

Tribute To Vestal Goodman

Written by Sandi Duncan Clark

Saturday, 20 September 2008 18:19 - Last Updated Thursday, 25 September 2008 20:06

Vestal Goodman

Another Legend Goes Home

DECEASED: DECEMBER 27, 2003



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I remember Vestal Goodman. That magnificent voice became familiar to me in my teens, and all of us have enjoyed the talent and personality for more than fifty years. I remember those beautiful eyes and that magnetic smile. I remember the vivid colored, designer clothes and the jewelry. From the early years, I remember the long hair, piled high in a hugh nest of curls and from more recent years, the fashionable coiffured style. And all of us remember the trade mark white hankerchief waving from the stage.

More that anything I remember the songs and the testimony. And, I remember the times I was fortunate enough to interview this wonderful lady; this Queen of Gospel Music.

Originally from the Albertville, Alabama-Sand Mountain, Alabama area, Howard and Vestal Goodman began their ministry shortly after their marriage in November of 1949. Vestal, sister of noted tenor singer, "Cat" Freeman remembered with the Statesmen, met Howard during camp meeting services, when he was 25 and she, only 15. They eloped four years later, and as they say, "the rest is history." Fortunately for southern Gospel music, that history included their fifty odd years singing Gospel music.

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Their list of hit songs include their very first hit, "I Wouldn't Take Nothing For My Journey Now," along with "What a Beautiful Day For the Lord to Come Again," "Who Am I," "The Sweetest Song I Know," and definitely "God Walks The Dark Hills."

Howard and Vestal started a church in Madisonville, Kentucky. They ministered there and toured the country singing. They started a recording studio there which produced many of the top Gospel hits during the '70s and '80s. The Goodmans became a headline group all across the nation during those years, and became a household word to fans of Gospel music.

Vestal, a minister of the Gospel, has performed solo since the death of Howard in November of 2002. She has continued recording and traveling with the Gaither Homecoming concert series. Just weeks before her December 27th death from complications from the flu, Vestal performed with the Homecoming Choir on their Christmas concert tour.

Vestal Goodman never met a stranger. That trait endeared her to young and old alike, and that endearment broadened over the years to include a friendship with performers in the

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contemporary Christian and country music neighborhood. Vestal Goodman crossed all boundaries...her passing has been noted in all Christian music publications and news veins, as well as secular publications.

I want to hit a few highlights of Vestal's career. Vestal was the first Christian female performer to garner a Dove Award. She was awarded the Dove in 1969 for Female Vocalist of the Year. Among the recognitions awarded the Goodmans are 17 Singing News awards, 3 Dove Awards and 2 Grammys. Vestal performed for President Jimmy Carter, and for the past several years, enjoyed performing at Estes Park, Colorado. This venue has basically hosted contemporary Christian artists, but Vestal quickly established herself with these performers.

Other acclaims came to Vestal and the Goodmans through the years, the most recent being Vestal's induction into the SGMA Hall of Fame in 2002 and Howard's posthumous induction in 2003. With these inductions, Howard and Vestal joined Rusty Goodman as members of the Hall of Fame.

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My conversations with Vestal in recent years were interviews for feature articles in US Gospel News. One interview followed the announcement of the Goodman's Final Tour. The other followed Howard's passing and Vestal's recording, "Vestal and Friends." We talked, we laughed, Vestal remembered and I listened. I listened closely, because Vestal had a lot to say. She talked about the history of the Goodmans. She talked about her sweetheart, Howard. She talked about her friends, especially mentioning Bill and Gloria Gaither, Mark Lowry and Guy Penrod. She talked lovingly about her children, Rick and Vicki.

She talked about her life with Howard, and the different roads God had taken their ministry. I've noted with interest that the Associated Press and other secular news services targeted Vestal and Howard's tenure at PTL with Jim Bakker, while Gospel music publications have touched briefly on that episode in the Goodman's career. Vestal addressed it fully in her biography, "Vestal." If you haven't read the book, you must.

Vestal talked of continuing her ministry after the death of her sweetheart, Howard. When I asked what her plans were, she replied, "I'm gonna keep on singing. I love people; I just love being around people. I love to share the love of God with everyone, and I want to keep on doing that as long as I can." She kept that promise, singing in churches and with Bill and Gloria Gaither on their concerts. She ministered wherever she went, whether she was singing or just visiting.

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I remember Vestal's laugh. She loved to laugh, loved to share her feelings, and enjoyed positive conversation. I won't forget in my last conversation with her, we talked about fashion and clothes and "girl stuff." I treasure her comment to me, "You're a girl after my own heart!"

Vestal Goodman was a good cook, although her travels often limited this. I remember Mark Lowry sharing Vestal's recipe for her wonderful Coconut Cake. This was the home-maker side of this famous lady.

Vestal was vacationing with her family in Florida when she went home to be with the Lord. She had become ill during their Christmas vacation there. How fitting that her passing from this world to the next, took place in Celebration, Florida. I can just imagine her chuckle and comment "That's just what it was...a celebration!" Vestal's funeral was held at Christ Church in Nashville, Tennessee at 1:00 PM on New Year's Day, 2004. It was not a funeral, but a celebration of the life of this wonderful lady; this Queen of Gospel Music.

I've shared my memories of Vestal with you. I've reminded you of her ministry, her music and her many noted recognitions. I'd love to hear your memories. Please share them with me via email at sandi@sgmusicforum.com . I can't wait to hear from you!