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Final Nominees Named!

2010
Diamond
Awards!



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singing gospel music.'

In This Issue:

Brumley MusicFest ~ Southern Plainsmen
Busted! ~ Avatar: Haven't We Seen This Before?

THE PUBLISHER'S PERSPECTIVE: A VIDEO MESSAGE TO READERS FROM ROB PATZ

Rob arrives in Branson two months prior to the Diamond Awards...on a covert op to plan big surprises for the awards show we'll all be talking about!



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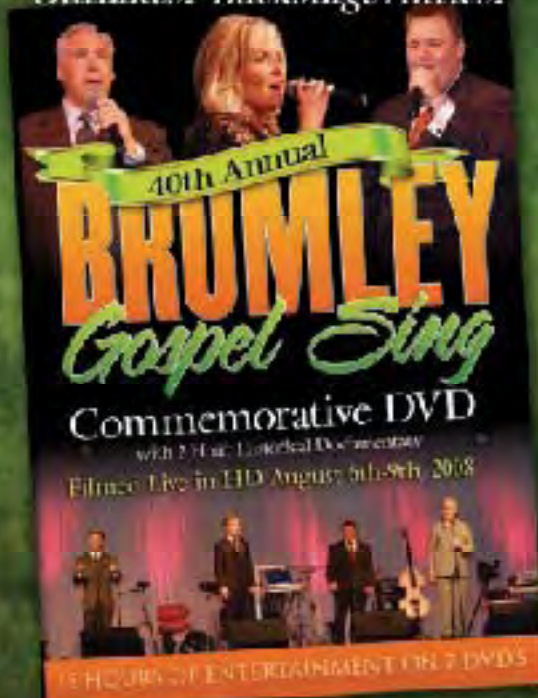
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Tribute Quartet, The Lewis Family, Aaron Wilburn, Geraldine & Ricky, Larry DeLawder



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SGN Scoops exists to showcase what is distinguished, intriguing, and real about southern & country gospel music. We seek with our stories to shed light on people fulfilling a call to minister - to make or support the making of music that excites an audience and glorifies God. And we seek to do it interactively.

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TIFFS, TABERNACLES, & WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

If you don't know that there is politics in southern gospel, you're even greener than I am.

But here's the thing: I'm denouncing it.

I was on this roll anyway after the publication of last month's *SGN Scoops*. Nothing gets people talking like award nominations, and the top 10 list for the SGN Scoops 2010 Diamond Awards was no exception. We encountered dismissive eye rolls, indignant protests, and enthusiastic gratitude, all in the same day. And though my personal role in the Diamond Awards is simply making sure it gets reported, I tended to take all of the responses personally, so much so that some of my friends – in and out of 'the industry' – had to stage an intervention.

Then I heard a sermon that made me laugh and think – the best kind! Pastor David Renfro of Evangel Church of God in Dayton, Ohio spoke to us about the transfiguration. Sunday School lessons of yore have this blessed event engraved in my mind as a felt-board story – complete with SeeThrough! Jesus and the booming voice of God the Father. Pastor Renfro, however, put his focus on the disciples that accompanied Jesus at this remarkable happening, in particular, Peter. While God was declaring and Jesus was personifying the glory, Peter was... spouting off about building three tabernacles.

It is Pastor Renfro's opinion that Peter might be a bit on the slow side.

God does not want our tabernacles to mark the occasions when He shows up big... If our attention is on ourselves, it's not on Him.

And so I ask, dear readers: what is gospel music about for you? Notice I did not say

southern gospel, and that is with purpose. As the time draws nearer for our Lord to come, as the work of the church becomes more urgent, it's this green-and-humble writer's opinion that labels and awards and the politics thereof mean less and less. This is not to belittle the celebration of achievement, but it is to say that too much emphasis on the fruits of our "gifted-

ness" (be it page hits, product sales, or even nominations) should not ever, ever, EVER supersede the reason we've chosen Gospel as the outlet for said giftedness.

Simply put: Our work is not for one moment more important than the reason that we do it.



KELLY CAPIRIOTTI BURTON,
 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

See, Peter was in the midst of one of the most incredible moments in history. He was beholding the Son of Man, the promise keeper of Israel, and the blaze-of-glory prophet, and getting to hear God say, "Check it out. My Son ROCKS!" (paraphrase, Matthew 17:5) And Peter, bless his heart, was so excited that he missed the point. God did not need three tabernacles to mark the occasion.

God does not want our tabernacles to mark the occasions when He shows up big.

He wants...our attention.

If our attention is on ourselves, on what we have to offer or gain, it's not on Him.

If our attention is on how a group with #1 hits on southern gospel charts can possibly be on the same top 10 list as a group who only sings every other weekend, it's not on Him.

If our attention is on who is traditional, who is country, who is acceptable, who is controversial, who has arrived, who is a neophyte, who is worthy, who is not, or whatever other tiffs we have... it's not on Him.

I understand that there is a business side to every industry, of course. People have to pay bills. People have to assume a professional posture. People naturally want to be noted as the best or the most popular – and if we're not striving to be excellent, there's really no point in making an effort.

We don't all need to be excellent in the same exact way, however. I had the distinct pleasure and privilege of talking to Joe Bonsall of the Oak Ridge Boys for this month's issue. I will let you read his story as he tells it, but I will point out here that this world-renowned – not gospel-renowned, not country-renowned, WORLD-renowned- entertainer has a heart

continues on next page >

Photos: Lou Hildreth with Jason Crabb; Lou with the Oak Ridge Boys: Duane Allen, Joe Bonsall, Richard Sterban, and William Golden.

Photos by Howard Hildreth



Ms. Lou: Nashville Celebrates Gospel Music With Gospel Friends

Howard and I recently spent three days at GOSPEL MUSIC NASHVILLE held at the Opryland Resort Hotel. Diana Thomas and her husband, David, of Freshwell Media, produced this monumental event. Their daughter, Andrea, and their son, Aaron, played a significant role in the success of GMN. Diana is one of the daughters of Jimmy and Dorothy Jones, FAMILY FRIENDLY ENTERTAINMENT NETWORK, responsible for taping all three days of gospel concerts. Diana did excellent MC duties, also. Other members of the Jones Family came from Texas to help, and each one did his or her part, making it a beautiful family effort. Aunt Connie and some of her family came. Youngest daughter, Carla, and her husband, Don, were there to

help. Daughter Mary Fay Jackson, host of Texas Country Gospel, was there interviewing artists and performing with the family. Some great music was made when Brother Jimmy Jones played his mandolin and the entire family joined him in singing the great old gospel songs. The delightful matriarch of the Jones Family, Dorothy, stood by with a sweet smile, knowing she and Brother Jimmy are serving the Lord and have poured their hearts

Greenish Me | cont'd

for people, a passion for music, and a dedication to Christ. The three can co-exist – and can be used to positively reach and touch the lives of an audience.

And while Mr. Ban-Joey will be the first to say ORB does not make a living in the gospel music industry, they also count themselves privileged to have a place in it.

The thing is, if a Christian industry is in fact Christian, then the fruit – the business dealings, the message board posts, the general response – of that industry should embody the example of Christ, specifically by being respectful, honest, and while not blindly supportive, friendly in nature.

I started to write that “SGN Scoops is at a turning point”...then revised that to “Southern Gospel is at a turning point”...but the truth is, our world is at a turn-

ing point. Maybe Jesus will return this year, and maybe not for another 100 years, but the world we live in is in desperate need of His light...not of our pettiness. I want to be able to say I spent my energy, used my gifts, communicated every day, the love of Christ, even in my disappointments, my aggravation, and the details of my work.

I love the song by Karen Peck and New River that asks, “Why Can’t all God’s Children Get Along?” The first time I heard it, at NQC 2009, I nodded my head emphatically and possibly shouted a few Amens. The next time I heard it live was just a few days after drafting this column, and I wanted to shout! Perhaps the sentiment seems too simple, but since God’s Word calls us to have the faith of children, I think it’s right on. 🇺🇸

and money into spreading the gospel all over the world with FFE Network. The concerts were filled with incredible gospel music, with artists and audience worshipping our Lord.

One of the joys for us was spending time with the terrific editor of SCOOPS DIGITAL, Kelly, and her husband Rod Burton. This couple is committed to sharing the gospel as a family. Rod was a featured performer at GMN and represented the soon-to-be-held event, BRANSON GOSPEL MUSIC CONVENTION beautifully. Howard and I will be in Branson—June 28th thru July 2nd-- to bask in the atmosphere of love and spiritual communion.

A highlight of our Nashville trip was the Southern Gospel Music Guild Harmony Honors on Monday night paying tribute to "100 years of Southern Gospel Music" with stirring performances by the Oak Ridge Boys, Blackwood

Brothers, Triumphant Quartet, the Nelons, Karen Peck & New River, Tribute Quartet, the LeFevres, Perrys, Gold City, Jason Crabb and the Crabb Family. Judy Nelson, President of the Guild, and her committee produced a fabulous concert, hosted by Karen Peck and Kirk Franklin.

A great friend, Dale Burrell, came to GMN from Knoxville to tape artist interviews for SOUTHERN STYLE PRAISE, telecast on FAMILY FRIENDLY ENTERTAINMENT on Saturday nights at 9:00. Dale and I worked together taping last year's SGMA Hall Of Fame Induction at Dollywood for Ark Studio, Inc, and I loved doing these new interviews in Nashville for his program. One of the most delightful guests was Lily Isaacs. The Isaacs were headliners at GMN. The interview with Joel & LaBreeska Hemphill could never cover the respect due them for all the years of their ministry. Joel's songs continue to reach millions, and the two of them




The concerts were filled with incredible gospel music, with artists and audience worshipping our Lord.

are still on the frontline for our Lord. I was blessed to interview Jerry Goff and congratulate his wife, "Little Jan" famous for her years with Wendy Bagwell, on her upcoming induction into the SGMA Hall Of Fame. Jerry & Jan Goff are beautiful examples of faithfulness to the call of the gospel. Clarke Beasley, Vice-President of the National Quartet Convention, was fun to interview.

A new friend, David Cooper, was so gracious. He did a "voice over" for Southern Style Praise after our interview. An exciting group, AQUA, from San Diego, California, with Pastor James Larson, was so special. James and the other members—Chris, Justin, and Hugh--won our hearts, as did Karen Harding, a longtime friend, who sings with them. We are thankful for the new friendships of Joni Larson and the other wives of the excellent quartet AQUA.

Be watching for all of this programming on Family Friendly Entertainment Network. Howard and I watch it in Houston on Sky Angel (Dish Network), and it is streamed on the Internet. Check www.familyfriendly.com (don't forget the e). Our heartfelt thanks go out to Jimmy Jones and his entire family for presenting GOSPEL MUSIC NASHVILLE and we are looking forward to next year.

May God bless all of our efforts to spread the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. 

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AVATAR:

Environmental Theme, Recycled Plot

So, I finally got to see the most popular movie ever made (at least if one isn't sensible enough to adjust for inflation): *Avatar*.

First impression? It really is as visually spectacular as every one says it is. I didn't see it in the theater, but I saw it on a friend's HDTV with a Blu-ray player and surround sound. I'm usually not one to care about those kinds of things, but in this case, I got the impression that the film's few virtues were visual, so I knew I would want to see a good presentation.

And a good presentation it was. Even without the 3-D effect, the CGI was very convincing, and the world created for this story was fascinating and visually spectacular. Unfortunately, it seems that James Cameron spent all his time focusing on the visuals when making this movie, and not a whole lot of time on the story.

It's not an outrageously bad script, actually; it's just that it's extremely surface-level. We've seen this movie 100 times before under different names. All the good guys are good, all the bad guys are bad, and none of the major characters undergoes any significant change. In the end, everything works out exactly like the audience would expect.

And, spiritually speaking, the film is utterly bankrupt.

[Warning: Plot spoilers follow!]

In the beginning of the film, a Marine named Jake Sully (played by Sam Worthington) has his mind put into an alien body, or "avatar," so that he can breathe the air on a distant planet, and so that he can interact with the locals as one of their own. In the regular world, Sully is in a wheelchair, so he's thrilled to have a different body that allows him to walk again. Sully's mission is to negotiate with the Native American-type aliens so that they'll let the Earth people drill under their land for some precious minerals. He can still return to his regular body when he needs to, to file reports.

Anyone who's seen Disney's *Pocahontas* knows what happens next. In both movies, the hero meets a beautiful young woman of the tribe. She teaches him to be an environmentalist, and how to talk to the trees. He realizes that the natives won't give up the land for any reason. And Sully's superiors move in anyway, killing everyone and everything in sight, because, of course, all white capitalists are inherently evil. (Of course white capitalists do bad things sometimes. But I grow weary of this cliché.)

Then, in a climax straight out of *Return of the Jedi*, the primitive woodland aliens take on and defeat the big bad machines. Since Sully has now been fully accepted by the alien tribe, Sully gets his mind permanently put in the body of the avatar so he can live with his new girlfriend, happily – and predictably – ever after.

Seriously, James Cameron, it was 12 years between this movie and

Titanic. You couldn't come up with a story that had a shred of originality in all that time?

Of course, sometimes there are good movies that have very simple, straightforward stories. The original 1977 *Star Wars* springs to mind. But the difference between *Star Wars* and this movie is that *Star Wars* was incredibly fast-paced. By contrast, the film clocked in at 2 ½ hours. Instead of being glued to our seats, my friend and I kept getting up to use the bathroom, get more snacks, etc. In other words, we were restless. When the film was over, we were both surprised—we thought it had been over 3 hours!

Having examined the different aesthetic angles of the movie, it's now time to move on to the most important part: the spiritual angle. What does the movie have to say? What can the audience take home with them after all the flashy visuals and action?

Unfortunately, the answer is "not much." Cameron takes a very typical anti-technology stance (and

a hypocritical one, seeing as how Cameron has hardly given up everything to live in a grass hut himself). And what should we embrace as opposed to technology? Why, paganism,

of course.

This movie is a huge piece of propaganda for Native American



We've seen this movie 100 times before under different names. All the good guys are good, all the bad guys are bad, and none of the major characters undergoes any significant change.

nature worship. Ironically, I don't think that Cameron actually believes in the pagan beliefs expressed in the movie. I think he's just using it as a metaphor for his political agenda of environmentalism. On that note, one would be hard-pressed to find someone who would say, "Destroying our planet is a good thing." The Lord told us in Genesis, before the fall, to take care of the earth (tk). But I highly doubt this movie is going to deeply touch a CEO who is making a ton of money off of destroying a rainforest somewhere. As for many others of us, we're tired of the lectures, thank you.

Why is it that a "kid's film" like *Up* has a distinctly more mature theme that adults can actually use in life, while an "adult's film" like *Avatar* is so utterly empty and shallow in its meaning? (More on Pixar next month.)

Of course, even the label "adult's film" doesn't quite fit. While the movie was aggressively marketed to kids, the characters keep dropping the phrase "g—d---" like saying it earns them carbon offset credits.

Another point of the movie is how we Americans are personally terrible to the Native Americans right now. Um, I hate to break this to the filmmakers, but I wasn't personally responsible for the Trail of Tears. Neither is anyone else who's alive. Why must this point be dragged up over and over again? Does it really help

anything to encourage the Native Americans to harbor their anger and hatred towards the rest of the American population?

There's also a creepy undercurrent to the behavior of the native aliens in this movie. Maybe I'm reading too much into things, but I've heard too many liberals (not all, but many liberals) refer to the 9/11 terrorists as "freedom fighters" who attacked the "bully" America. When I see the aliens in this movie attack the "bullying" machines with their primitive weapons, I can't help but see this as some kind of deranged wish-fulfillment fantasy on the part of the filmmakers.

So, at the end of the day, is this a movie worth seeing? Well, I don't regret seeing it, just because I wanted to have an informed opinion of such a huge cultural touchstone. But I don't plan on seeing it again, and I don't ever need to see a sequel. Admittedly, the visuals were a feast. But the story was a reheated TV dinner, and the morality was out to lunch.



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Rhonda Frye's Faith Boost >>

Purity in Industry | **BUSTED!**

When I received Christ, I was married with children. My desire was to model this meaningful relationship to my family. One morning, as I enjoyed quiet time with the Lord, the silence was broken by a voice calling "Mommy." I started to get up, but instead had the bright idea of letting my son "catch me" spending time with Jesus. After all, this would be a great opportunity to let him learn from my example. "Mommy is downstairs," I answered. Proudly I sat with my Bible open, paper on lap, and gripped a pink pen with the words inscribed "Battlefield Parkway Church of the Nazarene" on the side.

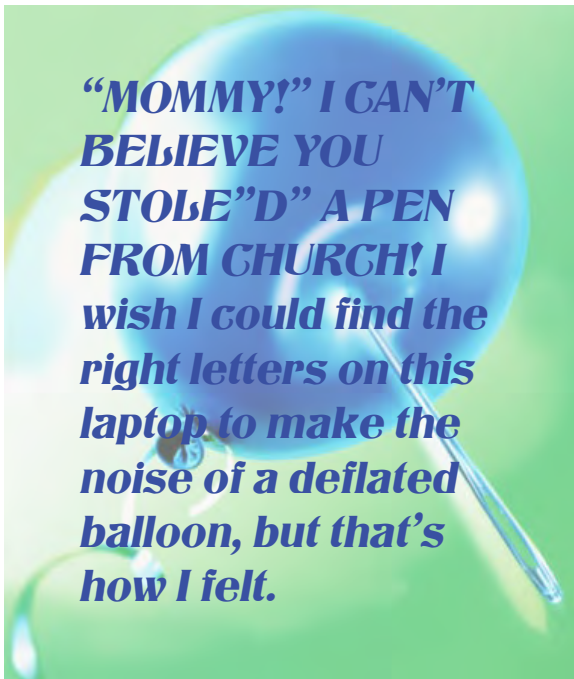
Listening to his footsteps drawing near, my head swelled. He entered the room smiling, then all of a sudden his expression changed, eyes widened and his arrows, I mean words were ... "MOMMY!" I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU STOLE"D" A PEN FROM CHURCH! I wish I could find the right letters on this laptop to make the noise of a deflated balloon, but that's how I felt. Busted. "What should I do, Austin?" "Put it back," he said. That Sunday, into the sanctuary we went and he

stood beside me as I put the pen back in its place. I am saddened when I read news of an artist appearing to be doing all the right things has been "busted." Recently, a popular artist admitted to living a homosexual lifestyle. With controversy, people speak opinions. I've noticed some are quick to remind us "homosexuality is an abomination unto the Lord." I agree, the Bible does say that, but is that the only sin God hates? Proverbs 6: 16-18 says: " There are six things the Lord hates- no, seven things He detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord in a family."

I also find Ezekiel 16 to be an eye opening passage as well. This chapter contains the longest prophetic message in the book of Ezekiel. It is an allegory about the Lord and His relationship to Jerusalem, who proved to be an unfaithful wife and eventually became a prostitute. It is evident that unfaithfulness to God surpasses ALL sin. Read verses 46-51 " Your older sister was Samaria, who lived with her daughters in the north. Your younger sister was Sodom, who lived with her daughters in the south. But you have not merely sinned as they did. YOU QUICKLY SURPASSED THEM IN CORRUPTION. As surely as I live says the Sovereign Lord, Sodom and her daughters were never as wicked as you and your daughters. Sodom's sins were PRIDE, GLUTTONY, AND LAZINESS, WHILE THE POOR AND NEEDY SUFFERED OUTSIDE HER DOOR. She was PROUD and committed detestable sins, so I wiped her out, as you have seen. " So what sin is worse? Unfaithfulness to God. Let's back up in this chapter to see find the cause of the sin. The first part of the chapter explains how Jerusalem was nothing- no one cared for her until God came along making her beautiful and made a covenant with her. Verse 15a holds the key. "BUT, you thought your fame and beauty WERE YOUR OWN."

Pride. Doesn't all sin trace back to pride in some way? Isn't there a multitude of ways pride can man-

ifest itself such as: idolatry, jealousy, strife, selfish ambition and sexual immorality? Couldn't the list go on and on? Self righteously, we Christians rank and number sins in our own opinion of severity, but does God do that? As I began to think of pride being the root of sin my heart began to weep for all of us in the Christian Music Industry. Those of us called to minister in the limelight are definitely on Satan's hit list. Throw in the fact, we're musicians/worshippers and the fact that many of us are married with families. Many in the industry hardly have a connection to a local church. Being on the road is isolating, making accountability difficult. Mercy! I'm



seeing the word "TARGET" written on our heads! Satan hates us and we are deceived if we think for one minute he's not on a mission to steal, kill and destroy us. What more pleasure could he get than by getting any of us to fall? When one falls, the body of Christ is wounded and all of our ministries lose credibility. It's not likely that anyone falls into sin "overnight." As the Casting Crowns song goes- it's a "slow fade." It's not likely anyone wakes up and declares "today is the day I'm going to fall into sin, destroy my family, ministry and the body of Christ." So where does it start? I suggest some form of Pride.

Satan's specialty is taking what's good then manipulating it until it becomes bad. In an industry driven by popularity we are all susceptible to letting our pride get the best of us. Being at the top of charts, winning awards, success and popularity are all wonderful things, but if we don't stay grounded, Satan could use these good things to tempt us to become prideful which leads us to other sins. United Christians makes Satan retreat. What would happen if we artists prayed for each other's protection and integrity? What would happen if we encouraged each other? What would happen if we confessed to God our jealousy the instant it reared its ugly head and promoted the other person instead? What would happen if we refused to criticize and became agents of grace advocating sincere restoration? What would happen if we realized we ourselves are susceptible of falling?

My heart breaks for the purity of our industry. I see how Satan is working against us and how easily anyone can fall to some degree. Humility is the opposite of pride, therefore I humbly admit, I haven't consistently prayed for my fellow artists. I haven't exactly been the model agent of grace. I embarrassingly admit, I've have been jealous of some of you. With those confessions, I ask forgiveness and you to join me in prayer for each other. I encourage you to think of artists right now, and then pray the following prayer. Go the extra mile and tell them you prayed for them today and I challenge you to ban with me and pray for the integrity of our industry often.

Father, I lift up _____ before You. I ask you to place a hedge of protection around their home. May they seek You first, hear Your voice and walk in obedience. May they be grateful for all you've done. Increase their anointing; enlarge their circle of influence and open doors. Keep them humble so they never prefer applause of man over Yours. Make them hungrier for You.

*In Jesus Name,
Amen*

I have prayed this prayer for Scoops readers and would like you to know I am available if I can serve you in anyway. I'm also putting together a team of pastors and concerned artist who wants to see integrity restored and maintained within our industry by organizing support groups and various ministry services to artists. If you are interested, please contact me. My email address is rhonda@sngnscoops.com

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Firm Foundation
Graveyard Revival
Dr. J.D. Brown
It's All About Him
Praise Incorporated
Journey Through the Sky
HisSong



LIVING LEGENDS

Ann Downing
Claude Hopper
Karen Peck Gooch
LuLu Roman
Peg McKamey Bean

MALE SOLOIST

Adam Crabb
Chris Hester
Ivan Parker
Jason Crabb
Mark Bishop

SONG

'Hold On'

Written By McCray Dove, Recorded By Dove Brothers

If You Knew Him

Written By Joseph Habedank Recorded By The Perry's

'Mercy Leads'

Written by Kenna Turner West, Sue C. Smith, and Stephanie Boosahda, Recorded by Sisters

Somebody Died For Me

Written By Christy Sutherland and Kyle Matthews,
Recorded By Triumphant Quartet, Christy Sutherland

What Children Believe

Written by Brent Lamb, Jerry Salley and
James Isaac Elliot, Recorded by Gold City

SONGWRITER

Dianne Wilkinson
Gerald Crabb
Jim Brady
Kenna Turner West
Rodney Griffin

FEMALE SOLOIST

Charlotte Ritchie
Christy Sutherland
Janet Paschal
Misty Freeman
Taranda Green

QUARTET

Brian Free & Assurance
Gaither Vocal Band
Gold City
Jericho
Triumphant Quartet

MIXED GROUP

The Hoppers
The Isaacs
Karen Peck & New River
The Mckameys
The Perrys

INSTRUMENTALIST

Gordon Mote
Kelly Back
Jeff Stice
Johnathan Presnell
Roy Webb
Zack Swain

DUET

Aaron and Amanda Crabb
Dustin & Kaila
Randy & Gigi Burgess
Hearts of Faith
Wendy Word & Forgiven

SUNRISE

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Quartet
Gigi & Randy Burgess
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Praise Incorporated



TRIO

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Greater Vision
Karen Peck & New River
New Day
Talley Trio

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2010

Final Nominees

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Karen Peck Gooch
By Jennifer Vineyard-Rulapaugh

CHRISTIAN COUNTRY GROUP

- Diamond Rio
- Dove Brothers
- Jeff & Sherri Easter
- Oak Ridge Boys
- The Wilsons



PAUL HEIL AWARD in BROADCASTING

- Daniel Graves, Heir Wave Internet Radio
- Jonathan Edwards of KWFC-FM, Springfield, MO
- Ken & Jean Grady, Gospel Music Today
- Les Butler Solid Gospel 105
- Mickey Bell, This Week in Gospel Music

CHRISTIAN COUNTRY MALE ARTIST

- David L Cook
- Dr. J.D. Brown
- Jason Crabb
- Shane Roark
- Tracy Lawrence



Jason Crabb
Promotional Photo

VIDEO/DVD

- Reunion, Gaither Vocal Band
- The Crabb Finale, Crabb Family
- Hinsons Live!, Freemans
- Me Against It, Mercy Mountain Boys
- Live at the Oak Tree, Crabb Revival

BLUEGRASS ARTIST

- Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver
- The Issacs
- Jeff & Sheri Easter
- Primitive Quartet
- Watkins Family

CHRISTIAN COUNTRY

FEMALE ARTIST

- Christy Sutherland
- Debbie Bennett
- Lisa Daggs
- Sharron Kay King
- Wendy Word

INDUSTRY WEBSITE

- GospelGigs.com
- GospelMusicToday.com
- SingingNews.com
- SoGospelNews.com (now AbsolutelyGospel.com)
- SouthernGospelOutreach.com

ARTIST WEBSITE

- Booth Brothers - boothbrothers.com
- Christy Sutherland - christysutherland.net
- Firm Foundations Qt - firmfoundationquartet.com
- McKameys - mckameyonline.com
- Paul's Journey - paulsjourneyonline.com

Top photos: Albert Brumley. Bottom Photo: Brumley 3rd generation.
All provided by The Brumley Family



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The
Brumleys
Bring It
Again.





Appearances include The Grascals, Karen Peck & New River (recent recipients of four 2010 SGN Music Awards), Aaron Wilburn (pictured), Mark Bishop, Chuck Wagon Gang, Brian Free & Assurance, Dove Brothers, The Diplomats, Little Roy & Lizzie, Christy Sutherland, & Willamae

The Brumley Sing has been privileged to call Lebanon, MO home for almost five years now.

When they made the move from Springdale, AR in 2006, the city of Lebanon welcomed the event with open arms and has maintained a great spirit of cooperation in the years since. The facilities of the Cowan Civic Center have perfectly match the growing needs of the ever-expanding event.

These were all factors to be taken into consideration when Arkansas State Representative Tim Summers approached the Brumley family earlier this year. After letting them know how much he had always enjoyed the Brumley Sing, he asked what it would take to get them to bring the event back to northwest Arkansas. After weighing the options, the decision was made to decline to offer to relocate.

It was then the idea of an entirely new event was presented. Summers asked the third generation of Brumleys - Elaine and her husband Brad, Betsy and her husband Kevin - to consider supervising a sing that would serve as a fundraising tool for "Decision Point." He explained how Decision Point was a drug

and alcohol treatment center with a very different view on treatment of these diseases, incorporating treatment for the entire family along with the person suffering from the addiction.

The Brumleys assumed the role of directing the development of this new event and the Brumley Music Fest was born. In keeping with the Brumley tradition of "only the best will do," the talent line up for this year's inaugural event is second to none.

In addition to benefitting Decision Point, the Rotary Club has agreed to provide valet parking for this event with the proceeds going to benefit Snack Pack for Kids of north west Arkansas. This program is currently providing weekend food to over three thousand local children every week. Concessions will be available during the concert, provided by students and parents of Bentonville high School. All proceeds will go to fund the BHS athletic programs.

Program sponsors include SGN Scoops, Walmart, Clarion Hotel, Bentonville area businesses, and personal contributors. If you are unable to attend the Brumley Music Fest but would like to become a sponsor, inquire at the official website. Tickets are \$60.00 for the two night event and only a limited supply remains.

www.brumleymusicfest.com

By Jimmy McMillan



CHRISTY SUTHERLAND

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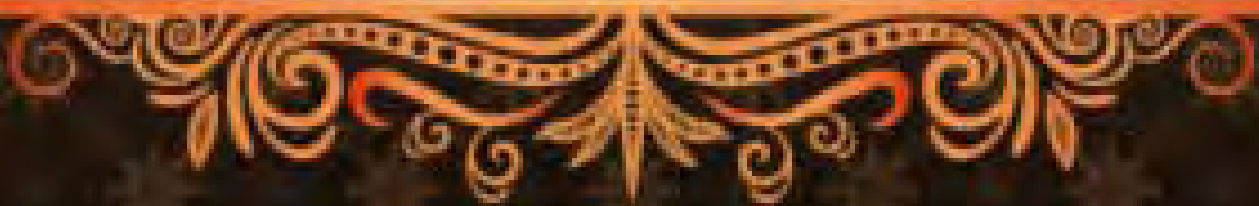
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*Oak Ridge
Boys:*

*We never
stopped singing
gospel music.*





How cool is it that H gospel music is honoring the Oak Ridge Boys?"

PHOTOS~Opposite page | Courtesy of Oak Ridge Boys. Top | The Oak Ridge Boys pose with SGMG President Judy Nelson after receiving the Presidential Honor. By Aaron Crisler/GospelMusicUpdate.com; Bottom | Performing at Kenny Rogers's 50 Years in music concert. Photo by Daniel Tommasino



Joe Bonsall, one of the "ORB" or "Oaks," says most things with a lightness in his voice. This is a man with serious accolades and a seriously prestigious career who rarely takes himself too seriously. Whether you get to know him from the countless ORB songs woven into America's musical culture, one of his memoirs (see sidebar, page__), over a plate of lasagna at Hendersonville's Nana Rosa, or as one of his near-3000 followers on Twitter, you'll know that Joe has a lot to say about a lot of things, and all of it with an enthusiasm for life that is contagious, kind of like an ORB song.

The Oak Ridge Boys, a self-proclaimed American music group that began as Oak Ridge Quartet, have a 50-year history that spans across and often defies genres. While many of their charting songs and general successes have occurred in the country music industry, gospel

music is at their roots and their core, and that is a subject Joe does not take lightly.

Joe and members Duane Allen, William Golden, and Richard Sterban have made up the current and iconic iteration of the Oak Ridge Boys for the past 36 years. Together they have musically transcended the gospel, country, pop, and rock and roll genres. In the 1970s, followed by a change in direction at shift to the Columbia record label, their music began to be more heavily promoted to country radio than to gospel. In that timeframe, the group who at one time was often seen in SG-matching-suits was widely accused of leaving gospel music or going country. Joe explained throughout our talk and from the stage at the Harmony Honors that this wasn't quite the case. More so, the ORB have been blessed with variety of success and opportunity.

"Last week, we were singing [at the 50 Years of Kenny Rogers concert taping] with Kenny, Wynonna Judd, Lionel Richie, and Smokey Robinson. [At the Southern Gospel Music Guild Harmony Honors] we'll be sharing the stage with Triumphant Quartet...there's never a reason to limit ourselves," Joe says.

Incidentally, Triumphant Quartet recently scored a hit with ORB's "Everyday," the song they would perform together on the stage at the Gaylord Opryland Convention Center. It was there that Judy Nelson, president of the SGMG, told the crowd that the Oak Ridge Boys, "Have touched people all over the world with gospel music."

Indeed, it seems that the industries showcasing ORB music agree. With numerous country accolades (among them, the Academy of Country Music's lifetime achievement/Pioneer honor), ORB was also inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2000, have won numerous Dove Awards (including Country Song of the Year in 2007 for "Jonah, Job And Moses"), Chris-

By Kelly Capriotti Burton

continued >



ORB joined with Triumphant Quartet on a hit song for both groups, decades apart: “Everyday” at the Harmony Honors in Nashville.
Photo by Aaron Crisler, GospelMusicUpdate.com

“All the guys in the group are Christians who believe in the gospel... We pay tribute to it every night in our concerts, and we pay tribute to it with the lives we live.” ~Joe Bonsall

tian Country Music Awards 2004 Mainstream Artist of the Year, and most recently, was honored by the SGMG with the President’s Honor, bestowed on them during Gospel Music Nashville, an inaugural event held during what is usually Gospel Music Association (leading up to the GMA Dove Awards) in April.

“I fondly recall having the opportunity of presenting a Gospel Music Award to the Oak Ridge Boys in Los Angeles, California in 1973,” recalls Nelon. “It just happened to have been Joe Bonsall’s first week with the group. Now, thirty-seven years later, it is such a privilege to present the prestigious SGMG President’s Honor to this same amazing group, consisting of Duane Allen, William Lee Golden, Richard Sterban and Joe Bonsall in recognition of their long successful career and significant contributions to the field of southern gospel music.”

The night of the SGMG Harmony Honors and the presentation of the Presidential Honor showcased the gospel stylings of Oak Ridge Boys as well as the relevance they hold in the current southern gospel

It’s no secret or even a touchy subject to say that ORB’s place in

southern gospel comes with a touch of controversy. So when the question is posed: How does the group balance songs like “Y’all Come Back Saloon” and “Trying to Love Two Women” with songs about Jesus? Joe responds with an answer that he’s clearly given before.

“I’ve never had a problem singing any of them,” he says. “‘Trying to Love Two Women’ – if you listen to the words – is saying it’s a bad idea! “Y’all Come back Saloon” is just about people who are down and out. There are blurry lines, but all the guys in the group are Christians who believe in the gospel... We pay tribute to it every night in our concerts, and we pay tribute to it with the lives we live.”

A typical ORB show – and there are about 150 a year – has a set list that weaves in and out of the nearly-four decades of music they have made together. Those sets change nightly and consist of country songs, love songs, songs about family, patriotic anthems, and always, several gospel songs.

“To me, it’s old news that ‘The Oak Ridge Boys went country,’” Joe says. “We don’t make our living in the gospel music industry, but we

never quit singing gospel music."

Joe says the group talks to younger artists in gospel music who would also like to "step out of the box" musically but are afraid of "getting hammered upon."

"We're just surfing a different feed," he adds. "If some lady in the fourth row doesn't like my hair, who cares? That puts everything in the wrong perspective."

Joe credits Bill Gaither and the 2008 Homecoming DVD highlighting *Oak Ridge Boys: A Gospel Journey* for putting them back in touch with their gospel music friends.

That same DVD was awarded a Dove Award for Long Form Music Video of the Year, marking the ORB's ninth honor from the GMA. Their first Dove was received in 1969 for "Jesus Is Coming Soon."

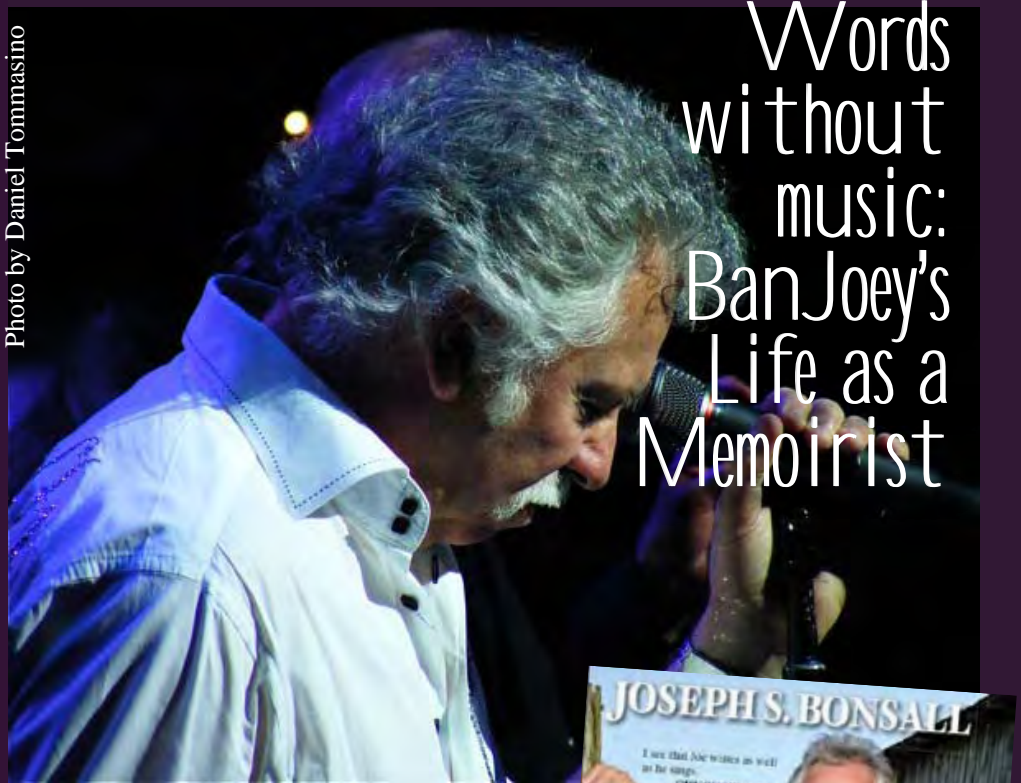
"I've been acquainted with the Oak Ridge Boys for over 40 years, and the one thing that I know for a fact is that they never forgot where they came from. They never forgot their gospel roots," says Bill Dykes, formerly of the Cathedrals and Jerry and the Singing Goffs, and currently with Billy Dykes and the Sensational Sunmen as well as SkyAngel TV.

"The Oaks have always been true to themselves, be it in gospel music or country, and most importantly they have always been true to their God. That is the reason why I believe the transition of them moving back towards Gospel Music again has been so easy. People always loved them and never forgot them from their original gospel music days," he continues. "Songs like "Jesus is Coming Soon" and "I Know" are songs that will live forever as sung by the Oak Ridge Boys."

The ORB's latest release, *The Boys Are Back*, an eclectic collection that put ORB on the playlists of a new generation of listeners,

continued >

Photo by Daniel Tommasino



Words without music: Ban Joey's Life as a Memoirist

Anyone who has seen Joe Bonsall act as the official spokesperson (and tweeter) for the Oak Ridge Boys knows he is a man of words. He has also demonstrated this in recent years in publishing a series of memoirs; the newest, *From My Perspective*, is due for publication this September from Journey Books.

Joe says he was given a broad canvas to write on for this book, and so he compiled a series of commentaries ("bigger than Tweets, but the same idea"), covering subjects such as veterans, guns, barn swallows, ORB on the campaign trail, and memories of celebrity friends such as Johnny Cash and Dottie Rambo.

At its core, Joe says, "This is a gospel book. [The Gospel] is entwined in every chapter...because I was led to do that."

Previous publications include *G.I. Joe and Lillie*, honoring America's soldiers and more specifically, Joe's parents, Joseph and Lillie Bonsall, and *American Journey*, illustrating life behind the scenes with the Oak Ridge Boys.

"This is a book about Joe," the author says. *From My Perspective* is currently available for pre-order through Amazon.com



also includes selections that embody the gospel and family friendly thread that runs through the group. The single "Mama's Table," (written by Nashville-based Jamey Johnson) tracing a family's story through a kitchen mainstay, hit the *Billboard* Country Singles chart and is a sentimental fan favorite, while show-opener "The Boys Are Back" and the raucous "Seven Nation Army" (previously recorded by White Stripes) consistently bring ORB audiences to their feet. Meanwhile, "You Ain't Gonna Blow My House Down" and "Live with Jesus" continue to showcase the group's gospel music roots.

The project as whole has been a creative turning point for the group, one that shows no signs of them slowing down or settling for the same old sound.

"We are four guys who are just like-minded," Joe says. "Nobody is ready to retire, and we're always thinking forward: How can we do it better?"

The new effort still resonates with long-time fans, such as editor of *AbsolutelyGospel.com*, Deon Unthank, who says, "I've been an Oak Ridge Boys fan since I was about 16 years old, and that was a long time ago. I was checking my old LPs not long ago and to my surprise I have more Oak Ridge Boys records than any other group. I started following the Oaks when it was Little Willie, Smitty, Ronnie Page, and Herman

I especially like how Ban-Joey will tweet you back even if you're not a celebrity. - Music Fan Karen Williams

Harper. I watched all the changes as the Oaks morphed into who they are today. Several personnel changes, and a lot of years later, I will still go see the Oak Ridge Boys every chance I get."

One new frontier all the Oaks have tread upon is that of social media, in particular, Twitter and You Tube. ORB has long stayed on the cutting edge of technology, with their active website message board and the debut of their version of White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army" at the 2009 South by Southwest Music Festival, a performance recorded for Direct TV and ultimately reaching millions of households.

"We surround ourselves with young people," Joe says, and he credits the group's Nashville-based public relations firm, Webster and Associates PR, with keeping in touch with new marketing techniques.

Joe recalls their first foray into the world of 140-characters: "We were with Jeremy Westby (of Webster) after an event and he started telling us about it. I was unsure, but we downloaded Tweetie right then and up accounts right then and there for the group and each of us individually."

What appeals to Joe is, "the short bursts of energy. My mind is always

going in 25 different directions anyway. I send Bible verses, goofy things, or like many people, what we're doing."

While Joe stands out as the most active Twitter-member of the group, Duane has carved out a Twitter niche with fellow gospel singer Mark Lowry; the two chide back and forth about gospel singers' love for eating, much to the amusement of their followers.

"I love the ORB on Twitter," says gospel fan Karen Williams (@MikeEnglishFan). "I especially like how Ban-Joey will respond to you & tweet you back even if you're not a celebrity. I also love to see pictures of Golden's paintings. They're down home fellas."

Unlike many celebrity Twitter users who use the outlet for announcements only, Joe communicates back and forth with many of his followers, responding to people who comment on their concert experiences, respond to songs, or just say hello.

"I'm social-minded," Joe says. "If someone says something nice, it's means something to me, and I've got to respond, though it's hard to do all the time."

As a direct result of Twitter-connections, Joe was recently invited

THE OAK RIDGE BOYS ACCORDING TO YOUTUBE *Click to watch*



Official Video for 'Mama's Table'



ORB & Gaither Vocal Band



Ban-Joey's back porch: "Sacrifice For Me"



to be a regular guest on the country, syndicated Tony and Kris Show. And likely, without that same kind of connection, this very story would not have been.

"I do believe [social media] is important to use," Joe says, "And it has built our fan base."

William also tweets occasionally, Richard a bit less, and Duane actively uses Facebook. Collectively, the group has also successfully used YouTube to communicate with fans old and new.

The group uses a flip-camera to record behind-the-scenes footage on their bus and backstage. These videos get a lot of hits because, Joe explains, "fans enjoy seeing things from our point of view." "It's a wide open world; it's all out there," Joe says. "Our biggest YouTube is us singing 'G.I. Joe and Lillie [a song Joe wrote about his veteran dad and his mother]. Someone else put it up on YouTube and a site called waronterror.com linked to it. Soon,

other military websites added it and people started emailing it to friends.

"Did we make any money on it? No, though it's a song I wrote, recorded by ORB. But because people heard it, they bought the CD Colors, which includes the song. They bought my book G.I. Joe and Lillie. It's hard to ascertain the value of social networking."

Clearly, the networking has been valuable for this group, who after decades together, is still rolling down the highway regularly and as true friends, approaching their dates with excitement, and hugging one another when the show is over.

"We are four-like minds, good, honest men," Joe says. "'One of the' has been my middle name since 1973! It just happened the other day... 'There goes one of the Oak Ridge Boys. It's a great place to be."

That great place expands across the territory of American music, offering a commodity that is in-

creasingly rare: music for everyone. While Joe describes the group as quintessential American music group, a middle American group, the one you see on the campaign trail with George Bush and at the state fair, he is perhaps happiest to say that an Oak Ridge Boys concert is one for the family: "There is nothing off color: you can bring your grandma or your little kids."

And when it comes to the gospel section of that American music scene, Joe states enthusiastically, "All of us are honored beyond words to be honored by gospel music."

He concludes, "We love gospel music; it is where our heritage lies. A lot of people's lives have been touched by Oak Ridge Boys music – including mine before I was ever a part of it. We're a southern gospel quartet singing country music with a rock and roll attitude."

It's a flavor all its own, and may many more lives be touched by it in the years to come. 🇺🇸

The country/southern sound with power vocals and tight family harmony has kept the Freemans at the top of the gospel music industry for several decades. With the next generation making their mark, The Freemans continue to communicate a timeless message while keeping their music young and fresh. In Part 2 of the SGN Scoops interview, "Keeping It Fresh," we learn more about the growth of their family, their music and their faith.

I feel blessed that I have my children with me on the road," says Chris Freeman. "It definitely has its moments, like any other family. I feel like the greatest trophies of our ministry are our children. Misty just gave us a grandbaby. A lot of people weren't aware that Misty had lost two babies. So we feel like this baby is God's timing and we are so in love and having the best time of our lives, really."

Chris mentions that there will soon be another Freeman on the bus. "Joe's been with us now 25 years," says Chris. "Joe is married and has two boys. The oldest one, Luke, is really active in church and sports. He is a great singer and will be traveling with us this summer."

As the family grows and more members step on the bus, it becomes difficult at times to keep growing in the same direction. What keeps the Freemans working well together and keeping everything in sync? "Spiritually, it goes back to being one-on-one with the Lord and studying the Word," says Chris. "You have to be rooted. I really feel that this family, this group; they are just that, rooted."

With the younger generation on stage and the fresh sound, it would seem to some newcomers to the industry that the Freemans must be one of the newer family groups in Southern Gospel. However, 2010 marks a major milestone for Darrell and Chris Freeman and the family ministry. "This is the 25th year since Darrell and I moved everything down from Ohio to Tennessee and took over the ministry," says Chris. "So that's another big thing for us; this year is 25 years!"

When the Freemans began in the music industry decades ago, things were very different for the artists. Darrell first started traveling with his parents in 1970 and he has seen a lot of changes, especially in transportation. "People are traveling in 45-foot buses that have everything: satellite, showers, everything. So the traveling is not easy, but it is a big-time upgrade from when I started with a limousine and a trailer."

"The other big change is the technology of tracks that allow a lot of groups to get out there with no band and do well," says Darrell. "It allows a lot of soloists to get out on stage with nothing but tracks and it has affected a lot, in good ways and bad. We've lost a lot of great young musicians that were not able to come into gospel music and play; they had to go elsewhere. They either had to play in churches or get into country music or whatever kind of music they could find. God has given them the talent to play and they have to go and play somewhere. We miss a lot of those young musicians I used to see years ago."

"Those would be the two biggest changes, and then obviously there's the Internet, which has changed the whole world." When Darrell and

Chris Freeman began, there weren't such things as personal computers. Now their music can go into homes across the world and into countries where they themselves have never been. It's a huge change from selling LP's out of the trunk of a limousine.

Chris reflects that there are differences since she first stepped on the Gospel Music stage, but unfortunately there aren't many more opportunities for female singers than there were when she was starting out. That makes it hard for ladies trying to break into the industry. "When I came into Southern Gospel music, I was just barely 17 years old. I joined the original Hinsons. Back then there wasn't nearly the number of groups that there are now. One thing that was a big help for me in the industry was that we were on the weekly show, The Gospel Singing Jubilee. Because of that, I was seen by more people and didn't have as great a difficulty of breaking into the industry. I was truly blessed. I just felt that God had His hand on me and it was His will. It was a desire of my heart but it was His will also."

"I feel like now it is harder for women to break into the industry than it was for me," Chris continues. "Most of the time, they have to be with their family. There are not that many groups on the road that aren't family groups that have a female vocalist. There are female soloists and I think it is definitely easier for them than it would be to try to be part of a group."

When Chris came on the scene in the 1970's, there were even fewer family groups than there are now. "The Speers were one of the only groups that I can think of, besides

the LeFevres, that hired females outside the family. So I think it is harder for women than men to get into this industry unless they are with a family."

As a family that treasures the special talents of the ladies in the group, the group has done well with music that features the Freeman females. Their goals for 2010 reflect the hard work of the family and especially the women who grace the stage with their soaring vocals. "We are finishing a brand new album and we are going into the studio to work on Chris' first solo album," says Darrell. "Misty is going to try to record an acoustical album this year. We are also doing some video work this year that is new. So we have plenty to do!"

Working hard on the music and its promotion is nothing new to Darrell Freeman. Some of the best advice he ever received was about the value of good old-fashioned elbow grease. "I've had the opportunity to be around a lot of successful people," says Darrell. "Not people that are just in Gospel Music or are pastors or preachers. One thing I always remembered was from a pastor friend of mine who was in our wedding. His name was JD Temples. He was quite a character; he was 6'6" and had a hard life in his early days. He built his church from the ministry of getting people out of jail. He always said that 65-70% of your success is hard work and the rest is living right and prayer. He believed in the work ethic and I think that anyone that I've ever seen that is successful works very, very hard. He was a successful man; not as a pastor only, but he also had a lot of hous-

The Freemans are Keeping it Fresh



Part Two

Written by Lorraine Walker

nesses and did well at all of them. He was a great singer and preacher. We would go to his church and did a lot of concerts with him. He'd say, 'Darrell, I can't afford to be a star.' He was funny. He was just saying he didn't want to go on the road, be a singing star and not make money."

A successful family ministry for the Freemans does not come at the expense of their spirituality and their relationship with Christ. This isn't easy when you are on the road so many days a year. "We try to be active in a church the days that we are available," says Chris. "Some of our best friends pastor a church in West Virginia and he sends us his messages on CD, so we listen to those. There is one thing I can honestly say, and I feel like I can speak for everyone in the group: There've been many, many times when you

But every day with Jesus is a fresh day...
 It is exactly how we make it. ~ Chris Freeman




get up to sing and at that time, that very moment, the song that you sing night after night, the Lord may turn it

into a blessing for yourself. In other words, I bless myself!" Chris laughs.

"But every day with Jesus is a fresh day, a fresh anointing. It's exactly how we make it. We've got to read the Word and we've got to believe. We've got to have faith. And

you do that as a family and as a ministry, and it will keep you."

As the Freemans continue to minister, they continue to keep it young and fresh as the years go by. With the release of their newest album, their commitment to family, music and faith is evident in every song that they sing. And every day that they live for Jesus is a fresh, new day for the Freemans. 



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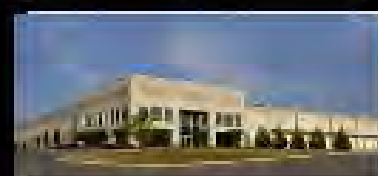
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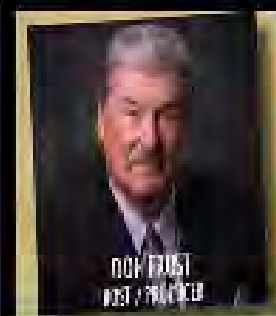
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Under the Radar & Through 30 Years:

Southern Plainsmen, Still Singing & Serving

By Jerry 'JT' Tinkle

For over 30 years there has been a southern gospel quartet around that has flown somewhat under the radar as far as national notoriety is concerned. That being said, this group has outlasted many of the bigger-named groups and has maintained a consistency of purpose, scope, and ministry, while treating crowds throughout the South to some of the finest southern gospel music anywhere; it is Southern Plainsmen, from the great state of Louisiana.

We recently spoke with Marcelle Slaughter, executive producer/manager of the group for some insight as to the longevity of the group and asked him to share the origins of the group, and as well as some of their history.

"The group idea was conceived by our first bass singer, Muriel (Merle) Mitchell, with whom I graduated from high school. We had been friends since 3rd grade and had sung together in junior high and high school choir. After he suffered an on job injury at about the



same time Johnny Garrett, first baritone gave his heart to the Lord, he contacted me via CB radio to come to his house to talk about something. When I arrived, Joe Chance, with whom I had also grown up, was there. They presented their dream of a southern gospel quartet and asked me



We were just green country boys with a dream to sing and share the Good News of Jesus Christ through song. We had no concept of bookings, recordings, travel, etc. We just kind of fell into it and God prepared the way for every single decision that had to be made. ~Marcelle

to sing tenor. The next day we gathered at Lakeside Baptist Church on Toledo Bend Lake, gathered around the piano, accompanied for only that one practice by Joe's sister, Colleen. We set about recruiting a pianist, the first being Lovitt Sigler, who was instrumental in getting us off on the right foot and made the first few appearances with us.

"The group began May 25, 1978. By July 21, the line-up that people remember as the first version of the group was Muriel, Johnny, Tim, myself and pianist, Leatrice. In November, we added Danny Laurence on bass guitar.

"Our first appearance was at my home church, Plainview Baptist Church on June 11, 1978. Pianist, Lovitt Siglar, was soon replaced by Leatrice James and due to other commitments, Joe Chance soon dropped out and was replaced by Tim Leonard on lead. Of the original group, Lovitt and Leatrice are deceased, the other three are ministers...Joe pastors Harmony Cove Baptist on Toledo Bend, Muriel pastors Middle Creek Baptist Church deep in the woods of Kisatchie National Forest, and Johnny pastors Thompson Chapel Baptist Church near Pulaski, Tennessee."

Marcelle also reflects on the goals that group has set and reached.

"The Lord was in charge of that. We were just green country boys with a dream to sing and share the Good News of Jesus Christ through song. We had no concept of bookings, recordings, travel, etc. We just kind of fell into it and God prepared the way for every single decision that had to be made as it came up. After that first date on June 11, 1978, we have been busy to varying degrees since that day. Early on our schedule was 75 - 80 dates per year; now, it's 175 - 180. We have been blessed!"

The Southern Plainsmen is associated with World Vision, a humanitarian charity organization which deals

with children and families around the world faced with poverty and injustice. How did the group come to partner with World Vision ?

Marcelle explains, "We have always had a heart for missions, obviously, any group that does what we do for the right reason has at the forefront of their agenda, missions. After a presentation at the annual Southern Gospel Promoters Association meeting a couple of years ago by another humanitarian organization that does great work and many southern gospel groups represent, I became interested in the idea and impressed that we should pursue this. Honestly, the organization I saw presenting didn't return my calls. Out of the blue, World Vision contacted me and I was impressed with their presentations, goals and heart of ministry through children of the world. My dream is that some child hosted through our efforts might someday rise to be a Christian Leader of some Third World Country or even one of the terrorist nations that are in the news everyday. It is through children that we can change the world!"

The heart that Marcelle spoke of that is for missions segues into an honor recently bestowed on them: "Louisiana's Ambassadors of Goodwill". Marcelle stated that this honor is not taken lightly.

"We were told that this was a wonderful honor bestowed upon us by then Governor Mike Foster. In 2008, at our 30th Homecoming, Governor Bobby Jindal, renewed our 'ambassadorship'. Despite the negatives presented in the national media about Louisiana, we are very proud of our heritage! I feel the majority of folk from Louisiana are Godly people or have roots there...the Catholic influence is very strong, particularly in South Louisiana but the Protestant influence further north is evident by thousands of churches dotting the countryside.

"In our hometown of Hornbeck, there are six Protestant Churches in the one-mile square town and three others within a few hundred yards of the corporate limit. Being from Louisiana, we try to let people know there are several cultures here; it's not all about bayous, cypress knees and alligators; we have rivers and streams, pine trees and sand hills, as well. I tell folk in our concerts there are three kinds of people in Louisiana...those from New Orleans, The Cajuns, and the 'Regular Folk' who live north of IH-10! (Tongue in cheek now, no letters please!)"

"A funny thing happened several years ago when I had an idea to 'enlighten' folk about Louisiana. I thought it would be a nice 'gimmick' to give people who visited our booth at the NOC a miniature bottle of Tabasco Sauce. I wanted to clear that with Clark Beasley as it is technically a 'food' item and artists' contracts clearly state that you should not distribute 'food items' from your booth. Clark misunderstood my message and thought I wanted to pass out tobacco! Needless to say, I got that straightened out right away!"

Along with the appearances at churches, festivals, fairs, and the like, The Southern Plainsmen have made the rounds on the TV and radio circuit over the years. For 10 years they were on radio, doing their own show. They have also appeared on countless TV shows.

Marcelle recalls, "We did that weekly show on Sat-



The group ministering recently in Louisiana.

urday mornings with KWDF's station manager at the time, Rich Dupree. We would do it live if our schedule permitted, but it was typically either taped or we would call in by phone or Rich would just do it for us. We might still be doing it, but the station burned in early 2000 and was off the air for a while. Rich moved on to other things and we just let it go.

"We are always proud to hear from DJs that play our material on various stations across the country. We do not currently have a single out there but are in negotiations regarding that possibility."

"As for TV, in 2002, Mark Lanier, formerly with Perfect Heart and Poet Voices, and who married my cousin, Paula, approached me about a Southern Gospel television show. Later that year, he and I became co-hosts of Southern Gospel Showcase which airs locally on KLAX-TV, the ABC affiliate in Alexandria, LA. The show still airs at 6:30 AM on Sunday, but when Mark went with Phil Cross and Poet Voices he bowed out and was replaced by Rich Dupree as my co-host. I am presently preparing to do a radio version of Southern Gospel Showcase on KTXJ Radio in Jasper, TX. We should start airing within the next three weeks (as of this writing). KTXJ is 24 hour Southern Gospel and we are blessed to have the station in our area!"

"Being on TV and radio programs so much also has given the group many opportunities to meet and work

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with some of the “giants” of Southern Gospel. Marcelle fondly recalls how this work put him in touch with people like George Younce, Glen Payne, J.D. Sumner, Glen Allred, and Ed Enoch, and brought a lifelong friendship with James Blackwood.

Is it by design or happenstance that this group – 30 years running and steeped in ties to southern gospel greatness, continues to fly under the proverbial radar?

“Not by design, no!” Marcelle says. “We have always just rolled with the flow, I guess. Those who know me, know that I don’t get rattled by much and am a very laid back person. I suppose my background in nursing, having spent many years as both ER and Surgery Director, I had to keep my cool in very tense, often life and death situations, so I’m not too excitable.

This group has always followed the paths the Lord opened to it, never refusing to go anywhere we were invited and trying to develop friendships and do its best to share the Good News


“We have mostly promoted our ministry alone, with only a couple of exceptions,” Marcelle says. “We signed with Southern Spin last year and have been very happy with Chris and Amy Unthank and the work they do. Mike Heimple of Capitol Artists takes care of some of our booking. We are members of the Bay Area Gospel Music Association of Houston and The South Texas Gospel Music Association of San Antonio; both are helpful to us, and it has been my distinct honor to

serve for several years as 2nd Vice President of The Southern Gospel Promoters Association.”

He believes all those associations to be helpful to their ministry. The group is also in negotiation with a record label, but nothing is set in stone yet.

“We have been blessed to stay very busy, primarily in small to medium-sized churches and work with a few promoters, mostly within 8 - 10 hours,” Marcelle says. “We have also traveled from coast to coast on a limited basis, so, if God sees fit to expand that territory, I pray we will be able and willing to do so.”

Thirty-plus years is a long, long time to stay in the world of Southern Gospel music, travelling and singing every weekend. “I suppose no endeavor comes without its disappointments and bad days, but truthfully, I have never seriously considered quitting. In the 32 years of living out of a suitcase, sleeping more nights in a bunk than in a bed and dealing with the breakdowns, financial difficulties, personnel problems, all those ‘bad’ things that come with a ministry such as ours, the good times so far out-weigh the bad that I am often asked about this or that ‘catastrophe’ by former group members and, honestly, God has removed many of those struggles from my memory,” Marcelle states.

Marcelle’s outlook well embodies Southern Plainsmen... a ministry steeped in longevity, service to God, and commitment to seeing souls saved for Christ. 



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Our SGN Scoops Staff is are comprised of professional writers, singers, speakers, publicists, and ministers. Please visit their websites for more from them. **| CONTRIBUTORS**



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Rhonda Frye is a full time minister of music serving the Lord in at least three different ways: teaching a pre-school music program, serving her local congregation as worship leader and associate pastor, and as a singer/songwriter/recording artist. Rhonda lives in Ringgold, Georgia and is supported by her husband, Eric and their three children. rhondafrye.com



Kelly Capriotti Burton is a former teacher, project manager, and tire queen, and a current southern gospel wife, mom of 2, stepmom of 2, event promoter, and writer/editor. She currently lives outside of Chicago sometimes and on a bus the rest, and survives to tell about it at mylifeastheglue.com



Born and raised in southern Ontario, Canada, Lorraine Walker has been interested and involved in Southern Gospel Music since the mid-80s. Since 2005, she has also authored the popular 'Reality Check' column and other features for sgmradio.com.



Tom Holste is a writer living in Chicago and a graduate of Act One, a screenwriting program specifically geared toward Christians. He has written and directed numerous short scenes for church events. tomholste.com.



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Jerry 'JT' Tinkle is the baritone for the Ministers Quartet from Muncie, IN. He hones his writing with their weekly newsletter, which he fills with inspirational stories from the road and from life. His mantra stands, "Just one more soul, Lord Jesus, just one more soul." ministersquartet.com



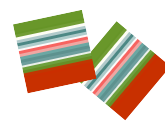
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Evie Hawkins's love for writing spun many articles that were read by music industry professionals and lead to the development of the Evie Hawkins Agency, in Nashville. Evie keeps residence in Alabama and Tennessee, and enjoys as much time as possible with her husband, their family, and the musicians whom she loves very much. eviehawkinsagency.net.



Chad Hayes is a pastor, husband, and father to an adorable one year old. He is also the resident CD reviewer for SGMRadio.com



Seventeen-year old Ben Johnson submitted the following as a persuasive essay for a secular writing class and also to SGN Scoops for reprinting. Thanks, Ben, for bringing awareness of classic southern gospel to another young audience!

Radio & Television & Southern Gospel Music



One catalyst launched Southern Gospel music from no more than three groups traveling and singing locally on the east coast to hundreds of groups traveling internationally. The advent of radio and television broadcasting was that catalyst, and it profoundly impacted the proliferation of the Southern Gospel music industry. Stay tuned to hear some of the story of how this happened!

The earliest promotion of Southern Gospel music began with James D. Vaughn, who started the radio broadcast WOAN in 1922. Vaughn's broadcasts became so popular that he started selling radios so that more people could listen to the show. When radio became more popular, the number of groups proliferated. A short time later, Vaughn came up with the idea of forming groups that would travel and perform locally in Tennessee and the surrounding areas. As time went on, more radio stations began to invite groups to sing on their shows. The Blackwood Brothers Quartet and the Weatherfords Quartet were two of the early groups that still continue to sing today. They would sing three times a day, five days a week on

the radio, and had around four regular concerts during the week. In a personal interview, Mrs. Lily Weatherford said that radio had an immense impact on their record sales and concert bookings. She also mentioned on a documentary "The History of Southern Gospel Music" that when they would announce a concert on their broadcasts, the concert would be packed out. The host of the video also said,

[continues>](#)

"Radio played an enormous role in spreading Gospel music...." In 1954 the Blackwood Brothers competed on Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts on CBS and won first place. Part of the prize for winning included a recording contract with RCA. They became the first gospel group to sell a million records. As you can see, radio was the first stepping stone in the growth of Southern Gospel Music.

The next wave of promotion for Southern Gospel music came in the form of television. Television was, and is, one of the most beneficial types of advertisement in America. In the 1950s and 60s, there were only a few channels being broadcast, and during that time nearly every household had a TV. This meant that if you were on TV, you were a household name. One of those household names was a group named the Florida Boys, which was on the weekly syndicated show, "Gospel Singing Jubilee" (GSJ). Les Beasley was the host of the GSJ and owner of the Florida Boys. The GSJ went national in '64 and aired from coast to coast for eighteen years. In a personal email from Mr. Beasley, he shared the impact of the show during those years:

Ben: The Gospel Singing Jubilee was the greatest thing to happen for The Florida Boys. We had gained some notoriety from a syndicated radio show that had been started in the late 40's. We also had a TV show called the Song Shop that was confined to the south east. That show was instrumental in getting

sponsors for the Jubilee. The Gospel Singing Jubilee was on coast to coast for several years. It made us able to book dates in every state in the lower 48 and also many Canadian Provinces. We signed a recording contract with Canaan Records as a result of the Jubilee and to say our record sales increased

is an under statement. - Les Beasley



The Florida Boys have not slowed down since then. They are still traveling and singing around the country and are one of the best known Southern Gospel groups in the history of the genre. The Florida Boys were not the only group to do well on television, however. The Melody Boys Quartet, owned by Gerald Williams, also aired on TV starting back in the 50s. Below is a personal email from Mr. Williams describing his days on

the air and what they did for Southern Gospel music:
Hey Ben!

I will try to give you some info that I hope will be of help in your essay. My radio days go so far back that it will seem like ancient history but here goes any way.

"... When television came to Little Rock in mid summer of 1954 we became a part of that and recognition from all that exposure helped out in sales, but more for the products we represented from our television program. We had a lumber company that signed on as a sponsor and in the first month they were with us they went from a gross sale of \$50,000 to \$100,00 per month. Other types of sponsors for television were automobile dealers, furniture stores and a steel mfg company. Our viewer audience according to the national rating companies of that day were just over 100,000 viewers per night for all five nights of the week we were on TV. Instead of increase in our recording sales it doubled our demand for appearances, so as a result of TV five nights each week we sang an average of four concerts each week which greatly increased our income and most important, it greatly increased the exposure and acceptance of Southern Gospel music. Later, television syndication of Southern Gospel took it to a national level never known by previous generations of gospel music performers.

- [Gerald Williams]

As you can see, television had one of the most profound impacts on Southern Gospel music, not only in

Radio and television broadcasts have been tremendously influential in the acceptance and popularity of Southern Gospel music.

popularity, but also in record sales, concert bookings, and concert attendance. TV was truly one of the greatest things that happened to Southern Gospel!

Because of radio and television, the Southern Gospel music industry has done quite well for itself financially.



Since its first days of radio, Southern Gospel music has become a multi-million, or even multi-billion dollar industry. Randy Gravely is the co-owner of several radio stations in Georgia which play oldies, classic hits and Southern Gospel. Gravely said in an article in USA TODAY (1) that, "...Performers can sell albums and go on tours to raise money. Without radio airplay," he said, "performers would never have that ability at all." The article also said that the National Association of Broadcasters commissioned a study showing that, "...Radio airplay helps boost music sales by \$1.5 to \$2.4 billion annually."



Bill Gaither is the best known icon in Southern Gospel music. He has recorded over fifty albums, over eighty videos, written roughly six hundred songs, is a gospel music Hall of Famer, owns a television station, a music publication company, record label, recording studio, restaurant, gift shop and several magazine publications. He has sold over twenty-million copies of his albums and over eighteen million copies of his videos. He is also a co-owner of the National Quartet Convention (NQC), which has been in existence for over fifty years. On average, the NQC draws an

attendance of approximately thirty-thousand Southern Gospel music fans annually.

An internet ar-

ticle by Douglas Harrison, "Why Southern Gospel Music Matters" states, "And in 2004, the genre's most successful impresario, Bill Gaither, outranked Elton John, Fleetwood Mac, and Rod Stewart for tickets sales world-wide." (2) Needless to say, this is a multi-million dollar industry for one man alone.

If you multiply this by hundreds of groups traveling year round, the fiscal impact is exponential. Think about all the group's bus payments, gas consumption, hotels, arena rentals, publicity, airfare and countless other expenses. These numbers show that the groups must acquire enough money to not only pay for these expenses, but also make enough to keep the group on the road. This means that the Southern Gospel music industry has become an extremely lucrative and stable industry.

Radio and television broadcasts have been tremendously influential in the acceptance and popularity of Southern Gospel music. Because the industry's expo-

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Radio cont'd

sure became so great, groups experienced immense increases in record sales, concert bookings and attendance, and sponsorship. If radio and television started Southern Gospel music's rise to fame, and has made it a multi-billion dollar industry today, to what heights will it be catapulted to through the internet, satellite radio, and orbital relay TV in the future? 🇺🇸

Sources:

(1) Singers tell Congress: Money (That's What I Want) - USATODAY.com Posted 5/3/09 (accessed January 28, 2010)

(2) Mark Allen Powell, "There's Just Something About That Man," Christianity Today, April 2004, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/april/1.32.html> (accessed January 12, 2010).



Ben Johnson is a self-described "huge fan of Southern Gospel music!" He's been singing this music with his dad, mom and sister on the west coast since he was nine. He runs sound for his family and just finished their latest recording using ProTools.

Ben says: "Having Southern Gospel music as such a big part of my

life for so long, has given me the opportunity to get to know a lot of the great people in the industry. I like just about all the styles within our genre from the Booth Brothers to the Isaacs to The Melody Boys. Singing at the Great Western Fan Fest each year lets me see all these great groups, and it's a lot of fun to be a part of it."

"A career in audio/electronic engineering, coupled with singing is where I hope to go. Since I just got my learner's permit, dad even lets me drive our coach when our family tours...I really enjoy that!

When he is not on the road, Ben enjoys time with friends, computer games and helping direct a youth choir and playing bass for the praise team at his church. He and his sister are homeschooled,


Ben adds: "If I could share one thing that I'd want people to really remember, it would be this: 'Besides 'Don't Do Drugs' and 'Help Prevent Forest Fires', (LOL!) I'd say to always follow Christ and share His love to those in need around you."



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Southern Gospel is filled with wonderful artists of all ages, colors and backgrounds. Young and old, married and single, conservative and liberal; the genre is a slice of the Church in middle America. However, the Church today, which strongly emphasizes the family, can cause Singles to feel like strangers. Is it the same for Southern Gospel?

Last month, we talked to single fans and artists who discussed the challenges of living single in a Southern Gospel world and we learned that they often feel like a target for those who want to change their status. Whether it's eager fans looking for attention or older supporters wanting to match-make, being a member of the non-married club can be difficult. When your social life is under the spotlight, it can be difficult to keep your relationships private.

Some singles we talked to remarked that it's difficult being a Christian single no matter what your profes-

sion is more on God and ministry," says Grant.

Johnmark Grant's life has not been conducive to building a special connection with a young lady. Extensive travel both with his family and on his own can lead to loneliness. "It is hard to hold a relationship when you are on the road a lot," Grant shares. He says it would be good to find someone because, "That would be nice if I had someone to sing with!"

Singles often find that married people want to help them with their love lives. Grant hasn't been bothered too much with this, with an occasional exception. "An old lady in one of the churches back home, who is just like the Granny on *Beverly Hillbillies*, thinks if you are not married by the time your 16 you're beyond all hope!" Grant laughs, "As I'm 24, in her eyes I'm past it!"

Grant does get serious when he talks about the search to find his life-partner. "This is a problem I have always

Living Single in a Southern Gospel World

Second in a series by Lorraine Walker

sion. As Facebook friend Sandra says, "I believe the strength to deal with all that comes from the same place." And whether or not your church has a specific ministry to singles, Sandra states, "For me, I need what God has for me, Sandra, not what others think Single Sandra needs."

There are many Christian singles who wonder how they can meet others without having to hang out in places they wouldn't go otherwise. Artists looking to meet someone also find it challenging when they don't have the time or opportunity to attend social events in their home churches. As Greg Bentley said last month, meeting singles when you are in the industry presents difficulties. "It is somewhat hard because you are always on guard trying not to offend anyone. You may be totally in the right, but someone may interpret your actions in the wrong way." As a result, Bentley has only dated ladies within the Southern Gospel industry.

This month, we talk to Johnmark Grant, a twenty-something artist from Southampton, England. Grant is a youth worker and travelling evangelist who is on the road for 11 months of the year. This is not an easy life for a single man who would like to change that status. However, he knows that this is what he is called to do. "The great thing about being single is you can focus

found, that it's hard to find a decent, godly girl that is A) single and B) godly. Then, if I have found that one is both A and B, I always get stuck on C, which is they want me to settle down and not travel." He admits it is much easier to date someone within the industry.

"I think non-artists don't understand how artists feel and what life is like on the road. They always think it's a joyride or an easy life when it is far from it," Grant shares. Still, there is a bias within the industry itself. Grant feels the Southern Gospel Industry treats single people much differently than married people.

"If someone is married, they treat them as if they know more about life than someone who is not married. That's not always the case." Grant knows that often the single artist can be the butt of jokes on stage, but he is okay with that. "Doesn't bother me at all, any free

advertisement!" Grant laughs, "Because who knows, one day the right female might hear it and contact me!"

"I am content with God's plan for my life, whether single or married."
- Johnmark Grant

Although Johnmark Grant may be frustrated with the challenges of develop-

continues on next page >

ing relationships while he continues to travel, he is not at all dissatisfied with his present status. "I am content with God's plan for my life, whether single or married," says Grant. "I'm happy being single until He sends the right one my way. If I do get married, I hope to be the best husband and father I can be with God's help."

Grant's message to those singles who think the grass is greener on the married side of the fence, is one of encouragement. "Don't give up, I have not!" Johnmark continues, "I always look on the bright side. Sometimes singleness prepares you for married life in the future. Wait on God's timing, and don't rush ahead. Fear not, and don't lose hope."

Next month we will hear from more artists who will share with us what it is like to live single in the Southern Gospel Industry. We trust you will find this series enlightening and encouraging, regardless of which side of the marriage altar you are on.

Our thanks to Johnmark Grant, Greg Bentley and the Facebook friends who contributed their thoughts to Part Two of Living Single in a Southern Gospel World. If you would like to contribute to this series, write to me at lorraine@sgnscoops.com.



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James Hillis & a Critical Reconnection

Some people dream all their lives of being singers...while others just seem to wake up one day and have an audience... By Evie Hawkins

James Hillis was not always on the stage singing, but he always loved Gospel music. His uncle, Lewis Haggard, was part of the Countrymen Quartet for many years, so James became “hooked” on singings and good old-fashioned four-part harmony. He imagined it would be pretty cool to do what his uncle did, but he wasn’t really sure if he was cut out for it. James was involved in sports at Madison County High School in Gurley, Alabama and didn’t feel the strong call to the music ministry at that time. Maybe the Lord had another plan; he just wasn’t sure. As James graduated, started a family, and continued to be involved in his local church and church sports, he knew he still had a desire to reach his full potential, the one God had planned for him.

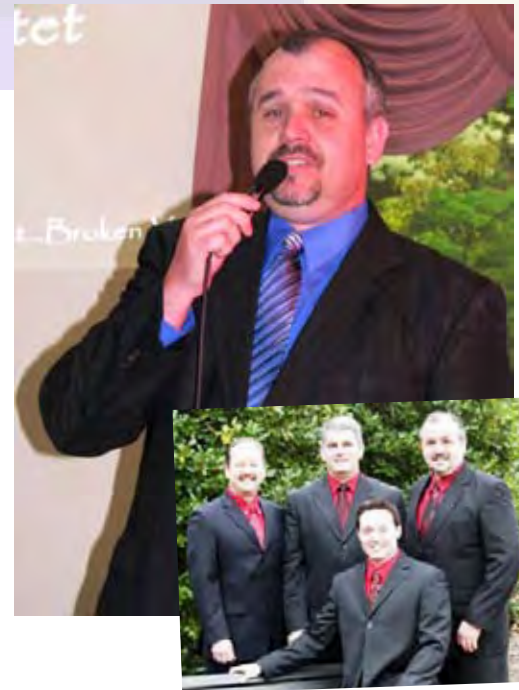
There was still a tug at James’s heart to somehow reconnect with the Gospel music he had loved since childhood, but that plan appeared to vanish quickly for James, as a critical event began to unfold in 1995. He suddenly had become deathly ill and an emergency brain surgery would be required to save his life. As the medical team put him to sleep in preparation for the operation, he remembers sincerely praying for God’s will, and hoping he would come through the life-threatening surgery to see his family again.

James said, “The next thing I remembered, the nurses were trying to wake me up, and telling me what a beautiful song I had been singing.”

While James was in the coma-like state, he was singing a Gospel song. The medical team was not only surprised, but said they were so blessed and amazed by this unusual phenomenon. James realizes this was a life-changing experience and remembers the wonderful feeling of perfect peace and wellness. From that day forward, James Hillis knew that he would sing for the Lord. He began to get right to the task at hand and formed his group, a Southern Gospel quartet. To this day, New Vision Quartet of Huntsville, Alabama, still travels and sings in churches and venues everywhere possible.

James says, “God has been good to me and my family in so many ways through the years, through the ups and downs he was always there, and where he leads me I will follow.”

James is married to Connie Kilgore-Hillis and they have three children and he has two step daughters. He and Connie attend Five Points Church of the Naza-



rene in Huntsville, AL. James sings Lead with New Vision. Other members include: Ken Woods-Tenor, Rusty Gipson-Bass, Dustan Taylor-Baritone, and Robert Woody-Road Manager. The group has recently performed with Eric Hinson & Hinson Revival, Highest Honor, Stone Wall Jackson, Classic Four and many more. New Vision Quartet will appear in concert during the Branson Gospel Music Convention in Branson, MO, June 28-July 2. The men would like to invite all their friends and fans of Southern Gospel music to attend the event. They have recently released a brand new project, “You’re Not Alone,” that is being played all across the U.S. and being podcast abroad.

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Present Your Body

"Christian Fitness" by Laurette Willis

While exercise was not a priority in Biblical times, Paul instructs us to "present your bodies a living sacrifice." Each of us is advised to take care of our body since it is the "temple of the Holy Spirit."

Here's a sobering question: do you think we'll be required to give an accounting to the Lord for the stewardship of our bodies and how well we've taken care of them?

That's a frightening thought for most of us! "You are not your own," Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19. "For you were bought at a price" (the shed blood of Jesus Christ).

Could that mean your body is not yours, but the Lord's? How well are we caring for the Lord's property?

The good news is that since your body belongs to the Lord, He has a vested interest in helping you care for it. Your body is not only the temple of His Holy Spirit, it's what you need to be able to walk around

on this earth and spread the good news that Jesus is Lord!

The more fit and healthy you are, the greater the probability is that you will be around longer to carry out His will for your life.

The enemy wants you to fail at your task, to fail horribly and go to heaven before your time. He doesn't really care that you're going to heaven--he just doesn't want you to take anyone else with you!

If your body is out-of-shape and lacking energy, it's difficult to do all the Lord is calling you to do. But you and the Lord working together can change that!

"What?!" you ask. "The Lord needs MY help? But He's omnipotent, all-powerful and in control!" Well, yes--and no. He is all-powerful, but He will not wrestle the cake fork out of your hand or pick up the strings like a grand marionette master and animate your body to take a brisk walk. We are the ones who have to exercise our will to exercise our body and "choose life."

We'll discuss the "secret weapon" of choosing life in our next article.

(Adapted from *The Busy Woman's Guide to Total Fitness* by Laurette Willis, Harvest House Publishers) available at www.PraiseMoves.com). 

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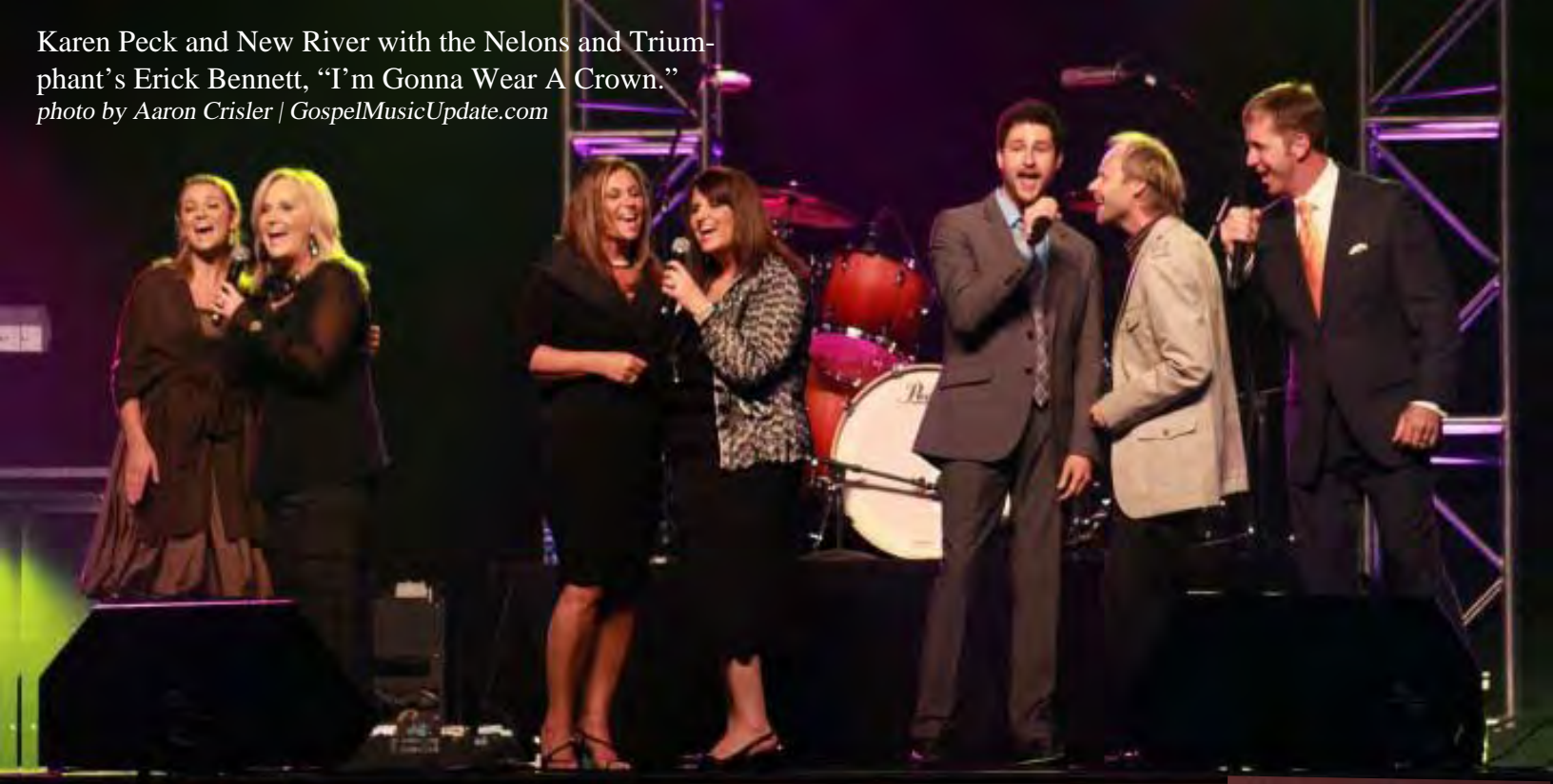
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Dixie Stampede

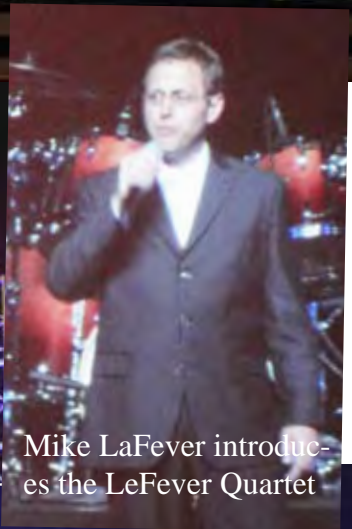
Karen Peck and New River with the Nelons and Triumphant's Erick Bennett, "I'm Gonna Wear A Crown."
photo by Aaron Crisler / GospelMusicUpdate.com



The audience.



The new Gold Harbor



Mike LaFever introduces the LeFever Quartet



Eric Hinson and Hinson Revival.



Gold Harbor
Photos by Paige Burton unless otherwise noted

Highlights from Gospel Music Nashville April 18-20

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It is the Lord's desire- and ours here at SGN Scoops Digital- that you become one of His followers. God has promised eternity in Heaven with Him for all those who accept Him as their Personal Savior. It's as easy as "ABC":

A: Admit that you are a sinner.

Romans 3:23- For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

B: Believe that, because of your sin, you deserve to spend eternity in Hell. However, Jesus shed His blood and died on the cross of Calvary to pay the debt for our sin. He then rose from the dead three days later, proving His victory over death, Hell, and the grave. He offers this as a free gift to anyone who will accept it in faith.

Romans 5:8- But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 6:23- For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Call upon Jesus and ask Him to come into your heart, forgive your sins, and make you one of His children.

Romans 10:9- That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Romans 10:13- For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

If you would like to accept God's free gift of salvation, then all you have to do is pray and ask Him. Your prayer might sound something like this:

Dear Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I know that I deserve Hell because of it. However, I believe that you died on the cross and rose again in three days to pay for my sin. I ask you to come into my heart, cleanse my sin, and make me one of your children. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Please remember that simply saying a prayer doesn't save you. You must believe this in your heart as well.

If you have any questions about salvation, or if you just prayed to receive Christ, please e-mail us at sgnscoops@gmail.com. We'd love to rejoice with you! God bless you!



Who's making new music...

CD Reviews by Chad Hayes

MERCY'S WELL
Songbook
www.mercyswell.com

Mercy's Well began as a duet in 1998 under the leadership of founder Brad Strider. They soon transitioned into a trio, and are now one of the up-and-coming good young groups in Southern Gospel music. The trio consists of Brad Strider (tenor/founder), Jon Azzarello (lead), and Greg Gainer (baritone).

Songbook is the group's latest album and the third in their *Hymns* series. All of these songs have a simple accompaniment of piano (or organ at times), and some of them have a bass guitar thrown in for good measure as well. Most of these songs will be familiar to longtime listeners of Gospel music, and the group's intent, according to group owner Brad Strider's liner notes, was to make this an album full of "convention songs." They even add a guest bass vocalist on a few songs to make themselves a quartet.

Now, the moment you've all been waiting for: THE SONGS!

The first song is the medium-tempo "He Will Surely Make It All Right." The first thing that you notice is that the vocal blend is tight, even though the baritone is just a bit hot in the mix. Also, the harmonies used in the vocal arrangements are just a bit different than the norm, giving the song a nice flavor. The tempo speeds up for "God Put A Rainbow In The Cloud." Again, the vocals are clear with a tight blend, and I found myself tapping my foot along with the beat laid down by the bass guitar. Also, segue into a slower portion of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" was a nice touch. The third song is the medium-tempo "Jesus' Love Has Made A Change," and it is followed by the album's first slower song, "Sin's Dark Sea," also the first song to use a guest bass vocalist, and they pick a good one for the part- Gene McDonald, formerly of the Florida Boys Quartet. Gene guests well on a one other song as well.

The tempo speeds back up for "Leave Your Sorrows And Come Along". This is one of those older songs that, at times, features each group member singing something different at the same time. Even though it's a cool effect, I must confess to the fact that it always frustrates me because I can't always tell what each per-

son is saying! Also, it's cool when they break into some "Do-Re-Mi" singing instead of using actual words. The sixth song slows the tempo down again. "The Unseen Hand" is an old song that just happens to be one of my favorites. Song #7 is a combination of two songs: "Life Will Be Sweeter Someday" and "Sweeter As The Days Go By." This medium-tempo song has a jazzy feel to it that sets it apart from the other songs on the album a bit. The tempo picks up for again the eighth song, "I'm A' Goin'." This time the guest bass is s Paul Harkey of the Anchormen. I happen to be a Paul Harkey fan, and his deep, rich tones really add to this song.

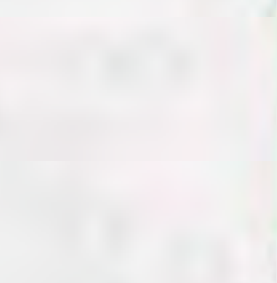
The ninth song is a slower number called "He Bought My Soul At Calvary." This song features some solid unison work along with some smooth harmonies. McDonald returns once again to sing with the guys on "He Was A Preachin' Man." This is a medium-tempo song that might be a good pick for a radio release from the album. Next up is another medium-tempo song with a lighter feel. "While Endless Ages Roll" is a fun song that I think listeners will enjoy. The album ends with another number that combines two songs: "When They Ring The Bells Of Heaven" with "Everybody Will Be Happy Over There." This is a toe-tapper that might also be considered for a radio release. I know that the guys probably didn't want to overuse the whole guest bass vocalist thing, but this song to me was crying out for a bass singer! Still, it was a nice note with which to end the album.

I don't think that I have to tell you that I am a Mercy's Well fan. I have enjoyed the *Hymns* series so far, and I can't wait to get my hands on a mainline studio album. If you like good, old-style, convention singing, then this album needs to be in your collection. The vocals and arrangements were top notch, and Donna Beauvais did a superb job as producer. My only complaint would be that the album could have used a bit more variety in tempo to spice things up a bit. Overall, I give this album a rating of 9 ½ out of 10 microphones!

Favorites: "God Put A Rainbow In The Cloud", "The Unseen Hand", and "He Was A Preachin' Man"



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