

## *A Conversation with Liberty Quartet*

At last year's National Quartet Convention, I had the chance to sit down with Boise, Idaho's Liberty Quartet—tenor Keith Waggoner, lead Dan Gilbert, baritone Jordan Cragun, and bass Royce Mitchell. I interviewed Keith Waggoner a couple of years ago (<http://www.southern gospelblog.com/archives/822>), so I exempted him from several of the general questions.

*Left to right: Dan Gilbert, Keith Waggoner, Jordan Cragun, Royce Mitchell*



Right before the interview started, Royce mentioned that he was hungry, so I handed him a pack of crackers. (Having some crackers handy saves several dollars in food court costs, money that can then be spent on CDs and LPs!) The interview started with him munching . . .

**Keith:** You know what, I'd better hold those [crackers], 'cause you can't talk and eat at the same time.

**Royce:** He'll tell me when it's my turn.

**DJM:** *It's your turn.*

**Royce:** These [crackers] are really good; Daniel got me one.

**Keith:** All these group's he's interviewed, and here's Royce chewing . . .

**Royce:** And it's zero grams trans fat.

**DJM:** *So, could we start off by each of you explaining individually where you come from, how you became interested in Southern Gospel, what groups you sang with before joining Liberty, and so forth. Keith, we could skip you, since I interviewed you a couple of years back.*

**Royce:** This is Royce.

**DJM:** *Oh, and if you want to know what groups Keith was in before he was with your group, you have two options: You can either read the interview on my website, or ask him, whichever's easier.*

**Royce:** I pick A. I'm gonna read the interview on your website, Daniel. And it is my favorite website.

**DJM:** *Thanks!*

**Royce:** . . . blog. And what was the question again? Oh, see, the first Southern Gospel group I was in was called the Gospel Four. I was thirteen years old. I sang tenor. And then my sophomore year in high school, it just dropped [*said in a sad voice*]. So I was stuck with what I had now. Let's see, my ninth grade year through my twelfth grade year, I was in barbershop quartets, too, to learn that tight harmony. And then, let's see, in college I was in a different traveling group every summer. One was Faith Freedom Trio, another was Spirit of Love. And have you guys have seen the guitar strap on that? I still have it today.

**Keith:** Yeah. Those were definitely 1970s groups! Spirit of Love . . . nice! [*All laugh*]  
Okay, we can get back to you.

**Royce:** God's Bible School graduates...

**DJM:** *You went to God's Bible School as well?* [Keith did go there]

**Royce:** No. I went to Northwest Nazarene College in Nampa, Idaho. Let's see . . . what else. New Creation was a quartet I was in. We were full-time for a while. Then I was a schoolteacher after that.

**Keith:** Tell him about your concert schedule with New Creation for that summer...you know, how many concerts you did.

**Royce:** Seventy-three concerts, seventy-three days.

**DJM:** *That's . . . insane.*

**Royce:** By the time we finished, it was just a duet. But we were doing Gaither things then, early Imperials . . . had a great time.

**DJM:** *You were doing Gaither things in terms of Gaither songs, or appearing at Gaither events?*

**Royce:** Gaither songs. Gaither events? No. Bill doesn't know me.

**DJM:** *His loss.*

**Royce:** I'll get you a free drink if you'll introduce him to me, though.

**Dan:** Dan Gilbert. Lead singer. Liberty Quartet. Where lead is king.



**Royce:** . . . rumbles the way only a bass can . . .

**DJM:** *I might have to start posting the audio of these things!*

**Dan:** My parents are from the south, Columbus, Georgia. My father being military, he got sent to Vietnam. So we were transferred back to Columbus, Georgia, to live there—mom and four boys, for the year that he was gone. And I remember going to church, Edgewood Assembly of God, and hearing different Southern Gospel groups, and just fell in love with that.

**Royce:** Oh, and by the way,

my dad's from Texas, and that's where I got my influences in Southern Gospel.

**Dan:** See, you weren't really listening to the question.

**Royce:** I was listening, I just didn't remember all of it.

**Dan:** So that's where [*bursts out laughing . . .*] [*regains composure*] So that's where I got that influence. [*bursts out laughing again . . .*] Sorry, Daniel! Hang on, it gets better!

**Royce:** He's got other interviews to do later on.

**Dan:** So, anyway, my parents just had it playing in the house, all the time. So I fell in love with Southern Gospel music at a young, young age. And then, [*bursts out laughing again . . .*] It's hard to keep your composure when Royce is making funny faces at you!

**Royce:** [*still munching on crackers*] No, I was just asking if you could hear this . . . I don't want it to go on there.

**Dan:** So, growing up, I was always involved in choir, in different groups. [*everyone breaks out laughing again at Royce*]

**Royce:** It's nothing.

**Dan:** But I was very involved in the big choirs in the 70s, the Singing Ambassadors. I just knew that I had a calling for my singing, and I was involved in a number of small groups out of that choir as well.

The latest group I sang with before Liberty was a group in Boise called Faithful Men. It started just a year before Liberty started.

**DJM:** 1995?

**Dan:** Yeah, about then. We did a joint concert. Well, no, no, no . . . when did Liberty start?

**Keith:** '96.

**Dan:** Okay, then.

**DJM:** *I wouldn't have remembered that except that there's a hat on your table that says that, and I saw it on the way I walked in.*

**Royce:** Very good. [*all laugh*]

**Dan:** So anyway, did a joint concert with Liberty. Faithful Men was involved in it. And I knew at that point that if there was any way possible, I needed to sing with Liberty. So here we are, seven years later! [*all laugh*] Still crackin' up!

**DJM:** *So you've been with Liberty for seven years now?*

**Dan:** Going on seven years.

**Keith:** Royce, has he been with you longer than any other member?

**Royce:** John Cotner was with Liberty for six years.

**Keith:** Dan, you have...

**Dan:** You mean I've broken the record?

**Keith:** You have broken the record.

**Royce:** Well, besides me.

**Dan:** Well . . . well, uh, good!

**DJM:** *It's not a race for the gold, it's a race for the silver.*

**Dan:** I remember hearing the Blackwood Brothers, J.D. Sumner. I knew for sure Southern Gospel music was what I wanted to sing even when I was with a Christian rock group.

**DJM:** *Really? Did you sing?*

**Dan:** Yeah, I was the lead singer for this Christian rock group. I was 15 or 16 years old.

**DJM:** *So did you sing or did you scream?*

**Dan:** It was singing. Do you guys ever remember hearing a song, “Drinking whiskey from a paper cup, You've drowned your sorrows till you can't stand up”? That was one of the songs we did. We had a full band—we had brass, keyboard, drums. Our drummer used to play with Jefferson Airplane. He'd sit there with no shirt on, and a hat, at our Christian concerts.

**Jordan:** So it wasn't Christian, then?

**Dan:** No, it was! It was Christian rock. It was not for me. So anyway, that's that for me, signing off.



**Jordan:** Is it my turn? It was so long ago . . . [*everyone laughs*], I don't even know where to begin.

**Royce:** He's 21.

**DJM:** *I've actually got two years on him, believe it or not.*

**Jordan:** You're only 23?

**DJM:** *Well, I just turned 23.*

**Jordan:** Well, good, there's someone else that's young and knows a lot. But anyway . . . [*everyone laughs*] Where do I begin? I come from a pastor's home. I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, and my dad pastored a church in Gas City, Indiana till I was three years old. Then we moved to Ponchatoula, Louisiana, and my dad pastored there. So I've lived in Louisiana since I was three years old, and my dad still pastors there today. I went to Hobe Sound Bible College when I was eighteen, in Hobe Sound, Florida. There I was on scholarship to sing, to travel around for the school doing public relations, singing in the Chapel Quartet. I traveled with them for two years.

**DJM:** *Did you sing baritone?*

**Jordan:** I sang bass one year. [*everyone laughs*] The first year I sang bass . . . [*everyone laughs*] Royce is laughing. My dad is actually a great bass singer.

**Keith:** He is.

**Jordan:** A much warmer, fuller sound.

**DJM:** *Has he been with any groups?*

**Jordan:** No.

**Keith:** He's awesome.

**Jordan:** He really is awesome. He's had several job opportunities to sing Southern Gospel, but he feels like he's called to pastor, so that's what he does. So singing bass was very hard, because my

dad traveled when he was in college. He did the exact same thing, and sang bass, and people would come up to me, and say, “Man, you’re good, but not as good as your dad.” So that was encouraging. So I switched to baritone. Then I got a call from Keith—I’ve known Keith for years. [*gestures about hip level*]

**DJM:** *Since you were that high, or since he was that high?*

**Jordan:** Since I was that high. He was a student recruiter at another college for years, and he tried to recruit me to God’s Bible School, and it didn’t work. I went to Hobe Sound Bible College in Florida—it was a sister college.

So Keith called me around . . .

**Keith:** Actually, it was on our way to NQC last year.

**Jordan:** On the way to NQC last year. He Facebooked me, asked what I was doing, what my plans for the future were. And he said to give him a call if I had time. To make a long story short, I flew out for a tryout in October of last year, and that was that.

**DJM:** *So, Keith, how did you hear about him?*

**Keith:** Man, I remember when he was a baby. They came to our house when his dad was traveling with a group. Beyond that, I’m trying to think. I remember when, I think it was at Appalachian Youth Camp—good grief! [*a cell phone rings, and everyone laughs*] If that was Bill calling, and he needs a third tenor singer . . .

**Jordan:** David just quit.

**Keith:** Anyway, I heard Jordan at an Appalachian Youth Camp. I still serve on the board of the camp. Anyway, Jordan sang in a talent contest, and . . . what was the name of the song? I think it was “Picture of Grace”, a Gaither Vocal Band song. I thought, “Man, that was pretty good.” But I never thought about it till three years later, when Doran Ritchey told us he wanted to back off of singing and just focus on piano. Royce told me to look up baritones, and there were three guys that I called. Jordan got back to me right away, and I didn’t even mess with replying to the other two guys. That’s how happy we were!

**DJM:** [To Dan] *So you’ve been with Liberty seven years now?*

**Dan:** Yeah.

**DJM:** [To Keith] *And you’ve been with them four?*

**Keith:** Let’s see. I signed the contract in December of ‘05. So it’ll be four years.

**DJM:** [To Jordan]: *And you’re coming up to the eight-month mark?*

**Jordan:** Eight months, working on nine.

**Keith:** Man, time goes by so fast!

**DJM:** [To Jordan] *One other background thing, because I think some of the readers will find it interesting. Your grandfather on your mother’s side was also a preacher, is that correct? And there’s some family connections that readers will find of interest.*

**Jordan:** Yes. My grandfather’s name was James Keaton. He had nine children. Four boys, five girls. Right? Five girls? [Consults with Keith.] Jimmy, Troy, Jeff, Bryan, four boys, and five girls. Three of the boys are pastors, and one of them is in the military.

All five of the girls, including my mother, are pastor’s wives or missionaries’ wives, which makes for an interesting family—except one of the girls, Kim Collingsworth, my mother’s sister. She is a great musician in Southern Gospel music.

**Royce:** She’s done pretty well with the tools I gave her. [*everyone laughs*]

**DJM:** *So does singing pretty much run in your family on both sides, then? Because there were several singers on your mother’s side.*

**Jordan:** Well, both. My dad’s family is also very musical.



**Keith:** You need to get a copy of Celebration's tape—is it on CD?

**Jordan:** My dad sang with a group called Celebration. They held concerts with the Cathedrals, the Stamps back in the day . . . they were an amazing quartet. But my dad was called to the pastorate, the baritone was called to the pastorate . . . all four guys in that group are senior pastors or associate pastors now. And my aunt, Kim Collingsworth, was the piano player. I'd forgotten that little side note. They were amazing. They have one studio project—a cassette tape, don't think they have CDs of it.

They didn't use any soundtracks—Kim was the

music. It was often said that Kim was a soundtrack in and of herself. You didn't really need one; she was incredible.

**DJM:** *I wanted to talk a little bit about the current recording; you just came out with a brand new CD called *The Journey*. I'll start with Keith, because he hasn't had much chance to talk yet.*

**Keith:** It is awesome! OK, OK...a little over the top. This recording, in all seriousness, is by far my favorite since I came to the group. I liked Amazed—Amazed has some great songs—but this CD... Wow! Between Roger Talley and Doran Ritchey's instrumental arrangements and Phil Cross's vocal arrangements we came up with a project that we're very proud of. Phil did his best job with us yet; he was awesome. He pushed us, challenged us, and the result is pretty cool. It has twelve songs, five written by Doran.

**Royce:** Ten are original.

**Keith:** No, actually, we have three covers: "Welcome to Heaven," which was done by the Singing Americans, "Till There Was Jesus," Jake Hess with the Imperials, and "He Came Down to My Level." So nine original. And of those nine, five are written by Doran. I guess he actually co-wrote one song with Jim Davis.

Jim Davis co-wrote another song with Joel Lindsey, Rodney Griffin wrote a song, John Robinson and Twila Labar wrote a song. . . oh, and there's a guy by the name of Marty Hamby, who's well known in church choral circles, from Lillenas. This is the first album that he ever orchestrated, and his orchestrations turned out to be incredible. They turned out really good.

**Royce:** What do you have to add to that, Dan?

**Dan:** I'm excited about the fact that our soundtracks have come up to another level, as far as orchestration, and a big quality sound. The vocal arranging that Phil did was just awesome. To see him work, to take a song that he's never heard before, to have everyone be quiet after he hears it once or

twice, and then to start building the parts, and hear the end result . . . it is amazing, that someone has that much talent and creativity, that is almost just there on demand.

**DJM:** *So with Phil's vocal arrangements, does he ever come up with something where you're like, "And you want us to sing that?"*

**Dan:** Oh, yes! Oh, all the time!

**Royce:** Edit that!

**Dan:** Phil and I have a special relationship.

**Royce:** He's come crying . . .

**Dan:** No, I did not!

**Jordan:** What did he have him in his phone as?

**Keith:** He used to have him in the phone—your name is . . .

**Dan:** In Phil's phone, if I ever call Phil, it shows up as Nerve Wrack. [everyone laughs]

He has nicknamed all of us, and my nickname is Nerve Wrack. Although this last recording, I did graduate from Nerve Wrack just back to Dan.

**DJM:** *Oh, congratulations!*

**Dan:** I've come up the ladder.

**DJM:** *So what were the rest of your nicknames, then?*

**Royce:** I can't share mine. But I want to say . . . Jordan's featured on three songs on this.

**Jordan:** Three?

**Royce:** Well, you've got that one phrase that's awesome.

**Keith:** Well, my name is Phil Jr., for obvious reasons. [everyone laughs] One other thing I



forgot to say about the recording, is that even though Doran is leaving us at the end of this month, we left a song on that he wrote and recorded with us, "The Welcome," as a guest solo. Doran's nickname was Delmar, because he did that Randy Travis song on *Do You Know Him?*

**Royce:** What did he call me?

**Keith:** Junior, it was just Junior.

**DJM:** *So you had Junior and Phil Jr. in the same group—had to be confusing!*

**DJM:** *So, Jordan: On song number two or song number three, "I Made it Mine," was that featuring you?*

**Jordan:** Yes. "I made it Mine."

**DJM:** *So was that something Doran wrote randomly, or was it specifically written for you, based on your background. I listened to it last night, and noticed you have a grandfather who was a pastor, so I was curious.*

**Jordan:** Well, his father was a pastor as well, and his grandfather was a pastor as well, so he wrote it with himself in mind. He wrote it before I joined, with himself in mind, but it ended up fitting me perfectly, as well.

**Keith:** And Jordan rocks on that song, too! I love it!

**Jordan:** You're kind.

**DJM:** *And what is your other solo on that CD?*

**Jordan:** "In the Day of the Lord." Great song.

**Keith:** He rocks on that song, too.

**Jordan:** Song 11.

**DJM:** *Song 11 had a unique melody. I couldn't remember the name, just that it was song 11. (I had only heard the CD the first time the previous day.)*

**Jordan:** I think that's a great song, by Jim Davis.

**DJM:** *So you were on only two?*

**Jordan:** They tried to use me on this one as little as possible! Actually, I came down with a cold mid-week, while we were recording, and Doran sang some of the baritone parts on there.

**Royce:** We tried to use you as little as possible on there? That's not true.

**Keith:** 'Cause I have only one solo on there. I'm like Steve French. The two of us only get one song per recording. At least it's his decision...

**Royce:** Well, stylistically, you wouldn't even know it's him, the way he sings. It's really good. What's the name?

**Keith:** "He Came to Me."

**Dan:** You and Phil spent two and a half hours on that song. That was one of the examples of Phil pushing to sing out of the box that you're used to singing in.

**Royce:** Just for people that have been following us through the years, this is the fourth recording we have of mostly original songs. We started with *Do You Know Him?*, *There's a Testimony*, *Amazed*, and then *The Journey*. We do all different styles, as you know. We do hymns, and we perform some of that old-time Southern Gospel.



**DJM:** *So how many of you have had formal musical training? I know several of you have college-level training in music.*

**Royce:** [To Dan] You played saxophone in high school, didn't you?

**Dan:** I was involved in marching band through junior high and high school. Didn't really discover singing or get any instruction until I was in my senior year of high school. I got transferred from one high school to the next, and didn't like their band. So I said, "Well, I'll just go do choir!" I really wish I would have had more time in choir than I spent in band. But I played saxophone in band.

**DJM:** *Royce, don't you have a Master's or a Ph.D. in music?*

**Royce:** I have my Bachelor of Arts from Nampa Nazarene University (College, then), and I started my Master's at Boise State—Go Broncos—and then I finished it in Oregon, at Portland State University.

**DJM:** *And isn't that in music?*

**Royce:** It's a master's in the science of teaching music.

**DJM:** *Okay.*

**Royce:** M.S.T.

**DJM:** *Keith, don't you have some formal training in music, too?*

**Keith:** I have a Bachelor of Arts in church music.

**Royce:** On top of that, I'm ordained, Keith is, Doran is, and he's [JORDAN] working on his license in ministry.

**DJM:** *So you can perform weddings after concerts?*

**Keith:** Yeah. Funerals. Actually, more funerals. We can preach—we're instant in season and out of season!

**DJM:** *Maybe we can talk a bit about where you travel. You're off the beaten path of most Southern Gospel concerts, but I understand you do come this way from time to time.*

**Dan:** We do stay mostly west of the Mississippi.

**DJM:** *How many dates do you do per year, by the way?*

**Dan:** Roughly 150 to 170.

**Keith:** Actually, this year we're scheduled to do 180 or so.

**Royce:** The most we've ever done is 203.

**Dan:** So almost everything is West of the Mississippi. North up to Alaska and Canada. We just took our first cruise to Alaska—that was successful, feel like we learned a lot. We have another cruise scheduled for October of 2010 with the Booth Brothers, Legacy Five, Beene Family, Greenes . . . green beans! . . . Yeah. Most of the time, we spend our winters south. Because if we go north, based on where we're at, we run into snow. So most of the winters, we spend our time down around southern California, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico.

**DJM:** *And I understand your travel plans are rather interesting, in that you will leave the bus in a certain state, fly home, fly back, and get the bus. Is that the case?*

**Dan:** Exactly. Because when we're in Tucson, or Phoenix, Arizona, that's a twenty-hour drive home. Well, if we only have three days at home, it makes no sense to drive. We'd be home long enough to do laundry, get back in the bus, and drive down in time for the concerts the following weekend. So we have found it more economical and better for our time at home to park our bus in RV parks down in Arizona, hop a plane, and fly home. That way, we're home the same day, have three or four full days at home, and fly back. We're permanent residents on C Street in Mesa, Arizona.

**Keith:** They love us!

**Dan:** Yeah. We're involved in karaoke night, parade, water volleyball . . . [*everyone laughs*]

**Royce:** We do have a management team. Did you know that?

**DJM:** *Yeah. I've spoken to them once or twice.*

**Royce:** It's based in Meridian, Idaho. Rick Whatley is the manager there. They do booking—we're not with a booking agency. Rick and I chart the course together, where we're headed. And then they do a lot of paperwork!

**Keith:** Thank the Lord for that!

**DJM:** *Any questions you'd like to be asked?*

**Royce:** How long have you been following us?

**DJM:** *Well, Elysse Barrett introduced us at NQC three years ago.*

**Keith:** Yeah, three years ago, I remember that!

**DJM:** *My first NQC, and apparently your first NQC, too.*

**Keith:** Yeah. Remember Elysse from the Biblical Worldview conference?

**Royce:** Yeah.

**Keith:** She introduced us.

**DJM:** *And you gave me the Timeless Hymns 2 project. And I put it—I think it was literally at the bottom of the stack of CDs I picked up that year. With the Cathedral background, I figured it would be slow-paced, organ-based hymns. And I was like, "I'll get to it, 'cause I give every CD that comes my way a review," but it was two months later before I finally got to the bottom of the stack. And I was like, "I can't believe I've waited this long!" Five stars, one of the highest reviews I gave to any CD I picked up at NQC that year!*

**Royce:** Is that right? Hmm!

**Keith:** That was a neat recording.

**DJM:** *Do you have a Timeless Hymns 3 in the works?*

**Keith:** [To Royce] I don't know . . . what do you think?

**Royce:** We've started to put together a list. But that reminds me, you talk about your influences . . . the Cathedrals have been our main group of influence.

**DJM:** *So how much Southern Gospel do you get on the West Coast, other than a couple of groups that are native to the West Coast?*

**Royce:** To our knowledge, we're the only full-time Southern Gospel group from the west coast.

**DJM:** *Who are some of the other part-time ones that make the rounds?*

**Keith:** Herb Henry Family, love those guys. Evergreen State Quartet.

**Royce:** RSV.

**Keith:** RSV's good.

**Royce:** Revised Standard Version. They're out of Bakersville, California. And they're really well received.

**Keith:** They do a good job. Evergreen State, Knox Brothers.

**Royce:** Johnson Family. There's two Johnson families, the one that plays the guitar with the three girls.

**Keith:** I don't think they travel anymore. But the other Johnson family, the Johnson Family Quartet out of Ontario, California, they do a good job.

**Dan:** What's that other trio? Light?

**Keith:** Lighthouse Quartet.

**Royce:** Cornerstone, out of Oregon. And then Washington has James Arnesson and Crossroads New Revival.

**Dan:** Father's Daughter.

**Royce:** Father's Daughter out of British Columbia in Canada.

**DJM:** *Now on the West Coast, do you find that a lot of the West Coast fans are people who have moved from the South, or are many of the fans that you get that are not just aware of your group — because every group has some fans who only know them, and not other groups—but of the Southern Gospel fans you encounter on the West Coast, who are familiar with both your group and some of the groups back here, do you find that a lot of them are transplants, people who've moved from the South?*

**Royce:** They have influences from the South.

**Keith:** Well, back in the day, the Blackwoods and the Statesmen would come out to the West Coast all the time.

**DJM:** *The Blackwood Brothers still do, in fact.*

**Keith:** The Blackwood Brothers—Jimmy Blackwood's group—they stay busy out there.

**DJM:** *They'll do a 25-day tour or something.*

**Keith:** And then the Cathedrals came up there for twenty years. The Hoppers have come out since the '70s. We actually have a surprisingly high number of Southern Gospel groups that tour the West. Then groups like the Beene Family started in California. The Crist Family started in Seattle, Washington, and moved east. But they still have a lot of fans in that area. Really, Southern Gospel is alive and well in the west, and there's a reason why you see a lot of these big-name groups not only come there on a year after year basis, but you're seeing more trying to break into the market.

**Dan:** But I think there's a fair share, too, who come up to us after the concert, and say, "We've never heard this style of music. We never knew this style of music existed, and we are hooked! We love this music! And this is the first time we've ever heard it!"

**DJM:** *And I have a few friends in Southern Gospel circles who knew nothing about Southern Gospel music until they heard about your group, and have since expanded to get interested in other groups.*

**Dan:** Exactly. And we make sure to let them know. We've done a tour out there with Greater Vision. People had never heard of Greater Vision. One of the top groups in the industry, and they've never heard of them! They know Liberty Quartet, because like you said earlier, we were their

introduction to the genre. But I think the vast majority of people expand out, and start listening to other groups.

**Keith:** And I think that's the cool thing about the west. It's largely an untapped market, if there is such a thing. They're largely saturated in the South, Midwest, East . . . you get out the West, and seriously, we're introducing people to Southern Gospel music who have never heard it. It's awesome. So I would say there are very few groups who introduce more new fans to this music than we do. That would be my guess, just based on what we hear at concerts.

**DJM:** *So let me phrase this whole issue in another way. Big-name groups, and medium-name groups, and little-name groups, people from groups of all sizes read some of these interviews. So whatever size of group it is, if they want to reach people on the West Coast and expand their ministry outreach to a national level—you know the West Coast better than practically anyone else, as far as from a Southern Gospel perspective. What would you suggest they do?*

**Royce:** The number one thing, as always, the ministry side of it, and feeling a call in that direction. But it had better be quality. Because if people come to one and it's not up to the standard, they won't come the next time.

**DJM:** *And that has hurt Southern Gospel in this area. But on the West Coast, fewer people have had a bad experience with a poor-quality Southern Gospel group.*

**Keith:** Unfortunately, that's a stigma that Southern Gospel—especially in bigger churches—has. We hear comments: “We didn't know what this was going to be. We thought it would be a bunch of hicks, singing through their noses.” There's no doubt about it that people who do shoddy work, in production or presentation, have hurt the market. Not only here, but even in the West. And, to add my two cents worth, it also hurts the reception of the Gospel.

**DJM:** *Any other practical ideas, besides presenting a high quality presentation—any practical ideas on ways for them to do that?*

**Royce:** It is very expensive. The marketing side of it, there, for newspapers. For instance, the Boise paper is the Idaho Statesman. It's something like \$750 for a 3x4. It's really expensive to get the word out that way. I'm thinking Internet is the best way to keep it going, and some of the groups are improving that.

**Keith:** And I know that, for instance, the Booth Brothers had a great tour through the Northwest and the West. Now, granted, the Booth Brothers do a great job, but three or four years ago, the West didn't really know them. They've done a great job of marketing, of building up a fan base, and then promoting to that fan base. They used Landon Beene to manage their western tour, and he did a fantastic job. I think it's just like breaking into any market. It's like us coming East. People don't know you. You'll have to get your foot in the door. Don't come and demand \$4500 to sing to people who have never even heard you before. There's a great chance it's not gonna happen! Get your foot in the door. People are gonna love you if you do a good job. Build some recognition the right way.

**DJM:** *Getting close to winding this up. What would you describe as your individual missions, and your group's mission as a group? What motivates you to go out on stage week after week? Jordan, maybe we can start with you, because you haven't talked for a while.*

**Jordan:** Umm, well, if I don't get on that bus every weekend, Royce isn't gonna pay me!  
[everyone laughs]

**Keith:** That's a great motivation!

**Jordan:** I got some bills and stuff!

**Royce:** He ain't gonna lie to you!

**Jordan:** I ain't gonna lie to you! But all kidding aside—well, that's obviously a reason, but

seriously, I love singing. I would rather sing harmony than do anything else. Growing up, I loved sports. I played high school basketball and football, but I would rather sing than do anything else. And when we get on that bus every weekend, I'm excited, because I love what we do! I keep waiting for it to wear off, but it's been about nine months, and it still hasn't. I honestly love what we do.

And the ministry aspect, everywhere we go, we see souls that are saved. I meet families that come up, who have known these guys for a while, whose lives have been changed (and not in a small way). The stories of the lives that have been touched...it's incredible. And that's definitely why I do what I do.

**Keith:** I'm gonna riff off what Jordan said. Every night, we have an invitation. Every evening, we make sure people have a chance to accept Christ. Doran, Jordan, myself—we all have had some part in that invitation time at some point or another. And that is very valuable. And that's a very important reason why we travel.

To get back to what Jordan said, I think the biggest impact we've been able to make has been encouraging Christians. I am amazed at the impact we've had, just doing our thing. We try to be real; what you see on the stage is what you're going to get off the stage. We try to just be who we are, except for Royce! [*laughs*] We don't let people see his crazy side!

But no, we have had an impact in people's lives. And to see them cry when they talk about a song that we sang, one that God used to speak their current situation, is pretty incredible. The last few weeks, we have been with several people who have lost someone close to them within the past year, whether it's a child or a spouse. And it's amazing, just in the last few weeks, how many people have come by the table to let us know how much we have ministered to them.

**Jordan:** How about the agnostic family?

**Keith:** Yeah, that was a couple that accepted Christ. We were at a concert in Arizona, a huge concert, and there was an agnostic couple in the congregation.

**DJM:** *What brought them to come?*

**Keith:** It was billed as an entertainment. We weren't billed as a church service, so to speak. It was at an RV resort. They showed up, they heard us, we gave the invitation, and we left. We didn't know this until a couple of weeks later, but this couple immediately found the chaplain, and said, "You know, whenever you get a chance, we want to talk to you. We have a few questions about what those guys were singing about. We've never heard this."

To make a long story short, after about three or four hours with them, he led them to Christ. It's pretty cool to hear a story like that, how God was able to use us.

**Royce:** I think that for me, it has to be the Gospel message in the songs. We spend hours looking through songs to choose, that are going to be on our next recording, that we are going to do in services. With the exception of three or four that are novelty pieces—

**DJM:** *Bus Driver.*

**Royce:** Yeah. But it still blesses me, but . . . [*everyone laughs*]

But with the exception of a few of those kinds of songs, they're not only songs that I need to sing, but that I need to hear. The music that we're singing affects my life every time we do it. To me, that's just a powerful thing. I'm still just as enthusiastic about being able to do what I'm doing as I was the very first time I sang. And these are my best friends, too.

**Keith:** If I can just add something about my buddy, Royce. In my four years of being with the group, we have yet to do the same concert twice. And the reason we don't go with a set program—and I'm thankful for it—is that Royce and, up to this point, Doran, have worked to read the crowd, to sense the Spirit's moving in the concerts. It's amazing.

In fact, we were in Hagerman, Idaho, not too long ago. Just another standard concert. But God

settled in, and Royce just took it in a different direction. God was just giving him the songs to sing. That's what I appreciate about him, and appreciate the most about the guys I travel with. They live it behind the scenes, and the fact that we don't have to get stuck in some rut—we can actually see God move—and at the same time present a quality program, that's pretty incredible, and I'm proud to be a part of that.

**Jordan:** When I first joined the group—I come from a pretty conservative background—I called my aunt Kim to ask her for some advice. I didn't know much about Liberty at the time. I said, “What do you think I should do?”

And the two main things she said were, “Well, I can't make the decision for you, but I can tell you—what are their priorities? That's what you need to find out. Are their priorities fame and money, or are the priorities to minister? Because I promise you, if it's fame and money, it will get lame real fast.”

And it didn't take me long to realize that the #1 priority of Royce and all the guys is definitely ministry, above all else. Countless times, I've seen him get to the end of the concert, feel the Spirit moving, and just give away CDs. I can say without a doubt that Royce Mitchell is a very godly man, and I have a lot of confidence in him.

**Keith:** Well, also, he knew it was definitely about the ministry when he got his first paycheck, too! [*everyone laughs*]

**Royce** [to Dan]: Anything to add to that, seven-year-man?

**Dan:** Liberty uses a lot of comedic relief in their concerts.

**Royce:** Scratch that. Humor. [*everyone laughs*]



**Dan:** And . . . there are those nights, just like any other job, where you don't necessarily feel like going to work. And you can be putting on your tie, and feel like “I've been driving all day, I haven't slept . . . honestly, I just don't want to sing tonight.”

But we get in there, the music starts, and you see those one or two people out there that, no matter what goes on, they won't crack a smile. But then as the concert goes on, you notice them loosening up and smiling. I've had people tell me—cause I run sound—“Young man, if you run sound this loud, we're getting up and walking out, and never coming back.” Those people now can't wait for us to come back, even with the volume up a little bit! Because they sense a spirit from this quartet that is real.

I've had people tell us, "You guys seem so happy!" Well, it's because we are! We have a joy that only God can give. And we want to share that joy, and we want to help people forget about their cares for a couple of hours.

And we have countless people that thank us, and not always for the music. "Thank you for helping me laugh, because I have not laughed for x number of months, or even years. But tonight I experienced something that I haven't experienced in . . . forever." There's a real sense of gratitude for us taking them to that place.

So that's what I've experienced in these seven years. Liberty Quartet is who we are. We can rest in the fact that we're doing what God wants us to do, and we're doing it in the way that he wants us to do it. And I feel that makes us very unique.

**DJM:** *Any other thoughts or comments, and could whoever wraps that up close with Liberty's contact information?*

**Royce:** Yeah. You said something about our mission. Our mission statement's on our website. It's powerful. Now I don't know it, but it's powerful! *[everyone laughs]*

**Dan:** Oh, my!

**Keith:** Now what contact information did you want?

**DJM:** *Website, a general group email, office phone number.*

**Royce:** Tell him about the Facebook and stuff.

**Keith:** [www.libertyquartet.com](http://www.libertyquartet.com) is our website and our Facebook page is [www.facebook.com/libertyquartet](http://www.facebook.com/libertyquartet). Jordan does a great job of uploading videos behind the scenes—for better or for worse!—and I usually add pictures, and what I like to think of as catchy little captions! One thing we'll be doing, especially for those on our Facebook page, is offering a free song download or two, to encourage people to sign up, that sort of thing.

**Royce:** Edit that!

**Keith:** Royce doesn't know about this yet! This is Southern Gospel—we're not used to hearing free! *[everyone laughs]*

They can book us at 208.938.9364, or [bookings@libertyquartet.com](mailto:bookings@libertyquartet.com). I think that's it.

**Royce:** Your blog—give them your blog.

**Keith:** Daniel knows I haven't posted forever. I'm working through Facebook now. Jordan, Dan, and myself are all on Facebook. Royce, why aren't you on Facebook?

**Royce:** I'm not sure what that is. But give them Daniel's blog.

**Keith:** Who?

**Royce:** Daniel's.

**Keith:** They're going to be reading it on his website!

**Royce:** That could be why I don't have Facebook yet! *[everyone laughs]*

**DJM:** *That was good! And thank you very much! [. . . and the recording of the interview ends with everyone laughing]*

