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Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel. By James R. Goff Jr. (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002. Pp. xiv + 394, notes including bibliographical references, index, ISBN 0-8078-5346-1)

Lynn Whidden

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Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel. By James R. Goff Jr. (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002. Pp. xiv + 394, notes including bibliographical references, index, ISBN 0-8078-5346-1)

While the title of this book speaks of gospel music and harmony, to this reader, the emphasis is squarely on the people and contexts that shaped the gospel music of the southern USA. Inadvertently perhaps, Goff also gives a good look at how America has become a commercial giant. For example, while describing gospel history Goff shows the personal ambition and work ethic of the performers — he mentions at least three that held down a full-time job while their music career was developing; secondly, how the very popularity of singing made it fertile soil for a music publishing industry; thirdly, while they seem strange bedfellows to many, business, family and religion were the glue of success for the gospel quartets; and fourthly, how the gospel music industry was constantly impelled by new media technology. Goff dedicates an entire chapter to James David Vaughan's remarkable achievements in the late nineteenth century. Vaughan established a successful music school and journal. He bought a license for a radio station and developed a host of new fans; issued more than 60 records on his own label; published the weekly newspaper and had an army of salesmen, "… singing-school students and quartet members alike…." (74) In Texas, another music empire was run by Virgil Oliver Stamps and later joined by J. R. Baxter. These men recognized the importance of radio to reach listeners and partnered with the 50,000 watt station XERL in Del Rio, Texas, to reach most of North America.

All of this is fine, but the book title may attract music lovers whose main interest is in the music sound and how it changed over time. In

Close Harmony, Goff describes many gospel groups: their names, their goals, but gives scant description of their sound. Surely it was musical qualities as much as family lineage that differentiated the groups one from another? True, music descriptions tend to be impressionistic, but the few used are so satisfying; for example, the Weatherfords "became one of the smoothest sounding gospel quartets of all time" (202).

Nonetheless, there is some satisfying history. Goff's gospel music history gives another perspective on the idiosyncratic music systems created by the early freedom-loving American pioneers. After a brief mention of the hymns in the seventeenth century psalters, often performed by "lining out" (a lead singer is imitated line by line by the congregation), we are plunged into evangelical theology in which salvation is individual responsibility. The spread of this theology, espoused by mushrooming numbers of Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptists, was aided by hymn singing at the great camp meetings. Only a favored few had songsters (books) so the rest joined in on the choruses which often had catchy tunes and words — an inclusive technique reminiscent of the lining out just mentioned. Another inclusive aspect of these early nineteenth century meetings, soon to be lost, was the participation of Blacks, and occasionally Native Americans.

Publishers were quick to see opportunity in the growing demand for religious music. The shape-note system (each of the seven music pitches of the western scale were visually represented by a different shape), developed first by John Tufts, and refined by Little and Smith in their 1798 *The Easy Instructor*, made music reading a possibility for the common man. Goff describes it as "a popular-music renaissance" (22). Publishers churned out songbooks to meet the growing demand fueled by pentacostalism. Goff describes the businesses run by the likes of Joseph Funk, Aldine S. Kieffer, Ephraim Ruebush, and Anthony Johnson Showalter who not only ran shape-note singing schools but also published the books to be used.

Goff introduces us to the great names of late nineteenth century music revivalism such as Dwight Lyman Moody, Ira D. Sanky, Phillip P. Bliss, and Fanny Crosby. The latter two were openly influenced by popular music (a description of exactly what this means musically would be nice), a practice not acceptable to everyone, especially those who labored against what they believed was the hedonism of urban living. No matter their zeal however, they were not able to penetrate the urban marketplace. Indeed, the nineteenth century ended with a Holiness-

inspired revival that affected gospel music (again, how did it affect the sound?) and that emerged as pentacostalism wherein movement of the Spirit and emotional worship were welcomed.

Remarkably, until the mid-nineteenth century, gospel music remained primarily a participatory, rather than a spectator activity. Church leaders insisted that choirs must consist of the whole congregation, not a select few. Singing together, especially the tunes rooted in the rural idiom, improved tuning through the addition of harmony. Gradually though, singing in harmony became the domain of quartets such as the Chuck Wagon Gang and the Blackwood Brothers. Their songs were heard by means of radio and 78 rpm records. In addition, after 1945, better roads and abundant gasoline allowed more touring. Although some voiced concern about the popularization of gospel music, its commercialization and professionalization continued apace, and as a result, shape-note music publishing companies died out.

Goff takes us through the 1960's, a time of great change. The many gospel quartets were finally joined by women and there was considerable borrowing of songs and styles among black and white musicians. Instead of outdoor sings concerts were held in modern venues. Formal clothing (coats and ties) was replaced with leisure attire for entertaining. Singers began to write their own songs and were freed of their reliance on publishers. Moreover, they focused on songs that would readily sell and there was experimentation with new sounds such as the boogie beat.

Television was the new hot medium but, unlike radio, required that the quartets time their performances and plan their sets and make-up. Gospel music groups adapted and successfully participated in country music shows such as the Ernest Tubb show, Flatt and Scruggs, and the Gospel Singing Jubilee, begun in 1964 by Showbiz Inc. and hosted by the Florida Boys.

Major recording companies began issuing top gospel albums. In 1964 the Gospel Music Association was formed and charged with creating a Hall of Fame. In 1970 a Gospel Hit Parade became a monthly charting guide. By this time Christianity had become, to use Goff's word, "hip". Celebrities such as Pat Boone, Johnny Cash, and Debbie Reynolds publicly professed their faith, and Elvis Presley acknowledged the influence of the gospel quartets, both white and black on his music. Goff notes a new spirit of idealism: previously quartets sang to make a

living doing something they loved. Now the singing was focused on ministry. By the 1970's there was a strong alliance between gospel music and evangelical Christian ministry. Still, despite appearing with TV evangelists like Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggart, gospel groups never became as well known as popular musicians nor as well paid. Then too, southern gospel artists were angered at their loss of influence in the music industry, an alienation that culminated with the establishment of the Southern Gospel Music Association.

Despite the increasing sociopolitical conservatism of America, gospel musicians continued to innovate; they co-opted popular music style and more complex instrumentation. Again, I do wish that Goff would give us more detail about how this affected the music sound. Some gospel groups allied with popular entertainers: for example, the Stamps traveled with Elvis Presley, while others feared the inclusion of contemporary styles meant the end of gospel.

Goff builds his history around lists of performers that become tedious for readers except for the few that grew up with this music. As a Canadian reader I started to skim many pages, yet as a Canadian I knew well the general music and political trends the author relates, and there are, indeed, a number of details that resonate. For example, subarctic Cree have told me that in the 1930's they listened, late at night, to the radio station from Del Rio, Texas. This remains the basis for their love of country music that is equalled only by their love of gospel music. And, in common with earlier generations of Americans, most northern Canadians continue to do, as opposed to listen to, gospel music.

Gospel has not ended in the Canadian North, nor as Goff describes for the South, lost its focus. Perhaps the salvation for gospel song is in the words of Roy Carter, the bass singer and manager for the famous Chuck Wagon Gang:

> Dad told me one time, "Son, there's ten thousand farmers out there plowing on the plow and listening to a radio or a cassette tape that believe sincerely that they can sing bass just as good as you can. It's because they understand it. It's simple" (109).

Lynn Whidden
Brandon University
Brandon, Manitoba