

SONS *of the* PIONEERS

LEGENDS OF WESTERN MUSIC

April 2024

SONS OF THE PIONEERS CELEBRATE 90 YEARS WITH GOSPEL ALBUM

The Sons of the Pioneers, celebrating an astonishing 90 unbroken years in 2024 as western music's most influential musical group, announce the release of a long-awaited gospel album, *Campfire Spirituals*.

The album, which features four songs composed by famous founding members Bob Nolan and Tim Spencer, offers longtime favorite hymns such as *How Great Thou Art* and *The Old Rugged Cross* and colorful cowboy spirituals such as *Will There Be Sagebrush in Heaven* and *The Boss Is Hanging Out a Rainbow*.

As any Pioneer fan would expect, all songs are wrapped in the group's lush, signature harmonies. The album revisits songs that were recorded by earlier Pioneers, most in the 1940s and '50s. The new album's three- and four-part vocal arrangements stay true to those earlier recordings, showcasing the enduring nature not only of the songs but also of the famed "Pioneer sound" itself.

"It's been 60 years since the Pioneers' last full gospel album, so, hey, we figured it was time," says Tommy Nallie, the group's trail boss. "So many fans have been asking us for this for a long time. We're proud of it, and we sure hope they like it."

Campfire Spirituals features the vocal trio of Nallie (middle voice), Ken Lattimore (tenor), and John Fullerton (baritone), with additional bass vocals by Chuck Ervin and harmonies by Paul Elliott. Instrumental duties are handled by Nallie (lead guitar), Elliott (lead fiddle, viola), Fullerton (rhythm guitar, mandolin), Lattimore (fiddle), and Ervin (string bass).

1. The Place Where I Worship (*Al Goodhart, Fay Foster, Florence Tarr*) The awe-inspiring features of the majestic West, where "mountains are altars of God," form this reverent cowboy's church. Nallie takes the vocal solos in this trio arrangement. The Pioneers recorded the song in 1962, but it was also recorded by other notable artists, including Red Foley, Gene Autry, and even Lorne Greene (in a 1966 RCA session directed by future Pioneer Billy Liebert, 1974–80).

2. Will There Be Sagebrush in Heaven (*Pearl Walla*) Loping along in their saddles, these cowboys figure that if Heaven can possibly boast the same "rare beauty" of their range, then it must be a mighty fine place indeed. Lattimore takes a vocal solo, and Nallie and Elliott trade instrumental duties. The Pioneers previously recorded this song in 1947, but it was picked up on many reissues.

3. The Mystery of His Way (*Bob Nolan*) Nolan, who was not religious *per se*, nonetheless wrote many compellingly spiritual songs, including this one, in which the irresistible forces of nature seem to be guided by a heavenly hand that is both benevolent and inviting. Nallie takes the vocal solos. Nolan wrote and recorded this song in 1952 with Victor. The Pioneers recorded it in 1954, after Nolan retired, and again in 1962.

4. Read the Bible Every Day (*Tim Spencer*) Fullerton takes the lead on this buoyant quartet gospel number written by founding member Spencer, who in 1955 created his own religious-music label, Manna Music. RCA released the Pioneers' 1947 recording as the B side to *The Old Rugged Cross*.

(more)

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5. The Old Rugged Cross (*George Bennard*) Lattimore sings the lead in this lush four-part arrangement of evangelist Bennard's classic hymn, penned in 1913. The song has been recorded by hundreds of diverse artists and in the late 1930s was one of America's most popular songs of any genre. In addition to the Pioneers' previous commercial release of this song in 1947, the group also recorded it in 1941 for NBC's *Symphonies of the Sage* radio transcriptions.

6. Just a Closer Walk With Thee (*unknown, public domain*) Supported by a background quartet, Nallie warmly delivers the lead on this traditional gospel number, which also features Elliott's fine fiddling. The song surged into the national consciousness in the 1940s as jazz, gospel, and brass bands recorded and performed it, often as an instrumental. The Pioneers' only previous recording came in 2009, but as a fan favorite, it has been a staple of the group's live shows for many years.

7. Land Beyond the Sun (*Calvin DeVoll*) An aging cowboy with his weary steed yearns for the Promised Land as a sweet reward, but only "when the work's all done." Ervin adds a bass vocal and a recitative to the vocal trio arrangement. The Pioneers previously recorded the song in 1950.

8. The King's Highway (*Bob Nolan*) Fullerton sings the lead on this jaunty Nolan waltz that invites travelers on a journey through life's hills and valleys, with a joyful welcome at its end. Nolan wrote the song in 1955, and the Pioneers recorded it for RCA the same year.

9. How Great Thou Art (*Stuart K. Hine*) Lattimore's tender-yet-potent tenor complements the earnest lyric of this hymn, which gained popularity in America and Britain in the mid-1950s. The song was the crown jewel in the catalog of Spencer's religious-music label, Manna Music, and the relationship allowed the Pioneers in 1955 to become one of the first popular groups to record it. Hundreds of other artists have since recorded it.

10. The Boss Is Hanging Out a Rainbow (*Bob Nolan*) This happy-go-lucky work song, which features the whole group in a double-trio vocal arrangement, depicts a benevolent God who wrangles bad weather for the cowboys' benefit. Nolan wrote the song in 1940, and it appeared on numerous Pioneer radio transcriptions as well as being commercially recorded in 1966.

11. There Is Power in the Blood (*Lewis Edgar Jones*) Fullerton, Nallie, and Lattimore trade vocal solos in the lively four-part arrangement of this hymn, published in 1899 and still used in many church hymnals. The Pioneers previously recorded it for the Standard Radio transcriptions in 1935, then commercially in 1937 and again in 1947.

12. The Lord's Prayer (*Albert Hay Malotte*) This spare, heartfelt trio arrangement echoes the Pioneers' 1951 RCA recording, keeping the listener's focus on the words, which are taken directly from the book of Matthew. Malotte, who created the musical setting in 1935 and is best known for this piece, also composed other religious works and numerous film scores, including Disney's *Ferdinand the Bull* and *The Ugly Duckling*.

Tommy Nallie, trail boss: middle and lead vocals, lead guitar
Ken Lattimore: tenor and lead vocals, fiddle
John Fullerton: baritone and lead vocals, rhythm guitar, mandolin
Paul Elliott: lead fiddle, viola, harmony vocals
Chuck Ervin: string bass, bass and harmony vocals

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