

The Musical Side of Billy Blanks

He's the king of Tae Bo, but kick the idea that he's only about martial arts and physical fitness.

He never was.

Billy Blanks has been a boxer, a karate champion, a bodyguard, an actor and he's even done a little ballet. He has ministered the Gospel, along with Tae Bo, in many countries around the world.

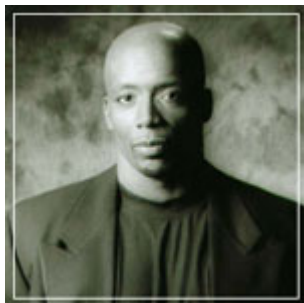
Now Blanks is a rapper.

Why is the king of Tae Bo rapping, you ask? "Basically, he just loves God and wants to honor him," says his assistant Belinda Robinson. "He wanted to get some funky beats that were competitive with the secular world, and that are targeted toward the youth."

Blank's new album is called "Let Loose," and it should be in the stores by July. Except for backup singers, the nineteen cuts are all Blanks. He, Chris Blake and Blank's wife, Gayle, are the producers of Walk by Faith Music, Inc.

"Billy is very gifted" says Robinson. "He plays music [piano] by ear. He has a music studio in his home, and that's how he started doing it [rapping]."

According to Robinson, the album has a very urban sound.

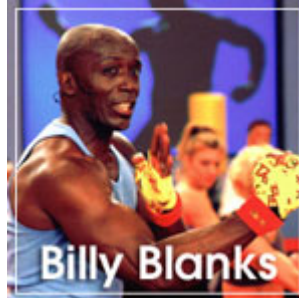


"It's very anointed," she says. "People will be shocked."

Meanwhile, maybe you've caught the latest infomercial of the new series of Tae Bo tapes and DVDs. The five tapes, called *Tae Bo 2004*, include, instructional, strength, power, cardio and flex tapes. These tapes begin at a very basic level that is comfortable for the elderly and infirm, and move the energy level up as you continue through them.

The package includes a set of weighted balls for strengthening and defining muscles and the cost is only \$29 or \$39, depending on where you purchase it.

One thing's for sure: You can't put Billy Blanks in a box.



Feasting Through a Season of Food Festivals

Gilroy, Calif., calls itself "the garlic capital of the world," but even if that isn't true who's going to stand nose to nose with anyone in Gilroy to dispute it? However, the evidence is pretty strong. Ninety percent of the nation's garlic crop comes from California, and most of that is grown within 100 miles of Gilroy. The Gilroy Garlic Festival is set for the last weekend in July – the 23rd through the 25th. Adult admission is \$10.

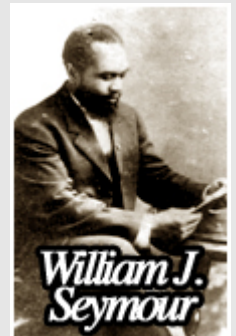
The festival's centerpiece is Gourmet Alley, "where true garlic aficionados will find the celebrated clove at its most elegant," says Geico Direct magazine. "Chefs and festival volunteers, using more than a ton of garlic, offer such delights as garlic scampi in wine sauce and calamari flambé."

For further information, contact the Gilroy Garlic Festival Association, 7473 Monterey St., Gilroy, CA 95020-5823; (408) 842-1625; or visit www.gilroygarlicfestival.com.

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Evangelist Seeks to Honor Seymour on Postage Stamp

A Florida evangelist is spearheading a drive to have the U.S. Postal Service honor William J. Seymour on a postage stamp. Seymour is the pastor who led the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. The October 1997 issue of Life magazine listed the Azusa Street Revival as one of the top 100 most significant events of the past 1,000 years.



Dr. Larry Martin, who leads the River of Revival Ministries, Inc., in Pensacola, Fla., plans to submit a formal petition on August 1, asking the Postal Service to issue a stamp in April 2006 honoring the 100th year of the Azusa revival. Seymour was the pastor of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission in that year.

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A Season of Food Festivals

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Some people believe the best crabs come from the area around Maryland's Chesapeake Bay. The little community of Crisfield is so convinced of it that every Labor Day weekend it holds a tribute to the crab called the National Hard Crab Derby & Fair. For three days at least, crab people – or crabby people – of the world can unite. There are steamed crabs, crab soup, crab salad, crab gumbo, and a great number of other crab dishes. Visitors may attend parades, fireworks, boat races, a carnival, arts and crafts exhibits, and a beauty contest in which the winner is crowned Miss Crustacean.

P.s.: She wears no pincers.

Festival date: September 3-5. Adult admission is \$4. For further information, contact the Crisfield Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 292, Crisfield, MD 21817-0292; (410) 968-2500; (800) 782-3913; or visit www.crisfield.or/crabderby.cfm.

Before William Jefferson Clinton became our 42nd President, Hope, Arkansas, was known for being something other than his birthplace. It was also the home of the Hope Watermelon Festival. Monstrously large and delicious watermelons are grown there, some weighing in at more than 200 pounds. Although there are lots of other things to do in this small town, it is still the country. If you're squeamish about being hit by a fusillade of watermelon seeds from the mouth of a nearby diner, then consider yourself warned. Remember, it's all in fun. Actually, such incidents are unlikely to occur, even during the seed-spitting contest. And you're unlikely to get hit during the melon toss, or gobbled up during the melon-eating contest.

Festival-goers will be entertained by top performers in music as diverse as country, blues, Southern gospel, Western swing, bluegrass, jazz and rock.

The Hope Watermelon Festival is held August 12-15. Admission is free, and parking is cheap. For further information, contact the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce, 108 East Third, P.O. Box 250, Hope, AR 71802-0250; (870) 777-3640; or visit www.hopemelonfest.com

We're berry, berry happy to greet you. That's what more than 100,000 festival-goers might hear as they enter in the tiny village of Warrens, Wisconsin, for the annual Warrens Cranberry Festival. The area is known as the "Cranberry capital of Wisconsin" because it has the largest concentration of cranberry marshes in the state. It also has the reputation of putting on the state's top community festival, and it has been ranked among the "Top 100 Events" in the nation. Visitors will almost run out of berries before they run out of vendors

More than 1,000 bring their wares to the festival each year, establishing more than three miles of booths that sell everything from arts and crafts to produce, from clothing to antiques. And at all times, visitors will be exposed to the most delectable cranberry concoctions.

Admission to the Warrens Cranberry Festival, which is held September 24 to 26, is free. For further information, contact the Warren Cranberry Festival, 402 Pine St., P.O. Box 146, Warrens, WI 54666-0146; (608) 378-4200; or visit www.cranfest.com.

The nuttiest festival in the world may be held in the town of Dothan, Alabama. Dothan and the surrounding area is where 65 percent of the nation's peanuts are grown. That's why it's called the "Peanut Capital of the World." The National Peanut Festival Inc. is a nine-day function that includes a grand parade, a cow-milking competition, tennis, a bowling tournament, a karate tournament, agricultural and homemaking exhibits, pageants, live entertainment and much more.

Unlike the summer festivals, the peanut festival is November 5-13. Admission is free. Contact the National Peanut Festival, 5622 U.S. Hwy. 231 South, Dothan, AL 36301-7899; phone (334) 793-4323; or visit www.nationalpeanutfestival.com

A may seem hard to get excited about a festival built around a lentil. After all, a lentil is a legume, a bean. But in eastern Washington, people are not ashamed of bean-eating. Thousands from the state and neighboring northern Idaho turn out for the National Lentil Festival. During August 20-21, Pullman, Wash., will be crowded with visitors out tasting the lentil chili and numerous other exciting lentil dishes. In addition to a lentil cook-off, other activities include a 5K Fun Run, a 100K Tour de Lentil Bike Race, and other events. Admission is free.

Contact the National Lentil Festival, 415 N. Grand Ave., Pullman, WA 99163-3133; (800) 365-6948; www.lentilfest.com

An understandably popular gathering is the Maine Lobster Festival. Even at an admission fee of \$5-10, you'd think organizers would have to beat people off with a stick. But every year the festival shoots for more lobster, and more people. Last year, visitors consumed 12.8 tons of Maine's finest. This year the goal is 16 tons. The setting is Harbor Park in Rockland, overlooking Penobscot Bay. Festival activities include a parade, top-notch musical entertainment, a 10K race, marine exhibits, a carnival with rides, and so forth. The festival will be held August 4-8.

Contact the Maine Lobster Festival, P.O. Box 552, Rockland, ME 04841-0552; (800) LOB-Claw (562-2529); or visit www.mainelobsterfestival.com

We might have saved the best for last, but we're not sure, only because it's something we've never tasted. In Silverton, Colo., we know that people fall over themselves for it, but most Americans have never even seen it. We're speaking here about that world-famous root called rhubarb. Historic Silverton is the setting for the International Rhubarb Festival, which is held every year on Independence Day. It's a real American festival, with a brass band, floats and motorcycles. Visitors come for the fun, but they stay for the rhubarb pie, cobblers, cakes and ice cream. Admission is free.

International Rhubarb Festival, P.O. Box 68, Silverton CO 81433-0068; (970) 387-5770; or visit www.silverton.org

Happy eating!

Apologies to the spring issue of Geico Direct magazine, from which almost all of the facts were derived.



Evangelist Honors Seymour, Azusa Street

(continued from page one)



Dr. Martin says he has pondered the stamp campaign for a couple of years, but didn't get it moving until about six months ago.

"I have been a student of the [Azusa Street] revival for a number of years," he said. "I wrote a biography of Seymour and I'm working a complete series of books on the revival."

Dr. Martin is hoping to involve hundreds, if not thousands, of churches in his effort by getting member to write letters or sign petitions addressed to the Postmaster General/Washington D.C., but sent to him. Time is running out; the cutoff date is July 1. A portion

of a sample letter on his website reads:

In a year when more African Americans were lynched than in any other year, the races mixed freely at Azusa Street Mission. Under Seymour's leadership, blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Asians all worshipped together.

I am asking you to release a postage stamp to honor Bishop Seymour on the 100th anniversary of this great revival.

The son of slave parents, Seymour is often credited with being the father of the modern Pentecostal movement. He was born in abject poverty on May 2, 1870, in the town of Centerville, Louisiana. After reaching adulthood, he left to work in Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and other states, often as a waiter. In Indianapolis, he converted to Methodism, but soon joined a Holiness congregation. In Cincinnati, Ohio, he contracted smallpox. The disease nearly took his life, leaving him blind in one eye and his face so scarred that he wore a beard the rest of his life.

Seymour was in Houston, Texas, in 1905. There, he first heard the Pentecostal message while attending a Bible school conducted by Charles F. Parham. Since Seymour was black, he was forced to listen to the teaching from the hallway because he was not allowed to sit in the class with the other students. Nevertheless, in a few weeks he was able to teach Parham's sermons himself. Though he had not yet received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, soon, he and Parham were holding joint meetings in Houston. Parham would minister to white audiences and Seymour would minister to black audiences.

Seymour arrived in Los Angeles in February 1906, but his first efforts to minister in the city were rebuffed by a church leadership suspicious of his message. Finally, he joined with a prayer group meeting at 214 North Bonnie Brae Street. A few weeks later, on April 9, powerful outpouring began in which many received the in-filling of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Hundreds began gathering at the home, spilling out into the street. On April 12, Seymour himself received the baptism. The group began to search for a larger facility and found a building at 312 Azusa Street, which had formerly been African American Methodist Church. The ramshackle downstairs portion of the building became the home of the Apostolic Faith Mission, and from it the revival fires fanned out across the nation and the world. People came from far and near to become a part of what was going on at Azusa Street, which is now part of Los Angeles' Little Tokyo community. One attendee said a thousand persons at a time would crowd onto the property, spilling out from the building into the street. The Apostolic Faith Mission eventually sent missionaries to twenty-five different countries.

To contact Dr. Martin, visit www.azusastreet.org, or write him at River of Revival Ministries, Inc., P.O. Box 36355, Pensacola, Fla. 32516, phone (850) 457-7057.

Western States Show Rise in Religious Activity

A recent study by The Barna Group, a Christian research firm in Ventura, Calif., indicates that religious activity has increased in the West. Overall, the survey found that Bible reading by adults in places other than at church had climbed 7 percent over the past decade, from 37 to 44 percent. Bible reading among Protestants had the most noticeable rise, from 47 to 59 percent.

Bible reading among residents in the West Coast states (California, Oregon and Washington) rose from 29 percent a decade ago to 44 percent today.

Another change was in participation in small groups that meet during the week for the purpose of prayer, Bible study or spiritual fellowship, not including Sunday school or other church meetings. In 1994, just 12 percent of adults engaged in such meetings during the week. Currently, 20 percent of adults participate. The biggest increase was evident among men (a 100 percent leap to 18 percent). Residents of the West increased participation from 11 to 26 percent.

The final area of growth was in personal prayer. While the Barna studies did not track this area in 1994, the 1999 statistic was 77 percent, compared to the current measurement of 83 percent who prayed to God during the past week. The biggest increases in prayer activity were among residents of the Northeast (71 percent in 1999 to 80 percent in 2004) and atheists and agnostics (from 20 percent in 1999 to 39 percent in 2004).

Several other areas of religious activity remained flat over the past decade. They include church attendance (42 percent in 1994, 43 percent in 2004); volunteering to help a church (25 percent in 1994, 24 percent in 2004); attending adult Sunday school classes (21 percent in 1994 and in 2004), and sharing one's faith in Jesus Christ with non-believers (58 percent in 1999, 55 percent in 2004).



Though the percentage of worshipers over the past decade has remained unchanged, the continued growth in the nation's population has ushered in a flood of new worshipers. Census data indicate that the national population has grown by nearly 30 million in the past ten years. Not including children, churches have reaped the benefit of an additional 22 million adults who are available to attend services, with an estimated nine million showing up in church on a given Sunday in 2004.



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A Misguided Message About Iraq & the Media

By Stanley O. Williford

The e-mail spoke about the startling progress in Iraq that had apparently been overlooked by the media.

It said that “the country had its first 2-billion barrel export of oil in August.”

It stated that Iraq “now receives 2 times the electrical power it did before the war.”

It told that “elections are taking place in every major city, and city councils are in place.”

It spoke of “60,000” Iraqi police patrolling the streets.

The e-mail, circulated mainly among Christians, gave us the kind of news that many Americans are desperate to hear, real examples of how one-sided and negative our media reports have become. There were at least 18 statements that pointed to the good that American and coalition forces have accomplished since the fall of Iraq.

Sadly, it turns out that too many of the statements – like the four examples mentioned above – were simply wrong. About half were true, and a couple were yet unproven. Although the e-mail wasn’t totally misleading, on the whole it wasn’t a great example of journalistic research. Whether it did more good than harm cannot be measured. But for a moment, I exulted in it.

The misguided memo pointed up how hungry we are to hear that our nation is on the right track. At a time when Americans are embarrassed by the perverse images of naked and abused men in Abu Ghraib prison, grieved over the sight of numerous flag-draped coffins on their way back to America, and angered by the beheading of an American businessman; at a time when we despair of hearing of the constant ambushing of our military people, and of soldiers shredded in roadside bombings, it means a lot to get any semblance of good news.

Like most Americans weary of the bad news coming out of Iraq, I became ecstatic after reading the copy of Sgt. Ray Reynolds’s e-mail. It had been sent to me by a tireless church member who makes it a practice to keep certain other members of our congregation well informed.

“Finally,” I thought after reading it, “here’s something good we can post on the website.” But then my own reportorial instincts began to kick in. “How can we verify this information?” I wondered. “Suppose it’s all a cruel hoax?”

The best way to find out, I decided, was to backtrack through the e-mails as far as I could go. However, the person I contacted first apparently had been notified already that some of the information she was disseminating was untrue. She e-mailed me the website for TruthorFiction.com, a Christian group set up to deal with rumors and statements of questionable validity. TruthorFiction.com also had received the Sgt. Reynolds memo and had begun to check on some of the statements. The group pointed out on its website that the picture that Reynolds had painted was not quite as rosy as it seemed.

The following is a copy of the e-mail sent by Sgt. Reynolds, who identifies himself as a medic in the Iowa Army National Guard. In the light-face type are Reynolds’ comments. In the bold-face type are TruthorFiction.com comments:

As I head off to Baghdad for the final weeks of my stay in Iraq, I wanted to say thanks to all of you who did not believe the media. They have done a very poor job of covering everything that has happened. I am sorry that I have not been able to visit all of you during my two-week leave back home. And just so you can rest at night knowing something is happening in Iraq that is noteworthy, I thought I would pass this on to you. This is the list of things that have happened in Iraq recently: (Please share it with your friends and compare it to the version that your paper is producing.)

◆ Over 400,000 kids have up-to-date immunizations. **[This statement is not only true, but it’s understated. According to UNICEF, by the end of 2003, more than 3½ million children had been immunized.]**

- ◆ School attendance is up 80% from levels before the war. **[True. UNICEF puts the figure even higher, at 95 percent.]**
- ◆ Over 1,500 schools have been renovated and rid of the weapons stored there so education can occur. **[Another understated truth. UNICEF says more than 2,500 schools have been renovated.]**
- ◆ The port of Uhm Qasar was renovated so grain can be off-loaded from ships faster. **[This statement is true, too. Apparently the port is modern and functioning for the first time in 20 years.]**
- ◆ The country had its first 2 billion-barrel export of oil in Aug. **[This is untrue, says the U.S. Agency for International Development. More than 2 million barrels a day are being produced.]**
- ◆ Over 4.5 million people have clean drinking water for the first time ever in Iraq. **[This is untrue, according to the USAID. Safe drinking water was not widespread in Iraq before the U.S.-led coalition invaded, but that was because water treatment systems were in disrepair, or had been looted.]**
- ◆ The country now receives 2 times the electrical power it did before the war. **[Again, this is untrue. USAID says power was restored in October 2003 to slightly more than pre-war levels.]**
- ◆ 100% of the hospitals are open and fully staffed, compared to 35% before the war. **[True. All 249 hospitals in Iraq, as well as 2,400 primary health care clinics were operating as of December, 2003.]**
- ◆ Elections are taking place in every major city, and city councils are in place. **[Untrue. In June 2003, U.S. authorities called halts to local election across Iraq and chose to put hand-chosen mayors or administrators into office. According to the Army News Service, there were three truly democratic elections by the end of 2003 in the cities of Tallafar, Zumar and Al-Eyaldia in northern Iraq.]**
- ◆ Sewer and water lines are installed in every major city. **[This statement remains unproven. According to USAID, the water and sewage in Iraq has been suffering from years of neglect, electricity shortages, and postwar looting. Work is under way to restore healthy water and sewage treatment.]**
- ◆ Over 60,000 police are patrolling the streets. **[Untrue. All accounts regarding the Iraqi police say that the goal is to have 35,000 to 50,000 in place by 2005 or 2006, says the U.S. State Department.]**
- ◆ Over 100,000 Iraqi civil defense police are securing the country. **[Untrue. The Civil Defense Corps is composed of Iraqis who remain citizens, as opposed to serving full time in the military, and are integrated into the coalition military units.]**
- ◆ Over 80,000 Iraqi soldiers are patrolling the streets side by side with U.S. soldiers. **[Untrue. The first Iraqi Army battalion of 700 soldiers graduated in Oct. 2003. By Feb. 2004, 3,500 had been recruited, about 2,000 of those being operational.]**
- ◆ Over 400,000 people have telephones for the first time ever. **[Unproven. No statistics are immediately available. Most of the work has been to restore telephone communications that were lost because of damage from the war.]**
- ◆ Students are taught field sanitation and hand-washing techniques to prevent the spread of germs. **[True.]**
- ◆ An interim constitution has been signed. **[True.]**
- ◆ Girls are allowed to attend school. **[True, but misleading because this is not new. According to Human Rights Watch, Iraqi girls and women have enjoyed comparatively more rights than in some other countries of the Middle East.]**
- ◆ Textbooks that don’t mention Saddam are in the schools for the 1st time in 30 years. **[True.]**

Don’t believe for one second that these people do not want us there. I have met many, many people from Iraq that want us there, and in a bad way. They say they will never see the freedoms we talk about, but they hope their children will. We are doing a good job in Iraq and I challenge anyone, anywhere to dispute me on these facts. If you are like me and very disgusted with how this period of rebuilding has been portrayed, email this to a friend a let them know there are good things happening.

Ray Reynolds
Iowa Army National Guard
234th Signal Battalion