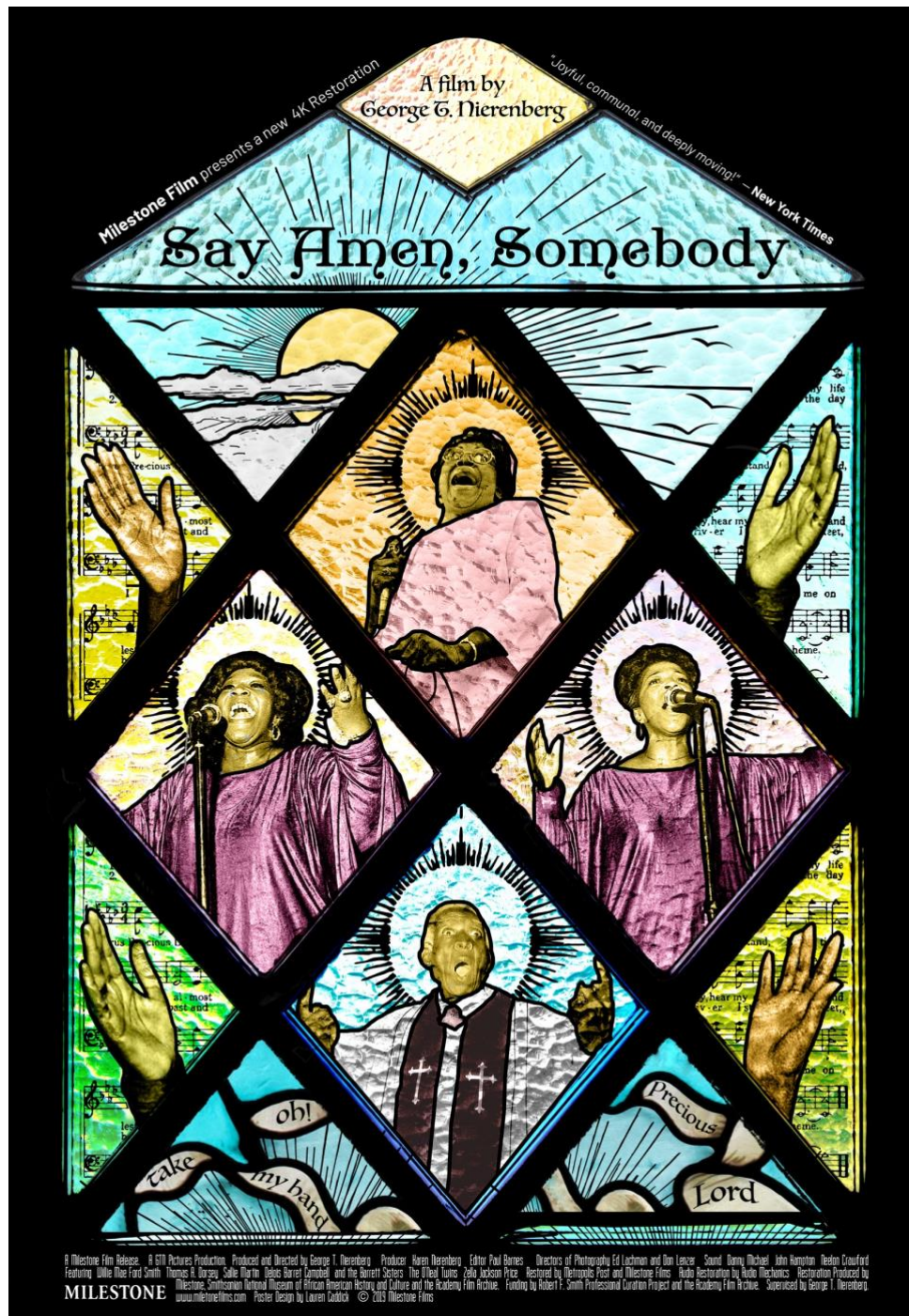


The National Museum of African American Culture and History, the Academy Film Archive and Milestone present



Selected for the 2019 Berlin International Film Festival Forum

US Premieres at the Film Society Of Lincoln Center, June 2019 and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC, Summer 2019

Film to 4K digital restoration by Metropolis Post. Audio Restoration and 5.1 Sound by Audio Mechanics. Restoration Produced by Milestone Film & Video and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and Academy Film Archive, with funding by the Robert F. Smith Fund Professional Curation Project and Academy Film Archive. Restoration supervised by George T. Nierenberg.

Say Amen, Somebody

Credits

Produced and directed by.....George T. Nierenberg
Producer.....Karen Nierenberg
Editor.....Paul Barnes
Directors of Photography.....Ed Lachman, Don Lenzer
Sound.....Danny Michael, John Hampton, Neelon Crawford
Appearing in the film.....Willie Mae Ford Smith
Thomas A. Dorsey
Sallie Martin
Delois Barrett Campbell
Billie Barrett GreenBey
Rodessa Barrett Porter
Edward O'Neal
Edgar O'Neal
Zella Jackson Price
Michael Keith Smith
Billy Smith
Jackie Jackson
Bertha Smith
Rev. Frank W. Campbell
Rev. Melvin Smotherson
Columbus Gregory
Geneva Gentry
Interfaith Choir
Bill White
Johnny E. Roland
Sylvia Wright
Production Managers.....Paul Sparks, Richard M. Gans, Jamie Lubarr
Additional Camera.....Robert Elfstrom, James McCalmont, Kenneth Fink, Stephen Lighthill,
Stefan Czapsky, Francis Kenny
Additional Sound.....Ronald Yoshida, Ray Cymoszinski
Gaffers.....Stefan Czapsky, Murray Van Dyke, Scott Stearns
Grips.....Morris Flam, David Hayball, Pat Waugh, John Burkley, Tom Dischert,
Helmut Luchs
Assistant Editor.....Grace Tankersley
Sound Editor.....Rick Shaine

Assistant Camera.....Mitch Dubinm Tony Cucchiari, Edward Gray, Lucy Hilmer, Jocelyn
Coblentz, Daniel Ducovney

Production CoordinatorLaurie A. Don

Production Assistants.....David Houille, Jeff Hardcastle, Janis A. Rockwell

Senior AdvisorPearl Williams-Jones

Advisors.....Jeff Titon, John Szwed

Research.....Karen Soderquist

Title Design.....Jerry Laufman

Photo Retouching.....Walter Austerer

Photo Copying.....Scope Associates

Remote Recording.....Recording Connection, Reel Sound Recording

Rerecording Mixer.....Rick Dior

Rerecording.....Trans/Audio, Inc.

Sound TransfersTransformation Studios, Post Horn Recordings

Public Address SystemMobile Sound

Film Processing/Printing.....DuArt Film Laboratories, Inc.

OpticalsExceptional Opticals

Negative Cutting.....John Guidone

CodingMagno Match

Musicians Performing in the Film

PianoBertha Smith, Lee Cochran, Charles Pikes

Organ.....Lee G. Scott, James Ward, Gene Cooper

Drums.....Arnold White, Banon Buchanan

Lead GuitarGregory Haynes

Bass GuitarSam Benford

Solo Piano.....Pearl Williams-Jones

Songs

“Take My Hand Precious Lord” by Thomas A. Dorsey

“When I’ve Done My Best” by Thomas A. Dorsey

“If You See My Savior” by Thomas A. Dorsey

“Never Turn Back” by Thomas A. Dorsey

“Singing In My Soul” by Thomas A. Dorsey

“Let’s Go Back to God” by Thomas A. Dorsey

“Highway to Heaven” by Thomas A. Dorsey, Mary Gardener

“Canaan” by A.B. Windom

“He Brought Us” by Charles Pikes

“Jesus Dropped the Charges” by Edward and Edgar O’Neal

“I’m His Child” by Malcolm Speed

“No Ways Tired” by Curtis Burrell

“He Chose Me” by James Cleveland

“What Manner of Man” by Roman Holmes

“The Storm is Passing Over” by C.A. Tindley

“Jesus Loves Me” by William B. Bradbury, Anna Warner

“My Heavenly Father Watches Over Me” by Charles H. Gabriel

“Is Your All On the Altar” by Elisha A. Hoffman
“Just a Closer Walk With Thee” Traditional
“God Shall Wipe All Tears Away” by Antonio Haskell

Special Thanks

Gerard I. Nierenberg, Ry Cooder, Bess Hawes, Anna Caravelli, Mara Mayor, Frank Driggs, John Baker, Dave Chertok, Jeff Hayes, Jay Freund, Sid Ordower, Mayfair Hotel, Dennis Reiff, Mark Brecker, Clayton Hannah, Tony Heilbut, Hyde Park Hilton, Hyatt Regency Houston, Barbara Coffren, John Sosenko, Jeremy Nussbaum, Bob Halfon, Lee Lighting of America, National Convention of Gospel Choirs & Choruses, John Carter, Collective Black Artists, Katherine Dorsey, Rev. Earl Preston, Antioch Baptist Church, Pilgrim Baptist Church, Cornerstone Institutional Baptist Church, Beersheba Baptist Church, Father Lucius Cervantes, St. Louis Area Agency on Aging, KIRL/AM, St. Louis Station Associates, Geneva Clark, Emma Stewart, Gospel Unlimited, Bicey Jenkins, Emmet McWoods, Irene W. Ross, Lively Stone Church of God and Christ

Dedication For Lily

Funding

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Administrating Organization: Folk Traditions, Inc.
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Restoration Credits

Film to 4K digital restoration by Metropolis Post, New York: Jack Rizzo, Ian Bostick (restoration artist), Jason Crump (colorist) and Allen Perkins.

Audio Restoration and 5.1 Sound by Audio Mechanics. Sound Engineer: John Polito.

Restoration Produced by Milestone Film & Video, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Academy Film Archive.

Funding by Robert F. Smith Fund Professional Curation Project and the Academy Film Archive.

Supervised by George Nierenberg and Dennis Doros.

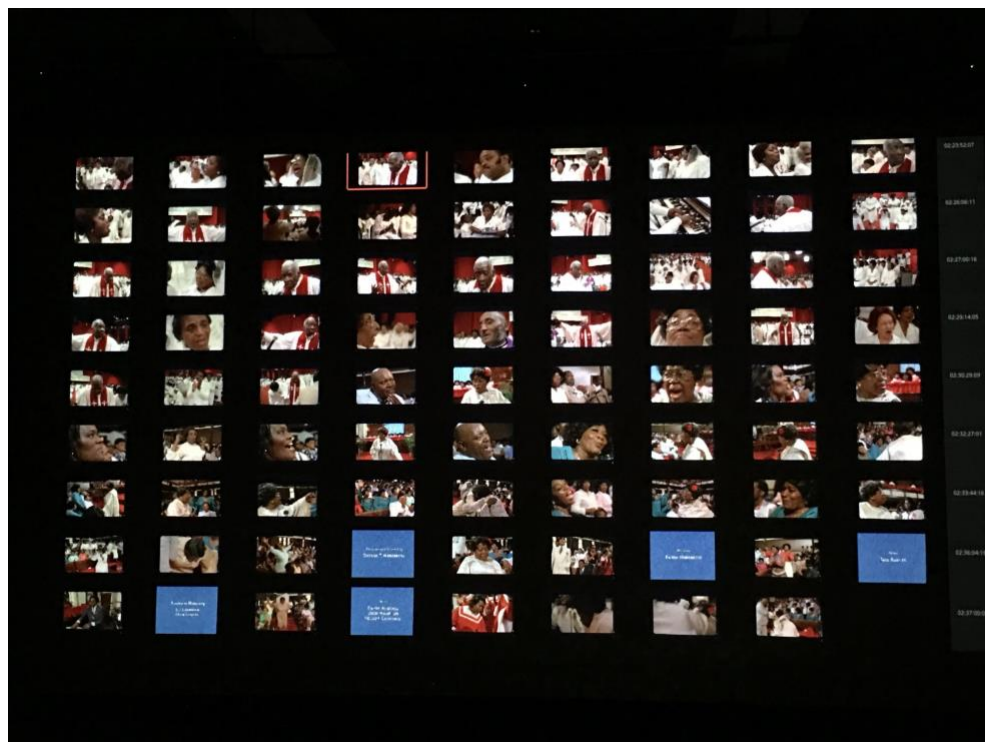
Thank you to:

Association of Moving Image Archivists
Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Dr. Rhea Combs
Ina Archer
Blake McDowell
Jasmyn Castro
Academy Film Archive
Josef Lindner
Tessa Idlewine
Michael Pogorzelski
John Bailey
Schomburg Center Moving Image & Recorded Sound Division
Shola Lynch

Restoration History

The restoration of SAY AMEN, SOMEBODY was created by the original 35mm optical negative off the camera a/b rolls, stored at the Academy Film Archive in Los Angeles. Joe Lindner and Tessa Idlewine

prepared the materials for restoration and they were sent to Metropolis Post in New York. The 4K scan was done at Metropolis Post on a LaserGraphics scanner. The timing sessions for color were done by Jason Crump with the director George Nierenberg and Milestone's Dennis Doros supervising. Throughout the film, there was light flicker in many parts of the film. Mr. Crump manually went through to correct them. Ian Bostick spent many hours in doing the digital cleanup of scratches, dust and dirt to bring the film back to its original state. Because of the music performances exuberant hand gestures, many digital artifacts that were created had to be removed one at a time by Mr. Bostick. Metropolis Post has been involved in many Milestone recent restorations including Nierenberg's ABOUT TAP and NO MAPS ON MY TAPS as well as the 4K restoration of I AM CUBA.



Audio Restoration

Using stereo surrounds and adding LFE (subwoofer) to the music sections to give it a great space and feels more like you're there in the room. The dialog sections are mostly center speaker only, which helps focus on the dialog and enhance the music when it enters in 5.1. There is some minor hum throughout that was fixed. Warming it up a bit in some sections and adding high frequencies in some of the dialog sections for intelligibility. Mostly all subtle changes. There were audible short dropouts from analog tape editing every now and then that I corrected. From 02:19:27:00 - 02:20:06:00 there is onscreen dialog that only plays in the right channel that was fixed.

— John Polito of Audio Mechanics, January 2019

Director's Statement

After I made my film on Black Jazz tap dancing, *No Map on My Taps*, I developed a fascination with the roots of American culture and was looking for an idea for another project. At dinner with Grammy Award-winning musician Ry Cooder one night, he said “you ought to look into Gospel Music. Those ‘cats’ are really neat!”...and *Say Amen, Somebody* was born. I knew little about Gospel music before I began the project, which gave me the freedom to experience this new world without any preconceived notions.



And so in 1981 at the age of 27, I started to go to African American churches throughout New York City, where I had my first experiences with the music, its people and its role in the religion. At the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses I met the two pioneers of Gospel music, Thomas A. Dorsey, the father of Gospel music, and Mother Willie May Ford Smith, considered one of the greatest Gospel singers of all time and the embodiment of the strong ties of music and religion at Gospel's root. They would become central characters in the film, along with

members of the next generation of Gospel singers they were nurturing. They all welcomed me into their world, and our connection was immediate. I spent time with them, their families and their communities in Chicago and St Louis, to know them better and meet those people they influenced. They shared their inmost stories about their lives, hopes and frustrations.

Over the next year I recorded hours of interviews and took hundreds of photographs. It was a way of developing intimacy with these wonderful people while sorting out the possibilities for the film's structure and what I would recreate of their lives on film. My goal was to help an audience feel the same emotions I was feeling — to use my skills as a filmmaker to give voice to the people in the film so that the audience would connect to their stories personally and deeply. I was then able to tell on film a story with the evolving relationships and themes one might expect from a narrative film.

The film shares the story of evangelical Gospel music as told through its pioneers and of their struggles to have their music sung in churches. It shares their utter commitment to Gospel music and the toll this took on them and their families.

If my films are not speaking on at least three different levels at the same time they're not reaching deeply into their subject matter. They are layered and nuanced, so that they cover more than just their apparent topic. *Say Amen, Somebody* dug deep into themes of women's struggles within patriarchy, the ties of family, and the state of contemporary Gospel. Similarly, my film *That Rhythm...Those Blues* is noted for its treatment of the early days of the civil rights movement as experienced in the music industry. And *No Maps on My Taps* tells the story of tap dance not only as an art form but also as an expression of black heritage and culture. All of my subjects honored and humbled me by sharing so intimately and so fully. They blessed me with the gift of sharing their passions and their callings.

— George T. Nierenberg, January 8, 2018

Production Team Biographies

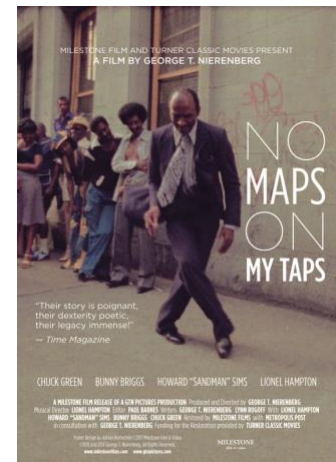
GEORGE NIERENBERG is an acclaimed Producer/Director whose career has spanned the world of independent cinema to network, cable and international television. His fascination with the roots of African American culture has led to a series of remarkable films.



Nierenberg (left, with Thomas A. Dorsey) began his career co-directing a documentary with Gary Wand in 1975 titled *The Hollow*. Early in the 19th Century two families, the Allens and Kathans, settled in the Southern Adirondack Mountains of New York State. In the 1900s, the Sacandaga Valley below rapidly grew up with farms, factories and mills. The economic disasters of the 1930s shut down the factories and mills. In 1932 the Sacandaga River was dammed, flooding the fertile valley below the Hollow. Forced from their homes, the valley residents sought

employment elsewhere, but the Allens and Kathans chose to remain up in the mountains. By 1960's the their descendants had isolated themselves in a remote hollow high in the mountains. Due to isolation, the Allens and the Kathans had intermarried so all the residents in the Hollow were related. Because of their isolation, misunderstandings developed between them and the outside world.

Nierenberg quickly rose to fame with his sophomore film, *No Maps on My Taps*. Now in the later stages of life and feeling that their work and their art form was being forgotten, great tap dancers Howard "Sandman" Sims, Chuck Green and Bunny Briggs found newfound fame with the film's premiere. They and the film gained wide acclaim around the world with a theatrical release featuring live performances by these now-legendary dancers. *No Maps on My Taps* aired on PBS, cable and international television and was awarded an Emmy. Because he thought there was more to say on the creative inspiration behind tap dancing, Nierenberg went on to direct the film *About Tap*, featuring some of the same performers, along with Gregory Hines. Milestone restored and re-released both films to acclaim in 2017.



The accolades for Nierenberg increased dramatically with his award-winning film, *Say Amen, Somebody* (originally released by MGM, now by Milestone) which explores the lives and work of the pioneers of Gospel music. Before its theatrical release, *Say Amen, Somebody* was celebrated at major film festivals including Cannes, Telluride, New York, Toronto and London. It was named "One of the Ten Best Films Of The Year" by *People Magazine*, *Siskel and Ebert*, and *Rolling Stone*, among many others.

In *Say Amen, Somebody*, Nierenberg presents the stories and performances in a way that is immersive and as joyous as the music itself. He interweaves footage of some of the greatest Gospel singers in history — notably in a staged appreciation for Gospel pioneer Willie Mae Ford Smith — with intimate scenes of the performers’ personal lives.



On *No Maps on my Taps*, Nierenberg (seen here with the stars of the film) developed a streamlined, dramatic focus to filmmaking that was influenced by the great documentarians Robert Flaherty and Lionel Rogosin. Nierenberg first spent months getting to know the performers, becoming intimate with their stories, their dreams, their hopes and their frustrations. He got to know their friends and family. This depth of experience

and familiarity allowed him to encourage the performers to enact situations and information he had already seen.

His goal was to make as concentrated a story as possible, so the documentary would contain the kind of evolving relationships and themes one might expect from a narrative film. For example, Nierenberg already knew of the tensions between Delois Barrett Campbell and her husband about her upcoming tour of Europe. Their on-screen discussion, though prompted by the director, was both real and very intense. Nierenberg cuts from that inconclusive argument, to the Barrett Sisters performance of *He Brought Us* with the first line, “The road might not be easy,” — creating an emotional centerpiece to the film.

But the greatest strength of *Say Amen, Somebody* are the film’s incredible performances. Captured in 24-track sound and filmed in an up-close-and-personal shooting style they are an ecstasy-inducing experience. In the much-loved original release, the limitations of the analog 35mm mono optical track was never noticed by the adoring audiences. However, the new digital restoration features the original stereo track that was created from the 24-track mag tracks as well as a new 5.1 digital restoration. Both the stereo and 5.1 tracks have been restored in Los Angeles by Audio Mechanics’ founder John Polito.

Nierenberg went on to receive an Emmy nomination for directing *That Rhythm...Those Blues*, featuring pioneer blues performers Ruth Brown and Charles Brown. The film tells the story of the early days of rhythm and blues and the ways that the genre helped break down racial segregation barriers at a time when Jim Crow laws were the norm in the United States.

Working in television, Nierenberg has produced, directed and developed projects for MGM, PBS, CBS, NBC, ABC, AMC, Bravo, Nickelodeon, Cinemax, Sony BMG and Reader’s Digest, including: *Neon Lights*, for National Geographic’s *Explorer* and a film on Voodoo in Haiti for ABC’s *Day One*. Nierenberg was enlisted as a producer to launch *Saturday Night with Connie Chung* on CBS. He also served as a consultant, overseeing the non-fiction programming at Lifetime Television and presently serves as a

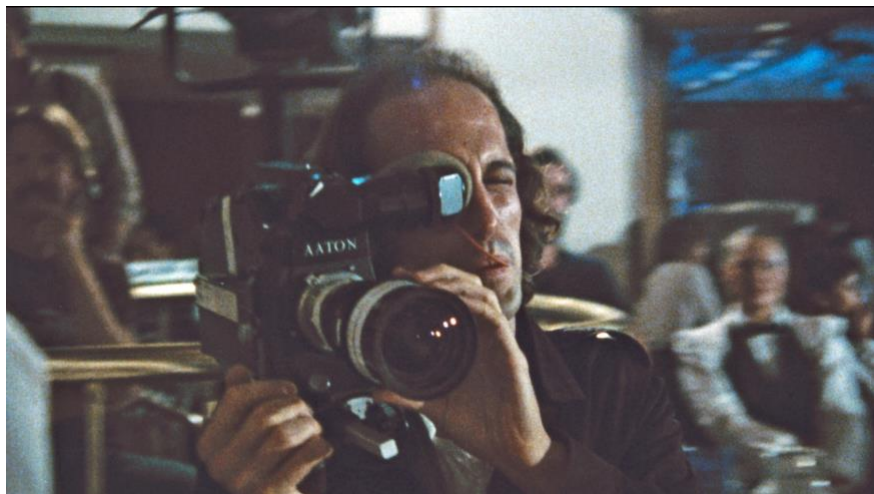
consultant to the Associated Press, helping to oversee the video production done by their still photographers.

For VH1's *Hard Rock Live*, he directed portraits of popular musical artists such as Chicago, Robert Palmer, Cyndi Lauper, The Blues Travelers, Sinéad O'Connor, and Boz Scaggs. For American Movie Classics he created *Gotta Dance!*, a two-part series on ballroom dancing. He has also directed for Walt Disney and Bravo, *Head of the Class: The Lion King*.

Nierenberg's music interests led him to work with Sony BMG, for which he completed two sound projects using the innovative DualDisc technology: Bill Withers' *Just As I Am* and Neil Diamond's *The Jazz Singer*.

All Nierenberg's films cover more than just their apparent subject matter. *That Rhythm...* is noted for its treatment of the early days of the civil rights movement, as experienced in the music industry. *Say Amen, Somebody* dug deep into themes of women's struggles within patriarchy, the ties of family, and the state of contemporary Gospel. Nierenberg also succeeded in igniting an interest in the subject of his films around the world. Indeed, just as *No Maps on my Taps* helped rejuvenate interest in tap dancing, *Say Amen, Somebody* provided invaluable support to the careers of many of its performers.

EDWARD LACHMAN is one of his generation's most gifted and versatile cinematographers, acclaimed for his work in a number of diverse genres and a recipient of numerous awards.



Born in 1948 in Morristown, New Jersey, Lachman (seen here shooting *Ornette: Made in America*) received a Bachelor of Arts from Harvard University in 1965 and then studied painting at Ohio University. Lachman has been a familiar figure in the modern independent film movement since the early 1970s. His cinematography debut in 1974 was *The Lords of Flatbush*, a low-budget film that starred

Sylvester Stallone, Henry Winkler and Perry King. In 1980, he worked on *Lightning Over Water*, codirected by Wim Wenders and Nicholas Ray documenting Ray's penultimate days trying to make a film before succumbing to cancer. Lachman collaborated with a number of influential independent directors through the late 1970s and 1980s, including as Shirley Clarke (*Ornette: Made in America*, restored by Milestone), Werner Herzog (*La Soufrière*), Maroun Bagdadi (*Les petites guerres*), Wenders (*Tokyo-ga*) and David Byrne (*True Stories*).

Say Amen, Somebody was one of his two collaborations with Nierenberg — Lachman worked as a cameraman on the interview crew of *About Tap*. For *Say Amen* he shared DP credit with Don Lenzer, although the two had very different styles. Unlike the more kinetic Lenzer, Lachman carefully placed his camera in a place where he knew he would get optimal coverage. Nierenberg loves to talk about

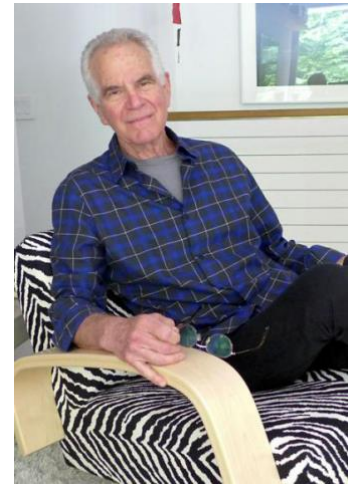
how essential he was to the film. Lachman, wearing a headset, was able to follow the interior details of the story that Nierenberg needed. The director talks about one scene in particular — the shot of Thomas Dorsey and Sallie Martin listening to a Victrola. It was a last-minute addition when a scene with the Barrett Sisters singing during a prison baptism fell through. Nierenberg praises how carefully Lachman was able to follow the couple’s relationship visually through the scene, a product of his understanding exactly what was happening in the scene.

After *Say Amen, Somebody*, Lachman continued to direct the cinematography in a number of artistically and financially fruitful ventures, starting with Susan Seidelman’s *Desperately Seeking Susan* in 1985. The controversial 1987 picture *Less Than Zero*, with a breakout performance by a 22-year-old Robert Downey Jr., was recut and watered down by the studio, much to the anger of both cinematographer Lachman and the author of the source material, Bret Easton Ellis. Not afraid of controversy, Lachman, along with Larry Clark, co-directed 2002’s *Ken Park*, a graphic look at teenage sexuality and relationships. International bans on the film’s content prevented it from reaching a large audience.



In 1994, Lachman was invited to join the American Society of Cinematographers, where he has been a distinguished member. In the years since, Lachman has achieved his greatest fame, working with Todd Solondz on *Life During Wartime* and *Weiner Dog*, Steven Soderbergh on *Eric Brockovich*, Sofia Coppola on *The Virgin Suicides*, and Robert Altman on the director’s last film, *A Prairie Home Companion*. Lachman is best known these days for his collaborations with director Todd Haynes, which began with the Bob Dylan biopic *I’m Not There*. Lachman has said that he directly references *Say Amen, Somebody* during the scenes of in which Dylan turned to religious music. Lachman was responsible for the brilliant cinematography on the Haynes’s miniseries *Mildred Pierce*, and the feature films *Far From Heaven* and *Carol* — the latter two receiving Oscar nominations for Best Cinematography. Lachman was given a Lifetime Achievement award in 2017 by the American Society of Cinematographers.

DON LENZER was born and raised in Southern California before he left at the age of 16 to attend Yale, where he majored in political science and spent a junior year abroad in France. He stated in a 2018 East Hampton Star article: *“I used to sometimes go the Cinémathèque Française in Paris two or three times a day. My French friends had a different attitude toward movies than I and my American friends had. I loved movies, but the French looked at them as works of art. While in Paris, I was talking with a friend from Yale and said for the first time that I thought I wanted to be a film director.”*



Although he has worked in documentary and fiction films, he prefers working on the nonfiction film: *“I love feature films, but I didn’t enjoy working on them that much. I tell people I love working on documentaries, and it’s most rewarding when it turns out to be a work that moves other people. But always for me it’s a way of learning about life. I do feel like I appropriate the world.”*

After graduating from Yale, he enrolled in the MFA program at UCLA, where he was influenced by his professor Ed Brokaw, who had worked with the Maysles, Richard Leacock and D.A. Pennebaker in New York. But Lenzer’s studies were interrupted in 1963 when he was drafted. After his stint, he ended up working for television stations in Portland and Seattle before moving to New York. He directed his first film *Fathers and Sons* for the Public Broadcast Lab in 1965 and that started his fifty-year career in cinema. Early in his career he worked on the concert documentary epic *Woodstock* and collaborated with Martin Scorsese on the 1970 documentary *Street Scenes*. Of Lenzer’s work on that film, Scorsese said *“the best documents were brought in by Don Lenzer ... I could have used his shots as they were.”*

In 1970, he and Lee Lockwood created *The Holy Outlaw*, filming Father Daniel Berrigan after his conviction and while the legendary activist was living in hiding. In 1973 he made a film entitled *A Wonderful Construction* documenting the building of the World Trade Center. He went on to work both in TV and documentary, with directors Barbara Kopple (*With Liberty and Justice for All*), the Maysles brothers, and others. He won Emmys for his work shooting *ER* as well as co-directing *Itzhak Perlman: In The Fiddler’s House* for PBS in 1995. Lenzer has been the cinematographer for five Academy Award-winning documentaries including *He Makes me Feel Like Dancing*, *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision* and *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*.

Cinematographer Tom Hurwitz ranks Lenzer with the likes of film greats James Wong Howe and Gregg Tolland and credits him (and *Say Amen*, *Somebody* cameraman Robert Elfstrom) for helping teach him the craft.

Lenzer states in that 2018 interview: *“If I’m working as a director of photography for someone else ... it’s really great for me to try to get into the head of the director as much as possible, to try to find out what they’re trying to do. Even if it isn’t exactly how I understand it, I have to appropriate it in some way and make it my story too, without in any way taking away from them.”*

Nierenberg raves about Lenzer’s “fabulous” work on *Say Amen*, *Somebody*, remembering that the cameraman often needed to wear kneepads on set because he was moving around so much during scenes.

PAUL BARNES once stated his real love was fiction films, deciding to get into the field after seeing *North by Northwest*. But he developed his taste for nonfiction at New York University where he had such important mentors as George Stoney, Len Lye, Carl Lerner, and Larry Silk. He started out as an apprentice and later assistant with George Stoney Associates, working on sponsored documentaries. He spent years paying dues on films he considered “truly junk.”



At the 1976 Flaherty Film Seminar, he met the young director George Nierenberg. Nierenberg hired him for *No Maps on My Taps* and it became the editor’s breakthrough film. Barnes has gone on to an extremely distinguished career, editing *The Weavers: Wasn’t that a Time?*, *Say Amen, Somebody*, *The Thin Blue Line* and, since 1984, all of Ken Burns’ documentaries, including *The Civil War*, *Jazz*, *Baseball* and most recently, *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History*. He has also

produced or coproduced some of Burns’ films for Florentine Films. He most recently worked on the series *Vietnam* with Burns. Barnes was born in Everett, Massachusetts, in February 1951 and presently resides in Alstead, New Hampshire. In *First Cut: Conversations with Film Editors*, Barnes talked about his collaboration with the performers: “In *Say Amen, Somebody*, the Barrett Sisters came to the cutting room a few times. They’d spot a few bad music cuts and help us fix them up. If I cut a piece of music out and made an awkward bridge, they could tell me if it was musically off. Since I don’t know music technically, I go by feel and so I worked to fix it up for them. Dolores kept asking me to make her arms look thinner! I said, ‘There’s a limit to the editing, Delores!’”

ANTHONY HEILBUT has no formal role in the filming of *Say Amen, Somebody*, however he played a major part off screen. A Harvard Ph.D. in English literature, Heilbut wrote *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (1971) which served as a guide for Nierenberg’s research for the film. James Baldwin said of *The Gospel Sound*, “It is a very beautiful book, with love and precision, no pity – a little like a Gospel song... I didn’t know that anybody knew that much about it, or cared that much, or could be so tough and lucid.”

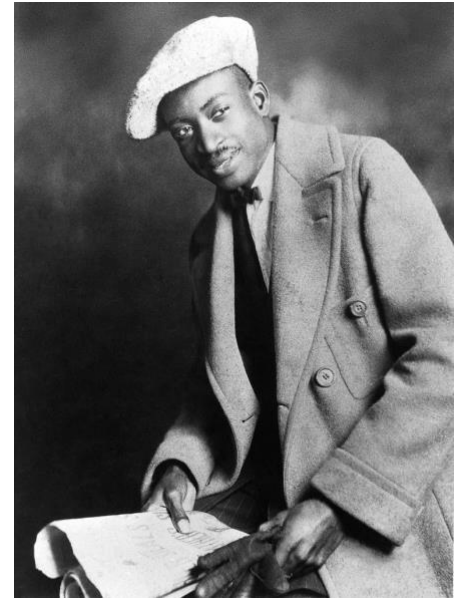
When *Say Amen, Somebody* first came out on DVD, Heilbut, wrote the liner notes for the release. A record producer as well as a writer, Heilbut produced an anthology of recordings of Dorsey’s “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” (*Take My Hand Precious Lord: The Beloved Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey*) which was selected for the Library of Congress’ National Registry for recordings in 2003. His most recent book, a collection of essays called *The Fan Who Knew Too Much*, in part covers the role of queer Gospel singers.

Performer Biographies

Thomas A. Dorsey is considered the creator of Gospel music, a musical revolutionary on an international scale. His story provides a kaleidoscopic look at issues of race and black cultural identity in the early and mid 20th century.

Dorsey was born July 1, 1899 and grew up in Villa Rica, Georgia before he and his family moved to Atlanta in 1908. His father was a sharecropper and preacher, and his mother played organ and sang in the church. After they moved to Atlanta, to make money for his family, the young Dorsey began to sell concessions at a vaudeville theater, where he learned about popular music. He left school at 14 and performed locally as a piano player.

Dorsey left Atlanta to live with family in Chicago in 1916, where he played piano, worked in a steel mill, and took lessons in music composition. Although he wrote some religious music, Dorsey began to write blues music because he knew that was more lucrative. Soon he had a successful working relationship with Ma Rainey, as her pianist. Around this time, married his beloved wife Nettie.



In the mid 1920s, Dorsey suffered from mental illness, which pushed him closer to sacred music. Still needing to make money, he released the successful and influential blues song “It’s Tight Like That” which he co-wrote with Hudson Whitaker.

Although now revered as a founder of Gospel music, Dorsey’s songs originally shocked people. His new style of sacred music was strongly influenced by the blues and was not accepted for many years. This complicated relationship is described by Davarian L. Baldwin in *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*:

His blues oriented syncopated rhythms and driving percussion supported blues trills and common speak to help Dorsey establish distinction within the Protestant sacred music world ... When old-line Protestant ministers heard this music and saw the way parishioners responded, all they thought was ‘sin music.’

Robert M. Marovich’s, *A City Called Heaven* cites a pair of breakthrough moments for Dorsey’s music. The first was at the 1930 National Baptist Convention, when Willie Mae Ford Smith’s performance of his song “If You See My Savior” brought Dorsey sheet music sales and national attention. The second was the creation of the song “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” which was written out of his grief and despair when his wife and child died in childbirth, which he recounts in detail in *Say Amen, Somebody*. Marovich argues that the song was at once personal and universal in its sadness, and quickly spread throughout the country.

Anthony Heilbut referred to the song as “the most popular of all Gospel songs.” A range of artists have covered it from Mahalia Jackson to Elvis Presley. Martin Luther King Jr.’s last known words, as he leaned over the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis just after he was shot, were to saxophonist Ben Branch: “Ben, be sure you play my favorite song tonight, ‘Precious Lord.’ Play it real pretty.” Mahalia Jackson sang it at King’s funeral days later. In 1972, Aretha Franklin sang “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” at Mahalia Jackson’s funeral. The next year Leontyne Price sang it at the state funeral of President Lyndon B. Johnson. *Say Amen, Somebody* is the definitive portrait of Dorsey’s incredible life and his performance of the song serves as one of the film’s emotional climaxes.

Dorsey worked with Gospel music both as accompanist for Ebenezer Baptist Church’s choir and as the choir director at Pilgrim Baptist Church, where he had been a member since 1932. As Jerma Jackson explains in *Singing in my Soul*, Dorsey also founded a “citywide chorus” to perform Gospel, which snowballed first into a local union of Gospel choruses and finally into the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses (NCGCC) in 1933. It is this convention that provides the setting for *Say Amen, Somebody*’s emotional concluding performance, almost 50 years after the NCGCC’s establishment. It was through the NCGCC and the support of Sallie Martin, that Gospel choirs and Gospel sheet music were spread nationally.



Jackson claims that not only did the NCGCC spread Gospel, it also established the art as part of black heritage. She describes the academic work done by NCGCC member Ruth Smith and the Illinois Writers’ Project, which reframed Gospel music with this emphasis on it being a part of a distinctly African American tradition. Framing Gospel as a “symbol for expressive worship,” Jackson writes “Once considered by many Baptist church leaders as a sign of primitive, backward behavior, expressive worship gradually came to be seen as a vital component of black culture and history.”

Jackson also speaks to the commercial side of Gospel, which was reliant on “independent ventures” rather than a larger corporate schema, thus allowing work for many African Americans, and especially African American women, within it.

Dorsey continued to have great success in songwriting in the 1930s and 1940s. But it was not until the early 1950s, when Hill and Range Songs began to publish his music, that he received his first royalties. Dorsey’s music had appeal to both white and black audiences. Heilbut wrote, “many a segregated service would end with tear-filled renditions of Dorsey’s songs.” Dorsey was pro-integration. “Until

everyone is free, no one is free," he told *Ebony* in 1962, adding that musicians were "first to integrate in America!"

As of a 1970 interview with *The LA Sentinel*, Dorsey had remarried and was still working as Pilgrim Baptist Church's choir director and assistant pastor. In *Say Amen, Somebody's* liner notes, Heilbut speaks to the dedication of Dorsey's wife. While Dorsey was being filmed for *Say Amen, Somebody*, his health was deteriorating. In a recent conversation, Nierenberg claims that by the time they shot the film he could no longer play the blues. He also described Dorsey as in the grip of Alzheimer's disease, saying that he knew getting the songwriter to retell the story of writing "Precious Lord" would be a struggle. A 1986 article on Sallie Martin reported that even at that very late point in his life, he was still attending National Convention of Gospel Choirs meetings. Seven years later, Dorsey, who played a monumental role in the creation and establishment of Gospel music for more than six decades, passed away.



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Willie Mae Ford Smith was born on June 23, 1904 in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, to Clarence Ford and Marry Williams. She was the seventh of 14 children. In 1917 her family moved to St. Louis, and in the eighth grade Willie Mae dropped out to work at her mother's restaurant. Like the Barrett Sisters, Ford's career can at least be partially credited to her deacon father, a lover of music, who pushed his daughters to sing as a quartet.



The eventually group split up, but Willie Mae continued to sing. Willie Mae married James Peter Smith and had two children with him, Willie James and Jacquelyn. The children always remained highly supportive of Willie Mae later in her life.

Smith chose the path of Gospel after seeing Madame Artelia Hutchins perform. Smith said "When I got back to St. Louis [from seeing Artelia Hutchins], my husband thought I'd lost my mind, and I had. I lost it to Jesus, and I was haven't found it yet."

In the decades following, "Mother Smith" became ordained as a minister, breaking gendered conventions of who could and who could not preach. Indeed, she left her local St. Louis church, at one point, because of its lack of acceptance of female ministers.

Over her life, Smith worked closely with Thomas A. Dorsey. It was her rendition of Dorsey's "If You See My Savior" at the 1930 National Baptist Convention that won his music more mainstream acceptance. Later, she served as head of the Soloists Bureau at NCGCC, where she successfully taught many Gospel singers.

In the 1940s, Mother Smith toured throughout the midwest and east. In *The Gospel Sound*, Heilbut writes that many successful careers began when young performers heard Smith performance. In a 1986 interview, Zella Jackson Price said that her mother had travelled with Smith and she herself had been inspired by inspired the older singer. Edward O'Neal was quoted as saying, "She was the greatest. Mahalia Jackson ran away from her." Of Smith's performance style at the time, Heilbut said "She was saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Ghost, an ordained Evangelist, and she let it show."

Following her husband's death and the loss of support from her accompanist daughter Bertha, Smith's career faltered. But by the end of the 1950s, she had recovered and was working — albeit with less critical and popular attention. Although her strength as a Gospel singer in her prime was unparalleled, she did not have the success of her contemporaries. As Heilbut explains it, this was the result of her interest in spreading her message of faith, rather than making money.

In a 1974 profile the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that Mother Smith was living in a "housing project for older adults" and earning \$40 a week as a "social worker's aide." However, as she told Heilbut in *The Gospel Sound*, "That's all right, I'm singing for Jesus." The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* profile opened with a description of a badge of hers that read "PRAISE THE LORD" saying that the phrase

“summed up a way of life.” Major commercial success may not have followed Smith into old age, but a faith in God, and a willingness to perform Gospel in God’s name did.

A couple of truly exceptional things happened for Smith in the 1980s. The first was the release of *Say Amen, Somebody* in 1982. Nierenberg had become interested in making her the focus of his documentary after seeing her perform at the 1980 NCGCC in New York and meeting her family. He was also interested in her relationship with religion and success. “Mother Smith was all about evangelizing,” he said on the film’s DVD commentary, “but she didn’t get the recognition because she was evangelizing rather than making records.”

Zella Jackson Price said in 1986, “The movie has meant so much to her in her golden years, made her accepted and loved by another generation ... If it were not for this film and the motivation it provided, her health problems would have taken over.” Eight years later, right after she died, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that the film had made her a “national star” in a way she had not been for decades.

In 1988, Mother Smith received the National Endowment of the Arts’ National Heritage Fellowship. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*’s headline was ‘*Mother Smith’: A Certified National Treasure*’, writing that she had long been a national treasure, but it was only now that she was receiving credit for it.

Following the release of *Say Amen, Somebody*, Smith’s health seriously diminished, although she still sang up to the time of her death. She passed away in 1994, with her two children following closely behind.



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Delois Barrett Campbell, Billie GreenBey Barrett and Rodessa Porter embody the ability to persevere despite pressures of family, finances, infirmity, and age. Delois managed to balance rehearsing with the Roberta Martin Singers while attending high school and later combined international travel with raising a family. Performing and preaching Gospel into their 80s, these three women *persevered*.

Delores (Delois) Barrett Campbell was born on March 12, 1926. Her sisters, Billie GreenBey and Rodessa Porter, who together made up The Barrett Sisters, were born three and five years later. Of the ten Barrett children, four died of tuberculosis. Their parents, Lonnie and Susie Barrett were originally from Mississippi, but moved to Englewood in Chicago's South Side, where their children were raised.

Both parents were intimately involved in the music of their church, which helped guide the three sisters' interests. When Rodessa told their father that she wanted to sing the blues like Etta James, he told her no, that she would sing Gospel. However strict he may have been, Rodessa also credits their father for making sure the sisters got along as children, which helped foster a close working relationship later. Lonnie was also a proud union man who built the house where Delois and her husband Frank would later live.

As children the sisters sang at the Morning Star Baptist Church. As teenagers, they performed with the Dorsey Convention, which they were able to join through their aunt who was already a member. In 1941, the first incarnation of the singing group was The Barrett and Hudson Singers, with Delois and Billie singing with their cousin, and (upstairs neighbor) Johnnie Mae Hudson. Rodessa played the piano with the group.

In high school Delois Barrett also sang in the choir under Norsalus McKissick, who was a member of the Roberta Martin Singers and through him was able to perform with the group. Delois worked with the Roberta Martin Singers through high school and after graduation, forgoing a voice scholarship, she toured with them. Her father would have prevented her from going, but charmed by Roberta Martin, he allowed Delois to tour so long as she stuck together with Martin. The Roberta Martin Singers had only recently become gender-integrated and Delois became one of the first women to join.

Around 1950, Johnnie Mae Hudson died and Rodessa, now 18, took his place in the group. Now officially The Barrett Sisters, the three started performing on a smaller scale, working over summers. Billie and Rodessa were ultimately happy for Delois when she left and toured with the Roberta Martin Singers, although it broke their group up for the time being. Following her marriage to Frank Campbell in the early 1950s, Delois stayed in Chicago and developed her talents as a soloist.

Rodessa began playing piano at a local church at 17. She married in 1950, and at her husband's urging she left the church and they moved to Gary, Indiana. She worked for a long time outside of Chicago, including as choir director at the Galilee Baptist Church in Gary, before finally returning to Chicago in 1963, where she served as the choir director at Liberty Baptist Church.

Billie had more formal musical education, going to an academy to study voice at Roberta Martin's recommendation. There she gained a grasp on how to work within a larger musical group. From a young age the three sisters found ways to mature and expand their singing through different paths, even after marriage.

After they made their first record, "Jesus Loves Me" in the 1960s, the sisters began to tour the East Coast. At that point all three sisters were married, and their spouses were supportive of their tour. The Barrett Sisters released a second album, *I'll Fly Away*. A *Chicago Defender* article from 1975 wrote about the high-profile work they were doing, noting that, "whatever their national fame, they are integral part of the religious, community and cultural life of Chicago." In this article, the sisters emphasized the religiousness of their work saying, "We believe it is our mission to use our God-given talent to sing to His glory, to sing praises to His name."

Time magazine reported that Delois performed at the funerals of Mahalia Jackson and Sam Cooke. Following the big push their careers were given by *Say Amen*, *Somebody*, the Barrett Sisters traveled internationally many times, even recording in Europe. In 1982, due to the success of the film, they appeared on several television programs, including *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson and *Oprah*.

The Barrett sisters faced the same problem innumerable other recording artists faced — they earned very little money from royalties. Their income was made chiefly through their performances. Indeed, as of a 2016 interview they were still trying to get the money owed to them. Heilbut wrote in *The Gospel Sound* that "The Barrett Sisters typify the struggles of all Gospel groups. Talent notwithstanding, their commercial success is slight." Adding that, at least in 1971, all three worked fairly mundane "other jobs" including as a secretary and at a bank. In a 2001 interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, the Barretts reflected on how the joy they took in singing ended up making business play a smaller role, a choice they regretted in hindsight. Billie said "we were fortunate that we had husbands and families to help support us, so we didn't worry about it."



Delois also faced domestic problems. In 2001 she spoke about the jealousy she felt from her minister husband Frank Campbell “because I could make more money than he could make. I could make in one hour what he would make in a whole week.” This was a struggle documented in *Say Amen, Somebody*.

A *Chicago Tribune* article on the Barrett Sisters in 2008 reported that they were still performing, citing an upcoming birthday celebration for Delois and a performance months earlier at Chicago’s Woodson Library. However, Rodessa is quoted as saying “We just can’t travel like we used to, because of Delois’ condition.” Following a long career, on August 2, 2011, Delois Barrett died of a pulmonary embolism.

A concert preceded her funeral, which included a performance by Jennifer Hudson, a mentee and friend. The *Chicago Defender* quoted President Barack Obama, “For decades, Delois performed songs that fed our spirits, brought us hope, and helped carry us forward in times of both despair and triumph. Throughout her life, she remained dedicated to her sisters, her family and the Chicago community, as well as to the Gospel music that served as source of inspiration.”

Shortly after her death, in 2013, a documentary on the Barrett Sisters was released entitled *The Sweet Sisters of Zion: Delois Barrett Campbell & The Barrett Sisters*. The director, Regina Rene, had first learned about the Barretts through *Say Amen, Somebody*. The release of such a film had been a major wish of the Barretts, and Delois was able to see a cut of the film before she passed¹

Rodessa and Billie are still alive. In a 2012 interview, Rodessa spoke about the difficulty she still faces in her life, as well as the importance of her religion. She said, “Now that I’ve gotten older, I’ve had some ailments that’s kind of taken away a lot of the feeling – I want to do, but I just don’t have the energy anymore. You know I pray to god and thank him every morning that I am still able to get up!” In 2016 Rodessa talked about how her faith helped her through her recent cancer treatment. In the same interview, Billy thanked God for her own health and spoke about continuing to perform every first Sunday at Lillydale Church, saying, “as long as I have a voice, I’m going to sing.”

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Edgar and Edward O'Neal, known professionally as The O'Neal Twins, were born August 17, 1937. They began performing together at a very young age, with Edgar playing the piano and Edward singing. The O'Neal family was Pentecostal, however they performed at a variety of different local churches. In the early phase of their career they received support from Willie Mae Ford Smith and P.C. Smith. It was Smith who helped the duo develop harmony in their music:



In the 1960s, they became better known, drawing larger audiences and receiving support from major performers like Aretha Franklin and The Staples Singers. It was at this time that the O'Neals began recording, with "Everyday With Jesus" in 1964. They worked in the Dorsey Convention before going on to perform with Reverend James Cleveland. It was under Cleveland that the twins pushed themselves to sing Gospel professionally. The O'Neals performed Cleveland's "He Chose Me," in *Say Amen, Somebody*. Because of their growing success, Edgar and Edward quit their jobs selling

insurance and working for the Bi-State bus system respectively, and began a lengthy and fruitful career in music.

As a duo, Edward and Edgar went on to perform at Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden, and the White House. Their album "He Chose Me" was nominated for a Grammy in 1980. During the 1970s they played a role in starting the Inter-Faith Choir Assembled of St. Louis Musicians, who were featured with The O'Neals, in *Say Amen, Somebody*: In 1986, reflecting on the many years they had spent singing Gospel professionally, they modestly claimed, "We're eating regularly."

On December 10, 1990 Edward O'Neal died of a heart attack at 53, leaving behind a wife, child and two brothers. In 1991 Edgar about continuing to perform as "the O'Neal Twin" — although he also liked "The O'Neal Experience" — and was seeking other performers who sounded like his brother: In 2004, the duo was inducted into the Gospel Hall of Fame. In 2008, Edgar O'Neal died at age 70, leaving a wife, daughter, and brother:

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Zella Jackson Price, with Billie GreenBey Barrett and Rodessa Porter, is a surviving member of *Say Amen, Somebody's* main cast. Like Sallie Martin, Price has had a foot in many different areas of the entertainment world. She has worked in performance, recording, production and radio.



Price was born in St. Louis to Zelman Robinson and Alberta Waterford Robinson. Although they divorced when she was ten, she remained close to both her parents. Price lived with her mother, grandmother and members of her extended family. Alberta was a singer who worked with Willie Mae Ford Smith, inspiring her daughter to become a musician. Price speaks warmly of the strong women of her youth.

Price told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1986: “We lived in a four-family flat, and they called us all Waterfords, first cousins, brothers, sisters, it didn’t matter. We’ve scattered and we have family reunions all over the country, and we’re still Waterfords.” She explained that when she was very young she spent a lot of time singing with her family and sang with them in the choir at church. She started recording in the early 1970s, and she claims it was the recording of her first album that resulted in her being in *Say Amen, Somebody*.

Price’s career in Gospel grew and she performed at the Superdome and the Smithsonian with celebrities like Shirley Caesar and Al Green. Locally, she worked as “director of religious entertainment” at St. Louis’s Fox Theater. As part of a set number of Gospel musicals she produced there, she put on a production called “Say Amen Again” in 1986, which featured a small reunion of the St. Louis Gospel singers from the film including the O’Neals and Willie Mae Ford Smith. She also hosted a popular radio show on KIRL.

Price was appointed the Whitney Museum’s “ambassador of goodwill” in 1991 and she sang in other countries and had her music interpreted. She also performed at the Whitney as part of the “8 in 7: New Ventures in American Music.” She spoke very warmly of her time performing in New York City: “They treated me like I was Patti Labelle or somebody... My impression of New York changed after I arrived there – they hardly let my feet hit the ground because they constantly pampered me.”

Price worked as a recording artist starting around 1974 with the record “I Say a Little Prayer,” claiming in 1986 that it was still her favorite song.

Her appearance in *Say Amen, Somebody* in 1982 was referred to in a 2007 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article as “her best exposure nationally.”

According to her, Price’s mentor Mother Smith had demanded that Price be in the documentary and as a result, her performance of “I’m His Child” was filmed. However, in order to introduce the scene,

Nierenberg needed to add the conversation between Price and Mother Smith. Because of Nierenberg's careful structuring, it became one of the film's most important scenes.

Price is quoted as saying "all the women in the movie, including myself, had trouble traveling. Our husbands wanted us to be home." However, as she told the *Post-Dispatch* in 1986, "Yes, some people did tell my husband, Harvey, 'if you don't let Zella travel, she's gonna throw you down an elevator shaft'"

Price's performance of the song "I'm His Child" was used (via lip synch) in a scene in the HBO adaptation of *Angels in America*.

When discussing a CD she was working on in 2007, Price spoke about her interest in straddling the line between traditional and modern Gospel. Price is also the aunt of Montina Cooper, who has performed on many of Beyonce's tours. Cooper also performed with musicians Mary J. Blige, Kelly Rowland and Jamie Foxx.



Price was recently in the news again for reasons unrelated to music. After 50 years of separation, Zella Jackson Price met her child who had been separated from her at birth in 1965. A controversy rose, though, because her lawyer claimed that Price had been lied to by the hospital and told that her child had died.

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Sallie Martin may be one of the most impressive and multi-talented performers and entrepreneurs of music in the 20th Century. Working in the Midwest and California, she lifted Thomas Dorsey's Gospel music far beyond its initial reach and was a pioneer in publishing, radio and television.

Martin was born in Pittsfield, Georgia in November 1895. Although her father was dead, the rest of her family, including her mother and grandparents, were very attentive to her. After the eighth grade, Martin dropped out to work a variety of jobs in Atlanta, where she later married her husband Wallace and enter the Sanctified Church. After moving to Chicago with their son, Wallace became involved with Chicago's seedier side and the marriage ended. Martin worked at a hospital on the city's Southwest side and attended church where she encountered the music that changed the course of her career.

Hearing a song that she liked led Martin to meet the writer, Thomas Dorsey. A fruitful working relationship evolved over time out of this relationship, as Martin began to sing with Dorsey. Their relationship was far more collaborative than singer and director, as she served as his National Advisor of the National Convention of Gospel Choir and Choruses and formalized the business of selling Dorsey's sheet music.

The story goes that Martin saw the careless way that Dorsey kept the money he made selling his music and claimed, "Really, you have something here but you don't know what to do with it." She sold music to the Gospel choirs that she helped establish, with or without the support of the church. They also used demonstrations to help sell the music. In the book *Chicago's New Negroes* author Baldwin writes about Martin and Willie Mae Ford Smith to illustrate how their demonstration of music served as a kind of authorship, as their own unique styles shaped the music so much. In his book *A City Called Heaven*, Marovich wrote: "Regardless of the size of Dorsey's catalog, it was Sallie Martin's street-smart business acumen that transformed the songwriter's drawer full of dimes and lack of generally accepted accounting principles into a real enterprise."

However, ultimately, Martin was not happy with the treatment she received from Dorsey and ended her work with him, opening up an entirely different chapter of her life. Using the touring connections that she had established through Dorsey, she began to start touring professionally first with Ruth Jones then with Roberta Martin and her group, before ultimately forming the Sallie Martin Singers. They worked together for almost 60 years.

Also after her split from Dorsey, she established a publishing group with Kenneth Morris, called the Martin and Morris Music Studio. Martin got people to buy the music and Morris handled the actual sales. The publishing company expanded far beyond their Chicago and, eventually, Los Angeles bases earning up to \$200,000 a year in revenue. In 1946 they began to distribute Gospel sheet music for a subsidiary of the white-owned Specialty Records in Los Angeles.



After having both toured with Dorsey in the 1930s and 1940s in Los Angeles and having established a branch of her publishing company there, Sallie Martin had an extended residency in the city through the mid 1950s. It was during this time that Gospel was growing in Los Angeles. Writing on Gospel in city of angels, Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje referred to Martin as an “early pioneer” of the genre, along with others from Chicago and the South. Martin had varying degrees of success recording her music with and without Cora Martin, at Capitol and Specialty records.

Beyond performing, Martin became the director of St. Paul Baptist Church’s choir (“Echoes of Eden”), which was notable for being broadcast over radio. Although Martin did not originate the church’s radio broadcasts, which started in 1947, she did lead them during a rare television appearance in 1950. In the same year she became a DJ and was credited by DjeDje as “one of the first female religious disc jockeys in California.” Martin also served as the director of the Los Angeles Gospel Choral Union for many years and was supportive of other musicians in Los Angeles.

Martin’s work output is staggering, but it’s worth remembering that for Martin, Gospel was ultimately about what the music was saying. Martin’s relationship with the music was not, to use Martin’s terminology, just about “emotion” but about “message.” Cheryl Sanders wrote in *Saints in Exile* that Martin and Willie Mae Ford Smith’s music merged the “sacred” and the “secular,” but ultimately “the purpose of this music ... is spiritual formation, by any means necessary.” In 1985, Martin said “In the blues you are singing because you are down and out, because your man or woman left you and you got real blue ... In Gospel, you are singing about the Lord. I don’t sing, the Lord just uses my tone.”



Martin eventually returned to Chicago. In *Gospel Sound*, musician Alex Bradford wrote about the friendship they formed on her return. “She’d take you from place to place, she’d stake you, she’d loan you some money. I’m not only speaking of me... any other singers who needed a break.” In a 1979

Chicago Tribune article, Martin says “I have had a good life. I said to God once, ‘Now I’m not worried about being a millionaire. Just help supply my needs. I’d like to see Paris, London, Nigeria, once. I’ve seen all those places. I’d like a home. I’ve got one. ... Now I’ve got a Pontiac sittin’ downstairs which I still drive any time I please.’”

A 1986 *Ebony* article, four years after *Say Amen, Somebody*, found a 90-year-old Martin still hard at work, sometimes performing at First Church of Deliverance, and working on the music scholarship-based Sallie Martin Foundation. Another article from 1986, in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, wrote about her appearance at the NCGCC that year, and the degree of positive attention she still received. Her 90th Birthday was a massive celebration, which *The Chicago Tribune* described as featuring musicians “raising holy hallelujah for more than five hours.” The Barrett Sisters and Willie Mae Ford Smith both performed.

In the essay accompanying the DVD of *Say Amen, Somebody*, Anthony Heilbut painted a melancholy picture of the end of Martin’s life — she died “isolated and forlorn, in a Chicago hospital.” Sallie Martin passed on June 18, 1988, resulting in a two-day funeral, leaving behind a decades-long career of massive scope.

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Pre-production

Say Amen, Somebody began as a suggestion from a musician friend Ry Cooder to director George T. Nierenberg. And from that, the film began to grow. Nierenberg and his wife began to go to church on in Brooklyn, Harlem and the Bronx, to learn about Gospel's history, and even attended Dorsey's National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses when it was in New York. It was there he met many of the performers who became part of the film.

Nierenberg did not have a background in Gospel before starting this project. He describes the experience of entering churches in which everyone knew the songs being sung while they were completely new to him. Nierenberg claimed that ultimately this lack of knowledge was a benefit to the film². With no previous background, he would be able to engage in the film with no baggage, allowing himself to be led by intuition instead.³

Nierenberg put a lot of thought into how he approached the subject of Gospel musicians. As he did while making *No Maps On My Taps*, Nierenberg picked his "characters" based on if they had historic value, were dynamic individuals, and a had a story to tell. It was also important that he felt he had rapport with them⁴.

In an interview with *American Cinematographer*, he said of covering Gospel "In this instance, I wanted to deal with performing arts whose expression was an extension of themselves, who had committed their lives to their art form and yet hadn't been recognized for their contributions."⁵ In the film's DVD commentary he said he felt that these ideas could be expressed through film, and he wanted the film "to serve as a voice for the people in the film" and that he could "articulate their stories in film terms."⁶



Before production, he spent time with the film's subjects, trying to have a "personal experience" with them⁷. He collected audio, which he implemented into the film's structure, as well as many, many, still photographs.⁸ Understanding what he wanted from the film's subjects was a very important process. He told the *Christian Science Monitor* "I sort out possibilities in my head, choosing aspects of their lives that I want to recreate on film"⁹.

2 Personal Interview with director George Nierenberg, 2017

3 Personal Interview

4 Personal Interview

5 American...

6 Commentary

7 Commentary

8 American...

9 Christian...

In a 1983 article in the New York *Daily News* Nierenberg referred to the film as a “story film” as opposed to a “documentary.”¹⁰ Nierenberg told *American Cinematographer*, “My directional approach is to create situations over which I have sufficient control. I create environments in which the characters I’ve preselected will interact in ways I’ve already observed. While my subject matter may appear to be documentary, what I am interested in is the narrative structure I can impose.”¹¹ In effect, Nierenberg instigated certain scenes to provide specific information to the audience and to provide cohesion to the film. Nierenberg had previously tried to film action that was completely independent of him, but found the result was not cohesive enough.¹²

A commonly cited example of how this method works in a scene is the two-part sequence of Frank Campbell and Delois Barrett Campbell at breakfast. In the first, Frank and Delois have a small fight while she is preparing breakfast, about her leaving the church to tour with her sisters. In the second part there’s a more intimate discussion on the same topic between the two at the table. In the first part Nierenberg prompted Frank, telling him that he wanted this topic, which he knew was already part of their lives, to come up, while not telling Delois. This allowed a “real honesty of emotions” on Delois’s part.¹³ Nierenberg added the second part of the scene because he felt the scene was lacking and Delois needed to “express herself to Frank.”¹⁴ Nierenberg knew what he wanted from the subjects’ lives to show, and how to do it most clearly, and set scenes up accordingly.

However, according to Nierenberg, these scenes, although constructed, should not be understood as artificial. He clarifies to *The Christian Monitor*, “My job is to make the feeling real for them, not just set them up to say certain things ... you’re not trying to make the characters into people they’re not: You’re trying to be honest as to who they are. So, whenever you try to re-create a situation, you have to assume a lot of responsibility. After all, you’re dealing with somebody’s life.”¹⁵ *Say Amen, Somebody* was a carefully conceived project, but one ultimately in service to its subjects.

Generally, Nierenberg carefully structures his documentary for clarity’s sake. For instance, as he did with *No Maps On My Taps*’ “tap competition,” Nierenberg used Mother Smith’s tribute, as a means to provide *Say Amen, Somebody*, with a strong narrative and to give additional “connective tissue.”¹⁶ One of Nierenberg’s primary interests is structuring each film so as to make sure every character was brought together. He says in the DVD commentary “I always try to bring my characters together in a film. In that way there’s a sense of unity.”

Nierenberg’s innovative work in structuring documentary both at a micro and macro level highlighted each character’s story. There is an understanding of who they are individually and who they are to each other.

10 NY Daily News

11 American...

12 Christian

13 Commentary

14 Commentary

15Christian

16 Personal Interview

Production

The production of *Say Amen, Somebody* was the result of rigorous technical work by Nierenberg and his crew as well as collaboration between the filmmakers and subject.

As a product of Nierenberg's very carefully prepared structure in pre-production, where he developed exactly what he wanted, the 100-minute film was shot in 15 days, with extra time allotted for lighting,¹⁷ Nierenberg's careful planning served not only a storytelling purpose but also an economic one. Unlike today's digital production, shooting on physical film was an expensive process. *Say Amen, Somebody* was shot on 16mm and the edited A/B rolls were optically blown up to a 35mm negative using a 1.66:1 aspect.¹⁸ Using 16mm and later Super 16mm (which is a specialty of cinematographer Ed Lachman) was very much the norm in indie film those days. After the film's release, DuArt Laboratories had an ad for 16mm-to-35mm blow ups that listed *Say Amen, Somebody* along with eleven other films released in 1982–1983 that had undergone the same process, including Susan Seidelman's *Smithereens* and Wayne Wang's *Chan is Missing*¹⁹.

In an article in *American Cinematographer* J. Greg Evans points out that the film features a very carefully thought out visual aesthetic, attempting to create as natural a lighting scheme as possible. Because of this aesthetic, "previously viewed incidents could be enacted ... in front of the cameras as he had observed them many times before." Different lighting was required in different places, including more than twenty 1000-watt bulbs used in the convention hall at the film's end.²⁰ In a visual metaphor of the film's merging of reality and construction, these lights were so large that they were left undisguised because they did not look very out of place in the ceiling of the cavernous hall.²¹

The film's success relies also on its full, dynamic, sound. Nierenberg made sure that his three soundmen picked up sounds from the audience, recording them on 24-track tape.²² As a result not just the film's sound but also its accompanying soundtrack is especially dynamic.²³ In his review, Roger Ebert praised the excellent quality of the sound, especially when heard in a movie theater, saying "one of the phenomenons during screenings of this film is the tendency of the audience to get into the act."²⁴ The film's acclaimed LP soundtrack, along with Gillian Armstrong's *Starstruck*, were held up as especially fine examples of film albums in a 1983 *New York Times* article.²⁵

Nierenberg personally relied on his relationship with the subjects while shooting in St. Louis and Chicago. In St. Louis he stuck with Mother Smith's children, Billie and Jacquelyn, with whom he formed

17 American

18 Personal Interview

19 Personal Interview

20 American

21 Commentary

22 American...

23 American... (Commentary notes it was used for soundtrack)

24 Roger Ebert

25 A Movie and Its Soundtrack

a close bond. Nierenberg was also close with the Barrett families and he later said that that Dorsey's "endorsement" of him was beneficial. "You have to do your homework!" Nierenberg said. He had to create a general sense of support and for the project in the communities he was working in in order to be successful.²⁶

A close relationship between crew and community plays a pivotal role in the content of the film as well. J. Greg Evans points out that one of *Say Amen, Somebody's* most memorable aspects is the closeness we feel with the musicians as they move and emote with powerful conviction. Evans quotes co-director of photography Ed Lachman:

"Intimacy was a very important part of this film, not only the intimacy of the mikes being able to pick up the quiet moments of people in the audience, but also the intimacy that the camera shares with these people. It weaves in and out of their lives by capturing personal moments shared by very few, yet the spirit of these moments is never disrupted by the obvious closeness of the camera."²⁷

Say Amen, Somebody's success as a production came both from technical know-how and a good relationship with those being filmed. The result was a film that, although carefully prepared and put together, makes us feel as if we are watching the experiences of others in a raw, unaltered, way.



26 Personal Interview

27 American...

Release and Reception

As the film was released the focus was taken from Nierenberg's behind-the-scenes efforts to the draw of Gospel music and those who performed it.

The film premiered at the Telluride Film Festival where Willie Mae Ford Smith performed after the screening. Of this performance, Roger Ebert said, "I can't speak for anybody else. But I know that at that moment I felt as happy as I ever expect to feel." Ebert remembered that as he and Smith were at lunch, Hollywood star Joel McCrea, there to receive the festival's Silver Medallion, came up to compliment Smith — to which she responded to in kind.²⁸ An even odder meeting of minds occurred when Smith sang happy birthday to Werner Herzog.²⁹ During the film's screening at the New York Film Festival the Barrett Sisters performed, and they also appeared at Ebertfest. Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* wrote that the film was an audience favorite at the New York Film Festival, along with Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*. Following its success there, United Artists Classics picked the film up for distribution.

A November 1982 article in *Variety* reported on United Artist's transition from "imported fare" to "U.S. indies" through its distribution of both *Say Amen, Somebody* and John Sayle's *Lianna* (another 16mm-to-35mm blowup at DuArt).³⁰ A letter to the editor of *American Film* from *New York Times* contributor Annette Insdorf mentioned the film in terms of trends in American independent film. She wrote about a "new breed of publicist" tied to "the ride of the American independents," as well as foreign films and the "classics division." One publicists she mentions is Steve Seifert, who worked on *Say Amen, Somebody*.³¹ United Artists Classics had a multi-faceted marketing approach, which helped place an emphasis on the film's church-going audience. They bussed church groups to screenings and created promotional fans.³²

The film received an overwhelming positive response, garnering rave reviews from major critics like Gene Siskel and Pauline Kael. Roger Ebert's beautifully-written review remains as one of the finest examples of his criticism. One element that many of the critics who wrote about the film touched on was the sense of ecstasy that the film provided. Richard Schickel at *Time* wrote, "The film's mood is never less than marvelously infectious." David Denby at *New York Magazine* wrote, "The music conquers doubt and unhappiness, and when it ends, you feel healed." Kathleen Carroll of the *New York Daily News* quoted Willie Mae Ford Smith saying "I just have a feeling within... You can't help yourself. It goes between the marrow and the bones. I feel like I could fly" adding that the film "has the same uplifting effect on its audience."

28 Ebert at Fest

29 Personal Interview

30 United Artists Classics

31 More Right Moves

32 Personal Interview

Many critics prised not only the great music, but also the peek behind the curtain of the lives of the film's subjects. Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* wrote, "some of [*Say Amen, Somebody's*] family scenes are as memorable as its songs." Audiences fell in love with the film and its stars. The careers of Zella Jackson Price, Mother Smith and the Barrett Sisters were all supported or reignited by the film's release.

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On Gospel...

Introduction from *Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic* by Pearl William-Jones (*Ethnomusicology*, September 1975)

If a basic theoretical concept of a black aesthetic can be drawn from the history of the black experience in America, the crystallization of this concept is embodied in Afro-American Gospel music. The cultural traditions and ideals of West Africa are the ultimate source from which the basic concept of a black aesthetic definition is derived. There are many aspects of black American culture, such as folktales, speech patterns, religious beliefs and musical practices, which reveal connecting links to African roots in subtle and sometimes obvious ways. Black Gospel music, however, retains the most noticeable African-derived aesthetic features of all (Washington 1973:19-35, 78-79). In concept and practice there has been some, but little significant deviation in Gospel from many of the basic traits found in the traditional music of West Africa and the various phases of evolution in the Afro- American cultural continuum. Deviation from or conformity to ancestral traditional practices is influenced by environmental factors. According to John Szwed, "Song forms and performances are themselves models of social behavior that reflect strategies of adaptation to human and natural environments." Black Gospel music, then, reflects changes and retentions of West African musical style and context that can only be "understood within a synthesis of social and cultural change" (Szwed 1970:220).

The consistent and persistent retention in Gospel music performance and practice of a clearly defined black identity growing out of the black experience in America is indicative of the indomitability of the African ethos. The process of acculturation and syncretism has done much to alter the social fabric of black life in America. In spite of this fact, cultural ties of the ancestral lineage have been preserved in various forms within the enclave of the black Gospel church and its music-black Gospel. Black Gospel music is one of the new seminal genres of contemporary black culture which continually maintains its self-identity while it nourishes and enriches the mainstream of the world's cultural sources.

Say Amen, Somebody

CHOSEN ONE OF THE TOP 10 FILMS OF 1982:

PEOPLE MAGAZINE
AT THE MOVIES WITH GENE SISKEL AND ROGER EBERT
CHICAGO SUN-TIMES
ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE
LOS ANGELES HERALD-EXAMINER
THE MIAMI HERALD
MacLEANS MAGAZINE

"One of the most joyful movies I've ever seen!"

— Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun Times*

"The film's mood is never less than marvelously infectious!"

— Richard Schickel, *Time Magazine*,

**"The movie conquers doubt and unhappiness,
and when it ends, you feel healed."**

— David Denby, *New York Magazine*

"Joyful, communal, deeply moving!"

— Janet Maslin, *New York Times*

"The most exuberant and revitalizing musical in years!"

— Michael Sragow, *Rolling Stone*

"The scene lifts the film into the sublime"

— Carol Flake, *Vanity Fair*

"Boasts some of the best Gospel music you'll ever hear"

— Steve Morse, *Boston Globe*

CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

Roger Ebert, March 30, 1983

“Say Amen, Somebody” is the most joyful movie I’ve seen in a very long time. It is also one of the best musicals and one of the most interesting documentaries. And it’s also a terrific good time.

The movie is about Gospel music, and it’s filled with Gospel music. It’s sung by some of the pioneers of modern Gospel, who are now in their 70s and 80s, and it’s sung by some of the rising younger stars, and it’s sung by choirs of kids. It’s sung in churches and around the dining room table; with orchestras and acapella; by an old man named Thomas A. Dorsey in front of thousands of people, and by Dorsey standing all by himself in his own backyard. The music in “Say Amen, Somebody” is as exciting and uplifting as any music I’ve ever heard on film.

The people in this movie are something, too. The filmmaker, a young New Yorker named George T. Nierenberg, starts by introducing us to two pioneers of modern Gospel: Mother Willie May Ford Smith, who is 79, and Professor Dorsey, who is 83. She was one of the first Gospel soloists; he is known as the Father of Gospel Music. The film opens at tributes to the two of them — Mother Smith in a St. Louis church, Dorsey at a Houston convention — and then Nierenberg cuts back and forth between their memories, their families, their music and the music sung in tribute to them by younger performers.

That keeps the movie from seeming too much like the wrong kind of documentary — the kind that feels like an educational film and is filled with boring lists of dates and places. “Say Amen, Somebody” never stops moving, and even the dates and places are open to controversy (there’s a hilarious sequence in which Dorsey and Mother Smith disagree very pointedly over exactly which of them convened the first Gospel convention).

What’s amazing in all of the musical sequences is the quality of the sound. A lot of documentaries use “available sound,” picked up by microphones more appropriate for the television news. This movie’s concerts are miked by up to eight microphones, and the Dolby system is used to produce full stereo sound that really rocks the theater. One of the phenomena during screenings of this film is the tendency of the audience to get into the act.

Willie May Ford Smith comes across in this movie as an extraordinary woman, spiritual, filled with love and power. Dorsey and his longtime business manager, Sallie Martin, come across at first as a little crusty, but then there’s a remarkable scene where they sing along, softly, with one of Dorsey’s old records. By the end of the film, when the ailing Dorsey insists on walking under his own steam to the front of the Gospel convention in Houston, and leading the delegates in a hymn, we have come to see his strength and humanity.

Just in case Smith and Dorsey seem too noble, the film uses a lot of mighty soul music as counterpoint, particularly in the scenes shot during a tribute to Mother Smith at a St. Louis Baptist church. We see Delois Barrett Campbell and the Barrett Sisters, a Chicago-based trio who have enormous musical

energy; the O'Neal Twins, Edward and Edgar, whose "Jesus Dropped the Charges" is a show-stopper; Zella Jackson Price, a younger singer who turns to Mother Smith for advice; the Interfaith Choir, and lots of other singers.

"Say Amen, Somebody" is the kind of movie that isn't made very often, because it takes an unusual combination of skills. The filmmaker has to be able to identify and find his subjects, win their confidence, follow them around, and then also find the technical skill to really capture what makes them special.

Nierenberg's achievement here is a masterpiece of research, diligence and direction. But his work would be meaningless if the movie didn't convey the spirit of the people in it, and "Say Amen, Somebody" does that with mighty joy. This is a great experience."

The New York Times

Janet Maslin, October 15, 1982

"THE beauty of Gospel music comes shining through in "Say Amen, Somebody," a rousing documentary by George T. Nierenberg, who has also made a documentary about jazz tap dancing. In "Say Amen, Somebody," Mr. Nierenberg visits with two of Gospel's legendary performers, Thomas A. Dorsey and Mother Willie Mae Ford Smith. It's Mr. Dorsey who gives the film its title, as he tells a long story to the camera crew and lets them know they ought to be a little more vocally responsive. Mr. Dorsey isn't used to listeners who aren't noticeably moved by what he has to sing and say. The film makes it clear why.

The camera visits a storefront church, a convention of Gospel performers, classes where Mr. Dorsey explains the songs he has written and those where Mrs. Smith (known as Mother Smith) instructs would-be Gospel soloists. It also visits a lot of kitchens and living rooms, where the music is no less stirring than it is on stage. Members of the Smith family reminisce about Mother Smith's career, and Mr. Dorsey talks about his own background and about how Gospel got started. "The Father of Gospel Music" is Mr. Dorsey's nickname.

Other performers are seen in the film as well, most notably the O'Neal twins, who talk about whether Gospel is religion or entertainment, and the Barrett Sisters, three women who stop the show on more than one occasion. When the film is shown tonight at 6:15 at Alice Tully Hall as part of the New York Film Festival, the sold-out audience will have the good luck to hear the Barretts perform in person after the screening.

In the film, Delois Barrett Campbell, the lead singer, is heard performing before large, ecstatic groups of listeners, and she's also heard singing over the dishes in her own modest kitchen. Then she and her husband, the Rev. Frank Campbell, get into a little discussion about her career. Delois is planning a trip

abroad, and her husband is unhappy about it. “I’ll be glad when our ministry can be together, as a husband and wife team, more than your sisters’ team,” he says. Delois considers this for a long moment, then says “You want some eggs with your sausage?” Mother Smith says she had this kind of husband trouble, too.

The music alone would be enough to make “Say Amen, Somebody” worth seeing. But it has warmth and friendliness, too, and some of its family scenes are as memorable as its songs. Mother Smith debates with a bashful grandson about whether women ought to be allowed to preach; her children visit a dilapidated railway station and remember tearfully how their mother used to embark on journeys away from home. No one is more moved, though, than when the music begins. And the music, as seen and understood here, is joyful, communal, and deeply moving.

The Washington Post

Richard Harrington, August 26, 1983

“Say Amen, Somebody,” the Gospel jewel that opens today at the West End Circle, is the brightest, funniest, most joyful—and certainly the most inspirational—film you’re likely to come across in a long time. It is so chock full of wonderful people, heartfelt songs and stories that if you can resist it, it’s time to get your pulse checked.

See “Amen.” Everybody.

George T. Nierenberg’s 100-minute film may be a documentary, but it plays like a historical epic. It has devastatingly heroic personalities, dramatic conflicts, comic relief, poignance and an exhilarating sound track. It is beautifully filmed and recorded. It celebrates bedrock faith and magnificent art even as it introduces some of the most fascinating people you could ever hope to meet.

The centerpiece of the film is the 1981 tribute to “Mother” Willie Mae Ford Smith at St. Louis’ Antioch Baptist Church. Smith, 78, and the Rev. Thomas A. Dorsey, 84, are pioneer figures in Gospel music, and the film traces the genre over a 60-year period.

The most eloquent, telling moments in “Say Amen” are the songs themselves, 25 emotion-drenched musical moments that course through the film like life-blood. They envelop singer and audience—in Gospel, there is no distance. During the tribute — which features brilliant performances by Delois Barrett and the Barrett Sisters, the delightful O’Neal Twins, and the ecstatic Zella Jackson Pierce — Smith beams with the realization that she doesn’t have to die and go to Heaven to hear the voices of angels.

Though Antioch Baptist Church is home base, “Say Amen” moves like an itinerant preacher, stopping at a storefront church, a Gospel convention, workshops with Dorsey and Smith; it also goes into the homes of the performers, capturing the life behind the songs.

Some scenes are astounding: a somber, proud Dorsey slowly recounting the sudden deaths of his wife and daughter in 1933, an event that inspired him to write "Take My Hand, Precious Lord." He speaks as if the tragedy occurred yesterday, and then slides softly into lyric, each word dropping from his mouth like a tear.

There's also a wonderful scene in which Dorsey and Sallie Martin, another pioneer spirit, talk about Dorsey's initial career as a blues man. Martin, with a wonderfully sour but loving expression, is not amused when a smiling Dorsey, listening to an old 78 titled "How Can You Have the Blues," says warmly, "That's kind of smooth, man! Want to hear some blues from me? 'The blues ain't nothing but a woman feeling bad . . .' Now what's wrong with that? Nothing! If you got a good woman and she don't feel good, get her to feeling good!" His feistiness surrenders a moment later: "Say amen, somebody."

From there, Martin and Dorsey listen to themselves on another scratchy 78, "If You See My Savior," one of the earliest recorded examples of Gospel. As they listen, Dorsey starts to sing softly. A moment later, Martin starts tapping her hands, then her feet and soon she, too, is singing along, transforming a genteel Gospel duet into a quartet that transcends time. It's a beautiful moment.

Although Dorsey is a strong presence in the film, it's Smith whose impression goes deepest. She is very much the anointed singer who, as one daughter says, "wasn't singing for show, she was singing out of believing." Nierenberg seems to find her always surrounded by a family devoted and thankful for her gifts. Smith tells wonderful stories, chides a grandson who's something of a chauvinist, counsels a young singer on her commitment to Gospel and the toll it can take on her family.

There's a poignant scene of Smith's son and daughter visiting the now-gutted train station where they frequently awaited her returns from long missions on the road; Nierenberg uses old photographs here and elsewhere to spin a web of place and time when commitments to a higher ground were set and solidified. Dorsey and Smith move slowly through "Say Amen." They also move with consummate grace—Dorsey's finger conducting an invisible chorus, Smith's eyes often looking homeward, heavenward.

"Say Amen" was funded by the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and the Missouri Arts Council. Never have tax dollars been better spent. Nierenberg, a 30-year-old documentarian who made "No Maps on My Taps," a wonderful film about jazz tap-dancers, spent a year researching "Say Amen," 15 days shooting and another year editing. His care and commitment show in his ability to capture the fundamental honesty of his characters and the closeness of their relationships. And cameramen Ed Lachman and Don Lenzer are so intimate with their subjects that you feel as if you are sitting right in the front pew.

"Say Amen" has enough warmth in it to melt an iceberg, and ultimately, it's a splendid celebration of selflessness and spirit.

"Say Amen, Somebody" is a secret to be let in on, and the hearing and the seeing of it is believing. You don't even have to believe in God. But you will end up believing in the human spirit.

MILESTONE FILMS

Milestone celebrates 29 years in business with a reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's work in rediscovering and releasing important films such as Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, Kent Mackenzie's, *The Exiles*, Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the Mariposa Film Group's *Word is Out* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, Milestone has long occupied a position as one of the country's most influential independent distributors. **In January 2019, Milestone's co-founders Amy Heller and Dennis Doros were awarded the Arthouse Convergence's 2019 Spotlight Lifetime Achievement Award and in April, the Denver Silent Film Festival's David Shepard Career Achievement Award.**

In 1995, Milestone received the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba*. Manohla Dargis, then at the *LA Weekly*, chose Milestone as the 1999 "Indie Distributor of the Year." In 2004, the National Society of Film Critics again awarded Milestone with a Film Heritage award. That same year the International Film Seminars presented the company its prestigious Leo Award and the New York Film Critics Circle voted a Special Award "in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films." In November 2007, Milestone was awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission's first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history. Milestone won Best Rediscovery from the Il Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards for its release of *Winter Soldier* in 2006 and for *The Exiles* in 2010. In 2015, the Il Cinema Ritrovato gave Milestone the award for Best Blu-ray, for the series, *Project Shirley* (Clarke).

In January 2008, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association chose to give its first Legacy of Cinema Award to Doros and Heller "for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation." And in March 2008, Milestone became an Anthology Film Archive's Film Preservation honoree. In 2011, Milestone was the first distributor ever chosen for two Film Heritage Awards in the same year by the National Society of Film Critics for the release of *On the Bowery* and *Word is Out*. The American Library Association also selected *Word is Out* for its Notable Videos for Adults, the first classic film ever so chosen.

In December 2012, Milestone became the first-ever two-time winner of the prestigious New York Film Critics' Circle's Special Award and received another National Society of Film Critics Film Heritage Award, this time for its work in restoring, preserving and distributing the films of iconoclast director Shirley Clarke. Important contemporary artists who have co-presented Milestone restorations include Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Barbara Kopple, Woody Allen, Steven Soderbergh, Thelma Schoonmaker, Jonathan Demme, Dustin Hoffman, Charles Burnett and Sherman Alexie.

From 2008 to 2014, Dennis Doros was elected three times as one of the Directors of the Board of the Association of the Moving Image Archivists and established the organization's press office in 2010. In 2016, AMIA awarded Doros the William O'Farrell Award for his career volunteer work and his contributions to the field. In 2017, Doros was elected President of AMIA. Heller and Doros travel the world to lecture on the importance of preservation and restoration and to present films from the

Milestone collection. They hope to express the importance of saving and exhibiting films outside the mainstream and to celebrate the pure joy of cinema.

In recent years, Milestone has premiered the 4K version of Mikhail Kalatozov's *I am Cuba*, restorations of Lois Weber's *Shoes* and *The Dumb Girl of Portici*, Ross Lipman's *Notfilm*, Kathleen Collins' *Losing Ground*, and George Nierenberg's *No Maps on My Taps*. They are currently restoring the the great documentaries of Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, including the Oscar®-winning *Common Threads*.

"They care and they love movies." — Martin Scorsese

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