

Mahalia Jackson

(Gospel Singers)

Scott #3216

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Designed by Howard Paine



Mahalia Jackson was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on October 26, 1911. Mahalia is known as the Queen of the Gospel Song. She was brought up in a strict Baptist family and as a child she was only allowed to sing in the Church Choir. However, Mahalia was strongly influenced by Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey and other rhythm and blues artists.

In 1927 at the age of 16, Mahalia moved to Chicago. She became a member of the Greater Salem Baptist Church Choir and soon afterwards became the choir's soloist.

Mahalia embarked on a cross-country gospel tour in the early thirties and gained national attention with songs such as, He's Got the Whole World in His Hands and I Can Put My Trust in Jesus. She produced her first recording, God Gonna Separate the Wheat From the Tares in 1937 for the Decca label. Her early recordings were not big sellers, but Mahalia continued to be successful in her live appearances. She didn't record again until 1945, this time for Apollo Records. Her first recordings with Apollo were not successful and the label came close to letting her go. In 1948, her first big hit, Move on Up a Little Higher was released. It became the most popular Gospel song ever recorded. Mahalia recorded 8 songs that hit Gold including, I Believe, Just over the Hill, When I Wake up in Glory, and Just a Little While to Stay Here.

Mahalia refused to sing songs that were not religious and she would not play in nightclubs or any other place she considered inappropriate for God's praise. She did sing on both radio and television, however and played to sold out crowds in annual concerts at Carnegie Hall. She was also very popular overseas. Her version of Silent Night was one of the all time best sellers in Denmark.

Starting in 1954, Mahalia hosted a Gospel radio show for CBS and in 1957, she performed at the Newport Jazz Festival. Mahalia sang at President Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. Mahalia was also active in the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 on, often performing at Martin Luther King rallies. She sang Precious Lord, Take My Hand at his funeral in 1968.

Mahalia Jackson gave her last performance in October 1971. She died of heart failure in Evergreen Park, Illinois on January 27, 1972.

Sources:

Encyclopedia Britannica

Encyclopedia Africana