



Courtesy, Peter Fleck

Bill Gaither, left, and pianist Gordon Mote share a musical moment at the Corral.

Southern gospel 'good, clean fun'

**ROBYN BRALEY
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD**

More than 4,300 southern Alberta music fans recently packed the Stampede Corral to laugh, sing and celebrate their faith.

The Bill Gaither Homecoming Lovin' Life tour stop in Calgary showed the enduring popularity of the southern gospel music tradition in our area. Four-part harmonies performed by singers with outstanding vocal ability never fail to bring the audience to its feet.

Dale and Gloria Schmidt sat two rows from the stage.

"The concert was uplifting, worshipful and entertaining all at the same time," said Gloria. "Along with great music, we found that the humour woven throughout the evening made the event good, clean fun."

Humour plays a key role in every Gaither concert.

"It breaks down barriers. When people laugh together, hearts open and they hear the message that is in our music," noted comic/singer/songwriter Mark Lowry, whose tune Mary Did You Know has become a Christmas classic.

Songwriting was where it all began for former high school English teachers Bill and Gloria Gaither. They co-wrote songs like Because He Lives, The King Is Coming and others that have become part of the North American Christian culture. The Gaithers' big break came when Elvis Presley recorded He Touched Me.

How popular is the Gaither brand of gospel music? In 2008, Together, a DVD recorded by the Gaither Vocal Band and Signature Sound, topped Billboard Magazine's charts. In 2004, the Gaither Homecoming Tour outdrew Rod Stewart, Elton John and Fleetwood Mac. This is the music Elvis and so many mainstream country and pop singers credit with influencing their styles.

Gaither's network of labels, TV production companies, studios, publishing houses and concert-booking interests generate revenues that make him one of the most powerful men in the entertainment industry. Not that you'd know it watching him onstage. He remains the No. 1 fan of both the music and the artists.

A Homecoming concert is not just about Bill Gaither. Headlining the Calgary concert was the The Gaither Vocal Band, including Bill Gaither, David Phelps, Wes Hampton, Michael English and Lowry. Sharing the stage were the popular Southern Gospel Quartet, Ernie Haase and Signature Sound; gospel artist Jesse Dixon; country-flavoured Jeff and Sherry Easter and power singer Janet Paschal.

Most of the artists have solo or group careers in their own right. English is known stylistically, as the Michael Bolton of Christian music. Gordon Mote, recently named top piano/keyboard player of the year by the Academy of Country Music, plays piano for many artists on the tour.

What makes Mote unique? He's been blind since birth, but that hasn't kept him from excelling as a studio player for stars like Brad Paisley, Trisha Yearwood, Alan Jackson and Alberta's own Paul Brandt. Mote played on the Risk CD, along with a song called Hope that Brandt wrote especially for the Alberta Children's Hospital.

Mote notes: "There's definitely a family atmosphere in gospel music. The artists, the fans and all the people behind the scenes genuinely care for each other."


ROBYN BRALEY IS A COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST AND PRESIDENT OF UNIMARK CREATIVE SERVICES AND BRALEY MUSIC.

PROUDLY CALGARY SINCE 1883

CALGARY HERALD

A DIVISION OF CANWEST PUBLISHING INC.

BREAKING NEWS AT CALGARYHERALD.COM


VANCOUVER 2010
 OFFICIAL SUPPLIER
 REGIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER

• SATURDAY, MAY 30, 2009