Richard Smallwood is a legend in his own time! After four decades as one of the most popular inspirational artists in the music business, with classic tunes such as “Total Praise”, “Center of My Joy”, and “I Love the Lord” to his credit, the Grammy-nominated singer, songwriter and pianist continues to enjoy widespread popularity and influence. His songs have been recorded by Whitney Houston, Destiny’s Child, Kelly Price, Gerald Levert, American Idol’s Ruben Studdard, and countless others throughout of the gospel world. Even the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, recorded Smallwood’s “Faithful,” on her latest CD.

While standing before a studio filled with friends and music industry colleagues, gathered for an intimate recording session of Smallwood’s latest CD, PROMISES, he made a startling confession. “I had not written a song since my mom died in 2005,” he told the stunned audience.

“I thought my gift had dried up. I would try to write and nothing would come. I’d sit at the piano, I’d pray and there was nothing.” Then, in 2009, I was watching CNN and was overwhelmed by the negativity I saw,” Smallwood recalls as his breakthrough. “I began to think that, regardless of what the media says, we as God’s children are heirs to the Kingdom and He has made us certain promises. He promised that He’d take care of us, and that He’d provide for us. If God says it, that settles it. I wanted to write a complete project with songs that dealt with the promises found in His Word so that I could encourage and remind us that God is still in control.
He began to play piano by ear by the age of five. By seven, he was taking formal lessons and by eleven, had formed his own gospel group. In junior high school, future pop star Roberta Flack was one of his teachers and musical mentors. He later graduated from Howard University cum laude with a degree in music. He was very active on campus as a member of Howard’s first gospel group, the Celestials, and a founding member of the renowned Howard Gospel Choir. Along the way, he also developed lifelong relationships with fellow classmates such as Donny Hathaway, Debbie Allen, and Phylicia Rashad who would all make names for themselves in show business.

After college, Smallwood taught music at the University of Maryland before founding the Richard Smallwood Singers in 1977. Their progressive, contemporary sound earned them a record deal with Benson Records in 1981. Their debut LP, The Richard Smallwood Singers, spent 87 weeks on Billboard magazine’s Spiritual chart and cultivated a fresh, young sophisticated audience for the ensemble. Their next LP, Psalms, hit #1 and they were on a roll.

“I have dreamed a few songs before, but I can count the times on one hand that I remembered what I had dreamed after I had awoken. But this time, not only could I remember what I had dreamed but sometimes more than one song would come at the same time and I could barely keep up with them. I knew that God was saying something that we all needed to hear.”

We can now hear what is arguably Smallwood’s most personal and intimate album yet. It features a tribute to his musical mentor, Walter Hawkins, (who died of pancreatic cancer July 2013); a collaboration with his protégé, Donald Lawrence; a cameo by jazz-soul artist Lalah Hathaway (daughter of his ’60s Howard University classmate, Donny Hathaway); his trusty ensemble of singers known as Vision; and yet another collaboration with his co-producer Steven Ford who first collaborated with Smallwood on his 1987 CD Textures, which included the popular “Center of My Joy.”

With Smallwood’s vast accomplishments, it could be easy to rest on his laurels, but that’s not his style. Since childhood, the Atlanta, GA native has been driven. His father, former pastor of the historic Union Temple in Washington, D.C., was a tough taskmaster, and his mother encouraged his early love of music. The two extremes fueled his passion.
They, then moved over to Word Records in 1987 where they recorded gospel standards such as “Center of My Joy,” “Calvary,” and “Holy Holy.” The group’s popularity led to an invitation to perform in the Soviet Union – reportedly the first gospel group to do a concert tour of the country at the time.

After a couple of albums with Sparrow Records in the early ‘90s, Smallwood retired the Smallwood Singers and birthed the choir, Vision. Their debut CD, Adoration: Live in Atlanta, appeared on Verity Records in spring 1996. It featured the smash radio singles “Total Praise” and “Angels.” In the years since, Smallwood and Vision have released radio blockbusters such as “Healing,” “Anthem of Praise” and “Bless The Lord.” It’s been over four years since Smallwood’s last project, Journey: Live In New York, which debuted at #1 in fall 2006 and spawned the radio hit, “I’ll Trust You.”

With producer Steven Ford (who has collaborated with artists ranging from Vickie Winans to Tye Tribbett) at the helm, Smallwood offers the same sophisticated symphony of praise that established his name over 30 years ago. “Not too many people understand my musical insanity,” he joked at the live session. “And Steven Ford has been working with me since the Middle Ages.” The two veterans pulled their best resources to spotlight a collection that spotlights not only the promises of God but also further solidifies Smallwood’s stature as one of gospel music’s greatest tunesmiths. Like Donald Lawrence said on that cool December evening, “Richard writes like Rogers & Hammerstein. His songs are ageless and they never go away.”

Smallwood recorded his latest project, "Anthology," on RCA Inspiration in front of a record number of gospel music lovers in the DC/Baltimore area in 2014. This critically acclaimed project, scheduled for released in 2015, is sure to sweep the nation and impact the world with more timeless music!
RICHARD SMALLWOOD DISCOGRAPHY
ALBUMS/CDS VERITY GOSPEL MUSIC GROUP
Richard Smallwood latest Gospel Album Promise (2011)
The Praise & Worship Songs
Persuaded: Live in D.C. #3 Top Gospel Albums (2001)
#12 Heatseekers (2001)
Healing: Live In Detroit #3 Top Gospel Albums (1999)
#10 Heatseekers (1999)
Rejoice #18 Top Gospel Albums (1997)
Adoration: Live In Atlanta #5 Gospel Albums(1996
SPARROW/EMI RECORDS
Memorable Moments #19 Top Gospel Albums (1999)
Live #11 Top Gospel Albums (1993)
Testimony #8 Top Gospel Albums (1992)
WORD/REJOICE RECORDS
Portrait #9 Top Gospel Albums (1990)
Vision #9 Top Gospel Albums (1988)
Textures #7 Top Gospel Albums (1987)
ONYX/BENSON RECORDS
Psalms #1 Top Gospel Albums (1984)
The Richard Smallwood Singers N/A (1982)

RICHARD SMALLWOOD AWARDS &
ACCOLADES
Grammy Nomination, Best Trad. Gospel Performance:
Grammy Nomination, Best Contemporary Soul
Grammy Nomination, Best Contemporary Soul
Grammy Nomination, Best Soul Gospel Performance:
Portrait (1990)
Grammy Nomination, Best Soul Gospel Performance,
Male: You Did It All (1988)
Grammy Nomination, Best Soul Gospel Performance,
Duo or Group: Psalms (1984)
NAACP Image Award Nomination for Best Gospel
Artist, Traditional
Stellar Award, Choir of the Year - Healing
– Live in Detroit (2000)
Stellar Award, Traditional Male Vocalist of the Year
Stellar Award, Traditional Choir of the Year
Stellar Award, Choir of the Year - Healing
– Live in Detroit (2000)

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