

Whether it be his loyal fans – or fellow artists, the voice of Jimmy Fortune is one of those special instruments. His recognizable tenor has graced some of the biggest hits of Country Music, earning the Virginia native a slot in both the hallowed ranks of the Country Music Hall Of Fame as well as the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

Music has always been important in Jimmy's life, as he first began performing with his father at local square dances back home. At the age of thirteen, he formed his first band – The New Edition – and the Jimmy Fortune story was beginning. As an adult, he built a reputation for being one of the most talented and versatile performers in the Nelson County / Staunton area – becoming known as an artist who could sing anything, ranging from Country and Bluegrass to Rock and Roll.

In the early 1980s, word of his talent reached Lew DeWitt. Known as the tenor singer of the Statler Brothers, DeWitt walked away very impressed with the singer's delivery. If that's where Jimmy's encounter with DeWitt ended, that would have been fine enough. However, what he didn't know was that Lew was in the early stages of Crohn's Disease – which would force

him to leave the quartet temporarily in 1982. DeWitt suggested that his partners in the group take a look at Fortune. They did – and Fortune was hired. Unfortunately, by the end of the year, DeWitt had to permanently leave the Statlers, and the job became his on a full-time basis.

To say that he carved out his own place as a Statler would be an understatement. Encouraged to develop his writing talents, Fortune wrote and sang lead on many of their biggest hits. “Elizabeth,” “Too Much On My Heart,” “Forever,” and “More Than A Name On A Wall” are just a few of the Statlers hits that feature the Fortune name and voice. He also was part of the group’s award-winning TNN variety series that ran from 1991 to 1998, and played date after date on the road, bringing their legendary sound to thousands each year.

Then, in 2002, Don, Harold, and Phil decided to call it a day, announcing their retirement. Jimmy was nowhere near ready to hang up his performing shoes, and was quickly back out on the road – opening up for the Oak Ridge Boys less than two weeks after the Statlers’ final concert. Though the nerves were there, he eventually settled into his own as a solo performer. In 2003, he released the well-received album *When One Door Closes*. He has since released the albums *I Believe*, *Feels Like Christmas*, *Windows* and 2012’s *Lessons*.

One of the biggest decisions Fortune made in his post-Statlers career was in making the move to Nashville. He felt that if he was going to make a name for himself as a solo artist, he needed to be closer to where the magic was. So, he made the move to Tennessee, and engrossed himself into the writing scene. In 2009, he teamed up with Kevin Denney and Tom Bodkin to write the powerful “On The Other Side.” The song, written about the loss of each of the writers’ fathers, was recorded by Bluegrass superduo Dailey and Vincent, and won IBMA Award for Recorded Gospel Song of the Year.

Jimmy Fortune continues to create. He released *Lessons*, a collection of his newest work in 2012, and is putting the final touches on a brand new album that is produced by Gospel powerhouse Ben Isaacs. He has also contributed the track “Virginia Dreams” to a new DVD that pays tribute to his fellow Nelson Countian Earl Hamner, Jr. – famous for his role as creator and narrator of *The Waltons*.

And, just like that twelve year old kid with his father, Jimmy Fortune is still at his best on stage. The performer continues to travel the country – whether as a solo artist, his own acoustic trio, or periodically with his friends Dailey and Vincent. Music is what he knows, and music is what he does so well. Even after a

career that has seen Gold, Platinum, Number One records, and 2009 enshrinement into the Country Music Hall of Fame, he's still working at being the best Jimmy Fortune he can be.

“If I get to a point where I don't think there is anything to learn anymore, that might be the point where I need to do something else. But, if I'm still learning and still out there singing and writing, I feel like God has a purpose for me. As long as I ask him to help me, and don't forget where it comes from, and be thankful for that, it will be positive, and something that my Mama and my Daddy, as well as the Good Lord will be proud of.”