



Group Singing in Gospel Music

“Gospel” is a broad term for Christian music based in American folk traditions. There have been a number of Gospel music styles since the nineteenth century, many of which are rooted in the group singing that takes place in worship services and at community social events. The type that perhaps had the most influence on Doo Wop is the Gospel quartet.

Gospel quartet singing owes much to the choruses organized by African-American universities beginning in the 1870s. Fisk University near Nashville, Tennessee, sponsored the most famous such group, the Fisk University Jubilee Singers. These student choruses, often called Jubilee groups, specialized in performing African-American spirituals. They became widely popular and toured the world to raise money for their colleges. It was less expensive, however, for a small group to go on tour. Fisk organized a touring group of just four singers, the Fisk Jubilee Quartet, and many other universities did the same. It was common for these quartets to sing *a cappella* (without any instruments) or with very simple accompaniment provided by a guitar or piano. Their singing style was also inspired by the barbershop quartets popular at the time.



The Golden Gate Gospel Quartet

The Jubilee singers helped to increase audience demand for religious songs. From the 1930s through the 1960s, many professional groups, like the Golden Gate Quartet, specialized in singing Gospel songs. These later groups combined the passion of the music from the Baptist and Pentecostal churches in the American South with lively rhythms taken from Blues and Jazz styles. Often in Gospel quartet singing, one singer will take the lead and perform a dramatic solo while the other singers have supporting roles.

In the video:

You will hear the Golden Gate Quartet performing the song “Gospel Train.”