

RELIGION

Kirk Franklin Back on Tour with "Tour of Life" Gospel Production

GospoCentric Records' pop/gospel recording sensation Kirk Franklin and The Family are back touring and performing on the "Tour of Life," an innovative scripted and staged gospel production currently touring the country and scheduled to appear in Portland on April 5. The location for this appearance has not yet been determined.

Franklin's return to the tour followed a tragic stage accident in Memphis, Tennessee, shortly after the tour initially got underway

back in October. He was hospitalized in a coma and spent a month at home recuperating. Now that he is fully recovered and has been released by his doctor, he's back performing on the rescheduled tour with The Family, Fred Hammond, Yolanda Adams, gospel comedienne Sister Cantaloupe, the K&K Mime Gospel Dance Troupe and other youthful gospel talents.

The rescheduled tour under the direction of ALW Entertainment Company got underway December 26.

This unique concept packaging popular youthful gospel recording artists with a Gospel Mime Dance Troupe, actors and an extremely funny gospel comedienne plus other musicians and performers in a performance setting complete with a made-to-order stage set, will rival or exceed any version of the "greatest show on earth." It will also mark the first time in history of the entertainment business that this approach has been used to present renown gospel acts and attractions to audiences across

the country.

The phenomenal rise of GospoCentric recording artist Kirk Franklin and The Family, whose popularity and record sales have taken him and his singers to heights of success no other gospel act has ever reached, also created a need to have Franklin's "live" performances take on a new look. This need plus the new audiences and acting experience he gained over the past year traveling and starring in the "hit" gospel play, "He Say...She Say...But What Does God Say?," helped spawn

the idea of presenting his future live performances with other popular gospel artists in a staged and scripted production form. The "Tour of Life" resulted!

This exciting gospel production has all the ingredients and talents necessary to make it one of the greatest gospel music experiences ever to grace a stage to be witnessed by young and old gospel music loving audiences.

The overall idea is to take gospel music and its leading popular artists far and beyond the ordinary gospel

concert stage in performances. This type of presentation makes the idea a living reality. It's a brand new day, a brand new way -- it's gospel music and some of its' leading performers coming your way on the "Tour of Life."

This electrifying, entertaining and exciting presentation of gospel music featuring Kirk Franklin and The Family, Fred Hammond, Yolanda Adams and others is more than a concert and much more than a dramatic stage play. It's an electrifying gospel experience that has no peer!

Mainstream culture embraces, redefines the meaning of 'Spirituality'

Underneath the biggest cult story in the US in 20 years lies an enduring question: What is spirituality?

Much of the reflection on the millennial sect Heaven's Gate, and the leader who compared himself to Jesus while leading his adherents to death, centers on the "spiritual" aspect of the tragedy.

Cult leader Marshall Herff Applewhite's "spiritual philosophy" of the soul hit Page 1. Internet groups chat on "New Age UFO spirituality." One ex-Heaven's Gate member says Mr. Applewhite's "physical body was born in Houston, but his spiritual self was on a higher level."

Yet pastors and theologians say all this indicates how widespread, casual, and even devalued the idea of "the spiritual" has become in the U.S. They say a new level of "spiritual

talk" among Americans may show a healthy longing for a higher or richer sense of life. But it also flattens or distorts a concept that had a distinct meaning inside churches and synagogues--of something genuinely "holy" or "divine" rather than merely psychological.

"The word spirituality is in such wide use today that it has lost its focus," says Gabriel Fackre of the Andover-Newton Theological Academy in Newton, Mass. "The closer we get to the year 2000 it seems, the more we will hear the phrase, from popular as well as cultic and esoteric movements."

Popular usage of spiritual has grown in mainstream culture as well as in churches and synagogues. Last Friday, for example, when the Rev. Martin Luther King's son met with James Earl Ray, in prison for killing

Dr. King, the son, Dexter King, described the meeting to reporters afterwards as a spiritual experience that helped him "complete...a spiritual circle."

Under the Protestant discourse that held sway, at least in many religious traditions, for much of the 20th century, spiritual suggested the nature or presence of God, the Holy Spirit. For the faithful, spiritual or spirituality was also tied to a deep moral sense -- including a sense of history, responsibility to a community, and of truth as a meaningful concept.

In recent years, the word's usage has undergone dramatic change. It means everything from emotional fervor or intellectual excitement, to a sensual experience, to the description of a "family" like Heaven's Gate that hoped to join a UFO being

who resembled ET, the loveable alien in the movie by Steven Spielberg.

Today, rock star Madonna describes herself as "spiritual." The recent film "Michael" about an angel on earth offers "both laughs and spirituality," says a reviewer. Spousal abuse is due to "spiritual weaknesses," writes a feminist. One New Age healer asks audiences to "do something spiritual" for themselves. "Spiritual decorating"--arranging furniture in a way that is calming, for instance -- is a fad. Yoga masters offer "spiritual massages" to eliminate "bad energy."

"I had a member tell me his daughter's wedding was the most spiritual moment of his life," says one local pastor, adding "He may have been confusing emotional with spiritual there."

Theologian David Wells, author

of "No Place for Truth," feels people use spiritual to challenge secular trends. "Modern life at a time where God is so marginalized can feel like a windowless room. People want to cut a hole in the ceiling. If you are mowed down by a secular culture, wounded, you feel a yearning for what is non-material." But, he adds, "there is a fundamental difference between this and Christian or Biblical forms of the word."

Experts point to three causes for the new use of the word: a backlash by the 1970s to a secularism that tried to eliminate spirituality, a new dialogue between Roman Catholics and Protestants after Vatican 2, and the popularity of Eastern religious ideas that use the language of spirituality.

"By 1972 we saw a shift from a cold secularism to a rebirth of spiri-

tuality as a viable category of personal identity," says Craig van Gelder, an expert on Christianity and culture at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.

"Constructing one's spirituality becomes the project of the 1970s and '80s."

"After Vatican 2, you found many in the Protestant world gladly accepting a new word, spirituality, which was a new way of speaking about a religious inner life of prayer," says Krister Stendahl, former dean of the Harvard Divinity School. The word became "democratized among lay Catholics and Protestants" in the 1970s, he adds. Zen Buddhism, transcendental meditation, yoga, and other Eastern beliefs began to take hold among baby boomers, many of whom watched rock groups like the Beatles journey to the East.

Heaven's gate relatives come to terms with cult repercussions

Twelve years after Terrie Nettles watched her mother leave for good to search the stars for God, she received a final insult.

Still wondering what ever became of Bonnie Lu Trusdale Nettles, Terrie Nettles learned her mother had died just four hours away in a Dallas hospital.

"I felt like somebody had ripped my guts out," Terrie Nettles said of her mother's death in 1985. She said

she thought at the time: "Now the answers are gone."

But her mother's memory returned last week with the news that 39 Heaven's Gate followers committed suicide inside a California mansion.

Ms. Nettles co-founded the cult that evolved into Heaven's Gate. She and cult leader Marshall Herff Applewhite shared a platonic but close relationship, trekking across the country and gathering followers to take a

spaceship to "the Next Kingdom."

Terrie Nettles' wondering began when her mother, a newly divorced nurse, met Applewhite, a music professor. Early one morning in 1973, they went to a nightclub where Terrie Nettles, then 19, worked. They told her they were leaving.

"I wasn't allowed to say goodbye. I wasn't allowed to tell her that I loved her and hold her hand," she said. "I felt like Herff prevented that from

happening."

That was the last time Terrie and her younger brother, Joe Nettles, saw their mother.

"I remember going down the stairs with her, trying to keep from crying," said Ms. Nettles, now 44. "They just said that God was leading them in a certain direction. They weren't sure exactly where, or what their mission was. But she said it was really big."

Seven months after the farewell,

the woman who would help stitch mysticism and Christianity into a cult sent a cryptic letter to her daughter.

Relying on a fiery Bible passage - Revelation 11:3-13 - Ms. Nettles tried to explain how she and a former opera singer became the center of a new universe, the origin of Heaven's Gate.

"And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand, two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth," the

passage begins. "These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth."

Her daughter struggled to understand.

"That's when they first realized who they thought they were, as the two witnesses," Terrie Nettles said Friday in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. "I had absolutely no clue as to what she was talking about."

Rabbi Shefa Gold co give concert at MJCC

Congregation P'nai Or and the Mittleman Jewish Community Center will present a concert by Rabbi Shefa Gold on Thursday, April 10 at 7:30 PM. Tickets for the benefit concert are \$10 general admission and \$8 for seniors and students.

"Chai" patron tickets are also available for \$18.

Shefa Gold is a nationally acclaimed composer of Jewish Liturgical and spiritual music. She has released six albums of her recorded works. The latest is called "Chants

Encounter." She teaches meditation, chanting, and many other facets of Judaism as a transformative path. Shefa's music seeks the essence of Jewish Prayer and invites the audience to come along on the joyous journey.

The concert will be held at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center which is located at 6651 SW Capitol Hwy. In Portland. It is presented with special support from Havurah Shalom. Call 244-0111 or 248-4500 for information.

Changing the image of Jesus

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON
I am always amazed when people claim that racism is over and done with and that if people of color just work hard enough, they will succeed in this country. I am always amazed because it seems that every week there is new evidence that racism is alive and well in America. Take the story of the passion play in Union City, New Jersey.

After 82 years of the Park Theater Performing Arts Center's production of "The Passion Play," this year the center chose an African American to alternate in the role of Jesus.

That's when the uproar began.

Not only did the center find that the people in this multiracial city were leaving profane messages and canceling tickets, but the actor, Desi Arnaz Giles, found himself facing death threats. "As soon as you're cast in something like this, you know it may stir some people," Giles said, "But death threats?"

It seems that the image of Jesus as a black man is so threatening to some that their reaction was to promise death to the performer.

Bernice Powell Jackson is executive director of the United Church of

Christ's Commission for Racial Justice in Cleveland, Ohio. This article appeared in issue #0166 of the CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL.

Wonderful people?

An "earth ship" of old tires, a little wooden elephant and mystified people still serve as reminders that the Heaven's Gate cult tried to build a New Mexico home before moving on to California.

"These were wonderful people," said Jim Thorsen, a leader in the New Mexico patriot movement who bought the cult's 40-acre compound last year.

Then, peering at a long, maze-like wall of symmetrically stacked tires, he admitted he had other thoughts: "OK, they were screwed up. But they were wonderful."

Heaven's Gate members bought the land 55 miles southeast of Albuquerque in June 1995 and began building an environmentally sensitive, fenced and gated retreat center, apparently intending it as a permanent monastery.

About 25 members worked the land, while five or six commuted about 10 miles in Jeeps and Cadillacs to work in rented offices next to Gustin's Hardware store in Mountainair. Patsy Gustin, who rented the three small offices for \$250 a month to a group calling itself "Computer Nomads," cried when she saw her ex-tenants on television, giving videotaped goodbyes before last week's mass suicide.

"It's shocking. They were very,

very, very nice people. They were always smiling," she said, lightly tapping a table where Heaven's Gate members once worked.

The kind, peaceful cult members with cropped hair planned a thriving commune on the remote property, Thorsen said. The land, a former youth camp dotted with pine trees, sits two miles up a dirt road from the tiny, dilapidated village of Manzano.

They drew up plans for a self-sustaining community, laid gas and electric lines and installed a vast septic system.

"They planned on attracting members, but they thought they would be subject to something like Waco or Ruby Ridge. That's why they came here," he said.

It appears to have been incredibly arduous work.

They milled lumber one tree at a time, mixed and poured their own concrete, and stacked hundreds of tires by hand. Pre-dawn laborers were rewarded by the chalking of "EB" (for early bird, said Thorsen) on the tires they placed.

When they suddenly decided to leave in April 1996, they had a partially completed, 3,700-square-foot building walled with old, stacked tires filled with dirt and chinked with empty soda cans.

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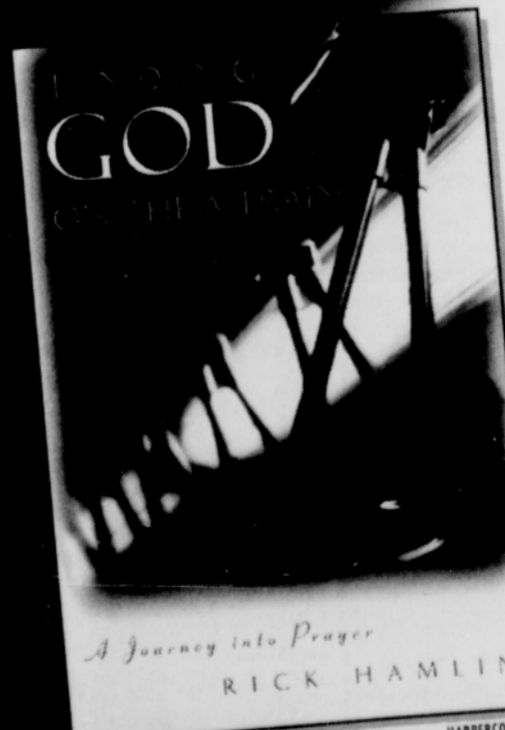
First Trumpet Call for Frenesi Lolita Vaughn/Phillips

Frenesi Lolita Carter was born to the union of Richard and Senola Carter on May 3rd, 1941 in Boise, Idaho. She departed this life on March 20th, 1997. Raised and educated in St. Louis, Missouri, she came to Portland in 1974. This vibrant young woman went to work for Untied Parcel Service and served well for 21 years, retired in 1995.

Frenesi accepted the Lord in 1983 under the pastorate of the Rev. T.L. Lewis, Pastor of Morning Star Baptist Church. She joined the Usher Board and was a faithful servant. She also was secretary both to Pastor Lewis and the church. In these latter years she was a member of Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of The Rev. Jonnie Pack IV, Pastor. She was there until her death.

As a sojourner for Christ, Frenesi had many attributes. She worked as an on-call person for Christian Women Against Crime (CWAC) preparing brochures in the early years of the school, helping students with their math and whatever she could do to help.

Frenesi was an achiever. In recent months she became a Certified Nurses Assistant. Services were Entrusted to: Cox Funeral Home, Inc. Portland, OR



"How should I pray?"
Rick Hamlin offers an engaging, funny, and touching tale of one man's lifelong pursuit of the answer to the question, "How should I pray?" in *Finding God on the A Train*. A fresh and fluent new voice on the Christian writing scene, Hamlin offers the candid story--sure to appeal to the millions today rediscovering the joy of prayer--of his search for an authentic spirituality.

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