



WALTER BURRELL

# Hollywood Happenings

(Ed. note: This is the second of a two-part exclusive interview with Clara Ward and The Ward Singers, number one Gospel-singing group in the world.)

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Clara Ward was still in her pre-teen years when her mother, Gertrude Ward, formed the core of what was to become The Ward Singers. For twenty years the group was constantly on the move and wore out 15 of their eight-door, specially built limousines as they hit almost every state in the country.

Then, in 1962, a scout from the New Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas caught them at Disneyland (it was their first appearance there) and offered them two weeks in Vegas with an option for an additional 38 weeks.

The first Gospelsers ever to make the Vegas cabaret scene, The Ward Singers were an immediate sensation. Long lines waited to cram into the New Frontier Lounge and their option was not only picked up, but they played 40-week runs there in '63 and '64.

In the interest of other engagements, these days the group limit their Las Vegas appearances to a couple of weeks once a year, the latest at Caesar's Palace in the spring of '67. But Vegas is still home to Clara Ward and is admittedly the place she wants to settle if and when she ever retires.

AMONG THE Ward Singers' greatest admirers are the other show business greats. Johnny Carson, Dinah Shore, Peter Lawford, Mitzi Gaynor, Carol Channing, Elvis Presley, Judy Garland, Dean Martin, Liberace, Tony Bennett and Vic Damone are just some of the stars who crowded the New Frontier Lounge at 4:00 a.m. --following their own shows.

Over the years the makeup of the group has changed, but not the quality of the singers. When she looks for a necessary replacement, Miss Ward says "I don't care if a girl has a better voice than I, but if it isn't at least as good, then I'm not interested."

She finds her girls in Negro church choirs and trains them herself in the Ward way of Gospel singing. The present group, with each the possessor of the necessary magnificent voice, consists of Mildred Means, a Ward singer since 1958; Voyla Crowley and Vermettya Royster, who joined in 1960; and Malvilyn Statham and Madeline Thomson, who arrived in 1961.

Over the years the Ward showmanship has sharpened, too, and their repertoire now includes such non-spirituals as "Without A Song" and "America, The Beautiful," both included in their stirring new Verve album, "The Heart, The Faith, The Soul of Clara Ward."

Miss Ward is the first to admit that whatever she sings winds up sounding like Gospel "because that's the only thing I have an ear for." She has made more than 100 records. She has also written some 200 songs, all based on Biblical themes.

SHE'S NEVER taken a voice lesson in her life and her piano lessons "lasted long enough for me to know what key I'm singing in." Despite that, she's been called the finest piano player in Gospel and does most of the playing for the group. Each of the singers takes the lead sometime during their performance, with Miss Ward taking over the last two or three numbers.

Miss Ward hit the campaign trail for President Johnson in 1964 and treasures her invitation to the inauguration. But nothing gives her and her singers greater satisfaction than the memory of their three weeks in Viet Nam last year--despite the fact that the airport was bombed as they were to leave. But Clara Ward knew she had God on her side.

## Making A Joyful Noise



CLARA WARD, at piano, with her famed Gospel-singing group who are the subject of Walter Burrell's "Hollywood Happenings", this page.

## Gardening Tools? Who Needs 'Em? MTA

### Launch Disaster Program

Veterans of Foreign Wars posts in the Department of Nevada are in the process of appointing Post Disaster Committees, which will cooperate with the agency in charge of any disaster or emergency. Local Posts will furnish their members for manpower needs.

The lack of interest in disaster or emergency control by citizens has caused the National organization of the V.F.W. to make the Disaster Program their number one project for 1968.

In view of the great number of disasters, natural and man made, which have plagued the Western States recently, the Department of Nevada expects to have every Post set up with an effective Disaster Committee by February 1, 1968.

Citizens are asked to contact their local V.F.W. Post for information regarding the Disaster Program.

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## League Of Women Voters

A CAMPAIGN to increase political party precinct participation is planned for January and February of 1968 by the League of Women Voters of Nevada, according to an announcement by Mrs. Richard G. Miller, President. A non-partisan organization which promotes informed participation in government but never endorses political parties or candidates, the Nevada League will be joining Leagues in the 50 states in a campaign to teach their members and the voting public how to make the voice of an individual voter heard in choosing the president.

For most voters the opportunity to influence decisions begins in the party precinct, and here is where the League is urging increased citizen participation. Prerequisite, of course, is membership in a political party.

A long-range goal is to encourage League members and other voters to continue to be active in politics after the presidential election. While Board Members of state and local Leagues are required to refrain from party activity during their term of office, all other League members are encouraged to take an active part in party politics.

George Abbott, Republican State Chairman, and William MacDonald, Democratic State Chairman, have indicated cooperation by their respective parties in the League's campaign. Mrs. Samuel Ford, chairman of the League planning committee, recently met with representatives of both parties to discuss publications planned for state-wide distribution prior to the precinct mass meetings to be held throughout all seventeen counties of Nevada beginning in January.

The publication of a revised Nevada Voter's Handbook by the Bureau of Governmental Research at the University of Nevada in Reno will also be coordinated with plans being made by the League and state central committees of both parties.

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munity or its Anti-Poverty Program."

The request, made at O.I. Executive Board meeting, Monday night, was ignored, but it is nearly certain that the staff of Manpower will strive to be placed on the agenda of the regular O.I. Board meeting Wednesday, June 10. (Regrettably the VOICE goes to press before that date).

It is to be hoped that Board members of Operation Independence will consider the gravity of the untenable situation, and realize how devastating it is to the program to allow individuals to use it for a battleground in a struggle for personal self-aggrandizement.

It also behooves the community at large to remember we all have a vested interest in the welfare of Operation Independence programs. The programs belong to the community, and we must be ever vigilant against the megalomaniacs who would destroy them.