

# Kingsmen Biography

For more than a half a century, no group has secured such a far reaching legacy like that of The Kingsmen Quartet. Since 1956, this group has risen from humble beginnings in the mountains of western North Carolina to one of the most beloved and innovative groups in Christian music. Countless renowned artists have been a part of this great lineage; such as Eldridge Fox, “Big” Jim Hamill, Ray Dean Reese, Squire Parsons, Johnny Parrack, Anthony Burger, Ernie Phillips, Gary Sheppard, and a host of others. The momentum has not stopped as this group continues to help define the Southern Gospel genre for a whole new generation of music lovers, perhaps more so than any other group.

In the mid-fifties, brothers Raymond, Reese, and Louis McKinney formed a gospel group, traveling locally throughout the western part of the Carolinas and completing dozens of recordings by the late 60’s. By the early 70’s, area natives Eldridge Fox and Ray Dean Reese joined this emerging quartet and in 1974 released their first live recording, “Big & Live” consisting of Fox, Reese, Jim Hamill, and Johnny Parrack. This Dove award winning album brought to gospel music, fresh arrangements and catchy melodies that would later become southern gospel classics, such as “Glory Road”, “Look for Me At Jesus Feet”, and “Love Lifted Me”. This would be the start of many legendary live albums for the Kingsmen. Traveling with a live band, the Kingsmen became one of few groups during this era to be able to perform with three to five musicians, granting them individuality and innovation in the industry.

Always seeking to have a creative edge, they began introducing themselves as, “The Ton of Fun”. Through the late 1970’s and 80’s, more hits were churning from albums such as “Chattanooga Live”, “Live Naturally”, & “Live at The University of Alabama”. These albums combined with high energy and up-tempo music brought music lovers an exciting brand of showmanship. Songs like, “Old Ship of Zion”, “Shake Hands with a Poor Boy”, “Beautiful Home”, “Saints Will Rise”, and “Child, Child” became gospel music staples. In 1981, “Excuses” became the Kingsmen’s biggest hit of that era; it was steady at number one for 18 months, making it the longest running number one song in Southern Gospel Music history.

The successes of The Kingsmen have led to many prestigious opportunities. In 1977, The Kingsmen performed on the south lawn of the White House for President Jimmy Carter and in 1982 they performed at the opening ceremony of the World's Fair in Knoxville, TN which was broadcast on local and regional TV, with President Ronald Regan present to open the fair. The Kingsmen was also the first group to film and record a live performance at the famous Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and in 2000 they were inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame followed by the Christian Music Hall of Fame in 2008. They've garnered multiple dove awards and numerous Singing News Fan awards including favorite bass vocalist, tenor, baritone, lead, instrumentalist, video, the 1992 favorite song "Wish You Were Here" as well as favorite album by the same name, male quartet of the year, and group of the year. The Kingsmen band was voted favorite band a record 17 times making this quartet one of the most awarded groups in Southern Gospel Music.

"The key is to never lose sight of what we are working towards" says Ray Reese, Kingsmen manager and bass singer. "We tour year in and year out to spread our music to people across the country. Our music has a message, the message of Christ. Every night we work to bring His message to our audience. Our goal is to see people saved through Jesus Christ whether we're singing indoors, outdoors, in an auditorium, church or studio recordings ". Today the Kingsmen consist of 2008 hall of fame inductee, Ray Dean Reese, his son Brandon Reese, Randy Crawford, Bob Sellers, and Chris Jenkins.

Ladies and Gentlemen...From the Land of the Sky...

The Mighty Kingsmen Quartet!

## **Accolades**

GMA Hall of Fame (2000)

Christian Music Hall of Fame (2008)

5 Individual SGMA Inductees

Performance at the White House (1977)

World's Fair Knoxville, TN (1982)

Multiple Grand Ole Opry Appearances

### **4 Dove Awards**

Telly Award – Old Time Way Video

SGMA Song of Year Honors

### **57 Singing News Fan Awards**

### **14 Number One Songs**