

HYMNS & SONGS

Heartwarming Favorites

HYMN WRITER BIOS

by Nan Allen

SOUTHERN BAPTIST LEGEND

Baylus Benjamin McKinney (known as B. B. McKinney) was born in 1885 in Heflin, Louisiana. He received degrees from Louisiana College, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Siegel-Myers School of Music, and Bush Conservatory. In 1942, Oklahoma Baptist University awarded him the honorary Doctor of Music degree. After serving many churches in music and teaching at various schools, McKinney became music editor of the Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources). Besides being a prolific hymn writer, B. B. McKinney was a pioneer in training future church music leaders. Under his leadership at the Baptist Sunday School Board, he began Church Music Week at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly, Ridgecrest, North Carolina, that is still held today. In 1952, Dr. McKinney was killed in an automobile accident while returning home from Church Music Week.

During his life, McKinney had more than 100 hymns published, including “Glorious Is Thy Name,” “Have Faith in God,” and “Serve the Lord with Gladness.” Three of his most popular hymns, “Breathe on Me,” “Speak to My Heart,” and “Wherever He Leads I’ll Go,” are included as a medley in this collection.

MODERN HYMN WRITERS

Keith Getty was born in Northern Ireland. He and his wife, Kristyn, write and perform compositions dubbed “Modern Hymns” around the globe. In this collection, one song, “In Christ Alone (My Hope Is Found),” cowritten with British composer **Stuart Townend**, has become a favorite of the worldwide church. Townend also composed another song for this medley titled “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us.”

In the early part of the 20th century, lyricist Charitie Lees Bancroft wrote a song “Before the Throne of God Above,” and Vikki Cook wrote the present tune associated with the beloved song.

CLASSIC HYMN WRITERS

Isaac Watts was born July 17, 1674, in Southampton, England. Isaac grew up in a home of nonconformist believers, in a day when the Church of England persecuted Dissenters and Independents. Watts showed writing talent early in his life. Having written over 600 hymns in his lifetime, Isaac Watts is referred to as “The Father of English Hymnody.” His hymns include “I Sing the Mighty Power of God” (included in a medley in this collection); “Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come”; and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

Charles Wesley, born in 1707, was part of the movement and method of study, along with his brother, John, now known as Methodists. Charles is credited with over 6,500 hymns, which include such classics as “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”; “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing”; and “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (included in a medley in this collection).

Fanny Jane Crosby was born March 24, 1820, in Putnam County, New York. Blind from birth, Fanny is known as one of America’s most significant gospel songwriters. Her repertoire contains over 8,000 hymn texts. William B. Bradbury, William H. Doane, and Ira Sankey are among those who wrote tunes to her lyrics. These include “To God Be the Glory” (included in this collection); “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine” (with tune by Phoebe Knapp); and “Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It” (with William J. Kirkpatrick).

SACRED HARP is a style of singing that began in 18th century England, but became most popular in post-colonial rural America. The style started as notating musical notes not on the grand staff, but as shapes—one shape used for each tone of a scale. Syllables *do, re, mi, sol, fa, la, ti* were assigned to the shapes representing the various pitches. Therefore, the idea of a “moveable *do*” became a signature of this kind of music notation and reading. Pitch is not absolute, but only as it relates to the other pitches. The composition of “How Firm a Foundation” is attributed to John Rippon and Joseph Funk, but the source is not truly known. It is just labeled as coming from the Sacred Harp tradition. Many songs that we sing today were written in this style with somewhat dubious origin, such as

“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Although the words and tune of “Come, All Christians, Be Committed” are attributed to Eva Loyd and James Wood respectively, it was written in the same style. All three of these Sacred Harp/Early American Hymns are included in this collection as a medley.

CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

Andraé Crouch, born in 1942 in California, grew up the son of a pastor. Andraé taught himself to play piano and began playing and singing his own songs in his father’s church when he was just a child. In the 1960s, Andraé began a singing group called Andraé Crouch and the Disciples. During his touring years, Crouch collaborated with many popular music icons. He has received numerous Grammy Awards. Included as a medley in this collection are three of Andraé Crouch’s most popular songs: “Through It All,” “Bless His Holy Name,” and “My Tribute.”

Buryl Red was born October 7, 1936, in Little Rock, Arkansas. He received his education from Baylor University with a Bachelor of Music degree in 1957, and from Yale University with a Master of Music degree in 1961. Red was awarded honorary doctorates from William Jewell College and William Carey College. He was an accomplished composer, arranger, and orchestrator, and, beginning in 1961, served in various settings as editor, producer, consultant to publishers of music education textbooks, and project consultant with the Radio and Television Commission. He directed the Centurymen, a male chorus of 100 Southern Baptist ministers of music, beginning in 1969, with a highlight being their 1989 appearance on Chinese television as the first telecast of religious music ever permitted in that country. His work as an arranger and orchestrator extended to commercial television, Radio City Music Hall, and Broadway.

Among his best known works are *Celebrate Life!*, *It’s Cool in the Furnace*, *Beginnings*, *Acts*, and *Christmas Time*.

Buryl Red died April 1, 2013, after a battle with cancer.

Ragan Courtney was born in Ruston, Louisiana, and graduated from Louisiana College. He then studied acting at The Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theater in New York City. Ragan and his cousin, C. C. Courtney, wrote and starred in the musical *Earl of Ruston*.

He wrote *Celebrate Life!* with his good friend Buryl Red. This musical sold over a million copies and was performed in countless venues. He then wrote *Bright New Wings* with his wife, Cynthia Clawson.

Ragan has taught at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky; worked as Drama and Worship Consultant for the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tennessee; and was the Director of the Center for Christianity and the Arts at Houston Baptist University.

Ragan Courtney lives in Houston, Texas, with his wife, where he continues writing, directing, and consulting for the theatrical productions of Jeannette Clift George and The Imperial Performing Arts.