice, based on technical understanding of the voice and a practiced skill in how to use it. Once we have “studied to show ourselves approved” as commanded in II Timothy, we can then preserve and protect Gospel singing as it is intended to be: a message of hope that sustains and inspires us through difficult times. We can also give praise to God by offering our very best.

Then may the Gospel singer truly say “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with understanding also: I will sing with spirit, and I will sing with understanding also.” – I Corinthians 14:15b
APPENDIX A

Interview with Dr. Mark Williams, otolaryngologist in Nashville, Tennessee

February 2009

Crystal Sellers: What special circumstances do you find working with Gospel singers?

Dr. Mark Williams: I actually moved to Nashville to open a voice care clinic for Gospel singers and Christian music singers as well. I realized that it was an underserved area. It is an area where there is a lack of education concerning voice health. So there are a lot of bad behaviors that first need to be identified and then singers need to be educated. Secondly, a lot of behavioral and mindset changes need to occur which is a slow process with this group of people.

CS: What do you feel are the most common statements heard from this community of singers?

MW: Gospel singers are a bit unique because different from other genres they carry a spiritual aspect with what they do. So there are a lot of singers who feel that if “I sing with a technique that is more healthful to the voice”, it somehow diminishes the spiritual aspect. They say that “my voice is not anointed, this is not how God intended for me to use my voice.” Well, how would you know how God created your voice to be used unless you have studied. I’m convinced that if you don’t know the purpose of a thing, you are bound to abuse that thing. That is exactly what happens to our voices in Gospel music.
CS: Do you find that singers because of their spiritual connection are singing to complete hoarseness?

MW: Whether they feel a compulsion to sing to hoarseness? I don’t feel that there is a compulsion there. There is almost a badge of honor it seems [that] when people have sung to hoarseness there’s almost an expectation that after you have really sung you are going to be hoarse. That is supposed to be a gauge or barometer to how well you have sung. When in reality this is the complete opposite. That is not an indication of how well you have sung but of how poorly you have sung. I think a lot of people don’t realize that it is not normal to be hoarse after singing. So that is another misconception that we have amongst Gospel music singers. They are so used to getting hoarse after singing and so many of their colleagues being hoarse after singing that it has become a norm and almost an expectation and it is really miseducation.

CS: So what do you feel are the common vocal issues that you find in this Population of singers?

MW: One key thing that I find and the most common issue that I find is acid reflux. It is very common and is a reflection of our dietary habits and lack of our exercise habits. A lot of Gospel singers go straight out to the restaurants and the buffets after church with 30 people and hollering in those noisy environments after having hollered in church. People don’t realize that because of speaking over ambient noise, you subconsciously speak louder. We use that sometime to see if someone is faking hearing loss. So we are eating at the buffets with the greasy foods which is abusing our voices after having abused our voices singing earlier and add on top of that reflux because of the poor diet.

CS: Do you feel that reflux causes the cords to be more vulnerable to other injuries?

MW: Of course. Interestingly a lot of people don’t feel that they have reflux even though I am looking at their cords and seeing physical evidence of it because they don’t feel the
heartburn. The reason for that, I believe, is because the esophageal lining is a little bit more resistant to the acid of the stomach because of its close proximity to where the vocal folds are. The vocal folds where never supposed to experience any type of acid. So I have some patients who refuse to take acid reflux medications because they don’t feel like they have heartburn.

CS: Do you feel that any acid reflux medications have any affects on the voice?

MW: I have not noticed that any of them do. There are a number of other medications that do, antihistamines, diuretics, inhaled steroids, a lot of those have more affects on the vocal folds that reflux medications do.

CS: What do you find are the challenges for singers with asthma?

MW: Perhaps one of the biggest is what medications they are on and how well their asthma is controlled. I understand that you have to take certain medications in order to control it. But some of those medications can be unavoidable. I think that the powdered inhaled steroids are the most deleterious to the voice than some of the inhaled that are in the small droplet form. That is the big issue the steroids. Every time you take a puff of the steroids you have the steroids passing through the vocal folds, so in order to get to the lungs they have to pass the folds first. So therefore there is going to be some impact on the folds. Now whether that is an appreciable or a noticeable difference on the vocal cords that pretty much depends on the person and the type of inhaled steroid being used, whether that is the powder form or the droplet form. My personal preference is the small droplet form.

CS: Do you suggest that patients use spacers?

MW: I do not often treat asthma but I certainly see that the efficacy of the treatment is better when the patient uses a spacer.
CS: When you are dealing with nodule, cyst or polyp patients, do you find they have a miseducation on what they are, i.e. patients believing that they can have one nodule?

MW: I find that there is a misunderstanding of what each of them are. Nodules are more like calluses that form on the vocal folds from misuse and overuse. The treatment for them is primarily speech therapy. We certainly prefer to change their behaviors before we go to surgery. Surgery is usually my last option in that case. Polyps on the other hand, the primary treatment for them is going to be surgery. So I think that people hear that they have a nodule or a polyp on their vocal folds they usually want the quick fix. For polyps the quick fix is surgery but I usually suggest that they still go through voice therapy. And many people don’t want to have the recurring discipline of going to a voice therapist and their strategy. So that is why they want me to hurry up and “heal it with steel”. That is the mentality that we have but unfortunately with both of them they are still going to need intensive rehabilitation and some change in vocal behaviors that contributed to the pathology.

CS: What do you feel is the appropriate amount of time of therapy before and after treatment? A lot of singers assume that if they can talk, they can sing. How long do you feel that time should be?

MW: There is a lot of controversy about how long a person should be on voice rest after surgery and what are the beneficial versus deleterious effects of voice rest for a singer. I personally like to put a patient on complete voice rest for one week. When in actuality they come back saying “well doctor I talked after about 2 days”. But if you have a highly motivated and compliant patient, I like to keep them on voice rest for 1 to 2 weeks at the most. After that time I will repeat my videostroboscopic exam to make sure that the folds are healing well. If they are healing well, I will do a graduated return to voicing from 4 to 12 weeks depending on how severe the injury was and how quickly the patient appears to be healing. Before I do any surgery I like to make sure that the patient has a consultation with a voice therapist. They
will also reiterate to the patient the important of complying with the voice rest and the graduated return to voicing.

CS: So is there a voice therapist that you work closely with to monitor the progress of the patient?

MW: There is. We actually work very closely with a therapist that is actually a professional singer, a Classically trained singer who could very well be a voice teacher or vocal coach herself. Her passion is to be a voice teacher or a vocal coach. Actually after they've had therapy with her, they want her to continue her work with them along that vein. She is very intent to maintain her role as voice therapist and identifying and correct bad behaviors and nursing the injured voice back to health. Her name is Melissa Kirby.

CS: So do you find it important that these patients are released to a voice teacher that knows what should happen next?

MW: That is our strategy. Once they have completed the rehabilitation and therapy process through Melissa, it is our recommendation that they go to a voice instructor or coach. I prefer that it is someone that I know and someone that I am familiar with their technique. As a matter of fact, I am meeting with someone this week to talk about his technique and what he’s teaching because I send my patients there I want to make sure that the teacher is teaching techniques that I believe are sound. Do I feel like I have all the answers when it comes to voice? No, because that is not my forte but I have studied and there are a lot of instructors out there with various instructional styles and their students are very protective and very loyal to them so you have to tread lightly when it comes to debunking a belief that some teachers have held.

CS: Do you feel that there should be some sort of certification for voice teachers as they are the only people who work this closely with a portion of the body that are not required to be certified? I personally believe that they should.

MW: I agree wholeheartedly. It’s a very dangerous thing. I have had one voice instructor argue me down about the
physiologic function of the diaphragm. They were trying to convince me that the diaphragm contracts, well, it doesn't really contract but the organs in the area are what push the diaphragm down. It is really about the dynamics of the functioning of the body. So I think a teacher should have some knowledge about anatomy and physiology at least as it relates to the three important aspects of singing which are respiration, phonation and resonation, the lungs, the vocal cords and everything above the vocal cords, the resonating cavity. If you don't have a good understanding of the functioning of those three systems then you can be dangerous. A little bit of knowledge can be truly a dangerous thing.

CS: For those patients on which you have to operate, how often do you find these patients returning to you?

MW: I do not see them returning that often. The question is that I am not exactly sure. With the Gospel music Population, there seems to be some compliance issues period. And whether or not they are coming back because they are no longer having problems or if they are coming back because they are repeating some of the same behaviors, they find themselves back in the same situation. They are not coming back because it is either an embarrassment issue or two, it is my fault that they are hoarse again and I certainly hope that it is not the latter. “I sang well after I completed my therapy, but now 6 months later, there is something wrong. That doctor didn’t cure me or that doctor didn’t completely heal me.” No it is not that, it is just that some of the same behaviors that got them there in the first place have been repeated. The ones that do not come back I have no way of monitoring the reasons why, but those that have come back and that I have seen for other reasons but I still take a look at their vocal cords, they are doing really well. However, those are the few that are compliant.

CS: I am realizing that there are a lot of hemorrhaging polyps happening among Gospel singers. Is the only solution surgery?
MW: It depends on the extent of it. If it is a true polyp then, yes, surgery is necessary. When we see vocal cord hemorrhage that can occur because of dilated blood vessels along the vocal cords. That is one of the reasons why I strongly advocate for what I call a voice screening. A voice screening is pretty much like any other screening. The philosophy behind is that if you catch a problem early enough before it becomes a universal problem or before it becomes a untreatable problem, then it is a lot better than waiting until you have a full scale injury and have to resort to more advanced measures to treat it. I recommend singers that are serious about their career and/or ministry to get their voices checked out. As you are aware there are many people in Gospel music who are harboring voice pathologies unaware. They could have [a] huge dilated blood vessel sitting in their cords that they do not know about. They could be one high note away from ending their career. That is perhaps one of the most feared injuries, the vocal cord hemorrhage and it is easily preventable, at least if you get a voice screening and we see a dilated blood vessel there, we can at least advise you about the presence of it, how to protect against it, we can get you some therapy and in some cases there are some surgical interventions that we can do to fix that blood vessel before it causes a bigger problem. I think voice screening is an absolute must for Gospel singer or any serious singer. The insurance companies for whatever reasons do not see that as a value and so as a result if they don’t have a specific complaint they do not pay for it typically. In reality most of the Gospel singers have a specific complaint “Every time I sing I’m hoarse after I finish”. That is a problem. We can take a look at your vocal cords and find out what’s going on. I do find that the vast majority of the people there are medical concerns. The problem is that the patient does not recognize that there is a problem.

CS: Do you find singers having videostroboscopic examinations of their cords during a healthy state to maintain as a point of reference?
MW: It does not happen often but with my professional artists, I like to do that particularly when they are in artist development and/or prior to signing to a record label. I have been in conversation with several different record companies and managers trying to coordinate a program where before they sign an artist they are protecting their investment. They want to know that they are signing a healthy artist. Now that is a little bit difficult to convince the artists themselves, let alone the record labels and/or the managers but we do have a small group who have seen the value in it and have committed to send their artists for a checkup even if they have to pay for it out of their pockets because it is just that important to make sure. You do not want to land a deal where you are opening a concert for a big name person going on tour and then one or two weeks before you are supposed to go on tour you have a vocal cord hemorrhage, and I am talking in code about an event that just recently happened, have to cancel because of a potentially treatable problem, if they had put forth the appropriate screening and training and modifications of their behaviors.

CS: How often are you prescribing the quick fix steroid shots?

MW: Not too often. I do have patients who will come in, and being here in Nashville everyone has a gig or are only in town for the day, and they are hoarse right now and really need something right now. Most of my patients know that I don’t do that. If I have not had a chance to look at your vocal cords before, I do not [provide injections] in general. I would be hard pressed to name an instance where I have prescribed a steroid shot without having first seen the patient. Another reason for getting a voice care screening is because if you find yourself in that situation, then I know what your vocal cords looked like before. I know that you are not harboring some potential deleterious pathology, so that if I give you a steroid it will not give you a false sense of security. That is a lot of pressure on a doctor and I try to educate the patients so that they understand that this is for your benefit that I do not do this. If that means that you have to miss this gig, then that means that you have to miss this
gig. It is better that you miss this one gig than to miss all of the other major gigs if you would have a permanent injury. It is a risk that they may be willing to take but sometimes I am not because I have to take the liability there.

CS: Any other comments?

MW: I have spoken with some of the biggest names in Gospel music about voice care, about simple things like warming up and you would be surprised about how very little [they know]. These artists are making a lot of money, their careers are well established and they don’t do a simple thing such as warming up.

CS: Do you feel like cooling down is important?

MW: It is very much important. It is like any other muscle that they use in the body. In order to protect and to get it to work most effectively you have to stretch it, exercise it regularly, warm-up and after you put it through its workout you have to cool down. A lot of times we see what we call singer’s nodules, they are small inflammatory nodules, but they are a lot softer in appearance than regular nodules and they can actually occur right after a pretty aggressive time of singing, they tend to dissolve after about 24 hours. The voice specialist has to be aware of what a singer’s nodule actually looks like and how that differs from a regular vocal nodule that we see.

CS: Sometimes a one time strobe is not an inclination of a long term pathology. How do you handle that?

MW: I go pretty much off of the appearance. On videotrobscopy you can get really good imaging, magnification of it and a singer’s nodule really just looks much more inflammatory, it looks like a little nodular swelling there and you can still see the mucosal wave around it unlike someone with more permanent nodules. If there is ever any concern, I would see the patient back in a couple of days and repeat the strobe. But that rarely happens, it is usually pretty straight forward. I have the inclination that this is what happened. You had a really intense workout and in reality
you should not get these but these are a little less injurious and less worrisome than true nodules. But still nonetheless I do not like to see them because it is a result of injury to the cords. But I think the cool down process is a very important process because you see someone right after a pretty rigorous singing engagement or performance continuing to talk and not taking time to rest.

CS: How often do you find issues using the rigid versus the flexible scope on singers? Do they tend to tolerate both types well?

MW: I prefer to go transorally with the rigid scope because the image size and resolution is so much better. They do now have the flexible ones where you can still use stoboscopy. I think they provide a slightly better picture of true phonation. It is hard to get a person to sing when I am holding your tongue and cannot say a true “e”. I think that transnasal is better tolerated. The image resolution is still lacking in comparison to the rigid scope. My personal preference is still the rigid scope.

MW: Have you received much information during your interviews about speaking and singing in noisy environments?

CS: I have not. Please share!

MW: The Lombard Effect. We usually will advise singers who are frequently on buses when they travel. Tour buses can be pretty loud and one of the things people like to do on tour buses is to converse and sing while they are in route and some with their guitars will even start playing on the bus. What happens is that there is a lot of ambient noise on the bus. So in order for you to hear yourself you subconsciously raise the level of your voice and start speaking and/or singing a lot louder than you ordinarily would. That causes injury to the voice. I advise patients/singers when you are on your bus, do not sing, do not speak. If you have to talk be mindful that you are using your voice at a normal volume level. Because if you are not cognizant of it, you will start to speak louder as the ambient noise rises. This is the same
process for airplanes, bars, restaurants and other areas. The other thing that happens before they go out to perform they interact and mingle with their audiences which is good from a public relations (PR) standpoint. You will see a lot of promoters asking singers to work the crowd before they get on stage to sing and afterwards as well. From a PR standpoint that is great, but from a voice standpoint, a singer is working his or her voice more than they really should before and after performing. It might impact your performance and your vocal health overall. So those are a couple of things that some singers do not really pay attention to.

CS: What do you think would be a good suggestion for singers on airplanes to try to stay healthy?

MW: There was an interesting study that showed that on a transcontinental flight (the worst form because of the length of time in flight), if a patient uses a nasal saline spray used every so often while in flight, it helps to flush the mucosa and those people are less likely to catch an upper respiratory infection. So just carry a bottle of nasal saline spray, use it every hour or so and that should help to flush out some of the germs. That is perhaps one that has a scientific foundation to some degree. When you are on flights, it is a great time to bring your headphones and just put your headphones on and bring a book. Even if you are not listening to anything, even if you are not really reading the book, what it tells people sitting next to you is that you are not going to talk. It says it in a polite way. Most people will not disturb you if you have your headphones on. If you are just sitting there on the plane, they feel more comfortable with striking up.
APPENDIX B

Interview with Erik Dillard, founder of The Erik Dillard Vocal Clinic

April 2009

Crystal Sellers: How did you start singing Gospel music?

Erik Dillard: My mother pushed me out front and gave me a microphone. My entire family is musical, everyone around me sang and at a certain age they were able to tell that I wanted to do something with singing. Even as early as three or four years old my mother saw that in me. She pushed me out there in my church.

CS: When you were younger and singing at that time, was there a particular style of Gospel that you sang at that time?

ED: At that age, not at all. I think it was mostly tonal recall, being able to sing notes back and singing melodies. As a matter of fact I remember the first song that I sang was “You Are My Sunshine”. At that time I had not developed anything that would have indicated if I was going to sing primarily Classical or Gospel or any other style. With time, I began to gravitate towards a particular style.

CS: When do you feel that first shift to a particular style started to happen?

ED: Honestly it was not really until I was about seventeen years old. It was later in life. I think that up until then I used to really struggle because of the fact that my voice was a lot more smooth and melodic. I do not do a lot of things that other Gospel singers do. So where other people find it very
easy to do the growls, I always sang things a little bit more pure, which is not really a good word to use, because I do not want to indicate that the other style is impure, but my notes were a lot more ethereal and clean, more a mainstream sound, rather Pop music like if you will. It was not until I was about seventeen or eighteen before I saw my musical identity starting to take shape. I did become a little bit more soulful but it still had that clean style to it.

CS: Do you feel like you are still singing in that style or have things changed?

ED: It changed in that I am not as technical as I used to be. I think before the thing that probably hurt me as a singer was that I was aware of Gospel style, aware of what we culturally require of Gospel singers. The checklist of sorts - did you growl? Did you run? I would say that other than that I have been able to hold true to what I do. Life experiences have probably changed my song, specifically its style. Now I don’t mind being imperfect sometimes. I let my imperfections work for me. Not saying that you want to sing incorrectly and do a bunch of stuff that is damaging. I am just not always trying to think about every line that coming out. I am coming out more from my heart which is good which allows me to stay true to myself.

CS: So if you could put a name on your style of singing what would it be?

ED: I would stay that my style is a hybrid of Gospel and Pop. Whenever you say Gospel music, whatever image comes to mind, couple that with Pop. Whatever middle road those two create is what makes up me.

CS: If we were to look at the various subgenres of Gospel music, where would you put yourself in connection to those styles?

ED: I would choose two of the subgenres. I would say I am more praise and worship and contemporary. I’m not so much Jazz, even though I sing the melismas and runs from time to time. Definitely I would not say that I am traditional, but if I
need to get a good squall out, I will. However, I will say more praise and worship and contemporary Gospel.

CS: How much does environment and circumstance affect your particular style of singing on that given day?

ED: You know, now I am fine. I used to struggle with that. Back in the day, you are on the line up with ten other artists and everybody is hollering and screaming and everything is what we consider to be the blanket definition of Gospel music. And all of a sudden I was thrown in the middle of that program and I would say that I never fell flat on my face before however, you could tell that I was trying to appease the crowd at that time and that was a struggle for me. So I found myself compromising a lot of my performances to try to get the crowd reaction. It was not until I travelled to Japan and saw that the people just appreciated my voice for what it was, it in turn helped me to appreciate my voice for what it was. So when I came back to the states I started to sing the songs the way that I felt them. I would stand up in the programs and if everyone else was doing their thing, I would just sing simply without the theatrics normally associated with Gospel singing. When I started to do that, I did not receive the immediate crowd reaction however, I received the type of accolades that last much longer. So I lasted in people’s minds. I would hear people say to me “you know that song really blessed me.” I feel that this is more rewarding than fanfare.

CS: Do you feel like there were adjustments that you had to make while singing in groups as opposed to when you were primarily singing solo?

ED: I always had issues with my vibrato. I found myself making tons of adjustments to keep up with other members of the group. I quickly knew that if I did exactly what everyone else was doing I was going to damage my voice. I tried to use a challenging/bad situation to pull out things in me that I knew could be good. I knew I wanted more volume, colors, tones and depth to my voice. So I just used those situations to try to help me as a soloist. So when I went back to coming out
of the tenor section and started singing lead again, I noticed a large difference and so did many others.

CS: Stylistically there are some things called for in group singing that are not called for in solo singing. Can you refer to some of those?

ED: The way that a choir will crescendo or decrescendo if at all is very different for the choir singer versus the solo singer. Ways of altering vowel sounds for a particular effect is Popular in group singing. I found singing in choirs that those are some things that we do together. It is like a strength in numbers sort of thing. So there are certain dynamics and techniques that Gospel music will require that only works if the number is right.

CS: There is a call for physicality, not necessarily in voice production but in the physical body movements especially in groups. Almost a sort of choreography, did you find issues with that?

ED: The experiences that I have had in singing for others, I would have to say no. The reason is because the groups were in my opinion a bit more mature so there was not a lot of acrobatics or aerobic activity on stage. The groups that I sang in were more flat-footed singers. The only time physical movements came into play was when individuals were expressing their personal praise to God. Now when I was directing choirs and had people singing for me I asked for a lot of choreographed movements, occasionally dips or other movements.

CS: Was there a time when pedagogy and healthy singing was not a focus for your performances?

ED: I would say majority of the time, I just sang without focus on the healthy part of singing. It was not until I started to sing in recording choirs where we were doing more studio work and background vocals where I saw that they were only bringing in the quality singers from the group. There was actually a separation of skill. Any other time it was just "make a joyful noise unto the Lord". It wasn’t until I got into this environment
where I saw that they were singling out three tenors out of eight for the recordings. That was quite shocking to me in the beginning.

CS: So when we look at the differences between the live performances and the recording sessions, what did you feel like you had to do differently in these situations, if anything at all?

ED: With time it got to a point where I was able to blend my vocal style fairly well. I would say in a live performance you have all of the energy and adrenaline flowing and the environment pulls you into an unhealthy place at times. You’ll have vamps that last much longer than they should. You have high parts or bridges to songs where people are really getting excited. Because Gospel music thrives a lot off of improvisation all of a sudden someone has gotten happy and have now inverted the parts twice instead of once that you have been practicing for months. So now all of a sudden we are up in the rafters. So with those types of adjustments that you make during live singing, it made studio singing harder. Now on the flip side of that was that the struggle that I had in the studio was trying to recreate that live world. That is something that I talk to a lot of people about because they say that they just don’t feel it in the studio. With time I was able to learn to mentally, spiritually and emotionally recreate that world and put myself back into that concert. I was able to see those people and the environment and it really helped that I had the actual recording with the audience in the headphones. I would just imagine and take myself there. What happens is that as we get older we lose our imaginations. We don’t have fun anymore.

CS: Have you seen pressure on some of the singers that you work with that they should sing to hoarseness as a representation of how well they have sung?

ED: I would see different waves of aftermath where level one is “we sang so well that I can’t talk”. Then in some cases the second level is where you have to sing again the next day and I have seen singers who are literally terrified and
panicking to the point of sweat and tears because their voices are not in their stellar level where they were before the first performance so I see it often.

CS: What did your time in your solo career look like? Rehearsals, performances & recordings?

ED: I think that when I started recording I was still technical and calculated in my approach to how I needed to get this song done. The rehearsals were enjoyed by those around me but for a live performance it was difficult because I was so married to the track and how we sang things on the track that if I heard one thing off in a performance it really bothered me. Those initial times when I started my career I realized that I wanted to be different. I wanted to do this thing right. Even if I never became a household name that was not what was important to me. I wanted to hold true to the authenticity of the genre I was singing at that time.

CS: Prior to being aware of what you needed to do vocally how were rehearsals and performances structured then?

ED: Prior to, we were always taught that what you did in rehearsal was what you did in performance so those same improper practices from rehearsals crept into performances. The yelling out in rehearsals, having long rehearsals with no rest, no food or drink breaks and you are continually working and it takes days for the voice to recover from this. Having been through those times where I could barely talk, I thought that was fine. I felt that this was the way it was supposed to be. At that time, that was what Gospel music required. Since at that time that was the area that I was entering with my music, I didn’t really know how I was going to be able to translate that into my solo style of singing but I knew I should try to find some sort of connection because I thought that was what was good. Now afterwards when I became more aware I realized that I should be able to talk after singing. I found myself not being able to relate to people as much because I was more careful. Many people saw me as being too technical.
CS: Was working in the groups was caused you to start taking vocal health more seriously and to start working with voices?

ED: The start of it all was when I started directing the Bibleway youth choir. At the time the director was leaving to go away to college and there was a need for a new director. I just happened to be in the room. That was literally how all this started. I happened to be sitting in the back after having missed a few rehearsals. All of a sudden they were saying they wondered who was going to take over the choir. I kid you not, I was in the last row and everyone looked at me. I decided to take the position. I felt like it was an opportunity. I was at a time in my life when I felt like I needed to exercise leadership skills and that was the perfect opportunity for me to be able to do just that. From there I was allowed to be that technical dude. I was allowed to address breathing and help singers to stretch their ranges. People began to appreciate that. I never thought I would be a vocal coach. That was the last thing that I thought that I would be doing. I have fulfillment doing that than anything else now.

CS: Did the training start with your work with Dr. Raymond Wise? Were you self-taught or patterned your coaching after certain methods?

ED: It was a combination of a lot of things. A good majority of it was good upbringing with Dr. Wise and Kathy Gall, Martha Delay and Wendy Turner. Basically it was a cascade of good teaching. Each teacher would guide me through to the next teacher. I found myself able to retain a lot of that information. I used it. Even when I veered off the path and started to do all of the incorrect singing, I still found myself always coming back on the right path. I would always get it together. It wasn’t until later on when I started doing my own albums and had my own background singers and I started getting them together, that I started to see more of a microscopic perspective of “oh, now I see what the voice is doing.” It was almost like the child playing with the toaster becoming a mechanic that was how I was. I had this little project. I had these three singers singing for me and I would dissect and see things in their voices. We all went to Dr.
Wise for coachings together. I saw how he interacted with people and how the environment was so enjoyable and people really enjoyed coming to work with him. There is this man that is sharing everything that is on his heart and the people are there on bated breath waiting to hear what he was going to say next. I think seeing that situation combined with my bubbly personality I think it just worked. I found joy in it and so did the other people I met along the way.

CS: What are some of the key factors that you find yourself having to be addressed when dealing with singers?

ED: The number one thing I find myself having to address is range. People have this misconception that singing high is right or that you have some amazing skill. I am working with people who want to sing higher. I also felt that way for some time. It wasn’t until I began to appreciate where my voice was and tell them to do the same. Maximize what you have first then we can work to see what you have up there. Yes, maybe you can sing like Minnie Riperton, Daryl Coley or Pavarotti, maybe you have that fabulous range like that. But if you don’t, let’s appreciate your Oleta Adams range. Let’s appreciate those low tones. Now there are those who can sing with an amazing large range like Rachelle Farrell. I work with those that have stamina issues and don’t realize that they have this particular issue. Then we come to realize that the real issue may be with breath.

CS: What events brought you to teaching abroad?

ED: I was working at the insurance company and I worked there for eight years. I really enjoyed myself. I knew that I did not want to do corporate work but I was really blessed with that job. My bosses were always understanding of my schedule. Basically for eight years I was doing my thing. I worked my day job and then at night I was in rehearsal. It was in 2005 and I was on a Gospel website that I was subscribed to and they sent out a notice for American singers to go to Japan and teach Gospel music. It was literally a light that lit up all over that email and it Popped off the page at me. I thought that I really wanted to do this. From that moment I was on a
mission to get to Japan. I wasn’t sure how I was going to do it but I knew that I was going to get there. So through a unique sequence of events, I landed this job to go to Japan and teach. I was only supposed to be there for two months at first but then the person that was to arrive after me had some issues so they asked me to stay. So I had to make the decision of whether to return to the states to my job which had allowed me the two month leave of absence or to stay for another two months and leave my job. The company just really guided me out so I taught for four months. Then I was asked back for another six months and then during that contract they asked me to stay for a year. So I made a second home in Japan.

CS: So what will you do when you return?

ED: I will be doing the same thing. The way that Japan is that it can be very monotonous. If the instructor makes the classes different it helped to make it more exciting. I go teach and do vocal training.
APPENDIX C

Interview with Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, pastor and music minister at Advent United Church of Christ

March 2009

Crystal Sellers: How did you start singing Gospel music?

Dr. Susan Smith: I grew up in a Lutheran church in Detroit and we basically sang hymns and anthems. Then one day on the radio I heard The Hawkins Singers singing “Oh Happy Day”. I didn’t know it was a Gospel song so I was dancing to it. My mother stopped me and told me not to dance to church music. From then on I was really curious about this music. So I started listening to it. I didn’t really start singing it a lot until I went to seminary. But it was “Oh Happy Day” that really started my interest in Gospel music.

CS: So when you started singing Gospel music in seminary, was it primarily traditional Gospel or contemporary?

SS: It was a mix. When I first got into it, I gathered the small group of black students [at Yale Seminary] together. At that time I still loved hymns but I wanted to do some other things. So I got this Gospel choir together and we started to sing a lot of different types of Gospel music. I don’t like a Gospel song that repeats for two hours. I just don’t pick them because they drive me crazy. It’s so funny that when the song “We Fall Down” came out, the choir asked me if I would teach it. I asked them what is there to teach, ‘we fall down,
we get up’ over and over again. For the life of me, I’m not sure why people like that sort of thing.

CS: Prior to the seminary, were you active in leading choirs then?

SS: When I was a teenager in the Lutheran church that I went to, I became choir director of the adult choir. I played piano and I played organ. So I taught the adult choir because I believe the director had gotten sick so I took over and also started a teenage choir. We sang primarily anthems.

CS: So after seminary, what type of musical experiences did you have?

SS: After seminary I became an associate pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. They did great Gospel music there. When they performed concerts there was a variety but on Sunday it was good Gospel music. So that is what I did. So when I came here to Columbus, Dr. [Jeremiah] Wright told me that when you have a church with black folks you have to have good music. So that is what I concentrated on when I got here.

CS: So have the Voices of Advent sort of evolved over time?

SS: When I arrived at Advent UCC there were five members total in the church. They were all also members of the choir. At the time they sang hymns mostly. They had a woman who was Classically trained who directed the choir/congregation. She was not at all interested in doing Gospel music. For this reason they performed hymns and were attempting anthems which was hard to do with only five people. So we evolved. What I did was tell them that Gospel or any type of music depends less on your actual talent and more on your spirit and drive. I learned that from dancers. It is not the most talented people that are the best dancers. It is the people that take what they have and try to figure it out. So from the very beginning we started singing songs that mass choirs sang. ‘It was not the number it was the spirit’ that became our mantra. If you were to take each of the members of our choir and let them sing separately it is one thing, but when
you put them together, they really pull it off because it doesn’t matter. You don’t have to be a good singer you don’t even have to be a singer. You just have to want to sing and you have to be willing to work. We do work because I don’t like for music to [sound] bad. I feel that if you are going to do it, do it. We perform things that are difficult. For the things that are really difficult I have a praise team that will sing it. It is about a challenge. We do well with it.

CS: Out of necessity, was that what started your work as music minister as well as pastor here at Advent?

SS: Yes, I had no intention of doing it. When the lady left we didn’t have anyone to fill in. She also played the piano as well. I said ‘well at least I can do this’. It was not my intention to do it. Shortly after she left our accompanist came. I liked him because he could pick things up quickly. His keyboard had instrumental capabilities so it felt like we had drums and an entire band. So we began to work. I thought that he would take over the choir eventually but he really just plays, that’s his gift.

CS: Would you ever give the music ministry portion up?

SS: No. I have had moments of frustration and anger and I wanted to forget it. It is really hard when you are choir director and pastor. As choir director it is a different personality. At times near concerts, I find myself saying ‘you need to sing it and you need to sing it right’ so people often get mad. I have left rehearsals before because of my frustration. Then I remember that I am a pastor as well and I deal with the difficulties and frustrations accordingly. On the flip side, the good that comes out of it in terms of my own children who are both musical, it was deeply rooted in them. I have also heard that some of the members of my choir have gone out and taken voice lessons on their own. The sound that we are able to create is like nothing in the world. I believe that it is what has helped to keep me sane. Every life has peaks and valleys but just to hear that sound, it helps me so much. When I direct I typically close my eyes.
because I don’t always want to see their individual faces, I just want to hear that sound.

CS: I’ve heard a lot of pastors say that the most important part of the service is the sermon and many music directors say that it is the music. What do you believe?

SS: I think that music is the set-up to the sermon. I believe that music can do what a sermon cannot at times. I also believe that some ministers use the sermon for their own glorification. There are some ministers that aren’t concerned with what they say, they just want a reaction from the congregation. In terms of the music, there are times when a person doesn’t hear what you say but the music reaches a spot in them that they need at that moment. I think that when music comes out truly inspired, it is like God whispering to His people. And He is whispering exactly what they need to hear at that moment.

CS: What do rehearsals typically look like?

SS: I think they are pretty rigorous. We warm up. I work a lot with them on intervals. I practice intervals because there are some who sing but may not have an ear for music so it helps to establish their ear. This also helps to get the voice warmed up. If it is not concert time and I heard something where an interval or section was incorrect, I will go over that with them. Then we start working on the songs that we are going to sing on the following Sunday. They stand during the entire two hour rehearsal. They don’t complain. I think the reason that no one notices it is because we just go fairly rapidly through what we are rehearsing. Every once in a while when we have sung a song that takes a lot of breathing I will allow them to sit for a minute to gather themselves. Then we get up and start again. If the blend isn’t there, we do exercises to work on blend. It’s funny because when we are out singing, I will hear someone in the choir say, ‘do you hear how they blended’, so I know they understand the concept. It is very hard to teach that. Teaching them to breathe from the diaphragm is funny. I have one lady that I can see in my mind. I have taught tons
of exercises about breathing but every time she takes a
breath you can see her shoulders Popping up. Many of my
singers are really curious about breathing. I’ve had them lie
down on the floor or sing bending over. They can actually
hear the difference. The challenge is that they ask now what
do I do when I stand up. It is a moment of self-discovery for
them. I tell them to bend over again and remember what
that feels like and try to recreate it standing up. It isn’t
something that I can really teach them but they can work at it
until it starts to make sense. I also try to focus on how to
sing softly but not breathy. You have to work hard to do it.
They really work at it and they enjoy it. I’m a high energy
person and I encourage them to get it. When I am working
with another section of the choir they will huddle together in
their individual sections to help the others to get it.

CS: So are songs being learned primarily by rote or by score?

SS: Right now it is a combination. It had been by rote.
Sometimes I will tell them to put the music down because
what I don’t like in any choir are people who use the music
as a crutch. The power and the spirit of the music are lost
because they have the music in front of them. You can’t find
the spirit if you are looking at music. Half of them don’t read
music, it is just a security blanket. Without the music you are
naked before God and you have to find out what is going to
make this piece of music, music. I am starting to teach them
how to read music.

CS: How important is ministry in singing?

SS: That is all it is. When we have our concerts, we will
rehearse and I’ll go crazy. Then it is usually the day before
the concert where I will get to a point where I will put it in
God’s hands and realize that it is what it is. I realize that it is
truly ministry. I pray about it and then I let it go.

CS: Does everyone in the group understand the idea of
performance versus ministry? Did you have to teach this or
did it come naturally?
SS: It came naturally to them. I think it was because it was never about the singing. It has always been about the spirit. I always encouraged them to close their eyes and give it to God.

CS: Last summer the choir won the [choir] competition at King’s Island [Amusement Park in Cincinnati, Ohio]. Did you feel that you had to prepare the group differently for this experience?

SS: I prepare them exactly the same way. That was a place where we had to sing one song a capella and one song with a track because our musician could not join us. Because it was a competition, I knew that there was no room for error. We did rehearse right before we went on to make sure that the timing was right with the track because that is difficult when we had never sung with a track before. We sang the other song a capella which I love to do because you can hear everything that you are doing. They did so well out there that day. What was different was that they had to think of themselves as more than just a church choir. They had to pay closer attention to what they were going to wear. We wore a uniformed outfit and they sang on such a high level. Even if they had not won, I would have been so proud of them still because they sang in tune with spirit and depth. It was a ministry.

CS: Because the Voices of Advent sing songs that cover many styles and genres, is there ever a discussion about approaching the vocal style of a song differently?

SS: Sometimes. For example, I’ll explain things are laid back, Bluesy or Jazzy. However, some things are hard to teach. Sometimes you have to demonstrate and rely on the individual singer to figure out the goal. When we sang Kyrie written by Dr. Johnson (Spelman Glee Club director), that is hard but so beautiful. The music was written to bring the audience to the edge of their seats on bated breath for the next phrase. That is what music should do. There are different approaches to other styles. However, Gospel music is pretty straight forward. The harmonies are typically
not a big deal. However there will be songs that have vamps in minor keys and then resolve to the major at the end of the song. At least they are able to tell the difference between the two now. I want them to think about things. I want them to learn things because it is not just a Sunday morning thing. It is an art.

CS: How many trained singers are there in the group?

SS: None. I think we have one that just joined who is a music major at Capital University. We also have a singer who sings professionally but I am not sure if she is trained.

CS: Do you ever discuss vocal health with the group?

SS: The raspiness, the tired vocal cords. I was told that just because you have a sore throat does not mean that you cannot sing. I was told that Jessye Norman performed an incredible recital while still having a sore throat. As far as how vocalizing really helps your health, having people protect their necks and my daughter yells at me because she says I yell too much because after rehearsals I have no voice. When we are getting ready to sing I tell them that they cannot eat dairy products. I tell them that they can go and get whatever they want after they finish the concert.

Now as far as how music affects your overall health, I have a tendency that when someone in the choir has had a loss or a death in their family or are having a bad time I ask them to sing a solo that they have. I believe that it helps them get through. I believe that if you can transform your attention from where you are and the circumstances, physically, mentally and spiritually, you are going to be alright. I believe that it will help to heal them. I believe that music can work miracles. I believe that it is the only thing that has helped me through many hard days.

CS: This is an awful segue but do you find yourself fatigued after Sunday morning services?

SS: I find myself fatigued but I am so tired that I can't rest. My daughter and I have a standing joke because she will take a
nap and she says that she is sleeping for me. Now it is not as bad because I don’t direct the whole service and preach as much anymore. I’m tired but it is usually a good tired. I don’t think I could do another service but it is an energy that is electric.
APPENDIX D

Interview with Martha Munizzi, Gospel recording artist

January 2009

Crystal Sellers: I read in your bio that you started singing southern Gospel and through meeting your husband transitioned into singing contemporary praise and worship music. Can you share with me more about that transition?

Martha Munizzi: Well, it [happened] when I was really young (I met my husband in high school). My parents were really my biggest musical influences when I was younger. We travelled around as a family, Southern Gospel was really what my dad did, he was a songwriter and he wrote in that style of music so I really started singing in that style. I grew up listening to a lot of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith and all of those phenomenal people. Then when I met my husband, he had listened to Andrae Crouch for so many years, and had attended his concerts. He said to me, “You need to hear Andrae Crouch”. I was used to all of the standards that we sang at our church so I had never heard Andrae Crouch. So after my husband and I got married I was working for ERA and they had a Christian magazine and the editor would bring in books and CDs for review in the magazine. So when they were done with these CDs, they would leave them in a box in the break room, and let the staff know that they were available if interested. So one day I went back there and thumbed through the box one day and saw a mass choir CD. Don’t ask me why? I guess it was the Holy Spirit that caused me to pick up that CD that day. So I went home and I put it on and my husband had
come home from work and I had it on and I was totally just blown away. I had never heard sounds like that. It really was a moment I will never forget. I just thought “ok I've found my new music”. From that moment on everything I took from that box was Gospel music. I would leave everything else behind and take only the Gospel music. And that is really where I started, that is exactly what happened.

CS: So in the transition between southern Gospel and contemporary Gospel was there some change in your singing style?

MM: Yes. When I sang with my sisters we always had this emotional or soulful style of singing, key changes, arrangements, but it wasn't the same sort of soul style you get in Gospel singing. So through listening to Gospel artists and some secular artists, I learned the style. I never said I wanted to sound like a black singer. I just wanted to be the best singer I could be. But I would stretch myself and listen to artists and followed many of my influences to the point where many would say that “she sounds like an African-American woman”. I appreciated it. It wasn't something that I intended to do. I really wanted to take who I am and sing from my heart. I just took all of the influences I had over the years to help me develop the style that I have.

CS: Were your early musical experiences, such as singing with your sisters and meeting your husband what led to your career in Gospel music?

MM: Oh yes! I mean just music period has probably been the pathway that led me to what I do now. Loving music, staying involved. My sister and I put together a band called Testament and that's how I met my husband who was our bass player and his brother was the drummer and we were the singers. And we all got together at church and we connected. We worked to stretch ourselves and it wasn't easy because we were young teenagers. It really reinforced our love for music. Praise and Worship was where our hearts were then and where mine is now.
CS: Have you ever had or currently have any voice lessons or coachings?

MM: When I was younger I was always in chorus at my school. I had a choral teacher who worked with us vocally and worked on our breathing. I had forgotten a lot of that for many years, but just constantly singing kept my voice in a good place, in a healthy place. Over the last few years, you know as you get older, and realized you’ve abused it too much I definitely started to work with someone to help me remember the breathing, the correct places to sing from and how to keep my voice healthy. I don’t get to work with him very much, maybe only once or twice a month. I have a coach here that’s excellent, he works with everyone, and he helps me. I never thought I would need it but you never know when you’ll need it. He helps me to stretch and to keep my voice warmed up. It’s really just a matter of singing every day. You need to vocalize every day to keep your voice stretched and pliable.

CS: Is vocal anatomy addressed in the coachings?

MM: Yes. I couldn’t tell you anything about it but he certainly could. He talks about where the voice sits and where it travels these things which are so important. Some of these singers, these professional singers, can sing the same note for long periods of time. I wish that I could do that sometimes. And because of their training they can. It’s just amazing what you can do with the right vocal training.

CS: What does the typical rehearsal day look like for you?

MM: It really depends on what I am rehearsing for. If I’m rehearsing for a concert, we usually get together for sound check and if we have some sort of special arrangement to a song we will work through it there. My musicians teach and train so once I get there we just make sure that everything is correct. So we typically book a two hour time frame for sound check. But if we are working on a new show or arrangement, we work with the guys in Detroit. We go for two or three days for several hours a day and work with a
small band. Then we bring up the background vocalists for the last couple of days. We will work with them and make a rehearsal track before they leave. We send it with them and tell them that they are expected to have this learned when we get back together. Most of the vocalists are professional so there is no big deal. We don’t have to rehearse for hours and hours or days and days. We just take several days and several hours to put everything together.

**CS:** While travelling back and forth to Detroit and other places, are there special precautions you take while travelling?

**MM:** In the past I never used to but now I do. It’s because it seems like now I am more prone to allergies. Since I am from Florida we have our own set of allergens here. But as I have gotten older I am having more issues with my allergies. So I drink a lot of water. I am really working to take better care of myself so I am drinking a lot of water and drinking Throat Coat tea. I also use the lozenges and I take those everywhere because they really help me to keep my voice hydrated and help me to keep my voice safe.

**CS:** Do you warm-up before singing?

**MM:** I do! My vocal coach sent me away with a CD that I have on my iPhone and on my way or in my hotel room I am doing my vocal exercises. It makes a big difference. Because typically with every record whoever is working with me nudges me and I’m thinking, why did I sing this song in this key again? I have to continue the stretching in order to sing these songs on a nightly or weekly basis. I have to keep my voice pliable. I definitely do vocal exercises.

**CS:** Typically, what does a performance day look like? Are there special things you do and don’t do on that particular day?

**MM:** Well several years ago I cut caffeine out of my life. I did it for health reasons. I also try to cut out milk and dairy. I haven’t completely connected the dots but I feel like there is a connection between eating dairy and issues with my allergies. I just try to steer clear from anything too mucus-forming. It does make a difference. I drink a lot of hot teas to
keep my voice well especially because I am travelling. I also try to just sleep or rest for 30 or 45 minutes if I get a chance. It really makes a difference. Then I make sure that I warm up. So as I am getting ready I am just warming up, preparing my spirit and praying. Just asking God to steer me, steer the presence of God that night. I keep the TV off as much as I can and just try to stay focused.

CS: For those that would be unaware of the difference, in your own words, what do you feel is the difference between a performance and ministry opportunity?

MM: Wow! I think that they both go hand in hand. I certainly don’t want to be in a situation where it is totally performance. To be realistic there are some places where you have 10 minutes to sing one song, so you don’t have the opportunity to really get into the ministry aspect of it. So if you are doing a showcase you want to bring something that is entertaining to the people, but at the same time they are being uplifted, they are being encouraged. You can always have an opportunity to minister to people. They don’t have to be on their faces crying. You can encourage or uplift someone no matter how much time you have to minister. All of that is ministry. And I present myself with my singers and my band with the level of ministry that I am able to bring to the performance, ministry is very important to bring to the table. There is a level of performance, excellence and quality that is engaging to the crowd, that gets their attention. But at the same time they are being uplifted, they are challenged. The Holy Spirit can do so much that I can’t do. So I do my part and the Holy Spirit does the rest. Now I’ve seen the extreme where it was such a performance that you felt like the Holy Spirit was off drinking coffee somewhere. That’s a sad situation. I think a lot of times that’s attributed to someone’s life or lifestyle where they have lost touch. I try not to judge but I say for my life I want to stay connected so that there is a performance aspect but also the Holy Spirit is doing its work.
CS: I need to backtrack a little because I realized I skipped a question. You mentioned doing warm ups before singing. Do you cool down after singing?

MM: No I do not. I usually just try to step offstage because after a concert I am pretty wiped and I just try to go back to my [promotional] table to work with people and talk with people. But I have never had a chance to do that. That is probably something that I should do. All I have really had was church training so this has been a course in discipline for me to warm up. But I have to because some of the songs are so high, I have to. In order for me to sing Glorious, I have to warm up.

CS: Do you see an ENT on a regular basis? For the occasions for which you have seen him, was it based on voice issue or were you just having a check-up?

MM: Actually it was last year when I was working on my new record. What I did not know is that I had developed voice issues in connection with acid reflux. I didn’t know that I had it. It is truly the 2008-2009 disease, everyone has it. I was doing all of the wrong things, I was eating chocolate and drinking coffee. And along with my sinus/allergy issues I was having horrible sore throats. So I, without consulting a doctor, thought that I just had cold symptoms and since I was working on my record, I kept singing but not at all to my full capacity. I realized then that something was wrong. So I went to the doctor and he said if I had come in sooner he could have helped me with my issues and I was totally kicking myself at that point. So in order to get better, I would maintain my performance obligations on the weekends and would shut my speaking voice down during the week. My kids understood that if they needed me they had to write me a note and I totally stopped yelling and using my voice to get the kids attention. I did none of that. My kids helped me and my husband really helped. So the Nexium and the periods of silence were a large help. So I cut out the food triggers to reflux and God really touched me and now I feel like I’m back. From now on I have learned that if I want to continue to sing there are certain things that I
just can’t do. So it doesn’t hurt me to give up coffee and chocolate.

CS: So when you went in for your examination did they use the flexible or rigid scope?

MM: I had that done every time I went in and I hated it. I had the flexible scope and they made me sing while I had it in. It was absolutely terrible. Because it was going to allow the doctor to figure out what was really going on, I lived through it.
APPENDIX E

Interview with Dr. Karen Alsbrooks, member of Raise Choir

May 2009

Crystal Sellers: When did you begin singing?

Dr. Karen Alsbrooks: I started singing as a child in church in the typical children’s choir. I think the typical age to start in the choir was around 5. I’m not sure if I started at 5 but around that age was when I started.

CS: Did you do any solo singing at all?

KA: Not much at all. I would have solos in the choir or sing with duos or trios. In that choir setting I would sing solos, duos and trios but never as a solo singer alone.

CS: Was this by preference?

KA: Yes, by preference.

CS: While singing in the children’s choir what voice part were you singing at the time?

KA: I sang alto.

CS: Were you always an alto? Did you ever venture into soprano at all?

KA: No I primarily sang first or second alto.

CS: Have you always had a low speaking voice?
KA: Yes, always. I think attributed to my height.

CS: When you started to sing with Raise were you an alto at the time?

KA: Yes, I was at that time.

CS: When you transitioned to tenor was it a significant moment, was the decision made out of necessity or did this happen over time?

KA: It was over time. It was not a night and day sort of thing. I started out as an alto but then the mix in the choir was that there were too many altos and no tenors. So he started to look for voices that had the extensive range in that they could also sing tenor. At the same time, I was getting older and his music is written very high. The first alto parts were primarily second soprano parts. That combination led to it and then being pregnant and after the birth of my daughter I felt very comfortable singing tenor. Initially it was a struggle, not in the fact that I couldn’t sing tenor, it was just that I had learned all of the alto parts so it was difficult to switch parts.

CS: Do you think if you tried to sing alto now, would it be out of reach vocally?

KA: No I can still sing it. Especially the lower range of alto. If there are songs where we are allowed to sing those parts I do.

CS: What led to your transition down to tenor 2?

KA: I believe it was necessity because at one point Raise had more first tenors than second tenors. Since second tenor was lower and easier I decided to do that. So in that case it was because of necessity. I believe that it was also more comfortable in the range for me.

CS: Raise has a very distinctive vocal style that is different than most Gospel choirs and/or groups. Do you feel
that your singing style changed from singing in church to when you started singing with Raise?

KA: That’s an interesting question. Because singing in Shiloh Baptist Church which was a very hymn oriented, anthem oriented church, you did not get that traditional Gospel music there. I can’t really say that I started in that traditional style and then Raise took me somewhere else. I started out singing anthems and I have a love for traditional Gospel which is still my favorite. I went from that anthem style to what Raise does which is a style that incorporates many different styles of music and singing.

CS: Do you think that if you ever joined a group that did primarily contemporary or the harder style singing of Gospel, do you think you could do it? And if so, would you still sing tenor while doing it?

KA: I think that is something that I could and would do. Could I sing it at tenor? I don’t know because the tenor parts are typically lower in some groups. But I think that I have a big enough range that I could accomplish what the music called for.

CS: Have you ever felt that you had to do any hard Gospel singing?

KA: No not really primarily because of my transition from singing at Shiloh into singing with Raise. Well I should take that back. When I lived in Pittsburgh, I sang in a young adult choir. It was not as refined as Raise but it wasn’t primarily anthem singing either. The music was primarily songs of the Hawkins, Andrae Crouch and even the Thompson Community Singers. That was exposure to a different style of singing.

CS: What style of Gospel music appeals to you?

KA: Traditional Gospel is primarily my favorite style of Gospel. I believe that it is relative to my age, what I
was exposed to and what I feel you should get out of Gospel music.

CS: What is that exactly?

KA: It should be the singing of the Gospel. So if it is indeed that then the words are going to evoke a spiritual realm. I say that because in Raise we can sing anything and if the words are right, it can be very spiritual. The words and the spirit make a connection so it can move someone even if it is a spiritual. I think that is a ding against other genres of Gospel music because I can hear things but if the words are not bible derived it doesn’t go anywhere.

CS: The connection to spirituality in Gospel music for you has to do with the words. Are there any other aspects?

KA: It’s the words, I think that it is also the Gospel singer’s relationship with Christ because you can have the words and you can have singers singing the words but they have no relationship with Christ. There won’t be that connection. It would just be people singing songs that are based in the word of God. It’s the music itself, the words of the music and the relationship of everyone that is performing that music. In a choir setting if someone over here is having an experience with God it will transition through the entire group. It is a contagious experience.

CS: I’ve struggled with the interpretation of using the word performance to explain the singing of Gospel music. But for lack of a better term I think it’s the best way to describe it for now.

KA: I think a better word would be ministry. If you define ministry as serving, then you are serving that congregation. It is not a one way street you are also serving those that are in ministry. It has a multifaceted event. It is to go out but also to come back to the performers as well.
CS: To transition back to the singing portion of this conversation, with having a lower voice do you feel that there is as much of a need for warm-up especially when singing early in the day?

KA: I think that because of the mechanics of the voice and my athletic background I don’t think it’s wise to start marathon without preparation and stretching and getting them prepared. The need, I believe, for everyone is there. Now whether someone addresses that need is another story entirely. From the physiological standpoint you can’t go in and start wailing and expect your voice to sound okay after no warm-up.
APPENDIX F
Interview with Nissi Walls-Allen, Gospel recording artist
February 2009

Crystal Sellers: How and why did you begin to sing Gospel music?

Nissi Walls Allen: I started singing Gospel in my early or late teens. I ended up singing in a group at church. We were all in the choir and about seven of us girls started a group called the Evangelists of Praise at the time. That is how I started singing Gospel. Of course I listened to a variety of Gospel music in my house. My mother liked Christian Rock so I grew up listening to that as well. So I grew up listening to Sandi Patti, Larnelle Harris, The Clark Sisters, the Winans and the Commodores. So I had a variety of music around me while growing up, but I chose Gospel because my mother was always in church. So then The Evangelists of Praise started singing together. Then from there, I started to sing with a community choir and that is where I met Dadra, Steve and Mary (also members of Anointed). This choir was called the Edwin Hawkins Music & Arts Seminar Choir (The Columbus Chapter), the name of the choir was later changed to Resurrection Mass Choir and Keith Dobbins was the director. So Anointed actually formed out of Resurrection. So I talked to Dadra at a Winans concert at OSU about starting a group. We felt that God had blessed us with our voices and the gift to sing, so there really wasn’t anything else we wanted to do other than sing for the Lord. It was in me to sing from my childhood and that is how and why I started to sing Gospel music.

CS: During your time singing with the choir and also with Anointed, did you feel like your singing style had to change at all to accommodate the different groups?
NWA: No, not really. That was a blessing because I was always able to stay true to who I was. In a choir you just sort of blend in and I was an alto but could also sing tenor. However, between the groups it flowed really well, I never really had to make any changes. I just adapted.

CS: You mentioned earlier how Anointed was formed. What events led to Anointed becoming national recording artists?

NWA: To make a long story short, we began singing a lot locally and in some surrounding cities in Ohio. We were invited to sing in a PAW (Pentecostal Assemblies of the World) District Meeting. So we sang there and someone heard us. After that event we were invited to sing at some other district meetings. We were already working with a man out of Youngstown named Duane Turnage who already had a reputation for working with Vickie Winans. He later became our manager. He met us at one of the district meetings and he didn’t (by the looks of us) think we could really sing. I was the tall girl, there was Mary with her look and Dadra with her look and one guy, so I’m sure we looked a little different and strange to him at the time. He left to do a fashion show that involved his boutique he owned at the time, and then he came back when it was time for us to sing. He heard us sing and saw that the whole place was enjoying our singing, he was surprised and wanted to work with us. So he followed us around to our gigs for a while. My mother was our manager at the time, so he talked to my mother about managing us and she told him that he needed to prove himself to her if he wanted to manage the group. So that next year when the Winans came back to OSU, Vickie Winans opened the concert and he got us backstage to meet her. She asked us to sing on the spot and we did. We did a piece of a worship song, and while we were singing for her, there was a guy standing outside of her dressing room who played for the Winans that night named Bernard Wright who was listening to us as well. He was working on his project in California, so he talked to Duane about having us come out to California to do vocals on his project and in return we agreed on him recording a demo for us to shop to the music labels. The engineer of his project was the owner of a production label called Brainstorm. He heard us and signed us to his production label. After that we worked on finishing our first album titled “Spiritual Love Affair” on the Brainstorm label. Once the album was completed, the executives at Myrrh/Word came out to California and heard the completed
project and were excited about what they heard. We recorded that album in two weeks, all the background vocals in one week and all the lead vocals in another week, and a few days for the mixing process. An A&R from the Myrrh/Word came in and bought us from the Brainstorm Label and we ended up on the Myrrh label, which was also under the Word Records label, and our career just took off from there.

CS: Have you ever had formal lessons or coachings?

NWA: I've never had formal vocal lessons where I paid for it, but in the choirs we would do vocal exercises from time to time. I just sang a lot even when I was by myself, I sang a lot at home. I haven't had any formal vocal training. I've just been blessed to be able to do what I've been able to do. I don't knock having that training because I believe that it can help further and increase your education about what you are doing. But me personally, I've never had it. I just sang all of the time. Experience was my teacher.

CS: How familiar are you about vocal anatomy?

NWA: It was never discussed in the few coachings I've had, but I had to go to the Vocal Clinic at Vanderbilt (University) and I learned some things there. They showed me my vocal cords and told me what to drink, what not to drink and how the vocal cords work. I've received that sort of information, but other than that, hadn't had any other in depth information on the anatomy.

CS: In the height of Anointed's fame, what did a typical rehearsal day look like?

NWA: We used to rehearse a lot when we first started, but the schedule got so crazy that we just had to rehearse right before whatever event we were about to perform for. The only time we really did rehearse was right before going on a tour. They would block out a week or three to four days before we were about to leave, and we would go to a rehearsal hall and just rehearse the show. At this point rehearsing a certain day of the week wasn't possible. No one really does that any more. You just get to a place and rehearse right before the show. A lot of times, with a lot of groups, you end up singing the same song or group of songs for the entire tour so you rehearse that set of songs over and over before you head out. When we first started we would
rehearse a lot but once the schedule really started going, we just didn’t have time. Sometimes if we knew that we were doing a specific song or show we would work on it individually and then put it all together.

CS: So while touring were there special health precautions that you took?

NWA: We would work out and try to eat right. They would order the food in and try to make it slightly healthier. However, there were many times where we were tired and we were just trying to make it through the day. So we ate whatever we could get our hands on at times. As we got older we tried to eat better, work out, do our vocal warm-ups and try to sing before we had to be on stage because singing was important. Singing in the mornings was always a challenge because we weren’t really morning singers. Singing at Sunday morning services were difficult so we began to phase those out of our schedules. Most of the time our concerts were at night, so we were used to singing better at night. If we had to sing for a morning service at 7, 8 or 9am, some of us had to be up as early as 5 a.m. so we would be able to sing by the time the service started. I’ve learned how to handle that a lot better as I became more actively involved in my church in Nashville and started to sing in the early services. So that really helped me to be able to sing early in the morning.

CS: So you have started a practice of warming-up before singing?

NWA: Yes. I think that’s important. I haven’t warmed up always, but I do now. The more you sing, the more you put wear and tear on the voice, so you have to start doing different things to take care of it. So now when you get some wear and tear on it, you have to start taking better care of it. You have to steward the gift that God has given you as best as you can.

CS: On the days of recording, what was the typical schedule like?

NWA: It really depended on who you were working with. But a typical recording day, we would try to maybe record a couple of songs a day. There were some producers Mark Heimerman and Chris Harris who we loved to work with in Nashville. They taught us the value of time and quality. We
were used to dealing with other producers who had us in the studio working around the clock. Once we started to work with the CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) producers, we were prepared to work all night but they would tell us “no, we have to go home, we have families.” They really taught us the quality of time and the value of working in the studio. We would work from 10 am to about 7 pm. We really loved it. Our voices were allowed time to rest and we didn’t feel overworked. Our bodies were well rested too. We were able to come into the studio and work fairly quickly. We treated recording like a regular work job. We would take breaks, go to lunch and then come back and finish out the day. We would play ping-pong as a stress reliever from time to time.

CS: What does promotional touring look like?

NWA: The process was exhausting but rewarding at the same time, because we would have to be at places back to back. It involved lots of interviews, CD signings, and opportunities to talk to people. There were many networking parties where we met industry executives from other labels and other artists. Some days would be difficult because of the amount of traveling we were doing. However, it was the work ethic that took our music to the next level.

CS: We are going to switch gears and talk about vocal health. Were your visits to the ENT prompted by voice issues?

NWA: Yes, they were prompted by vocal issues. I had been on tour. Sometimes when other groups would have off days on tour, we would still have to work. We were always doing something. So we never really took days off to allow our voices to rest like we should have. I would be a little hoarse during performances but I would push until I had a voice. I had done that so many times until my voice finally gave out. I had a sore throat and other issues. So I finally went to see a vocal doctor. I was off for about a month. She told me about honey and tea and how thin the vocal folds actually were. She scoped my vocal folds and showed me how red and irritated they were. It was very interesting. She showed me what they do and why some of my upper range had been eliminated. They were very swollen and red. So I was off for a month and found others to take my place in performances. During that time my voice was getting better.
and back to normal. So that is the point when my exit from Anointed began.

CS: The time off, did it involve therapy and/or voice rest?

NWA: She put me on voice rest, told me to shut up. She also mentioned that I had a really low speaking voice which was also causing wear and tear on my voice. She mentioned that I should try to talk a little higher. I tried but this was the voice my mother and father gave me and it would be really hard to change it. So I appreciated the doctor’s advice, but I had to do what I had to do, because singing was my livelihood and there are some things that one just has to do to continue to work.

CS: You mentioned being scoped. Did the doctor use the rigid or flexible scope?

NWA: I had both scopes used. At the Voice Clinic at Vanderbilt, they used the rigid scope through my mouth. In an earlier scope I had the flexible scope and I did not know he was going to go through my nose. He said lean back and I said ok? And the next thing I know he was sending the tube up my nose. I was about to flip out. He looked at my throat and cords to see if they were okay. I did not have to sing while the flexible scope was in.

CS: Any other final thoughts?

NWA: Singers should really sing in a comfortable range for themselves especially in Gospel music. Especially because Gospel music audiences feel as if you’re not doing anything or being effective if you’re not screaming or hollering. I don’t really care about hearing a singer scream and holler. I like to hear a nice voice with a great tone that tells the story, that’s saying something. Some audiences don’t know how to appreciate a voice with a great tone. In the Gospel arena, it is easy for people to make you feel as if you are not being effective because they are not responding to you. So my thing is that I don’t want people to get caught up in trying to entertain people by screaming and hollering. You can mess your cords up so bad trying to keep up with the need to entertain your audience in that way. Singers should really learn to take care of their voices and sing in a range that is truly comfortable for you. It is okay to stretch every once in awhile, but if you are not a soprano, don’t let a producer or songwriter try to put a song in a soprano range and ask you
to sing it. That is where a lot of vocal issues occur. This is what happened to me because when you are in a group there is a level of competition amongst each other to try to wow the crowd, which is really not necessary, but due to insecurities, I felt I had to do extra because I had the lower voice. Mary and Dadra had the higher pitched voices. So I kept trying to sound like them as much as I could or wow the crowd as much as I could because of the response that they would get from the crowd. I got caught up in that insecurity, but then I began to realize that my voice was not made for that. Everybody has their favorites of course. But singers should never think that they aren’t making an impact, by just being themselves. I really want to encourage singers to do their thing, sing their song in their range to the best of their ability. I hope that they don’t play into the insecurity of feeling like they have to scream and holler all the time, to be effective. Use the voice that God has given you. Know your niche and work it.

CS: Did you feel like you were pushed to sing tenor because of necessity?

NWA: No, tenor is my comfortable range. I was able to sing all three parts. Sometimes I’d scare myself singing soprano. I kept asking myself had I lost my mind because of what I was able to do. But when I started singing it, it just came out. That was not really comfortable for me, but I consider myself a contralto but I love singing tenor. I believe that is what God has given me. On this project that I just finished recording I am finally doing the voice that is me. My cousin who is actively involved in Gospel musicals, she would sometimes ask me for some of my songs to perform on the road. When I recorded my first solo project, she picked on me because I was singing most of the songs in my upper register. On this project I started to sing in the register that is most comfortable for me. So I finally had the opportunity to sing in the best area of my voice on this project, and I really love it.
APPENDIX G

Interview with Pastor LaRue Howard, Gospel recording artist and worship pastor at Faithworld Church, Orlando, Florida

February 2009

Crystal Sellers: How did you start singing Gospel music? Did you start in the church?

LaRue Howard: Pretty much. Being from a little rural town in South Carolina, I grew up in a Baptist church. My mother had me in the choir early. So a lot of my musical experience came from the Baptist church, the tuning up and the lining of the hymns. So that was definitely the foundation of my musical experience.

CS: Since the music sung in the Baptist church is primarily traditional style Gospel, when did you make your shift into more of the praise and worship style of Gospel music?

LH: Not until I moved to Florida but I actually would take that back. It was really around the 1990s when the praise and worship style started to become Popular. So I would say around that time.

CS: Prior to the ‘90s were you still singing the traditional style of Gospel and also singing Classically as well?

LH: I grew up in Baptist church and started playing piano at age seven and also studied dance so I had many other musical experiences growing up. In high school I joined the choir and got to go to All State Choir competition and also the other fun opportunities like All County competition. So I had
those experiences, as well as playing in the band in high school that helped me with learning to read music. So it was after that during college that I became actively involved in Classical music.

CS: What was the inspiration that lead you to attend undergrad as a voice major?

LH: When I went to college I started out as a nursing major. I didn’t fare so well during the first year. So my second year of college I was always in the music department because I joined the choir that year. I was always there because all of my friends were there and I realized that this was what I really loved to do, so I changed my major to vocal performance during that year.

CS: Had you had any Classical training prior to this time?

LH: No, not any Classical training. I had had some one-on-one vocal training that was mostly performance based but I don’t remember it being Classically focused training.

CS: I read in your biography that a lot of your Christian walk was altered during your collegiate years. So the events that led to your career in Gospel music did they start that early? Did you feel that when you were singing in college you were going to work towards a career in Gospel music?

LH: No, that actually happened a little later. It’s funny because spiritually speaking the whole notion of being in music ministry full time came to me in a vision. I got saved when I was in college. So when I was praying and asking God for direction in my life, I was in an intercessory prayer group and really I was seeking God about the purpose for my life. It was during that time that God gave me that vision and showed me singing on a stage singing in front of countless numbers of people. On the stage behind me there was a band and a group of singers. At that time I wasn’t sure what the vision meant but I just knew that I was going to do something in music. I just held on to that vision and knew somehow I was going to get there. I was living in Atlanta, GA at that time. I married my college sweetheart and we
moved to Orlando, FL and we started attending Faithworld Church with Pastor Clint Brown. God was just reminding me of that vision. I knew somehow that being at Faithworld would allow that vision to come to pass. I did not know how, I just knew that it would.

CS:
What were your coachings and lessons like during your Classical training? And how were they similar to any coachings you may have had now as a Gospel singer?

LH:
I have not had any coachings since I’ve been out of college. My vocal coach was Toni Anderson for the remainder of my college years. What I remember the most about her was that she was showing me how things affected my voice, from monthly cycles to birth control, to my habits such as drinking since I was not saved my entire undergraduate career. That was such a learning experience for me. Learning about the placement of the voice was monumental, using my chest voice and head voice and knowing I had a higher range than what I thought. I always thought that I was an alto, but she told me that I was a mezzo-soprano and she would warm me up to a high C#. It would blow my mind that I could sing that high. We would always start with vocalises, and she taught me several arias and I had the opportunity to do several scenes from different operas under her direction. That was really cool.

CS:
Do you think that you would go back to an occasional lesson or coaching now?

LH:
I have really wanted to do that for some time now. I think that it would be extremely helpful. Just because it would help like it does an athlete who has a coach to help build muscle strength and endurance. It would be helpful for singing as well. Even though I sing praise and worship and sometimes I have to go real churchy, I realize that sometimes during worship it doesn’t require all of that. I think a lot of time as artists we get carried away with all of the runs and the trills when really it’s the anointing that is on the gift that really makes the difference. And if one can just learn to lay back, it’s during those times that I revert back to
my training, the correct way of singing during those times of worship when you let the anointing and presence of God work. So to answer the question, I would love to have some coaching.

CS: Do you know a lot about the vocal anatomy?

LH: Remembering it? Some. Not as much as I did.

CS: How does your approach to the music change when you are singing as a soloist and when you are working as the worship pastor? Do you feel that there is a change in the approach?

LH: Yes and No. No because my objective is always the same. When I step on stage my objective is always to change the atmosphere and to create an atmosphere for the manifested presence of God whether I am by myself or with a group. Yes it changes because if I am by myself I know I am limited in the type of music I can do. Whether I am singing to tracks or singing a capella or whether I am with the band and singers there is a change.

CS: So as far as music is concerned, definitely but as far as the goal is concerned, not really?

LH: Yes, definitely.

CS: On a more literal standpoint as a worship pastor, when you are choosing your vocalists, what are you looking for?

LH: I am definitely looking for tone quality. I like a more full sounding singer as opposed to a singer that is a little thin or nasal sounding. I also look for stage presence. I think those are the top two aspects that I am looking for.

CS: We discussed earlier that the members of the band were all trained musicians, are any of the vocalists trained as well?

LH: No they are not. They are mostly straight church singers.

CS: During the Judah Music Conference are there important aspects that you stress to the attendees of this conference?
LH: During this conference I teach different classes. Pastor Brown as director will usually tell me what he would like for me to teach on. Sometimes it could be on worship leading, structuring the music department and establishing a relationship between music pastor and church pastor.

CS: What does your typical day look like prior to arriving at the church to lead worship at a service?

LH: I am usually here in the morning doing a lot of administrative work. I don’t have an assistant which can be a little discouraging at times because I don’t really get to do much of the creative side because I am doing a lot of administrative work. I am updating our 100+ voice choir roster, attending staff meetings and then going home and getting the family ready and getting back for the service.

CS: I noticed yesterday that sound check is a key element for service preparation. What are the specifics that you are looking for during that time?

LH: I have taught my singers that as soon as you arrive in the building you go to your mike and check your own levels in the monitors. The goal is to make sure that everyone can hear everything okay. The sound check is not a rehearsal, the point is to check big entrances and making sure that any transitions in songs are set. We might do quick run throughs of songs.

CS: Did you have to adjust as a Classical singer to the differences between singing with and without amplification?

LH: I didn’t notice it. It came naturally. It’s so funny because I’m used to just not having the amplification and relying on what I hear naturally.

CS: Do you find that there is a special health regimen that you go after during tour?

LH: Definitely, I try to stay away from dairy products. I try to increase my water intake. Before I got pregnant I was doing
a lot of walking and working on my breath support. I was travelling more during the past spring and fall.

CS: Do you encounter moments of vocal fatigue?

LH: Yes, but it really depends on the surrounding and what exactly I am doing that determines how long it takes to get to that point.

CS: What is your typical warm-up time frame?

LH: It’s funny because my voice has because accustomed to the routine. In the morning I am doing lip trills in the shower and I try to warm-up low first. From the time I wake up until I hit the stage for sound check I am trying to do something.

CS: Now if it was a recording day, does the schedule seem different at all?

LH: The schedule is really about the same. I remember during the last recording session there was a song that I was really struggling with, singing what I wanted to sing, hitting the notes that I wanted to hit. I was tired so I said give me 15 minutes, a can of Red Bull and some crunches and I was good. I was fine after that. The crunches just helped me with waking up and getting that extra lower abdominal support engaged.

CS: How do you feel your vocal stamina and endurance has been affected during each trimester of your pregnancy?

LH: First trimester there was really no change. No morning sickness and not much of a change vocally. During the second trimester, I think I was just more aware of the baby being there. So I was more cautious of engaging my abdominal muscles for support so I didn’t sing as high or as long. During the third trimester, I became more comfortable with that idea but breathing became a little more difficult. The third has been more challenging so instead of singing as much I talked more. I feel like I have been having a few more vocal breaks.

CS: Have you visited an ENT?
LH: Yes.
CS: How often?
LH: I have not been in several years.
CS: What took you there?
LH: I was a school teacher prior to becoming a worship leader and I was working in a very old trailer that had lots of mold that I was unaware of. I realized that I was having some raspiness and was constantly hoarse so that is what took me to the ENT.
CS: Did they prescribe therapy or what was their suggestion?
LH: They put the camera down my throat and noticed the injury. So they took me through a few weeks of speech therapy with a speech language pathologist and we did six weeks of vocal rest. This was interesting because I was a school teacher so I had to bring in microphones and speakers to adjust. I did a lot of lip synching in the choir. Thankfully we did not need any other treatments.
CS: Do you keep photos on record?
LH: Yes the ENT has them. I’m not sure about the location of my copy.
CS: So was the scope the rigid or flexible scope?
LH: I chose the rigid scope because I told them I could lift my soft palate really well.
CS: What do you feel constitutes a good or bad performance?
LH: I would say executing your song in the manner that those who are listening can really enjoy it. And that you feel comfortable with what you have done. I was telling one of my singers that you are going to have good vocal days and bad vocal days where you are not going to be able to sing all of the notes that you are normally able to sing for whatever reason. So when you know that you can’t sing those high notes, sing those notes that are in your comfortable range.
and work with what you can work with. That does not make it a bad performance. You have just executed the song in the same manner that you would just not using the same creative technique but the same passion and the same conviction. It doesn’t matter what you do vocally, it matters about your passion and conviction.

CS: Do you feel like changes in personal and mental aspects of life affect your singing?

LH: Absolutely, but spiritually speaking, I’ve learned that when you are praising God sometimes you are using that time to get your breakthrough. Sometimes you have to use that time for yourself.

CS: What do you feel, in your own words, is the difference between a performance opportunity and a ministry opportunity?

LH: I guess one would say musical content or the people that were there. However, I always say that no matter where you are singing or who you are singing for it should be the same. There are several corporations that bring their major conferences here to Orlando so even if I am singing “You Raise Me Up” or “Ain’t No Stopping Us Now”, my intent is to always acknowledge God in my personal time before going on stage and just say God let the sound of my voice reach them in a way that they will know that there is something different or something that they have never experienced before. If I am singing “Respect” whatever, I want them to feel something difference. So for me there is never really a difference in my intent in singing inside or outside of the church.

CS: What are some of the comments that you get the most from those who hear you sing? What do you think they are most engaged in when it comes to your singing?

LH: That’s hard for me to answer because I try not to pay attention to what they say. I acknowledge it but I don’t internalize it. Someone once told me to keep my ears
plugged to the accolades of men because I don't want to get caught up in that.

CS: Do you find it challenging when you have to sing vocal phrases in all ranges while teaching?

LH: No I enjoy it. I actually get a kick out of knowing all of the parts.
APPENDIX H

Important Terms Relevant to Gospel Singing and the Black Church Experience

There are many terms specific to Gospel music that will be helpful to know as we discuss the specifics of Gospel singing. Below is a list of terms that will be used throughout this document.

**Baptist Lining Hymns** - A leader speaking or chanting a line of text which is then sung by the congregation. The history behind lining hymns goes back as early as 17th century England where church pastors were required to recite the text of a hymn line by line due to lack of literacy in their congregations. Notable hymnist Isaac Watts decried the fact that hymn singing in church was "horrendous and lamentable." To improve this condition he began composing hymns in basic poetic meters that allows them to be sung to familiar tunes. Thus, it was up to the pastor to recite
the text of a hymn line by line and the congregation to sing it to a tune that
was either suggested in the hymn book or agreed upon beforehand. ⁶⁹

**Belting** – using chest voice qualities, thick vocal fold mass and/or full voice
qualities especially in the upper register of the voice by both men and
women

**Bluesy vocal passages** – vocal passages based on the Blues or pentatonic
scale

**Bridge** – the transitional part of a song that separates the beginning of the song
from the ending or vamp (see vamp)

**Cadenza** – florid passages or extremely long held notes used just before the final
chord of a song

**Dove Awards** - annual awards ceremony celebrating achievement in
Contemporary Christian music (CCM)

**Getting the spirit** (also known as catching the spirit or going in) – showing
outward expressions of praise by crying, shouting or speaking in tongues
(see glossolalia and shouts)

**Glossolalia** (also known as speaking in tongues) – the ability to utter words or
sounds in a language not known by the speaker as a religious expression
and used as a secret language in conversation with God

⁶⁹ [http://www.arts.state.al.us/actc/compilation/smith.html](http://www.arts.state.al.us/actc/compilation/smith.html)
**Head voice/falsetto** – the Classical sounding singing in the upper register of the voice, often called falsetto for both men and women in Gospel contrary to it being called head voice in women and falsetto in men in the Classical arena.

**High tessitura in choral singing** – singing in the upper pitch extremes of the voice during choral singing because of the key in which the piece was composed.

**Melismas/runs** – highly florid vocal passages used as an indication of virtuosic vocal ability called “runs” in Gospel music.

**Moans** – reminiscent of Blues singing, the singer departs from the words and uses a pressed hum while vocalizing.

**Modulation** – change of key usually occurring by upward motion by either half or whole step key progressions.

**Scat** – singing on nonsense syllables in improvising Jazz style but used for artistic expression in Gospel music.

**Sermonette** – small sermon often included in a song.

**Shouts** – 1. Physical movement or dance as a form of praise, or; 2. Loud outbursts of praise.

**Southern Gospel** – a form of Gospel music which has its roots in bluegrass and country music.
**Stellar Awards** – annual awards ceremony celebrating achievements in Gospel music

**Testimony** – recalling a story or event where God has made a significant impact

**Transitions between speech and singing** – shifting from singing into testimony or sermonette

**Vamp** – repeated section at the end of a song

**Vibrato manipulations** – there are three types of vibrato manipulations used in Gospel music

**Delayed** – reminiscent of Jazz singing – maintaining a note without vibrato and slowly introducing vibrato at the end of the note

**Eliminated** – vibrato is not used at all, used especially in choral or group singing to assist with intricate harmonies

**Exaggerated** – use of lots of vibrato either naturally created or by manipulation of the lower jaw to create a larger sound

**Yells** – loud vocal outbursts of either expression of praise or song lyrics
# APPENDIX I

## Compendium of Relevant Gospel Recordings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregational Era</th>
<th>Recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucie Campbell</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Era</th>
<th>Recordings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albertina Walker</td>
<td>Best of Albertina Walker; Songs of the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara Ward</td>
<td>When the Gates; Somebody Bigger than You and I; I Feel the Holy Spirit; Meetin’ Tonight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dottie Peoples</td>
<td>Dottie Peoples – Greatest Hits; Live featuring “On Time God”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Bobby Jones</td>
<td>The Ambassador; Faith Unscripted; Just Churchin’; The Gospel Experience: Live in Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Cleveland</td>
<td>The King of Gospel; It’s a New Day; Having Church; The Best of James Cleveland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Williams and the Spiritual QC’s</td>
<td>The Collection; So Much to be Thankful For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahalia Jackson</td>
<td>Gospels, Spirituals and Hymns; The Best of Mahalia Jackson; The Essential Mahalia Jackson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mississippi Mass Choir</td>
<td>Mississippi Mass Choir Greatest Hits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percy Bady</td>
<td>The Percy Bady Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rance Allen</td>
<td>The Best of the Rance Allen Group; The Rance Allen Group – Live</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roberta Martin</td>
<td>The Best of the Roberta Martin Singers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosetta Tharpe</td>
<td>Complete Recorded Works in 3 Volumes; Original Soul Sister; The Gospel of Blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sallie Martin</td>
<td>Throw out the Lifeline; Precious Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley Caesar</td>
<td>After 40 Years: Still Sweeping through the City; Hymns; Best of Shirley Caesar, I Remember Mama</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Barrett Sisters</td>
<td>The Best of the Barrett Sisters; What a Wonderful World</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Caravans</td>
<td>The Best of the Caravans; Paved the Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Dorsey</td>
<td>Precious Lord: The Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willie Mae Ford Smith</td>
<td>Mother Smith and Her Children (discontinued)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilmington Chester Mass Choir</td>
<td>It’s Not Over; The Change Will Come</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contemporary Era</th>
<th>Recordings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anointed</td>
<td>Spiritual Love Affair, Under the Influence, The Call</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commissioned</td>
<td>The Best of Commissioned; Commissioned Reunion Live</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donnie McClurkin</td>
<td>We are All One, The Essential Donnie McClurkin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edwin Hawkins</td>
<td>The Best of the Edwin Hawkins Singers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hezekiah Walker</td>
<td>The Essential Hezekiah Walker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milton Brunson</td>
<td>Rev. Milton Brunson and The Thompson Community Singers Greatest Hits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raymond Wise &amp; Raise Choir</td>
<td>It’s Time to Go; Classic Raise; A Raise Christmas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Smallwood</td>
<td>The Center of My Joy; Adoration, Persuaded, Healing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ricky Dillard</td>
<td>7th Episode: Live from Toronto; A Holy Ghost Take Over; Unplugged: The Way Church Used to Be</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take 6</td>
<td>Greatest Hits; So Much to Say; Take 6; The Standard</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Winans</td>
<td>The Very Best of The Winans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tramaine Hawkins</td>
<td>All My Best to You; Gospel Legacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walter Hawkins</td>
<td>The Very Best of Walter Hawkins; Love Alive 1-5</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>Word Ministry Era</th>
<th>Recordings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrae Crouch</td>
<td>The Best of Andrae Crouch; Keep on Singing; I’ll Be Thinking of You</td>
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<tr>
<td>BeBe &amp; CeCe Winans</td>
<td>BeBe &amp; CeCe Winans – Greatest Hits; Relationships; Different Lifestyles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Byron Cage</td>
<td>An Invitation to Worship; Live at New Birth Cathedral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daryl Coley</td>
<td>The Collection: 12 Best Loved Songs; Compositions: A Decade of Songs; Live in Oakland: Home Again</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donald Lawrence</td>
<td>The Law of Confession Part 1; Go Get Your Life Back; I Speak Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fred Hammond</td>
<td>The Essential Fred Hammond; Pages of Life Chapters 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel Houghton</td>
<td>New Season; Alive in South Africa; The Power of One</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kim Burrell</td>
<td>No Ways Tired; Kim Burrell Live; Everlasting Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurt Carr</td>
<td>No One Else; Just the Beginning; Awesome Wonder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha Munizzi</td>
<td>Change the World; No Limits – Live; The Best is Yet to Come</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marvin Sapp</td>
<td>Thirsty; Diary of a Psalmist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick Henderson</td>
<td>Saints Praise &amp; Worship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ron Kenoly</td>
<td>High Places: The Best of Ron Kenoly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandra Crouch</td>
<td>We Sing Praises; We’re Waiting</td>
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<td>Smokie Norful</td>
<td>I Need You Now; Life Changing; Live by Smokie Norful</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Clark Sisters</td>
<td>You Brought the Sunshine; Is My Living in Vain; Live One Last Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Whitfield</td>
<td>The Best of Thomas Whitfield; I’m Encouraged</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanessa Bell Armstrong</td>
<td>Vanessa Bell Armstrong – Greatest Hits; Walking Miracle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yolanda Adams</td>
<td>The Best of Me – Yolanda Adams Greatest Hits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Crossover</strong></td>
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<td>J Moss</td>
<td>V2; The J Moss Project</td>
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<td>John P. Kee</td>
<td>Not Guilty: The Experience; The Essential John P. Kee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kierra Sheard</td>
<td>I Owe You; This is Me; Bold Right Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirk Franklin</td>
<td>The Fight of My Life; Hero; Nu Nation Project; The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin</td>
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<td>Trin-i-tee 5:7</td>
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<td>Life; Victory Live; Stand Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winans Phase 2</td>
<td>We Got Next</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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