

## CELEBRATING GOSPEL MUSIC WEEK

Mr. Speaker, beginning this weekend, more than 3,000 individuals will gather in my hometown of Nashville to celebrate one of the most exciting and fastest-growing segments of the music industry. While most people around the world think of Nashville-Music City-as the place to come to enjoy the best country and bluegrass music in the world, Nashville is also home to another powerful music force: the Gospel Music Association.

From April 1st through April 5th, Nashville will host Gospel Music Week. It is five days of concerts, worship services, performance showcases, educational seminars and exhibits, all culminating on Wednesday evening with the GMA Music Awards. Known as the Dove Awards, this year's ceremony will be held at the Grand Ole Opry House and hosted by Rebecca St. James and Kirk Franklin, both Grammy and Dove Award winners themselves. St. James and Franklin will also perform during the evening's program that will feature artists ranging from soulful gospel to guitar driven pop to powerful quartet harmonizing and more.

The sold-out event is a testimony to the popularity and power of gospel music today. Christian and gospel music sales have increased from \$381 million in 1995 to over \$700 million annually, an 80 percent increase over the last decade. Over 43.5 million units of Christian and gospel music CDs, cassettes, digital albums, and digital tracks were sold in 2005. That figure represents over 6 percent of all music sales in 2005 and ranks higher than Latin, Soundtracks, Jazz or Classical releases.

As John W. Styll, president of the Gospel Music Association has said, this growth in the Christian and gospel music isn't surprising. "The heart of gospel music may be in the lyrics, but the soul is in the passion with which these artists perform."

Clearly, the world is passionate about gospel music and the many outstanding artists who will appear in Nashville in the coming days. I salute each of these individuals, and the Gospel Music Association, as they prepare for the 37th Annual GMA Music Awards and Gospel Music Week and another year of inspiring performances that touch the hearts and souls of music lovers worldwide.

Jim Cooper

Member of Congress