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INFORMANT/EVENT [Interview with Lester Myles]

The following is a catalog of a recorded interview with Lester Myles at his record company (Voyage Records) located at 170 Ritch Street, Clarksdale Mississippi. The interview mainly concerns Lester Myles history as a gospel performer and record label executive.

Lester C. Myles Jr. (hereafter “LM”) was born January 10, 1963 in Friars Point, Mississippi. LM has lived his whole life in Friars Point and has no interest in hearing the blues. He has been dealing only in gospel music. He grew up to the records of Sam Cooke, The Dixie Hummingbirds, Jackson Southernaires and The Canton Spirituals. LM discusses the origins of The Sons of Wonder. He says a fellow named Dave Anderson put the group
together in 1969. The group included Lester Myles Sr. and his brothers (LM’s uncles). The Sons of Wonder recorded an album for the Champ label out of Nashville and a 45 for the Paine(sp?) label out of Memphis. LM has been with the group for 30 years. LM talks about other members of the group who were not family, Clarence Murray and Horace Jones who both died. LM’s mother’s brother Eddie West was a group member, the rest of the member’s were LM’s father’s brothers. LM plays lead guitar in the group.

[ELAPSED TIME: 5 MIN.]

LM discusses that he wrote and sang two songs on their recent CD. LM learned guitar from his uncle. He received his first guitar when he was 5 years old. LM discusses his guitar style. In response to the question, “how would you define gospel?”

“Gospel music is the compilation of lyrics and music that uplifts. Basically, what you do in gospel music is to lead people who are down and out, who have problems, who are lost, lead them to Christ. Show them a better way. Most time I say to let me in boys and girls where the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life and that’s what gospel music should portray, a path to eternal life”.

LM talks about their gospel audience and that they have all been brought up in the church. LM talks about his role in the studio, which entails producing, engineering and musician. He learned his skills from Earl, hands on experience and divine inspiration.
LM discusses the difference between musicians who have been taught and those who are self taught. He regards those who are self taught to have received divine inspiration.

“When you are taught you only play what you have been taught. When you are inspired you play from within, it’s a feeling, it’s emotional, it’s the true you, you are not playing a certain pattern. It’s just what’s in you comes out.”

LM talks about even though he loves the style of gospel he grew up with, it is necessary to change with the times, in order to reach the young audience. LM believes tastes come back and the old style gospel will become popular again. LM talks about the retail shop in their building. He discusses how gospel artists come to do their recording at Voyage Records.

LM talks about how there are no longer as many local gospel groups. LM says all of the local churches have choirs. At his church he plays guitar and Lee plays bass guitar and there is no piano. Voyage Records occasionally records choirs, but those recordings are not real popular around Clarksdale. LM discusses the history of instrumentation in gospel music, from accapella to simple guitar accompaniment to full band arrangements. Vocals remain prominent because the most important aspect of gospel music is the words.
LM discusses The Sons of Wonder’s new CD Train Ride.

“We’re trying to reach lost souls, let men, women, boys know that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. That’s our mission.”

LM discusses online music distribution. LM talks about secular music as being a much bigger seller than gospel music.

“Gospel is promoting the word of God, which is to correct you when you are wrong, to lead you in a right way and people tend to go the opposite, instead of going the way they should be going, and they don’t want to hear they should stop doing this and stop doing that and go the way the Lord wants you to go, but they want to have fun. Blues talks about ‘my baby done gone and left me’. Blues is, I don’t want to be in that predicament, my baby’s done gone and left me and run off with Jody and this and that. Where is the gospel actually gives you hope, promise, it uplifts you instead of having you in that blues mode. Down and out with the blues.”

[ELAPSED TIME: 25 MIN.]

LM questions why people wouldn’t prefer uplifting music.

“People would rather run after worldly things, than seek eternal life.

[INTERVIEW ENDS: 27 MIN.]