

The Enterprise

St. Mary's County, Maryland

Making a joyful noise

Southern gospel singers Walls of Jasper say they hope something more than themselves shines through in their music

Wednesday, Aug. 22, 2007

By Susan Craton
Staff Writer

Aside from the three men with microphones standing behind the altar, the sanctuary in Leonardtown Baptist Church is deserted this Wednesday evening.

But it's not quiet.

Even without a congregation or audience listening, a music track is on and the members of Walls of Jasper are singing. The members of the Southern gospel group — Dan Doig, Gary Reed and Jim Wyman — are going through their weekly practice. They rehearse "There Is," a song that will be on the group's latest, soon-to-be released CD.

When they get to the refrain, all together the three men lean in and sing.

There is sacrifice for sin

There is amazing grace,

There is a change that comes within

Each time a sinner prays.

Members of the Walls of Jasper have been singing together for close to 14 years. The group was put together in 1994 by Jenny Page, the longtime choir director at Leonardtown Baptist, to sing for a Valentine's Day banquet. The group sang "Show a Little Bit of Loving Kindness."

"I remember our pastor at the banquet," said Doig of the Rev. Clyde Phillips. After the group sang "he slapped his knee and yelled 'Woo hoo! Looks like we've got a new group.'"

Invitations to sing at area churches started to arrive, and the three men accepted, calling themselves the Leonardtown Baptist Men's Trio. As time went on, they chose to formalize as a group more. And in 1999, the group changed its name to "Three for Thee."



Staff Photo by Reid Silverman

From left, Dan Doig, Gary Reed and Jim Wyman, members of the Southern gospel group Walls of Jasper, practice in the sanctuary at Leonardtown Baptist Church. The group has been together for close to 14 years and is set to release a new CD.

"Oops," said both Reed and Wyman as Doig tells the story.

It turned out that an all-female group from Alabama or Georgia had already been singing under the name Three for Thee. So, the Leonardtown men changed their name again. They became the Walls of Jasper.

The name is a reference to Revelations 21:18 and a description of heaven where, the verse says, there will be walls of jasper.

"Jasper is like crystal. It's translucent," Reed said. "And we like to think of ourselves as in service to the Lord, not pretentious in any way."

While their singing is polished and the style of music is toe-tappingly upbeat, the members of Walls of Jasper say that their singing is not about entertainment and it's not about them.

They want to "point people to heaven," Doig said.

"Point specifically to Jesus," Reed added.

There is a cross that's blood-stained

But the story does not end.

For there is a tomb that's empty

And it's the only one there is.

This view of their singing as a ministry is one that Phillips has noticed. "Oh, I love those guys," he said. "They sing because they have a talent and want to use it to honor God. Their singing leads the church to worship ... it's not a performance ... It's never just a talent on display."

Walls of Jasper is invited to sing at between 10 to 15 events each year, mostly in Southern Maryland, but also on the Eastern Shore and occasionally in Virginia and Pennsylvania. In addition, they still sing at their church about four times a year.

The group has already recorded two CDs, in addition to the new one to be released in October. Instead of recording songs they frequently perform, the trio decided that about half of the songs would be new songs, new arrangements for them.

It makes the singing fresh, Wyman said. "A lot of it's going to be brand new to people."

The project was recorded at Harvest Gospel Studio in Huntington, W.Va., and at Rex Coombs Music in Leonardtown. The West Virginia connection was important to the singers. "They have access to session players from Nashville ... and they're very familiar with the style of music we do," said Doig, who was familiar with the studio because he grew up in West Virginia.

Outside of their singing careers, Doig is a software engineer for Northrop Grumman, Reed is a recreation coordinator for the St. Mary's Department of Recreation, Parks and Community Services and Wyman works as consultant with Booz Allen Hamilton.

Doig and Wyman, in particular, have been serious musicians most of their lives. It's also fun and it's a ministry to them.

"We do have a lot of fun," Doig said.

"None of us take ourselves too seriously," Reed said.

"There's a very fine line between what you're doing and who you're doing it for," Wyman said. "It's not about us at all. It's about the Lord."

E-mail Susan Craton at scraton@somdnews.com.