

MURRAY'S
ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF
SOUTHERN GOSPEL MUSIC

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David Bruce Murray's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Southern Gospel Music

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For all the
fans of
Southern Gospel

Introduction

This book is an encyclopedia of Southern Gospel music. From all I've been able to gather, it's the only book of its kind that collects historical Southern Gospel data and categorizes it alphabetically.

This book is not meant to be a balanced look at the genre, however. I intentionally included some obscure entries for trivia buffs such as the **Brown's Berry Four** and a little known movie titled *Sing A Song For Heaven's Sake*. Popular groups haven't necessarily been treated equally either. For example, the **Statesmen Quartet** entry is much longer than the **Stamps Quartet** or the **Blackwood Brothers** entries. Some critics will likely say these entries should be equal in scope, but the point of this encyclopedia is not to proportionately represent groups based on their popularity.

The point of this work is to pass on to readers the results of my historical research. When my research led me to quite a bit more information about **Jack Toney** than it did about **Jim Hamill**, for example, I didn't feel like I should intentionally reduce the Toney entry so as to be consistent with the shorter length of the Hamill entry. I hope no one is offended by the lack of balance, because balance was never my intention in the first place.

The encyclopedia format of this book should allow you to use it as a reference work, but you can also read it from cover to cover. There's some redundancy from entry to entry where personalities overlap. This is intentional to aid the reader in mentally connecting the dots as they read through the material.

Every effort has been made to get all the facts correct in this book, but there's bound to be a few errors that slipped by. Corrections and additional information are welcome and may be directed to my attention via my website at www.musicscribe.com or by email to dbmurray@musicscribe.com. I hope to publish a greatly expanded second edition of this book a few years.

David Bruce Murray, October 6, 2005

Abernathy, Lee Roy

(Aug. 13, 1913 - 1993)

Lee Roy Abernathy was born into a sharecropping family that frequently relocated during his teen years. He began singing at the age of five in his father's group, the Atco Quartet, and learned to play piano by the time he was 14. In addition to sitting under shape note instructors like James Vaughan and Adger Pace, Abernathy studied at the Conservatory of Music in Atlanta, GA.

Abernathy wrote a number of gospel classics including "He's A Personal Savior," "A Newborn Feeling," "Wonderful Time Up There (Gospel Boogie)" and a parody of that song called "Terrible Time Down There." He was also noted as a Southern Gospel music instructor, particularly for his "Modern Gospel Piano Course By Mail." Along with Dwight Brock, Abernathy was one of the first to play "turnaround" type introductions on songs. He was responsible for printing the first gospel sheet music and boasted of thousands of piano students taught with his *Modern Gospel Piano Course by Mail*. He also served as a vocal coach to individuals such as London Parris who went on to have great success in the industry.

He wrote a book in 1948 simply entitled *IT*. The book is a collection of his songs and his commentaries about quartet life. It was designed to be a handbook for gospel musicians. It is a highly sought collector's item today.

Abernathy was also well known as a performer. He pulled stints with the Rangers and the Homeland Harmony Quartet. Abernathy and Carroll "Shorty" Bradford also performed together as the Happy Two, billed as a "two man quartet." The Happy Two were an unusual group. Their program focused on corny humor and drew from songs that had interesting parts that intertwined with each other. When they sang, they sounded almost like a quartet. Both singers had extensive vocal ranges, and this added to their appeal. At one time, a \$500 diamond ring was offered to anyone that could sing as high and as low as Bradford. They excelled at novelty tunes. One of their recordings, "Shorty's Banjo," features Bradford playing "Cripple Creek" on the piano. He makes the piano sound remarkably like a 5-string banjo.

The expertise of these two gentlemen led them to form a new quartet in the early 1950s called the Miracle Men. A former comrade from the Homeland Harmony Quartet, Aycl Soward, joined the pair to sing bass. Earl Terry was the first tenor and Idus Spivey filled out the quartet at the baritone. When the Miracle Men were on a program, you could rest assured that they would be singing songs that no other group on the program would sing. This was because Abernathy was a prolific songwriter. Often, the group would sing five-part music with Abernathy providing the fifth vocal part. Abernathy and Bradford only kept the Miracle Men together for about a year before returning to their popular two-man format.

In addition to gospel music, politics also had an attraction for Abernathy. He composed songs for Franklin Roosevelt's 1936 campaign and was a candidate for governor of Georgia in 1958.

Abernathy continued to teach piano and voice lessons to many famous gospel musicians until his death in 1993. The SGMA Hall of Fame and the Georgia Music Hall of Fame have inducted him into their respective halls. In later years, he continued to travel on a part time basis with various quartets as a vocal coach and pianist. In 1983, a recording titled *Command Performance* paid tribute to the songs of Abernathy, with performances by the Rex Nelon Singers, Gold City, the Singing Americans, the Hemphills and others.

---John Crenshaw contributed to this entry.

Abner, James Buford

(Nov. 10, 1917-)

Buford Abner was best known for his work with the Swanee River Boys, a frequently featured group on the *Saturday Night Barn Dance* on radio station WSB in Atlanta. The group also released a number of radio transcriptions. Abner sang lead and managed the group until he retired in the early 1970s. The SGMA Hall of Fame inducted him in 2002.

Buford Abner has garnered his share of honors. The University of Florida recognized his accomplishments, presenting him with a copy of Stephen Foster's handwritten manuscript of the song "Way Down Upon the Suwanee River" Buford Abner was also an inductee into the Southern Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame in 2002, and was presented with a Living Legend Award at the 2003 Grand Ole Gospel Reunion. That evening, he joined with three other legends (Mosie Lister, Glen Allred, and Fred Daniel) to delight the crowd with a couple of songs in the old Swanee River Boys style.

---John Crenshaw contributed to this entry.

Aikin, Jesse

See: **Shape Note Method (Solfege)** and **Christian Minstrel**

Allen, Duane

Duane Allen sang lead for the popular Prophets quartet in the early 1960s, but is best remembered for his 40-year stint with the Oak Ridge Boys. With Allen at lead, the group was recognized as one of the top gospel quartets on the circuit until 1975 when they left gospel music to pursue a successful career in Country music. In 2001, Allen and the Oaks returned to gospel music when they signed with Spring Hill, one of the larger gospel record labels. Allen chose the songs and sang lead for an all gospel project titled

From The Heart. Another all gospel recording by the Oaks called *Common Threads* was released in 2005.

Allen, Joseph

Joseph Allen sang tenor for the original Vaughan Quartet in 1910. In 1917, he traveled with a unique group called the Vaughan Saxophone Quartet. This group sang songs in the expected Vaughan quartet style, but they also performed four part sax instrumentals.

All Night Sings

The Stamps-Baxter School Of Music promoted the first event to be billed as an "All Night Sing" in 1938 at the conclusion of a singing school they had sponsored in Dallas. It became an annual event that lasted into the 1950s. In 1948, Wally Fowler began hosting an all night singing event at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville and broadcasting it over WSM radio. The popularity of the event caught on and was duplicated at venues across the country by Fowler and other concert promoters.

Allred, Glennan "Glen"

(Jun. 19, 1934-)

Glen Allred was born in Monroe, Tennessee. He joined the Oak Ridge Quartet when he was 16 to play guitar and sing baritone. He moved to the Gospel Melody Quartet in 1952, and has sung with that group (since re-named the Florida Boys) for over 50 years. Allred was recognized for his 50 plus years in gospel music in 2001 when he was inducted into the SGMA Hall of Fame.

America Sings

Produced by Jerry Goff, *America Sings* was a gospel show that aired on television from 1967 to 1972. The half hour program featured the Thrasher Brothers and Goff as recurring musical acts and helped to cement their respective careers as recognized Southern Gospel artists.

Andrus, Sherman

After singing with Andrae Crouch and The Disciples, Sherman Andrus was hired to sing for the Imperials in 1972. The Imperials were in the midst of a shift from traditional Southern Gospel to a more contemporary gospel style when Andrus joined them. Racial tensions were so tense at the time that Larry Gatlin sometimes filled in for Andrus at certain events, though Gatlin never recorded with the Imperials. In 1976, Andrus and Terry Blackwood left

the Imperials to form a contemporary group called Andrus, Blackwood, and Company.

In 2004, the 1972-1976 version of the Imperials consisting of Andrus, Armond Morales, Jim Murray and Terry Blackwood recorded a CD along with the Stamps Quartet called *The Gospel Side Of Elvis*. Their live performance of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" at the 2004 National Quartet Convention featuring Andrus on a solo is included on a video project titled *Remembering The Greats*.

Arnold, Robert S.

(1905-)

Robert S. Arnold sang with the Carr Quartet in the 1920s. He started his National Music Company in 1937, and published shape note songbooks for 60 years.

Bagwell, Wendell Lee "Wendy"

(1925 - 1996)

After serving as a United States Marine, Wendy Bagwell formed the Sunliters in 1953 with Jan Buckner and Jerri Morrison. Their first major hit was a sentimental song called "Pearl Buttons." Over the next 40 years, the group released more than 60 recordings, and never changed the original lineup. The group is best remembered for their 1970 release titled *Here Come The Rattlesnakes*. The title track featured Bagwell's hilarious comedy routine about the Sunliters singing a date for a church that handled snakes in their worship services. It was the number one "song" on the *Singing News* chart from November 1970 to January 1971.

Bagwell was later hired to be a spokesman for Stanback brand headache powders in a television ad campaign. He became nationally known for his signature catch phrase "and that's a fact with my hand up." Some of his other comedy routines included "Ralph Bennett's Volkswagen," "Me, Old Ronnie, and the Monkey," and "Pickin' Up Paw Paws." Bagwell passed away in 1996 and was posthumously inducted into the SGMA Hall Of Fame in 1997.

A PARTIAL WENDY BAGWELL AND THE SUNLITERS DISCOGRAPHY:
This, That & The Other (1970), *And That's A Fact With My Hand Up* (1986), *What's That Name?* (1988)