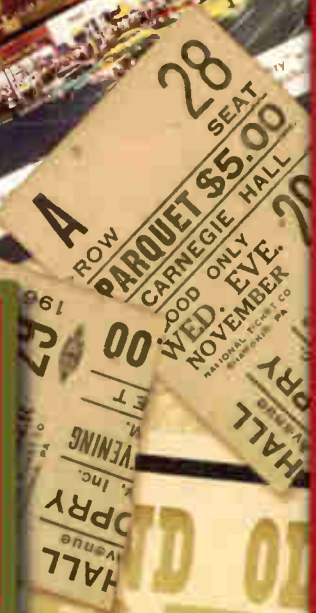


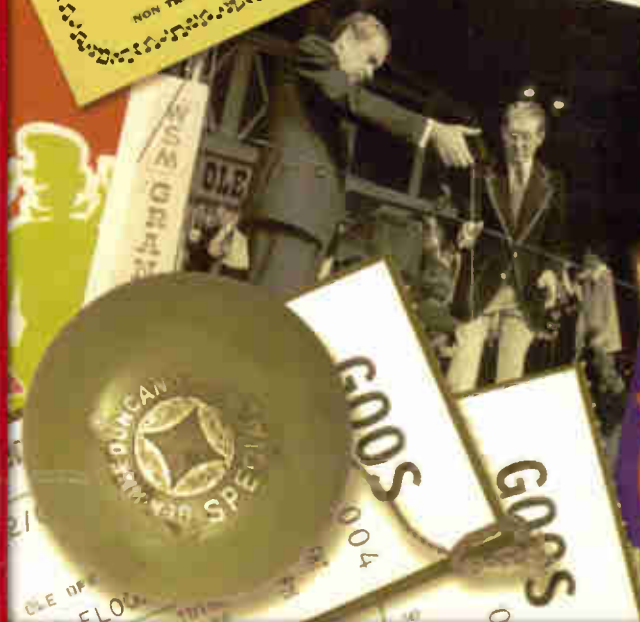


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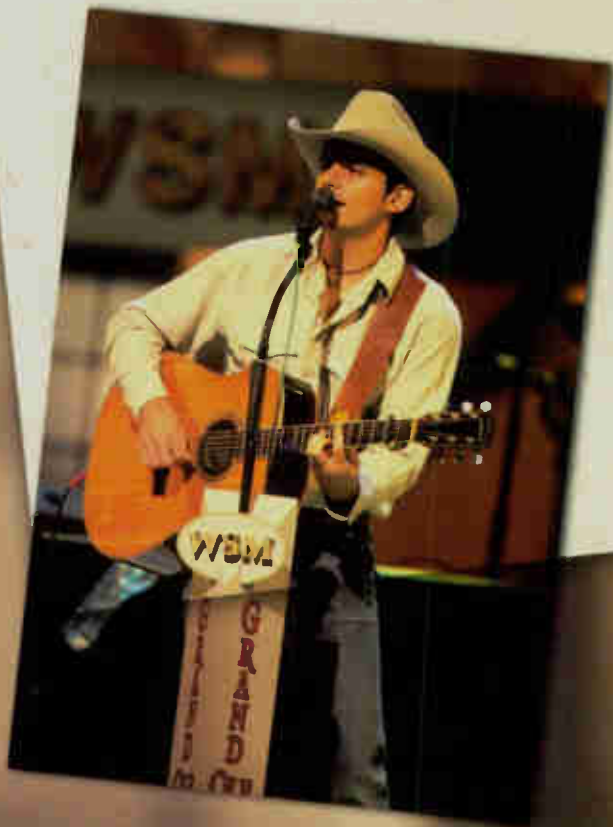
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GRAND OLE OPRY®

Pilgrims travel to Jerusalem to see the Holy land, and the foundations of their faith. People go to Washington to see the workings of our government, and the foundation of our country. And fans flock to Nashville to see the foundation of Country Music, the Grand Ole Opry. It's been the living, breathing heart of our music for 80 years. This is its story; And country music's as well. Hope you enjoy it.



-Billie



★ PICTURE HISTORY BOOK ★

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Will the Circle Be Unbroken?

An Introduction to the Grand Ole Opry

The six-foot circle of dark, oak wood in the Opry House stage is shiny but clearly well worn. Cut from the stage of the Opry's famous former home, the Ryman Auditorium, this circle gives newcomers and veterans alike the opportunity to sing on the same spot that once supported Uncle Dave Macon, Ernest Tubb, Patsy Cline, and others.

"That circle is the most magical thing when you're a performer," says Brad Paisley, "to stand there and get to sing on those same boards that probably still contain dust from Hank Williams' boots."

Many things about the Opry have changed over the years—its members, the sound of its music, even its home. But there's always that oak-solid center to remind every singer or musician who steps inside that they take part in something much larger than themselves, that wherever they go they have a connection to the legends and the giants who came before them.

As that wooden circle is the heart of the stage, the Opry's heart is its music and its members—a broad scope of styles by a wide range of artists.

"The Grand Ole Opry celebrates country music's diversity," says Opry general manager Pete Fisher. "In addition, the Opry presents the many generations of artists who have formed country music's legacy and continue to forge its future course."

Indeed, during any given Opry show, audiences can expect the best in country, bluegrass, comedy, gospel, and more by Country Music Hall of Famers, cast members who helped establish the Opry as the home of country music, revered superstars, and young artists just starting to make names for themselves.

The Grand Ole Opry began just five years after commercial radio was born in the United States. In 1925, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company built a radio station as a public service to the local community and with the hope that the new medium could advertise insurance policies. The station's call letters, WSM, stood for the company's motto: "We Shield Millions."



Early WSM advertising postcard, late 1920s

Soon after going on the air, National Life hired one of the nation's most popular announcers, George D. Hay, as WSM's first program director. Hay, a former Memphis newspaper reporter who'd most recently started a barn dance show on Chicago radio powerhouse WLS, joined the station's staff a month after it went on the air. At 8 p.m. on November 28, 1925, Hay pronounced himself "The Solemn Old Judge" (though he was actually only 30 years old) and launched, along with championship fiddler, Uncle Jimmy Thompson, what would become the WSM Barn Dance.

Hay's weekly broadcasts continued and proved enormously popular, and he renamed the show the Grand Ole Opry in 1927. Crowds soon clogged hallways as they gathered to observe the performers,

prompting the National Life company to build an acoustically designed auditorium capable of holding 500 fans. When WSM radio increased broadcasting power to 50,000 watts in 1932, most of the United States and parts of Canada could tune into the Opry on Saturday nights, broadening the show's outreach.



This early Opry souvenir features founder George D. Hay (center) and Opry cast members from the 1930s.

The new space wasn't enough to keep up with the audience's increasing enthusiasm for the weekly show. The Opry went through a number of homes in several parts of Nashville before settling, in 1943, at the Ryman Auditorium, a former religious meeting house built in 1892 by riverboat shipping magnate Captain Thomas Ryman for traveling evangelist, Reverend Samuel Jones.

The Opry stayed at the Ryman for nearly 31 years. Many of the show's legends spent most of their Opry runs there. (Only in late 2004 did the Grand Ole Opry House pass the Ryman as the Opry's most enduring home.)

The popularity of the Opry shows was star driven. Until 1938, the show had emphasized instrumental performances. Any singer was subordinate to the band. All that changed when young Roy Acuff joined the cast that year. His performance of "The Great Speckled Bird" his first night forever changed the Opry.



Opry fans crowd Nashville's Fifth Avenue in this 1955 photo.

The show's popularity also was enhanced after the NBC Radio Network began carrying the show in 1939. Sponsored by Prince Albert Tobacco, the network show featured Opry stars Uncle Dave Macon, Acuff, Deford Bailey, and Hay. In October 1943, the *Prince Albert Show* segment, with Acuff hosting, began airing nationally on more than 140 NBC affiliates.



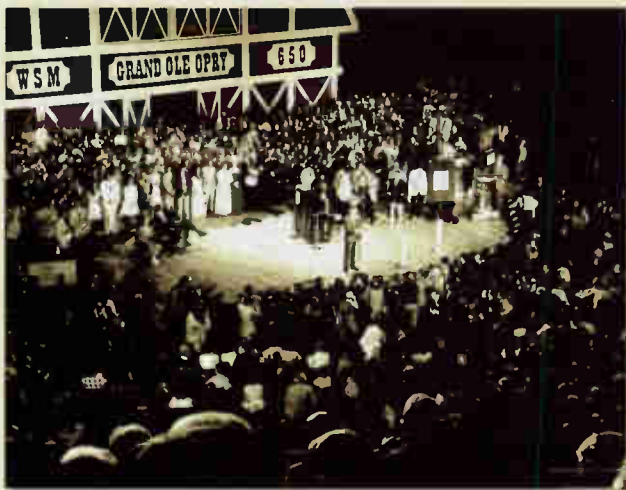
Roy Acuff (far right) points to a board announcing the expansion of the Opry's Prince Albert Show network broadcast on NBC.

Throughout the '40s, Opry stars spent weekends performing on the show in Nashville and weekdays traveling around the nation, performing first in tent shows and later in auditoriums. Artists and musicians crammed into automobiles and later buses as they became ambassadors for country music and the Grand Ole Opry.

Ernest Tubb took a group of Opry stars to New York's Carnegie Hall in 1947. Another Opry group played Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., that same

year. The Opry's first European tour in 1949 took Red Foley, Acuff, Minnie Pearl, Rod Brasfield, Little Jimmy Dickens, Hank Williams, and others to U.S. military bases in England, Germany, and the Azores. And in 1961, an Opry troupe including Patsy Cline, Grandpa Jones, Bill Monroe, and Jim Reeves played Carnegie Hall a second time.

The touring tradition has continued. In 1991, the Opry conducted a 10-city Grand Ole Opry Tour to celebrate the show's 65th anniversary. In 2004, Vince Gill, Patty Loveless, Del McCoury, and others reprised an Opry tour. And the Opry's 80th anniversary festivities included a return trip to Carnegie Hall and "An Evening With the Grand Ole Opry" multi-city tour.



The entire Grand Ole Opry cast takes the stage during the opening night ceremonies March 16, 1974, at the Grand Ole Opry House as special guest, President Richard Nixon speaks to the crowd.

Even as it held tightly to its traditions, the Opry took advantage of new technologies and opportunities. In 1955, Ralston Purina began sponsoring an hour-long regional-network television show from the Ryman stage featuring Opry stars. And in 1974, the Opry moved from the Ryman to a new, larger facility at the heart of a multi-million-dollar entertainment complex nine miles from downtown Nashville.

The 1970s also saw the simple little radio show televised live for the first time. The national PBS Television Network televised the show on March 4, 1978, and annually through 1981. Then in April 1985, a half-hour segment of the Opry began airing each Saturday night on TNN as *Grand Ole Opry Live*. *Opry Backstage*, a live 30-minute series that aired before *Opry Live*, began in 1987. *Grand Ole Opry Live* eventually expanded to

the full hour and can now be seen each week on Great American Country (GAC).

As country's popularity boomed during the 1980s, Opry management ensured the show's future by adding a new generation of stars to the roster, beginning with the induction of Ricky Skaggs, Lorrie Morgan, Reba McEntire, Ricky Van Shelton, and Holly Dunn. By the end of the 1990s, many of country's top superstars—including Garth Brooks, Clint Black, Alan Jackson, Vince Gill, Steve Wariner, Diamond Rio, and Trisha Yearwood—could call the Opry home. The Opry's additions in the new century reflect the show's commitment to a broad range of country music. Recent inductees have included bluegrass greats Ralph Stanley and Del McCoury, second-generation singer Pam Tillis, and award-winners Trace Adkins, Terri Clark, Brad Paisley, and Dierks Bentley.

Today, there are more ways to enjoy the Grand Ole Opry than ever before. From April through December, there are the Tuesday Night Opry shows. There's the two-hour radio program, *America's Grand Ole Opry Weekend*, syndicated in some 200 markets. Just as country greats like Jeannie Seely and Jim Ed Brown grew up listening to the Opry on radio, future generations of Opry stars also may hear it on the Internet, on satellite radio, or via the American Forces Network.

However they hear it, and wherever they come from, those future Opry stars will one day take their place inside that famed round piece of stage. They will enter the circle that remains unbroken, and they will feel the presence of the hundreds who've come before. They will know the value of remaining genuine and honest, and they will continue to entertain millions while keeping founder George D. Hay's first commandment: "Keep 'er down to Earth, boys!"



The Del McCoury Band performs at the Grand Ole Opry House.

Our Members

How does someone become a member of the Grand Ole Opry?

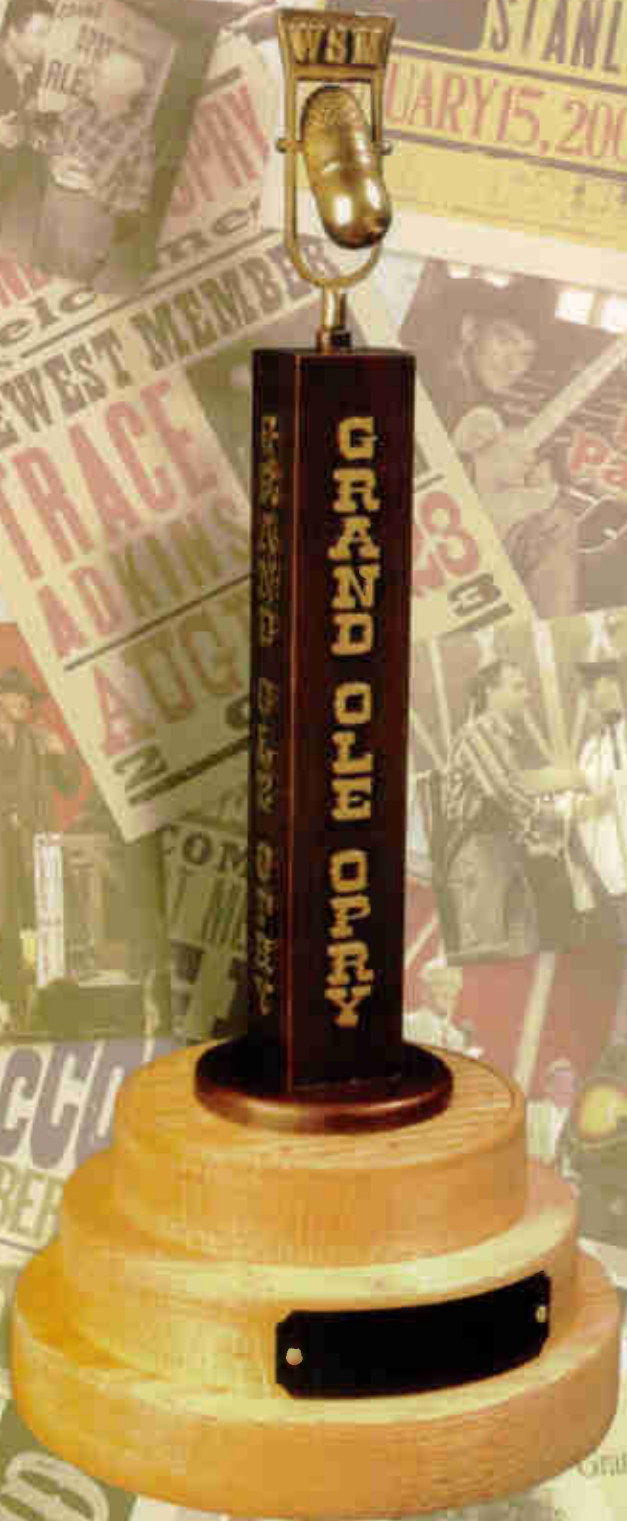
There's no magic formula, no secret code that grants access to one of the most coveted invitations in all of music.

The decision to increase the Opry's ranks is, and always has been, made exclusively by the show's management. The people who've been entrusted with the Opry's tradition and future direction take into account all the standards of success in country music—radio airplay, album and ticket sales, industry recognition—when considering an act for membership. The Opry considers career accomplishment, as well as the potential for continued success.

But the Opry doesn't simply pass out invitations to the biggest stars with the most hits. Opry management looks for a musical and a generational balance. Opry membership requires a passion for country music's fans, a connection to the music's history. And it requires commitment – even a willingness to make significant sacrifices to uphold that commitment. Often, the Opry seeks out those who seek out the Opry, though decisions aren't based on which artists appear most on the show, either.

The decision to bring a new act into the Opry fold is a two-pronged one, based on a combination of career accomplishment and commitment. But, really, it comes down to just one word: relationships. The relationships between performers and fans. The relationships Opry members have with each other, relationships that may last for decades. And, perhaps most importantly, the relationship between each artist and the ideal of the Grand Ole Opry.

New members guarantee the future success of the Opry. Yesterday's bright young talents have now become legends. And today's superstars will become icons to future generations. All new members add another chapter to the Opry story, and their commitments, their relationships, have made the Opry endure for 80 years strong.



Trace Adkins

When Trace Adkins made his Opry debut in 1996, he made the most of the big day by asking girlfriend Rhonda Forlaw to marry him. In the glow of the Opry spotlights, she accepted.

In 2003, the 6'6" Trace looked 4'11" Opry star Jimmy Dickens in the eyes—a stepladder was involved—and accepted Little Jimmy's invitation to join the Opry cast. Tears flowed on both occasions.

The son of Aaron, a paper mill worker, and Peggy, a schoolteacher, Tracy Darrell Adkins grew up in Sarepta, Louisiana. He played linebacker at Louisiana Tech, where he also studied petroleum technology. After two years he left and worked as an off-shore oil rigger for nearly a decade. With a high-school background in the gospel quartet New Commitment, Trace became the lead singer in the Louisiana-based band Bayou Speak Easy in 1985.

It wasn't long before Trace set his sights on Nashville; he embarked on a country music career in 1992. Three years later, when he was discovered in a small club just east of Nashville and signed to a recording contract with Capitol Records, the father of two could lay claim to two failed marriages. One of them resulted in a bullet wound to his lungs and heart.

His other battle scars included a severed finger from an industrial accident and severe facial injuries from an automobile accident. Then there was the exploding 400-barrel oil tank that crushed his left leg.

But in 1996, things started looking up with the release of his debut album, *Dreamin' Out Loud*. Trace received a warm welcome from country radio and fans alike with his first single, "There's a Girl in Texas," followed by "Every Light in the House."

Trace reached the top of the country charts with his next two singles—"(This Ain't) No Thinkin' Thing" and "I Left Something Turned On at Home." After his debut sold more than a million copies, the next CD, *Big Time*, produced another string of hits. "Don't Lie" was a product of his third album, *More*, released in 1999. Trace followed that in 2001 with *Chrome* and more hits, including "I'm Tryin'" and the title cut.

Comin' On Strong, including the slyly sexy hit single "Hot Mama," came five months after a greatest hits package. In 2005, Trace released the appropriately titled *Songs About Me*. Each of his three most recent albums debuted atop the country charts.

"I've never been one that looked for the rainbow," Trace has said. "I'm too busy standing in the rain."

A decade and millions of albums into his career, Opry member Trace Adkins is firmly established with a country audience that loves his country voice, real-life songs—and even this former linebacker's dance moves.

With a little help from his step ladder, Little Jimmy Dickens is eye-to-eye when he invites Trace to join the Grand Ole Opry cast.



Birthplace: Springhill, Louisiana
Birth Date: January 13
Opry Induction: August 23, 2003



Bill Anderson

If you want someone's attention, whisper. That maxim could've been written just for Bill Anderson.

The soft-spoken Country Music Hall of Famer's way of breathing a song earned him the nickname "Whispering Bill." And after more than 40 years in the business, his songs—whether he sings them himself or they're recorded by others – still demand attention.

The South Carolina-born, Georgia-raised entertainer learned guitar at age 12 and soon formed his own band. While Bill was studying journalism at the University of Georgia, Ray Price covered the then-20-year-old's "City Lights" and took it to No. 1 for 13 weeks in 1958. Decca Records quickly offered Bill a recording contract, and by the end of that year he had his own record on the charts.

Bill's recording career kicked into high gear when he joined the Opry in 1961, just as "Po' Folks"—the song that gave his backing band its name and inspired a restaurant chain—entered the charts. The following year, "Mama Sang a Song" spent seven weeks at No. 1. Bill's signature song, "Still," repeated the feat in 1963.

In all, Bill has had 80 singles reach the country charts. But he wrote so many songs he couldn't record them all. Two songs with his name on them hit No. 1 in 1964—first Lefty Frizzell's "Saginaw, Michigan," then Connie Smith's "Once a Day." He penned "When Two Worlds Collide" with Roger

Miller, and Conway Twitty had a chart-topping hit with Bill's "I May Never Get to Heaven."

Artists ranging from Roy Acuff to Aretha Franklin, from Dean Martin to Jerry Lee Lewis have cut Bill's songs. His "The Tips of My Fingers" has been a five-time hit, first for Bill in 1960, and most recently in 1992 for Steve Wariner.

Steve's revival of "Tips" led to a renewed interest in songwriting for Bill, who'd already been inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Association and Georgia Music Halls of Fame. In 1995, fellow Opry member Vince Gill recorded "Which Bridge To Cross, Which Bridge To Burn," a song they'd written together.

Bill's other recent credits include Steve Wariner's Grammy-nominated "Two Teardrops"; Mark Wills' "Wish You Were Here"; Kenny Chesney's "A Lot of Things Different"; and Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss' award-winning duet, "Whiskey Lullaby."

Bill's career has extended far beyond country music. He's hosted TV game shows and has appeared on the daytime drama *One Life to Live*. He has penned a best-selling autobiography and a book of anecdotes. He also continues to record. His most recent album is called *The Way I Feel*.



Birthplace: Columbia, South Carolina
Birth Date: November 1
Opry Induction: July 15, 1961



Ernie Ashworth

Ernie Ashworth was at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, when his single "Each Moment ('Spent With You)" started shooting up the charts like the guided missiles he was working on. With his sights set on a country music career, Ernie headed back to Music City.

Ernie, who was playing and singing on Huntsville radio station WBHP by the time he was 20, found success in Nashville as a songwriter during the early '50s. Signed as a writer for Acuff-Rose, Nashville's first music publishing company, he wrote for such country greats as Little Jimmy Dickens, Carl Smith, Johnny Horton, and Wilma Lee Cooper. Even pop idol Paul Anka had recorded one of his songs, called "I Wish."

Though music publisher Wesley Rose arranged a record contract for Ernie in 1955, recording success eluded him, and he eventually returned to his hometown of Huntsville. In 1960, Rose called him to record again. This second attempt turned out better. "Each Moment" became a Top 10 country hit. So did Ernie's next record, "You Can't Pick a Rose in December."

Three years later, Ernie found the smash he'd been waiting for. "Talk Back Trembling Lips," a bouncy number about a man paralyzed by heartbreak, went to No. 1 and stayed on the national country charts for 36 weeks. It crossed over to pop radio and led to an invitation to join the Opry. The song also inspired another of Ernie's big hits—

his trademark stage suit with big red lips outlined in gold studs.

Ernie earned Most Promising Male Artist accolades from *Billboard*, *Cashbox*, and *Record World* magazines. In 1965, he gave the movie business a try, appearing in *The Farmer's Other Daughter*.

Ernie received the Major Independent Record Label Awards Show's Living Legend Award in 1991. That same year, Curb Records released a retrospective of his Top 10 hits. He was inducted into the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in 1992.

Ernie still brings the house down with his hits and his trembling-lips suit, but he's also a businessman who owns AM radio stations in Ardmore and Gallatin, Tennessee. He remains an active Opry member and continues to play road dates. He recorded a *35th Grand Ole Opry Anniversary* CD in 1999; two singles from that album, "Lonely's Only Bar" and "She Don't Smoke, She Don't Drink But She Lies," became popular independent country hits in Europe.

It's a long way from the cotton fields of Alabama to the world-famous Opry stage. But as Ernie is fond of saying, "It's a lot more fun than the cotton field."



Birthplace: Huntsville, Alabama
Birth Date: December 15
Opry Induction: March 7, 1964



Dierks Bentley

Because Dierks Bentley is touring non-stop all year, the Opry decided to take its invitation of Opry membership in 2005 "on the road" to the successful young artist. Opry member Marty Stuart briefly interrupted Dierks' performance in Los Angeles at the House of Blues to issue the welcome surprise invitation. Stuart walked onto the stage an hour into Dierks' set and said, "Will you do it...will you marry the Grand Ole Opry?" "Hell yeah!," Dierks replied. On Stuart's command the Opry microphone stand was positioned at center stage.

After the invitation, Bentley was left speechless and had a hard time getting through his next song. "This is the greatest night of my life. Thanks you guys for sharing this with me," he stated to the packed house.

On October 1, 2005, Dierks became the youngest current member of the Opry.

Dierks' reputation as a country renegade, blending traditional country with a newer edge, has garnered the attention of fans and critics alike. Consistently ranked at the top of the charts, his self-titled debut CD spawned the hit singles "What Was I Thinkin'", "How Am I Doin'?" and "My Last Name" and was certified Platinum* by the RIAA. His sophomore album, *Modern Day Drifter*, debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Country Charts in 2005 and was recently certified Platinum* by the RIAA taking him from talented newcomer to chart-topping country mainstay with hits such as his #1 single "Come A Little Closer," "Lot of Leavin'

Left To Do" and "Settle For A Slowdown."

Dierks' long and varied list of awards and accolades includes 2005 CMA Horizon Award, ACM's Top New Artist in 2004, CMT's Breakthrough Video Award, Top New Artist of the Year by Billboard and R&R, Breakout Artist of the Year by Music Row Magazine and one of the Top 10 Breakout Artists of the Year by Access Hollywood.

From his early days in Nashville as a researcher at TNN, Dierks has had incredible admiration for the Opry and its members. In fact, he was such a fan in those days that the Opry's General Manager had to go as far as limiting his backstage access, making Dierks' Opry induction an "ultimate backstage pass." "It's like having a home off the road and a place you can always go to play music in town," Dierks says about his new status as 'Opry member.' "The Opry is such a huge part of American history. It's bigger than just country music. It's a big reflection of our country."

Becoming a member of the Grand Ole Opry is truly a dream come true for Dierks. Even though he's currently on the road much of the year, he makes a point every opportunity he gets to come back home to Nashville to play his favorite stage - the Grand Ole Opry.

"Hopefully I can be a really great asset to the Opry, and I'm looking forward to proving that over years to come," he says.



Dierks is joined on stage by his loyal dog Jake on the night of his Opry induction.

Birthplace: Phoenix, AZ
Birth Date: November 20
Opry Induction: October 1, 2005



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Clint Black

It's hard to imagine a stronger move out of the gate than the one Clint Black enjoyed. Clint emerged at the end of the 1980s as one of a number of "hat acts"—tall, usually handsome singers of songs rooted in honky-tonk but buffed with a contemporary sheen—but he quickly pulled away from the pack with his debut, *Killin' Time*. The album's very first single, "A Better Man," went to No. 1, and was followed by three consecutive chart-toppers. The album itself went triple platinum. Its success led to the CMA Horizon Award and the ACM Male Vocalist, Single of the Year and Album of the Year Awards in 1989 for Clint, and CMA Male Vocalist honors in 1990.

Not a bad start, although Clint wasn't exactly an overnight sensation. The Texas-raised singer had put in almost a decade prior to his breakout, playing the club circuit in and around his hometown of Houston and writing songs, drawing not only on the country music that his father had played when he was a kid, but also on the pop and rock music of the '70s with which he and his friends had grown up. *Killin' Time* was traditional-sounding country through and through, but Clint would incorporate those pop and rock influences into every album that followed.

Since then, Clint has enjoyed enviable success. Several albums—*Put Yourself in My Shoes*, *The Hard Way*, *No Time To Kill*, and *Nothin' but the Taillights*—have been million sellers. He's scored 30 Top 10 hits, among

them "Like the Rain," "Summer's Comin'," "A Good Run of Bad Luck," "The Shoes You're Wearing," and "When I Said I Do," an award-winning duet with his wife, actress Lisa Hartman Black, whom he married in 1991. He has written or co-written most of the material on his records. He's had a hand in producing all of them, too, and sat in the producer's chair for Buddy Jewell's self-titled release in 2003.

Clint's also dabbled in his wife's trade. He had small parts in the films *Maverick* and *Anger Management*, and larger roles in the television film *Still Holding On: The Jack Favor Story* and in 1999's *Going Home*. His humanitarian efforts were recognized in 2000 when the Country Radio Broadcasters presented Clint with its Humanitarian of the Year Award.

In 1999, he released his eclectic and adventurous *D'Lectrified* album. More recently, Clint donned yet another hat when he became a partner in (as well as flagship artist for) Equity Records. His first record for the venture, *Spend My Time*, came out in 2004.



Birthplace: Long Branch, New Jersey
Birth Date: February 4
Opry Induction: January 10, 1991



Garth Brooks

Although Garth Brooks has given up a phenomenally successful recording and performing career to raise his three daughters at home in Oklahoma, he's certainly left an indelible mark on music—and popular culture—worldwide. Yet for the staggering list of accomplishments he's amassed, Garth considers his Opry membership the pinnacle of his entertainment career.

"To be recognized as a member of the Opry," he says, "is among the class of honors that will never be topped, no matter how long or how far my career goes."

The youngest of six children, Garth grew up in Yukon, Oklahoma, an oil town near Oklahoma City. He first moved to Nashville in 1985, only to return home 23 hours later. After completing a degree in advertising at Oklahoma State University, he ventured back to Music City in 1987, and within six months signed a recording contract with Capitol Records.

Garth's first single, "Much Too Young (To Feel This Damn Old)," from his self-titled debut album, hit No. 8 on the charts. Three No. 1 hits followed: "Not Counting You," "The Dance" and "If Tomorrow Never Comes."

The only male artist to have four albums—*No Fences*, *Ropin' the Wind*, *The Hits*, and *Double Live*—each exceed sales of 10 million, Garth has sold more than 100 million records. That total places Garth second only to Elvis

Presley as the best-selling solo artist of all time, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

Garth has received nearly every accolade the recording industry can bestow upon an artist, including two Grammys, 11 Country Music Association Awards and 24 Billboard Music Awards. His TV credits include eight NBC specials, hosting *Saturday Night Live* twice, and executive producing the made-for-TV movie, *Call Me Claus*. He's also earned a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

In 1997, Garth's Central Park concert in New York drew the largest crowd the park had ever seen. The HBO special *Garth Live* from Central Park was that year's most-watched cable television special.

In October 2000, Garth announced his retirement from touring and recording. The following year his album *Scarecrow* was released. Although he has occasionally obliged when asked to appear at various benefit concerts and events, Garth insists he plans to stay out of the spotlight until his youngest daughter, Allie, turns 18—in 2014.



It's another all-star collaboration as Garth jams with Steve Wariner on "Longneck Bottle."

Birthplace: Tulsa, Oklahoma
Birth Date: February 7
Opry Induction: October 6, 1990





Jim Ed Brown

Jim Ed Brown has the career distinction of topping the charts as a member of a trio, a duo, and as a solo artist. He also has one of the smoothest singing voices ever put on record.

One of five children of a struggling Arkansas lumberman and his wife, Jim Ed and family gathered around the family's battery-powered radio to listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights.

Inspired by what they heard, Jim Ed and his older sister Maxine would harmonize together. They began appearing on local radio while Jim Ed was still in high school.

By his second year in college, Jim Edward (as he was credited) and Maxine were regulars on the *Barnyard Frolic* on Little Rock radio station KLRA. Their first hit, "Looking Back to See," became a No. 8 country hit in 1954. The next year, younger sister Bonnie joined them, and they became the Browns, scoring another Top 10 hit with "Here Today and Gone Tomorrow." The group signed with RCA in 1956 and quickly notched two Top 5 hits, "I Take the Chance" and "I Heard the Bluebird Sing."

After a two-year stint in the service, Jim Ed joined his sisters again, and in 1959 they hit with the "The Three Bells," topping the country chart for 10 weeks and the pop charts for four weeks. Follow-up singles "The Old Lamplighter" and "Scarlet Ribbons" were pop-country hits as well.

The Browns joined the Opry in 1963, but by the mid-'60s, Bonnie and Maxine decided to retire. Jim Ed went solo and scored hits throughout the next two decades. His 1966 smash, "Pop a Top," hit No. 3.

Beginning in 1975, Jim Ed co-hosted the syndicated weekly television series *Nashville on the Road* for six seasons. He also teamed with Helen Cornelius to become one of country music's most successful duos. The pair topped the charts with "I Don't Want To Have to Marry You" in 1976, and were named CMA Vocal Duo of the Year in 1977.

In 1983, Jim Ed became host of *You Can Be a Star*, a country music talent search on The Nashville Network. In 1994, he and his wife Becky co-hosted TNN's travel show *Going Our Way*.

Today, Jim Ed remains the smooth-voiced crowd pleaser, and from time to time Opry audiences witness a truly magical moment, when Bonnie and Maxine reunite with Jim Ed on stage and the Browns are once again together in the spotlight.



Jim Ed Brown with Helen Cornelius

Birthplace: Sparkman, Arkansas
Birth Date: April 1
Opry Induction: August 12, 1963



PHOTO: CHRIS HOLLO

Roy Clark

If the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the name “Roy Clark” is his stint as pickin’ and grinnin’ co-host of television’s *Hee Haw*, that would be understandable. Not many performers can boast starring on a show that ran for more 23 years.

But there was always a lot more than comic timing and charm to the man who first played at the Opry when he won a national banjo competition—at age 17, in 1950. Roy had come out of the Washington, D.C., area and had already been touring with legends Hank Williams and Grandpa Jones. He soon played behind Red Foley and Ernest Tubb, too – a virtuoso on all stringed instruments and able to handle trombone, trumpet, and piano to boot.

It was as a guitar wizard that Roy first got seriously noticed, at 27—after an invitation to open for Wanda Jackson led to his own tour—for 365 straight nights—and a trip to Las Vegas as a headliner. The next year he had his first hit, “Tips of My Fingers,” a country song with orchestra and strings.

Through the 1960s, Roy’s smooth vocals and supple playing made him a crossover star. He was a fixture on television variety shows from *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* to *The Flip Wilson Show* to *The Mike Douglas Show*, wowing audiences with instrumentals such as “Malaguena” or “Caravan,” which were in Roy’s hands somehow at once hot and laid back.

Singing, he had such memorable vocal chart hits as “Yesterday, When I Was Young,” “I Never Picked Cotton,” and in that more comic mode, “Thank God and Greyhound You’re Gone.”

Since 1969, Roy has won 25 major awards, including the Country Music Association’s Entertainer and Instrumentalist of the Year honors and Instrumental Group of the Year (with Buck Trent). His Academy of Country Music achievements include Comedy Act, Lead Guitar, and Entertainer of the Year, as well as the Pioneer Award. He has a star on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame and a Grammy for “Alabama Jubilee” (1982).

His musical adventures since have included a notable collaboration with Texas guitar wizard Clarence Gatemouth Brown, and Roy became another sort of pioneer when he opened the Roy Clark Celebrity Theater in Branson, Missouri, in 1983—starting the process which would put Branson on the country music map.

Roy now lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and pursues a busy concert schedule. His recording career resumed after a decade-long break in 2000 with *Live at Billy Bob’s Texas*; *Christmas Memories* followed that same year, and in 2005, a series of recordings of *Gospel Greats*. Those flying fingers and soothing voice remain quite an attraction.

Birthplace: Meherrin, Virginia
Birth Date: April 15
Opry Induction: August 22, 1987



Roy Clark joins Vince Gill and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band during a 2003 tribute to Roy Acuff.





Terri Clark

An independent-minded artist who's as serious about her guitar playing as she is about singing and songwriting, Terri Clark has blended classic and modern influences to become one of the distinctive female artists of the "New Country" era.

A native Canadian, Terri was born in Montreal but raised in faraway Medicine Hat, Alberta. A country music fan from childhood—her grandparents were musicians who once opened for the likes of George Jones—she grew up on records by artists such as Reba McEntire, Ricky Skaggs, and the Judds, and was making local appearances by the time she finished high school.

Moving to Nashville in 1987, Terri performed for tips at clubs like the famous Tootsie's Orchid Lounge while pursuing a record deal. She signed with Mercury Records in 1994, and stormed onto the hit parade in 1995 and 1996 with four Top 10 hits: "Better Things To Do," "When Boy Meets Girl," "If I Were You," and "Poor, Poor Pitiful Me." Her accomplishments won her the title of *Billboard's* Top New Female Country Artist in 1995 and three Canadian Country Music Awards in 1996, the first of a dozen she's taken home over the years.

Yet despite her success—the following three years saw her score again with songs like "Now That I Found You," "You're Easy On The Eyes" (her first No. 1), and "Every

Time I Cry"—Terri continued to grow as an artist. In 2000, she released the introspective *Fearless*, which earned critical acclaim for its artistry and a Top 20 single in "A Little Gasoline."

Combining the mature songwriting and emotional depth of *Fearless* with the accessibility of her earlier work, Terri returned in 2002 with *Pain to Kill*. The album generated two major hits, including "I Just Wanna Be Mad," which was the first No. 1 country hit by a female artist in more than two years. Her stature as a major artists was ratified in 2004 when Mercury released her *Greatest Hits* collection, which included a new No. 1 hit, "Girls Lie Too"; Terri's performance of the clever, pointed song with an all-female, all-star band on that year's CMA Awards was a highlight of the televised show.

Culminating a dream since her childhood days, Terri joined the cast of the Grand Ole Opry on June 12, 2004.



Steve Wariner and Terri Clark's mother, Linda, surprise the singer with an invitation to join the Opry.

Birthplace: Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada
Birth Date: August 5
Opry Induction: June 12, 2004



John Conlee

John Conlee's hits have very rarely been songs that see life through the hard-fact-hiding "Rose Colored Glasses" described in his first smash record of 1978.

Through all the years since, his emphasis has been on songs of the lives of everyday people—middle class, hardworking people, and those who've been unable to attain even that level of economic ease. He made a fresh hit all over again of "Busted," when country fans might have thought Ray Charles and Johnny Cash had enjoyed the last word on that one. He had us nodding in agreement to the tough realities of "Nothing Behind You, Nothing in Sight."

"There are more of us ordinary folks than anybody else," says the big-voiced baritone whose hits also include "Common Man," "Working Man," and "Friday Night Blues."

When John Conlee looks at love, the view includes Harlan Howard and Bobby Braddock's searing "I Don't Remember Loving You"—and, never the movie-star type himself, he had no trouble singing about being on the "Backside of Thirty."

No-nonsense John grew up on a 250-acre Kentucky farm where he raised hogs, cultivated tobacco with mules, and mowed pastures. He also worked as a funeral-home attendant and mortician, and as a pop-music disc jockey in Nashville before settling into a career in country music in the mid-'70s. It's typical of the man that he used the returns from that long string of

No. 1 hits (four in 1983 and '84 alone) to get back to farm life himself.

"I spend all of my off-time, what I have of it, with my family on our farm," he explains. "I enjoy it. There's no glamour to it. Woodworking, gunsmithing, or driving a tractor require getting grease or varnish all over you. It's dirty work, but I like it."

John, who became an Opry member in 1981, still stirs the hall to the rafters, most recently, with his salute to the families of American fighting troops on "They Also Serve." He maintains an active touring schedule and recently released *Classics*, an album of classic hits plus new favorites, and an album of sacred songs, *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*.

Profoundly involved with Feed the Children, John has raised more than \$140,000 - one dollar at a time—for the charity from the dollar bills tossed on the stage when he sings that 1983 hit version of "Busted." Instrumental in the crusade for America's farmers that became the Family Farm Defense Fund, he helped Willie Nelson, Neil Young, and John Mellencamp organize and entertain at Farm Aid concerts that raised more than \$13 million in grants.



John welcomes Pat Sajak to the Opry stage.

Birthplace: Versailles, Kentucky
Birth Date: August 11
Opry Induction: February 7, 1981



Wilma Lee Cooper

Some call her style “bluegrass,” some “mountain music,” others “pure hillbilly,” but whatever the name, there’s just one way Wilma Lee Cooper has gone at it—full throttle.

“Singing just like I did back when I was growing up in those West Virginia Mountains,” she’s said, “where if you were good, you were also loud! And I’ve never changed; I couldn’t sing any other way.”

First achieving prominence in the 1940s performing with her late husband, champion fiddler Stoney (Dale T.) Cooper, big-voiced Wilma Lee sang and played guitar with a bursting-at-the-seams energy. Like her contemporary Rose Maddox, Wilma Lee forged a vocal style that hinted at a sound that listeners would come to know as rocking country, while maintaining her strong link to older ballad styles.

From the first, she’s had special feel and success with story songs—from “The Legend of the Dogwood Tree,” “Little Rosewood Casket,” and “Sunny Side of the Mountain” for Rich-R-Tone and Columbia Records in the ‘40s, to “Wreck on the Highway” and “Philadelphia Lawyer” for Hickory in the early 1960s.

She sings those ballads with a clarity and simplicity that lets the audience follow every story twist. Singing that way is a lesson she learned in childhood, as Wilma Leigh Leary, already working as a member of West Virginia’s regionally famed performing

Leary Family. Her celebrated delivery of gospel and devotional songs emerged at the same time.

It’s probably Wilma Lee and Stoney’s rousing, old-style jubilee hits of the ‘50s and ‘60s—“There’s a Big Wheel,” “This Old House,” and “Big Midnight Special”—that audiences have responded to most of all.

She continued performing with her group the Clinch Mountain Clan after Stoney’s death in March 1977, and was appearing on the Opry regularly until a stroke suffered on-stage in 2001 forced her to cease performing. Doctors who told her she wouldn’t walk again underestimated Wilma Lee’s spirit. In February 2005, during an Opry set hosted by Emmylou Harris, Wilma Lee Cooper walked onto the stage of the Ryman Auditorium to a standing ovation and greeted the crowd.

The Smithsonian Institution in Washington honored Wilma Lee as the “First Lady of Bluegrass” in 1974. She takes her place alongside the great singers of traditional country music, where Opry fans have revered Wilma Lee all along, and still recognize her today.



From left, Opry general manager Pete Fisher, Margaret Eakin, Wilma Lee Cooper, and Vince Gill.

Birthplace: **Valley Head, West Virginia**
Birth Date: **February 27**
Opry Induction: **January 12, 1957**



Diamond Rio

There has not been a slew of groups inducted into the Opry cast in the modern era. That makes it all the more notable that Diamond Rio made its first Opry appearance in October, 1991, and in 1998 became the first group since The Whites, 14 years earlier, to receive Opry membership.

With their lighter-than-air harmonies and intricately woven instrumentation, this six-man group has been turning songs into standards since their debut album in 1991 helped to define the "young country" movement. Diamond Rio has been awarded top vocal group honors six times in total from the Academy of Country Music and the Country Music Association and sold more than 10 million records, with more than 20 Top 10 singles.

Diamond Rio evolved from the Tennessee River Boys, a band that performed at the former Opryland theme park. Singer Marty Roe, guitarist Jimmy Olander, and keyboardist Dan Truman left that group to form their own in 1986. Drummer Brian Prout and mandolin player Gene Johnson joined the new band in 1987. Bassist Dana Williams—a nephew of Opry members Sonny and Bobby Osborne—came on board two years later.

In 1991, the group's first single, "Meet in the Middle," went to No. 1 and was followed by a pair of Top 5 hits—"Mirror, Mirror" and "Mama Don't Forget to Pray for Me." Such No. 1 songs as "How Your Love Makes Me Feel," "One More Day," "Beautiful Mess," and "I Believe" followed. The 2001 hit ballad "One More Day" became a key song of healing after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In 2004, Diamond Rio received the Minnie Pearl Humanitarian Award for its work on behalf of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, for which the band members serve as National Ambassadors, as well as the American Lung Association, and others.



MARTY ROE: Birthplace: Lebanon, Ohio; Birth Date: December 28

JIMMY OLANDER: Birthplace: Minneapolis, Minnesota; Birth Date: August 26

GENE JOHNSON: Birthplace: Jamestown, New York; Birth Date: August 10

DAN TRUMAN: Birthplace: St. George, Utah; Birth Date: August 29

DANA WILLIAMS: Birthplace: Dayton, Ohio; Birth Date: May 22

BRIAN PROUT: Birthplace: Troy, New York; Birth Date: December 4

Opry Induction: April 18, 1998





Jimmy Dickens

Hillbilly singers never will come any hillbilly-er than Little Jimmy Dickens. Indeed, as he put it himself on one early hit record, he's "a plain old ... cornbread lovin' country boy," from the toes of his loudly colored cowboy boots to the top of his head, just 4'11" later.

The current generation of country fans will recognize Jimmy from his frequent guest spots in the videos of Brad Paisley, but the truth is that Jimmy first gained national exposure nearly half a century ago. None other than Roy Acuff first introduced him to the old Ryman Auditorium stage all the way back in 1948, and Dickens has been wowing Opry audiences pretty much ever since—longer than any other current cast member—with his flamboyant rhinestone-studded outfits, wild novelty hits, and country humor.

Jimmy was the oldest of 13 children born to a West Virginia farmer. He started singing on radio station WOLS in nearby Beckley while attending the University of West Virginia, opening his program "crowing like a rooster." Even though Jimmy had to walk to and from the station, he set his sights on an entertainment career that would eventually find him spreading his brand of "Hillbilly Fever" all around the world.

Literally. Jimmy has made 13 trips to Europe, and he twice entertained the troops in Vietnam. In 1964, Jimmy became the first country artist to completely circle the globe on a world tour. That same year, he released "May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose." The single topped the country

charts, even went to No. 15 on the pop charts, and Jimmy found himself on several network shows, including *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*.

Of course, by then, Jimmy had been a beloved figure among the country faithful for years. He'd had a string of down-home novelty hits, including "A-Sleeping at the Foot of the Bed," "Out Behind the Barn," and "Take an Old Cold Tater (And Wait)," the song that prompted Hank Williams to dub his diminutive friend "Tater." Jimmy is also a master of the recitation and a ballad singer so expert that it once prompted no less than George Jones to honor his friend with the tribute album *Like the Dickens!*

Jimmy joined the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1983, and in 1996 he and his wife Mona celebrated their 25th anniversary by renewing their marriage vows on the very Opry stage where Dickens still shows the world that "I may be little...but I'm loud!"



*Jimmy
and his wife,
Mona*

Birthplace: Bolt, West Virginia
Birth Date: December 19
Opry Induction: August 1948



Joe Diffie

Known for his vocal range, Joe Diffie is a much-respected interpreter of both traditional and more modern country songs. His warm voice and clear phrasing of lyrics have proven to be crowd pleasing whether he's singing ballads or more rambunctious novelty numbers.

With that range, Joe was a dominant singer through the 1990s, with four gold or platinum albums, some 17 Top 10 hits, and more than 6 million in record sales at Epic Records. Those early hits included "If the Devil Danced (In Empty Pockets)," "New Way (To Light Up an Old Flame)," "Home," and "Ships That Don't Come In." During the mid-'90s, Joe veered towards a string of more comic song successes with the likes of "Prop Me Up Beside the Jukebox (If I Die)," "Bigger Than the Beatles," and "Third Rock from the Sun."

Born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in a musical family, his first public performance was in his aunt's country band at the age of four. By the time he was in college, he'd seen stints in a rock band, gospel group, and a bluegrass band, signs of that flexibility to come. After school, Joe worked on songwriting while handling a day job at an iron foundry. He had his first break when country legend Hank Thompson recorded his song "Love on the Rocks." (In 2002, Joe and Hank were inducted into the Oklahoma

Music Hall of Fame simultaneously.) That initial success encouraged him to head for Nashville in 1986.

Joe's deep knowledge of country music and "quick study" abilities rapidly attracted attention in the songwriting and publishing community.

In between shifts at the Gibson Guitar warehouse, Joe sang demos on "I've Cried My Last Tear for You" (later a hit for Ricky Van Shelton), "Born Country" (likewise for Alabama), and "You Don't Count the Cost" (Billy Dean). Charley Pride, the Forrester Sisters, Tracy Lawrence, and Doug Stone all recorded his songs. In 1989, Holly Dunn topped the charts with "There Goes My Heart Again," a song Joe co-wrote. That contract with Epic to begin recording himself soon followed.

Joe recalls his first appearance at the Opry well. "It really is, you know, a scary thing," he says, "especially when you've revered the Opry, heard so much about it, and cared so much about it. So to get to come out there and sing was just terrifying—really scary. But now it feels comfortable, of course!"



On March 11, 2000, Joe Diffie wed Theresa Crump in the conservatory gardens of the Gaylord Opryland Hotel.

Birthplace: Tulsa, Oklahoma
Birth Date: December 28
Opry Induction: November 27, 1993



Holly Dunn

Holly Dunn began her career as a hit songwriter, penning chart-toppers for a host of country stars. In the mid-'80s, she moved from behind the scenes to center stage with a string of Top 10 hits.

The Texas native was the youngest of four children born to a Church of Christ preacher. Her brother Chris moved to Nashville and began a successful songwriting career while Holly was attending Abilene Christian University.

"I saw what Chris was doing and thought, 'Hmmm ...'" she recalls. "I grew up in the same house he did. I played guitar just like he did, and I'd been writing songs since I was a kid and performing them all the time."

As soon as Holly earned her degree in public relations and advertising, she, too, headed to Music City.

Within a year, she landed a staff songwriter deal with a major Nashville publisher. Four years later, she moved to the newly formed MTM Records, a label in search of an artist who also wrote songs. The label found the perfect combination in Holly. Her career took off in 1986 with "Daddy's Hands," originally recorded by The Whites but written by Holly as a Father's Day gift in 1985. Holly's version stayed in the Top 10 for six months and earned her two Grammy nominations.

Over the next three years, she recorded three top-selling albums for MTM. When that label folded in 1989, she continued

her hot streak with Warner Bros. Her debut album for that label yielded the No. 1 hit "Are You Ever Gonna Love Me."

The Academy of Country Music picked Holly as its Top New Female Vocalist in 1986. In 1987, she won the Country Music Association's Horizon Award. She won the 1987 Nashville Songwriters Association's International Award for "Daddy's Hands" and took home the BMI Country Songwriter of the Year Award in 1988.

Holly had learned to love the Opry from seeing Opry stars on tour in her native San Antonio when she was a tiny tot. After making numerous guest appearances on the show, she received her invitation to join in 1989.

Recent years have found Holly pursuing a variety of interests. She worked for a while as a morning personality for Detroit's powerhouse WWWW country station and released the acoustic gospel album *Full Circle* in 2003. She now resides in Texas and operates Holly Dunn's Art Song Gallery in Salado. Holly jokingly says she now "makes music to pay for her art supplies." Spoken like a true Renaissance woman.



From left, Jean Shepard, Rhonda Vincent, Carolyn Dawn Johnson, and Holly Dunn sing a hymn backstage at the Opry.

Birthplace: San Antonio, Texas
Birth Date: August 22
Opry Induction: October 14, 1989

PHOTO: JERRY GAZA



Gatlin Brothers

Few singing groups can sound quite so harmonious as family singing groups. The Gatlin Brothers have been at it, quite harmoniously, for more than 40 years.

A popular Opry attraction since their induction in 1976, the Gatlins have always loved to sing as a unit. They won their first talent contest at home in Texas in 1954 at a Hardin-Simmons University talent show in Abilene. Larry was six, Steve four, and Rudy only two! They began performing gospel patterned after the Blackwood Brothers and the Statesmen on Slim Willets' radio and TV shows in Abilene that same year—dressed in cowboy outfits.

During the mid-1970s, the Gatlins became consistent hit-makers at Monument Records. Initially, Larry was signed on his own, following his success as a songwriter, and he was soon working with Tammy Wynette. But the Gatlins wanted to perform their music together, so he wrote a song specifically for the three of them—in 15 minutes. "Broken Lady" went to No. 1 and won the Gatlins a Grammy the same year that they joined the Opry cast, in 1976.

"I Just Wish You Were Someone I Love" climbed to the top of the charts in 1977, and "All the Gold in California" followed two years later. Over the next 10 years, the Gatlins had nine more Top 10 hits,

including "Sure Feels Like Love" and the chart-topping "Houston (Means I'm One Day Closer to You)."

Larry's songwriting career had begun when the Opry's Dottie West spotted him singing in Las Vegas in 1971, encouraged him to write, and even provided him a ticket to Nashville. Dottie would record two of Larry's songs; others were performed by Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, and Elvis Presley.

In the 1990s, Larry earned rave reviews for his work in the Broadway musical *The Will Rogers Follies*. He released his autobiography, *All the Gold in California: And Other People, Places & Things* in 1998.

The brothers returned in 2002 to an active touring schedule after a 10-year hiatus and recently recorded *Family Gospel Favorites*.



Steve (left), Larry, and Rudy.

LARRY GATLIN: Birthplace: Seminole, Texas; Birth Date: May 2

STEVE GATLIN: Birthplace: Olney, Texas; Birth Date: April 4

RUDY GATLIN: Birthplace: Olney, Texas; Birth Date: August 20

Opry Induction: December 25, 1976



Vince Gill

As one of country's most accomplished singers, songwriters, and musicians, Vince Gill is truly regarded as a triple threat.

The Oklahoma native began his career as an instrumentalist, playing guitar and dobro, and making his first recordings with regional bluegrass bands while still in his teens. After a brief stint with Louisville, Kentucky's influential Bluegrass Alliance, Vince moved to Los Angeles and found work with fiddler Byron Berline's Sundance. Shifting to more popular musical styles, he became the lead singer of Pure Prairie League in 1979, and later worked in the Cherry Bombs, backing Rodney Crowell and Rosanne Cash.

Vince moved to Nashville in 1984 and landed his first recording contract. However, his early solo recordings found only intermittent commercial success, and the next five years mostly found him doing studio work—he was one of the late Conway Twitty's favorite harmony vocalists—or touring with Emmylou Harris.

Gill finally broke through on his own in 1990 with "When I Call Your Name," a song he co-wrote. The string of hits that followed—23 of his releases have reached the Top 10 to date, including five No. 1s—established his soulful tenor voice, sophisticated guitar playing and mixture of ballads and country-rockers as a regular presence on country radio.

Vince has won more Country Music Association Awards than any other artist in history, having claimed 18 since 1990. He

also holds the record for the most Grammy Awards won by a male country artist, and in all, he has won more than 70 industry awards recognizing his work as a singer, songwriter, and guitarist. His career record sales have exceeded 22 million.

In recent years, Gill has enjoyed a unique status as one of country music's youngest "elder statesmen." Renewing his interest in bluegrass, he hosted 2003's PBS special, the *All*Star Bluegrass Celebration*, and has recorded as a harmony singer with up-and-coming bluegrass artists as well as country favorites and newcomers. He is an articulate advocate for the Grand Ole Opry, too, reminding young artists of the show's cherished heritage and encouraging them to appear on its stage.

Married since 2000 to Christian-pop singer Amy Grant, Vince's humanitarian efforts on behalf of countless charities have been recognized with the Minnie Pearl and Harmony Awards in 1993. He was named Tennessean of the Year by the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 1994, and, in 2001, Vince was honored with the Career Achievement Award at the TNN & CMT Country Weekly awards show.

In 2003, Gill released his *Next Big Thing* album and, appropriately, in 2004 he "took it to the people," headlining the Grand Ole Opry American Road Show, with dates across the country.



Birthplace: Norman, Oklahoma
Birth Date: April 12
Opry Induction: August 10, 1991



Billy Grammer

Billy Grammer, the singer, is also one of country music's great guitar players. And a notable brand of flat-tops, the Grammer Guitar, was the product of the company he started.

Billy was born one of 13 children to a coal mining family in Illinois. He spent his childhood on a farm, fishing the Wabash River and dreaming of becoming a mechanical engineer.

But music was a big part of Billy's family life, and he often played fiddle, guitar, or mandolin for family gatherings and local events. "Daddy played the fiddle, or violin, if you like, and we entertained at the social functions around home," he remembers.

After high school he served in the Army and took on an apprenticeship as a toolmaker. After the war he found himself like thousands of other soldiers—out of work. Hearing word of a possible opening with Connie B. Gay, a disc jockey and promoter in the Washington, D.C., area, Billy hitchhiked to Arlington, Virginia, auditioned, and got the job.

His skills as musician won him stints in the bands of artists such as Hawkshaw Hawkins and Grandpa Jones and a sideman role on Jimmy Dean's television show. He then formed his own band and began performing as a solo artist. In early 1959, he recorded his memorable, folksy hit "Gotta Travel On." Its success led to membership in the Opry cast.

A superb instrumentalist, Billy has always been in great demand as a session picker. "I've got a little more of a broad sense of music than the average guy coming up playing country music," the 46-year Opry member says. "Musicians I have talked to through the years have told me that I have a little extra punch, a little extra push."

His exceptional guitar style has been featured on albums including *Gospel Guitar*, *Country Guitar*, and *Sunday Guitar*.

During the 1960s, Billy turned his talents to developing what was once called "the finest flat-top guitar on the market"—the Grammer Guitar. The first such instrument came off the production line in 1965. A guitar Billy presented to Johnny Cash in the '60s recently sold for more than \$131,000 at auction.

In 1990, Billy was inducted into the Illinois Country Music Hall of Fame along with Tex Williams, Lulu Belle & Scotty, and Patsy Montana.

Billy and his wife of 60 years, Ruth, make their home in Southern Illinois.



Birthplace: Benton, Illinois
Birth Date: August 28
Opry Induction: February 27, 1959



Jack Greene

At the close of the 1960s, Jack Greene was as luminous a country star as any in the world. In just three years, he scored nine Top 5 country hits, including five No. 1s. The first of these, "There Goes My Everything," topped the country charts for nearly two months in 1967, prompting Jack to give up his job as Ernest Tubb's drummer in favor of a solo career.

"Ernest told me 'Son, I believe it's time to go,'" Jack remembers today. "But he also said, 'If you can't make it, you can always come back and be a Troubadour.'"

He never had to come back. In the fall of 1967, Jack and "There Goes My Everything" took the Country Music Association Awards for Single of the Year, Album of the Year, Song of the Year, and Male Vocalist of the Year.

Born and raised in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, Jack learned to play guitar when he was barely 10 years old, and he got his first radio job as a teenager. At 18, he was appearing on the *Tennessee Barn Dance* on WNOX in Knoxville, Tennessee. From there, he moved to Atlanta, where eventually he would spend a decade keeping time and touring the South with the Peach Street Cowboys.

In 1962, Jack joined Tubb's Texas Troubadours and began performing regularly on the Opry. But it wasn't until his version of "The Last Letter" on a Troubadours album led

Decca chief Owen Bradley to record Jack singing "There Goes My Everything."

Over the next few years, the "Jolly Green Giant," as he became known, released a series of instantly indelible country-politan hits, including "All the Time," "What Locks the Door," "You Are My Treasure," "Lord, Is That Me?" ("My favorite song I ever recorded," he says), "Back in the Arms of Love," and "Statue of a Fool." He also had two No. 1 albums and hit singles with Jeannie Seely, who joined his road show and recorded with him for several years.

The highlight of Jack's show remains Jack's singular voice, an aching, operatic cry that even Marty Robbins or Roy Orbison might have envied. And when Jack's rich, quivering tenor rises to the dramatic final note of "Statue of a Fool," the Opry audience still responds with a staggering blast of ovation.



Birthplace: Maryville, Tennessee
Birth Date: January 7
Opry Induction: December 23, 1967



Tom T. Hall

Since country music has long been celebrated for the strength of the stories it tells, it tells you something that there's one performer in the music's history identified simply as "The Storyteller." That would be Tom T. Hall.

That tag was natural enough. There was no precedent for the combination of detailed observation, arresting storyline, and full-blooded characters Tom T. delivered in such songs as "The Day Clayton Delaney Died," "Old Dogs, Children, and Watermelon Wine," "Margie's at the Lincoln Park Inn" and "I Flew Over Our House Last Night." And the way he sings these stories—simple, clear, and as understated as a friend talking to you on a porch—matches the songs perfectly.

Some claim that the Kentucky-raised singer, songwriter, and author has "retired" to his farm south of Nashville. Don't believe them.

Today, Tom T. regularly supervises acoustic sessions at his own recording studio, comes up with more of those utterly distinctive songs, often co-written with his wife Dixie now, and can be seen at venues from Nashville's Station Inn to festivals across the country in support of the bluegrass music he holds especially dear. And from time to time he gets up and sings some in the same, unmistakable, laid-back style that took him to the country charts time after time in the 1970s.

The fourth son of a brick plant worker and Baptist minister, Tom T. began playing guitar at age four and wrote his first song at nine. In his teens, he formed a bluegrass band, which performed locally. After a stint in the army, while working as a radio copywriter in Roanoke, Virginia, he wrote songs on the side that were recorded by Jimmy C. Newman, Johnny Wright, Dave Dudley, and Bobby Bare.

After moving to Nashville in 1964, he had several early hit recordings of his own, including "I Washed My Face in the Morning Dew," but when Jeannie C. Riley's recording of his composition "Harper Valley PTA" sold 6 million copies and swept the 1968 awards, his own recording career at Mercury Records really took off. That career has continued through more than 45 albums.

Tom T. has authored a string of books, including an autobiography, a songwriting textbook, and several novels. His songs continue to be recorded with great regularity by everyone from Alan Jackson to bluegrass Charlie Sizemore to a host of Americana/ "alternative country" singers on the salute collection *Real: The Tom T. Hall Project*.



Tom T. Hall and his wife, Miss Dixie

Birthplace: Olive Hill, Kentucky
Birth Date: May 25
Opry Induction: January 1, 1971



George Hamilton IV

Travel is a way of life for George Hamilton IV. One look at his passport confirms that. Certainly, no one would dispute his unofficial title as the "International Ambassador of Country Music."

Along with his title, George IV has compiled an impressive list of firsts. He appeared at London's first International Festival of Country Music (1969) and performed at the first such international festivals in Sweden (1976), Finland (1977), Holland and Norway (1978), Germany (1979), Paris and Zurich (1980), and Vienna, Austria (1984).

He was the first American country singer to appear in Russia and Czechoslovakia (1974) and the first American to record a studio album in Eastern Europe (Prague, 1982).

George IV was the first American country singer to have his own British TV series. He also appeared in England's first Country Music Summer Season show.

The firsts don't stop there. George IV also was the first pop artist to switch to country music. As a college student, he gained stardom with the million-selling 1956 Top 10 pop hit "A Rose and a Baby Ruth." He spent his weekends and vacations touring. By 1959, he had his own TV show on ABC.

One evening in 1960, sitting in the Ryman Auditorium enjoying the Opry, he decided to switch from pop to country music. After all, his roots were in country.

At age 12 or 13, this North Carolina native saved his paper-route money and, with his parents' permission, rode a bus to Nashville to see the Opry. From his hotel room, George IV watched Red Foley and Ernest Tubbs go into the National Life building to rehearse. He went over to watch rehearsals and met Chet Atkins, who invited him backstage.

After George IV moved to Nashville to pursue a country-music career, Chet signed him to RCA Victor. George IV joined the Opry the same year he had his first country hit, "Before This Day Ends," in 1960. His first No. 1 came in 1963, with "Abilene."

George IV admired the work of Canadian artist Gordon Lightfoot and recorded several of his songs, including the hits "Early Morning Rain" and "Steel Rail Blues." George IV worked extensively in Canada, even hosting a TV show there for six years. From Canada, George IV ventured to Europe, New Zealand, South Africa, Hong Kong, Australia, and the Holy Land, where he taped two TV specials.

He took a break from the Opry in 1971 to spend time with his family in North Carolina and to devote time to his television work in Canada and Great Britain. He moved back to Nashville in 1976 and plays the Opry regularly when not off to Europe and points beyond.



Father and son, IV and V, wait for their cue to take the Opry stage.

Birthplace: Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Birth Date: July 19
Opry Induction: February 6, 1960



Emmylou Harris

God didn't make honky-tonk angels, but if he had, he would have broken the mold with Emmylou Harris. With her crystal-clear soprano, lissome beauty, impeccable instincts, and uncompromising integrity, Harris redefined the image and role of women in country music. Few if any artists have so successfully erased boundaries between country, folk, and rock 'n' roll.

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Emmylou spent her youth in North Carolina and Virginia. As the daughter of a career Marine, her upbringing was not particularly musical. But during the '60s she fell in love with folk music—especially Bob Dylan and Joan Baez—and began performing while studying drama at the University of North Carolina. She moved to Greenwich Village in 1967 to join the burgeoning folk revival, sharing stages with Jerry Jeff Walker and David Bromberg, and released her first record in 1969.

On the East Coast club circuit, she met Gram Parsons, and both her career and life changed forever. Parsons, formerly of the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers, became her mentor and singing partner, drawing her into the '70s country rock movement, and strengthening her ties to traditional country music. Emmylou toured and recorded with Parsons until his death in 1973.

"After he was gone I wanted to carry on with what I thought he would have wanted me to do," she recalls, "bringing certain elements of folk music, with its emphasis on the lyric,

trying electric things, but always coming back to that electric country base."

In 1975, she recorded her first major album, *Pieces of the Sky*, introducing her Hot Band which, over the years, has known such world-class players as James Burton, Albert Lee, Rodney Crowell, and Ricky Skaggs.

Emmylou has enjoyed seven No. 1 hits and 27 Top 10 songs including "If I Could Only Win Your Love," "Together Again," "Sweet Dreams," "Making Believe," "To Daddy," and "Heartbreak Hill."

She has 10 gold albums and 11 Grammy Awards, including one for her 1987 *Trio* album with Linda Ronstadt and Dolly Parton. In 1995 she released the ambitious *Wrecking Ball*, a collaboration with celebrated rock producer Daniel Lanois, and won a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Recording.

In 1999, *Billboard* magazine recognized her distinguished career achievements with its highest accolade – the Century Award.

The night she joined the Opry, Emmylou summed up her feelings about her music: "Music is like food, sustenance. You certainly don't do it for the spotlight. ... You do it for the amazing exhilaration of singing, the feeling of the music going through you."



Emmylou Harris and Vince Gill share the Opry stage.

Birthplace: Birmingham, Alabama
Birth Date: April 2
Opry Induction: January 25, 1992





Jan Howard

Jan Howard has seen her share of ups and downs personally and professionally and has managed to come out on top.

Married at age 15, Jan had three sons before she turned 21. After two divorces, she headed to Los Angeles and took on jobs as a waitress and a secretary to support her family.

Through singer Wynn Stewart she met and later married up-and-coming songwriter Harlan Howard. Although she had no musical training or experience, Harlan convinced her to record demos of his songs, which brought her the attention and encouragement of Johnny Bond and Tex Ritter. In 1959, she and Stewart recorded the duet "Yankee Go Home." That same year she made her Opry debut; it was one of the first times the \$65-a-week secretary had ever sung on stage.

The Howards moved from California to Nashville in 1960. Jan's first solo single, "The One You Slip Around With," was a Top 10 hit, and both *Billboard* and *Cash Box* magazines named her their Most Promising Country Vocalist.

In 1964, she signed with Decca Records and had another hit in 1965 with "What Makes a Man Wander." That same year she joined Bill Anderson's syndicated TV and road show and sang with him regularly on the Opry. For seven years they won many top-duo awards, and she enjoyed her greatest chart success with their duets: "For Loving You" went to No. 1 and was followed by four Top 5 hits.

At the same time, Jan's solo single "Evil on Your Mind" (named one of country music's 500 greatest singles by the book *Heartaches by the Number*) went Top 5. "Bad Seed" reached number 10 in 1966, and, over the next seven years, she charted several more singles.

Jan's single "My Son," a song that began as a letter to her son Jimmy in Vietnam, was released just a few weeks before he was killed in action in 1968. She wrote of coping with the tragedies of his death and that of her youngest son David in her 1987 autobiography, *Sunshine and Shadow*.

In 1992, Jan's efforts on behalf of the armed forces, mental health, the Veterans Administration, Vietnam veterans, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial earned her the Tennessee Adjutant General's Distinguished Patriot Medal, its highest civilian honor. And in 2005, the Commander in Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars presented her with the Medal of Merit, which is awarded for "exceptional service rendered to country, community and mankind."

A regular guest on the Opry for years, she formally joined the cast in 1971. Jan still tours periodically and continues to work for causes related to military veterans. In 2005, she was recognized by her home state with her induction into the Missouri Country Music Hall of Fame.



Birthplace: West Plains, Missouri
Birth Date: March 13
Opry Induction: March 27, 1971



Alan Jackson

It's a biographical feature of many a country music star: Bitten by the bug at an early age, often nurtured by a musical family, the budding artist devotes himself to a musical career almost from the time he can walk. But it's not part of Alan Jackson's background. He showed little interest in music until the years following his high school graduation, when he started sitting in with local bands and to try his hand at songwriting after he'd put in eight blue-collar hours driving a forklift, working at a marina, or fixing cars.

Once that interest had been kindled, however, soon Alan decided to devote himself to it wholeheartedly. He moved to Nashville in 1985, where he was signed as a songwriter with Glen Campbell's music publishing company after a chance meeting in the Atlanta airport between Campbell and Alan's wife, Denise. But Alan wasn't content to settle for a songwriting career. In spite of repeated setbacks and disappointments that brought him close to throwing in the towel (every major label in town turned him down, some twice), he persevered until Arista Records signed him in 1989 as its first country act.

Since then, the Georgian has forged a career remarkable for its consistency. He's recorded 44 Top 10 hits (31 of them chart-toppers), from "Here in the Real World" in 1990 to "Too Much of a Good Thing" in 2004 (the video for which was filmed at the Opry). He's sold more 43 million records and won dozens of awards, including multiple CMA and ACM honors for song, album, male vocalist, and entertainer of the year

as well as a Grammy for his poignant 9/11 rumination "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)."

On record and off, he also has been a rock-steady supporter of traditional country music. He's maintained a plainspoken style that foregoes the rock-influenced material and stage shows of many of his contemporaries. He's released an album that pays tribute to his musical influences and recorded pointed commentaries on the state of country music. And when the CMA wouldn't let George Jones perform more than a snippet of his award-nominated song "Choices" on its 1999 awards show, Alan made his displeasure clear by interpolating a few lines from the song into his scheduled performance.

Fourteen years earlier—in 1985, the year Alan moved to Nashville—George had sung a song, "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes," that asked who would take the place of giants such as Haggard, Twitty, and Jones himself. In the time since, Alan Jackson has become the leading exemplar of traditional country, and shown that those shoes fit him to a T.



Birthplace: Newnan, Georgia
Birth Date: October 17
Opry Induction: June 7, 1991



Stonewall Jackson

Named after the famously resolute Confederate general—the choice of his father, who died weeks before he was born—Stonewall Jackson was “stone country” long before people starting tossing that term around.

His huge 1959 No. 1 hit “Waterloo,” penned by Nashville songwriting giants Marijohn Wilkin and John D. Loudermilk, crossed over to the pop charts, then took him to *American Bandstand* and to an incongruous tour with Sam Cooke and Fabian. To this day, it seems to be the Stonewall song people remember and request most.

There’s some irony in it, since that undoubtedly catchy, marching-band sort of tune, a gleeful ode to life’s mishaps and failures, is so different from most of his 40 charting hits. The deeply affecting hard country “Life of a Poor Boy” and “A Wound Time Can’t Erase” are more typical—and not by accident.

Born in North Carolina, raised in Georgia in difficult circumstances that included both being poor and suffering the moods of an abusive stepfather, he tried running away from home, then falsifying age records to get into the Army—at 16, both unsuccessfully. The following year, he joined the Navy, where he learned to play guitar and sing; when his stint ended, he decided to give singing a try, heading back to the farm to work until he saved enough for a new pickup truck. When he got it, in 1956, Stonewall drove right into Nashville.

What happened next has become a country music legend. Having taken a room in a motel across the street from Acuff-Rose, he walked into the publishing house, and asked to be heard. Three demo songs were recorded on the spot, on a tape that went right to Wesley Rose. The most powerful man in town was so taken with Stonewall’s straightforward, utterly country singing, so removed from both the Nashville Sound of the time and the rock ‘n’ roll that was dominating all of pop music. Stonewall is reported to have told Rose, “I came here for just one purpose—to get on the Grand Ole Opry. Can you get me an audition?” It was a solid rule at the time that only singers with records out – and Stonewall had never had any—could get on the Opry. With a call from Wesley Rose, Stonewall appeared in days, with early mentor and backer Ernest Tubb.

It was fitting that Stonewall was presented the Ernest Tubb Memorial Award in 1997 for his contributions to country music. He sings, in front of his band the Minutemen, with the same old-school, down-home directness today that he did the day he first walked onto the Opry stage. With the release in the past year of both a set of his complete recordings through the ‘60s, Bear Family’s *Stonewall Jackson: Waterloo*, and of his late-’70s recordings with Little Darlin, a new generation has a chance to hear that music again.

Birthplace: Tabor City, North Carolina
Birth Date: November 6
Opry Induction: November 3, 1956





George Jones

There's only a short list of names nominated when the familiar barroom or living-room debate over "Who's the best country singer there's ever been?" comes up. The man who's so often the winner continues to headline over a hundred live dates a year (after more than 50 years of recording), still sounds like no one else at all, and, to this day, always makes time for regular appearances at the Opry. As you know, he's called "The Possum."

For his singularly expressive delivery of every syllable of some of country music's great heartbreaking ballads, and his rousing attack on those grin-making novelty change-ups, George Jones has been justly honored.

Inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1992, he was awarded the Academy of Country Music's Pioneer Award that same year. In 2002, he was awarded the National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest honor for artistic excellence, in a ceremony at the White House.

People who keep track of numbers say that George has charted more singles in his extraordinary career, than any other artist in any music format. As the 2004 compilation *George Jones: Fifty Years of Hits* made plain in its three CDs, he had hit records in every decade of the second half of the 20th century. Now that's popularity that's lasted!

Born in southeast Texas near Beaumont, the eighth child in a poor family, George was introduced to music by his mother,

a church pianist, and his truck-driver/pipefitter father, who played guitar. He was singing at age 9, playing guitar at 11, writing his songs at 12 – and had a regular spot on a Jasper, Texas, radio station by 15.

The first of his long list of hits was the near-rockabilly "Why, Baby, Why" recorded at Starday Records in 1955. Two years later, he moved to Mercury, where he recorded "White Lightnin'," (his first No. 1), and such enduring classics as "The Window Up Above," "She Thinks I Still Care," "The Race Is On," and "Walk Through This World With Me."

In the tumultuous years in which George was married to Tammy Wynette, and they both recorded with Billy Sherrill at Epic Records, their perfect duets included "Golden Ring," "We're Gonna Hold On," and "Two Story House." George's own new hits there included "The Grand Tour," "The Door"—and in 1980, the indelible "He Stopped Loving Her Today." From "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes" to "Choices" on 1999's Grammy-winning 1999 *Cold Hard Truth* album and beyond, great George Jones records have not stopped arriving.

Through every twist and turn in country music fashion, his pre-eminent gifts have remained clear. In recent years, George has become a successful seller of everything from sausage to that family-friendly drink called "water," but he's never "sold" anybody a song. He's lived in them.



Little Jimmy Dickens helps George Jones celebrate his 71st birthday onstage at the Opry in 2002.

Birthplace: Saratoga, Texas
Birth Date: September 12
Opry Induction: January 4, 1969





Hal Ketchum

Unlike many of the Opry's stars, Hal Ketchum didn't grow up listening to the show.

"I came to the Opry with a certain innocence," the New York native recalls. "I knew a lot of the music, through my father's record collection. I did not know the radio show. I played the Opry the first time, shortly after 'Small Town Saturday Night' in '91. There is an indescribable place on that stage where it feels like you are a part of history, a very fine history. And I really like that a lot. I felt the magic of the Opry the first time, and so, I came to it in amazement."

Through his father, Hal knew the music of country legends like Marty Robbins and Patsy Cline. As a youth, he even joined Buck Owens' fan club. Hal started playing drums at age 15, though he later switched to guitar. Although he enjoyed music, he spent nearly 20 years as a carpenter and furniture builder before getting his break in the music business.

In 1981, Hal left New York for Austin, Texas, and honed his songwriting skills in that town's clubs. He released 10 of his songs on a 1986 album called *Threadbare Alibis*. At the same time, he began making trips from Austin to Nashville.

Hal eventually signed a publishing contract that led to a record deal with Curb Records. In 1991, the single "Small Town Saturday Night" launched him to stardom. *Radio & Records* magazine named it the No. 1 Single of the Year, and *Music Row* magazine called

it the year's breakthrough video. The song also helped Hal's debut album, *Past the Point of Rescue*, achieve gold status.

By the time Hal joined the Opry in 1994, he had an impressive catalog of hits, including "Past the Point of Rescue," "Sure Love," "Mama Knows the Highway," and "Hearts Are Gonna Roll." Hal also had a hit with a cover of "Five O'clock World," a 1965 pop hit for the Vogues that had been written by Hal's producer, Allen Reynolds.

Hal also is an established painter. His work has been shown in Santa Fe, New Mexico's esteemed Pena Gallery, where he had a successful art-show opening in 2002. He also is a master carpenter who likes to make toys. He is a true artisan and a musician's musician.

When Hal joined the Opry family, he wrote a poem for the occasion. It read, in part:

*A thousand souls and singers have beckoned
me to this hallowed place.*

*And tho' some would say I've come a long way,
I would say simply that, tonight, I arrive.*



Hal and his wife Gina cut their wedding cake. They married on Valentine's Day 1998.

Birthplace: Greenwich, New York
Birth Date: April 9
Opry Induction: January 22, 1994



Alison Krauss

Alison Krauss learned violin at age five, started fiddling at eight, and was winning contests with her bow a few years later. She earned her first record contract at 14, won her first of 17 Grammys while still in her teens, and was inducted into the Opry at age 21.

Now in her mid-30s, the multi-talented Alison has sold more than 7 million records, making deep inroads in the pop culture world for the American string music she plays and sings so well.

A fixture on awards shows such as the Grammys and Oscars, she and her talented Union Station band are also likely to pop up anywhere from *David Letterman* to *Sesame Street*. She was key to the success of the genre-expanding movie soundtrack *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

When Alison joined the Opry in 1993, she brought with her the hot pickers of Union Station. Members of the band today include Barry Bales on acoustic bass, Ron Block on banjo and acoustic guitar, Dan Tyminski on acoustic guitar and mandolin and Jerry Douglas on Dobro. Alison became the first bluegrass artist in 29 years to be inducted and the youngest cast member at the time.

At 14, she recorded her first album, *Too Late To Cry*. By age 18, she earned a Grammy nomination for her 1989 release *Two Highways* featuring Union Station. The following year, Alison won the Grammy for Best Bluegrass Recording for *I've Got That Old Feeling*.

At just 17, Alison was already a veteran performer when she and Union Station made their first Opry appearance in 1989. They've performed on the show numerous times, charming Opry audiences with tight harmonies, superb musicianship, and the leader's delicate, captivating voice.

Alison Krauss and Union Station won a second Grammy in 1992 for *Every Time You Say Goodbye*. In addition, she has been honored for her collaborations with James Taylor, the Cox Family, Shenandoah, and Vince Gill.

I've Got That Old Feeling was named the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) 1991 Album of the Year. In 1992, the IBMA awarded her Album of the Year honors for *Every Time You Say Goodbye*. Alison is a four-time IBMA Female Vocalist of the Year winner and has twice received Entertainer of the Year honors.

The accolades continued for Alison at the 1995 Country Music Association Awards when she took home four trophies—Vocal Event (with Shenandoah), Single of the Year, Female Vocalist, and the Horizon Award.



Alison Krauss & Union Station (l-r): Ron Block, Dan Tyminski, Jerry Douglas, Alison Krauss, Barry Bales

Birthplace: Champaign, Illinois
Birth Date: July 23
Opry Induction: July 3, 1993



Hank Locklin

One of country's greatest tenors, Hank Locklin scored one of the biggest hits of the music's golden era with "Please Help Me, I'm Falling," which spent a remarkable 14 weeks at No. 1 and 30 weeks in the Top 10 in 1960.

Born Lawrence Hankins Locklin into a family that usually reared doctors, Hank was picking guitar for amateur contests in Milton, Florida, by age 10. In his teens he was a featured performer on Pensacola radio station WCOA.

For the next several years, he played with a variety of groups through the South and worked at various jobs in Florida, including farmer, ribbon mill hanker, and shipyard worker.

After World War II ended, his career started taking off, and he appeared on Shreveport's *Louisiana Hayride* and the *Big D Jamboree* in Dallas, Texas. He recorded briefly for Decca, and after meeting producer Bill McCall, Hank recorded for McCall's Four Star Records for five years.

Hank scored his first Top 10 song in 1949 with "The Same Sweet Girls." Four years later, he had a No. 1 with "Let Me Be the One," and a recording contract with RCA Victor followed.

The next year, he had a Top 5 with "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On," which he wrote, and a double-sided Top 3 hit with "It's a Little More Like Heaven" and "Blue Grass Skirt."

In 1960, the remarkable success of "Please Help Me, I'm Falling"—the song not only dominated the country chart that year, but crossed over into the Top 10 pop charts in both the United States and the United Kingdom—earned him membership in the Grand Ole Opry.

Other hits followed in the '60s, including "Followed Closely by My Teardrops," and "The Country Hall of Fame," and Hank went on to help pioneer the creation of concept albums in country music with releases such as *Foreign Love*, *Irish Songs*, and *Country Style*. In all, Hank has sold more than 15 million albums.

Long a favorite with Opry audiences, Hank returned to the studio in 2001 to record *Generations in Song*. Featuring long-time colleagues such as Dolly Parton and Jeannie Seely, newer friends and admirers like Vince Gill (who cites Hank as an influence) and Jett Williams, and his son, Hank Adam Locklin, the album confirmed that Hank Locklin continues to be, as always, a powerful singer whose voice continues to win new fans.



Hank receives a pat on the back from Vince Gill after performing a duet together.

Birthplace: McLellan, Florida
Birth Date: February 15
Opry Induction: November 9, 1960



Charlie Louvin

With his rich tenor, steady rhythm guitar, gracious spirit, and resolute work ethic, Charlie Louvin anchored the Louvin Brothers when all other forces conspired to tear the duo apart. As a solo artist, as well as with his older brother Ira, his songwriting and singing continue to influence country music into the 21st century.

Born Charlie Elzer Loudermilk in 1927, he grew up in the Sand Mountain region of Alabama and worked beside his brother in the cotton mills and fields. As teenagers they developed a harmonic singing style—seamlessly interwoven and intensely focused—which would take them from a tiny radio station in Chattanooga to the top of the 1950s country charts.

During the late '40s and early '50s, Charlie's commitment to the Army frustrated the duo's commercial chances. With the Acuff-Rose company publishing their songs—Charlie and Ira were prolific composers, penning more than 500 songs in little more than 20 years—the Louvins signed with Capitol Records and released "The Family Who Prays," which became a gospel standard.

With his military service over at the close of the Korean conflict, Charlie rejoined Ira and the two found a home on the Grand Ole Opry. Beginning in 1955, they expanded their audience by introducing secular material to their gospel repertoire. Their original song, "When I Stop Dreaming," was a Top 10 hit and stayed on the charts

for 13 weeks. While other country acts felt the sting of rock 'n' roll, Charlie and Ira flourished, scoring a No. 1 with "I Don't Believe You've Met My Baby," followed by the Top 10 hits "Hoping That You're Hoping" and "You're Running Wild" in 1956.

By 1963, however, Ira's alcoholism and temper finally broke the brothers apart. Charlie pursued a solo career, landing Top 10 hits with "I Don't Love You Anymore" in 1964 and "See the Big Man Cry" in 1965.

In 1970 and 1971, Charlie joined Melba Montgomery for a series of chart-making duets, including "Something to Brag About," "Did You Ever," and "Baby, You've Got What It Takes." *Living, Lovin', Losin': The Songs of the Louvin Brothers* featured Charlie, as well as today's top stars paying tribute to the Hall of Famers. The project won a Grammy for Best Country Album in 2004.

Today, Charlie continues to perform regularly on the Opry and release heartfelt albums, keeping alive the timeless songs and inimitable style he and his brother created.



Birthplace: Sand Mountain, Alabama
Birth Date: July 7
Opry Induction: February 10, 1955

**COUNTRY MUSIC
HALL OF FAME
ELECTED 2001**



LOUVIN BROTHERS

IRA LOUVIN - JULY 7, 1927 -
CHARLIE LOUVIN - APRIL 21, 1924 - JUNE 30, 1967

COUNTRY MUSIC'S STELLAR DUOS, IRA AND CHARLIE LOUVIN THOROUGHLY INFLUENCED SINGERS RANGING FROM THE EVERLY BROTHERS TO THE CRACKERS. RAISED IN HENEGAR, ALABAMA, MANDOLINIST IRA AND FOLK COUNTRY SINGER CHARLIE THRILLED MILLIONS WITH THEIR STRATOSPHERIC, YOKING TENOR TO CHARLIE'S LEAD. THOUGH THEY OFTEN CROSSED GENRES, JOINING THE GRAND OLE OPPY IN 1941, THEY SCORED HITS "DREAMING" AND "I DON'T BELIEVE YOU'VE MET MY BABY" ON CAPITOL. AFTER IRAS SOLO CAREERS IN 1961, CHARLIE CONTINUED ON THE OPEL 2001 ACCIDENT.

COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION



Patty Loveless

The daughter of a Kentucky coal miner, Patty Loveless grew up the youngest of seven children. She remembers listening to the Opry when she was just three years old. On Friday and Saturday nights she would sing along while her mother mopped the floors.

Growing up in a household of music lovers, she was influenced by all kinds of music—the pure Appalachian sounds of her native Kentucky, and the rock 'n' roll and big-band music she heard on the records her brothers and sisters played.

“My father loved the mountain bluegrass sound of the Stanley Brothers, Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs, and Bill Monroe,” Patty recalls. “He took me to see Lester, Earl & the Foggy Mountain Boys perform on top of a concession stand during an intermission at a local drive-in theater. I was only six years old, and I can still remember that moment to this day.”

At 14, Patty traveled to Nashville, where she auditioned for Porter Wagoner. Soon after, the Wilburn Brothers hired her to replace their departing “girl singer” Loretta Lynn (a distant cousin of Patty's) and as a staff songwriter.

The “girl singer” ended up marrying the Wilburns' drummer and moving to North Carolina, where she and her husband performed in area rock groups, but the marriage didn't last and Patty returned to Nashville and country music, where she first came to light as one of the mid-'80s “new traditionalists.” Her first album, *Patty*

Loveless, was released in 1986; her first Top 10 single, “If My Heart had Windows,” came in the spring of the following year. She married producer Emory Gordy Jr. in 1989; he has been her musical collaborator ever since.

A string of hits in a traditionalist vein followed, among them “Don't Toss Us Away,” “Timber” (her first No. 1 hit), and “Hurt Me Bad.” In 1993, she moved to Epic Records, where songs such as “How Can I Help You Say Goodbye” and “Lonely Too Long” laced her country with pop elements. Along the way, she won the ACM Award for Top Female Vocalist in 1996 and 1997, CMA Female Vocalist of the Year honors in 1996, and the CMA Album of the Year trophy in 1995 for *When Fallen Angels Fly*.

In 2001, Patty went back to her roots, releasing her brilliant album *Mountain Soul*. The disc paid homage to her Kentucky upbringing and the mountain music so beloved by her father. “I felt like I was connecting to my father's heart,” Loveless says. The music was “a direct line to where I'm from, who I am.” Her 2003 release, *On Your Way Home*, was another fine effort that merged the acoustic country of *Mountain Soul* with the honky-tonk sounds of her earlier years.

Birthplace: Pikeville, Kentucky
Birth Date: January 4
Opry Induction: June 11, 1988





Loretta Lynn

Had Loretta Lynn never sung, “When you’re lookin’ at me, you’re lookin’ at country,” the sentiment would still be true. For people all over the world, for more than 40 years now, Loretta Lynn has defined country music.

Her Butcher Holler, Kentucky, raising, motherhood, and early marriage to the late Mooney “Doolittle” Lynn has provided much material for her writing, of course. “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” as autobiographical song, celebrated book, and Oscar-winning movie, made Loretta a household name.

But she’s never been an Appalachian, “Eastern” singer. Loretta headed towards Nashville from her long-time home in Washington state, where “Doo” had supported her first stab at country stardom. She brought the more Western honky-tonk style with her—a style in which she’s second to none as a singer. She was first noticed and supported by Patsy Cline and the Wilburn Brothers, but it was Texan Ernest Tubb who’d be an early partner and first introduce her on the Opry in 1960, in what Loretta has called “the best moment of her life.”

Loretta’s “sing it as she feels it” vocal style—sometimes exuberant, often soulful, usually feisty—has been the perfect match for her groundbreaking, straight-talking songs of life as she—and we—know it, from “Don’t Come Home A-Drinkin’ (With Lovin’ on Your Mind)” to “The Pill,” from “One’s on the Way,” to “Love Is the Foundation.” Often writing about topics nobody’s raised before and nailed them, she’s universally recognized as

one of country music’s greatest and most influential songwriters.

From the time of her first single, “Honky Tonk Girl” on little Zero Records in 1960, Loretta ruled the country charts for decades, mainly recording at Decca records with her producer and mentor Owen Bradley. She’s had some 60 hits as a solo artist—most of them self-penned, of course—and that’s not even counting 18 more that were unforgettable duets with Ernest Tubb, then Conway Twitty.

Inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1988, Loretta also was the first woman to win the coveted Entertainer of the Year Award of the Country Music Association. She then went on to win Entertainer of the Year from the Academy of Country Music as well. Record by record, she has, in fact, won dozens of awards, including more recently the Best Country Album Grammy, and the Americana Music Association Album and Artist of the Year awards for 2004’s *Van Lear Rose* album, and the Johnny Cash Visionary Award from CMT.

In recent years, Loretta has run her hotel and tourist attraction at Hurricane Mills, Tennessee, toured regularly, and always returned to perform at the Opry.



Vince Gill kisses Loretta Lynn’s hand during a recent Opry appearance.

Birthplace: Butcher Hollow, Kentucky
Birth Date: April 14
Opry Induction: September 25, 1962



Barbara Mandrell

Multi-talented Barbara Mandrell has spent a virtual lifetime in the spotlight.

Born in Houston on Christmas Day 1948 to musical parents Irby and Mary Mandrell, Barbara learned to read music before words. She took up accordion, pedal steel, and saxophone while in elementary school and made her show business debut at age 10 on Cousin Herb Henson's Bakersfield TV and radio show.

What was supposed to be only a trade show performance turned into an audition for Chet Atkins and "Uncle" Joe Maphis, and Barbara soon joined Maphis performing at the Vegas Showboat. She became a regular on the Los Angeles TV show *Town Hall Party* and went on to Red Foley's ABC-TV show *Five Star Jubilee*.

After touring with Johnny Cash and Patsy Cline, Barbara started performing with her parents as the Mandrells. She married Ken Dudley, a young drummer they hired for the act, and temporarily got out of show business when his career as a Navy pilot sent them both overseas.

But Barbara couldn't stay out of the spotlight. One night while visiting the Opry, she whispered in her dad's ear, "Daddy, I wasn't cut out to be in the audience."

Nashville club appearances led immediately to Music Row interest and she signed with CBS Records, hitting the charts with the Otis Redding classic "I've Been Loving You Too Long."

In the late '60s and into the '70s, she was a consistent hit-maker with country/pop tunes such as "The Midnight Oil," "Standing Room Only," "Sleeping Single in a Double Bed," "Married but Not to Each Other," "Years" and "(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right." In 1979, she was the Country Music Association's Female Vocalist of the Year, and for the next two years she and sisters Louise and Irlene starred in the popular TV variety show *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters*.

In the late '70s and early '80s, Mandrell was one of country music's dominant artists, becoming the first artist to win the CMA Entertainer of the Year Award two years in a row, in 1980 and 1981.

In September 1984, Barbara and two of her children narrowly escaped death in a serious auto accident. After extensive physical therapy, she made a full recovery and returned to live performance in 1986.

A guest appearance on the TV show *The Commish* sparked her interest in acting, and she began appearing in television series. She has since concentrated on acting, taking roles on *Touched by an Angel*, *Baywatch*, *Diagnosis Murder*, *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*, and other series and specials.



Barbara smiles for the camera alongside Pat Sajak, Vanna White, Billy Ray Cyrus, and Pam Tillis during the taping of *Wheel of Fortune* at the Grand Ole Opry House.

Birthplace: Houston, Texas
Birth Date: December 25
Opry Induction: July 29, 1972



Martina McBride

In the early 1990s, Martina McBride was working as a waitress, singing on demo tapes, and selling T-shirts for Garth Brooks' tour. She has since sold more than 10 million albums, due in large part to her incendiary delivery and impeccable sense of song. In 2004, when she picked up her fourth CMA Female Vocalist of the Year trophy, she tied with fellow Opry member Reba McEntire for the most wins in that category. Yet for all of the accomplishments and accolades, Martina says that at the end of the day she's "just Mom."

Born Martina Schiff, she learned country music when her father, a Kansas farmer with his own part-time band, taught her such classics as Patsy Cline's "I Fall to Pieces." Martina started singing with him at age seven. "Dad played acoustic guitar and sang," she recalls. "I sang with him. Mom ran the soundboard. It was a family thing to do."

After high school Martina went to Hutchinson, Kansas, and sang with a band there. She soon decided to form her own band, renting a rehearsal studio from a sound-system operator named John McBride. Though the band didn't work out, a romance bloomed and the couple married in 1988. In 1990 they moved to Nashville. The following year John toured with Garth Brooks as his production manager, and Martina went along and sold T-shirts.

Two years later, after signing with RCA, she became Garth's opening act. In 1994, her second album, *The Way That I Am*, yielded two Top 10 hits, "My Baby Loves Me" and "Life # 9," plus "Independence Day," which won numerous video awards, and changed the subject matter female vocalists could address in country songs.

Martina became a member of the Grand Ole Opry during the taping of its 70th anniversary TV special in 1995. "It's so incredible," she said. "Whenever I do the Opry it still feels like the first time. I still get nervous. The Opry's going to be here for hundreds of years, and I'm just proud my name is on that list. It's a highlight of my life."

Martina's recent hits have included "A Broken Wing," "I Love You," "Blessed," and "This One's for the Girls," the video which featured daughters Delaney and Emma.



Martina McBride accepts the Minnie Pearl Humanitarian Award from Bill Anderson and Vince Gill.

Birthplace: Sharon, Kansas
Birth Date: July 29
Opry Induction: November 30, 1995



PHOTO: ANDREW ECCLES



Del McCoury

When Delano Floyd McCoury was young, his family relocated from North Carolina to just north of the Mason Dixon Line in York County, Pennsylvania. Del's older brother, G.C., introduced the young boy to bluegrass through the music of Flatt & Scruggs. Before long, he had taken up the banjo, and by the early 1960s he was playing bluegrass in the honky-tonks of the Baltimore-Washington, D.C., area.

In 1963, Del made his first Grand Ole Opry appearances when he was recruited by Bill Monroe to join his Blue Grass Boys. Though he was hired as a banjo player, Monroe soon made him into a guitar player and lead singer, and when he left the band the following year, Del continued to play those roles—first during a brief stint in California with the Golden State Boys, and then back in Pennsylvania with his own band, the Dixie Pals.

For the next quarter of a century, Del was a part-time musician, working as a logging truck driver to support his growing family while playing at bluegrass festivals on the weekends. But though he couldn't devote himself entirely to his music, his reputation as a singer of unsurpassed intensity grew steadily.

Del's son Ronnie began playing with the band on a part-time basis in 1981 at age 13. Six years later, Robbie McCoury made his debut with the band, and at the beginning of the 1990s, Del and his family moved to

Nashville to pursue music full-time as the Del McCoury Band. With Mike Bub on bass and Jason Carter on fiddle, the group quickly developed into one of the finest units to ever grace a bluegrass stage, and by the end of the decade they had become the top winner at the International Bluegrass Music Association's annual awards.

Throughout the '90s and into the new millennium, the Del McCoury Band has embodied the best qualities of bluegrass. In 2003, the band debuted their own record label, McCoury Music, with the release of the Grammy-nominated *It's Just the Night*. And just months later, while accepting a record-setting eighth IBMA Entertainer of the Year Award, Del received the invitation he had waited for his entire life: to become a member of the Grand Ole Opry.

Today, the Del McCoury Band enjoys the praise of traditional bluegrass lovers and tie-dyed clad "Del-Heads" alike. Their current dates range from performing arts centers to hardcore bluegrass festivals to hip, youth-oriented "jamfests" such as Bonnaroo and High Sierra, spreading the bluegrass gospel wherever they go. Del has proven not to be a relic of bluegrass music's past, but an architect of its future.

Birthplace: Bakersville, North Carolina
Birth Date: February 1
Opry Induction: October 25, 2003



The Del McCoury Band



Mel McDaniel

Like a thousand other teenagers in the '50s, Mel McDaniel saw Elvis Presley on TV and knew what he wanted to do with his life. But most teens don't grow up to write songs like "Baby's Got Her Blue Jeans On," turn an obscure Bruce Springsteen tune into a country smash, go fishing in Alaska, or become a member of the Grand Ole Opry at the age of 44.

The Opry's 60th anniversary special on CBS-TV, in fact, closed with "The Grandest Lady of Them All," a hit Mel had written for Conway Twitty in 1978, long before he ever dreamed of joining the institution.

Born in Checotah, Oklahoma, Mel grew up in Okmulgee, the son of a truck driving father, who he barely knew. At age 14, he taught himself the guitar chords to "Frankie and Johnny" and first performed publicly at a high-school talent contest. He married his school-days sweetheart and made a go of music in Tulsa. His first journey to Nashville, however, resulted in little more than a job at a gas station and a disillusioned heart.

As if taking a cue from a Johnny Horton hit, he headed north to Alaska, where he honed his skills playing to packed houses in Anchorage. Two years later, he returned to Nashville and landed a job as a demo singer and songwriter with Combine Music. Through the efforts of renowned music publisher Bob Beckham, Mel signed

to Capitol Records in 1976 and released his first single, "Have a Dream on Me." His career finally took off with "Louisiana Saturday Night" in 1981 and other Top 10 hits which helped define the '80s country sound: "Right in the Palm of Your Hand" (which was later covered by Alan Jackson), "Take Me to the Country," "Big Ole Brew," and "I Call It Love."

While on stage in Louisiana in 1996, Mel was nearly killed after falling into an unmarked orchestra pit. Though he was unable to tour for years afterwards, and still walks with the aid of a cane, he has returned to the performing and songwriting life he chose long ago.

Even with hit after hit of his own and top tunes penned for others, his 1984 chart-topper "Baby's Got Her Blue Jeans On" remains his signature number. The song earned Grammy and CMA Award nominations and essentially did what Mel always said he wanted to do: "I wanted to be a singer because I wanted to make people feel good with my music."



Birthplace: Checotah, Oklahoma
Birth Date: September 6
Opry Induction: January 11, 1986



Reba McEntire

Reba McEntire likes to stay busy.

The redheaded Oklahoman has parlayed her country music success into multimedia stardom. She has sold nearly 50 million records, authored two books, played the lead in a Broadway musical, and starred in her own TV series. She's also recently launched her own clothing line. During that whole time, the former rodeo girl has rarely fallen off the country charts.

The third of four children born to a schoolteacher and an Oklahoma rancher, Reba grew up in a family of achievers. Her father and grandfather were world-champion steer ropers, and Reba traveled the rodeo quarter-horse, barrel-racing circuit. When she sang the national anthem at the 1975 National Finals Rodeo in Oklahoma City, singer Red Steagall heard her and advised her to go to Nashville and make a demo.

Reba's first single hit the country charts in 1976, and she's returned more than 80 times since then. She's hit the top of the charts more than 20 times, from 1983's "Can't Even Get the Blues" to 2004's "Somebody." She joined the Opry the same year she released two of her most popular singles, "Whoever's in New England" and "Little Rock." Other No. 1 hits include "For My Broken Heart," "How Was I to Know," and "The Heart Won't Lie," a duet with fellow Opry member Vince Gill.

Reba has earned more gold and platinum awards than any female performer in any field of music. The Recording Industry Association of America has certified 23 of her albums gold or better. Nine of those albums have gone platinum, with her *Greatest Hits* and *Greatest Hits Vol. II* collections selling more than 4 and 5 million copies, respectively.

Reba's acting career has ranged from her role as a gun-toting survivalist in the campy 1990 science-fiction flick *Tremors* to that of Annie Oakley in the Broadway production of *Annie Get Your Gun*. She has starred in three TV movies, including one based on her 1992 hit "Is There Life Out There?" And TV viewers can catch her every Friday night in the title role of the sitcom *Reba* on the WB network.

Reba is admired for her business acumen as much as her craft. Starstruck Entertainment, which she started with her husband/manager Narvel Blackstock, encompasses booking, management, music publishing, transportation, and recording services. Her long-lasting, wide-ranging success makes many other female country superstars—Martina McBride, Faith Hill, Sara Evans, and Trisha Yearwood among them—cite Reba as a major influence and role model.



Four decades of CMA Female Vocalists of the Year get together backstage during an Opry run at the Ryman.

Birthplace: Chockie, Oklahoma
Birth Date: March 28
Opry Induction: January 14, 1986



Jesse McReynolds

Jesse McReynolds forged his reputation as a great mandolinist and singer as one-half of Jim & Jesse, one of the most talented and acclaimed acts in bluegrass music. Since brother Jim died late in 2002, Jesse has continued to fill listener demands for the great music of Jim & Jesse, while also striking out in new musical directions.

Inspired by the five-string banjo-playing of Hoke Jenkins, Jesse originated the complex "cross-picking" style of mandolin playing. His music combines bluegrass, mainstream country, rock, folk, pop, Spanish, and other styles. Even though he's best known as a bluegrass, Jesse has shown himself to be one of the most innovative and prolific mandolin players around.

Raised near Coeburn, Virginia, Jesse McReynolds grew up in a family steeped in traditional mountain music. That background made it natural for him to follow the footsteps of his grandfather, Charlie McReynolds, who was one of the first musicians to record for Victor, later RCA, in Bristol, Virginia, in 1927.

In 1952, Jesse and Jim made their major-label debut on Capitol Records. In 1967, three years after joining the Opry, the duo had a Top 20 country hit on Epic Records with "Diesel on My Tail." They recorded for several other labels, including their own Old Dominion Records, releasing such classics as "The Flame of Love," "Cotton Mill Man," and "Paradise."

The duo regularly made the country charts from the '60s through the '80s, with such

tunes as "Better Times A-Coming," "Ballad of Thunder Road," "Freight Train," "North Wind," and "Oh Louisiana." The brothers won induction into the International Bluegrass Music Association's Hall of Honor in 1993.

Whether working with or without Jim, Jesse has shown up in musical settings that cross a variety of genres. Jim & Jesse recorded one of the first bluegrass-rock crossovers in 1965, with their Chuck Berry tribute *Berry Pickin' in the Country*. In 1969, the Doors' Jim Morrison picked McReynolds to play mandolin on *The Soft Parade*. While working with banjoist Eddie Adcock, fiddler Kenny Baker, and Dobro player Josh Graves, Jesse recorded during the late '80s and early '90s as part of the Masters supergroup

Since completing what turned out to be Jim & Jesse's last album, *Tis Sweet to Be Remembered*, Jesse has built a new edition of his backup band, the Virginia Boys. He released 2004's *New Horizons* album, which featured the patriotic single "America on Bended Knees." Jesse also recently recorded an instrumental album with fiddle wizard Travis Wetzel.

Jesse and his Virginia Boys still tour, performing frequently at bluegrass festivals, in addition to their regular Opry appearances.



A young Jesse McReynolds, dressed in his army fatigues, poses with his mandolin.

Birthplace: Coeburn, Virginia
Birth Date: July 9
Opry Induction: March 2, 1964



PHOTO: BETH GWINN

Ronnie Milsap

Just as Ray Charles brought country music back to rhythm and blues, Ronnie Milsap brought rhythm and blues back to country—and like Charles, he did it his own way. With a catchy, danceable country pop sound, he dominated radio during the '70s and '80s and pushed the genre beyond its rural roots and into mainstream entertainment.

Born blind in a poor region of North Carolina, Ronnie lived with his grandmother until he was six years old. He attended Morehead State School for the Blind in Raleigh, where he was given strict classical training. But late at night he listened to his favorite country, gospel, and R&B broadcasts. The music reminded him of home.

Milsap studied pre-law at Young-Harris Junior College near Atlanta, eventually earning a scholarship to Emory. Instead of moving forward with law, he threw himself into music, forming his own band. During the mid-'60s, he landed a stint with J.J. Cale and session work with producer Chips Moman, notably on Elvis Presley's "Kentucky Rain" and "Don't Cry Daddy."

In 1973, Ronnie moved from Memphis to Nashville. Before you could say "overnight success," he was signed by RCA and released the two-sided hit, "All Together Now (Let's Fall Apart)" and "I Hate You." He followed up with "That Girl Who Waits on Tables" and "Pure Love."

A year later, he had three No. 1 songs. The biblical flood of hits wouldn't let up for 15 years: "Daydreams About Night Things," "(I'm A) Stand by My Woman Man," "Smoky Mountain Rain," "Lost in the Fifties Tonight (In the Still of the Night)," "How Do I Turn You On," and "Don't You Ever Get Tired of Hurting Me" all stormed the charts.

Along with his multiple gold and platinum albums—including the only gold braille album ever awarded—Milsap has earned six Grammys and loads of CMA and ACM Awards. The ebullient performer and original stylist changed the face of country music, but has never forgotten his own difficult road to stardom and his good fortune along the way. In 1986, he established the Ronnie Milsap Foundation to aid the blind and visually impaired. "In some way it's a blessing that I was born blind," he once said. "If I had been born sighted in western North Carolina ... I certainly wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now."



Birthplace: Robbinsville, North Carolina
Birth Date: January 16
Opry Induction: February 6, 1976



Lorrie Morgan

"You can't imagine how it felt the night I became a member of the Opry," Lorrie Morgan says. "The first time I could really call this place home. I couldn't stop shaking or trembling or crying."

That Saturday night more than 20 years ago might have been Lorrie's first night as an official member, but it certainly wasn't her first night at the Opry. Lorrie grew up backstage at the Opry, the daughter of Country Music Hall of Famer George Morgan, a 26-year member known everywhere for his smash 1949 hit "Candy Kisses."

Born in 1959, Lorrie made her Opry stage debut early, introduced at the Ryman Auditorium by her proud father. "My little 13-year-old knees were absolutely knocking," she recalls. "But I saw Dad standing there just bawling, and those people gave me a standing ovation. I thought, 'This is what I'm doing the rest of my life.'"

George Morgan died when Lorrie was 16, but she still carries in her heart two pieces of advice he left her: "Never say, 'I can't,'" and "Always remember your manners."

Morgan's vocal style, combining country sincerity and pop sophistication, really took off in 1989 with the emotion-filled hit "Dear Me." She won a CMA Award in 1990 for her work with her late husband, Keith Whitley, the great country traditionalist who had died the year before. Her three subsequent albums—*Leave the Light On*, *Something in*

Red, and *Watch Me*—all sold more than a million copies.

She's released hit after hit in a distinctive style steeped in passion and believability—"I Guess You Had to Be There," "What Part of No," "Except for Monday," "Something In Red," "I Didn't Know My Own Strength," "Half Enough," and others.

Throughout her career, Morgan says, she's thought of the Opry as home.

"The Opry gave me my start in country music," she says. "It's a place we all need to go from time to time to remember why we're here and what gave us the opportunity to be here."

Morgan has recorded duets with singers ranging from Frank Sinatra to Johnny Mathis to Dolly Parton to husband Sammy Kershaw. Inspired by George Morgan's love of spicy chicken, Lorrie recently joined Kershaw in starting hotchickens.com, a restaurant and mail-order operation. When she's not on the road, Lorrie spends time with her kids—daughter Morgan and son Jesse—in the studio, or at home on the Opry stage.



Birthplace: Hendersonville, Tennessee
Birth Date: June 27
Opry Induction: June 9, 1984



Jimmy C. Newman

Jimmy C. Newman was born and raised in true Cajun style just outside Big Mamou, Louisiana. However, it wasn't Cajun music but the cowboy music of boyhood hero Gene Autry that got him started singing with bands, traveling through the South and Southwest. Soon, he was host of his own radio show in Lake Charles, Louisiana. That led to membership on the famous *Louisiana Hayride* radio showcase, to a TV show in Shreveport and to a Dot Records recording contract.

In 1954, Jimmy C. had his first country hit — the plaintive “Cry, Cry Darling,” which he co-wrote. He followed that with the hits “Daydreamin” and “Blue Darlin” and won Opry membership in 1956. In 1957, he had his biggest country hit with “A Fallen Star,” which also crossed over to the pop charts.

Then it was time for Jimmy C. to get back to his Cajun roots. He formed his Cajun Country band and was soon playing the music of his native Louisiana to fans around the world. Along the way, he became the only Cajun artist ever to receive a gold record on a Cajun French song. The tune, “Lache Pas La Potate,” earned gold status in Canada in 1976.

Jimmy C. and his band—known for their skilled, high-energy performances—have enjoyed success in Europe since their first appearance in London, England, at the famous Wembley Country Music Festival in 1980.

In 1991, Jimmy C. and Cajun Country earned a Grammy nomination for their

Rounder Records album *Alligator Man*. The next year, Jimmy C. earned a special award from the Cajun French Music Association of South Louisiana for contributions to the promotion of Cajun music worldwide.

In November 1993, Jimmy C. added to his list of television credits with a guest appearance on the CBS Sunday Night Movie *Conviction*, playing and singing traditional Cajun music.

On March 12, 2000, Jimmy C. was inducted into the North American Country Music Association's International Hall of Fame; that award hangs on the wall alongside his induction into the Cajun Music Hall of Fame in Lafayette, Louisiana. Jimmy was inducted into the Cajun Hall of Fame in October 2004. For all that acclaim, he's equally proud of his induction into the Fred's Lounge “Wall of Fame” in his hometown.

The proud Cajun credits his band for much of his unique sound. With Bessyl Duhon on Cajun accordion and some of the best musicians in Music City, the group treats audiences to such high-spirited favorites as “Jole Blon,” “Jambalaya,” and “Diggy Liggy Lo.”

Jimmy C. and wife Mae continue to make their home on their 670-acre Singing Hills Ranch in Rutherford County, Tennessee, just a short drive from Music City and the Grand Ole Opry.



Birthplace: Big Mamou, Louisiana
Birth Date: August 29
Opry Induction: August 1956



Osborne Brothers

The Osborne Brothers scored points for the ages—with University of Tennessee football fans at least—with their 1967 recording of “Rocky Top,” the hillbilly anthem that accompanies every Vols touchdown.

However, Sonny and Bobby Osborne’s recording of the Felice and Boudleaux Bryant rouser—also one of Tennessee’s state songs—is just one of many highlights in the duo’s more than 50 years of making music together.

Born in the coal mining region of southeastern Kentucky, Bobby and Sonny grew up immersed in tunes like “Nine Pound Hammer” and “The Knoxville Girl,” as well as other mining songs and folk ballads of the Appalachian Mountains.

Because of a six-year age difference, they didn’t start out working together professionally. Mandolinist/tenor singer Bobby worked with bluegrass greats including Jimmy Martin and the Stanley Brothers, while a teenage Sonny won his spurs playing banjo with the great Bill Monroe.

Based on a rich harmony blend that usually included a third singer, and on masterful, distinctive picking from both brothers, The Osborne Brothers’ sound became one of the most distinctive and most imitated in bluegrass music.

The brothers formed a duo in 1953 following Bobby’s discharge from the U.S. Marine Corps. Their recording debut came in 1956 in tracks for MGM that continue to rank

among the classic examples of Osborne Brother style. It was on these recordings—notably including “Once More”—that they changed the customary arrangement of trio harmony parts in bluegrass. Their sound featured Sonny singing lead in a high tenor, with two harmony parts arranged below.

The brothers’ 1960 appearance at Antioch College in Ohio helped usher in a new era of acceptance for bluegrass among younger and city-bred audiences.

In 1963, The Osbornes signed with Decca Records and continued to make waves with adventuresome arrangements sometimes involving non-traditional instruments such as drums and electric guitar.

In addition to “Rocky Top,” the brothers’ hit records include “Making Plans,” “Up This Hill and Down,” “Midnight Flyer,” “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” “Muddy Bottom,” “Tennessee Hounddog,” “Georgia Pineywoods,” and “Ruby.” And the Osbornes haven’t limited themselves to just one state song. Their “Kentucky” has been named an official song of their home state.

The brothers from Hyden, Kentucky, headed back to the bluegrass state in 1994 for what is regarded as the highest honor in bluegrass, induction into the International Bluegrass Music Association’s Hall of Honor.



SONNY OSBORNE: Birth Date: **October 29**

BOBBY OSBORNE: Birth Date: **December 7**

Birthplace: **Hyden, Kentucky**

Opry Induction: **August 8, 1964**



Brad Paisley

In the six years since his first album was released, the youngest member of the Grand Ole Opry has seen all three of his CDs sell millions, has had a string of singles top the charts, has racked up country music award after award, and has filled arenas during live shows. And by his choice, Brad Paisley is also a very frequent—and versatile—performer on the Opry stage.

When Brad was inducted as an Opry member in 2001, a letter from George Jones was read to the crowd that said in part, “I am counting on you to carry on the tradition—and make folks sit up and listen to what good country music should sound like.”

Brad very much has lived up to that assigned mission with records—and memorable, award-winning videos that follow them—from pointed satire in “Celebrity” to the heart-tugging “Who Needs Pictures,” the rambunctious “Mud on the Tires,” and the shattering “Whiskey Lullaby” duet with Alison Krauss.

Brad’s hit albums feature a heavy percentage of original songs topped off with ear-catching instrumentals. His songwriting talent is such that when his comical “I’m Gonna Miss Her (The Fishing Song)” was momentarily shopped around Nashville, Alan Jackson, George Strait, and Garth Brooks all expressed interest. (Brad decided to keep that one for himself, of course.) His guitar-playing skills, regularly on display at the Opry, could keep him working constantly on that account alone.

Born in 1972 in tiny Glen Dale, West Virginia, Brad’s earliest memory, he’s said, is of his railroad worker grandfather, a fan of Merle Travis, Chet Atkins, and Les Paul, playing guitar. That same granddad gave him his first guitar at age eight. By 10 he was performing, and by 12 writing songs with enough finesse that he was soon a regular on the celebrated Saturday night *Jamboree USA* radio show at Wheeling’s WWVA. There he began to meet country music and Opry veterans. While still in his teens, Brad opened shows for such Opry legends and personal favorites as Roy Clark, Jack Greene, and Little Jimmy Dickens.

He would have a songwriting deal at EMI Music Publishing within a week of graduating from Belmont University’s music business program. Nashville demos on which he began to appear led to his signing by Arista Records. Some 40 Opry appearances followed before the night he was surprised by the early invitation to join the cast. The rest is ongoing history.



Birthplace: Glen Dale, West Virginia
Birth Date: October 28
Opry Induction: February 17, 2001



Dolly Parton

Few entertainers have achieved Dolly Parton's combination of near-universal name recognition, multi-media success, almost-fawning respect of her peers, and—at the root of everything—remarkable artistic consistency over a long and varied career.

A shrewd businesswoman with a sparkling, self-effacing wit, Dolly created her larger-than-life persona from what might have been the blueprint of a Li'l Abner dream—hourglass figure, golden wigs, glamorous fashions, glittering jewelry, and a slightly ditzzy “dumb blonde” act.

And it is an act. As the singer herself has noted, “I don't mind dumb-blonde jokes, because I know I'm not dumb. And I know I'm not blonde ...”

Her blend of talent, image, intelligence, and sincerity has allowed Dolly the rare gift of appealing to men as an icon of femininity, even as women innately see her as a fun-loving, gal-next-door confidante.

Such across-the-board appeal has expanded her success well beyond recordings and concerts to include books, film, cosmetics, and her Dollywood entertainment complex, while her personality and razor-sharp repartee make her a cherished, first-call guest on talk shows.

Still, it all began with the music. A remarkable songwriter who imbues her honest, home-spun tales with poetic grace,

Dolly would have been a star tunesmith even if she'd had the face, figure, and voice of Ernest Borgnine.

Happily, she did not.

Her inimitable, acrobatic warble is one of the finest, most recognizable instruments in music, and fits with her lyrical gifts so perfectly that no one can deliver a Dolly Parton song as magically as the artist herself.

The fourth of Robert Lee and Avie Lee Parton's 12 children, Dolly grew up in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. Following her dreams, she moved to Nashville the day after high school graduation. She met Carl Dean that day; two years later, they were married.

The following year, Dolly became a regular on Porter Wagoner's syndicated television show, and for the next seven years, she enchanted millions of viewers weekly.

In 1974, Dolly made a break with Porter (addressing the split with her breathtakingly bittersweet “I Will Always Love You”). Difficult as it was, the wisdom of the decision is borne out by history.

Inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999, Dolly continues to perform and record with an exuberant vitality that has never waned. Just as importantly, her Dollywood Foundation has expanded her Imagination Library Program to more than 40 states, encouraging reading to preschoolers by providing a free 60-book library to participants.

Fellow Opry member Marty Stuart said of her, “People and trends come and go. She remains steadfast and solid. She's timeless, beautiful, and spiritual. The Bible says, ‘Many are called, but few are chosen.’ I think we all agree that she is a chosen one.”



Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld joins Dolly Parton on the Opry stage.

Birthplace: Locust Ridge, Tennessee
Birth Date: January 19
Opry Induction: January 4, 1969



Stu Phillips

Montreal native Stu Phillips grew up in Calgary, Alberta, in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies, writing many of his early songs there. He grew up listening to the Grand Ole Opry on a small crystal radio set and fell in love with the show and country music in general.

Stu formed his own band at an early age, establishing a following at local events as well as working part-time for a radio station. A position as a radio announcer led to other jobs, including producer, engineer, and disc jockey.

On the air, Stu was host to a variety of shows in Canada, including *Stu for Breakfast*, *Town and Country*, and *Cowtown Jamboree*. From radio, Stu moved to television, first as host of *The Outrider*, then to a stint on *Red River Jamboree*, a major Saturday-night show on the CBC network.

In addition to his TV work, Stu began to enjoy recording success, particularly with his *Echoes of the Canadian Foothills* album. After four more years with the CBC, Stu set his sights on Music City, moving to Nashville in 1965.

He got work doing a local morning TV show and that year signed with RCA Records. With Chet Atkins producing, Stu began hitting the country charts with such tunes as "Bracero," "The Great El Tigre," "Vin Rose," and "Juanita Jones."

He joined the Opry in 1967 after making some 20 guest appearances.

Stu has toured extensively in the Far East, Middle East, and Africa, where his records have received the equivalent of gold records.

In 1993, Germany's Bear Family Records released a CD featuring 35 songs from early albums. That same year, Stu also released *Don't Give Up on Me* on Broadland Records and was inducted into the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame.

Since 1998, Stu Phillips, Opry member, has been Stu Phillips, American citizen. Having lived in the U.S. longer than in his native Canada, Stu celebrated American citizenship with his wife, Aldona, on the Opry stage that Fourth of July weekend.

"Our lives simply evolved over the years and took a new direction," he said. "Whenever I traveled overseas, I used to think of Canada as my home. After moving to Nashville, our lives became integrated into this land with all its comforts. Now, whenever I travel overseas, home is Tennessee, where I live."

Lately, his music, including the single "Only God," has been found on the Christian country charts. Stu Phillips still tours and performs on the Opry, although he has also become a minister in the Episcopal Church, receiving his divinity degree from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.



Stu with fellow Opry star Jeannie Seely

Birthplace: Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Birth Date: January 19
Opry Induction: June 1, 1967



Ray Pillow

Ray Pillow has made his mark on country music not just as a first-rate hit-maker but also as a music publisher.

He learned to play guitar as a teen, graduated from high school, and joined the Navy. After his discharge, he got a degree in Business Administration from Lynchburg College in Virginia.

"My first professional appearance was at the VFW Hall in Appomattox, Virginia," Ray recalls. "I sort of got talked into substituting for a sick member of my uncle's band. When I walked out on the stage to the microphone, I knew what I wanted to do ... but I didn't know if I could do it. After I finished and heard the applause, I knew I was doing what I had wanted to do all along."

Ray came to Nashville in 1961 as a regional winner in the Pet Milk Talent Contest. He came in second in the national finals, but his performance landed him a guest spot on the Grand Ole Opry. That just fueled his desire for a country music career.

He released his first two singles, "Take Your Hands Off My Heart" and "Thank You Ma'am," in 1965. Capitol released his first album, *Presenting Ray Pillow*, and by late 1966 he was a star. That was the year he teamed with Opry star Jean Shepard on a pair of hits, the Top 10 "I'll Take the Dog"

and "Mr. Do-It-Yourself." Between those two singles, he became an Opry member himself.

Ray's other hits included "Volkswagen," "Common Colds and Broken Hearts," and "Reconsider Me." In 1994, the state of Virginia added him to its Country Music Hall of Fame.

In addition to his own performing career, Ray has helped shape the professional paths of others, including Lee Greenwood. His publishing company published many of Lee's hits, including the 1985 CMA Song of the Year, "God Bless the USA." Ray is well known on Music Row as a publisher who can match the right artist with the right song and recording company.

Although he knew he was country, Ray has never been a "rhinestone cowboy." In fact, several record producers told him that he should be a pop singer, because he looked like one. "But I didn't want to be a pop singer," Ray says. "A country singer is all I'm ever going to be. I sing what I like to sing." Just as he sang that night years ago in Virginia.



Ray enjoys Valentino's, his favorite restaurant, with his family.

Birthplace: Lynchburg, Virginia
Birth Date: July 4
Opry Induction: April 30, 1966



Charley Pride

With 36 No. 1 hits and more than 25 million albums sold, Charley Pride has become a true country music legend. The journey, however, was not without its share of challenges.

Born to poor Mississippi sharecroppers, Charley was one of 11 children. At 14, he bought a guitar and taught himself to play. Unofficially starting his music career while playing baseball in the Negro American League with the Memphis Red Sox, Charley sang on the team bus between ballparks. After a tryout with the New York Mets, Charley returned home via Nashville where he was heard by manager Jack Johnson, who promised a recording contract would follow.

A year later, Charley returned to Nashville and was introduced to producer Cowboy Jack Clement, who asked him to cut a couple of new songs, including one that became his debut hit, "Snakes Crawl at Night." During a public appearance in support of the single at a Detroit show, he stepped on stage to thunderous applause that soon turned to dead silence as the audience realized Charley was African American. Race, however, ultimately didn't matter.

From 1966 to 1984, the overwhelming majority of his more than 50 singles reached the Top 10, with more than half hitting No. 1, including "Kiss an Angel Good Morning" (a pop-country crossover million-seller),

"Mountain of Love," and "Is Anybody Going to San Antone?" In 1971, he was named CMA Entertainer of the Year.

In 1993, 26 years after he first played the show as a guest, Charley joined the Grand Ole Opry. Remembering his initial dream of baseball stardom, Charley said, "It's as if I had made it in baseball and they came up to me and took me to Cooperstown and said, 'This is where your plaque is going to be—beside Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jackie Robinson and Hank Aaron ...'"

In 2000 Charley joined the ranks of another elite country music group when he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

In 2005, Charley and his wife, Rozene, whom he met during his ball-playing days in Memphis, celebrated 50 years of marriage. The couple has two sons, Kraig and Dion, and a daughter, Angela. Currently living in Dallas, Charley spends much of his time at home with his grandchildren. He also keeps up his golf game and works out annually with the Texas Rangers during spring training.



Birthplace: Sledge, Mississippi
Birth Date: March 13
Opry Induction: May 1, 1993



Jeanne Pruett

Visit the Grand Ole Opry any season of the year and you'll likely hear Jeanne Pruett introduced as "Miss Satin Sheets." While Jeanne has enjoyed worldwide success with dozens of singles, the three-week chart-topper "Satin Sheets" earned her 1973 Song, Single, and Album of the Year nominations from the Country Music Association.

One of 10 children born to a full-time Alabama farmer and part-time cotton mill worker, Jeanne moved to Nashville in 1956. Her first record came out the day Opry stars Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, and Hawkshaw Hawkins died in a tragic plane crash.

Jeanne also worked as a songwriter for Marty Robbins Enterprises. Marty recorded several of Jeanne's songs, including the hits "Count Me Out" and "Love Me." Jeanne still counts those Saturday nights shows when she shared the stage with Marty among the most memorable moments of her Opry career.

Tammy Wynette, Conway Twitty, and others also covered Jeanne's songs. "It is easier to be accepted in the music business by your peers as a performer after you have proven yourself as a writer," she says. "The acceptance of fans is another thing. You sell them after you have gone into the studio and come up with the best you have." She first won their acceptance in 1971 with the single, "Hold to My Unchanging Love." Her own version of "Love Me" reached the Top 40, but those records just set the stage for what was to come.

"Satin Sheets" hit country radio in March 1973, aided by 1,600 pink satin sheets that Jeanne cut by hand and sent to radio programmers and music executives across the nation. The international hit topped the country charts that May. A few weeks later, Jeanne became an official Opry member – the last singing artist to join the show before it moved to the Grand Ole Opry House from the Ryman.

Jeanne's subsequent hits included "I'm Your Woman," "You Don't Need to Move a Mountain," and "Welcome to the Sunshine (Sweet Baby Jane)." In 1983 alone, she had three Top 10 hits: "Back to Back," "Temporarily Yours," and "It's Too Late."

More recently, Jeanne has become almost as renowned for her skills in the kitchen as for her work on the stage. She's the author, editor, and publisher of the best-selling *Feedin' Friends* cookbook series. "I still do a lot of home canning, such as tomatoes and preserves," she says. "And I love it."

The girl from the Alabama farm is now back on the farm. She and husband Eddie Fulton have a 160-acre ranch and farm outside Nashville. On sunny days, you might find Jeanne on nearby Center Hill Lake aboard her 65-foot houseboat—dubbed, like its owner, "Miss Satin Sheets."



Miss Satin Sheets greets Garth Brooks backstage.

Birthplace: Pell City, Alabama
Birth Date: January 30
Opry Induction: July 21, 1973



Del Reeves

Nearly 40 years after joining the Opry, Del Reeves remains one of the show's most entertaining regulars. He's loved as much for his comic timing and impressions of other country singers as for twangy, truck-driver hits like "Girl on the Billboard" and "Looking at the World Through a Windshield."

Born Franklin Delano Reeves in Sparta, North Carolina, the youngest of 11 children, he was playing a regular gig on a local Saturday radio show by age 12. As Del tells it: "I had four brothers in World War II and when they left home they left their old guitars lying around. I got to playing around with them, and little by little, learned to play. My mother used to tune the guitar for me."

Del attended Appalachian State College in Boone, North Carolina, and then served four years in the Air Force. While stationed at Travis Air Force Base in California, he began writing songs, singing on country music television shows, and recording with Capitol Records. After his military discharge, he stayed in California, where he was building a strong reputation as a singer-songwriter-performer with songs recorded by Carl Smith and Roy Drusky. Friend and fellow songwriter Hank Cochran talked Del Reeves into moving to Nashville from California in 1962. And he's still here.

Three years after moving to Music City, Del's 1965 United Artists recording of "Girl on the Billboard" went to No. 1, sold a million copies, and earned Del the nickname of The Doodle-Oo-Doo-Doo Kid for the nonsense syllables that he sang

with the song's guitar intro. That same year, "The Belles of Southern Bell" went Top 5. In 1966, "Women Do Funny Things to Me" hit the Top 10, and Del hit the Opry stage as a full-fledged member. After Porter Wagoner introduced him as an Opry member, Del—whose parents were in the audience to witness the night's events—burst into tears and could only sing the chorus and the end of his song.

Del's other top singles include: "Good Time Charlie's," "Be Glad," and "The Philadelphia Fillies." He has had more than 25 hits.

The tall, thin performer has appeared in eight movies, including the 1969 film *Sam Whiskey* with Burt Reynolds and Angie Dickinson, as well as cult classics like *Second Fiddle to a Steel Guitar* and *Forty-Acre Feud*. He also hosted his own television show, *Del Reeves Country Carnival*.

These days, Del can be found on stage pleasing audiences with one of his signature hits or one of his engaging impersonations of any number of other country acts. Off stage, Del leads a quiet, rural life with his wife and family, raising horses and cattle.



Birthplace: Sparta, North Carolina
Birth Date: July 14
Opry Induction: October 14, 1966



Riders In The Sky

The four members of Riders In The Sky bound onstage in colorful Western wear, lasso undulating around their heads, their “Great Big Western Howdy” punctuated by yips and yodels. This quartet of Grammy-winning madcap cowpokes consists of Ranger Doug, Idol of American Youth; Too Slim, the Fastest Wit in the West; Woody Paul, King of the Cowboy Fiddlers; and Joey, the CowPolka King. Perpetual crowd-pleasers, these talented musicians fill each live performance with Western music favorites offset by wacky cowboy humor.

The Saddle Pals got their start in 1977 at a Nashville nightclub called Phranks and Steins. Sharing a common love for authentic Western cowboy songs, they practiced in their living rooms until they were ready to hit the road in their cowboy costumes. With the 1980 release of *Three on the Trail*, they found an audience hungry to reconnect with cowboy music. The Riders went on to become part of the Country Music Foundation’s Walkway of Stars; establish *Riders Radio Theatre* for public and commercial radio; host *Tumbleweed Theatre* for TNN; and appear in *Sweet Dreams*, the Patsy Cline biopic starring Jessica Lange. In 1982, Riders In The Sky joined the Grand Ole Opry.

Woody’s Roundup featuring Riders In The Sky appeared as a companion album for the soundtrack of the 1999 Walt Disney/Pixar animated classic *Toy Story 2*. The album earned a Grammy Award for Best Musical Album for Children in 2001. The Riders won their second Grammy in 2003 for the

Walt Disney Records release *Monsters Inc.: Scream Factory Favorites*. They continue to collaborate on animation features, tour, and perform live.

When Riders In The Sky perform “Tumbling Tumbleweeds,” “Red River Valley,” and other favorites, their arrangements showcase each member’s top-caliber musicianship. Their latest offering, *Silver Jubilee*, is a two-CD release featuring their best-loved songs and a live mini-concert. Their website biography muses that this 32nd album is “perhaps the quintessential Western music album of the modern era.”

As their audience basks in musical nostalgia, Riders In The Sky leave the folks with helpful hints like, “Don’t squat with your spurs on.” It’s the least they can give their audience. It’s the Cowboy Way.



*Woody Paul; Ranger Doug;
Joey, the CowPolka King; and Too Slim*

JOEY, THE COWPOLKA KING: Birthplace: Chicago, Illinois; Birth Date: January 6

RANGER DOUG: Birthplace: Great Lakes, Illinois; Birth Date: March 20

WOODY PAUL: Birthplace: Nashville, Tennessee; Birth Date: August 23

TOO SLIM: Birthplace: Grand Rapids, Michigan; Birth Date: June 3

Opry Induction: June 19, 1982



Jeannie Seely

Jeannie Seely's mother has said that Jeannie was just four when she learned to stretch up, tune the knob on her family's big console radio to 650 WSM and keep it there. Jeannie Seely is still on the dial at 650 WSM—performing regularly on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry.

Jeannie, who was raised near Townville, Pennsylvania, remembers sitting in the family's Ford, eating popcorn and drinking soda pop, listening to the Opry on Saturday nights while her parents played cards at friends' houses.

By age 11, she was performing on a weekly radio show in nearby Meadville and a few years later turned up on TV in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Years of playing auditoriums, small clubs, and country music parks followed. Moving to California, she worked as a secretary with Liberty and Imperial Records in Hollywood before moving to Nashville in 1965 at the urging of Opry member Dottie West.

"I don't know enough to go there yet," Jeannie remembers telling West. Dottie's response: "Jeannie, that's where you go to learn."

A recording contract with Monument Records gave Jeannie her first hit in 1966 with the bluesy Hank Cochran tune "Don't Touch Me," which went to the top of the charts and earned her a Grammy Award. One year later, the singer who became famous as "Miss Country Soul" fulfilled her childhood dream by becoming a member of the Opry cast.

Other hits followed—"I'll Love You More (Than You Need)," "Can I Sleep in Your Arms," and "Lucky Ladies." Jeannie briefly worked as duet partner of Porter Wagoner and had a successful touring and recording partnership with fellow Opry member Jack Greene, including the Top 10 single "Wish I Didn't Have to Miss You." Jeannie is also a successful songwriter, with songs cut by Dottie West, Faron Young, Connie Smith, Willie Nelson, and Ray Price. Just one of her memorable songs is "Leavin' and Sayin' Goodbye," a 1973 hit for Young.

Known for her plainspoken ways and sometimes earthy humor, Seely published a book of witticisms, *Pieces of a Puzzled Mind*, in 1989.

In 2000, Jeannie, who has made frequent stage and screen appearances, hit the road for Atlantic City to portray the character of Louise opposite her friend Terri Williams in *Always ... Patsy Cline*. The role was that of an energetic, funny woman with a heart full of love for her friends and for country music—a part she knew quite well.

In 2003, Seely released *Life's Highway*, a country/bluegrass project with contributions from famous friends including Steve Wariner, the Osborne Brothers, and the Whites.



Birthplace: Titusville, Pennsylvania
Birth Date: July 6
Opry Induction: September 16, 1967



Ricky Van Shelton

It took Ricky Van Shelton years of hard work—in country music and at “real jobs”—to become an overnight sensation.

Ricky hit the Top 40 for the first time in 1987 with the title track from his debut album *Wild Eyed Dream*. That launched a recording career that would include 10 No. 1 hits. But Ricky had worked for years as a salesman, house painter, plumber, appliance store manager, and construction worker—working days and practicing at night, waiting for his big break.

Ricky was raised in the tiny community of Grit, Virginia, where his family still lives. He was the youngest of five children, all of whom loved the outdoors and spent a lot of time hiking and camping.

He added the middle name Van to avoid being confused with another Ricky Shelton in his hometown.

In high school, he was recognized as an exceptional artist and singer. Young Ricky took art classes and sang in the chorus. After high school he continued performing locally.

In 1984, he moved to Nashville with his wife-to-be, Bettye, and worked various day jobs while honing his music.

In June 1986, CBS Records offered him a recording contract. Producers and studio musicians were startled by the high quality of the rookie's vocal performances, which he'd honed by years of practice.

A year later, he had his first hit. In 1989, when he joined the Opry, he told the audience that he had dreamed of having a big bus and of hearing himself on the radio.

“And I dreamed about playing the Grand Ole Opry,” Ricky said. “But one thing I never dreamed is that I'd be asked to join.”

From his first recordings, country fans realized they were witnessing the rise of an especially gifted singer who performed in the smooth style of Eddy Arnold, Jim Reeves, and Conway Twitty.

His steady stream of No. 1 hits included “Somebody Lied,” “Life Turned Her That Way,” “I'll Leave This World Loving You,” “I've Cried My Last Tear for You,” “I Am a Simple Man,” and “Keep It Between the Lines.” In 1991, he teamed with fellow Opry member Dolly Parton for the smash hit duet, “Rockin' Years.”

He turned songs previously associated with other Opry stars—“Life Turned Her That Way” (Jimmy Dickens) and “Statue of a Fool” (Jack Greene)—into hits again.

Today, Ricky maintains a busy concert schedule. He also has distinguished himself as a painter, pilot, collector and author. His series of children's books about a duck named Quacker has sold more than 200,000 copies, and his paintings can be viewed by his fans on the Internet.



Ricky chats with Jim Ed Brown before delivering “Statue of a Fool.”

Birthplace: Danville, Virginia
Birth Date: January 12
Opry Induction: June 10, 1988



Jean Shepard

Since honky-tonk heroine Jean Shepard became an Opry member in 1955, 2005 marks her 50th anniversary in the cast. She's the first singing woman ever to reach that milestone, but then, she's a performer whose career has been marked by a whole series of firsts. Her early hit duet "A Dear John Letter," sung with Ferlin Husky, was the first post-World War II country record by a woman to sell a million copies.

But her most lasting breakthroughs can't be measured in numbers. When Jean began recording for Ken Nelson at Capitol Records in 1952, there was really no precedent in country music for a young woman recording and touring on her own rather than as a member of a family team, couple, or as a band's "girl singer."

Jean's remarkable records were hardly wilting lily stuff, either. The teenager who dared to sing "Twice the Lovin' in Half the Time" as her first single would go on to have hard-country hits through the '50s with "Don't Fall in Love with a Married Man," and "The Root of All Evil (Is a Man)." Maybe most daringly, in 1956 she took—for the first time on a country hit—the part not of a wronged wife but of "The Other Woman." These forceful hits set the stage for Loretta Lynn, Jeannie C. Riley, Wanda Jackson, and other assertive country women that have followed. Jean's own high-charting hits continued right on through the classic "Slippin' Away" in 1973.

Born in Oklahoma, Jean grew up in Visalia, California—one of 10 children in a musically inclined family that listened to the Opry on the radio but had to save pennies to buy a Jimmie Rodgers record once a year. Hank Thompson spotted her when she was just 14, singing and playing bass in an all-girl band she'd formed, the Melody Ranch Girls; he quickly brought her to the attention of Capitol. She was an early star, along with Porter Wagoner, of Red Foley's *Ozark Jubilee* broadcasts out of Springfield, Missouri, and relocated to Nashville in 1958.

She married Opry great Hawkshaw Hawkins, with whom she had two sons, Don and Harold—the latter born and named for Hawkshaw after his death in the tragic plane crash that also took the life of Patsy Cline. Jean today is happily married to Benny Birchfield, a musician, singer, and member of Nashville's music community.

Jean has been, over her 50 years at the Opry, a vocal proponent of undiluted, hard honky-tonk sounds on-stage and on the air. We can all hear what she has in mind directly—every time she sings.



From left, Connie Smith, Jan Howard, and Jean Shepard

Birthplace: Paul's Valley, Oklahoma
Birth Date: November 21
Opry Induction: November 21, 1955



Ricky Skaggs

The great Chet Atkins once credited Ricky Skaggs with “single-handedly saving country music.”

Atkins was talking about the early '80s, when Ricky's hot picking and traditional-sounding tunes took over the charts at a time when country had been sliding into pop-music styles.

Ricky definitely had the credentials for this role: He was already an accomplished singer and mandolin player by his teenage years in Eastern Kentucky. In fact, he showed signs of his eventual stardom in early guest spots with the likes of Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs.

The child of a musical family, he entered the world of professional music with another future star, his friend Keith Whitley. Bluegrass pioneer Ralph Stanley took the young musicians under his wing in 1971. Stints with other top acts during the next decade—including J.D. Crowe, the Country Gentlemen, and Emmylou Harris—helped build Ricky's reputation for creativity and musical drive. The 1975 debut LP of J.D. Crowe & the New South, with Ricky in a key role, has won credit as one of the most influential of bluegrass albums. Forming the band Boone Creek brought Ricky to center stage, where he's remained since.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Ricky turned his attention to mainstream country music. With the release of *Waitin' for the Sun to Shine* in 1981, Ricky moved to the top of the

country charts. He remained there through most of the 1980s—earning a spot in Billboard's Top 20 artists of the decade and Top 100 of the past 50 years. He garnered eight awards from the Country Music Association, including Entertainer of the Year in 1985, nine Grammys, and dozens of other honors.

With exposure spanning from Opry appearances—he joined in 1982—to streaming on the Internet, Ricky has more recently become a leading exponent of bluegrass. Key to that was his Grammy-winning album *Bluegrass Rules!* Coming as a new generation of fans explored the music's origins, the disc joined Ricky's roots and experience with classic material from the first generation of bluegrass masters.

Along with his great band Kentucky Thunder, Ricky won his most recent Grammy, a 2003 award, for his tune “Simple Life” from the *Live at the Charleston Music Hall* album. Other recent bluegrass releases are his first gospel CD, *Soldier of the Cross*; a tribute album to bluegrass legend Bill Monroe, *Big Mon*; and *Brand New Strings*, a disc focused on new material in bluegrass style.



Ricky with members of his Kentucky Thunder band.

Birthplace: Cordell, Kentucky
Birth Date: July 18
Opry Induction: May 15, 1982



Connie Smith

"There's really only three female singers in the world: Streisand, Ronstadt and Connie Smith. The rest of us are only pretending."

—Dolly Parton

That's high praise indeed, especially considering it comes from a woman heralded as having one of country music's all-time best voices. But countless others agree with Dolly.

Connie grew up in Hinton, West Virginia, a bashful child in a family of 14. She remembers saying at age 5, "Someday I'm gonna sing on the Grand Ole Opry."

She was a housewife and mother with a four-month-old son in Warner, Ohio, in 1963 when she and her husband traveled to see Opry star Bill Anderson perform at the Frontier Ranch Park in Columbus. Talked into entering a talent contest, Connie subsequently won and got to meet Bill, who offered to help her launch a country-music career, inviting her to appear on the Ernest Tubb Record Shop radio show in March, 1964.

Although Bill missed hearing her sing that night (Ernest himself hosted the show), he invited her back to Nashville in May to record some demos. In June, Chet Atkins signed her to RCA Records, and a month later she recorded Bill's song "Once a Day." Released in August, by November it hit No. 1, where it stayed for eight weeks. Her debut album remained on the chart for more than 30 weeks, spending seven of those at

the top spot. More Top 10 hits followed, including "I Can't Remember," "Nobody but a Fool," and "Cincinnati, Ohio."

She first joined the Opry in 1966, but by 1968, Connie needed to escape the pressures of constantly touring, recording, and making movie and TV appearances. She concentrated on raising her five children and becoming more involved in her church. In 1971, the year she rejoined the Opry, she scored a No. 2 hit with Don Gibson's "Just One Time."

In 1997, Connie married fellow Opry star Marty Stuart. The couple's first meeting actually took place in 1970, when Marty was an 11-year-old fan at a Connie Smith concert who had asked his mom to buy him a bright yellow shirt so Connie would notice him during her performance. "I think Marty and I match so well," Connie says today. "I love him with all my heart."

Dolly Parton and many others would no doubt proclaim Connie Smith and country music another "perfect match."



Connie and Marty Stuart show their chemistry during a duet on the Opry stage.

Birthplace: Elkhart, Indiana
Birth Date: August 14
Opry Induction: June 13, 1965



Mike Snider

When Mike Snider and his old-time string band take to the stage of the Grand Ole Opry, they bring a combination of musical excellence and rural comedy that always leaves a delighted audience cheering for more. Mike's blend of irreverent humor and utter reverence for the old-time music tradition makes him a perennial favorite of Opry audiences and a much-respected member of the bluegrass music community.

Mike began playing old-time banjo at age 16, after hearing a Flatt & Scruggs album. In short order he became the Tennessee State Bluegrass Banjo Champion, then won the Mid-South Banjo Playing Contest. At age 23, he found himself the National Bluegrass Banjo Champion. Today his musical accomplishments also include a mastery of fiddle and harmonica.

Mike's popularity grew with appearances on The Nashville Network's *Nashville Now* alongside Ralph Emery, and as a cast member of the syndicated comedy variety show *Hee Haw*, which he joined in 1987. In 1990, six years after his Opry debut, the legendary Minnie Pearl inducted Mike as a member of the Grand Ole Opry. Mike finds himself heir apparent of the country comedy mantle once worn by Minnie and her partner Rod Brasfield, Jerry Clower, and others.

A showman to the core, Mike's pronounced (and genuine) East Tennessee drawl incites laughter the moment he opens his mouth. He regales the audience with tales featuring

his wife, Sweetie, and an endless supply of jokes about country life.

Funny stuff aside, Mike and Company play serious music. The band consists of topnotch musicians: fiddlers Matt Combs and Shad Cobb, bass fiddler Todd Cooke, and guitarist and banjo player Tony Wray. Together, these men play the kind of tight, seamless, and timeless old-time mountain music that lays the groundwork for today's bluegrass. Recordings of Mike and the string band are available at his appearances and on Mike's website, *mikesnider.com*. Recent titles include *Mike Snider – Old Time Favorites*, *Mike Snider – Comedy Songs*, and *Live at the Station Inn*, recorded at Nashville's most venerable live bluegrass venue.

Mike and Sweetie—whose name is actually Sabrina—live in Mike's hometown of Gleason, Tennessee, with their children Katie Lynn and Blake.

When Mike and the boys take the stage, audiences know they'll laugh, tap their toes, and hear perhaps the best string band in existence. They will be well entertained, and for Mike Snider, that makes for a good night at the Opry.



Birthplace: Gleason, Tennessee
Birth Date: May 30
Opry Induction: June 2, 1990

PHOTO: DAN LOFTIN



Ralph Stanley

If Ralph Stanley were to have a motto that expressed his musical philosophy, it might well be “Back to the Future,” for he’s earned enduring fame with a “mountain music” style that harkens back to the simple, stark sounds of the string bands and church singing of his childhood.

Born in the Clinch Mountains of Southwestern Virginia, Ralph was taught the basics of the old clawhammer style of banjo playing as a youngster by his mother. When he returned from military service in Germany at the end of World War II, he and his older brother Carter formed their Clinch Mountain Boys, making their first records in 1947. Though they struggled to make a living, the Stanley Brothers’ 1950s and early 1960s recordings introduced dozens of classics into the bluegrass repertoire and made their mournful duet one of the music’s most influential sounds.

After Carter’s death in 1966, Ralph began to highlight an older, more haunting sound that gave greater emphasis to his craggy tenor singing and clawhammer-influenced banjo playing. As a bandleader, he nourished such young and promising talents as Ricky Skaggs, Keith Whitley, Larry Sparks, and Charlie Sizemore, all of whom eventually graduated to distinguished solo careers.

While enthusiasts of folk, bluegrass, and country music have long revered him, Ralph has lately been commanding the kind of honors due a musical original. In 2003, he shared with his friend Jim Lauderdale a

Grammy for Best Bluegrass Album. The year before that, he won Grammys for Best Country Male Vocalist Performance and Best Country Album, for his part in the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* collection.

In January 2000, Ralph became the first artist of the new millennium to join the Grand Ole Opry. He holds the Living Legend Award from the Library of Congress and was the first recipient of the Traditional American Music Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In addition to all these honors, Ralph was chosen to be the closing act for the 2002 Down From the Mountain Tour, a series of sold-out concerts inspired by the success of the *O Brother* album. In 2004, he co-headlined the Great High Mountain Tour, an amalgam of music from the *O Brother* and *Cold Mountain* films.

Despite his growing fame, Ralph Stanley still lives near the spot where he was born in a mountainous, tucked-away corner near the rugged Virginia-Tennessee border. It remains his cherished retreat from the rigors of the road and the 150-plus shows he continues to do each year.



Birthplace: Dickenson County, Virginia
Birth Date: February 25
Opry Induction: January 15, 2000



Marty Stuart

It would be difficult to identify any contemporary performer who shows even a smidgeon more zest for performing country music—and virtually every conceivable sort of country music—than Marty Stuart.

On any given show at the Opry, Marty might reach back to the songs of Jimmie Rodgers or Roy Acuff or Johnny Cash, bring in that bluegrass on which he was practically raised, offer up moving gospel duets with wife Connie Smith—or rip into some just-penned new example of his own charged-up “hillbilly rock.”

Always the showman in a day when that’s less common than it once was, Marty and His Fabulous Superlatives, we can be sure, will be dramatically attired, choreographed for group stage moves—and set to surprise with that range of choices. Not for nothing was their 2003 debut album as a group, complete with references to the plight of actual farmers, to George Jones and George Jetson, simply titled the all-encompassing *Country Music*.

As much as he’s been an innovator, Marty has been an invaluable preserver of country history—as a performer of classic material; as the photographer and author of the book *Pilgrims: Sinners, Saints & Prophets*, with its essays and photos of country greats from Earl Scruggs to Jerry Lee Lewis; and as a dedicated collector of important country memorabilia.

Marty made his first Opry appearance as a 13-year-old mandolin player traveling

with Lester Flatt’s band. After Lester died in 1979, Marty branched out, playing a kind of bluegrass fusion with fiddle player Vassar Clements and working with guitar virtuoso Doc Watson. A six-year stint touring with Johnny Cash followed, and Marty—who plays guitar, bass, mandolin, and fiddle—became a sought-after session and concert musician, playing with the likes of Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris, Bob Dylan, Randy Travis, and Roy Rogers.

He broke into the Top 10 for the first time in 1990 with the album *Hillbilly Rock*, which went gold, as did the follow-up, *Tempted*, which featured four big hits, including its title song. His duets with “no-hats” friend Travis Tritt, “The Whiskey Ain’t Workin’” and “This One’s Gonna Hurt You (For a Long, Long Time),” brought the duo a Grammy and a CMA Award.

Marty became a member of the Grand Ole Opry 20 years after that first, teenage appearance. His 1999 album *The Pilgrim* was a critically acclaimed country-opera cycle that included guests Ralph Stanley, Johnny Cash, and George Jones in key parts.

In 1991 liner notes, Marty Stuart pondered, “I don’t know; maybe I’m a bridge between the past and the future.” He got that right.



Marty accompanies Andy Griffith at the Opry.

Birthplace: Philadelphia, Mississippi
Birth Date: September 30
Opry Induction: November 28, 1992



Pam Tillis

When Marty Stuart brought brand new Grand Ole Opry member Pam Tillis to the stage in the summer of 2000, he welcomed her as “country music royalty.” There was truth in that.

Pam had enjoyed nearly 20 Top 10 hits by then, including six No. 1s, and had won three CMA Awards — including the coveted Female Vocalist of the Year title in 1994—as well as two Grammys. She’d first appeared at the Opry on the Ryman stage at age eight, singing “Tom Dooley” with her father Mel Tillis—one of the brightest singing stars of his generation, and composer of dozens of classic country songs.

But Pam was hardly just handed down that recognition, royalty style. When she decided that she wanted to make a career out of music herself, she was determined that it would come without riding on her famous father’s coattails.

Besides the honky tonk she’d grown up with, Pam was influenced by the music of the Beatles, Janis Joplin, Stevie Wonder, and Carole King. She experimented with pop, Broadway, soul, and jazz singing before heading home with a style that brought bits of all of those to country.

Through the 1980s, she pounded the pavement of Nashville’s Music Row, working as a back-up vocalist, jingle singer, club performer, songwriter, and demo singer before finding recording success with her first hit single, the pointed “Don’t Tell Me What to Do.” Hits that followed, from

“Shake the Sugar Tree” to “Maybe It Was Memphis,” “Mi Vida Loca,” and “Cleopatra, Queen of Denial,” would help define the widening country sounds of the 1990s.

“In all of my years in the music business,” Pam says, “I’ve been very proud that I wasn’t calculated, that I really did what I felt, and what I thought was honest for me to sing. Daddy always said, ‘Never change who you are; let it come around to you.’ So when things did happen for me, it was because what I wanted to do was what people now wanted to hear.”

Pam paid tribute to Mel Tillis’ music with her acclaimed 2002 album *It’s All Relative*, which featured adventurous turns on Mel’s songs.

Famed for her versatility, Pam was one of the first women to produce her own album, and has written hits for Chaka Kahn, Conway Twitty, and Martina McBride. She has appeared as a guest actress on a number of prime-time TV series and starred in the Broadway show *Smokey Joe’s Cafe* in 1999.



Birthplace: Plant City, Florida
Birth Date: July 24
Opry Induction: August 26, 2000



Randy Travis

From Randy Travis' early days, when his earthy baritone earned him comparisons to George Jones and Lefty Frizzell, to his country-gospel albums of recent years, he's never strayed far from his roots. Randy's arrival in the mid-'80s heralded a New Traditionalist phenomenon and paved the way for the county boom of the following years.

The Opry knew Randy was the real deal. Besides, he'd been discovered practically across the street at the Nashville Palace.

Randy's manager, Lib Hatcher, managed the nightclub, and Randy worked as a dishwasher and short-order cook. Occasionally, he'd lay aside his grease-stained apron and emerge from the kitchen to sing a song that invariably would drive the hard-core country patrons wild.

Randy signed with Warner Bros. Records in 1985. His first single for the label, "On the Other Hand," received little response, but the follow-up, "1982," kicked his career into high gear. George Jones, Loretta Lynn, and other Opry legends voiced their support for the plainspoken young man from North Carolina. They had found someone to carry the torch into the future.

In 1986, a re-released "On the Other Hand" went to No. 1. So did "Diggin' Up Bones." By the end of that year, just as "No Place Like Home" was hitting the charts, Randy found a new musical home – the Grand Ole Opry.

Randy's *Storms of Life* album, released in 1986, sold more than 3 million copies. His next collection, *Always & Forever*, spent 10 months at No. 1, won a Grammy, and sold more than 5 million copies. By the time Randy turned 30, he'd sold an estimated 13 million albums. Today, that total stands at 21 million, making him one of country music's best-selling acts ever.

To date, Randy has had 29 Top 10 hits, 16 of them No. 1s, including the Country Music Association Single of the Year "Forever and Ever, Amen" and Song of the Year "Three Wooden Crosses." His awards include four Grammys, nine trophies from the Academy of Country Music, and five from the CMA. He has appeared in more than 20 feature films, including *The Rainmaker*, *Maverick*, and *Fire Down Below*, and made guest appearances on such TV shows as *Matlock* and *Touched by an Angel*.

Randy married his manager in Hawaii in 1991. In recent years, he has reigned in the hectic pace of his career and now balances his time between recording, acting, and touring.



Birthplace: Marshville, North Carolina
Birth Date: May 4
Opry Induction: December 20, 1986



Travis Tritt

Travis Tritt mixed the rowdiness of Southern rock with the traditional honky-tonk laments and came up with a sound that rocked the country music world beginning with his first release, "Country Club," in 1989.

"I'm a firm believer that there's only two kinds of music - good and bad," Travis says. "I like to describe my music as a triangle. On one side is a folk influence from people like James Taylor, Larry Gatlin, and John Denver. On the second side are George Jones and Merle Haggard—that type of music. And then on the third side are the Allman Brothers and the Marshall Tucker Band. They're all balanced together, all part of what I do."

Travis began his musical career as a soloist in a Marietta, Georgia, church's children's choir. He taught himself guitar at age 8 and wrote his first song at age 14. He worked on the Atlanta club circuit for many years before coming to Nashville.

A local Warner Bros. Records representative helped him produce demo tapes that led to the label signing him in 1988. His album *Country Club* yielded three Top 5 singles: "Help Me Hold On," "I'm Gonna Be Somebody," and "Drift Off to Dream." *Billboard* magazine named him the top new male artist of 1990.

In recognition of his spectacular rise, the Country Music Association gave Travis its Horizon Award in 1991, and the following year he was invited to join the cast of the Grand Ole Opry. As he recalls, membership

was a bit of a surprise: "All my life I've dreamed about this. At one point I didn't know if I would ever be invited to be on the Opry because I have a side that's a little more contemporary. But I'm a country artist. I've always been and it's a privilege to be here."

Earning another CMA Award in 1992 and a Grammy in 1993 for "The Whiskey Ain't Working," his duet with fellow Opry member Marty Stuart, Travis was a near-constant presence on the country charts for the next five years with songs like "Can I Trust You With My Heart," "Foolish Pride," "Sometimes She Forgets," and "Where Corn Don't Grow."

After a fallow period in the late 1990s, he came roaring back to the top of the charts after the turn of the century with rootsier, frequently thoughtful songs like "It's a Great Day To Be Alive," "Modern Day Bonnie & Clyde" and "Strong Enough to Be Your Man."

Displaying another side of his musical personality, he appeared on 2000's *Big Mon* tribute to Bill Monroe—not only singing, but playing the banjo, too, as he did in 2004, when he was a featured guest in the Earl Scruggs' Artist in Residence concert series at the Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum.

Today, Travis Tritt is known not only as a country-rockin' innovator, but as an artist who respects country-music tradition.



Birthplace: Marietta, Georgia
Birth Date: February 9
Opry Induction: February 28, 1992



Porter Wagoner

If he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in just 2002, for fans of the Grand Ole Opry, Porter Wagoner has been the very model of a country music star since he was inducted into the cast in 1957.

A welcoming presence as a long-standing and frequent Opry host, it rarely takes but one flash of the lining of one of his famously splendid, eye-boggling suits and a few of his well-timed lines for any Opry audience to feel right at home. It's no wonder that his hits included "Company's Comin'" and "Y'All Come."

The tall, thin Missourian brought to country music a singing style that was part Hank Williams-era honky-tonk, part lean, bluegrass-influenced old-time storytelling, and with a notable dose of undiluted gospel influence on the side. That mix of the modern and traditional has always been part of the Porter Wagoner story.

Since 1954, he has had 81 charting singles, including 29 Top 10 records and three No. 1s. Such key hits as "Misery Loves Company," "I've Enjoyed As Much of This As I Can Stand," "The Cold Hard Facts of Life," "The Carroll County Accident," and "Green, Green Grass of Home," were all deeply rooted, hard-country classics. Porter brought them, and country music, to a massive and often new audience, through the most modern means then available—syndicated television.

The Porter Wagoner Show ran for an amazing 21 years, beginning in 1961, and

reached more than 100 TV markets; it was one of the most influential programs in country music history. And it was on that show that he introduced the world at large to the talents of Dolly Parton. Their unsurpassed, soulful duets yielded 14 Top 10 hits between 1967 and 1974, winning a Grammy for their indelible version of Jack Clement's "Just Someone I Used to Know" in 1969 and three consecutive CMA awards as Duo of the Year.

Porter was hardly new to broadcasting when his own show took to the air; he'd been singing on local Missouri radio at 15, and learned the TV ropes from Red Foley as an early regular on the Springfield, Missouri-based *Ozark Jubilee* show during the '50s. Legendary RCA A&R man Steve Sholes had so much faith in him as a young singer that he allowed him four years to experiment until he found that fresh and lasting Porter "combination of ingredients" style. Porter continues to record to this day. His much-read autobiography, *A Satisfied Mind: The Country Music Life of Porter Wagoner*, tells a compelling story, but seems to keep needing new chapters. A moving and engaging singer, always the great showman, he is one of the Opry's most visible treasures.



Porter and Dolly Parton join forces on the Opry stage.

Birthplace: West Plains, Missouri
Birth Date: August 12
Opry Induction: February 23, 1957



Billy Walker

When Billy Walker was building his early career as the “Traveling Texan, the Masked Singer of Country Songs,” he probably wondered if anyone would ever take him seriously. By the time he joined the *Louisiana Hayride* and shared the stage with Elvis Presley, he knew just how far he’d come.

Billy’s childhood story reads like a Woody Guthrie song. Born in the dusty West Texas town of Ralls, Billy lived through the Great Depression, drifting with his family from one town to the next. At the age of 13, his father gave him a dime to see a Gene Autry film, and thereafter he dreamed of becoming a singing cowboy. He plucked turkeys to earn enough money to buy his first guitar; after only two years of practice, he found a steady but unpaid singing job at a New Mexico radio station, hitchhiking 80 miles every week just to get to Clovis.

In 1949 he joined the *Big D Jamboree* in Dallas, where he was befriended by Hank Thompson who helped secure Billy’s first recording contract for Capitol Records. By 1952, Billy had become a mainstay on the *Louisiana Hayride*, even assisting in bringing Elvis Presley to the Shreveport program.

Although Billy charted intermittently throughout the ’50s, he had to wait until 1962 for his first No. 1 song, “Charlie’s Shoes” stayed on the charts for five months and

led to a parade of hits including “Willie the Weeper,” “Heart, Be Careful,” “The Morning Paper” and the Western-tinged “Cross the Brazos at Waco.”

After a benefit concert in Kansas City in 1963, the Tall Texan narrowly avoided an encounter with the darker side of fame. After Billy received an urgent call to return home, Hawkshaw Hawkins, who also was performing that day, handed him his plane ticket and took a separate flight. That small private plane crashed 30 minutes from its final destination, killing Hawkins, Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, and Randy Hughes. For years, Billy carried a wound so deep that he couldn’t speak about the loss of his friends. One day, he realized the greatest tribute he could give was to continue singing.

A deeply devout man and a charismatic entertainer, Billy joined the Grand Ole Opry in 1960, introduced by Ernest Tubb. “It was electric,” Billy remembers. “It’s not every day that you get to be a part of history.”



Birthplace: Ralls, Texas
Birth Date: January 14
Opry Induction: January 1, 1960



PHOTO: HOPE POWELL

Charlie Walker

A figure in a white cowboy hat walks to the wooden circle with a jaunty ease that belies his looming frame. Twin fiddles kick things off with two short notes, the shuffle beat starts, and Charlie Walker's effortless baritone comes over the microphone. Thus begins a real treat for the live Grand Ole Opry audience: a taste of true Texas honky-tonk.

Charlie Walker started singing as a Texas high school student. He joined the Cowboy Ramblers as a singer-guitarist and provided remote broadcasts from Sellers Studio to various Texas outlets. During World War II, Charlie played country music over the Armed Forces Radio Network as part of the Eighth Army Signal Corps occupation forces in Tokyo. Back Stateside, Charlie relocated to San Antonio in 1951 and quickly became its most popular country music announcer, broadcasting from KMAC as "ol' poke salad, cotton-picking, boll-pulling, corn-shucking, snuff-dipping Charlie Walker." Soon Charlie had become one of the nation's Top 10 country disc jockeys.

Alongside his burgeoning radio career, Charlie succeeded as a country recording artist. He achieved a regional hit with "Tell Her Lies and Feed Her Candy" and his first charting song, "Only You, Only You" on the Decca label. But Charlie hit gold on Columbia Records in 1958 with "Pick Me Up on Your Way Down," penned by a young songwriter named Harlan Howard. The song

became a million-seller, the shuffle became a country-music staple, and Howard was on the road to legend status and a future spot in the Country Music Hall of Fame. Charlie continued to score hits with "Who Will Buy the Wine" (1960), "Don't Squeeze My Sharmon" (1967), and others. He remained San Antonio's top country disc jockey until his move to Nashville, where he became a member of the WSM Grand Ole Opry in 1967. In addition to his frequent Opry appearances, Charlie has toured the world with his clean, straight-ahead honky-tonk.

Charlie's main hobby over the years has been golf. He has participated in many pro-celebrity tournaments: the Sahara Classic, the American Cancer Classic, the Southern Open, the Greensboro Open, the Atlanta L.P.G.A., and more. Additionally, Charlie has rallied fellow golfers and Opry buddies for fundraising events benefiting favorite children's charities.

Newer country music fans that may not know his name will recognize Charlie's Texas swing, country shuffles, and solid honky-tonk. Chances are, if it sounds familiar, it's because today's young artists heard it first from Charlie Walker.



Charlie welcomes his entire "Walker gang" to the Opry stage.

Birthplace: Copeville, Texas
Birth Date: November 2
Opry Induction: August 17, 1967





Steve Wariner

The combination of drive and talent that has made Steve Wariner a major country music figure showed up early. He started it all with an obsession with guitar, then grew into being a singer, songwriter, painter, producer, showman, and Opry member.

At age nine, Steve was playing guitar, and by 10 he was playing bass in his father's country band.

"As a young guy, all I wanted to do was play guitar," Steve says. "My mom would have to make me quit. I used to come home for lunch when I was in grade school, and as soon as I got in, I'd go straight to the bedroom and start playing the guitar. Every day, my mom would have to yell at me, 'You'd better eat this sandwich and get back to school!'"

By the time he hit his teens, Steve had started singing publicly—just because the bands he played in needed a singer. But he didn't take it seriously until star country vocalist Dottie West caught his show in Indianapolis. She hired him as a bass player and introduced him to the Opry. At age 17, he was playing bass for West, by 22 for Bob Luman, and at 24 for guitar legend Chet Atkins.

Chet took on Steve as a protégé, recognizing his talents as a singer and blazing instrumentalist. He signed Steve to RCA Records in 1977, and the singer soon had a bevy of smooth country hits, including his first No. 1, "All Roads Lead to You." Other albums and record-label affiliations, including a move to a harder

country direction and more self-penned hits on MCA Records, landed Steve in the country Top 10 with more than two dozen other singles and nine more No. 1 songs.

A lifelong dream came true in 1996 when Steve joined the Grand Ole Opry. Proud parents Roy and Ilene, wife Caryn, and sons Ryan and Ross were in the audience.

During that period, Steve put performances on hold to concentrate on songwriting and came up with hits for Bryan White, fellow Opry members Clint Black, Garth Brooks, and others. Steve picked up Song of the Year honors from both the CMA and the ACM for "Holes in the Floor of Heaven," the tune that would also win CMA Single of the Year honors and launch another round of professional success.

Burnin' the Roadhouse Down, the album containing "Holes," went gold, as did the follow-up *Two Teardrops*, which included the hit title track penned by Steve and Opry buddy Bill Anderson. Steve continues to record, often from the studio in his Tennessee home.



Birthplace: Noblesville, Indiana
Birth Date: December 25
Opry Induction: May 11, 1996



The Whites

The Whites' family harmony is the result of lots of practice—more than 30 years of singing together around the house and performing professionally on the road. Daddy Buck and daughters Cheryl, Sharon, and Rosie are all top-level singers and musicians individually. And when they hit the Opry stage together, it's plain why their talents have made them one of country music's all-time favorite family acts.

Father Buck, a fine mandolinist and piano player, was raised in Texas, where he was exposed early on to the Lone Star State's rich heritage of swing and honky-tonk, and learned the then-new bluegrass style as well.

Buck's skills on the piano landed him early gigs with the Opry's Hank Snow, Ernest Tubb and others. He married Pat Goza in 1951 and in 1962, they moved from Texas to Arkansas, where they began performing with another couple as the Down Home Folks. Their children performed as the Down Home Kids.

By the mid-'60s, the family was well known in bluegrass circles, and when the younger Whites decided they wanted to sing professionally, the family moved to Nashville in 1971. During their first years in Nashville, they performed as the Down Home folks and recorded several bluegrass albums.

In 1973, mother Pat retired from the group, and in 1975, the Whites played a Washington, D.C. show with Emmylou Harris. That association led to Sharon and

Cheryl's providing background vocals on Harris' 1978 *Blue Kentucky Girl* album.

The Harris connection also led to a renewed friendship with Ricky Skaggs, who was playing in Emmylou's Hot Band at the time. The family had met Ricky when he played bluegrass with Ralph Stanley, and he ended up playing fiddle and singing with the Whites on a Far Eastern tour in 1979. Two years later Ricky and Sharon married.

By 1982, the Whites hit mainstream country radio with a sound built on ear-catching harmonies, gliding dobro by Jerry Douglas and strong song selection. Their first Top 10 hit, "You Put the Blue in Me," was followed by "Pins and Needles," "Wonder Who's Holding My Baby Tonight," and "Hanging Around."

The family act joined the Opry cast in 1984. Buck remembers: "I got mighty excited."

The group enjoyed another career highlight with on-screen roles in the 2000 hit movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and its Grammy-winning soundtrack, contributing "Keep on the Sunny Side" to the project. They also appeared in *Down From the Mountain*, a documentary and CD featuring live performances of *O Brother*-themed tunes.



BUCK WHITE: Birthplace: Oklahoma; Birth Date: January 13

CHERYL WHITE: Birthplace: Wichita Falls, Texas; Birth Date: January 27

SHARON WHITE: Birthplace: Wichita Falls, Texas; Birth Date: December 17

Opry Induction: March 2, 1984



PHOTO: CHRIS HOLL

Trisha Yearwood

She may be a small-town Georgia girl, but Trisha Yearwood has one of the biggest voices—and one of the quickest rises to the top—in country music.

Heavily influenced by the country/pop crossover successes of both Patsy Cline and Linda Ronstadt, Trisha Yearwood “arrived” in 1991 with “She’s in Love With the Boy,” a No. 1 debut single, quickly followed by three more Top 10 singles from her debut album: “Like We Never Had a Broken Heart,” “That’s What I Like About You,” and “The Woman Before Me.” She had actually made it to Nashville six years earlier, enrolling in Belmont University’s music-business program in 1985. She soon started singing demos while working as an intern at a Music Row record label.

By 1992, Trisha had notched an impressive six consecutive Top 10 hits, toured with Garth Brooks, won the Academy of Country Music’s Top New Female Vocalist Award and the American Music Award for Top New Country Act, and released a second album, *Hearts in Armor*, which had gone platinum as well. The album’s lead single, “Wrong Side of Memphis,” included the prophetic lyric, “I’ve had this dream from a tender age ... calling my name from the Opry stage.” The album also featured the plaintive “Walkaway Joe,” a duet with the Eagles’ Don Henley.

More successful albums and hit singles followed, including “The Song Remembers When,” “XXX’s and OOO’s (American Girl),” and “Believe Me Baby (I Lied).” In 1997, “How Do I Live,” the first single from her *Songbook* album became a monster smash, propelling the greatest-hits collection to the top of the charts. She was named CMA Female Vocalist of the Year (in 1997 and 1998) and also won ACM Female Vocalist honors as well as two Grammys. The years since her 1999 Opry induction have been filled with career and personal growth, along with hits such as “Real Live Woman” and “I Would Have Loved You Anyway.” Her *Where Your Road Leads* album included a title track duet with Garth Brooks. She’s recorded several songs with Garth, including the 1997 Top 5 hit, “In Another’s Eyes.”

After nearly three years out of the spotlight, Trisha returned in 2005 with a new single, “Georgia Rain.”



Trisha talks backstage at the Ryman with the Opry’s resident Cajun, Jimmy C. Newman.

Birthplace: Monticello, Georgia
Birth Date: September 29
Opry Induction: March 13, 1999



80 Unforgettable Moments

at the Grand Ole Opry

During the past 80 years, the Grand Ole Opry has broadcast more than 4,000 shows, no two of them exactly the same. And while every Grand Ole Opry performance is memorable, some are particularly notable, even downright historic. The first performances. The final curtain calls. The grandest moments of the Grand Ole Opry. No one who heard them – or saw them – could ever forget.

1 November 28, 1925 – The WSM Barn Dance—forerunner of the Grand Ole Opry—broadcasts for the first time from a 15'-by-20' fifth-floor studio in National Life and Accident Insurance Company Building. A white-bearded, 77-year-old fiddler named Uncle Jimmy Thompson, who claimed he knew a thousand songs and could “fiddle the taters off the vine,” played a set that began with “Tennessee Waggoner.”



2 April 17, 1926 – Uncle Dave Macon becomes a Barn Dance regular. The 55-year-old former vaudevillian was the show’s first performer with a national reputation, and he entertained Opry audiences with his old-time banjo picking and comedy until three weeks before his death on March 1, 1952, at age 81.



3 June 19, 1926 – DeFord Bailey, the Opry’s first African American member, makes his Opry debut. Bailey, billed as “The Harmonica Wizard,” would be a regular on the show until 1941, and his signature tune, “Pan American Blues,” often would open the broadcasts.



4 December 1927 – Following an NBC network broadcast of conductor Walter Damrosch’s *Music Appreciation Hour*, WSM program director George D. Hay, nicknamed the “Solemn Old Judge,” proclaims, “For the past hour we have been listening to the music taken largely from the Grand Opera, but from now on we will present the Grand Ole Opry.” The new name sticks.

5 February 1934 – In order to accommodate growing Saturday-night crowds at the National Life Building, the Opry moves into the recently constructed Studio C, which seats 500.



6 October 1934 – The Opry rents the 800-seat Hillsboro Theater, a former silent-film house in the Vanderbilt University area. The show’s platooning system begins here, as the performers play two 15-minute segments in front of separate audiences. Known today as the Belcourt Theatre, the venue continues to house film and music events.

7 June 13, 1936 – The Opry relocates to the Dixie Tabernacle—a 3,500-seat religious revival house with wooden benches, sawdust floors, and no dressing rooms—at 410 Fatherland Street in East Nashville.



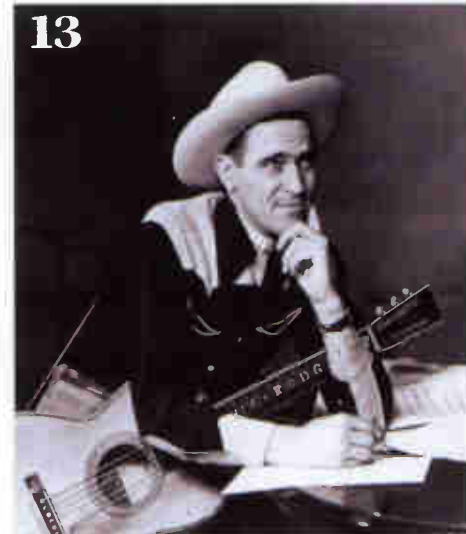
8 February 5, 1938 – Roy Acuff makes his second Opry appearance with his band, The Crazy Tennesseans, after a lackluster debut four months earlier. Acuff’s rendition of “The Great Speckled Bird” generates an avalanche of mail, prompting WSM to add him to the cast officially two weeks later. Acuff’s addition to the Opry begins shifting the show’s emphasis from instrumental music to vocal performers.

9 July 1939 – The Opry moves to the War Memorial Auditorium downtown Nashville. Because the auditorium’s seating capacity—2,200—is a third less than the Dixie Tabernacle, the show begins charging admission—25 cents.



10 October 14, 1939 – The NBC radio network begins carrying a half-hour Opry segment, hosted by Roy Acuff and sponsored by Prince Albert Tobacco. The show attracts mostly regional affiliates.

80 Unforgettable Moments at the Grand Ole Opry



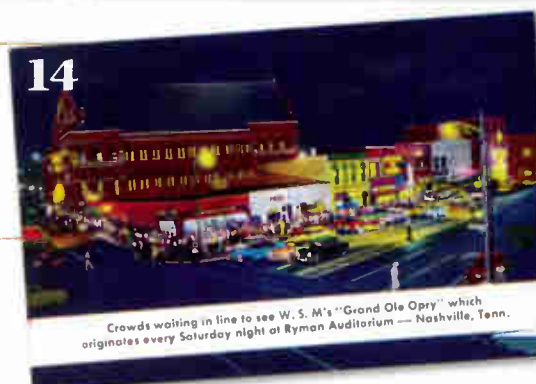
11 October 28, 1939 – Bluegrass patriarch Bill Monroe joins the Opry cast and performs “Muleskinner Blues.” George D. Hay is so taken with Monroe’s performance, he declares that if Monroe ever wants to leave the Opry, he’ll have to fire himself.

12 November 1940 – Comedienne Minnie Pearl joins the Opry cast. Though many of the signature elements of Minnie Pearl are present already, the gossip of Grinder’s Switch has not yet added the famous price tag to her flowered straw hat. That would come a few years later as an accident when a tag inadvertently left on a new bunch of silk flowers flopped out during a performance and drew laughter from the cast backstage. Minnie decided to leave the tag as a part of the costume and a testament to “human frailty.”

13 January 16, 1943 – Ernest Tubb makes his Opry debut. He brings with him the guitar of his idol, Jimmie Rodgers, given to Tubb by Rodgers’ widow, Carrie.

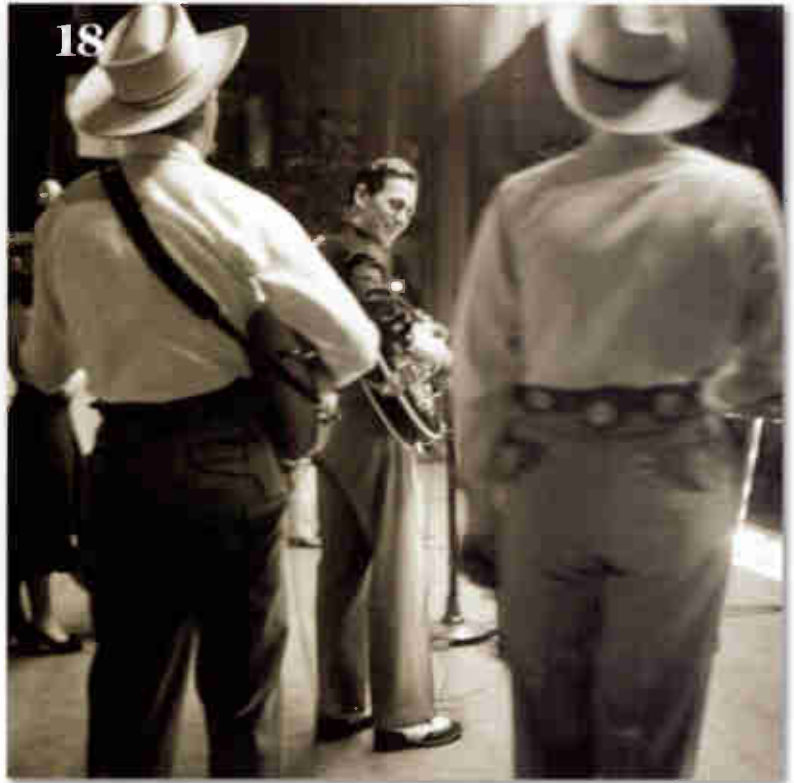
14 June 5, 1943 – The Opry moves to the Ryman Auditorium on Fifth Avenue in downtown Nashville. The building, a former tabernacle, features oak pew seating and nearly perfect acoustics, but no air conditioning.

15 December 30, 1944 – Western swing bandleader Bob Wills plays the Opry. Because drums have not been allowed at the Opry, Wills’ drummer must set up his kit behind a curtain. A woman seated in the portion of the balcony that passed over the wings of the stage becomes so excited during Wills’ performance that she falls out of the balcony onto the stage.





17



18



19

16 April 14, 1945 – A performance of “Taps,” played to mark the passing of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt two days before, becomes the first use of a trumpet during an Opry broadcast.

17 December 8, 1945 – Earl Scruggs makes his debut with Bill Monroe’s Blue Grass Boys, completing the historic line-up that would serve as the prototype for the bluegrass sound—Monroe on mandolin, Scruggs on banjo, Lester Flatt on guitar, Chubby Wise on fiddle, and Howard Watts on bass.



20

18 January 1946 – Red Foley brings a young guitarist named Chet Atkins to the Opry for the first time.

19 April 26, 1947 – Roy Acuff, who had left the Opry the previous year in a salary dispute, returns as host of the Royal Crown Cola Show.

20 June 11, 1949 – Hank Williams makes his Opry debut. The audience calls him back six times to reprise his song, “Lovesick Blues.” Opry legend Little Jimmy Dickens says it’s the Opry performance by another artist he most vividly recalls to this day.



21 May 29, 1950 – “Mother” Maybelle Carter and the Carter Sisters—June, Anita and Helen—join the Opry.

22 December 30, 1950 – Lefty Frizzell sings “If You’ve Got the Money, I’ve Got the Time” and “I Love You a Thousand Ways” during his Grand Ole Opry debut.

23 May 1, 1954 – Andy Griffith makes his first Opry appearance.

24 October 2, 1954 – Elvis Presley sings Bill Monroe’s “Blue Moon of Kentucky” during his one and only Opry appearance. Presley is nervous about the reaction of Monroe to his souped-up 4/4 time version of the waltz, but is pleasantly surprised when the bluegrass legend compliments his interpretation.

25 October 1955 – Jim Reeves joins the Opry cast. Among the internationally popular member’s biggest hits is “He’ll Have to Go.”





30



27

26 July 7, 1956 – Johnny Cash joins the Opry. Johnny meets his future wife, June Carter, backstage at the Opry the same year.

27 May 11, 1957 – The Everly Brothers make their Opry debut, the same week their first single, “Bye Bye Love,” enters the country charts.



26

28 1958 – The Friday Night Opry begins. The show had begun broadcasting from WSM’s Studio C as the *Friday Night Frolics*.

29 January 9, 1960 – Patsy Cline joins the Opry cast. Cline’s monster hit “Crazy” was written by a young songwriter named Willie Nelson.

30 March 9, 1963 – A silent prayer is held during the Opry in tribute to members Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, and Hawkshaw Hawkins, who had died March 5 in a plane crash near Camden, Tennessee. Also remembered is Jack Anglin of the duo Johnnie and Jack, who was killed en route to a prayer service for Cline. Opry manager Ott Devine encourages the audience “to keep smiling, and to recall the happier occasions. I feel I can speak for all of them when I say ... let’s continue in the tradition of the Grand Ole Opry.”



31 1965 – Johnny Cash drags his microphone stand across the front of the Ryman stage, breaking all the footlights. He is banished from the Opry. Later that night, Cash wrecks his car, breaking his nose and his jaw.

32 May 13, 1967 – Merle Haggard debuts at the Opry.

33 March 15, 1968 – Rock group the Byrds, featuring Gram Parsons and future Desert Rose Band member Chris Hillman, perform on the Grand Ole Opry. The group sings Bob Dylan's "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere," then substitutes the original "Hickory Wind" for a planned cover of Merle Haggard's "Sing Me Back Home."

34 April 6, 1968 – A curfew imposed by the city of Nashville following the Rev. Martin Luther King's assassination in Memphis two days earlier forces the Opry to cancel its live performance. For the only time in its history, the Opry broadcast is a previously taped show. Roy Acuff, Sam and Kirk McGee, and other performers put on a makeshift show at a nearby square-dance hall for Opry fans that afternoon.

35 May 11, 1968 – The Opry pays tribute to founder George D. Hay, who had died in Virginia on May 8. Opry announcer and Hay protégé Grant Turner says: "He called himself the Solemn Old Judge. If he was solemn, it was only the face of those who sought to change or corrupt the purity of the barn dance ballads he sought to preserve. We, the performers and friends of the Grand Ole Opry, salute the memory of one whose influence is felt on the stage of the Opry tonight—the Solemn Old Judge, George D. Hay."





39



36



36 November 10, 1973 – Popular Opry member David “Stringbean” Akeman appears on the Opry for the final time. When Stringbean returns home from the Opry that night, he and his wife, Estelle, are ambushed and murdered by two men who hoped to rob the couple of money Stringbean reputedly had hidden in his home. Twenty-three years later, some \$20,000 would be found, rotted and worthless, in the walls of the house.

37 March 15, 1974 – The Opry broadcasts its last Friday show from the Ryman. George Morgan’s “Candy Kisses” ends the show. After the Opry, Johnny and June Carter Cash sing “Will The Circle Be Unbroken” on Grand Ole Gospel Time to end the final broadcast from the Ryman. A young writer named Garrison Keillor covers the Opry’s final Ryman performance and is inspired to create his own unique radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*.

38 March 16, 1974 – Roy Acuff opens the new 4,440-seat Grand Ole Opry House with a performance of “The Wabash Cannonball.” President Richard Nixon attends and leads the Opry audience in singing “Happy Birthday” to First Lady Pat Nixon, who is 62. Acuff attempts to teach the President how to yo-yo before the Opry audience.

39 June 28, 1974 – Roy Acuff introduces former Beatle Paul McCartney to the Friday Night Opry crowd, and he and his family visit with the performers backstage. McCartney and his band Wings have been visiting Nashville and recording.

40 March 15, 1975 – The Cumberland River floods the Opry House parking lot, coming to within just 17 inches of the venue’s main floor. The Opry must celebrate the Opry House’s first anniversary in the Municipal Auditorium downtown. More than 7,000 attend the broadcast—the largest live Opry audience to date.

80 Unforgettable Moments at the Grand Ole Opry



41 October 1975 – Four members of the Apollo-Soyuz crew (three American and one Russian astronaut) visit the Opry following the spacecraft's historic flight.

42 June 7, 1976 – For the first time in its history, the entire United Nations delegation assembles away from its New York headquarters when they fly to Nashville. While in the city, the representatives attend a special Monday Opry performance.

43 January 29, 1977 – Andy Warhol and Jamie Wyeth visit the Opry at the invitation of Tex Ritter's widow, Dorothy, the official Opry hostess and patroness of the Nashville art scene. The two artists are in Nashville to attend a reception at Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art for an exhibit of portraits they painted of each other.

44 May 22, 1977 – More than 2,000 Canadian country music fans attend the Grand Ole Opry Sunday Matinee. The Opry dedicates the show to the Canadian fans in honor of Victoria Day, a Canadian national holiday, which was observed the Monday following the show.

45 March 4, 1978 – The Grand Ole Opry is televised live for the first time, as part of a PBS pledge-drive special.



42





46 June 17, 1978 – Marty Robbins drives his new, custom-made Panther DeVille onto the Opry stage. Roy Acuff gets a security guard, who writes Robbins a parking ticket.

47 January 27, 1979 – Actress Sissy Spacek joins Loretta Lynn on the Opry stage as Spacek prepares for her starring role in the motion picture *Coal Miner's Daughter*. Spacek would later win an Academy Award for her portrayal of the Opry legend.

48 March 10, 1979 – At the invitation of Porter Wagoner, R&B superstar James Brown performs at the Opry. Brown's set includes "Your Cheatin' Heart" and "Tennessee Waltz," as well as his own "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."

49 June 9, 1984 – Lorrie Morgan becomes an official Opry member. The daughter of Opry star George Morgan had made her Opry debut years earlier on the Ryman Auditorium stage, singing "Paper Roses." "My little 13-year-old knees were absolutely knocking," she said. "But I saw Dad standing there just bawling, and those people gave me a standing ovation. I thought, 'This is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life.'"

50 April 13, 1985 – The Grand Ole Opry begins regular television broadcasts for the first time, as a half-hour program called *Grand Ole Opry Live* on The Nashville Network (TNN). The program eventually would expand to an hour, moving to Country Music Television (CMT) in 2001 and Great American Country (GAC) in 2003.



51 May 18, 1985 – Then-Vice President and Mrs. George Bush visit the Opry. Ten years later, the couple would celebrate its 50th anniversary at the Opry House.

52 June 28, 1985 – Country singer Gary Morris becomes the first person to sing opera on the Opry when he performs Rudolfo's first aria from Puccini's *La Bohème*.

53 October 6, 1990 – Garth Brooks joins the Opry cast the same night that Alan Jackson first appears on the show. Introduced by Johnny Russell, Brooks performs "Friends in Low Places," "If Tomorrow Never Comes," and "The Dance."

54 November 3, 1990 – On the occasion of her 50th anniversary with the Opry, Minnie Pearl receives 50 dozen—that's 600—roses from Dwight Yoakam. President and Mrs. George Bush send a congratulatory telegram, and Dolly Parton shares her good wishes via videotape. After seeing Parton's message, Pearl quips, "I wear a hat so folks can tell us apart."

55 October 23, 1992 – Opry patriarch Roy Acuff makes his final performance. "The King of Country Music" would die exactly one month later, at age 89.



54

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
November 1, 1990

Dear Minnie:
Barbara and I have learned that you are celebrating your 50th anniversary with the Grand Ole Opry, and we are pleased to join with your many friends in honoring you on this milestone occasion.

Since Sarah Colley first walked on the Opry stage and into our hearts as Minnie Pearl, your trademark style of country humor has been enjoyed by generations of fans. From your rousing greeting of "How-dee" to your countless light-hearted anecdotes about life in Crindlers Switch, you have become a treasured part of Americana. On behalf of a grateful Nation, we are delighted to express our heartfelt appreciation to you for your many years of wonderful entertainment.

Best wishes for an enjoyable evening. God bless you.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Sarah Colley Cannon
874 South Curtiswood Lane
Nashville, Tennessee 37204

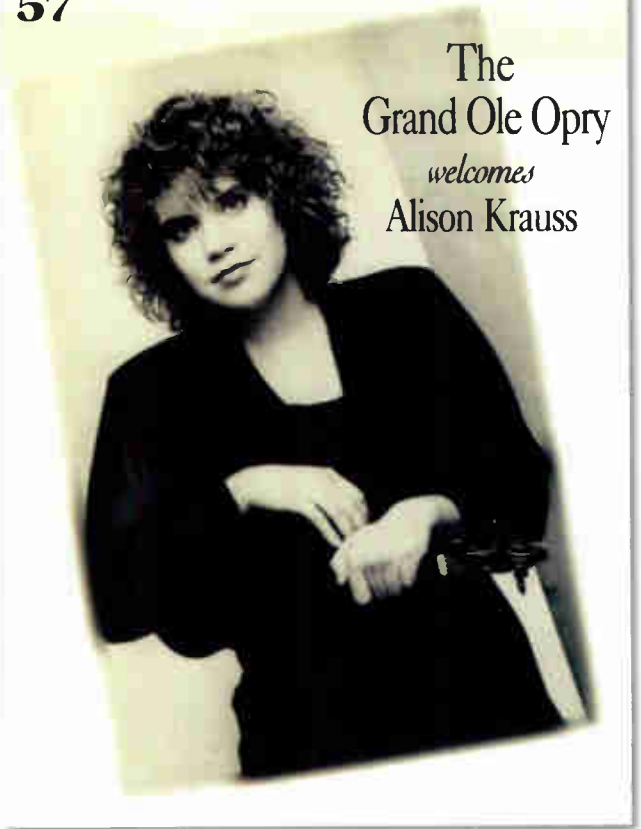
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56



57



59



56 May 1, 1993 – Charley Pride joins the Opry, 26 years after first appearing on the show as a guest.

57 July 3, 1993 – Alison Krauss becomes the first bluegrass artist in 19 years to join the Opry cast when she is inducted by Garth Brooks.

58 August 18, 1995 – As Dolly Parton and Vince Gill perform a duet of "I Will Always Love You," they are joined by Parton's former mentor, Porter Wagoner, about whom the song was originally written. Parton and Wagoner had not performed together in 21 years.

59 November 30, 1995 – Martina McBride joins the Opry during a taping of a CBS special celebrating the Opry's 70th anniversary, inducted by one of her biggest influences, Loretta Lynn.

60 November 23, 1996 – Trace Adkins takes the occasion of his Grand Ole Opry debut to propose to his girlfriend, Rhonda Forlaw. She accepts.

63



64



61 1997-1998 – Over a nine-month period, Vince Gill makes more than 40 Opry appearances as he prepares the release of his album, *The Key*, often testing the new songs on the Opry audiences.

62 January 3, 1998 – Grandpa Jones makes his final Opry appearance. The 84-year-old entertainer suffers the first of a series of strokes shortly after his performance and goes straight from the Opry to a Nashville hospital. He would pass away on February 19.

63 November 7, 1998 – Jimmy Dickens celebrates his 50th Opry anniversary with friends and cohorts Carl Smith, Waylon Jennings, Bobby Bare and Bill Anderson are on hand to celebrate with him. He joins Herman Crook, Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl, Bill Monroe, and Grandpa Jones as the only Opry members to have celebrated 50 years as cast members. Teddy Wilburn would recognize 50 years with the Opry in 2003, and Charlie Louvin would celebrate his golden Opry anniversary on February 26, 2005.

64 January 15-16, 1999 – The Grand Ole Opry broadcasts all three of its weekend shows from the Ryman Auditorium for the first time in 25 years, surprising Trisha Yearwood with an invitation to join the cast. She would become an Opry member on March 13, 1999.

65 May 5, 2000 – A special fiddling presentation spans 88 years as 12-year-old Luke Bulla and 100-year-old Bob Douglas both make their Opry debuts.

61



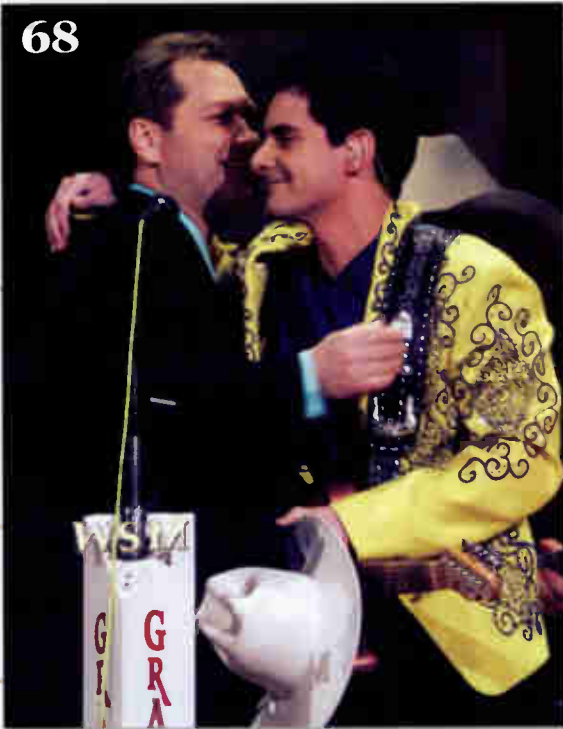
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70



68



66 June 10, 2000 – The Opry unveils its first major set redesign in 25 years. Designed by Emmy-winning production designer Rene Lagler, the new set features a barn-shaped backdrop made of aluminum, wood, and projection materials, as well as large projection screens to the sides of the stage.

67 June 17, 2000 – To commemorate the launch of the Grand Ole Opry on the Internet, Ricky Skaggs plays “Tennessee Waggoner,” the same song Uncle Jimmy Thompson reportedly played during the first broadcast of the WSM Barn Dance 75 years before.

68 February 17, 2001 – Brad Paisley is inducted into the Opry while wearing the bright yellow jacket that Buck Owens wore on the cover of his 1966 *Live at Carnegie Hall* album.

69 August 10, 2002 – The Dixie Chicks make a surprise on-stage announcement that Opry members Porter Wagoner and Bill Carlisle have been elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

70 August 31, 2002 – On the occasion of its 4,000th consecutive Saturday night broadcast, the Opry pays tribute to one of its most beloved past members, Minnie Pearl. Opry member Steve Wariner receives the Minnie Pearl Humanitarian Award during the evening’s broadcast presented by Kathy Mattea.



71

71 September 7, 2002 – Alan Jackson, Kenny Chesney, Lee Ann Womack, and Jim Lauderdale serenade Opry member George Jones with versions of his classic hits during a birthday celebration. Jones takes the stage himself for a performance of “I Don’t Need Your Rocking Chair.”



72

72 November 30, 2002 – Tim McGraw makes his Grand Ole Opry debut on a bill that also includes Brad Paisley.

73 December 14, 2002 – Toby Keith makes his Opry debut. Keith Urban and Trace Adkins also appear that night.

74 January 4, 2003 – Hank Williams Jr. and Hank Williams III both perform during an Opry show commemorating the 50th anniversary of Hank Williams death. Hank Williams Jr. introduces the son of Rufus “Tee Tot” Payne, the street musician who mentored Hank Williams. Vince Gill, the Whites, and Little Jimmy Dickens also perform during the tribute.

75 January 10-11, 2003 – Darryl Worley premieres “Have You Forgotten?” on the Opry stage. “We did four separate performances of that song out there that weekend,” Worley later recalled. “Every one of them was a standing ovation.” Worley’s label rush-releases the song to radio, and it shoots to No. 1 after just five weeks on the charts.

77



74**80****78**

76 February 16, 2003 – Marty Stuart, Travis Tritt, and Hank Williams Jr. pay tribute to Waylon Jennings, who had died the previous Wednesday. Williams sings his song “Eyes of Waylon,” and the three entertainers spend an hour singing such Jennings hits as “Only Daddy That’ll Walk the Line,” “This Time,” “I’ve Always Been Crazy,” and “Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way.” Porter Wagoner calls the tribute “the most exciting night I can ever remember on the Opry.”

77 June 14, 2003 – While standing on a stepladder, 4’11” Little Jimmy Dickens invites 6’6” Trace Adkins to join the Opry.

78 July 10 and 13, 2004 – Camera crews shoot the video for Alan Jackson’s “Too Much of a Good Thing.” The crew shoots B-roll footage backstage during the Saturday Opry on the 10th and Alan’s performance at the Tuesday Night Opry on the 13th.

79 January 22, 2005 – At Marty Stuart’s invitation, R&B singer Mavis Staples performs on both Saturday Opry shows. She and Stuart sing the Staple Singers’ 1955 hit “Uncloudy Day,” and a cover of the Band’s “The Weight.” On the late show, Staples and Connie Smith sing “Sweet Little Jesus Boy.”

80 March 26, 2005 – Ricky Skaggs, Trace Adkins, the Oak Ridge Boys and Craig Morgan perform during Grand Ole Opry Live’s first telecast on American Forces Television, which includes live feeds to and from soldiers stationed in Iraq.

Opry Members

1920s

DEFORD BAILEY
HENRY BANDY
THE BINKLEY BROTHERS AND THEIR
DIXIE CLODHOPPERS
THE CROOK BROTHERS
KITTY CORA CLINE
THE FRUIT JAR DRINKERS
THE GULLY JUMPERS
THERON HALE AND HIS DAUGHTERS
SID HARKREADER
UNCLE DAVE MACON
UNCLE JOE MANGRUM AND FRED SCHRIVER
THE PICKARD FAMILY
ED POPLIN AND HIS BARN DANCE ORCHESTRA
DR. HUMPHREY BATE AND HIS POSSUM HUNTERS
ARTHUR SMITH
UNCLE JIMMY THOMPSON
MAZY TODD

Even in its early days, the Grand Ole Opry presented a broad range of what would become known as country music. Born as a barn dance program in a downtown office building, the show emphasized old-time fiddlers and harmonica players, as well as what George D. Hay called "hoedown bands" like the Possum Hunters and the Gully Jumpers that gave the show a rural feel. Here are just some of the stars whose names appeared on the Opry roster during its first years of existence.



1. Fruit Jar Drinkers 2. DeFord Bailey 3. Uncle Dave Macon 4. Crook Brothers
5. Fiddlin' Sid Harkreader 6. The Opry Cast, circa 1928 7. Possum Hunters

1930s

ROY ACUFF AND THE SMOKY MOUNTAIN BOYS
ZEKE CLEMENTS AND THE BRONCO BUSTERS
COUSIN JODY
THE DELMORE BROTHERS
CURLY FOX AND TEXAS RUBY
HILLTOP HARMONIZERS
JAMUP AND HONEY
PEE WEE KING AND THE GOLDEN WEST COWBOYS
THE LAKELAND SISTERS
ROBERT LUNN
SAM AND KIRK MCGEE
BILL MONROE AND HIS BLUE GRASS BOYS
NAP AND DEE
FORD RUSH
SARIE AND SALLY
JACK SHOOK AND HIS MISSOURI MOUNTAINEERS
ASHER AND LITTLE JIMMIE SIZEMORE
THE VAGABONDS
LEROY "LASSES" WHITE

The Opry's popularity grew rapidly in its second decade, forcing the show to move four times and, eventually, to start charging admission. But nothing seemed to dampen the public's enthusiasm for stars like the Delmore Brothers, the husband-and-wife duo Curly Fox & Texas Ruby, and long-bow fiddler Arthur Smith and his band with Sam and Kirk McGee, the Dixieliners. Comedy acts took their place on the Opry as Sarie and Sallie and Jamup and Honey joined the cast. Stylistically, the show's emphasis moved from old-time instrumentals to modern country singers, and two of the Opry's most enduring figures, Roy Acuff and Bill Monroe, joined the cast during this time. These acts are among those who regularly played the Opry during the '30s.



1. Sam & Kirk McGee 2. Sarie & Sally 3. Asher & Little Jimmie Sizemore 4. Delmore Brothers
5. Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys 6. The Opry Cast, circa 1935

Opry Members

1940s

DAVID "STRINGBEAN" AKEMAN
EDDY ARNOLD
THE BAILES BROTHERS
ROD BRASFIELD
LEW CHILDRE
COWBOY COPAS
THE CACKLE SISTERS (CAROLINE
AND MARY JANE DEZURIK)
JOHN DANIEL QUARTET
LITTLE JIMMY DICKENS
ANNIE LOU AND DANNY DILL
MILTON ESTES AND HIS MUSICAL MILLERS
RED FOLEY
THE DUKE OF PADUCAH (WHITEY FORD)
WALLY FOWLER AND THE OAK RIDGE QUARTET
PAUL HOWARD AND THE ARKANSAS COTTON PICKERS
JOHNNIE AND JACK
GRANDPA JONES
JORDANAIRE
BRADLEY KINCAID
LONZO AND OSCAR
GEORGE MORGAN
MINNIE PEARL
THE POE SISTERS
OLD HICKORY SINGERS
ERNEST TUBB
CURLEY WILLIAMS AND HIS
GEORGIA PEACH PICKERS
HANK WILLIAMS
THE WILLIS BROTHERS

During the '40s, the Opry moved to its most famous home, the red-brick Ryman Auditorium. The half-hour Prince Albert Show segment, which had been carried regionally on the NBC radio network, went national, carried by more than 140 stations. Opry stars like Red Foley, Eddy Arnold, and Minnie Pearl became ambassadors for country music, traveling throughout the nation during the week and returning home to the Opry stage on weekends. During this decade, Ernest Tubb took an Opry troupe to New York's Carnegie Hall, and the show made its first European tour. These are some of the entertainers Opry listeners began hearing during the '40s.



1. George Morgan 2. Minnie Pearl 3. Hank Williams 4. The Opry Cast, circa 1942 5. Red Foley
6. Ernest Tubb with and his Texas Troubadours.

1950s

- CHET ATKINS
- MARGIE BOWES
- CARL AND PEARL BUTLER
- ARCHIE CAMPBELL
- THE CARLISLES
- MARTHA CARSON
- MOTHER MAYBELLE CARTER AND THE CARTER SISTERS
- JOHNNY CASH
- CEDAR HILL SQUARE DANCERS
- WILMA LEE AND STONEY COOPER
- SKEETER DAVIS
- ROY DRUSKY
- THE EVERLY BROTHERS
- LESTER FLATT AND EARL SCRUGGS
- LEFTY FRIZZELL
- DON GIBSON
- BILLY GRAMMER
- HAWKSHAW HAWKINS
- GOLDIE HILL
- FERLIN HUSKY
- STONEWALL JACKSON
- GEORGE JONES
- RUSTY AND DOUG KERSHAW
- THE LADELLS
- THE LOUVIN BROTHERS
- MOON MULLICAN
- JIMMY C. NEWMAN
- WEBB PIERCE
- RAY PRICE
- JIM REEVES
- MARTY ROBBINS
- JEAN SHEPARD
- RALPH SLOAN AND HIS TENNESSEE TRAVELERS
- CARL SMITH
- HANK SNOW
- BEN SMATHERS AND THE STONEY MOUNTAIN CLOGGERS
- RED SOVINE
- JUSTIN TUBB
- PORTER WAGONER
- KITTY WELLS
- THE WILBURN BROTHERS
- DEL WOOD
- FARON YOUNG

The '50s Opry had it all—honky-tonk, bluegrass, crooners, comedy, even a little rock 'n' roll. During this time, the show not only brought in established acts like Flatt & Scruggs and Mother Maybelle Carter, it could also turn an unknown like Stonewall Jackson into a star. And as the recording industry in Nashville took hold, Opry membership and hit records often went hand in hand. Here are some of the acts who made the Opry one of the nation's most popular music programs during this decade.



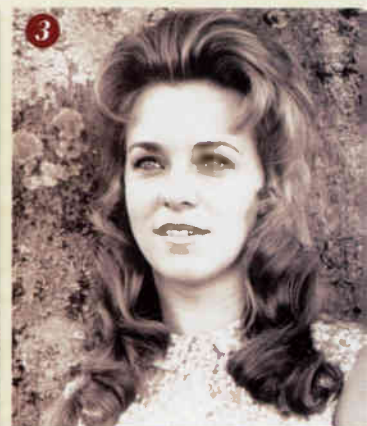
1. Kitty Wells 2. Marty Robbins 3. Flatt & Scruggs with T. Tommy Cutrer
4. Johnny Cash 5. The Opry Cast, circa 1956

Opry Members

1960s

BILL ANDERSON
ERNIE ASHWORTH
BOBBY BARE
THE BROWNS (JIM ED, MAXINE
AND BONNIE BROWN)
PATSY CLINE
JIMMY DRIFTWOOD
THE FOUR GUYS
THE GLASER BROTHERS
JACK GREENE
GEORGE HAMILTON IV
SONNY JAMES
JIM AND JESSE
HANK LOCKLIN
BOBBY LORD
BOB LUMAN
LORETTA LYNN
WILLIE NELSON
NORMA JEAN
THE OSBORNE BROTHERS
DOLLY PARTON
STU PHILLIPS
RAY PILLOW
DEL REEVES
TEX RITTER
JEANNIE SEELY
CONNIE SMITH
LEROY VAN DYKE
BILLY WALKER
CHARLIE WALKER
DOTTIE WEST
MARION WORTH

The Opry began the '60s by inducting a bevy of young talent. Patsy Cline, Hank Locklin, George Hamilton IV, and Billy Walker all joined in the first year alone. And no fewer than six future members of the Country Music Hall of Fame would enter the Opry fold. While the era also had its share of tragedy, including the untimely deaths of Cline, Cowboy Copas, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Johnny & Jack's Jack Anglin, Jim Reeves, Texas Ruby, and Ira Louvin.



1. Billy Walker 2. Bill Anderson 3. Connie Smith 4. The Opry Cast, circa 1965 5. Loretta Lynn 6. The Browns

1970s

JERRY CLOWER
LARRY GATLIN AND THE GATLIN BROTHERS
TOM T. HALL
DAVID HOUSTON
JAN HOWARD
BARBARA MANDRELL
RONNIE MILSAP
JEANNE PRUETT
DON WILLIAMS
TAMMY WYNETTE

The Opry found a new home during this decade, leaving the urban surroundings of the Ryman for the suburban splendor of the new Grand Ole Opry House and an adjoining theme park. The cast continued to expand, too. Here are some of the new stars and old favorites who joined the show during the '70s.



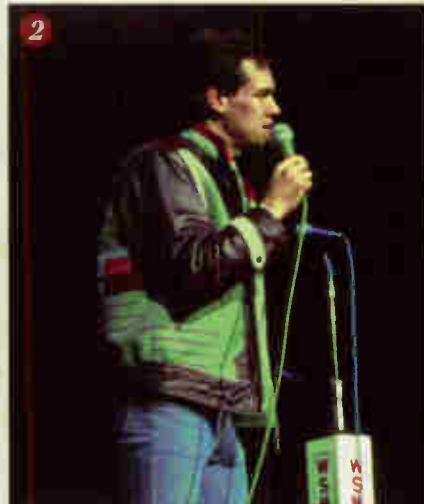
1. Barbara Mandrell 2. Tammy Wynette 3. The Gatlin Brothers 4. Ronnie Milsap
5. The Opry Cast, circa 1975 6. Jan Howard 7. Jerry Clower

Opry Members

1980s

BOXCAR WILLIE
ROY CLARK
JOHN CONLEE
HOLLY DUNN
PATTY LOVELESS
MEL MCDANIEL
REBA MCENTIRE
LORRIE MORGAN
RIDERS IN THE SKY
JOHNNY RUSSELL
RICKY VAN SHELTON
RICKY SKAGGS
MELVIN SLOAN DANCERS
B.J. THOMAS
RANDY TRAVIS
THE WHITES

Country music rode a rollercoaster during the '80s, falling suddenly in the post-Urban Cowboy years, then roaring back with the "New Traditionalism" of the latter half of the decade. The Opry's roster additions during the decade reflected that traditionalism, from the Western harmonies of Riders In The Sky to young artists like Patty Loveless and Randy Travis, who had deep roots.



1. Patty Loveless 2. Randy Travis 3. Boxcar Willie 4. Roy Clark 5. The Whites 6. Riders In The Sky

1990s

CLINT BLACK
GARTH BROOKS
BASHFUL BROTHER OSWALD (PETE KIRBY)
DIAMOND RIO
JOE DIFFIE
VINCE GILL
ALAN JACKSON
HAL KETCHUM
ALISON KRAUSS
EMMYLOU HARRIS
MARTINA MCBRIDE
JOHNNY PAYCHECK
CHARLEY PRIDE
MIKE SNIDER
MARTY STUART
TRAVIS TRITT
STEVE WARINER
TRISHA YEARWOOD

Country's popularity exploded during the '90s, and, suddenly, Opry membership was more desired than it had been in a long time. The new additions to the roster during this decade include many superstars of the genre.



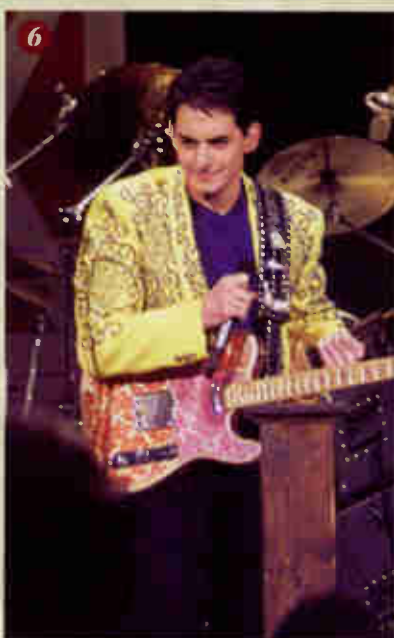
1. Clint Black 2. Alan Jackson 3. Mike Snider 4. Bashful Brother Oswald 5. Emmylou Harris 6. Marty Stuart

Opry Members

2000s

TRACE ADKINS
TERRI CLARK
DEL MCCOURY
BRAD PAISLEY
RALPH STANLEY
PAM TILLIS
DIERKS BENTLEY

Today, country fans can experience the Opry in more ways than ever—in person, on radio, on TV, and via the Internet. And recent additions to the Opry's lineup reflect a commitment both to country music's glorious past and its very bright future.



1. Ralph Stanley 2. Del McCoury 3. Pam Tillis 4. Trace Adkins 5. Terri Clark 6. Brad Paisley 7. Dierks Bentley

Making Magic:

The Elements Behind the Opry

Just as the Opry is unlike any other show, so are the elements and people necessary to its success. The Opry is the heart of Gaylord Entertainment, the Opry's parent company, and Gaylord leadership strives to maintain the Opry's rich past while propelling the show into the new century.

With an eye on both the Opry's history and its future, Opry General Manager Pete Fisher begins putting together Opry shows weeks and sometimes months before the curtain goes up each weekend. Each month, cast members communicate to the Opry's office personnel when they'll be available to perform and when they'll be on the road. Fisher and Gina Keltner track the availability of potential guest artists as well, communicating with record label personnel, artist management, agents, and publicists to determine which members and guests will appear each weekend. If they're talking to a platinum-selling superstar, they might discuss scheduling an Opry appearance several months down the road. They might talk with an artist's manager about timing an appearance to coincide with a new album release. And there's always the chance that they'll talk with a member or guest about making the kind of surprise appearance for which the Opry has become famous.

The large number of shows the Opry puts on—nearly 200 each year—and the sheer volume of acts booked means that eleventh-hour changes will always occur. Pete vividly remembers one such instance. “A couple days prior to Dolly Parton's scheduled appearance, she fell ill and had to postpone,” he says. “But the Opry artists always step up, sometimes with only an hour or two's notice.”



Keith Urban performs for a packed house.



Steve Buchanan, Gaylord Entertainment Sr. Vice-President, and Pete Fisher, Opry Vice-President and General Manager, work to build upon the Opry's rich legacy.



Talent Coordinator, Gina Keltner.

Making Magic: *The Elements Behind the Opry*

This time, Brad Paisley stepped up and took Dolly's place on the show. "Brad altered his schedule and really came in and saved the day," Pete says.

While an Opry show may require months of advance planning, the scheduling follows a weekly timeline that begins with the conclusion of the previous weekend's shows. During one of those performances, Pete might talk with a cast member who has made arrangements with another artist to do a special performance the following weekend. Perhaps an artist's publicist mentions another client who could play the show the following Friday. On Monday, the staff starts assembling all the pieces of the Opry puzzle.

Once he confirms most of the artists available for a show, Pete assembles the weekend's line-ups, careful to strike a balance between the fresh and the familiar, the members and the guests, the Hall of Famers and the baby acts. As he places artists in the show, Pete creates the potential for magical moments. Perhaps Bill Anderson will introduce Kenny Chesney, who had a hit with Bill's song "A Lot of Things Different." Maybe Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss will reprise their award-winning duet, "Whiskey Lullaby," or Alison could bring along some of her bluegrass heroes, like Larry Sparks and Tony Rice. George Jones might invite some younger singers to join him for a song, as he did one night when he sang "White Lightnin'" with Buddy Jewell and Craig Morgan. Or perhaps the night could hold the rare reunion of Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton. The possibilities are limitless.

By Tuesday, Pete completes the weekend's initial line-up and provides copies to the Opry staff for disbursement to potential visitors. On



Little Jimmy Dickens checks in at the Opry backstage desk with Jo Walker and Becky Sanders



Dierks Bentley poses with his fans at an Opry Shop appearance.



Opry announcers: Hairl Hensley, Eddie Stubbs, and Keith Bilbrey





The Carol Lee Singers



The Opry Band

Wednesday and Thursday, the Grand Ole Opry Customer Service operators go into full swing, selling tickets for the shows. Each month, customer service representatives speak with people from all 50 states and at least 10 foreign countries.

Meanwhile, the Opry's marketing and sales staff, as well as its publicity firm, work to make Opry fans aware of upcoming performers and shows. They meet with artist representatives to include artists in advertising, as well as media and retail promotions. The staff also continuously updates the opry.com website with the latest Opry news.

Late afternoons on Friday and Saturday, a whirlwind of activity swirls up and doesn't wind down until the evening's shows are complete. Jo Walker and Becky Sanders, the Opry's backstage desk personnel, arrive. From this point on, everybody checks in with them – Opry announcers like Keith Bilbrey, Hairl Hensley, and Eddie Stubbs; the musicians in the Opry band; the Carol Lee Singers, the show's back-up vocalists; and the evening's performers and their guests. They arrive first one by one, then in large groups. With them come families, friends, and band members.

Once the lights dim and the crowd hushes, the Opry's big, red curtain will rise and fall for two and a half hours, revealing a succession of artists. And, as they have for years and years, those famous words will originate from the stage—"And now presenting ... the Grand Ole Opry!"



Making Magic: *The Elements Behind the Opry*

Opry Staff Members

The Grand Ole Opry family goes beyond the stars and the fans to talented extended family members who work with each other to make sure each night at the Opry is an unforgettable night for everyone from the artists in the spotlight to the fans in the balcony. The Opry is a family reunion every time the big red curtain goes up, and it wouldn't be possible without these gifted family members.



Green Room



Administration and Operations



Concessions



Hosts and Hostesses



Marketing and Sales



Media & Entertainment Administration



Opry Shop



Maintenance



Box Office



Customer Service



Horticulture/Landscape



Support Services



Production

You Wrote
The Book On Country.
We're Proud
To Share A Page.

Congratulations to the Grand Ole Opry®
on 80 years of legendary performances. We've
been honored to share the stage with you
for the past 30 years. And now we're proud
to be the presenting sponsor.



Old Country Store



Martha White's relationship with country music began in the early 1940's when the company realized that folks in the South like their music almost as much as they like biscuits and cornbread. In 1948, Martha White® sponsored its first show on the Grand Ole Opry.

Today, that partnership is recognized as the longest continuing sponsorship of a live radio show anywhere in the country. Martha White products have evolved over the years to meet consumer needs – just as the Opry has responded to current music trends while still embracing its equally rich heritage. Today, you get the same down-home goodness you expect from Martha White products but with added convenience from a versatile line of baking mixes.

www.marthawhite.com



A Southern Family Tradition

Catch the Opry in Your Hometown!

America's Grand Ole Opry Weekend, a weekly nationally syndicated radio program, features great live Opry cuts from today's top artists including Alan Jackson, Martina McBride, Kenny Chesney, Toby Keith, and more. Plus you can hear exclusive interviews from backstage, debut performances by country's hottest new acts, and more straight from the Opry stage!

For a complete listing of the 200+ country radio stations that play *America's Grand Ole Opry Weekend*, log on to www.opry.com.

AMERICA'S
GRAND OLE
OPRY®
Weekend

WESTWOOD ONE

GAYLORD ENTERTAINMENT

Gaylord Entertainment is one of the largest and fastest growing companies in the hospitality and entertainment industries. The company owns three industry-leading brands:

- **The Grand Ole Opry**, a country music phenomenon that provides the best of country music through live performances that are broadcast nationwide via television and radio.
- **Gaylord Hotels**, the only hospitality brand dedicated to serving large groups and conventions. Gaylord has carved its niche by providing flawless service and everything the convention attendee needs – luxurious guest rooms, expansive meeting space, distinctive retail and dining, themed environments capturing regional charm, and top-notch entertainment – all under one roof at each of its highly regarded hotels.
- **ResortQuest**, the largest vacation property rental, management and brokerage company in North America.

Gaylord Entertainment owns a unique portfolio of music and entertainment offerings, among them: the now-legendary **650AM WSM** radio station, the historic **Ryman Auditorium**, the **Wildhorse Saloon**, **Springhouse Links**, **General Jackson Showboat** and **Music City Queen**, and the **Radisson Hotel at Opryland**.

Gaylord Entertainment is a publicly traded company listed on the New York Stock Exchange (symbol GET). For more information about the company, visit www.gaylordentertainment.com.

Grand Ole Opry Visa®

The official card for the true country music and Grand Ole Opry fan.

Show the world you're an Opry fan wherever you go and earn great rewards at the same time. Every time you use your Opry Visa you will earn one point for every dollar you spend. Redeem your points for free VIP Opry tickets, limited edition merchandise, free hotel accommodations, and much more. You can redeem your rewards for as few as 1,000 points or save them for something truly spectacular. Cardholders enjoy a low fixed percent introductory APR with no annual fee.



TO APPLY:

- Pick up an application in the lobby during your next Opry visit.
- Call 1-866-422-6566.
- Visit opry.com and click on the Opry Visa link.

Apply today so you can be on your way to earning Grand Ole Opry rewards and becoming a member of the Opry Visa family!

Everything In One Place So You Can Have It All.

As soon as you walk through the front doors of Gaylord Opryland™ Resort & Convention Center you will know why our tagline is “Everything In One Place So You Can Have It All.”

Surround yourself...Southern hospitality; nine acres of lush gardens under soaring glass rooftops; 2,879 guestrooms and 600,000 square-feet of meeting, ballroom, and exhibit space; Relâche, the spa, salon and fitness center; cascading waterfalls; an indoor river with flatboat cruises; six restaurants; five lounges; four eateries; 20 specialty shops; a state-of-the-art Video Games Arcade; a Cyber Café; and much more...Gaylord Opryland truly offers everything under one incredible roof.

With outstanding dining, shopping, entertainment, and events, everyone will find something they love at Gaylord Opryland. Experience fine dining at Old Hickory Steakhouse, enjoy fresh seafood and beautiful surroundings at the Cascades Seafood Restaurant, have a romantic night at Ristorante Volare or dine on casual Southern cooking at Rachel's.

Finally a place to soothe body and soul—Relâche, the spa at Gaylord

Opryland features a world-class spa, state-of-the-art fitness center, and salon, and is dedicated to pampering, peace, and renewal. And don't miss the opportunity to visit our lounges to hear the music that made Nashville famous.

In addition to everything under one roof, check out Gaylord Entertainment attractions, from the world-famous Grand Ole Opry® and the General Jackson Showboat to Springhouse Links, Wildhorse Saloon, Ryman Auditorium, and Grand Ole Opry Tours!

TO EXPERIENCE IT ALL FOR YOURSELF,
call 615-889-1000 or visit www.gaylordhotels.com.



RYMAN AUDITORIUM®



For over 100 years, the Ryman Auditorium has captured the voices of time, creating a history of sound that still vibrates within each performance. The history began in the 1830s, when steamboat captain Thomas Ryman began construction of the Union Gospel Tabernacle, intended to house the revivals of his spiritual mentor, Reverend Samuel Jones. Upon Ryman's death in 1904, the Union Gospel Tabernacle was renamed the Ryman Auditorium.

In the years to come the Ryman would play host to religious services, entertainment, and political rallies. The "Carnegie Hall of the South" as some affectionately called her, attracted legends such as Rudolph Valentino, Mae West, and Charlie Chaplin.

During the Grand Ole Opry's stay from 1943-1974, the

building gained nationwide recognition as the "Mother Church of Country Music." Pioneering performers such as Bill Monroe, Hank Williams, and Patsy Cline helped shape country and bluegrass music from the Ryman stage.

Following a major renovation effort by Gaylord Entertainment in 1994, the Ryman Auditorium began a new chapter of history. The Ryman is now open daily as a museum. Patrons can walk through the Ryman's halls filled with fascinating memorabilia from its storied past, sit in the original wood pews, and stand on the stage where legends performed. In 2001, the Ryman was designated a National Historic Landmark.

With its world-class acoustics and unique atmosphere, the Ryman continues to attract world class artists, ranging from country legends such as Merle Haggard and Dolly Parton to rock and pop favorites such as Coldplay and Elvis Costello. Every summer the Ryman hosts a renowned Bluegrass Concert Series where fans are able to see the best in Bluegrass on the very stage it where it was born. People around the world know the Ryman's history and spirit make any performance magical. Recently, the Ryman was named the "Theatre of the Year" at the Pollstar Concert Industry Awards in Los Angeles for both 2003 and 2004. Winning over an impressive list of nominees that included New York's Radio City Music Hall and Hollywood's Kodak Theatre - home of the Academy Awards, the Ryman proved that far from being a relic of the past, it is a living monument that continues to present the best in entertainment to a new generation of audiences.

Ryman Auditorium

*116 Fifth Avenue North
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 889-3060
www.ryman.com*

The Opry is just a click away at



Log on today to experience the Opry online.

Tradition meets technology! The Grand Ole Opry can be heard over the Internet each Friday and Saturday night. Log on to opry.com and enjoy the show! Be the first to know about exciting upcoming events and performances by registering to receive weekly e-mail updates. Enter to win great Opry prize packages, visit the online gift shop to purchase Opry gifts and tickets, or join the Grand Ole Opry Fan Club.

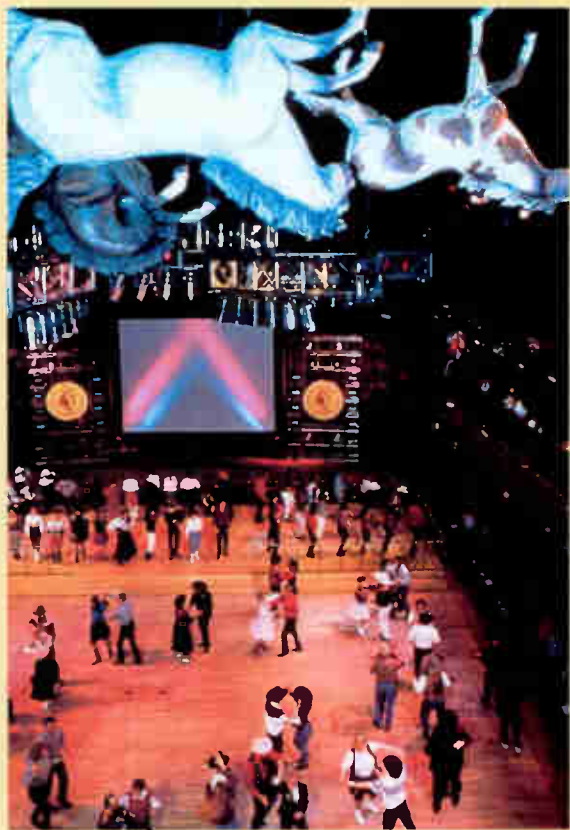
Taste Bud Entertainment

The **Wildhorse Saloon**, a Mecca of entertainment in America, began literally with a stampede of cattle through the streets of Music City. To capture the attention of Nashvillians and country music visitors, on June 1, 1994, the Wildhorse Saloon paraded a herd of cattle down Second Avenue and past the front doors of the newly opened club led by the one and only Reba McEntire. Since then, the Wildhorse Saloon has continued to capture the interest of over 1.5 million visitors each year.

The Wildhorse Saloon is a 66,000-square-foot live music and restaurant destination. Annually, country music fans stampede to the Wildhorse for a great barbecue meal, the hottest concerts, and the newest dance steps. Such house bands as Ricochet, Lonestar, Yankee Grey, Shane Stockton, and most recently Trick Pony have called the Wildhorse home and headed to the top of the charts.

The Wildhorse opens daily at 11 am and serves off the menu until midnight. Live entertainment is offered Tuesday - Saturday. Come by and see why the Wildhorse Saloon is Nashville's #1 Dining and Entertainment Destination!

*For more information, call 615-902-8200
or log onto the official website, www.wildhorsesaloon.com.*



650 WSM
Nashville's Country Legend!

Every Friday and Saturday night, people across the nation have tuned in WSM Radio to listen to the Grand Ole Opry. Here is where the WSM Grand Ole Opry, the Mother Church of Country Music, was born 80 years ago and grew into the world's longest-running live radio show. WSM is truly America's country music station, with its legendary night-time signal, serving communities within a 750-mile radius and beyond. WSM is also the unparalleled source of news and entertainment in Nashville, one of the South's most dynamic cities. So when it comes to Nashville and country music, remember the three letters that say it all – **WSM** – *Nashville's Country Legend!*





*"That's all for now friends...
Because the tall pines pine
And the pawpaws pause
And the bumble bees bumble all around,
The grasshoppers hop
And the eavesdroppers drop
While, gently, the old cow slips away...
George D. Hay saying, so long for now."*

September 13, 1984
Nashville, Tennessee

Salute to Roy Acuff

Opry House
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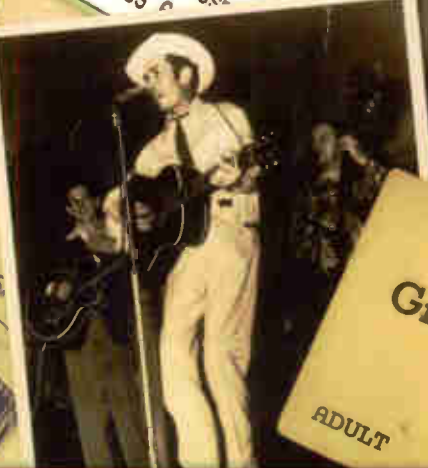
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