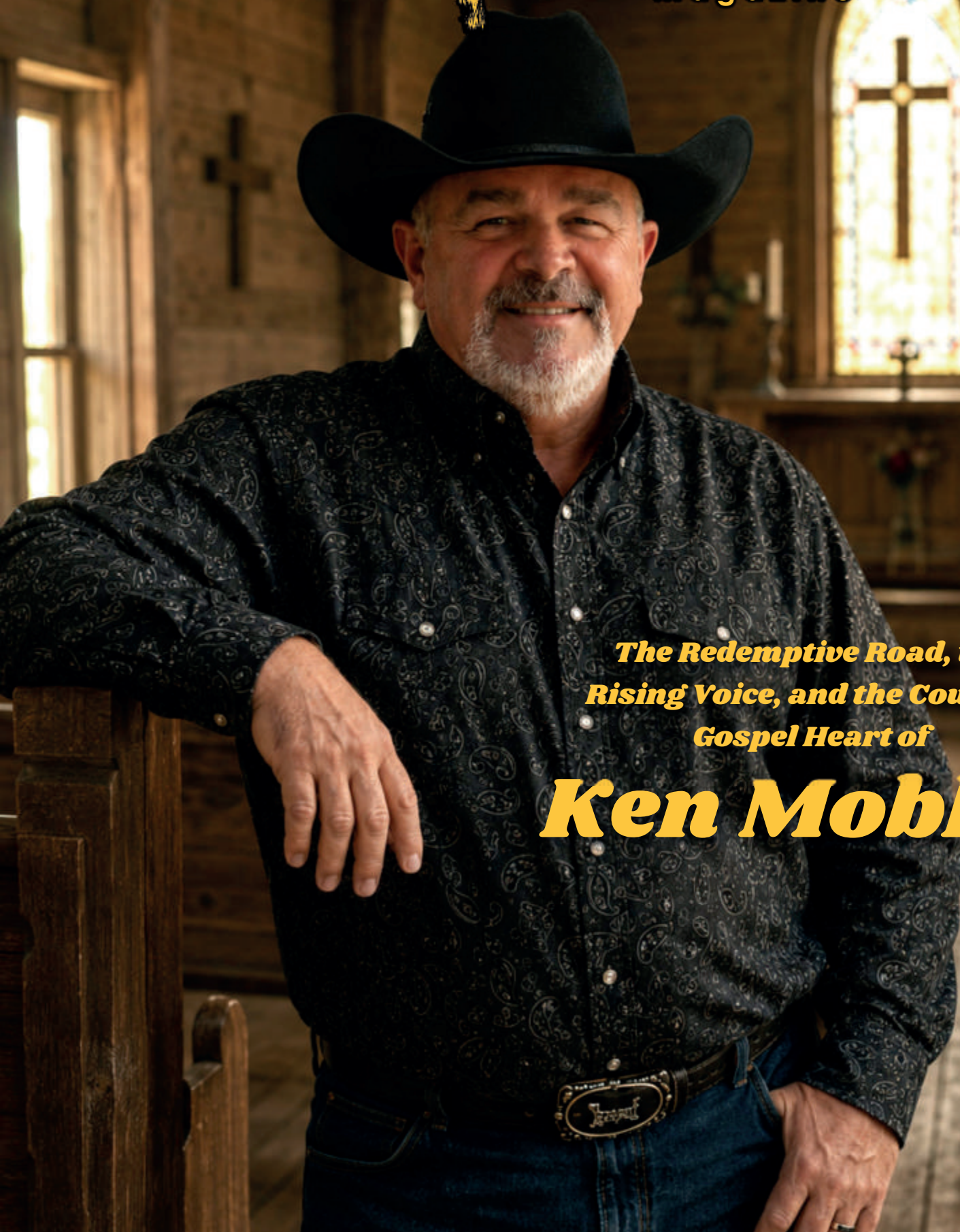


SEPTEMBER 2026

CrossCountry^{USA} magazine



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Rising Voice, and the Country
Gospel Heart of*

Ken Mobley

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SEPTEMBER 2026

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From the Editor

September arrives with the first hints of fall - cooler mornings, earlier sunsets, football season, festivals, and church revivals. Everyone is settling back into routine after a memorable summer, and a busy schedule begins again.

As we step into September, I can't help but reflect on what an incredible season this has been for Cross Country USA Magazine. The past few months have carried us across state lines, into packed auditoriums, church gatherings, and community celebrations. We were blessed to attend many wonderful events again this year in June, including the 12th Annual Country With Heart Benefitting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the 44th Annual Sunday Mornin' Country at the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville, Tennessee. In July, we traveled to the 70th ICGMA weekend in West Plains, Missouri, Country Tonite Theatre in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, for the Neal McCoy concert, and the Pure Gospel Revival near Ashland, Kentucky, just to mention a few. Our hearts have been blessed every step of the way.

We've had the privilege of meeting so many of you at the events we've attended this year. Each handshake, each conversation or interview, and each testimony shared reminds us why we do what we do. There is nothing quite like seeing Christian Country artists, Country performers, and long-loved legends stand before a crowd and pour out their music and their faith. Those moments stay with us long after the songs are over.

Our travels have also given us a front-row seat to the incredible work God is doing through music across this nation. We've watched families worship together, seen young artists step boldly into their calling, and witnessed seasoned performers continue to inspire with grace and humility. Every event has strengthened, encouraged, and shared the love of Christ through the stories and songs that define our genre. Cross Country USA is thrilled to attend even more special events throughout the remainder of the year.

You are part of this journey with us. Your support keeps this magazine moving forward, and your prayers sustain our team as we travel, write, design, and distribute each issue.

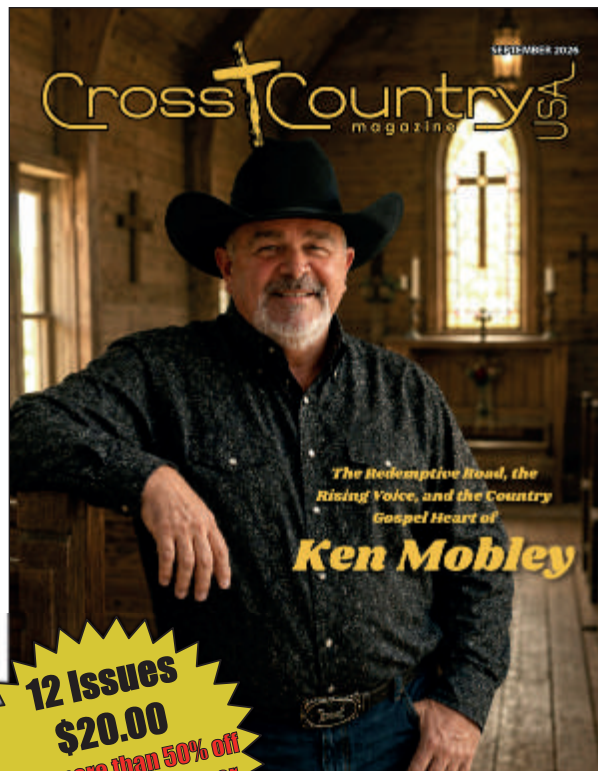
Thank you for walking with us through another busy and beautiful season. God has been faithful, and we look forward to all He has in store as we continue this journey, sharing His goodness through music.

Robin

Robin Tanner, Managing Editor

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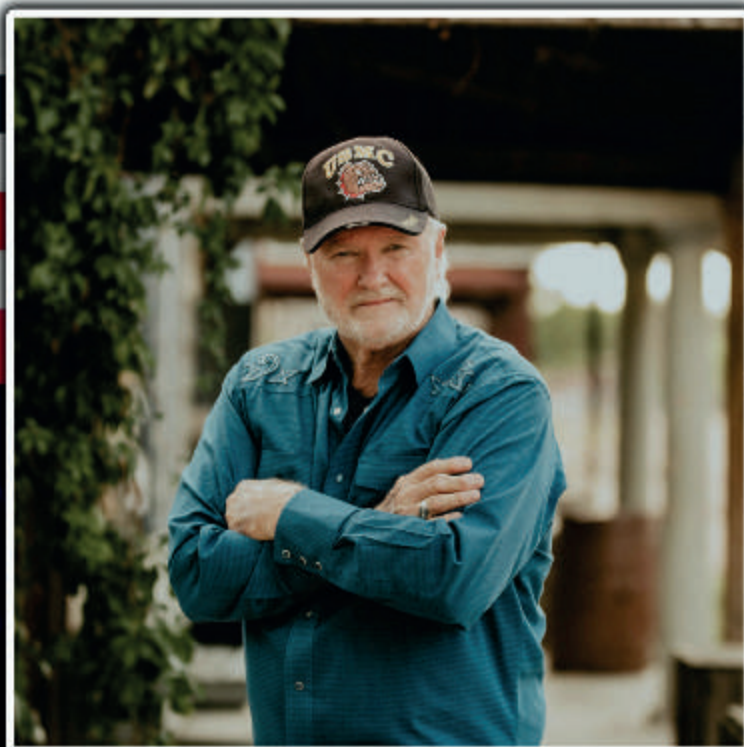
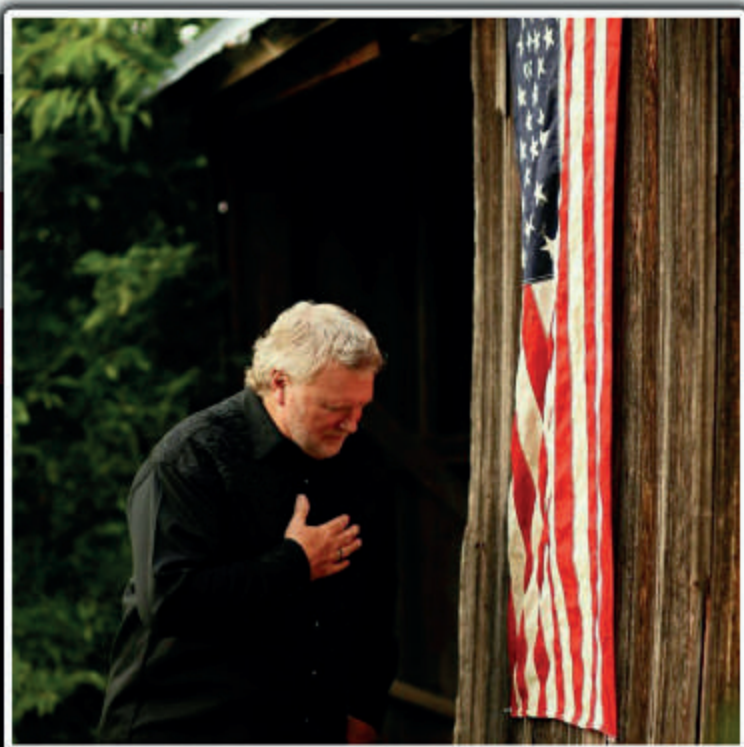
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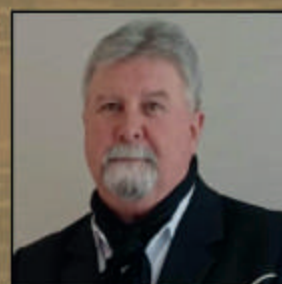
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Leading Me Home
Melissa Garner

By Robin Tanner

PHOEBE WHITE

Kentucky cowgirl Phoebe White is a 16-year-old multi-instrumentalist, singer-songwriter, and gifted yodeler whose star continues to rise across the Western and Country music world. She was featured in Young Country a few years ago, but with all she has accomplished since then, it was time to revisit her remarkable journey.

Performing publicly since the age of seven, Phoebe has already won more than 26 talent competitions and placed in a dozen more. She credits her success to the people who helped her from the beginning. “I am thankful to have wonderful musician mentors, excellent vocal teachers and guitar teachers, and songwriter friends,” she shares. “I have had the pleasure of participating in music at church my whole life and to enjoy a variety of musical instruments in our home. I deeply appreciate the encouragement and support of my family who has consistently provided for me as I continue to learn and grow as an artist.”

Phoebe’s musical influences reflect her deep love for Western, Classic Country, and powerhouse vocalists. Riders in the Sky, Roy Rogers, Patsy Montana, Patsy Cline, LeAnn Rimes, Carolina Cotton, Whitney Houston, and Dolly Parton are just a few of the artists who have shaped her sound.

The album “UnXpected,” featured Grammy Award winners, Riders in the Sky, Suzy Bogguss, and Kentucky Bluegrass legends The McLain Family Band. Produced by folk singer Michael Johnathon, “UnXpected” reached number three on the Western Music Charts.

Her newest album, “Cowgirl’s Delight,” follows the impact of “UnXpected” and continues her partnership with producer Michael Johnathon. “I co-wrote many of the songs on this album with my mom, Tiffany White, and my Nashville songwriting friend Corey Lee Barker,” Phoebe explains.

Phoebe’s growing list of accolades reflects her dedication and talent. Most recently, she received the 2026 Youth Achievement Award from the Tennessee Songwriters



Association International. “One of my favorite awards to have received was the 2022 Janet McBride Best-of-the-Best Yodeling Award from the International Western Music Association,” she says.

Her young career is already filled with unforgettable moments. “I received a special honorary exhibit at the Kentucky Music Hall of Fame. In 2024, I was featured in an exhibit at the Frazier History Museum.” But one memory stands above the rest. “My most favorite career highlight was performing on the Grand Ole Opry with Riders in the Sky in 2023! It was such an incredible experience, an absolute dream come true. Stepping into that historic circle on stage is electric. It truly was an honor I will never forget.”

Phoebe also stepped into the national spotlight in 2025 when she performed for celebrity judges, Lionel Richie,

Carrie Underwood, and Luke Bryan on American Idol. "It was super exciting and a whole lot of fun," she recalls.

She has shared the stage with several artists who have become mentors. "I love the memory of singing an impromptu duet with Suzy Bogguss on stage, who later recorded a duet with me for my most recent album. It was super fun to open for Michael Martin Murphey on Song of the Mountains at the Lincoln Theatre in Marion, Virginia with Ruth McLain of the McLain Family Band." Murphey himself praised her talent, saying, "Phoebe's songs are remarkable, her voice exquisite, and her yodeling will make you see stars!"

Phoebe has also made multiple national TV, radio, and media appearances, including Woodsongs Old-Time Radio Hour, Woodsongs Kids, The Best of America by Horseback, NPR radio, and many more.

Through every milestone, Phoebe has remained grounded in her faith. "Always keep Christ first. Recognize that all good gifts come from Him. He is the reason I sing. I give God all the thanks, praise, glory, and honor for the opportunities He has given me, for the special people He has brought into my life through music, for the gift of music, and for these many wonderful experiences."

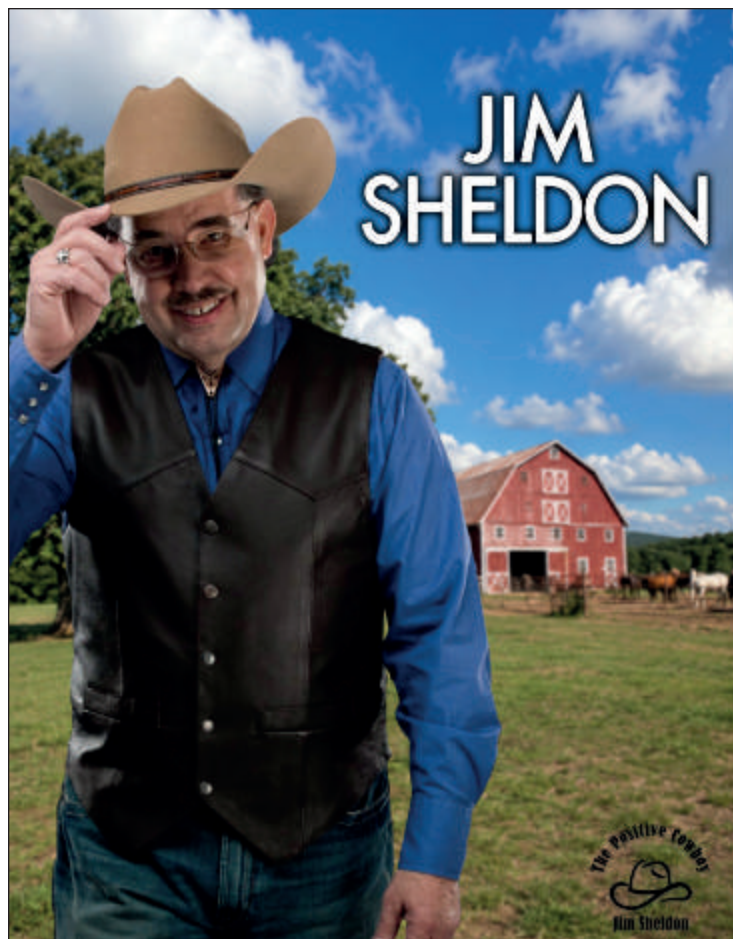
She often reflects on John 15:5: "Jesus says, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.'"

Her concerts are filled with joy, energy, and plenty of yodeling. "I really enjoy the meet-and-greets because I think my audiences are the nicest people you could ever want to meet. They are what make these events so special. Watching them smile and hearing their reactions to my music is so much fun. They really make my heart happy!"

Phoebe's dream is to continue writing, singing, recording, and performing for as long as God allows. She hopes to return to the Grand Ole Opry - and one day become a member. "Every time I visit the Opry, it feels like home. The history there is a treasure worth both protecting and sharing."

With her faith, her passion for Western music, and her dedication to preserving America's rural and cowboy heritage, Phoebe White plans to continue inspiring audiences across the globe. Her music reintroduces timeless Western classics to new generations while reminding America of its glorious past and lighting the way for its future.

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Photos by Bob Anderson

By Robin Tanner

*I*t was a wonderful time in West Plains, Missouri, as artists, families, and friends gathered to celebrate 70 years of the International Country Gospel Music Association. The milestone event – which included the prestigious Gold Cross Awards. - was held July 16 -18 at The Bridge Church.

Artists traveled from across the United States to the Ozarks with one purpose in mind - to lift up the name of Jesus through song. The ICGMA welcomed first-time participants as well as long-time members who have been a vital part of this association for decades. Many shared that attending feels like a family reunion and church service all at once. The atmosphere was filled with encouragement, fellowship, and heartfelt worship as artists supported one another and celebrated the ministry God has given them.

Congratulations to Dan and Marilyn Duncan and the entire ICGMA board for reaching this remarkable 70-year milestone. Their dedication has kept the vision strong, and this year's gathering was a beautiful reminder of the unity, purpose, and joy found in Country Gospel music.



Dan & Marilyn Duncan



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Bruce Haynes and James Payne



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The Tiptons

Female Horizon of the Year
Molly Clair Corman

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Joy Roberts

Gold Cross Female Artist of the Year
Heather Van Deren

Group of the Year
White River

Crossover Artist of the Year
Victoria Steelman

TV Show of the Year
Alabama Gospel Roots

Promoter of the Year
Debbie Bennett

Producer of the Year
Chuck Day

Bluegrass Artist of the Year
Waymasters

Album of the Year
Inspired (Ava Kasich)

Gold Cross Artist of the Year
Jim Sheldon

Songwriter of the Year
Bruce Haynes

Video of the Year
Let It Go (Bev McCann and Johnathan Bond)

Male Horizon of the Year
Ray Epperson

Song of the Year
The Cross Says It All (James Payne)

Instrumentalist of the Year
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Remembering...

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JERRY BRANSCOMB • BEN JONES



Jerry Branscomb

May 3, 1956 – July 25, 2026

Jerry L. Branscomb was born on May 3, 1956, in Dayton, Ohio, arriving into a world that would one day know him for his quiet strength, unwavering loyalty, and the steady kindness that marked every chapter of his life. His childhood in Dayton shaped him early; a place where family roots ran deep, work was done with one's hands, and character was measured not by words but by the way a man lived.

As Jerry grew into adulthood, those early lessons became the foundation of a life defined by perseverance and integrity. He spent many dedicated years working for General Motors, earning the respect of colleagues who knew him as reliable, hardworking, and always willing to lend a hand. After retiring from GM, Jerry found new purpose on the open road as a truck driver. He loved the freedom of travel, the rhythm of long miles, and the friendships formed along the way.

Wherever he went, he carried the same steady presence that made people feel at ease.

But Jerry's greatest devotion was always reserved for his family. He shared his life with his beloved wife, Sandy Branscomb, whose companionship and support were constants through every season. Together they built a home filled with laughter, resilience, and deep affection. Jerry's pride extended to his children - Josh (Mindy), Chris (Amanda), Shayne (Crystal), and Cody (Teressa) - each of whom carries forward the lessons he lived: work hard, love deeply, and stand steady. His grandchildren - Lucas (Emily), Kylah (Austin), Addelynn, Anniston, Ovid, Ives, and Torygg - were his delight, and his great-grandchild Karmen brought a special joy to his later years.

Jerry was a devoted son to Cleo Branscomb, and a caring brother to Junior (Betty), Tony (Peggy), and Dimple (Dan). He carried the memory of his father, Floyd Branscomb, with quiet honor. And through all the years, he shared countless moments with Benny, his loyal canine companion, who remained faithfully by his side.

His interests reflected a vibrant, down-to-earth spirit. Jerry loved to sing and write songs, offering his family melodies shaped by heart and meaning. The outdoors called to him - hunting, fishing, and riding horses brought him peace and adventure. He cherished traveling, especially cruises shared with family and friends, creating memories that now shine even brighter.

At the center of Jerry's life was his faith. Psalm 121 was his anchor, a passage he returned to for strength and comfort. Its words guided him through challenges and shaped the quiet, enduring belief that those who knew him admired.

On July 25, 2026, in Ray, Ohio, Jerry Branscomb passed peacefully from this life. His seventy years left an imprint of love, integrity, and steadfast devotion. He is dearly missed



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by all who knew him, and fondly remembered for the gentle, faithful way he walked through the world.

His legacy lives on in the family he cherished, the friendships he nurtured, and the steady goodness he carried every day. His song continues.



Ben Jones

August 30, 1941 – August 9, 2026

Ben Lewis Jones was born on August 30, 1941, in Halifax, Virginia, arriving in the world with the kind of bright, spirited personality that would one day make him unforgettable. Raised in the rural South, he grew up surrounded by front-porch storytelling, small-town humor, and the kind of neighborly warmth that shaped both his character and his future. Even as a boy, Ben carried a spark - a quick wit, a generous heart, and a love for people that would follow him through every chapter of his life.

As he moved into adulthood, Ben's creative gifts began to take shape. He found his way into acting, writing, and performing, discovering that his natural charm translated effortlessly to the stage and screen. Those early years in entertainment laid the foundation for what would become one of the most recognizable roles in American television. In 1979, Ben stepped into the shoes of Cooter Davenport on The

Dukes of Hazzard, and something magical happened. His portrayal of the loyal mechanic with the easy grin captured the heart of a nation. Cooter wasn't just a character; he became a symbol of friendship, goodness, and the timeless American spirit. Generations grew up with Ben's voice on the CB radio, his laugh echoing from the garage, and his unwavering loyalty to the Duke boys. Through him, Cooter became part of our shared cultural memory.

But Ben Jones was never defined by a single role. After his years in Hollywood, he carried his authenticity into public service, serving two terms in the United States Congress. He spoke for everyday Americans with sincerity, humility, and conviction - the same qualities that had endeared him to millions on television. Whether in front of a camera or behind a congressional desk, Ben remained utterly himself: honest, grounded, and guided by a deep love for his country.

In the later years of his life, Ben found joy in celebrating the community that had embraced him. With his wife, Alma Viator, he created Cooter's, a museum and gathering place that became a beloved destination for fans nationwide. There, Ben welcomed families, signed autographs, told stories, and made every visitor feel like an old friend. He fronted Cooter's Garage Band across more than a dozen albums, published his memoir "Redneck Boy in the Promised Land," and hosted annual Dukes of Hazzard festivals that drew more than 100,000 fans. He never once took for granted the people who had supported him. His gratitude was genuine, his kindness sincere.

Ben's final day reflected the simplicity and joy he carried throughout his life. On August 9, 2026, at his home in Luray, Virginia, he passed peacefully while preparing to watch his beloved Atlanta Braves. Alma's words captured the truth of his journey: "I lost the love of my life today... Ben had the most amazing rich full life. He loved and was loved by so many."

He leaves behind his wife, Alma; his children, Rachel and Walker; and an enormous extended family of fans, colleagues, and friends who knew him as generous, funny, and unmistakably himself.

Ben Jones lived a life that touched millions - a life full of laughter, service, creativity, and heart. His story remains, bright and enduring, in the countless people who loved him. His light still shines.

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CrossCountry Report

CHRISTIAN COUNTRY MUSIC NEWS & SCOOPS

Nancy Jones and Friends to Celebrate George Jones' 95th Birthday at the Nashville Palace

Nancy Jones, widow to the late George Jones, announces "The Possum's" 95th Birthday Celebration taking place at The Nashville Palace in the "Randy Travis Room" on Sunday, September 13, 2026 at 4pm.



"George Jones remains one of the most beloved Country music singers of all time and I could not let this birthday milestone go by and not celebrate," says Nancy Jones. "George's actual birthday is the 12th, but that falls on a Saturday and so many of my friends are out touring and making a living, so I decided to make the event the next day so they could come and be part of it. For the people that get tickets, they are gonna love this show! So many of George's friends are coming to celebrate with us."

"We've had the opportunity to work with Nancy before, helping raise money for two officers and their families following the tragic ambush in Huntsville, Alabama," said Josh Bleidt, founder of Concerts 4 A Cause. "So when this opportunity came along, it fell right in line with one of our main objectives - supporting music education. We're honored

to work alongside Nancy again, celebrate George's incredible legacy and help invest in the next generation of songwriters."

"The proceeds of this birthday celebration are going to two different organizations that support Country music. First, Concerts 4 a Cause, which helped me raise money for two police officers in Huntsville, Alabama, that got ambushed and shot just before our big Emmy-award winning tribute show a few years ago. The second will be The George Jones Scholarship at MTSU, where they have a Life and Music of George Jones class. I want to make sure George's legacy continues through the next generation and the best way to do that is to help the college that is teaching students about George's music," adds Jones.

George Jones is regarded among the most important and influential singers in American popular music history. He was the singer of enduring Country music hits, including *She Thinks I Still Care*, *The Grand Tour*, *Walk Through This World With Me*, and *He Stopped Loving Her Today*, the latter of which is often at the top of industry lists of the greatest Country music singles of all time. Jones would ultimately record more than 160 charting singles, more than any other artist in any format in the history of popular music.

Jones worked with producer Billy Sherrill to craft a sound that was elegant and rooted, scoring with *The Grand Tour*, *Bartenders Blues*, and many more. Sherrill also produced duets between Jones and his then-wife Tammy Wynette, and in the 1970s, they scored top-charting hits, including *We're Gonna Hold On*, *Golden Ring*, and *Near You*. By the time *Golden Ring* and *Near You* hit in 1976, Jones and Wynette were divorced, and Jones was battling personal demons. His solo career cooled until 1980 when he recorded *He Stopped Loving Her Today*, a ballad penned by Curly Putman and Bobby Braddock that helped Jones win Country Music Association prizes for best male vocal and top single. *He Stopped Loving Her Today* revived a flagging career, and Jones won the CMA's Top Male Vocalist award in 1980 and 1981. He also earned a Grammy for Best Male Country Vocal Performance. He signed with MCA

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Records in 1990 and began a successful run, and he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1992. His guest vocal on Patty Loveless' *You Don't Seem To Miss Me* won a CMA award for top vocal event in 1998, becoming his final Top 20 Country hit.

Lacy J. Dalton to Celebrate 80th Birthday With Acoustic Evening



Singer-songwriter and Country music outlaw Lacy J. Dalton is celebrating her 80th birthday. The celebration, An Acoustic Evening With Lacy J. Dalton and Friends, is a special Nashville event marking this once-in-a-lifetime milestone, taking place October 15th at 7:30 p.m. at 3rd & Lindsley in Nashville, Tennessee.

Joining Dalton for the intimate evening are Country Music Hall of Fame member Jimmy Fortune, David Frizzell, Terri Gibbs, Makenzie Phipps, Dale Pounce, and Michelle Wright. This rare Nashville appearance will celebrate Dalton's remarkable career while benefiting her nonprofit, the Let 'em Run Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to preserving, rescuing, and providing sanctuary and homes for America's wild horses and burros. Sponsored by Mezek Films along with Gus Arrendale and Springer Mountain Farms, the evening promises unforgettable music, stories, and special moments shared among friends while supporting a cause close to Dalton's heart.

"I'm calling this my 'Not Dead Yet' Birthday Bash," shares Dalton. "I'll be 80 years old on October 13, and we are celebrating in a grand way on October 15th! I'm proud to have made it this far. Not everybody can say that! I'm incredibly thankful to all of my friends who are coming out to perform, and hey, you never know, there might be a surprise or two. I don't live in Nashville and only make it back every couple of years, so I want to officially announce that this will be my last Nashville performance... maybe... who knows... could be! I'm kidding!"

Dalton is currently celebrating the 45th anniversary of her signature hit *Takin' It Easy*, the title track from her third album of the same name with Columbia Records. Released in July 1981 as the lead single from the project, the song went on to become the highest-charting single of Dalton's career, reaching No. 2 on the Billboard Hot Country Singles & Tracks chart. Co-written by Dalton, Billy Sherrill, and Mark Sherrill, *Takin' It Easy* helped define her distinctive blend of Country, Rock, and soulful storytelling, and remains one of her most enduring classics.

Lacy J. Dalton first captured the hearts of Country music fans with her 1979 Top-20 hit *Crazy Blue Eyes*. She became one of the most successful female vocalists of the 1980s, known for hits like *16th Avenue*, *Takin' It Easy*, *Everybody Makes Mistakes*, *Hard Times*, *Hillbilly Girl With The Blues*, and *Black Coffee*. Dalton has shared the stage with legends such as Willie Nelson, Hank Williams, Jr., Merle Haggard, Glen Campbell, and George Jones. Her music continues to resonate with audiences, reflecting her status as a trailblazer in the genre.

Kenyon Lockry Embraces '90s Country Vibes with New Collection of Original Songs

Boot scootin' is coming back to Country music with the fall release of new original music from Kenyon Lockry. The Country traditionalist, first introduced to fans by the legendary Hall of Fame star Mel Tillis, has embraced the fiddle and steel guitar on a fresh take on the '90s country vibe for a dozen self-penned songs. "Further Than California" is set for release this October. The title track will be the first single to radio this fall.

Continued on page 24 > > >

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There's a new road opening up in Nashville, and for artists searching for more than just a place to release music, it may lead exactly where they've been trying to go. Rhythm Road Records, led by owner and producer David Timms, is stepping onto the scene with a simple philosophy: great artists deserve great music, honest direction, and people in their corner who genuinely believe in what they're creating. Timms brings an artist's perspective to the producer's chair. He understands that behind every single, every studio session, and every dream of hearing a song on the radio is a person trying to find their place in an industry that can sometimes feel overwhelming. At Rhythm Road, the goal is to make that journey feel a little less complicated and a lot more personal. With an ear for authentic country music and a respect for the craft of songwriting, Timms is building Rhythm Road around quality rather than shortcuts. It's about finding the right songs, the right sound, the right players, and the right path forward for each individual artist. But perhaps what sets Rhythm Road apart is the atmosphere Timms wants to create. This isn't about artists becoming another name on a roster. It's about building relationships, developing talent, and creating a place where musicians can walk through the door with a dream and find experienced friends ready to help them shape it. Rhythm Road Records is Nashville business with a front-porch spirit: professional, passionate, and always about the music.

<<< *Cross Country Report, continued from page 21*

Kenyon shares, "Making 'Further Than California' was a real bucket-list thing for me. I always dreamed that when I could afford it, I'd bring my whole family to Nashville, put them up in a nice hotel, and go record an album. It was a blast - I even recorded at County Q, the same studio where I cut my first demo that got Mel's attention on 16th Avenue. It felt like Eddie Arnold or Jim Reeves - surreal."



That treasured family experience is what this project is all about. The storytelling and music flow effortlessly on songs dedicated to his wife Jenni and their family. One thing is for sure, this collection is definitely not a "one sound" monotonous collection of music. Lockry includes a few surprises with a Rhumba-flavored song, a fired-up electric guitar track, a classic waltz, a fiddle-tinged heartbreak song and a party dance number. Kenyon Lockry's genius of creating memorable hook lines will have fans singing these songs over and over.

"Country To The Bone" is an undeniable spirit that showman Kenyon Lockry radiates. There aren't many artists who can say a Country Music Hall of Fame star took them under their wing. But Kenyon's uniquely fresh, original sound built on the foundation of classic Country music didn't escape the keen ear of Mel Tillis. Under Tillis's management, Lockry recorded three albums and toured nationally to Branson, the

CMA Music Festival, and multiple appearances at the Ryman Auditorium and the Grand Ole Opry.

"He taught me everything I know. He was like a grandfather to me. He was the funniest person I ever knew - everything he did was funny, even when he wasn't trying, with that stutter. Everyone in Nashville has a Mel Tillis story, and I was blessed to be front-row center as his protégé," shares Lockry.

With the groundwork laid out along with strong support from family and a Country legend, Kenyon Lockry stepped out with his own music making five more independent records featuring his original songwriting and performing live to crowds of dancing fans with his band The Osceola Boys weekly in his home state of Florida. For previews of the upcoming album, Kenyon Lockry "Further Than California," follow Kenyon on facebook.

Randy Travis Releases New Single, 'I Don't Care'



Country music legend Randy Travis has released his powerful new single, *I Don't Care*, a long-vaulted track co-written by Travis and Michael Curtis that offers fans a first glimpse into his upcoming full-length album - his first in more than eighteen years. Unearthed and brought to life by his longtime producer Kyle Lehning, the recording was meticulously assembled, remixed, and remastered to preserve



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the unmistakable warmth, emotion, and authenticity that define Travis' timeless sound. The song marks a significant milestone in a year already rich with celebration, arriving as Travis commemorates the 40th anniversary of his multi-platinum debut album "Storms of Life" and continues reconnecting with audiences nationwide on his More Life Tour.

I Don't Care unfolds as a gripping portrait of a relationship fractured beyond repair. Through lyrics steeped in betrayal and emotional reckoning, the narrator reaches a moment of clarity - recognizing that once trust is broken, the love that held everything together can no longer survive. Travis' performance is described as deeply felt and unmistakably his own, carrying the emotional weight and vocal sincerity that have made him one of Country music's most enduring voices. The single continues Travis' ongoing effort to share unreleased material, offering fans a rare window into the vault while honoring the artistry that shaped his storied career. With *I Don't Care*, Randy Travis continues to honor his legacy while opening a new chapter - one built on perseverance, gratitude, and the enduring power of a voice that changed Country music forever.

This fall, Travis will conclude his More Life Tour, a remarkable run that has taken him to more than fifty cities across twenty-four states, reaffirming his bond with fans who have followed his journey for decades. His resilience remains one of the most inspiring chapters in modern Country music; after surviving a near-fatal stroke in 2013, Travis has continued to tour, record, and advocate for creators' rights and responsible AI use. His life story is now headed to the big screen in the forthcoming feature film "Forever and Ever, Amen," with Clay Walker portraying Travis in his forties and fifties.

Karen Waldrup's Inspiring New Music Video For 'Keeping The Faith' Available Now

Known for her powerful voice, viral videos, and genuine connection with her fans, Karen Waldrup has released the official music video for her current single, *Keeping The Faith*. The video brings the song's message of hope, perseverance, and trusting the journey of life, reminding viewers that even during the hardest times, there is always something better ahead.



For Waldrup, the song is deeply personal, reflecting her own experience of trusting God's plan while going through major life changes, including a difficult divorce. *Keeping The Faith* is a reminder that heartbreak and unexpected challenges can often lead to new beginnings and that sometimes the greatest blessings come when we least expect them. The video premiered with American Country Network and digitally with Country Evolution.

"*Keeping The Faith* is about believing that good things are ahead, even when you can't see them yet," says Waldrup. "Creating this music video meant so much to me because it gave me a chance to tell this story in a very personal way. The process was honestly healing, and it reminded me of how important it is to keep moving forward, even during the hardest seasons. You may not always understand why things happen, but if you keep believing and trusting the journey, better days can be waiting right around the corner."

Waldrup is also excited to announce that her new single, *Just In Case*, written by Ava Paige and Becca Rae Greene, will be released September 18. Inspired by the everyday lessons life teaches us, the song takes a lighthearted look at being prepared for whatever may come your way, from keeping extra cash on hand to carrying a set of jumper cables. With its relatable message and playful take on the old saying "better safe than sorry," Waldrup brings those familiar life lessons to life in *Just In Case*.

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Don't Look Ethel! A Salute to the Musical Genius of Ray Stevens



Nashville will come together to celebrate one of the most innovative, influential, and entertaining musical talents in Music City history when "Don't Look, Ethel! A Salute to the Musical Genius of Ray Stevens" takes place on Monday, Nov. 9, at the Grand Ole Opry House.

The all-star evening will honor the extraordinary career and musical legacy of Country Music Hall of Fame member Ray Stevens, bringing together a lineup of Country, Gospel, comedy, and entertainment stars for a one-night-only celebration of his remarkable contributions to American music. The show will feature performances by Ricky Skaggs, Ronnie Milsap, Jamey Johnson, Gretchen Wilson, Mark Chesnutt, The Gatlin Brothers, Lee Greenwood, Collin Raye, Darryl Worley, Dailey & Vincent, Mark Wills, Billy Dean, Jeff Bates, Deborah Allen, and Cledus T. Judd (who will also host the event).

Additionally, the evening will feature a special appearance by Country Music Hall of Fame member Randy Travis, along with remarks from Nancy Jones, WWE Hall of Famer Jerry "The King" Lawler, and WWE Legend Mickie James.

"I've always been so fond of the Nashville music community, and I'm truly honored that they would want to do this tribute. All my life I've wanted to be successful in the music

business and have people appreciate what I create. That's impossible without the fans. I'm so grateful for all of them!" says Stevens.

Stevens' enduring legacy blends heartfelt songwriting with comedic brilliance, securing his place as one of Country music's most versatile and celebrated icons.

More information is available at axs.com and Opry.com.

Soul of the Song on TCT Today Hosted by Melanie Walker



Melanie Walker with Leon Everette

TCT's Flagship show, TCT Today, will be airing Soul of the Song with host Melanie Walker. The first episode featured Country music artist, Cassidy Daniels from CBS's The Road on Friday, August 14th.

The interviews were held backstage at the 44th Sunday Mornin' Country at the Grand Ole Opry House. The guests appearing this season include Cowboy Joe Babcock, Mandy Barnett, Charlie McCoy, Leon Everette and the Fox Brothers. Viewers can watch Soul of the Song on DIRECT TV 377 or go to tct.tv to watch episodes online or the app on Video On Demand.



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Johnny Owens Pays Tribute to Father Buck Owens With New Single, 'Act Naturally'



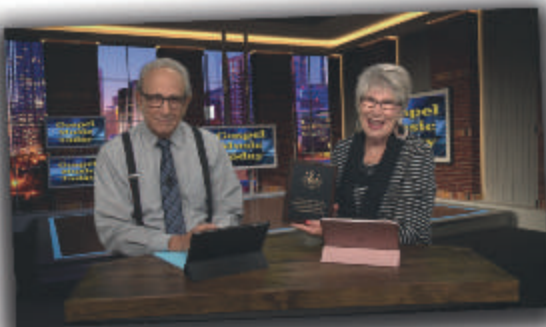
Johnny Owens, youngest son of Country Music Hall of Fame member Buck Owens, pays tribute to his father's enduring legacy and the iconic Bakersfield Sound with the release of his new single, *Act Naturally*, available now. Premiered by The Music Universe alongside Johnny Owens' only in-person sit-down interview about his father's legacy, the recording celebrates the timeless sound that made Buck Owens a Country music legend while reflecting Johnny's dedication to preserving the traditional Bakersfield Sound 20 years after his father's passing.

"To the world, Buck Owens was a Country music icon, but to me, he was simply Dad," shares Johnny. "This year marks the 20th anniversary of his passing, the 60th anniversary of his landmark album "Live at Carnegie Hall," and on August 12, he would have celebrated his 97th birthday. Releasing *Act Naturally* felt like the perfect way to honor him because no one ever took the stage more naturally than my dad. I miss him every day, and I hope this song reminds fans why his music

and the Bakersfield Sound continue to mean so much to so many people."

Act Naturally is the first release from Johnny Owens' forthcoming full-length tribute album honoring the extraordinary career of Buck Owens. The 10-track collection will celebrate the music that helped define the Bakersfield Sound, featuring beloved classics from every era of Buck's career, including *Big in Vegas*, *Together Again*, *Streets of Bakersfield* and more. Through these timeless songs, Johnny continues his mission of preserving his father's legacy and introducing a new generation of listeners to the storytelling, authenticity and traditional Country sound that made Buck Owens one of the genre's most influential artists.

Johnny Owens carries forward one of Country music's most celebrated legacies as the youngest son of Country Music Hall of Famer Buck Owens. Raised alongside the creation of the legendary Buckaroos and surrounded by some of Country music's greatest artists, Johnny developed an authentic appreciation for the Bakersfield Sound that can only come from living its history. After spending years supporting his father's career, Johnny stepped into the spotlight to honor Buck's legacy through his own performances, captivating audiences with a voice that recalls the timeless sound of classic Country. Performing everywhere from the Buck Owens Crystal Palace to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Nashville's Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Johnny continues to celebrate the music that defined a generation. As author and Bakersfield Sound historian Robert E. Price wrote, "Johnny Owens is as close in tone and appearance to his Buckness as any that walk the earth today."



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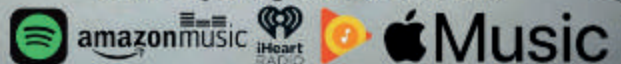
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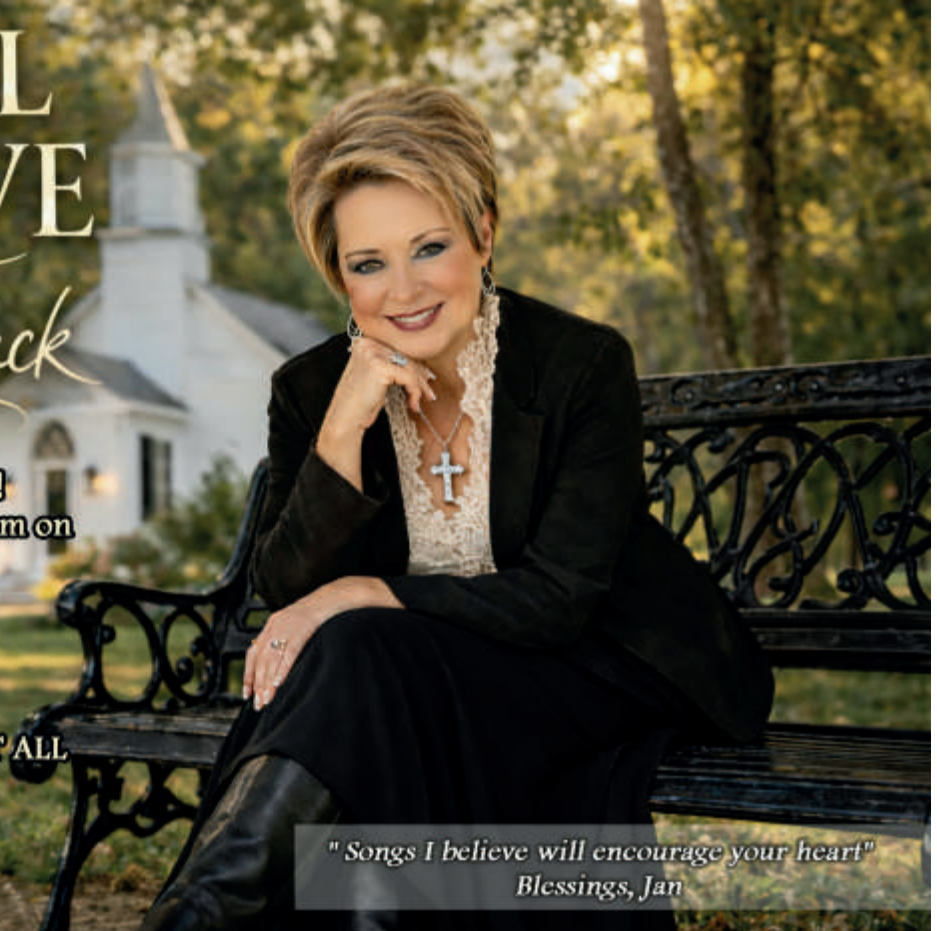
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The Story Behind the Song

THE LAST SONG

Staff, Cross Country USA

Written by Mike Owens and Nick Reed

Recorded by Terry & Debra Luna

The Last Song began during a simple morning phone call between longtime co-writers Mike Owens and Nick Reed. During the COVID years, the two wrote several songs together, some of which appeared on the Reed Brothers' final album. But one conversation in particular sparked something deeper. Nick asked, "If I had just one last song to sing, I wonder what it would be?" Mike followed with his own question: "What would I write about if I only had one more song to write?"

Those sobering thoughts led them to the heart of their calling. "We do it to bring glory to God and to draw people closer to Him," Mike said. They agreed that the chorus had to center on Jesus, the cross, and His redemption plan. The message would be simple, direct and anchored in the question every believer must answer: Are you washed in the blood? By the end of the conversation, they had the inspiration. Over the next couple of days, they shaped the song with intentionality, knowing it could be powerful in the right hands.

Those hands belonged to Terry and Debra Luna of Leoma, Tennessee. "I knew that God had landed the song with good and honest hearts," Mike shared. "Terry and Debra absolutely crushed the vocals." Released to radio in February 2026, the song began a steady climb up the charts.

Terry Luna remembers the moment he first heard *The Last Song*. "Mike and Nick had written something simple, direct, and profoundly true: we have no guarantees in life. We often assume there will be another Sunday, another concert, another conversation or another opportunity to tell someone about Jesus. But there may not be."

"One of the things that makes *The Last Song* so powerful is the way the perspective changes with each verse. The first



Terry & Debra Luna

belongs to the writer: '*This could be the last song I write.*' The second belongs to the singer: '*This could be the last song I sing.*' That third verse is where the song becomes more than a reflection on the uncertainty of life. It becomes an invitation. The urgency isn't only about how much time the songwriter or singer may have left. The person, listening isn't guaranteed another opportunity either. And then the chorus answers the question: If this really were the last song, what would we want to say?"

When Tommy Smith of Canyon Creek Records heard the track, he immediately recognized its potential. "People need to hear this song," he said. "I believe radio will really connect with it." His encouragement confirmed what Terry and Debra already sensed: the song carried a message that needed to be heard.

That message resonated deeply. This month, *The Last Song* rests at #1 on Christian Voice Magazine's Country Gospel Top 100. Yet for Terry and Debra, the chart position was never the goal. "Long after charts are forgotten," Terry said, "our prayer is that someone will still hear *The Last Song*, consider the question it asks, and turn their heart toward Christ."

Debra's initial reaction to the song was very different. "Terry asked me to give it a listen," she recalls. "I listened one time and firmly told him, 'No, I do not want to do this song. It brings back too many memories. It's too real. This very well could have been the last song you ever sang.'"

Her mind went straight back to 2020; the year Terry was diagnosed with prostate cancer. After extensive testing, they learned the cancer was more advanced than expected. Terry chose surgery, believing it would be the quickest path back to ministry. But post-surgery results revealed the cancer was more aggressive than originally thought. Forty-three radiation treatments followed.

Debra shared that the treatments began to take its toll on Terry. "His strength and energy were disappearing. As churches began reopening following COVID restrictions, we tried to keep some of our singing dates, but eventually we had to cancel. Terry was simply too weak. Every day I drove with him to the cancer treatment center. Because of COVID restrictions, I waited in the car while he received his treatments. As the days passed, I watched him grow weaker. The words of *The Last Song* describe the treatments taking a toll on the body and soul, and that is exactly what I witnessed."

"Then, finally, came day 43. I watched Terry slowly walk out of the treatment center, shuffling his feet with tears rolling down his face. He quietly said, 'It's over. It's over, and the Lord allowed me to survive.'" It took months for him to regain his strength. During that time, prayers were being offered on our behalf from people all over the country and beyond. Through it all, we believed the Lord, our Healer, was at work. Terry still deals with some of the lasting effects of everything his body endured, but he remains determined to sing for the Lord. He often says that God gave him a job to do, and today *The Last Song* has become part of his testimony. That is why the song I once refused to sing has become so personal to me."

"None of us knows which song will be our last, which service will be our last, or when we will have our final opportunity to tell someone about Jesus. As Terry reminds audiences, we are not promised tomorrow, or even the next hour. This truly could be *The Last Song* someone hears."

Today, Debra is convinced the song found its way to Terry for a reason. "He sings it with a conviction that can only come from having lived through the message behind it," she said. "We have watched God use the song to touch hearts and bring people to Christ."

Terry and Debra extend their gratitude to songwriters Mike Owens and Nick Reed for entrusting them with such a powerful message. Above all, they give thanks to Jesus - their Healer, their Savior, and the One the song ultimately points to.

The Last Song

VERSE 1:

*This could be the last song I write
My last chance to lead someone to Christ
Time takes its toll on the body and soul
This could be the last song I write*

CHORUS:

*So, I'll write you a song about Jesus
I'll sing of His mercy and love
I'll tell of the cross where they nailed Him
And ask, "Are you washed in His blood?"*

VERSE 2:

*This could be the last song I sing
Sweet words of praise to my Savior and King
God only knows when the curtain will close
This could be the last song I sing*

CHORUS:

*So, I'll sing you a song about Jesus
I'll sing of His mercy and love
I'll tell of the cross where they nailed Him
And I'll ask, "Are you washed in His blood"*

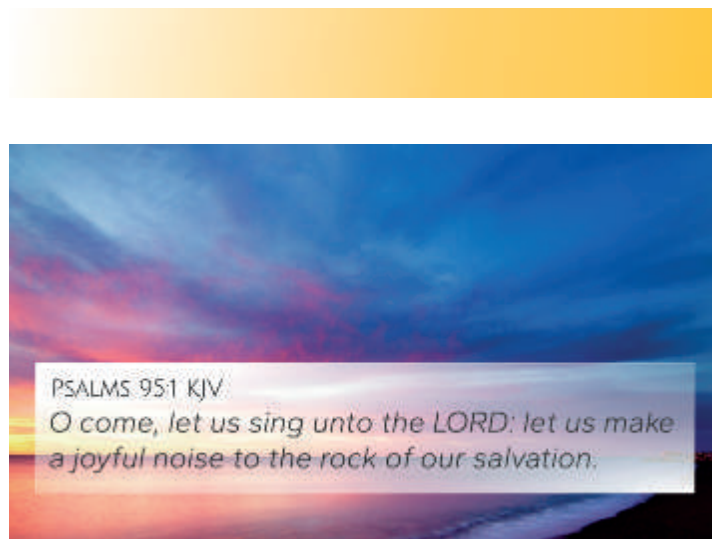
VERSE 3:

*This could be the last song you hear
Can you feel the Spirit drawing near
Listen to the Lord open your heart's door
This could be the last song you hear*

CHORUS:

*So, I'll sing you a song about Jesus
I'll sing of His mercy and love
I'll tell of the cross where they nailed Him
And I'll ask, "Are you washed in His blood"*

Publishing: Music by Oasis Publishing / BMI



DARYL BRANSON

By Chloe Wright

To Daryl Branson, music has always been more than a pastime; it has been a part of his heritage. He started playing bass guitar when he was only four years old and spent his formative years playing with his family in their band. By eight years old, Daryl was performing regularly at community and town events. This was the beginning of a lifelong journey for him that would take him from the stage of Country music to an unwavering devotion to the Gospel.

The music of legends like George Jones and Merle Haggard have influenced much of Daryl's upbringing; however, Daryl was also heavily influenced by his mentors, Rocky and Tamie Smith, as well as other artists such as Jeff Chapman, the Kingdom Heirs, Carolina the Band, and Quinton Mills.

Daryl's rise to fame was marked by several accomplishments, including opening for legendary Country band Alabama in 1981, performing with the Jody Brown Family and playing in the house band for soul singer Percy Sledge, but he cites the most important moment of his life did not occur on a stage. On February 14, 1976, he accepted Christ.

Daryl's life journey has had its share of darkness. From October of 1981 until 1991, Daryl embraced his calling to preach by sharing the Word throughout North Carolina. However, during that time he wandered from his purpose.

In 2017, Daryl faced one of the most difficult physical challenges of his life when he was told he would need to have his foot completely amputated. As a result, he was confined to a wheelchair and had a bleak medical prognosis. At this point, he anchored his hope in his faith. "God began to heal me," Daryl recalls. "I didn't have to have my foot removed. I have had to have several surgeries, and I have lost a few toes, but God has been faithful to continue to help me."

His determination was strengthened by this period of testing. Daryl now finds himself back in the studio after entering into an agreement with Grace Records Nashville LLC to produce music under their label through Debbie Bennett and Junior Bennett. He is preparing now for the release of a new original song entitled *Drinking From My Fountain*, which he wrote in 1997.



In 2013, Daryl and his wife Susan felt called to create Daryl Branson Ministries, which they have done by traveling as evangelists taking the Gospel to churches and assisted living facilities as well. The couple's ministry is not one-dimensional; Daryl tells others about Jesus through music and testimonies while Susan provides encouragement and compassion with her certification in Domestic Violence Counseling. The ministry has a mission to reach as many people as possible and show to them the same unconditional love that God has shown them.

When attending a service of Daryl Branson Ministries, Daryl assures everyone in attendance that they will receive an authentic experience with God. "People can look forward to hearing the Word of God through singing and testimonies. Be prepared to laugh, cry, and most importantly, Praise God!"

Steve Warren

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Kelbi Watkins

CHRISTIAN COUNTRY GIRL



By Teresa Schwienberg

Sixteen-year-old Kelbi Watkins is excited to release her very first single *Christian Country Girl* written by her producer Rick Schweinsberg. Though Kelbi may be a new name to Christian Country fans, she is certainly not new to singing.

“**W**hen I was eight years old, I was at VBS (Vacation Bible School) at our church. I felt my heart beating out of my chest. I went up and prayed at the altar. I was so happy and excited! I remember running around everywhere telling people and saying I wanted to be baptized. I was baptized a few weeks later,” shares Kelbi. “Ever since I was old enough to step on stage, I have been singing. God has given me a gift to share His message. I am so grateful He is using me. I feel like He has something big planned for me.”

To look at Kelbi, such a beautiful teen who holds the title of “Miss Northeast Alabama” in the thirteen- to fifteen-year-old division and won many other pageants, one might think her young life has been an easy one. That is far from the truth. Kelbi’s parents, Tanza and Ryan Watkins shared her story. “At age two,” Ryan shares, “Kelbi was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. We were going back and forth to Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville from our home in Ider, Alabama, for about eight months.”

Tanza continues, “Kelbi began walking like an old woman. Her ankles were really swollen. She could no longer run but walked very slowly. In the first appointment, the doctor began telling us what life would look like for Kelbi.”

The young parents were devastated while looking at their beautiful first born little girl, not knowing what the future held, having nothing but the doctor’s description of what all their lives would look like after that day.

“On the way back home from Nashville, I felt God tell me ‘Everything is going to be all right,’ says Ryan. “I shared that with Tanza. When the Lord speaks to you, you know it’s Him, and you can trust Him. I heard Him say, ‘There’s an end to this!’”

Tanza shares, “The doctor had told us Kelbi would have to have a test where they put her under. We didn’t feel comfortable with that. We chose to trust God and not have the test.”

“Our family members were scared and wanted us to get the test,” says Ryan. “They pressured us to get it. It was hard to stay strong and trust God, but we knew what He had told us. After eight months, we went back to the doctor and Kelbi was running all over the place and down the hall. We knew we had witnessed a miracle.”

“From that time on, Kelbi has had a special anointing on her life!” continues Tanza. “When I see her singing, all I can do is cry.”

Kelbi has a best friend, Alexa, whom she stood beside singing most of her life. Kelbi and Alexa go to school and church together. In fifth grade, they got to share something very special together. They prepared and sang for their high school BETA Club and won. From there, they won their state BETA Club talent contest and got to proceed to the National BETA Club finals in Nashville at the Opryland Hotel. Kelbi and Alexa sang *The Truth I’m Standing On* in front of several thousand students and adults.

“To sing a Jesus song in front of that many people, competing with the best from every state in forty or fifty

schools against all types of talent, not just singing, and to win at such a young age was a blessing,” says Kelbi. “Another pivotal moment in my singing was in Geraldine, Alabama at the ‘Singing in the Park.’ I was singing with Alexa and a neighbor, Yazzy, who has become like a big sister to me. That is when I started getting more opportunities to sing outside of my church. To sing with my best friend and my big sister, two friends who I can share ministry with and pray with helps us depend on each other on God. We share the same gift and talent to use for Him.”

Kelbi has many things to look forward to in her sophomore year of high school. She will hopefully get her driver’s license soon. She is also singing for Founders’ Day in Ider, Alabama on Labor Day with their huge parade. She is also looking forward to more pageants and moving up from her JV team to the girls’ varsity basketball team and playing for a coach who has won a state championship. Kelbi enjoys reading and looking out for students who may be bullied or picked on. She also leads a Bible Study during their break time in the cafeteria and does not mind how many other students listen. She hopes they will become interested and join in with her and her friends.

Kelbi also loves her church. Her Papaw is her pastor and her daddy is her worship leader. “I love growing up in a small church where everyone knows each other. I love being able to go to people who have a strong relationship with God for wisdom and advice. I also love that we do VBS right before school starts where I get to serve. I love seeing kids go to the altar to follow Christ like I did and working and praying with them. I also got to share a devotion and my testimony this year. I also love singing with my friend Alexa and my dad.”

Kelbi’s dad, Ryan, is a former Red Hen artist at Daywind and now a Nashville Christian Country artist. He and Kelbi have enjoyed singing at The Ark Encounter for three years. Kelbi’s mom, Tanza, says she does not sing. “All I do is cry,” she says. “When Kelbi sings, I just think about the anointing that is on her life and how God healed her.”

When asked why she chose her new release *Christian Country Girl* as the song she wanted to record for the first time, Kelbi shared, “I have always wanted to sing professionally and see what it was like in the studio. It was great doing that for the first time with my dad also recording a song.

Kelbi continues, “I picked this song, because I related to the sassiness in it. I seem outgoing, but I can also be reserved. I was able to express my strength through the song. When someone cusses at school, I tell them I don’t speak that way and don’t want them to speak that way around me. Sometimes, you have to stand your ground for the Lord in situations. This song talks about that.”

There is no doubt Kelbi Watkins is here to stay and stand her ground for the Lord. She is definitely a Christian Country Girl!

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Mark Wills

Returning To His Roots With ‘Grand Ole Revival’

Staff, Cross Country USA

Mark Wills returns to the heart of where his musical journey began with “Grand Ole Revival,” a powerful new live album recorded inside the historic Grand Ole Opry circle. The project, arriving November 6, 2026 via Gaither Music Group, marks a rare moment in Opry history as only the second live audio album captured on the Opry House stage since the 1970s. The collection brings together timeless songs of faith performed with an extraordinary lineup of Country and Gospel legends, and it begins with the release of the first single, *The Baptism of Jesse Taylor*.

Produced by multi-Grammy Award winner Ben Isaacs, “Grand Ole Revival” preserves the spontaneity, reverence, and musicianship of a once-in-a-generation session. Wills is joined by Cody Johnson, Trisha Yearwood, Vince Gill, Ricky Skaggs, Rhonda Vincent, Jamey Johnson, Travis Tritt, The Oak Ridge Boys, The Isaacs, Charlie McCoy, Whisperin’ Bill Anderson, Mae Estes, Rebecca Lynn Howard, Leona Williams, The Sound, Jim and Melissa Brady, and the Gaither Vocal Band - an all-star cast united by their love of Country and Gospel tradition.

For nearly three decades, Mark Wills has been one of Country music’s most recognizable voices, earning 19 Billboard-charting singles across seven albums, including *Wish You Were Here*, *Jacob’s Ladder*, *I Do (Cherish You)*, *Don’t Laugh At Me* and the six-week No. 1 smash *19*

Somethin’. Yet, “Grand Ole Revival” reflects the music that shaped him long before chart success - songs learned in church pews, family gatherings, and the small-town roots that formed his earliest memories. The album’s debut single, *The Baptism of Jesse Taylor*, sets the tone with a stirring performance celebrating grace, redemption, and the life-changing power of faith.

“Ever since I was a little kid, the very first music that came into my life was hymns, so it means a lot to me to be able to sing some of the songs I’ve loved my whole life,” said Wills. “In more than 30 years of making music, I’ve never experienced a tracking session like this one. Recording them live in the Grand Ole Opry circle made this project even more special since that has rarely occurred in its 100-year history. I think this project reflects that time-honored history and tradition that makes The Opry such an important part of Country music.”

Ben Isaacs echoed the significance of the moment. “That love of pure Country is something that we all have in common, and it unites us deeper than just our ears,” he said. “The Grand Ole Opry is the DNA that built Nashville and Country music, and it runs deep. The dust from Hank Williams’ shoes is still ingrained in the cracks of the hallowed floor of The Opry Circle. Recording live from The Opry stage was a moment when we could weave our story and music into the DNA of that stage and its history.”



power of those songs. “Grand Ole Revival” reminds us why these songs still matter. They connect generations through faith and the storytelling that has always been at the heart of Country music.”

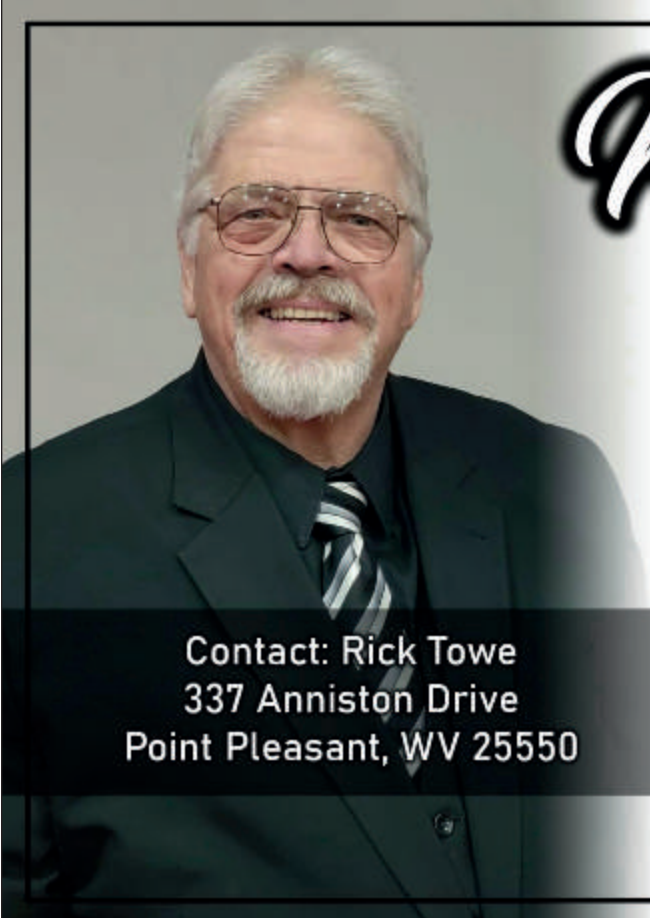
The album features beloved classics including, *The Lily of the Valley* (ft. Cody Johnson), *I’ll Fly Away* (ft. Ricky Skaggs and Rhonda Vincent), *How Great Thou Art* (ft. Trisha Yearwood), *Because He Lives* (ft. Vince Gill and Rebecca Lynn Howard), *Victory in Jesus* (ft. The Isaacs), *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus* (ft. Mae Estes and Ben Isaacs), *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* (ft. Leona Williams, The Isaacs, Jim Brady and Melissa Brady), *I Saw the Light* (ft. Travis Tritt and The Oak Ridge Boys), *Mansion Just Over the Hilltop* (ft. The Sound), *Look for Me for I Will Be There Too*, and the title track *Grand Ole Revival* (ft. The Isaacs and Whisperin’ Bill Anderson).

With its blend of Country tradition, Gospel truth, and heartfelt storytelling, “Grand Ole Revival” stands as one of the most meaningful projects of Mark Wills’ career, a return to the songs that shaped him and a celebration of the Opry’s enduring legacy.

www.markwills.com

www.gaithermusic.lnk.to/grandolerevival

Paul Sizelove, President of Sun Label Group, emphasized the project’s generational impact. “The Grand Ole Opry has long been a place where the stories and songs that define Country and Gospel music are passed from one generation to the next,” he said. “Mark Wills has always understood the



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***The Redemptive Road, the
Rising Voice, and the Country
Gospel Heart of
Ken Mobley***

By Jackson McKee

The first thing you notice about Ken Mobley isn't the cowboy hat, the boots, or even the unmistakable warmth in his South Georgia drawl. It's the sincerity. The kind of sincerity that can't be manufactured, rehearsed, or polished for the stage. It's lived-in. Weathered. Proven. And it's the thread that runs through every chapter of his life - from the dirt roads of his childhood to the hospice halls where he has spent more than fifteen years serving families in their most fragile moments, to the more than 1,400 programs he has performed across the country sharing what he proudly calls Dirt Road Gospel.

Mobley's story is not simply one of musical ascent; it is one of calling, redemption, and service. It is the story of a man who has spent his life walking into places most people avoid - hospice rooms, veterans' shelters, pandemic-stricken nursing home - and bringing with him the one thing he believes every person needs: hope.

"God loved me when I was unlovable. He showed me kindness when my heart was bitter. He gave me hope when I had none," Ken says. "Every opportunity I have today is because of the transforming power of Jesus Christ."

This is the heart of the Singing Cowboy. And this is why his story stands as one of the most compelling, relevant, and deeply needed features of the year.

THE ROOTS OF A REDEEMED STORY

Raised in South Georgia, Ken grew up surrounded by the sounds of traditional Gospel, country living, and the kind of storytelling that shaped generations before him. Those early influences became the foundation of his signature style - Dirt Road Gospel - music that blends honest narratives with unwavering faith.

But the road to becoming an award-winning Country Gospel artist wasn't paved with industry connections or overnight success. It was carved through hardship, healing, and a long season of learning to trust God's voice above every other.

"Your story is My story, son," Ken recalls the Lord saying to him during a quiet moment of prayer. "Tell people where you've been, what you've gone through, where I met you in your darkest moments, and how I brought you through them."

That moment changed everything. It redirected his ministry, reshaped his songwriting, and ignited a fire that continues to burn through every lyric he writes.

THE PANDEMIC THAT BIRTHED A MINISTRY

In 2020, when the world shut down and isolation became a daily reality for millions, Ken received a call from a friend working at an assisted living community. Residents were lonely. Families were separated. Caregivers were exhausted. The emotional toll was devastating.

Ken's response was simple - but it became historic. "Can you open the windows?" he asked. When she said yes, he replied, "If you can open the windows, I'll come sing outside."

That single act of compassion sparked a ministry that spread across the Southeast. Ken traveled from facility to facility, singing through windows, across courtyards, and under awnings - anywhere he could safely bring hope to people who desperately needed it.

Those outdoor concerts became lifelines. Caregivers cried. Residents waved from behind glass. Families stood outside in masks listening to hymns that reminded them they were not forgotten.

As restrictions lifted, those window concerts turned into invitations to come inside. Relationships formed. Hearts healed. And Ken discovered a deeper calling than he had ever known.

"Every concert is more than a performance," he says. "It's an opportunity to encourage hearts, share God's love, and remind people that even in life's hardest seasons, there is always hope, mercy, and grace waiting at the end of the road."

A LIFE OF SERVICE BEYOND THE STAGE

Ken's ministry doesn't end when the music stops. For more than fifteen years, he has served in hospice care, walking with families through the most sacred and difficult moments of life. Today, as Director of Veteran Resources for Three Oaks Hospice, he ensures veterans receive the honor, benefits, and compassionate care they earned through service.

A veteran himself, Ken has become a respected advocate across the Southeast, building partnerships, educating healthcare professionals, and connecting thousands of veterans with VA benefits and community resources.

His commitment extends even further through Operation PATH, a nonprofit initiative providing compassionate hospice care to homeless individuals, including homeless veterans nearing the end of life.

This is where Ken's heart beats strongest. "My mission has never been to build a career, it has always been to build God's Kingdom," he says. "If people remember my name, I'm grateful. But if they leave remembering the name of Jesus, then I've accomplished exactly what God called me to do."

THE RISE OF A COUNTRY GOSPEL VOICE

In recent years, Ken's music has gained national attention. His original songs, including *Where Are You Now*, *Old Church Songs*, *Jesus Is the King*, and *I Know Jesus* have earned multiple Top 10 appearances on Christian Country radio charts.

In 2026, he received two major honors: Gospel Music Fan Awards 'Horizon Male,' and Kingdom Impact Award. These awards recognize not only his musical excellence but his unwavering commitment to using music as ministry.

He has been featured on Alabama Gospel Roots on PBS, appeared on RFD-TV's Cowboy Church, and partnered with SGH Promotions and Never 2 Late Ministries. His newest album, "Dirt Road Revival," includes his latest radio release, *No Funeral*, a song that captures his signature blend of storytelling, faith, and Country Gospel authenticity.

THE PEOPLE GOD SENT ALONG THE WAY

Ken is quick to say he doesn't walk this road alone. He often expresses gratitude for the people God placed in his life to guide, encourage, and strengthen him. "God never gave up on me, even when I had given up on myself," he says. "And He used faithful people to open doors exactly when I needed them."

He credits Randall Wilds, Ava and Jerry Kasich, Victoria Steelman, Rachel Taylor, the members of Going Higher, Stephanie Hager of SGH Promotions, and Dennis Williams of Alabama Gospel Roots as instrumental voices in his journey.

THE POWER OF DIRT ROAD GOSPEL

Ken's concerts are not just musical events, they are gatherings of community, memory, and faith. He has watched people from every background find common ground in a lyric, a story, or a testimony.

"I've watched bankers, farmers, veterans, young families - people from every imaginable background - find connection in a song," he says. "Those moments remind me that the songs were never really about me. They're about a God who meets people exactly where they are."

His goal is simple: To create an atmosphere where people laugh together, reflect together, worship together, and leave knowing they are loved by a Savior whose grace is greater than any burden they carry.

THE CALLING THAT STILL DRIVES HIM

Ken's testimony is not polished perfection, it is raw redemption. It is the story of a man who asked God how he could serve "in bigger and better ways," and received an answer that changed his life: "Tell My story."

Today, every song he writes is a sermon. Every concert is a mission field. Every handshake, every prayer, every lyric is an offering of gratitude to the God who restored his life.

"The greatest rewards of my ministry aren't measured by the things of this world," Ken says. "They're measured by the lives God allows me to touch along the way."



THE SINGING COWBOY'S LEGACY

Ken Mobley stands as a reminder of what this genre is truly about: faith, service, redemption, and the power of testimony. He is a rising voice in Country Gospel music, yes. But more importantly, he is a servant. A storyteller. A veteran advocate. A man who believes every song is an opportunity to point someone to Christ.

And in a world desperate for authenticity, his Dirt Road Gospel continues to shine like a lantern on a dark night: steady, warm, and unmistakably rooted in the love, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ.



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LEGENDS SERIES

LUKE HENDRICKSON

Staff, Cross Country USA

Luke Hendrickson made a profession of faith at the age of twelve, but the alluring call of musical success eventually pulled him away from his spiritual foundation. For over twenty years, he played guitar and sang in nightclubs, finding himself increasingly trapped by addiction and destructive strongholds. Even after achieving his lifelong dream of becoming a full-time musician, a persistent emptiness remained in his soul - one that no chemical or amount of success could ever fill. On April 1, 1995, in a moment of utter desperation and repentance, Luke called out to Jesus. To his amazement, God touched his life, forgave his sins, and filled him with the Holy Spirit.

Initially, he felt terrified to surrender his musical talents to ministry, fearing he might fall back into selfish ambition. However, God spoke to him through a prophetic encounter with a woman he had never met, who told him he was destined to praise God through his songs, echoing the truth of Psalm 28:7. Ordained into ministry in 1996, Hendrickson has since become a prolific creator, writing many songs, recording 15 albums, and publishing 12 books.

Operating largely out of his home studio, Luke played most of the guitar and bass on his music, occasionally collaborating with members of The Answered Prayer Band, which he formed in 1997. Today, five of his most recent albums are widely available across major digital download platforms, and listeners can stream 15 of his albums alongside nine of his audiobooks for free at lukesgospelmusic.com. Currently, Luke Hendrickson serves as the pastor of a small church in south Louisiana and shares the Gospel every Sunday night at a local drug rehabilitation center.

Much of Hendrickson's musical and spiritual journey is rooted in the unwavering faith of his late mother, Ewell Ava Sandle Hendrickson. As the spiritual leader of their home and a profound witness to God's love, her covering prayers and biblical guidance kept him alive through his darkest years. Even during his decades of rebellion, the reverential fear of God she instilled in him never truly left. She raised her children with strict biblical principles and loving discipline, refusing to tolerate the racial prejudice often prevalent in the South. Luke freely admits that any good he accomplishes today is owed directly to Jesus and the firm foundation his mother built. Luke's current single is titled, *That's The Way Mama Raised Me*. "The unwavering faith of my precious mother has inspired many of the songs that God has helped me write," Luke admits. "Any good that I'm able to accomplish, I owe to Jesus and the faith instilled in me by my mother."



His upbringing was equally shaped by the grit and patriotism of his father. A successful entrepreneur who owned a trucking business and two service stations, his father had joined the Army at age sixteen to serve in the Korean War. Coming from a lineage of military service - including a grandfather who fought in both World War I and World War II - his father raised the children with military-style discipline, teaching them the value of hard work. Luke's father could have bought him anything but taught him to earn what he got.

Observing what he describes as the erosion of the cultural and moral fabric of the United States, Luke uses his music as a clarion call for spiritual renewal. He urges believers to remain diligent in their convictions and to boldly speak the truth in love. His ultimate hope is that his music will encourage families to return to the foundational biblical principles that originally positioned the country as a global force for good.

In looking toward, the future of both the church and the nation, Hendrickson frequently points to the timeless warnings and promises of Scripture, pointing believers back to the ancient paths: "This is what the LORD says: *'Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.'* But you reply, *'No, that's not the road we want!'*" - Jeremiah 6:16

"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." - Psalm 9:17

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." - Psalm 33:1

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ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

DARIN KINSER

By Teresa Schweinsberg

“If there was ever a song that told my family’s story, it is *Garden of Stone* written by Gerald Reeder,” says Darin Kinser. “As soon as I heard the lyrics, it was as if Gerald knew my parents and was writing their biography. I knew I had to record it.”

*They grew up in hard times
Both raised dirt poor
She worked in the factory
He fought in the war
‘til death do us part
Were the words that were said
On the day that Mama and Daddy were wed.*

Darin continues, “Though my dad never went to war, all of the other lyrics were my parents’ story exactly.”

Darin says the night the song was previewed on Facebook as a demo, it broke his heart, but more than that, it told his story.

Darin’s mother went to a strict fire and brimstone preaching church with her best friend. His dad had been raised in church, going with his grandfather as a boy. His parents loved each other fiercely.

In 1995, Darin’s dad told everyone he loved them, walked into the bedroom, put his hands across his chest, looked toward the ceiling, and passed away. They would later learn it was a massive heart attack from blocked arteries. Darin was thirteen at the time.

“They were married twenty-one years in June, and Daddy passed in January,” Darin shares. “My mother grieved his loss for the next twenty-two years. She never went out of the house other than to visit her mom or his grave. Most of the time, she just sat in her bedroom. She would occasionally come out to the dining room to get something to eat but go right back to the bedroom to sit and stare.”

Darin says his mother would frequently say, “I don’t know why he left here without me!” She longed to be with him, so much so, her life seemed to stop when his did.

Darin’s mom succumbed to stage four breast cancer twenty-two years after his dad passed away. She spent fifty-eight days in the hospital and was given three months to live. She exceeded that time but was in Hospice a week before she finally was able to be reunited with her husband.

*Dad worked the night shift,
Mama, she worked days*



*Raised up us boys
On a mill worker’s pay
Mama made the biscuits
Daddy mowed the grass
Raised gardens and grandkids
Till the day that he passed
Now he lies in a garden,
A garden of stone
Where the rows they are straight
And the rows they are long
Mama’s eyes grew weary
From the tears that she cried
And Mama stopped livin’
On the day Daddy died.*

Sad words for sure, but somehow Darin found comfort in the lyrics Gerald Reeder had written and brought them to life in his emotional recording of the song.

Darin wants others to know that no matter how hopeless a loss may feel, “we do not grieve as others who have no hope.” (I Thessalonians 4:13.) He has hope his mother and father are reunited and knows he can go see them one day. In the meantime, he places flowers in the garden of stone and remembers the love they shared.

Joy LaVallee

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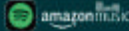





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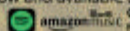
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The Tradition Continues at the Grand Ole Opry House

By Robin Tanner

Photos by Penny Rawls Photography

The tradition continued in Nashville, Tennessee, as fans filled the Grand Ole Opry House on June 7th for the 44th Annual Sunday Mornin' Country, a cherished celebration of faith, family, and the music that has shaped generations. For three uplifting hours, the stage at the Opry house came alive with heartfelt moments, timeless hymns, and beloved Gospel favorites performed by some of Country music's most treasured artists.

This year's lineup featured legendary performers including Jimmy Fortune, John Berry, harmonica virtuoso Charlie McCoy, and Nitty Gritty Dirt Band founder John McEuen, each delivering powerful performances that reminded the audience why Sunday Mornin' Country remains one of Music City's most meaningful traditions. Also gracing the stage were Mandy Barnett, Cutter & Cash and The Kentucky Grass, Adam Warner, McKenzie Phipps, Aubrey Nicole, and Cassidy Daniels, adding fresh energy and heartfelt testimony to the evening.

At the core of the event is the Music City Christian Fellowship, whose members performed throughout the show and embodied the mission that has guided Sunday Mornin' Country for more than four decades. Co-producers Lynn Fox of The Fox Brothers and Melanie Walker hosted the evening with grace, humor, and spirit, each sharing songs that blessed the audience and honored the legacy of the event.

The stage also welcomed longtime contributors who have become part of the Sunday Mornin' Country family: founder Cowboy Joe Babcock, Tennessee River Boys, Music City Quartet, Diane Sherrell, Shelton Bissell, and many others whose dedication keeps the tradition thriving year after year. The powerful voices of the 85-member Country Chorale lifted the room with harmonies that echoed through the Opry House.

A special highlight of the evening came when children from Carpe Artista Academy joined the Country Chorale for a moving performance of *The Circle*, celebrating the Grand Ole Opry's 100th anniversary. The collaboration symbolized unity, heritage, and the enduring circle of music that continues to inspire new generations.

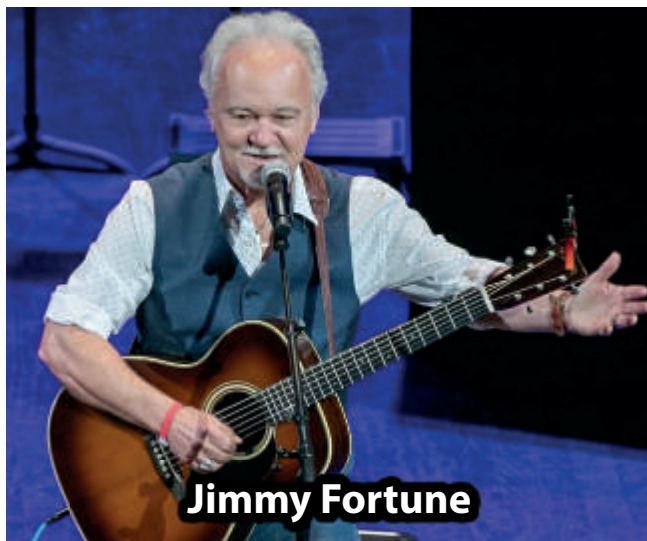
As the final notes faded with *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*, one thing was clear: Sunday Mornin' Country remains a beacon of hope and joy during CMA Music Fest week, offering fans a place to gather, worship, and celebrate the artists who share the message of Christ through song.

Make plans now to attend Sunday Mornin' Country 2027, returning to the Grand Ole Opry House on June 13th.

Visit musiccitychristianfellowship.org or follow New Sunday Mornin' Country on Facebook for more information.



**Hosted by Melanie Walker
and Lynn Fox**



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Carpe Artista Academy and the Country Chorale



Cowboy Joe Babcock and Trail Jazz



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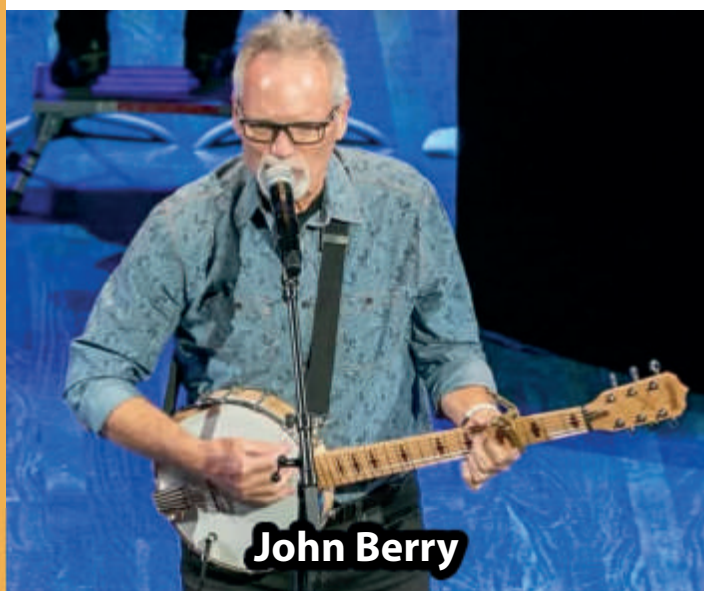
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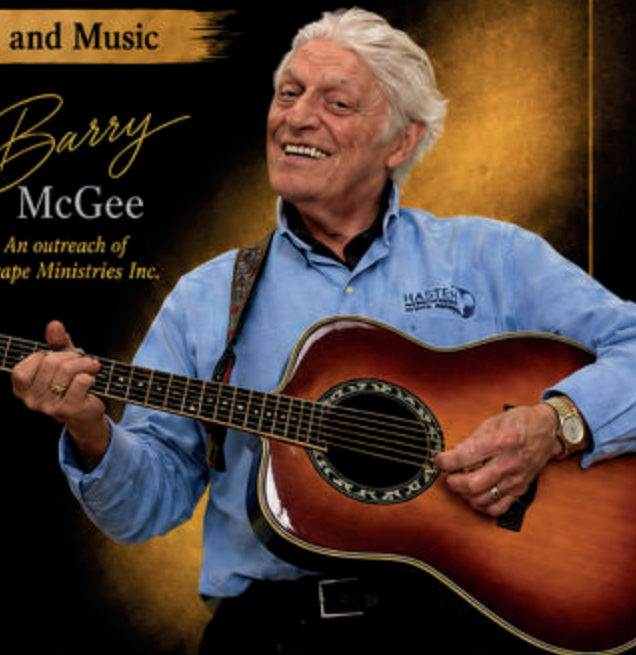
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The Legacy & Music of CHARLEY PRIDE

Charley Pride's story is one of the most remarkable in American music. It's a journey that began in the cotton fields of Mississippi and rose to the grand stages of Nashville, forever reshaping the landscape of Country music. One of the most successful careers in the history of Country music for over 50 years, he is credited with helping to break color barriers by becoming the first black superstar within the genre.



He was born on March 18th, 1934, as a sharecropper's son on a cotton farm in Sledge, Mississippi. Growing up, Charley was exposed primarily to Blues, Gospel and Country music. His father fostered Charley's love of Country music by tuning the family's small radio to the Grand Ole Opry broadcasts. At 14 years of age, Charley got his first guitar - a Silvertone from a Sears Roebuck catalog - and taught himself how to play it by listening to the songs that he heard on that radio.

His unique journey to the top of the music charts includes a detour through the world of minor league baseball, a brief time serving in the Army as well as hard years of labor. But in the end, with boldness, perseverance and undeniable musical talent, visits to Nashville led to an extraordinary career in the 1960s.

Charley Pride's arrival in Nashville was unprecedented. Pride became the first Black artist to achieve major success in Country music since DeFord Bailey. His breakthrough came in 1966 with *Just Between You and Me*, earning him his first Grammy nomination and opening the door to a historic career.

Charley was introduced to Country singers Red Sovine and Red Foley who invited him to perform during one of their shows. He went to Tennessee because Red Sovine had told him that if he ever became serious about a singing career, he should stop by Cedarwood Publishing, the company that booked Sovine's shows. By sheer luck, Pride met Jack Johnson, who had been actively searching for a promising black Country singer. Johnson made a simply produced

recording of Charley performing a couple of songs. Johnson and Charley's producer Cowboy Jack Clement continued to shop Charley around to the Nashville labels. But, finally, in 1966, Chet Atkins, the legendary guitarist and a rising executive at RCA Records, decided to trust his ears and with his backing RCA signed Charley. Atkins took Charley under his wing, nurtured his talent and spearheaded a promotional campaign that addressed the racial challenges of mid 1960s America.

A three-time GRAMMY® award winner, Pride has garnered 36 chart-topping Country hits, including *Kiss An Angel Good Morning*, a massive #1 crossover hit that sold over a million singles. Many of Pride's hits included *Just Between You And Me*, *Is Anybody Goin' To San Antone*, *Burgers and Fries*, *Mountain of Love*, *Someone Loves You Honey* and many more fan favorites.

He became RCA Records' best-selling artist since Elvis Presley. His warm stage presence, humility, and unmistakable voice made him a favorite among fans worldwide. Pride performed concerts worldwide and toured the United States, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

Charley Pride received the prestigious Country Music Association's 'Entertainer of the Year' award in 1971 and the 'Top Male Vocalist' awards of 1971 and 1972. In 1975, he became the first Black man to host the Country Music Association Awards.

In 1993, Pride was inducted into the Grand Ole Opry. He also received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award by the

Recording Academy in 2017 and was honored with the PBS American Masters bio-documentary, “Charley Pride: I’m Just Me,” narrated by Tanya Tucker. Pride was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2000.

The CMA’s Willie Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to him by current Black Country hit maker Jimmie Allen during the 2020 CMA telecast. This would be Pride’s last public performance at the CMA Awards where he sang *Kiss An Angel Good Morning* with Jimmie Allen after accepting the CMA Lifetime Achievement Award.

Charley’s smooth baritone voice won over millions of fans to become Country music’s first Black superstar. He went on to serve as an inspiration to generations of Black performers, including Darius Rucker, Jimmie Allen, Mickey Guyton and many others.

One of the more surprising aspects about Pride’s rise to fame is how easily he was accepted by the Country music audience once they heard him sing. “People often say to me, ‘You must have had it hard,’ and when I say, ‘No, I didn’t,’ they give me that you-gotta-be-lying look. The big problem early on was that [concert] promoters were reluctant or scared to book me,” says Pride. “But they finally came around.”

Charley Pride passed away on December 12, 2020, but his influence has only grown stronger in the years since. His posthumous honors reflect the enduring respect he commands across the music world.

One of the most meaningful tributes came from the Ryman Auditorium, where Pride’s legacy is now permanently enshrined with a statue. His story is featured among the greats who shaped Country music, honoring his courage, artistry, and groundbreaking achievements. Visitors to the “Mother Church of Country Music” can see Pride’s contributions highlighted as part of the institution’s ongoing commitment to preserving Country music history. Pride was also inducted into the Music City Walk of Fame in November 2025

The Opry will celebrate the life and legacy of Country Music Hall of Fame member and Opry member Charley Pride during a special show, “Opry 100 Honors Charley Pride” on September 22. The tribute show will feature performances by Darius Rucker, Pam Tillis, Neal McCoy, Pride’s son, Dion Pride, and more. Charley’s presence at the Opry was always marked by grace and remains one of the most cherished chapters in the show’s history.

Charley Pride’s legacy is more than a catalog of hits. It is a testament to perseverance, faith, and the belief that music can bridge divides. He broke barriers without bitterness, choosing instead to let his voice speak for him. His journey from Mississippi fields to international stages stands as one of the greatest American success stories.

Today, his influence continues to inspire artists across genres. His life reminds us that courage and kindness can change the world, and that a single voice, when lifted with conviction, can echo for generations.

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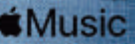
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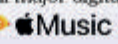
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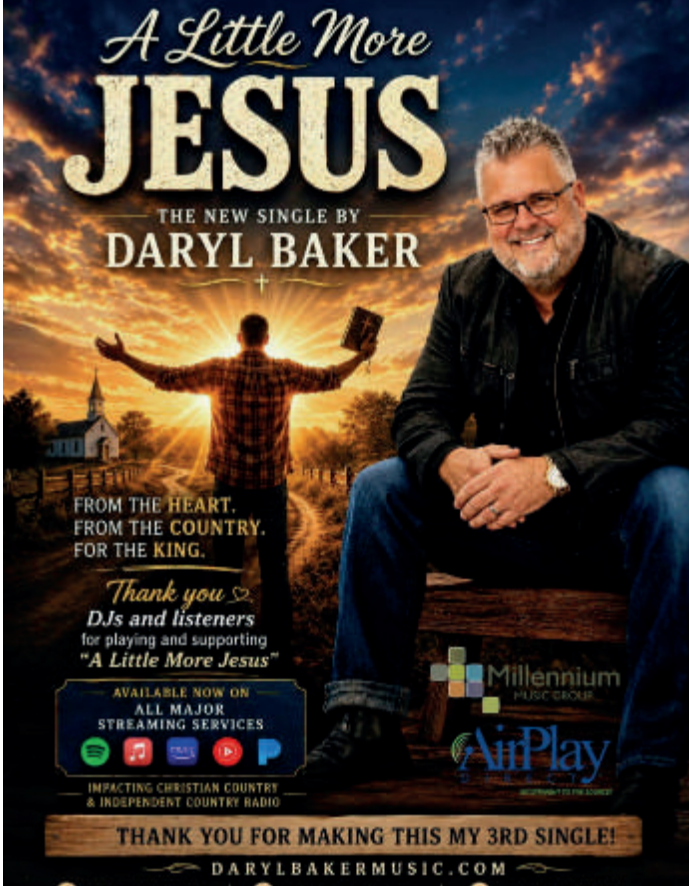
      

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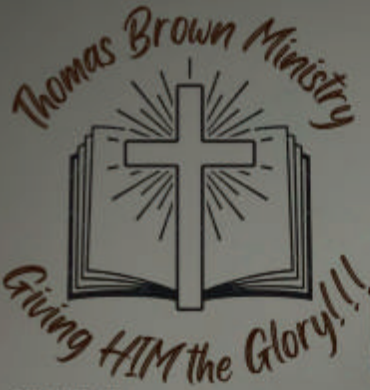
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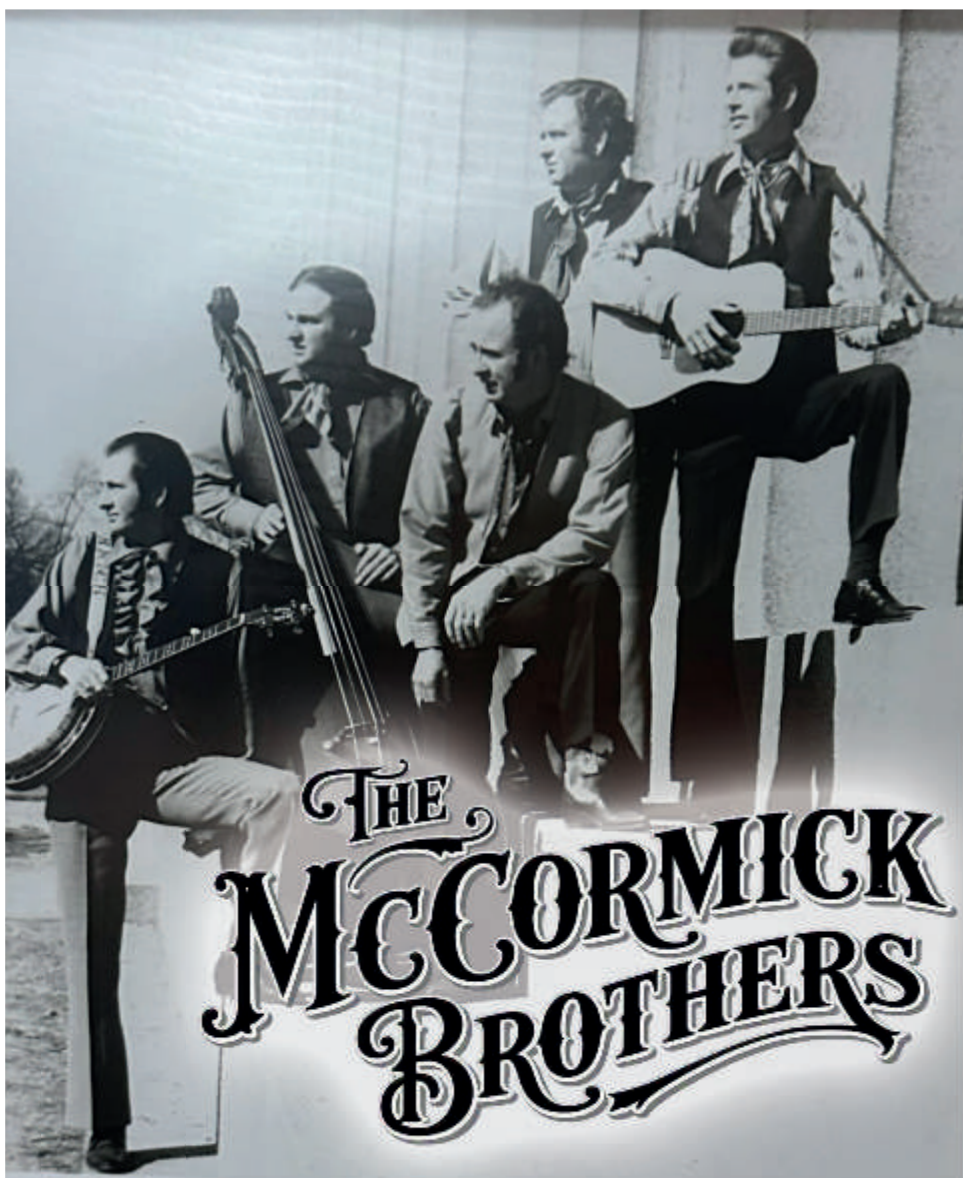
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Nashville Bluegrass Nostalgia

By Teresa Schweinsberg

Mention Bluegrass and banjo or pioneers of Bluegrass music in Nashville, and you might hear the name McCormick.

Those who are music history buffs will certainly know the impact the five siblings known as the McCormick Brothers had on the present day “new grass” sound.

The McCormick Brothers consisted of, in birth order, Lloyd (lead vocals and guitar), Kelly (tenor vocals and mandolin), Haskell (baritone vocals and banjo), William (bass vocals and bass guitar), and Gerald (lead vocals and rhythm guitar), with an older sister Louise singing, too, in the earlier years. Though three of the five brothers have gone on, both Haskell and Gerald are still singing and playing. Their love of music, especially Gospel and Bluegrass, is still at the heart of everything they do. Haskell plays his banjo, but not publicly anymore, while Gerald plays and listens any time he gets the opportunity to be around good music.

A visit to Gerald McCormick’s home is like entering a Country music museum. His basement, family room, and garage walls are covered with pictures and memorabilia from a very lengthy career in Country, Bluegrass, and Gospel music. Pictures with Johnny Cash, Pat Boone, and Billy Graham and stories to accompany each picture are only part of the impressive collection. Other pictures include their peers of that day, Ralph Stanley and his brothers, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, and Bill Monroe.

Born and raised in a little town called Providence, near Westmoreland, Tennessee, a few miles northeast of Nashville, the McCormick Brothers are a household name around the area. Walking into a little restaurant in Westmoreland called “Kathy’s Cupboard,” one will see their picture on the wall in a place of honor. Calling attention to it will immediately be met with stories of the “pride of Westmoreland.”

Pages and pages could be written, and have been, of the brothers’ meager beginnings in a two-room log house with no running water, the sadness of unknowingly selling a pet goat for food, which led to buying their first guitar, or their parents Willie and Mary raising them to love God and put Him first in everything they did and family second. If one is interested in more of their story, one might travel to the International Bluegrass Music Museum in Owensboro, Kentucky, the Kentucky Bluegrass Hall of Fame, or visit the Luis B. Nunn Center for Oral History. There one will find a documentary filmed of the McCormick Brothers’ history or see much of the memorabilia Lloyd had saved, which was donated by his brothers after his death.

The brothers got their start playing for local school cake walks, church picnics and Decoration Day at church. Gerald shares, “We were always in church, where Dad was a deacon. Our parents believed in the passage in Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Kelly and Gerald also became church deacons, but all of the members of their family served and played Gospel music in church all their lives. Gerald says even when the boys got away from God in their teens, they still attended church and God brought them back to Him. “When you give your whole life to God,” Gerald says, “He never leaves you alone. When you get off the path, He’s always telling you to get back on.”



Gerald McCormick

In 1941, the McCormick Brothers recorded their first two vinyl records at ACME Records at WHIN Studio in Gallatin, Tennessee, both Gospel. In the late 1940s, the brothers were doing a radio show on WLAC Radio. Bill Monroe was in his hotel room listening. He gave Lloyd and Kelly an opportunity to audition for him. When the boys got there, they were so nervous, they could not even sing or tune their guitars. At one point, Bill asked Haskell to work for him. Haskell’s response was, “Well, I’d like to finish high school before I start traveling.” That statement is the way the brothers lived their lives, family and what was important first before big opportunities took them away from everything they had ever known...faith and family. Haskell did work for Mr. Monroe at a later date for a little while, but home was where his heart was.

In the early 1950s, the brothers’ two albums were doing well, they had a radio show on WHIN and played three thirty-minute sets on Saturdays, and they had graduated to playing at movie theaters in between movies. That led to playing at drive-in theaters with a lot more notoriety. They

would travel in a car to play with a huge upright bass, clothes and all the other instruments with six people. The older brothers worked in a factory all day while the younger brothers attended school. Then, they played music at night. It was not an easy thing to do for them. Sometimes their music took them to be interviewed in Cincinnati or to play in Indiana, but they still had to be back at work and school the next day after driving six hours.

In 1953, Hank Williams died. Fred Rose, a Nashville music mogul, had signed Hank to his first contract. He had joined with Roy Acuff as well. Mr. Rose had heard the McCormick Brothers and sent them a contract in the mail for his company Hickory Records. They released their first song, *Banjo Twist*, an instrumental featuring and written by Haskell. Next came their biggest hit, *Red Hen Boogie*. Kelly was featured on the song playing something called a cackler, which sounded like a chicken cackling when he blew it. It became a novelty song used to open and close many radio shows, but brought them a lot of attention.

As Gerald began to reminisce about being 12 or 13 years old and going with his brothers to the Opry, you could see a smile appear on his face. He told stories of sitting in Roy Acuff’s dressing room backstage with Marty Robbins and Oswald sitting around playing. “Marty Robbins was closing the Opry one night as I sat with them backstage. I asked him if he would dedicate a song to my friend I graduated high school with now in the army in Alaska. I had no idea my friend would be listening to the Opry in Alaska that night and called to tell me he heard it and how it made him feel,” shares Gerald.

Gerald continues, “In the ‘50s, a lot of Bluegrass groups would stop by our house on a Sunday after church. My brothers would BBQ a goat to feed everyone. I just thought it was normal for Bill Monroe to stop by for a little pickin’ party. I was just a boy and didn’t realize this was not a normal event for others outside my family.”

The McCormick Brothers were gaining popularity in the late 1950s. They released many vinyl 45 rpm records with a song including vocal on one side and an instrumental on the other side with Haskell’s unique banjo pickin’ featured on the songs. Many of their instrumentals were selected for radio show theme songs. In 1955, the McCormick Brothers were named ‘Most Promising Small Country Instrumental Group’ in Country & Western Jamboree magazine’s DJ poll and in 1956, they were voted ‘Best New Music Group’ in the same magazine. That same year, they were also voted ‘Most Promising Small Country Instrumental Group’ in Cashbox magazine’s DJ poll. They were also listed in Cashbox magazine’s ‘Who’s Who in Country Music’ in 1960 and were ranked in the top ten ‘Favorite Small Country & Western Groups’ in Billboard.

All of this recognition landed the McCormick Brothers in touring packages to open for Johnny Cash, Jim Reeves, Marty Robbins, the Wilburn Brothers, Ferlin Huskey, Conway Twitty, and others. They played on the Ozark Jamboree in Missouri, Tennessee Barn Dance in Knoxville,

and The Porter Wagoner and Wilburn Brothers tv shows and of course, the Grand Ole Opry.

Though Gerald had sung with his brothers since the age of 13-14, in 1969, he was asked to officially join the group when they opened for Marty Robbins on his tour package and to drive the bus. Most of the shows they played were within a few hundred miles of home as all of them were still working full time jobs during the day. Though fans in other parts of the country heard them on the Opry and other shows, they were never privileged to hear them in person.

Gerald shares that his brothers could play one square dance close to home and draw just as big a crowd and make just as much money, while getting some rest, as they did on the big shows and touring. They chose not to do the major tours and once again to put faith and family first. However, Gerald did remember his brothers being invited to play at the Freedom Rally in front of the Washington Monument for President Richard Nixon.

Though Gerald has many personal and very interesting stories to tell about many celebrities who are a part of his and his brothers' history, his humility prevents him from allowing them to be in print. He frequently stated after a memory he shared, "Oh, don't print that. My mama and daddy would think that was bragging." However, after much persuasion, one of those stories was shared and permission given. The story is one Gerald holds very dear.

Johnny Cash had invited Gerald to come to a recording session for *I Wanna Be That Way*. When he finished, Johnny said he and June were going to sing at a Billy Graham Crusade and asked Gerald and his late wife, Martha, to join them and Rev. Graham for dinner at his house. Dr. Graham said the blessing over the food. After dinner, they all sat in a circle at Johnny's house. Johnny and June sang a song, and then Johnny passed a guitar around for others to sing, including the brothers. Then, Ruth Graham testified and Billy Graham spoke for a few minutes.

What impacted Gerald McCormick the most about that night was one question asked of Dr. Graham about the greatest service he had ever been in. Dr. Graham shared about a day when he spoke in Korea. He asked everyone who had given their heart to Jesus that night to hold up something white. As Dr. Graham left in a helicopter, he said the only thing he could see from the air was a field of white as hundreds of thousands of people acknowledged their acceptance of Christ.

During the afternoon interview, it was evident if Gerald McCormick wanted to leave readers with one important thing about his brothers and him, it would be that they loved God with all their hearts and though they loved Country and Bluegrass music, singing Gospel music and seeing lives changed as Dr. Graham had seen in Korea was the most important thing they ever did.

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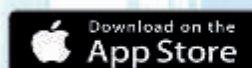
OFFICIAL CHRISTIAN COUNTRY TOP 100 - SEPTEMBER 2026

TM	LM	SONG TITLE	ARTIST	TM	LM	SONG TITLE	ARTIST
1	3	Preacher Man	David Timms	51	57	The Promise	Charity Hamilton
2	10	Let Me Tell Ya Bout My Faith	Kali Rose	52	43	I Was There	Jerry Weatherly
3	7	The Bridge	Daryl Baker	53	88	Squeeze Your Guts Out	Jimmy R. Price
4	9	God Is Good Y'all	Wings of Love	54	63	One Man	Bruce & Betsy Mullen
5	20	The Last Song	Terry and Debra Luna	55	69	Leading Me Home	Melissa Garner
6	13	That's The Way Mama Raised Me	Luke Hendrickson	56	62	The Eastern Gate	Ava Kasich & Martha Lambert
7	15	Jesus Is The Way	Rachel Taylor	57	67	We All Need Jesus	J'Lee
8	5	This One's For You	Rocky and Tamie	58	77	High Tower	The Epps Family
9	17	Edge Of Heaven	Scott Peacock	59	32	My Tiny Soul	JW Jackson
10	30	Piano For Sale	Chris Golden	60	64	Angels Among Us	Dale Rochell
11	2	Jesus Is The King	Ken Mobley	61	79	I Just Walked	Gary Russ
12	27	If I'm Guilty	Thomas Brown	62	74	I Will Never Know The Desert Again	Eddy Mann
13	21	At War With Myself	Cyndi Reynolds	63	93	Without You (I Haven't Got A Prayer)	Frontier Brothers
14	25	Healer	Allen Frizzell	64	90	Man Down At The River	Gary Herd
15	1	Looking For The Light	Delnora	65	76	Jesus Wouldn't Do	Jordan Davis
16	33	Sunday's Best	Shellem Cline	66	81	Love Is All You Need	Joy LaVallee
17	8	Song For My Son	Walker Hayes	67	80	Me And Jesus Gonna Get It Done	Norman Lee Schaffer
18	31	Soldier Of The Cross	John Penney	68	72	The Storm	Jan Harbuck
19	36	Snowy Sunday Morning	Biscuits and Gravy Band Indiana	69	71	If I Know Him	Kevin Kappler
20	54	Three Nails And A Cross	George Strait	70	82	If I Could Talk To Daddy Again	Roger Barkley, Jr.
21	11	Saving Grace	Krystina B	71	70	Footprints In The Sand	Dwight Sanders
22	41	Old Gravel Road	John Michael Ferrari	72	45	How Much Grace	Liam Tysinger
23	37	There's Power In The Name Of Jesus	Jonathan Ray Smith	73	78	Far Side Banks Of Jordan	Julie Reese
24	14	The Turn	The Pauls	74	44	Wish You Were Here	Johnathan Bond
25	19	Jesus Loves Me	Dierks Bentley	75	47	Somebody Bigger Than You And I	David Smith
26	69	Let Him In Anyway	Blake Shelton	76	84	Grace	Dawson Road
27	6	What I Got (La-De-Da)	Caleb Deramus	77	86	Trade Your Story For Glory	Marty Deroche
28	42	The Good In Bye	Small Town Sunday	78	75	Someday Things Are Gonna Get Better	Johnny Jones
29	4	When I Hear His Name	Victoria Steelman	79	-	The Great I Am	Steve Warren
30	39	Cherished Memories	Jeff Hamilton	80	83	Songs Like Those	Debbie Mills
31	48	House of Fire	Lonnie Hardy	81	87	Drinking From The Fountain	Daryl Branson
32	46	Georgiana Alabama 1939	Michael Ray Fain	82	96	The Devil Cried	Jason Welch
33	56	America I Will Stand Up For You	Mike Leichner	83	94	Stand Up For The Flag Kneel At The Cross	Ray Epperson
34	18	My God Can	Valerie Ellis Hawkins	84	85	Empty No More	Marty Denton
35	55	Jesus On My Mind	Bruce Hedrick	85	95	Never To Far Gone	Alex Ervin
36	50	River Of Life	Sonshine Road	86	98	When A Cowboy Prays	Brandon Lake and Cody Johnson
37	38	Getting Back Up	Troy Richardson	87	89	Redemption Story	Alexa Finney
38	61	I Know A Carpenter	Michael Knight	88	-	Raised In Nashville	Victoria Steelman
39	65	Hot Line	Bobby Gibson	89	91	A Prayer I Never Prayed	Tyson Leamon
40	24	In The Morning	Hunter Logan	90	-	When Was The Last Time	Chuck Day
41	23	Whiskey Road	Michael Tetrick	91	92	Not On My Watch	Darin Kinser
42	53	Strength Of A Survivor	Aaron Justice	92	99	Let Go Of The Reins	Daryl Jorden
43	16	What I Don't Know	Paula Slow	93	-	What Can I Say	Barbara Jean
44	59	Little More Like Jesus	Dave Edwards	94	-	Whiskey Lies	Kentucky Yoder
45	52	Somebody Here	Linda Lanier	95	-	The Scars You Can't See	Debra Camp
46	66	Rocks	Heather Thomas Van Deren	96	100	We Found Each Other	Troy Ervin
47	22	Why Me	Jenny Dean	97	-	Building Bridges	Carolina The Band
48	58	I'm Yours	The Murphys	98	-	A Little More Jesus	Daryl Baker
49	51	Real Good Day	Kevin Morris	99	-	Talking To Your Chair	Marshal McKellar
50	28	Wayfaring Stranger	Debbie Bennett	100	-	Try Jesus	Justin David Chapman



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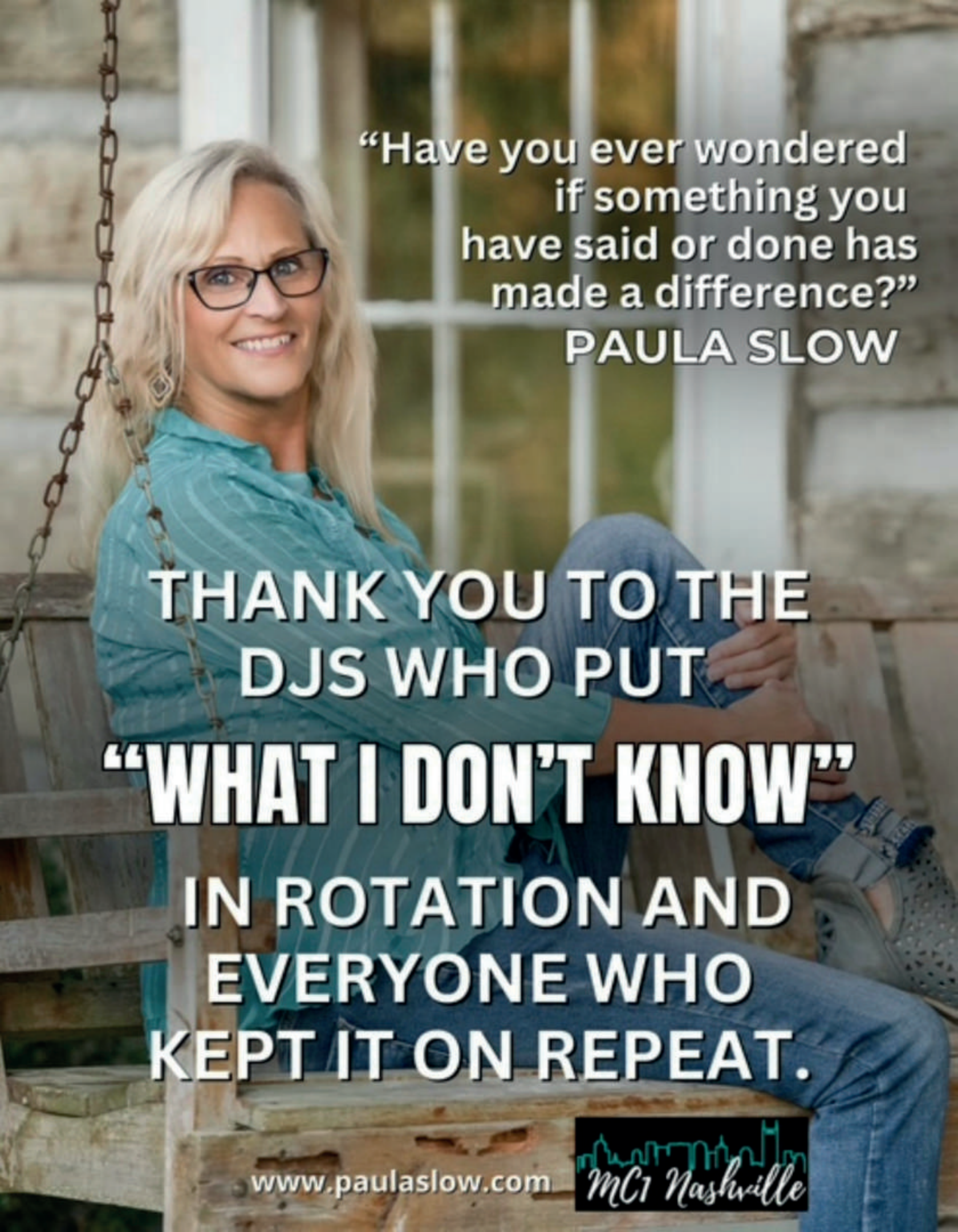
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A woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a teal shirt and jeans, is sitting on a wooden swing. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a stone wall and a window with white frames.

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BELLES of BLUE

A Legacy Still Singing

By Cory Parker

In the heart of Kentucky, where Bluegrass roots run deep and Gospel truth rings clear, two sisters carry forward a legacy born long before their group ever had a name. Belles of Blue, led by Nancy Decker and “Jolly” Dollie Slayton, is more than a Bluegrass Gospel ensemble - it is the continuation of a family calling that began on an old blue bus rolling through the Midwest.

Their story traces back to Willow Springs, Missouri, where the Singing Murdy Family lived out a ministry woven from Scripture, harmony, and the kind of faith that shapes generations. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Murdy family traveled from revival to revival, church to church, festival to festival, singing Bluegrass Gospel and preaching the good news. They performed everywhere from small rural congregations to Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri, carrying with them a sound that was unmistakably theirs - raw, heartfelt, and rooted in the Word.

All seven Murdy children grew up in that atmosphere. They learned to sing before they learned to speak, learned to harmonize before they learned to drive, and learned to minister before they ever understood the weight of ministry. Their parents taught them that music was not a performance but a calling, a way God reaches hearts that sermons alone sometimes cannot.

One of the family's final moments together came in Quincy, Illinois, when their mother gathered the adult children to record a Gospel television program for WTJR, a Christian Television Network affiliate. It was a treasured moment, one last unified offering before the passing of both a brother and their father. That memory still anchors the sisters today.

Nancy, the eldest of the seven, has spent more than fifty years writing and performing songs that carry the themes of faith, hope, and perseverance. A retired elementary school teacher, she now lives with her husband, Wayne, on their farm in Leitchfield, Kentucky, serving as an office administrator at Camp Loucon. Her life has always been a blend of ministry and melody.

Dollie, the youngest - born on the very bus the family traveled in - grew up surrounded by Gospel music and quickly developed her gift for harmony and songwriting. Today she and her husband, Joe, pastor Free Grace, Free Salvation Church in Edmonton, Kentucky, while she also serves at Wisdom Faith Academy. Her life, like Nancy's, is a seamless blend of faith, family, and music.

Though twenty years apart in age, God had a plan to bring them together. Nancy was already married and raising children when Dollie was born, yet years later she found herself teaching her younger sister to play upright bass in her Bluegrass band. What began as lessons soon became ministry. Before long, they were performing together, writing songs that combined biblical truth with everyday life - songs that felt lived-in, honest, and deeply personal.

Their songwriting partnership eventually expanded to include their sister Daisy Smith, creating a three-sister collaboration that continues to this day. Their greatest influence remains their parents, whose ministry taught them that music is not entertainment, it is a vessel God uses to reach the hurting, the searching, and the hopeful.

Nancy's songwriting career gained international attention in the mid-1990s when her original composition *Sawmill Man* from the Grogan & Company album "Songs About Home" was featured on *Prime Cuts of Bluegrass* and charted worldwide. It was a milestone that affirmed what her family had always known - Nancy had a gift for telling stories through song.

She has performed at iconic venues including The Station Inn, The Gibson Showcase, and The Lucy Opry, sharing stages with Bluegrass legends such as Uncle Josh Graves, Josh Graves Jr., and Kenny Baker. Yet despite these accomplishments, Nancy remains grounded in the same truth her parents taught her: the greatest stage is the one where someone's heart is changed.



Today, Belles of Blue continue that legacy through Sound Biscuit Records, releasing original Bluegrass Gospel music rooted in Scripture and personal testimony. Their sound is unmistakably theirs - rich family harmony, traditional Bluegrass instrumentation, and lyrics that point listeners toward Christ.

Like many independent artists, one of their greatest challenges has been building and maintaining a dedicated band. Finding musicians who share both the musical vision and the long-term commitment required for ministry is no small task.

"We have definitely put the work in, more than twenty years' worth," Nancy says.

The sisters are especially grateful for longtime mandolin player Jeffrey Woodard, who has faithfully traveled with them

for nearly a decade. His consistency has helped anchor the group through seasons of change.

But the greatest reward is not found in applause, chart positions, or recognition. "Our greatest joy is knowing we're spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and giving hope to people through our songs," Nancy says. "When someone tells us a song encouraged them or helped them through a difficult season, that's what it's all about."

Their first two Sound Biscuit releases - *Black Heart* and *A Different Shade of Blue* - introduced audiences to the depth of their message. Both songs drew from deeply personal experiences while pointing listeners toward the hope found in Christ.

Their newest single, *Hebrew Children*, continues that mission. Written by Nancy, the song retells the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - three young men who stood firm before King Nebuchadnezzar and refused to bow. Nancy wanted an up-tempo Gospel number, but more importantly, she wanted to remind listeners that the same God who delivered the Hebrew children is still delivering His people today.

The message has resonated deeply, making *Hebrew Children* one of their most requested songs.

Dollie shares, "My testimony is called *The Trained Up Trainwreck: The Story of the Preacher's Prodigal Daughter*. I was raised in church by wonderful parents, but somewhere along the way I derailed. One day I cried out to God, 'I'm not my parents. I can't do what they did.' God gently reminded me, 'I didn't ask you to be your parents. I just want you to fulfill the purpose I created you for.' That moment changed my life. I surrendered completely to Jesus Christ. I prayed seven years for my husband's salvation, and today we both serve Him together. My prayer is that people understand God can use anyone, regardless of their past."

"I accepted Christ at five years old during a revival meeting," says Nancy. "That decision has carried me through every season of life. Nearly eight years ago I lost my husband

of twenty-one years to suicide. During that dark season, God never let go of me. One day, in the middle of my grief, I clearly heard Him say, 'Be still and know that I am God.' From that moment, healing began. Today I've been able to minister to other widows who have experienced similar loss. Through our song *A Different Shade of Blue*, we share hope, encourage conversations about mental health, and remind people they are never alone."

The sisters often reflect on their father's legacy. Though many of his songs were never professionally published, people still sing them today. At his funeral, person after person stood to share how his music, friendship, and preaching had led them to Christ.

"We may never fully know who is changed by our music," Nancy says. "But if one person comes to know Jesus because of a song we've sung, then everything we've done has been worthwhile."

The Belles of Blue strive to remain faithful to the biblical values they were raised with. "We don't change depending on where we're playing," they say. "Whether we're in a church or at a Bluegrass festival, we're the same people. We believe God's Word is timeless."

Their desire is simple: to encourage families to stand firm in their faith, raise their children with biblical values, and remember that

God is not the author of confusion.

Whether performing at a church, festival, or community event, audiences can expect rich family harmony, heartfelt testimony, traditional Gospel favorites, and original songs filled with biblical truth and encouragement.

"We're not just entertainers," the sisters say. "We're ministers. Every handshake, every smile, every conversation after a concert is another opportunity to point someone to Jesus Christ."

Their hope is that people leave every performance encouraged, strengthened in their faith, and reminded that God is still working in their lives today.



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A full-page background image of Debra Camp, a woman with long blonde hair, smiling and wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with a colorful beaded necklace and a light purple shawl draped over her shoulders. She is standing on a sandy beach with the ocean in the background.

DEBRA CAMP

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and **Randy Fowler** for
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Christian Hutton for
producing it, and **Randall
Wilds** for helping us
get it out there for the
world to hear.

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