

The Selby Walsh Story

By Dan Kochakian



Selby Walsh, circa March 1970. Courtesy of Selby Walsh.

In *B&R* 308, Chris Bentley, in his 'Chris's Curiosities' column featured a rare disc by Selby Walsh on Belt Records. Nothing was known of Selby, but Ray Astbury did some research and found more information on this Muskegon, Michigan, gospel singer and musician. Following Ray's research Dan Kochakian located Mr. Walsh who provided the following insight into his life and music.

"I was born in Decatur, Mississippi, in Newton County on 12th September, 1939. My parents were Albert and Mittie Wash. I was born as Wash, but I changed my last name to Walsh more than fifty years ago. My father was a sharecropper and I worked on the farm with him, cutting pulpwood in pieces. I think they used to make paper out of it. We hauled that and then that was sold. Most of the time, we had our own truck. We also worked the farm with cotton and corn, our main crops to make a living. My father and I worked at the James Farm and the Jordan Farm in the Decatur area.

My uncle Solomon Wash played harmonica. There were seven children, but it was mainly me in the family who was interested in music. My brother had a harmonica, but he never learned to play it, so I took it up and learned songs from the radio in the '40s and '50s. I used to listen to WLAC out of Nashville.

NB: Ray Astbury found the the following information: 1940 census, Beat 3, Newton County, Mississippi; Albert Wash, 28, Farmer; Mittie Wash, 29; Katie Wash, 6; Leona Wash, 5; Charlie T., 3; James, 2; Selby, 3/12. All were born in Mississippi.

I played at Boler High School and was in a band back then and we used to play in one club across the county line. Our county, Newton, was dry, so we had to go across to get alcohol.

I was playing harmonica and singing, and Leroy Brown played guitar. Sometimes a drummer would sit in. Sometimes I played with another guitarist named Willie Earl Mason. We didn't travel much, just played near home. We got a few dollars a night. Most of the money went to rent the instruments and sometimes I didn't get anything for playing. Overall, I got very little out of it, but one time, I got \$5 and I thought that was good. When I was about seventeen, I bought a

guitar from the money I made raising corn, so I used a holder for my harmonica so I could play both at the same time. I never played slide guitar.

We liked Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed and other rhythm and blues bands. Muddy and Jimmy were our main influences. We played from ten o'clock at night to two o'clock in the morning. Nobody played before we got onstage. That's when the music got started.

I moved to Muskegon Heights, Michigan, in 1959 or 1960. I remember playing the Rainbow Club in Muskegon Heights around that time. I moved north from Mississippi so I'd have a better chance of playing music. There I played for seven dollars a night.

Around 1962, I started working at New Way Equipment Company in Muskegon, so I moved there in 1963. We made and sold air-ride suspension equipment for the big trucks. I worked there for just about 41 years and retired in 2002.

I paid a record company in the 1960s to cut a record for me. I did the recording, but they never released the record, so I lost out. I wanted to record because I was inspired to write songs for the Lord who saved me. I stopped playing in clubs and was baptised in Jesus' name at the Zion Tabernacle Church at 5th and Hackley in Muskegon Heights.

The Belt label was in Muskegon. A guy named Jay owned a recording studio at 979 East Broadway. I played guitar and harmonica on the two records I cut for Belt in 1969. I have no idea how they got that name, Belt. It was just me on vocal with my guitar and harmonica on the first record. The studio hired a couple of people for my second record to do background vocals. These were the only two records I ever recorded.

I became a member of Christ Temple Church in 1964, and play for that church now. That's where I've been ever since. I play the piano and sometimes sing, play the harmonica and the guitar. I sing songs like 'Glory Hallelujah, Since I Laid My Burden Down,' and 'Oh, Ship Of Zion.' I only play the music that represents the Lord now".

Selby Walsh Recordings

Belt 101

vcl/gtr/hca

90694 A My Jesus Is So Good To Me

90694 B I Am So Glad Jesus Brought Me Out

Belt 105

Vcl with organ/drums/background chorus

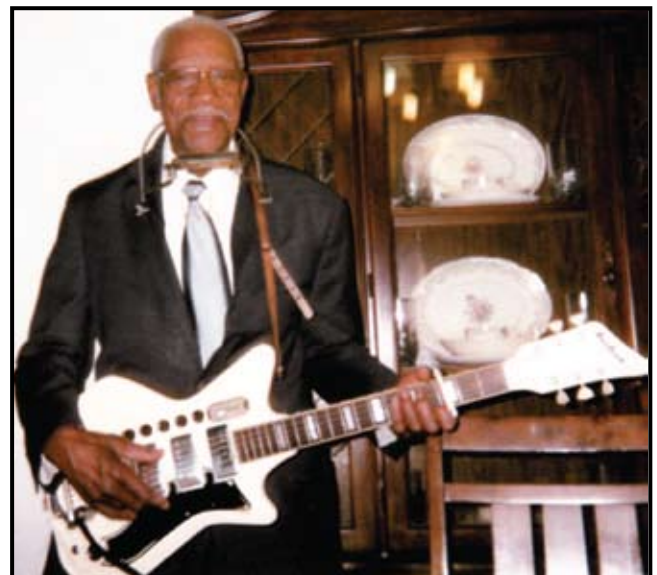
13097 Lord, You Brought Me From A Long Way

Vcl/gtr/organ/drums/background chorus

13907 When I Reach My Home On High- vocal

Note: Same matrix number in dead wax as side one

Based on an interview by Dan Kochakian on 1st May 2016. Thanks to Ray Astbury for assistance. Label shot from the Dan Kochakian Collection.



Selby Walsh, May 2016, Muskegon, Michigan. Courtesy Selby Walsh.

