

CREEK SIDE

GOSPEL MUSIC CONVENTION

SMOKY MOUNTAIN CONVENTION CENTER | 4010 PARKWAY, PIGEON FORGE, TN

2017

Welcome to the 2017 Creekside Gospel Music Convention

Thank you for joining us at the 2017 Creekside Gospel Music Convention in beautiful Pigeon Forge, Tenn. We hope you are ready to hear some great music but most of all we hope you are ready to worship the Lord with us. Daytime showcases and special events, afternoon exhibit hall and jam sessions, and evening concerts will ensure that your days and nights are filled with good gospel music. Midnight Prayer in the Breakfast Room of the Ramada Inn will end your evenings with just a little talk with Jesus.

Don't Miss Creekside Opening Smoky Mountain Gospel Showcase

Monday, Oct. 30 will begin with a bang, as Creekside holds the first **Smoky Mountain Gospel Showcase**. Creekside will begin the day at the Ramada Inn - Smoky Mountain Convention Center at 12:30 with a musical showcase filled with artists from the East Tennessee area. Artists include Eternal Vision, Leonard and Joyce Repass, the GloryBound Singers, Bishop Curtis Manning and Angela Marie.

Monday afternoon the Exhibit Hall will be open following the showcase, filled with artists' booths and singers waiting to chat with you. The Hall will be open every day and is part of your free admission to Creekside. The evening concerts begin at 5:00pm with **Scott Roberts and the Five O'clock Band**. Motivational speaker **David Ring** brings his presentation of resilience and hope during the evening concerts on Oct. 30 and Nov. 1.



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Dr. Jerry Goff Honors

Every Monday evening during Creekside week, a leading member of the Gospel music community is honored. **Eric Bennett**, of Triumphant Quartet, will be presented with the Dr. Jerry Goff Honors award this evening. SGNScoops is thrilled to join with host Dr. Jerry Goff in recognizing this distinguished gentlemen. Dr. Jerry and Jan Goff return to Creekside for the whole week. The pair will also host the 2017 Diamond Awards.

Midnight Prayer

Midnight prayer time begins on Monday evening and will be held Tuesday and Wednesday night as well in the hotel lobby. More information will be available that evening. Midnight Prayer hosts include Steve and Metha Dover of Clearvision Quartet, Rocky and Gail Smith of 4 The Right Reason, and Tim and Angela Griffin of The Griffins.

Tuesday, October 31: Begin Your Day with a Creekside Showcase at 9:00am

Join us for a Creekside Showcase with hosts Richie Rose, Karl Isaac Rice and John Whisnant. Hear more than 25 artists as they begin your day with a song. Join us later in the Exhibit Hall at 4:00pm. Tuesday evening, the concert will begin at at 5:00pm with **Scott Roberts and The Five O'clock Band**. Don't miss feature artists **Brian Free and Assurance**, **the Hyssongs**, and more.



The Diamond Awards Presentation on Tuesday Evening

The **2017 Diamond Awards** will be presented on Tuesday night, October 31, during a celebration hosted by **Dr. Jerry and Jan Goff**. Special musical guests and industry personnel will be on hand for the gala. The evening will not only be a time to honor the best in Gospel music but also the time to praise the Maker of music and life, Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, November 1 begins with Breakfast and School

At 8:30 a.m., the **Pine Ridge Boys** will be hosting a special breakfast for a nominal cost. Larry Stewart, Wayne Shuford, Ivory Luke and Steven Craps return to Creekside to delight one of their most appreciative audiences. Their special guests are the Bates Family. Tickets are \$10. Contact Vonda Easley (256-310-7892) for more information.

Also on Wednesday, at 11:00 a.m., Pat Barker will present his **Pat Barker University**. The popular bass vocalist will offer training from vocal coaching to stage presence. There are still limited spots available for \$25 on a first-come, first-served basis. Please contact Rob Patz (360-933-0741) or Vonda Easley (256-310-7892) for inquiries.

Wednesday afternoon events begin in the Exhibit Hall at 4:00pm and then the Evening Concert at 5:00pm with **Scott Roberts and The Five O'clock Band**. Wednesday night's special guests include **the Nelons** along with many other fine artists. Special speaker **David Ring** returns to encourage you. Also, Creekside brings back the **Red Back Hymnal Mass Choir**. Artists will gather on the stage to form a mass choir, singing from this time-honored songbook.


Thursday, November 2: More Great Music

The morning showcase begins at 9:00am, with your hosts Donnie Williamson, Nathaniel Justice and Matt Felts. Once again, start your morning off right with over 25 artists raising the roof with great gospel singing.

Attend the Exhibit Hall at 4:00pm and then the Evening Concert at 5:00pm with **Scott Roberts and The Five O'clock Band**. Our special Evening Concert will finish Creekside 2017 with a bang. **The Browders, Soul'd Out** and more will ensure that Creekside is filled with wonderful music and worship until the very end.

2017 Creekside Gospel Music Convention and its Board Members wish to extend their thanks and appreciation to all of the artists, staff and volunteers who have made this event a special occasion. We appreciate all of you who have enthusiastically supported us for six grand years of presenting Gospel music. We hope to present many more years of the best music this side of heaven.





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Creekside 2017

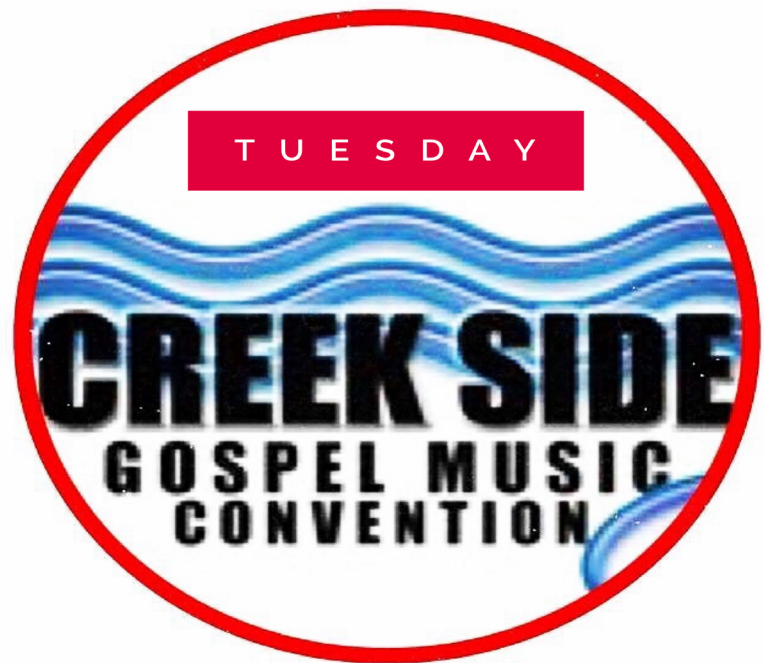
Artists & Happenings



Monday
October 30, 2017

Monday Evening Schedule

4:30 PM – Doors Open
5:00 PM- Scott Roberts and The 5'oclock Band
5:15 PM- Patriotic Song (Drummond Family)
"I Stand" With band
5:20 PM-Welcome (Vonda and Rob)
5:23 PM- Hope's Journey
5:35 PM- Shane Cruse
5:47 PM- Broken Vessels
5:59 PM- The Chordsmen
6:11 PM- Introduction of Emcee Jeff Sneed (Rob from Backstage)
6:12 PM- Gospel Truth Trio
6:24 PM- The Bunkleys
6:36 PM- Troy Burns Family*(15 Min)
6:51 PM- Mercy Rain
7:03 PM- Jim Sheldon
7:15 PM- The Chandlers*(15 min)
7:30 PM- Offering
7:35 PM- David Ring
7:55 PM Sneed Family*(15 min)
8:10 PM- Honoring of Eric Bennett with Dr Jerry and Jan Goff
9:10 PM- The Connells
9:22 PM- The Coffmans*(15 min)



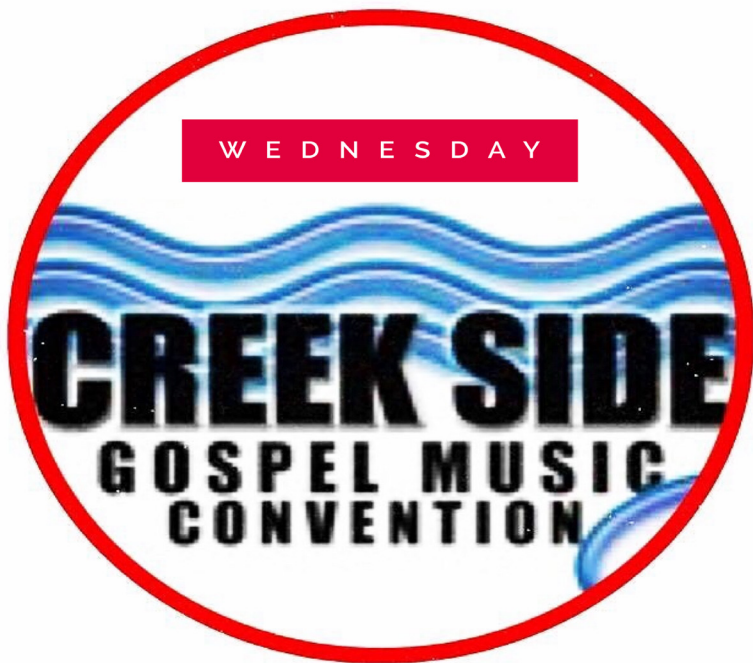
Tuesday
October 31, 2017

Tuesday Evening Schedule

4:30 PM – Doors Open
5:00 PM- Scott Roberts and The 5'OClock Band
5:15 PM- Patriotic Song with band
5:20 PM- Welcome and Introduce Emcees Matt Felts and Nathaniel Justice (Vonda and Rob)
5:23 PM- The Griffins
5:35 PM- The Schofields
5:47 PM- Redeemed Trio
5:59 PM- Purpose
6:12 PM- Bev McCann
6:24 PM- Day Three
6:36 PM- Matt Felts(sing and Introduce Les Butler)
6:48 PM- The Dodrill Family
7:00 PM- The Williamsons*(15 min)
7:15 PM- The Hyssongs* (15 min)
7:30 PM- Brian Free and Assurance*(30 min)
8:00 PM- Offering
8:05 (Diamond Awards)

Creekside 2017

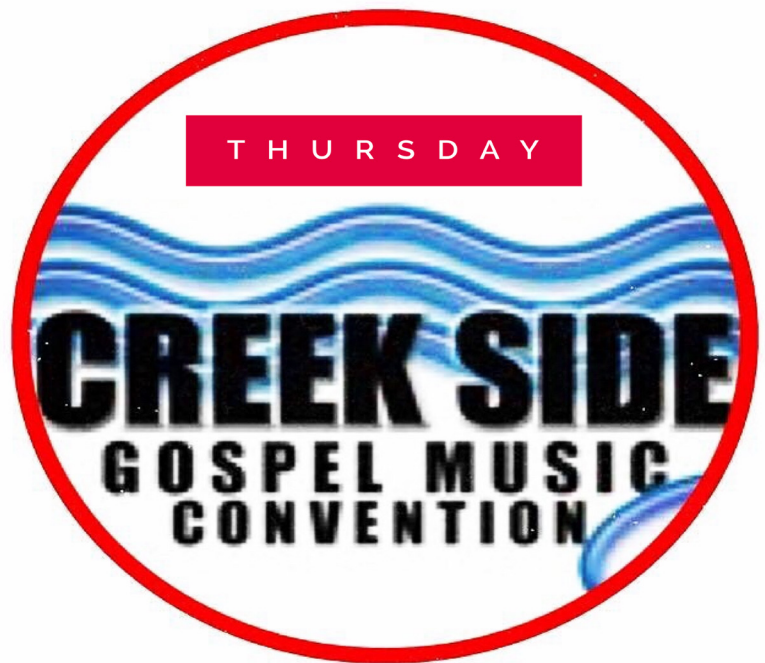
Artists & Happenings



Wednesday
November 1, 2017

Wednesday Evening Schedule

4:00 PM – Doors Open
4:30 - Scott Roberts and The 5'OClock Band
5:00 PM - GloryWay Quartet
5:15 PM- Patriotic Song with band
5:20 PM- Welcome and Introduce Emcees Ricky Atkinson (Vonda and Rob)
5:23 PM- Ricky Atkinson
5:35 PM- Appointed 2
5:47 PM- Charlie Sexton and Linda Foster
5:59 PM- Work In Progress
6:12 PM- Debbie Seagraves
6:24 PM- The Riders
6:36 PM- Singing Epps Family
6:48 PM- Drummond Family
7:00 PM- Bates Family* (15 min)
7:15 PM- Mark 209* (15 Min)
7:30 PM- Offering
7:33 PM- David Ring (20 min)
7:53 PM- Annette Bingamon
8:05 PM- The Nelons (20 Min)
8:25 PM- Pine Ridge Boys* (15 min)
8:40 PM- Ava Kasich
8:52 PM- The Journeys
9:04 PM- Sacred Harmony
9:16 PM- Red Back Hymn Sing (30 Min)



Thursday
November 2, 2017

Thursday Evening Schedule

4:30 PM – Doors Open
5:00 PM- Scott Roberts and The 5'oclock Band
5:15 PM- Patriotic Song with Band
5:20 PM- Welcome (Vonda and Rob)
5:23 PM- The Shireys
5:35 PM- Charles Scarlette
5:47 PM- South of Heaven
5:59 PM- Kristen Stanton
6:11 PM- Introduction of Emcee
6:12 PM- 4 The Right Reason
6:24 PM- Dennise Nichole Dittman- Cook
6:36 PM- Common Bond Qt
6:48 PM- Hazel Sain
7:00 PM- Eagle's Wings
7:15 PM- Dennis Cook
7:27 PM- McKay Project
7:39 PM- Offering
7:41 PM- Bless'd Ministries
7:53 PM- Harley Madden
8:05 PM- Soul'd Out Qt* (20 min)
8:25 PM- Browders* (20 min)- Close with Invitation

Lights, Camera ... Heart Amber Nelon Thompson faces a variety of lessons in life and film

Amber Nelon Thompson is becoming comfortable in front of the camera. The Nelons' soprano is making her big-screen debut in *A Question of Faith*, which is slated for a release this fall.

"I play Michelle Danielson," Thompson says. "It's about three different families who go through some very, very trying times. One family is struggling with losing a loved one. Another family is living with a loved one who makes a mistake, and they don't know how to help. Another family is struggling with the possibility of losing a loved one. All three families are kind of woven together in the end."

The faith-based film was the first that she had even auditioned for, and the cast includes C. Thomas Howell (*The Outsiders*), Renee O'Conner (*Xena: Warrior Princess*), Kim Fields (*Facts of Life*), C.T. Stallings (*War Room*), Richard T. Jones (*The Wood*) and Christian recording artist Jaci Velasquez.

"My first day, I remember seeing all of these people walk around and was just intimidated," Thompson recalls. "I was like, 'that's Tootie! (Fields' character on *Facts of Life*.) I've seen her on *Nick at Nite*.' I was like, 'this is the coolest thing in the world.'"



By Craig Harris



The experience didn't come without its challenges for the 27-year-old. "They have a set schedule where they have to film," Thompson explains. "My family was very gracious to allow me to take the time to film this movie. My sister (Autumn) filled in for me for a few weekends where I had to be off the road.

"It has been tiring. It's early call times, but it's so much fun that I didn't think of it as work ... not until after it was done. During the filming, it wasn't tiring at all. My adrenaline was going so much. It's life. I make it work. I'm only this age once, and this is the time to do it."

Thompson's mother, Kelly Nelon Clark, has appeared in multiple films. "My mom has really been the actress in our family," Thompson points out. "She's done TV shows, movies.

"This kind of just fell into my lap. I wanted to (do movies), but I wanted it to be the right one. I wanted it to fit me. I was just patient and waited." Filming concluded in September.

"I immediately came off set, and my mom said, 'what did you think,' Thompson remembers. "I said, 'I would do this a million times over again.' It's a good tired. I'm tired because my dreams have come true all day.

"I hope they call me back (for more films). It's so exciting. I still feel like I'm dreaming. I'm like, 'this is not real life.' I'm so blessed ... I'm so blessed that God takes care of His children and gives us a great life."

While the big screen has been kind, Thompson's small-screen experience proved to be considerably different. Thompson was a part of an episode of the Learning Channel's *Say Yes to the Dress* in October of 2013. The show followed Thompson – who began an engagement one month earlier – as she was in search of her wedding dress.

"They asked me to come on the show and be a part of it," Thompson explains. "They knew I had been engaged at Disney World. They wanted me to come on and try to find my Cinderella wedding dress.



It was supposed to air about a month after our wedding, which was going to be in June of 2014.”

However, a detour in the four-year relationship occurred after filming for the show was completed. “We went through the engagement,” Thompson points out. “In March, we started realizing our paths were going separate ways. We started praying for God’s direction in our lives.

“So many times, a lot of young couples, they don’t ask the hard questions. They don’t want to ask the hard questions. They want to pretend everything is good, but both of us had that (same) feeling. We were just trying to figure out what that was. We started seeking counsel from our pastors and people we loved. Come April, we made the decision to call off the wedding. There was an instant peace you just can’t explain. It’s the peace of God. We were four weeks away from the wedding day.”

Despite the peace that followed, the outcome wasn’t the anticipated result.

“To sit here and say it was easy ... I’d be lying,” Thompson says. “It was very tough ... but it was the right decision to make. Both us walked away with respect for each other. It wasn’t something where we were mad at one another. There was no drama. It was an all-God thing.

“I wasn’t mad at him. He didn’t hurt me. We truly did love each other. We truly cared about each other. Sometimes, that’s even harder. He is an amazing person, and we respect each other. We were each other’s best friend. That’s a hard thing. I didn’t just lose a love of my life ... I lost my best friend.”

A host of emotions ensued. “You grieve,” Thompson explains. “It’s like a death. You don’t have that person any more.

“In the beginning, I went through depression. It was very hard. I asked a lot of questions. Even though I knew it was the right decision and knew it’s a God thing, but you still wonder why. I started really reading my Bible and got in the Word. I read about Israel, and Israel asked for a king. They kept asking for a king. God said, ‘You have a king. I am your king.’ They wanted an earthly king.

“I read this conversation they were having with each other. God said, ‘I’ll give you your king.’ He gave them one. He was an evil king.

“When we were dating, I kept praying that it would be the one. I finally realized that I was Israel. The one thing I wanted in my heart the most was to be married. If I had just stopped and listened to God at that moment ... that’s what I would have changed. I think if I would have listened to God, it would have saved us a lot of heartache.”

The episode was televised despite the ending of the relationship.

“It still aired,” Thompson notes. “It’s still on TV. I feel like everybody in America has seen it. It’s still a reminder to this day. It’s something that was really hard.

“I watched it the day it aired, and I said, ‘you know what Amber ... the only way to heal the wound is to watch it. It’s going to hurt you, but you have to let it cut you.’”

Amber admits that it has been an evolving process of getting to the point to where she can talk openly about the situation. “I was very depressed,” Amber recalls. “I was an introvert for a while. I didn’t want to talk about it, but it’s easier to be transparent when you just let it all out. I’m very open and honest about it (now). I try to help people as much as I can. I try to be open. You can make it through. It’s a good decision ... even (though) a hard one.

“Life is not easy. Life is tough. Every day of my life, I face hard times and trials.”

It took some time before she resumed dating. “Even thinking about a wedding, it was nauseating,” Thompson emphasizes. “It took me a good year (to date again). Dating takes a while. When you get in the mindset of I’m going to spend the rest of my life with this person and it doesn’t happen, it takes a while to rewire your brain. You have to hit the reset button. That’s not easy.



“When we first started dating, the things I wanted were different from what he wanted. We kind of settled because we cared for each other. Eventually, those things stack up. It’s important to wait for the right one. Now, when I go to dating, I don’t settle. It’s a matter of being equally yoked.”

Amber is in a committed relationship again, one that is approaching its one-year anniversary.
“We’re taking it very slow,” Thompson says. “We’re letting God lead us. We are best friends. God just kind of led us to each other.”

“I’m excited about the future. From now on, I’m just letting God lead.”

She’ll face the future with a grateful mentality. “Every day, I wake up, and I’ll pray and just thank God,” Thompson explains. “I’ve gone through phases and depression and wanting to give up. Everybody goes through those times. God just continually shows me my purpose ... that’s to glorify Him through whatever doors He opens.

“I’ve looked back now at the mountain and know that I can come over it and climb it. I’m ready to climb it. I have my gear on this time.”

Photographs courtesy of Daywind and Craig Harris.



The Connells

Welcome to Creekside 2017



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OCTOBER 30 - NOV 2

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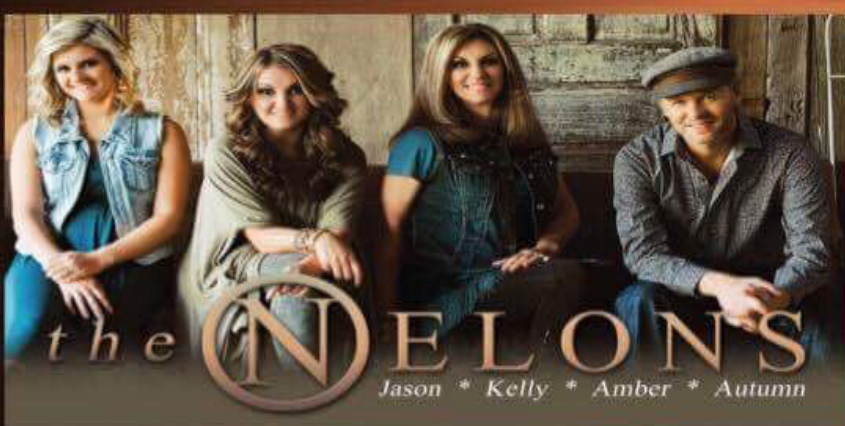


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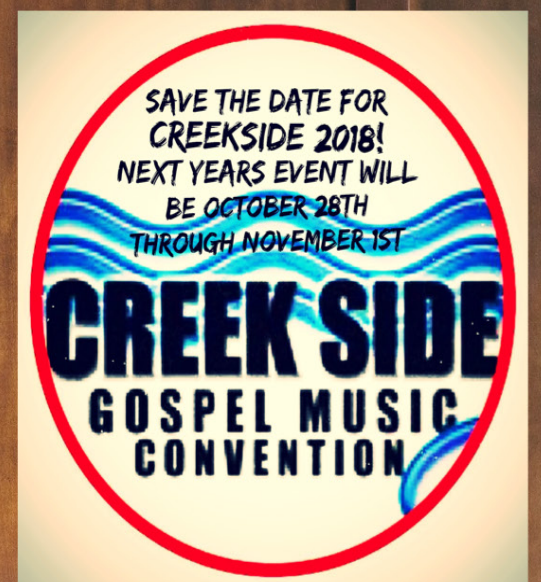
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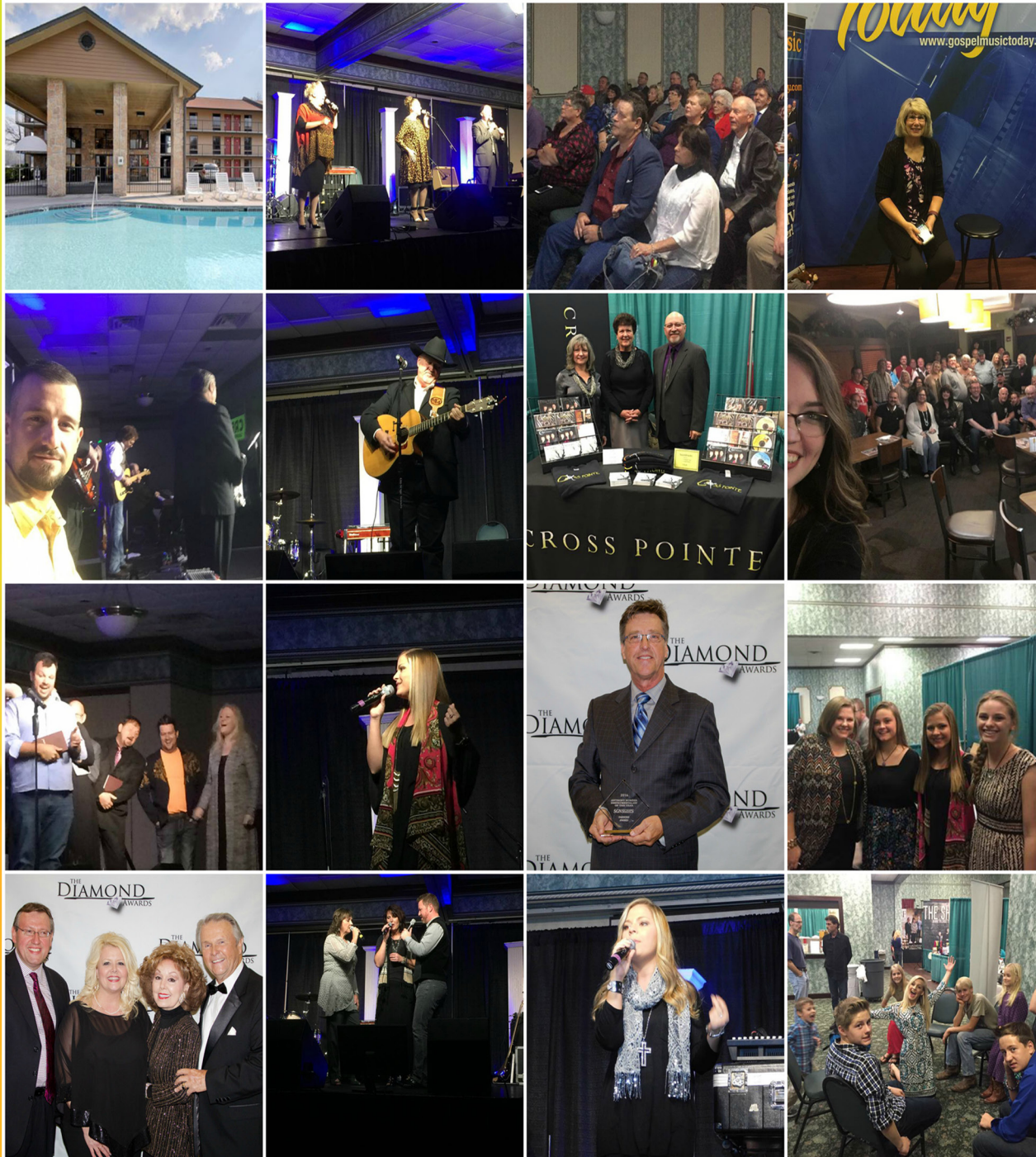
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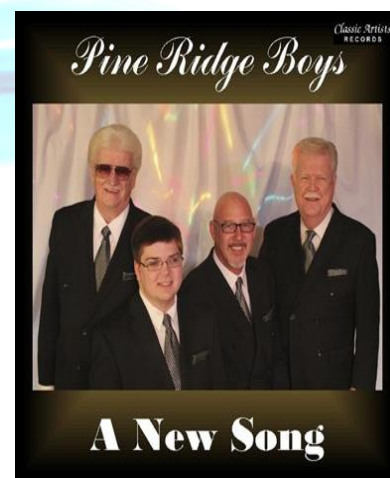
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Eric Bennett: This is what I do

By Lorraine Walker

Eric Bennett, acclaimed bass singer for Triumphant Quartet, was surprised to hear that he will be presented an award by Creekside Gospel Music Convention on Oct. 30.

“I found that out, and I was incredibly honored,” says Bennett.

Then, he jokes, “Was everybody else busy?”

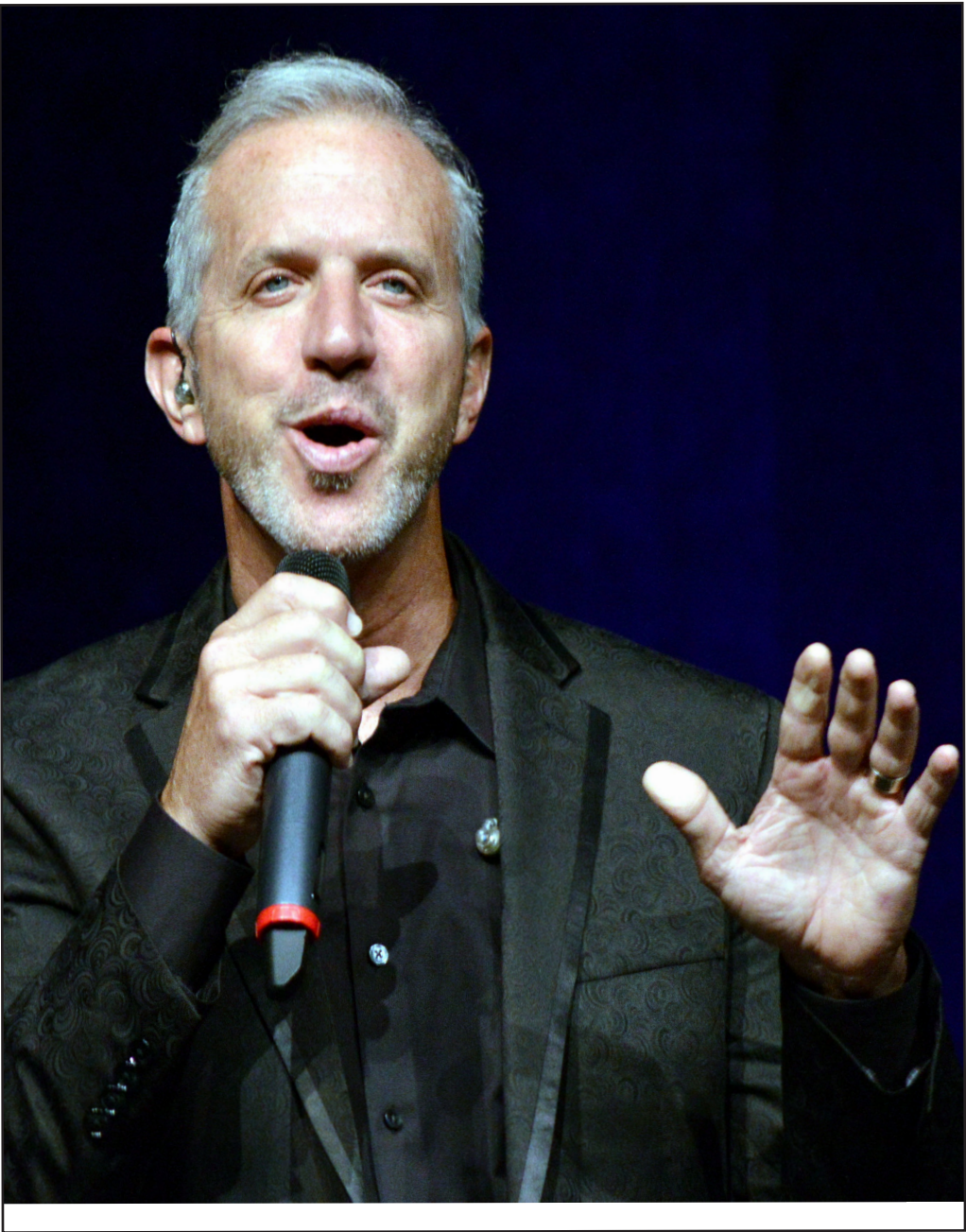
Dr. Jerry Goff will be presenting the Lifetime Achievement award to Bennett on that Monday night.

“When brother Jerry called me with that, I was just floored,” Bennett recalls. “Then, I thought, ‘if this is a lifetime achievement, is it the end of my life? Is there something I don’t know here?’ But, no, seriously, I was just humbled by it.”

Bennett points out that Triumphant doesn’t aim for awards.

“We do our own thing,” Bennett explains. “We just sing and just enjoy life, and (I’m honored that) somebody would notice that I love what I do, and I cherish the people that I get to sing to, and hopefully live what I sing. It’s huge to me that people would notice.”

Bennett grew up in the small town of Battleground, Ala., on a farm with three sisters and a brother. His parents raised him to go to church every time the doors were open, and he loved his upbringing.





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“My cousins and my brother started singing when I was about 15,” Bennett shares. “When I was 16, my brother asked me to sing with them. I used to listen to records of the Kingsmen and Ray Dean Reese. (I) love Ray Dean. That’s how I got into it. He (my brother) brought home their live album, and I listened to it, just loved it. I started trying to sound like Ray Dean.”

At 12 years old, Bennett already had a low voice, which he says was weird. Then, at 16, he developed a bass-singing voice.

“My brother helped me learn the part,” Bennett says. “I cut a few CDs with them. Then, I sang with another local group for a while, and then, I pastored a church for a while.”

It was not easy for Bennett to accept that he was called to pastor a church.

“I’ll be honest with you ... I ran from it for a long time,” Bennett admits. “Even the preaching part of it ... ‘Lord, are you sure? You know who I am. Do you know what you are doing here?’

“I ran from it as far as I could, and I was told by people, ‘run from it if you can,’ but He finally caught up with me and said, ‘this is what you are supposed to do.’ So, I went looking for a church, and they called me, gave me a shot. It was just a little small country church. We started with maybe 30 people or so, and we built it up. God was good. He blessed and it grew greatly. I was there about two years, and then, I felt the push to move on. It just felt like it was time, and I didn’t even know why. Two weeks later, I got a call from the Kingdom Heirs. I just resigned, and boom, two weeks later they called.”

Bennett drove up from the home he shared with his wife, which was close to all of the rest of the family, to try out for the Kingdom Heirs.

“This is not cocky at all, but sometimes you just know when God is in things,” Bennett shares. “I told my wife on the way up there, ‘do you want to move to Tennessee? (Because) I know I’ve got this job, if it is something that would interest you.’ She said, ‘if you feel that is what God is leading us to do, then just do it.’ Sure enough, I got up there to sing, and they hired me. There was several other people they could have hired, but it was a God thing. He was in it all the way.

“I knew that pastoring was not necessarily my life-long job or whatever, but I knew that He was preparing me for this. So, I sang with the Kingdom Heirs for 11 years, and then, an opportunity opened up at a theatre, and we (Triumphant Quartet) did that for five years with Louise (Mandrell).”

In the mornings, Bennett’s quartet performed a gospel set, and Mandrell joined them.

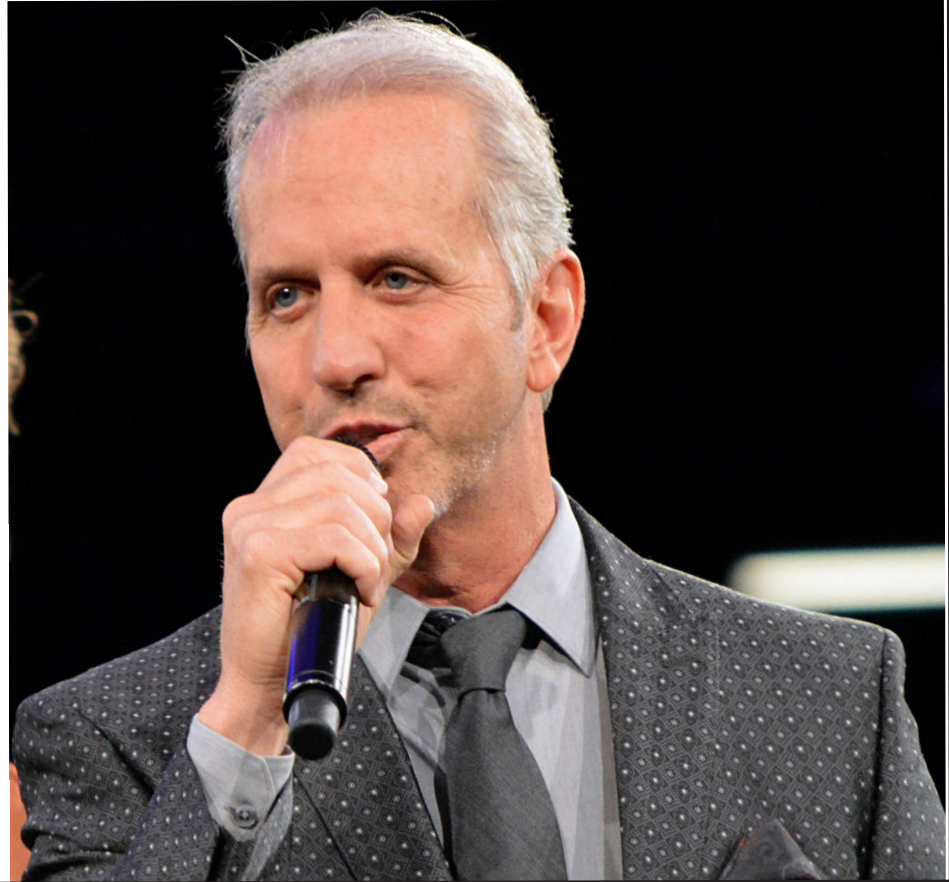
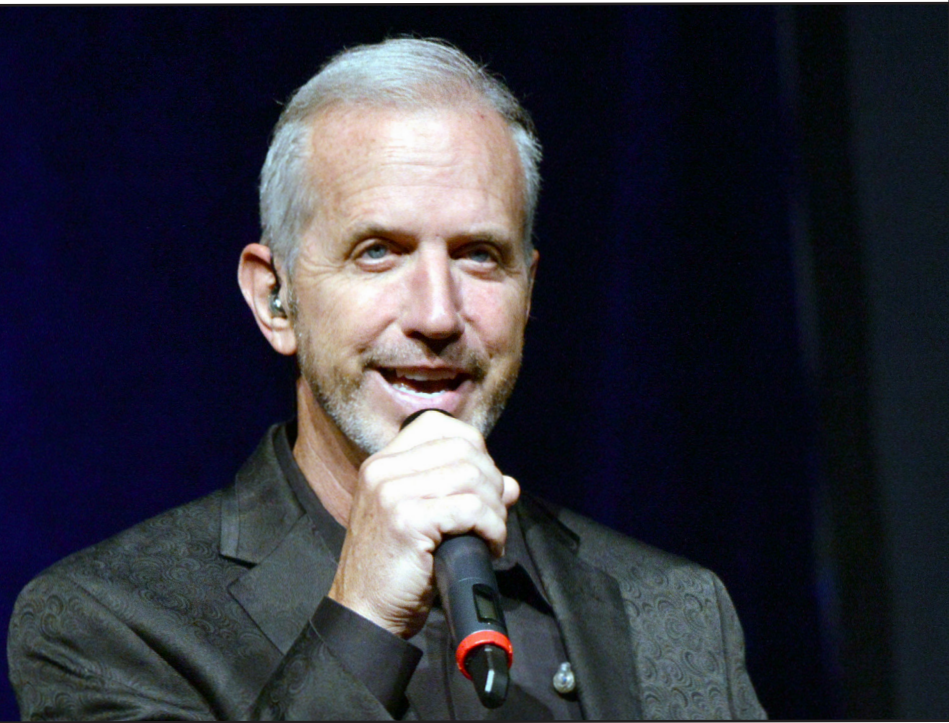
“She did her secular stuff at night, which was great, but we did all gospel,” Bennett remembers.

Bennett says that the group loved Mandrell. They really appreciated (Louise Mandrell Theater marketing director) Sande Weiss and her giving the quartet a chance. Mandrell resumed touring, and Triumphant also left the theatre.

“God has been beyond good to us,” Bennett emphasizes. “To keep (founding group members) Dave (Sutton), Scotty (Inman) and Clayton (Inman), all four of us together, is just a huge blessing. We have an incredible bus right now. And by that, I mean everybody gets along. We have a driver that is excellent, Jamie (Bramlett). Our piano player, Aaron (Dishman), if you’ve been around him, he’s just an angel, prince of a guy. Our soundman (Adam Bradford) is wonderful. We have hardly any cross words at all, and when it is, it’s usually Clayton and Scotty because they are father and son.”

One of the reasons for the group’s popularity is the music that they present and the lyrics that speak to hearts.

“God has blessed us with incredible songs that really minister to people,” Bennett points out. ‘Somebody Died for Me,’ ‘Amazing God’ ... those songs were very impactful. And now, of course,





(there's) 'Chain Breaker.' It's an incredible song. I think it's going to touch a lot of lives, because a lot of people right now are dealing with a lot of stuff."

The people hearing these songs often come to Bennett for counsel and prayer.

"We are so blown away by the people that entrust us with their problems and their life issues," Bennett shares. "I just had a lady that reminded me that a few years ago, when we were here, she had just lost her daughter, a baby. She just asked us to pray, and what a privilege it is to pray for somebody like that, that they feel comfortable enough and have confidence in you, to come and allow you into their life that way. It's incredible and very humbling."

While introducing the song, "Chain Breaker," Bennett will often tell the audience about a girl whose life was torn apart by drugs and how she heard the song, which convicted her heart and led her to come to know Jesus.

"We hear about the drugs of course, and 'our son's this,' 'our grandson's addicted'... since we've started singing 'Chain Breaker,' and sharing the story, that's what I hear a lot," Bennett explains.

Bennett and his fellow vocalists find the road life a little wearing at times, and singing the same program can be difficult.

"We know every night when we get up there, even though we have sung those same songs hundreds of times, that there is a new audience, and 90 percent of the people are hurting," Bennett says. "We sing with a new freshness every night. God gets us there."

"Now is it tough sometimes, when you pull up to a place and unload the equipment, yes, that's a little tough. But once you hit the stage and once you see the crowd, see the response, see the need out there ... it's just a different ballgame."

As spiritually draining as it might be to minister to so many people night after night, to see the need and try to show the people the love of the Lord, Bennett always appears ready for the challenge.

"You know what I do ... I listen to sermons every day," Bennett points out. "I hardly ever listen to music, unless it's a type of praise song. Sometimes, I listen to sermons all day long. I love sermons. I know who I am. I know what I need. 'There is none righteous, no, not one.' 'All have sinned and come short of His glory.' I know who I am, I know I'm rotten at the core."

"That's a problem with a lot of gospel groups. They all have good intentions. They get into the industry because they love it. They love the Lord. They love gospel music. But once you are out there and you are giving, giving, giving, and you are going from church, you don't get it (back), because you are singing. I found myself years ago not replenishing. I was reading (the Bible), but you know, you read a little one day, maybe skip a day ... I felt like with who I was, and how serious it was to be filled when I get on stage, as much as I can be, to be filled with the Spirit and to be where I need to be, I have to read every day. I have to listen to messages every day. I have my favorite pastors I listen to."

Bennett isn't the only one of the guys who is serious about staying in the Word.

"We have Bible studies on the bus," Bennett says. "We have to because we all know who we are. I lead the guys usually once a week in a Bible study, unless we are going to be home on Sunday and we can go to our church. And when we are home on Sunday, we are all in church. That's another thing that I am very proud of these guys for. We have to stay fed, because when you are empty, you are vulnerable."

Sometimes, it is easy to doubt the path or calling one might have on their life. Bennett says he never doubts that singing with Triumphant is where he is supposed to be.

"I feel that this is my purpose," Bennett points out. "A lot of peo-

ple go through life and never know what their purpose is. I know what my purpose is. It's what I am doing. Now, do I get tired of getting on the bus and leaving my wife? Yeah. Do I get tired of missing my grandbabies' birthdays? Sure ... but that's why, when we are gone, we make the best of it on the road. We have fun on the road. We try to make it as fun as we can. We go to malls. We go to ballgames. We do whatever we can to have fun, because it's hard out here. The bus looks big on the outside, but on the inside, especially with Clayton – the guy's pretty big – it's just tight in there. About every day, we go to a mall, or somewhere, to get away from each other, and just walk and exercise."

When their venue has a gym, the guys will often play basketball or another sport, just having fun together.



"But when we are home, we are zoned in and focused on our families – our wives, kids and grandbabies," Bennett states. "My mom is still living. She is 86, so I try to go there once a month as she lives five hours from me."

"(Former Triumphant pianist) Jeff Stice said something one day. He said, 'I don't get tired of it. I get tired in it.' I think it's a very wise saying and it's very true. I never get tired of what I do. I get tired in what I do.

The road life was always a dream for Bennett, one that has come true.

"I wanted to be (Gold City bass singer) Tim Riley so bad," Bennett admits. "I wanted to be (Cathedrals bass singer) George Younce so bad when I was little. Ray Dean Reese is the guy I really heard as they came around a lot. But you know, after a while ... there was a Tim Riley. There was a Ray Dean Reese. There was a George. So, I had to finally come to the fact that I had to be me. But I've always wanted to do this since I was a kid, and I still want to do it. I want to do it as long as I can. I want to be getting up and down out of the bus, somebody helping me up on it, somebody helping me off of it ... until the voice goes, or the body goes, or something. I just want to be singing. I love it.

"This is not who I am. This is what I do. There's a big difference. A lot of people get wrapped up in this being who they are, and this is not who I am. I am a Christian first. I love the Lord first. I am a husband. I am a daddy, and thank God, I have incredible kids that are serving the Lord. I want to be granddaddy of the year. So, that's who I am. This is what I do ... big difference. You have to separate them. I really don't try to live right because of gospel music. I don't want to live right because it's my duty for the fans. I just want to live right because it's what I feel like God expects from me. He's done what He did. I want to do what I need to do for Him since He gave His life for me. I want to live right for my wife and my kids. I think you have to separate the two."

And he does.

Photographs by Craig Harris and Lorraine Walker

What others are saying about Eric Bennett

"I started watching Eric sing when I was 11 years old. He was with the Kingdom Heirs, and that was the first quartet I had ever heard or seen. He was always so kind and was a big encouragement to me through the years. I'm incredibly blessed to work for such a Godly man who I can honestly call a true friend." – **Aaron Dishman, Triumphant Quartet pianist**

"Eric Bennett is my friend. I've always thought he could sing a solo better than any bass singer that ever walked. My fondest memory of Eric takes me back to my dad. My dad loved Southern gospel music and was very proud of Triumphant Quartet. My dad suffered a stroke about 12 years ago and passed away back in March, but shortly after he had the stroke, the group bought a new bus. Well, my dad had lost the use of his legs and had to be in a wheelchair. This was tough on him, because he was a man that loved to be on the go. Triumphant was in concert in Lebanon, Tenn., about an hour away from where he and mom lived, so my sister and mom brought him to our concert so he could see it. I remember them driving up and daddy smiling at the sight of our new ride. I remember the look in his eyes that told me he wished he could climb up the steps to see inside. I remember Eric looking at me, walking to my dad, and helping me carry him up those steps and on to our bus. I remember the look on my dad's face. I remember Eric helping me carry him back down the steps and putting him back in his wheelchair. I remember my dad smiling and giving us the thumbs up sign. I remember how happy Eric seemed to be to have helped me. Sometimes, changes happen, and we move to different chapters in our lives ... but that memory of him helping me carry my dad will stay with me forever. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of this award than my friend, Eric Bennett. I love him, and I always will." – **Jeff Stice, former Triumphant Quartet pianist**

"Eric is one of the most consistent men I know. He has an even demeanor, willingness to serve, and he's a pretty decent workout partner. We've been friends since he joined the Kingdom Heirs days, but the Triumphant days have created brothers. One of my favorite quotes ... 'if serving is below you, leadership is beyond you.' Eric is a tremendous leader." – **Clayton Inman, Triumphant Quartet lead singer**

"What do I love about Eric Bennett besides his immense talent? His love for his family ... and his friends ... and his absolute kindness and professionalism throughout the years I worked with Triumphant. Congrats Eric. Well-done my friend." – **Donna King**

"Eric Bennett has been a precious friend to Howard and me for many years. Not only does he sing fabulous bass for Triumphant Quartet, a group of men who are greatly respected in the gospel music industry and adored by the fans, but Eric never fails to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a tremendous honor to have the privilege of expressing our appreciation for our long-time friend." – **Lou Wills Hildreth**

"It's difficult to cover the many facets in the life of Eric Bennett in a sentence or even in a paragraph. From pastor, to singer, to evangelist, Eric is a true Christian gentleman, an award-winning singer that has guided his singing group, Triumphant, to pinnacles of success. His ministry, whether preaching or singing, is guided by his desire to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. His many, many years of devoted service is truly deserving of recognition by his peers. I'm proud to call Eric my personal friend and fellow minister." – **Dr. Jerry Goff, president of Sharing Christ Ministries, Inc.**

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