

CLOSEUP

CMA

WINTER 2016

CHRIS
YOUNG
WORLD
TRAVELER

2015
SRO
AWARDS

THE MEN
OF
'NASHVILLE'

CHRIS STAPLETON
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photos: Stapleton - Dan Jones/CMA; Estier - Natasha Mostache/CMA; CMA Foundation - Kayla Schoen/CMA; Young - John Russell/CMA



CMA
AWARDS
50

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CORPORATE CONNECTIONS

EXECUTIVES
SHARE IDEAS AT
ANNUAL BRAND
MARKETING
SUMMIT DURING
CMA AWARDS

by PHYLLIS STARK



Brand marketing executives from across the nation had an opportunity to experience the power and bankability of Country Music firsthand during the Country Music Association's two-day Brand Marketing Summit in Nashville in November.

Held in conjunction with the CMA Awards, the 10th annual event organized by the CMA Partnerships team provided valuable workshops coupled with a VIP experience for attendees, who toured the backstage area, attended the Awards, walked the red carpet and celebrated at pre- and post-show parties. Early risers also had the opportunity to see Tim McGraw perform live on ABC's "Good Morning America" at the Bridgestone Arena Plaza.

Participants focused on brand partnerships prior to the broadcast as the teams involved with Dickies' deal with artist Canaan Smith and Pure Silk's deal with Jana Kramer detailed the benefits and successes of those affiliations.

"Country is part of the DNA at Dickies and the No. 1 genre in the country right now," Dickies' Brand and Sponsorship Marketing executive Stacey Portnoy told attendees. She also noted that the company seeks to work with artists they can "incorporate into the culture" of the brand.

Smith and Universal immediately saw the benefits of a

partnership. "I don't have to bend myself as an artist to fit Dickies," Smith noted. Universal Music Nashville Vice President of Marketing Brad Turcotte said, "The goal with Canaan was to find a partner that he can grow with and that supports all elements of (his) music." And the label found that in Dickies.

Portnoy spoke about the ease of dealing with Country artists and their teams. Illustrating her point, Portnoy noted that after working on a previous partnership with The Band Perry, she was astonished to receive a hand-written thank you note from the group's lead singer, Kimberly Perry.

"I've worked with every genre of music," she said, "but those (other) teams are very difficult to work with, especially rock. Working in the Country Music space has always been a pleasure."

Pure Silk shave cream's deal with Kramer has yielded similarly positive results, according to panelists. Pure Silk Vice President of Sales and Marketing John Price said they chose Kramer for their campaign because she is "down to earth and approachable and had a (large) fan base." Similarly artist manager Greg Hill of Hill Entertainment Group said he was looking for a brand partnership for Kramer that would be "authentic," and found that "everything about Pure Silk was a very natural fit for Jana."

"I'm not just going to work with a brand because it's money or

exposure," Kramer said. "I wanted to be authentic." She also was impressed with the company's willingness to experiment with new ideas. "I like when a brand is open to trying different things because that's what excites me to keep going with the brand," she said, explaining how their partnership evolved from initially just singing a jingle to appearances in Pure Silk commercials.

"I don't want to just do one thing and be gone," Kramer said. "I want to have a true partnership."

Price said he enjoys creating partnerships with music stars because "music is one of those passion points that consumers really care about. It cuts through the clutter."

And the benefits cut both ways. Warner Music Nashville Director of Digital Marketing and Video Promotion Adam Zinke said a Pure Silk web campaign included an iTunes link that yielded big results for pre-orders of Kramer's latest album. And Price said Pure Silk saw a 70 percent bump in its email database as Kramer fans signed up for a sweepstakes promotion tied to the brand.

The more than 30 summit attendees also heard presentations about the current Country Music market, complete with eye-opening CMA research, as well as presentations from Live Nation, ABC Television Network and Shazam.

The address from Live Nation Vice President of Country Festival Sales Matthew Corlett focused on the growing popularity of Country Music among live event fans, and the company's quickly expanding roster of Country Music festivals. He said the average music fan spends about \$20 at shows, above and beyond the

ticket price, but the average Country fan spends \$28 per show. Corlett called CMA Music Festival "the Super Bowl of all Country Music festivals," noting that it typically sells out months in advance, and before any performers have been announced.

Hill said the Summit helps him learn new ways to approach partnerships.

"Any time you can talk to brands in an open setting, and talk to other companies, and try to figure out what their needs are, it's positive," he said. "An open dialogue is a good thing to expose people to the power of Country Music and our artists. ... That's how great relationships form, when you share ideas and come up with common solutions."

CMAworld.com

"I'M NOT JUST GOING TO WORK WITH A BRAND BECAUSE IT'S MONEY OR EXPOSURE. I WANTED TO BE AUTHENTIC."

— Jana Kramer



(FACING PAGE, L-R) GREG HILL, CEO HILL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP; WMN ARTIST JANA KRAMER; SHARI LEWIN, BRAND PARTNERSHIPS AGENT AT WME; AND JOHN PRICE, VP OF SALES AND MARKETING FOR PURE SILK DISCUSS KRAMER'S PARTNERSHIP WITH PURE SILK DURING A CASE STUDY PANEL AT THE CMA MARKETING SUMMIT. (ABOVE) SUMMIT ATTENDEES GATHER BACKSTAGE AT "THE 49TH ANNUAL CMA AWARDS" AFTER THEIR BEHIND-THE-SCENES TOUR.

photos: Kayla Schoen/CMA

EYE ON THE FUTURE

ROB MILLS, ABC EXECUTIVE IN CHARGE OF CMA PROGRAMMING, SEEKS STEADY INNOVATION

by TOM ROLAND

When Rob Mills left Connecticut to study film at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, his intent was to get into screenwriting. Now, as ABC's Senior Vice President of Alternative Series, Specials and Late-Night Programming, he's the network executive in charge of the CMA Awards, "CMA Music Festival: Country's Night to Rock" and "CMA Country Christmas."

It's not a role he originally anticipated, particularly because he grew up a rock fan in New England. But it's one he values heavily.

"Country is sort of where I was ending up anyway as a music fan," he said. "This is where all the music was migrating to."

TV can be a tough world. Jobs are gained and lost based on ratings, and given the unpredictability of the public's taste, there's a huge amount of insecurity in the broadcast business. For his part, Mills shows little of that. He's recognized on the CMA staff as an unflappable, level-headed guy, and even on the day before the CMA Awards telecast in November — as a big piece of the opening monologue was being revised — he was surprisingly calm. But Mills is guided in part by the observations of the screenwriter that created *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

"The old William Goldman saying is true of nobody knows anything in this business," Mills said. "Whether it's an awards show or a series or anything else, all you can do is just believe in what you're doing, don't second guess yourself and try to put on the best product you can."

Mills' journey from writer to CMA overseer hinges on one significant crossroads moment. Shortly after arriving in California, he was advised to get a job with a talent agency, which would allow him to make tons of contacts in a short period. So he joined Creative Artists Agency as an assistant in the Alternative Television Department, where the focus is on unscripted/reality series. It became an unexpected career path.

"This was March 2000, so it was right after 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire,' but it was right before 'Survivor,'" Mills said, recounting his initiation at CAA. "That summer, 'Survivor' took off and this new genre was born and everything exploded, so it was great to be right there."

Three years later, he ended up at ABC, where he played a role in the development and/or continued success of "The Bachelor," "Dancing with the Stars" and "Shark Tank," and now he's the guy who gave final approval to the earth-shaking Chris Stapleton/Justin Timberlake collaboration at "The 49th Annual CMA Awards" on Nov. 4.

But there's a thread that runs through all of it. The drama in reality shows and game shows isn't that different from the plot line of a movie or from the progression in such CMA Song of the Year winners as "The House That Built Me" or "He Stopped Loving Her Today."

"Reality TV was a very different and, at that point, new form of storytelling," Mills said.

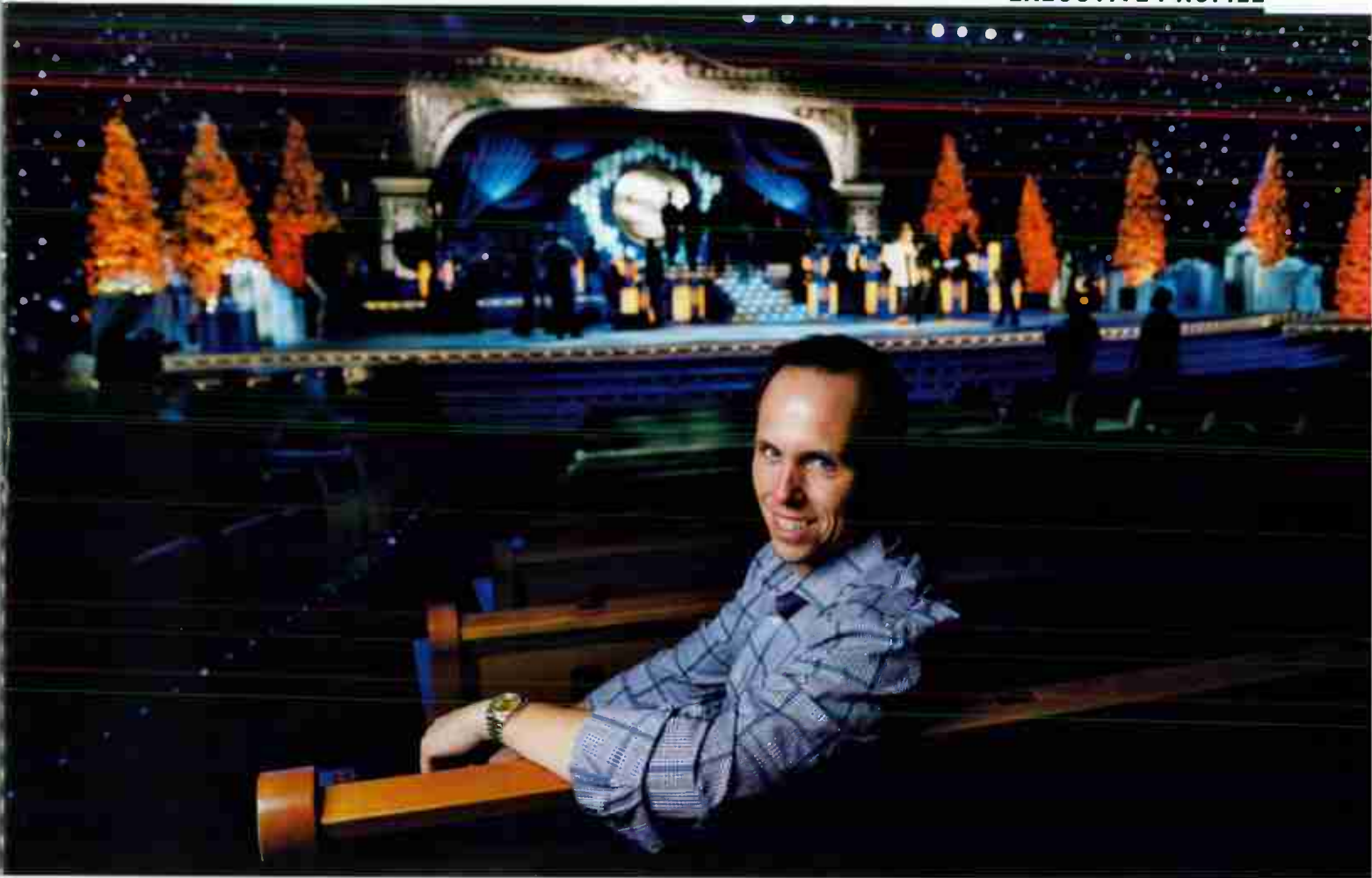
"New," of course, is not an adjective that applies to the CMA Awards, which turn 50 this year. The Awards have utilized the same co-hosts, Brad Paisley and Carrie Underwood, for the last eight years.

But the genre's position in the world is new. Country has never been as broadly accepted as it is today, and it's never had a weekly dramatic series pay homage to it the way that ABC's "Nashville" has. Tourism in Nashville itself has exploded, the city is experiencing a construction boom, and the community was labelled the "it" city by *The New York Times*.

"The format has experienced surges in popularity in the past, but nothing compares with where we are as a format today and the role that ABC has played in the expansion of Country Music," said Sarah Trahern, CMA Chief Executive Officer, and a former GAC and TNN executive. "Having a network champion for our three programs who understands

"WHETHER IT'S AN AWARDS SHOW OR A SERIES OR ANYTHING ELSE, ALL YOU CAN DO IS JUST BELIEVE IN WHAT YOU'RE DOING, DON'T SECOND GUESS YOURSELF AND TRY TO PUT ON THE BEST PRODUCT YOU CAN."

- Rob Mills



the 'live' television arena and has a genuine affection for the music has been beneficial for the industry."

The evolution of both Country and its Nashville hub are key. As established as those entities are, they've continued to evolve and adapt, as Mills did in his career, and as the film and TV world have in the digital age. And much of that progress is the reward of smart risk-taking.

"You've seen with Netflix and Amazon, they've broken the mold of what (series) can be," Mills said. "If you want to use the CMA Awards as (a parallel) example, this is something that has been around for 50 years. There's a model, but if you don't try new things, whether it's having different types of artists performing together or you do a monologue that's topical and gets people talking, you find that things become stagnant."

Mills' own musical choices have changed over time, and like much of America, they're now intersected with Country. He was familiar with the format — his father was a big fan of outlaw Country, including Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson — but his own preferences leaned toward rock. Through the years, rock became increasingly angry, while Country — once regarded as a tear-in-your-beer idiom — moved more toward positive messages

and upbeat sonics. That's a more friendly position, both for radio stations and for television.

Friendly is a key point in Mills' relationship with CMA's television properties, which he's overseen for two years. Nashville, as a production location, is "just as robust" as New York or Los Angeles, but much more welcoming. And that's particularly true of his relationship with Robert Deaton, who is the executive producer of CMA's three TV properties.

"Rob has proven to be a valued member of the team," Deaton said. "He asks the right questions, fights the right battles, and has a healthy level of respect for our music and industry. Philosophically, we are on the same page and working together to achieve the goal of not just telling the story, but shining a national spotlight on Country Music's Biggest Night."

So far, it's ended up a good storytelling relationship. The CMA Awards brought ABC its best ratings night in eight months, surpassing its closest competition by 2 million viewers.

Early on in his relationship with CMA and the industry, things are clearly rockin'.

ABC.GO.COM

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

by CHRIS TALBOTT

SOMETIMES ARTISTS GET A SMALL BUMP IN RECORD AND TICKET SALES AFTER A PARTICULARLY EXCITING PERFORMANCE ON AN AWARDS SHOW. AND NEW ARTISTS CAN PICK UP A LITTLE AUDIENCE SHARE WITH AN EYE-CATCHING PERFORMANCE.

And then there's Chris Stapleton.

The Kentucky-born singer, songwriter and guitarist already had become a respected figure on Music Row, with six No. 1 hits as a writer. His first album, *Traveller*, ranked as the year's best-selling Country debut. Then he performed on "The 49th Annual CMA Awards" in November, and his career shifted into overdrive. He made history by winning Album, Male Vocalist and New Artist of the Year on the same night, then took the stage with Justin Timberlake on a pair of fiery duets seen by 13.6 million viewers.

The R&B-flavored performances that featured a horn section in full throat had Keith Urban, Charles Kelley and almost every star dancing ecstatically in the aisles. Then near the end of the night Miranda Lambert took the stage to accept an Award wearing a Stapleton concert T-shirt.

"It doesn't feel like a real thing still," Stapleton said a few weeks later. "I've got to say it was a highlight reel night for me. I don't have many other nights that I can compare that to on a professional level for sure, and a personal level, too. It just felt like a lot of efforts getting to bubble up to the top there for just a minute. Even if it was just that moment for me — even if that's all that it is and we sell a few records and we just play a few more shows off it — what a great thing, you know? I'm never going to be over it. It was an amazing, magical night."

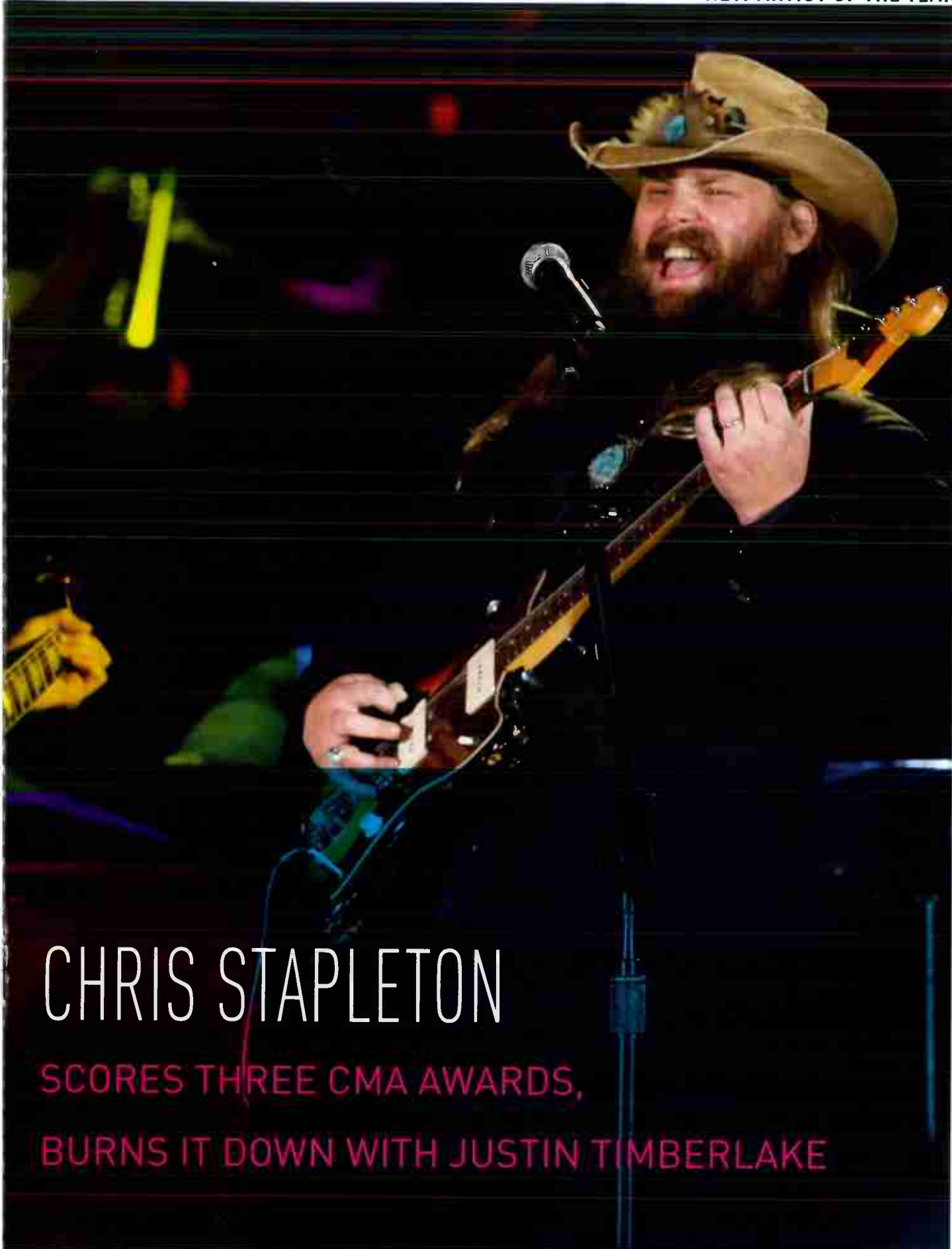
And one likely to reverberate in Stapleton's career for some time.

The singer didn't just get a little sales bump after the broadcast; he set records. His album re-entered the all-genre *Billboard* 200 albums chart at No. 1, a first, and stayed there for two weeks. His live appearance requests have spiked, and his first forays into larger rooms early this year (including a three-night stand at the Ryman

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photo: John Russell/CMA



CHRIS STAPLETON

SCORES THREE CMA AWARDS,

BURNS IT DOWN WITH JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

... continued from page 10

Auditorium) have sold out, leaving Stapleton with a bit of wonder in his voice when he talks about it.

Authenticity sells, it turns out. Stapleton's blend of old-school Country and R&B, performance instincts and personal style connected with a lot of people that night, something producer and friend Dave Cobb felt eight years ago when he first heard Stapleton's work with his Grammy Award-nominated former bluegrass group, The SteelDrivers.

"I heard his voice coming through an iPhone," said Cobb, who co-produced *Traveller* with Stapleton. "The moment I heard that, it's a no brainer to try to track him down and make a record. Years later we wound up doing it. Chris really is the fabric of America. He has so much of what's important about historical American music in his background. He's got this incredible fabric of American music in his voice, in his sound. It's timeless."

Millions of viewers responded, and so did Timberlake. The two had talked about collaborating in the past, after the pop star had reached out in admiration. But it wasn't until Stapleton was nominated for three Awards that they finally were able to make it work. They started off their performance by trading verses on Stapleton's cover of George Jones' "Tennessee Whiskey," then slowly built momentum as they switched to Timberlake's "Drink You Away."

It was a sweaty, soaring set with a small-club feel that drew some of the largest cheers seen at the Awards, and the performance continued to reverberate for days as fans watched it over and over on the Internet. And though the crowd was cheering wildly, it was Timberlake who was Stapleton's biggest fan that night.

"Man, every time I walked up to the stage and I won an Award, I think he might have been more excited for me than I could have ever been in the moment," Stapleton said. "I was in shock. He was jumping up and down and losing his mind. We were hugging each other and dancing together."

In those moments, Stapleton realized every sacrifice and decision he'd made along the way had suddenly paid off. He could have long ago put out independent albums, but he doggedly stayed on Music Row pursuing his vision of a major-label deal with creative control. When his first Mercury Records Nashville album was shelved during a merger a few years ago, he could have gotten frustrated and given up. Instead, like his favorite Country Music heroes, he kept at it, convincing doubters one at a time, until he made the record he wanted. And when he finally got his chance to stand in



CHRIS STAPLETON TALKS TO MEDIA OUTLETS AFTER WINNING NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR, ALBUM OF THE YEAR, AND MALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR.

front of millions and take his shot, he was ready.

"It was a lesson for me: Follow your heart and your gut on how you want to do things, and the things that you're comfortable doing, even if it's not the things that everybody else is comfortable with you doing," Stapleton said. "You're the one that has to get up there and sing those songs every night and be whoever you are, you know? So I'm real grateful that we did things that way, and it turned out as well as it did. It was a remarkable thing and without sounding too corny, it feels like a really American thing to do. Do things your own way and have it work out and have people look you up for it."

All along Stapleton said he's felt a responsibility to Country Music, to represent it in a true and respectful way. Now that he's joined folks like Willie and Waylon and all his other inspirations on a very exclusive list, that feeling is even stronger.

"You read over any of those lists, it's intimidating," Stapleton said. "That you get to be a part of that, yeah, it makes the hair stand up on my arms to think about it. I also feel a responsibility to it, you know? Maybe I shouldn't, but I feel like I was handed a responsibility to live up to that."

ChrisStapleton.com

photo: Jamie Schramm/CMA

| A WEEK TO REMEMBER |



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP-LEFT) NANCY JONES ACCEPTS THE JOE TALBOT AWARD ON BEHALF OF HER LATE HUSBAND, GEORGE JONES. CARRIE UNDERWOOD, CMA CEO SARAH TRAHERN, BRAD PAISLEY AND CMA BOARD PRESIDENT SALLY WILLIAMS GATHER AFTER THE CMA AWARDS HOSTS PARTICIPATED IN THE CMA RADIO REMOTES PRESS CONFERENCE. CHRIS YOUNG PRESENTS THE 2015 CMA MEDIA ACHIEVEMENT AWARD TO *THE TENNESSEAN'S* CINDY WATTS. MAC McANALLY ACCEPTS HIS MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD FROM JANA KRAMER DURING THE PRE-TELECAST CEREMONY. COLLEGE MASCOTS, WHO APPEARED DURING BRAD PAISLEY'S PERFORMANCE, GREET FANS OUTSIDE THE CMA AWARDS RED CARPET. JOHN CARTER CASH ACCEPTS THE WILLIE NELSON LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD ON BEHALF OF HIS LATE FATHER, JOHNNY CASH.



photos: Nancy Jones, John Carter Cash, Mac McAnally - Donn Jones / CMA; Remotes - Scott Hunter / CMA; Mascots - Hunter Berry / CMA; Mascots - Jamie Schamm / CMA



TROPHIES PRESENTED AT CMA'S TOURING INDUSTRY CELEBRATION IN NASHVILLE

by WENDY PEARL

What happens on the road, everyone hears about in Nashville with the annual celebration and presentation of CMA's touring industry honors known as the SRO Awards.

Affable host Jay DeMarcus of Rascal Flatts set the tone by telling the industry crowd at Marathon Music Works that he has been asked to host the CMA Awards and other awards programs for years, but he was holding out for a hosting gig with no press coverage and an open bar. This was it.

"Our touring industry members are on the frontline, every day taking our music directly to the fans in small clubs, stadiums and everything in between," said Sarah Trahern, CMA Chief Executive Officer. "Their hard work and many contributions to the success of the format deserve attention and a standing ovation."

DeMarcus, Dierks Bentley, Hunter Hayes and Cole Swindell presented trophies to members of their road families, while Jason Aldean, Kenny Chesney, Little Big Town, Old Dominion, Chase Rice, Blake Shelton, Ricky Skaggs, George Strait and Steve Wariner recorded personal congratulatory messages to celebrate the winners. The evening was a shining example of everything that makes Country Music tours among the most popular and profitable business centers for the industry.

Swindell summed it up when he presented the SRO Award for Manager of the Year to Kerri Edwards: "We all know how hard she works on the team, but it is nice seeing her recognized by the industry."

Brian O'Connell, who won the SRO Award for Talent Buyer/Promoter of the Year, spoke with passion about how this is the touring industry's CMA Award: "This is OUR CMA Award for the guys and girls on the road who put it up and take it down."

The winners in 15 categories were determined by CMA members in related categories.

For a complete list of winners, visit CMAworld.com.





photos: Donn Jones/CMA

As the winners came off the stage, they were asked if they could go back in time and tell their younger self one thing that would make their life easier now, what would it be?

PHILIP EALY LIGHTING DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

"Keep doing what you're doing."

KERRI EDWARDS MANAGER OF THE YEAR

"Surround yourself with good people and build a good team."

DAVID FARMER TOUR MANAGER OF THE YEAR

"Don't worry about if the band is on time or not for sound check."

MARY ANN McCREADY BUSINESS MANAGER OF THE YEAR

"Enjoy it more."

JAMES McDERMOTT FOH ENGINEER OF THE YEAR

"Know when to shut up."

EBIE McFARLAND PUBLICIST OF THE YEAR

"Listen more and talk less."

DARIN MURPHY TALENT AGENT OF THE YEAR

"Treat people as you would like to be treated."

BRIAN O'CONNELL TALENT BUYER/PROMOTER OF THE YEAR

"Fight harder."

KRIS O'CONNOR TOUR CATERER OF THE YEAR (Dega Catering)

"Be patient."

SALLY WILLIAMS and LISAANN DUPONT

VENUE OF THE YEAR (Ryman Auditorium)

"Dream as big as possible."

(FACING PAGE) WINNERS OF THE 2015 CMA SRO AWARDS. BACK ROW (L-R) BRIAN O'CONNELL, KERRI EDWARDS, EBIE McFARLAND, DAVID FARMER, JAY COOPER, DARIN MURPHY, SARAH TRAHERN, AND JAMES McDERMOTT. FRONT ROW (L-R) ED WANNEBO, MARY ANN McCREADY, SALLY WILLIAMS, LISAANN DUPONT, JAY DeMARCUS, AND KRIS O'CONNOR.

(THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM) JAMES McDERMOTT (CENTER) RECEIVES THE 2015 SRO FRONT OF HOUSE ENGINEER OF THE YEAR AWARD FROM HOST JAY DeMARCUS AND DIERKS BENTLEY.

COLE SWINDELL (R) PRESENTS HIS MANAGER, KERRI EDWARDS, WITH THE 2015 SRO MANAGER OF THE YEAR AWARD ALONGSIDE EVENT HOST JAY DeMARCUS

2015 SRO PUBLICIST OF THE YEAR EBIE McFARLAND (CENTER) RECEIVES HER TROPHY FROM CLIENT HUNTER HAYES AND HOST JAY DeMARCUS.



(L-R)
WILL CHASE,
CHARLES ESTEN,
MUSICIAN
COLIN LINDEN,
SAM PALLADIO,
JONATHAN
JACKSON AND
CHRIS CARMACK
SALUTE THE
CROWD AFTER
PERFORMING
DURING THE CMA
SONGWRITERS
SERIES.

THE MEN OF 'NASHVILLE' ACTORS MOONLIGHT FOR SPECIAL EDITION OF CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES

by PHYLLIS STARK

The male stars of the ABC series "Nashville" don't just play talented music stars on television; they're also talented musicians in real life.

Those talents were amply evident at the CMA Theater inside Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in November when five of the show's cast members performed in the round as part of the CMA Songwriters Series. They mixed their own original songs with tunes written for them to perform on the show, while sharing behind-the-scenes anecdotes and stories behind the songs.

Chris Carmack (who portrays Will Lexington), Will Chase (Luke Wheeler), Charles Esten (Deacon Claybourne), Jonathan Jackson (Avery Barkley) and Sam Palladio (Gunnar Scott) shared the spotlight with songwriter pals Trent Dabbs, Chris Gelbuda, Travis Meadows and Jonathan Singleton, all backed on guitar by musician Colin Linden. Country singer Mark Collie, who plays the recurring role of Frankie on the show, was a surprise guest performer.

The actors spoke of their deep respect for the Nashville songwriting community. Esten said that when the demos first arrive of the songs they'll be performing on the show, "I'm like that kid at Christmas who can't wait to come down the stairs and see all the presents around the Christmas tree."

On the red carpet prior to the show, cast members spoke about how they feel embraced by Nashville and their desire to give back to the community by performing at events like the CMA Songwriters Series.

"To be asked to be part of this is a real privilege," Palladio said. "To be associated with the CMA, to be onstage with a lot of great friends and collaborators, is an inspiring thing." Esten said the show has thrust the cast into an unexpected but welcome role as ambassadors for Music City: "We've been embraced, and we embrace this town fully."

Chase, who described himself as the only non-songwriter of

the group, took on the role of genial host for the show, while also taking his turns performing. He got laughs for playing a snippet of the only song he's ever written, an alma mater for the Kentucky high school he attended, and for joking, "We are the men of 'Nashville,' not the burlesque show of the same name."

Carmack also drew laughs when he revealed that his song "Being Alone" is routinely referred to by the cast as "Peeing Alone," setting off a string of jokes on that topic before he performed it with Palladio on harmony.

The actors — particularly Jackson — demonstrated they are also talented songwriters in their own right by playing some of their original compositions. Jackson moved from guitar to piano for his song "The Hands of Your Drug," which he said was inspired by people close to him who struggled with addiction while he was growing up. Palladio shared the true story of his grandfather's long-distance romance with a Nashville woman, and then played a poignant song he wrote about their story called "Wake Me Up in Nashville."

Before playing "I Know How to Love You Now," a song he wrote with Deana Carter that made it onto the show, Esten said, "It's a bucket list thing to have a song I wrote on a show I love so much."

The actors also offered some insight into their off-screen friendships as well. Palladio revealed that he and Carmack watch the show together on Wednesday nights while knocking back a few whiskeys at Palladio's home, and then embark on a two-hour jam session that Carmack said they call "tweets and beats."

Some of the evening's best moments came when the performers joined forces. Carmack and Palladio played several songs together, with Palladio moving from guitar to cajon for the latter part of the show.

All of the stars joined forces for the rousing finale, the appropriately titled "One More Song," which Esten wrote with emerging Country star Chris Janson, and which he said was inspired by Waylon Jennings.

CMASongwritersSeries.com

FRONT AND CENTER TV SERIES IS ALL-IN WITH CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES

by KEITH RYAN CARTWRIGHT

Without ever saying a word, Brett Eldredge introduced himself to songwriter Tom Douglas. Before the two so much as shook hands, Eldredge let his singing do the talking.

Douglas was sitting at a piano when Eldredge, an Illinois native with a soulful baritone, walked in and did the one thing that came naturally — he began singing along to the melody.

"One Mississippi, two Mississippi, counting down the seconds" and so it began. A few hours later they had written "One Mississippi," which Eldredge then recorded for his debut album, *Bring You Back*.

"That's how we met," recalled Eldredge, the 2014 Country Music Association's New Artist of the Year. "I knew I wanted to go back and write more songs with that guy."

Eldredge made certain to include Douglas at a taping of the CMA Songwriters Series for the critically acclaimed television series "Front and Center," which will be broadcast this year. Now in its sixth season, the one-hour concert series will highlight five Country artists, beginning with an episode featuring Darius Rucker followed by episodes with Ronnie Dunn, Eldredge, Kip Moore and Steven Tyler.

Dunn joined Eldredge on stage to sing "One Mississippi," while Eldredge sang "Believe" along with Dunn, who has earned 20 CMA Awards and sold 30 million albums during a 20-year career with Brooks & Dunn. Dunn then joined longtime go-to songsmiths Craig Wiseman, Neil Thrasher, Tony Martin and Wendell Mobley.

"They saved us," Dunn said of the songwriters. A formidable songwriter in his own right, he's thankful CMA gives songwriters an opportunity to shine alongside artists. "They came in and carried a big load of the Brooks & Dunn thing and Ronnie Dunn throughout this whole process."

The "magic moment" of writing a song that will eventually become a No. 1



ABOVE: KIP MOORE PERFORMS AT THE IRIDIUM IN NEW YORK CITY FOR A SPECIAL CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES EPISODE OF PUBLIC TELEVISION'S "FRONT AND CENTER."

BELOW: LINDSEY LEE, NUWO BUTTERCOURT, STEVEN TYLER AND ERIC PASLEY PERFORM AT THE "FRONT AND CENTER" TAPING OF THE CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES AT THE MELROSE BALLROOM IN NEW YORK.

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GLOBETROTTER

CHRIS YOUNG CROSSES BORDERS TO LAY GROUNDWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL CAREER

by COURTNEY BEEBE and CHRIS TALBOTT

When Chris Young went to Germany in 2015, he went with a purpose.

Like most performers, he wanted to sell a few tickets and see the sights in a land Country Music artists don't often visit. But he was also on a fact-finding mission as a member of the CMA Board of Directors, searching for evidence of a Country Music fan base and laying the groundwork for not only his return, but increased traffic by his colleagues and peers.

"A lot of people were saying that's the next market they'd like to expand into," Young said. "When I come to the [CMA] International Committee I can say, 'I've been there. I know what's possible. There are definitely Country Music fans there.'"

Young wasn't certain what to expect on his first visit overseas during the 2013 CMA Songwriter Series in the United Kingdom, but immediately saw the possibilities.

"I thought people over there would think, 'Who is this guy? We don't know anything about him,'" Young said. He quickly found that the once very real barrier of distance has been removed in the Internet age. A guy from Murfreesboro can catch on pretty easily in Munich, it turns out. "People go on YouTube and the Internet and find what they want to find. By the time I got there, they knew stuff of mine. It was just really, really cool."

After discovering this, Young has made a concerted effort to grow an international audience, and to advocate that others do the same.

He joined Brad Paisley's European tour in 2014, tapping both Paisley's fan base and his deep understanding of the business.

"He helped me build that market as much as anything that I have done," Young said. "And he's right: You're going over to another country. You're playing a secular form of music from the U.S. Good music is good music, so people are finding it and falling in love with it. Now Country's as popular as it's ever been."

That's holding true everywhere. Last year Young performed on three continents outside his North American tour dates, with sold-out shows in Europe, a tour of U.S. military bases in Asia and headlining slots at Australian festivals.

"It's not every day you wake up playing Country Music in Tokyo," Young said. "We headlined the CMC Festival in Australia early last year and had over 10,000 people. We sold out shows in Europe. It's just a really, really great feeling as far as what we're accomplishing there and the connection we're able to make with the fans."

Young thinks of these as the first footsteps on a long journey, and his team is focused on helping him clear the way.

"Chris understands the importance of building an international audience," said Rob Beckham, Young's agent who serves as co-head of WME's Nashville office and is a member of the CMA Board. "Chris took it a step further by going to Glasgow, Scotland and Manchester, UK and Germany. It was very fulfilling to be able to help him get to that point, but it relies on the artist wanting to go around the world to actually create a fan base."

Young has long been aware of the value of putting in the work. He got his start as a teen who won his fans one and two at a time through a grassroots effort that spread from his nearby hometown, then to Music Row and now around the world. There was a time when he hand-built his own booths in the CMA Music Festival Fan Fair pavilion. Today he's one of Country's most distinct voices and young hit-makers. He's also something of an ambassador.

"Anyone who has seen Chris live has seen how easily he connects to audiences – and he's been able to achieve some good radio play here, which is very significant if you consider that we don't have dedicated Country radio in the U.K.," said Milly Olykan, Festival and Events Director at The O2 in London and member of the CMA Board. "I think a contemporary artist like Chris helps promote the genre as not being perhaps what people think it is."

CHRIS YOUNG PERFORMS FOR A SOLD-OUT CROWD AT THE O2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE IN LONDON.



That's been something of Young's specialty since he entered the business as an eager teenager. Already more than a decade into his career, he's the rare Country artist to release five major label albums by the age of 30. Young recently scored his seventh No. 1 hit with the title track from his 2015 RCA Records Nashville release, *I'm Comin' Over*. The album debuted at No. 1 and marks the most mature, complete vision Young has assembled as an artist. Already established as a hit songwriter, Young expanded his scope further, taking control of the recording process with collaborator and co-producer, Corey Crowder.

Young was so consumed with the writing and recording process, he spent his own money to fund the initial sessions until he revealed the music to Sony Music Nashville executives.

"We were all really nervous until we saw week 1 results on the single," Young said. "Then we had an incredible fan response and did the biggest first week sales I've ever done. It's been fun watching this thing and there's a lot to be done. There's a lot more room to grow. I'm excited about this. Everything's coming together at the right time."

ChrisYoungCountry.com

"PEOPLE GO ON YOUTUBE AND THE INTERNET AND FIND WHAT THEY WANT TO FIND. BY THE TIME I GOT THERE, THEY KNEW STUFF OF MINE. IT WAS JUST REALLY, REALLY COOL."

- Chris Young

photos: Chris Young; David McGeer; Art Agency



THE PROFESSORS PERRY

The Band Perry participate in a CMA EDU panel moderated by "America's Morning Show" host Blair Garner (far left) at Vanderbilt University.

(L-R) LESLIE SATCHER, MATT JENKINS, CHRIS DESTEFANO AND ASHLEY GORLEY PERFORM AT THE FINAL CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES PERFORMANCE OF 2015 AT JOE'S PUB IN NEW YORK CITY.



SHARING THE JOY

CMA Chief Executive Officer Sarah Trahern (center) and members of the U.S. Marine Corps collect Toys for Tots donations before the "CMA Country Christmas" taping at the Grand Ole Opry House.



photos: Band Perry - Caitlin Harris/CMA; Songwriters - Kevin Ylarola/CMA; Marine Corps - Hunter Berry/CMA

GLOBE AND GAVEL

In recognition of their tireless volunteer service to the CMA Board of Directors, outgoing CMA Chairman Frank Bumstead (r), immediate past President and 2016 CMA Chairman John Esposito (l), receive the crystal gavel and globe, respectively, from CMA Chief Executive Officer Sarah Trahern (center) at the December CMA Board meeting.



COLLEGE CONNECTION WITH EDU

Corey Smith (center) meets with students at the University of Alabama's CMA EDU chapter after a campus visit and Q&A session.

CMA HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Steve Turner (third from left) receives the CMA Foundation Humanitarian Award at the December CMA Board meeting from (l-r) Bill Denny, lifetime CMA Board member; Judy Turner (spouse); Country Music Hall of Fame member Brenda Lee; Jon Loba, former CMA Awards and Recognition Committee Chairman and Executive Vice President, BBR Music Group; Sarah Trahern, CMA Chief Executive Officer; Frank Bumstead, outgoing CMA Board Chairman and Chairman, Flood, Bumstead, McCready & McCarthy, Inc.



photos: top and bottom: photos - Christian Bottorff/CMA, Corey Smith - Hodges Urby

HIGHER AND HIGHER

CMA FOUNDATION TO REACH RECORD LEVEL OF GIVING IN 2016

by WENDY PEARL



The CMA Foundation is putting its money where its mission is with a record \$2.68 million earmarked for the support of in-school and after-school music education programs in 2016.

The grants set a donation record and bring the Country Music Association and the CMA Foundation's total commitment to music education since 2006 to more than \$13.68 million.

The funds will be used to build recording studios, support teacher training, purchase instruments, fund musical theater productions, summer camp programs, and much more. Early in the creation of the CMA Foundation, the focus was on purchasing instruments, primarily in Metro Nashville Public Schools, which hadn't received new instruments in decades. Five years and thousands of instruments later, the CMA Foundation Board has made the strategic shift to focusing not only on providing instruments, but expanding efforts to support sustainable, quality music education through partnerships with established programs nationwide.

CMA also is funding a research study in partnership with the Give a Note Foundation, created in 2011 by the National Association for Music Education, which represents 60,000 music teachers across the country. The grant will fund a national study on access to music education that can be analyzed and made available to organizations that wish to make informed decisions for philanthropic gifts in music education — where the need exists, and where the infrastructure exists, to make gifts impactful.

"It has become clear as we review hundreds of grant applications each year that being able to identify those regions and cities with the greatest need would be very beneficial — not just to the CMA Foundation, but to many other grant-making organizations," said Ron Samuels, past Chairman of the CMA Foundation Board of Directors. "The need for

"KEEPING TALENTED STUDENTS
ENGAGED IN AFTER-SCHOOL
LESSONS CAN FURTHER DEVELOP
THEIR SKILLS AS MUSICIANS AND
PERFORMERS."

— Ron Samuels

(ABOVE) DARIUS RUCKER SPEAKS AT THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES EVENT AS THE CMA FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES A \$1 MILLION INVESTMENT IN MUSIC EDUCATION. (NEXT PAGE) CHARLES KELLEY (R) WATCHES ON AS ELIJAH MICHEAUX, A MEMBER OF THE NAFME NATIONAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE, SHOWS OFF HIS TRUMPET SKILLS AT THE NAFME NATIONAL IN-SERVICE CLOSING CONCERT WHERE THE CMA FOUNDATION ANNOUNCED A \$150,000 GRANT TO THE ORGANIZATION'S GIVE A NOTE FOUNDATION.

music education programs is clear. Determining where the need is the greatest will help us better focus our resources."

Of the \$2.68 million that will be distributed in 2016, \$1 million will go to Metro Nashville Public Schools, bringing CMA's decade-long commitment to \$10 million. In partnership with MNPS and the Nashville Public Education Foundation, the CMA grant goes directly toward providing instruments, teacher enrichment and music education for more than 85,000 local students.

"When this program began, it was important to fund the purchase of instruments, which hadn't been purchased in decades," said Joe Galante, Chairman of the CMA Foundation Board. "Now that we have instruments in every Metro school, the CMA Foundation has expanded its support to include teacher education, which is critical in developing and maintaining strong, sustainable music programs."

Creating a bridge with after-school music programs is equally important to the CMA Foundation Board. One such program being funded again in 2016 is the W.O. Smith Nashville Community Music School, which was created in 1984 with the purpose of making quality music instruction available to talented, interested, deserving children from low-income families at the nominal fee of 50 cents a lesson.

"By providing funding for the outstanding music programs at W.O. Smith, we are able to supplement and bridge the work we are doing with Metro Nashville Public Schools," Samuels said. "Keeping these talented students engaged in after-school lessons can further develop their skills as musicians and performers."

Studies indicate students who participate in music and the arts are more likely to graduate, have better attendance rates and earn higher GPAs than those not enrolled in arts classes. The CMA Foundation recognizes the benefits of music education in keeping kids engaged and the importance of supporting local music educators.

Nashville Mayor Megan Barry, who spoke at the MNPS grant announcement, lauded the partnership with the CMA Foundation as an example of what cities across the country must do to have a real impact in public education.

"I am grateful for the CMA Foundation's deep commitment to our city," Barry said. "It is a shining example of what is possible through strong public/private partnerships, and it is showing the country the value and importance of music education. Nashville is proud to be Music City, and we are incredibly fortunate to have such a strong investment from the music industry."

Visit
CMAworld.com
for a full list
of grant
recipients.



SPECIAL CONNECTION

CMA ANNOUNCES \$3 MILLION GIFT AS SOUND OF MUSIC FLOWS AT MONROE CARELL JR. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

by WENDY PEARL

Nine-year-old Jose had never played drums before he became a patient at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. But he was banging like a seasoned pro for Lady Antebellum's Hillary Scott and an audience of hospital executives and industry guests during a recent donation announcement.

During the enthusiastic solo from his hospital bed upstairs, Jose grazed his arm. "My husband is our drummer and he does that all the time!" Scott said as she watched Jose's moves on a computer monitor. "He is always covered in Band-Aids."

The sweet exchange perfectly captured the relationship between the Children's Hospital, the Country Music industry, and the children who benefit from the facilities and medical staff.

Following the performance, and with the help of former and current patients from the hospital, Scott revealed that Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital would receive a significant philanthropic gift of \$3 million from the Country Music Association to help fund a four-floor expansion.

"Country Music is a format known for telling stories. Now the Country Music community will be known for building them," said Kix Brooks, who hosted the announcement and serves on boards for both CMA and Children's Hospital. "Building floors means helping more children and families — locally, regionally, and around the world — and I can't imagine anyone with a heart not embracing what is going on at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at

Vanderbilt. When you see the courage of a child, or the face of a parent, you know how important it is for our industry to support the ongoing growth of Children's and why it is life changing."

"I know I can speak for all the other artists when I say that we have an immense appreciation for everything the hospital is doing in our very own backyard for some of the bravest and strongest kids out there," Scott said. "The smiles I saw on their faces today, despite what they're facing, is exactly why we're dedicated to being sure as many children and families get the best care possible."

CMA's gift represents the Association's further investment in the health and well-being of children throughout the region and will be used to support costs associated with Children's Hospital's four-floor, 160,000-square-foot construction expansion. Children's Hospital is adding the new space to better meet the needs of the growing number of critically ill children and families who come from across the region to receive the highly specialized pediatric health care services that only the hospital can provide.

The gift from CMA and its membership marks a high point in the longstanding relationship between the Nashville neighbor organizations that reside just blocks apart. VUMC has long supported CMA, its membership, and their families through



Photos: Kayla Schoen/CMA



ongoing efforts to provide health care services, both conventional and those tailored to help artists protect their health and achieve full potential.

VUMC's participation in and support of CMA's Instrumental Healthcare program allows CMA members and their families access to affordable health care through the Medical Center's diverse adult and pediatric specialty and sub-specialty programs. VUMC also has long supported the unique needs of CMA artists through such highly specialized health care programs as the Vanderbilt Voice Center and the Musicians Hearing Center. Through its LifeFlight Event Medicine program, VUMC also provides emergency medical services to support the CMA Music Festival each year.

More than 200 artists have brought the healing power of music to Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt over the past three years.

"CMA and our members have benefited a great deal from our longstanding relationship with Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the Children's Hospital," said Sarah Trahern, CMA Chief Executive Officer. "Our partnership is the definition of reciprocal care: Vanderbilt has provided affordable health care options to our members and staff through CMA's health insurance programs; they are in our 'backyard' attending to the immediate needs of the industry; and they are widely supported by our artist community including Lady Antebellum, Dierks Bentley and Rascal Flatts. Supporting their ongoing growth is mutually beneficial."

childrenshospital.vanderbilt.org

(FACING PAGE) NINE-YEAR-OLD JOSE PERFORMS A DRUM SOLO VIA FACETIME FOR ALLISON CUTLER, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER, AND HILLARY SCOTT OF LADY ANTEBELLUM DURING A PRESS CONFERENCE ANNOUNCING CMA'S \$3 MILLION CHARITABLE GIFT. (ABOVE) HILLARY SCOTT ANNOUNCES CMA'S GIFT TO MONROE CARELL JR. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

"COUNTRY MUSIC IS
A FORMAT KNOWN
FOR TELLING STORIES.
NOW THE COUNTRY
MUSIC COMMUNITY
WILL BE KNOWN FOR
BUILDING THEM."

— Kix Brooks

GRANGER SMITH

Granger Smith didn't have an interesting story to tell while living in Nashville more than a decade ago. It seemed like a small thing, but it bothered him.

"If someone said, 'Well, tell me about yourself,' I would say, 'Well, I'm living down the street and I'm writing songs,'" Smith said. "That was kind of the extent of my story. I hated that. I didn't move back to Texas to start a band in order to make a story. It just kind of unfolded that way."

Now Smith has one hell of a story to tell: Country Music outlier builds the kind of career most aspiring artists seek. He accumulated 4.5 million followers on social media and 40 million video views—without the help of an established label, booking agent or manager. Now he's returning to Nashville on his own terms.

When Smith releases his Wheelhouse Records debut album, *Remington*, co-produced with Frank Rogers, in March, it will be his eighth studio album since 1999, following a string of independent releases. He has played thousands of shows with a super-tight band of buddies, and his brother Tyler is his manager.

Now that Smith has tapped into Music Row, he sees the upside. Broken Bow Music Group executives offered him a contract after he managed to put his single, "Backroad Song," on the charts himself.

"When we signed, we were charting on *Billboard* at like No. 56," Smith said. "It wouldn't have gotten any higher than that. Then [Broken Bow] came in and now here we are, 10 weeks later, we've got a Top 15 record. They have definitely just killed it in that aspect."

Just as importantly, Broken Bow has promised to let him keep following his own path.

"I'm so grateful that we took that path. When I'm sitting in front of a radio station in wherever city in the U.S., I'm still happy to be able to have some kind of story to tell them."

GrangerSmith.com



photo: Eric Ryan Anderson



photo: courtesy UMG/Aristo Media

CLARE DUNN

Clare Dunn jokes that if she doesn't make it now, after achieving a lifetime goal of a major label record deal, it will be all her fault.

Following the release of a well-received self-titled EP last fall, the Colorado native is self-producing her Universal Music Nashville debut, due in 2016, choosing to work with a handful of friends she'd met through music.

"I finally had an opportunity to do what I've always dreamed of," Dunn said. "I've made this record a million times in my head, and I knew that I just now needed the chance to go do it, and they gave that to me. My record label believed in me. It's hard to comprehend for me sometimes."

Watch Dunn perform, and you'll see why Universal executives are hands-off. A rowdy child with boundless energy that even the family farm couldn't tame, Dunn has logged thousands of performance hours as a dancer and musician. She briefly studied with Janet Jackson's dance crew and put 100,000 miles a year on her Ford touring after graduating from Belmont University with a songwriting degree — which she paid for by driving a heavy-duty truck while home in the summers.

The result is a fearless artist who knows how to command a room, no matter how big. Take her appearance at halftime of the Titans–Raiders game in November, where she faced every hurdle known to a musician. As she walked out on stage, almost invisible tucked high under the scoreboard, a blast of cold rain hit her and sent much of the already wet crowd headed for the concession stands.

"I hadn't attended a football game before," Dunn said. "So when I saw them all leave the stadium seeking shelter, I thought, 'Oh, duh, Clare.'"

"It's OK," Dunn said with a laugh. "It's just my practice for the Super Bowl."

ClareDunn.com

MAREN MORRIS

Maren Morris knows how to grab your attention.

The Texas-born singer wondered how fans might react to her music, so she put out an exploratory EP last fall. The self-titled five-song set quickly drew more than a million spins and started a run of dominoes that led to a spot on Little Big Town's tour and a deal with Columbia Nashville.

By the time she showed up at a recent Spotify concert event for Country Music's most exciting new artists, the room of industry insiders was already hooked, singing along, as she performed.

"The whole point of it is to connect with people," Morris said. "When I can see from the stage people starting to sing the lyrics, and you can tell they recognize the song, and they're moved by it, and they get excited by some of my other stuff, it's exciting for me. You never really know until you get up there if you're reaching somebody or not."

Morris has gotten nothing but validation since moving to Nashville. As she spoke in early January, Morris was set to release her Columbia Nashville debut single, "My Church." The song, written with writing and producing partner Busbee, drew an immediate response from fans of the EP and will now get a proper release to Country radio.

She'll also hit the road with Keith Urban later in 2016, another milestone.

After spending 10 years performing and recording in Texas and three more in Nashville as a songwriter, Morris is about to learn how the whole wide world feels about her. And she can't wait.

"I'm so excited about this year and all that will happen," Morris said. "I know there's going to be so many moments that I really want to document and never forget because this is such a dream of mine, to be able to travel and meet new people and collaborate with new people and share my music and try to make those connections every single night."

MarenMorris.com



photos: Sony Music Nashville



photo: Eric Brown

WILLIAM MICHAEL MORGAN

Scan through today's Country Music airplay charts and William Michael Morgan stands out.

A leader of a new wave of traditional Country Music singers, Morgan's voice is unabashedly old-school velvet. It's so smooth, Warner Music Nashville executive and Morgan's co-producer Scott Hendricks called it flawless and jaw-dropping.

The Mississippi native also wears a cowboy hat, and he does it without a hint of irony. He even leans toward bashful humility when talking about his debut single, the romantic "I Met a Girl."

"Obviously it's not 'Today I Started Loving You Again' by Merle Haggard," Morgan said with a rumbly laugh. "I wish it could be. More than anybody in the world I wish it could be. We're just trying to make the music that we know how to make."

Morgan comes by his sound honestly. He formed his own band, comprised of middle-aged musicians who all shared Morgan's love of Haggard, George Jones and Keith Whitley, at age 14. He played honky-tonks on weekends before moving to Nashville permanently at 18.

"We didn't really have much of a name for the band, we just loved to get together and play," Morgan said. "The great thing about finding those guys is they all loved the same kind of music I did and we just blended so well. I was lucky enough to have a steel guitar player all those years, and I just fell in love with that sound."

Fans are, too, and Warner Music Nashville executives are prepping for a larger launch in 2016 with either an EP or full-length album. There has been a steep increase in songwriting callouts, vocal accompaniment requests and live appearances.

"It's the fast lane," the lanky singer said. "You're getting calls every day saying, 'Hey, we just added four more shows.' It's amazing. I'm just trying to keep up with everything. Trying to tell my mama where I'm going all the time."

WilliamMichaelMorgan.com

Debut Spotlight compiled by CHRIS TALBOTT

FRONT AND CENTER

... continued from page 17

hit is something Dunn, Eldredge and Rucker all referred to as a rare, yet special, moment.

Rucker, who shared the stage with nine different songwriters responsible for penning some of the most memorable songs of his Country career, said that “songwriters are the backbone” of Nashville.

The onetime front man for Hootie & the Blowfish turned Country crooner tipped his hat to songwriters like Chris DuBois and Rivers Rutherford — “There’s something special about seeing an artist and songwriter sitting on a chair working on a song” — along with his longtime pal Charles Kelley.

Rucker teamed with Kelley, a founding member of the seven-time CMA Award-winning trio Lady Antebellum, and Nathan Chapman to write his No. 1 hit, “Homegrown Honey.”

“After we wrote it, I said, ‘This is my first single,’” recalled Rucker, who wrote the song a day before going through 50 or more songs and selecting which ones would make the final list for his latest album *Southern Style*. “(Kelley) told me I had a week, ‘and if you don’t cut it, I’m going to cut it.’”

Kelley added, “It felt like a hit song, and sure enough it was another No. 1 for him.”

Rucker, friends with Kelley for nine years, joked about the two of them having played hundreds of rounds of golf together before ever writing a song. It was Kelley who suggested they write with Chapman.

Kelley said that Rucker’s success in Nashville — he’s scored seven No. 1 hit singles on the Country charts — has come in large part because he’s embraced the songwriting community.

“The songwriters are a huge part of what drives the success of the genre,” Rucker said. “Without these stories, there’s nothing.”

DuBois said sharing the stage with artists like Rucker “is an opportunity we don’t get very often as songwriters.” DuBois has written 14 No. 1 hits dating back to 2000, including Rucker’s 2009 chart-topping single “It Won’t Be Like This for Long.”

“Nashville is a unique community,” DuBois continued. “Songwriters are like a brotherhood and the collaboration is a big part of what makes Country Music thrive.”

Throughout the taping of each episode of “Front and Center,” the artists also talked about the importance of camaraderie and friendships with songwriters. Dunn said he hopes Country fans and viewers are able to “experience the unique relationship” that an artist has with songwriters.

“There’s an adage in this town that it’s about the song, not the singer, and that’s very real,” Dunn said. “I hope you see some of the bond and the relationships these guys have. They become friends over the years, and it doesn’t hurt to have their phone numbers.”

Eldredge feels that when songwriters come together, they get to know one another on a different level.

“The birth process of a song from the very beginning till the final moment of seeing people cry to your song or seeing people laugh to your song or smile or blush to your song or throw crazy things on stage,” Eldredge concluded, “that’s why I got into music.”

CMASongwritersSeries.com

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MERYL JOHNSON
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Meryl Johnson, a Nashville native, will be responsible for development and management of CMA's digital presence, including CMA's website, mobile platforms, digital partnerships, video distribution, database development, and digital advertising initiatives.

"The digital landscape has made a significant impact on how we reach our key audiences," said Damon Whiteside, CMA Senior Vice President of Marketing and Strategic Partnerships. "Meryl has a proven track record for creating successful digital campaigns and partnerships across radio, film and television. Having someone on our team with her unique experience in entertainment is key as we leverage new and existing digital platforms and strategies for heightening the awareness of Country Music."

Johnson comes to CMA with more than a decade of experience in entertainment media. Her previous post was as Director of Digital Marketing at Warner Bros. Pictures in Los Angeles where she managed the development of digital marketing campaigns, including paid media, social media, creative, mobile/tablet apps, CRM programs, digital public relations, promotions, and experiential events.

Johnson's previous affiliations include Focus Features, NBC Universal, Clear Channel Broadcasting and Cumulus Broadcasting.

photos: Christian Bottorff/CMA



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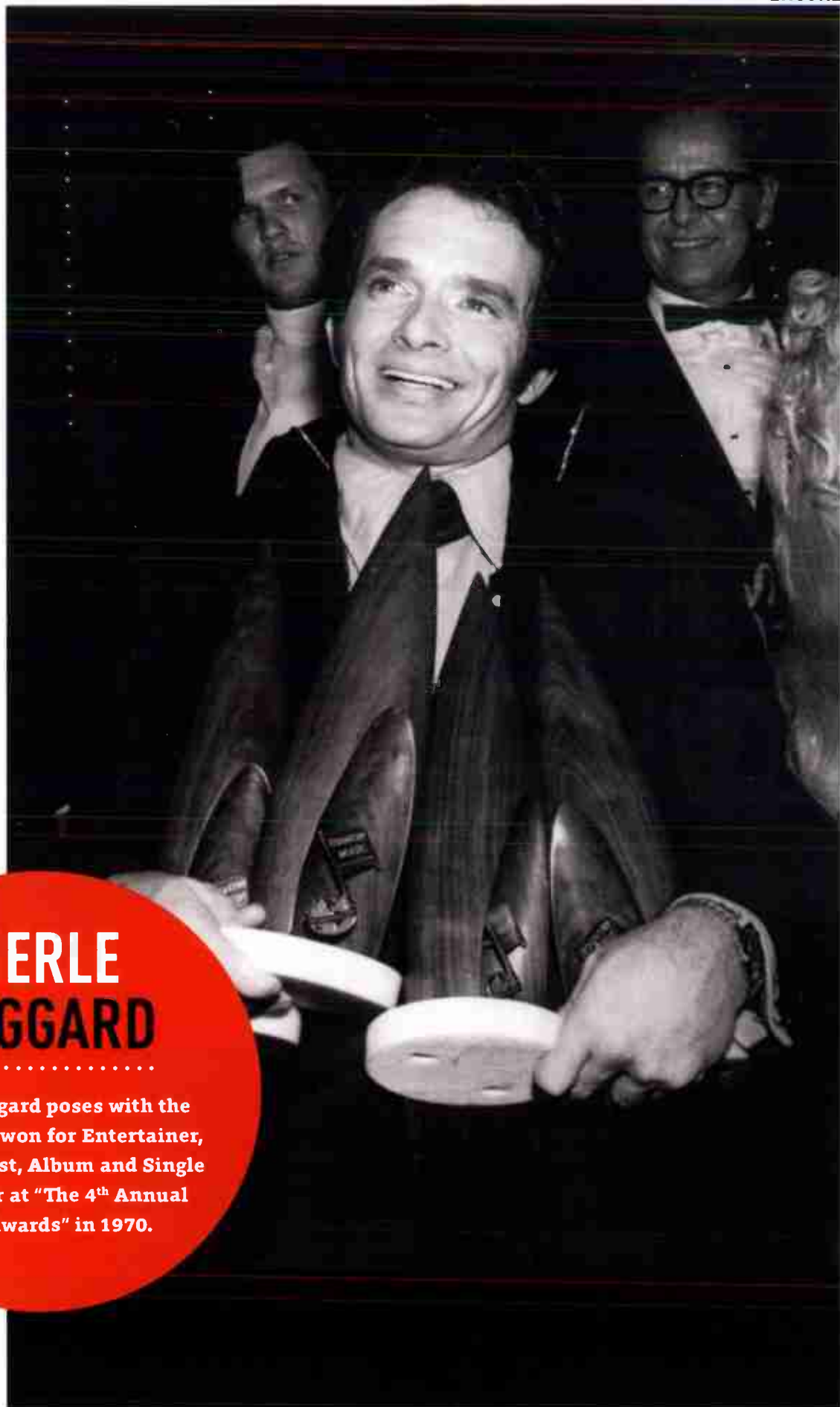
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MERLE HAGGARD

.....

Merle Haggard poses with the trophies he won for Entertainer, Male Vocalist, Album and Single of the Year at "The 4th Annual CMA Awards" in 1970.

Photo: CMA archives

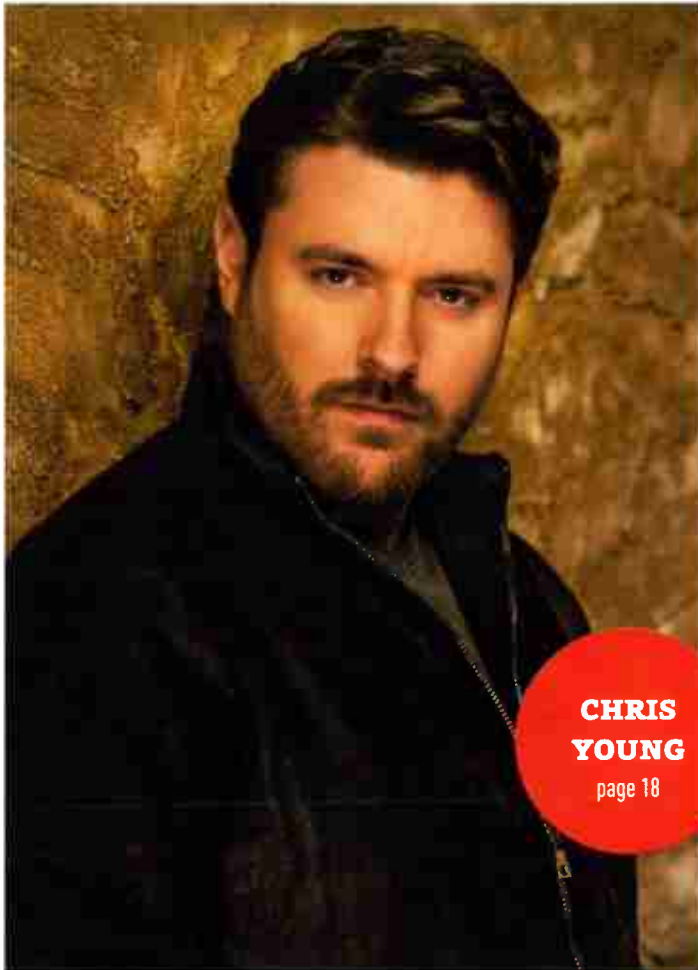


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