

Mahalia Jackson



1912 - 1972

SONG COMMENTS

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Song comments

510717D I bowed on my knees and cried holy

Another stellar Apollo recording by the once and future queen of gospel music, Mahalia Jackson. "I Bow on my Knees" was coupled with another great track, "City Called Heaven" (see WEEK #18) and sold as Apollo 250. This 78-rpm disc was my introduction to Mahalia and remains my favorite of all her singles.

Backed by Mildred Falls on piano, Blind Francis on organ, and an unnamed choir, Mahalia pours every ounce of emotion into "I Bow on my Knees." Building in intensity and abandon throughout the recording, Mahalia is clearly lost in the power of the song, contributing her trademark on-pitch shouts and moans near the conclusion. One can almost envision her: eyes tightly closed, face contorted, body writhing as she wrecks the church, congregant by congregant.

The November 1951 recording session at which Mahalia recorded "I Bow on my Knees" also produced the aforementioned "City Called Heaven," as well as other Apollo classics, "How I Got Over," "His Eye is on the Sparrow," and "It is No Secret." This session may well rank as one of Mahalia's most inspired, producing some of the greatest gospel music to be etched onto shellac.

One more note: on the "unnamed choir," could it have included Lowman Pauling and the Royal Sons Quintet [aka The Five Royales]? After all, the Royal Sons' first coupling for Apollo was comprised of matrixes C2458 and C2459, which come sequentially after the matrices assigned to Mahalia's November '51 session, C2451-C2457, with "Bow.." assigned C2454. An aural comparison between the choir on "Bow" and the Royal Sons' "Bedside of a Neighbor" would help in solving the mystery.

Bob Marovich

510717E City called heaven

Mahalia Jackson's Apollo recordings present her at her absolute finest. On Apollo, there was no bland choir backdrop, no orchestra, no Mitch Miller, no crossover syrupiness, "Just Mahalia, Baby" accompanied by piano and organ. Sometimes the Southern Harmonaires (aka Larks) or Melody Echoes would accent her performance with smooth-as-silk background vocals.

Mahalia's Apollo sides feature a magnificent voice bereft of category, an ability to summon every ounce of gospel emotion from every note. She's Thomas A. Dorsey's most perfect protege, demonstrating the power of African-American sacred hymnody, transforming a ten-inch plate of vinyl into a messenger of religious ecstasy.

"City Called Heaven" (aka "Poor Pilgrim of Sorrow"), recorded for Bess Berman's Apollo label in August of 1951, has all of this and a chilling starkness as well.

To best experience "City Called Heaven," wait until after dark. Turn off all the lights until the only light that can be seen comes from the turntable. Put the record on and sit in silence. Listen to Mahalia as she confronts the terrible darkness of earthly anguish with a supplication to Heaven that will make the hair on the back of your neck stand on end. Guaranteed.

Bob Marovich

541122C A rusty old halo

This Bob Merrill composition provided Mahalia with her greatest radio airplay, for the song was not only played on African-American radio stations during the gospel hour, but was picked up by top-40 stations. Through it did not become number one on that chart, it was being sung and hummed throughout the nation. It garnered more fans for Mahalia than did "I Will Move On Up A Little Higher," for even as early as 1954, it was a "crossover," selling to more than one record-buying public. This is a high praise for a first session with a recording company. This recording welcomed Mahalia Jackson to the Columbia Records roster, for though there might have been some studio work with Columbia before this session, the November 22, 1954, session yielded not only "Jesus Met The Woman At The Well" and "The Treasure Of Love," but "A Rusty Old Halo."

The song can best be described as "cute." The lyrics concern a modern day Scrooge, who, despite his vast wealth, gets to heaven, but only to get a "rusty old halo and skinny white clouds." The message of the song is clearly that you must live the best life on earth to receive just rewards in heaven. Set in sprightly 6/8 waltz time, Mahalia sings this attractive melody without improvisation, and on the choruses, overdubs and harmonizes with herself, one of the few times she does this on recordings. The guitarist supplies some fine licks to back her up. While this recording was extremely popular and served the purpose of introducing Mahalia to a larger and different audience, it was only a diversion in her record catalogue. Yet, it provides some pleasant listening.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

541122D Jesus met the woman at the well

Like "Walk Over God's Heaven," this rendition was at first viewed by many traditionalists in 1954, when it was released, as being dangerously close to jazz (it should be remembered that, Sister Rosetta Tharpe notwithstanding, in the Fifties there was still a line of demarcation between jazz and gospel). In addition to a boogie-woogie-inspired piano accompaniment by Mildred Falls, Art Ryerson's guitar alternates between jazz and rock licks, while Bunny Shawker insinuates a strong backbeat on the drums. Over this foundation, Mahalia delivers a melodic line that can be traced directly back to one of her idols, Bessie Smith.

Composed by J. W. Alexander, leader of the Pilgrim Travelers, a gospel quartet which flourished from the Forties through the Sixties, the story concerns the encounter of Jesus and a woman from Samaria, of whom he asked for a drink of water, against all social laws of the time. Extremely popular with quartets in the Fifties, Mahalia cast the song as a rollicking jubilee and essays all of her vocal power in her rendition, even permitting herself several repetitions of the word "running," to denote the conversation of the Samaritan woman.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

541122F Walk over God's heaven

This version of Dorsey's arrangement of the jubilee spiritual "I got shoes" was a popular hit for Mahalia in late

1954 and 1955, and was considered to be as close as she would ever come to jazz. It quickly received wide acclaim from jazz enthusiasts, college students and guitarists, resulting in a new cadre of Mahalia Jackson fans.

After a four-bar introduction by the bass, supplying a rhythmic riff, the drums, with a two- and four-accented beat, and the piano, spinning forth a series of thirds in the upper register, Mahalia, in stentorian tones, announces that when she gets to heaven, she's going to walk, shout, and talk all over the place. Treated as a call and response between Mahalia and guitarist Art Ryerson, who displays virtuoso-like technique in his jazz licks, Mahalia literally soars up to heaven, singing at the top of her register for long periods of time. On the verses, she states the word "heaven" on a high Ab, suggesting that there will be real joy there, and descends to low Ab on the words "Everybody talking 'bout heaven ain't going there," to emphasize its application to the so-called Christian and the sinner.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

541123B (I will) Move on up a little higher

In 1946, the Baptist Training Union Congress (of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A.) met in Chicago, where they held a special program in honor of Lucie Campbell, its music director. The concert was held at the Olivet Baptist Church, and among the performers were Mahalia Jackson and the Brewster Ensemble from Memphis, Tennessee, led by the Reverend W. Herbert Brewster, who would later be honored by the Smithsonian Institution as one of the pioneering gospel music composers. Brewster's group sang his latest composition "I will move on up a little higher," and the song was the hit of the evening. Unknown to Reverend Brewster, a professional recorder, using a steel disc, had been hired to record the evening's concert. Theodore R. Frye, a gospel singer, composer, and publisher, and a close friend of Thomas A. Dorsey, secured a copy of the song, published it under his and Mahalia's name, and taught it to her. On September 12, 1947, Mahalia, accompanied by Mildred Falls on piano and Herbert J. Francis, known as Blind Frances, on the organ, recorded "I will move on up a little higher" on the Apollo label. The song was an instant success and became Mahalia's signature song. The song was such a commercial success that it, along with another Brewster composition, "Surely, God Is Able," recorded by Clara Ward and the Ward Singers on October 6, 1949, in Philadelphia for the Gotham label, eventually received a gold record for selling the first one million copies of a gospel song (in fact, each recording sold only 500,000 copies, but the system recognized that as a "million" in what was then a relatively small market). The Columbia recording was made 16 years later, and the similarity between the two recordings is remarkable. While the original version only featured organ, this version includes piano, bass, drum, organ and guitar. There is the same bass melodic introduction, complete with the triplet figure that so marked the first version, and what is most surprising, after 16 years of hard singing, Mahalia is able to sing the song in the same key as the 1947 recording. Beginning near the lowest region of her register, Mahalia gradually moves up to her top register as she is "Coming over hills and mountains, goin' drink from the Christian fountain," and that she intends to "live on forever." She goes out sightseeing in Beulah, and flies and never falters. Then she

begins to move on up a little higher, and every round goes higher. She finally reaches the pinnacle of her journey, as the range and dynamics of the melody soar higher and higher. All through her vocal travels, the accompanying ensemble acts as a choir, responding to her every statement. There is little wonder that "I will move on up a little higher" was her signature song.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

541123C Keep your hand on the plow

This spiritual was originally titled "Hold On," and is, like "Elijah Rock," placed in the minor mode. Recorded in 1954, this is one of the most moving and accepted gospelized versions of the spiritual (many musical purists find gospelized spirituals difficult to accept). Sung as a moderately fast shout song, Mahalia encourages the Christian to hold on, for there is a reward at the end of the race. Once again she returns to "wandering couplets" for her verses (the original song concerns Noah and the flood). In this version she uses such couplets as "I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me for I am the way" and "You may talk about me as much as you please, but the more you talk, I'm going to stay on my knees." Though she is encouraging others to hold on, her treatment of the melodic line, employing much shading and dynamics, notifies the listener that she, too, will hold on. The accompaniment is characterized by a grooving pulse that continues after Mahalia has completed her short solo, and then slowly fades.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

550804A A satisfied mind

Like "You Must Be Born Again", this is a selection from outside gospel. In fact, it is from the country and western repertoire, and like Ray Charles at about the same time, Mahalia sets out to prove that she can handle the literature. And for the most part, she was successful. A certain country and western flavor has been maintained on this recording, with its real quarter time pulse (actually 6/8 time), rather than gospel's 12/8, and a guitar motive worthy of the Grand Old Opry. Obviously destined for the popular music chart, Mahalia delivers the song in the clear and strong middle portion of her register, and employs little improvisation. The Jack Halloran Singers create a response to her solo by punctuating structural phrases. This rendition includes such popular music traits of the time as modulating up a half step and repeating the final phrase at the end. This was gospel's first strong treatment of a country-and-western-flavored song and is Mahalia at her "easy listening" best.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

551103G Joshua fit the battle of Jericho

This spiritual is given a highly jubilant treatment in this rendition, suggestive of the military campaign Joshua waged against Jericho. There is little doubt, though, that Mahalia has incorporated the battle against slavery waged by the abolitionists, and the intervention of God when slavery was finally abolished. Once again Mildred Falls and Ralph Jones cooperate to provide the ideal accompaniment for this jubilee song. Falls has a particular fondness for playing the melody in the bass register of the piano, and here she provides an introduction in that

register, offering the opening lines of the melody. When Mahalia enters she brings along organ, guitar, drums, and bass. Together they essay the story of the battle. An unusual feature of this cut is the piano solo taken by Falls, only because in gospel, once a singer begins there usually is only the voice until the end, and then the instruments may continue. This interlude, however, gives us the opportunity to hear Mildred at her best.

Mahalia delivers the song as if she is a proud messenger reporting to the Lord of the Manor. She delivers a straightforward powerful delivery and at the last word, begins at the octave above, and as the walls tumble, her melody line tumbles down to the octave below.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

560327K Take my hand, precious Lord

This Thomas A. Dorsey composition, second only to "Amazing Grace" as the most popular song in gospel music, was his expression of despair after the death of his wife and newborn child in 1932. Popular since its introduction that year, the song has been translated into over 50 languages, and is so popular that African-American congregations can sing it without a score. It has been recorded by more gospel singers than any other song. Often cited for its close similarity to the 19th century hymn, "Must Jesus Bear The Cross Alone," "Precious Lord", nonetheless, bears the Dorsey stamp. Always able to take the language of the poor and downtrodden and turn them into memorable lyrics with appropriate tunes, Dorsey has done the same in this composition. Consider such lines as:

"Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light."

and

"At the river, here I stand,
Guide my feet, hold my hand."

and one immediately recognizes Dorsey. It is not easy to miss the verve with which Mahalia delivers the last mentioned couplet, for not only does she take her time and savor every syllable and note, she offers some of her most serene singing in the prayer.

One of the favorite songs of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Precious Lord" was sung at his funeral.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

It is my personal opinion that Mahalia sounded best singing for Bess Berman's Apollo label. She was backed by Mildred Falls on Piano, Blind Francis on organ and occasionally the Harmonaires (aka The Larks) on vocals. Mitch Miller and crew began handling her at Columbia in 1954. They made her a rich lady, no doubt, but at the expense of the spontaneity of those early Apollo sessions. Columbia made her a crossover gospel artist but in the process lost the verve she displayed in recordings such as "City Called Heaven" (Apollo 250) and "How I Got Over" (Apollo 248),

One major exception is Mahalia's 1956 recording of Thomas A. Dorsey's "Take My Hand, Precious Lord." Gone are the overdramatic arrangements and milquetoast chorus. It's minimalist Mahalia doing what she does best: wringing every ounce of emotion out of a song in a musical prayer to her Saviour. It's the very best version of this composition I've ever heard.

"Take My Hand, Precious Lord" was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s personal favorite and Mahalia delivered it at his funeral in 1968. It is this recording that today plays in the

National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, TN, in the very room in the Lorraine Motel where Dr. King spent his last living moments before being slain by an assassin's bullet.

Bob Marovich

560327N Trouble of the world

The popularity of this well-known spiritual was due, until 1959, to the concert choral arrangement by William Levi Dawson. With the release of Universal International's film, *Imitation Of Life*, the song took on an association with Mahalia Jackson. During the funeral scene, the climax of the film, Mahalia sings this stirring arrangement for the viewing of the body. While the song did not take on a funeral reputation, it has become known as the song in which Mahalia shows the full power of her voice, and the extent of her wide range. Beginning on a low G, her final statement of "I'm going home" is delivered 12 scale tones higher. Other memorable moments of this rendition are when, at the end of verse two ("I want to see my mother"), Mahalia connects the last line of the verse with the chorus that follows by inserting five tones (D, C, B flat, A, G) that lead her directly back to the low G for the word "soon," and her pilgrimage through the nine tones it takes her to complete the "God" in her cadence. Like "Elijah Rock," Mildred Falls is at her best in this performance.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

580706F He's got the whole world in his hands

This spiritual, with obscure roots, was made famous by concert singer Marian Anderson, but Mahalia gives it a gospel rendition that gives it new life. Recorded live at the Newport Jazz Festival on July 7, 1958, Mildred Falls established a walking jubilee tempo, over which Mahalia virtually bounces out of the lyrics. While most versions of this song employ only a chorus with different lead lines (whole world, everybody here, little bitty baby), Mahalia returns to the practice of borrowing "wondering" couplets to provide a contrasting section. Among the vast catalogue of such couplets Mahalia has chosen the following:

"If religion was a thing money could buy,
The rich would live and the poor would die."

While there are no particularly outstanding features in this performance, it is good Mahalia Jackson, occasional hand claps and all, and it is even better to have such a significant song performed by this artist.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

580811C My God is real (Yes, God is real)

This gospel ballad, composed in 1944, demonstrates Mahalia's ability to - as gospel singers love to say - "stand flat-footed" and sing. This compliment means that there is very little improvisation, an absence of clichéd licks, but an outpouring of pure soul. In this rendition, Mahalia reaches a pinnacle of serenity seldom displayed. Employing both her full chest and head voices, where she invades her soprano quality, she essays several of her favorite vocal mannerisms: decorating the last word in a phrase to call forth its full meaning, approaching a note by singing first a tone higher than that note, and only then singing the melody tone, leaping a full octave to open up the melodic line ("Yes, God is real" in the second chorus), and

delivering part of the song as spoken, rather than sung speech, as she does with "Oh yes" during the choruses. Her conviction of the reality of God's love is never more apparent than when she sings "Oh, His love for me" in the final chorus, where she begins the phrase on a high E and works her way down to the key tone.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

580811D Didn't it rain

"Didn't it rain" is an example of a "before the war" spiritual, the first music to generate a genuine respect for the musical creativity of African-Americans. Such songs, most often composed communally, were created not only to praise the Lord, but also to teach the Bible, release the frustration of suffering and pain, and to testify. Mahalia does all four in this rendition.

Cast as a rousing jubilee, rather than a sorrow song, she virtually turns the story of Noah - using the antebellum pronunciation of Noah - and the flood into a joyful shout. From the heavily accented introduction by her longtime pianist, Mildred Falls, and organist, Lilton Mitchell, to her final phrase, by which time she has sung herself so happy that it takes six repetitions of the final word to bring the song to a close, Mahalia releases the full power of her huge, burnished alto. Her wide range is displayed from the first two verses, which alternate with choruses, to the end, while her sense of syncopation is evident each time she sings the title of the song. Delivered as a testimony, she sprinkles the lyrics with such familiar textual interpolations as "children" ("chirrun" for its sonorous quality), "talkin' bout'," and "Brother Noah". Particularly fascinating is her treatment of the vamp (a repeated section during which she extemporizes variations such as "to the east, to the north," etc.). This performance is just as appealing as it was when she first delivered it in 1954.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

580811E

I'm going to live the life I sing about in my song

Though Dorsey composed the words and music of this song in 1941, Mahalia's performance provides the listener with a glimpse of Mahalia Jackson, the composer. While she sings Dorsey's words, she discards his melody, made famous by Brother Joe May in a 1950 recording, and substitutes a melody composed of phrases from a number of spirituals. The most recognizable borrowed phrase is that assigned to the refrain, and is built on that of "I Want Jesus To Walk With Me." Regardless of the melody, Mahalia is on firm ground in this reading. Here she explores the top part of her range, celebrating the several colors she assigns to each syllable. As the spirit moves her, she alters the pronunciation of certain words to produce the sound that gives meaning to a phrase, such as her altering "shun" to "shurn." By placing the melody in a minor mode and medium tempo, she transforms this ballad into a sorrow song, over which she places her testimony of conviction. Of particular interest is the piano counter-melody of Mildred Falls, characterized by running triplets.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

580811F His eye is on the sparrow

This 19th century hymn, another adopted by the

African-American church as its own, is almost as much associated with Mahalia as is "I Will Move On Up A Little Higher." Again treating the song as a Baptist Lining Hymn, Mahalia takes pain to broaden and diminish the voice to emphasize the lyrics. She even adds to the lyrics by inserting (among other such examples) the "little ole sparrow" and goes further to add "I know He cares for you and me," a practice called textual interpolation. At the end of the first strain (the verse), she employs text painting on the word "sparrow" by beginning her line on one note and sliding down the octave as she sings. Indeed, the sparrow even becomes smaller in her interpretation.

This rendition also offers an almost equal distribution of chest and head tones, for while Mahalia delivers a great part of the lyric in the middle voice, her refined use of her soprano head tone is nothing less than extraordinary. Note that in the chorus, "My soul," and "free" are delivered in gorgeous head tones. Of particular interest is the note that she selects for the word "free", a note 12 notes above her lowest pitch. She brings the song to a close with her usual note above the final tone, and only afterwards resolves to key tone.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

590311B Great gettin' up mornin'

In this shouting rendition of a jubilee spiritual, which must certainly sound like one the slaves would have rendered, the true meaning of the song becomes easily apparent. "Gettin' up morning" refers not only to that day discussed by John the Relevator, but also to the day when all slaves would be free, and would bid farewell to that "peculiar institution" called slavery. The day is likened to a great celebration, and Mahalia, taking the role of a preacher in a fiery sermon, leads the congregation through activities ranging from contacting Gabriel to sound the trumpet (Emancipation Proclamation) through walking the children (notifying the slaves), coming from every nation (plantation), to redemption (freedom). All along this journey, the choir reiterates their belief with their response of "fare ye well." The piano, organ, and drum underlie this journey with a solid harmonic and rhythmic foundation, over which Mahalia literally barks out her phrases. She finds special joy in the phrase "great gettin' up morning," and delivers the word "great" on a different pitch each time it returns in the lyric. She even signals its importance by occasionally stating "great, great gettin' up morning," just as if she had been moved by the spirit, and her rendition supports that notation. Notice that though this song is delivered at a rapid speed, she comes to a full stop at the end of the last chorus and in the Baptist Lining Hymn tempo, attaches her usual decorated cadence.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

590311E I found the answer

The re-release of this song will surely please Mahalia Jackson fans, for it was first released in 1959, and though there was one recording of the song before Mahalia's by Eugene Burke, it has not been covered by any other gospel singer. Accompanied by piano, guitar, bass, and drums, the song is set to a medium tempo and sung with restrained control by Mahalia until she reaches the line "The sun is shining for me each day," where she unleashes the power and volume which marks her singing, as she soars up to a high C#. This is a song in which Mahalia becomes the

sacred storyteller, speaking to the most despondent listener. Her joyous confidence and solid singing speak to any listener.

Notice that in the last chorus when she reaches the line stated above, she opens up the voice and leaves it open for the remainder of the song, even leaping up a fifth on the last word, while changing the color of the vowel to fit her spirit. She, indeed, has found the answer.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

590311G God put a rainbow in the sky

"The sun is shining for me each day" is delivered in such a way that the listener can feel what Noah must have felt when he saw the rainbow after the flood. This bouncy jubilee song, performed in the usual call and response manner when a choir is present, is the kind much loved by Mahalia, and this version verifies that, for she sings three full choruses, each slightly different, before she allows herself to leave that comfortable area for the verse. Even as she tells the story of the flood, the choir will interrupt her to state "God put a rainbow in the sky," the internal refrain. After the verse, the choir makes highly rhythmic statements of their response, probably inspired by Mahalia's percussive approach in her delivery. Attack and a percussive delivery are so important in this rendition that occasionally Mahalia will announce that "God put a rainbow in the sky," making the rhythmic delivery all the more powerful.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

591117A You must be born again

This is not the famous song of the same title by Dorothy Love Coates, popular in the 1950s, nor is it the 19th century hymn by George Stebbins, but a composition by Stuart Hamblen, composer of "It is no secret what God can do" and "This ole house." Though characterized by hymn-like melodic lines, its popular music stamp, however, is easily discernible. Unfortunately, with the exception of a very few songs of this type, most notably "Rusty old halo," Mahalia brought little to these songs. Yet, with the help of solid gospel piano and organ, she manages to transform the song into gospel. Hamblen was always known as a composer who could write an attractive chorus (called the "hook" in show business), and he has done the same with this song. The most interesting part of the song is the opening of the chorus: "The Lord respects no person," and Mahalia places it in her general gospel style, and the addition of some unusual handclapping helps to pronounce the rhythm.

The song was frequently used during her 1954 National CBS Radio show, often sung over one of the other two songs with the same title.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

591117B The Christians testimony

Though this is a cut from a 1959 session, it is a prime example of gospel in Chicago, 1955. 1955, the exact center of the Golden Age of traditional gospel which extended from 1945 to 1965, enjoyed the culmination of over 30 years of gospel development, and ushered in the period where gospel could no longer be contained in the African-American church. Such elements as the forceful soloist, a soul-searching choir in the background, supported by a

solid piano and organ accompaniment, was the watershed mark of classic gospel, and this is exactly what Mahalia delivers in this performance. Especially notable is the vamp (extended repetition) beginning "Didn't you deliver?" where Mahalia enumerates, through questions, the wonders of God. In actual performance, such a section could go on for four or five minutes, and is highly respected by gospel music lovers. Choir and instrumentalists execute a fine Roberta Martin-style cadence (closing) to the spirited jubilee.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

591117C If we never needed the Lord before

This song has once again come into popularity because of a new recording by the a cappella group, Take 6, marking its third major outing. Composed by Thomas A. Dorsey in 1943, it was first recorded by the St. Paul Baptist Church Choir of Los Angeles in 1948, and became the first gospel choir recording to gain wide acceptance; this present version was recorded by Mahalia in 1959, while the Take 6 recording comes from 1988. It is interesting that Dorsey used the word "never" in his published version, through all singers tend to sing "ever". As soon as the choir provides a slow "color" introduction, Mahalia begins a moderately slow reading of the song, bringing a completely new meaning to it (both the St. Paul and Take 6 recordings are delivered at a faster tempo), for here it becomes a plea to the Lord. In fact, during the course of the song, Mahalia makes a direct plea: "We sho' do need you now." Typical of the classical gospel is the soprano who, beginning with the verse ("We need you in the morning") anticipates each new section by singing "ooh" or "who" on a high note, introduced into gospel by Marion Williams during her period with Clara Ward and the Ward Singers. Gospel singers call this device the "high who."

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

591117D Come on children, let's sing

A percussive organ introduction begins this genuine example of a shout song, complete with the choir responding to Mahalia's call. The choir combines the responses of gospel and the bass interpolations of the spiritual ("Hallelujah," "My Lordy, Now"), and provides strong support during the vamp at the end of the verse. In a persuasive delivery, Mahalia invites all to come on and sing, shout, and pray about the goodness of the Lord. Placing the melody in the top part of her range, she fairly preaches in tune. This is one of those songs, which could have gone on for several more minutes.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

610418F Elijah rock

Mahalia returns again to the spiritual, a body of music she never forgot. This was extremely important during her career, for she was most active when spirituals were being performed mainly by college and university choirs such as Fisk, Tuskegee, and Hampton, and very few people had any notion of what a spiritual might have sounded like when the slaves created them. When it is remembered that the spiritual in the 19th century was to African-Americans what the gospel song is in the 20th century, her performances of these songs come as close to authenticity

as we will possibly ever come. This arrangement is by Jester Hairston (who, at this writing, is a member of the cast of the NBC television show "Amen"), and was recorded during Mahalia's European tour of 1962. Thankfully, the performing artists were only Mahalia Jackson and Mildred Falls, for the concerts produced some of the most exquisite recordings left by Mahalia Jackson, of which "Elijah Rock" must certainly be the finest.

Mildred Falls reaches her zenith as a pianist and accompanist on this recording, for she not only sets the tempo and mood, but without detracting from the singing of Mahalia, she creates rhythmic and melodic riffs that, when combined with the voice, add up to perfection. After the piano introduction in which Falls outlines the melody in the bass register of the piano, accompanied by patting her foot, and this is clearly audible, Mahalia begins to wave a story, ostensibly about Elijah, an outstanding prophet of the Old Testament. While Elijah figured in many incidents, including the cessation of the worship of idol gods, raising the widow's son from the dead, and his being fed by ravens, none of these incidents appear in the story. Instead, Elijah is treated as a strong servant of God, around whom Mahalia intersperses "wandering" couplets such as "Satan is a liar and a conjurer too, if you don't mind [watch] out, he'll conjure you," and "Some say the Rose of Sharon, other say the Prince of Peace, but I can tell this old world, He's been a rock and a shelter for me." (In Jewish tradition, Elijah is the herald of the Messiah.) Mahalia was in extremely good voice on this recording, and though the large audience applauds enthusiastically after her performance, they are absolutely quiet during the performance. It doesn't matter, however, for Mahalia gets happy, she claps her hands and generally "has church." So much so, that the initial performance seems incomplete to her, and she continues after a pause in a reprise, and though not included on this recording, there was obviously a second reprise. This recording is a study in beautiful and soulful singing, rhythmic syncopation in both voice and piano, and praising God, all in a minor mode.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

620322K Without God I could do nothing

Composed by Beatrice Brown, a longtime associate of Thomas A. Dorsey, the rendition of this composition offers an opportunity to hear the quintessential Mahalia: a solid medium-paced 12/8 gospel meter, with Eddie Robinson providing classic gospel piano, while Albert Goodson (composer of "We've Come This Far By Faith") at the organ executes a call-and-response exercise with the piano, and the drums accent the rhythm with a march-like cadence; a choir offering a background response of "oohs" in the Roberta Martin Singers tradition; a text into which a singer can sink her teeth, and free reign to interpret the song as she feels it. Into this situation Mahalia brings a stirring declaration of her firm belief that without God she would be "like a ship without a sail." It might be noted that during one of the choruses, her improvisation causes her to insert an extra number of bars, making that stanza a little longer than the others.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

630311E In the upper room

"In The Upper Room," like "These Are They" and "Just Over The Hill," recorded earlier in her career, is the kind of

song perfectly suited to the Mahalia Jackson style: a slow section, rendered in the Baptist Lining Hymn style, followed by a moderately rhythmic section where she could emphasize her terrific sense of beat and rhythm. Composed by Lucie E. Campbell, director of music for the National Baptist Convention for over 40 years, and the person for whom Mahalia had to audition before she could make her first appearance before that great body, this 1946 composition celebrates a visit to the Upper Room with Jesus, where one is sitting (Mahalia says "standing") at His blessed feet. The story of this visit is told in the slow, decorated, and heartfelt style of early African-American prayer meeting services, where, without the benefit of piano or organ, singers would appear to seize favorite lines or words and, as Mahalia does, begin a phrase at the soles of their feet and bring it up through their entire body (note her treatment of the line "Seeking there His love in prayer"). At the end of the "moaning" section, as it is sometimes called, the piano, in a classic gospel lick, announces the rhythmic section. Mahalia is joined by the Jack Halloran Singers and a stirring organ, here played by Billy Preston, as she essays all of her various techniques in this toe-tapping homage to prayer. She is extremely comfortable with the "Singers" and during the third chorus, while the bass is "pumping" bass, as it is called, she attempts to sing along with the background voices, but halfway through gives in to the spirit, and adds a lead line to the background. Nothing that will not work, she once again assumes the lead.

This song was originally recorded on Apollo in 1952, and while that version has long since been out of print, this new version, from 1963, captures the voice, nuances, and spirit of the original.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

630311F Walk on by faith

The inclusion of "Walk On By Faith" in this collective will surely be viewed as memorial to James Cleveland, the composer. Cleveland composed over 500 gospel songs, and was the most important influence in African-American gospel music after Thomas A. Dorsey. He was just coming of age when Mahalia began to ride a national crest, and as part of the Chicago gospel scene, would arrive early at all of her concerts in town, and later had the opportunity to play piano for her on one of her concerts. While this composition was written for, and originally recorded by the Roberta Martin Singers, Mahalia Jackson has forever placed her stamp on it.

She has once again created her musical element: organ and piano accompaniment in a moderate 12/8 time, complete with the obligatory triplet figure in the accompaniment; a choir to punctuate important sections of her melody; and a melody and lyric that speaks to her heart. She begins the songs in her middle register: "We cannot see in the future, we cannot see dark clouds, we cannot see [Lord] though all of our teardrops" - and by this time Mahalia has lifted the melody up an octave and holds on to the word "Lord" - "walk on by faith each day." On the word "day," she opens up her voice and range to release four ascending tones. Not only is this classic James Cleveland, but classic Mahalia Jackson.

On the special chorus, where James begins to cite the days of the week, Mahalia seems fairly contented to sing "On Monday, walk on, on Tuesday, walk on." However, when she reaches "Let Jesus be your guide," the secret of

her success as the world's greatest gospel singer spills forth.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

630312A Nobody knows the trouble I've seen

Mahalia Jackson begins this sorrow song, a variety of the Negro spiritual, as she will deliver it in the Baptist Lining style, but at the beginning of the verse, changes the tempo to a moderately paced jubilee. What follows is actually recomposition of the song, adding a different verse and a choral response. While an interesting arrangement has been made of this selection, involving a chorus, the result is less than satisfactory. It cannot be denied that she offers some powerful singing in the rhythmic section, and for some sparkling interchange with the choir, but the most appealing section is the opening, with its free, highly embellished and moving melodic interpretation of this popular spiritual.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

630312F In my home over there

H. J. Ford, one of the popular gospel music composers of the Fifties, has had his songs recorded by such gospel singers as the Angelic Gospel Singers and the Pilgrim Travelers. On this cut Mahalia takes one of his gospel ballads and delivers it in her beloved Lining Hymn style. While she displays her special talent for this kind of song during the verse, it is in the middle of the chorus, at the line "And I shall see His blessed face" that she comes into her own. Here she opens up the voice to its full capacity (the high tone is her top C) and "worries over the note." Nowhere is there a better illustration of her use of the appoggiatura (overshooting the melody tone by one note, but immediately resolving it to the melody tone) as in her treatment of the final statement of the word "there". The first part of the word is sung one tone higher - and there she lingers - than the melody tone, and after enjoying herself on the top tone, she finally arrives at the melodic note. The organ and piano make an outstanding contribution to the beauty of this selection.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

630924H If I can help somebody

Mahalia returns to her Baptist roots for this performance, delivering Martin Luther King, Jr.'s favorite song in the Baptist Lining Hymn tradition, sometimes called the "Watts" style. So called because many of the hymns of the English theologian Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and others were rendered in a slow, languorous manner, without a regular pulse, it deteriorated into a style that allowed the singer to execute each syllable by adding several extra tones, bending these added tones in myriad directions, and reshaping the melody into a personal testimony. This tradition is a beloved one in the African-American church, and no one handles the style with as much aplomb as Mahalia.

Though most commonly rendered with a single instrument, piano or organ, this version employs piano and a string orchestra most effectively, for the strings sustain chords as the pianist executes running arpeggios under the voice, leaving Mahalia free to wander through all of the tones in and around the melody, hold tones as long as she

feels the spirit, and to color each sound with the hue that gives it real meaning. A prime example is her execution of the word "no" in the first chorus, where not only does she use all of eight tones to state the word, but while she begins in a voice that is patient and confident, the thought of living a life in vain cause her to spit the word out at the end as if it is unholy. This freedom, however, causes a slight disagreement between Mahalia and the orchestra at the final cadence when she decides to hold a note a little longer than agreed and the orchestra resolves the tone as she continues to hold. This in no way mars this extraordinary performance of a beloved song.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

650803A City called heaven

Also known as "Poor Pilgrim Of Sorrow," this sorrow song has been sung by everyone from Marion Anderson to Sarah Vaughan, and yet, Mahalia brings a church service meaning to it rarely heard. As has been stated above, no other singer, with the possible exception of J. Robert Bradley, could handle the free nonmetric hymn or song like Mahalia Jackson, and this cut is an example of her ability to take each syllable and imbue it with deep meaning. Such songs also give her the opportunity to exploit all of the many colors she can bring to her voice, from the golden depth of her huge alto, to the brilliant top notes delivered in head tones. Particularly arresting in this version is the delivery of the lines "I have no hope for tomorrow," the number of tones she assigns to "tomorrow," and in the chorus, "I don't know which-a-way I can run." For that moment she has become "poor pilgrim of sorrow."

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

650803D What a friend we have in Jesus

This 19th century white gospel hymn, early on adopted by African-American church congregations as one of those songs which would become so well known that it could be sung by any congregation without the benefit of words or music, has been recorded by almost every gospel singer, but it is only on this recording that we finally hear Mahalia Jackson's version. The wait has been well worth the time.

Heretofore unissued, this version is set in a solid and stirring 12/8 gospel meter, with a rather active accompaniment by piano and organ. Mahalia sings two verses of the hymn, through which she delivers these familiar words with subtle inflections and controlled nuances. She looses herself in the last part of the song and gently interpolates an "um hun" after the line "Who will all our burdens share," before she brings the song to a close with her perennial slowing down of the last phrase and creating a cadenza on the last syllable. This is a welcome addition to the Mahalia Jackson library.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

670326H Calvary

Among spirituals which parallel the church year, "Calvary" is important, for it, along with "Were You There?," "He Nevuh Said A Mumblin' Word," and "He Arose" constitutes the principal music for the Easter season. Though she is not in her most comfortable performing element, that is, with only a piano for accompaniment, the supporting instruments allow the piano free reign. In fact, this song is a cut from her 1967 Easter

concert at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, reportedly the first concert of gospel in that bastion of Western European music.

Appropriate to the theme, this spiritual is set in the minor mode, and she delivers it as if it were another Baptist Lining Hymn, sometimes adding so many tones to a syllable that a syllable becomes a phrase within itself. Though she sings only one verse and chorus, she imbues them with the Mahalia Jackson style: an ample use of the head voice (seldom encountered on the Apollo label, for which she first recorded, but abundant on the Columbia releases - note the head voice use on her third statement of the word "Calvary" at the beginning of the song); her penchant for changing the pronunciation of words to get the best vocal sound (surely becomes "sholy"), adding several tones to a syllable (in the section which begins "Cain't you hear Him calling his father?" she allots nine tones to the final statement of the word "hear"); and the full power of that dark, rich alto.

In this recording Mahalia transports the listener to Calvary.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

680405F It is well with my soul

Mahalia returns to the Baptist Lining Hymn style for this 19th century hymn. The introduction - the last phrase of the song - by solo organ, with the heavy vibrato associated with the Chicago style of organ playing introduced by Kenneth Morris at the First Church of Deliverance in the late Thirties, sets the tone for her reading of this song. Not until she begins to sing does the piano enter, and then only to play arpeggios and chords under the voice, leaving Mahalia free to celebrate her faith. This she does as if she is communicating solely with herself and God. While she always takes liberties with melodies and phrasing, she is completely free in this rendition, transforming the hymn from a simple statement of believe into a rousing shibboleth of confidence.

The piano and organ provide the perfect complement for this rendition, even serving as the congregation during the chorus and responding to Mahalia's "it is well" and "with my soul" with similar statements in the instruments. The verses are delivered in a straight-forward manner, but when she reaches the chorus, she goes into a vocal tailspin, leaping octaves (on the final statement of the word "well" in the last half of the chorus), and then cascading down an octave, all the while turning the melody inside out, and upside down. This is Sunday morning singing.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

680405D Roll, Jordan, roll

The first published report of a spiritual with text appeared in the National Anti-Slavery Standard on October 12, 1861, and described "Go Down Moses." The complete manuscript, listing 20 stanzas, appeared in December of the same year. It appears that the second spiritual to be published was "Roll, Jordan, Roll," in the November 1862 issue of Dwight's Journal of Music, transcribed by the 19-year-old professional musician, Lucy McKim. Her description is significant, for unlike that of "Go Down, Moses," her description was a serious one, and "in perception and sensitivity it was far in advance of anything that had preceded it." Additionally, "her letter [describing the song] was the first to describe this music in terms of its

style and technique, rather than focusing on religious or political aspects of slavery while regarding the music as indescribable." How delightful it is to have the world's greatest gospel singer interpret, in this collection, the second most important historic spiritual.

Unfortunately, it is not Mahalia at its best, or perhaps the circumstances were not at their best. She has reshaped the song into modern gospel, replete with a medium slow 12/8 gospel meter; piano, organ, drum, and guitar accompaniment; a choir which participates with her in a call-and-response section in the chorus; and an unusually forceful reading of the melody and text (Jordan becomes "Jerdan"). There appears to be a few pitch problems, since voice and instruments never seem to be absolutely in tune with each other. Yet this is an important performance and deserves to be in this collection.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

690131A If I could hear my mother pray again

James W. Vaughan, like his African-American counterpart, Thomas A. Dorsey, was one of the first white American composers of gospel music to realize the commercial value of such music. Not only did he open a publishing house for the sale of his music, as did Dorsey, but like Dorsey, he participated in gospel music conventions. To a text by James Rowe, an Englishman who settled in Georgia near the turn of the century, he composed, in 1922, a melody that would become a gospel staple. "If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again" is now considered a part of gospel's standard repertoire, though its use as a Mother's Day song has declined because of the painful remembrance it evokes. On the other hand, it is a welcomed song at any other time of the year.

Mahalia finds no sorrow in such remembrances. Rather she celebrates the idea of bringing back the "good old days." She sings this song to a rocking jubilee beat, over which she savors - in golden tones - the memory of her childhood. She delivers a particularly poignant performance when it is known that her mother died as a young woman, even before Mahalia achieved the celebrity that was on its way (fortunately, her father did not die until the middle Fifties, by which time she was famous). Particularly haunting is the opening of the second verse:

"She used to pray that I, on Jesus would rely,
And always walk the shining gospel way."

Piano, organ, and a choir provide ample support for her Sunday morning-like performance of this beloved song.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

690131B Search me Lord

This song is not to be confused with the Thomas A. Dorsey song of the same name. Usually called "Lord, Search My Heart," this is one of those songs communally composed in the first part of this century, and passed from congregation to congregation, where it picked up additional melody lines and variations on the text. Such songs are called missionary, revival, or tabernacle songs, and "Search My Heart" is one of the most popular.

Comprised of six choruses, each with a different lead line, Mahalia asks the Lord to touch her heart while she's living, praying, testifying, singing "I'm holy," singing your praises, and telling the sinner man to pray. There is a gradual dramatic build from the first chorus to the last,

each becoming more urgent and melodious. A new twist is supplied by the use of "stopped time" (the instruments drop out for a beat or two) near the cadence in the choruses.

Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer

00002A Dear Lord, forgive

This gospel hymn, copyrighted in 1911, has become a favorite of most gospel singers, though few recordings of the song exists. While Mahalia sang this song in concert as a Baptist Lining Hymn, this version is in a slow 4/4 time, accompanied by piano and organ. Though it was composed for this kind of performance, the song seldom receives such a performance, and yet, it works. It must be mentioned that she does slow the tempo down at the end of each stanza.

This is one of those cuts where Mahalia refrains from improvising, and simply sings the song, relying on her beautiful voice and interpretation to carry it. What an astute decision, for she offers a perfect reading of this unreleased jewel