

Hovie Lister, A Native of Greenville, SC

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This week I am featuring certainly one of the true legends in Southern Gospel Music and although he passed away several years ago his accomplishments continue to affect our music. He is none other than Hovie Lister, a native of Greenville.

I learned last week that retired Sheriff Johnny Mack Brown, Senator Tom Corbin and Councilman Joe Dill have been able to have a bridge named after Hovie to serve as a memorial to a native of the up-country. The location of this bridge is on highway 25 where the Highway 25 by-pass splits with Highway 25. This dedication is scheduled for Sunday, 17 Feb. at 2 p.m. at Reedy River Baptist Church with Charles Waller Master of Ceremonies.

As you may know Hovie was born in Greenville, South Carolina in the Poe Mill area. He was born on September 17, 1926, into a singing family. His grandfather taught "shape note" music schools. Hovie's father was one of five boys and four of the five sang with Hovie's father. They were known as The Lister Brothers and only sang part-time and worked regular jobs in the cotton mill. Hovie stated that there were a lot of weekday singings and that every Thursday at the Salvation Army Auditorium a gospel music concert was held.

Gospel music in those days was very popular. That was some 65 years ago. This was Hovie's start with gospel music. He had taken piano lessons while in high school and the summer between his junior and senior year in high school his father sent him to the Stamps-Baxter School of Music in Dallas, Texas. While attending this school Hovie studied both voice and piano.

At the end of the school Mr. Stamps asked Hovie to go to Raleigh, North Carolina and fill-in for the pianist of the Lone Star Quartet, which he did. Also, he filled in for both the lead and baritone singers during this summer. While in his senior year in high school he played the piano for his father's group and taught music.

After high school Hovie played piano for The LeFevres while some of the group was in the military. While playing with The LeFevres another singer from Greenville, Connor Hall, called and asked Hovie to join the Homeland Harmony Quartet. He played piano with Homeland Harmony for about a year and half and then moved to Charlotte to play piano with the original Rangers Quartet. While Hovie was with the Rangers they moved to Atlanta. This was the beginning of Hovie's music career in Atlanta. While singing with the Rangers, Hovie made a lot of friends in Atlanta and among

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those was a young man named Barry Howell. Barry's father Major Howell owns the Atlanta Constitution Newspaper.
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One day Barry told Hovie that his father was going to start a radio station (WCON). This put Hovie's mind in gear because he had already tried to form a quartet a year earlier but because of his age he could not get the seasoned singers to leave their quartets and join him. So Hovie made an appointment with Mr. Howell and pitched his idea of having a quartet on the radio. Mr. Howell agreed and Hovie had from 6 to 6:30 AM and 12:00 to 12:30 each day as his radio time slot. Of course, back in those days radio was live and there was one small problem Hovie did not have a quartet. Mr. Howell asked Hovie what he was going to do for money and Hovie said that he would book concert dates through the radio program. Mr. Howell did not believe that would work so he agreed to pay Hovie and each member of the quartet \$50 per week, which was an excellent salary in the late 40's.

With this salary commitment Hovie had the edge he needed to put his quartet together. As you all know the group was and is called The Statesmen and began in 1948. The first members of this group were Mosie Lister, Bobby Strickland, Gordon Hill, Bervin Kendrick and, of course, Hovie. After a short time Mosie decided to spend more time writing and dropped out of the group. Of course, Mosie is the person who wrote so many of the great songs, which The Statesmen recorded over the years. Mosie was replaced by Jake Hess and not long after James S. Wetherington also joined the group. Most folks would recognize James by the name of "Big Chief." This was the beginning of The Statesmen's long career of being the guide by which all other groups were measured and in my opinion very few ever brought the skill and professionalism of The Statesmen to the stage. As time went on the members changed but Hovie always was able to get the very best. Denver Crumpler, who Hovie had worked with in the Rangers, joined the group and brought a tenor voice unmatched to this day. The Statesmen traveled over the country singing to packed houses night after night. Ironically enough, some of the largest crowds were in the Mid-West. The Statesmen have recorded over 100 projects and spent weeks on the road at a time during the 60' and 70's.

If the responsibility of managing The Statesmen was not enough, Hovie was also an ordained minister and for 12 years was pastor of a church in Cobb County, Georgia. Many Saturday nights Hovie would have to travel long distances from a concert to preach on Sunday, but according to Hovie he always was at the church on Sunday.

Hovie in the 80's joined with other legends to form The Masters Five. This group was made up of Hovie, JD Sumner, James Blackwood, Jake Hess and Rosie Rozell. According to Hovie The Masters Five had a great 10-year run.

I asked Hovie to give me his favorite song. That he said would be difficult but one of his favorites was The Statesmen's recording of "Oh What A Savior" featuring Rosie Rozell. Many of Mosie Lister's songs are among his favorites.

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This article is nothing more than a glimpse into the life of one of the greatest men of all time in Southern Gospel Music. Hovie abilities as a musician, singer, manager and supporter of Southern Gospel Music are sorely missed. Hopefully young singers will recognize the important of professionalism and standing for one's beliefs as Hovie so faithfully did over the years. For more about this man and his quartet read the book "Happy Rhythm."

I can be contacted at (864) 979-9626 or (864) 895-1287. Remember if you would like to be a part of historical event call me about making a donation to this memorial for Hovie Lister.