Eric Griffis

Field Notes

Interview with Ederic Kerney

Tuesday, May 18, 2010

For the American Music Archives at the University of Mississippi

The interview was for the ongoing project to interview people involved in the making of religious music in the North Mississippi area to be archived in the American Music Archives within the University’s Special Collections at the J.D. Williams Library on Campus.

I interviewed Ederic Kerney at 9:00am on Tuesday morning at his office in the broadcast studio building for KBUD 102.1 FM in Sardis, Mississippi. The building is located at 627 East Lee Street, Sardis, Mississippi 38666. The building is on Mississippi Scenic Road 315 which is also called East Lee Street at this location. It is about a block or two east of Interstate 55 off of exit 252. Miles Laseter also helped with the interview by asking some follow up questions at the end and monitoring the audio recording while I asked the bulk of the questions.

Mr. Kerney runs the radio station as a fulltime gospel music station with his wife. They lease or rent the airwave frequency from a company that owns the rights to it. The Kerneys are in charge of all the programming for the station. Mr. Kerney said his wife is the program director. When we were there, his wife was in and out of the station running errands such as picking up their children at certain times. Mr. Kerney seems to stay at the radio station and run the day to day operations. He has answered the phone every time I have called from a Friday afternoon to a Monday morning. Mr. Kerney declined to give his birthday in the interview but at one point said he is 34 years old. I do not know how old his wife is. They must have more than one child. When we got there Mr. Kerney was talking to his “oldest child” on the phone because he referred to him/her as such. Mrs. Kerney said she had to go pick up one of her children while we were there.

Mr. Kerney was referred to as “Pastor” while we were there, but no specifics were given. I get the impression that they view the radio station as their ministry. During the interview we talked mostly about the types of gospel music they play on their station such as traditional, contemporary and rap. We talked about the differences and similarities in those types concerning the way the music sounds, the way the songs are worded, the messages they convey, and the audiences they are intended to reach. We talked about sub-genres such as quartets and choirs and the different ways those songs are structured. Mr. Kerney talked about the availability of people in different areas being able to hear the different types of music before his station started to air the different types of music. He talked about what meaning and effects the music has on him as an individual and on the African American community in the region and as a whole, socially and
spiritually. He made connections from the current day all the way back to slavery days and how the songs were structured while being sung in the agricultural fields to deliver messages. He offered much insight into those subjects. His answers also suggested to me that he was expressing a type of oral folk knowledge about this history because he said many of the same type of things I have heard other people say regarding these subjects. He gives us both his own feelings regarding the music and his understanding of the broader culture which is similar to what others have said.

The interview lasted about 40 minutes. Mr. Kerney called in another gospel music DJ from the area named James Figgs so that we could interview him also while we were there. When Miles Laseter conducted the interview with Mr. Figgs, he told us more about Mr. Kerney and this radio station. Mr. Figgs told us about how the Kerneys tried to make the gospel radio station work on their own. He said the station was not making enough money for the owners of the frequency so they took the station from the Kerneys and put a different kind of music format on. Then the station owners could not make any more money with that than the gospel format made, so they let the Kerneys run the station again. Then the Kerneys had to “knock on doors” trying to get enough sponsorships for the station so that they could “make enough money to raise a family on.” Then they finally found a couple big sponsors so that they could keep the station on the air. Both the Kerneys and Mr. Figgs seem to think of the station as a service to the community rather than a business. Please refer to my set of field notes, as well as Miles Laseter’s field notes on the interview with James Figgs for more information on him. We interviewed Mr. Figgs directly after we interviewed Mr. Kerney.

We scheduled a follow up interview with Ederic Kerney tentatively for Thursday, May 20, 2010 at about 12:15pm. He said he could play selections from his record collection for us to discuss the time period from when contemporary gospel music as a genre came out of traditional gospel and he said he could discuss the lyrics and music of the songs for us.