

Eric Griffis

Field Notes

Follow up Interview with Ederic Kerney/ Interview with Evelyn Turrentine-Agee

Thursday, May 20, 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.

Miles Laseter and I arrived at around 12:15pm on Thursday at 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.

This interview is unconventional to say the least. We originally intended to do a follow interview with Reverend Ederic Kerney who runs the radio station with his wife. We did our first interview with Kerney on Tuesday, two days before this one. The content of the interview was going to focus on the differences in traditional gospel music and contemporary gospel. The Kerneys play both kinds on this radio station. Mr. Kerney informed us that he had many 45rpm records in the radio booth from the era when contemporary gospel was just getting started. According to Mr. Kerney in the first interview, contemporary gospel started emerging in the early 1970s. He said he could plug our field audio recorder into the radio stations equipment and play selections from these records and talk about the significance of each one. We think there may have been a miscommunication. Miles mentioned doing a "survey" of the music. Reverend Kerney left for about ten minutes to go next door to McDonald's for lunch. When he came back, he announced to us that he had a new idea. He was going to do a survey on air of his listeners. The recording started at around 12:45pm. He hooked up our recorder to the radio and then he went on the air. He asked his listening audience to call the radio station and tell him whether they prefer traditional gospel music or contemporary music. He also asked them to give the name of a specific song they particularly liked and tell why they felt the way they do. From that point on, the only discussion we had with Mr. Kerney was off the air and off the recording. He was not telling us anything that he did not want us to record, but he had our recorder hooked to his equipment and never switched his microphone to off air to talk through it during songs. Rather he turned and offered us commentary a few times. Most of his off air comments were to point out specific examples of how the song lyrics of traditional gospel songs related to everyday situations that people go through. The log notes these interactions the best that I can explain them inside brackets. Most notably was during the song about the mule when Mr. Kerney told me that the song illustrated how church politics work.

At one point in the interview Mr. Kerney played a song by Evelyn Turrentine-Agee. At

that point, he looks up her number in one of his cell phones and calls her on the radio station's hard line for us to do a short interview with her over the phone. He briefly explains to us that she is a gospel singer before we talk to her. She is a traditional gospel singer and explains to us how and why she sings traditional music and how she feels about other forms of gospel. She is from St. Louis, Missouri and currently lives in Detroit, Michigan. We took down her mailing address to send her a consent waiver to archive her interview. Her address is:

Evelyn Turrentine-Agee

PO Box 351065

Detroit, MI 48235

Mr. Kerney talked to a couple listeners after that, but towards the end of the recording he plays a few songs in their entirety. Mr. Kerney was also operating our field recorder so he should turn it on and off during commercials and situations such as that. There is one instance when he turned off the recorder while talking to a caller and I do not know whether it was intentional or not. I did not notice it at the time. I believe it may have been intentional because the caller was promoting a traditional gospel sing on the upcoming Sunday night at a local Church. He lists several local singing groups that will be in attendance. Mr. Kerney's tone in talking to the man sounded like he did not want the caller to promote the show on the air and was hurrying the caller along. It was while the man was listing the groups the first time that the recording is paused and picks up after the caller is off the air. I thought that the list of local groups mentioned by the man would have been an interesting bit of information especially since we have heard Mr. Kerney and others reiterate the point that many of the nationally known celebrity groups and singers got their starts singing in local churches in this area. That was the only instance of Mr. Kerney editing the callers or the music from our recorder. The rest of the recording we have is the same as what aired on the live radio except when he put the radio on automatic programming during the Evelyn Turrentine-Agee interview and listening to the playback it sounds like he might have paused the recording during a commercial.

So, in the end, we did not listen to any contemporary songs whether on vinyl 45rpm records or otherwise. He did play some traditional gospel songs from some famous secular artists from before they became famous such as R&B artist Johnny Taylor and Blues artist B.B. King. The recording ended up being a survey of why the regular listeners of this full-time gospel station from all over the North Mississippi area listen to traditional gospel music and a sample of some of their favorite songs that represent this genre. One reason why they must be regular listeners is because Mr. Kerney referred to some of the callers by their first or last names even when they did not introduce themselves. Even though Evelyn Turrentine-Agee is not from this area, she has performed with many artists from here and her interview reinforced the same sentiments that the callers were making. Ederic Kerney signed a release form for this recording but Evelyn Turrentine-Agee needs to be mailed one. Also, Mr. Kerney made no announcement to his listeners that we were recording for the archives but his listeners did know they were talking live on air on the radio.