

Billy Rainey

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This week's feature is about a person who has been involved in Southern Gospel Music for over 35 years, mostly in television. His name is Billy Rainey. I featured Billy a few years ago and was thinking about him this week so decided to pay tribute to his dedication to Southern Gospel Music. Billy is from the upcountry and working with WGGG-TV in 1975 and continued until his retirement a few years ago.. He was the host of "Down Home Gospel" which airs each Saturday night. Now for a look at this person and his mark on Southern Gospel Music.

As earlier stated Billy began his tenure with WGGG-TV in 1975. At this time he was in the construction business and as he began to view different programs on TV 16 he believed in what he saw and soon found himself driving up Paris Mountain to ask for a job selling advertising for the station. Later when the station moved from atop Paris Mountain to Rutherford Road, its current location, Billy's construction background came in handy. Billy and his father actually built the inside of the studios. Billy grew up in a family that was very close, loved the church, and loved gospel music, especially Southern Gospel Music. Billy introduced a program in 1976 called "Gospel Startime" which was the forerunner to his current program "Down Home Gospel." "Gospel Startime" featured a variety of co-hosts including his wife, Jim McManus and others. The program's format featured local musical talent, a variety of topics and guests, and lots of fun. The show became so popular that it was expanded from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. According to Billy the success of "Gospel Startime" stemmed from a down home atmosphere. Billy learned early on that listening to the music was entertaining but listening to the words were a blessing.

In 1993 Billy started the "Down Home Gospel" program which is still going strong. It is a down home show where present-day viewers are able to kick their feet up on Saturday nights and enjoy a mix of local and nationally-known musical guests, lighthearted humor and a blessing from the Lord. A variety of guest co-hosts such as Gene Thompson, Federal Marshall Johnny Mack Brown, James Blackwood, Ken Turner, Charlie Baker, Eddie Broome, Allen Lovelace, Jack Bratton, Steven Bishop and current host Shawn Thompson. Yours truly had the privilege of being a guest on the program several months ago.

Many of the nationally known groups will visit both "Down Home Gospel" and "Nite Line" when in the area. If you view WGGG-TV history which is 33 years and counting you would see that most all the major Southern Gospel Music artist have been a part of this station's history. The Blackwood Brothers, JD Sumner and The Stamps, Hovie Lister, Rex Nelson and the list is somewhat endless. Billy has certainly made a mark on Southern Gospel Music within the viewing area of WGGG-TV.

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I can be contacted at (864) 979-9626 or (864) 895-1287. I will be co-host with Gretta Campbell on September 20th with a special guest and friend Miles Cooper. I hope you will tune in to this program.