The following is a catalog of a digitally recorded interview with Avery Dunn at the studio of The Bullseye 95.5 WOXD-FM located at 302 Highway Seven South, Oxford, MS. Dunn is the Disk Jockey and producer for “Gospel Time,” a series of religious programs that are aired on the radio station beginning at six a.m. on Sundays and lasts until six p.m. Dunn invited my coworker and me to hear his Gospel group, The Christian Crusaders, perform live that morning before interviewing him. The interview concerns Dunn’s role in the radio program the Christian Crusaders, and in the Gospel scene in Oxford. Of particular interest is information Dunn relates about William Buford’s important contributions to the Gospel scene in LaFayette County and about how Dunn personally changed the Gospel music in Oxford.

Dunn was born in Lafayette County on January 10, 1961 and grew up in Oxford. He has three children and two grandchildren. He is the forth child out of five; he has three sisters and one brother.

While growing up Dunn listened to all types of music, but remembers specifically listening to a Gospel music program on the radio every night.

Neither of Dunn’s parents were musical. His interest and education in music were acquired from outside of the home as he grew up.

*Quote:* “I started at a young age. Actually, I used to go the house when I was growing up and y’all probably remember the show *Hawaii 5-0* used to come on and it used to come in with a drum beat every time and that just thrilled me every time that show used to come on back in the early ’70s or something. I used to just sit there and beat on stuff when that show come on. I worried my dad to death because I liked that beat. That’s originally how I got into wanting to play the drums cause of that beat to that program that came on and it just kept going on from there. As I got older and got into music and school, that’s where I started. I got into the band because I wanted to play the drums.”

Dunn plays the drums, the bass guitar, and the keyboard. He learned to play the
bass guitar and keyboard by ear. His brother plays bass guitar as well and he also learned to play by ear.

[0:3:09] Dunn discusses the Christian Crusaders, the Gospel group he is a member of.

**Quote:** “Been singing 36 years. We started singing when we were probably 10 years old. William Buford got the group started up in Abbeville, Mississippi. He was probably just like my dad was with his son, the rest of them used to sit around and pick up boxes or anything and act like they were playing guitars or doing things like that. So he went and bought him a guitar. That’s when he picked it up by ear. He just started playing the guitar and he saw some talent in us young guys and he said, ‘Well, I’m gonna put this talent to work.’ He just started taking us around to other programs where older groups were singing on programs and stuff. And he would ask people, ‘Let these boys sing.’ We couldn’t hardly sing, couldn’t hardly carry a note really, but they would go ahead and put us on the program and just let us sing. They got a thrill out of seeing us young boys up there trying to sing and play instruments. As we grew older the talent got better and better. He glad he started and stayed with us.”

[0:4:13] The group had been together a year before Dunn joined the group. He did not go to the same school as the other members, but they knew him and asked him to join because they were wanting to add drums to their sound, which was not common during that time.

**Quote:** “Back early, probably in the ‘70s, they didn’t have drums in the church and other stuff. We were sort of leary about bringing the drums into the church and start playing, but we went in there. I was the first drummer to start playing here in Oxford, the drums in the black church in Gospel music. We just went from there.”

[0:4:47] The Christian Crusaders played most of their music in the church. But they also traveled and played in different programs. Dunn also plays R&B with a few other bands, such as “The Perries” and “Herbert Willy and the Checkmates.”

[0:5:25] Dunn explains the differences in playing Gospel in the church and R&B in the bars, but that there are similarities in the music genres.

**Quote:** “Churches are most like, it’s a ministry and you’re giving praise. You’re more like giving praise to God when you’re in the churches and you’re playing and singing Gospel music. When you’re out in the bands with R&B and Blues, it’s more like an entertainment, just entertaining the crowds. Still Blues songs still carry messages just like pretty much like Gospel songs do. People sing songs about their life and how they come up to hardships in life. Blues is mostly hardships in life. Some of it is good. They sing about the good times in life too. Blues and Gospel are pretty much on the same level. In Gospel music people sing to express themselves also, like different hardships in life and they sing about the
good times too. It’s giving God praise for bringing them through the hardships and hard times they’ve had in life.”

[0:6:24] There are two distinct play lists for each setting despite the commonality in the subject of the songs.

Quote: “You have to keep them on a different level, a different setting.”

[0:6:43] Dunn enjoys playing both genres and does not prefer one over the other.

[0:6:55] Dunn recalls how he got involved in the radio program on 95.5.

Quote: “Pretty much like everything else I was hanging up around the radio station. The guys who started the group took us out to the radio station and let us sing on the radio station too. When we got through singing I just hung around the radio station and watched the DJ’s and how they would do stuff. And one day I was at the radio station, the old radio station they had up at the top of River’s Hill over there on University Avenue and they guy said, ‘Man, I need to go to the store. I need to leave for a minute,’ or something and he said, ‘Can you handle the controls and just stay here and watch them until I get back?’ That’s all I was waiting for, you know, cause I had been sitting in the window watching him anyways. I said, ‘Sure, sure,’ and that’s when I got in there and actually just started DJ-ing. They got the albums then, the old records – the big albums. Man, I got in there and got to going with it and just kept going from there. He just started leaving me more often. I think he just [laughs] saw that I liked doing it and he’d be like, ‘Man, I need to go to the store again,’ and I said, ‘Go ahead,’ [laughs] cause I wanted to do it anyway. That’s when I got started. It’d be about 15-20 years ago.”

[0:8:00] Dunn is also a Lafayette County constable, a Sear’s salesman, and does maintenance work at the School of Technology on top of working at the radio and singing in the Christian Crusaders.

[0:8:25] The Christian Crusaders have been playing on the radio station for 15-20 years.

[0:8:42] There are nine members in the group and three different types of instruments being played: the bass guitar, and guitar, and the drums. Sometimes they will have a keyboardist join them. They used to have two guitars, but one of the guitar players is a Minister of a church now and no longer as the time to play with the group.

[0:9:40] Dunn’s brother is the only family member in the group, but his son will play every now and then. He also plays the drums, which he learned from his father. Dunn’s nephew and a few other boys also learned how to play the drums from him.
Quote: “I was the first drummer that started in the churches around here so that amused the other guys in the area. The other groups started wanting drums so they started watching me and they said ‘Show me how to do this,’ and ‘Show me how to do that,’ so I showed them how to play too and they caught on. Most all of them started playing by ear too.”

[0:10:25] When Dunn and his group introduced the drums to the Gospel group, the older congregations were scared that they would be bringing a lot of noise to the music. But, as they incorporated it more and played more, the congregations began accepting the new type of music and began liking it. Soon choirs and other Gospel groups wanted to incorporate the drums and now every church in the Oxford area has the drums.

[0:11:09] Dunn discusses how church music was in his childhood.

Quote: “Back in the early ‘60s and ‘50s back in a church like that they didn’t have music at all. They used to sing without music generations ago. You’re talking about people that was singing then, they were pretty tough cause they put their own harmony’s together and just sung without music. Music started growing and coming to the churches as we come on and different generations. I mean, you had older people that would do it, but mainly back in the day there wasn’t any music. They just sung and harmonized.”

[0:11:45] The churches began incorporating music into their worship because of the Blues, which encouraged people to begin playing the guitar and eventually expanded their playing repertoire from the Blues to the Gospel. Today, churches incorporate various instruments into their worship.

[0:12:20] The Christian Crusaders play all over the Oxford area and North Mississippi. They used to travel to Indiana and Iowa, but do not any more.

[0:12:42] Dunn compares Northern and Southern audiences.

Quote: “It’s different. I think that most people up North think that Gospel music originated from the South and when you go up North to sing to the Northern people they love it. It’s different from the singing up there then they do down here. People come – cause the people who move from the South and move North they remember how to sing the words and you see them at programs when you get there and after the program they say, ‘Oh man, I’m from the South and, man, we miss that singing, we miss that kind of singing. Y’all come back again.’ Cause they just don’t get it up there like they did down in the South.”

[0:13:30] Dunn explains that the older crowd doesn’t attend the programs as much as they used to because the music has gotten louder now and it hurts their ears. A lot of the programs today are attended by a younger crowd because of the music.
The age of the audience determines the type of music that is performed. If there are more older people in the crowd, the band will play more “low-key” songs while if there are more young people, the band plays more “up-beat” songs.

Northern audiences still know how to get into the music and clap their hands to praise God.

Dunn was not involved in naming The Christian Crusaders. It was the result of William Buford. Dunn is unsure exactly how the name came about because it was already named that when he became a member of the group.

Dunn defines what Gospel music is to him.

Quote: “Gospel music – we’re gonna really just base that on giving God praise. We go back and think about how good God’s been to us when we go to sing. Like I said, people write songs based on their lives. They go through trials and tribulations and hardships in life and then when God brings you through those hardships and trials and tribulations we give Him the praise and we give Him the glory and all the honor and we magnify His name for doing that. That’s why we like – just praise Him. The Bible says in Psalms 150 ‘Everything that have breath, just praise the Lord.’ That’s why we like to sing and just give Him the praise for just being good to us and bringing us through all of our many different hardships and not just hardships, but good times in life. We just give Him praise for that. We do that – we find that – there’s something about music that – everybody’s got a special song that they like and like to sing and you can be down and out sometimes and just having a bad day and that special song just comes in your head and you get to humming that song and singing the song and it makes your day. It just brings your day back. It’s like rejoicing. It just lifts your burdens from that hardship you’re having that day. That’s why I like singing. I just like giving God praise through Gospel music.”

Many of the listeners of Gospel music listen for the same reasons that the singers sing it. The radio station has a request hour on Sunday and they receive many callers who call in requesting a song. Some of the callers request the same song every Sunday because that song lifts them up and inspires them to overcome their hardship.

Quote: “Gospel music plays a part in your spirit, just lifting you up.”

Gospel music enhances the religious experience in churches, which use the music as inspiration before the message is delivered by the Pastor.

The music that is played in churches is Gospel music, but it differs from what Dunn plays because he is a part of a “quartet” and not a “choir.”

Quote: “It’s still based on Gospel music. It’s inspirational music.”
Gospel music is any music that praises God. There doesn’t have to be singing involved, it could just be instrumental, but as long as it is being done to praise the Lord it’s Gospel music because it’s all part of the worship service.

The old radio station on University Avenue’s call letters were WSUH and it was an AM station. It was joined with Mission 98. It was a locally owned station that would play in the morning and in the afternoon Mission 98 would take over. The format for the station was similar to the format 95.5 has today on Sundays. But the program only lasted from 7am-1am then instead of all day and it wasn’t until it moved from AM to FM that the Gospel program became an all day affair.

Dunn believes family is very important to Gospel music.

*Quote:* “Family, that’s the roots of a lot of Gospel music is family. People used to stick together – as a matter of fact a lot of groups that started back then were family groups cause there were big families. People had big families back in the ‘50s and ‘60s and they would just start out with brothers singing and sisters singing and as they got older then began branching out and got other members to come in as they lose some – as they died, as some of the members of the family died, they’d get other people to come in to keep the group going. Family was how it got started with a lot of quartet groups and even with choirs cause mommas and daddies – they had the big families – and momma and daddy would make them get together to sing. So family played a big part in Gospel music.”

Dunn’s parents did not influence him or his brother because he did not have that big of a family. William Buford started his group.

Dunn discusses the important role William Buford played in Gospel music in the Oxford area.

*Quote:* “William Buford was a very important figure in the Lafayette County area. He worked at the university for years in the Athletic Department. He’d travel with the football team, carrying the equipment and stuff like that and keeping the baseball fields up and stuff like that. In Lafayette High School in the youth department he was very involved out there. He was on the school board. William Buford was the guy – cheering was his life. Whatever it took for cheering he was there for. He was a voice for cheering. He was a voice in the community. William Buford was a very talkative man. This was a man, I don’t care if you come up to him – like this interview I’m doing now, he would have talked your head over. You wouldn’t have to ask him anymore questions. That man could just – it was a gift he had from God. If you ask him just one question, you’d probably have to cut him off because, you’d say, ‘Okay, you answered that question,’ cause he could go on and on and on. That was a very talkative man. It was just a gift that he had. I mean, you could stop him on the street and you could ask him a question or if he had an opinion about something – BAM! – it was there. He could
start talking and give you his opinion about it and talk and talk and talk, and
you’d be like ‘Okay, okay. You answered the question.’ [laughs] But he was just
that way. Kids loved him. I wasn’t even from Abbeville. I was from Oxford, but I
knew about him and when they first asked me to come down to the group, the
guys borrowed me a set of drums from somebody because they wanted to hear me
play with them at practice that night and when we got through practicing he come
over to talk to me and he said, ‘So you really wanna play with us?’ and I said,
‘Yeah,’ and he said, ‘Okay. We’re gonna go to Sears-Roebuck and order you a set
of drums [laughs] and we gonna get you to playing.’ We got started right away.
So, he was a big inspiration to the community.”

Buford started the group because his sons were sitting around pretending to
play instruments and he tested his sons to see if they were really interested in
playing by starting the group. Buford’s family (his sons and nephews) were the
first members of the group.

The Christian Crusaders have released one c.d. in 1991. They are currently
attempting to put together another cd, but everyone’s so busy that it’s hard to get
everyone in the studio at one time to record.

The songs they record are all original compositions that the members write.

Quote: “I’ll just say for myself, I can be at home some nights and just a song can
drop into my spirit and I’ll get up and I’ll write the words down and I just keep on
writing and keep on adding to it. When we got to rehearsal, I’ll get with the guys
and be like, ‘Y’all, let’s try this’ and say a few words to the verse and we’ll put a
little music to it and we’ll keep on it. One of the other guys might add something
to it, ‘Lemme try this,’ you know, and before you know everyone will get
together on one accord. You done put a song together just that quick. Everybody
just falls into the same spirit.”

Every member will bring in ideas for songs that they will all work on to create
a final song.

Different programs the group performs at will request different songs for them
to sing.

Dunn’s favorite song is one of his own compositions, “Bye and Bye We’ll See
Jesus.”

The Christian Crusaders used to rehearse once a week, but since people are
busy now they try to get rehearse once a month.

They typically rehearse in a church in Abbeville called Springfield, where one
of their group members is a pastor (Jerry Malone [?]).
The Christian Crusaders play all over the Oxford area in many of the churches. Denomination does not matter to them because everyone thinks on the same accord when it comes to God everyone is on the same page.

The group does not talk much during performances, but while the group was setting up their equipment Buford would get up and “warm-up” the crowd before the group played. Today there is usually an MC that keeps the programs going while the groups are preparing to perform.

Dunn enjoys all of his performances because he is there to give God praise. They’ve performed outdoor concerts, but it’s all the same to Dunn as long as he gets to praise God.

There is a little cross-over in the audiences for R&B and Gospel that Dunn plays, but the audiences are different.

*Quote:* “I think people just, when they – it’s about religion, when they feel like they’re praising God they don’t like going to the – a lot of times the Blues artists and stuff perform in bars and different places like that. So a lot of church members don’t like hanging out in the bars and different places like that. I mean, I’m not trying to talk people down who hang out in bars and stuff like that, but they just don’t do that. They don’t like to put the two together.”

Personally, Dunn would rather play an outdoor open-aired concert instead of in a bar because bars are smokey.

*Quote:* “Most of the times R&B and Blues is entertainment and is about making money. So I used it to make money and entertain, but I prefer playing in churches better than I do playing in the bar areas.”

The Christian Crusaders do not get paid to play for churches. A lot of professional groups charge to play, but they are about singing and giving God praise.

The Christian Crusaders plan on making another cd as soon as they can coordinate all of their schedules. There are studios in Oxford now that will help them record their cd because they can go lay a track individually and then all meet up to finalize the track together.

They will choose the songs that go on the cd by using the songs they perform frequently and rehearse. They plan on putting all of the songs they perform on it.

Dunn explores how the music scene in Oxford has changed over his lifetime.

*Quote:* “It’s changed a lot. It’s changed a lot. Back then, we based our music on [music] originated from the Blues. Now the younger crowds are coming in. They
call it ‘Contemporary Gospel’ music and even ‘Hip-Hop Gospel’ music. So a lot of these younger people now they’ve got music that they do that’s based on like rap. They do Gospel music in a rap style. And then you’ve got some of the choirs that are doing Contemporary Gospel music styles and R&B style. So they pretty much originated just like we did. We originated our music from Blues and Motown and R&B. Now the younger generation is coming in and they’re coming back and doing their Gospel on the same style like Hip-Hop and R&B.”

[0:33:56] Dunn does not mind the new style of Gospel because he supports whatever needs to be done to reach the youth and help keep them away from crime and drugs.

*Quote:* “It’s all good to me. Whatever it takes to help the young people cause a lot of the rap music is influencing them to go the wrong way.”

[0:34:49] Dunn feels that music has a big influence on a person and the choices he/she makes.

*Quote:* “It’s just something about music. People love music. Most people when they get in the car the first thing they do is turn the radio on and find their favorite radio station that they like.”

[0:35:05] Dunn believes that a music’s beat draws people in.

*Quote:* “I’d just say it was the culture. A lot of the black people – it’s just the culture. Music is just a part of our culture. We just – I mean, even when people work back then, they sung. They’d either hum something. So music just came down through the generations and just kept getting passed on down through the generations. We just love it. I mean, y’alls generation do too, I’m sure. Everybody just got their favorite song that they like. I didn’t care much for the heavy metal, but I do listen to the rock music and I like country music! [laughs] So it’s based on different songs. I listen to – a lot of times it’s still the words of the songs and the beat plays a big part with me and I like to listen to the different chords, the beats, but I listen to it all. Ain’t much on classical though. [laughs]”

[0:36:14] Dunn explains that his group is not altering their musical sound in order to draw in more of the younger crowd because the older crowd is more resistant to accepting the new form of music. They don’t listen to the words of the song, but rather focus on the musical sound and what type of scene that sound is typically associated with. But, if it helps draw in the younger people, Dunn supports the new type of Gospel. He feels that he is more accepting of it because of his involvement in the radio station and the greater access to music that that entails.”

[0:37:16] Dunn describes “Contemporary Gospel.”
**Quote:** “Contemporary Gospel is more like, I don’t know if you remember the – it’s just like R&B style music. It’s a different format than the quartet. You really have to hear it to know what I’m trying to say, but I’ve just known the styles from down through the years. I’ve come from the Blues style and then from an R&B style, rap style, and now they’ve got contemporary. So we basically are really saying that our style is the traditional Gospel music and then they got the Contemporary Gospel and now they’ve got the Hip-Hop Gospel.”

[0:37:58] The new groups incorporate bits and pieces of the past styles in their music.

**Quote:** “They might start off with a little Mo-town music in the song and then they’ll put their part in it, the Hip-Hop, and then they might fall back into a Mo-town. Contemporary Gospel is pretty much like that. They take an old song that was brought up in like the Blues style and then they’ll add their style to it. It’s still based on some of the same words, but they’ll just use a different style of beat to the song and different music. A lot of the music now they can do it like electronic. Back then, when people were playing music they did it manually, they played it themselves. But a lot of music now is just synthesizers that you can program it and different boards and like that, but back then you played it. You played it and sung.”

[0:38:53] Dunn feels that the new electronic approach to music has changed the music and the musicians.

**Quote:** “To me, I think the older generation is more gifted than the younger generation cause they got it too easy. They can’t just really sit back. You probably hear – like BB King, his background, he had people actually back there playing horns and the guitars and all that. But now, instead of having horns, they got it in the keyboards and everything is synthesized. Even with – heck, you don’t even really know how to sing! They’ve got – you can go in and put a note down on a board and they’ve got computers now that can go in and bend your voice to get it in tune to the music. It’s been different. I think the people back then probably had more of an experience in singing then the younger people now. Some can still sing, but they aren’t more talented than the older people.”


**Quote:** [laughs] “I hate to think, but it seems like it’s going more towards Contemporary Gospel and the Hip-Hop because the older generations are fading out. As the older generations fade out and the newer generations come in, it’s leaning more towards that, towards the Hip-Hop and Contemporary. They’re trying to revitalize the older type of music now, the record fields, they – of course, you’ve got technology now that can do that. They can take music off of albums and put them on cds and stuff and sort of revive it. That’s a good thing. I hope they keep that going cause you don’t need to lose that tradition as the younger
generations come up they’ll know how generally the music got started and it’ll be a part of their experience in life.”

[0:40:40] Dunn believes that family is not as big of an aspect of Gospel music as it was back when he was a kid because family units are not as big as they were. The term “family” now also applies to groups and choirs.

[0:41:12] Dunn thinks that parents are trying to influence the types of music that their children listen to. Many agree with Dunn that as long as it draws in the youth and keep them off the streets and away from crime, they are willing to accept the new form of Gospel. It’s more accepted in the middle-aged generation and not the older generation.