Traditional Music from Alabama's Wiregrass
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The Wiregrass region of southeast Alabama takes its name from a plant indigenous to the area. Predominantly rural, the region was once known for its cotton production, but now relies on peanuts, poultry, cattle and timber as cash crops.

Traditional music flourishes in the Wiregrass. Bluegrass, gospel, blues, and Sacred Harp singing are among the diverse styles of music being made in homes, churches, and community centers throughout the region. This wealth of music, discovered during a ten-county folklife survey of the Wiregrass, inspired the production of this recording. During a two-year period, ethnomusicologist Stephen Grauberger traveled through Pike, Crenshaw, Bullock, Barbour, Dale, Coffee, Covington, Geneva, Houston, and Henry Counties documenting those traditions that characterize a way of life in the various communities that he visited. These field recordings represent a sample of the music he found.

The Wiregrass Folklife Survey is a project of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture in partnership with the Pike Pioneer Museum in Troy. The project was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts with additional support from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.
"Amazing Grace," Mount Pisgah Primitive Baptist Church, Lafayette (Chambers County), May 26, 1996, (2:36).

On the day of this recording, singers from the Wiregrass region had traveled to Chambers County for a Sacred Harp singing convention. After a full day of singing the shape-note hymns, they stayed to sing from a book with no musical notation, Benjamin Lloyd's *Primitive Hymns*. The Lloyd Hymnal, which was originally compiled and published in Greenville, Alabama in 1841, contains metered hymns and is used regularly in Primitive Baptist worship services. Abbreviations for the poetic meter of each hymn, such as L.M. for long meter or C. M. for common meter, indicate the type of music needed to fit the words. While common meter tunes are interchangeable with the words to any common meter hymn, singers usually associate a particular tune with a given text, a preference that is dictated by tradition.

The enduring hymn "Amazing Grace" was written in 1779 by John Newton, a former British slave trader who experienced a religious conversion before writing these verses. In this recording, "Amazing Grace" is "lined out" in traditional fashion. The song leader gives out a line of the hymn and then the congregation sings the
same phrase. This practice dates from a time when there were few songbooks or people who could read. Here the tradition continues due to a conscious sense of preservation and love for the music.

"Come Heed the Love of the Lord and Let Your Joy Be Known." New Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, Linwood (Pike County), March 31, 1996, (2:24).

Another style of lined-out hymn singing is termed "Dr. Watts" by the African-American congregations who use this style of singing in the devotional part of the worship service. Although named for early eighteenth-century British composer Isaac Watts, who wrote many of the hymns popular at the time when slaves were being introduced to Christianity, the term now refers to the style rather than actual authorship of a particular hymn. The leader intones a line of the hymn and the congregation then follows, singing each word very slowly, dwelling on and often embroidering each syllable. Many singers will say that this style of singing creates a prayerful state of mind by causing one to concentrate on the meaning of the words.

"Come Heed the Love of the Lord" appears as #348 in the National Baptist Hymn Book. This excerpt is from a devotional service preceding the Pike County
Singing Convention. William Henry Roberson leads the hymn and continues with a prayer accompanied by "moaning" from the congregation. Moans are phrases that are chanted, often repetitively, and serve to intensify the worship experience for the participants often invoking the presence of the Holy Spirit.

"I Heard the Angels Singing," Pauline Griggs, Dothan (Houston County), June 18, 1996, (1:54). "In a Time Like This," same as above, (:47).

Pauline Jackson Griggs grew up in Dale County where sacred music was a part of the daily life of her family. She remembers her mother Lela singing hymns and spirituals all day long while doing housework. Her father Judge Jackson published the shape-note songbook the Colored Sacred Harp in 1934, which includes the song "Shout and Sing" that Pauline wrote as a teenager and her father set to music.

Here she performs two of her mother's favorite spirituals. Pauline Griggs recalls her excitement as a little girl in the early 1920s watching the old people at the Union Grove Missionary Baptist Church gather in a circle during the worship service to shout and sing. Both the "ring shout" and spirituals were forms of African-American religious expression that developed in the South during the time of slavery. Versions of
"I Heard the Angels Singing" have been documented in Alabama by a number of folk song collectors including John and Alan Lomax.

"David's Lamentation," Pleasant Grove Primitive Baptist Church (also known as Carroll Church), Ozark (Dale County), January 14, 1996, (2:24).

On any given weekend throughout the year Sacred Harp singers gather in rural churches in the Wiregrass for an all-day singing and dinner on the grounds. The singers arrange themselves in a "hollow square" according to voice part with the basses facing the trebles and the tenors facing the altos. A song leader stands in the middle holding a songbook in one arm and marking time with a vigorous down/up motion with the other. These Sacred Harp singers continue the custom, derived from singing school classes, of singing the notes, then the words.

This singing genre takes its name from the Sacred Harp, a songbook published by B. F. White in 1844, which became popular in the South. It is part of a much older tradition known as fa-sol-la or four shape note singing. In colonial times itinerant singing school masters in New England devised a system of teaching music using different shaped notes to designate each tone on the scale. This system of learning music spread South in the early 19th century during a period of religious fervor known as "The Second Great Awakening."
W. M. Cooper published a revision of White's *Sacred Harp* in 1902 in Dothan. As he traveled the Wiregrass region teaching singing schools, he also sold his books. Now his revision is the standard songbook of Sacred Harp singers in the Wiregrass, while another Sacred Harp book, the 1911 Denson revision, became popular in North Alabama.

"David's Lamentation" was composed by Boston singing school master William Billings in 1778. The text is based on the Biblical verse 2 Samuel 18:33 and is set in minor key.

This selection was recorded at the Helms-Bayne Memorial Singing at the Pleasant Grove Primitive Baptist Church, which is the first Cooper Book singing of the New Year. The church is a fine, old high-ceilinged wooden building much loved by the singers for its acoustics.

"Jesus Rose," Alabama and Florida Union State Convention, Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, near Abbeville (Henry County), September 23, 1995, (2:30).

African Americans in Alabama's Wiregrass have a long history of singing from the *Sacred Harp* and of holding annual singing conventions. Since at least the 1880s, Henry County has been home to these shape-note singings. The Alabama and Florida Union State Convention, where this recording was made, began in 1922 and still meets
annually with representation from the various county conventions active in the region.

New composition has always been a part of the Sacred Harp tradition. There were a number of white and black composers in the Wiregrass region during the early part of this century. The now defunct Dale County Colored Musical Institute formed in the late 1920s to teach African-American children to read and write music. Not long after, this Institute and the Alabama and Florida Union State Convention recommended that **The Colored Sacred Harp** songbook be published by Judge Jackson.

The resulting songbook, published in 1934, contains songs from 26 composers, with Judge Jackson as the primary contributor. The song "Jesus Rose" from the Colored Sacred Harp was written by Bishop J. D. Walker, the associate editor. While active participation in the black Sacred Harp tradition is dwindling, the book itself has enjoyed a new-found popularity due to recognition of its historic significance by scholars and the community itself.

"Golden Harp," Davis Brothers, Klondyke Gospel Music Center, Newton (Dale County), April 15, 1995, (2:19).

The Davis Brothers trio includes Jackie Davis, his son Kevin and his brother Mike Davis. Mike's wife Brenda often plays piano accompaniment, but not, however, on this a cappella selection. When the group formed in the 1960s another brother, John, was singing in the trio. The group sings old time gospel standards and more

*Davis Brothers perform at the Klondyke Gospel Music Hall.*
contemporary gospel music including songs composed by Mike and Jackie.

The unusual inclusion of a Sacred Harp piece in its repertoire pays tribute to the family's musical heritage. Mike recalls summers as a child in Coffee County attending Sacred Harp singing schools after the crops were laid by. "The Golden Harp," composed by J. P. Reese in 1869, was one of their father's favorite tunes. It is written in the minor key.

In this rendition, Jackie sings treble, Kevin alto, and Mike tenor. The bass vocal part is absent. This rare opportunity to hear a Sacred Harp song sung by a trio gives the listener a clear sense of the harmonies present in this traditional music form.

The Klondyke Gospel Music Center, housed in a former country church, is a rural performance venue developed by Ron Jeffers specifically for the presentation of gospel singing. Groups from Alabama as well as from neighboring states perform for a local audience every Saturday night. No admission is charged, but "love offerings" are accepted to help defray the costs of each group's musical ministry.

"I'm Traveling Home," St. Elizabeth Senior Choir, Sweet Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church, near Brundidge (Pike County), March 18, 1995, (3:05).

Three members of the Saint Elizabeth Senior Choir are recorded here singing at a performance honoring the anniversary of the Sweet Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church Choir. Anniversary celebrations recognizing the longevity of choirs and gospel quartets are traditional events in African-
American communities. The Saint Elizabeth Senior Choir has celebrated many anniversaries of its own. Members Ida Mae Peeble, Minnie Maddox, Fannie Christian and Voncile Delbridge have been members of the choir for 50 years. Choir president Annie Wilson has been with the group for 20 years. Wilson, Peeble, and Maddox are the featured performers in this recording of "I'm Traveling Home."

Ida Mae Peeble, who leads the song, started singing in her first choir in Inverness, Alabama in 1934. She learned this song from her brother-in-law, and usually pairs it with another, "Moving On," which also uses the train symbolically in the lyrics. In developing a comfortable harmony, Peeble said they sing a song over and over to determine how high or low each voice part should be. They then determine what she calls the "stopping period," that is, the length of time notes are sustained between lyric phrases. The songs performed by the senior choir were learned from other groups, the radio, and from books during a lifetime of singing.


The Zion Juniors began as a glee club in the 1950s, outlasting their mentor group the Zion Seniors. They were often invited to sing in people's homes and eventually began performing in churches and at annual choir singings in the community. Now they are invited to participate in choir anniversaries and other events from Florida to

The Zion Juniors perform.
Birmingham. While the personnel have changed over the years, two original members, John McGuire and James Ginyard, remain. The Zion Juniors still prefer to sing *a cappella* (without instrumental accompaniment) unlike many African-American gospel quartets in the region who have added electric instruments. To the delight of the older members of their audiences, they sing many of the same songs and in much the same style as they did in the 1950s and '60s.

"Family Prayer" is a Zion Juniors arrangement of an old Brooklyn All-Stars song. Robert Wilson sings lead and is backed by James Ginyard, James Wilson and Everester Thomas.

"One of These Days," Glory Bound Singers, Tarentum Community Center (Pike County), January 28, 1995, (2:25).

The Glory Bound Singers are a young gospel quartet who devote their free time to their singing ministry, performing regularly in the Wiregrass region. This performance was recorded during a cake auction at the Tarentum Community Center, to benefit a cancer patient in the community. Several gospel groups donated their time and talent at this fund raising event.
Although Glory Bound usually sings with instrumental accompaniment, they like to vary their program with the occasional a cappella tune, such as this one, to showcase their fine vocal skills. The gospel song is based on a traditional folk melody. Members of the group at the time of this recording were: David Freeman, bass; Robbie Carter, lead; Jennifer Hughes, soprano; and Josh Keen, baritone.


After the Civil War a new shape note singing tradition began that used seven shapes and syllables (do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti) to designate notes on a scale, rather than the four shapes used in Sacred Harp singing. Called "seven-shape" or "new book" gospel singing, the genre was promoted by publishing companies, such as Reubusch-Kieffer, Stamps-Baxter, and Vaughan, that published new books of songs each year and sent teachers into communities across the South to hold singing schools. The music and lyric content of the new books tend to be lighter and more optimistic in tone, compared to many of the somber and stately tunes found in the older four-shape song collections.

Alabama has produced a number of seven-shape composers. Stanley Smith of Ozark in Dale County wrote this song, which was recorded at the 66th annual Alabama State Gospel Convention where he served as president. Smith began singing
Sacred Harp music as a boy and later embraced seven-shape singing also. In addition to composing several songs for the new book publications, he is one of the few contemporary composers published in the latest Cooper edition of B. F. White's Sacred Harp.

"Glory, Glory, I'm So Glad," Fifth-Sunday Convention of Pike County Shape Note Singers, Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, Linwood (Pike County), March 31, 1996, (3:28).

One genre of sacred music that has received scant attention from music scholars is that of African-American seven-shape singing conventions in Alabama and elsewhere. As in the Sacred Harp tradition the black and white conventions developed separately. In the Wiregrass region African Americans began singing from the same "new book" gospel publications as their white neighbors did in the early part of this century. Even though the material is the same, the vocal styles are somewhat different. Black seven-shape singing generally contains more melodic ornamentation, particularly at the end of phrases. Also an emphasis is on the upbeat, or the second and fourth beats, in the music. The black singers in the Wiregrass have also retained the practice of singing the notes through first before singing the lyrics.

Among the black seven-shape conventions, there are a number of county and
individual church organizations scattered around the state. There are at least three African-American state conventions as well: the Alabama-Florida State Convention based in the Wiregrass; the All-State Convention, which includes groups from Northwest Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia; and the Central Union, which includes conventions in Central Alabama north of Montgomery.

The participants sing from a number of the seven-shape publications collected over a lifetime of singing. Some literally bring suitcases of books to the conventions. The song "Glory, Glory I'm So Glad" was published in 1940 by G.T. Speer and written by Pace Alger.

"It's Hard To Stumble When You're On Your Knees," Reverend J. C. Folks Choir, Mount Olive #2 Missionary Baptist Church, Shiloh community (Pike County), March 4, 1995, (3:45).

In most African-American churches in the Wiregrass, the music of church choirs is a vital part of the worship service. The selection here was recorded at a special event, the 8th Anniversary of Reverend J. C. Folks, pastor of Mt. Olive #2 Missionary Baptist Church in Pike County. The program included a variety of guest performances by quartets, choirs and soloists from neighboring churches.

In the arrangement heard here, both Melvin Diggs and Jocelyn Griffin take a turn
singing solo. Adding to their voices is the strong backing of the J.C. Folks Choir and the piano accompaniment of Griffin. In the call-and-response technique typical of many African-American gospel choirs, the soloist sings a verse or two and the choir chimes in forcefully either between verses to sing a chorus or at certain times during a verse to punctuate the musical phrase. Spontaneity and spirit combined with verbal and melodic improvisation add power to this performance.


The Mac Opry is a monthly show and live radio broadcast primarily featuring performances by bluegrass bands from the region. It is held at the MacArthur Technical Institute every third Saturday night of the month.

In the fashion of bluegrass legend Bill Monroe, Lonnie Magoo of Southern Comfort sings his rendition of the bluegrass gospel tune "Working on a Building," which originated as an African-American spiritual. Magoo, besides being a very good vocalist, plays guitar, dobro, banjo and even some fiddle when needed. He plays dobro on this song. Sharon Magoo plays acoustic bass, Dennis Lowrey plays mandolin, and Frank Manning plays guitar. Ed Ward, a fiddler from Lockhart is not a regular member of Southern Comfort, but lends a hand during this performance. Dennis Lowery is the only original member of this band, which began in 1983.

The Magoos manage the Flatwoods Music Park near the border of Crenshaw and Butler counties. This venue, which hosts monthly bluegrass performances and a three-
day event in August, is a converted chicken house. In the summer the performances are held in the open air, but in winter the enclosed part of the structure becomes a cozy spot heated with wood stoves. Any time of year the audience knows to bring their own lawn chairs and that RV parking is available.

"Glory Land March," Circle City Bluegrass Band, Dothan (Houston County), August 17, 1996, (3:01).

Circle City Bluegrass band is based in Houston County, where they play for many community events. Members of the group include "Bill Dad" William Frank McGlaun on fiddle and vocals, Howard Linsey on mandolin and vocals, Luther Hasty on guitar and lead vocals, and Buster Watson on banjo. The original group formed in 1981 at the Dothan Farm Center. Luther Hasty, the only original member of Circle City used to play with the Dickerson Family Bluegrass Band, a group featured on an album of music from the Chattahoochee River Valley. A good portion of Circle City's repertoire is gospel music and they occasionally play all-gospel programs.

The Glory Land March was originally published as a seven-shape gospel piece and was popularized by the Masters Family gospel group in the 1930s and 40s. The tune was often performed as a show piece for piano players who accompanied gospel quartets on tours. This instrumental version is excerpted here due to the length of the performance.
"I Found A Solid Rock In Jesus," Bishop Perry Tillis, The Saviour Lord Jesus Pentecostal Holiness Church, Samson (Geneva County), February 19, 1995, (2:02).

Perry Tillis was born in 1920 in Talladega County, but grew up on a farm in Coffee County near Elba. He began playing music at age 14, first learning to play the ukulele, then the guitar. In his younger days he worked as a farm laborer and truck driver, playing and singing the blues in his spare time. Later he travelled and played the blues for a living, performing in clubs as a solo act, as was typical for a bluesman in the pre-World War II South.

In 1954 he went blind. He continued his itinerant lifestyle until 1967 when he experienced a religious conversion. He now lives next door to his The Saviour Lord Jesus Pentecostal Holiness Church in Samson where he leads services every first and third Sunday of each month. He plays and sings gospel music in an improvisational blues-like style. This song was excerpted from a worship service, where he plays electric guitar and sings through an old, poor-quality amplifier using a glass bottleneck as a slide.


A. Z. Stanley and his gospel group are well-known in southeast Alabama where they perform regularly. They broadcast a Sunday morning gospel show on WTVY in
Dothan, and Stanley also serves as announcer for a weekly gospel program on WOOF, which is heard in Florida and Georgia, as well as southeast Alabama.

Stanley, who was born in 1940, began singing at age ten in his brother's gospel group, the Wiregrass Stars of Webb, Alabama. At 13 he sang for the Rising Stars Juniors of Webb and, three years later, for the Rising Stars. He then moved to Newark, New Jersey where he formed his group, the Sensational Bibletones, in 1972. He moved back to Dothan to work as a mason in the 1980s bringing the group back with him. Once a year they return to New Jersey for a short tour. They’ve expanded their Southern touring into Tennessee, Florida, and Georgia.

Present members of the Sensational Bibletones are: A. Z. Stanley, lead singer; Robert Porter, tenor and bass guitar, Ernest Jones, baritone; Otis Murry, drummer, William Jones, keyboard; and Perry Ingram, lead guitar. Aaron Greenwood and Willie B. King sang back-up harmonies on this arrangement of the Sensational Nightingales tune "Hold On." It was recorded at an anniversary singing for the Traveling Stars gospel group in Coffee County.

"This Little Light of Mine," The Holy Bible, L & J Music Hall, Dothan (Houston County), August 11, 1996, (2:11).

When A. Z. Stanley and the Sensational Bibletones had their annual homecom-
The Holy Bible gospel group (A.Z. Stanley in foreground).

"I Shall Not Be Moved"/"I'm Going Home to Jesus," Hartford Community Church, Hartford (Geneva County), February 19, 1995, (5:22).

This recording captures the emotional music of a worship service at a white Pentecostal Holiness church in the Wiregrass. Lead vocalist and bass guitar player is Ed Youngblood, accompanied by Joey Rhodes on guitar, Charles King on guitar, Rita King on piano, Carl Lewis on drums and Billy Hudspeth on guitar. The congregation is led by the Reverend Hughvon King, who, in addition to his responsibilities as a pastor, is a truck driver, musician and instrument maker.
His musical instruments are often quite inventive, using unconventional materials such as hubcaps and metal tubing to make guitars and mandolins. He plays his instruments during his weekly worship services.

Secular


There are many fans of early country music in the Wiregrass, partly due to the legacy of Hank Williams, who grew up in Crenshaw and Montgomery counties and was heavily influenced by the recordings of Jimmy Rodgers. Rodgers was an early country music star from neighboring Mississippi and was very popular with rural Alabamians.

His 1932 tune, "No Hard Times" is performed here by Southern Comfort at a Saturday night appearance at the Mac Opry in Covington County. Guitarist Frank Manning sings, while accompanied by Lonnie Magoo on dobro, Sharon Magoo on acoustic bass, Dennis Lowery on mandolin and Ed Ward on fiddle.


Jack Perkins began singing and playing guitar as a boy growing up in Pike County near Spring Hill. In the early 1940s Perkins played in a local country band that performed live on the radio at WBTF in Troy.

His earliest memories of music include his mother singing while holding him on her lap. "Wedding Bells" is a ballad that he remembers his mother and her sisters singing, always without instrumental accompani-
Information provided by the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University in Memphis indicates the verses were published as a broadside ballad in 1893 in London.


J. W. Warren learned to play the guitar as a teenager and said he was particularly influenced by the music of Blind Boy Fuller. The first song he learned was "John Henry," which he still plays using a slide. He remembers making up words to songs as he plowed behind a mule in his Daddy's fields in the 1930s and early 1940s. He and his brother would sing across the fields to each other.

Warren claims kinship with blues singer Big Mama Thornton and tells tales of playing at house parties together in the region. During World War II, Warren joined the Army and was stationed in the Philippines where he learned to play Hawaiian style guitar (playing the guitar on his lap using a slide) a technique he occasionally still uses today.

"Louise" is a composition from his youth that he plays using a pocket knife to slide across the strings in a Delta blues style.

"Freight Train Blues," David Johnson, Elba (Coffee County), March 26, 1995, (2:45).

Many blues harmonica players have a song in their repertoire that imitates the sound of a freight train. David Johnson said he developed his in 1942 when he was a young
man traveling from town to town playing his harp. Johnson is a younger cousin of Perry Tillis, featured above, and the two men used to play together until Tillis dedicated his life to his church. Both were recorded by Bengt Olsson in the early 1970s and had songs issued on two albums, Southern Comfort Country and Old Country Blues on the British Flyright label.

This selection was recorded outdoors at Johnson's home near Elba. His fluid harmonica playing and singing are accompanied by the sounds of his chickens and his handmade whirligigs that decorate his yard.

David Johnson

"Tom and Jerry" (51), "I've Decided to Follow Jesus" (54), "Soldier's Joy" (1:11), "Dill Pickle Rag" (1:15), Everis Campbell, Troy (Pike County), February 21, 1995.

Many traditional fiddle tunes were brought to this country by immigrants from the British Isles. In this country, other instruments such as the guitar and an African instrument, the banjo, joined the fiddle, creating string bands primarily to play dance tunes.

Born in Laurel Hill, Florida in 1909, Everis Campbell moved with his family to Pike County in 1918. His grandfather and father were fiddlers as was his brother Newt. He started playing for square dances when he was a boy using a three-quarter size fiddle his father bought him after finding Everis in the closet with his own fiddle secretly trying to learn to play. Both Everis and his older brother Newt could fiddle as well as play guitar accompaniment. They traveled to fiddle contests, often held at community schoolhouses, and won many prizes.
Everis and Newt also played for square dances in people's homes. For this form of rural entertainment, it was common to remove the furniture and roll up the rugs. He remembers that the wooden floor would be smoothed for dancing by scrubbing it with scalding water, sand, and a corn-shuck mop.

Campbell rarely played the fiddle late in life, but recorded a few tunes two years before his death in early 1997. He said that Dill Pickle Rag was his wife's favorite.

This CD was produced by Stephen Grauberger and the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture with assistance from Anne Kimzey, Henry Willett, and Gussie Gibson.

DAT mastered by David Brose.

All photographs and recordings by Stephen Grauberger.

(Alabama Traditions 107)
SUGGESTED READING AND LISTENING


Jackson, Judge. 1934. *The Colored Sacred Harp.* Ozark, AL: Published by Author.


