

# entertainment

## Roots of American music revealed in gospel tunes

By Deb Gray

Come on down, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters; for He's got you—yes, all of you—in His hands. Come out tonight and hear the Salvation Bands. Tonight you might get saved. Tonight you might feel the heavenly vibrations. This could be the night to change your life.

It happened Saturday evening, when the State Fair Board booked a grandstand concert that tapped American music at its roots. On stage was an American contribution to culture, a musical form that came about after the black slaves integrated their music into their white masters' church services.

Gospel. The root of everything.

At least the Isley Brothers think so. "Our music is gospel with different words," Ronald Isley told Rolling Stone magazine.

### Five acts

It was the first time the state fair has put on such a show. There were five acts; the Imperials, said to have pioneered commercial acceptance of gospel music; London Paris and the Apostles; the John Mathews Family; Bob Weils and the Inspirations; and Ray Burdett and the Emeralds.

A crowd of about 2,500 persons attended Saturday, hand slapping, singing along. For some, it was a summer night to cherish; "What could be more beautiful?" one woman asked from beneath bandana and curlers. "A dark night with big stars and all that gospel music."

Even though a post stood in a bee-line between herself and the stage, the woman didn't mind. "In heaven there are no posts," she said.

The show started about 7:45 p.m., with John Mathews (of the Mathews Family) as emcee. His delivery was reminiscent of a hawker hustling people into a burlesque show: "We've got 'em from Texas, we've got 'em from Tennessee, we got 'em from everywhere," he said.

What these gospel groups rely on for excitement, for show, are the lines sung by the bass. When gospel became integrated into the rhythm and blues mainstream, this excitement switched into an upper register, with a female singer often wailing above it all in the Aretha Franklin tradition.

And the Apostles have a real basso

profundo—croaking along in the vicinity of low-low B sometimes. Miking this guy so he doesn't sound like he's burping into the sound system has got to be a challenge.

### Keyboards strong

While the four groups that preceded the Imperials didn't come to its standard, the other groups had moments. In his act, John Mathew featured his son Dale, who was quite a keyboard player and singer. Dale gave a haunting rendition—in tones reminiscent of John Davidson—of Kris Kristofferson's "Why Me Lord?" The original thrust of the song seemed changed—it sounded like a man speaking of only heavenly love instead of Kristofferson including a love-for-a-woman element.

All of the groups had strong keyboard players, especially the Emeralds and the Inspirations.

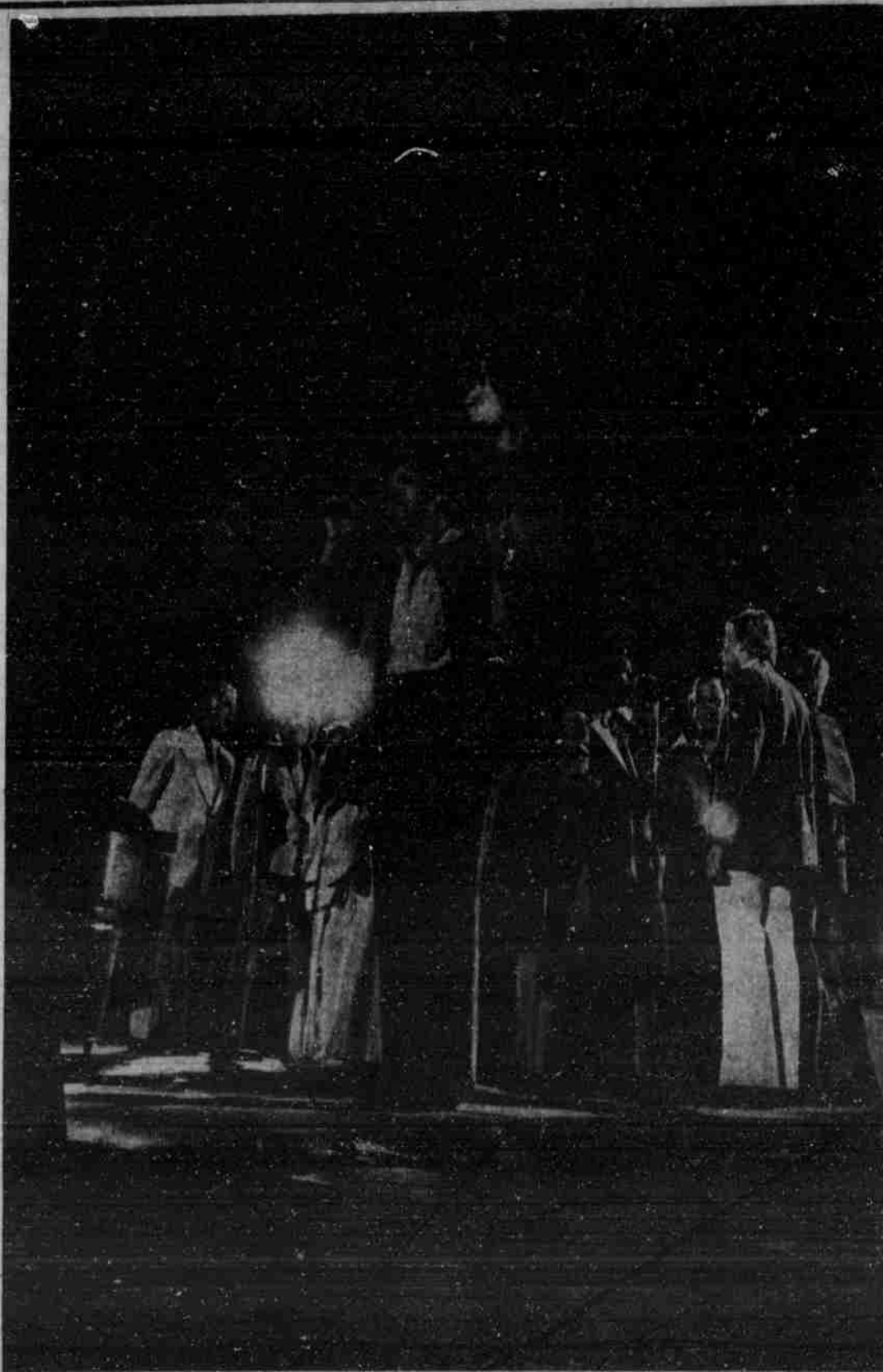
The Inspirations with their white pants and red blazers looked like they'd just attended a Big Red luncheon at the Nebraska Club. At the end of the set, the piano player got into it, turning halfway around on the bench, like Jerry Lee Lewis, banging both of his feet onto the stage like mad.

### Slow spots

For people who came to the concert to get their religion from music and not from sermons, the program slowed down at times as when, for example, John Mathews gave a dissertation on the flag. An excerpt from the poem he recited: "They used to wear her (meaning the flag) on the briny foam/Sir, but they don't treat her like they used to back home." Fade into "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

And Ray Burdett's enactment of "the most important event in history"—the Crucifixion—was too commercialized. While Burdett was on his knees for a tune about "The Third Man" at Golgatha, the three Emeralds hovered close by in long white gowns like angels wrapped in blue spotlights.

But all this is picking nits. Gospel music operates on a plane different from other forms of music. It is music with a purpose. To say, "Yes, there is an omniscient power in the universe. There is something to believe in." A Krishna, a Buddha, a cosmic consciousness, or whatever other name what only used to be known around here as God goes by these days.



Gospel groups join for a grand finale at the State Fair grandstand show Saturday.

After all the groups had finished their sets, they regrouped on stage for the finale, "How Great Thou Art." The song had already been performed twice before that night, but no matter.

The voices on stage started, hundreds of the faithful joined in from the grandstand

in a united statement of tribute, of reverence.

The audience rose to its feet. And throughout the audience arms were raised toward heaven, supplicating the divine intelligence to come down to earth and have pity on a trouble world.

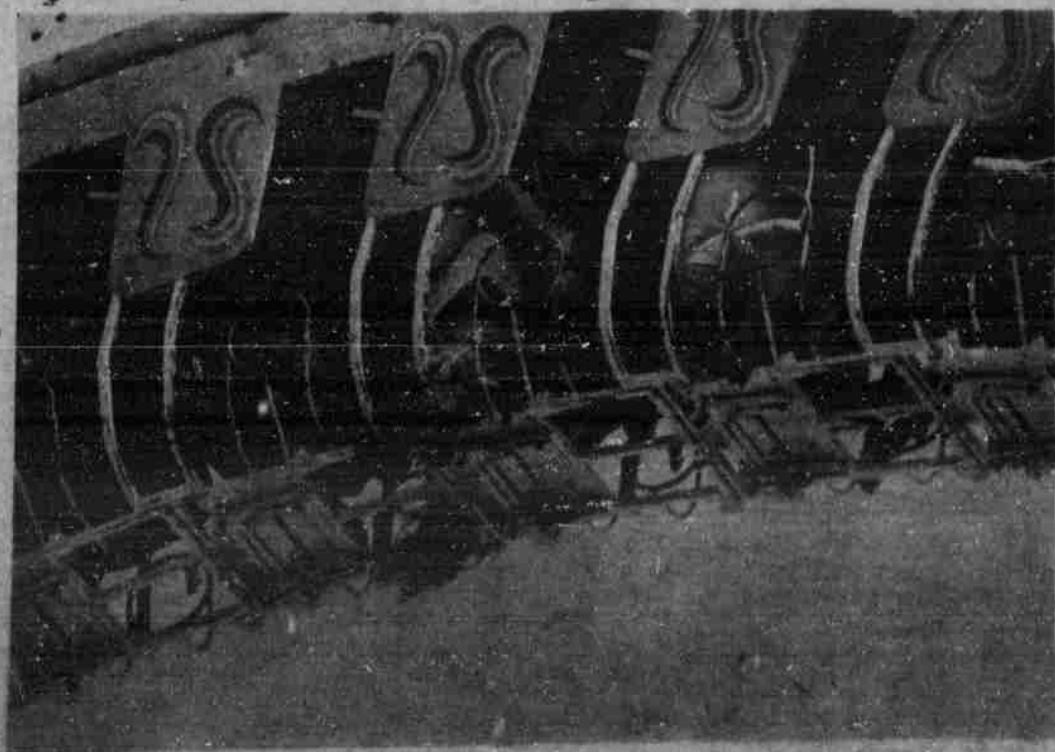
## Nebraska State Fair: an assault on the senses

By Deb Gray

It's an assault on the senses.

There's nothing like the smells, the tastes, the sounds and the sights of a state fair.

Labor Day in Lincoln was a scorcher. But that didn't stop the thousands of people—estimated at 100,000 by fair officials—from coming out to the fairgrounds to join in the circus.



Riders find themselves momentarily upside down on one of the many rides at the Nebraska State Fair.

Part of the fascination of the fair comes from its broth of emotions: excitement, frustration, fatigue. There is mystery on the midway: people calling to you from under jaundiced lights, grabbing for your attention.

### Double Ferris wheels

The two Murphy Bros.—each one has his own carnival—have both their midways together at the state fair this year. So,

there are more rides—two, count 'em, two—double ferris wheels.

Overall, the rides are cheaper this year.

Instead of coughing up 75 cents for each ride, people buy coupon books which are redeemable for shows or rides.

As always, the fair has its bizarre quirks—the girl who changes into a gorilla, the women at the burlesque show with the mannequin faces and Siamese twins eternally facing each other.

### Fishbowl life

The 23-year-old male twins said in an interview that their fishbowl life doesn't bother them.

"They'd be looked at anywhere they went anyway," their father said. "They might as well earn their way."

There were oddities of a different sort: the U.S. Navy band, dressed in summer whites and blue-anchor insignias, singing country.

The Norfolk Police Dept. exhibit was a hit. Behind glass cases was marijuana, labeled and displayed in every conceivable form. "Marijuana Leaf" was one sample. "4 Rolled Joints," "Brick Kilo" and "Water Pipes" were others.

### 4-H contests

But all this is not the crux of what the state fair is about. It is about thousands of 4-Hers across the state, who have dreamed and worked toward a purple ribbon for months.

It's about families such as the Elmer Eberspachers of Seward. Each year about this time, the family hits the road, showing draft horses at state fairs throughout the Midwest.

This year their three-year-old mare Lori did well, taking in about 15 winning ribbons from the Iowa, Missouri and Nebraska State Fairs.

### Family affair

To the Eberspachers, breeding horses is a family thing. Elmer started breeding horses 40 years ago. Now his son takes the draft horses around to shows, and his grandson works at cleaning out the stalls.

The fair is about boys like David Knabe, who fattened a Yorkshire boar on three and one-half gallons of ground corn a day up to 926 lbs. And now, David said he wouldn't sell his hog, named Extreme, for any amount of sausage or money.

And the fair is about people like Dale Shoemaker. For 22 years he has stood at the gate taking tickets from faceless thousands. He keeps coming back.

"It gets in your blood," he said.

