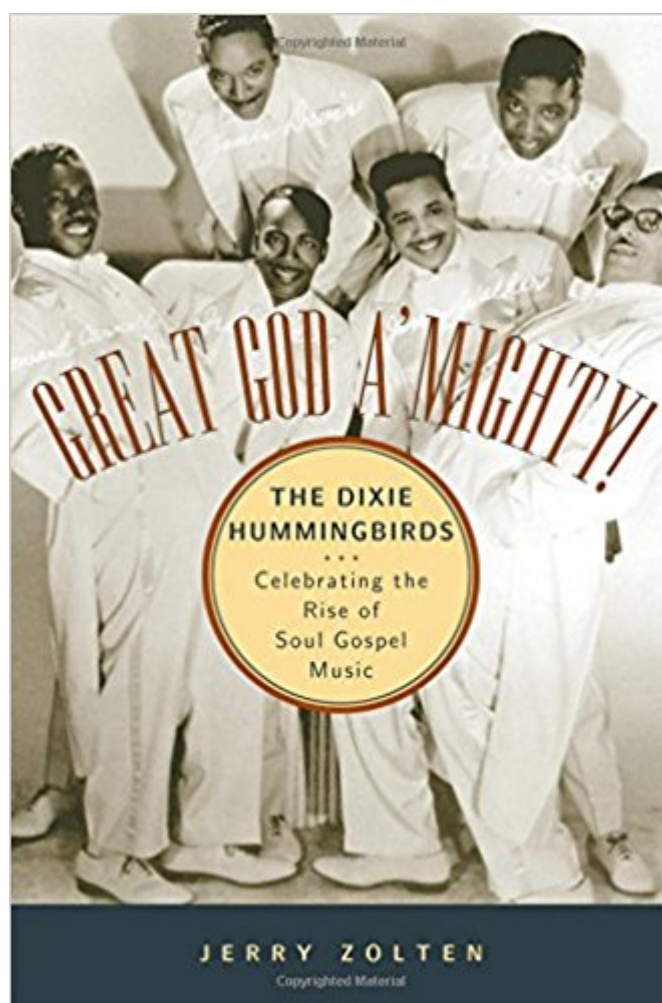


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# Great God A'Mighty! The Dixie Hummingbirds: Celebrating The Rise Of Soul Gospel Music



## Synopsis

From the Jim Crow world of 1920s Greenville, South Carolina, to Greenwich Village's Café Society in the '40s, to their 1974 Grammy-winning collaboration on "Loves Me Like a Rock," the Dixie Hummingbirds have been one of gospel's most durable and inspiring groups. Now, Jerry Zolten tells the Hummingbirds' fascinating story and with it the story of a changing music industry and a changing nation. When James Davis and his high-school friends starting singing together in a rural South Carolina church they could not have foreseen the road that was about to unfold before them. They began a ten-year jaunt of "wildcatting," traveling from town to town, working local radio stations, schools, and churches, struggling to make a name for themselves. By 1939 the a cappella singers were recording their four-part harmony spirituals on the prestigious Decca label. By 1942 they had moved north to Philadelphia and then New York where, backed by Lester Young's band, they regularly brought the house down at the city's first integrated nightclub, Café Society. From there the group rode a wave of popularity that would propel them to nation-wide tours, major record contracts, collaborations with Stevie Wonder and Paul Simon, and a career still vibrant today as they approach their seventy-fifth anniversary. Drawing generously on interviews with Hank Ballard, Otis Williams, and other artists who worked with the Hummingbirds, as well as with members James Davis, Ira Tucker, Howard Carroll, and many others, The Dixie Hummingbirds brings vividly to life the growth of a gospel group and of gospel music itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Dixie Hummingbirds, along with the Swan Silvertones and the Soul Stirrers, were the foremost popularizers of the a cappella style of gospel music that brought the spiritual music of traditional African-American communities to a wide-and primarily white-audience in the 1950s. In this excellent history, Zolten, an assistant professor of American Studies at Penn. State, Altoona, carefully and lovingly details the almost 75-year history of the Hummingbirds, from their start in the Depression to their induction into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2000. He deftly explores how the group's history itself embodies numerous American ironies: that an "unintended result" of segregation "was the flowering of a distinctly African American homegrown culture" that included gospel music; that the Depression and the mass migration of African Americans from the South "created a nationwide market for black entertainers of all kinds" that allowed the Hummingbirds their initial financial success. Zolten interestingly points out that the group, known for its hard-driving vocal sound, won its only Grammy award for their own version of "Loves Me Like a Rock" by Paul Simon, whose original version had featured the Hummingbirds and brought them to a new rock-oriented audience. Adding to the book's success are Zolten's numerous interviews with founding members James Davis and Ira Tucker, as well as their many collaborators, which add personal depth to the book's amazing wealth of detail and dates. This is a fine exploration of an important style and era in the history of American popular music and culture. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Making extensive use of interviews, Zolten (communication arts and sciences and American studies, Pennsylvania State Univ., Altoona) charts the rise of soul gospel music by capturing the verve and fervor of gospel greats, the Dixie Hummingbirds, during the last 50 years. After chronicling their founding in 1928 and early concerts in South Carolina, he continues with the addition of the silver-throated Ira Tucker and their move in 1942 to Philadelphia then New York City. There, they landed a stint at the influential, antiracist Caf&#x82; Society, which led to national exposure. Using the Hummingbirds as an example of how African American religious music has changed during the last half century, Zolten also charts their transition from spiritual group to soul-drenched gospelists punctuated by the electric guitar of Howard Carroll to what they are today. Throughout, the author places the Dixie Hummingbirds in their social and musical contexts, discussing how pre-World War II racism and then the Civil Rights Movement influenced the group, and notes their impact on doo-wop and Motown. This intriguing, fast-moving history is highly recommended for anyone interested in music, social history, gospel, or the American experience. Dave Szatmary, Univ. of Washington, Seattle Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I love the book! It gave me a lot of insight as to how times were in the 40's and beyond for African American and Gospel group as a whole. Very stimulating read.

This is a very good book for those interested in learning more about this great gospel singing group. It was well written and entertaining.

This is my grandfather's FAVORITE group of all time. He said that it brought back so many memories and had him back down memory lane! HE LOVED IT!!

Jerry Zolten, co-author of 'Speaking to an Audience' and writer for Living Blues magazine, has devoted his interest into the lives and music of The Dixie Hummingbirds. What would gospel be like today if not for the influence of singers like The Hummingbirds, Fairfield Four, Skylarks, Kings of Harmony, Radio Four, the Selahs among others? They brought to us the reality that gospel was populated by every type of people you can name. All that travels the gospel road those that succeeded were the Dixie Hummingbirds for their spiritual qualities and their unique a-capella style. It was their backbone and their success that kept them together until now. Before there was Rock-n-Roll there they were. They sang through history from the Depression, the World Wars, Korea and Vietnam and through the decades of changing pop culture. Now that perseverance and dedication rewarded them, this will be their 75th anniversary. They have their place in the American Music Hall of Fame. This is their story that began in 1920s Greenville, S.C. to their 1974 Grammy winning song 'Love Me Like a Rock.' Others made popular during their long career are, 'Christian's Automobile,' 'Have a Little Talk With Jesus,' 'Ezekiel Saw the Wheel,' 'Two Little Fishes & Five Loaves of Bread,' 'Let's Go Out to The Programs,' 'Savior Don't Pass Me By,' 'Devil Can't Harm a Praying Man,' 'I've Been Born Again,' and 'Wonderful to Be Alive' among a long line of memorable songs. James Davis and his friends began singing in a rural church. Their next 10 years would be jaunting from town to town, working radio stations, schools and churches. By 1939, the a-capella songbirds recorded their 4-part harmony spirituals on Decca. By 1942, they moved to Philadelphia and then New York with the Lester Young band they brought down the house each night at the CafÃ© Society. For there they catapulted into nationwide tours, major record contracts, collaborating with Stevie Wonder and Paul Simon. And they're still going stronger as ever. There are interviews of the artists who worked with the Hummingbirds. The book brings out the vivid life that shaped the gospel singers and gospel music. In the words of Ira Tucker, Sr. at the anniversary

roast, he said, "There have been a lot of people that have turned their backs on us. But you know what? The man upstairs sits high and looks low. That's who we have our faith and trust in, is God Almighty. I'd like to say this to you. It wasn't the money that kept the Hummingbirds out there." In conclusion"....Don't think that we are finished. I'm glad not. AMEN. There are notes in the back of the book to further your search in Blues, Gospel, Jazz & Broadcasting with bibliography of books, articles, interviews, recordings & documentaries for more reading. n the subject of Blues, Gospel and those that influence the story of soul music, like Willie Dixon, Billie Holliday, Wynonie Harris, Mahalia Jackson and Josh White. Afterwards is a listing of the Hummingbirds recordings of their singles and albums, anthologies & collections, CD & Videos. Their collaborations with Marion Williams(Standing Here Wondering Which Way to Go), Melissa Manchester (Bright Eyes), Leon Redbone (Double Time), Harry Chapin (Living Room Suite), The Kennedys (Life is Large) and House of Blues-Music in the Air: The Dixie Hummingbirds 70th Anniversary Celebration and All-Star Tribute with Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, Patty LaBelle, Wynonna Judd, Shirley Caesar and Vickie Winans. With all this, isn't that why they're so successful!

Full disclosure: I have known the author for many years.This is wonderful book. Even though I know and admire the author, I would not lie about the book. If I didn't like it, I just wouldn't say anything. This is a wonderful book.The book is solid scholarship, and it is readable. How often do you see that? It reads like a compelling narrative, which it is, but it also has the complete discography of the Dixie Hummingbirds, and chronicles the racist times the men lived in and overcame. It is equal parts reference for American Studies and a fun read.Highly recommended!

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