I recently had the opportunity of interviewing Pat Barker, bass singer for the Dixie Echoes and recently a top 5 nominee in the Singing News Fan Awards for Horizon Individual of the Year.

DJM: *How did you get interested in Southern Gospel, and what sparked a desire to sing it yourself?*

Pat: My dad was the one who got me interested. He loves Southern Gospel, he loves quartet music. So I was raised on it as well.

DJM: *Was he a bass singer, too?*

Pat: Yes, he was.

DJM: *Did his voice sound anything like yours?*

Pat: You know what's funny—for a Father's day gift, I took every recording he'd made, some he didn't even known about, and put them on CD. When I was listing to them, I thought, “Wow, that sounds just like me!”

Without knowing it, I just got his voice. He can sing the solos, and he got quite an incredible range. I wish I had a voice half as good as his.

DJM: *What sparked a desire to sing it yourself?*

Pat: Going to see the quartets—going to see Masters V, and later Stamps and Cathedrals, seeing those guys, I thought, “It doesn't get any better than this!” That's what got me going.

DJM: *Was the Diplomats the first group you sang with?*

Pat: I sang with a group called Crystal River Boys. It wasn't any of the Crystal Rivers you've heard of—it was just out of my church, traveled every other weekend, and sang within a 50-60
mile radius of the church. But as far as full time, yeah, the Diplomats were the first.

**DJM:** *What years were you with them?*
**Pat:** It would be 2000 to 2002, somewhere around that.

**DJM:** *Did you record any CDs with them?*
**Pat:** I did three. The first one was called The Promise, the second one was Georgia Live, and the third was Hymns Vol. I.

**DJM:** *What did you do after leaving the Diplomats?*
**Pat:** I was a music minister before the Diplomats. Then when I left the Diplomats, I went back to being a choir director. I did that till I joined the Dixie Echoes.

**DJM:** *And you joined the Dixie Echoes last year?*
**Pat:** I joined them in August of last year, about 2 weeks before quartet convention.
DJM: Had your comfortable range shifted? Did you have to do anything to get back in vocal shape?

Pat: Yeah, it did. I'd never been that low a bass singer—that's no secret to anybody. I was really having to sing through the rafters—teaching sopranos, teaching altos, all the parts, so what few low notes I had were gone. When I joined the Dixie Echoes, it was really 5 or 6 months before I was doing some of the stuff Tracy was doing. It took a while—Tracy's such an awesome bass singer.

I've gotten more comfortable with it, but still it's a struggle. He did a low solo line on "Roll Way Troubled River," low like George Younce, but I've been doing it high. I do the low note at the end with the group, but I'm not comfortable doing that note as a solo. I can do it some nights, but I can't do it every night, so I don't do it.

DJM: What is your comfortable low note?

Pat: As a solo, I really don't like to go lower than a C. I just don't think it's real pretty below a C. Now if I'm just taking a note down with the guys at the end, on "How Big is God," I think that's an A-flat, and there's another A-flat at the end of one of those songs. G is about it if I'm going with the guys at the end of a song.

I don't have a bass microphone I can work, since I share a microphone with Scoot [Shelnut], so I have to be comfortable with the notes.

DJM: Your rendition of "How Big is God" got quite a bit of positive comments at NQC, even from people who prefer less traditional artists. Has that been something of a signature song for you, or did you just start doing it since joining the Dixie Echoes?

Pat: You know, that was something we started with the Dixie Echoes. We were in Branson, trying to come up with songs for a new CD, when Dallas [Rogers] was still with us last year. Randy mentioned "How Big is God." I'd heard the song—Gene McDonald, John Hall, George Beverly Shea, Andy Griffith, and Tennessee Ford have recorded it, there's lots of versions—but I didn't really know it that well. I didn't know the verses at all.

We practiced it at Branson, then I listened to Gene's version. That's really where I got the feel of it was from his version. About two weeks later we did it on stage, and people really seemed to enjoy it. People were reminded of what a great song it is. There have been nights I've sung it, and it hasn't been all that great, but they still love it. It's just such a good song, you can't mess it up. Over the last few months, I suppose it has become a signature song. It's just a good song.

DJM: As most of the readers know, the Dixie Echoes' concerts are all-live, with just a piano, bass guitar, two microphones, and four voices. Compared to the typical Southern Gospel setup, what is the greatest benefit from doing it this way? And on the other hand, what's the greatest challenge?

Pat: There are two equal benefits. Setup is very quick. It takes us about fifteen minutes from taking equipment off the bus to finishing sound check. The most it's taken is twenty to twenty-five minutes if we have a glitch in the sound.

And, we're not stuck to the tracks and the stacks. If you have stacks, you have to stick with them.

The biggest hassle is when someone's sick. Last weekend, everyone of us was was sick. When it's live like that, you cannot cover up how sick you are. With the two mikes, that's it—you just hope that the sound is sweetened from our lips to their ears because we know how bad it sounds!

DJM: Of all the songs the Dixie Echoes sing regularly, which do you find to be the most
challenging?

**Pat:** Oddly enough, probably Brother Noah. Those words, I got so mixed up. The first three nights we sang that song, I totally blew it, forgot the words. Every night we sing it, I'm trying to concentrate, trying not to mess up. The second time I sang it, the guys said, “The people screamed, 'Help us Noah,’” and instead of saying “God has shut the door,” I sang, “Help us shut the door,” having the people outside shutting the door instead of God!

That song has really gotten me in trouble. That's probably the most difficult.

**DJM:** *Who are your greatest influences a bass singer?*

**Pat:** The top one is George Younce, bottom line, he was the best, to me. And then Rusty Goodman. And I would have to say probably J.D. After that. Those three were the ones I listened to the most and saw in concert the most. Well, I didn't ever get to see Rusty, but I have a ton of his recordings.

**DJM:** *Did you see the Happy Goodmans video New Haven reissued on DVD a couple years back?*

**Pat:** Yes. Actually, the night I was watching that the first time was the night Scoot [Shelnut] called me with an invitation to join the Dixie Echoes!
DJM: Have you been singing any of his songs with the Dixie Echoes?
Pat: Yes, for the first five or six months we sang “Who am I”—that I've sung for years. Lately, we recorded “Not in a Million Years,” so we'll sing that pretty much every night.

DJM: What are your favorite Southern Gospel songs?
Pat: We Shall See Jesus. The Old Rugged Cross Made the Difference. I like the Trio rendition, but Guy did that on the England video when Rex had passed away, and I think that's the best rendition I've heard. That night, that setting, he nailed it. Also, Mylon LeFevre sang that and did a great job on the Alleluia recording that the Gaithers did.
Then probably Who am I.
We do “Little is Much when God is in It.” I've always loved that song, the message in that is really good—those would probably be my tops.

DJM: If you weren't a bass singer, what part would you want to sing, and who would you want to sing it like?
Pat: Baritone, and I'd want to sing like Mark Trammell.

DJM: Really? I typically basses saying tenor.
Pat: I know, but tenors are ugly. Just look at Wesley!
But seriously, baritone is the part that really holds the whole thing together—the meat of the blend, and the most challenging part. Any time I get a chance to sing some baritone, I take it.

DJM: When you're singing that, how high are you comfortable singing?
Pat: If I'm singing a part, I can feel pretty comfortable with the F above middle C. If I'm on a solo part, about a D or E-flat on a solo. There's one point in the concert where we do “Just a Little Talk with Jesus.” I'll hit Wes's note, and the crowd gets a kick out of it.

DJM: If you could change one thing to improve Southern Gospel, what would it be?
Pat: Don't get me started!
I don't understand why we are moving into this the louder the better, the more flashy, the bigger the endings, the more we can change keys, it's just too much of what could be a good thing. Just keep it simple, the crowd likes it simple. The crowd wants something they can keep the words, they want to be moved. I just think we're trying to be too commercial.

DJM: I hope this isn't too tough a question, but it just occurred to me. You know, take the Civil War as an example. People get together and re-enact old battles, to show people what it was like years ago. The Dixie Echoes sing a style quite similar to what groups did years back, and probably every sing you're singing each night was written before you and I were born! Anyhow, what keeps the Dixie Echoes from being a reenactment group?
Pat: That's a great question:
First off, though we use two microphones, our program is much different than the Blackwoods or the Stamps. James and Hovie would just introduce songs, but Randy's emcee work is different. When you come see us, you're going to get Stewart being very funny, and Randy is gonna talk to a crowd like you're in the living room. He can talk to a crowd like nobody I've ever seen, reminds me of how George would handle a crowd.
When you went a Blackwoods concert, you would hear Blackwood songs. When you went to a Statesmen concert, you'd hear Statesmen songs. But at our concert, you'll hear all different types—classics, hymns, black Gospel spirituals. Any song we do, we could put it in that quartet style. We could take a contemporary song and do it quartet style if we wanted to!

I think the mix and the humor keeps it fresh.
Randy will change the set almost every night—we never have a program. He calls the songs as he sees fit and then he takes requests from the audience. He keeps it new and fresh. Randy does incredible job of keeping it interesting to the crowd and not looking like a reenactment.

**DJM:** So do the Dixie Echoes take requests often?

**Pat:** We take requests almost every night. It depends on how much time promoter gives us. We'll typically do it in church settings, but rarely in concert venues. Sometimes we'll get a song we don't really know, do it on the spot, and hope for the best.
And when you've got Stewart...he's just one of the best, period. I didn't know how good he really was till I started with the Dixie Echoes! He's able to play pretty much anything he hears. It's kinda fun when people do requests and we can just make it up as we go.

**DJM:** Could you tell us a bit about your family?

**Pat:** My wife's name is Kesha, and we've been married for 6 years. We've got a little 3-year-old named Andy (named after Andy Griffith!), and we have a little girl on the way. Her name is Breelyn, and her middle name is Taylor—that way I could have Andy Taylor! She's due on December 17th.

**DJM:** If you could put together a dream-team quartet, with or without yourself singing bass, who would you pick?

**Pat:** I would put George Younce on bass.
I would put David Phelps on tenor.
I would put Glenn Allred on the baritone.
For lead, Dale Shelnut.
Of all the lead singers I have heard, Dale wins hands down.
If you don't mind, on piano, probably Gordon Mote.
Me and him were raised about 20 miles apart.

**DJM:** Did you know him then?

**Pat:** Through his brother, who is blind as well. We would be in vocal
competitions together. Gordon would be at the same competition competing in his age group. I got to meet him and talk to him a little bit. Me and his brother got a long pretty well. But now, Gordon might not know me from Adam.

**DJM:** *Any other thoughts or comments?*

**Pat:** Let me say something about Billy Todd. He was the kindest gentleman I'd ever met. When I first met the Dixie Echoes, he was going into the hospital. I believe he was having a stent put in. They were on two week trip, and he wasn't going to be able to.

I'd never met Randy or Randy me, but a friend suggested me. Randy called me, and I went with them for two weeks. It was back in '97. Kevin Ivey was with them. “Suddenly a Rainbow” had just come out, form the Reunion album, and I filled in those two weeks.

Later on, I joined the Diplomats. My second concert with the Diplomats was at the Billy Todd Day in his hometown. Even though I had filled in for him, that was the first time I actually got to meet him. He pulled me up there to sing with them. He encouraged me, nothing but kind words. There was not a jealous bone in his body—not that there should have been. He was one of the best ever! I have the greatest respect ever for him and his family. He was just the greatest guy.

Several current and past members of the Dixie Echoes had the honor and privilege of singing at his memorial service a few days ago. We sang “Family Bible” and “Little is Much.” Then Les Beasley, Glenn Allred, Darrel Stewart, Tommy Atwood, and Buddy Lyles got together and sang “Too Much to Gain to Lose.” We all got together at the end and sang “Precious Memories.” It was a fitting tribute to one of the all-time greats.

I was saved when I was 25. That was ten years ago. I had been a choir/youth director and had even made a solo album before my salvation experience. There is no greater decision I have ever made than that one.

I just love what I'm doin'! I could not imagine doing anything else with any other group. It really has been fun, and I hope it will last a long time.