

## Squire Parsons

This week I am featuring one of the true gentlemen in Southern Gospel Music. This artist is none other than Squire Parsons. Squire is from a little town in West Virginia called Newton, which is about fifty miles from Charleston. He stated that his father was active in the music program of his local church and also was part of a local quartet. Other members of Squire's family were also active in music in one way or the other in the different churches located in the area.

The music schools came through the area in the early 1900's and this was where the Parsons Family began to learn the quartet style singing, commonly referred to as "shape note" music. Squire said that his father's quartet, called the Newton Baptist Quartet, would come to his house and practice. This put a burning within Squire to sing. Also, Squire said that his mother would sit him in front of the record player and put a stack of "78's" on to play. She attributes this in part to Squire following the music profession.

As time went on Squire began to be a part of the local groups in the area and became active in school both in the band and choir, but his first love was the choir. After graduation he went to college to study to be a civil engineer, but after one semester he changed his major to music and received a BS in music education. After college he taught music for a time.

While in college, Squire met a man by the name of Conrad Cook who had left school to join a rock band. After a time Cook came back to school and told Squire that he should try to write songs – and with that began the songwriting career of one of the greatest songwriters of all time. Squire and Conrad sing in a quartet called the Calvarymen for a time. For those of you who do

not know, Conrad has written some great songs such as "Gloryroad," "Old Ship of Zion" and countless others. Conrad's love is black spirituals, and if you see him in concert that style of singing will be found.

Now for a few facts about Squire. He began writing songs in 1968, and he stated that he had written to date some 700-plus songs of which about 400 had been recorded. From 1975 to 1979 he sang with The Kingsmen and this is what brought him and his wife, Nancy to Asheville. In 1979 Squire felt as if the Lord was leading him into a special ministry. Squire stated that when he left the Kingsmen he never intended to be a solo artist, but his plan was to be a preacher/singer. I for one am glad that God allowed him to become a solo artist.

On Squire's first recording he recorded a song that he wrote entitled "Sweet Beluah Land." This song will certainly be considered one of the all-time greats in Southern Gospel Music, and I would say that this song has been recorded by as many if not more groups than any other song. Some of his other more notable songs are "The Master of the Sea," "Broken Rose," "Mama," and one of my favorites is "A Little Tear." Over the last twenty years Squire has recorded over 40 projects – some have been solo projects and other have included his group.

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