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America's Music Legacy: Rhythm and Blues
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America's Music Legacy: Gospel

Score: **80%**
 Rating: **Not Rated**
 Publisher: **MVD Entertainment Group**
 Region: **A**
 Media: **DVD/1**
 Running Time: **120 Mins.**
 Genre: **Live Performance/Independent/Documentary**
 Audio: **Dolby Stereo**

I have to admit that I've never attended a church service with rocking, gospel-style music. The music experience I had in church was vanilla hymnal tunes, sung by the congregation with a seriously amateur level of musicality. I did end up playing music professionally much later, but I can't draw even a dotted line between church and my love for music. The artists featured on this DVD, **America's Music Legacy: Gospel**, would tell you the opposite story. Most of them discovered their love for music in the church, had their talents nurtured in that setting, and pursued careers in a largely sacred setting. Levar Burton (known to most of us as Lt. Geordi La Forge, of *Star Trek* fame) hosts the two-hour event, introducing each artist with a short bio and explaining their musical significance. **America's Music Legacy: Gospel** is an awesome survey course for those interested in the music to learn more about its beginnings. It's also an incredible showcase for artists that long-time gospel fans will know well and appreciate seeing in this "greatest hits" collection.



My history with music includes a few years behind the microphone at small, college radio stations. The last show I had was memorable for many things, one of which was the DJ that followed us. He was an older, white guy from rural Ohio who had what he called a gospel-themed show. His stacks of wax included records with titles like "Are You Prepared To Die?" and exclusively featured white artists. This points up a possible confusion that we can clear up now: **America's Music Legacy: Gospel** deals predominantly with the gospel tradition that drew inspiration from African-American culture, not its white, Protestant offshoot. This is not to say there aren't some white artists on **America's Music Legacy: Gospel**, because there are several good examples of more contemporary artists that attempted to marry pop sounds with traditional gospel lyrics or messages. Unlike some of the praising, sacred music that hails from rural areas of the South and Central US, you won't mistake anything on this collection for mountain music.

What you do hear is the influence of blues, jazz, and rock, but saying these musical styles influenced gospel is a bit twisted. More likely is the scenario where artists worked in parallel, almost living two lives, one secular and one sacred. Mahalia Jackson is an example, featured here in tribute, an artist who covered almost every musical angle during her career. The challenge for these performers was the risk of alienating their gospel audience, the same audience that originally catapulted them into the limelight. It seems at this point in musical history to be a bit like the transition Hip-Hop and Rap made in recent years, from inner-city expression to white, suburban celebrity. The other thing you learn about gospel is the large number of family connections in bands like The Winans that have siblings, or that are comprised of husband-wife teams. Burton does a great job of setting the tone for some really spirited performances, including some prerecorded or archival footage for past artists like Mahalia.

Fans of gospel music will be excited to see this released on DVD, and it will give casual observers a better understanding of the roots of this incredibly vital music. Especially for fans of R&B and Jazz, **America's Music Legacy: Gospel** will strike a familiar note, but some of these artists didn't "cross over," so there's a great opportunity for discovery here. Yes, everything around the music (and some of the musical performances) are quite dated but there are principles at work here that are absolutely timeless. The searching, praising, testifying quality of gospel is something that transcends time and place, and it's the common bond between all the artists featured on **America's Music Legacy: Gospel**.

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