

# THE HILL

## **Singing in the night**

By Carrie Sheffield

*written for [www.thehill.com](http://www.thehill.com)*

In the wee hours of the morning at the Dirksen Building, you may hear the baritone strains of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" or Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" echoing off the granite walls and marble floors.

Don't be alarmed. It's not a ghost or a drunken staffer; it's a practice session by Marnell Tanner, the superintendent in charge of nighttime maintenance requests for the Senate.

Patrick G. Ryan  
Marnell Tanner

Tanner works the 10:30-p.m.-to-7-a.m. shift, responding to everything from broken drainpipes to failed lighting. "As far as complainers, it's pretty bipartisan," Tanner said of the work orders he receives from both Republican and Democrat offices.

As a break from the mundane happenings of facilities management, Tanner turns to singing. To help pass the hours and hone his talent, Tanner practices at least two hours a day on the job.

"When my associates leave the office, I go for it," Tanner said. "I practices scales and exercises, never a complete song. It's ugly. It would be embarrassing if someone were to record it."

But over time, Tanner has been able to piece together enough snippets to release a CD of ballads on his own dime. The record, *My Way*, is 10 favorites such as Lou Rawls's "Wind Beneath My Wings," Barry Manilow's "Somewhere in the Night" and Larry Graham's "One in a Million You."

Tanner is ambitious, yet self-deprecating. "I don't really consider myself a creative person," Tanner said. "I don't think of my voice as unique, but for what I like to sing, it is."

Tanner, 47, said his classical style is unusual for the country, pop and gospel tunes he favors. He hopes someday to get picked up by a major record company.

“I would like to be able to turn on the radio and hear” his singing, Tanner said. “I can sing. That much I’m confident of, but as far as the music business goes, I’m a babe in the woods.”

Tanner has gotten help maneuvering through music-industry thickets from fellow musician Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), well-known among constituents for the hundreds of religious and patriotic songs he’s written and recorded.

Hatch circulated Tanner’s CD among some of his industry connections, including his attorney. “He’s a real talented guy with a lot of ability and a real tender story,” Hatch told The Hill. “I think he deserves a lot of credit. I’d like to help him if I could.”

Oddly, the pair can’t seem to agree on how they met.

Tanner said Hatch called him into office last November after hearing *My Way*, given to the senator by one of Tanner’s employees. Hatch countered that it was Tanner who approached him.

Tanner said Hatch suggested he could sing with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir someday. Hatch said he never said such a thing, though he had mentioned that gospel singer Wintley Phipps, of a similar vocal strain as Tanner, had sung with the famous choir.

“He’s 72 [actually, 71], so I’ll give him a break,” Tanner said. “I’m not going to call him a liar. If he says he didn’t say it, I really don’t want to make him mad. It’s more important to keep him on my side. He may have forgotten. He’s kind of in the business of running the country.”

Senatorial quibbles aside, Hatch has agreed to let Tanner record four of his compositions on Tanner’s upcoming CD and a single Hatch wrote dedicated to boxing legend Muhammad Ali.

Tanner is a busy man. Besides his nocturnal work in the Senate, he has a full-time day job as a manager of base operations services at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in Bethesda. And he has a consulting company on the side.

Music is his first love. Tanner dreamed of cutting a record since he was voted most talented by his high school class 30 years ago. He studied sociology and music at Central Missouri State University, where he received formal vocal training.

After college, he put his dreams on hold when he met his wife.

"I took the safe route: worked, had a family," said Tanner, a father of two daughters, one of whom will attend college next fall. Now that the nest is emptying, Tanner has returned his energies to music.

In August he released *My Way*, which cost him \$16,000. With only 2,000 copies of the CD cut, Tanner isn't likely to make a profit.

So far, sales have come mainly from friends, fellow parishioners at his church and patrons of Nick's country bar in Alexandria, where Tanner is a regular karaoke favorite.

The Capitol Hill employee sees the ordeal as training for his next CD, due out in late spring. If he hits the big time, great; if not, Tanner's not worried: "I don't necessarily need the money, so I might as well take that chance."



## **"Come to the Manger" Reviewed by RadioIndy.com!**

By Eric Lawrence

*written for [www.radioindy.com](http://www.radioindy.com)*

"Come to the Manger" a CD by gospel artist Marnell is a collection of classic Christmas music while also featuring three beautiful original holiday songs. The vocals are deep and rich, sweetly sung with such passionate qualities. You will also be delighted by beautiful orchestrations throughout the album as the vocals are complimented by a stunning elegance of grace and poise. "Ave Maria" is strong, powerful and delivered with spiritual energy of devotion. The harmonies on "Let There Be Peace on Earth" are sweet and tender which adorns the lead vocals that are heartfelt and emotional. Marnell has elegantly inspired refreshing originality to these timeless holiday pieces. If you're a fan of Josh Groban or Johnny Matthis you will not be disappointed when you hear these wonderful and divine Christmas classics.



**ChristmasReviews.com**

## **ChristmasReviews.com reviews “Come to the Manger”**

By Richard Banks

*written for [www.christmasreviews.com](http://www.christmasreviews.com)*

Not pop, not jazz, not gospel, not blues, not soul, not even, strictly speaking, classical, though at times it does have something of a classical patina, Marnell's spirited vocal arrangements defy any sort of classification. Nevertheless, I have to put everything in its rightful place, and Marnell's place seems to fall somewhere between classic American pop and easy listening.

Although he is a baritone, the power in Marnell's voice reminds me a little bit of Paul Robeson. Marnell's songbook reflects a love of classic American Christmas songs, and all of his arrangements register in a spiritual and reverent way.

Of passing note, Marnell is the superintendent in charge of nighttime maintenance requests for the U.S. Senate and three of the selections, including the title track *Come to the Manger*, were co-written by Senator Orrin Hatch.

I haven't heard anything quite like Marnell, and I enjoyed the novelty of his old-fashioned reverence. He has a voice that could easily sing blues or soul; that he chooses the pop idiom makes him somewhat unique among singers today. Lovers of traditional Christmas will find Marnell's *Come to the Manger* a feast for the ears.