

★ **CRS** ★
BINGO!
Win A Free iPad



**HALL OF
FAMERS**
GLEN CAMPBELL
**POP PDS
TALK
COUNTRY**

SONY/NASHVILLE'S
**GARY
OVERTON**
The Interview

**LABEL
CONTACTS
INSIDE**



COUNTRY
AiR CHECK

FEBRUARY 2012

WELCOME TO CRS! ★ DON'T MISS:



AT THE
RYMAN
LIVE!

WED, FEB 22ND 12:00 PM



CRS BINGO!

“R-AD-I-O and Bingo was its name-o!” Welcome to the first consecutive CRS Bingo! contest, brought to you by Country Aircheck and Power Source Country. We’ve taken the popular “Fan Fair Bingo” concept and added a few twists ... and prizes! Not just *any* prizes, mind you, but two Apple iPads, courtesy of Power Source Country. Good luck!



THE RULES

- * Complete any space(s) on the CRS Bingo! play card (right) by emailing your answer(s) or photo(s) to crsbingo@countryaircheck.com by 8am Friday (2/24).
- * Standard bingo rules apply: Five in-line spaces across, down or diagonally count as a “Bingo.”
- * Everyone who successfully completes a “Bingo” will be entered to win an iPad 2.
- * Everyone who successfully completes a “Cover-All” of every space will be entered in a separate drawing for an iPad 2. (Ed. Note: Could be great odds!)
- * Winners will be drawn at the New Faces Show & Dinner Friday (2/24).



R1. Picture of yourself congratulating a 2012 Country Radio Hall of Famer.

R2. Picture with any label regional rep or VP/Promotion in an elevator, revolving door, closet or bathroom.

R3. A quote from Clear Channel CEO Bob Pittman’s keynote.

R4. Number of stair steps from the Renaissance Ballroom area to the top-level NCC floor.

R5. The city and calls of CRS Exec. Dir. Bill Mayne’s first job in radio.

A1. Name of the CRS Board President.

A2. Picture of yourself with Chet Atkins, Owen Bradley, Roy Acuff or Minnie Pearl (bronze versions).

A3. Picture of yourself and a friend in the CRS 2012 Badge Bar.

A4. Three Bob Night: Picture(s) of yourself with three people named Bob. (Likely candidates: Bob Reeves, Bob Mitchell, Bob Richards, Bob Moody, Bobby Young, Bob Kingsley, etc.)

A5. Read Wednesday’s CRS Daily Buzz (powered by Country Aircheck) for the designated clue.

D1. Post a photo to your Facebook or Twitter of any artist reading Country Aircheck (and notify CA by email, as detailed above).

D2. Names of the performers scheduled for Thursday’s BMI/Country Aircheck-sponsored WCRS Live!

D3. Card Swap: Visit the Power Source booth (NCC Level 2), pick up their business card and put yours in the bowl. Send us Jason Higgins’ or Rich Miller’s cell number.

D4. The names of the panelists and moderator at any CRS session.

D5. Photo of yourself with one of Nashville’s oversized Gibson Guitars.

I1. The second song performed during Wednesday’s UMGN luncheon.

I2. The color of the shirt Edison’s Larry Rosin wore during Wednesdays Research Presentation.

I3. Picture of yourself in or in front of the Bridgestone Arena.

I4. Read Thursday’s CRS Daily Buzz (Powered by Country Aircheck) for the designated clue.

I5. The names of the Country Radio Hall of Famers on the bottom-left and top-right plaques in the display between the hotel and NCC.

O1. Post a photo to Facebook or Twitter of yourself with a cupcake and/or coffee from the St. Jude booth in the NCC (notify Country Aircheck of the posting via email).

O2. The third song performed during Thursday’s Capitol luncheon.

O3. One of the phrases on the Country Aircheck CRS hand sanitizer stations.

O4. Photo of yourself and a rep from the sponsoring company/label at any after-hours CRS event.

O5. The first sentence in the second answer given by Gary Overton in The Interview, page 47.

Open to all CRS registrants, excluding employees, spouses and associates of Country Aircheck and Power Source. One iPad per winner.

Beverlee Brannigan



It's Only Make Believe: Brannigan with the late Conway Twitty during the CRS artist-attendee reception in the late '80s. She's only missed the seminar twice since 1979.

“
You have
to love
every
person
you work
with for
the talents
they
bring.”
”



Class Acts: With Dick Clark in the United Stations Presidential Suite at an early '80s CRS. Brannigan went to Northwestern University with Clark's son, television producer Rac.



Guitar Pic: Brannigan is still hanging with the format's biggest stars, evidenced by this shot at Keith Urban's Wichita show last year.

Encourage Meant At Every Level

Country Radio
HALL OF FAME

One of only four women to be inducted into the Country Radio Hall of Fame, **Beverlee Brannigan** spent 20 years at KJJY/Des Moines, arriving as a 24-year-old first-time PD and tasked with launching the station from scratch. KJJY went on to become a steady ratings leader with a nationwide reputation for excellence. For the past decade, Brannigan has equaled or surpassed that success at Journal's KFDI/Wichita, which has consistently ranked No. 1 in the market. National honors during her tenure have included a CMA Station of the Year Award and two morning shows recognized as Personality of the Year. Brannigan doubles as cluster OM, and in 2010 she was elevated to the company-wide post of Dir./Country Programming.

I've been interested in radio my whole life. No lie, one of my very first memories is of the WNEW/New York jingle from when I was four and living in New Jersey. Why is that that taking up space in my head? I grew up north of Boston in a preppy little town called Topsfield. My memories are full of radio. You hear musicians saying there was always music in their house; for us it was the radio. Mother listened to WBZ/Boston, a Group Westinghouse station. Dad loved classic music, so that was always blaring.

My first Country job was at WOKQ/Dover, NH. I got a call one day out of the blue from JJ Jeffrey of the famous WRKO. He and "Doc" Bob Fuller had bought some radio stations, and 'OKQ was one of them. They were looking for part-time air talent, and he'd heard me on WNPB. I didn't know a thing about country music.

I fell hard for the music. After college I did afternoons at WOKQ for two years and loved it. The owners, Fuller-Jeffrey Broadcasting, then bought KJJY/Des Moines, which was actually licensed to Ankeny, IA. They needed to run it on a shoestring. I was single, unattached and I could relocate. That was my first PD job, in 1981. I was 24.

I didn't know enough to be scared or intimidated. I packed my things in my car and drove across the United States to Iowa. Some of the biggest challenges were all the ones that just come with a startup. Plus, I was a woman. I also did middays and afternoons, but I'm not the greatest air personality. I had the benefit of working with some terrific people who gave me great coaching, like Rusty Walker, Joel Raab and JD Spangler.

The big station at the time was KSO-AM/Des Moines. KJJY went on to be a really great station with one of the greatest staffs I've ever managed, but believe me when I tell you I made *plenty* of mistakes. In 2001, Wilks came in and bought KJJY from Barnstable, and my services were "no longer required." I was two weeks' shy of 20 years there, but I saw it coming. I got up in the morning, and my husband had left me flowers. It was a hard day.

Being out of work was a great centering time. I'd meditate and pray and think about what I needed and wanted to do. It was a great time to step back and listen to radio differently. I learned how annoying some of the radio stuff is when you're listening as a listener. I learned that just because it happened on the morning show, not everyone heard it. I learned it's important to account for people who aren't listening when the cool thing you did happened.

I'm a long-term thinker and relentless, which may explain my longevity. When you have a long-term view, the bumps in the road are easier to get through without being too reactive. If I have any gift, I suppose it's being able to recognize what is spectacular about the different personalities I've worked with. They are way cooler than me. It's a matter of pointing out to people what they do well and encouraging them.

You have to love the air talent. That's the first thing. You have to love every person you work with for the talents they bring to you. After you love them, you hold them accountable for being great. Brian & Kelly [current KFDI morning hosts] would say,



"She gets us." [APD/middays] Carol Hughes would say, "She's hard, but has made me a better jock." Then they'd say, "Her desk is messy." I love a clean desk, but I have a great deal of difficulty keeping it that way. That's my dirty secret.

I'm proud of the morning show talents who have won the CMA Personality of the Year Awards at KFDI. The station won a CMA in 2003, and that was a highlight. The week I was called with the Hall of Fame news was the same week Brian and Kelly won the CMA Award. We also had a terrific book, and that was the most exciting news. The accolades are wonderful, but the thing you come to work and grind on every day is to move the ratings needle.

I don't know what being in the Hall of Fame means yet. I'm so flattered and extremely honored to be in that group of people. My first reaction is probably that I'm not worthy, but apparently some other people think I am, so I'll accept it graciously and hope in some way my being in there can encourage other people. Encouragement is probably most true to my heart. I want to encourage people to be great every day, to be part of the industry I love so much. Since I'm among so few women on that wall, perhaps it will encourage others. If that happens, I'll take that as a win. I have just been so fortunate to work with great companies, talented airstaffs and people who have made me look good. I really won the lottery when it came to that.

Encouraging excellence is something we really need to continue doing. When I look around broadcasting, what I'm seeing is making me sad. We're getting away from serving our local listeners. Broadcasting comes with a responsibility, whether it's Country or other formats. Bob Fuller, one of the first owners I worked for, instilled this. You have to serve the people listening, and I see instances where that isn't happening. For those who do continue to serve listeners and be good broadcasters, more recognition is probably in order. **CAC**

Moby

Endearing To Listeners, Even In Deer Season



Hard Drivin' Men:
With NASCAR legends
Kyle and Richard Petty at
WKHX/Atlanta circa 2002.

Country Radio

HALL OF FAME

One of radio's true larger-than-life personalities, James "Moby" Carney worked his way up from small-town radio in Tennessee to WAMB, WKDA-FM and WKQB/Nashville, WQXM/Tampa, KSRR and KLOL/Houston and KEGL/Dallas, making his name for years riding the "shock jock" wave with top ratings before a decade dominating mornings at WKHX/Atlanta, where Moby was first syndicated. Widely known for his community service efforts, he was so popular among Houston law enforcement officers that their battering ram had a Moby sticker on it and is still called "The Moby" today. Although diagnosed with MS in 1984, he hasn't slowed down for a moment. For the past seven years, his self-syndicated morning show network from Roswell, GA has been carried in numerous markets in partnership with United Stations. Moby says ignorance is bliss. "If we'd known up front what a monumental job it was, we'd have never done it."

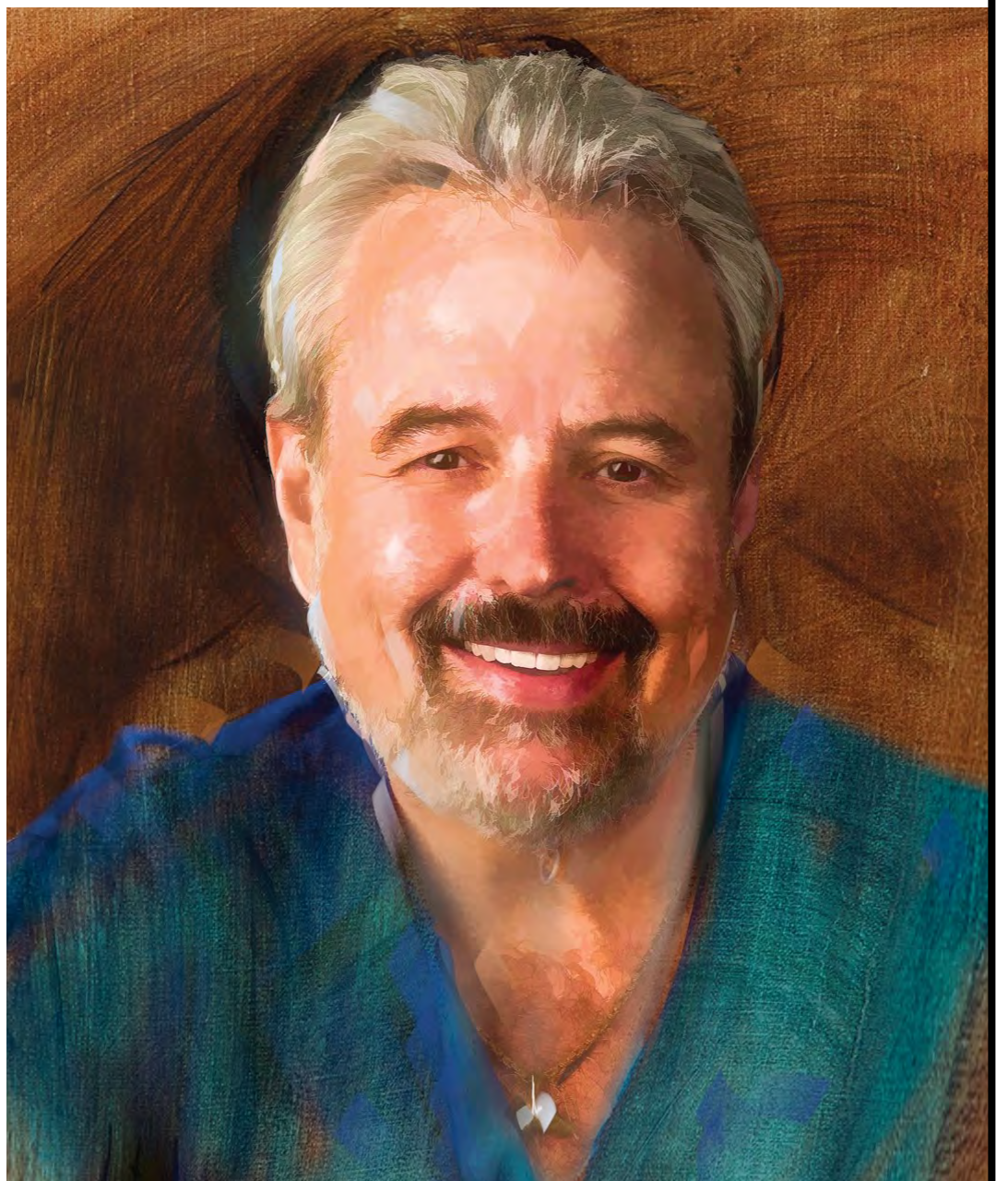
I was offered a job at 15, before I was even interested in radio. Mac Johnson, who owned 250-watt daytimer WCSV/Crossville, TN, called my dad and asked, "Jim, you got a boy in high school, don't you?" Dad said, "Yeah, what's he done?" Turns out Mac hires a high school student to do work part-time Sunday mornings. He had just fired a kid he'd caught at the station with beer and buddies. Daddy asked me, "Want to go work for Mac at the station?" I said, "That sounds like fun!" I showed up a half-hour early, at 5:30am, with my Thermos of coffee and sandwiches my mom had made me. My job was to play gospel music from 6-11am. Mac said, "This is a mic switch, and this is how you cue a record. And at 11 o'clock, if you'll just turn this on and punch this button, that intros the Baptist Church. By the time he's done preaching, I'll be back." That is all the formal training I've ever had. And if you listen, you can tell!

I earned the minimum wage — \$1.60 an hour. What Mac didn't know is that I would have paid *him*. My goal has always been to embrace the audience, endear myself to them, and allow them to endear themselves to me. It may sound weird, but I was always the fat kid who felt as if he had to be the friendliest guy around to make up for that. I was always overtly friendly, but honestly so. I was named "wittiest" in my senior year of high school, always a jokester. When the girls got their hearts broken, they'd come cry on my shoulder and I let them do it. I became more by feeling I was less. Even now, from time to time, part of me still feels that.

My mom was upset when I dropped out of college at Belmont, but I knew I wanted to pursue radio. I had been doing every other shift on AOR WKDA-FM/Nashville all weekend for 18 months. PD Jack Crawford promised me I'd get the first available fulltime shift. The guy who was doing 7-midnight had a bit of a "problem." One evening, he came in, puked and passed out on the control room floor. I didn't know what to do, so I called Jack. He said, "Well, guess what? You're the new 7-midnight guy." Two books later, I had a 50 share.

When I moved from afternoons at KSRR/Houston to mornings, what was I going to do to stand out? It became, "Good morning, Houston. Get your lazy asses out of bed!" I fed off the audience. The dirtier I was, the more the audience loved it. I pushed it as far as I could. It became a self-perpetuating monster, this shock radio thing. And nobody else in the country was doing it like this. I wasn't making much money, and soon L.A., Detroit and other markets were calling. When I told GM Jeff Trumper this, he said, "Moby, you've got a contract." I said, "I know it, and they know it. They're talking really big money." He sat back in his chair, playing with this little wind-up robot. After thinking for a moment, he threw it to me across the desk and said, "Welcome to the 50% tax bracket." I thought, "This is a good day." I've still got that robot.

For years, people had been saying to me, "Moby, listen to how you sound. You should be doing Country." My agent called about an opportunity to do Country for Norm Schrutt at WKHX/Atlanta. But



I loved Texas and was doing really well in rock and roll. But within a couple of days, my five-year-old son said, "Daddy, I was listening to you today and you said 'ass.'" I thought, "He's going to grow up emulating me." And about how I'd always been told to pursue Country. So I took the job and immediately became a more mature disc jockey trying to get into heaven.

[Future Hall of Famer] Rhubarb Jones was on 100-kw WYAY & WYAI, and was very successful. I had just arrived at WKHX, and saw him at a Travis Tritt listening party. I asked somebody to introduce me to him. Sweetest individual you've ever met. Rhubarb took my hand and said, "Moby, we know you're here, and there's plenty of room here for both of us. And as soon as you get settled, my wife and I want to take you out to dinner." I pulled him close and said, "I didn't come here to be your friend, buddy." And I let him go and walked away. He knew right then the war was on. We are good friends now, but only because he understood that it was business. Rhubarb's such a great guy that he will allow me to be his friend 20 years later.

There's no way to express the gratitude I feel to be inducted. My nine-year-old daughter can walk down that hall with her grandchildren and point up and say, "That's Grandpa. That's my dad." I didn't know I'd be able to leave a legacy like that. I was absolutely stunned by the news. And I'd just been inducted into the Georgia Radio Hall of Fame the prior Saturday. When Mike Culotta from the board called, he said, "Well, this *has* been a good week for you, hasn't it?"

I'll know it's time to hang up the headphones when someone calls 911 and they carry me out feet first. After 41 years, it's still so much fun. Retire? What would I do? Deer season only lasts three months a year. **CAC**

“My goal has always been to embrace the audience, endear myself to them, and allow them to endear themselves to me.”



Southern Belles: Hosting a
2011 beauty pageant at a
Benton House senior living
home in Georgia in 2011.
Moby's been doing these for
more than 20 years.

Ron Rogers

Father Of Modern Country Music Radio



Music Man: As GM of the No. 1 station in Austin, Country music aficionado Ron Rogers always took time to visit with the stars whose hits graced the airwaves at KVET & KASE. Pictured are Ron and his wife Pam with Garth Brooks, Willie Nelson and George Strait.



“
I’m still
meeting
with
people
smarter
than I
am and
learning
every
bit
I can.
”



Country Radio HALL OF FAME

A lover of Country music, perennial “student” at CRS, and nine-year format representative to Arbitron’s Radio Advisory Council, Rogers worked nearly his entire 42-year career in the Texas capital. He was, most notably, President of KVET Broadcasting’s top-rated KVET-AM & FM and KASE for 24 years. Rogers, who was inducted into the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in 2004, took every phone call and put no cap on what his employees could earn. His straightforward, supportive management style propelled eight stations in three markets to ratings/revenue dominance and engendered among his employees long-term loyalty rarely seen before or since.

As a kid, I did play-by-play on the all-star baseball games we played where you’d flip little cards around. At school, my voice changed before many others’, and people told me, “You ought to be in radio.” I majored in radio/television at the University of Texas, and sold Bibles door-to-door. I was bitten by dogs and rained on, but it taught me the value of the dollar better than anything. The question you asked was not, “Do you want a Bible?” but, “Would you prefer the speckled or gilded edges?” I learned you’d better create a need for radio and adapt the pitch to use *your* stations as opposed to others’.

We got to see LBJ [owner and future President Lyndon Baines Johnson] from time to time at KTBC-AM-FM-TV/Austin. I got to know Mrs. Johnson better, as she was more involved in running the stations than he. The whole family was always very gracious. When I was at KVET & KASE in the early ‘90s, Mrs. Johnson had lost her GM at KTBC & KLBJ. She asked if I’d come over and evaluate resumes of prospects for her. I ranked them 1-5, with No. 1 whom I’d hire first. She thanked me, and soon hired No. 5. Maybe she thought I was trying to put a fast one over on her. It’s funny, because he lasted about six months, and she then hired No. 1.

If you’re not smart, look at people who are. When we took KOKE Country, I studied Gordon McLendon’s and Todd Storz’s operations. Rather than play Bob Wills for an hour at noon, why not be uptempo with five-minute newscasts and jingles? Nobody had ever heard of jingles in Country before. We still played Marty Robbins and Jim Reeves, but put sophistication into the presentation to appeal to a broader group of folks. There was no blueprint, we had no money to advertise and were a daytimer. But it worked. We went to No. 1.

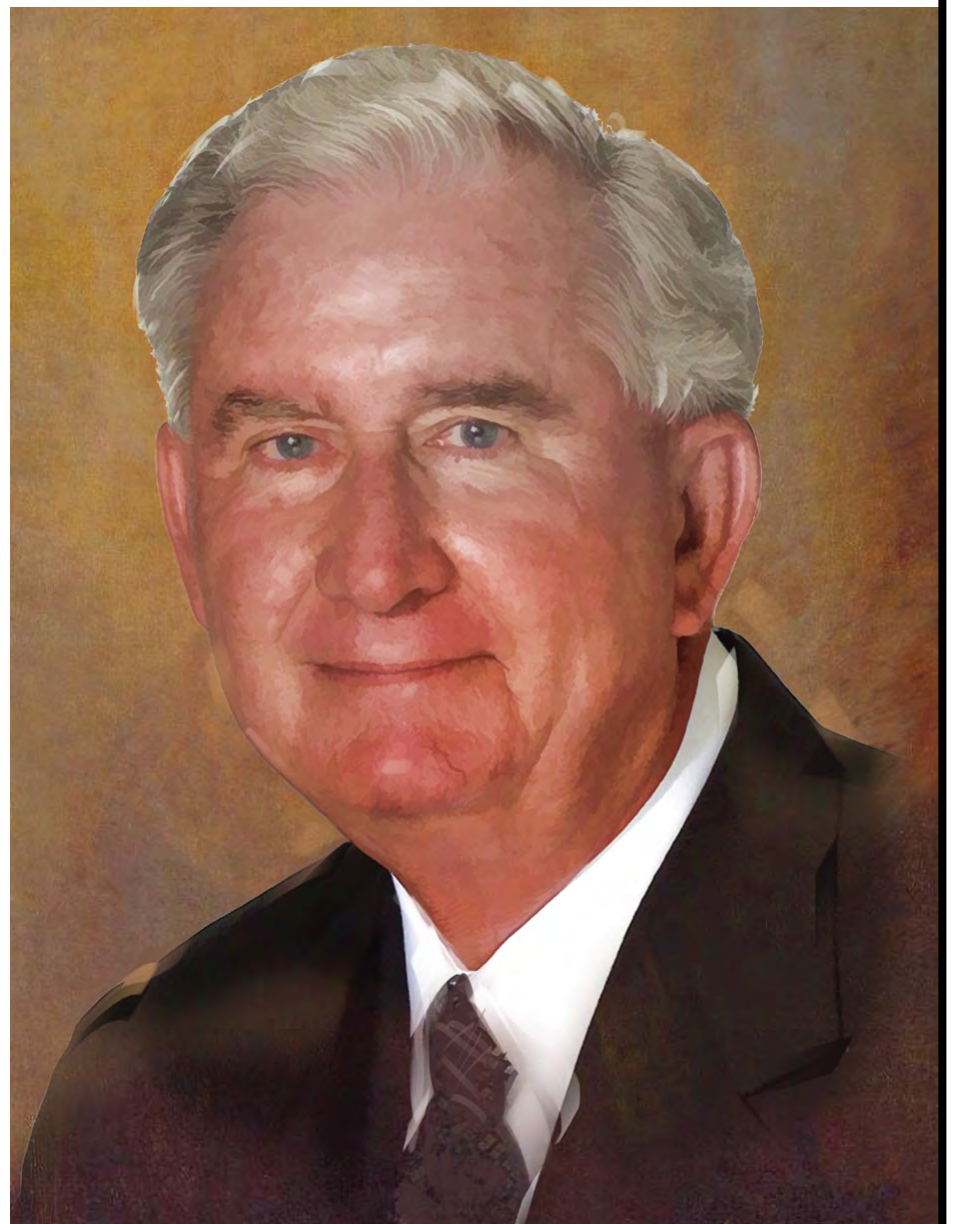
When George Strait came by with his first single “Unwound” in 1981, we were among the first, if not the first, to play it. I really liked George. Several years later, an MCA staffer divulged to me, “George loved that visit so much, he said, ‘Man, those guys are nice. If this singin’ thing doesn’t work out, I think I want to be in radio.’”

One time someone came up backstage and said, “Mr. Rogers, I hate to tell you this, but Dave Dudley just fell off the stage.” A moment later, it was, “One of Willie Nelson’s boys just hit Jerry Lee Lewis in the mouth.” I asked, “Did Dudley break anything?” They said no. “I said, ‘Well, then, prop him up and tell him he’s going to have to sing 10 or 15 minutes more because Jerry Lee can’t come out right now.’”

Willie is big buddies with [Texas Hall of Famer] Sammy Allred, who was on KVET. He was with Sammy one day, and I was told Willie was smoking [pot] in the studio. I said, “Well, ask him to leave.” They said, “You’d better ask him to leave,” so I told Willie, “I can’t jeopardize my license with you doing that.” Not long after that, I fired Allred, so Willie and I didn’t speak to each other for a few years.

I hired Allred back several years later and took Willie to play golf at the Austin Country Club. We were first going to have lunch, and Willie had on his Pedernales Cut-N-Putt Golf Club tank top. The pro told me, “Mr. Rogers, I don’t care who he is.

The University of Texas’ first baseball announcer, Ron Rogers debuted contemporary formatics on Country KOKE-AM/Austin in 1964, shaping a new sound that to this day remains the format’s standard.



He can’t play golf in that.” So I said, “Put a shirt on my bill.” I later said to Willie, “I know it’s going to come as a great shock, but they won’t let you play in your shirt. So I bought you one.” There were 15-20 people wanting his autograph and, right in front of ‘em, Willie took his tank top off and put mine on. He grinned and said, “Ron, I know it’s wrong, but I get so many nice country club shirts doing this!”

A few months later, Willie came by and brought a piece with four pictures of him in that shirt. A “for sale” tag around one read, “\$1,000,” with the next marked down to \$750, another was \$200 and the last said, “Will trade for one Pedernales tank top.” A gold plaque read, “Ron Rogers, I’ll give you the shirt off my back – Willie.” We turned out to be great friends. It was in my office for a long time, and I still have it in the garage – my wife doesn’t want it in the house.

It means a great deal to be inducted. For many years there was a survey among GMs on the most admired stations. And KASE was in the top 10 or so every time. I also was pleased with that because it meant that my colleagues thought that we had done well, and that I had represented them pretty well on the Arbitron Advisory Council, including as chairman.

Fabled University of Texas football coach Darrell K Royal told me, “Ron, I’d follow Bear Bryant into the restroom if I thought he’d tell me something about coaching.” I did that, too. I’d say, “Look, I’ll go to CRS and if I learn five things, it’s worth my time.” I’m still meeting with people smarter than I am and learning every bit I can.

CAC

Eddie Stubbs



De-Vinyl: Stubbs readying a 78 at WAMU in 1990.

“
Many
times
those
old
records
have
been
the best
friends
I’ve had.
”



Hello Kitty: Stubbs, the late Johnnie Wright and Kitty Wells circa 2002.



Hi Cat: Tom “Cat” Reeder, WAMU’s Gary Henderson and Stubbs circa 2003.

America’s “Hillbilly” Disc Jockey

Country Radio HALL OF FAME

*Arguably the most knowledgeable person about country music’s history working the airwaves today, WSM-AM/Nashville’s **Eddie Stubbs** spins 78s, 45s, LPs and current CDs – accompanied by his eloquent, gracious storytelling and fueled by his passion for the music. He grew up in Gaithersburg, MD listening to WSM at night, later becoming an accomplished fiddler for the Johnson Mountain Boys while pursuing radio at WYII/Williamsport, MD and public WAMU/Washington, DC. In 1995, Stubbs joined WSM and the very small fraternity of those to ever become Grand Ole Opry announcers. He received the CMA Large Market Personality award in 2002, the first AM station jock to win in that category in 20 years. Today, Stubbs is both Nashville’s longest-running evening air personality and WSM’s longest-tenured talent to ever host that daypart.*

The first generation of bluegrass was my first love: Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Don Reno and Red Smiley, Mac Wiseman, Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers. WAMU had wonderful on-air host Gary Henderson, who was on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Gary became a mentor to me, and I failed more than one test on Friday mornings in high school from listening to him. When I’d go watch him work, he let me cue up records. We were kindred spirits, and when you hear me on the radio, you’re really hearing Gary. He had great timing and anecdotes to help sell any record. Gary’s still on the air at WAMU.

The first time I saw Kitty Wells perform, it was like my life changed. I used to go see Kitty and Johnnie Wright, and had worked with Johnnie on a box set in 1991. It was a thrill to play with them several times. Johnnie had even offered me a job about five times over the years. In 1994, I was going through a divorce; it was a very sad time. They were in Maryland for a show, and while with them on their bus, he said, “More than ever, you need a change in your life. If you come to Nashville, I think you’ll do good. Next year we’ll be working in Nashville 4-5 nights a week at the Texas Troubadour Theater, and we’d really love you to come to work for us.” They hadn’t had a fiddler in their band for 32 years, and didn’t need one. It didn’t take long to make up my mind, and I moved to Nashville in March 1995 and started my life over.

When I got Johnnie and Kitty in my life, it was like inheriting a third set of grandparents. They rescued me from some of the darkest days of my life. They believed in me, gave me encouragement, unconditional love and support and allowed me to become a part of their family. Anything I’ve ever done that has happened in this town can be directly traced to those people. I will never, ever be able to repay their kindness for what they did for me.

I was backstage at the Opry on a Friday night. Seventeen days after arriving in town, without having been on-air at WSM, OM/PD Kyle Cantrell, who’d hired me, handed me this script for GTE Telecommunications. He asked me if I could read it. It had all these big words like “peripheral.” I said, “I don’t talk this way.” He said, “I didn’t ask if you *talked* this way, I asked if you could *read* it.” I said, “I guess so.” With 10 minutes’ warning, he said, “Good. You’re going to announce the next half-hour of the *Opry* and introduce Bill Monroe.”

My knees literally knocked side to side. The perspiration was rolling off my receding hairline because Bill Monroe was a real iconic figure to me. I didn’t sleep the whole night. And the next night, I was on the televised portion of the *Opry* on TNN, playing fiddle behind Kitty Wells on “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels.” Those are 24 hours to remember.

My first time on-air at WSM was filling in on a Sunday morning playing these 15- and 30-minute recorded ministries. Here I am, a 78-rpm kind of guy trying my best to learn their computerized system. There’s a torrential thunderstorm, and suddenly our 50,000-watt blowtorch is knocked off the air – in my first shift! I called our PD at 5:30am, and his response when he picked up the phone was, “I *thought* that would be your ring.”

In the days before we had music directors and consultants, there were what I reverently call “hillbilly disc jockeys” – guys like [Hall of Famers] Don Owens and Tom “Cat” Reeder. They were true fans of the music, and *they* had say over what was going to get played and, often, how it was going to turn out. They were so in touch with the listeners, they pretty much



knew the kinds of cars they drove. They had a platform where artists would call them or come and see them when they were in the area. It was like a triangle among the artists, the fans and the radio, all working together. And there was nobody telling you that you couldn’t play something. If it was good, you played it. They played the top current records, but seasoned their program with older music and other recordings that might be regionally popular. That’s what I wanted to be – a good hillbilly disc jockey.

Many times those old records have been the best friends I’ve had. They’re always the same. They don’t judge you, and you know what they’re going to be like. You may listen to them in a different mood or a different mindset, but there’s a consistency that will always be there. It’s a friend that’s always on the shelf, just waiting for you go pull it off and connect with it.

My goal at WSM has always been for things to be as country as possible; there’s no such thing as “too country.” If you can visualize and smell the country through those speakers, that’s when it’s just right. That’s when it’s real. You can play a 78 by Cowboy Copas at 9:30pm, but it wouldn’t sound quite the same at 9:30 in the morning. There’s something especially meaningful – a certain mystique – about hearing traditional country music over the airwaves at night. I think country music was meant to be enjoyed that way.

The Hall of Fame plaques hung outside our studio here for years, and every night I would walk by, looking at people like Tom “Cat” Reeder, the first DJ I ever heard on the radio when I was about four. And Don Owens, who got Tom started, and was Gary Henderson’s idol. You realized that they were the among the very best, and it’s extremely humbling to be thought worthy enough to be alongside them. For most of us who work in radio, this is the highest honor that any of us will ever receive. I feel like I need to go out and earn it now. **CAC**

Rusty Walker

Master Of The Arts & Call Letters



Tying One On: Wearing a necktie on-air, as WZZK listeners expect from their DJs.

Country Radio HALL OF FAME

*Ponder for a moment that, with more than 750 stations under his wing during the past 42 years, **Rusty Walker** has worked at or with the majority of all the Country stations in rated markets in America. Beneath his Mississippi small-town exterior is one of the most strategic-thinking, competitive programming minds in all of radio. Regarded as a pioneer for bringing the Top 40 sound and structure to Country broadcasting, Walker has a finely tuned acumen for interpreting research, which, combined with an eye and ear for the show-biz side, has led to numerous success stories. Countless Country pros proudly attest to have benefited from Walker's innate mentoring skills, with many more sure to follow.*

In 1970, I was 16, working at the Dixie Queen, a local hamburger/soft-serve ice cream joint in Corinth, MS. Ron Morgan, who did 7pm-midnight on our "Countryopolitan" WWTX-FM, came by for a burger every evening before his show, and knew I loved radio; all we did was talk about it. Ron got an opportunity to go to the AM and do play-by-play, and told me, "You ought to audition for my job." The next day, I went to the downtown sales office to audition. There was no mixer, just a microphone and turntable, dual-wired into a cart machine. I read the front page of the newspaper into the cart machine at 3:30pm, and by 7pm that night I was out at the studio – a trailer 15 miles out of town – spinning the hits for \$1.60 an hour. It was love at first sight. I worked there six months before I even knew you had to have a license.

My first programming job came while doing mornings at WQYK/Tampa. Then-PD Jim Malloy had hired John St. John and me, and the three of us would sit together designing clocks and developing ideas to put on the air. A huge Elvis aficionado, Jim had all kinds of Elvis memorabilia. In January 1977, posted on the bulletin board was, "Jim has relocated to Memphis and Rusty Walker is now PD." It turned out that Jim had a premonition that something was going to happen to Elvis. Literally overnight, Jim left to go to Memphis without a job; he was simply drawn there. Of course, later that year Elvis died. It's the oddest thing.

In those days, AM Country stations were playing 80-90 currents. We were very streamlined for an FM Country station, a lot tighter than everybody else. After WQYK achieved some success, John and I went to co-owned WQIK/Jacksonville to re-create what we'd done in Tampa. We started with a 2 share and left three years later No. 1 with a 13.

I've always liked very confident air talents with good pipes. Fred Winston in Chicago is somebody I've always been in awe of. Another is Brother Bill Gable, who was at CKLW/Detroit a long time. He did a great job of communicating succinctly in the Bill Drake concept of getting everything done in seven seconds. As someone who cannot tell you what I think about a song until I find out what the consumer thinks about it, Bob Pittman and Ed Salamon were gigantic influences in my early days. So was Malrite President John Chaffee, who played a big part of the births of Album Rock WMMS & Country WHK/Cleveland, among the best stations ever to grace the airwaves.

My ability to launch successful stations like KMLE/Phoenix and KCYY/San Antonio came from low self-esteem. I was never good enough to get a job at a successful station. I'd have to go to a bad station and try to make it a good one. So early on in my career, I gained a lot of skill in start-ups, which was basically talent mentoring. It played to my early interest in becoming a band director. When they did a personality test on me, the characteristics of "director" was way off the chart.

One station I'm particularly proud of building was WZZK/Birmingham. New City gave us all the tools we needed. We filmed fabulous TV spots that ran heavily most of the year. We'd order t-shirts 10,000 at a time and generated "rock star revenues." At one time, we had



about a 30-share 25-54. The company was excited to have these Southern kids more interested in the science of the business than all in the other stuff.

Another favorite station was the old Y106/Atlanta. Talk about stylized: We had Rhubarb, George Mason-Dixon, General Zach Taylor and Dixie Lee. We played "Dixie" at the top of the hour. "From high atop the tallest man-made structure in Georgia, you got it cranking on Atlanta's Y106 FM." Then we'd always say something stupid – our "outrageous IDs." Our competitor, WKHX, was managed by Norm Schrutt. After we had beaten Kix for the first time, it was, "Boom! Kickin' Schrutt and taking names."

Have I ever been soundly beaten in the ratings? More times than you will ever know. There's the old Thomas Edison line, "If you want to have a good idea, you first must have many of them." Anybody who tells you to fix your weaknesses to equal your strengths is wrong. You've got to maximize your strengths to *overwhelm* your weaknesses, because if you're trying to fix what's wrong in the first place, you're headed in the wrong direction. I'm a big believer in finding what you can do well and doing it over and over again.

I live in Iuka, MS (pop. 3,000), but everybody else in our company lives in Corinth because it's a metropolitan area – 13,000 people! I fell in love with Iuka the day I moved here because I love small towns and the water; it's got the best part of the Tennessee River. Iuka's a great place to raise your kids and keeps me close to the country sensibility. Everybody knows everybody. Here, I'm Sammy, not Rusty. It's so much like the Miranda Lambert song, "Famous In A Small Town."

As for being inducted, I'm really speechless. In the past, people have told me, "I nominated you," and I'd say, "I'd rather be relevant than a relic." I hope that is still the case. It's only going to make me work even harder, because I'd like to have a couple more gigantic wins as a member of the Hall of Fame. **CAC**

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Son Of A Beach: As WQIK/Jacksonville PD in 1979. Dig the North Dallas Forty t-shirt.



We Need The Stinkin' Badges: Before they became household names, here are Rusty and Reba circa 1977.

Bill Whyte



Call Him Conductor: An official press shot from his early days as bandleader of Bill Whyte & The Short Line; that name referenced the famous railroad.

You Can Go Home Again

Country Radio HALL OF FAME

With his roots planted in small-town America, Bill Whyte has earned recognition beyond his wildest dreams as a songwriter, bandleader, recording artist and now with his induction. A top personality on KWRE/Warrenton, MO, WUBE/Cincinnati, WMIL/Milwaukee, WFMS/Indianapolis and WSM-FM/Nashville, Whyte's a CMA Large Market Personality winner and one who never said no to community service. These days he's penning songs, songplugging, guesting at his beloved WSM, playing select gigs and continuing to write comedy for United Stations. Although Whyte admits, "I've had the most unplanned career ever," somehow it feels as if things have turned out exactly as they should.

I grew up on a farm in Missouri and while in high school was very active in the Future Farmers of America. I'd compete in public speaking against students from other small towns. One day I was listening to Country KPCR/Bowling Green, MO, and this guy I knew from another Ag chapter was on the air! I thought, "If he can do that, I can, too." Daytimer KPCR ("Kow Pasture Country Radio") was a one-bedroom trailer actually in a cow pasture. If you had a warm body and could breathe, owners Paul and Betty Salois put you on the air. I didn't know anything about radio, but was hired as their "weekend warrior." Paul showed me the microphone, how to put a needle on a record, how to put a cart in for a commercial, said, "OK, you're on the air!" and then he left! I learned on the fly. But the minute I had a piece of radio, I was hooked.

College was three-and-a-half hours away near Kansas City, and I had a band going at the same time. For four years, every Friday I'd drive home, play a gig en route, work Saturdays from noon-sunset, sign KPCR off, run to another gig, sign back on Sunday morning and at noon drive back to school. In the summer, I worked at KPCR every day for \$80 a week. But I could play my own records and talk about my band, and you couldn't beat that. Believe it or not, Duke Hamilton, who's in the Hall of Fame already, also started in that same trailer.

My parents thought working in radio was great, but not so much the music part. Mom said, "You'll just wind up playing in honky-tonks." Later, she was so proud, and ironically, I *did* wind up playing honky tonks for years. I was country from the git-go. Coming out of a gig at 2am, I'd turn on WSM-AM/Nashville for Ralph Emery. Sometimes you could pull in Bill Mack in Ft. Worth, Charlie Douglas in New Orleans, Mike Hoyer in Des Moines – those great all-night truckin' shows. Ralph had an open-door policy, and I once got to watch him do his show with Little Jimmy Dickens and Marty Robbins. While working at WUBE/Cincinnati, I was in Nashville for CRS, and was walking by the WSM studios with Dale Turner. I told him my dream had always been to do overnights on that station. Dale said, "Really? Do you know what that all-night shift pays?" After he told me, I said, "You know, I really *don't* want to do the all-night shift at WSM." All these years later, here I am, working in that studio!

Creative music things have always been part of my radio career. In 1997, I was working at WMIL/Milwaukee and found out that WSOC/Charlotte PD Paul Johnson was getting Lonestar to recut "No News" as "Big News" with lyrics about how the Panthers would defeat the Packers in the NFC Championship. I called Lonestar in the studio and said, "Richie! Are you recording this song?" They just exploded in laughter – they'd been busted. I said, "OK, but when the *Packers* win, will you re-record it if I send you the lyrics?" They agreed, the Packers won, I wrote the lyrics overnight and they recorded it. We started playing the song, the Packers won the Super Bowl, and it was a monstrous hit all over Wisconsin – so big that WMIL sold cassettes of it for \$5 at a remote, with people lining up in a snowstorm as far as you could see to buy them. We sold at least \$50,000 worth, and it all went to the Child Abuse Prevention Fund.

On Sept. 11, 2001, I was doing mornings at WSM-FM, and had scheduled Bruce Robison to come in for our "Songwriter's



Corner" feature. We were watching the TV, describing "this generation's Pearl Harbor." Bruce, who hadn't heard the news, came in and opened his guitar case. I tapped him on the shoulder and pointed at the TV. He didn't say a word, and then just shook my hand, packed up and left. We were completely immersed in what was happening, and WSM-FM kept me on the air the entire day. Talk about being one-on-one with your audience. It was a tough but very proud day to be in radio.

We didn't have a lot of money growing up, and you learned to stand on your own two feet. My mom was killed in an automobile accident a long time ago, and my dad has been blind for many years. Last spring, I played an "evening in the round" with Linda Davis and her husband Lang Scott. I said, "It would be so great to take this show to my hometown," which is about 1,200 people. They said, "Let's just go do it for your dad." So for Father's Day, we rented out the Knights of Columbus building I'd performed in as a kid. The place was packed, with my dad in his bib overalls in the front row. To see so many family members and friends from all those years – people who'd heard me from that cow pasture – was incredible. The coolest part was seeing my dad surrounded by a sea of people, all up hugging him.

Walking by those Hall of Fame plaques of people I've worked with – Duke Hamilton, JD Cannon, Bill Cody – I'd be lying if I said I didn't think, "Could that happen to me?" After I came back to Nashville to write and perform fulltime, I figured, "Once you're off the air, you're out of mind." When Charlie Morgan, for whom I'd worked at WFMS, called, I teared up and my wife started crying when I called her. Neither one of us expected it. That enough peers say, "Yeah, he deserves to be there" is just an overwhelming, incredible honor. Now that I'm a starving songwriter, I'm trying to figure out how much the plaque will be worth if I melt it down to sell it for scrap. **CAC**

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All Aboard: Wearing his satin jacket on-air at KPCR in the early '70s.

Bob Kingsley

More Stories To Tell

One of Country radio's highest-profile personalities for the better part of 40 years, Bob Kingsley began producing American Country Countdown in 1974 after a successful career in Los Angeles radio. Four years later, he assumed hosting duties. During the past 34 years, Kingsley has compiled numerous accolades and honors, including the ACM and CMA National Personality of the Year Awards. He was inducted to the Country Radio Hall of Fame in 1998 and has hosted the Hall of Fame dinner, as well. The CRS President's Award this year recognizes a man who has been a constant supporter of CRS events and the organization's most avid ambassador.

President's Award

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CRS if you
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competitive.”

Every year at the Hall of Fame Dinner I get the same feeling that I had when I went in. I know the nerves. I remember how excited I was. You're going into the Country Radio Hall of Fame! I've watched everyone go up there to accept, and I wonder if they have that feeling of acceptance.

I was born and raised in California, which is not exactly a stereotypical Country hotbed. It's almost overwhelming when I think about it how far I've come. There's a plaque with my name on it on that wall, and you think, "I've done something: I've made a contribution and am in the company of people who helped promote country music." That's a big deal and it still blows me away.

My chosen career path was to be a jock and play records. For me, it was always about talking about the artists, the songwriters and the musicians. Then, of course, having it evolve into the *Countdown*, it just doesn't get any better. I never thought about not being accepted. But when you're outside of Nashville, that's the hub, the home, the *Opry*, everything. To be included with those heavyweights is pretty cool.

I went to the second CRS and still remember it like it was yesterday. It was out at the Airport Hilton and I was staying at a little hotel down the road with no hot water. The quickest shower I ever took. I walked into the Hilton and to this day, I haven't been able to find the name of the guy who was obviously a record promoter, wearing bright-colored tights and running all over the hotel.

The next day, Ed Salamon delivered a speech on programming. I thought, "Boy, do I like that. As soon as I get back to L.A., I'm going to rip off those ideas!" I remember thinking this is something I have to attend every year. I've never missed a CRS since. There were always great parties going on, but during the day there were things to learn, people to meet and it was so organized. I don't care who you were looking for, sooner or later they'd be walking through that lobby.

One of my favorite memories from CRS was meeting Johnny Cash. It was so hard to get hold of him, and I got the chance to sit down with him. It's great to sit with Tim McGraw or any current act now, but this was in '73 or '74, and I was truly an outsider getting to talk with Johnny Cash. Buck Owens was always interesting, too. Some of these people were impossible to get. Talking with Waylon Jennings after he went straight was one of the best interviews I've ever been involved with; he talked about it all.

We didn't do actualities in the beginning, and getting artists on the phone was tough. But if you got to them early, normally you had continued access as their careers grew. I don't believe I could still do this and be on so many radio stations without the one-on-one interviews. Today, artists see how important it is to speak with Country radio. I listen to several morning shows every day, and there's not a day that goes by when I don't hear something about an artist or an actual artist on the air.

CRS just keeps getting better. Every single year I come back with something I've learned. I also love being involved and believe in it so much. I talk to stations almost every day and am always preaching that you really need to go to CRS. If you want to be competitive, I think you really need to go and hear what people have to say. There's also no better way to get started with networking – it's a family feel. What other genre has its own hometown?

For about 15 years we've been sponsoring songwriter events; that's one contribution we've made. I know this sounds trite,



but without those songwriters we'd have nothing. It dawned on me some years ago that when you hear a song, you don't necessarily think about who wrote it. But I remember hearing some of them play their own tunes and thinking how different it was than the record. The emotion I got was different, too. I love hearing these people perform their own stuff.

This year we'll have two nights and at least 12 A-list songwriters. The response has been sensational and the publishers were all extremely cooperative. Do you think there's a songwriter that hears their song who, for the most part, doesn't think they could do it better? I remember Harlan Howard saying that, and it's true! It's wonderful to hear a songwriter with a guitar in his hand telling a story about how that song came about. I remember one year when Craig Wiseman told the story of how he came to write "Live like You Were Dying." I had tears in my eyes. Then he did the song and told us Tim McGraw had cut it. Being onstage with a bunch of people paying attention can be a new experience for some of them, but once they get up there, they come to life. It's a wonderful way to hear songs we're all familiar with.

Bill Mayne called and said Mike Culotta was trying to get in touch with me. We got on the phone, he gave me the news and I just couldn't believe it. Talk about an overwhelming moment! To be perceived this way is great. Looking at the previous recipients, it's amazing to be in that company.

It gets a little emotional. It's like that first CMA Award. And then the Hall of Fame; they're all truly significant when I look back at them. I reach over and tap on my wooden desk here and wonder, "Are they really talking about me?" It's not as easy to start in radio as it used to be. But if you want it bad enough and you're not consumed by the dollar, there are places you can find a way in.

I love this business. I just got done with a writers' meeting where we looked at what we're doing this week. Once again, we've come up with some stories I cannot wait to tell. There are two or three interesting things here that I don't know if anyone else knows, and I'll deliver it like I'm the only one who does. It's exciting, every single week.

CAC



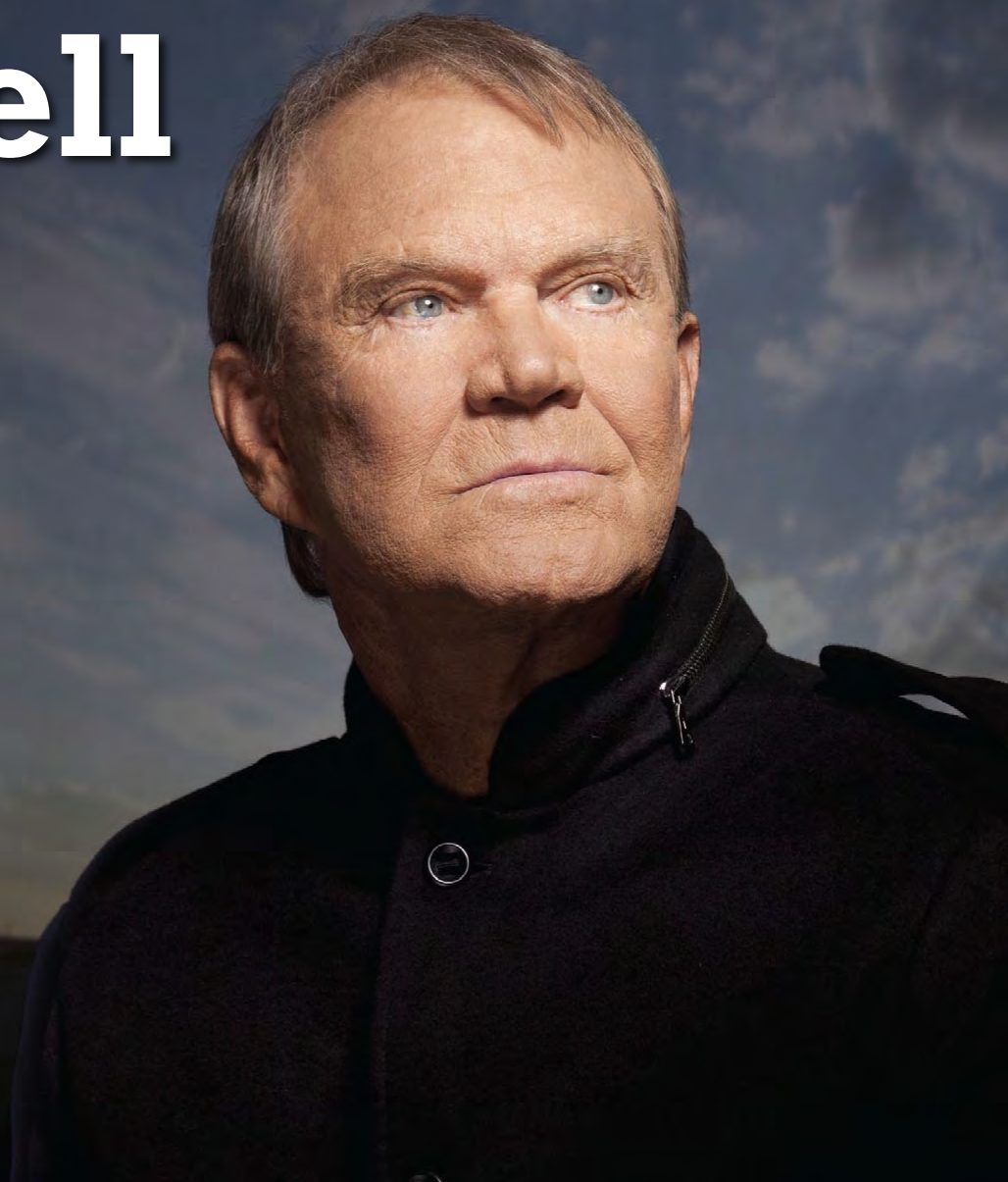
Mr. Roper! Bob congratulates Top Male Vocalist Glen Campbell at the 1968 ACM Awards. Pictured (l-r) are Jan Howard, Kingsley, Campbell and the late actor Norman Fell.



Hat Acts: With Brad Paisley.

Glen CRS Career Achievement Award Campbell

Extraordinary musicianship, mass-appeal entertainment and the unique ability to interpret songs are among the hallmarks of Glen Campbell's unparalleled career. **Country Aircheck** asked three of today's most influential country artists for their personal reflections on Campbell's many contributions. **Keith Urban** and **Brad Paisley** performed a musical tribute to Campbell during last November's CMA Awards, and **Blake Shelton** joined The Band Perry alongside Campbell in a Grammy tribute earlier this month.



Brad Paisley

Glen is a good example of somebody who's so good at so many things that it's hard to properly reward any of them. He was, first and foremost, a virtuoso guitarist who began playing on Beach Boys and Frank Sinatra records – stuff that wasn't the least bit country and also not easy. Those records had chords out the wazoo, and you had to cop a completely different style for each of them.

I was born too late for the *Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour*, his network TV show where you'd see him play leads with people. God bless The Nashville Network in its day; that's where I realized what he was. Glen would come on to perform, and you'd say, "Oh, he *played* that?" He was so well-trained by playing for all those other guys as a session player.

Where you really saw Glen shine were the live shows. He could stand onstage, sing and then take a ride on the guitar – an intricate, creative, flourishing ride – before coming right back to the song. And he's still doing that today.

Because his records were always very tasteful, you'd be hard-pressed to realize this guy was the lead player. It's different than on a Vince Gill or Stevie Ray Vaughan record, where you think of a guitar being just as prominent as the vocal. Glen was a *vocalist* on records. There were some songs with leads, however. On his 1989 *Walking In The Sun* album, he re-cut Lefty Frizzell's "Gone, Gone, Gone" and played some great guitar on that.

We had a great night five or six years ago. He joined us for an encore and played two songs with me, which was a blast. I think we played "Folsom Prison Blues" and something else. He just went off, started improvising and basically schooled me.



Keith Urban

I remember the first time I met Glen, I looked at his hands and thought, "Those are the hands that played the songs I grew up listening to." I have to say, though, that Glen had a stronger vocal influence on me than anything else. My dad had Glen Campbell records, so I knew all those songs by the age of six.

There was something about his voice that just had this beautiful tonality to it. He had a kind of an angst or cry in it that really appealed to me. Because I emulated those songs early on, he probably impacted my vocal style without me really knowing it.

"Where's The Playground Susie" is one I've always loved. Oh my gosh, melodically it's just magnificent! That's another Jimmy Webb song, and Glen had the right voice for Jimmy's melodies; it was a perfect marriage. Glen can sing so many different kinds of songs, but there are certain vowel sounds and notes that, when you blend them the right way, showcase the core strength of his range.

Another lesson from Glen was the understanding that you can be a great guitar player, but if the song doesn't require a bunch of gymnastics, you don't put it in. That's the mark of a tremendously gifted musician – the instinct of what *not* to play.

I hope people continue to realize what a pioneer he was on TV by bringing people on his show who never would have received exposure if not for Glen's ability to expand country to a national stage. That's an extraordinary and commendable thing which helped our genre massively.

I often use him as a reference when people talk about what is country and what is pop. All of his songs were huge pop hits and Glen didn't wear a hat, which allowed some of those songs to find their way across musical borders. What he was doing then bore little or no resemblance to Hank Williams, but it certainly didn't make it any less country. **CAC**



Blake Shelton

Growing up, I owned the 45s for "Rhinstone Cowboy" and "Southern Nights." We listened to those so many times it was mind-numbing. As it turns out, that's what everybody across the country was doing with Glen Campbell.

Right now, I can appreciate how he was able to balance TV with being a current country artist at the same time. You can work it to your favor if you treat it right, and he's the template for that.

As a vocalist, he spanned all genres with his sound, which at times leaned as much pop as it did country. Lyrically though, the songs were definitely country. For every singer like me that he impacted with his vocals, there's another group he influenced as a guitar player.

It was an honor to be part of the Grammys earlier this month, but especially this particular tribute and performance for, with and about Glen Campbell. I know when my career is over, I'll look back at it as one of the big moments.

A few years ago, we played a show together up in Canada. One of my favorite things was watching Glen hold a note with that huge grin on his face at the same time. I don't know how somebody does that so effortlessly. After the show, he was just the warmest guy you can imagine meeting. Suddenly, here's this iconic figure standing there in white tennis shoes that he wore onstage. We loved that and wondered, "Why the hell can't we get away with that?"

COUNTRY GOES THE POP PD

A Culture-Clash Conversation



Programmers jumping the fence from Top 40 to Country is hardly a new phenomenon, though the recent numbers are remarkable. About 18 months ago, a small army of Pop programmers entered the format in top markets including Denver, Houston, Nashville, Sacramento, San Diego and Seattle. In each case, the station's performance improved. More recently, Jeff Kapugi joined WUSN/Chicago, Rob Morris was tapped for a July arrival at the new KMNB/Minneapolis (where even interim PD Kevin Metheny has a Pop pedigree) and Brian Michel took the reins at WUBL/Atlanta.

So what do experienced and successful programmers from outside the format think about Country? What, if any, preconceived notions did they bring with them? Have their views changed? How different is the relationship with labels? And what does Country do better than other formats? To find out, **Country Aircheck** put together a panel of fence-jumpers who have since enjoyed a good bit of Country success: KILT/Houston's **Mark Adams** (CBS Radio), WSM/Nashville's **Dan Bowen** (Cumulus), KSON/San Diego's **Kevin Callahan** (Lincoln Financial) and KKWF/Seattle's **Mike Preston** (Entercom). They took it from there.

COUNTRY GOES THE POP PD

Country Aircheck: Before you started programming a Country radio station, what was your perception of the format as a competitor and a listener?

Mike Preston: I sat a few feet from Becky Brenner at KMPS/Seattle for nine years and had a lot of exposure to what was a successful station for a long time. It was a fun, music-passion format from an overall radio standpoint, and it generated strong ratings and revenue. From a listener standpoint and for my taste, it was executed with a little less intensity than I would like to have seen. Sonically, it felt like people were playing it way too safe as opposed to the vibrant, active stations I usually programmed.

Dan Bowen: From my perspective [atWSTR/Atlanta], it felt about the same as what I was doing. I knew we were sharing a lot of audience, and because of that and the mass appeal nature of certain titles, it felt like the game wasn't completely different. For me, it's a great place to be because I was always a country music fan. To be programming it makes it doubly exciting.

Kevin Callahan: I grew up on country music and my personal music roots are in country and rock. Depending on which format I was programming at the time, I was envious of the listener loyalty and the values that typically come through on Country radio. Before San Diego, I was in Albany, NY, so we were competing with a heritage station, WGNA. Watching the magnitude of what some of their events could do in terms of attracting loyal listeners was probably the biggest thing. It's great to do this now in a format that is accessible to my entire family and where I am in my life right now.

Mark Adams: I don't have anything nearly as insightful. I had never listened to Country radio in my life until a year and a half ago. My perceptions were

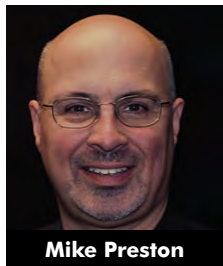
background, I don't know that those strong beliefs, like the moral compass or the political views, are there. There is a lot truth to this format being about God, country and family.

Are there any beliefs you had about Country that no longer hold water?

MA: I've done about eight formats, and they have more in common than they do differences. Good PPM execution is good PPM execution; that's the beginning, middle and end of it. All the things people insisted on – that Country is so different and you have to play everything, people love the artists and you need to play 28 currents and all this other stuff – I just don't buy it. I applied what I would call Hot AC mechanics to KILT, because the two formats have a lot in common, at least in terms of how music libraries are assembled. We tightened it up, increased the turnover on the hits we were playing and got rid of the songs I thought didn't matter. We've been improving our position ever since.

MP: I would echo that 100%. I heard, "You can't spin records that hot." Wrong. You can. Or, "People won't accept the energy or the intensity of what you're doing." Wrong on that, too. And as Mark said when talking about PPM mechanics, it goes beyond that. We've all heard people who can execute well, but the stations aren't that good. You still need have to have a great product. Many Country stations are sitting in clusters with other successful stations, but for some reason avoid strategies and tactics that are working.

MA: Here's something I say all the time that is considered sacrilege in the format, but I maintain I'm right: Anybody can put out a crappy record. The biggest artist in the world can put out a terrible song and conversely,



Mike Preston

“All the things people insisted on, that Country is so different and you have to play everything, I just don't buy it.”

— Mark Adams

entirely stereotypical. My closest exposure prior to taking over KILT was having an office next to Jeff Garrison and basically making fun of him for the banjo music he would play. My first real exposure was the day I took over the station. We had a lounge performance with The Eli Young Band, whom I'd never heard of. I watched the listeners file in and, demographically, it didn't look that dissimilar from anything you'd see at a Hot AC or even a Top 40 event. That was a revelation. When the band started playing, I thought they were pretty cool. I became a fan quickly. Now it's just a lot of fun, and I love being in Country radio.



Mark Adams

Longtime Country programmers will say that Pop PDs oversimplify things when they first get into the format. Was that your experience?

DB: Country is much more sophisticated behind the scenes than most people give it credit for. Coming in, I don't think I understood everything you must take into consideration when putting together a great Country station. When you start thinking about sounds, tempos, genres and the balance of all those factors, it's just more complex than on the Pop side. Figuring what sounds right has more depth in a way you didn't seem to have to deal with in Pop. For example, there aren't a ton of great females in the format, so you have to evenly space those out.

KC: If you ask people in my building, they'll say I've made it more complicated (laughs). I agree with Dan on all those things, but the attraction to this format that continues to ring true are the strong beliefs of the life group and making sure those are present on the station. In my Rock and Pop

someone you've never heard of can put out a great one. I've done Top 40, Hip-Hop and Rock and believe, in this day and age, we're in a song format.

Now, when you talk about upper-demo women who are partisans and have been with the format a long time, is there a greater benefit of the doubt given to the Tim McGraws, Toby Keiths and Rascal Flatts? Sure, and as a programmer you have to figure out where that line is. But at the end of the day, it's about the song. If it's a hit, it will go. Nashville does not want to hear that and I fight with them about it all the time.

How does Nashville's promotional pitch differ from your past experience?

MP: If the right two or three people were already believers, that means more to me than the alphabet soup that I'm always given in Country promotion. Timing, momentum, internal and external market factors all come into play. On top of that, there's my own passion or dispassion for the songs. I'd rather know about the 4-5 people I'm in sync with than the other 130 stations; they're not what matters to me. I do find, and I hate to say this, there is a little more of a lemming mentality than in Pop or AC. Like Mark, I programmed both those formats and had credible programmers I knew. I'd see what they were doing and jump in, too. It wouldn't matter if 68% of the panel was in.

MA: I'm the day-to-day PD at our CHR station, too, and on that side they work facts, metrics and things I care about. How well is it selling? How is it moving? What's going on digitally? What's the marketing plan? How many TV shows is the artist appearing on? How are we working in concert with the radio station to break this song and make it become a hit? Is there a callout story from a station that has 300 spins? Is there specific information to help me make a decision? Even in reference to callout, they're smart enough to know I don't care what a white-leaning, Midwest Top 40 is doing, because my Top 40 is

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COUNTRY GOES THE POP PD

Rhythmic and in a Hispanic market. So they come to me with stories of stations with similar demography. In Country, not only do I *not* get that, but they just throw out call letters of stations I've never heard of in markets I've never been to that have nothing in common with Houston. Nine out of 10 times, they're referencing spins that are occurring at 3 o'clock in the morning. Apparently, I'm not supposed to know all that, but sadly, I figured it out pretty quickly.

KC: As slow as the David Nail or Lee Brice examples of the past year or so were, even Country is trying to push things too fast through the charts. When we look at audience feedback on songs, it's amazing that when a label is ready to give up on a song or it hits No. 1, I have people just starting to get familiar with it.

DB: With any format right now, it takes a long time to develop a song or artist, but especially Country.

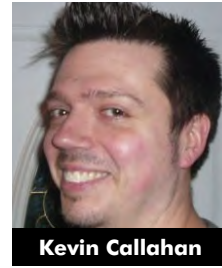
MP: There's something I didn't know before I got into the format, but I've now seen it borne out in every music test I've done and in my callout, and it appears all promotion execs know this: Country songs don't burn. So it's not burned, it's still testing great, but no, we don't want you to play it anymore because we have another song by the same artist. So they ask if we can just flip it out. Since when do you own a slot?

Every one of us who has programmed knows the songs are actually bigger with the audience when they're coming down, not when they're going up. It kills me that there's this choreography of slotting one artist this week because another one is scheduled for next week and so on. That doesn't happen in other formats.

MA: I have one more point and it's emblematic of this topic. Lady Antebellum's "We Owned the Night" is still a big record for us. I've had people comment to me, "Man, I can't believe you have 1,000 spins on that." One thousand? I have

MA: Depending on the markets, too, you're seeing a split. Some markets have a Classic Country station that does well. You can't sit in the mushy middle; you have to own something. It's extraordinarily difficult to be a station that has true programming appeal for people age 12-54. You have to pick somewhere, and the more contemporary side is where the music has evolved. The vast majority of Country records are really good pop songs.

MP: The reason some pure Pop stations haven't totally embraced Country is that, sonically, it doesn't mix well with a Rhythmic format.



Kevin Callahan

MA: Right. It's a much better fit with Hot AC, and that's true even here in Houston in our cluster. KHMx plays a lot of Country music. "Just A Kiss" from Lady A is a power on that station. But on our Top 40, we don't even play songs that are mass appeal like The Fray or One Republic because the station is so Rhythmic. In terms of demographic appeal, I think Country and Hot AC have a lot in common and that was my starting point when I first took over KILT.

Every format has its own nuances. What does Country do better than most?

KC: One thing is artist access. For programmers, it's no big deal to go backstage and get a great picture with a terrific country artist; it's fun. But when you bring listeners along, country artists are just better at realizing that's a lifelong memory for listeners and music buyers. Labels, management and artists all understand how important that is.

MP: The first thing is that the artists still truly appreciate what radio brings to the table.

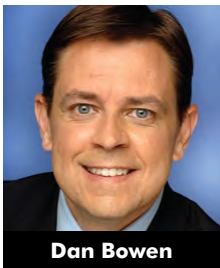
KC: When Country artists come to visit, they pay attention to you and what interests you. In other formats, if you're lucky enough to get the artists in the station, it's all about them. That's important, because in Country you can build

“You can't spin records that hot.” Wrong. You can. Or, People won't accept the energy or the intensity of what you're doing. Wrong on that, too.

— Mike Preston

records I've powered at Top 40 and Hot AC with double that and they stay in power. There's no way in hell your average P1 Country listener is tired of their favorite song after 400-500 spins. It's nonsense.

MP: We know so much more now. We know how many spins songs actually get and what the sales really are. There is far more research in terms of listener opinion, and yet so much of how Nashville wants to run the music through the chart hasn't changed. That's where the disconnect is. God love those artists Kevin mentioned who take 56 weeks to get to No.1, but there are a lot of songs that last a lot of weeks only because the labels just won't give up, even though the tea leaves clearly indicate it's not going to happen.



Dan Bowen

Has the format become mainstream?

DB: If Country is the new Pop and brings shares, I'm all about it. But those real stories about life are what brand this format and make it unique from others. Right now it

feels like the format is in a growth mode.

KC: I look at Country as a format that's been gradually making its way toward the mainstream. It's not a stereotype that used to exist. Lots of people can relate to it because of the stories. I think we're in a pop/mainstream cycle right now, but I don't know that even if that changes the format will be any less popular.

MP: Today, when a band is sitting in the lobby of our stations to visit, you can't tell if they're here to see the Rock station, the Alternative or the Country station because the stereotypes Kevin referred to have been broken down. Those are a rarity today. That's because there's a generational shift.

a relationship and talk about what's important to everybody.

MP: Nashville should be applauded for that. It makes radio want to be a great partner when we know the artists value our contribution to what they're trying to do.

DB: Another thing Country does so well is program with sincerity. We try to make a deeper connection with listeners than you see in other formats.

MA: The format lends itself to public service more effectively than other contemporary formats. In Top 40, it's a bitch to come out of Jay-Z or Kanye West and try to do something touchy-feely. In Country, there's an expectation of that, and the audience does reward you for it. Good, local radio is important regardless of the format, but utilizing your station as a public service vehicle is something Country has always done well. There's still a big value to that.

The last two years have seen a wave of Pop programmers shifting to Country. Is that a defined strategy in some companies?

MA: I would say, and I'm sure this is with Mike's company, too, they look at every situation differently. They just look for the best person for the job. Here, it started with my Market Manager Brian Purdy, who said, "I like what you've done with our other stations. Can you try this with KILT?" If there was anything they liked about me, it's that I had no preconceived notion about the format. In some cases, that's an advantage.

MP: The Wolf had talked to many well-known Country programmers before me, but they felt the station was more akin to a Pop station than the standard Country station. When Mike Moore and the guys were bringing me into Entercom, I said, "Hey, why do you guys want a Top 40 interloper getting in the middle of all this?" Mike said, "Are you kidding? This format needs new ideas." I was lucky my name popped up.

CAC





A Face IN THIS World

Your CRS 2012 New Faces

Eli Young Band | Hunter Hayes | David Nail | Sunny Sweeney | Thompson Square

*They scored their first Top 10 hit with 2009's "Always The Love Songs" and notched a No. 1 with the platinum-selling "Crazy Girl" last year, but this Republic Nashville band has been building a fan base the old-fashioned way for years. And now it's all coming together with their album *Life At Best* and latest single "Even If It Breaks Your Heart."*

Eli Young Band

What does being a New Face mean to you?

Jon Jones: It's like going out and playing a recital in front of your whole family at Christmas. There's no intimidation factor that may have been there a few years ago.

Mike Eli: The fact that radio voted for us to be part of the show is a huge deal to us.

Was it important to establish yourselves as a road band first before tackling radio?

JJ: To get airplay later on in our career really taught us how important Country radio is to our success. As "Crazy Girl" started climbing the chart, our relationships with radio strengthened. They wanted to know what they could do to help it top the chart.

James Young: A lot had changed in radio since we last did a radio tour. We hit more places this time around. I think "Crazy Girl" allowed us to get us into new markets and play in front of more people. Plus, we loved supporting the stations that have supported us.

What was the difference between the "Crazy Girl" radio tour and other radio tours?

JJ: The Republic Nashville promotion team did an excellent job at picking out places that were key for us to go to. They found ways for us to get outside the conference room and get in front of listeners, which is where we really thrive.

Chris Thompson: We also got feedback from radio staffers who'd notice the interaction between the four of us. They saw that we're

friends, we actually like one another and enjoy what we're doing. That aspect of our live show really shines through in a performance.

What were some of your favorite radio events?

JJ: We played with Darius Rucker for KYGO/Denver at Red Rocks. That was pretty amazing.

ME: I remember seeing pictures of The Beatles, U2 and other artists who've performed there. At the time, they were selling the benches from the original auditorium. A couple of the guys bought some, and we got to take a little piece of Red Rocks home.

JJ: Joel Burke was one of the first PDs who introduced us to the region. He understood that the fastest way for us to make an impact in the area was to get us to play live for fans.

What was the transition to Republic like for you, and who made you feel at home?

JJ: Everyone. There's not a weak link there. Jimmy Harnen is unafraid to lay it out there and say, "This is a great song. This is a great band. Give this a chance. You're going to love them." Getting to know Matthew Hargis and his approach toward radio was also intriguing. Everyone on the promotion staff is allowed to do things their own way as long as they work hard at it. Their personalities really shine through.

JY: When you have a band and a radio team that's hungry for a hit, it's the perfect combination.



Woolly Bully: With WDXB/Birmingham's Dollar Bill.

NEW FACES



Hunter Hayes

While the industry gathered for CRS 2011, Hunter Hayes was in the studio recording every instrument on his self-titled debut album, which he also wrote, co-wrote and co-produced. When time came to promote his Top 15 lead single “Storm Warning,” Hayes took a mobile recording studio on the road to visit radio. By the time the album hit stores Oct. 11, he was already two dates into his first headlining tour.



Hunter Calling: With WCOL/Columbus, OH's John Crenshaw.

Is it important to you that the New Faces bill is determined by radio?

This will be my first CRS, and I'm fully aware that the people who voted for me see a lot of music. To be worthy of the event is pretty cool. I have radio and fans to thank for all the success. They have absolutely changed my future and my life.

Which station was your early adopter?

Easy. My hometown station in Lafayette, LA. KMDL added “Storm Warning” the day I set out for my radio tour, and they kept playing it.

What was your most memorable radio event?

There were tons, but we did a morning appearance for WCOL the day after our concert in Columbus, OH. It was very last-minute and they told us it was going to be at a pumpkin festival. So I thought we were going to go a pumpkin patch at 4am. We went to this downtown restaurant, and as we were driving up it was like a ghost town. All the streetlights were off and no one was awake. I wasn't expecting any listeners to be at this show but, I kid you not, it was like the whole town *packed* the place. There were people with four or five empty beer cans on the table and cheering at 6am.

You came into our offices with a massive rig and recorded a song on the spot. Did you do that at every station on the radio tour?

Almost. We wanted to do something cool that radio probably hadn't seen before. For me, it was fun because I was doing what I'd be doing if I were at home anyway. We built a recording studio in one rig that ended up weighing 120-130 pounds. It cost a fortune to build, but it was totally worth it. I recorded a three-minute song in 30 minutes and split it into four parts so we still had room to talk. Looking back, I'm glad we did it that way. I'm most myself when I'm making music.

Before topping the chart with “Let It Rain” in January, David Nail scored a 2011 Best Male Country Vocal Performance Grammy nomination for “Turning Home.” His credits also include the Top 10 single “Red Light,” which peaked at No. 6 in 2009.

David Nail

What does radio's New Faces vote mean to you?

It's a pretty big deal. I remember going to my first New Faces show thinking, “Okay, there are a lot of important people in this room.”

Who were some of your early radio backers?

Mike Kennedy (KBEQ/Kansas City), Marci Braun (WUSN/Chicago) and Nate Deaton (KRTY/San Jose) have always been strong believers. There've been tons of people who've stayed in my corner and reminded me to be patient because being a new artist isn't easy. I feel like, now, we've not only broken through, we've kind of established an identity. I credit that to my record label and the early supporters who've helped put us on the map.

What were those early radio tours like for you?

I've always looked up to guys like Vince Gill, who always makes you feel like you're in his living room when he sings. But those conference room performances were intimidating as a new artist. I've always been somewhat shy, but over the years, I've gotten more comfortable letting loose. A lot of times we'd go to the stations and sing at 5 or 6am. It was hard just to wake up at 4am, shower and warm up your voice. That was something early on that I always took a lot of pride in doing. Hopefully that impressed them.

Did your Grammy nomination help at radio?

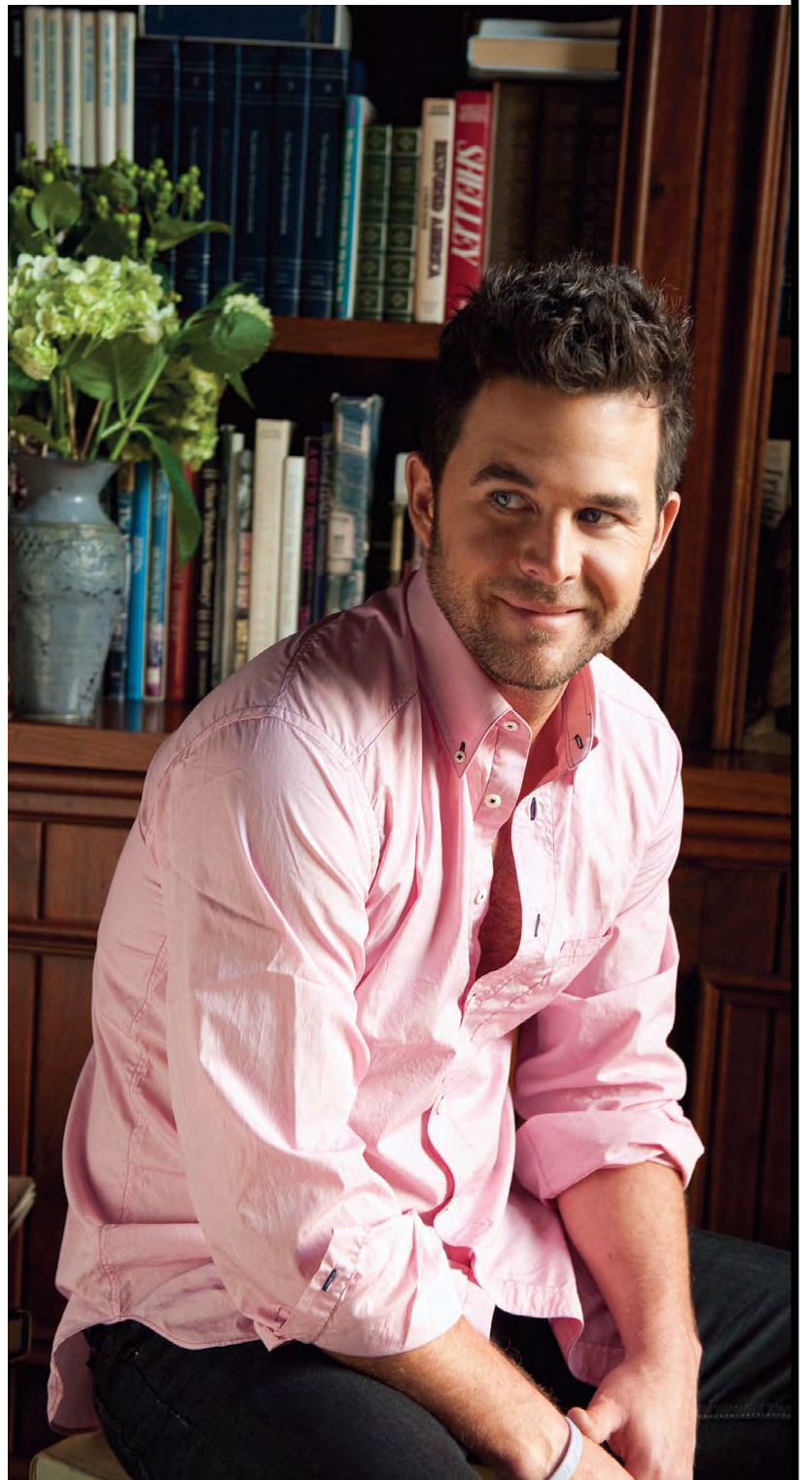
It definitely didn't hurt, but radio has always been a cheerleader for me. After the nomination, I visited a lot of stations where they would high-five and congratulate me. To get support like that from PDs and others makes the recognition extra sweet.

What was your first CRS like?

I had just signed with Mercury in 2001, and had just gotten my first cellphone. [UMG exec] Brian Wright's invite to attend a Universal event was one of my first cellphone calls ever. He explained the conference to me and said every artist from every label is in town. I remember they turned the Hermitage Hotel into a House of Blues Casino. Everyone, including Shania, was there. I thought, “I'm going to be doing stuff like this every night for the rest of my life!” I went to the bar for a beer and handed the bartender a couple dollars. He said, “Sir, everything's on the house tonight.” I walked up to Brian and said, “Every beer is *free*? Y'all are paying for *everyone's* alcohol?” I was flabbergasted. I remember feeling like the rest of my life was laid out before me. I still laugh about it because I found out real quick that it wasn't like that all the time. But for that night, I thought, “Wow, this is the music business! You don't have to pay for *anything*!”



Nailed It: With KMXN/Topeka, KS's Kyle Kristofer and Amber Lee.



Sunny Sweeney

The Texas spitfire shares her title as one of the Big Machine Label Group's flagship artists with Taylor Swift and Jack Ingram. A move to Republic Nashville in 2009 led to her first Top 10 single "From A Table Away" last March, and "Drink Myself Single" soon followed. Both are featured on her current album Concrete.



We're On A Float: With Republic Nashville's Jimmy Harnen and Stacy Blythe.

Is it exciting to get this recognition from Country radio?

This is the coolest thing that has happened in so long. Knowing that it was voted on by radio is a huge compliment because it's just me doing what I do, and they're digging it.

Your radio visits for "From A Table Away" and "Drink Myself Single" were a bit different, weren't they?

Well, we usually had beer. I can't count how many times we went into a conference room at 11am while everyone watched us pull out a six-pack and our "Hillbilly Koozies," which are brown paper bags you wrap around a tall boy. But that's how I started doing music – at a bar with a bunch of people who were too drunk to function.

We published a few trade shots of you and radio with a massive inflatable sun. Whose idea was that?

That was all Jimmy Harnen. We were driving in Tampa and he goes, "Slam on the brakes! Go back!" We turned around and went to this store where they were selling these *huge* rafts. He bought them out. We took a few to a couple stations because they were a pain to blow up. But everywhere we went, people would ask, "Isn't he president of your record label?" He's one of the hardest workers in this whole business, and it's *hard* on a radio tour. There's no time to sleep. You're singing and traveling like a gypsy. There were times when we were like, "Well, Jimmy's president of our record label. If he can do it, we can do it."

Is it important to have a label that works just as hard as you do?

There's not *one* slacker at Republic. They bust their asses all the time. You can email them in the middle of the night and most of the time, you'll get a response back instantly. It's a 25-hour-a-day job, and it's all for the sake of good music.

Who at radio has made the biggest impression on you?

I have three sisters, and Marci Braun (WUSN/Chicago) could easily be the fourth. At dinner one time, Johnny Chiang (KKBQ/Houston) took note that I love gum. A month later, I went back to the station and he bought 100 packs of gum for me. It's really cool when people go out of their way when the clearly don't have the time. They just do it out of the goodness of their hearts.



**NEW
FACES**

Thompson Square

During CRS 2011, Thompson Square's Keifer and Shawna Thompson celebrated the RIAA gold certification of their first No. 1 hit "Are You Gonna Kiss Me Or Not" just two weeks after their self-titled debut album hit stores. The track topped the chart in March, went platinum in May and went on to be the No. 1 most played single of 2011. The couple also rounded out the year with three American Country Awards and two Grammy nominations.

What does being a New Face mean to you?

Keifer Thompson: It means everything.

Shawna: Keifer and I had been going to CRS for four or five years before we signed with Stoney Creek. Hearing everyone on the New Faces bill was a big deal. Being invited to be part of it seems surreal.

Did you ever think about how one song might change your whole career?

KT: You can't anticipate the success of "Are You Gonna Kiss Me Or Not." I think we had 60 stations on the add date. When that happens, you just hang on. There were a lot of people who boosted the song when it needed to be boosted and kept it in power maybe longer than it should have been. We learned so much about how songs become hits. And there have been a lot of artists out there who've been successful for 10 or 20 years who still haven't gotten Grammy nominations. Some people go through their whole career without a No. 1 hit. My idol Bruce Springsteen's never had a No. 1. I put it in perspective like that.

Speaking of, you covered The Boss at every radio tour visit. Did that go over well in the Northeast?



Feeling's Mutual: With KXKT/Omaha's Hoss Michaels.

ST: When we got to WXTU/Philadelphia, we questioned whether we should do it. That's pretty much Springsteen territory.

KT: A lot of times you'll get booed because he's such an institution there. But Springsteen is one of my biggest influences. It was out of pure respect that we covered him. Razz at WXTU is a huge Springsteen fan. They liked it and complimented us on it.

Is it bizarre to look back at how far you've come?

KT: It's come full-circle. When you finally get the chance to do what you want to do – what you go to bed dreaming about – when you finally get to do that for a living, it's a dream come true.

ST: Last year's CRS was our one-year anniversary of working at The Wheel on Broadway. We had a showcase party there and played for a bunch of our radio friends. Benny Brown surprised us mid-concert with our first gold certification plaque, which he hid under his jacket so we wouldn't see it. That was a *very* memorable CRS moment.

Is it safe to say CRS will never be the same for you?

KT: I don't think anything will be the same.

CAC



GOING TO THE VOTE SHOW

CRS/Country Aircheck Award Nominees

The third annual Country Radio Seminar/Country Aircheck Awards celebrate the year's top professionals who have made an impact in Country radio and the music business. Congratulations to all the 2012 CRS/CA Awards nominees!

Major Market Station (metros 1-25)

WUSN/Chicago
KYGO/Denver
WYCD/Detroit
KEEY/Minneapolis
WXTU/Philadelphia

Large Market Station (metros 26-50)

KASE/Austin
KBEQ/Kansas City
WMIL/Milwaukee
WQDR/Raleigh
KAJA/San Antonio

Medium Market Station (metros 51-100)

KUZZ/Bakersfield
WHKO/Dayton
WBCT/Grand Rapids
WIVK/Knoxville
KFDD/Wichita

Small Market Station (metros 101+)

WKSF/Asheville, NC
WUSY/Chattanooga, TN
KUAD/Ft. Collins, CO
WXBQ/Johnson City, TN
KTTS/Springfield, MO

Major Market Market Manager/GM (metros 1-25)

Dan Bennett, KPLX/Dallas
Bob Call, KYGO/Denver
Natalie Conner, WXTU/Philadelphia
Debbie Kenyon, WYCD/Detroit
Rod Zimmerman, WUSN/Chicago

Large Market Market Manager/GM (metros 26-50)

Jim Bryant, WUBE & WYGY/Cincinnati
Nate Deaton, KRTY/San Jose
Pam McKay, KAJA/San Antonio, KASE
& KVET/Austin
Brent Millar, WPAW/Greensboro
Jeff Tyler, WMIL/Milwaukee

Medium Market Market Manager/GM (metros 51-100)

Tim Feagan, WBCT/Grand Rapids
Bill Gentry, WAMZ/Louisville
Eric McCart, KFDD/Wichita
Bill McMartin, WSSL & WESC/
Greenville, SC
Mel Owens, KUZZ/Bakersfield

Small Market Market Manager/GM (metros 101+)

Wayne Foster, KJUG/Visalia, CA
Rex Hansen, KTTS/Springfield, MO
Pete Hanson, KUAD/Ft. Collins, CO
Lisa Nininger-Hale,
WXBQ/Johnson City, TN
Leonard Wheeler, WSLC/Roanoke, VA

Major Market OM/PD (metros 1-25)

Mike Culotta, WQYK/Tampa
Shelly Easton, WXTU/Philadelphia
Tim Roberts, WYCD/Detroit
Meg Stevens, WMZQ/Washington
Gregg Swedberg, KEEY/Minneapolis

Large Market OM/PD (metros 26-50)

Joel Burke, KASE/Austin
Mike Kennedy, KBEQ/Kansas City
Travis Moon, KAJA/San Antonio
Bob Richards, WLHK/Indianapolis
Kerry Wolfe, WMIL/Milwaukee

Medium Market OM/PD (metros 51-100)

Beverlee Brannigan, KFDD/Wichita
Coyote Calhoun, WAMZ/Louisville
Mike Hammond, WIVK/Knoxville
Buzz Jackson, KIIM/Tucson
Lance Tidwell, WWYZ/Hartford
Sue Wilson, WQMX/Akron

Small Market OM/PD (metros 101+)

Jeff Davis, WKSF/Asheville, NC
Bill Hagy, WXBQ/Johnson City, TN
Gator Harrison, WUSY/Chattanooga, TN
Adam Jeffries, KJUG/Visalia, CA
Rob Kelley, WQHK/Ft. Wayne, IN

Major Market Music Director (metros 1-25)

Marci Braun, WUSN/Chicago
Garret Doll, KYGO/Denver
Lance Houston, WUBL/Atlanta
Jay Roberts, WQYK/Tampa
Ginny Rogers, WKLK/Boston

Large Market Music Director (metros 26-50)

Cadillac Jack, KCYE/Las Vegas
TJ McEntire, KBEQ/Kansas City
Mitch Morgan, WMIL/Milwaukee
Bob Pickett, KASE/Austin
Angie Ward, WTQR/Greensboro

Medium Market Music Director (metros 51-100)

Colleen Addair, WIVK/Knoxville
Kris Daniels, WHKO/Dayton &
WQNU/Louisville
Carol Hughes, KFDD/Wichita
Kix Layton, WSSL/Greenville, SC
Dave Taft, WBCT/Grand Rapids

Small Market Music Director (metros 101+)

Stephanie Crist, KMDL/Lafayette, LA
Brian Hatfield, WKSF/Asheville, NC
Dave Michaels, WQHK/Ft. Wayne, IN
Chris O'Kelley, WKXC/Augusta, GA
Bill Poindexter, WUSY/Chattanooga, TN

Major Market Personality/Show (metros 1-25)

Lisa Dent & Ramblin' Ray,
WUSN/Chicago
Laurie DeYoung, WPOC/Baltimore
Doc & Andie, WXTU/Philadelphia
Dr. Don Morning Show with Rachael
And Grunwald, WYCD/Detroit
Fitz In The Morning, KKWF/Seattle

Large Market Personality/Show (metros 26-50)

Randy Carroll & Jamie Martin,
KAJA/San Antonio
Mike Kennedy, Jillian Gregg, Zeke
Montana, KBEQ/Kansas City
Marty McFly, WKDF/Nashville
Jeff Roper and Angie Ward,
WTQR/Greensboro
Scott Ward & Tommy Carrera,
KFRG/Riverside

Medium Market Personality/Show (metros 51-100)

Andy & Allison, WIVK/Knoxville
Brian & Kellie, KFDD/Wichita
Natalie Cash & Jim Carey, KWEN/Tulsa
Ellis & Bradley, WSSL/Greenville, SC
Scott Wynn & Sue Wilson,
WQMX/Akron

Small Market Personality/Show (metros 101+)

Dan & Dude/WQHK/Ft. Wayne, IN
Dex & Mo, WUSY/Chattanooga, TN
Eddie Foxx Show with Sharon Green,
WKSF/Asheville, NC
Brian Gary & Todd Harding, KUAD/
Ft. Collins, CO
Phillip Gibbons, WGSQ/Cookeville, TN

National/Syndicated/ Personality/Show

AfterMidNite with Blair Garner
American Country Countdown w/Kix Brooks
Big D & Bubba
Bob Kingsley's Country Top 40
CMT Radio Live with Cody Alan

Platinum Label

Arista
Capitol
EMI Nashville
RCA
Show Dog-Universal

Gold Label

Big Machine
Broken Bow
Curb
Republic Nashville
Valory

VP/Promotion

Shane Allen, Capitol
George Briner, Valory
Keith Gale, RCA
Steve Hodges, Capitol & EMI Nashville
Jack Purcell, Big Machine
Royce Risser, UMG/Nashville

Director/National Promotion

Buffy Cooper, (formerly) BNA
JoJamie Hahr, Valory
Matthew Hargis, Republic Nashville
Mandy McCormack, Big Machine
Norbert Nix, (formerly) RCA
Mike Rogers, Curb

Regional Promotion

Cliff Blake, Republic Nashville
Charlie Dean, Mercury
Dawn Ferris, Broken Bow
Louie Newman, MCA
Erik Powell, Big Machine

Independent Promotion Team/Exec.

Bigger Picture
Grass Roots Promotion
New Revolution
Nine North
Diane Richey Promotion

"New Face Of Country" Professional

Kevin Callahan, KSON/San Diego
Byron Kennedy, KNCI/Sacramento
Kevin Mannion, KNIX/Phoenix
Mark Niederhauser, WMN
Adam "Phathead" Zuckerberg,
WJVC/Nassau-Suffolk



Senior Class: The Broken Bow/Stoney Creek SVPs with their leader. Pictured (l-r) are Jon Loba, Benny Brown, Paul Brown, Carson James and Rick Shedd.

Benny and the Gents

The Man (And Men) Behind Broken Bow's Against-All-Odds Success

“I’ve been in enough business relationships to know that if greed keeps things from being a win-win for both parties, then it’s a short-term relationship.”

— Benny Brown



Before Benny Brown and Broken Bow Records, the trajectory for independent country labels was unwavering and unfortunate. With one very notable exception in the form of Mike Curb, the flight plan for indies always ended in a smoldering heap on some not-too-distant portion of the runway.

Not only did Brown and his upstart label bust down the major-fortified gates and forever shift Nashville’s record company balance of power, he also rewrote what it means to be a music man. Consider that this Northern California car dealer who is not a musician, songwriter or performer is the creative center of a company that has had, over the last seven years, three of Country radio’s No. 1 most-played songs. In 2005 it was Craig Morgan’s “That’s What I Love About Sunday,” followed in 2009 by Jason Aldean’s “She’s Country” and, last year, Thompson Square’s “Are You Gonna Kiss Me Or Not.”

“I love that it’s three different acts,” says Jon Loba, SVP over the Broken Bow and Stoney Creek label group. “He’s got the best ears in this town. Some may say that’s hyperbole, but no other label group has done that twice in that time frame, let alone three times.”

Bathtub Of Demo-aid

Brown’s music industry efforts started with trying to help a young singer he heard on a Northern California TV show in the late ‘80s. He visited Nashville artist manager Jack McFadden, who represented Lorrie Morgan at the time. While in McFadden’s office, Brown noticed a bathtub full of cassette tapes and asked if he could have the unwanted song demos. McFadden couldn’t imagine why there was any interest. “I told him I wanted to listen to them,” Brown explains. “He said, ‘You’ll go tone deaf!’”

But listen to them he did, taking a long interest in music a step further. “From 1963 to 1985 I was an independent car dealer and spent a lot of time on the road listening to Country radio,” Brown explains. “A lot of times that was the only thing you could get in rural areas. Sometimes I’d be on the road and go two days without sleeping. Me in the car, making stops at dealerships, and the thing that kept me awake at night driving from L.A. to Northern California to Seattle was the radio. And I got to where I could listen to a new song or artist and know whether it would be a hit or not.”

His fascination with music was extended with the early ‘90s purchase of Nashville’s Legends Studio, which he used to develop artists including Mercury’s Wesley Dennis. “I was so frustrated with the single choices, and we ended up buried

in recoupables,” Brown says of the experience. “Never saw a penny. That was my first issue with major labels.”

Brown also worked with artists Joanie Keller and Damon Gray. “We had a song called ‘Three Little Teardrops’ with Joanie and couldn’t get anyone interested,” he says. “So we started the label just out of frustration.”

Benny’s nephew Paul was the parts manager at his dealership while going to law school. “I was involved in concerts somewhat, and driving home from a show in Reno we talked about it,” Benny says. “I felt we needed someone on the legal side, so as soon as he passed the bar we started the label.”

That was July, 1999. Keller and Gray both released albums on Broken Bow in 2000, but the label’s first No. 1 was still years away. “We had to figure out what was real and what wasn’t,” Paul says. “When we got to town, we saw a lot of presentations from the different consultants we hired. At first we were told to go to secondary stations, and if you could get something going there it would pop up to the big chart. But that doesn’t happen. We had to learn that lesson, and Benny just kept pushing forward.”

Almost Home

The lack of early success was surely disappointing, but it didn’t dissuade the young company. “My way of thinking was always long-term,” Benny says. “Even in the car business, I built it based on long-term relationships, not greed up front. After seeing what happened to me and my artists, I thought I could come up with a different business model that was fair to the artist and to the label.”

A Nashville entertainment attorney retained to draft the label’s early contracts was taken aback by Brown’s parameters. “‘Nobody gives this much,’ he told us,” Benny recalls. “We set it up so the artist has a really fair portion. I’ve been in enough business relationships to know that if greed keeps things from being a win-win for both parties, then it’s a short-term relationship. I wanted whomever I worked with to feel good about it. So we came up with a model and have pretty much stuck to it.”

Curb’s early mainstream country success came via co-ventures with labels, so Broken Bow’s notion of winning a toe-to-toe slugfest with the majors seemed foolhardy to some.

Benny and the Gents

to keep Benny from putting out ‘Almost Home.’ They begged him. It’s a 4:38 ballad on an unknown act. Career suicide, they said. I was everyone’s last chance to talk Benny out of it, so I got him on the phone. At the end of the conversation he said, ‘I’ve been a gambler my whole life. You don’t bet on nines, you bluff on nines. I’m not going with any other song, I’m going with my ace. That’s the ace. Tell them to go work it.’”

Paul adds, “Benny said, ‘If we can’t win with a great song, we need to know that. We can’t afford to push good songs up the chart. There’s no return on investment.’”

“Almost Home” was a top 10 hit in 2003, suddenly elevating an independent from the kiddie table. “I heard a lot of people laugh about the car guy,” Paul says. “What does the car guy know? He knew what he liked and pretty early on learned we can’t be making albums for Benny. He started making music for what he perceived the mass audience to be. He’d bring employees into the dealership’s conference room and play them songs, take that feedback and make decisions based on it. These are real people. Music isn’t confined to Nashville, L.A. or New York. It lives throughout the country.”

Spend & Save

Even with Morgan’s success, there were many hard lessons learned. Sherrié Austin, Chad Brock, Lila McCann and Joe Diffie taught Broken Bow an important lesson about known artists hoping for a second chance. “No matter how much you believe in someone, once they fall out of grace or sight with radio, it’s hard to ever bring them back,” Benny says.

His affection for the artists only deepened the disappointment. “You feel like you’re family to them and want so much for good things to happen. That’s the hard part of this business, seeing people who are so deserving and you can’t make it happen, no matter how much money you spend.”

Paul Brown points to his uncle’s almost irrational passion and resolve as keys to Broken Bow’s success. “People always ask me what it takes to make it as an independent, and I tell them you have to have someone who’s willing to throw \$15 million in the street,” he says. “If it’s not there when he comes back the next day and doesn’t ruin his day, you have a chance. We didn’t hit a home run right off the bat, and it’s easy to give up. We were in it for millions, but the more we learned, the more we realized that nobody really knows anything. The audience tells you whether you’ve got a hit or not. Until then, it’s just gut.”

And Benny’s increasingly dead-on gut shouldn’t overshadow his business acumen. SVP/Promotion Carson James remembers his first in-person meeting with Brown at his dealership. “We’re in his office talking philosophy and getting ready to negotiate, but he leaves both doors to the office wide open,” James says. “The whole time we’re talking, people are coming in and out, asking him quick questions. But he never lost his focus, which really impressed me. And when you called Corning Ford and asked to speak to Benny Brown, they never asked who’s calling. He picked up every single call. For him to be worth what he’s worth and have all the successful businesses he’s had over the years, that says a lot.”

“One of the things I’ve learned in the 20-some-odd years I’ve been working for Benny is that \$100 is a lot of money to him,” Paul says. “A million is a good investment or bad investment, but \$100 is a lot of money. He helps control costs across the board, even in deals with artists. Jason Aldean fully recouped in his first royalty period and has been recouped ever since. Part of that is controlling costs, and Jason has created a really nice royalty stream for himself.

“The other thing is loyalty, and Megan Mullins is a perfect example,” Paul adds. “He cut 34 sides and released four singles trying to get something going. For whatever reason, it didn’t connect.”

Hit Pickin’

Much of the impetus for starting Stoney Creek was Brown’s belief in Mullins. “For whatever reason, I thought maybe we need a different promotion staff with a fresh start,” Benny says. “And we’d never really been able to push more than two songs at a time on the charts. I don’t think it’s fair to talent for them to sit in the wings and wait. With a second staff we had a chance for those people to be heard.”

Benny relocated to Nashville 18 months ago, and still owns five new car dealerships out West. But being in Music City may not be completely to his advantage. “When I was in California going to work every day at the dealership, I probably listened to twice as many songs,” he admits. “But I just finished a media room at home, and I told these guys I’m going to start devoting more of my time to where it all starts.”

Brown remains extremely hands-on with song selection. “You have to match the song and music to that person,” he explains. “Some artists can’t hear themselves doing it. You finally talk them into it and they do it, and it becomes their favorite song. With some artists it takes more persuasion than others. Out of all the artists I’ve ever worked with, Jason has been the easiest. We’ve been on the same page, for the most part, though his single choices may be a little different. Craig Morgan was the opposite. He didn’t want to cut ‘Redneck Yacht Club,’ much less have it as a single.”

SVP/Operations Rick Shedd says, “Benny’s so focused and engaged in the creative part of the business. His joy is finding songs, matching them to artists and then bringing them to market. It’s a collaborative process and all opinions are considered and encouraged, but at the end of the day, Benny Brown makes the decision.”

His work with Thompson Square highlights Benny’s ability to help artists find songs that reflect who they are. “Shawna’s voice is what really attracted me, and when I heard the demo for ‘Let’s Fight’ it all came together,” he says. “I knew what I wanted to do with them, but I didn’t say anything. So we invited them to a Christmas dinner we were having for the staff, and I announced at dinner that they were going to be our newest artists. They actually broke down and started crying.”

Song selection continues to be a give-and-take process. “I barter with them,” Benny admits. “Keifer and Shawna Thompson are great songwriters, but it’s all about the best side. I don’t care who wrote it, who published it, who gets the money. We cut ‘Are You Gonna Kiss Me Or Not’ in the first group of songs for them and always felt like it was the big song.”

Beyond Broken

Broken Bow and Stoney Creek aren’t the company’s only music-related ventures. “Years ago, we started on the publishing company and have been building on it,” Brown says. “We’ve got some great writers now. We’re getting some good cuts. If you’ve got great writers and it’s the right song, you get to hold it and own it.

“I’ve been very pleased with the progress we’ve made with Stoney Creek, but I don’t see myself starting any more labels. I want to grow these and do the best we can for the artists. We do have a management company and plan to grow that. We’ve got BBR Land, which is buses to take care of our artists. We’ve also got BBR Air to take care of me and the artists. Those aren’t all about money-making.”

Paul points to return on investment. “Right now, if you leave capital sitting in the bank, not much is coming from it,” he says. “So when you can put it to work, it makes a lot of sense. Especially with a brand new artist, it’s very difficult for them to ride comfortably. We’re able to put them in a newer bus and they get charged back for it, but we’re very fair about that, too.”

That fairness makes the company a great place to work, according to Shedd. “There’s a true family feel in whom he hires, whom he signs and the way we’re treated,” he says. “If you’ve been in the record business for more than five years, you’re a refugee from somewhere, but here we do everything for the right reasons. We do things other companies wouldn’t do and we don’t do things other companies do. And we always make the best decision for the artist and the music. That’s the biggest difference. We’re not driven by corporate pressures.”

Nor is there a scramble to take credit for the label’s successes. “You won’t hear Benny taking credit for breaking Jason Aldean,” Paul says. “We didn’t break Jason Aldean. We did everything we could to promote him, but who Jason Aldean is broke Jason Aldean.”

Adds James, “The family atmosphere is so tight. Make no mistake: It’s a business, but everybody really does care about each other. It’s not about individual accolades, though they are recognized. It’s about what we do collectively.”

And driving that collective success is Benny Brown, who once found himself in the office of songwriter Larry Shell and saw a plaque for “Rumor Has It,” which was a hit for Reba. “I’d found that song in the bathtub of demos,” Benny says. “I’d wanted it for one of my acts at the time. I said to Larry, ‘I can tell you one thing about that song: It was a long time between when you wrote it and when it got cut.’ And Larry said, ‘Yeah, seven years. How’d you know?’”

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“It’s all about the best side. I don’t care who wrote it, who published it, who gets the money.”



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A New Day For A Dynasty

Perhaps the most momentous power shift Nashville's seen in years took place in April 2010, as 15-year EMI Music/Nashville publishing head Gary Overton jumped to the label business as Sony Music/Nashville's Chairman. Prior to publishing, Overton served as an artist manager for Alan Jackson, and even had a short stint in A&R (see below). His tenure at Sony has already seen a restructuring from four promotion teams to three, though the wholesale upheaval some predicted was never in the cards. In his first extended interview on the job, Overton tells Country Aircheck about his vision, what he's learned, his thoughts on following a legend, how an executive from the creative side hits his numbers and much more.

Country Aircheck: You've been at Sony for almost two years. Have you figured out what this job is yet?

Gary Overton: Oh, yeah, as much as I ever will. I worked in A&R at BNA for a year back in the early '90s. I was hired just to be a song guy in A&R; there were no other real responsibilities. But I went to virtually every meeting – promotion, marketing, sales – you name it. I went, one, because I felt like my job was to help bring what is unique and compelling about the music

and artistry to all those people so they would know how to represent it. And, two, I could find out what labels do.

And over the years as a manager and in publishing, I interacted a

lot with more than just the A&R departments. Of course, once you get inside you hopefully learn more and a lot faster.

Jump ahead 18 years, and all that stuff you learned is not quite the same.

It's like riding a bicycle or swimming. I'm not as graceful or as fast as I used to be, but I could get down the pool. I wasn't looking to go from publishing to a record company, but Sony/Nashville was a very well-run company. [Former Chairman] Joe Galante did an incredible job and created a dynasty here. And Sony Music Entertainment seemed very healthy. So if I was going to take the jump and accept the challenge, it seemed like the right time and the right company. There were other opportunities, but those labels didn't make sense for me.

What did you think the job would be, and what has the reality been?

I was thinking music always has to be first and that it's a new day. We need to figure out what makes sense now for our business, artists and partners. Don't just live on what historically has been the business model. The key has always been having and finding great department leaders, and there were a lot of great people already here. So it was really about finding people who shared my vision or were willing to adapt to the new vision. And then it was about advancing the ball down the field.

But the volume of emails, phone calls, reports and meetings is incredible because of how big a place this is. The thing is to not get buried by all those things because what's most important is great music, the artists, working through your friends at radio, media and retail and, ultimately, selling records. We can get very caught up in 10 hours of meetings a day and not accomplish any of that, so I've had to cut down on the meetings.

Is there an area you weren't as versed in that you had to immerse yourself in right away?

As a manager you know the sales stuff, but don't have to know the mechanics because you're a step removed. Here, the sales function is the most important thing I can do besides finding, helping create and exposing compelling music. We have to sell records – that's kind of job 1. When I became a manager, I asked the artist's business manager to make me a pie chart of income sources so I knew where to be an expert first. Here, 99% of our income comes from record sales. So, I need to understand the sales function and now, of course, digital sales, which didn't exist when I was a manager. There's a lot to learn.

Your previous interaction with Country radio was probably nothing like what you're experiencing now.

I've been a fan since I grew up in New Jersey listening to WHN/New York – Conway and Loretta. At the same time, I was listening to and going to concerts at Madison Square Garden of The Who and Led Zeppelin, but I loved country. I'd pick up my friends in my mother's Delta 88 and I'd have it on WHN. They'd go, "What the hell is that?" As far back as I can recall, Country radio has been a real friend to me.

Is it challenging to get our artists onto Country radio? For some artists it is. Others who are doing really well, not as much. But I look at Country radio and try to understand their perspective and the difficult jobs they're tasked to do. And their jobs *are* very difficult. Radio's been very welcoming, honest and fair to us, which is what I've asked for. I think we've done a good job finding music with them in mind, because they are, by and large, a pretty accurate barometer of what the listeners want to hear. It's a very symbiotic relationship, to be quite honest. Some people like to paint it as less than that, but I don't feel that way at all.

You've made several road trips to get acquainted with radio. What'd you ask them?

I asked how their business was and, in some cases, was glad to hear [previously declining] ad revenues were leveling off or coming up. I asked about their websites

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“To follow arguably the best record executive this town has ever seen, that's daunting.”



and what their task was with that. I asked their perspective of not only country music, but also of Sony Music/Nashville, its artists and promotion staffs. I remember walking to the parking lot with a PD after a nice dinner and saying, “Well, thanks for a great time. I really appreciate you.” She said, “That’s it?” I said, “That’s all I had. Was I supposed to ask you something else?” She said, “You’re not going to tell me what adds you need today or ask why am I not playing it?” I said, “No, that’s what we do on a daily basis. I wanted to hear what’s important to you, and how we can work together. I don’t have an agenda.” The response was, “Wow, that’s never happened before.”

Is there anything about radio that makes you scratch your head and ask, “Why the hell do they do that?”

I don’t know that I understand the radio business well enough to scratch my head. I don’t presume to know any more than they might understand what goes on at a record label. Consolidation and acquisitions seem to make it challenging for us to promote to radio and seem to create challenges for each station when they’re gobbled up. But that’s nothing new.

What have you thought as you’ve realized that communication from radio to promotion and then to a label head, manager or publisher isn’t always a straight line?

People believe and many times are led to believe that a promotions staff can manipulate songs on a week-by-week basis until they’re No. 1, then move that record out of range and move our other record in there. The fact of the matter is, if a record is very strong it’s doing a lot of its own things. We are massaging it along the way because there are a lot of fine points to promoting a record that I’m

finding out about. We have eight promotion people representing any given record, so I have eight sources of input. Then I

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have radio people I can speak to, and the manager and the artist calling. There’s a lot of chatter [and] it’s rather comical at times.

What do you find humorous?

How stories evolve. You tell a kid the monkey’s in the tree and by the time he tells the other kids, the aircraft carrier’s in the living room. You’re like, “How did that happen?” With as many cooks in the kitchen as there are, it’s a loud kitchen.

What are you learning about promotion?

It’s one of the few activities I’ve not done for a living in this business. I’ve driven a tour bus, promoted some dates and done a lot of things. But I’ve never done promotion. I’ve always felt it was the hardest job there is. The worst thing in the world for them was the invention of the cellphone because they truly work 24/7. It’s hamsters on wheels when the chart closes, and then one minute later the new chart opens. It doesn’t end. There’s not been one person on staff here that, even when they’re on a family vacation, isn’t sending me emails throughout the day even though I tell them, “I really would like you to have balance in your life. Please, try to step away from it so you can get some balance and keep your family and your life.”

Until recently you had a SVP/Promotion as a layer of management between you and the three VPs. Did you eliminate that layer because you wanted to be closer to promotion yourself?

I’ve not made a decision to not hire for that position, but am in a kind of test period to see how this works. I have direct contact with the VPs of Promotion so they can give me information without a filter. Radio is arguably one of our two most important partners, so being a step closer to radio and promotion is a good thing. I’m not looking to hire today, but I’m also not saying that position won’t exist. A lot of what I’m trying to do is make this a label built for 2012, 2013, 2014 and on to 2020. Maybe that position is not necessary. Maybe it’s there to create a new position. Several years ago there weren’t digital people in this building. Now we have a number of them. I’m just trying to evolve what we do.

You have one CRS under your belt at Sony. If I recall, you didn’t come away all that excited about the panel you were on last year.

Well, I think I got tuned up in that panel. There were two questions I was told



would not be asked and, of course, those were the first two I was asked. One was about M-Score and the other was about performance royalties. I remember trying to give a very honest answer to both in my limited knowledge at the time.

As for CRS, all the labels and managers try to get our artists and music out there because we have all these important radio people in town. A microcosm of that last year was having Kenny Chesney invite 30-35 people to his house in St. John for a weekend to hear what he was up to. It was very interesting to watch all the radio folks interacting with each other, very happily talking about music they’re excited about, maybe music they weren’t so excited about, whose chain was being bought and who had a new boss. I think Kenny saw that and intuitively knew not to make the weekend about him 24 hours a day. He let them have their time.

At CRS, all the labels are competing to chauffeur these guys around every minute of every day. We’ve got a lunch, a breakfast, a dinner. Maybe we should let these guys have their time to interact with each other, whether it’s around the panels or just time they can actually spend together talking about what’s going on in their markets or with their group. I enjoy CRS a lot, but there’s a lot jammed in; it’s a blur. We had a great boat show last year and we’re going to have another great one this year, but it’s a lot.

We almost need the Secret Service walking all of us around to make sure we’re at the right place at the right time. I imagine with the CRS app folks can make their own calendar and get where they need to go.

You’re the quarterback who follows Brett Favre – the guy following a legend. Do you feel that?

Absolutely. You’d have to have an insatiable ego to think that it’s anything but that.

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To follow Joe, who created a dynasty here – arguably the best record executive this town has ever seen – that’s daunting. The key was to learn a lot from what he created, but then have a vision for how to take it from here to down the road. So, yes, at times I heard, “Well, Joe didn’t do it that way.” And I’d say, “Well, Joe’s not here.” I just try to be judged on the merits of what I’m trying to help create. History will judge how I did.

If I remember correctly, it was rumored in the press that I was firing the whole staff. That was interesting because I’ve never done that anywhere. Jimmy Bowen was most known for doing that, and he had reasons. Not having been at a record company, I didn’t have a whole staff I could just walk across the street. And that’s a good thing because I could get to know the staff on a group and individual basis and make some choices.

The early press releases talked about Joe being a consultant for six months. How involved was he?

We had a couple months together in the building and then he was working from the house for the remainder of his consultancy. He said, “Listen, I’m here for you, call me if you need something. Otherwise,

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I’m not going to bug you. If you call me, you’ve always got me. If you need me to attend a meeting with you, I will go. If you need me, I can travel with you or without you. Whatever you need, that’s what I will do for you. But I won’t be there saying, ‘Why the hell did you do that? This is how I always did it. Boy, this was a dumb idea getting you in here.’” He was nothing other than helpful.

You inherited a lot of Sony/Nashville artists – from superstars to mid-level artists to new acts. Who has been signed since you’ve been here?

It is interesting how long it actually takes to sign an artist, make a record and then find the right time in the calendar to release it. But I guess the ones who were truly signed after I started include Casey James, Wade Bowen and Kristen Kelly. I like to sign artists who’ve been out performing so that when they sign with us, it’s not the first time.

In this age of the Internet, social media, 500 TV channels, etc., when artists of a certain level can take their message to their million Facebook friends, do superstars need record labels? Right now, for instance, Tim McGraw is a free agent, and I hear Kenny only owes you one more record.

I can’t imagine Kenny Chesney being anywhere other than here for his entire career. (Laughs) But to answer the question: Absolutely! So tell me about the stars who have gone off and done their label. How well have they done?

Well, Toby Keith has been pretty successful.

I love Toby and what he’s done after saying, “I’m gonna do it my own way.” Now he’s back letting Universal fund it all. Kenny’s an amazing man and artist, and can talk to you as an artist because that is what he is; he’s a superstar. But then there are times when he’s almost standing outside of himself looking at his career and the industry in a very intelligent and intuitive way. We were talking about how he’s in just about every business *but* the label business. And he said, “That’s not by mistake.”

There’s a lot that goes into the label side. There’s a lot of things we do that the general public and even those in the industry don’t really realize how involved we are in artists’ careers. We are a part of their touring mechanism, bringing radio to the shows and promoting shows. There’s the digital frontier, trying to really get our arms around it and protect the artists’ music. Radio promotion is, by far, one of the biggest things we do. And we’re talking to Tim because he’s an incredible artist and he’s looking for a label home. I don’t see many superstars saying, “Eh. I don’t need those guys.”

Speaking of artists, you had a long relationship with Alan Jackson, who left your label group last year. What happened there?

First of all, I *have* a long relationship with Alan. You said “had.” Alan and I have been friends since before he had a record deal, and I have been blessed to be his publisher, his manager and with his record label. When I got here, his deal was pretty much up and had not been extended at that point. We had a lot of good conversations, and it came down to where he and I had the conversation. He had made a management change and gone back to Nancy Russell. He made some other changes in his career, and it just seemed like a natural point. He had been with Arista and, ultimately, Sony for 20 years. So it was pretty much agreed on by both of us.

I said, “The last thing I would want, running a label that represents a superstar like you, and certainly as your friend, would be the place that cannot continue to support your career. I want you to be excited about the music and to make great music. And people want to hear it. So if moving on makes sense for you, I understand.” It was really bittersweet for both of us because we had been together since day one.

Do intermittent rumors about Sony acquiring other companies or leadership changes bother you?

I don’t have as much trouble as other people because I feel like I know the truth most of the time. But I’ll be honest with you: It really pisses me off because my staff wonders if their job could be in jeopardy, wondering, “Is Gary going to be here?” There’s usually an agenda and personal gain at the other end of those rumors. They’ll say the company’s going to be bought and someone else will be running the place, but they’re 0-for-2 so far. The great thing is working for Doug Morris, whom I’d not known before. He started out as a writer/producer and became arguably the most successful record executive there’s been in our business. He’s very open. He called me the first time he heard those rumors and said, “I just want you to know, Gary, it’s all bullshit. One thing you’ll know about me, I’m a straight shooter. If you ever have a question, you ask me. If something comes up, I will let you know. But you’re doing a marvelous job. You’re staff is doing incredibly



well down there in Nashville.” I said, “Thank you. That helps me a lot, mostly for my staff.” And it means a lot to have his open support and for him to make that call.

Sony/Nashville was Country Aircheck’s 2011 Label Group of the Year, with two of your imprints in the top 5. What other accomplishments from your first two years make you proud?

Well, we had four of your top 10 songs of the year, and have had 20 top 10 singles. I think 15 went to No. 1. As for sales, six of the seven albums we put out in 2011 debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Top Country Albums chart, and the other debuted at No. 2. And we’ve had something like 80 award nominations – CMA, ACM and Grammys. That’s by far the highest of any country label.

As we talk, you’re sitting in a pretty comfortable-looking rocking chair. Does that chair have any significance?

Not in itself, but a funny story: I wasn’t on the job at EMI a month when the CFO came in to do budgets. We sat down and were chatting when he said, “This is Stickley furniture, isn’t it?” I said, “Yeah, you’ve got a good eye.” He noted how expensive it was and kept talking about reducing spending on certain items to be able to afford furniture like that. So I said, “You want to talk about it? Let’s discuss this. Guess how much all this furniture cost.” He guessed \$30,000, and I told him it was \$47,000. “Now, ask me how much it cost EMI. Zero. It’s mine. I brought it with me, and I’ll take it with me. If EMI was going to buy the furniture, I certainly wouldn’t spend that kind of money.”

They found over time that I’m blessed to be involved in the creative side and that I can also count. I’ve hit my numbers everywhere I’ve been. When I got here, we had some artists who couldn’t get traction, so we didn’t release their albums. So instead of having 12 releases, we had seven. If there’s a question about not making numbers, I’ll say, “You’ll find out that I know how to do this.” We made our numbers and we’re going to blow through them this year. I can count.

On a more personal note, what have you enjoyed most about this job?

My wife, Jan, always said to me, “You’re not going to end your career in publishing. You like challenges.” And she’s right – I love challenges. It’s not that publishing wasn’t challenging, but I’d been at EMI 15 years, and according to someone’s tally, had been Publisher of the Year 12 times and had made our numbers virtually every year.

It was going really well and there really was no end in sight. And some have asked why I would join a record company at arguably the *worst* point in record industry history. I always think, “Yeah, thanks for bringing that up.” But I’ve really enjoyed the challenge, getting to learn

new things about our business that I’ve not been involved with before and being updated on some things I was involved with before that have changed. I like being closer to the music that gets to the public through radio, whereas before I was one step removed from that. There are lots of little victories, and I want to make sure that when there’s a No. 1 party for a single my promotion staff gets to go to it. We don’t make money from that, but they work their asses off to accomplish it. It’s important to me that they go to those so they can enjoy it. And sometimes the writers and publishers who are there will call them out and thank them, which means a lot. It’s a hard business and it’s a hard time. But it’s fun to be successful at a label, having not been at a label before, and being able to share that victory with everybody.

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