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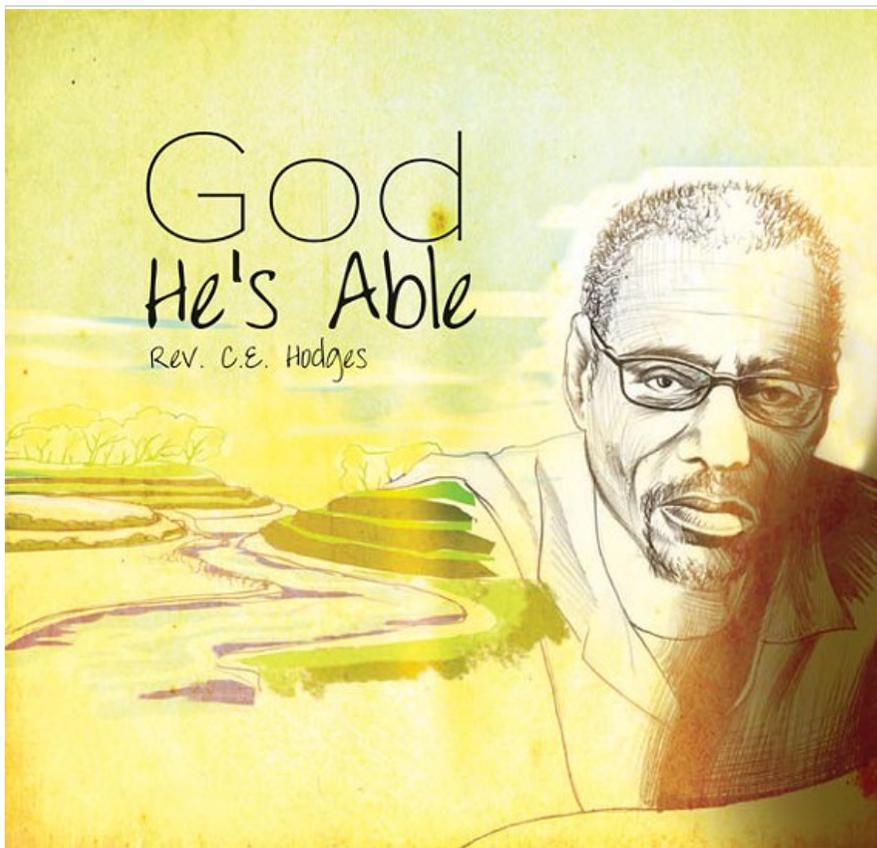
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Soul Messenger

Charles Hodges releases "God, He's Able."

by [ROBERT GORDON](#)



If you've heard an Al Green hit, you've heard Charles Hodges.

He's the organ player, the one producer Willie Mitchell called "Do Funny" — as in, when listening to a take before what would become the final one, Mitchell would say to Hodges, "Go in there and do something funny." Hodges plays the memorable organ stabs that punctuate "Take Me to the River" and the sweeping swells that bring together "Love and Happiness."

He plays soul music like he's in church, and he plays church music from his soul. That's him on Little Milton hits (e.g., "Walking the Backstreets and Crying") and on all the classic Ann Peebles and Syl Johnson songs. He once traded licks with Stevie Wonder on an unreleased Al Green track.

"I have no conflicts about secular music," Rev. Hodges says. "I put *me* in that work. I'm doing what God has given me the ability to do: 'Whatsoever you do, if you put me first, I am with you.' So I know God is with me when I play that music."

In the 1960s, Hodges moved from the stage of Beale Street's Flamingo Club to the road band for O.V. Wright.

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"I wrote one of his biggest records: 'T'd Rather Be Blind, Crippled and Crazy,'" Hodges says. That song was recently covered by the Derek Trucks Band.

Rev. Hodges — an ordained minister for 13 years — also wrote Al Green's "Always," from the *Full of Fire* album.

"I was lying in bed, and the soap opera *Edge of Night* came on," he explains. "The theme music propped me up. I flew into my den, had the keyboard there, and came up with 'Always.' I called Willie [Mitchell], said 'I just wrote a song. I got faith in it.' He said, 'Well, Al Green is looking for a song.' I put my clothes on. Al was already there. He got a pencil, and we came up with the lyrics."

Rev. Hodges has just self-released his second solo CD, a church project called *God, He's Able*. Its 12 tracks are split between the soulful organ that is his trademark and a balance of contemporary gospel — a more hyped-up, synthed-up keyboard sound.

"God says, 'Sing a new song.' He says, 'Make a joyful noise.' 'Down By the Riverside' — that's an old hymn. But then I saw the beauty in that song, and I put a more sophisticated beat to it." In his arrangement, he shifts the rhythm, waking up the song, giving it a sly humor.

He's joined by his brothers, with whom he recorded all the 1970s Al Green hits: bassist LeRoy Hodges (heard most Sunday afternoons at B.B. King's Blues Club) and guitarist/songwriter Mabon "Teenie" Hodges.

The family makes a highlight of the spacious "Suddenly," a love song waiting to go pop. Rev. Hodges is featured on piano, applying his organ runs to every one of the 88's acoustic keys. Teenie sneaks in the subtle hooks that marked his best Hi material. And LeRoy carries the bottom. Rev. Hodges handles many of the lead vocals, singing in a voice that whispers at the same time it shouts.

The title song features Thomas Bingham, longtime bandleader for Ann Peebles, playing licks that outside of church would pierce the hearts at juke joints. In the song's middle, Hodges sings about the redemptive part of his personal story, a moment in 1978 when he'd poisoned his body from drug abuse:

"Al Green came and prayed for me in the hospital. He started out the door, then came back, said, 'You're gonna be all right.' He asked me to go on the road with him.

"God can do anything. Sometimes God don't heal you the way you want to be healed. I suffer from diabetes, but He gives me the strength to go through it. I'm healed spiritually."

Last month at Willie Mitchell's Royal Studio in South Memphis, Rev. Hodges reunited with his brothers to back a young Canadian singer, Frazey Ford. Lawrence "Boo" Mitchell engineered. Doug Easley also played guitar, and James Robertson drummed.

"That was one of the most dynamic performances and settings that I've ever been in," Hodges says. "[Ford] is so talented, and I just love her spirit. I love the smile on her face. I close my eyes, and it seems like I can see her. She touched my heart."

The Rev. Charles Hodges can be heard at a couple of local churches. On most Sundays, he plays organ at New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Germantown at 7:50 a.m. and at Unity Missionary Baptist Church in Collierville from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. To purchase his new CD or for further information, visit RevCEHodges.com.

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I think this is a very well written piece

Posted by [Caldwell](#) on July 17, 2011 at 8:50 PM | [Report this comment](#)



Nicely done Robert. I got more from watching and hearing Rev. Hodges play the organ than a whole year of college! Truly the Drawbars King.....

Posted by [rollreallyroll](#) on August 1, 2011 at 5:58 PM | [Report this comment](#)