



## AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL PEARCE

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I was only a few days into my first year at Wheaton College (Illinois) in 1974 when I heard a recording of a trombone player down the hall from my dorm room. I was familiar with the many recordings of my then trombone heroes: Urbie Green, J.J. Johnson, Bill Watrous, and George Roberts. But this sound was something so different, so fresh, so new, that I ran down the hall to discover a friend playing a new LP record by a trombonist named Bill Pearce. While the name was new to me, I was to learn that Bill Pearce was at that time, and remains today, one of the most recorded trombonists of the 20th century with over thirty albums to his name. Hearing Bill Pearce play in my dorm began what was to become a wonderful friendship as I came to meet Bill shortly after my first encounter with one of his recordings and we have enjoyed being in contact ever since.



When thinking of Bill Pearce's playing, the first word which comes to my mind is "sweet." His lyrical playing is smooth and supple, and while he has a blistering technique and a double tongue which, should he wish to do so, could play "Blue Bells of Scotland" in record time, his trademark has always been his soaring high range which, combined with his tasteful slide vibrato, never fails to move listeners.

Trombonists today may scratch their head and wonder, "If Bill Pearce has recorded so much, why don't I know about him?" Even though he has been recording albums for over 50 years, most of his recordings for the first half of his career came out on Word, the then dominant label in Christian music. Through the 1970's, his albums, both as a trombone soloist and as a member of both the "Melody Four" Gospel quartet and the duet collaboration he had with tenor Dick Anthony, "Pearce and Anthony," were best sellers. Since that time, most of his recordings have been self-produced through Bill's syndicated radio ministry, "Nightsounds." As such, their distribution has been more limited. Information on how to obtain Bill Pearce's recordings is found at the end of this interview.

To know Bill Pearce is to love him. Rarely have I ever met a person who is more

humble and self-deprecating. Despite his undeniable stature among the first tier of jazz trombonists, he always speaks of his trombone heroes with awe, striving to learn something new from them even as they would single him out for praise. Bill's humility is a hallmark of his "Nightsounds" radio program, heard nightly on over 150 radio stations in the USA as well as in Canada and overseas. He is a quiet, vulnerable man whose program speaks directly to the heart of listeners as he offers comfort, encouragement and the peace which comes from God. "Nightsounds" is a unique blend of Bill's resonant voice, topical musical selections and passages from the Bible. As it is broadcast in many outlets late at night or early in the morning, Bill's voice has become a well known part of "night owl" radio. At the moment, "Nightsounds" does not have a presence on the world-wide web, but plans are well underway to develop a web site. However, any of the stations which carry "Nightsounds" do broadcast their programming live via RealAudio.

1999 saw the release of Bill Pearce's first compact disc album, a double CD set called "A Touch of Gold," featuring 50 tracks spanning 50 years of playing and broadcast ministry. It is a wonderful collection featuring a wide variety of styles and arrangers, and some stunning accompanying musicians including Kurt Kaiser, Larry Mayfield, The Singers Unlimited and Otis Skillings. In 2000, Bill will re-release his 1965 album, "A Quiet Place" on CD, and several of his classic recordings with the Melody Four Quartet have been remastered and released on CD as well.

Because Bill Pearce is not widely known to today's generation of trombonists, I asked Bill if he would do this interview with me for the *Online Trombone Journal*, so both players who have admired him for so long and those who do not know of him could hear him tell his story. It is a fascinating tale of one who often felt discouragement but trusted in God - a God who was faithful and put many people in Bill's path to help him through whatever difficulty he was experiencing. His is a story of struggle, perseverance, humility and dependence on God. It cannot fail to move.

Now in his 70's and dealing with the effects of Parkinson's Disease, Bill no longer is playing the trombone publicly but his "Nightsounds" radio ministry continues unabated. Bill's story is an inspiring one, and I found myself, during the interview, becoming overcome with emotion myself. Knowing Bill Pearce for over 25 years has been one of the great privileges of my life, and as you read this interview, I'm sure you will end up considering him a friend as well. Thanks, Bill, for your lifetime of inspiration.

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**Douglas Yeo:** Bill, give us some background on your life as a youngster growing up and your early experiences with the trombone.

**Bill Pearce:** It all began in a place called Carlisle, Pennsylvania, near Harrisburg, the state capitol. I was born on May 20, 1926. We later lived in the Philadelphia area, and moved for a time to a Welsh community called BalaCynwyd. I have an older brother and sister; my brother is a retired physician and my older sister is fine



trumpet player. Long ago Phil Spitalni with his all girl orchestra invited her to play first trumpet. The three of us had a brass trio together. My sister played lead and my brother trumpet as well even though he didn't end up specializing in music.

My Dad was an itinerant Methodist minister who had a radio program on the top Philadelphia and Camden commercial stations: WFIL, WIP and WCAM. It was a daily broadcast called "Christian Voices." He was the speaker, my mother played piano and sang with her beautiful soprano voice and our brass trio held forth.

So in our home we had a good background in music. My first interest in music really was grade school orchestra - they needed a clarinet player and whether I looked like one or not, I was chosen to play an old metal clarinet. I didn't take to that instrument at all, and it just frustrated the Dickens out of me. I finally got angry enough to throw it down on my mattress hard enough that I slightly bent it, so we had a repair bill to start out with.

I took the clarinet back and they it got repaired, and my grade school music teacher thought a trombone might work better for me and fit in better with our family and their brass instruments. Growing up, we had a lot of young people visiting in our home; my dad had a Bible class there and some well known evangelical Christian folks in the Philadelphia area would come to that including a new pioneer youth evangelist who had just come in from the west coast named Percy Crawford. He formed a group called the Young People's Church of the Air which was on the radio for an hour every Sunday - teen agers flocked to it. He had a male vocal quartet that was excellent and also formed a brass quartet made up of two trumpets and a trombone and either an alto horn or another trombone. The quartet would often come over and practice at our house and the trombone player played very well.

I recall when I was about 10 years old, during a break in one of their practice sessions, looking at the trombone which the trombone player had left on his chair. I was fascinated by it and wondered if I could ever make any sounds on a thing like that. I began to pester my dad and showed an interest in getting a trombone and he bought me an old King trombone for \$20 at a local second hand shop. That worked pretty well - it was enough to get me started. I had a Victrola record player in my third floor room and I put some old 78 RPM John Philip Sousa marches on and tried to sort of moan my way along with them. My teacher, who was at my school, came around once a week to give private lessons. He tied a little rope around my slide so I wouldn't use it. He just wanted me to start making a good tone and stop messing around with those recordings.

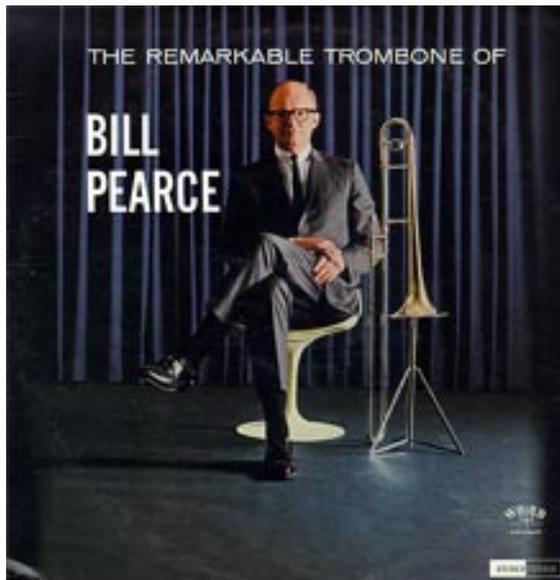
I guess I had a knack for it because it began to come along. I had an ear and I could figure out some of the slide positions, so I began to investigate on my own. Along the way, I picked up some Harry James recordings. He really knocked me for a loop; I thought he was just fantastic. I soon became a jazz fan and started putting away all of my allowance to buy some 78 RPM RCA jazz records.

One day I heard an unusual 78 RMP record. On one side of the disc was a recording of Knute Rockne, the famous football coach of Notre Dame, speaking - no, rather, yelling - at his team during halftime and they were losing, so you can imagine the energy there. However on the flip side of this funny old recording was a trombone

solo by somebody named Tommy Dorsey. It was called "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You." Well, you know the rest of the story. I was absolutely intrigued by the sound this guy got on that old scratchy 78, so I thought, well, why can't that be me?

My folks thought I might have some promise and they found a new teacher for me in Philadelphia in a music store called Henton-Knecht Band Instruments. Actually, he was more than just a teacher, in fact you may remember the name Donald Rheinhardt. He was famous for his "pivot" system of mouthpiece placement. He was a clinician, a visionary, a pioneer, a trail blazer, and all of the great musicians, both symphonic and jazz, as they came through Philadelphia, would come and spend a couple of hours with Don Rheinhardt. He's the guy my parents sent me to to start taking lessons with! At 11 years of age! This guy was so cerebral that I didn't know what he was talking about half the time. He would theorize with me, trying to get me away from the "Dorsey sound" which he thought was a plague even though I thought it was wonderful!

To tell you the truth I didn't make out too well as a student of Don Rheinhardt because I just felt that he was intimidating - my being so young and all - so I thought it was time to move on. So, as it turned out, on one Sunday afternoon in 1937, Percy



Crawford asked "little 11 year old Billy Pearce" to play a solo on his radio program which was recorded at a summer camp in the Pocono Mountains called Pinebrook. So, with his wife Ruth as the accompanist, I had my radio debut on the trombone. It was the Gospel song, "He Lives" (two verses and an extra refrain in B flat - no variations). It was broadcast across the Nation! Incidentally, a new Gospel singer from Canada named "George Beverly Shea" was on the same program!

The teacher I went to next was my band teacher in high school. He was a military type and very strict about my doing everything it by the book and the book was the Arban method of course. When he would call me in for a lesson I would know that was pending so I would get about 5 minutes of cramming in to see what I could do with lip trills and making decent sounds and scales and things like that. He didn't dig that at all and finally he dismissed me, saying I wasn't serious enough, that he wanted to spend his time with musicians who really wanted to play. So, I went back to my junior high school teacher who encouraged me all over the place. He gave me a solo to learn - he was trying to enter me into the state contest because he thought I showed some promise. I'll never forget that piece he gave me to play; it was called "La Comparcita." It was a Latin thing and I got kind of tired of that within 2 pages. I couldn't get into that at all, it was too technical, I thought, another planet for me. It just seemed too impossible, so I thought, well, I'll just try to do what comes to me naturally.

So I began to do things on my own, and listened a lot. Back in those days you could

get into the theater for about 50 cents but you could stay all day. You would see the same movie, but between shows, as they were rewinding the reels, they had these name bands on stage doing a 20 or 30 minutes concert. The first time I heard Tommy Dorsey was when Gene Krupa was his drummer. It was completely dark in the theater and you heard those drums begin - it was Krupa doing a tom-tom solo, and before you knew it they were into "Song of India." I was totally mesmerized by the whole thing. Later Glenn Miller came through with his band and that was a precision unit if there ever was one. His brass players were right on the money, just amazing. So that's the kind of dream I had as a kid growing up.

I finally got a spot with Percy Crawford's brass quartet and worked with those guys as they traveled. As we were better known and got more invitations, we spread out from the Philadelphia area to New York, New England down to Baltimore and Washington DC and so on. That was good training for me - the first trumpet player was sort of a hero to me. He looked sharp, he combed his hair right, his glasses even looked good, dressed correctly, and was just a very clean person. His playing matched his image. So, I learned a lot about purity, how to form a beautiful tone and to play "within limits!"

**DY:** How was it that you came to be a Christian?

**BP:** My dad was preaching in a small church in New Jersey, speaking on the subject of Christ's return, and God just got a hold of me. I was the first one down the aisle to make a decision to follow Christ. From then on it was "touch and go" in my Christian life, and by the time I got into the service I knew I had to make some decisions because I was in a life and death position there - we were on our way to some serious campaigns in the Pacific. I eventually got to Iwo Jima with a Marine show-band I played in, entertaining the troops. I took time to go down to the beach at Iwo Jima soon after the island was taken. The artifacts of war were still in the sand and the white crosses were there and I saw Mt. Suribachi where they took that famous shot of putting the flag up, and I saw the pill boxes and the way guys were pinned down in that ridge of volcanic ash. I was really touched that night when I looked around the beach there. Something happened inside of me. I thought "I have to get out of this thing and start making a purpose to my direction," and that day I had a new awareness of God's claim on my life.

**DY:** So, you were in the military service during the World War II. How did that come about?

**BP:** When I was 18, World War II was on and many of us were swept out of high school into the service of our country. Most people waited to be drafted and joined the army. The Navy quota was full, and I decided I wanted to be a Marine like my father had been. He was a drill instructor and an officer at Parris Island (South Carolina) and at the officer training center in Quantico, VA during in World War I. He used to tell me stories about the Marine Corps so, on the basis of that I went down one day and asked to enlist. Before I knew it I was on a train to boot camp at Parris Island. And that was an experience in itself. To make a longer story very short, we went through basic training with everybody else. I survived Parris Island and we went to 15 weeks of jungle training at Camp Lejune and then another several weeks

out to camp Pendelton. By that time we were bona fide valid members of the Marine Corps Infantry, having had to qualify on just about every weapon there was from small arms to flame throwers to grenades to BAR's to light and heavy machine guns, the M-1 rifle, and so on.

So we were dutifully prepared for whatever the enemy was, and got shipped into the 3rd Division on the way to Iwo Jima and the Pacific. My father, having been in the service in World War I, knew some of the military people who had become generals later and one of his speaking engagements in Washington, DC found him over the the Pentagon to look up some of his old buddies. As they discussed the old days, he said, "I've got a son who's an army physician in the Army and a younger son who's in the Marine Corps down at Lejune, shipping out." They checked on me in the records and found I was indeed a machine gunner in the infantry, on the way to the Pacific.

Well, I didn't realize something was up until as we were queuing up to get on the trains to go on out to the west coast and on to the Pacific islands, they called my name, and I remember the Sargent who yelled, "I don't know who in "H" you know - in heaven or wherever - but you've been transferred out of this unit. Get your gear and move over to Hadnot Point," which was the main barracks of Camp Lejune. Well, I did that, and before I knew it, I was in the band because they had transferred me out of Washington that day since my dad had said I think that my son Bill would be of more service to you as a bandsman than as an infantry man. They took his word for it and before I knew it I was in the band. I sent for my instrument and soon found myself playing first trombone in the Camp Lejune staff band marching in the pivot position of the front line next to the Director!

So, having gone through "Semper Fidelis" and learning that backwards and forwards doing countless marches and parades for six months, we got another General at the camp who was a tough number and decided that no Marine should go through his tour of duty without going overseas or seeing action or something like that. So before I knew it I was on the train again with my 60 pound pack and Seabag going out to the Pacific theatre. I made it as far as Hawaii.



The day we were being shipped out was an awfully rainy morning. I was depressed and in a blue funk when I heard this "sound!" I went to see what it was and it was a big band going through their paces, warming up. When they had a brief break I went to the Sargent who was leading and said "Who do I talk to to get into something like this?" He said, "What's your interest?" and I said I play trombone. He said, "I'll tell you what, we have rehearsal here at 10 o'clock every morning - get permission from your Commanding Officer and come on around here tomorrow morning so we can audition you." Well, the next day, I got my Don Reinhardt Mouthpiece out of my sea bag and grabbed a trombone from somewhere and they brought over a pianist and a fair to middling drummer and a bass player and said, "Well, what do you want to kick off?" So I thought a second and remembered we had played in junior high something called "Honey Suckle Rose," in the key of F, so I said, "How about Honey Suckle Rose, in the key of F?" And he said, "Great." So he gave me an intro. I guess I went about half way through it, having not played for quite awhile, but evidently they had heard enough so the Sargent said, "Hold it!" He told me to go down to the quartermaster, and turn in my rifle and grab a trombone from the warehouse of musical instruments. Well, as you can imagine I hopped to and that warehouse had the best of everything - Steinway pianos and French Selmers - you name it. I picked out a beautiful French Selmer trombone with a white case and a purple plush lining inside and engraving all the way up the bell and a big "USMC" down the front and man, this was a class item! So, that's what I did during - playing my way, entertaining Navy and Marine Corps troops in the Pacific theatre and mainland China until discharge.

**DY:**Where did things lead after that?

**BP:** After the war I tried going to junior college under the GI bill but it wasn't for me. I never did too well in school. I was a learning disability kid - of course we didn't know what it was back then. I didn't seem to be able to learn in the system, I wasn't able to concentrate, or to retain any kind of information. I think now they call it

Attention Deficit Disorder, or Learning Deficit Disorder. After the war I worked a little driving a truck and played a few dance jobs around here and there. And I joined the American Legion drum and bugle corps, They had these baritone bugles with one valve. So I got in as many groups as I could that I could fit in with, mostly dance jobs.

Some time later I found myself in Chicago and thought I'd go to the Moody Bible Institute, but I flunked out there within a semester. I was then in a real spot because they needed to give my room to a "more serious student." After drifting for three or four days around Chicago and doing a lot of praying, I wandered up to the radio department of Moody. They owned about seven big stations, and the head announcer said to me, "I can't get you out of my mind - would you ever have any interest in taking an announcing job here at WMBI radio?" I said, "No, not really, because I have a pretty bad Philadelphia accent and I don't know what to say." And he said, "Why don't you take a shot at it?" So I did; I took an audition, and he evidently passed me. I think he was either an angel or the Lord put him there, because he was "the man in the middle" who was really standing there at the time I was wavering. He talked to the program director even though I didn't have the greatest record at the school, so they put me on six months probation. I got the job and stayed for 25 years.

During those six months I got "fired up" and I thought, "I am in a moment of truth here, I'm going to be a loser in life, I'm a drifter - here's God's opportunity that He's given me," so I decided I was going to learn how to speak. Tape was just invented then and they had a Magnacord tape recorder at WMBI. So I got with that tape recorder and I practiced vocabulary through the Reader's Digest "Word Power" section, learned a new word every couple of days and used it. I worked on the vowel sounds and listened to the great voices at NBC and CBS like Dave Garroway and Paul Harvey. I was a newsman and announcer and I worked on my stuttering and my air-headedness and fortunately found an older man at the radio station who took an interest in helping me and got me into the Word of God. He taught me to think more clearly in some other areas than my own interest, and also urged me to keep a "journal" which I do to this day. He really helped me to get my feet on the ground.

Before I knew it I was made "Special Events" director at the station. I was also doing news on the outside, freelance interviewing and so on. I was the newsman for one of our announcers, one of those bubbly guys who did the morning show. We got chatting one morning and he asked if I had ever tried singing. I said I hadn't ever really thought about it and he said, "Well, why don't you do a solo for us sometime one morning?" So I took him up on it something new started. A new guy just came into the Moody music department named Dick Anthony and he and I got into a vocal duet ministry which lasted for 30 years.

Dick was a very fine musician. The musical chemistry we had was quietly exciting. I found myself totally turned on, and I gave it everything I had. Before I knew it, WMBI was auditioning a new group called the "Melody Four Quartet" and miraculously I got in it as the bass. Word Records [NB: Word Records in Waco, Texas, was for many years the leading Christian music record label] was just starting and we were the first of a stable of artists. Dick and I were a duet team called "Pearce and Anthony," and we did our first five or six albums on Word. The quartet did more

albums with Word than I can count. So we were off and running.

Kurt Kaiser came playing piano through Chicago and he and I hooked up with my trombone and before I knew it we were recording "head arrangements" for Word. Then things at Word really started shaking and Paul Mickelson and Ralph Carmichael were raising the level, using professional sidemen and before we knew it Word records was paying our production fees. We were playing with name people, including members of the Chicago Symphony string section, lead trumpet Bobbie Lewis, Mark McDunn and studio players; John Haynor was playing bass trombone with us. Guys like this were playing backgrounds. We were just at the right place at the right time. I was working hard and new young arrangers came through with good ideas and we were doing albums with top musicians. It was just a gift of God with timing that put me in the middle of all this. I was the only one doing anything at Word in brass work at all apart from a guy in Detroit named Chuck Ohman who was a fine trumpeter whom I had worked with in Percy Crawford's days. I was just blowing bubbles, making 30 or 40 albums over the years - there were so many I lost count. Incredible.



**DY:** You were an unusual player in that you used large bore equipment, didn't you?

**BP:** After that first King trombone my father bought for me, I played a Conn 32 H which was my first new horn. When I got to Moody, I got a Conn 72H which was awfully big, but I liked the big bore sound. Then Dick and I did our first orchestral album and I played the 72H for that. Shortly after that I heard about the Olds Band Instrument Company out in Fullerton, California which had a warehouse in Chicago. Somebody told me of a new big bore model trombone they made called the "Opera," made in red brass and nickel silver. I made an appointment to go to Olds and come and try out one of their horns. Little did I know I was talking to the vice president of the Olds Company. I started to play around, putting the horn through its paces, intervals, pedal tones, playing high upstairs. He stopped me midstream and said, out of the blue,

"Would you have any interest in being a clinician or a soloist for our company?" I didn't know what he meant - I began to back off by saying I work with Moody Bible Institute, we don't sell anything, we don't advertise anything, it's a Christian institution and all this stuff. He said, "I'm not asking you that, but let's say you played a concert somewhere and some young player would come up and say what kind of instrument is that. Would you show him, would you tell him?" I said, "Well of course, you know I would." That's all he wanted to know, and he gave me the trombone just like that and asked me to pass on any ideas about improving the horn

and they'd see what they could do. So I walked away with that instrument, by far the most playable trombone I've ever had. The high range was phenomenal, the low range was as it should be with a .547 bore and I used a Bach 12 Mt. Vernon mouthpiece which I used my whole career after my military service until this day.

When I finally played the International Trombone Association Workshop (ITW, now the International Trombone Festival or ITF) in Nashville for the first time in the early 1970's, I was playing the Olds Opera down there, and people like jazzman Phil Wilson would come up and say, "I wouldn't want a horn that big! How do you play a .547 bore?" Well, it just worked for me. The Opera was just great, I'd never played a horn with an easier high range than that. The double high F was just great on that horn. But eventually, Olds went out of business and they gave me all the Operas they had left, three or four of them. I gave them away over time and ended up with the one left which is "under glass" in Allentown, Pennsylvania, at a television station which wanted it for a display. I did 75% of my recordings with that instrument.

Meanwhile when Olds went out of business I got invited down to the ITW again. King was interested in me because I started playing a 4B but it was too cumbersome. The next time I played at ITW, for the third year, Yamaha was just breaking in to brass instruments. I took a couple of the Yamaha models on the road and played them; they had a nice .547 model but it was a little heavy, but they would make a lighter slide for me as the Olds Company did. I played a Yamaha for awhile and then picked up a Bach 36G, an excellent horn, very accurate, but difficult for me to play. I made my final album on this horn. I finally gave it to a missionary who has it in Africa somewhere. I bought a Benge and tried that for awhile and it didn't work out well and sold that to a guy and picked up a Getzen 510 that had an 8 inch lightweight bell. It worked pretty well, had a difficult high range and is a .510 bore or something. Now I play a Besson bell section with a Getzen light weight slide. It's a nice horn!

**DY:** Who are the trombonists you admire and have influenced you?

**BP:** Well of course Dorsey was the first one I heard. Jack Jenny and I played with a similar approach, and Bobby Byrne was very accurate but my vibrato was different than his. I'd say Jack Teagarden also had some very interesting ideas going. Dick Nash was best for his high, lyric playing. I think I really identified with Urbie Green - he was a great encouragement to me in the few times we talked together. Of course being a little bit of a jazzer I was enamored with Bill Watrous and what he's done and Phil Wilson, too. George Roberts was another friend; he was an encouragement to me when we met at one of those Intentional Trombone Workshops in Nashville. It was great to just sit at dinner and talk quietly with that guy. He even picked me up at the airport, carried my bags and took me to dinner!

**DY:** What advice would you have for the aspiring trombonist?

**BP:** Stay with it, work with the best teachers you can, pray a lot, look for openings, play anywhere they ask you to play, grow in the word of God - it's a whole package. I remember George Roberts one time - I'll never forget it - in one of his clinics, pointing to his trombone, he said, "That is not my instrument. I am the instrument. That," pointing to the trombone, "is an amplifier of what I am." And I believe it, for

what we are and who we are spiritually, emotionally even physically comes out. As we emote and embrace the instrument, it just pulls our souls from within us.

**DY:** Your new "Touch of Gold" compilation album contains what you have called your final recorded trombone track. Which track is it and how did it come to be your last recording?

**BP:** It's the next to last track, #49, "Beyond the Sunset." A few years ago I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease which is a progressive kind of thing. I began to notice that I didn't have the control I used to have when playing - everything else seemed to be fine but playing got rough. It was tough to understand. Near the end of 1995 I began to notice less control when I played the horn. One day I was doing a huge concert in Michigan, 1000 people out there, a beautiful auditorium, great sound, great piano player. But I wasn't making it. I turned my back on the audience and I said to the Lord, "What is this?!" I tried it again and things just weren't working right - the audience didn't seem to care, but I knew something was up. So I told the audience that this is my final solo concert after 47 years on the road and so it was. There's a certain kind of exertion when playing that emotionally and physically causes my arms to get into tremor and my "playing arm" loses control.

I knew my trombone playing days were nearing an end, so I asked the Lord if he would give me one more shot at it so I could do one more solo album but the Lord said "No." So I asked my friend Otis Skillings if he would help me put down one more track. I really wanted to record "Beyond the Sunset." Would you believe it took us four three hour sessions to get through one simple little solo? I used to do an entire album in 10 hours! I worked and worked a note at a time, a phrase at a time. Otis worked with me very graciously and patiently on that. The only reason I did it was because I wanted to encourage people who may be struggling with something, with their playing, with a disease, maybe they're a paraplegic, maybe they need help, and let them know that where Christ is there's hope. It may not seem like it's that much of an effort when you hear it, but I was struggling with every note. My horn was shaking like crazy and I couldn't get a fix on the mouthpiece. So that's track 49, maybe the Lord will use it in some special way sometime. Even though I don't play publicly any more, I'm ready to give it all - to Him! I keep the trombone out of the case . . . on the stand - keeping it warm and "ready to fly!"

**DY:** You have been involved in a Christian radio ministry for 50 years, from the time you began working at WMBI in Chicago through your own program there, "Nightwatch," and for the last 30 years your own syndicated program, "Nightsounds". What is happening in your radio ministry today?

**BP:** Miracles! I wish you could see the spiritual "power surge" in people's lives, the averted suicides and encouragement that God is giving people through what we're doing. The Bible tells us in Philippians Chapter 4 that the Apostle Paul said, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." And certainly that's been the case here - the very fact that we're still afloat is a miracle to me. It's one day at a time and God is doing it. Our ministry is better than it's ever been in every way. When I get discouraged, I just look at that and say, "Here we go, I don't know, but it's up to you, Lord. Let's get into the saddle for another day."

The Lord is still moving in the Nightsounds ministry. I sometimes make mistakes and because I'm human I revert and regress and get discouraged a bit, but then I turn on the microphone, pick a subject, pull some music off the shelf and before I know it, God has done it again! Another program comes out and sometime between the recording and the editing block a miracle has happened . . . almost every night here.

**DY:** Someday Bill Pearce will move from this world to the better one. How would you like to be remembered when that time comes?

**BP:** Our aim and resolve in Nightsounds is to lift high the Cross, to settle on and emphasize the person of Jesus Christ, to reflect Him . That's been my goal for years. On the Nightsounds program, we choose a different subject every time we come on the air and I do a lot of reading and quoting, and we try to pull it together musically with personal observations and so on. I try to back off of the "speed talk" thing. The world's moving so fast today, people just need some time to sit back and think. That's what we try to do at Nightsounds - let people think and pray a little about their direction and purpose.

In all of this I want to exalt the Lord. Christianity is a risk and we're here not to be popular and we're not here in a contest, we're not on display. We're here to make a difference, so if it can be done with a trombone on a recording, or by playing in the locker room of the New York Yankees, it can be done at a Billy Graham crusade, or at an academic appearance of the greatest trombonists of the world. I've just tried to be ready when God gives me opportunities to talk about his love and mercy and grace, and I've given it all I have.

**DY:** Who are you especially looking forward to seeing in Heaven?

**BP:** Of course the Lord, I'd like a few questions of Him! Even though I wouldn't have wanted to be the Apostle Paul's roommate - he was one tough customer! - I think he'd have a lot to say. I'd like to speak to the guys who had the same kind of weaknesses I've had. David would be a champ I'd like to talk to for a while, and guys like Nehemiah and Daniel - these are winners. Peter had his foot in his mouth all the time, he was impulsive, probably one of these psychologists would nail him as an obsessive compulsive, I wonder how those guys did without eyeglasses and hearing aids and stuff! And I'd love to talk to some of the great preachers who have gone before. I'm old enough to have worked with some of them back long ago. Billy Sunday's songleader is one of them, Lewis Sperry, also Chafer, Tozer, Barnhouse, Billy Graham - all of them and more.

You know, I've been inspired by men and women of God who had something to say that is so much bigger than any of us that we know it's coming from somewhere else. I used the trombone as a tool for spreading the Gospel because it was the only thing I could do well. It's a testimony to my junior high band teacher who really helped me out. He taught me to believe in myself that I was something other than a failure.

When spreading the Gospel, the greatest thing we can do is be consistent. When I'm not consistent with what I say over the air, I'm very hesitant to even come into the studio until I get the act together again. Not that you need to be perfect, but we should progress, we can't sit in the middle of a puddle and just sit there looking

dumb, we've got to move on.

You know, Colossians 3:23-24 would be a good signature - **"Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord not unto people, knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ."**

And when these horns of ours fall into the dust and go back to the elements, we're going to have something that's lasting, and it will be our sound that's touched the hearts, the minds, the souls of people. It's invisible, but the invisible things of the world are something God uses, and that's the spirit of God working through any of us.

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**Selections from "Touch Of Gold: An Anthology"**

[Joshua](#)

4.9 MB MP3

[What Wondrous Love Is This?](#)

3.7 MB MP3

[Beyond the Sunset](#)

3.5 MB MP3

For further information about Bill Pearce's recordings including "A Touch of Gold" from which the above MP3 files are taken, see the [Selected Discography](#).

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Douglas Yeo is bass trombonist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and on the faculty of New England Conservatory of Music and Boston University. His award winning website, <http://www.yeodoug.com>, is considered one of the internet's premiere music sites and has won numerous awards for its content and design. He is an accomplished serpentist and he has also been known to play harmonica in a rock band.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL PEARCE

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Many of Bill Pearce's recordings are available on cassette or compact disc. Below is a select discography of Bill's albums. Those which are indicated as being available from "Nightsounds" (many of which include tracks from his older, out-of-print LP recordings) may be ordered for \$10.00 + \$2.00 shipping for cassettes (\$15.00 for the double cassette, "A Touch of Gold") and \$15.00 for compact discs (\$25.00 for the double CD, "A Touch of Gold"). A catalog of available recordings which includes a complete track listing is available from "Nightsounds." Also available from "Nightsounds" is a current station listing of radio outlets which carry "Nightsounds." Orders as well as correspondence for Bill Pearce may be addressed to:



Bill Pearce  
Nightsounds  
6110 Broadcast Parkway  
Rockford, Illinois 61111-4488

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**The Remarkable Trombone of Bill Pearce.** Arrangements by Kurt Kaiser. Word WST-8312-LP. Out of print.

**A Quiet Place: The Rich Trombone of Bill Pearce.** 1965. Arrangements by Kurt Kaiser. Word WST-8460-LP. Out of print, but available soon through "Nightsounds."

**Reach Out: Bill Pearce, Trombone.** 1975. Arrangements by Larry Mayfield. Word WST-8663-LP. Out of print.

**Son Of My Soul.** 1975. (Vocal album) Arrangements by Larry Mayfield. Word WST-8662-LP. Out of print.

**This is Bill Pearce.** Arrangements by Larry Mayfield. FourMost LP FM7121CS. Out of print.

**Bill Pearce, Trombone.** 1979. Arrangements by Larry Mayfield. New Dawn ZLP 3103. Out of print.

**Bill Pearce.** 1981. Arrangements by Larry Mayfield. New Dawn ZLP-3187. Out of print.

**Great Hymns of the Faith.** Bill Pearce sings hymns and tells the stories behind them. Nightsounds Cassette C09. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Together Again LIVE!.** Bill Pearce in concert with George Beverly Shea, and the Melody Four Quartet. Nightsounds Cassette C05. Available from "Nightsounds."

**What Wondrous Love.** Bill Pearce, trombone and vocal (includes previously released material from out of print discs). Nightsounds Cassette C03. Available from "Nightsounds."

**In His Likeness.** Bill Pearce, trombone and vocal (includes previously released material from out of print discs). Nightsounds Cassette C07. Available from "Nightsounds."

**The Gentle Touch.** Bill Pearce and Dick Anthony, vocal duo (includes previously released material from out of print discs). Nightsounds Cassette C04. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Encore.** Bill Pearce, trombone (includes previously released material from out of print discs). Nightsounds Cassette C08. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Bright and Beautiful.** Bill Pearce, trombone and vocal. Arrangements by Otis Skillings. Nightsounds Cassette C013, Compact Disc CDBB. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Learning to Lean.** Bill Pearce, trombone and vocal. Nightsounds Cassette C10. Available from "Nightsounds."

**16 Singing Men In Concert.** Bill Pearce with the "16 Singing Men". Nightsounds Cassette C06. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Christmas In The Air.** Bill Pearce, trombone and vocal (includes previously released material from out of print discs). Arrangements by John Innes and Larry Mayfield. Nightsounds Cassette C01. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Favorites.** Bill Pearce, trombone and vocal (includes previously released material from out of print discs). Nightsounds Cassette C012. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Touch of Gold.** Bill Pearce, trombone and vocal (includes previously released material from out of print discs). 50 selections spanning 50 years of trombone and radio broadcast ministry. Nightsounds Double Cassette C014, Double Compact Disc CDTG. Available from "Nightsounds."

**Cornerstone.** Douglas Yeo, bass trombone. Bill Pearce contributes several

readings of Bible verses on this recording. Die Letzte Posaune CD 83175.  
Available from [Douglas Yeo](#).

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