

Tribute To Hovie Lister

Written by Scott Evans

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A Tribute To The Legend

Hovie Lister

BORN: SEPTEMBER 17, 1926; DECEASED: DECEMBER 28, 2001



Hovie Lister was, by all definitions of the word, a legend in southern Gospel music. Hovie was just a young man of 21 when he began to organize the group

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that would become the Statesmen Quartet. That same group became the measuring stick for all of the groups that followed in southern Gospel music and very few have ever achieved the excellence of the Statesmen Quartet.

The Statesmen were organized in Atlanta, GA in 1948. Hovie was particular in the group members that he wanted for his new group. He wanted the best that were available but he also wanted individuals that were dedicated to the Lord. The original group chosen by Hovie consisted of Mosie Lister (no relation to Hovie) singing lead, Bobby Strickland singing tenor, Bervin Kendrick singing baritone and Gordon Hill singing bass. While this is not the group that made the Statesmen name famous, this is where it all began.

The best lineup for the Statesmen is something that Gospel Music Historians love to debate. For the most part the general consensus seems to be that around 1953 is when the Statesmen were at their best. The group personnel at that time consisted of Hovie Lister still leading the way and being joined by Jake Hess singing lead, James "Big Chief" Wetherington singing bass, Doy Ott singing baritone and Denver Crumpler singing tenor.

The Statesmen had many personnel changes over the years but somehow Hovie always seemed to be able to replace whoever left and just keep going on! The Statesmen were responsible for such classic songs as "Happy Rhythm", "O What A Savior" and countless others.

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Hovie was involved in some other groups later in life as well. In 1980, Hovie was involved in the formation of the Masters V. This group included Hovie, Jake Hess, James Blackwood, JD Sumner and Rosie Rozelle. Needless to say, they were an instant hit! Health problems forced this group off the road and the members of the group went various ways but during the time they were singing, it was great!

With the help of Bill Gaither, the Statesmen made a comeback in 1992. I remember the excitement around the industry when it was announced that the Statesmen were going to be re-formed. Led once again by Hovie Lister and Jake Hess, they were joined by Bob Caldwell, Biney English and Johnny Cook, and they hit the



ground running. The first project was called "Revival" and is chocked full of great quartet singing the Statesmen way!

In 1993, Hovie was diagnosed with throat cancer. He had surgery on his 67th birthday and by the spring of 1994, he was back out on the road and healthy once again. Various health problems had plagued Hovie over the past few months but Hovie never lost his spirit.

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Southern Gospel Music will never forget Hovie Lister. I am too young to remember the Statesmen in their heyday. In fact, I wasn't even born yet! I learned who Hovie was from people that did remember him and from reading about the history of southern Gospel music. I saw Hovie a number of times on Bill Gaither's Homecoming Videos and I was one of the first in line to get the new Statesmen project in 1992. This year at the National Quartet Convention in Louisville, KY I had the pleasure of meeting Hovie Lister for the first time. It was a chance meeting as I was walking around the convention hall. We only spoke briefly but I found him to be a humble man who truly felt he was the most blessed man in the world.

Southern Gospel Music will miss Hovie Lister as we have missed Glen Payne, Brock Speer, JD Sumner, Kenny Hinson, Danny Gaither, Rex Nelson and all of the other legends who have gone on to glory. Just imagine though the reception that Hovie got as he entered through the gates of glory. I would be willing to speculate that Big Chief, Bobby Strickland, Denver Crumpler, Rosie Rozelle and a host of others were part of the welcoming committee. Another legend has joined that Heavenly Choir.

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