

**The Blind Boys of Alabama** have spread the spirit and energy of pure soul gospel music for over 60 years, ever since the first version of the group formed at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind in 1939. Today, founding members Clarence Fountain and Jimmy Carter are joined by more recent arrivals Bishop Billy Bowers, Joey Williams, Ricky McKinnie, Bobby Butler, and Tracy Pierce on a mission to expand the audience for traditional soul-gospel singing while incorporating contemporary songs and innovative arrangements into their hallowed style.

The group toiled for more than 40 years on the traditional gospel circuit. But in 1983, their career reached a turning point with their crucial role in *The Gospel at Colonus*, the smash hit musical drama created by Bob Telson and Lee Breuer. This Obie Award-winning Off-Broadway and Broadway success, coupled with their appearance on two original soundtrack albums (in 1984 and 1988), brought the Blind Boys' timeless sound to an enthusiastic new audience.

The 1992 album *DEEP RIVER* - produced by Booker T. Jones and featuring a transcendent version of Bob Dylan's *I Believe In You* - earned the Blind Boys their first Grammy Award nomination. It was, as their executive producer and long-time booking agent Chris Goldsmith notes, "the first time the Blind Boys ventured into 'gospelizing' relevant contemporary songs that weren't traditional soul-gospel songs." In 1995, the Blind Boys released the roof-raising live album *I BROUGHT HIM WITH ME*; it was followed (in 1997) by *HOLDING ON*, an experiment in funk-ed-up contemporary gospel. The group did not record again until 2001, when Chris Goldsmith decided to self-finance the Blind Boys album he'd been hearing in his head for years. "I saw a show with [blues singer/guitarist] John Hammond and the Blind Boys performing together that was an epiphany for me. Around the same time, John Chelew came by to talk about his ideas for a Blind Boys album."

The result was the Blind Boys' Real World label debut, [SPIRIT OF THE CENTURY](#) - a set of hot-wired traditional gospel and carefully chosen contemporary songs that became the group's best-selling album to date and won the 2001 Grammy Award for Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album. One track, a version of Tom Waits' *Way Down in the Hole*, became the theme song for the acclaimed HBO dramatic series *The Wire*. (Throughout their 2003 touring season, the Allman Brothers Band played this cut over their PA system each night just before hitting the stage.)

[HIGHER GROUND](#) - a spiritual excavation into the soul music tradition - earned the group its second consecutive Grammy Award for Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album. Backed by Robert Randolph and his Family Band (as well as Ben Harper, on several tracks), the Blind Boys offered masterful interpretations of Curtis Mayfield's *People Get Ready*, Aretha Franklin's *Spirit in the Dark*, the Stevie Wonder-penned title tune, and even a touch of Funkadelic (*Me and My Folks*). During the 34th annual Dove Awards (2002) sponsored by the Gospel Music Association, the Blind Boys of Alabama were inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame and presented with the Dove Award for Higher Ground as the Best Traditional Gospel Album.

During the 2003 holiday season, the Blind Boys undertook a special series of Christmas concerts featuring songs from their first Christmas CD, [GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN](#), with guest appearances by Aaron Neville, Mavis Staples, John Medeski, and others.

While the sound of traditional soul gospel is still unmistakably at its core, [ATOM BOMB](#), the group's latest album, includes The Blind Boys' most adventurous forays into pop music yet, featuring loops, raps and roaring blues riffs. The disc includes an exuberant version of the Fatboy Slim/Macy Gray tune "Demons," featuring rapper Gift of Gab from Blackalicious, while Los Lobos guitarist David Hidalgo and blues harp icon Charlie Musselwhite help recast Norman Greenbaum's gospel-rock classic "Spirit in the Sky" as a raw, Detroit-style boogie.