

Artist Bio

BILL GAITHER

Few people in the world of music are as admired, respected or accomplished as Gospel Music Hall of Famer Bill Gaither. Although, as a songwriter, he has contributed more than 500 songs to church hymnals throughout the world, including a number of classics, recorded some 40 albums, and made possible the first gold-selling inspirational album, he considers himself first a schoolteacher and coach. And even though sheet music sales of just three of his standards--"He Touched Me," "Because He Lives," and "The King Is Coming" -number close to two million he calls himself a facilitator. His concerts with wife Gloria, The Bill Gaither Trio, and his Gaither Vocal Band were the first of their kind to sell out in huge arenas across the country, and his 12 self-produced and self-marketed videos have reached sales in the millions, yet he says, with his customary modesty, that he is an entrepreneur. He is, indeed, all of those things and more, but first and foremost, he is a preservationist, an historian, and a trailblazer.

If you ask Bill Gaither, himself, which hat fits most comfortably, he is quick to say he's still a coach at heart. "I always want to take something and make it better" he maintains. Because he feels that well-crafted songs--including the more than 500 he has penned--are still important, he has become the historian of inspirational music, which in turn has been a motivating factor in his attempt to preserve the music of the genre's pioneers. A self-described nurturer by nature, Gaither has stayed in touch with people all his life, including friends such as Hovie Lister and Jake Hess of The Statesman Quarter, members of The Speer Family, J.D. Sumner, James Blackwood of The Blackwood Brothers, Vestal and Howard Goodman and others who helped to popularize southern gospel music. In fact, Gaither's first recorded song was by The Speer Family.

Celebration in song and word has always been exciting to Bill Gaither. Growing up in rural Alexandria, Indiana (pop. 6,028), he dreamed of becoming a gospel singer. He made an attempt to be a professional while in college, but soon realized he wasn't very good and turned his attention to teaching English. He soon earned a teaching slot at his alma mater, Alexandria High School.

His former students still recall how quickly they'd complete assignments so time would permit Mr. Gaither to play his guitar and sing his songs. That assignment also brought him his life's partner, when he met a substitute French teacher, Gloria Sickal, who soon became his wife and musical partner as well. On weekends, he would harmonize with his brother, Danny, and sister, Mary Ann, playing in churches. The Gaither Vocal Band was born in 1963, again playing first in churches, then moving to high school auditoriums, and after setting attendance records in both, began conquering 2,500 seat city auditoriums, then the 12,000-15,000 seat arenas. To this day, the promoter in Bill Gaither can recite seating capacities in almost any venue in the country .

Bill Gaither became a household name when his self-penned "He Touched Me" catapulted him to the top of the music industry in the late '60s, earning him a Grammy nomination in 1969. Recorded by Elvis Presley, among the legions of others, it received international recognition and was cited as having more impact on the listening public that year than any other song recorded. In 1969, the song also earned its writer Dove Award honors as Songwriter of the Year, a title he earned consecutively from 1972 to 1977 for such standards as "The King Is Coming," "Something Beautiful," "There's Something About That

Name," and "Because He Lives" introduced their music to a whole new audience.

In 1975, Gaither's entrepreneurial skills took forefront when he and Gloria formed "Praise Gathering For Believers" at the Indianapolis Convention Center. The three-day musical and educational event annually draws 11,000 people and is sold-out one year in advance. The Praise Gathering soon led to the Family Fest in Gatlinburg in 1985 as well as the Jubilate held each year on New Years' Eve in Charlotte's 24,000 seat arena.

Additionally, Gaither likes to identify young people and help them to success by giving them spots on his tours or as members of the Gaither Vocal Band. Among those whose careers have received Gaither boosts are Sandy Patti (8 years with The Gaithers), Carman (6 years), Michael English (10 years), Steve Green (6 years), Mark Lowry (14 years), Don Francisco and Jon Mohr. "I've always enjoyed putting somebody else out front," he points out.

It was this side of Bill Gaither which led him, in the early '90s, to begin setting down the musical history of southern gospel in a series of 12 videotaped "reunions" Because he felt the pioneers of the industry were being ignored and in danger of being forgotten, he conceived the idea of gathering all the pioneers in one room (his studio in Alexandria) singing all the songs which inspired them, and capturing it all on video and audio tape.

The first tape, "Homecoming," debuted on The 700 Club in 1992 with an 800number for ordering. The response was so astounding that the show was repeated during Sweeps Week as a ratings booster. Gaither repeated this formula 11 more times with such tapes as "Old Friends," "Turn Your Radio On," "Landmark," and "Reunion." He started buying time on networks. To date, more than seven million tapes have sold and a network of very loyal "fellow pilgrims" has been developed. The concept also led to a one-hour special on The Nashville Network in November 1995 entitled "A Gospel Reunion At The Ryman," which topped the ratings for the network. Due to that ratings success, TNN commissioned four more shows for 1996, and by1999, the Gaither Gospel Hour was running almost weekly on TNN. The Gaither Family Music Hour joined the P AX-TV family in 2001 and is now seen on 10 networks.

Tapings have been staged at Washington's prestigious Kennedy Center, New York's Beacon Theatre, New Orleans' Saenger Theatre, The Alabama Theatre in Birmingham, Red Rocks in Colorado and in London, Ireland and Hawaii. A two-part special on the beloved hymns from Billy Graham's Crusades, taped at the Billy Graham Training Center in North Carolina, was telecast in October 2001. Gaither's Spring House Music was named the top video company of 2000 by Billboard Magazine, placing 20titles on the chart that year, with Gaither-produced videos spending more than a dozen weeks at the top of the chart

ASCAP named Bill and Gloria their first-ever Christian Songwriter of the Century in2000. In 1996 Bill and Gloria Gaither were the first musical artists to be inducted into the Christian Booksellers Association's Hall of Honor. Only three people have been previously honored with this distinction: Reverend Billy Graham, Dr. Kenneth Taylor (author of The Living Bible) and Dr. Richard Halverson (former U. S. Senate Chaplain).

Gaither sums up the success of the venture: "Christian music is not a style, it's a theology wrapped in a lot of different styles; therefore, the artists have become segmented. The videos have been unifying. Gloria and I have always been a bridge. Our circle ranges from presidential candidates to college students. It encompasses all."

GAITHER VOCAL BAND FACT SHEET

BILL GAITHER (Founder/Bass)

Has written more than 600 inspirational songs

Received ASCAP's first Christian Songwriter of the Century award in 2000

Has won 5 Grammy Awards and 28 Dove Awards

Founded the Gaither Vocal Band in 1981

MICHAEL ENGLISH (Lead Vocals)

Began his career in his family's singing group, The Singing Samaritans, in 1972

Featured on numerous Gaither Homecoming videos and won multiple Dove awards over the course of his career.

In addition to his music career, Michael released his autobiography, *The Prodigal Comes Home*, in April 2007

Originally joined Gaither Vocal Band in 1985 and rejoined in 2009

WES HAMPTON (Tenor)

Wes is a graduate of Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Serves as worship leader at Church of Brook Hills in Birmingham, AL

Joined Gaither Vocal Band in 2005

MARK LOWRY (Baritone)

Holds a Youth Degree from Liberty College (now Liberty University) in Lynchburg, VA.

Featured on almost all of the Gaither Homecoming videos - now numbering more than one hundred - often in the co-hosting role with Bill.

Originally joined Gaither Vocal Band in 1988 and rejoined in 2009

DAVID PHELPS (Tenor)

Earned a degree in vocal performance from Baylor University

Nominated for The Gospel Music Association's 2002 Male Vocalist of the Year

Originally joined Gaither Vocal Band in 1997 and rejoined in 2009