

Traditions & Beliefs

A Publication of the Initiative for the Study of
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2016 African American History Month Issue

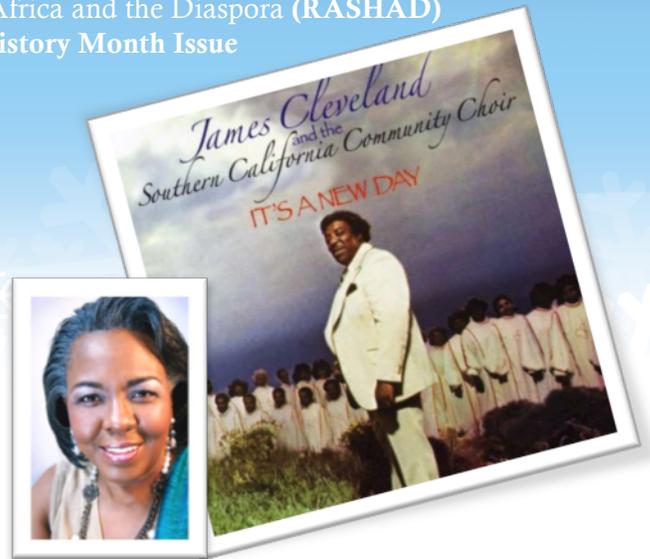
In the Spirit of Teaching!

This special African American History Month issue of *Traditions & Beliefs* is dedicated to Reverend James Cleveland and the incredible music educators whose classroom, workshop, rehearsal hall, seminar, and sanctuary activities include lessons on the place of African American religion in world history and culture.

For more than 30 years, many of the top teachers, composers, singers, and musicians have worked with me at area churches, universities, concert halls, and other venues to share their knowledge with interested and engaged audiences.

I am proud to say that through Cleveland Chautauqua—an annual celebration of “Great Ideas, Great Art, and a Great Lake!,” the Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD), and, Spiritual Gifts: A Professional Black Sacred Music Repertory Ensemble—the 501 (C)(3) arts education organization for which I serve as the Executive Director, I have benefitted tremendously from my many years of music and life lessons.

Please join me in applauding the efforts of my teachers and fellow music lovers in Greater Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and, most recently, those in Vienna, Austria and Paris, France! --RNW



The Gospel According to James

Regennia N. Williams, PhD, Executive Director & Editor
regennia@gmail.com

In the fall of 2011, as we approached the 80th anniversary of the birth of the **Reverend James Cleveland (1931-1991)**, I invited a group of incredibly gifted and talented musicians to participate in a workshop titled “Harvest Time: A Seasonal Celebration of African American Sacred Music” and featuring James Cleveland’s gospel music. Not only did Beverly Brown, Leonard Burks, Larry Drummer, Dr. Marlin Grenee Hunter, Drene Ivy, Michael Keith Jester, Brenda Johnson, Pastor Nathaniel Williams, Jr., and others show up and show out at Trinity Cathedral in Downtown Cleveland, Ohio, many of these musical artists agreed to share their thoughts on songs made famous by James Cleveland and/or members of his Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA). They also agreed to allow me to publish those thoughts.

In the first week of 2016, I decided to review the musicians’ statements and photographs, and, since they gave me their permission in 2011, to publish those materials here. On February 9, 2016, the world will mark the 25th anniversary of James Cleveland’s passing. Thanks to the ongoing work of GMWA and others, however, his music is still going strong!

For more information on GMWA, including contact information for the Cleveland chapter representatives, please visit <http://www.gmwanational.net/>. You might also enjoy reading *Nothing but Love in God’s Water: Black Sacred Music from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement* by Robert Darden (2014), or listening to the songs described in this newsletter.



Photos by Nathaniel Rhodes

Sing, and they are featured in the choir’s

THOUGHTS ON JAMES CLEVELAND AND HIS GOSPEL MUSIC WORKSHOP OF AMERICA



Photos (Clockwise from top): Beverly Brown, Dr. Marlin Grenee Hunter, Drene Ivy (seated at piano) and Dr. Hunter conducting, and Beverly Brown and the workshop choir at Cleveland's Trinity Cathedral.

"I was a teenager when this song came out. I taught it to the high school gospel choir, Rejoice, and to the church choir called NuTones at Mt. Pleasant [United Methodist Church]. I remember everybody loving to hear this song and being blessed by it. Today, the anointing placed on this song has not left it. It still blesses, encourages, and teaches those listening [to the message] about the salvation of the cross, and makes you realize you are special enough for Him to die for and redeem."

Beverly Brown on "He Decided to Die," written by Dr. Margaret Pleasant Douroux and recorded by GMWA

"There have been times when I felt all alone through my life, feeling like giving up but knowing that my savior is there for me and has been all of my life. The Lord has been faithful through my illness and many challenging situations in my life. I know if He's brought me through that, He is able to take me on through –which he is doing! Praise the Lord!"

Dr. Marlin Grenee Hunter on "I Don't Feel No Ways Tired"



Photos (Clockwise from top left): Leonard Burks, Pastor Nathaniel Williams, Jr., the workshop choir, and Michael Jester and Minister Karen Barhams.



to

Leonard Burks

“When attending a GMWA convention, I met the composer of the song, who shared many stories about how he composed songs. He then began to play ‘God Has Smiled on Me.’ This impacted me, so I began write [my own music]. I will never forget Isaiah Jones, James Cleveland’s musician.”

“Truthfully, ‘Lord Do It’ was not a favorite song of mine, initially. But . . . after receiving word that my brother was terminally ill, and subsequently hearing that same news about my father, my only relief was in asking God to heal my hurts. Simply stated, I needed the Lord to “do it!” True to His nature, He did!” **Michael Keith Jester**

“I first learned this song in the late 70s. It is still one of my favorites. The song itself speaks volumes to me today, because of the fact that in every era of my life, I needed the help of the Lord. More than a decade after the passing of James Cleveland, the song is still a popular selection in many churches.” **Pastor Nathaniel Williams, Jr. on “Lord Help Me to Hold Out”**

Enjoying Great Music, Food, and Fellowship!



Photos (Clockwise from top right): Brenda E. Johnson, Regennia N. Williams (at table) with Larry “Sonny” Drummer and Erma McCann, longtime GMWA supporter, Leonard Burks and Dr. Marlin Grenee Hunter, and Drene Ivy and Anita Peeples.

For more information:

Spiritual Gifts
P.O. Box 18683
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118, USA
SpiritualGiftsChoir@gmail.com

***Please like our page on Facebook!**
<https://www.facebook.com/SpiritualGiftsChoir/?fref=ts>

Telephone: (216) 244-6630

“The song ‘How I Got Over’ [from Aretha Franklin’s ‘Amazing Grace’ album with James Cleveland’s Southern California Community Choir] was one of the first songs that I heard James Cleveland present. I taught it to my high school gospel choir. It blessed me as well as them. I feel that it will bless everyone who hears it – how I got over life’s problems and everything!”

Drene Ivy

“The James Cleveland song, ‘Let Him in Today’ reminded me of the time I came to Christ at the age of seven. I felt the Holy Spirit and couldn’t wait to take the pastor’s hand and be saved. When I hear, ‘Let Him in today. Open up your heart and let the Lord come in,’ it reminds me of my salvation.”

Brenda E. Johnson

FROM THE ARCHIVES

HISTORY*

The era of the Cleveland Chapter of the Gospel Music Workshop of America began on June 18, 1969, in the auditorium of the Faith Temple Baptist Church. The late Mr. Aaron Holbrooks was appointed States Representative by the National body and acted as Moderator; Mr. William Charles Sims, National Vice President acted as Advisor. On that night, we were honored with the presence of Rev. James Cleveland, founder of the G.M.W.A., Inc.

After preliminary routines, the Rev. James Cleveland explained the basic philosophy of the organization. In a very impressive manner, he gave us some of the points of problems and conduct of singers, announcers of religious music, and gospel musical staff members. He further related to the educational aspects needed in order to receive the respect of the public and others to whom services were being rendered.

On November 28, 1969, Mr. Aaron Holbrooks, President and States Representative passed. Elder Ralph Skipper was appointed as States Representative and remained so until 1973.

On August 6, 1973, Mr. Bobby L. Mitchell was elected president. [He] had been appointed States Representative at the National Board Meeting prior to his election.

Under the dogmatic guidance of Mr. William Charles Sims, the Cleveland Chapter of G.M.W.A. began to grow in progress and size. Seven of the chartered members are still active with the chapter. Mrs. Ann Jones, Religious Announcer of Cleveland, was one of the first to become an active member of the Cleveland Chapter.

Others have joined us, and we hope to be an inspiration to all who come in contact with us. For with God all things are possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Elise Wright

Elise Wright, Secretary

*Undated document, c. 1974.