

**GET LIFTED UP WITH R&B GOSPEL'S THE VERY BEST OF
SOUNDS OF BLACKNESS**

Sounds Of Blackness just may have been the most unlikely musical success story of the '90s. A genre-defying choir performing original music that blended gospel, blues and R&B, should not have been popular at a time of gangsta rap and New Jack Swing. But it was. Uplifting, joyful, celebratory, positive and soulful, The Sounds Of Blackness was exactly the alternative many fans wanted, and needed, to hear.

The Very Best Of Sounds Of Blackness (A&M/UME), released September 25, 2001, features the group's best-loved tracks from throughout the decade. Half of the album's 16 selections were Top 40 R&B, and the majority of the songs were written and/or produced by hitmakers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis (Janet Jackson, etc.). That the superstar team would sign The Sounds Of Blackness as the premier act for their new Perspective Records venture (via A&M) was an act of courage --one later justified by Grammy Awards and two gold albums.

Founded in 1971 in St. Paul, MN, and directed by Gary Hines, the group naturally came in contact with homeboys Jam and Lewis, former members of the Time (Prince's early '80s band). In fact, the Sounds were featured on the Batman soundtrack thanks to Prince. With powerful singer Ann Nesby upfront, the group made its major label debut with The Evolution Of Gospel (1991). The Grammy-winning album featured the R&B hits "Optimistic" (#3), "The Pressure (Part 1)" (#16) and "Testify" (#12) as well as "Your Wish Is My Command." The gold album also led to a spot on Luther Vandross' Power Of Love tour, contributions to the Mo' Money soundtrack ("Joy") and the Grammy-winning Handel's Messiah: A Soulful Celebration, and

their own now-perennially popular holiday album The Night Before Christmas: A Musical Fantasy (which included "Soul Holidays").

The ensemble scored three more R&B Top 40s plus a Soul Train Music Award with 1994's gold follow-up, Africa To America: The Journey Of The Drum: "I Believe," "I'm Going All The Way" and "Everything Is Gonna Be Alright." The album also included **Testify's** "The Harder They Are, The Bigger They Fall," "The Lord Will Make A Way" and "Black Butterfly."

1997's Time For Healing brought together the R&B Top 40s "Spirit" (featuring rapper Craig Mack) and "Hold On (A Change Is Comin')" as well as "Love Will Never Change" and a version of the O'Jays '70s classic "Love Train." Since Perspective's contract with A&M ended that year, the Sounds have indie-released Reconciliation and are preparing an album for 2002.

In this millennium, Sounds Of Blackness will surely be heard again.

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