

Profile

The a cappella jazz group known as Take 6 are not only the heirs to the rich tradition of the doo-wop and gospel groups of the 1950s, but also the leaders in the second wave of jazz and pop vocal groups that emerged in the 1990s. With these noteworthy legacies at their foundation, these multiple GRAMMY winners continue to look and move in a forward direction as the first decade of the 21st century unfolds.

The Take 6 story began at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1980, when freshman Claude V. McKnight III formed a quartet known as the Gentlemen's Estate Club. When tenor Mark Kibble heard the group rehearsing in – of all places – a campus restroom, he joined in the harmonies and performed onstage with the group that same night.

Mervyn Warren joined shortly after, and the group briefly took the name of Alliance. They performed in local churches and on campus for the next few years, with personnel changing frequently as older members graduated and new voices arrived on campus to replace them.

After college, the group signed with the Warner Brothers label in 1987 and changed their name to Take 6. Their self-titled debut album, released the following year, scored two GRAMMY Awards and landed in the top ten on *Billboard's* Contemporary Jazz and Contemporary Christian charts.

The group's swinging, harmony-rich gospel sound attracted a flurry of attention, and the group went on to record or perform with numerous jazz luminaries, including Quincy Jones, Ella Fitzgerald and Stevie Wonder.

The 1990 followup album, *So Much 2 Say*, was equally successful, climbing to the number 2 spot on *Billboard's* Contemporary Jazz chart and scoring a GRAMMY for Best Contemporary Soul Gospel Album. Warren left the group a year later to pursue a career as a producer. He was replaced by Joey Kibble, Mark's younger brother.

The group added instrumentation to their purely a cappella sound beginning with the 1991 holiday release, *He Is Christmas*. The album scored yet another GRAMMY, this time for Best Jazz Vocal Performance. A string of finely crafted recordings continued throughout the remainder of the decade: *Join the Band* (1994), *Brothers* (1996), *So Cool* (1998) and a second holiday album, *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* (1999). *Join the Band* and *Brothers* were both GRAMMY winners.

In 2000, Take 6 released a live recording and a best-of collection, followed by *Beautiful World* in 2002. The group left Warner Brothers after *Beautiful World* and launched their own Take 6 label. Their maiden voyage in the new venture was *Feels Good*, released in 2006.

Take 6 joins Heads Up International with the release of *The Standard* in August 2008. The album includes guest appearances by R&B luminaries Aaron Neville and Brian McKnight (Claude's brother), as well as veteran jazzmen George Benson, Al Jarreau and Jon Hendricks. "While we sing lyrics that always exemplify our spiritual and moral convictions, what we really are at the core is a jazz vocal group," says Dave Thomas, a member of the Take 6 lineup since 1985. "So we decided to do an album of jazz standards, a record that will stand up as the jazz vocal album for all time."

McKnight stands behind the ambitious claim. "We go into every project saying it will be the best," he says. "At least the best we've ever done, and depending on the concept or the genre, it may be the best that's ever been done by anyone. When we take on a project or step into a new phase of our career, we're not afraid to say, 'Hey, let's move some mountains.'"

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