

MCG Records Our Story

The 21st century, young though it is, has been very good to Gospel music, and with good cause. As one of the fastest growing musical formats in America, modern Gospel has made leaps and bounds into the lives of an ever-broadening audience. And at the forefront of this "Gospel Explosion," is James Bullard, president and CEO of one of MCG Records, one of Gospel's hottest young labels. Bullard, however, is anything but new to the business of music. In fact, he is rightly considered by many to be the father of contemporary Gospel. With over 20 Grammys to his credit, Bullard is a seasoned, longtime veteran of the Gospel music business, and has spent his career as a pivotal figure in moving Gospel from the back burner to center stage in American popular music.

"There's an tidal wave of Gospel coming," says Bullard. "There's a torch being passed now from some of the pioneers of this music to the young people they've trained and raised up. My goal for MCG is to remain contemporary and up-to-the-minute in our approach without losing touch with this music that is so dear to people around the world."

From any lesser figure, such words might hint of false bravado, but Bullard has the track record to back him up. In 13 ½ years at Word Records, one of the most famous labels in Christian music, he assembled the most creatively and commercially successful roster of Gospel artists in history, launching the careers of a host of stars, including Shirley Caesar, Rev. Milton Brunson, The Mighty Clouds of Joy, Al Green, Helen Baylor and O'Landa Draper and the Associates.

In November of 1993, he was appointed vice president of Atlanta-based music organization, InterSound, and in only three years repeated his past history, putting together a stable of some of Gospel's hottest artists-Grammy and Stellar-winning acts William Becton and Friends, DeLeon Richards, Vickie Winans and the Mighty Clouds of Joy, among them.

It was 1996 when Bullard realized a lifelong dream in the founding of his own company, the Majestic Communications Group, known now to the world by the acronym, MCG.

With a confidence born of profound faith in his Creator, and a track record Bullard sees as clear evidence of Divine guidance, the young dreamer from Atmore "set up shop" once again, seeking both great artists and a gifted, devoted, and determined staff to assist him in his undertaking.

Louise Bullard-Garrett, his eldest daughter, left a longstanding administrative position at the University of California/Berkeley in January of 1999, to work full-time with MCG in realizing its goals and aspirations, as vice president. Vice president Jerry Peters heads MCG's A/R department, is one of Gospel, urban contemporary, and R/B's most renowned producers, arrangers and musicians. Gospel veteran Glen Stevenson, MCG's Director of R/B Gospel, has been pivotal in discovering and signing to the label many of its most successful acts.

MCG has watched as its impressive roster of both new and established acts have staked out solid turf on the national music charts. Propelled the phenomenal sales of Love Will Go All the Way, the debut album and video from Lee Williams and the Spiritual QC's, and its number one single, "I've Learned to Lean," MCG was well on the way to realizing its founder's dreams and the new millennium dawned. Lee and the QC's follow-up album, Good Time, released in early 2001, soared immediately into Billboard's Gospel Top 10, with its runaway smash single, "You Didn't Have To," firmly established the group, and MCG as forces to be reckoned with on the modern-day Gospel landscape. And now, hot on the heels of Lee and the QC'S smash album, Good Time, featuring the national, chart-topping hit, "You Didn't Have To," comes their eagerly anticipated MCG Records follow-up, Right On Time, a riveting, 13-song testimony of love and faith, running a gamut from solid, rocking R/B Gospel to heartfelt balladry and powerful anthems. The quartet's exciting, high-energy, R/B and rock-flavored Gospel quartet sound continues to captivate listeners, crossing all walks of life, ethnicity and denomination.

But that's only the beginning of MCG's success stories-past, present and future. In the classic Quartet tradition, and on the heels of their smash album, Blind Man, their latest release, Have You Heard the News, rocks and it rolls. It swings, sways, whispers, cries and shouts the Gospel message into the lives of the masses with a spine tingling intensity that grabs hold of hearts and changes them forever.

Have You Heard the News is the latest entry in a repertoire that spans the 40 years since Slim took the helm of the Angels in the early '60s, yielding such standards as Better Make a Change, People Don't Do, Where Shall I Be, Shame On You, and Death and the Beautiful Lady, among many others. The fundamental quartet sound-a lead singer backed with a stack of dramatic harmony and counterpoint vocals-and a band of bass, drums, guitar and keyboards, is still the core of the Angels' sound. It's also the bedrock on which a lion's share of the popular music of the second half of the 20th century was built.

The title cut of the new album has all the markings of an irresistibly catchy, swinging, gospel/R/B classic-to-be.

Both the 1999 and 2000 releases from the legendary Reverend James Cleveland's GMWA Gospel Mass Choir have proven MCG to be the premier bearer of venerable Gospel tradition. Smoking sides from George Dean and G4, a the new project from O'landa Draper's Associates, "Hold On," the hit single from the recently signed Doc McKenzie and the Hi-Lites, and the current chart-climbing debut, Always Remember, by modern Gospel great Michael Winans of the Winans brothers, and his supremely gifted wife, Regina Winans, all offer clear evidence that MCG's presence is equally prominent on Gospel's cutting edge.

Perhaps the ultimate indicator of MCG's emergence as a big-league player in the music industry came when the label signed R/B legend Billy Preston, whose debut MCG recording was released in the late-summer of 2001. Preston is duly celebrated for his inimitable work as a solo hit-maker ("Will It Go Round In Circles," "Outa-Space," "Nothing From Nothing," "Space Race" and "With You I'm Born Again" were ALL Top Five mainstream chart hits for Billy), songwriter (Joe Cocker's signature song, "You Are So Beautiful," penned by Billy, has become a standard in the pop pantheon of the 20th century), and sideman extraordinaire, with his definitive keyboards gracing the work of legendary artists that truly span the entire spectrum of contemporary music, among them Mahalia Jackson, Ray Charles, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Barbra Streisand.

Having recently secured new national mainstream distribution for its product through the Malaco system, and exclusive Christian market distribution with the pre-eminent Central

South, Inc., MCG can rightfully boast one of the broadest and most visible presences in Gospel today.

But no matter how far he climbs in the firmament of the Gospel music industry, Bullard never fails to give credit where it is ultimately due. "My roots were as a Southern, country black boy," he concludes. "But humble beginnings never held me back, because I know God is directing my life. Even as a kid lying under a pecan tree in Atmore, I remember thinking that as far I can dream and believe, that's where I can go. In man's terms, I've been blessed to continually grow and reach higher heights, but it's really just been trying to serve God, and do my best to follow where He leads."

About James Bullard

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

Record executive and Gospel industry pioneer, James Bullard, has long been acknowledged as one of the true visionaries of Gospel music. After decades of accolades and awards, not to mention launching the careers of a long list of Gospel giants, that includes Shirley Caesar, Rev. Milton Brunson and the Thompson Community Singers, The Mighty Clouds of Joy, Al Green, Helen Baylor, Deleon Richards-Sheffield, The Ranch Allen Group, The Clark Sisters, Vickie Winans, Leon Patillo, Phillip Baylor, Deniece Williams, Jennifer Holliday, Edwin Hawkins, Billie Preston, Inez Andres, Albertina Walker, and O'Landa Draper and the Associates, Bullard today is the president and CEO of his own pace-setting label, MCG Records.

Having discovered, signed, recorded and released six smash-hit albums on MCG in the last ten years by Lee Williams and The Spiritual QC'S (I've Learned To Lean, the Billboard Top Ten Gospel gem, Good Time, the five time Stellar Award winner, Right On Time, Tell The Angels, Soulful Healing, and So Much To Be Thankful For), it's clear that James Bullard and MCG Records are just beginning to write the next chapter in the ongoing story of this singular businessman and driving force "behind the success" of so many great talents.

A man of humble origins, Bullard has risen to his position of preeminence without forgetting either his roots, or the true Source of his success. With over 20 Grammys to his credit, Bullard is a seasoned 40-year-plus veteran of the Gospel music business, and is widely regarded as one of the pivotal figures in moving Gospel from the back burner to center stage in American popular music. Bullard freely acknowledges that, at its core, his strategy has always been very straightforward.

"I think my greatest capability has been just formulating a plan and making it a reality," he says. "We must know who we are, where we are, and where we want to go". There's an explosion of Gospel coming. There's a torch being passed now from some of the pioneers of this music to the young people they've trained and raised up. We're going to continue polishing and refining things, and contemporizing our approach without losing touch with the music that is so dear to people around the world."

From any lesser figure, such words might hint of false bravado, but Bullard has the track record to back him up. In over 13 years at Word Records, from 1980 to 1993, he assembled the most creatively and commercially successful roster of Gospel artists in history, posting sales of more than 12 million units, and surpassing his first three-year sales projection in only eight months.

In November of 1993, he was appointed vice president of Atlanta-based music organization, InterSound, and in only three years built what remains today a thriving roster featuring a host of the Gospel's hottest acts—Grammy and Stellar-winners William Becton and Friends, DeLeon Richards-Sheffield, Jennifer Holliday, James Hall Worship and Praise, Slim and The Supreme Angels, and Vickie Winans, among them. With powerhouse producer, composer, arranger and musician Jerry Peters as his A/R executive, Bullard signed and developed 20 new artists, accounting for up to 18 of the company growth, and sales of over one million units. This success subsequently positioned InterSound to be purchased in the late '90s by Platinum Entertainment for over \$29 million, and folded into the CGI label.

Bullard departed InterSound in 1996 to found Majestic Communications Group, known now as simply MCG Records. MCG released its first album in November of 1997. Having secured national mainstream distribution for its product through retail giant, the Navarre Corporation, and exclusive Christian market distribution with the pre-eminent Central South, Inc., MCG can rightfully boast one of the broadest and most visible presences in

Gospel today. The label was well positioned in 1999 to both reinvigorate the career of the legendary quartet, Slim and the Supreme Angels, catapulting them again to the Top Ten with both their first MCG releases, *Over Yonder*, and its hit follow-up, *Blind Man*. But it was the discovery and nurturing of a little-known quartet from Tupelo, Mississippi, called Lee Williams and The Spiritual QC'S, that truly opened the floodgates for MCG, unleashing a torrent of hits singles and albums to rival Gospel's grandest, most venerated, and hottest acts of the day.

When the first single, "I've Learned to Lean," from the group's first album of the same name, literally exploded to No.1 on Gospel radio across America, it was clear Bullard was still in full possession of his Midas touch - adding more entries to the success-after-success stories that already crowded his resume. And there has been no slowing down or looking back since, for Bullard and the company he now helms.

"The album that wouldn't die," as Billboard magazine dubbed it, *I've Learn to Lean* spent nearly an entire year on the publication's Gospel Top 40 album chart. Eighteen months later, fuelled by the brush fire that its predecessor had ignited across the country, Lee and The QC'S second effort, *Good Time*, wasted no time in making its presence known, soaring to the Top Ten almost upon release, and unleashing another national radio smash in "You Didn't Have To."

With a select roster of artists that includes the Racy Brothers, Marlene Watson, the world renowned Dixie Hummingbirds, Lynn "Fuzzy" Taylor, Samantha Cassidy, Darryl Richmond, Calvin Suggs and Friends, Rynn Edwards, Lynwood "The Funnyman" Williams, Apostle J.L. Cash and Praise, and Helen Baylor, Bullard has raised the bar in Gospel even higher, by releasing long-format performance videos concurrent with almost all of his artists' albums. But of even greater significance, in 2001 MCG became the first Gospel label ever to produce and distribute to theaters a full-length, 35mm film, featuring Lee Williams and The Spiritual QC's in concert. With successful and heralded runs in major markets that included Atmore, Alabama, Atlanta, Georgia, and Memphis, Tennessee, Bullard could rightly lay claim to taking Gospel to even greater heights than ever before.

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Bullard grew up in the tiny agricultural town of Atmore, Alabama. He moved to Cleveland, Ohio, in his late teens where he formed a vocal trio called BOS—Bullard, Oliver and Ship—which toured and recorded together with considerable success for 12 years, from 1958 to 1970. Bullard's highly astute handling of BOS's business affairs brought him to the attention of Cleveland-based Wayout Records which, in 1970, hired him to start and operate a Gospel division for its label.

Bullard's first project, "I'm Glad He Knows My Heart," by newcomers The Sensational Saints, became a major Gospel hit, and his next production, "I Had a Dream," was another smash. Bullard began to hone his skills as a marketer, personally visiting record shops around the country and, in the process, selling thousands of units.

"I viewed what I was doing as common sense, and it was working," he recalls. "I started to focus on that more and more. That's when I first starting seeing a vision for taking this music to the people in ways that hadn't been done before."

Bullard began investing his own money in Wayout recording projects, eventually departing the company with ownership of all the master recordings he had made there, forming his own label, named after his group, BOS. To keep his fledgling label afloat, Bullard began doing promotion and sales work for Birthright Records in Los Angeles, whose roster featured Edwin Hawkins, among other notables, and characteristically, he sold more than \$36,000 of product within a matter of months.

Impressed, Birthright offered to merge its label with BOS, even allowing Bullard to retain ownership of his BOS masters, as they excitedly watch Bullard's marketing expertise dramatically lift Hawkins' album sales into the healthy six-figures..

Bullard 's career climb continued unabated, when a year-and-a- half later, in 1978, he got an offer from Roadshow Records, a major force in both secular pop and R/B, asking him to take charge of their act, Shirley Caesar, commissioning him to make her a "household word." Bullard accepted the challenge and once again delivered the goods, building Caesar's reputation as the "Queen of Gospel" in both the secular and Christian markets, and bringing her with him to Word Records when he took his next giant step upward.

PROCLAMATIONS OF RECOGNITION:

In an official proclamation from the mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, Bullard's home for the first few years of his career, the Honorable Michael R. White stated: "On behalf of all the residents of our five-time All-American City, I would like to recognize James Bullard as one of the major forces in Gospel Music today. Mr. Bullard's most impressive career began right here in Cleveland, where he formed a vocal trio called BOS (Bullard, Oliver and Ship), and later headed the Gospel arm of WayOut Records. His reputation in the music business soared as he went on to form world-renowned Gospel Music divisions at both Word Records, and InterSound Music. Bullard discovered, nurtured and launched the careers of many of the greatest artists in the history of modern Gospel—including Shirley Caesar, Reverend Milton Brunson and the Thompson Community Singers, the Mighty Clouds of Joy, Vicki Winans, Candi Staton, and Al Green, before starting his own label, MCG Records, in 1996, which is to day on e of the most influential labels in Gospel Music. Bullard has received over 20 Grammy Awards, and innumerable industry and community honors, including the 1998 Golden Circle Award for Lifetime Achievement at the annual MacDonald's GospelFest. As the 54th Mayor of the City of Cleveland, I hereby offer this Proclamation of Recognition to James Bullard, and encourage all citizens to join me in this recognition, as he continues to take Gospel Music to new heights."

From the Quartet and Gospel Singers of Cleveland came this equally laudatory acknowledgement of Bullard's immense contribution to this most American of art forms: "This honor is presented to James Bullard, for meritorious service in Gospel Music, from his beginnings in the City of Cleveland, Ohio, as a record producer and artist. From the recording his first hit song, "I'm Glad He Knows My Heart," until the present day, he has attained the honor of being one of the most highly acclaimed producers and entrepreneurs in the Gospel recording industry, and is still held in the highest regard in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio."

THE FUTURE:

Today, Bullard bristles with anticipation over the opportunities he sees on the horizon at MCG. "From a revenue and market-share standpoint, Black Gospel is the only remaining untapped music in the world," he explains. "I continue to strive to help people see Black Gospel music as an art form and for young people to see it as a viable career. God showed me a vision that the bride is ready, and the groom is going to be whatever

record company decides to make a commitment and staff itself with people who understand what has to happen. I've held onto this vision for years, and now God has given me the company with which it's going to be realized."

But no matter how far he climbs in the firmament of the Gospel music industry, Bullard never fails to give credit where it is ultimately due. "The Lord has enabled me to walk among presidents, congressmen, senators, mayors, and music industry leaders without forgetting the ordinary people—who they are and where they are," Bullard concludes.

"My roots were as a Southern, country boy. But humble beginnings never held me back, because I know God is directing my life. I don't have anything to do with it. And I knew that before I even knew what I was talking about. I was a kid, lying under a pecan tree in Atmore, Alabama, looking up through the leaves on the tree, I heard these words in my spirit "as far as you can see, you can go". In man's terms, I've been continually growing and reaching higher heights, but I'm really just servicing God, and doing my best to follow where He leads."

About Louise Bullard-Garrett

Louise Bullard has spent the better part of her adult life in preparation for her position today as vice president of office administration and promotions for Nashville-based MCG Records, one of the hottest young labels in modern Gospel music. Even though those preparations and their ultimate purpose may not always have been readily apparent, in retrospect they make perfect sense, and form a symmetry that could only be Providential.

Born and raised in Atmore, Alabama, Louise initially pursued a career in modeling upon her graduation from high school, which led to a year's stay in Cleveland, in route to the Bay Area of California, which became here home for the next three decades.

Gradually feeling led more to the world of business than the business of modeling, Louise studied business administration in a Bay Area community college, and began a 15-year career as a customer relations specialist for Hoffmann/LaRoche Pharmaceuticals in San Leandro. It was not long after her move to the West Coast that she met her husband-to-be, Robert Garrett, a probation officer in the California Correctional system, whom she married in 1974.

When Hoffman/LaRoche closed its facilities in San Leandro, Louise spent a year doing volunteer community service work, acquiring private and corporate donations to finance the building of a library at the elementary school attended by the eldest of her two daughters, Rathesia, and LaShanell, both now young adults.

Louise's success in that volunteer capacity led to a new profession as a fund-raiser and coordinator of special events for the library department at the University of California at Berkeley the next year. Functioning in a variety of administrative positions at U.C. Berkeley for the next 15 years, Louise acquired skills that, added to her public relations talents honed in the pharmaceutical industry, would pave the way for her entry into the music business in the late-'90s.

Louise's father, MCG president and CEO, James Bullard, had frequently talked with Louise about his dream of leaving a legacy for his family. Therefore, she was not surprised when he informed her that God told him to start a record label for the people. And, in 1996 he announced the actual formation of MCG. Absorbed in her own family and career in California, it wasn't until 1998 when she started working with her father and MCG on a part time bases that she realized that this business would be the legacy Bullard would leave his family. Bullard has always tried to be obedient to God, and for that MCG would become his legacy and fulfill God's command to start a company for the people. Louise holds her father in the highest regard and to be able to walk in his footsteps and take an executive position with the company is a dream come true and a one in a lifetime opportunity.

Continuing her work at UCB, which had come to include heading the university's yearly United Way campaign, Louise began to ease her way more into the business of MCG, working from her California home in 1999. The following year, she decided that her years of p.r. and administrative training could indeed be put to good use in the "family business," and with the enthusiastic support of her family, she and her husband relocated to MCG's then-home base, in Atlanta.

"I realized that leaving behind a legacy was a dream my father had held and nurtured for a long time," says Louise, "and I decided I wanted to assist him in any way I could in

attaining that. As the oldest of his children, I also felt a sense of commitment to do this, for James and the rest of my family as well.

"MCG was already growing by leaps and bounds when Robert and I moved back east from California," she explains, "and it had become clear that it was no longer possible for me to do all that was needed of me, and to do it well, on a part-time basis. When I started full-time, I knew I had a lot to learn about how to apply what I'd learned in my previous careers to the music industry, and also to get a very clear and specific idea of where the company was at that time, and where I best fit into the overall plan. In over a year now, I've realized that learning curve continually spikes upward. A job, a career...a life should all do that, or else you're just standing still, and probably even getting in the way!

"My highest hope now, in the business world, is to make MCG a Fortune 500 company, looked up to by people in all walks of life," Louise says. "I would hope MCG is and will become all the more a source of encouragement to others to listen when God speaks, pay attention to their dreams, and pursue them, and persevere. Because God can and will make all your dreams come true. MCG is the living proof of that."

The obvious workings of a guiding hand much larger than her own is something Louise readily and gratefully acknowledges. "In retrospect I can see that for all the years I spent in California, in careers seemingly having nothing to do with the music industry, the Lord was in fact preparing me, all that time, to be exactly where I am, doing exactly what I'm doing today," Louise concludes. "I feel the path I'm on now is the path God had intended all along."