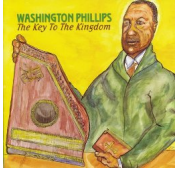


Washington Phillips – Key To The Kingdom (2005)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 08 August 2011 11:19 - Last Updated Thursday, 18 July 2013 15:21

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01. *Lift Him Up That's All* 02. *Paul And Silas In Jail* 03. *Mother's Last Word To Her Son*
04. *The Church Needs Good Deacons* 05. *Jesus Is My Friend* [play](#) 06. *A Mother's Last Word To Her Daughter* 07. *I Had A Good Father And Mother* 08. *I Am Born To Preach The Gospel* 09. *Take Your Burden To The Lord And Leave It There* 10. *Denomination Blues - Part 1* 11. *Denomination Blues - Part 2* 12. *What Are They Doing In Heaven Today* 13. *I've Got The Key To The Kingdom* 14. *Train Your Child* 15. *You Can't Stop A Tattler - Part 1* 16. *You Can't Stop A Tattler - Part 2*

[play](#)

17. *Wouldn't Mind Dying If Dying Was All* 18. *I'm So Glad Today, Today* 19. *Honey In The Rock* 20. *Mother's Prayer*

Personnel: George Washington Phillips (vocals, zither); Blind Mamie Forehand, A.C. Forehand.

THE KEY TO THE KINGDOM contains the 16 surviving recordings by the mysterious gospel singer Washington Phillips, originally released by Columbia Records between 1927 and 1929, as well as four tracks from the even more obscure gospel duo of Blind Mamie and A.C. Forehand that were originally released on the compilation STOREFRONT AND STREETCORNER GOSPEL 1927-1929. This Yazoo release features far superior remastered sound and crucial new liner notes that cast new light on Phillips's life and work. Most interestingly, the notes deduce that rather than playing the obscure dolceola, he is in fact playing two modified zithers simultaneously. ---cduniverse.com

East Texas street evangelist Washington Phillips recorded 18 tracks in Dallas for Columbia Records between 1927 and 1929, 16 of which were issued on 78s and have survived into the

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21st century. As a body of work, those 16 recordings are as singular as any from the pre-Depression era, featuring Phillips' personalized hymns and sermons accompanied by his modified zithers, which give the songs an eerie and delicate brightness. For years it was thought that Phillips played a dulcicola (a zither-like instrument with a small keyboard attached that was invented by piano tuner David P. Boyd in the 1890s) at these sessions, but it now appears that he actually played two self-modified table zithers (one a phonoharp and the other a celestaphon) simultaneously to get his unique, celestial sound. But Phillips was more than a zither player with an eccentric playing approach; he was also a fine -- if unassuming -- singer, and his carefully composed musical sermons move like gentle, airy hymns, not exactly blues, but not exactly gospel, either, and all shot through with Phillips' distinct personality. In this regard he has a definite modern compositional sense, one that is built around his personal view of the world, but accompanied as it is by archaic-sounding instruments, the end result is like nothing before or since.

All of his surviving recordings are of a piece, so it is difficult to pick out one or two as key tracks, but "Paul and Silas in Jail," "What Are They Doing in Heaven Today," and the two-part "Denomination Blues" are particularly striking. The Key to the Kingdom essentially replaces Yazoo's earlier Phillips release, *I Am Born to Preach the Gospel*, with updated (and corrected) liner notes, and four bonus tracks by fellow street musicians Mamie and A.C. Forehand that were recorded by Ralph Peer in Memphis in 1927. These bonus tracks are more than added-on filler, as A.C. (Asa C.) is a fine slide guitarist and Mamie has an engaging, delicate and haunting singing style, particularly on "Wouldn't Mind Dying if Dying Was All" and "Honey in the Rock." Mamie supposedly played finger cymbals at these sessions, but the bell-like touches on these songs are mono-tonal and not really percussive, sounding suspiciously like a desk service bell from a hotel. Needless to say, these odd tracks are every bit as unusual as the ones by Phillips, adding in a more bluesy touch. Document's *Storefront & Streetcorner Gospel* release includes all of the Phillips tracks found here, plus all four of the cuts from Mamie and A.C. Forehand (as well as alternate takes of three of their songs), and two delightful recordings by street preacher and harmonium player Luther Magby to make what is probably a better buy, although *The Key to the Kingdom* might be easier to find. Either way, this is utterly original music. ---Steve Leggett, Rovi

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