

Roberta Martin

(Gospel Singers)

Scott #3217

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Designed by Howard Paine



Roberta Martin was born on February 12, 1907 in Helena Arizona.

Roberta was greatly influenced by the blind pianist Arizona Dranes, whose style she emulated. Roberta started an all-male gospel quartet in the 1930s with Theodore Frye.

In the 1940s gospel music left the churches and started to become more mainstream. Jazz, Blues and Gospel merged until sometimes it was difficult to tell where one style started and where one left off. Roberta added female voices to her group in the forties and they became the first mixed gospel singing group. Prior to Roberta, gospel choirs were all female and quartets were all male.

By the early fifties, the group was known as The Roberta Martin Singers and they were the most popular gospel group of that era. The group was characterized by a distinct lack of synchronicity and harmonious sounds. It was easy to discern each backup from the others. They did not blend one into another as did most gospel groups of the time.

Roberta has been called the Helen Hayes of the Gospel World and she was a major influence on later gospel singers including James Cleveland.

Roberta died on January 18, 1969 in Chicago, Illinois. Over 50,000 mourners attended her memorial service.

Sources:

FleetWood Bios - Uncover.Com

