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AN UNTOLD, INSIDER HISTORY OF THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA, THE QUINTESSENTIAL GOSPEL VOCAL GROUP, AND THE LONGEST-RUNNING MUSICAL INSTITUTION IN AMERICA

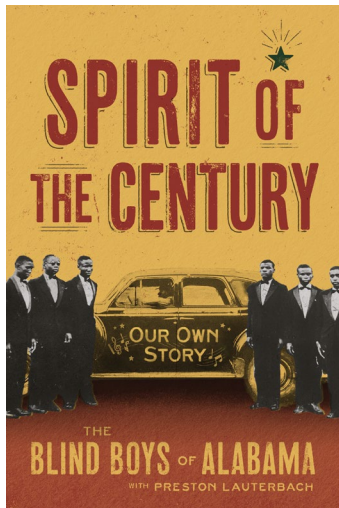
“The Blind Boys of Alabama have enjoyed an astonishing career marked by an unwavering work ethic, inspired collaboration, and mesmerizing live performances...A riveting and exciting read.”

—Booklist

“For more than seventy-five years since my Gospel-singing, schoolteacher mother introduced me to the Five Blind Boys from Alabama, we have been graced with their magnificent music, their thundering, harmonic power that moves soul and spirit. They’ve stood the test of time and they’re still striking hot iron with every note. Get on board with Spirit of the Century—people get ready, this is the train that’s comin’!”

—Taj Mahal

The Blind Boys of Alabama recently took home the 2024 GRAMMY Award for Best Roots Gospel Album, their sixth total GRAMMY (among 16 nominations). The win was for their first album in six years, *Echoes of the South*, and comes at a time of a renewed interest in the longest running group in American history. And in an important year for them. 2024 is the 85th anniversary of the group, the founding members having met at school in 1939.



They star in PBS Special “A Symphony Celebration: The Blind Boys of Alabama with Dr. Henry Panion, III,” currently airing nationwide, which features the group performing alongside a full symphony orchestra and a 300-member choir from Alabama’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities. In addition to the new album they’ve also just released for the first time in digital format the live recordings from their critically acclaimed 2009 concert film “Live in New Orleans.” And they continue to tour across the world.

But most exciting, and a first for the group, is the publication of their memoir *[SPIRIT OF THE CENTURY: Our Own Story](#)* (Hachette Books, 3/19/24). Written with Preston Lauterbach, the book features extensive interviews with all surviving members of the group across its several iterations, along with key musical contributors, to tell their own story completely and for the first time. It also draws from the group’s private archive. As a result, the book is an authentic, intimate perspective on the group’s evolution and enduring success that gives their story the same inspirational power that you hear in their songs.

Group leader and singer Ricky McKinnie has been with the group for over thirty years and throughout its renaissance. Longtime member Joey Williams is music director, guitarist, and vocal arranger. Jimmy Carter, who retired last year after finishing the latest album, was a fellow student at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Deaf and Blind where the original group formed.

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Several years after meeting at school, a singing battle – commonplace at the time and crucial for the awareness of gospel groups – against five other blind boys from Mississippi led to the original Five Blind Boys of Alabama name.

The decades-long story of the Blind Boys of Alabama intersects with pivotal moments and issues in American history and is an ideal prism through which to trace music, culture, history, and race in America. It will at once appeal to music and history fans. It also has a strong and inspiring faith component; in fact, the Blind Boys were signed to Specialty Records and offered the same contract as Sam Cooke to cross over to popular music, but they never wavered in their commitment to gospel music.

That commitment has taken them to Broadway co-starring alongside a young Morgan Freeman in “The Gospel at Colonus,” world tours, and performances at the White House for three presidents. **SPIRIT OF THE CENTURY** invites readers to follow along on that eight-decade journey together from a segregated trade school; through the rough and tumble indie record game and grinding tour schedule of the golden age of gospel; singing the theme song for “The Wire;” and winning six GRAMMYS. And the musicians and celebrities who have been part of the Blind Boys world, and are discussed in the book, are as diverse as they are astounding, including Prince, President Barack Obama, Lee Ann Womack, Don Imus, Morgan Freeman, Lou Reed, Robert Plant, and John Legend.

Thought-provoking, heartfelt, and deeply inspiring, **SPIRIT OF THE CENTURY** is a fascinating and one-of-a-kind read. As **Whoopi Goldberg** says, “**this is a story you WANT to know. If you know anything about the Blind Boys of Alabama—spirit, heart, and determination go into this fabulous blend of voices and music. And you will understand the struggle, not just theirs but all of ours.**”

The **Blind Boys of Alabama** are the longest running group in American music and have been performing gospel music since 1939. In addition to being inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame and the Alabama Music Hall of Fame, they have won numerous honors for the music, including six GRAMMY Awards, and were presented with the coveted GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009. This is their first book.

Preston Lauterbach (coauthor) is the author/co-author of numerous books, including *Brother Robert*, *Bluff City*, *Beale Street Dynasty*, and *The Chitlin' Circuit*. He lives near Charlottesville, Virginia.

[SPIRIT OF THE CENTURY: Our Own Story](#)

**By the Blind Boys of Alabama
With Preston Lauterbach**

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