

An Interview with Dan Keeton

Dan Keeton came onto the national Southern Gospel scene in July 2004, when he joined Ed O'Neal's Dixie Melody Boys. He stayed with them through late 2007, when he left to form the Dan Keeton Quartet.



I recently had the opportunity to talk with him about his group's launch, what you can expect from a typical Dan Keeton Quartet concert, and where he sees his group going in the future.

DJM: *A few months ago, you launched the Dan Keeton Quartet. How have the first few months gone?*

Dan: They're going very well. I am humbled by the attention I've received while starting off on my own. Paul Heil has played our music on The Gospel Greats, and last week we were on the Jim Bakker show. It's got to be the Lord working.

DJM: *When you initially announced the Dan Keeton Quartet, some people thought you'd be forming a male quartet. But the group is a mixed quartet, with your wife Nancy singing the highest part. How are you structuring your harmonies? Specifically, do you generally sing what in a male quartet would be a high lead, with Nancy singing tenor?*

Dan: Yeah, our blend is such that she sings over me most of the time. I'm a tenor with a pretty high range, so on the ending we'll sometimes switch. Basically, we key our songs just a little higher than a male quartet. The part I'm singing is a high lead, just in a little higher key, with Nancy singing tenor above me. But it works out.

DJM: *I sometimes ask groups what makes their sound or their presentation unique, but I'll ask you the opposite, in a sense. What Southern Gospel groups would you consider closest to yours stylistically?*

Dan: I would say that we've had a family group influence, but we have also had influence from male quartets such as the Cathedrals, Kingsmen, and Gold City.

DJM: *On the clips from your first recording on your website, quite a few of the songs are Southern Gospel classics. What kind of mix of new and old songs would listeners find in average concerts?*



Dan Keeton Quartet

Left to right, Chris Little, Rick Grey, Nancy Keeton, Dan Keeton

Dan: Just to start off with, this first album was kind of an introduction to our sound. The song “Following in Their Footsteps” was the only original song. Right now, there will be only one or two original songs you’ll find in our concerts. Right now, we’re working on an album of completely original songs, with maybe one or two classics.

DJM: *So a few years down the road, will there be a different ratio of classic songs?*

Dan: The first album is just an introduction to our style, we’re gonna go

toward more original songs. I have a briefcase full of songs I want to get recorded, and I’m writing every day. So I want to get the new material out.

DJM: *When will this album of completely original songs be out?*

Dan: We’re working on it now; it will be out in about three months, before or at NQC.

DJM: *Is your first recording available now, and where can it be found?*

Dan: It available now, and it can be found at our website and our concerts.

DJM: *In your live concerts, are all of your songs performed with soundtracks, or do you have a live accompanist in the group?*

Dan: Our baritone, Chris Little, plays piano. Our bass, Rick Grey, also plays a little piano. I play guitar. We’ll be incorporating that more into our concerts, and be doing more acapella numbers.

DJM: *What do you think Southern Gospel in general, and your group in particular, will have to do to make it past the current economic troubles—gas prices specifically coming to mind?*

Dan: Well, right now we’re traveling in a Dodge Caravan. I bought a bus, not specifically to drive the group in – more to convert into an RV and use sporadically. But we travel every week in a Caravan. I told the boys last week that if the gas prices get any worse, we’ll have to squeeze into a Prius.

That’s for us—what other people do is up to them. But as full prices get higher, I don’t see how

anyone will be able to keep driving a bus.

DJM: *Do you see your group as more of a ministry or an entertainment group?*

Dan: The ministry vs. entertainment debate is everywhere, and not to get into that whole debate, but it was gospel music that opened my heart to being saved. Lots of folks have different opinions of what to do, but I hope to use music to be a ministry to people, maybe young people that were like me. I was from Detroit, Michigan and didn't know anything about Southern Gospel. It was the Happy Goodmans' music that got me hooked—then on one particular album, it was Vestal who spoke of how I could be one of God's children and be saved.

I think there's a good balance between entertainment and ministry if it's done right.

DJM: *Any other thoughts or comments?*

Dan: I respect and honor the people who have paved the way for me. The Goodmans, Hinsons, and Dottie Rambo were some of them, and I think we would do well to respect and honor them a little more.

DJM: *Any specific ideas on how we might go about doing that?*

Dan: I think people kind of let them go off by the wayside while looking for new groups, new things. They're kind of still out here, but we don't pay them a lot of attention. We don't book them a lot, we don't play them on the radio a lot. Ed O'Neal's the first one that comes to mind, and Naomi Seago is another.

The record companies and talent agencies are letting our legends fall by the wayside, paying more attention to new people, new groups. Then when the legends are gone we wish we would have done more. Let's honor them while we have them with us.