

SECTION IV – ITEM A – 2

Billy Ray Hearn

Legacy-leavers are hard to come by; it takes a committed kind of vision to keep your eyes open enough to see opportunity, to take risks. EMI Christian Music Group founder Billy Ray Hearn has spent the past 50 years becoming such a visionary. With a life committed to risking everything for the sake of the Gospel, he has built a far-reaching legacy of its message and music, a legacy that will continue to unfurl for generations to come.

With lifelong decisions made from the need to bring together faith, music, and cultural relevance, Billy Ray Hearn has been referred to as the ‘father’ of contemporary Christian music. His history is full of firsts: he was the first to graduate from Baylor University with a degree in church music. From there, the rest is history. His involvement with the wildly successful and innovative youth musicals, *Good News* and *Tell It Like It Is*, sparked the idea that contemporary music had a place in the Church. In 1972, Hearn started Myrrh Records—one of the first labels devoted to contemporary Christian music—at Word Inc. in Waco, TX.

Hearn had great faith in the music and vision of the Jesus Movement of the 1970s. And so, in 1976, he formed his own label, Sparrow Records in Canoga Park, CA with a small roster of artists, whose music has since inspired a genre: 2nd Chapter of Acts, Barry McGuire, Keith Green, and John Michael Talbot. Later, by the 1980’s: Margaret Becker, Steve Taylor, and Steve Green.

In addition to finding and signing great artists, Billy Ray Hearn has a love for producing. Among his best is his Dove Award winning recording of Handel’s *Messiah* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir. He also produced the highly-acclaimed hymns albums; *Hymns Triumphant*, its sequel, *Hymns Triumphant, Volume II* and Executive Produced the 2 million selling/Grammy Award winning *I Love To Tell The Story* by Andy Griffith.

In 1992, Hearn sold Sparrow to EMI Music, and the label continued to thrive, with the growth and success of such landmark artists as Steven Curtis Chapman and BeBe & CeCe Winans.

Though he semi-retired in 1996, Billy Ray has continued to play a pivotal role in the industry he helped create. Recognized as one of the foremost visionaries and innovators of Christian music, Hearn is a member of the Gospel Music Hall of Fame and in 1999 received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Gospel Music Association. He continues to produce recordings of orchestral and choral works of the church and is active in many charitable endeavors including work with the Nashville Symphony, Baylor University where he was a Regent for nine years, the American Cancer Society, Nurses for Newborns, Easter Seals, and chairs his own Sparrow Foundation.

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If you ask the father of Contemporary Christian Music his life philosophy, the secret to his success, he'll tell you this: "I've always been led by the importance of doing what God says to do, the importance of the family, and the importance of always doing the right thing, whether it's good business or not." These are to sustain a legacy.

Billy Ray Hearn's journey has led him to be a leader, a teacher, an artist, a producer, a visionary, a philanthropist, along with countless other roles including father and grandfather.

Even still, you never know what he's going to do next.