

Sweet tidings of the Good Women Choir

By Benson Idonije

For a decade and half, from the seventies to the eighties the Good Women Choir ruled the scene and established its dominance with good goespel music, an involvement which still remains its main preoccupation.

However, the popularity of the choir has wanted over the years. Not that the quality of its music has in anyway deteriorated, but because the mood of the record-buying public has altered in favour of foreign-based gospel which now has a powerful influence on the youth. And this is because the music has been deliberately made overtly commercial to engender popular appeal, with elements of rock and funk as the main underlying features.

However, under the able leadership of Mrs. D.A. Fasoyin, the group which is based in Ibadan, is still kicking and alive, wailing from one chorus to another, employing an effective group - vocal harmony style that identifies gospel with African music in terms of rhythm and the call and response pattern of singing. Usually, Mrs. Fasoyin dictates the tunes and the choir replies with joy, peace and good tidings as it preaches the gospel of Christ.

It cannot be exactly correct to say that the Good Women Choir, Ibadan and district was discovered by Mr. Ola Kasim, but its success story cannot be written without particular reference to Kazim. He was the group's mentor in the sense that he not only took keen interest in its survival, he gave it recognition and put it in the limelight by recording it on his personal lable of Ibukun Orisun Iye, assuming the role of producer, band manager and generally making sure that the choir's songs were well thought out and faithfully recorded.

The group/s first big hit was *Jesu O Seun* and way back 1977 when Radio Nigeria 2 was dominating the air waves and making history, I gave the music a lot of air play because the choir sounded to me as the Nigerian indigenous answer to the Edwin Hawkins Singers of America who were reigning supreme at the time.

Consequently, I was involved in the pre-release arrangements and ceremonies for one of the choir's subsequent albums in 1980. Titled *Odun yi a Tura*, the album has eight songs with its main focus on Jesus Christ of Nazereth and the redemptive work that he did on the cross of cavalry.

Other songs in this album are *Eje jesu ba colour mi mu*, *Kosi agbara bi ti Jesu*, *Mo gbekele o*, *Somi deru jeje fun ota*, *Mofe losi Jerusalem*, *Jesu ngba dura* and *Oluwa ku ise o*.

The Choir's formula for lsuccess is simplicity in terms of melodic inventiveness, presentation of messagte and the rhythm occpaniment which employs organ as the only Western instrument with all the others being percussive African instruments. The accompanying music unambitious in terms of progression and choice of instruments, and this has paid off tremendously because it has eliminated all the inadequancies of wrong chords and atonalities which usually render the music of most of groups flat and unpleasant to listen to.

The Good Women Choir owes its continued popularity to the indigenous rhythmic approach which has earned it a unique style with a gospel sound that is easily identifiable. For this

reason, the music continues to remain authentic and down to earth.

Another hit album for which the *Good Women Choir* will forever be remembered was recorded in 1978 as follow-up to its initial hit.

Titled *Oluwa mbo*, this album is a warning to unbelievers as well as devout Christians to be ready at any time for the coming of *Jesus Christ*; so that when the trumpet sounds they will all be part of the rapture that will take place. Other songs in this package are *Kamo sora*, *Gbigbega ni Oluwa*, *Jesu dara pupo*, *mo nwoju Olorun*, *Bamise temi*, *Baba gbe soro mi fo*.

The messages are based on Biblical texts and scriptures but have been composed for gospel singing by Mrs. D.A. Fasoyin who is also the leader of the choir.

The *Good Women Choir* is still exploiting this individual and original approach with which it now appeals to a matured target audience. Needless to say that its impact is very well felt at the grassroots level - an indication of the fact the *Good Women Choir* will remain relevant for many years to come.