

# CrossCountry<sup>USA</sup> magazine

HAPPY NEW YEAR

**MICHAEL RAY FAIN**

*Country to the Core*

**Lonesome Road Ministries  
Expands Outreach**

**Music Memories Museum  
Huge Attraction in a Small Town**

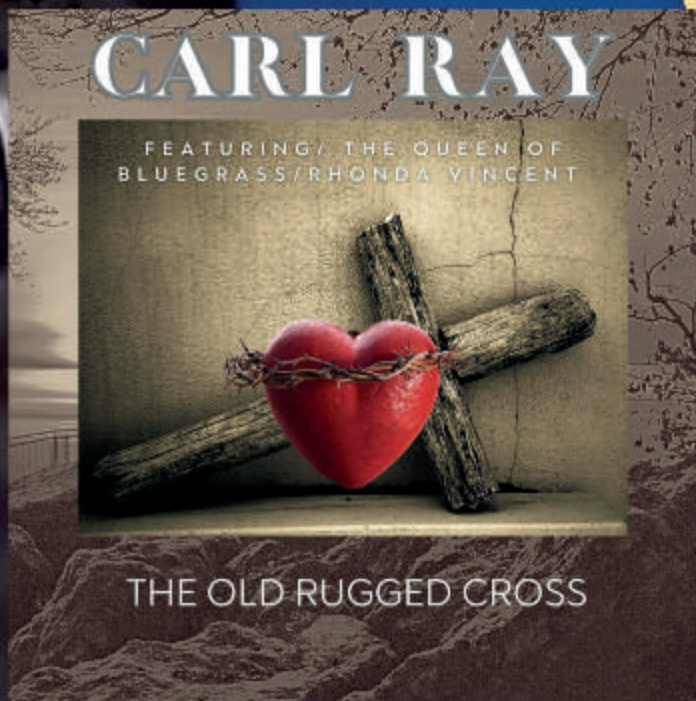
**SNAPSHOT STORY: Music City Christian  
Fellowship's 2023 Christmas Gala**



# *The Old Rugged Cross*

PRODUCED BY  
GREG COLE

#48 AND CLIMBING  
ON THE  
CHRISTIAN COUNTRY  
TOP 100 CHART

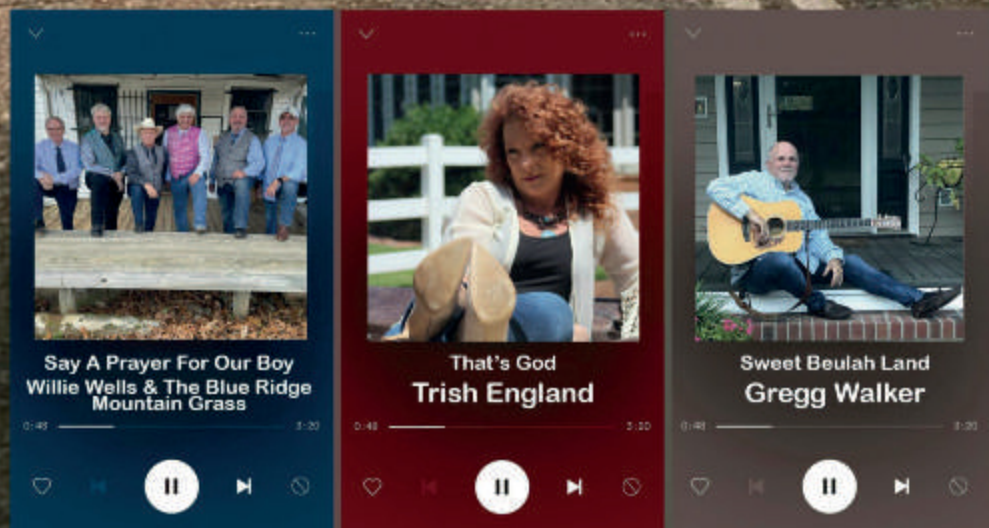
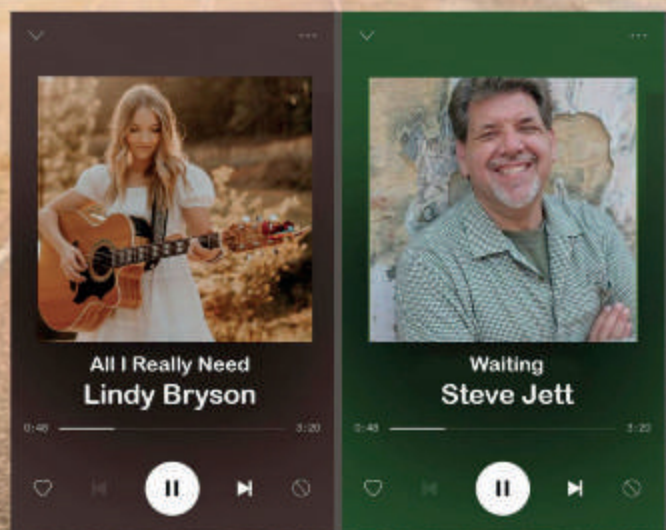
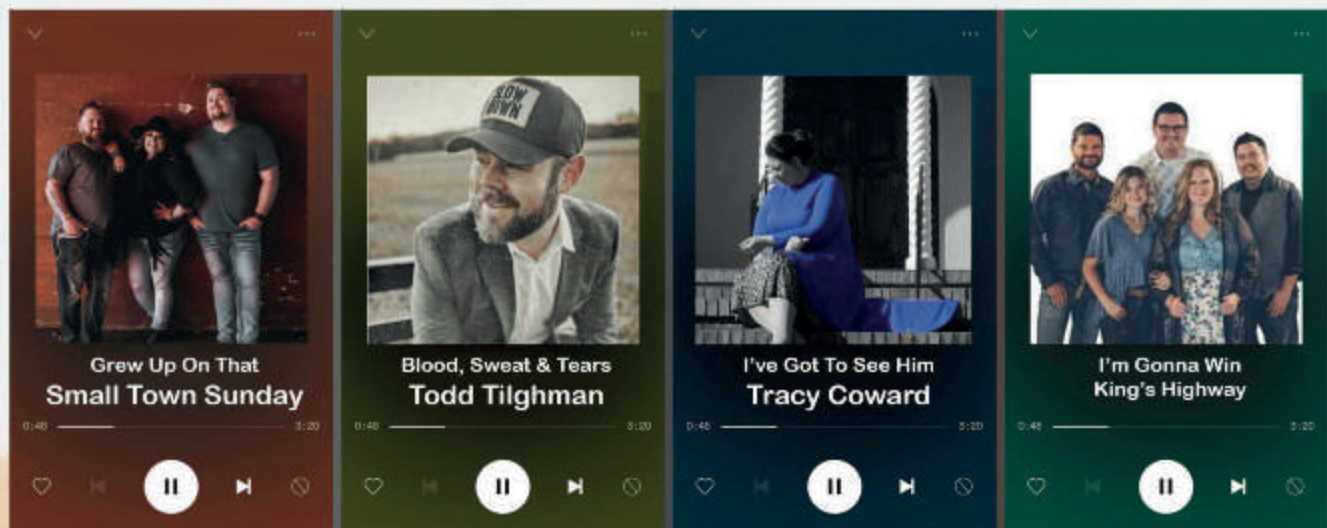


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## From the Editor

### More In 2024!

Happy New Year! I pray you all had a Merry Christmas and enjoyed your time with family and friends celebrating the birth of our Savior.

The beginning of a new year symbolizes a brand new start or new beginnings. Many will make their new year's resolutions on January 1st, then by the end of the month those resolutions are broken. But you tried, right?!? LOL! Instead of making resolutions, just focus on being a better person and putting God first in this new year.

2023 is history and you can't change it. Now it's time to face 2024 straight ahead with God in the driver's seat. When you get in your automobile and drive you don't look back in the rearview mirror while driving forward down the road! You are facing forward and watching for turns, bumps, or obstacles ahead. Your past is like the rearview mirror, it's small and only seen at a glance. The windshield is the future - it's big with a clear view of what's to come. This year, keep your eyes on God as He leads the way.

We can't change 2023 with its share of ups and downs along with triumphs and tragedies. Many faced life-changing situations while others enjoyed achievements and success. With all the chaos and division in the world all we can do is BELIEVE MORE, DREAM MORE and LOVE MORE in 2024! We should focus on more in 2024. I don't mean more as with material or financial means, I am referring to things money can't buy.

BELIEVE MORE in 2024! Believe that you will see blessings of healing, good health, or job security. Believe and pray that your loved ones will draw closer to God. Believe that your faith will grow stronger with each passing day. Believe that those many prayers you have taken to the throne of God will be answered. Believe and trust that God has you in the palm of His hand and will supply your needs according to His riches in Glory. Believe for more in 2024.

DREAM MORE in 2024! Do you have a dream or goal that you would like to achieve? Put legs on your dreams and let God guide you as you strive to reach your destiny. Write your dreams and goals down at the beginning of this year. If you have worked on these and sought God's will, then look back at the end of the year at what you have accomplished.

LOVE MORE in 2024! Love like never before in your everyday life. Show love and kindness to your family but go beyond that by showing love to someone who really needs it. It could be a friend, co-worker, elderly or even someone God puts in your path. Show the love of Christ throughout this year.

*Robin*

**Robin Tanner, Managing Editor**

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## ZAC CLIFTON

By Robin Tanner

Zac Clifton is a twenty-two-year-old Traditional Country singer/songwriter. He started singing when he was nine and started playing the guitar and writing songs at age twelve. After seeing Randy Travis and then George Jones in concert at age nine, Zac fell in love with traditional Country songs and knew right then he wanted to sing Traditional Country music.

**T**he young Texas native felt from an early age that he had a special calling on his life. “Ever since I can remember I always had this feeling in my heart that I was meant to entertain people. I’ve always loved making people laugh and smile and knew that was my calling. Around the age of nine years old, I started singing, and that’s the moment it all clicked for me. I knew this is what God was calling me to do. I also began writing short poems around that same age.” At twelve years old Zac decided he wanted to put music to those poems and learned how to play the guitar. Since then, Zac has been traveling and performing, trying to hone the abilities that God has given him..

He attended a Merle Haggard concert at thirteen and was invited on Merle’s bus to meet him and sing for him. He was blessed to open for Merle several times following their meeting. This was a great turning point for Zac, which opened new doors for him, enabling him to meet many Country legends. Kris Kristofferson compared Zac’s singing and songwriting to that of a “young Hank Williams.”

“When I first started singing, I originally just sang traditional Country music. Some of my influences included Merle Haggard, George Jones, Hank Williams Sr. etc. I still sing Traditional Country music, but about three or four years ago I began writing Christian Country music and really felt God calling me to spread His Word through song. Some of the musical heroes that inspire my Christian walk include The Happy Goodmans, Walt Mills, Mark Lowry, and The Gaithers to name a few.”



“God has blessed me far more than I deserve,” he adds. “There are many memories from my musical journey that I cherish and hold in my heart. There’s no way I can list all that God has done for me but here are a few notable mentions. I’ve had the privilege of getting to know the late Merle Haggard and open a few shows for him. I’ve also had the honor of opening for quite a few more Country legends including Willie Nelson, Marty Stuart, Doug Stone, T Graham Brown, Rodney Crowell, and Doug Kershaw.”

Zac shares how challenging it can be, especially being a young artist in the music industry. “One of the biggest challenges I had when I started my music ministry was getting into churches to spread my music. The Christian Country music scene is a completely different ballgame! I got discouraged quite a few times. There were multiple times when I almost threw in my towel, but the continual support from my family, church family, and from the Holy Spirit helped me to regain focus and continue to push forward. God has opened so many doors that I could never have opened on my own, and in the same way He’s closed the doors that needed to be closed in my life! Only God can do those sorts of things! The rewarding part is seeing how my music touches and ministers to people!”

Zac has been honored to win several awards including, ‘Overall Winner’ at the John Ritter Tribute Showcase in 2021, Texas Country Music ‘Hall of Fame Ambassador’ in 2022,



Texas Troubadour 'Songwriter' Winner and 'Fan Favorite' in 2021.

Zac's latest album, "Come To The Cross" was produced by the late, great Bobby Flores and includes eleven original songs, including the title cut, which is his latest single. *Come To The Cross* currently sits at #66, making a short leap from #70 last month. "Honky Tonk Heaven" was Zac's previous album which included ten songs written by Zac and one that he co-wrote with his good friend, Matt Engelhardt.

"The greatest testimony I can give is that even though I'm human and often make mistakes, God still loves me unconditionally. Ever since the day I believed and accepted God into my heart I was grafted into His family eternally, and there's nothing I can do to make God love me any less! I'm the King's Kid!! I'm constantly finding hope and inspiration in my Pastor, R.O Murray and Pastor Robert Morris' messages. Their understanding of God's Word is amazing! I've gotten many ideas for songs from their messages and from the messages of David Jeremiah, Tony Evans, and so many more of the spiritual leaders."

"Another testimony and one of my life lessons learned is when God freed me from the bondage that alcohol had on me. One night I asked God for a way out. I needed His divine intervention and help to break the chains that were choking me and slowly killing me. Long story short, God showed up

in a big way and broke the chains that weighed me down. It did require some tough love from God, but that was a small price to pay for the freedom that God gave to me in return. That's something only God can do! I believe that for all the issues and problems of the world, there's an answer in God's Word. The best way I can think to put it is that none of us are worthy and we all fall short. We all need God's grace daily. Thanks to Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, we can all be righteous in His sight if we choose to accept that gift!"

"My mission and #1 goal is to spread God's Word the best way I know how through song! Not only through the classic Hymns or the Praise and Worship hits, but through the songs and melodies that God has given to me and blessed me with. If you get the chance, I'd love to see y'all at one of my concerts! You can expect to hear some jokes and some good music, but most of all you can expect the Holy Spirit to be moving!"

Zac Clifton is carrying the torch that keeps Traditional Country Music and Christian Country music alive. Once you hear this young man, you will certainly agree.

[www.facebook.com/realcountrymusicsnextgeneration](https://www.facebook.com/realcountrymusicsnextgeneration)



# Dale Rochell

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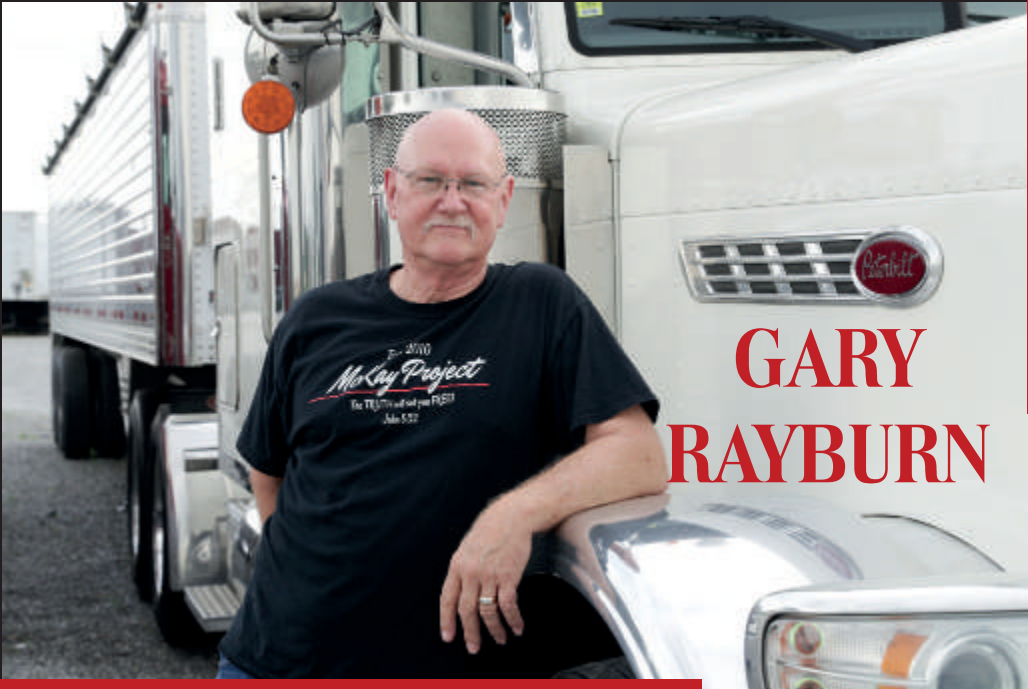
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**Lonesome Road Ministries founder, Chaplain Gary Rayburn logged over four million miles as a truck driver from 1972 – 2007. God has taken Gary off the road and into full time ministry. He says, “I still have a heart for all you drivers out there.”**



**By Robin Tanner**

**G**ary asked Jesus in his heart in 1995. He explains, “My marriage was bad, and I got involved with drugs and alcohol. I went to church with my wife but quit going. The preacher visited me and tried to lead me to Jesus. I said that’s not for me. I got in my semi the next day, driving down the road crying like a baby. I told God to give me a sign. Prove it and I will give my life to you. I saw a sign that says “Christ Is The Answer.” God, I didn’t mean a literal sign! Then a white church bus passed by with the driver pointing to heaven. God, I need something big! On the interstate across a bridge, there was a big sign with Jesus pointing at me and the sign read, “This One’s for You!” Jesus Christ saved me. It felt like the whole world was lifted. That’s when He gave me a gift to write songs.”

He continues, “I remember a sermon that my first pastor, Russ Beadles, preached from Matthew, chapter 13, The Parable of the Sower. Some seed fell by the wayside, some fell upon stony places, other seeds fell among the thorns. Some seed fell on fertile ground and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much that was planted. Here are the words that stood out in my mind that day: ‘You are that ground, you get to choose. Which ground are you going to be?’ I thought to myself, well that’s a no brainer! I want to be that fertile ground. I prayed that day, ‘Lord if I get to choose, then make me that fertile ground. Lord use me to make a difference everywhere I go. I want to produce fruit for your Kingdom.’ That was over 27 years ago, and God has answered that prayer.”

In October 2000, Lonesome Road Ministries was born. It began with a cassette tape ministry and over the years has transitioned to CDs, to podcast, to radio and even a TV program for one year featuring many music artists and preachers. Chaplain Rayburn shares, “God has increased our vision and our production each year. What started out as 100 cassettes a month eventually became 20,000 CDs every month. To date we are closing in on 3 million free CDs distributed all over the country and around the world. God kept increasing us and moving us to new levels each year. I have had the chance to pray for many that are out on that ole lonesome road. I could have never dreamed or expected what God has done in our lives. God can mold you into something that He can use if you just surrender to what He is calling you to do.”

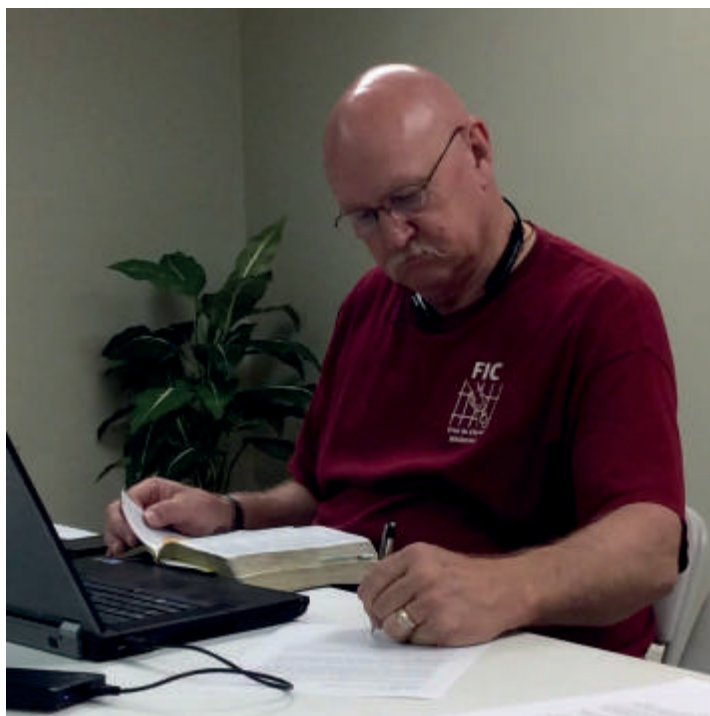
Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, ‘Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.’ Working together we can become stronger and do ten times as much as working alone. The vision for Lonesome Road Ministries is clear to continue to work together with as many churches, ministries, and businesses that are serious about reaching the lost and watch God do what only God can do. He wants to enlarge each one of us, but we must enlarge our vision and efforts. Just like the little boy with a few fish and a few loaves, just a small lunch enough for a young lad. But when he placed it in the hands of the Master it became a miracle and was enough to feed thousands.



Channel 21 Ministries was created in 2012 by Darrell Spicer, and Gary Rayburn worked with him in this ministry equipping men and women truckers to become Road Chaplains. They put Chaplains out on the road right where the truckers were and equipped them with CDs, bibles, testimony books, and tracts, to work alongside of the radio, podcast, CD ministry to get the Gospel message into the hands of as many as they can. Gary says, “We have between 60 – 80 Chaplains right now actively seeking out those that are lost and away from God on the road. In 2020, Darrell had to retire due to health issues with his wife and turned Channel 21 Ministry over to Lonesome Road Ministries. So, they now operate under the name Lonesome Road/Channel 21 Ministries.

They recently released Lonesome Road Vol. # 4 music project with MAC Records in Columbus, Mississippi. Gary mentions, “Dennis McKay and Studio 115A has helped us make a dream of mine come to pass. That is to get some of the songs God has given me out as music CDs for the truckers. We have been debuting a new music CD at the Mid America Truck show for several years. We have over three million CDs sent out free of charge.

The 11th. Annual 3 Fold Cord Conference is scheduled for June 28, 29, 30, 2024 at the Lonesome Road Ministry Center in Keenes, Illinois. Artists and Chaplains include Gary Rayburn, James Payne, Roger Barkley, Jr., Ava Kasich, Sonshine Road, and many others.



Lonesome Road Ministry has partnered with Roger Barkley, Jr. of Barkley Music & Media to reach the next level in their ministry. Gary states, “Roger and I came up with the idea for podcast cards to replace the CDs which are fast fading out of the vehicles. Since we started producing these podcast cards we have produced over 360,000 cards to send out across America. We have also launched our own Internet radio

station, Lonesome Road Radio, and now we have our new Lonesome Road TV and streaming channel. God continues to put people in our path to help us get the Gospel in as many hands as we can. We recently attended the Petro Truck Stop Chapel as they were having their Driver’s Appreciation and met some great people during chapel. We met Rick Jey who has a streaming company called GIAJ Global, Media OTT Network. Rick has offered us our very own streaming channel on his network for Lonesome Road TV.” These programs will air all over the world on Roku, Apple TV, and Fire TV. You can find Lonesome Road TV by searching Media OTT Network on their streaming network. The possibilities are limitless as God continues to orchestrate the outreach of Lonesome Road Ministries.

There are many testimonies from truckers who hear Lonesome Road/Channel 21 Ministries radio program, Church on the Road, or receive the CDs the ministry distributes. One trucker shares, “I was seeking God and listening to your CDs every morning. Even the mornings that I was high on meth I still listened to the CDs as tears flowed down my cheeks. Thank you for sending them to me. Gary, I thank you for praying for me that morning I stopped you in front of the post office. I’d never been so lost in my life, I was terrified. I stayed in the darkness a while longer after that day. But I kept on seeking God, and March 2, 2019, God set me free from meth, glory to God. My husband and my cousin are both following Jesus everyday also. What an amazing journey this has been. I’m so excited to see where God is taking us in our future. God Bless you at Lonesome Road Ministries.”

Another trucker shares, “I drive a truck from Arkansas to Illinois and back every week. I found one of your CDs in Searcy, Arkansas at the Loves Truck Stop. I can’t believe how much God has been dealing with my heart. I never get fuel here and this time I did and now I know why. Not only has God been dealing with me but He had to leave me a CD with my name, Joe, in it! I want you all to know that it helped me to fall on my knees and give my heart back to God. Thank you all so much for what you do. I would love to do more for God. I would like to be a part of the work you all do.”

“We are a church on the road,” says Gary. “We are the called-out ones, bringing the Gospel message to the people wherever they are. We must not sit inside the walls of a church building on our blessed assurance waiting for Jesus to return. He has given each one of us a call to go out into the highways and the hedges to compel those who are on the road with the Gospel message so that His house will be filled. The best sermon you have is your own testimony of what Jesus has done in your life. We must go out and share with others!”

He adds, “Want to join our family of mighty warriors? We want to work with you! We have many ministries, churches and individuals that are a part of Lonesome Road Ministries.

[www.lonesomeroad.org](http://www.lonesomeroad.org)  
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# Remembering...

GUYNN SOWELL

June 1, 1957 - November 21, 2023

**Staff, Cross Country USA**

Guyenn Sowell was born on June 1, 1957, in Mobile, Alabama and grew up in Leakesville, Mississippi. After graduating as Valedictorian of Leakesville High School class of 1975, Guyenn went on to obtain a BS degree in petroleum engineering from Mississippi State University in Starkville. Guyenn was employed by UNOCAL for 25 years and finished his career with SAMPSON, Inc. in 2013.

As a country boy growing up in South Mississippi, Guyenn learned to work hard by watching his dad do the same. He loved his mama's cooking, especially her homemade biscuits. Guyenn loved the simple life and never wanted the spotlight on him. He was a follower of Jesus Christ and a servant at heart because of the example of his Lord and Savior.

Guyenn loved his family and served and sacrificed unselfishly as a demonstration of the love shown to him. He was a Godly man of his word, and his loyalty was immeasurable. His devotion and commitment to his family was evident to all wherever he went whether across the states or overseas. He was the proud and supportive father of The Family Sowell, a faith-based sibling band from Knoxville, Tennessee with driving instrumentation, tight family harmony, and original songs written straight from the heart.

Guyenn Sowell, age 66, passed away peacefully on Tuesday, November 21 at Park West Hospital in Knoxville, Tennessee surrounded by his wife, Cindy, and their six children, Jacob, Joshua, Naomi, Abby, John-Mark and Justus after a worshipful time of praying, singing and the reading of



God's Word in complete surrender with the leadership staff of the Sowell family's church community of Northstar Church - West Campus.

His faith was made sight, and he heard the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" and we rejoice together knowing his body is fully healed and has been made whole. Guyenn ran his race, he fought the good fight, and he finished STRONG!



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# SNAPSHOT HIGHLIGHTS



## 2023 CHRISTMAS GALA

By Robin Tanner

The Music City Christian Fellowship held their annual Christmas Gala at The Texas Troubadour Theatre in Nashville, Tennessee on the evening of December 2nd. A wonderful time was had by all who attended as many artists shared the stage performing sounds of the season.

The event was hosted by Music City Christian Fellowship President Lynn Fox and Vice President Melanie Walker along with the Founder, Cowboy Joe Babcock. It was a great night of fun, food and fellowship.

Make plans to attend Sunday Mornin' Country at the Grand Ole Opry House June 9, 2024. For more information visit [www.musiccitychristianfellowship.org](http://www.musiccitychristianfellowship.org) or the Sunday Mornin' Country Facebook page.



**MCCF President, Lynn Fox**



**Cowboy Joe Babcock featuring Melanie Walker, Jim Adkins, Keith Ital, and Tennessee River Boys**

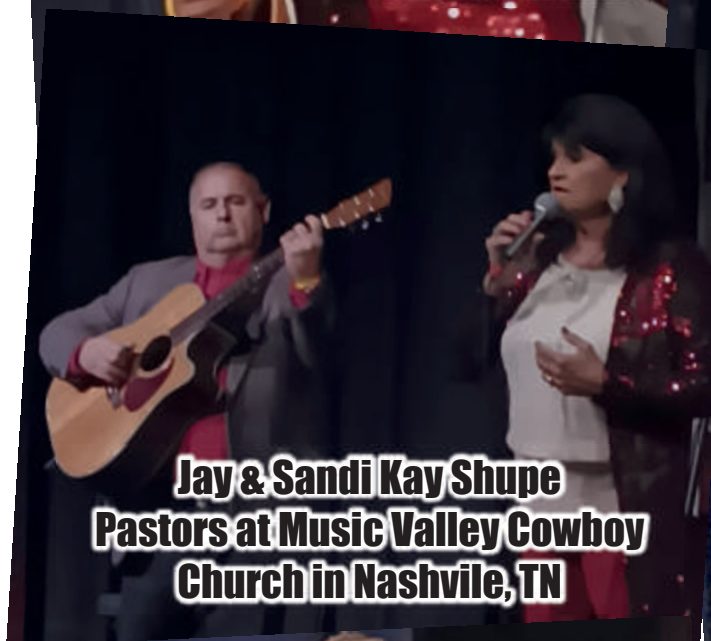




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That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.  
Psalm 67: 2

## NEWS FROM THE MEDICAL MISSION FIELD Fall 2023

### BARRY'S PERSPECTIVE

I am so excited to be a part of HASTEN International! This growing global and domestic medical mission ministry continues ministry in Mexico, Zimbabwe, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti through your faithfulness. We're so happy to welcome Dr. Tannia and Dr. Daniel in Colombia, South America, who are off to a great start in treating folks, sharing the Gospel, and praying for them in the marketplaces. As we grow, we begin to focus on the new components of this ministry. The introduction of the domestic medical missions trailer brings excitement to many people across the United States. We will start treating and sharing the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ with the underserved in many cities who cannot afford other dental and medical treatment. Ask God how generous of a financial gift He will enable you to give in supporting HASTEN's expanding ministry on a monthly basis.

Your selfless contributions to this impactful organization, touching the lives of many, stands as a remarkable testament to your unwavering faith in our Lord. Contributing to HASTEN International, now endorsed with the Give With Confidence label by Charity Navigators, is a fulfilling experience. Expect divine blessings exceeding your generosity!

### COLUMBIA

How thrilling to see the enthusiasm and passion that Dr. Tannia and Dr. Daniel have for medical missions. Although they committed to one remote clinic per month, they've done FOUR remote clinics between July 23rd and the end of August.

#### New Banners Enhance the Impact!

Daniel and Tannia are beside the HASTEN banner on the right. The lady at the far left is Nohelly who is an essential part of the evangelistic team.



The banner on the left shows Psalm 67:2-6 which is HASTEN's Key Scripture. The banner on the right shares that "God Provides." You also see the mobile exam table and mobile dental chair as well, which were part of the start-up budget. This panoramic photo shows the set-up for this very rural church.

The team saw 30 patients. Note the banners' dual purpose as privacy screens! In the waiting area Nohelly shares the gospel and leads a Bible study.



### HAITI

The impact of lawlessness is hard to understand as it impacts the day-to-day lives of ordinary people in Haiti. Dr. Dan's family, the operation of the medical clinic, and ministry are greatly impacted. The difficulties in getting food, fuel, power, and medical supplies all require increasing effort and time. Needless to say, the costs have skyrocketed. Furthermore, the violence has spread.

"Here in Gonaives nothing is certain because each day at 16 miles from our city several people have died or kidnapped. I don't know when but I know that God will do something. The situation is really complicated and impossible for us, but with God all things are possible." Dr. Dan continues the medical mission work. He even conducted a remote clinic on August 19.



### Domestic Trailer Update:



We've done a lot of work all over the world, and now we are embarking on a domestic component. This trailer was purchased to minister in underserved areas and to underserved people – those who don't have the capacity or the money to seek dental or medical care. We're going to do dental on one end of the trailer, and medical on the other end. I am so thankful that you joined us on this journey. And hopefully we'll be in your hometown somewhere and give all your people an opportunity to serve on this trailer and to volunteer for people who need our services, and show what the Christian churches will be able to do with this kind of ministry.

—Dr. Peter Kunkle, Executive Director



SCAN ME



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Outreach Director  
HASTEN International  
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Homestead, FL 33034  
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# CrossCountry Report

CHRISTIAN COUNTRY MUSIC NEWS & SCOOPS

## **Connie Smith and Sam Wellington Inducted Into Ohio Country Music Hall of Fame At Grand Ole Opry**

The Ohio Country Music Hall of Fame is proud to announce the induction of two legendary artists, Connie Smith and Sam Wellington of The Four Guys, into the prestigious hall of fame. The induction ceremony took place on December 1st at the iconic Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee.

Jackie Thomas, director of The Ohio Country Music Hall of Fame, and Richard Lynch, Country music singer/songwriter and owner of Keepin' It Country Farm in Waynesville, Ohio presented the award to Smith and Wellington.



**Sam Wellington and Connie Smith**

Connie Smith, often referred to as one of the greatest voices in Country music, has had a successful career spanning over five decades. She has earned 11 GRAMMY nominations, 20 Top 10 Billboard Country singles, and 31 charting albums. Smith was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2012. Known for hits like *Once a Day* and *How Great Thou Art*, Smith continues to tour and record, often with her husband and producer, Marty Stuart.

Sam Wellington, along with his fellow band members Berl Lyons, Brent Burkett, and Richard Garratt, formed The Four Guys in the late 1960s. Within months of arriving in Nashville, the quartet was invited to perform on the Grand Ole Opry, making them the first vocal group to become lifetime members of the legendary show. The Four Guys went on to tour with Hank Williams, Jr. and the Charley Pride Show, and were nominated for 'Vocal Group of the Year' by the Country Music Association and Music City News.

"We are thrilled to honor these incredible artists for their contributions to Country music," said Jackie Thomas, director of The Ohio Country Music Hall of Fame. "Connie Smith and The Four Guys have left an indelible mark on the industry, and we are proud to add them to our list of esteemed inductees."

For more information about The Ohio Country Music Hall of Fame, please visit [www.facebook.com/OCMHF](http://www.facebook.com/OCMHF).

## **The Oak Ridge Boys Honored With "Tennessee Music Pathways" Marker In Oak Ridge, Tennessee**

GRAMMY® Award-winning and Country Music Hall of Fame members, The Oak Ridge Boys were honored by The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development with the unveiling of the "Tennessee Music Pathways" marker in Oak Ridge, Tennessee on Monday, November 20. William Lee Golden and Richard Sterban were in attendance representing The Oak Ridge Boys along with Tennessee Representative John Reagan, Oak Ridge Mayor Warren Gooch, and family members of former Oak Ridge Boys' Wally Fowler and Lon "Deacon" Freeman, both original members of The Oak Ridge Quartet. Oak Ridge Mayor, Warren Gooch also presented The Oak Ridge Boys with a key to the city and a proclamation honoring their contributions to the city.

"It was a very special day," shares William Lee Golden. "Being part of this remarkable group is something I never take for granted. Our journey has been uniquely blessed and one that very few have had the opportunity to achieve. I am thankful to Duane Allen, Joe Bonsall, and Richard Sterban for their contributions to The Oak Ridge Boys, along with our band and co-workers. A special thank you to Gus Arrendale and Springer Mountain Farms for helping make this day possible!"

"I can't think of anywhere I would rather have been than at the Grove Theater in Oak Ridge with the kind folks at The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development who worked so hard to design this marker," expresses Richard Sterban. "The Oak Ridge Boys as a group goes back 80 years to the original members, Wally Fowler, Lon "Deacon" Freeman, Curly Kinsey, and Johnny New, and we have never forgotten them or their contributions. It has been a privilege to build on that."

Oak Ridge Mayor, Warren Gooch stated, "The City of Oak Ridge is proud to partner with the Tennessee Department of Tourism to honor The Oak Ridge Boys at the historic Grove Theater. 80 years after they first performed here, we get to unveil this marker for Oak Ridgers and visitors to see for decades to come."

"The Oak Ridge Boys have achieved enduring success and widespread acclaim, and it all started right here in Oak Ridge," said Commissioner Mark Ezell, Tennessee Dept of Tourist Development. "It is an honor to recognize the group's achievements and contributions to our state's rich music heritage, as a part of the Tennessee Music Pathways." -





**William Lee Golden, Simone Golden, Richard Sterban, and Donna Sterban with the families of Lon "Deacon" Freeman and Wally Fowler at the Tennessee Music Pathways Oak Ridge Boys marker in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.**

(Photo by Jeremy Westby / 2911 Media).

The Oak Ridge Boys have received four Academy of Country Music, two American Music, five Billboard, four Country Music Association, five Grammy, and twelve Dove Awards, just to name a few. They are members of the Grand Ole Opry, the Gospel Music Hall of Fame, the Vocal Group Hall of Fame, and the Country Music Hall of Fame. They have achieved seventeen #1 hits including *Leaving Louisiana In The Broad Daylight*, *Bobbie Sue*, *Trying To Love Two Women*, *(I'm Settin') Fancy Free*, *American Made*, and the unforgettable *Elvira*. With an astounding thirty-seven Top 20 Country hits, and with twelve gold, three platinum, and one double-platinum album, The Oak Ridge Boys have made their mark in every facet of the Gospel, Pop, and Country music industry.

### **Tracy Lawrence Donates \$250,000 at 18th Annual Mission: Possible Turkey Fry**

Tracy Lawrence, hosted his 18th annual Mission: Possible Turkey Fry and Benefit Concert in Nashville, Tennessee on November 21st. The event was held at the Nashville Fairgrounds with over 250 volunteers who helped fry over 1,200 turkeys that were distributed throughout Middle Tennessee, providing over 10,000 meals to those in need during the Thanksgiving holiday.

Lawrence was joined by Lee Brice, Priscilla Block and Halfway to Hazard for a packed out benefit concert at the Wildhorse Saloon and donated another \$250,000 towards Mission: Possible's long-time partner, Nashville Rescue Mission. The yearly event has now provided more than 86,000 meals to the homeless across Middle Tennessee and raised over \$1M for Nashville Rescue Mission.



**Tracy Lawrence Benefit Concert Photo By Annie Loughhead**

"I'm very proud of what Mission: Possible has grown into over the last 18 years," Lawrence shared. "To see hundreds of volunteers frying turkeys for hours is nothing short of incredible. I want to thank Lee, Priscilla and Halfway to Hazard for being a part of this memorable and giving event."

The Turkey Fry kicked off bright and early at the Nashville Fairgrounds. It's the second year at the upgraded location to accommodate the growing event, with Lawrence kicking off the daytime event by dropping the first turkey into the fryer. Lawrence's cause called upon star-studded helping hands including Gary Allan, Chris Young, Jamey Johnson, Ian Munsick, Travis Denning, Phil Vassar, Spencer Crandall, Frank Ray, David Lee Murphy, Trey Lewis, Kasey Tyndall, Noah Thompson and the evening's performers including Halfway to Hazard. The charity event brought in dozens of industry members and the greater Nashville community to lend a hand in the massive undertaking.

For additional information on Tracy Lawrence, visit his website. [www.tracylawrence.com](http://www.tracylawrence.com).

*Cross Country Report continued on page 26 > > >*







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### Alabama Announces Jun Jam XV111

Legendary Country band Alabama announced June Jam XVIII, taking place in Fort Payne, Alabama at the VFW Fairgrounds on June 1, 2024. Tickets for the iconic festival, benefiting charitable causes throughout the state of Alabama, are on sale via Ticketmaster.

Following a 16-year hiatus, Alabama co-founders Randy Owen and Teddy Gentry resurrected June Jam this past summer, drawing nearly 11,000 fans to Fort Payne, raising hundreds of thousands. Owen and Gentry are thrilled to continue the tradition and plan to keep June Jam going for years to come.

Collectively, the past 17 June Jam events have raised over 20 million dollars for the state of Alabama. Money raised goes to The June Jam Foundation which donates to those in need across the state, including disaster relief.



"What a great way to help raise money for many charities and those in need and at the same time, having a great party in a field with our guest artists and fans," says Gentry. "Come join us." "Looking forward to another great June Jam," adds Owen. "It's gonna be fun!"

Alabama will announce their lineup of talent in the coming weeks.

June Jam was created by Fort Payne's sons, Alabama, and brought some of the biggest names in Country music together for charity. The first June Jam benefit concert took place in 1982 and continued annually for sixteen years, making it one of the biggest Country music events in the nation. Previous performers include Garth Brooks, Charlie Daniels, Alan Jackson, The Judds, Tim McGraw, Toby Keith, Wayne Newton, Dolly Parton, Trisha Yearwood, Charley Pride, Willie Nelson and many more.

June Jam XVIII is produced by Outback Presents and Conway Entertainment Group.

Over 50 years ago, Jeff Cook, Teddy Gentry and Randy Owen left the cotton farms of Fort Payne, Alabama to spend the summer playing music in a Myrtle Beach, South Carolina bar called The Bowery. It took them six long years of tip jars and word-of-mouth to earn the major label deal they'd been dreaming of. Then, seemingly no time at all to change the face of Country music. Alabama, Country music's first band, was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2005. The group is known for hit songs including *Mountain Music*, *Roll On*, *Dixieland Delight* and *If You're Gonna Play In Texas (You Gotta Have A Fiddle In The Band)*. From humble beginnings picking cotton in the fields, to international stars, Alabama went on to sell 80 million albums and charted 43 No.1 hits, becoming the most successful band in the history of Country music. In November 2022, Alabama co-founder Jeff Cook passed following a lengthy battle with Parkinson's disease. With his prior encouragement and wishes, Alabama continues touring on a limited basis, keeping the iconic music they created alive for the current and future generation of fans.

### Moe Bandy Honored at 2023 Texas Country Music Awards with First Ever Moe Bandy Icon Award

CMA and ACM award-winning Country music legend Moe Bandy was presented the first-ever "Moe Bandy Icon Award" at the 2023 Texas Country Music Awards on November 12 at Billy Bob's Texas. The awards ceremony was hosted once again by TCMA Spokesperson Brandon Rhyder along with his co-host Malone Ranger, on-air personality with 95.9 KFWR The Ranch.

"The evening was a dream come true in every way," expresses Moe Bandy. "I have had a wonderful career in Country music. To have an award created that will continue to be given out year after year is very humbling. I am thankful to the good Lord above, my family, and all of my fans. I am a blessed man."

"The Texas Country Music Association is very proud and honored to have created a new staple in the Texas Country Music Awards - the Moe Bandy Icon Award - with the very first one being presented to Moe Bandy himself," shared Linda Wilson, President, Texas Country Music Association. "Moe has been such a solid staple in the country music industry in Texas, our nation, and around the world, and we couldn't have been more excited to present him with this award at Billy Bob's Texas during the Texas Country Music Awards. In future years, the Moe Bandy Icon Award will be presented to others who have shown the same dedication to their music and this industry as Moe has."

Bandy recently released his new album, "Thank You Lord." Delivering a heartfelt project, Bandy recorded twelve heartfelt tracks and featured special guests The Isaacs on *Family Bible*, and The Oak Ridge Boys with Nora Lee Allen on *The Lord Is My Shepherd*. The title track, written by Mo Pitney, Bobby Tomberlin,





and Cheryl Riddle, offers a true reflection of where Bandy is in his life today, of which he is thankful for another mile, another day, and a life many could have only dreamed of. "Thank You Lord" features tunes from prominent Nashville songwriters, including Willie Nelson, Bill Anderson, Hank Williams, and more. The twelve-track project was produced by Michele Voan Capps and sponsored by Gus Arrendale and Springer Mountain Farms. It is available on all streaming platforms now.

"We all try to live life to the fullest and with purpose," shares Bandy. "When you get to a certain place in your life, you reflect on your past. We have all made mistakes and decisions that we may regret, but you have to look at the positives. God has been so good to me. He has given my family blessings that I never dreamed were even possible. I am so thankful to Him and wanted this album to fully reflect my faith in God."

Bandy's Country music accomplishments include ten No. 1 hit songs, many Top Ten hits, five Gold records, and numerous ACM and CMA Awards. He started his recording career while he was a sheet metal worker in San Antonio, Texas, but after a decade of hard labor, Bandy traded his sheet metal for Gold albums. In the mid-seventies, when the Country Pop Kenny Rogers, John Denver, and the outlaw sound of Waylon and Willie was all the rage, along came the traditionalist Moe Bandy. Bandy recently penned an autobiography, "Moe Bandy: Lucky Me."

### **Garth Brooks Invites Scotty McCreery to be the Newest Member of the Grand Ole Opry**

Multi-Platinum selling Country artist Scotty McCreery was invited to become a member of the Grand Ole Opry by Opry member Garth Brooks. McCreery was surprised onstage during his spotlight artist performance at the Opry's Country Christmas show.

"Merry Christmas," Garth said walking onto the stage handing McCreery a wrapped gift. "This is a Christmas present to the Grand Ole Opry," Garth later continued. "We would love to invite you to be the newest member of the Opry."

"Holy cow. Yes, I would love to," McCreery replied. "I grew up listening to your records Garth and you're a part of what made



**L to R: Vice President and Executive Producer of the Grand Ole Opry, Dan Rogers; Scotty McCreery; Garth Brooks; and McCreery's Manager, Scott Stem**

Photo Credit: Chris Hollo

me want to do this for a living and I didn't think that dream would become a reality, but it is because of all of y'all sitting in this house tonight. God bless y'all."

McCreery continued, "When I got started doing this people asked, 'what are your goals,'" voice cracking with emotion McCreery shared, "and I'd say 'one day I'd like to be a member of the Grand Ole Opry.'" Then bent down and touched the circle of wood in the Opry's center stage where so many of his heroes and peers have stood.

"We're thrilled to extend this much-anticipated invitation to our friend Scotty," said Opry Executive Producer Dan Rogers. "Whether he's on the Opry performing his hits, putting his spin on some old favorites during a performance on one of our Opry Country Classics shows, or offering a holiday set as he did tonight, Scotty consistently delivers and is always at home on the Opry stage. It'll be exciting to hear the words 'Scotty McCreery, you're a member of the Grand Ole Opry!' in the early days of 2024."

McCreery's induction date will be announced soon.

*Cross Country Report continued next page >>>*



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**42nd Annual "Sunday Mornin' Country"  
Returns To The Grand Ole Opry House**

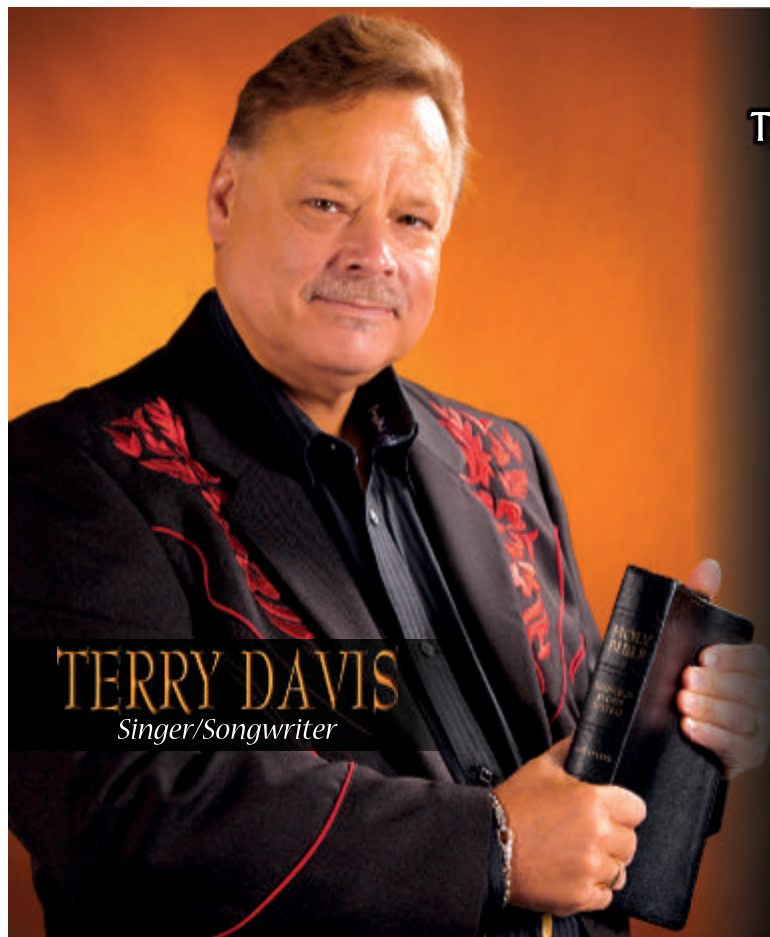
The 42nd Annual "Sunday Mornin' Country," event, sponsored by Music City Christian Fellowship, will be held at the Grand Ole Opry House, Nashville, TN on Sunday, June 9, 2024.

"Sunday Mornin' Country" promises to be the best ticket in town, blending top Country artists and Gospel music together for a time of celebration and Inspiration. This yearly event brings great entertainment for the whole family as Country music artists come together to share their heart as well as their favorite Gospel songs.

Sponsored by the Nashville-based nonprofit, Music City Christian Fellowship, the concert at the conclusion of CMA Music Fest/Fan Fair each year leaves its fans and guests with an uplifting memory of Nashville that will last a lifetime. "Sunday Mornin' Country" is the longest running named Country/Gospel event associated with the week of CMA Music Fest/Fan Fair.

The Music City Christian Fellowship board announced, "Brenda Lee will be the host of "Sunday Mornin' Country once again." We are currently scheduling Country and Gospel artists that we know you are going to love."

"Sunday Mornin' Country's" past artists and performers have included Brenda Lee, Charlie McCoy, Connie Smith, The Oak Ridge Boys, Cowboy Joe Babcock, Lulu Roman, Ronnie McDowell, Fox Brothers, Melanie Walker, Barbara Fairchild, John Berry, T. Graham Brown, Rhonda Vincent and many more. For more information and updates, visit [www.musiccitychristianfellowship.org](http://www.musiccitychristianfellowship.org) or [facebook.com/Sunday Mornin' Country](https://facebook.com/SundayMorninCountry).



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**CHUCK HANCOCK**



*Men Like These*  
**PAUL STAGGS**



*You Get To Me*  
**DELNORA**



*It Had To Be God*  
**TIM LIVINGSTON**



*Not Just On Sunday*  
**THE PAULS**



*Old Rugged Cross*  
**CARL RAY**  
(Featuring Rhonda Vincent)



*You Carry Me*  
**JOY LAVALLEE**



*You're Worth It All*  
**TY HODGES**



# *Country to the Core*

## MICHAEL RAY FAIN

**C**ountry living and Country music is alive and well in Virginia native, Michael Ray Fain. The singer/songwriter combines the traditional sounds of Country and Christian Country with songs that will touch the listener down to the core of the soul.

**By Robin Tanner**

Michael Ray calls the southern Blue Ridge Mountains home. Family roots run deeper than the walnut trees that grow along the banks of Rye Cove Creek. He recalls growing up in those Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. "Some of my first and fondest memories are of waking up to a rooster crow and Johnny Cash on the radio; breakfast served from a wood burning cook stove; a milk cow named Homer (Homer always reminded me of Johnny Cash and a boy named Sue); granny churning butter; drinking spring water from a metal dipper; enjoying dinner on Sunday; ladder back chairs and everyone listening to grandpa's fiddling and Uncle Jack's picking."

This way of life shaped Michael Ray Fain in the man he is today. "I'm sure this type of living was considered outdated even when I was a kid, but that was the way of life at Granny Fain's and Pa Joe's. They lived just a short distance down the road. My sister and I spent a lot of time there, especially after the loss of our dad at an early age and mom working night shift to support the family. It wasn't always fun or easy back then, but I lived it, and I loved it! I learned a lot about life and what it means to carry your own water. I believe a man's word and handshake still means something. I believe in working hard for what you want. I believe in respecting the elderly and those that have sacrificed for our freedoms. I believe in music that moves people, and I believe in God. Some may

think it's old school, but some things, especially the good things, never go out of style. It's like Hank Williams, Sr. Music - I still think it's some of the coolest ever recorded. Hank was my dad's favorite singer. Hard core country music was ingrained in me at an early age. Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Randy Travis, and Alan Jackson are just a few that have set the bar for me. Those guys were not only great Country artists, but they also felt the call to write and record Gospel music. That's right up my alley! I love Country music. It reaches deep into your core being and lets you know it's there. Christian Country music is a perfect combination to reach hearts and souls."

Michael credits, "Performing in church, getting to know and respect the art of making music with artists at all levels, and living life is what gives us something to write about, has shaped me into who I am."

Michael Ray took guitar lessons from Edd Easter, a member of the legendary Bluegrass Gospel group, The Easter Brothers. After learning a few chords, he got his first experience at performing with a Gospel quartet singing and playing rhythm guitar. Fain states, "I love everything about music, writing, and recording, performing live and interacting with the band and audience, it's a great experience for everyone."







In 2010, he recorded his first album of original songs. That same year he formed a Country band called The Rye Cove Band. They spent the next five years playing music venues and private events. The band took a break after steel guitar player Larry Martin gained his heavenly wings. He reflects back on memories with his friend and fellow band mate. "Larry was a fine musician and friend. He was a positive influence on me and was very supportive of my music."

During the break with the band, Michael Ray spent the next three years building a log cabin near his family's home place, where he currently lives with his wife Ramona. Along with musicians, carpenters are also found among the many branches of the family tree.

"Sometimes the mind and heart disagree, but still, choices have to be made," reflects Fain. "On a country back road, Clint Black's *A Better Man*, came across the air waves. I'd heard the song a hundred times before. I made a choice to take a different path in life because on that one particular day, Clint was singing for me. We all have to make choices at some point, some work out, some don't. Be thankful for the ones that do and learn to live with ones that don't. Life is a lesson but it's also a blessing! With each new day comes the opportunity to be better than we were yesterday."

In 2022, he recorded a Country and Gospel album. Then Michael Ray was fortunate to sign with Grace Records Nashville label in June 2023 and released his debut single *America I Love*. Resonating God, Country, and Family Values, *America I Love* has struck a common chord with

listeners. It is currently charting in the top 10 Cashbox Independent Country and is also charting well on Christian charts. The music video currently has over 1.4 million views on itube247. Michael mentions, "I Love recording and playing music, but I really needed a way to get my music heard nationally. Debbie Bennett was an answer to prayers." Debbie Bennett is President of Grace Records Nashville.

Michael Ray has a passion to write and perform his music to reach hearts that have a need to feel something more than beats. He shares what a fan can experience at his shows. "Expect to be treated like family while listening to original honest Country music as well as covers from some of Country music's greatest. I want fans to not only hear the music, but to feel it and leave the event feeling better than when they arrived." He adds, "One of the most satisfying things in life is to be able to make folks feel what you feel through a song, especially if it has a positive healing feeling."

Michael Ray's brand new radio release is *His Only Son*, and is available on all streaming platforms. "I'm very excited about this newest release. Recorded with some of the finest Country musicians in the business, it's Christian Country to the core. I know it's not possible to fully understand the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the eyes of God the Father, but I pray that even the smallest glimpse of that sacrifice will create a closer walk between listeners and the Lord."

[www.michaelrayfain.com](http://www.michaelrayfain.com)

# BILL BAKER



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# The Story Behind the Song



## HE'S TO BLAME

Written and recorded by Don Stiles

Staff, Cross Country USA Magazine

He further explains, "I was sitting in my office one day reading and studying and meditating on the awesomeness of God when the thought came to me that all I have that's good and wholesome in my life is only because of what Jesus did for me on Calvary. I thought, *He's to Blame*. Wow! Next thing I knew the Lord began giving me the words and the melody as the tears started flowing and I put pen to paper and the song was born. God is so AWESOME."

He concludes, "Jesus doesn't just make the difference in your life, HE IS the difference. He's the Way, the Truth and the Life. God doesn't just have the answer to each and every problem, HE IS the ANSWER. Thank You, Sweet Jesus."

### *He's to Blame*

*I could spend a million years and not begin to share,  
This story of how Jesus pulled me from despair.  
He reached way below the bottom to erase my shame.*

*Forever I was changed and He's to blame.  
He's to blame for all this joy that floods my soul.  
He's to blame for the why and how I now am whole.  
He's the reason I can testify today I'm not the same.  
Heaven knows my name and He's to blame.*

*The world can see the difference Jesus made in me.  
My desire is to be just what He'd have me be.  
A life once wrecked by sin and bound for hellish flame.  
But then salvation came and He's to blame.*

Award winning singer/songwriter Don Stiles has written numerous songs including, *I've Got Something To Praise God For* recorded by Cedar Ridge and *It's Not So Hard To Praise Him* recorded by The Wilburns, which became their first #1. Both of these songs reached the Top Ten in The Singing News Chart. To date, Don has been blessed to have ten #1 songs as a writer and artist. His latest radio release, *He's To Blame* is currently climbing the charts and becoming a crowd favorite. Don states, "We are humbled and honored in regards to the success of these songs. Making the charts is one thing, touching hearts is everything! The Lord continues to bless me by giving me timely-message songs to share."

Don Stiles shares the inspiration for *He's To Blame*. "This particular song is very special to me personally as it simply explains and declares who is responsible for each and every good thing in my life. For all the joy that floods my soul, it's all His fault. I owe absolutely everything to Jesus Christ my risen Lord and Savior and soon coming King."



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# CrossCountry<sup>USA</sup> **HOT100**

OFFICIAL CHRISTIAN COUNTRY TOP 100 - JANUARY 2024

TM	LM	SONG TITLE	ARTIST	TM	LM	SONG TITLE	ARTIST
1	10	Take Up Your Cross	Mary James	51	76	Papa's Love	Ben Coulter
2	17	He's To Blame	Don Stiles	52	72	My Guilt Was No Match (For Gods Grace)	Chuck Hancock
3	20	Hold My Halo	James Payne	53	23	Appalachian War Cry	Lonnie Hardy
4	8	We Are Here Together	Jan Harbuck	54	69	I'm Good	Steve Roberson
5	16	Grew Up On That	Small Town Sunday	55	88	Dying To Save Me	Melissa Evans
6	32	Going Back Home	Shay & Michi	56	55	Hold On Jesus Will Come	The Journeys
7	11	I Know The Man	Mike Lechner	57	69	Papa's Love	Ben Coulter
8	22	Don't Hide Your Scars	Johnathan Bond & Young Harmony	58	77	Lovin' Me	Gina White
9	24	Between The Pulpit And The Pew	Ken & Kim Stull	59	73	Traces Of Your Love	Johnny Jones
10	13	Heavens Grand Tour	Wayne Atkins	60	26	Go Burn That Plow	Troy Richardson
11	19	Surrounded	Jimmy R. Price	61	87	The Old Sinner	Jamie Coulter
12	7	All Alone	Roy Morris	62	75	What'll I Do	Barry McGee
13	27	What Does It Profit A Man	Carolina The Band	63	36	I'll Speak For You	Jacky Jack White
14	40	In Jesus' Name We Pray, Amen! Amen!	Melanie Walker	64	81	No Prayer Requests	Lorraine Howard
15	25	One More Time	Terry Davis	65	31	This World Is Not My Home	Todd Brumley
16	48	Tattoos And Scars	Steve Warren	66	70	Come To The Cross	Zac Clifton
17	34	Child Come Home	Waymasters	67	45	All I Really Need	Lindy Bryson
18	6	When I Didn't Have A Prayer	Sonshine Road	68	93	Victory Song	Russell Gilbert
19	38	How Big God Is	Terry and Debra Luna	69	86	Where Time Is No More	Greg Finch
20	1	Let Him In	Chris Darlington	70	89	Papa's Love	Ben Coulter
21	9	Broken Vessel	Marvin Harrell	71	82	Momma's Wall Of Fame	Michael Lusk
22	37	America I Love	Michael Ray Fain	72	96	I Need Your Grace	Michael Tetrick
23	43	I'll Send It Up	Mike Haemmerle	73	83	Rapture Ready	The Gospel Friends
24	3	If Not For You	Chris Golden	74	84	Get On Out Of Here	Mike Walker
25	35	I Bleed The Color Free	Deano Graham	75	-	Not Just On Sunday	The Pauls
26	44	A Better Place	Stella Parton & Johnathan Bond	76	90	Thank You For Trying	Jeff Napier
27	51	Small Town Girl	Victoria Steelman	77	-	Folks Don't Pray Anymore	Kenny Hatcher
28	5	Grace Led The Way	Michael Knight	78	99	Called	Donna Kilmurray
29	2	Used To Be's	Bill Baker	79	92	Don't Take His Job Away	Gena Hamilton
30	41	The Prodigal Story	Jonathan Ray Smith	80	-	Gods Gonna Part The Water	Kenneth Hall
31	58	Look What I Found	Keith Buchanan	81	68	That's God	Trish England
32	47	Turn My Eyes To Heaven	John Penney	82	94	Old Time Feeling /Soul Fillin' Station	Dale Rochell
33	52	From Afar	Paula Slow	83	89	We Could Leave Any Day	Dena Clark
34	74	High Above The Midnight	Richard Lynch	84	97	If Jesus Is A Stranger	Ray Stevens
35	46	A Good Place To Turn Around	Ron Hemphill	85	95	When Jesus Swings The Wrecking Ball	Alan Bibey & Grastowne
36	62	In His Eyes	Katie Estes	86	85	Mamas Endless Love	Steve Anthony
37	57	A Better Way To Go	David Smith	87	-	Once Upon A Cross	Barbara Fairchild
38	14	Rich In His Love	Bobby Jones Family	88	-	Six Feet Deep	David Timms
39	61	Man Of His Word	Michael Austin	89	98	He Never Really Went Away	Debbie Bennett
40	63	Hello Mama	Sherry Damron	90	-	Old Hymns	Cyndi Reynolds
41	54	Jesus Has A Mountain	Danny Thomas	91	100	Bethlehem, Virginia 1 BC	Steve Bridgmon
42	15	Sweet Beulah Land	Gregg Walker	92	-	Your Worth It All	Ty Hodges
43	49	I Wished We Had A Little More Time	Harry Claytor	93	-	Men Like These	Paul Staggs
44	53	Rest On The Water	Wink Kelso	94	-	Blood Sweat And Tears	Todd Tilgham
45	59	That's What Really Matters	Paul Tuttle	95	-	Never Easy To Say Goodbye	Debbie Mills
46	60	I'm Heading In A New Direction	Elaine Roy	96	-	You Carry Me	Joy LaVallee
47	33	The Father's Hand	Suzzette Michaels	97	-	The Day That My Sin Died	Kesha Parish
48	91	The Old Rugged Cross	Carl Ray & Rhonda Vincent	98	-	You Get To Me	Delnora
49	21	Diggin' Up Roots	Joe Richard	99	-	Living In His Glory	Troy Richardson
50	65	Gonna Be Leaving	Jerry Grant	100	-	It Had To Be God	Tim Livingston



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## The Legacy & Music of HANK WILLIAMS

Hank Williams is considered the most influential artist in Country music. It has been 71 years since Hank's life ended way too soon but his songs will forever be the masterpiece of American music. We honor the life and music of the legendary Hank Williams.

**K**nown by many as the father of contemporary Country music, Hank Williams was born on September 17, 1923 in the rural community of Mount Olive, Alabama. His birth certificate says "near Garland," Butler County. This is located 50 miles south of Montgomery. His mother gave him a guitar when he was eight years old, but his musical influence came from a local Blues street singer, Rufus 'Tee Tot' Payne. From Tee Tot, Hank learned how to play the guitar and sing the Blues, which became the basis for his songwriting. His mother moved the family to Montgomery, Alabama in 1937, where she opened a boarding house. Here, Hank formed a band called the Drifting Cowboys and landed a regular spot on a local radio station, WSFA, in 1941.

Hank met Audrey Mae Sheppard in 1943 while he was playing a medicine show and married in 1944. In 1946, Hank and Audrey visited Nashville to meet Fred Rose, one of the heads of Acuff-Rose Publishing. Rose liked Williams' songs and asked him to record two sessions for Sterling Records, which resulted in two singles. Both of the singles, *Never Again* and *Honky Tonkin*, were successful and Williams signed a contract with MGM Records in 1947. Rose became the singer's manager and record producer.

Released in 1947, *Move It On Over* became Hank's first single for MGM and was an immediate hit, climbing into the Country Top 5. In 1948, he had joined the Louisiana Hayride. *Honky Tonkin* was released in 1948, followed by *I'm A Long Gone Daddy* which peaked in the Top 10. In 1949, he recorded *Lovesick Blues*, initially recorded by Emmett Miller. The single became a huge hit, staying at number one for sixteen weeks and crossing over into the pop Top 25. Williams sang the song at the Grand Ole Opry, where he performed an unprecedented six encores.



Hank and Audrey Williams had their first child, Randall Hank, in the spring of 1949. Also in the spring, Hank assembled the most famous edition of the Drifting Cowboys, featuring Bob McNett, Hillous Butrum, Jerry Rivers, and Don Helms. Soon, he and the band were earning 1,000 dollars per Hank Williams concert. Williams had no fewer than seven hits in 1949 after *Lovesick Blues*, including the Top Fives *Wedding Bells*, *Mind Your Own Business*, *You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)*, and *My Bucket's Got A Hole In It*. The next year saw another string of hit singles, including the number ones, *Long Gone Lonesome Blues*, *Why Don't You Love Me*, and *Moanin' the Blues*; as well as the top tens, *I Just Don't Like This Kind of Livin'*, *My Son Calls Another Man Daddy*, *They'll Never Take Her Love From Me*, *Why Should We Try* and *Nobody's Lonesome For Me*.

In 1950, under the name of Luke the Drifter, Hank recorded a series of spiritual records. Many of these songs are sung in churches today and still touch the heart and soul of the listener. These Gospel songs included, *I Saw The Light*, *House of Gold*, *Drifting Too Far From The Shore*, *Picture From Life's Other Side* and *I'll Have A New Body (I'll Have A New Life)*.



Hank racked up hits in 1951, beginning with the Top 10 hit *Dear John* and its number one flip side, *Cold, Cold Heart*. Hank had several other hits in 1951, including the number one *Hey, Good Lookin'* and *Howlin' at the Moon*, *I Can't Help It (If I'm Still in Love With You)*, *Crazy Heart*, *Lonesome Whistle* and *Baby, We're Really in Love*, which all charted in the Top 10.

In 1952, Hank was still cranking out the hits, *Honky Tonk Blues* hitting number two in the spring. Hank released five more singles in 1952, *Half as Much*, *Jambalaya*, *Settin' the Woods on Fire*, *You Win Again*, and *I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive*, which all went Top 10.

As Hank's musical career rocketed beyond precedent, the demands on his time became unrelenting. Hank was the superstar of the day, and all the pressures that go with that were on his shoulders alone to bear. The music inside Hank was his to give, whether by the words of one of his standards or by his performances of someone else's work.

Hank had a wide variety of musical ideas. From sacred hymns to tales of broken hearts and troubled love, to rousing dance tunes, Hank always had a song to sing. We all know his songs that have become the standards of the industry. But Hank also recorded novelty songs and Blues-laments, Country Hymns and "story ballads."

The world knows Hank Williams. Hank's songs and performances were legendary even before his death at the early age of 29. Hank has become the standard against which all Country music is measured.

Hank was scheduled to play a concert in Canton, Ohio on January 1, 1953. Charles Carr, a young eighteen-year-old friend of Hank's was driving. Just before sun-up on New Year's morning in Oakhill, West Virginia, Hank was taken to a hospital where he was officially declared dead at 7:00 a.m. on January 1, 1953. He was 29.



### The Drifting Cowboys

Three days later, on Sunday, January 4, 1953, Hank was buried in Montgomery, Alabama with a record crowd in attendance. More than 25,000 mourners came out to pay their respects to the most famous hillbilly singer/songwriter in history of American music.

Dozens of Country music stars attended, as did Audrey Williams, Billie Jean Jones, and Bobbie Jett, who happened to give birth to a daughter two days later. *I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive* reached number one immediately after his death, and it was followed by a number of hit songs throughout 1953, including the number ones *Your Cheatin' Heart*, *Kaw-Liga* and *Take These Chains From My Heart*.

In 1961, Hank was one of the first three to be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. Hank's music has not only stood the test of time, but his music continues to influence countless numbers of recording artists.

Hank Williams would have been 100 years old on September 17, 2023. A Centennial Celebration was held to commemorate his 100th birthday which included concerts, festivities, and an induction into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame. The celebration was held in historic downtown Montgomery Alabama, which is home to The Hank Williams Museum. The museum is a top tourist attraction where fans can visit throughout the year.

Portions of this article were from the Hank Williams website. Visit [www.thehankwilliamsmuseum.net](http://www.thehankwilliamsmuseum.net) for more information about the museum.







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# MUSIC MEMORIES MUSEUM

Nestled between Augusta, Macon, and Savannah, Swainsboro is one of Georgia's most charming cities. Rich in history and thriving with contemporary culture and arts, Swainsboro is home to one of the deep south's most popular attractions – The Music Memories Museum.

**By John Lanier**

---

The Music Memories Museum houses and displays one of the largest private collections of authentic items and personal clothing once owned by more than 250 famous music icons dating back to the early 1950s. Covering the musical spectrum – from Country, Rock, Pop and Jazz to R & B, Bluegrass and Gospel – visitors to the museum can view items and clothing once owned by artists like Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton, George Jones, Rascal Flatts, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, John Lennon, Cher, Elton John, Freddy Mercury, Michael Jackson, Olivia Newton-John, Whitney Houston, Little Richard, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand, and hundreds more.

Michael Bright, owner of The Music Memories Museum, has decades of experience in the music business, including his years as a touring recording artist. He recalls, “I started singing secular music, a little Rock-n-Roll but more Country music. During that time, I was introduced to Country singer Ronnie McDowell. Through his friendship I was able to meet many singers such as Conway Twitty, Reba McEntire, Roy Clark, Ricky Skaggs, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Acuff, Tanya Tucker, Sawyer Brown, just to name a few. But one memory I will never forget was when I had the rare opportunity to stand side by side with Roy Acuff on the Grand Ole Opry stage.”



**Michael Bright, owner of the  
popular Music Memories Museum**



It was during the early 1990s that Michael says he was introduced to someone else that forever changed his life and altered the path of his music career. “His name is Jesus,” Michael shares. “I gave my life to the Lord and started singing Southern Gospel music.”

In 1995 Michael recorded his first Southern Gospel music CD. He explains, “I sent it out to radio stations and took the time to call the DJs and asked them to play my music. Then the next amazing thing happened... the song, *It's Gonna Be A Good Day* charted at #34 in the Top 40 in the USA. My music then began to reach outside of the USA. In 2006, I became the first and only Southern Gospel recording artist to have five songs simultaneously chart in the Top 25 in the UK and two of those songs reached #1 on the charts and stayed in the Top 40 charts for almost a year.”

Michael was a featured guest on numerous TV programs and from 1995 to 2013 he traveled full time, performing more than 250 concerts a year. Michael says, “What makes this incredible, all this happened without a radio promoter, booking agent, or record company.”

Since retiring from the road, Michael has enjoyed his other passion – Antiques. Since 2014, he has served as the manager for Swainsboro’s Main Street Market Antique Mall. This is where Michael’s next venture was realized. He opened The Music Memories Museum inside the antique mall. “I decided to share my music memories of singers I grew up listening to on the radio and some that I had the opportunity to meet personally through my private collection of hundreds of authentic autographs, personal items and clothing once owned by Country music, Rock n Roll, and R&B singers. You can see my private collection at the Music Memories Museum located inside Main Street Market Antique Mall. I thought Swainsboro, Georgia would be a great location for the museum because of all the music history it has.”

He’s not kidding or exaggerating. Unless one is a long-time resident of Swainsboro, one may not be aware of the rich, musical heritage of the quaint, charming city. Swainsboro is home to the historic Nancy Auditorium – only one mile from The Music Memories Museum. It’s where Hank Williams, Jr. performed in front of a live audience for the very first time on March 22, 1958. He was eight years old. At only nine years old, Brenda Lee’s first paid performance was on the same stage in 1953. Patsy Cline performed there in 1957, at the age of 25.

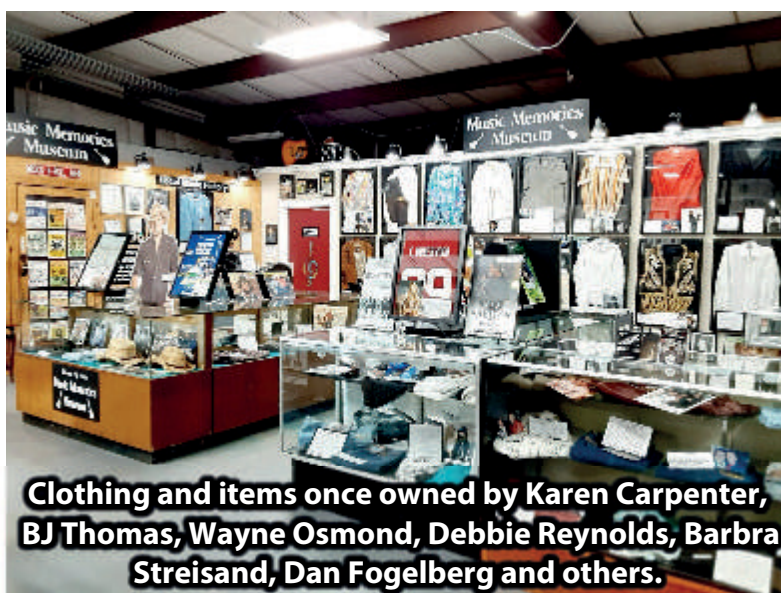
Hundreds more performed on the stage of Swainsboro’s Nancy Auditorium on through the 1970s, including Bill Monroe, Loretta Lynn, Chet



**1999 Harley Davidson once owned by Gregg Allman of the Allman Brothers**



**Audio mixing board once owned by Johnny Cash**



**Clothing and items once owned by Karen Carpenter, BJ Thomas, Wayne Osmond, Debbie Reynolds, Barbra Streisand, Dan Fogelberg and others.**





**The Nancy Auditorium in its glory days**

In 1957, Grand Ole Opry star Webb Pierce and General Manager of the Grand Ole Opry Jim Denny went in as partners and purchased the Nancy Auditorium and WJAT radio station. Pierce hired Johnnie Bailes (as in the Grand Ole Opry's Bailes Brothers) as the General Manager for WJAT radio. They had some sort of arrangement, if they booked a group or singer for the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee, they also had to perform at the Nancy Auditorium in Swainsboro, Georgia.

For Michael, the combined history of WJAT Radio, The Nancy Auditorium,

Atkins, Mel Tillis, The Statler Brothers, The Blackwood Brothers, The Happy Goodmans, The Oak Ridge Boys, Roy Acuff, Connie Smith and so many others.

How did so many musical icons find their way to Swainsboro, Georgia? It started with radio station, WJAT, opened by Jack A. Thompson in April of 1950. He later developed a plan for an auditorium to be used for concerts, becoming known as the Peach State Jamboree. Building it on to the radio station, The Nancy Auditorium, named after his wife, opened in April of 1954.

and his decades long career in the music business translates into a lifetime of music and cherished memories. He invites you to share this experience with him at The Music Memories Museum in Swainsboro, Georgia. "I hope on your visit you will find a personal item from your favorite singer that brings back a special memory in your life."

[www.musicmemoriesmuseum.com](http://www.musicmemoriesmuseum.com)


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

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A photograph of James Payne, an older man with white hair and a goatee, wearing a dark, patterned button-down shirt. He is holding a dark-colored electric guitar with a light-colored pickguard. The background is a dark, textured wall.

# JAMES PAYNE

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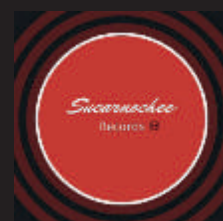
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# LEGENDS SERIES

## TERRY & DEBRA LUNA

By Robin Tanner

Mention "The Bakersfield Sound" and the first names that come to mind might be Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Tommy Collins or Joe and Rose Lee Maphis. Add to that list Terry & Debra Luna and their own style of West Coast Country Gospel. The husband-and-wife team of singer-songwriters primarily perform their own material; inspirational songs that are encouraging, uplifting, sometimes fun, some poignant and reflective; all with that "Bakersfield Sound."

"All of our songs come from real-life experiences," says Debra, "We're honored that God allows us to share those life lessons and words of encouragement to others."



Born in Bakersfield, Terry grew up in an exciting time of West Coast Country music history and was influenced by many of the local icons. Terry remembers hearing Traditional Country and Country-styled Gospel music at local community events and church services. After showing an interest in music at a young age he learned to play rhythm guitar when he was thirteen years old. At an early age Terry knew that God was calling him to the ministry of music; he was deeply influenced by The Christian Troubadours, The Gospel III, The Countrymen, Goodmans, Hinsons and the Rambos.

As a youngster, Terry could always be found watching a nightly local television show in Bakersfield, Cousin Herb Henson's Trading Post, which featured many local and national Country artists each evening. Buck Owens, Spade Cooley, Merle Haggard, Roy Nichols, Bonnie Owens, Billy Mize and many others influenced his interest in music. However, it was a Sunday morning at his local church that

changed Terry's trajectory in music. The pastor of Terry's church invited The Christian Troubadours to minister in the morning service. The power of a Gospel song is not to be underestimated. After experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit and hearing the life-changing message in the songs, Terry immediately knew that he would be involved in Country Gospel music in some fashion. Now 70 years old, he still enjoys writing, singing, and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ through Country Gospel Music.

Debra comes from a rich family heritage of preachers, evangelists, pastors, singers, and musicians in Central California. At an early age Debra recalls singing at her grandparents' church, often times being lifted to the pulpit in order to see the congregation. Listening to her mother and aunt play the piano, Debra knew that she wanted to learn the instrument and play in church and youth camps, which she accomplished in her early teens.



Terry and Debra met as teenagers and very quickly shared the same interests in Gospel music. They were both members of several local groups that toured the west coast. They married and continued to minister in song and worship in various capacities as they raised their family of three children. They have ministered in music together for over 50 years, still going strong.

The Lunas continued to work in their local church as music ministers, worship leaders and choir directors as well as traveling part-time with their groups. “I have enjoyed the journey so far, I’m convinced it’s not quite finished yet,” says Terry, “I am grateful and blessed to be able to write and sing the songs with my best friend.”

“I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. Psalms 104:33,” quotes Debra, “One of my favorite scriptures. I have been singing in churches, concerts, and conventions since I was very young. God blessed me with a Christian home with Christian parents who were very active in the local church. Every time the church doors were open, we were there! I am thankful for my strong Christian heritage. I am married to a wonderful singer, musician, worship leader, music director, husband, father, and friend. Our plans, with God’s direction, are to sing unto the Lord as long as we live!”

Terry recalls a telephone call in 2011 from a woman telling of her tragic experience as a tornado devastated her home in Central Mississippi. “She tearfully described the helplessness of rummaging through what was left of her home and belongings, only to find her copy of the “Look Up” CD lying yards from the home, undamaged by the storm. She knew the message of the title track on that CD was to look past today’s circumstances, seek the comfort of the Holy Spirit and know that God has us in His protection. She called to say thank you for the song, it helped her through several dark days after the storm. Testimonies such as these, and there are countless others, are God’s way of showing us that we are in His perfect will, doing what he wants us to do for this season.” Every song has a story and the duo are often asked to share the “story behind the song” while ministering in church services.

Terry and Debra now reside in Middle Tennessee, a convenient location as they travel around the country and continue to write and record Country Gospel and Christian

Country music. They are blessed with three grown children, eight beautiful grandchildren that love to sing and play instruments and worship the Lord. They were recently blessed with their first great-granddaughter. “Yes, God is good!” says Debra, “Our pastor used to say, ‘it feels like God bent down and kissed the earth and we’re right in the middle of the smack!’ We are blessed!”

Terry and Debra have recorded several projects containing mostly original songs. The husband and wife duo have charted eleven songs in the Top 10, three of which have reached the number one spot. Those songs included, *He Is Here* and *Don’t Tell Me He Can’t (I Know He Can)* both written by Debra Luna, and *Highest Hill*.



Terry and Debra have been blessed with the ICGMA, GMAA and NACMAI ‘Duo of the Year’ Award several times; received the ‘Songwriter of the Year’ and ‘Song of The Year’ Award for *Diggin’ Up*, written by Debra, from the Gospel Music Artists Association in 2014. They were recently inducted into the International Country Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame in 2023. “It is an absolute honor to be inducted into the Hall of Fame alongside so many legendary Country Gospel singers, writers and musicians.” said Terry at the induction ceremony held in West Plains, Missouri in July.

Terry and Debra recently released *How Big God Is*, written by Debra, from their latest project “Side By Side.” It is currently charting in the Top 20 on both Christian Voice Magazine and Cross Country USA Magazine’s Top 100. The single is available on Canyon Creek Records. A new project is scheduled for release in the near future.



Their latest project, "Side By Side" was released in July 2019. The CD contains new songs written by Terry and Debra and one from the pen of legendary Country and Country Gospel singer/songwriter Freddie Hart. They round out the disc with a new song, *The Cross and The Plow*, written by Mark Ford and their updated version of *Today I Started Living*, written by Jerry Short.

Terry and Debra were previously contributing writers to Christian Servant Magazine, an inspirational quarterly magazine serving the Gospel music artist and industry. They also hosted a weekly radio program, "The Country Gospel Corral," on CampMeetingRadio.com as well as a monthly countdown show for the station.

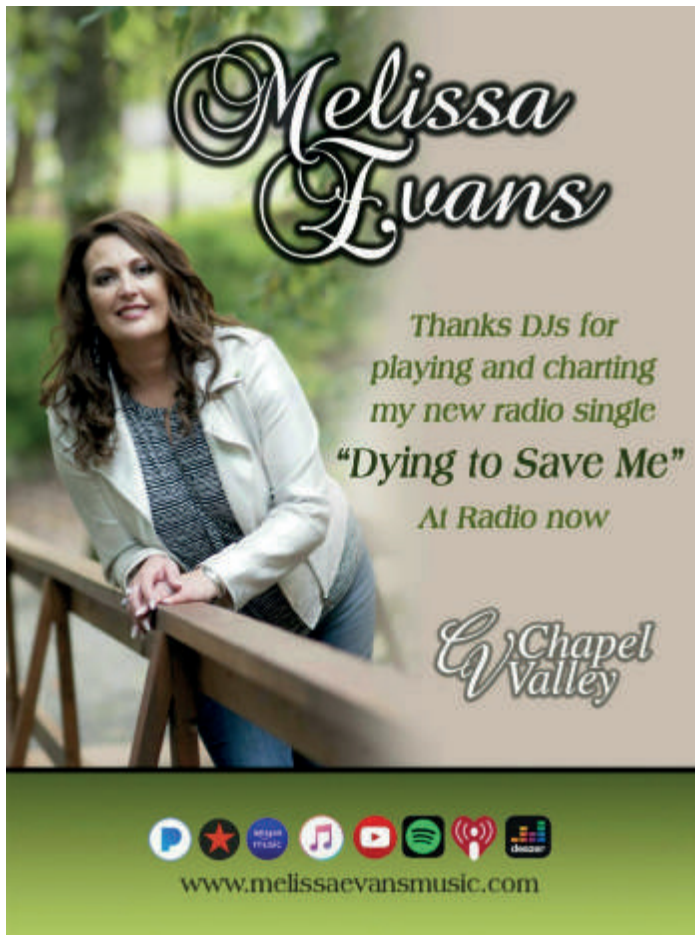
When asked to share a memorable moment from their career, Terry shared, "We have been blessed with meeting so many wonderful people in this industry, many of whom we call friends to this day. One such individual we were so honored to get to know quite well was Freddie Hart, the award-winning singer/songwriter of such mega-hits as *Easy Lovin'* and *Hang in There Girl* and so many others. We had the privilege of working with him in concert on several occasions in Southern California. Freddie even pitched us some songs from his living room in Burbank. Freddie and his wife Ginger were such an inspiration to us both, we are honored to have called them our friends." Debra adds, "We also enjoy hearing how our songs minister to individuals, it is confirmation that we are doing exactly what the Lord has called us to do."

Spend an evening in concert with Terry and Debra Luna and you'll soon learn that the couple loves the Lord, they love each other, and they love to share their passion of singing songs about Jesus. They often tell "the stories behind the songs" as they share their music. "Prior to every concert, we hold hands and pray that the Lord will anoint our songs and minister through us," said Debra. "Music is our passion!"

"We have dedicated our lives to singing unto the Lord. We write songs that God gives us through real-life experiences, we are honored that God uses us to share the story of Jesus with others along the way."

When asked what their goals were at this stage of their career, Terry said, "More than fifty years of singing together and still counting, we're not finished yet! We pray that God continues to bless us with new songs, the voices to sing them and the strength to continue to carry the good news of Jesus Christ around the country." Debra adds, "We want to allow the Holy Spirit to touch lives, to minister to those who are hurting and those who need salvation."

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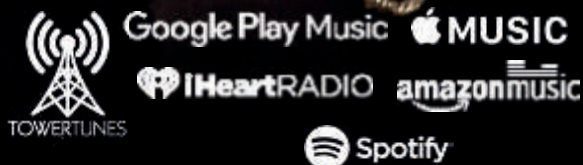


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