

Tribute To Jack Toney

Written by Sandi Duncan Clark

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On April 15th, Jack Toney, noted lead singer for many years with the legendary Statesmen Quartet, passed away from a major heart attack. Jack was at home in Boaz, Alabama, with his wife Gail. Along with his wife Gail, Jack is survived by a daughter and two grand-daughters. His funeral was held on Sunday, April 18th in Boaz.

Jack Toney enjoyed a long career in southern Gospel music, and was credited as one of the best lead singers in the industry. He had one of the smoothest voices in southern Gospel music, and is recognized for his classy stage presence and strong vocals. While Jack had not been traveling regularly for several years, he was still actively involved in Gospel music. He had recently performed on the annual Gold City/Southmen Quartet reunion on April 9th, with former members of the Southmen Quartet.

For nearly five decades, Jack Toney contributed much to the art of southern Gospel music. He grew up in Boaz, Alabama, having been born near the noted Sand Mountain, Alabama. The Sand Mountain area is the homeplace for such noted singers as Vestal Goodman, Cat Freeman, Rosie Rozell and other legendary Gospel music performers.

Jack began his singing career as part of the FFA Quartet in high school. Out of high school, he joined Rev John Hull in an evangelistic organization, traveling extensively throughout the southeast. It was during that time, he met Hovie Lister, and formed a lasting relationship with the man who would introduced the nation to traditional, classic southern Gospel music with the Statesmen Quartet.

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For almost five decades Jack Toney made a major contribution to southern Gospel music. His first full-time job was with the Prophets Quartet. During a stint filling in for Les Beasley and the Florida Boys, Jack learned that J.G. Whitfield was putting the Dixie Echoes together and Jack became a part of this legendary quartet.

In late 1963, his earlier friendship with Hovie Lister produced an invitation to join the Statesmen when Jake Hess resigned, and Jack moved to Atlanta, Georgia. During that time, with Doy Ott, Rosie Rozell, "Big Chief" Jim Wetherington and Jack, the innovative Statesmen had radio programs, television shows and worked extended tours three times a year to the west coast, booking approximately 280 dates a year.

After a five year tenure with the Statesmen, Jack joined J.D. Sumner the Stamps Quartet, and eventually became part of the Masters Five. Hovie Lister had retired the Statesmen in the '80s, but in the early '90's he reorganized the quartet. Jack reunited with the Statesmen and remained with them until Hovie's death in 2001.

At the time of his death, Jack was retired from the quartet circuit, working only a few dates each year with the Reunion Quartet. This quartet included Bill Shaw, Buddy Burton, Buddy Poe along with Jack, and booked between 12 to 15 dates a year. He also sang select dates with the Grand Ole Gospel Reunion Quartet. This quartet was organized by Charlie Waller, to perform at the Grand Ole Gospel Reunion each year. They had just completed a new recording to be available at the 2004 Grand Ole Gospel Reunion in August in Greenville, S.C. The members of the Grand Ole Gospel Reunion Quartet were John Rulapaugh, Buddy Burton, Roy Pauley and Jack.

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As a song-writing team, Jack and his wife, Gail, have more than five hundred songs to their credit. Some of their compositions reached the top of the national charts with The Palmetto State Quartet, the Statesmen, Kevin Spencer and Friends and the Kingsmen Quartet performing them.

Jack Toney was also a regular on the Gaither Homecoming Videos. He sang with Vestal Goodman, Jake Hess and Rex Nelon as the Gaither All-Star Quartet. He traveled with the Homecoming choir, and did studio work on the Gaither videos.

Jack's love for southern Gospel music, his out-going personality and his vocal talent all contributed to his long career. He often described himself as the "best fill-in" quartet man in the business, having filled in for ailing and retiring members of many regional groups as well as numerous professional quartets. Without a doubt, the Gospel music industry will miss this giant as he joins the heavenly Homecoming choir. Please keep Gail Toney and the Toney family in prayer as they deal with the sudden loss of their husband, father and grandfather.

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