

RELIGION

The Portland Observer

The Steeles: A Musical Family Fusing Gospel-Tinged Melodies With R&B And Jazz Flavor

In a world in which change and individuality frequently face resistance, who step out, risk-takers with a commitment to quality and excellence, sometimes have to go that tester mile to stand out. Such is the case with the Steeles, justifiably regarded as one of the music industry's best kept secrets.

With the release of Heaven Help Us All, their stunning debut album for Elektra Musician Records, the two bother, two sister Minneapolis-based team, the secrets' out. Given the opportunity to share their awesome musical gifts, J.D., Jearlyn, Fred and Jevetta Steele rise to the occasion with a milestone album that stand out as one of 1993's truly thrilling recording debuts.

Initially encouraged by their father, J.D. Steele Sr., (considered the family's musical patriarch and mentor), the Steeles could frequently be found on shows in the Midwest with gospel greats like Mahalia Jackson, Reverend James Cleveland The Staple Singers. "Our father would get us on every gospel show that came to Gary," recalls J.D., "from the time we were just tots! Having a career in music was like a natural evolution for us."

The Steeles moved to Minneapolis in the late '70's. Word of their dynamic harmonies and distinctive individual vocal styles soon led to a slew of commercials and background session dates. In 1982, the group became involved with The Gospel At Colonus, an epic musical that debuted at The Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York and ended with a 12-week run at Broadway's Lunt-Fontanne Theatre in 1988.

1989 was a pivotal year for the Steeles. Aside from signing with Elektra Entertainment, Jevetta Steele was heard on "Calling You," the haunting theme from the movie, Baghdad Cafe. The success of the Island Records' soundtrack resulted in an Academy Award nomination and a gold record in France. Jevetta's soulful rendition was also heard on the 1990 CBS-TV series of the same name that starred Whoopi Goldberg and Maureen Stapleton and can be currently heard on the AT&T "Calling You" commercial. Jevetta's solo debut is being released on Columbia Records summer of 1993.



Heaven Help Us All clearly fills the Steele's objective in putting together a debut set. From the harmonica-laden, blues-tinged, uplifting "Tide Keeps Lifting Me" to the title track that is a timely, moving, a cappella rendition of the Stevie Wonder 1970 call for peace and understanding, the Steeles display a diversity that is breathtaking. Superstar Prince (at whose Paisley Park studios the album was recorded), a long time supporter of the Steeles, contributed the rousing tune "Well Done."

"I'd say that 'Heart In My Hand,' the first song we recorded for the album, was really the prototype for the record's direction. I helped us define what we wanted to do as a first record-

ing," says J.D. Jevetta concurs. "After ten years of doing a whole variety of music, the question was how to balance all of it and make one album that can cover r&b, gospel, jazz, everything we know we can do."

The Steeles have cut through the boundaries that can often restrict and constrain true artistry. The spine-tingling harmonies that are laced throughout the album from the emotive opening track "Heart In My Hand" to "Big God," the inspirational closer, unquestionably comes from years of singing in church. "Heaven Help Us All spans the musical spectrum and defies strict categorization. The album is simply great, great music."

Why Me Lord?

This age-old question comes screaming from your entrails with such a force that you frighten not only those around you but you even frighten yourself.

No one likes to feel like they have been "dooped", "conned", "taken-for-a-ride" or "hood-winked" by anyone—especially a family member.

With this new age, the teeming masses has spawned a new strain of genes who have the ability to shuck-n-jive, connive, and just plain old, pull-the-wool over the eyes of society. Even though, some may refuse to consider this fact—these mutations were taught either directly or indirectly by the very people who are now pointing the accusing fingers and making the loudest complaints.

The schools and the court systems have washed their hands with the entire situation; so, the church becomes the, sometimes reluctant, foster parents. "We've messed-up! Now you fix it!" says society. And now, all that you can hear is a resurgence of—"Why me Lord?" from church members all over the country. The Almighty Father's response is, "Because—the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak That's why!" [Romans 15:11]

There has never been a time when there has been such an abundance of confused-mindedness. This has happened because man has abundance of confused-mindedness. This happened because man has chosen to deviate from God's norm and venture out on his own into deep waters without any safety equipment. Either in the physical or in the spiritual sense, this is considered foolish; however, this new generation believes in taking foolish chances. And if it includes risking life and limb, so-much-the-better.

You don't have to go too far to witness these phenomena. As you drive

down Martin Luther King, Boulevard, you may see a person having a conversation with the side of a building or impeding the flow of traffic and yelling at the passing vehicles calling each one a foul name or you may see young people walking aimlessly down

the streets with their hands either under their shirts or dug deep into their pockets and with saddened faces hanging lower, like today, you may see a man with a long woman's overcoat on with red rubber boots and carrying a large shopping bag. And—sometimes, you might even spot this same man in extreme temperatures dressed the same way. This is sad!

But—what is really and truly a sad estate is the fact that Christians are running scared. Man has truly gone to his extremity. Why doesn't he just let go and let God.

Jesus has already gone through and has overcome, victoriously, all the trials, oppressions, tribulations, the grief, the pain and stresses that mankind is being subjected to—this day and in this time. This truth was not just for the people of Jesus' time period but for everyone through the end of time; for people of all ages, all races, male and female.

You can make it—if you have Christ in your life. I say to all Christian believers, "Stand up! Stand tall! Don't give-in to the world's pressures. Listen to the words of Paul as he spoke to the church of Corinth. Let his words also speak to your hearts. "Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God from whom all help comes!"

He helps us in all our troubles, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God. Just as we have a share in Christ's many sufferings, so also through Christ we share in God's great help. If we suffer, it is

for your help and salvation; if we are helped, then you too are helped an given the strength to endure with patience the same sufferings that we also endure. So our hope in you is never shaken; we know that just as you share in our sufferings, you also share in the help we receive.

We want to remind you, brothers, of the trouble we had in the province of Asia. The burdens laid upon us were so great and so heavy that we gave up all hope of staying alive. We felt that the death sentence had been passed to us. But this happened so that we should rely, not on ourselves, but only on God, who raises the dead. From such terrible dangers of death. He will save us again, as you help us by means of your prayers for us. So it will be that the many prayers for us will be answered, and God will bless us; and many will raise their voices to him in thanksgiving for us." — [Corinthians 1:3-11 GNB]

As Paul said, he and his disciples felt like giving up; but, all that they had to do was to reflect back on what Christ had experienced for them. So should it be with the Christian believers today. Instead of the doubt and the fears, there should be an assurance that God will...! God, our Father, is the same yesterday, today and forever more. He never changes! As God blessed then, he blesses today. As God delivered then he delivers today. As God healed and forgave then, he heals and forgives—right now. Just call on His Almighty name and have faith knowing that God will hear and answer your prayers; that God will supply your every need. Just like He said He would. [Philippians 4:19]

Don't ask, "Why me Lord?"—but, proclaim "Here am I Lord. Send me!" When your flesh is weak, just remember that we can do all things through Christ Jesus who gives us all the strength that we will need to handle the task set before us.

God knows what we are capable of even when we don't.

Homeless To Get

State and Federal Cuts Result In \$1 Million Shortfall For Homeless Services

The Community Action Commission is sponsoring a media conference to provide information on homeless services which will be cut, what this will mean for homeless and low-income persons, and how the commu-

Free Services In Multnomah County

nity can help. The Community Action Program Office, major funder of the emergency basic needs system of services in Multnomah County, has experienced a total loss of over \$1 million in funding for these services in the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1993. The media conference will be held on: Friday, July 2, 1993, 10am, Mental Health Services West, Bridgeview Community, 707 NW Everett, Portland (in the lobby)

Participating in the conference will be spokespersons for social service agencies who will describe the

human cost of these service cuts and Chuck Currie, coordinator of Burnside Advocates Group and chair of the Commission's Homeless Advisory Committee.

Visual aids describing the cuts and what people can do will be displayed. Media packets will be available.

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I Peter 1v.11