

WHY WE SING

**Indianapolis Gospel Music
in Church, Community and Industry**



Why We Sing:

Indianapolis Gospel Music in Church, Community and Industry

Saturday, November 12, 2011

Neal Marshall Black Culture Center

Indiana University, Bloomington

Powerful...dynamic...life changing... are adjectives which come to mind in describing gospel music in Indianapolis. The Circle City is home to not one, but two gospel music labels, Aleho and Tyscot Records, both of which have attracted award-winning, chart-topping recording artists from across the nation. Indianapolis is well represented in the top-level leadership of the largest and most influential national organizations which cultivate and promote gospel music as cultural, religious, and artistic expression, including the Gospel Music Workshop of America, the Gospel Announcers Guild, and the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship. And on Sunday mornings, congregations in church sanctuaries across the city are electrified by the dynamic flow of musical sharing between choirs and congregations of virtually every denomination.

Why We Sing: Indianapolis Gospel Music in Church, Community and Industry is a one-day conference which explores how the city of Indianapolis has served to inform, enrich, and disseminate this African American religious music expression both locally and globally. Gospel music has been an important component of religious expression in African American churches since its rise to prominence in the early decades of the twentieth century; it now stands as a key factor which distinguishes African American churches of all denominations. Indianapolis is rich in its treasure of recording artists and studios, radio announcers, producers, promoters, church choirs, vocalists, and instrumentalists linked to the performance and dissemination of gospel at both the national and international levels.

The conference includes three roundtable discussions with the eight prominent Indianapolis gospel music icons featured in this newsletter. In addition, each roundtable is framed by two IU scholars, one of whom introduces the discussion, the other who provides summary and synthesis from their respective disciplinary perspectives in ethnomusicology (Dr.

Portia Maultsby), religious studies (Dr. Sylvester Johnson) and African and African Diaspora studies (Dr. Valerie Grim). The conference seeks to establish the regional significance of Indianapolis in the evolution and development of this traditional African American musical genre, whose audience crosses boundaries of race, culture, age, language, and nationality.

Why We Sing concludes with an evening concert at Fairview United Methodist Church, which showcases a local volunteer-based community choir under the direction of Sherri Garrison, worship leader at the 10,000 member Eastern Star Baptist Church in Indianapolis; performances by Indianapolis recording artists Rodnie Bryant, an Indiana University alum; and Lamar Campbell, whose credits include appearances on NBC's *Today* and CBS's *Late Night With David Letterman* alongside Aaron Neville. A four-piece live band under the musical direction of gospel recording artist Tyron Cooper, former director of the IU Soul Revue, will accompany them. Al "the Bishop" Hobbs, former Executive Vice Chair of the Gospel Music Workshop of America, past General Manager of radio station WTLC in Indianapolis, and founding chair and president of Aleho Records, will serve as emcee. Participation in the community choir, open to the general public, offers a rich and rewarding aural-based learning experience characteristic of traditional gospel choir instruction nationwide.

Conference organizers include ethnomusicologist Dr. Mellonee Burnim and ethnomusicology graduate students Tyron Cooper and Raynetta Wiggins, all of whom represent the National Research Council's number-one-ranked IU Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology.

Why We Sing: Conference Schedule

Why We Sing: Indianapolis Gospel Music in Church, Community and Industry

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Time	Activity
9:00-9:45 am 9:50 am	REGISTRATION WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS Convener: Dr. Mellonee Burnim, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology
PANEL I 10:00-11:30 am	GOSPEL MUSIC IN CHURCH AND COMMUNITY Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sherri Garrison, Director of Worship, Eastern Star Church; Former Director, Gospel Music Workshop of America <i>Women of Worship</i> • Rev. A. Thomas Hill, Recording Artist; Pastor, Healing Streams Word & Worship Center • Rodnie Bryant, Founding Director, Christian Community Mass Choir; Tyscot Recording Artist Moderator: Dr. Mellonee Burnim, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology Respondent: Dr. Valerie Grim, Chair, Department of African and African American Diaspora Studies
11:30-1:00 pm	Lunch (on your own)
PANEL II 1:00-2:30 pm	THE INDIANAPOLIS GOSPEL MUSIC INDUSTRY Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Leonard Scott, Co-founder, Tyscot Records; Pastor, Rock Community Church • Al "the Bishop" Hobbs, Founder, Aleho Records; Former General Manager WTLC; Past Executive Vice Chair, Gospel Music Workshop of America Moderator: Tyron Cooper, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology Respondent: Dr. Portia Maulsby, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology
2:30-2:45 pm	Break
PANEL III 2:45-4:15 pm	NEW DIRECTIONS IN GOSPEL MUSIC Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamar Campbell, Recording Artist; Worship Leader, Emmaus Christian Church • Liz "Faith" Dixon, Radio Announcer, WTLC AM 1310 • Tracy Williamson, Founder TRE7, Inc., Artist Development, Marketing and Production Company Moderator: Raynetta Wiggins, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology Respondent: Dr. Sylvester Johnson, Department of Religious Studies
4:15-4:30 pm	Acknowledgements/Closing Remarks Dr. Burnim
5:00-6:30 pm	Community Choir Rehearsal Fairview United Methodist Church 600 W. Sixth Street Bloomington, IN 47404
5:00-6:30 pm	Dinner Break (on your own)
7:00 pm 7:30 pm	Fairview Doors Open Concert Fairview United Methodist Church 600 W. Sixth Street Bloomington, IN 47404

Why We Sing: Artists and Speakers

Rodnie Bryant

"I think that each album that we have recorded has been a result of a personal encounter with God—either Him lifting us, chastising us, or teaching us something...I think that's probably how most of us choose our music—something hit us. And gospel music is a heartfelt music, so knowing that, everything we sing comes from the heart, a lot of times it comes from our experience."

"Whatever you do in life I don't care what it is...I know you have to be called."

Director, producer, and arranger Rodnie Bryant began to build his reputation as a musician more than thirty years ago. A graduate of Indiana University, Bloomington, Bryant served as director of the long-running, and highly regarded IU Voices of Hope gospel choir while a student, and later formed the 60-voice Rodnie Bryant & The Christian Community Mass Choir (CCMC) in Indianapolis. In 1988, CCMC was the grand prize winner of McDonald's Gospelfest, prompting their debut release with Tyscot, *Greater Faith*. Their second project, *Angels Watching Over Me*, catapulted the choir to a number 12 ranking on the Top 40 Gospel chart released by the national trade magazine *Gospel Today*. CCMC's third release, *He's a Keepa*, produced by Stellar Award winner Donald Lawrence, garnered 1998 Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA) Excellence Awards for Choir of the Year, New Artist of the Year, and Song of the Year.

Rodnie Bryant's status in the Indianapolis gospel music community is evident through his involvement as director of the Indy Mass Choir, the Indianapolis chapter of the Gospel Music Workshop of America, and through his creation of the Indy Youth Gospel Music Camp. The camp began weekly sessions in 2000 with 75 attendees to provide instruction in music, dance, and life skills for young people 13–20, and now has a roster of 225. Bryant's musical impact extends into churches through his appointments as Minister of Music at Messiah Missionary Baptist Church, Barnes United Methodist Church, and currently, Umoja Christian Church in Indianapolis. Bryant has toured with such gospel headliners as Donald Lawrence, Karen Clark-Sheard, and Ricky Dillard.

Lamar Campbell

"I promised the Lord that if he opened the doors for me to be able to do gospel music and provide for myself, that's what I would stay true to. He has done that and I have done that."

"We do music that a lot of people would love in a lot of different places in the world....Sometimes when we think of our music reaching the four corners of the earth, we forget that the four corners are represented right in our own backyard. So there's a Latino community...an African community...a strong Jamaican influence...I want to touch those."

Stellar Award nominee, Lamar Campbell is a critically acclaimed gospel artist, songwriter, and choir director whose career spans over two decades. At age eight, he was already playing piano in his home church; by age 15, he had assumed the role of musical director for a small Baptist congregation in Indianapolis. After studying music at Butler University, he founded his first gospel group known as Lamar Campbell & Praise in the late 1980s, whose Tyscot release, *Ready*,



All portraits courtesy of the artists; background photos by Chris Jacob

Why We Sing: Artists and Speakers

yielded the popular “This Debt of Love I Owe,” penned by Campbell, and led to the group’s rise as a significant name in Indianapolis and surrounding areas.

Campbell has served several Indianapolis churches as minister of music, including the mega-churches Eastern Star and Light of the World, and currently, Emmaus Christian Church in Lafayette Square Mall, one of Indy’s fast-growing congregations. His Indianapolis-honed musical leadership also extends nationwide, as evident by his tenure as choir director and worship leader at the 14,000 member Windsor Village United Methodist Church, in Houston, TX—the largest United Methodist church in the nation.

In 1995, Campbell founded his second group, Spirit of Praise, which garnered considerable acclaim with the albums *I Need Your Spirit* and *When I Think About You*. Lamar Campbell and the Spirit of Praise have toured with major gospel recording artist Cece Winans and have appeared alongside Aaron Neville on NBC’s *Today Show* and CBS’s *Late Night with David Letterman*.

Liz “Faith” Dixon



“Gospel music is evolving. There are different art forms—you have gospel neo-soul; you have gospel hip hop; you have gospel country. There’s not a genre of music that gospel cannot touch. And to think that gospel music is choir music only in the 21st century—that is not it!”

“I feel like God is tired of his people being fed garbage. I think that He is raising up—like the Mary Marys. And if they can play it on hip hop stations, God is saying something. So it is getting ready to flip the script, mark my words. In order to reach the lost, you have to show them that, hey, you can have fun and listen to God and let this song minister to you where you are. God has got to get his message out to His people by any means necessary.”

Beginning at 11 a.m. on Sundays, Liz “Faith” Dixon takes to the airways with *The Gospel Showcase*, featuring three hours of gospel music videos on Indy Music Channel IMC.TV. From 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Monday–Friday, Dixon is afternoon host of the Kingdom Takeover, and on Saturdays from 5–7 p.m., she becomes God Squad co-host of the *Nu Church Radical Praise Party*, both on WTLC AM 1310 in Indianapolis. Her present-day radio personality is a far cry from her earlier days on secular airways at WTLC as a producer of the afternoon show *Racy Stacy*.

Liz Dixon’s entrée into the gospel music industry began as an intern, engineering assistant, and programming assistant at radio station WGCI 107.5 in Chicago, where she came into direct contact with such on-air personalities as Tom Joyner and Doug Banks and assisted in coordinating WGCI *How to Make it in the Music Business* seminars. Subsequent internships at PGD (now Universal Music Group) and BMG provided her with opportunities to work on assignments linked to Atlantic, Interscope, Island Def Jam, J Records, Jive, Motown and other top flight recording companies.

After relocating to Indianapolis, Dixon eventually secured a position as local producer of the *Tom Joyner Morning Show* at 106 WGGR. She has also hosted the secular radio show *Chop Shop* and served as music director on Hot 96.3. Feeling spiritually led, in 2002 Dixon began an extended hiatus from radio. Four years later, she returned to WTLC devoted exclusively to her mission to lift up and encourage her listeners at AM 1310, with her trademark refrain “God has a plan and purpose for each and every one of you!” Her current duties include producing Hall of Fame Amos Brown’s number one community service talk show *Afternoons with Amos*.

Why We Sing: Artists and Speakers

Sherrri Garrison

“Ministry takes more than just singers. But if everybody is a lead singer, then you have no followers. It’s not just about teaching the songs and teaching the words and teaching the melody. It’s about teaching the word of God, too, because that’s what ministry is about.”

“My worship and my praise [are] not predicated on how I feel. It’s about acknowledging who He is and thanking Him for the gift that He’s given to me, because He didn’t have to give me this. I’m not perfect, but He still uses me.”

The dynamism of Sunday morning worship at the 10,000-member Eastern Star Church in Indianapolis is sparked and sustained in large part by the musical and spiritual gifts of Sherrri Garrison, who has served there as minister of music and worship leader under Pastor Jeffrey Johnson for the last 23 years. With responsibilities spanning each of the church’s three locations, on Sunday morning Garrison travels from one church to another, striving to replicate the qualitative worship experience in each context. Aided by her full-time staff of three and her roster of 19 part-time musicians, she is the high-energy driving force and visionary behind the praise team, the dance and mime ministries, and six choirs, three of which she directs.

Under Garrison’s leadership, in 1999, the Eastern Star Recording Choir released its first CD, which generated engagements across the United States and abroad—London, Paris, Greece and Japan. For over ten years, Ms. Garrison has served as director for the Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA) Women of Worship, which, in 1993, recorded its debut release *It’s Our Time* in Indianapolis. Dubbed as the first national release of an all women’s choir in gospel music, the success of *It’s Our Time* is marked by the ever popular “Order My Steps,” recorded under Garrison’s baton.

Currently music director of the Indy Mass choir, the Indianapolis chapter of the GMWA, Garrison has also partnered as choral conductor with the National Symphony Orchestra of Nashville in a 2003 tribute to Martin Luther King. Garrison was appointed by Bishop Paul Morton to the Board of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship. She has shared the stage with such gospel greats as Tramaine Hawkins, Kirk Franklin, Byron Cage and Kurt Carr.



A. Thomas Hill

“I’m kinda coined as one of the musical pastors, because music is just in my blood. It’s what I do. To me, gospel music has just simply been a means of encouraging people. Today I’m a pastor, but I’ve come through many roads to get to where I am today. But I can look in retrospect and realize that the gift of music was given me by God to encourage. And that’s kind of what a pastor or shepherd does—they’re an encourager of people. So [music] was a precursor to take me to where I would ultimately fit.”

“The gospel music industry—you got to be in it for its real purpose, because if you get into it to think, ‘I’m really going to make a living’ (and there are those who have been able to get there), but they’re a minority.”

Pastor A. Thomas Hill rose to prominence in the 1970s and ‘80s as a recording artist and songwriter with The Pentecostal Ambassadors, a male trio, all of whom were members of Grace Apostolic Church, which recorded four albums with Savoy & Tyscot Records. After completing 20 years at IBM, in 1991, Hill dedicated himself to full-time ministry. For four years, he served as

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South Central Regional Director with the nationwide Promise Keepers Men's Ministry, which served as a platform for his musical leadership in rallies, seminars, and assemblies which attracted thousands across the United States. As a further index of his trans-cultural ministry, Rev. Hill also led worship seminars for Maranatha Music and the National Coalition of Men's Ministries.

After serving for six years as Associate Pastor of Outreach and Foreign Affairs for Eastern Star Church in Indianapolis, under the guidance of Rev. Jeffrey A. Johnson, Sr., in 2003, Thomas assumed the pastorate at Healing Streams Word & Worship Center, a former Lowes Theater in the city. He also currently serves as songwriter, actor, and managing director for an Indianapolis-based Christian theater company founded by his sister, which for over 25 years, has produced the music passion play *Upon This Rock*. With its cast of over 300 community volunteers, this seasonal production has generated sold-out crowds from its initial church performance sites, to its more recent extended runs with Grammy-Award-winning gospel headliners at the 2200 seat Clowes Hall on the Butler University Campus in Indianapolis. In 2009, Upon This Rock Productions presented Pastor Hill in a live debut solo recording in Indianapolis titled *Uncensored Worship, Unrestricted Praise!*

Al "The Bishop" Hobbs

"Of all the music on the face of the planet, gospel seems to reach me and others in a place where other things can't reach."

"I honestly believe there is gospel the music and there is gospel the industry. The music is matriculating in churches from the greatest of our mega-churches all the way down to our storefronts. Gospel music has become the favorite form of sacred music in the African American worship experience bar none. And why has it done that? Simply because it has never thrown away in its presentation any other era of sacred music."

One of the most iconic figures of Indianapolis gospel music is Al "the Bishop" Hobbs, President and CEO of Aleho International Records, which he launched in 1992 as a part of his entrepreneurial company, Aleho Enterprises, which he founded in 1964. Under the banner of Aleho, it was Al Hobbs who served as executive producer for the Gospel Music Workshop of American Women of Worship release *It's Our Time*, which included Glen Burleigh's ever popular "Order My Steps," which has become a standard in African American churches across the nation.

Hobbs began his career in gospel music as an account executive and gospel music announcer at WTLC FM in Indianapolis, and he quickly moved through the ranks as sales manager and general manager to become Vice President and General Manager in 1981. Hobbs retired from this position in 1993, earning the honor of being the first African American to oversee the Panache Broadcasting WTLC AM/FM properties, then valued at over 24 million dollars.

Currently a member of the Board of the 30,000 member Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA), in 1992, Hobbs was elected the organization's first chairman, following the death of its president and founder, Rev. James Cleveland. His credits also include having served, since 1977, as chair of the Gospel Announcers Guild of the GMWA, recognized by many as the world's largest organized body of religious announcers, with a membership of over 1300.

Widely celebrated for his many civic and industry achievements, Hobbs was nominated for a Gospel Music Association Dove Award in 1996, inducted into the Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 1998, and in 2007, he received a Stellar Award commemorating his 50 year career in gospel music.



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Dr. Leonard Scott

"I just thought it [Tyscot Records] was going to be just for our church choir, but it just seemed like God had plans for this to be more than [that]."

"I can remember an old Bishop telling me one time, 'Your record company is not like any other. Yours is a platform for God.' And I kinda believe that he was in the spirit when he said that, because I've seen a lot of companies come and go. And some things that have even happened to us should have taken us out. But [when] God's hand is on you..."

Dr. Leonard Scott has been a seminal figure in the Indianapolis music industry and community as a pastor, singer, songwriter, host of the local health talk show *Medically Speaking* and co-founder of the oldest existing African American-owned gospel music label, Tyscot Records, in 1976. Initially funded by his dental practice and operated from offices there, Tyscot was established as a recording vehicle for a local church choir project. Despite a severe crisis in 1993 when its distributor, Spectra, filed for bankruptcy and left the company owing over one-half million dollars, Tyscot weathered the storm, largely because its artists chose to stay the course and renew their contracts even though there was

no guarantee they would be paid. The Tyscot roster has featured such prominent gospel artists as Rance Allen, The Anointed Pace Sisters, Deitrick Haddon, Kathy Taylor, Bishop Noel Jones, Lamar Campbell and Rodnie Bryant of Indianapolis, and John P. Kee and the New Life Community Choir, whose project, *Walk By Faith*, charted as the number one gospel recording in the nation in 1992. Kee's 1999 release, *Not Guilty*, sold more than 500,000 copies and gave Tyscot its first RIAA certified Gold Record.

In 1988, Dr. Scott's son, Bryant, became the label's general manager. During his thirty-year career, Dr. Scott has penned over 100 songs and has recorded several albums including his latest release *My Worship Experience* (2010), recorded at the Madame Walker Theatre in Indianapolis in partnership with his son Bryant. In 2000, Scott and his wife, Christene, founded Rock Community Church in Indianapolis, where he currently serves as pastor.



Tracy Williamson

"My father was instilling in me at three [years old] to be a producer."

"[I was sixteen], at a rehearsal, and I was prophesied to. And the Lord said, 'I've called you to bring my word to my people through your songs.'"

"The bad thing about being driven is that you are driven by yourself, and literally by yourself."

"We are a progressive ministry empowering people to walk into their destiny through praise and worship."

Tracy Williamson, a native of Chicago, IL, determined at an early age that she would make a mark in the music industry. Not long after graduating from Northern Illinois University with degree in marketing, she was hired in 2000 by Debbie May, former booking manager for Kirk Franklin, to assist with a Fred Hammond Chicago

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tour. Inspired by this success, Williamson began to hone her songwriting and producing skills under her mentor, Grammy-nominated and Stellar-Award-winning producer, Percy Gray, Jr.

In December of 2000, Williamson relocated to Indianapolis to work as marketing, A&R, and label director for Tyscot Records, where she has worked as either songwriter or producer for DeAndre Patterson, Rodnie Bryant, and Grammy nominee and 2008 Stellar Award winner for Quartet of the Year, The Rance Allen Group. Most recently, she has worked for *Be Lifted Up* by Bishop Leonard Scott. Her achievements have prompted feature spots on MTV, WGN's *People to People*, and in *Ebony* magazine in 2005 as one of the Top 30 Leaders of the Future.

Conference Sponsors:

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Conference Organizers (from left to right): Tyron Cooper, PhD Candidate (Ethnomusicology)
Dr. Mellonee Burnim, Director, Ethnomusicology Institute
Raynetta Wiggins, MA/PhD Student (Ethnomusicology)
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