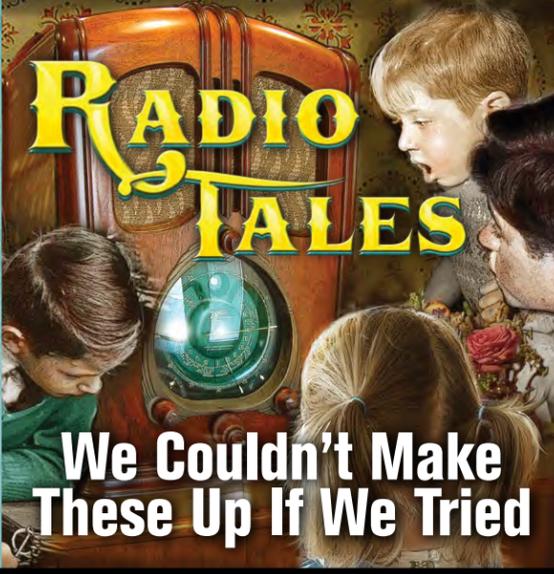


# WOMEN IN COUNTRY



The Gatekeepers  
The Creators  
The Numbers  
.....  
The Whole Story



We Couldn't Make  
These Up If We Tried

# CLAY HUNNICUTT THE INTERVIEW

LABEL  
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INSIDE!



# COUNTRY AIRCHECK

FEBRUARY 2015



THE NEW  
SMASH  
FROM  
**GARY  
ALLAN**  
"HANGOVER  
TONIGHT"  
LET  
HANGOVER  
HIT YOUR  
PLAYLIST  
ON MONDAY  
(3/2)!

MCA  
NASHVILLE  
A UNIVERSAL MUSIC COMPANY

★ **ACM VOTERS UNITE** ★



**JASON ALDEAN**

**NOMINATED FOR**

- ★ **Entertainer of the Year** ★
- ★ **Male Vocalist of the Year** ★
- ★ **Album of the Year "Old Boots, New Dirt"** ★



★ **ACM VOTERS UNITE** ★



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- ★ **Album of the Year "Old Boots, New Dirt"** ★





## Almost everyone has one. At least one. Something about radio brings out the wacky and sometimes downright unbelievable in people. Over a beer, at CRS or backstage at a show, folks share their favorite stories of their days in radio ... and Country Aircheck's been listening.

### Scorn Field

"At KSON/San Diego we'd just done a promotion to win a trip to the CMA Awards when I got a voicemail on my work phone," says Cumulus' **Greg Frey**. "A lady said, 'My fiancé won the trip and I want to put together a surprise for him. Call me back. And if he answers, don't let him know I called you because I don't want to spoil my surprise.' So I called the number, she answered and I said, 'Hi, I'm Greg Frey calling from KSON. I got your message. What can I do for you?' She said, 'Well, I'm curious why KSON would give away a trip to Nashville for one.' I replied, 'Um, no ma'am, it's a trip for two.' And as soon as I said it, I realized what was going on. She immediately said, 'I knew it! That son-of-a-bitch! Who's he taking?' So, yeah. He had another girl on the side and ended up not taking the trip."

### Doggie Bag

"When I worked at WMSI/Jackson, MS, there was a guy named Art Reed who moved to middays out of afternoons after something like 20 years, with me taking over the shift," says MCA's **Van Haze**. "He was a quirky fella, and one day I came in early as usual for my shift and Art was in the studio shuffling around and crying. He'd pull himself together, do a break, then start crying again. I went in and said, 'Art, what's wrong?' He said, 'My dog died this morning right before I had to rush here to work.' I was like, 'Art, I'm so sorry, man. If you need to leave early, I'm happy to take over now.' He said it was okay, he would finish his shift. Then I asked him what he did with the body and he said, 'I didn't know what to do, so I wrapped him up in a garbage bag and put him in my fridge.' Wait, what? 'Well, yeah. I didn't have time to bury him.' So I said, 'Art. You need to go home right now, take your dog out of the fridge and bury him ... And clean your fridge.'"

### The Eyes Have It

"After a Justin Moore concert in Columbus, a lot of radio people – including from other markets – along with the record reps and Justin, were hanging at the bar across from the venue," says WQMX/Akron's **Sue Wilson**. "I was sitting at a table telling a story and waving my hands, as I always do. Justin leaned down to hear me better and my finger went straight into his eye. It was awful. He immediately grabbed his eye and within minutes it was swelling. He said it was his fault

but I thought it was mine and felt horrible. They ended up taking him to an eye doctor for a prescription, drops and a patch he had to wear onstage at his performance the next day in DC! The following CRS, we posed for this picture. He is such a good sport."

### Burnin' Thing Afire

"In the mid-'90s I was working a club gig for KDGE/Dallas sponsored by Tabasco, which had just come out with those tiny little bottles," says Big Machine's **Alex Valentine**. "The venue was a lot closer to the Oklahoma border than it was to Dallas, and both OU and OSU football players were in attendance. We decided to have a Tabasco drinking contest and my promotions assistant, a geeky kid who we'll call Vincent, was charged with opening the bottles and handing them to the contestants. These guys were putting down, 30, 40, 50 of these and he was opening all of them. After it was all over, my friends and I stayed and partied a little bit before hopping in the limo that was going to take us back to the station. We're driving down I-75 late in a pouring rainstorm and someone in the car yells, 'Hey, is that the Edge Jeep?' We slow down and, sure enough, it's the station vehicle on the side of the road, with Vincent standing in front of it slapping at the hood. We stop and find out he had

pulled over to relieve himself and, in the most painful way possible, figured out he still had Tabasco all over his hands. With his dingus on fire, he was scooping rainwater off the hood of the Jeep into his pants. Luckily, our limo driver told us his last client had been a couple on their anniversary, and had left a can of whipped cream in the car. So we handed that to Vincent as a cooling agent, jumped back in the limo and rolled on back to town."

### Get Yer Shine On

"When I was programming WKKT/Charlotte, my Dir./Promotion Mark Gray and I drove down to Columbia, SC for a George Strait show," says Curb's **Ryan Dokke**. "Sarah Johns was opening and Keifer Thompson was actually her tour manager at the time. Sarah's from Kentucky and had some moonshine with her, so she hands it to me and says, 'You go first.' I'd never had it before, being a kid from the Northwest. So I tip it back and gulp, gulp, gulp before passing it on. The others are staring at me and someone says, 'Never had moonshine before have you? Sit tight, bro.' Sarah goes, 'You're going to feel that in about 20 minutes.' Sure enough, we're standing near the soundboard watching George when all of a sudden my legs go wobbly. I catch myself, trying to play like nothing happened. I turn to Mark and say, 'We gotta go.' So we leave and, I'm not proud of it, but I urinated on the side of the Colonial Center before passing out in Mark's car, which broke down on the way home. Eventually, we all made it back safe and sound, but that was my first experience with moonshine."

### Family Eviction

"My father was a radio guy at [Top 40] KLIF-AM/Dallas, which was the biggest radio station on the planet," says KVOO/Tulsa's **Rowdy Yates**. "Everybody wanted to be on KLIF and everybody wanted to sound like KLIF. There was even a sign above the door that said 'America's most imitated radio station.' And it was. One day when I was about five years old, my dad dragged me up to the office because he had to pull a relief shift for somebody. It just happened to be a weekend that The Osmonds were in Dallas-Fort Worth to play Six Flags. Donny and Marie were in the studio on-air with Mike Sullivan. The rest of the Osmond family were uncontrolled, unsupervised and just terrorizing the hallways upstairs and downstairs. Well my dad thought they were just a bunch of kids who managed to get inside an unlocked door. He rounded them all up and threw them out. 'Get your little asses out of here! Go home! Get out of here, kids!' I'm trying to tell him, 'Dad, wait! That's ...,' but he's just not hearing it. And sure enough, Mike Sullivan came walking out of the studio with whoever the record guy was and says, 'Hey Joe, have you seen where the Osmond children went?'"

### Bark At The Whom?

"Not long after 9/11, Ozzy Osbourne was trying to come up with a patriotic name for a tour he had coming up and the PD of our Rock station at the time, Paul Cannell, suggested *Ozz Bless America* to his record rep," says KXKS/Shreveport, LA's **Chris Evans**. "Word made it back to Ozzy, he liked the idea and they ended up going



Sue Wilson  
and Justin Moore

# RADIO TALES

with it. Wanting to thank Paul for the idea, Ozzy thought he'd call him at the office to show his appreciation. Our receptionist Roberta was really more a rap fan than a rock fan and wasn't familiar with Ozzy Osbourne at all. Worse, she could be a little overly protective and tough when it came to call screening. One day the phone rang and this hard-to-understand, stuttering, slurred voice asked for Paul. Anybody who's heard Ozzy talk knows he sounds sort of out of it. Roberta was sure it was just some stoned Rock listener trying to get to Paul, who was on the air. So she coldly told him no and hung up on him! Ozzy called right back trying to explain himself and again – this time a lot more adamant. Roberta made it clear: 'I don't know no Ozzy Osborne and you ain't talkin' to Paul!' Click! Paul never did get to talk to Ozzy, but ended up getting the message either through the label or by email. None of us would have known it even happened had Roberta not mentioned later that some drunk guy kept calling and insisting on talking to Paul. After a few questions we finally figured out it was Ozzy."

## Pale Ale

"I was doing afternoons at a big top-ranked AC station in the South in the '90s," an anonymous radio pro says. "Our chief engineer was probably in his late 70s and had a habit of being hard to find. More often than not, he was hiding out at the transmitter napping, drinking or both. One afternoon the hotline rang and it was him. He was clearly pretty tight and asked me if I'd play 'Whiter Shade Of Pale' by Procol Harum. It was afternoon drive in the middle of the week right about five o'clock, so I told him that wasn't gonna happen. He seemed to understand, I got him off the phone and got back to work. About two minutes later in the middle of some Phil Collins song, the station went dark – dead air. Just a hum in the monitors. I started freaking out trying to find his number to make sure he knew we were down. About that time the hotline rang. I picked it up and heard, 'Hey. How about playing that song now?' The drunk old bastard was listening out at the transmitter site and just pulled the plug! The PD got involved, though, and he put us back on fairly quickly. I thought for sure the guy was in big trouble, but he'd worked there a million years and even used to own part of it. Everyone but me and the PD got big laughs out of it."

## Cowboys From Hell

"When I was 15 or 16 I worked at a small-town AM Oldies radio station," says Big D & Bubba's **Patrick Thomas**. "One of my jobs was to get up early on Sunday morning and put on the *Mt. Calvary Baptist Church Hour*."

The church paid like \$300 to put their church service on the air every week. They would record their entire 60-minute service on cassette and my job was to play it back the following Sunday at 6am. You had to get there a little early to back time out of the satellite feed by playing music into the service. We could play whatever we wanted as long as it was Oldies from the library. My very last day at the station was a Sunday and at 5:55am I played Pantera's 'Cemetery Gates' just to see if anyone would notice. If they did, they couldn't fire me because I was already leaving. So the whole five-minute song plays and I'm thinking, 'I'm going to get away with this! No one's going to say anything!' Right about that time I see the request line ring. I answered and it was the preacher from the church! In this old Southern preacher voice he says, 'I don't think what just happened is very funny. I know there's some sort of mischief going on up there and someone will hear from me on Monday!' Oh well, right? But I had in my head the image of old women sitting at home waiting for *Mt. Calvary Baptist Church Hour* when suddenly their radios were set ablaze.

## Tongue End Groove

"Tyler Farr played one of the monthly Girl's Night Out shows I do with male artists and all female audience members," says KWEN/Tulsa's **Kristina Carlyle**. "I knew we were in trouble when I walked into the venue and could tell one of the girls near the stage was obviously already drunk at 7:45. She was shouting so loud I could hear her even after I ducked backstage. She kept shouting about how she liked my 'Easter dress,' basically heckling me while I was onstage until I acknowledged her. It wasn't mean, just drunken commentary throughout my remarks about our collection for hungry kids in the area. I finished by explaining that everybody gets to meet and take a picture with Tyler afterwards, then I pointed at her and said, 'But no touching, because I may be wearing an Easter dress but I can still kick your ass.' The whole bar burst into laughter. When Tyler came on she basically heckled him the whole time, too. Afterwards in the meet-and-greet line she told me she was going to lick Tyler's ear. I thought I had her talked out of it, but damned if she didn't try. She totally got his neck instead. Gross. Then Stephanie O'Donnell threw her out."

## Bread & Gutter

"We were in Tucson at one of the first remotes I did as a morning show host," says KPLX/Dallas' **Skip Mahaffey**. "It was at a really unique place at the time with 20 lanes of bowling, an outdoor volleyball pit, a gigantic sports bar, a great restaurant and it overlooked the Saguario National Monument. We were doing their grand opening on a Saturday in August so it was hotter than the hinges of hell."

To say the owner looked like he was not in the best of health was an understatement. He was a little guy with a big round belly that says 'heart attack waiting to happen.' He was running around, sweating profusely, and they told me he wanted to do his actual grand opening speech live on the air. A local TV crew wanted to get a view where you could kind of see the Saguario monument, which meant we were standing in one of the bowling lanes. So we do the big introduction, 'Ladies and gentlemen, here's Kyle Whats-His-Name.' Literally as I stuck the microphone in his face he said, 'Skip ... argh.' And that was it. His fist clenched, he grabbed his shirt and went down. As God as my witness, they said he was dead before he hit the ground ... which was good, because he face-planted on the ball-return. To add insult to injury, a ball came back at that moment and hit the guy in the head. Immediately, because you know I'm a radio pro, I stepped over the body and said, 'We're gonna be here 'til three this afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, so come on by!' Boy, was it awkward asking for that talent fee."

## Bucket Seats

"It's widely known that my former boss and consultant Rusty Walker had a fear of flying that impacted his travel for many years," consultant **Phil Hunt** says. "He eventually overcame it, but for a time, my title was SVP/Consulting Services & RV driver. On one road trip, we drove his 35-foot motor home from Iuka, MS to Albany, NY for a station visit at No. 1-rated WGNA. We then rented a car to drive to New York City to visit WYNY and newly appointed PD, the late Uncle Fred Horton. That's where the story begins. As we picked up the rental car Rusty noticed there was no ashtray. 'No big deal,' he said. 'We're both trying to quit so that's just fine.' As we traveled downstate we missed a turn and ended up on the George Washington Bridge going into New Jersey. By the grace of God we turned around, went back over the bridge and eventually took the right exit. In celebration, both of us fired up a cigarette and soon we were on our way to the Shelburne Hotel with the windows rolled down on a beautiful spring evening. Within a few blocks from our hotel, Rusty commented, 'You know, this town stinks.' I added, 'Air pollution here is just horrible.' There was more truth to that comment than anyone knew. As we pulled up to the hotel, Rusty stuck his head out the window to ask the doorman about parking when the guy frantically yelled out, 'Sir your back seat is on fire!' Rusty and I jumped out of the car as the hotel crew became the water bucket brigade and eventually snuffed it out. We'll never know exactly whose butt caught, but one thing I know for certain: Whether driving a burned-out rental car or a 35-foot motor home, Rusty always made you feel like you were riding in a Cadillac." **CAC**



Tyler Farr getting licked

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COUNTRY  
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# WHAT'S ON YOUR CHECKLIST?

- STRATEGIC EVALUATION-STATION ACTION PLAN
- RESEARCH: MUSIC TESTING, PERCEPTUAL STUDIES, AND FOCUS GROUPS
- DIGITAL STRATEGY/SOCIAL MEDIA EXECUTION AND SALES ADVICE
- SELLABLE PROMOTIONAL IDEAS
- TALENT COACHING

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7:00 p.m.

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Belmont Room



*Songwriters:*

Bob DiPiero

Casey Beathard

Rhett Akins

JT Harding

Ross Copperman

Jon Nite

Chris DeStefano

Jimmy Robbins

Liz Rose

Caitlyn Smith

Nicolle Galyon

Lori McKenna

Hillary Lindsey

*See you there!*

Make plans now. Limited seating available.



We are honored that several warriors from the Nashville area will be joining us.

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Westwood One



# THE DAVE REYNOLDS 2015

## The Bobby Bones Show Set To Debut First Ask Anything Chat Tuesday March 3, 2015 With UMG's Dierks Bentley

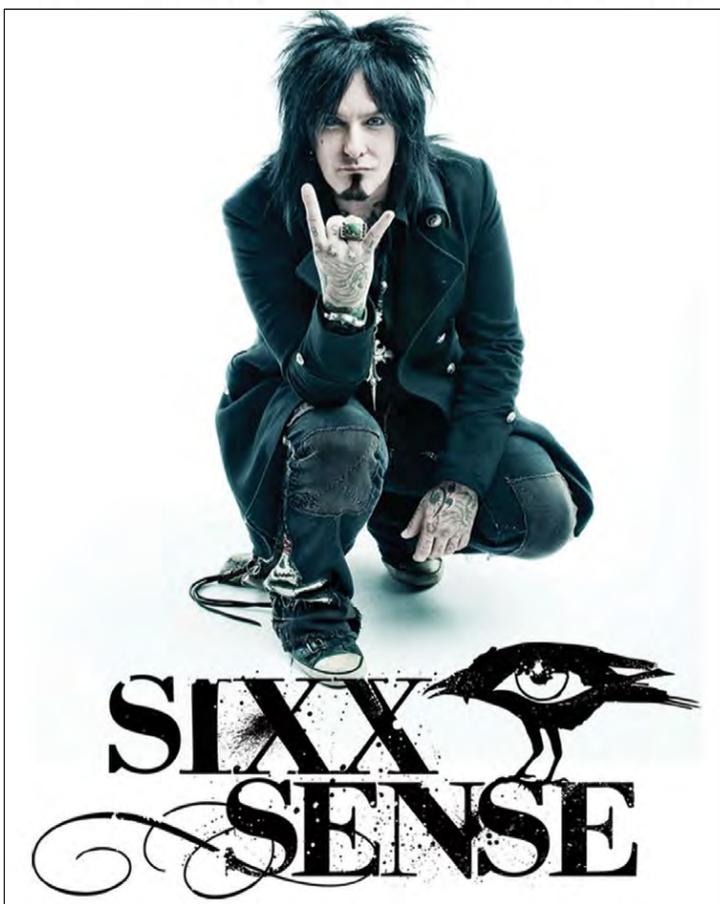


NASHVILLE (02/25/15) Ask Anything's Dave Reynolds announced today that his online chat company will be providing exclusive artist content for The Bobby Bones Show beginning Tuesday March 3, 2015. The inaugural Bobby Bones Ask Anything Chat will feature UMG Nashville artist Dierks Bentley. Show host Bobby Bones added, "we love any opportunity to get our listeners closer to the artists, and Ask Anything is another great opportunity." Dave Reynolds stated, "Thanks to Bobby Bones, Premiere Networks, Jennifer Leimgruber, Justin Cole, and Michael Bryan for allowing Ask Anything to be a part of their growing Nashville family. I'm hoping that when Bobby, Amy, Eddie, Ray, Alayna, and Nada find out I invented a glow in the dark toilet

seat they'll think I'm cool." It was also announced today by UMG Nashville that "Sounds Of Summer" tour opening acts Kip Moore and Canaan Smith will be a part of this first ever powerhouse Bobby Bones Ask Anything Chat lineup. UMG Nashville added, "UMG Nashville is excited to continue our long-standing involvement with the Ask Anything brand as it debuts the first ever Premiere Networks Bobby Bones Ask Anything Chat." Nationally syndicated by Premiere Networks, The Bobby Bones Show broadcasts on Country radio stations nationwide and is also available on [www.iHeartRadio.com](http://www.iHeartRadio.com) and the iHeartRadio mobile app, iHeartMedia's all-in-one free digital listening service. For more information, please visit [www.BobbyBones.com](http://www.BobbyBones.com).



## Nikki Sixx Enters Second Year Of Sixx Sense Ask Anything Chats



NASHVILLE (02/25/15) He was a highlight of the 2014 CRS, he just finished up dates in Japan on the final Motley Crue World Tour and now rock legend Nikki Sixx enters his second year of carrying exclusive Ask Anything Chats on his Sixx Sense radio show. Nikki noted, "Ask Anything is a great way for our Sixx Sense listeners to connect with their favorite musicians." Since debuting June 17, 2014 with Linkin Park, Sixx Sense Ask Anything Chats have featured Judas Priest, Marky Ramone, Sixx:A.M., Slash, and The Smashing Pumpkins. Ask Anything's Dave Reynolds added, "Nikki Sixx is a rock and radio icon. The day he told me he wanted to run Ask Anything Chats on Sixx Sense was my personal 'Rock 'n' Roll Hall Of Fame Day.' Nikki made me feel like a rockstar." Ask Anything would also like to thank the rest of the Sixx Sense family: Jenn Marino, Bill May, Lorre Crimi, Justin Michael, and Kyle Chrise. Sixx Sense airs on more than 75 stations worldwide. For more information, visit [www.SixxSense.com](http://www.SixxSense.com).

# CRS ASK ANYTHING UPDATE



## Cody Alan Enters His Fourth Year With Ask Anything

NASHVILLE (02/25/15) CMT's multi-talented Cody Alan enters his fourth year of running Ask Anything Chats in Nashville. Since debuting in July of 2012 with UMG Nashville's Scotty McCreery, Cody has lead the Nashville charge with exclusive chats from Tim McGraw, Brad Paisley, Hunter Hayes, Little Big Town, and Darius Rucker. Two-time ACM "National On-Air Personality of the Year" award winner Cody Alan added, "fans love our Ask Anything Chats! And I love how they totally enhance our CMT shows with real artist interaction." Ask Anything owner Dave Reynolds stated, "I still remember coming to Nashville in early 2012 and nobody really wanting to take a chance on my idea. Bryan Switzer had introduced me to Anne Oakley at CMT and within minutes of meeting Anne we were sitting with Cody doing a handshake deal. To this day I owe Cody, CMT, Anne, Dingo, Bryan Switzer, and Dustin Stout a world of thanks for welcoming me to Nashville and giving Ask Anything it's first home for exclusive country chats." After Midnite w/ Cody Alan, All Access w/ Cody Alan and CMT Radio Live w/ Cody Alan are nationally syndicated by Premiere Networks. For more information visit [www.iHeartRadio.com](http://www.iHeartRadio.com), [www.aftermidnite.com](http://www.aftermidnite.com) and [www.cmtradiolive.com](http://www.cmtradiolive.com).



**CMT**  
**RADIO LIVE**  
**WITH CODY ALAN**

## Saturday Night Online w/ Romeo Enters It's Sixth Year Of Ask Anything Chats With Exclusive Kelly Clarkson Chat 02/28 8pmEST



NASHVILLE (02/25/15) Entering it's sixth year, the partnership created December 31, 2009 between Saturday Night Online and Ask Anything continues to create chat history every Saturday night. Show host Romeo commented, "Saturday Night Online is ALL ABOUT listener interaction and ASK ANYTHING connects our worldwide audience to the biggest stars on the planet every week. We couldn't ask for a better digital engagement platform." Dave Reynolds noted, "This content partnership Romeo and I created had its most successful year in 2014 and we see no limitations on how we can help SNOL artists in 2015. I'm still amazed that Romeo takes my calls after all these years." It was announced today that RCA's Kelly Clarkson will be doing an exclusive SNOL/Ask Anything Chat Saturday February 28th at 8pm to promote her sixth studio album, Piece by Piece, set for release March 3rd. Kelly's fans will once again have an opportunity to interact with the most featured Ask Anything artist ever. Dave Reynolds had this personal message for Kelly, "I might never get to tell you in person how special you are to Ask Anything. You've always made each viewer feel like they're YOUR #1 fan. Thank you Kelly." For more information on how to get your station connected to the SNOL nation, contact Superadio SVP/Programming Rich O'Brien, 508 630 0344 or [rich@superadio.com](mailto:rich@superadio.com)



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MIRANDA LAMBERT



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JERROD NIEMANN



OLD DOMINION



STEVEN LEE OLSON



JAKE OWEN



BRAD PAISLEY



CHASE RICE



DEE JAY SILVER



THE SWON BROTHERS



CARRIE UNDERWOOD



TRISHA YEARWOOD



CHRIS YOUNG



# SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE WELCOMES YOU TO CRS 2015



Last year's share of female-voiced singles in the Top 100 songs was the lowest in almost 20 years – 18%. Predictably, much was made of this in the media, with Country radio and Nashville's good ol' boy music business frequent targets of blame. Simple sound-bite explanations are grossly inadequate, however, when studying a phenomenon that has existed for decades, transcends media, is shaped by the broader culture and touches every aspect of society.

In this extended editorial coverage, Country Aircheck dives deep into the numbers, speaking with scores of radio and music professionals in pursuit of clarity. Capping the effort is this roundtable discussion with a record executive, program director, artist and songwriter held late last month at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild, songwriter Natalie Hemby ("White Liar," "Pontoon," "Drinks After Work"), WSIX/Nashville OM/PD Michael Bryan and BBR Music Group EVP Jon Loba offered thoughtful perspective, shared a few laughs and came to agreement on more than a few points.



Karen Fairchild, Michael Bryan, Natalie Hemby, Jon Loba

# W*in* WOMEN COUNTRY

## Examining The Gender Disparity

**Country Aircheck:** We just stood in the rotunda and looked at the Hall of Fame plaque for The Carter Family and Mother Maybelle. Now we're sitting in the Taylor Swift Education Center. Those are some pretty stout pillars at either end of this business of country music.

Women have often been at the forefront of the genre, but the imbalance is equally undeniable. Michael, was gender balance even on your radar at Top 40?

**Michael Bryan:** No. Still isn't. And it's not something I think about when I'm selecting songs for Country radio, either. I'm looking for the best song, whatever that happens to be. I can't speak for other programmers, but I'm not going to try to put a guy on for the sake of putting a guy on or put a girl on for the sake of putting a girl on. I'm going to try to put the best song on the air, period.

**Going to the other end of the food chain, Natalie, how aware are you of marketplace issues when you're in the writer's room? Is there discussion of what the audience will accept, what the market is for artists who have deals – most of them male – and could record your songs?**

**Natalie Hemby:** I really don't look at who's in the market. Maybe occasionally. Through the years, I've developed relationships with certain artists and so if their record is coming up, I absolutely write for the record. One thing I sometimes have

a hard time with is, a lot of people want to write with me because they want to get a female cut. But at the end of the day, I just want to write a great song and wherever it's supposed to land is where it's supposed to land. A great example of that is "Pontoon." We wrote it a long time ago and it just fell at the right time into the right hands.

**Karen Fairchild:** But you do it from such a real place. You want to collaborate. I've never been in the room with you – and I've written with you a lot – where you said, "Let's write a hit."

**NH:** I don't think anybody really knows what a hit song is.

**That's an interesting study.**

**KF:** "Pontoon" was a hit, not because I sang it, but because a female sang it. We talked about it as a band. Any of the four of us could have sang it, but when we heard Nat sing it on the work tape, we thought it was sexy and kind of funny from a chick to be talking about ... motor boating, but on a pontoon. Now, would a single artist

female have cut that? I don't know.

**Jon Loba:** I don't think the same dynamic would have worked. I don't know if it's the texture or what, but if you look at the format, that's the biggest challenge: solo females. A song-plugger friend was recently telling me how frustrated she is that her company only has one female staff writer and she was trying to get the president to sign more. She thought we need more female perspective rather than men writing for women or

female artists trying to adapt a male song. And she said he told her flat out, there's not as much solo female stuff being cut and none of it is connecting anyway. So, the shot of making money is diminished and I'm not willing to take that risk. Then it becomes self-fulfilling prophecy.

She was also talking about so many of the solo females right now not having a lot of life experience. And the fact that as a 28-year-old female, she isn't hearing much music from solo females that moves her or says anything. There's always the discussion that radio is biased, but to Michael's point, radio wants to play music that keeps their listeners tuned in. We have more forms of measurement now than ever before to see if that's the case. There are taste-making programmers saying we need more balance in the format and they are actively trying to do that. But they play them, they're not registering and that's why we're not breaking through.

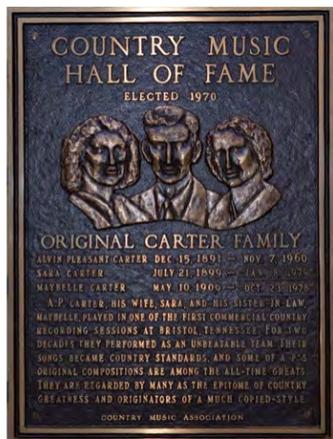
**KF:** Are they not registering because they're not familiar? There are only four or five women on the radio that are familiar, so it's going to take a lot more investment on labels' part. I know that's a double-edged sword if listeners aren't responding.

**JL:** We're giving the audience what they want.

**KF:** If we're really going to talk about it, then we have to talk about Kacey Musgraves, Brandy Clark and Ashley Monroe. Why are we not hearing them on the radio?

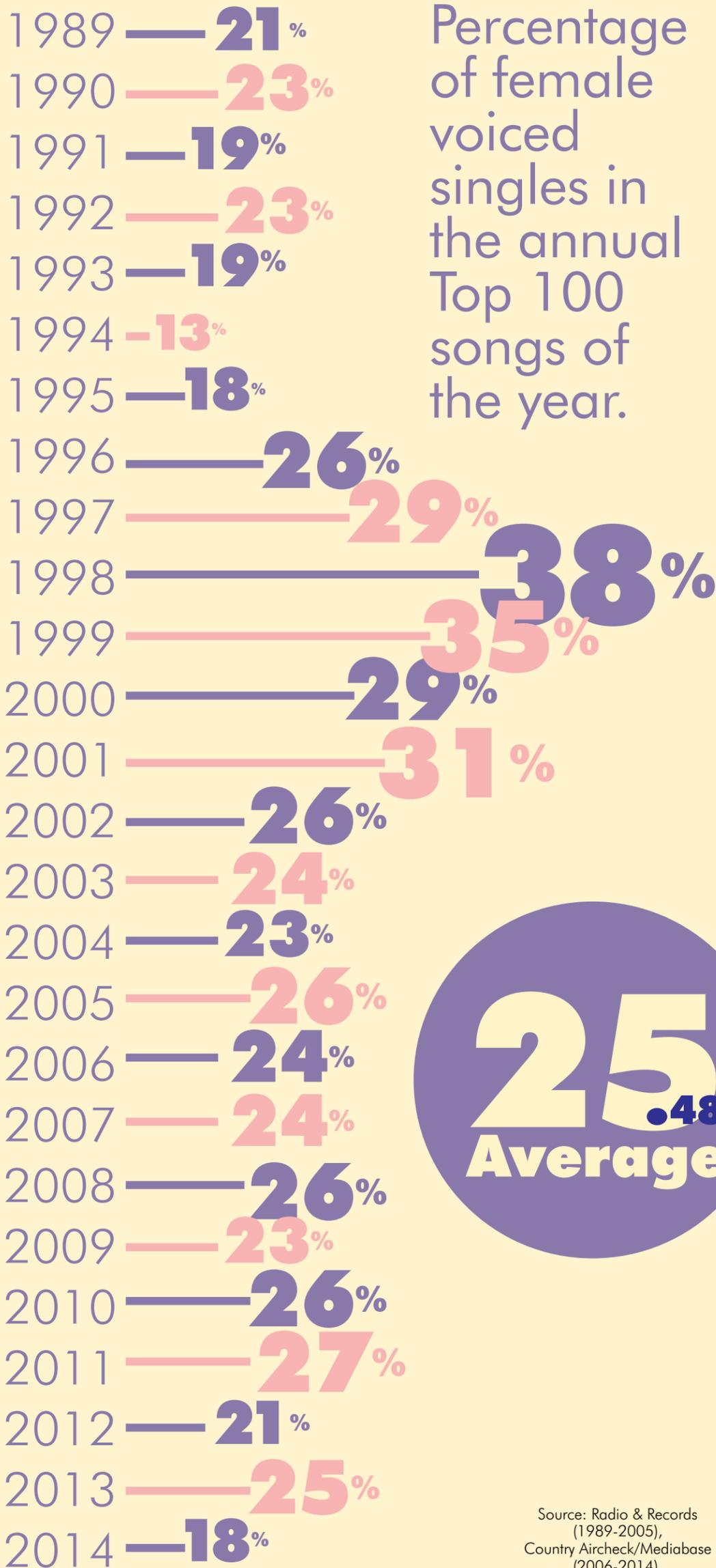
**Michael, what are your thoughts?**

**MB:** I played every Kacey Musgraves single that came out ... a lot. For whatever reason, we could not get the metrics. Even though she had all the touch points you need – critical acclaim and major media – there were some challenges and it just did not connect all the way. She is set up, though, to come out with a new



**Mama Tried:** The Carter family's Mother Maybelle sets the tone.

# LADIES ROOM



Source: Radio & Records (1989-2005), Country Aircheck/Mediabase (2006-2014).

## W*in* MEN COUNTRY

album that will. The bigger challenge for our format is we're so superstar-heavy and they go to the front of the line every time. It's very hard for anyone, male or female, to break. And we can only play what we get. I was never asked a single time to play Brandy Clark. She had no deal so there was no promotion push. The really interesting thing on Ashley Monroe is she worked through Warner, but it was not through the Warner team. They had an indie working her. I got really close on "Weed Instead Of Roses." But it was right at the same time as "Follow Your Arrow" and there were little things ...

**KF:** The stars weren't lining up.

**MB:** Yeah. I just heard what will be the first single off her new project and she's going to have the platform



**Karen Fairchild**

because she's got the duet with Blake Shelton that's going to be a No. 1 record.

**With an audience makeup that leans female, would you expect that favors male or female artists?**

**JL:** SiriusXM's John Marks says that according to every bit of research they have seen and done, female listeners are harder on female artists than the males. But there's much more acceptance for those new females that have something to say. He played newer artists for a week in heavy rotation and several male titles connected, but the female connection wasn't there. (See sidebar, page 18.)

**MB:** Feel free to smack me if you need to, I've never heard a guy say I don't get along with other guys, but I've certainly heard women say I can't get along with other women. I don't know if that plays into it at all.

**JL:** It doesn't at Top 40.

**Even Top 40 is only 31% female. More balanced than Country, but nowhere near 50-50.**

**NH:** Maybe it's because girls are writing ballsier stuff than guys write these days. The girl artists are coming out with guns blazing, trying to make their point, make their mark as to who they are as an artist and an individual. Guys, on the other hand, seem to have an easier route.

**KF:** It's a party mix and it's a familiar sound right now. It feels good. Every day, all day long, it's like turning on a playlist for a party.

**MB:** People are trying to escape from life when they turn on music. We try to do hills and valleys to give them the whole range of human emotion. You can't live in one lane for too long. That's what's gotten us in trouble over the last year.

**NH:** Yeah, one day, I'd like to drive home at 5pm and hear a slow song on the radio. I don't have to party. I'm tired.

**MB:** I don't know if the rest of the format will end up playing this, but I just put in Lee Ann Womack's "Send It On Down." It's the best sounding song; she is so distinct. I told Bobby Bones the other day, why don't we just spike it one time in the morning and see what happens? It wasn't in the top 200 on iTunes before we played it and it was like No. 38 within an hour after. That is reaction.

**Going back to something Natalie said about whether it's easier for men, I heard a quote from a record executive that was along the lines of, "If I sign a male artist, they're going to make a record, put it on my desk and then go tour. If I sign a female artist, they're going to make a record, put it on my desk and sit there and look at me."**

**KF:** That's not true. Some of the girls that are out right now are the hardest working ...

**NH:** I'll tell you what a label guy said to me one time when I was 19 and watching a show. This is terrible, but I'm going to say it. He said, "You know how we figure

"ASHLEY HAS BEEN LIKE A MEMBER OF MY FAMILY FOR MANY YEARS.  
SHE'S BEEN ONE MY FAVORITE ARTISTS SINCE BEFORE THAT.  
I CHALLENGE ANYONE TO SPEND A LITTLE TIME WITH HER AND NOT FALL IN LOVE.  
IT'S TIME SHE GETS HER DUE AS A SOLO RECORDING ARTIST AND I'M SO DAMN  
PROUD AND EXCITED TO WATCH HER STAR RISE!!"

- BLAKE SHELTON



ashley monro

ON TO SOMETHING GOOD

Impacting March 9th

# Dial It Down

AC  
35%



Top 40  
31%



Urban  
19%



Country  
14%



Rock  
10%



Source:  
Mediabase 24/7

Percentage of 2014 spins for female-voiced titles in the Top 100 current and recurrent songs, by format:

# W<sup>in</sup> MEN COUNTRY

out who we sign? We either want to be him or we want to f— her.” That’s really nice, but that was in LA.

**Can a new male artist have success with less substantial material?**

**NH:** That’s my only thing. I don’t care if it’s a guy or girl, I feel like the best song needs to win. We’ve got a few new males who sound like somebody that’s established already.

**MB:** Imitators never work for a long time. One of the interesting things is that Country was about the story. Even an uptempo song could hit you in the heart. We’ve gotten away from that. Now it’s about the hook, which is a Pop mentality.

**KF:** You are playing Kelleigh Bannen’s “Smoke When I Drink,” which is hooky. I’m just going to throw this out there ... if Cole Swindell was singing that, would it already be racing up the top 10?

**MB:** I think we’re the only station playing that song.

**KF:** I know, but why?

**MB:** I saw they released it on iTunes. I love Kelleigh and think she deserves a shot.

**KF:** And talk about a hard worker. She’ll do anything that radio asks her to do.

**JL:** We still have to connect with the listener. There are two gatekeepers in this process after the record is made: the gatekeeper of the radio station and the gatekeeper of the listeners. We can let them through all we want, but in the end, it still has to connect.

**MB:** We’re in the exposure business. We expose things and the audience tells us if it works or if it doesn’t work. We can want something to work all day long ...

**NH:** You have to have the right artist, the right sound, the right producer, the right manager and then you send it to radio, hope they like it, then you hope the listener likes it. Then you hope it goes up the chart. Then you hope people buy it.

## Creatively Speaking

If the charts are a bro’s – er, a man’s world, what does that say to or about Nashville’s creative community? **Country Aircheck** spoke to several on the frontlines of A&R and publishing to find out.

The sharp end of the spear may be deciding which artists to sign. “To me it’s like running a football team,” says UMG/Nashville Chairman/CEO **Mike Dungan**.



Mike Dungan

“When the draft comes up, you take the best possible athlete and then figure out how to make it work. But the truth is, women are definitely slighted. And it’s been that way for a while. It’s obviously tough to break females.”

BMLG SVP/A&R **Allison Jones** says the tide may be turning, and cites Dot flagship artists Maddie & Tae and their 2014 breakthrough debut “Girl In A Country Song” as proof. “Who would have ever thought you would open a label with two teenage girls that no one’s heard of and have a debut single go No. 1 and approach platinum?”



Allison Jones

Compelling material is certainly key. But with top women Taylor Swift, Miranda Lambert and Carrie Underwood writing much of their own material, the outlets for writers are currently limited. Creative Nation Co-Owner/General Manager **Beth Laird** asserts that fresh, unique songs for women are out there and largely uncut. “I see that two ways,” she says. “On one side, it’s a bummer country fans won’t hear these songs. On the other, I’m sitting on some amazing gems and when the right artist comes along, it could be huge.”



Beth Laird

And the time may be ripe. “I am super excited about the quality female talent in Nashville right now,” Laird adds. “It’s better than it’s ever been. It’s definitely an exciting time for females, even though they might not be represented

on Country radio as much as we would like. Whenever there’s something missing on radio, it’s a great time for someone new to come and blow it wide open.”

Dungan is hoping **Mickey Guyton** is the woman to do that, and her single “Better Than You Left Me” had a record-breaking add week debut. “Mickey came in and knocked us down,” he says. “This town is full of great singers, but Mickey’s voice is stupendous. The entire package – her personality, the way she connects with people. If you’re around her, you feel it almost immediately.”

Immediate, however, does not describe her journey to this release. She’s been in development for years. “You’re not out yet, so no songwriter is going to write a song that’s your style,” Guyton explains. “When I was looking for songs, it was hard because either they were too young or they were too outdated. And being a female, everybody tends to – I don’t want to say



Mickey Guyton

‘overthink’, but – overthink whenever it comes to putting a song out. You have to be so cautious because the standard is so different for women. It was definitely a frustrating process for the last couple of years. Because with this new movement of country, the record label is trying to figure out, ‘Where can a girl fit in all of this?’ It was very difficult but at the same time, it caused me to write better songs. All that waiting helped me to be a better songwriter and write more from the heart.”

That caution is palpable. “The party thing is working so well that collectively as an industry – certainly on the radio – we give that a pass,” says Dungan. “For females, they’re expected to have Song of the Year material the minute they walk in or else it’s not likely they’re going to get a shot. We’ve seen several dozen of them over the last couple of years come out with one or two singles that fail in the 30s and then we never hear from them again. And we see some songs from men that are pretty mediocre get much farther up the chart.”

Historically, that hasn’t always been the case (see Ladies Room, page 10). “In the ‘90s and early 2000s, a significant amount of the playlist and the platinum-selling artists were female,” says Sony/ATV Pres./CEO **Troy Tomlinson**. “There were lots of gifted, compelling female artists who knew who they were and had something to say – and it resonated with the consumer. We’ve had them through every era and we have them now. But the last thing we want to do as a genre is minimize that which has made us strong and healthy.”



Troy Tomlinson



Jon Loba

**MB:** It is really hard to sell a ticket. It’s hard to have a radio hit. It’s hard to get a cut.

**KF:** The whole thing’s hard.

**Looking at entertainment in general, the “heroes” girls are exposed to probably lean heavy toward men. Is part of this more about the entire culture than the specifics facing our little corner of it?**

**KF:** I don’t know. The biggest record in the last 10 years was Adele, and we’re all dying to hear what she’s going to do on the next one. There’s a girl that I don’t think conformed to the “photo shoot, cut your hair, slim down a little” deal. She just delivers compelling music and we have to hear her. Beyoncé is like the goddess of music. Some of it gets a little too sexual for some folks, but we all have to watch her. We have to see what Taylor’s going to do next. There are women heroes out there young girls are watching. In country we have Miranda ...

**NH:** There are millions of girls who want to be her, too. Be confident like she is.

**KF:** But let’s really name them: Miranda, Carrie, there was Taylor and is Taylor. In the bands, there’s Hillary Scott, there’s Kimberly and I, hopefully. There’s Kimberly Perry, Shawna Thompson, Jana Kramer. We’re having a hard time even coming up with 10.

**NH:** What’s frustrating is seeing what some of the girls go through. I don’t know her entire story, but Sarah Buxton says when she got her deal she knew what she wanted to do and sound like, and the label wanted to change all that.

**JL:** The best artists I’ve worked with, the true stars, have a strong sense of who they are. While they’re willing to play around the margins a little bit to be



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RECORD PRODUCER OF THE YEAR**

**2010 MALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR  
ALBUM OF THE YEAR  
CMT VIDEO OF THE YEAR  
HUMANITARIAN OF THE YEAR  
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FLY

MADDIE & TAE  
EMPOWER  
ANYONE  
WHO'S EVER  
DREAMED

& EMBRACED THE MISTAKES  
THAT LET YOU FLY

2015 CRS NEW FACES

ACM NOMINEE

VOCAL DUO OF THE YEAR

SOUNDS OF SUMMER TOUR 2015

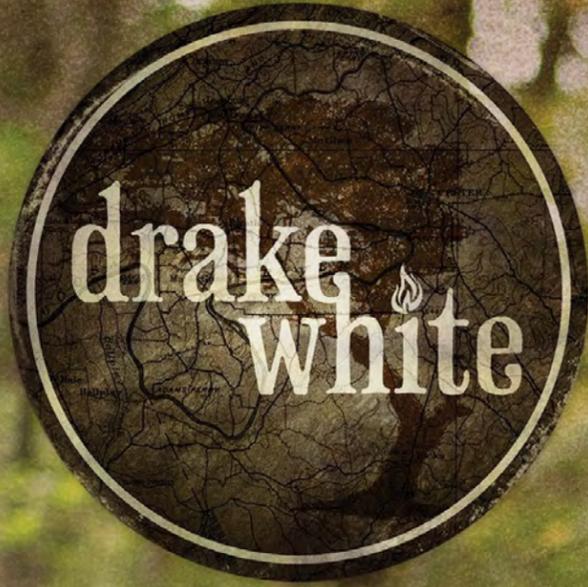
WITH DIERKS BENTLEY

Dot  
RECORDS



Maddie  
& Tae

# IMPACTING 3/16



IT  
FEELS  
GOOD

"FEW VOCALISTS SING WITH THE ENERGY & PASSION OF DRAKE WHITE. HE BROUGHT THE CBS COUNTRY PDs TO A WELL-DESERVED STANDING OVATION."  
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- MICHAEL BRYAN, VP/PROGRAMMING IHEARTMEDIA NASHVILLE

*Dot*  
RECORDS

# GIRL CRUSH?

Percentage of current/recurrent airplay among the Top 100 country songs given to female-voiced titles in 2014 by...

All Reporting PDs

Female PDs

Former Top 40 PDs



Source: Mediabase 24/7

# WOMEN COUNTRY

commercial and hit that middle lane, at the end of the day they stand up for who they are and say 'No, I'm not willing to compromise.' I would love to have more of those female artists coming through my door, but more often than not, they're very attractive, sing relatively well, want to be onstage and want to be a star. I don't hear a voice – not in the vocal sense, but emotionally and mentally.

**Our Hollywood sidebar (page 16) puts a pretty big hole in the idea that things are slowly getting better, which is something we hear a lot.**

**JL:** I don't know about movies, but I do think in music there are so many program directors wanting that balance.

**MB:** Some things are breaking. Kelsea Ballerini's got a top 30 record right now from a small label that has to churn and push so much harder than the big boys. She's a great writer, she's super young, but she's got potential. You see the Mickey Guyton thing pop on 80 stations its first week.

**KF:** I might get in trouble on this from Dungan, but that's the same song they cut four years ago. So, what is going on in the A&R process?

**MB:** Radio's asking the same question because we saw her at the Ryman two years ago and she destroyed everyone. We had programmers walking up to the promotion team going, 'I will add this song to power if you give it to me.' You never hear stuff like that. But it's taken all this time.

**JL:** Because sometimes when you have something

# CLUB CRACKERS

The blogger cliché that women are held back by country's good old boys' club may best be examined by asking for the perspective of those unlikely to be members – female PDs and those who've moved in from other formats. **Country Aircheck** asked both groups for their take.

WDRQ/Detroit PD **Robby Bridges**, who previously worked at Hot AC WEBE/Bridgeport, CT and Top 40 WPLJ/New York, says greater female presence at other formats (see graph page 12) is simply a reflection of audience preference. "That's all about great songs," he says. "It just happens that Pop has Katy [Perry] and Charlie XCX putting out the biggest hits. In Country

there's an appetite for artists including Blake and Luke, which limits the number of spaces for radio to play as many females as maybe we'd like." Interestingly, more than 20% of 'DRQ's 2014 top 100 current and recurrent airplay came from female artists – close to 7% higher than average.

KJUG/Visalia, CA PD **Rik McNeil**, whose prior stops include Rhythmic Top 40 KPLV/Las Vegas and KSEQ/Visalia, notes a format's biases can shape a new gatekeeper's perceptions. "There's a tendency to look toward the success of people who've been doing it a long time and [avoid] what might upset that balance," he says. But bias isn't exclusive to Country. "There are Pop programmers who will tell you they play fewer females or that they have to maintain some kind of balance, and the balance is usually male dominated."

KSOP/Salt Lake City PD **Deb Turpin** says she has no bias when it comes to the gender of an artist, but sometimes the listeners do. "The audience can be a little more critical of a female artist," she says. "When we throw a new one up from a woman, sometimes we'll hear it's 'screechy' or 'whiny.' I would never hear that about something new from a male artist."

"It's very hard to break a female artist," says KCYE/Las Vegas PD **Kris Daniels**. "Is it

our listeners? The old-school radio mentality was that women don't like hearing women on the radio. As a female on-air personality, it is very hard to get female listeners to like you. But once you get them, they're on your side forever. So, is it certain PDs or MDs who have an issue with it, or is it that we're not introducing the artists to the listeners in a way they can fall in love with them?"

Good question. "Kelsea Ballerini came in and I really liked her personality, but I don't know if that translates through the radio," says Turpin. "It will take a while for that to get out there because the listeners only have the song to judge by. You kind of have to go, 'Look, we're your favorite radio station – trust us when we say this artist is good and she has more where that came from.'"

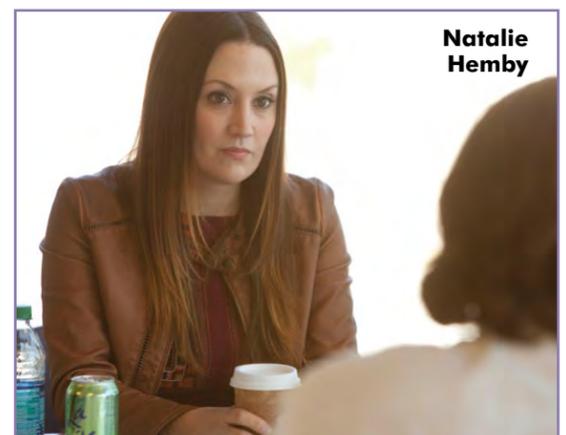
That tack may not be as easy as it sounds. "Let's talk about Kacey Musgraves," says Daniels. "I love her. She was different and sounded country, but a lot of people didn't want to play her because she was different. Here's a girl who dresses retro country, has written hits for Miranda and sounds like traditional country, just updated a little bit. So why didn't it work? Who was holding her back? It wasn't me!"

"It really comes down to the audience," Bridges says. "Programmers have a vision for their stations and what they want the format to be. Labels have their vision. But neither of us really matters unless there's an audience there that wants to hear and buy those songs."

So, is there an issue keeping female artists off the air? "I hope not," Turpin says. "Just because the artist is a female, would a programmer say, 'Nope, too many women, I'm not playing this song'? I would hope PDs listen and make their decision based on the song. If there's a secret club where people go, 'We have to have the right mix of male and female on this radio station,' I haven't been invited."

McNeil, however, says there may be. "There are label people who tell me they regularly hear from programmers who still believe there's only room for so many females on their playlist," he says. "I've even heard from some label folks who talk to people who will give them an exact number."

Bridges seems optimistic. "It's not an issue in the sense that as long as we're playing songs there's an appetite for – in other words songs that are testing, songs that are selling – as long as we're playing the right songs, I think we're ok."



Natalie Hemby

that's so special, you really want to give it every chance. Rightly or wrongly, you want it to be set up absolutely perfect.

**Speaking of Dungan, let me read you what he said in our December issue: "The people who are responsible for writing songs that were female-themed or better suited for women really didn't do a good job for about 10 years. We didn't have great songs ... women just were not making competitive records, with a couple of exceptions." Discuss.**

**KF:** He said that to me one night when Kacey was about to come out. There's part of that where he's right. But why? Why are they not making compelling music? Is it because there are so many damn voices in their head? We've been through the ups and downs as a band and I've sat in the room after a failed couple of singles and about to go make a new record. I've listened to, 'Well, radio really didn't want to hear that kind of song from y'all. That one sounds like an old Little Feat song. Radio didn't play that poppier sounding thing you put out a couple years back.' I'm like, do you guys hear yourselves? How would we ever write a song if we listened to all of this? We have to hear it and take whatever nugget is there, but then we gotta turn that off.

And we're seasoned. We've been in the business 15 years and those are difficult moments for us. What is it like to be a woman by yourself in a board room playing songs you wrote and starting to hear those voices? If you don't have a great manager and a confidant or collaborator who can talk you through that ... 'Hey, own whatever truth is there, let the rest of it go and just make your music.' Having Jay Joyce as our producer, we don't talk about boundaries. We don't talk about other people's music. We're talking about what we can do that is going to be bad-ass.

**NH:** What's really sad is Nashville has a pretty big community of women who are phenomenal singers, but don't want to be artists. Maybe they did at one point, but they see how hard it is and say, 'Let me write songs.'

**KF:** The superstars are in the writing room. Jessi Alex-



Robby Bridges



Deb Turpin



Rik McNeil



Kris Daniels

"One of the strongest male voices  
to come along in some time." - BILLBOARD



COUNTRY  
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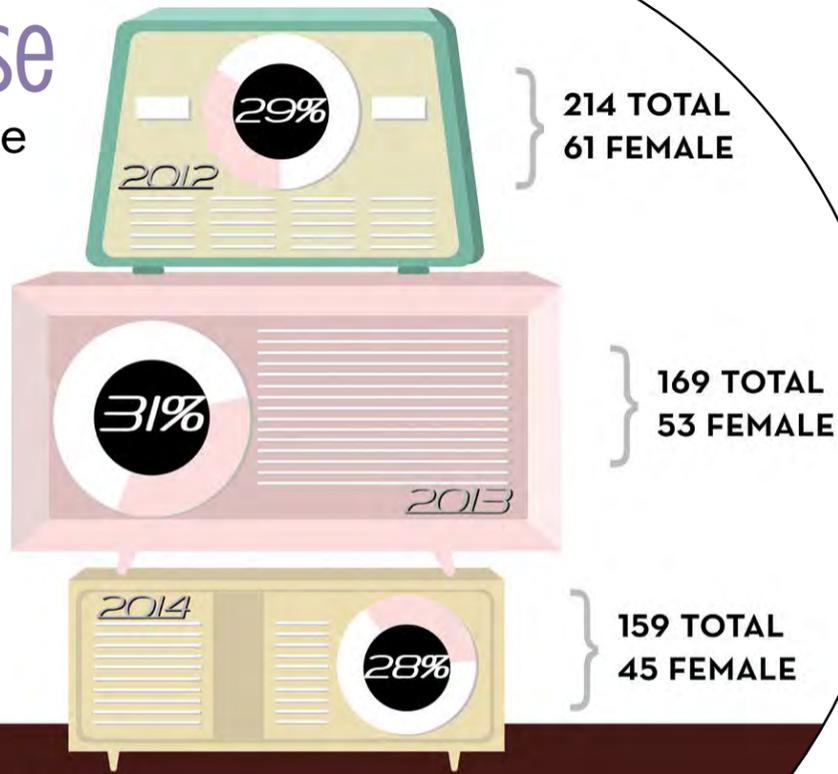


POWER UP NOW!



# Catchin' Release

Percentage of singles released to radio voiced by women, by year.



Special thanks to Sony/Nashville and R.G. Jones for assistance with this data.

# W*in* MEN COUNTRY

ander, Natalie Hemby ...

**NH:** Even like Kate York, Kree Harrison, who maybe isn't doing a lot of writing, Lucie Silvas, Hillary Lindsey.

**If the most talented creators say I don't want to be pushed through the extruder of the music business ...**

**KF:** You're right. It is harder to be pushed through as a woman. As a community, if we want to see this change, we must nurture these women to write honest songs, to write their heart and not to pander. They can write party songs, but they have to feel authentic. You know, compelling songs like "Pontoon" and "Day Drinking."

(laughs)

**NH:** It's funny, but Miranda didn't break at radio until her third record. And she was selling records and got Album of the Year.

**KF:** Remember when she sang "Dead Flowers" on the ACMs, then it died at radio? They knew they had a special record and they were like, oh, crap.

**NH:** Well, they probably shouldn't have put it out as the first single anyway. But my point is it took the second single from her third album going No. 1.

**JL:** Talk about someone who didn't let those around her change who she was. She stuck to her guns.

**MB:** If you want to screw up the creative process, ask a lot of people their opinion.

**NH:** If you want to lose who you are, ask everyone their opinion.

**If you're in a creative business or you're a creator, where's the balance between needing to succeed and pay the bills, and artistically wanting to push the envelope? When do we challenge ourselves, as artists and gatekeepers, to push the audience? When do we stay within the system, accept things the way they are and make some money?**

**NH:** As a writer, there is always a way to make something commercial with an honest creative side. You just have to work harder at it. Music Row has become the song mill and we're all writing five days a week. The songs end up sounding like another one you wrote the week before. I don't think enough thought is put into the process because everyone's so busy. We need to think about the artist and take that time to help them bridge their music to the next thing.

**KF:** We just need to nurture. I can't tell you the amount of time I spend on the road with young female artists. I feel like a therapist and I'm happy to do it, but backstage at a festival I'll just be saying, "Keep going, keep going, keep going. Keep your head down,



Country music isn't the only pop culture industry regularly mentioned for its underrepresentation of women. Opportunity for lead roles and compensation imbalance for actresses make headlines from time to time in Hollywood, and with good reason.

"From the 1940s through today, females have accounted for about 25% to 30% of all speaking characters," says Dr. **Martha M. Lauzen**, Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University. "In 2013, females accounted for 30% of all speaking characters, though only 15% of protagonists in the top 100 grossing films domestically."

Those numbers aren't much different from the numbers shown in radio airplay

creeping incrementalism – things get better every year. And we believe it. But if you look at the data, it's just not true.

"You hear on a lot of industry panels, 'Oh, that might have been the case 20 years ago.' They'll point to Kathryn Bigelow winning the Oscar for Best Director and assume everything has been fixed. That's why it's so important to actually count."

Lauzen notes onscreen underrepresentation can at least partly be attributed to the low numbers of women behind the scenes. "Last year I conducted a study of the top 500 (domestic) grossing films and found females comprised 42% of characters on films with at least one female director but only 32% of characters on films with exclusively

“What we have been sold for at least the last 10 to 15 years is that things have gotten so much better. And we believe it. But if you look at the data, it's just not true.”

across several formats (see graph page 12). Like country music, Hollywood is playing to a middle America audience with a similar demographic breakout. "More than 50% of movie-going ticket buyers are women," Lauzen says.

The issue may be even bigger than mainstream audience tastes. "I would broaden the frame even more," she says. "If you look at the number of women in tech industries, on Wall Street in the financial sector and across the board, we are underrepresented. What we have been sold as a culture for at least the last 10 to 15 years is that things have gotten so much better. This idea of

male directors." In country, there appears to be little corollary between female decision makers and airplay for women (*Girl Crush*, page 14), though there may be bias reasons behind that, as well.

"Women in decision making roles are often underrepresented themselves," Lauzen says. "In film, the notion of why Amy Pascal at Sony or Donna Langley at Universal haven't hired more women may be because they are tokens and more closely watched. It would be difficult to push a more traditionally female agenda and, considering the system they rose in, they're much more likely to hold the values of men in similar positions."



Michael Bryan

focus, be who you are. Don't let them talk you into what you don't want to do."

**One of the criticisms is that the gatekeepers are mostly male, but at BBR Music Group, most of the department heads are female, and to your credit, Jon. When I look at the roster, though, that's not reflected. Is it because the talent's not there or is it because it's that much harder?**

**JL:** This has been an internal discussion between our owner Benny Brown and myself. He feels he has more of a vision for male acts and is less sure of females – especially considering how hard it is to have to succeed there. The last thing you want to do is sign a female and not be able to give her the best chance possible. We've talked about how many women are in positions of authority in the company and how we can draw on that. But it also goes back to how many females come through my door who sing beautifully and look great,

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**BLACK RIVER  
ENTERTAINMENT  
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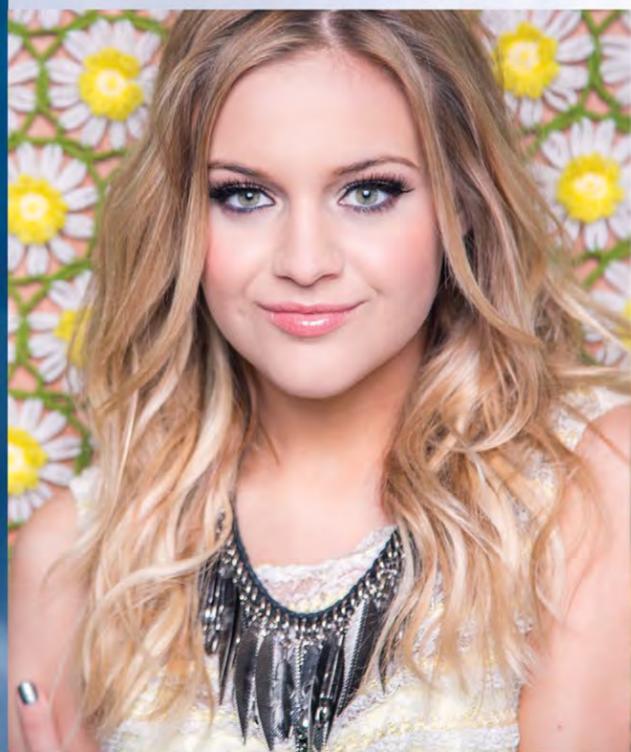
FEATURING NEW MUSIC FROM:

**KELSEA BALLERINI**

**JOHN KING**

**CRAIG MORGAN**

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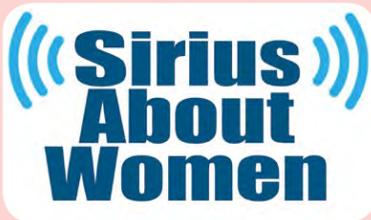


**BLACK RIVER  
ENTERTAINMENT**

The Highway's Aug. 11-17 "Fresh Female Voices" initiative, part of SiriusXM's annual Music Discovery Week is just one of the ways Sr. Dir./Country Programming **John Marks** is addressing the issue. "I just decided to put a twist on it," he says. "Rather than playing all kinds of new music, we just focused on the female element because that appears to be the primary question in country music today."

Roughly 20 songs from different female artists received five to six spins during the week. Marks also made a point to include as many sonic differences and styles as possible, vigorously solicited social media feedback and monitored digital sales before, during and after the program. "For the effort in general, people applauded it," he says. "But in terms of general reaction to the music, it was really kind of a non-plus. And that's in terms of sales and social media reaction. Most were received with at best a yawn, outright hostility, or even worse, zero noise or sales."

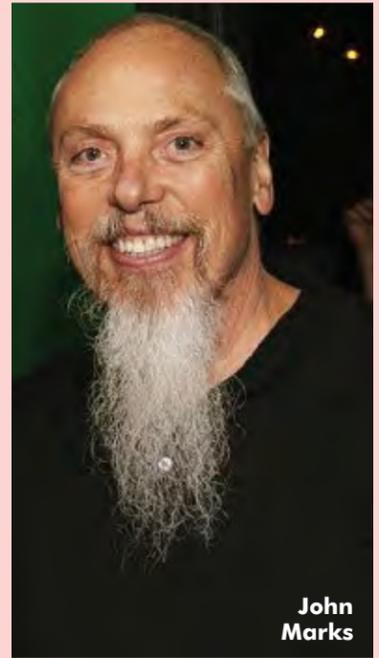
There have been anomalies, however. Marks says that newcomers Clare Dunn and Brandy Clark have moved the needle, though each was on the Highway's playlist before the "Fresh Female Voices" program. "Both stand



on their own identities and aren't trying to be anyone else. Think about Carrie, Miranda and Taylor – those who distinguish themselves in their own way are going to be the ones who have the biggest opportunity."

As for the general lack of female success in the format and relatively muted response to "Fresh Female Voices," Marks sees the problem simply. "The music isn't compelling overall and market conditions just aren't accepting it," he says. "I don't think that there's any gender bias as much as it is that there just isn't compelling female music that makes people engage."

Marks doesn't believe the problem lies with programmers or record labels. "We're agnostic as to gender, type, style, whatever," he says. "Everybody just wants a hit. As many female artists and types, styles and varieties as we've tried on The Highway, the reception has been almost unanimous that people either had no opinion or didn't like it. It's been fascinating. And maybe there are [talented women] out there who simply don't wish to be subjected to the rigors of the business – I don't know. But when something compelling from a woman gets released, it'll happen. And I'm looking for it every day."



John Marks

# WOMEN COUNTRY

but don't necessarily have anything to say.

**NH:** Sometimes they're too young. They don't know.

**Is Country unfairly tagged as backwards on this issue?**

**JL:** From my perspective, yes. Radio is giving the

Horses, the new Chris Stapleton – there's a chance there will be a lane for that. The challenge we have sometimes with a commercial radio station is that we can't be anybody's favorite, because we have to play to such a wide audience. It's a mass appeal medium, so we can't be too niche. But we also have to make people look up at the radio and go, "What is that?"

**KF:** Like "The House That Built Me." First time I heard it I had to pull my car over because I was crying so hard. But God knows the festivals are more fun when we're all out there singing "Day Drinking," "Pontoon" and "Crash My Party."

**JL:** It's hard to argue with success. That's my biggest issue with when we all started wringing our hands about

**KF:** The first order of business is finding these artists; they're out there somewhere. The next is getting radio to push through on people like Kacey. It might take a little bit longer to get a female all the way up the charts and it might not research, but maybe we could just go with our gut a little longer sometimes. Encourage young women songwriters to write their heart and stop putting boundaries on themselves. Encourage the labels to do the same thing. Give these girls some room to do what they do. Stop editing them, changing their hair color and worrying about the photo shoot before we worry about the music. Let's not put the cart before the horse. I know the numbers aren't encouraging, but I think it's about to turn. There's music coming.

“ Would it be great if it was a 50/50 balance between male and female? Awesome, but the marketplace has said that's not the case yet. ”

platform. Again, I sound like a broken record, but we are not giving the audience something they want to consume. Whether it's we don't nurture long enough or we aren't putting forth music that says something to them, I don't know. I go back to that plugger who isn't hearing a lot of songs that relate to her life. Listening to female songs myself, we don't have a lot of those coming across the desk.

**NH:** My only criticism for Country is a lack of diversity – room to push the boundaries a little more. I think of an artist like Jason Isbell ...

**MB:** There's one song of his I'm actually thinking about right now. Sturgill Simpson, A Thousand

bro-country. I agree there needs to be diversity, but at the height of our popularity we started worrying. Consumers are going to tell us when they're done with it.

**Is gender disparity something we need to fix? If so, how?**

**MB:** I don't think we do it for the sake of diversity. We do it for the sake of great music.

**NH:** I totally agree with you.

**KF:** I totally agree with you, too.

**MB:** Would it be great if it was a 50/50 balance between male and female? Awesome, but the marketplace has said that's not the case yet. And if the songs are great, it will be.

**JL:** I completely agree with almost everything you say. With respect to labels, we obviously haven't been getting it right, so let's give them that room and freedom. Now's the time to take the chance. We've been at this for how long, so let's find strong brands and identities and strong women with something to say. Having more women involved in that will help – taking a shot on a female producer, getting more female writers in town. From that, will be born what we're all looking for.

**NH:** It's fixing itself. Just having this discussion is important. People are talking about it online all the time. To reiterate what Karen said, let's nurture female artists and instead of changing them, make them stars

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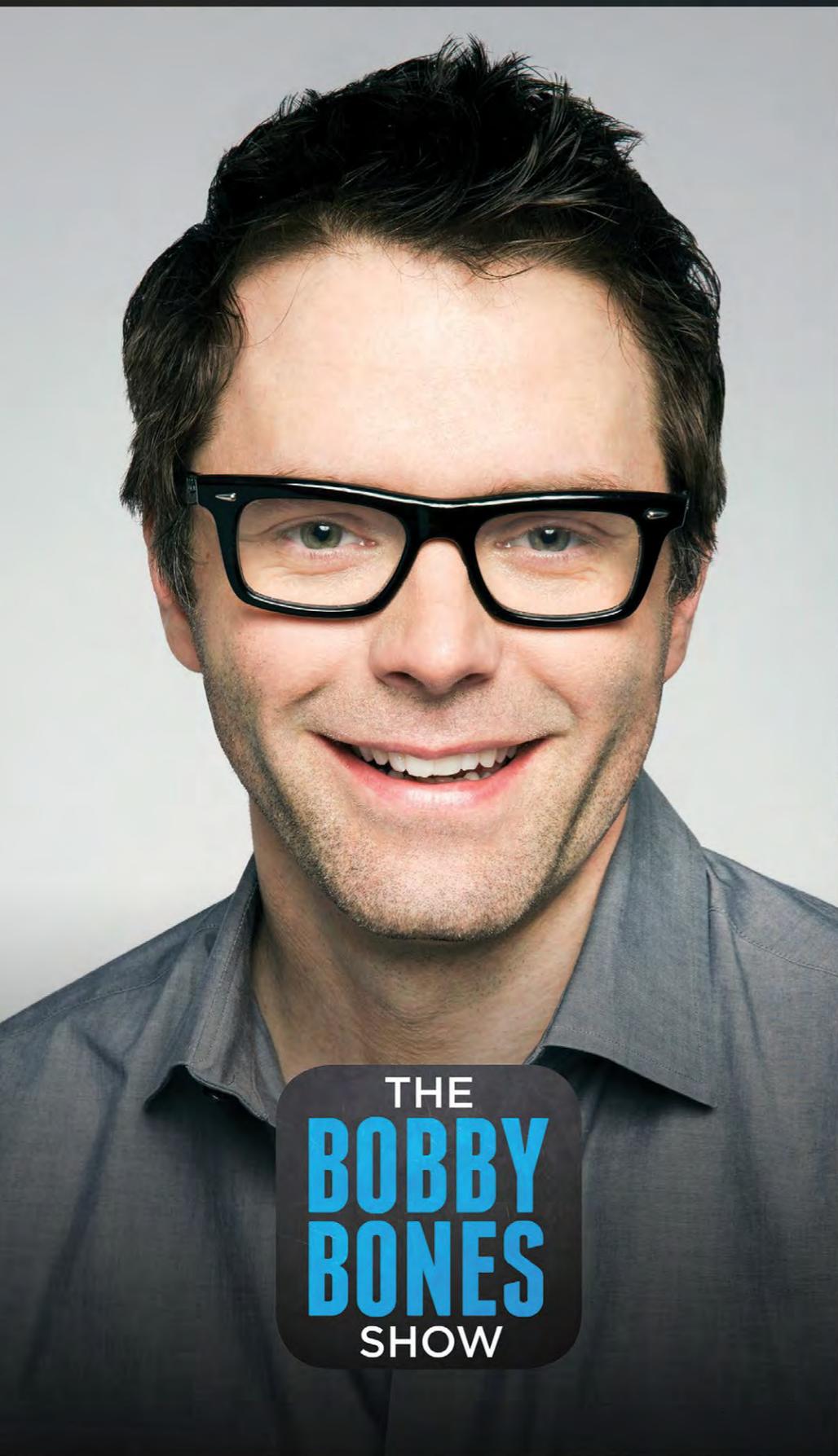
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Frankie Ballard

# FACE



# TIME

**C**ountry radio voters chose these five acts to perform on one of the most sought-after stages – the CRS 2015 *New Faces of Country Music Show*. Country Aircheck spoke to this lucky group to find out what they’ve been up to and uncover a few surprises.

## Frankie Ballard

Warner Bros./WAR’s Frankie Ballard came into his own last year, scoring back-to-back No. 1s with “Helluva Life” and the title track of his second album, “Sunshine & Whiskey.” He’s looking to score a hat trick with his current single “Young & Crazy.”

**What does it mean to you to be in the CRS New Faces Show?**

I knew it was such a prestigious thing to be selected, so I felt really humbled and honored. It’s one of the biggest shows of the whole event.

**What are you most looking forward to at CRS?**

Just seeing my friends at radio. I usually have to travel all over the country to see them. For CRS, everybody comes to Nashville. There are always lots of cool parties, lots of hangs and music.

**What tricks do you use to remember names/stations/call letters?**

On my first-ever radio tour, I wrote some stuff down in a journal – not only because I wanted to remember the folks but because I wanted to remember my first tour. So I wrote down where we went to eat, notes about the person. Now, I’ve seen these folks so many times, we’re just old friends.

**How are your packing skills? How long does it take you to get ready?**

I consider myself an A+ packer. I always take my time and I don’t pack light. I can pick up my suitcase and know when it’s getting close to 50 pounds.

**When you have a radio station lunch or dinner, what’s your “go-to” item?**

One thing I always try to do in restaurants is stay within their “wheelhouse.” Something they do well. Don’t get the salmon at a burger joint because it’s probably not going to be that good. If it’s a steakhouse, maybe you ought to try to order what they do best.

**A radio tour is a lot like being in school. What’s one lesson you’ve learned?**

Patience. You’re meeting people for the first time. They’re not going to start playing your song – they don’t even know who you are. It usually takes a couple times to really develop a relationship with folks.

**Which “animal” station mascot best describes your personality?**

I’m probably like a tiger, a little gnarly.

**What were a couple of your highlights from last year?**

“Helluva Life” and “Sunshine & Whiskey.” I’ve never had anything close to a hit song and I was blessed enough to have two of them in 2014. The Florida Georgia Line tour I’m on now is all because of that. And it was all because Country radio played those songs. I owe them everything I ever accomplished in this career of mine. I’m so thankful.

**If you were playing tour guide for the folks coming to CRS, where’s one place they have to go?**

I’d take them off the beaten path. Maybe over to Melrose Billiards on 8th Avenue, or out to east Nashville to see a little bit of music at The 5 Spot, like on a Sunday night.



# Sam Hunt

MCA's Sam Hunt penned Kenny Chesney's 2012 "Come Over" and two 2014 hits, Keith Urban's "Cop Car" and Billy Currington's "We Are Tonight." But with his own No. 1, platinum-selling "Leave The Night On" and follow-up single "Take Your Time," Hunt's slaying audiences on his own.

**What does it mean to you to be in the CRS New Faces Show?**

I'm flattered and excited to be a part of it.

**What are you most looking forward to at CRS?**

Just getting a chance to visit with some of the friends I've made in radio over the last several months. There are still a lot of folks I'm looking forward to thanking for playing my music.

**How do you remember people's names/stations/call letters?**

I'm bad with names and call letters. I didn't treat my radio tour like I was selling anything. I just wanted to get to know all the people in Country radio. I've had a lot of great dinners. When you see somebody a couple of times throughout the year and you have such great experiences, it's not as hard to put names to faces.

**How are your packing skills?**

I'm very efficient at getting ready. I'm not very efficient at

packing. I'll get on the road, open my bag and realize I've just thrown in one pair of pants and a dirty t-shirt.

**What's your "go-to" menu item?**

I would say seafood in the broad category and salmon as a sub-genre of seafood I really love. My favorite part about traveling has been the different food experiences.

**What's something you hope you never have to eat again?**

I really don't like the taste of curry. There have been a few times when we've had Thai or Indian food. I'm just not a big fan.

**What's one "lesson" you've learned on your radio tour?**

I've learned that as big and powerful as the Country radio community is, it's a pretty close-knit, family community. Everybody knows everybody.

**If you were playing tour guide for the folks coming to CRS, where's one place they have to go?**

I would recommend The Local Taco over in Sylvan Park off Murphy Road. We go every time we get back to Nashville. All their ingredients are locally grown and they do mainly tacos with a few side dishes.

**What were a couple of your highlights from last year?**

One is having a song of my own played on Country radio alongside all the great artists I grew up listening to. And another is putting out my first record, which I've wanted to do for several years but the circumstances weren't right. The timing all came together last year.

**You also released it on cassette. Was that your idea?**

Yeah, it was. A lot of people have put out versions of their album on vinyl. I didn't really come up in that era. Cassette tapes were the thing when I was first introduced to music, so that was a little more personal to me.

**Do you still have a cassette player to play your own album?**

No, but I bet if I dug around at my house back in Georgia I could find an old Walkman or something.



# Maddie & Tae

Dot's Maddie & Tae offered their first single "Girl In A Country Song" as an "answer song" to all things Bro-Country. Their cheeky debut was certified gold and went No. 1, proving this duo is poised to "Fly."

**What does it mean to you to be in the CRS New Faces Show?**

**Maddie:** We know *New Faces* is one of the hardest things to get a spot in. So when we found out we were going to be playing it and were the only female act, our jaws dropped. We're excited to bring some girl power onstage. Last year we attended CRS but we were just songwriters under Big Machine Music.

**Tae:** It was really cool seeing everyone perform. It motivated us to hopefully get there one day. We never thought that the next year would be our time.

**What are you most looking forward to at CRS?**

**Maddie:** "Girl In A Country Song" was such a big statement, but now we have the opportunity to show all of our radio friends more and prove we're not just one-trick ponies. We've got so much more behind us.

**When you have a station lunch or dinner, what's your "go-to" item?**

**Maddie:** Tae's allergic to gluten. We always try to do a meat and a veggie, nothing too greasy. And always water – especially if you're going to be singing.

**Tae:** We always get water and then squeeze lemon and a little sugar in there. It's free lemonade.

**What's something you never want to eat again?**

**Tae:** There was a place somewhere up north that had gluten free pasta and garlic bread. This bread, whew it was bad! It tasted like Play-Doh.

**How are your packing skills? How long does it take for you to get ready?**

**Maddie:** Tae is the better packer; I'm the better-prepared over-packer, which isn't always a good thing.

**Tae:** Yeah, if we're out for two days, I'm packing two outfits.

**Maddie:** And I'll pack four. A backup for my backup. Tae takes way less time to get ready. I am a perfectionist and have to get my hair and makeup a certain way.

**What's one "lesson" you've learned on your radio tour?**

**Tae:** Make sure your driver can read signs. Our driver took us to Chicago and drove us under a bridge that he clearly could not make it under. It was scary.

**Maddie:** A radio tour taught me you have to go with the flow. Even if you get in a bus wreck or locked out of your bus. Or you're staying on the 23rd floor of a hotel and have to walk down 23 flights of stairs on the way to your radio station visit because you got stuck in the elevator. It's definitely all been good lessons learned.

**Which "animal" station mascot best describes your personality?**

**Tae:** Mine would be a cat because I love cats. I'm a crazy cat lady.

**Maddie:** I would say a bull, because you'd see a bull on a ranch – that's my happy place.

**What were a couple of your highlights from last year?**

**Tae:** Making our *Opry* debut was one of those moments you can't believe is happening and you'll never forget.

**Maddie:** Getting our No. 1 record. But it wasn't the day it went No. 1; it was watching the song go up the chart. That means your fans are pulling for you and all those friends you made at radio believe in you.





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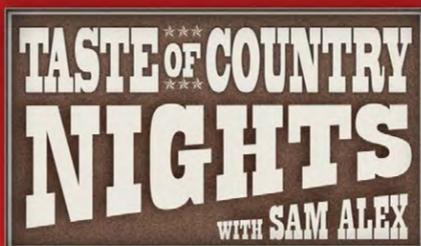


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## Eric Paslay

EMI Nashville's Eric Paslay was already a successful songwriter, counting Jake Owen's "Barefoot Blue Jean Night" and Eli Young Band's "Even If It Breaks Your Heart" among his cuts. Last year he went No. 1 as an artist with "Friday Night." His current single is "She Don't Love You."

**What does it mean to be in the CRS New Faces Show?**

It's a major, awesome opportunity to get to play *New Faces*. It means, "We want your face to stick around for a little longer."

**You've been to CRS before – what's one of your favorite memories?**

I'm usually the designated diabetic, so I'm allowed *not* to get too crazy. I remember wandering around in the Bridge Bar getting to meet all the famous people before I had anything going on. Being a new kid in town, it was one of the first places you could go hang out and meet everybody in radio.

**What can you tell us about your New Faces video?**

It'll definitely be entertaining. We've been brainstorming on it since the day we found out I'm doing it. I have a very dry and goofy sense of humor. From "She Don't Love You" to this *New Faces* video will be a big leap.

**What tricks do you use to remember names/stations/call letters?**

I remember people's faces. I'll admit it – I'm not the best with names. I've started using little tricks of "this rhymes with this," and "they're kind of like this lyric." Now I see people so often that I remember their name because they're my friends.

**How are your packing skills?**

I am insanely fast. I did forget a pair of jeans recently, but good thing I was wearing some when I walked out the door. I'd packed in about two minutes. It's easier when you're already half-packed all the time.

**What's one "lesson" you've learned on your radio tour?**

I grew up in Texas. It's cool to go up to Montana, New York and Maine and meet people who are a lot like the people you came from. That's the coolest lesson: realizing we're all the same but we have different traditions and different accents. Songs connect with everybody.

**Which "animal" station mascot best describes you?**

The wolf, because half the time I'm trying to howl out another song, seeing if the moon smiles and likes it or not. And like wolves, we all work at night.

**What were a couple of your 2014 highlights?**

Having a No. 1 song and my album came out. And a "double No. 1" song – a No. 11.

**If you were playing tour guide for the folks coming to CRS, where's one place they have to go?**

We'd go to McNamara's Irish Pub over in Donelson. They have good live Irish music, everybody there treats you like family and they have incredible food.

## Cole Swindell

Warner Bros./WMN's Cole Swindell went from selling Luke Bryan's merch to writing his songs ("Roller Coaster"), plus hits for Florida Georgia Line ("This Is How We Roll") and Thomas Rhett ("Get Me Some Of That"). Swindell proved just as successful on the mic with his No. 1 debut single "Chillin' It" and follow-ups "Hope You Get Lonely Tonight" and "Ain't Worth The Whiskey."

**What does it mean to you to be in the CRS New Faces Show?**

I've always heard of it, but it's crazy to think I'm in that category now. I had just gotten off a plane when my manager told me I was one of the *New Faces*. I was pumped – to be off the plane and to be included in the show. And all I could think about was, 'Oh God, now we have to make a video.'

**What can you tell us about it?**

There are some parts we shot in Mexico and it's a mix of funny and also telling my whirlwind year-and-a-half story. I have some special guests in there who were in Mexico with me. I haven't seen it yet, but I know I needed a stunt man. I'll leave it at that.

**How do you remember names/stations/call letters?**

It's tough for me to remember names, but when you're meeting people on your radio tour, you're forming a friendship. So it's a little easier to remember than if you're just casually meeting somebody. I couldn't be mad if they forgot my name because they have a lot to remember, too.

**When you have a radio station lunch or dinner, what's your "go-to" item?**

I try to eat healthy, like a grilled chicken salad. I need to keep myself in shape.

**What's something you hope you never have to eat again?**

I'm not picky at all, but I'd say a cucumber. I like to try most anything.

**What did you learn on your radio tour?**

Whether the people are in a huge or small market, you never know where they're going to be a year from now. They're all in it to hopefully support you and you should always treat people the same – how you would want to be treated. I've tried to let them know how appreciative I am because nobody would know who I was if they weren't taking a chance on me as a new artist.

**Which "animal" station mascot best describes your personality?**

The bull, because I'm determined. It's been a pretty crazy path I've had, from selling t-shirts to writing songs for other people to finally getting to where I need to be.

**What were a couple of your highlights from last year?**

Playing the *Grand Ole Opry* was nerve-wracking, seeing photos of all those legends and where we've come from. We wouldn't be where we are now without all of them. It was something I'll never forget.

Another highlight was being on tour with Luke Bryan and Lee Brice, playing football stadiums and other huge venues. And having four No. 1 songs that I wrote last year was something I'll probably never have happen again. I had recorded two myself, and the others were Luke and Thomas Rhett. I cannot complain. It's been an unbelievable trip.



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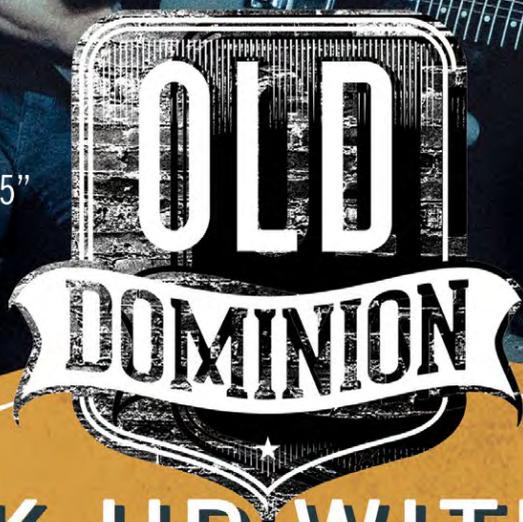


"Old Dominion will be THE breakout act of 2015"

Steve Geoffries, iHeartMedia Phoenix

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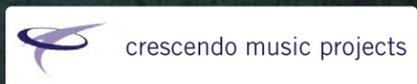
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# LABEL PROMOTION CONTACTS

**ABBREVIATION KEY:**

<b>A</b> Activator	<b>I</b> Indicator	<b>P</b> President
<b>AR</b> A&R	<b>IM</b> Interactive Marketing	<b>PA</b> Partner
<b>BD</b> Business Development	<b>LO</b> Label Operations	<b>PB</b> Publicity
<b>C</b> Consultant	<b>M/CB</b> Mgr./Creative Brand	<b>PE</b> Promotion Executive
<b>CH</b> Chairman	<b>MA</b> Mid-Atlantic	<b>PR</b> Promotion
<b>CO</b> Coordinator	<b>MP</b> Manager Promotion	<b>RD</b> Radio Division
<b>CR</b> Client Relations	<b>MR</b> Music Row	<b>RP</b> Regional Promotion
<b>D</b> Director	<b>MS</b> Mid-South	<b>RS</b> Radio Syndication
<b>D/RP</b> Director/Regional Promotion	<b>MW</b> Midwest	<b>RM</b> Radio Marketing
<b>D/NP</b> Director/National Promotion	<b>NC</b> National Coordinator	<b>S</b> South
<b>D/SP</b> Director/Special Projects	<b>ND</b> National Director/Promotion	<b>SE</b> Southeast
<b>DSM</b> Digital & Social Media	<b>NDRM</b> National Director/Radio Marketing	<b>SC</b> Secondary Promotion
<b>E</b> East	<b>NE</b> Northeast	<b>SP</b> Specialist
<b>EA</b> Exec. Asst	<b>NM</b> New Media	<b>SVP</b> Sr. VP
<b>FP</b> Field Promotion	<b>NP</b> National Promotion	<b>SW</b> Southwest
<b>GC</b> General Counsel	<b>NPS</b> National Promotion Strategy	<b>W</b> West Coast.
<b>GM</b> General Manager	<b>O</b> Owner	



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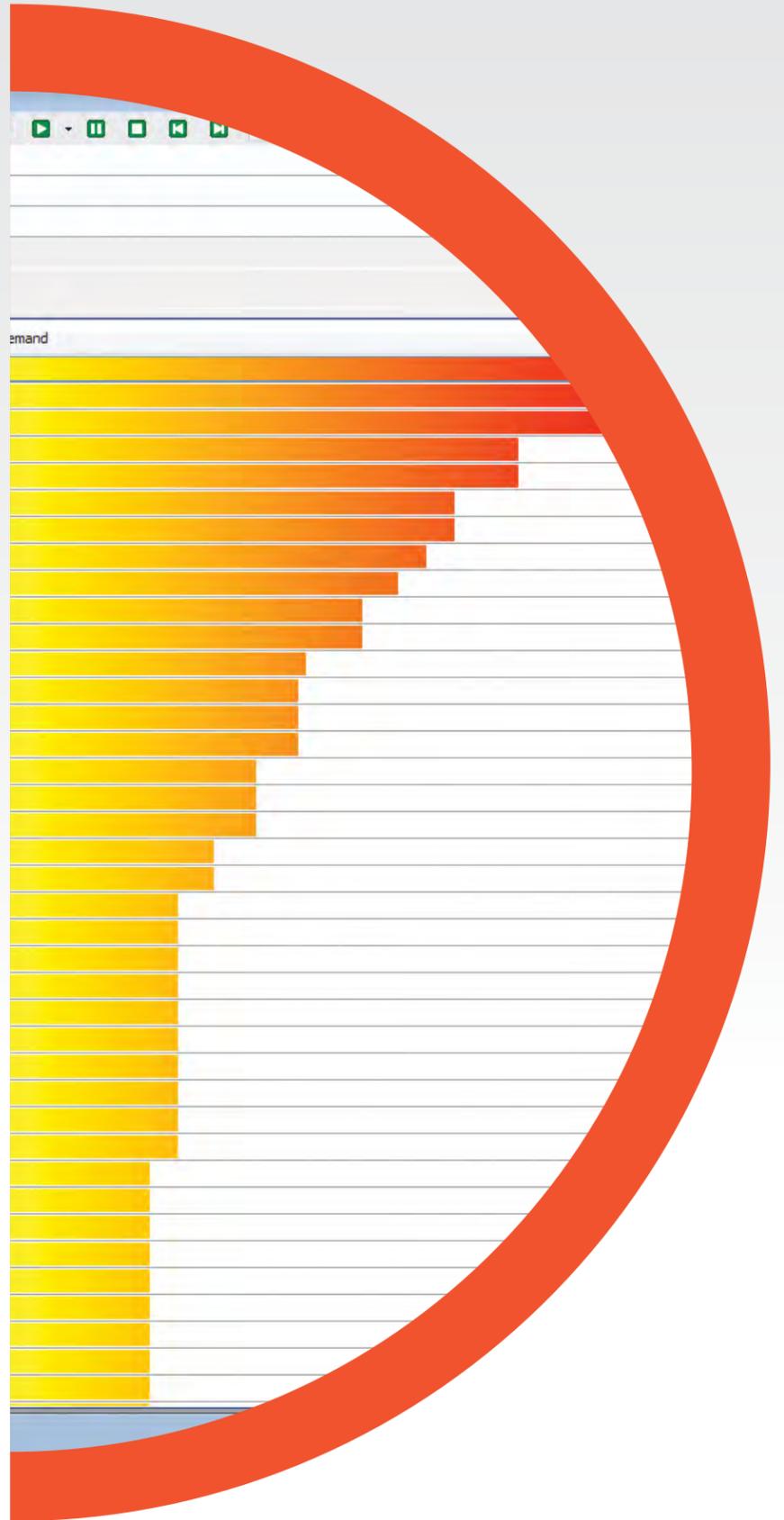
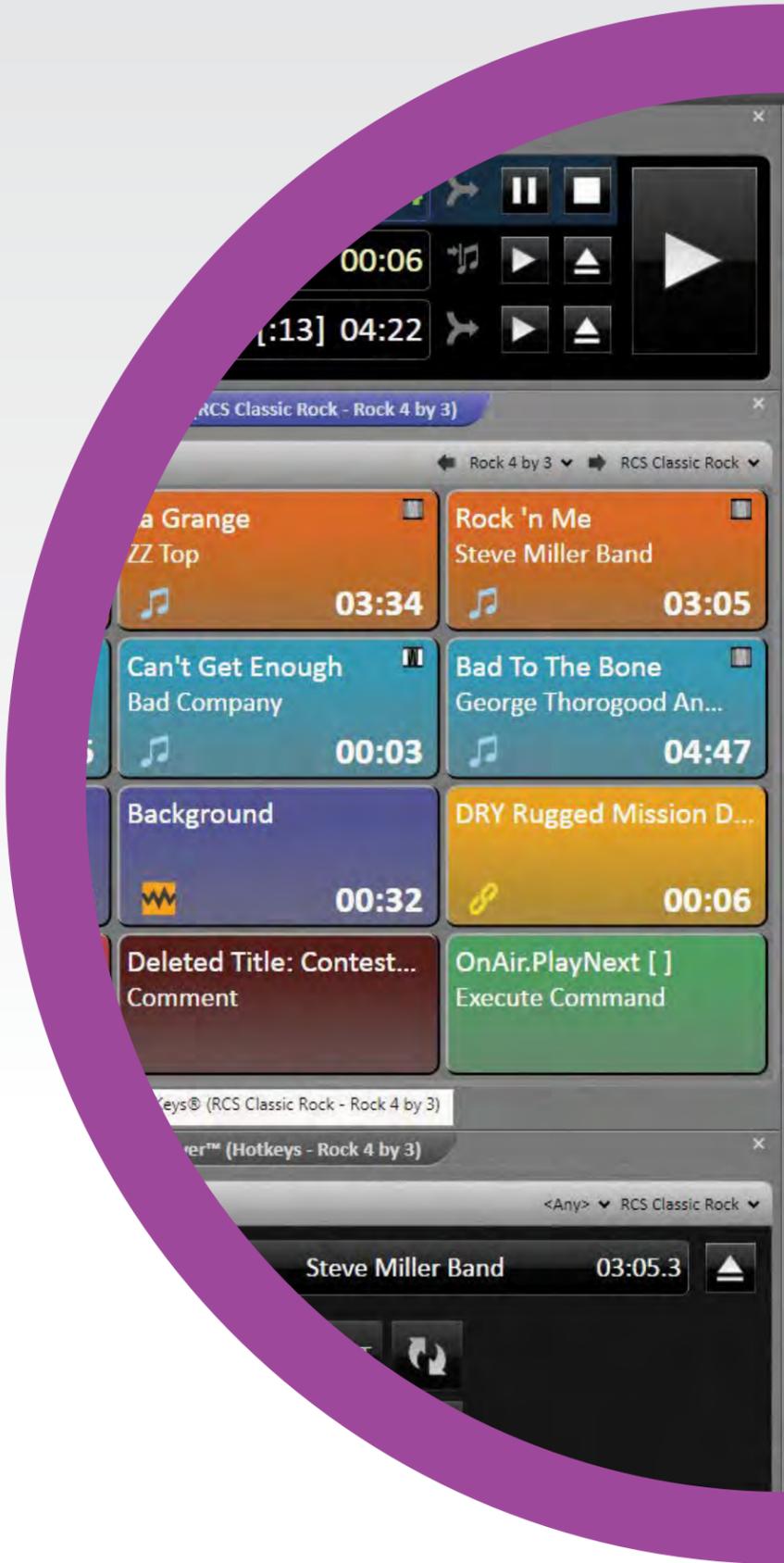
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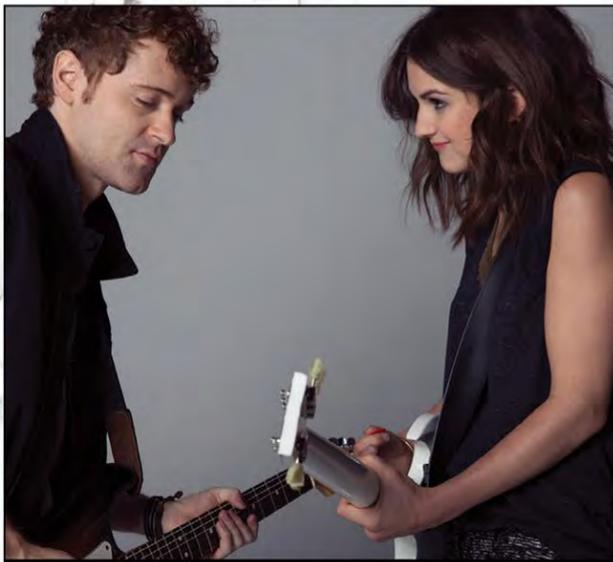
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# Clay Hunnicutt

## Best Of Both Worlds

**P**romoted to iHeartMedia EVP/GM National Programming Platforms in March of last year, Clay Hunnicutt brought a little bit of Nashville to the Big Apple.

A career that started at a small market Country station has grown into one of the key executive roles at the top of the largest radio group in the world. Hunnicutt's branding, sales integration, events and programming oversight extends across iHeart's formats and platforms, but he continues

### THE INTERVIEW

as company-wide Brand Manager for Country. When Country Aircheck spoke to him in March, he admitted the new

job included a good bit of "drinking from the informational fire hose." Having worked almost a full year in the new gig, Hunnicutt offers a candid assessment of his role, the company he helps steer and Country's place in it.

**CA:** Has the water pressure receded at all?

**CH:** The pressure has, yes. When you get into a job, you learn the landscape, where to go, what to do and the triggers to pull. But the pace has certainly not decreased. We are as active, aggressive and movement-oriented as ever. Even more so – 2015 is off to an incredibly fast start. Once you get the feel for the job under your belt, you can move a little bit quicker.

**What does the job look like on a daily or weekly basis?**

We're in the office a lot, but we're also on the road at our various marquee events. An average week involves supporting the local markets and programmers by giving them access to all the resources that the entire company has from a programming, events and marketing and branding perspective. We are a conduit of resources they can fully leverage to drive the brands – whether it's WSIX/Nashville, Z100 [Top 40 WHTZ/New York] or [Top 40] KIIS/Los Angeles – that are what the company is all about.

Help them elevate their radio stations and their ratings by engaging listeners with a compelling product.

We also work on the sales side to integrate clients, innovate content and engage their products with our brands, personalities and key events. That's a dynamic process because they have goals and we have goals and parameters. We work with key clients like Macy's, Taco Bell, 7Up and Pepsi on some really big campaigns. They all have music initiatives as well, so we work and meet with them constantly. Programmers are now much more in meetings with clients for the creativity. We really explain and teach clients what our formats and brands stand for so they can develop a message that isn't disconnected or disjointed.

**How is iHeartMedia different from Clear Channel? Where is the balance between being a multi-platform media company and still driving a huge percentage of revenue from frontline terrestrial stations?**

Clear Channel was built on radio stations. iHeartMedia still has an unbelievable foundation of 859 radio stations in 150 markets. That will never change. What you've seen over the last two or three years is us trying to grow the business. We are innovators in the event space with the *iHeartRadio Music Festival* and offshoots in the *iHeartRadio Country Festival*, the *Ultimate Pool Party* and so many others. You also have to talk about brand and content development with Premiere Networks, run by Darrin Davis, with Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity. Our events are also on TV. The *Jingle Ball Tours*. The app is on your dashboard as we've worked to integrate with the automotive industry.

It's not just about what happens on the radio. It's about all the ways we can be wherever the listeners are. We want to expose music, we want to expose our brands and we want people to be engaged. It does take the word "media" – that's not a fluff word to us. If you start looking at the diversity of the programs and platforms where our products and brands are available, it is truly a media company. That has really transformed under [Chairman/CEO] Bob Pittman and [President/CFO] Rich Bressler in the last two to three years.

**Now that you're in New York, there are a lot of people downstream who are probably curious to know what the culture is like at the top of iHeartMedia. What kinds of things are important, what's not important? What's the vibe?**

One, creativity wins. Bob Pittman is incredible about making sure the best ideas float to the top no matter where they come from. Put them on the table, let's discuss them and if it's a great idea, we'll go do it 110%. There's also an openness of being able to disagree and be heard. You may not always win that argument, but to at least be able to raise some dissent in the room is important. Out of that comes real productivity. Those are two really big cultural shifts.

There's also a genuine excitement about where the company is, where it's going and for the people who are doing it. I started as an unpaid intern in this business and now I'm doing what I'm doing only because of this company allowing people to grow. There is a willingness to teach, mentor and lead – we continue bringing programmers in for our label summits and that level of engagement. We give them a voice in *On The Verge* and who will win *iHeartRadio Music Awards*. I don't know that there are that many companies doing that these days. So, the culture at the top really is inclusive. Let's get the absolute best people in the room, let's get the best ideas on the table and let's do some amazing things.

“  
The culture at the top really is inclusive. Let's get the absolute best people, the best ideas and do some amazing things.”



**Is radio a receding medium?**

Not at all. Radio's death has been predicted for the last 80 years, but 92% of people are listening every week. That has not decreased over the last 30 years. So much research shows that over 70% of people are still discovering new music on the radio.

Radio is a companion and truly the medium of connectivity. It's live – one of the last in-the-moment mediums. Weather or traffic, it's there. If you want to know what your favorite artists are doing, it's there. If you want to go to these unbelievable events, radio makes that possible. If you want to break new acts, it's possible. We saw it this week in *Country Aircheck* with "Smoke" from A Thousand Horses – that's iHeartMedia's *On The Verge*. Rather than receding, I think it's growing.

**That 92% has been consistent, but TSL has been steadily declining as consumer choice grows. Is a shifting view of platforms behind what's going on with**

**THE INTERVIEW**

**translators and HD2? At some point will tower-bound signals that cover a market be less important because everything's available digitally on Google's satellites? Translator prices have skyrocketed. Why?**

You'd have to ask an engineer first, but there aren't too many 100,000-watt FM signals you can plop down in the middle of a market like Atlanta or Chicago. So you have to find ways to create mainstream or niche formats. If people are launching new stations on HD2 and translators, there's clearly a demand. It's an opportunity to continue to grow brands, develop new products, expose new music and engage listeners. Expectations are different than for a 100,000-watt station, so it's a matter of continuing to offer products and brands that listeners have said they want in whatever way we can reach them.

**How much of your time goes to Country?**

Depends on the week, but probably a good 30-40%. Even when I'm working on national programming initiatives, I'm always thinking, "How can we impact our 140-plus Country radio stations with this?" We may be working on something on the Top 40, Urban or Rock side that might be applicable to Country, and vice versa. And we're constantly working with the labels, choosing the next *On The Verge* artist, developing the *iHeartRadio Country Festival* or getting country artists into other events like the *iHeartRadio Music Festival* and the awards. I'm in Nashville regularly, meeting with labels, keeping our finger on the pulse of the format.

**iHeartMedia's Chicago Country launch has drawn a lot of interest. I know you can't share the game plan, but what can you tell us about the desire to be in that market and what you think it takes to compete?**

We're constantly looking for opportunities to grow the format, which is our largest by-station count and No. 2 to Top 40 in listening. Competition is healthy and something I relish at times because it makes us get better when somebody launches against us or if we launch a new station. Those moments cause you to physically stop and think about what you're doing – how you're programming break to break. That's the exciting part of it that we all became programmers for.

As for Chicago specifically, it's market No. 3 and WUSN has obviously been very successful there for a long time. We saw an opportunity with only one station in the market to come in and do things a little bit differently. I've seen this in almost every single case – whether we have added a Country station into a market or somebody has done that against us – Country shares grow. So I look at it as a positive for the format. We're not going to program like WUSN and I'm sure they're not going to program like us, so there will be some diversity. Boston and Pittsburgh were the same way. We've been aggressive in the last six months and I think we're at our best when we're looking proactively at how and where we can grow. We don't just come in blindly and throw radio stations on.

**We heard a rumor that iHeart was looking pretty intently at New York before Cumulus launched WNSH. Did that spur action in Chicago, as there has been a lot of talk about Cumulus considering that market?**

What the other competitors are doing doesn't really factor into it. The move needs to be right for us and the listeners. Has New York been talked about before? Of course it has. Especially when it didn't have one for so long. Our biggest problem is we are so flippin' successful in New York with Z100, WKTU, Light FM, Q104 and Power. They're all in the top four or five in various demos, which makes it almost impossible to [flip one to Country].

**We've seen PDs from other formats brought into Country, like Tommy Chuck in Baltimore. We've also seen Steve Stewart bumped up within the format to Chicago. What's the balance in growing programmers within the format or bringing them in from outside?**

It depends on the individual. We've had some great Country PDs come from Rock or Top 40 and some have only ever been Country PDs. We also have great Country programmers like Gregg Swedberg, Kerry Wolfe and Steve Geofferies oversee other formats as an OM or VP/Programming. Tommy, specifically, is a very talented programmer and a great talent coach who

gets the fundamentals. You can teach people about a format and help them through the relationships if they don't have them. It's not an effort to bring Pop or Rock people into Country. If they are a really good PD and aggressive, I don't know that format matters.

**Where are you right now in terms of national shows relative to where you thought you'd be?**

Purely from my perspective, we are about two years ahead with Bobby Bones. I don't know that anyone expected we'd be on 80 radio stations at this point. A syndicated show usually takes multiple years to grow like that. His ratings success has been very good. His engagement with the markets is absolutely fantastic. In those aspects and in their willingness to learn, adjust and continue to grow, that show is really miraculous. And it will only get better.

CMT and *After MidNite* has been an unbelievable partnership. Cody Alan is heavily involved in our events. We simulcast their National Championship football kickoff party with Toby Keith and Lady Antebellum. We both went into it saying this is not a one-sided affair, it is a true partnership. John Hamlin, Anne Oakley, Brian Philips and the team have been really open to ideas. We bring ideas to them, they bring them to us and it's been really successful.

**You mentioned market engagement, and with a show like Bobby's being on 80 stations, do you see a ceiling for national shows in being able to have that engagement from a national platform?**

No, I don't. It's all about being compelling and a companion. If you're real and listeners can relate, that

do that at other formats as well. Country has everything from Luke Bryan to new Zac Brown, Maddie & Tae, A Thousand Horses and Sam Hunt pushing the envelope. It's a pretty dynamic format right now.

**We've taken a deep look at women in country for this issue, what's your take?**

There are great female artists, solo and as part of groups. Could some of the music be better? Sure, but I think that about the guys, too. One thing I saw in research about 10 or 12 years ago, and I tell label folks this, if you're going to be a female in this format, you have to be a woman of substance, have a story and be unapologetic in who you are. Martina, Trisha, Miranda, Carrie, Loretta – all women of substance.

**What do you think of Nash Icon and a possible shift in how we look at Classic Country?**

There's always going to be an appetite for the music that creates memories. Listening to Garth's "Friends in Low Places" takes me to exactly where I was when I heard it. There's always room to play music that was so huge. Going back to "My Maria" or "Fancy" – I still like to listen to that stuff. And new fans are discovering it because if you're 20 years old right now, a song from 1992 came out before you were born. My son is the biggest Journey fan in the world because I loved them growing up and now he does, too. Does that mean I should go create a Journey format? No.

**Is there something to that hybrid mix of currents and classics?**

It's a wait-and-see. We're not rushing to launch 15



wins. The key is having a conversation that puts the listeners in the room. You can't put a million people in a room, but you can. Ryan Seacrest is a phenomenal example of that. He's a huge star in his own right and people will approach his table and be awestruck at the person he's having dinner with. They'll ask for a photo or an autograph, but then they turn to Ryan and have a conversation with him in a way that they won't with the other person. They'll bring up something he talked about on his show because he's real to them. He's in their daily lives, their routines. Bobby is the same way. When I'm out with him, people come up and want to talk about what Amy said or what Lunchbox did. That lets you know you're really hitting the mark.

**What about on the station level? Is there a limit to how much national programming you can employ considering the need to have people in the market who can connect with listeners on the streets?**

Every market and station is different from the listener and client perspective. All of that needs to be factored in. We don't just willy-nilly throw syndication on or have all live people just because. It really has to make the most sense for the radio station itself, the needs of the market and the needs of the listeners. We look at all of that; there's certainly not a one-size-fits-all. We've seen it where all syndication works, we've seen where no syndication has worked, and everything in between.

**There is that fear-baiting notion that we're in a headlong rush toward robot dayparts...**

What I want to tell people about that is the best wins, whether that's live, syndicated, a weekend countdown or anything else. The best show wins and that's what it should be about. The listeners tell you, and I really like that.

**How's Nashville doing – labels, artists, songwriters?**

Amazing. What I love is everybody's open to great ideas and doing things differently. There's really an influx of great, new music we're seeing with *On The Verge* and our discovery programs on-air and online. Nobody's resting on what they've already got. People like to bash, bro-country and say all the songs sound the same. You can

radio stations tomorrow. We'll see if it's successful in more than one market – as we do in other formats. Rhythmic AC is blowing up right now. Will that last 18 months or 10 years? All '80s stations were a big fad for about two years. Now '80s is an element of certain stations, but it's not its own format. We'll see.

**When you think back to that unpaid intern, what was your wildest ambition at that point? Could you have imagined sitting in a New York City office as part of the world's biggest radio group?**

The answer to the second question is no. I got into radio because it was fun and I wanted to be around the stations. When I got the internship at [WUSY/Chattanooga], I emptied garbage, set up remotes and did anything because I loved the atmosphere. The personalities, the pace, the craziness that went on – maybe it's because I'm easily bored, but I love how fast it is. I can call somebody and in five minutes, we can have something on the air at 850 radio stations. There's no other medium that can do that. So I marvel at what has been built and what we get to do every day.

Several people believed in me, including WUSY's GM, Sammy George, who made me PD when I was 24 and had absolutely no business being the PD of US101. But I understood what the brand was about and he saw that in me. I wouldn't be here if he hadn't, and then nurtured it along with my first consultant, Mike O'Malley. Marc Chase was a huge influence. Bob Pittman, now, is like getting a PhD in marketing, entertainment and how to engage people. Not just listeners, but music industry, clients – everyone.

This world is about relationships and no other format does it like Country. When you add what Bob and the rest of the team are about into the Country universe, it gets really good really fast. I get the best of both worlds because I love Nashville, still live here and it will always be my home, but I also get the hustle and bustle of New York. Tom Poleman, with his background and expertise, and then my background and my expertise – we are a tandem unlike any I've ever seen. It is probably the most exciting time of my career.

**CAC**

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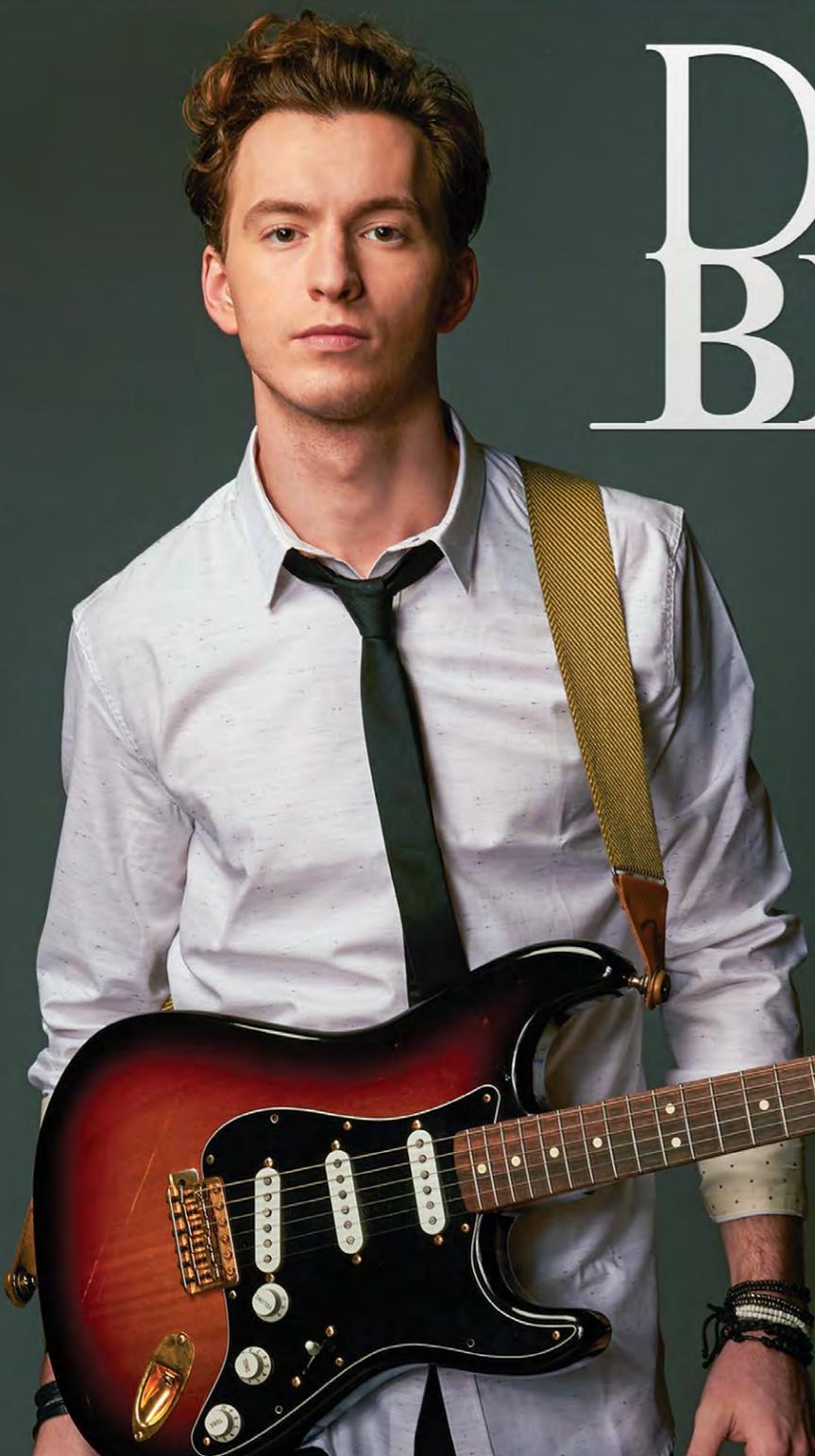


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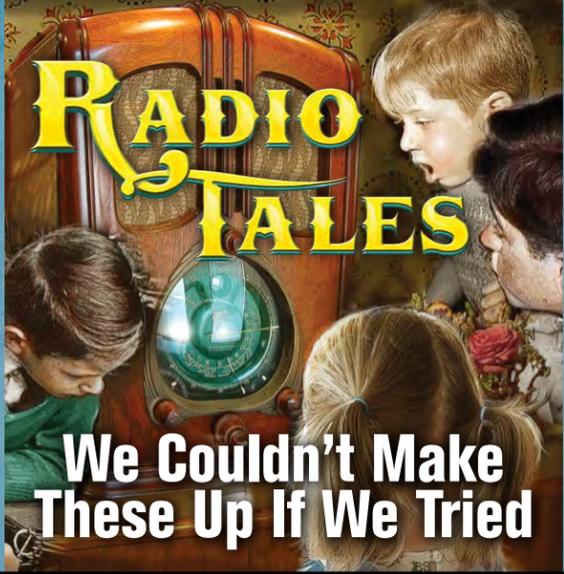
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# CLAY HUNNICUTT THE INTERVIEW

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# COUNTRY AIRCHECK

FEBRUARY 2015

On the  
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# KIP MOORE

## I'M TO BLAME

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