

The Mighty Clouds Of Joy - Family Circle (1963)

Written by bluesever
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A1 Family Circle A2 Lord Hold My Hand A3 Judgement Day A4 By Faith A5 My Precious King A6 Glory Hallelujah B1 I Came To Jesus B2 Nearer To Thee B3 Meeting Tonight B4 How I Found The Lord B5 Amazing Grace B6 You'll Never Know

Incredible. This is stomping hard-gospel that will appeal to fans of early RnB/Soul/RnR. It's amazing how much the great Wilson Pickett styled his voice on the hair-raising gospel shouts that grace this record. ---hillsidestranger, rateyourmusic.com

Contemporary gospel's preeminent group, the Mighty Clouds of Joy carried the torch for the traditional quartet vocal style throughout an era dominated by solo acts and choirs; pioneering a distinctively funky sound that over time gained grudging acceptance even among purists, they pushed spiritual music in new and unexpected directions, even scoring a major disco hit. The Mighty Clouds of Joy were formed in Los Angeles during the '50s by schoolmates Joe Ligon and Johnny Martin; while still in their teens, the original group -- which also included Leon Polk, Richard Wallace, and brothers Ermant and Elmo Franklin -- made their recorded debut in 1960 with "Steal Away to Jesus," cut for the Peacock label. Their debut LP, Family Circle, arrived a year later. In the years that followed, the Mighty Clouds joined the ranks of gospel's greatest showmen; one of the first groups to incorporate choreographed moves into their act, their nimble footwork and bright, color-coordinated outfits earned them the sobriquet "The Temptations of Gospel."

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More importantly, they were the first group to add bass, drums, and keyboards to the standard quartet accompaniment of solo guitar, resulting in a sound that horrified traditionalists but appealed to younger listeners -- so much so, in fact, that the Mighty Clouds became the first gospel act ever to appear on television's Soul Train, where they performed their disco smash "Mighty High." Their crossover success continued with opening slots for secular pop stars including Marvin Gaye, the Rolling Stones, and Paul Simon, whom the group backed during a monthlong stint at Madison Square Garden. While lineup changes plagued the Mighty Clouds throughout their career, they remained active into the new millennium; in addition to co-founders Ligon and Wallace, their latter-day incarnation also included Paul Beasley, Michael McCowin, Wilbert Williams, Johnny Valentine, and Ron Staples. As the years advanced, Ligon took a more supportive singing role, with lead vocals performed by ex-Gospel Keynotes vocalist Beasley. Ligon died in December 2016 at the age of 80. ---Jason Ankeny, allmusic.com

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