



Bad Boy of Gospel Music: The Calvin Newton Story (American Made Music Ser)

Russ Cheatham

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"I messed up," Calvin Newton lamented, after wasting thirty years and doing time in both state and federal prisons for theft, counterfeiting, and drug violations. "These were years of my life that I could have been singing gospel music."

During his prime, he was super-handsome, athletic, and charged with sexual charisma that attracted women to him like flies to honey. Atop this abundance was his astounding voice, "the voice of an angel."

This book is his prodigal-son story. Audacious, Newton never turned down a dare, even if it meant climbing on the roof of a speeding car or wading into a freezing ocean. As a boy boxer, he was a Kentucky Golden Gloves champ who k.o.'ed his opponent in twenty-three seconds.

By his late teens he had been recruited by the Blackwood Brothers, the number-one gospel quartet in the world. In his mid-twenties while he was singing Christian songs with the Oak Ridge Quartet, Newton's mighty talent and movie-star looks took him deep into hedonism--reckless driving, heavy romancing, and addictive pill popping.

As 1950s rock 'n' roll began its invasion of gospel, he and two partners formed the Sons of Song, the first all-male gospel trio. Long before the pop sound claimed contemporary Christian music, the Sons of Song turned gospel upside down with histrionic harmony, high-styled tuxedos, and Hollywood verve. Their signature song, "Wasted Years," foreshadowed Newton's punishing fall.

This biography looks back at the destructive lifestyle that wrecked a sparkling career. When well into his sixties, Newton turned his life around and was able to confront his demons and discuss his prodigal days. He talked extensively with Russ Cheatham about his self-destruction and the great personal expense of his own bad-boy choices and late redemption.

In this candid biography, one of gospel's all-stars discloses a messed-up life that vacillated between achievement and failure, fame and infamy, happiness and grief.

Russ Cheatham is an associate professor and coordinator of the criminal justice program at Cumberland University. His work has been published in *Bluegrass Unlimited* and *Music Row Magazine*.

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