

# BARRY CRAIG

Spotlights dance on stage to the rhythms of Barry Craig. Now, they do, but a year ago he couldn't get on the stage. He had talent, he could sell a song, but the Navy Band couldn't buy...no openings for a pop/gospel vocalist. Three times they told him so, in '68, '70 and '71.

Each time he returned to his duty station, organized another choir and band and did his thing – entertain. There are a lot of people in the services who have worked under Barry's direction, from his seven-piece rock band, "Market Time Express," and an interservice choir in Vietnam to his 27-man choir on the USS Butte.

Not bad for a graduate of the Navy's Cargo Handling and Counter-Insurgency schools and a veteran of two tours in Vietnam and sea duty in the Mediterranean. To Barry, Da-nang, Chu-Lai, Camrahn Bay, Saigon, Malta, Athens, Corfu, Naples, Rota, Guantanamo Bay and Boston are identified by musical memories.

Barry first sang at age five with his mother, gospel singer/pianist Orabelle Craig, in the family home and church in Toledo, Ohio. His father, the Reverend Booker T. Nelson, is a Baptist minister in Cleveland, Ohio.

"I always wanted to be a singer," Barry said. "It has always been in my mind. When I got to high school, I was encouraged to stay with singing, although I got a lot of laughing from my brothers and sisters for singing opera." While in high school he won superior ratings in vocal competitions at Kent, Bowling Green and Ohio Universities.

After graduation in 1966, and "With Uncle Sam at my door," Barry enlisted in the Navy and volunteered for Vietnam. He returned to civilian life in 1970, because "There was no place in the Navy for a popular vocalist." He sang and played piano in clubs in Philadelphia and the Midwest, and cut a 45 record on the Hallmark label, *By the Time I Get to Phoenix* and *Top of the Mountain*.

Restless, he auditioned a third time for the Navy Band, was turned down but reenlisted in the Navy anyway, since "It was all I knew after high school." Back in Vietnam again, he formed "Market Time Express." He also entered the All-Navy Talent Contest. During his first hitch, Barry had won the Naval District Talent Contest in Davisville, R.I., in both 1968 and 1969. Now, in 1971, he was trying to return to Davisville for the big one. But no funds were available and his request was turned down.

"I sent a letter requesting to go to the U.S. to participate as a representative of all Navy people in Vietnam." Finally, with the aid of the Chief of Chaplains, his request was approved, but he had only two days to make the trip. And he had only two dollars and change in his pocket. A flight to Seattle, another to Chicago, a third to Davisville, all on November 3. The plane landed at 8:20 p.m. and at 8:40, Barry was on stage singing...no rehearsal, no rest, no time to nause after the grueling flight. He walked away with second prize, an honor and definite surprise under those adverse conditions.

Back to Vietnam, he was assigned to the Force Chaplain in Saigon, and another choir was formed. He also learned that the Navy was now accepting vocalists in the Musician



rating. Barry was the first vocalist to enter the School of Music in Norfolk, but "Who teaches the only vocalist in a school that has just instrumentalists? I studied piano, theory and harmony."

Upon graduation, Barry auditioned for the Navy Band for the fourth time, and immediately was accepted. His first assignment was to PORT AUTHORITY. "Outta sight! My heart will always be with PORT AUTHORITY. Them kids, they're outta sight!"

Barry is "outta sight" too – he's doing his thing, entertaining the people. And he's good – always cooking! Barry is a featured vocalist with the COMMODORES, one of the top "big bands" in the country. They make lots of good sounds to back his songs, but his powerful baritone voice booms up and over.

He stands at the mike, head cocked in the air, surveying the audience. Lt. (j.g.) Brittain, Director of the COMMODORES, gives the downbeat and Barry turns it on. Driving rock, ballads and gutsy soul, with beautiful polished showmanship is his act. It gets the audience turned on and they join in, clapping and singing, following his soulful sounds.

From rehearsals and recording sessions to tour and one-nighters, Barry Craig is always "on stage," performing in the spotlight.