

The Paschall Brothers

African American *a cappella* gospel
Chesapeake, VA

The Paschall Brothers stand firmly in the great tradition of unaccompanied religious singing in Tidewater Virginia. The black gospel quartet tradition can be traced back to plantation life in the South. According to Alan Young in his book *Woke Me Up This Morning*, the first reference to black gospel quartets was made in 1851. The "modern" quartets were born in the late 1920s and early 1930s with the emergence of groups like the Heavenly Gospel Singers (1934), the Blevins Quartet, and most notably, The Golden Gate Quartet of Norfolk, Virginia. Norfolk was often referred to as the "home of the quartet." From neighboring Chesapeake, The Paschall Brothers are one of the few remaining ensembles in Virginia performing this once flourishing art form.

Unlike the older Alabama gospel tradition with its trademark reliance on formal song structure and straight-ahead harmonies, Virginia's gospel music was looser and more rhythmic. Influenced by such varying sources as the popular Mills Brothers, the swinging jazz of the Three Keys, and the emotional wailing of area pulpit preachers, the Virginia gospel style of singing was something daring and exciting – spiritual music geared for the body as well as the soul.

Reverend Frank Paschall, Sr. formed the ensemble in 1981 with his five sons: Frank Jr., Reverend Tarrence, Wendell, Dwight, and William. Reverend Paschall Sr. passed away in 1999, but his sons have carried on his legacy. It takes only a few opening notes for the artistry of the Paschalls to claim the listener's ear. After the late Rev. Paschall, Sr.'s passing, the lead vocal work shifted primarily to Tarrence Paschall, but as in many quartets, the vocal parts are traded among the members for different songs. Billy Paschall primarily sings bass, often in the "pumping" style employed by numerous Tidewater quartets. Frank Paschall, Jr., and Johnny Lewis trade off on tenor and baritone. Renard Freeman brings to the Paschall's a smooth tenor voice reminiscent of the great Sam Cooke.

The Paschall's perform frequently at local area churches and festivals in the Tidewater area and have performed at several national festivals, including the Lowell Folk Festival, the Roots of American Music Festival at Lincoln Center, and the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife. In 2007 they released *On the Right Road Now* on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings which was part of the African American Legacy series, co-produced by the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture.