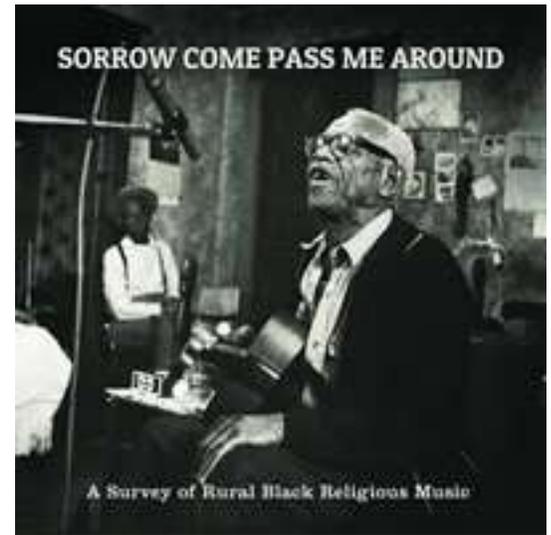


SORROW COME PASS ME AROUND: A Survey of Rural Black Religious Music
Dust to Digital DTD-31 (42:03)

EPHRAIM CARTER: Sorrow Come Pass Me Around; WILLARD ARTIS 'BLIND PETE' BURRELL: Do Remember Me/ A Little Talk With Jesus Makes It Right/ I Shall Not Be Moved; BABE STOVALL: The Ship At The Landing/ Will The Circle Be Unbroken; ANNIE LEE AND OSCAR CRAWFORD WITH ANNIE MAE JONES: You Don't Know What the Lord Has Done For Me; REV. RUBIN LACEY: Talk About A Child That Do Love Jesus; ROBERT 'NIGHTHAWK' JOHNSON: Can't No Grave Hold My Body Down/ You Got To Give An Account (with DOROTHY LEE, NORMA JEAN AND SHIRLEY MARIE JOHNSON)/ Climbing High Mountains; KATIE MAE YOUNG: By The Grace Of My Lord, I've Come A Long Way; EDDIE LEE 'MUSTRIGHT' JONES: My Sun Don't Never Go Down; CHESTER DAVIS AND CONGREGATION: Glory, Glory Hallelujah (A); COMPTON JONES AND GROUP: Glory, Glory Hallelujah (B); FURRY LEWIS: Glory, Glory Hallelujah (C); PATTIE ROSEMON: I Heard The Voice Of Jesus Say; NAPOLEON STRICKLAND: Motherless Children



These are recordings made by David Evans with various associates between 1965 and 1973, except that Eddie Lee Jones was recorded by Bill Koon in 1965. The set was originally issued in 1975 on Advent 2805 with the same title. The original notes are reproduced in the booklet with only typos and factual errors corrected. In them Evans states his purpose in making this selection to be to present a broader range of performance styles than the gospel singers and preachers with congregations which mostly represented rural religious music in the collector-mind at that time, 'and with the hope of showing the important role that religious music plays in the Southern black communities and in the daily lives of individuals'. 'For this album, an attempt has been made to select some of the best available examples from recent field recordings' to illustrate the vitality of religious performance outside a professional context, to which end most of the recordings selected were made at people's homes. The notes informatively consider relationships between secular and religious musical traditions.

The title track is a fife and drum performance from Waverly Hall, Georgia (1970), with the Jones brothers on fife and drum. This group had an album of secular recordings on Testament and Evans says their repertoire only included a couple of religious songs. Napoleon Strickland (1969) represents the better-known folk and drum tradition of Como, Mississippi. Alternating fife playing and singing – it can hardly be described as accompanying himself – he manages to create a mood effectively in both modes.

Eddie Lee Jones also had a full album on Testament and is a bluesman with religious songs in his repertoire, which he performs in essentially the same style. As a street-singing bluesman/songster, Babe Stovall evidently also found it advantageous to have spiritual songs in his repertoire and performs them with gusto and characterful and swinging instrumental accompaniment. Robert Johnson, recorded at Skene, Mississippi in 1967, not only has a famous namesake but before he was converted in 1953 worked under a name borrowed from another recording artist. It seems unlikely his approach to religious songs differs much from his former blues work. His fierce knife-playing is deeply moving. On 'You Got To Give An Account' ('of your sins') he accompanies his three teenage daughters in an enthusiastic performance influenced, logically enough, by more recent gospel styles; 'You can't hide, you can't hide, because the Lord is walking by your side.' Evans describes 'Climbing High Mountains' as 'one of the most powerful performances I know in this style.' With its mesmeric guitar figures, it comes over as an intense personal response to the hardships of rural life.

Blind Pete Burrell, who was in his late thirties when he was recorded in 1969, is a master guitarist and must have been one of the revelations of the original album. Though the notes do not suggest he is actually a guitar evangelist his musical style belongs to that idiom. 'I Shall Not Be Moved' had taken on a particular significance at the time of its recording and is presented with particular elan.

Rubin Lacy recorded in the 78-era. He gave up both the blues and the guitar in the 1930s to become a professional preacher but it's the same voice. His conversion song here is sung *a cappella* at his home. It's a very rhythmic performance thanks to energetic foot-tapping and the same is true of the Crawfords, who incidentally demonstrate that rural styles are independent of denomination, in that Annie Lee is Sanctified, Oscar is Baptist, and Annie Mae Jones is a Methodist! Pattie Rosemon and her daughter Katie Mae Young, recorded at Senatobia, Mississippi in 1973, have highly ornamented solo styles of great beauty but these performances seem very static, almost to belong to a different tradition from the rest of the album. They are also the most obviously 'amateur' contributions.

'Glory, Glory Hallelujah' appears in three contrasting versions. Chester Davis was recorded at a Missionary Baptist Church district convention in Rubin Lacy's church at Ridgemont, California, in 1966 with Lacy in the congregation. Compton Jones, recorded at Senatobia, Mississippi in 1973, is accompanied by the diddley bow of Glen Faulkner and miscellaneous percussion in a performance as beguiling as it is unusual. Furry Lewis, no doubt the best-known performer on the set, contributes a bluesman's version. These three performances are run together in a single track, perhaps a mistaken judgement. The comparison of the three approaches is fascinating but listeners will not necessarily want to make it every time they hear the track and there is no reason why they should be forced to.

Contemporary judgement was that the album triumphantly succeeded in its aims and there is no cause to dissent from it. Given that the notes themselves refer to there being more where these came from, it is puzzling that this has not been expanded to CD length. It is difficult to resist the verdict 'little but good' but it is very good and if most purchasers will probably find themselves playing the guitar accompaniments more than the other tracks, perhaps that is our loss!

Howard Rye