

SG History 101 - Stamps Trio

JOHN CRENSHAW 10/01/2004 | 16 COMMENTS



Recently, I was in a discussion about "flash in the pan" gospel groups. These were groups that made a big hit in the gospel music field, but had a very short life span. **The Stamps Trio** was one such group. Their career was short, but quite active.

The name of the trio recalls a deep heritage in gospel singing. There have been numerous versions of "Stamps" groups singing and promoting gospel music for many years. This is one of the few trios that used that famous name.

The members of the Stamps Trio were young, but all had made a mark in gospel music prior to forming the group. They began their career around 1964, and it lasted less than a year.

Donnie Sumner was the baritone singer and pianist for the group. The unique sound of the Stamps Trio focused around his interesting arrangements and original compositions. **Donnie** is the nephew of the late **J.D. Sumner**. He received much of his formal training in the Music Education Department at Lee College in Cleveland, Tennessee. This trio demonstrated the ability to take songs both old and new and make them sound fresh and interesting.



The lead singer for the group was **Byron Burgess**. Byron had previously spent time singing with the **Harmonizers Quartet** and was also a member of the **Rhythm Masters Quartet**. He and Donnie often switched parts, so the title "lead singer" may be a bit misleading. Byron possessed a very smooth voice, and was a noted vocal instructor at the famous **Stamps Quartet School of Music**.

Jim Murray was the tenor singer for the Stamps Trio. Jim's name became a household word among gospel music fans when he joined **Jake Hess and the Imperials**. Prior to joining the Stamps Trio, Jim had traveled the country with the **Orrell Quartet**. Jim added his beautiful tenor voice to the talents of **Larry Orrell**, **Buddy Liles**, **Johnny Marine**, and **Chuck Ramsey** in that fine young quartet.



This group was not a full time aggregation, for all the members had "day jobs" within the Stamps organization. Jim, Byron, and Donnie all worked at the Stamps Quartet Music Company in Dallas, Texas and were "weekend warriors" as the Stamps Trio. Instead of concert performers, their job was reminiscent of earlier years in gospel music. Their main job was to sell Stamps Quartet Music Company song books!

The Stamps Trio was known as an ambassador for the Stamps Quartet Music Company. While the big groups of the day were singing in air conditioned auditoriums, much of their time were spent at singing conventions promoting the latest Stamps Quartet Music Company song books. Instead of giving full concerts, they were relegated to hot school rooms singing one or two "special" songs after several hours of class singing. That is called dedication to gospel music!

Temple Records, a division of Stamps Quartet Music, Inc. released two recordings by this short-lived group. "Temple Records Presents the Stamps Trio" and "Command Performance Featuring the Stamps Trio" are very much in demand by gospel music collectors. It is very interesting to hear some of the arrangements contained on these albums, for several of them were used nearly note for note by other groups in later years.



The talents of these gentlemen were not overlooked by the gospel music community. Their exceptional talents probably led to the break up of the trio. Donnie Sumner joined his uncle J.D. as pianist and later lead singer for the **Stamps Quartet**. Jim Murray replaced **Sherill Nielsen** in the Imperials Quartet. **Lee Gann** and **Dean Brown** joined the trio for a short time before it disbanded.

The name "Stamps" was represented in fine fashion with this outstanding trio. They may have attained "flash in the pan" status, but they are no doubt an interesting part of the history of gospel music.