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Wilburn delivers comedy to souls

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All Aaron Wilburn wanted was to be a songwriter. But somewhere down the line, he ended up in comedy.

It's a good thing because had Wilburn not become a musician and comedian, audiences would have been deprived of a double blessing.

I discovered this when I attended a recent fundraiser for Taking Back the Streets in the Name of Jesus Ministries. Wilburn was in town to headline the event, and I was fortunate to be seated at his table.

Our conversation was fascinating.

At age 11, Wilburn wrote his first song. He started recording songs at 16. In between he gave his life to the Lord and went on to become a successful Southern gospel songwriter, touring with the Happy Goodmans and penning hits for the likes of Bill Gaither, Shirley Caesar and the Mighty Clouds of Joy.

Yet for all his success, which includes membership in the Alabama Music Hall of Fame, this country boy from a small town in Alabama called Bobo (yes, Bobo) hasn't forgotten his Southern roots.

Humble and accommodating, Wilburn happily sat down with me for a chat after the fundraiser about his career and his faith.

"Faith is everything," Wilburn said of his 30-plus years in show business. "(Laughter) is a gift God has given to the world, and it's healing. God helps me use laughter to get people to a place where he can minister joy into their spirits."

Wilburn usually does about 130 engagements a year, performing at churches, arenas and conferences throughout the U.S. His hilarious clean songs and jokes, including the phrase, "bless his heart," have increased his fan base thanks to the Internet, where his performance of "If My Nose

See LEWIS, 2B

Is Running Money" has been viewed on YouTube more than 6 million times. Now living in Hendersonville, Tenn., Wilburn is a father and a grandfather. He has been married 22 years. His family is a frequent topic of his act, which covers everything from redneck culture to bossy GPS systems and antioxidant black pepper.

Still a songwriter, Wilburn recently wrote a tune for legendary R&B singer Percy Sledge that will appear on Sledge's next album. Wilburn also just released his 10th comedy CD, "O Blessed Tail Lights."

In 2013 Wilburn will travel with other well-known Christian artists to Haiti as part of Cruise with a Cause, a missions cruise that will dispense water filters, computers, supplies and revival to people in Port-au-Prince. The cruise will make history as the first ship of its kind allowed to dock in Haitian waters in 25 years.

Wilburn beamed at that thought, recalling an encounter with a man whose wife was suffering from terminal cancer and depression.

"I'll never forget, I was in Houston and he walked up to me after the show with tears in his eyes and said, 'thank you for allowing me to hear my wife laugh again.' " Wilburn said. "It's those kinds of moments that make going out on the road worthwhile."

Just then, someone walked up to us and Wilburn looked at me apologetically.

His ride was waiting. It was time to go. I arose and smiled, sad to see the interview come to an end.

I could have listened to him for hours. Bless his heart.

Lakendra Lewis is an author, freelance writer and founder of Diamond Ministry.

Caption: LAKENDRA LEWIS

SPIRITUAL MATTERS

Wilburn recently wrote a tune for legendary R&B singer Percy Sledge.

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