



ERIC
CHURCH'S
SINNERS
@ 20



TROY
TOMLINSON
THE INTERVIEW

ACMs
WITH CARTER FAITH

COUNTRY AIRCHECK

JULY
2026

ERIC CHURCH

HOW 'BOUT NOW?
TWENTY YEARS IN,
ERIC CHURCH IS STILL
DOING IT HIS WAY.



YOU LOOK GOOD, DAMN

BRANTLEY GILBERT
"GOOD DAMN"

FROM THE UPCOMING ALBUM
SINS OF THE FATHER
AVAILABLE JULY 24TH



BBR
MUSIC GROUP

WHEELHOUSE
RECORDS

BMG



LET'S GO TO VEGAS!

WITH CARTER FAITH & ACM RADIO WINNERS

Red Ain't Your Color: On the ACM's blue carpet (above).

Lost & Found: Performing "If I Had Never Lost My Mind" at the 61st ACM Awards (right).

MCA's Carter Faith recorded the iconic song by another Faith (Hill) - "Let's Go To Vegas" - as the Academy of Country Music returned to the city after three years in Texas. Nominated for Album of the Year and anticipating her first awards show performance, Faith also found time to bet ... and let it ride.

"I've been to Vegas for one day, one time, two years ago," Faith says in an interview a week before the awards. "I opened for Shaboozey at the Virgin Hotel just as 'Bar Song' was popping off. I flew out the next day, but I did have time to learn blackjack. I put \$20 in and cashed out at \$200."

In 2025, she attended both major awards shows - ACMs and CMAs - for the first time. "I sang with Crystal Gayle, who I'm obsessed with, at the ACM After Party," she says. "But they almost didn't let me in because I didn't have a credential."

Credentials weren't a problem this year. Faith's *Cherry Valley* is the first debut album to get an Album nod since Chris Stapleton's *Traveller*, news she received

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This Is Austin: Carter meeting a big radio group in Texas before opening for George Strait.

ACM RADIO WINNERS

DOUBLE DOUBLE

National Daily On-Air and Weekly Personality

Bryan "B-Dub" Washington, *B-Dub Radio* and *B-Dub Saturday Night*

"I have won the weekend award twice before, and have submitted for the daily category, but never been nominated," says B-Dub. "So, being nominated for both this year was awesome, but winning both just shocked me. The way ACM did it this year was special - finding out in front of thousands of my colleagues at the *CRS New Faces* show. I got to experience my peers and colleagues congratulating me in person. This was the first time someone has won both categories, and a nice confidence boost that I'm on the right path with the show. None of it happens - at the end of the day - without people who believe in you, so it is an award for every station that carries my show as much as it is mine."

"The ACMs were back in Vegas this year, which is a city that hits different in your 40s than it does in your 20s and 30s," he continues. "I was responsible and made it on time to everything. I did the remotes, went to Topgolf for a bit, the KWNR Guitar Pull and the BBR/BMG brunch. At the show itself, the ACM treated us very well, and it's nice that it ends so early so we had the whole night to enjoy Vegas. We rode the High Roller Ferris wheel for the first time and went to In-N-Out Burger, still all dressed up. Thankfully, the double-double animal style sauce came out of my shirt!"



Sounds Like The Radio: B-Dub (r) with Zach Top at the ACM Radio Remotes.

LET'S GO TO VEGAS!

WITH CARTER FAITH & ACM RADIO WINNERS

Saturday, May 16

- 3:15pm Lobby call & checkout of hotel
- 4pm Carter Faith soundcheck at Moody Center
- 7:30pm Carter Faith set (45 mins.)
- 8:30pm Transfer to AUS FBO for charter flight
- 9pm Depart AUS for LAS

Sunday, May 17

- 12pm Band & strings Call Time
- 12:10pm Principal Call Time; Talent Check-in
- 12:52pm Dress rehearsal performance, "If I Had Never Lost My Mind"
- 2pm Red Carpet arrivals
- 5pm Live show: 61st Academy of Country Music Awards



ACM RADIO WINNERS

CANNONBALL RUN

Major Market Personality

Chris Carr & Company, Chris Carr, Sam Sansevere, "Dubs" Michael Wilczynski, KEEY/Minneapolis

Sansevere, who missed last fall's CMA Awards because she'd just had a baby, wasn't planning to come to the ACMs either, but made a gameday decision to go, much to the delight of her co-hosts. "That was the best surprise of the whole weekend," Carr says. "I'm glad I hadn't given her seats away."

While Carr loved receiving a trophy from BBR/BMG during their pre-show brunch, its "cannonball" shape and size did cause some delays when he tried to take



The Gang's All Here: Dubs, Carr and Sam (l-r) at the awards show.

it though airport TSA in his carry-on "meticulously wrapped in my wife's pajama pants."

After the show, Carr took his team to dinner at Emeril's, where former *The Bachelorette* contestant Tyler Cameron was seen waiting in line to get in both before and after their meal. Carr also spotted Shaboozey "everywhere I looked" in Vegas. "Nobody put in more steps that week than him."

Speaking of steps, Carr and his wife Stephanie ran around town with Travis Moon and his wife, Joni. "If you're going to Vegas and need a tour guide who's going to put a lot of miles on your feet, you want Travis," Carr quips sarcastically. "He knows where he's going, he just doesn't really know how to get there. We did 30,000 steps with them one day. I think we passed the Bellagio Fountains six times, and saw the front and back of everything."

ELECTRIC SLIDE

Large Market Personality

Heather Froglear, KFRG/Riverside

Froglear participated in the Sharla McCoy-produced remotes in Vegas, calling the experience "spectacular" and "an absolute whirlwind. In all, I talked to about 35 artists. The vibe was electric, and I got a ton of great content. Our artists are so giving of their time, and that was a long day for all of them. Sharla knocked it out of the park."

One memorable artist was Stephen Wilson Jr., with Froglear saying, "It was the first time I've ever cried during an interview. I got so emotional talking to him about losing the dad he revered." Froglear drove back to Riverside before the awards show itself, but managed to squeeze in a label dinner with West Coast radio friends before she left.



Red Hat Society: Heather Froglear with Dasha (r) at the radio remotes.

THE BIG D

Major Market Station

KSCS/Dallas



Texas' Best: Farb (r) with Cody Johnson at the radio remotes.

For APD/MD Al Farb, the ACM radio remotes provided some of the highlights from his Vegas trip. "It was such a unique opportunity to connect with so many artists in one place and bring those moments back to DFW in real time," he says. "We captured a ton of great content throughout the weekend—interviews, stories, behind-the-scenes moments—that our listeners got to experience right along with us."

As for the win itself, he says, "To be recognized

like this by our peers is incredibly special. It validates that the connection we work so hard to build with our community every day is real. This award is a reflection of that relationship – and of a team that pours their heart into every break, every song and every experience we put into the world." Reinforcing that, his "jack-of-all-trades teammate," Hailey Jostmeyer, surprised the whole staff – on and off air – by creating personalized "ACM winner" graphics with each person's name and photo, and putting them up in the studio because, as Farb says, "This award truly belongs to everyone, every single department that shows up every day and plays a role in what we do."

REAL ID

Medium Market Personality

Mo & StyckMan, Greg "StyckMan" Owens and Melissa "Mo" Wagner WUSY/Chattanooga

Family obligations prevented Mo and StyckMan from going to Vegas, but it was the sixth ACM win for him, fifth for her, and their third together as a team. Both call the industry recognition "a blessing" and Owens says there "was a lot of high fives and hugging in the studio" over this latest win.

Wagner says their "foundation of community and being genuinely us" is what helped the afternoon duo secure their win. "We always find that real life moments are what translates and connects us to our listeners, so we always try to showcase those elements," she says. Adds Owens, "The listeners are there for us. They know our story and they're a part of it. They have as much fun with us as we do with them."



No Mo: WUSY's StyckMan (r) at CRS with Parker McCollum.



**SO PROUD
TO BE YOUR
PLATINUM
LABEL
OF THE
YEAR!**



*Thank you for a
record-breaking
year!*

EJA



Ella Langley





LET'S GO TO VEGAS!

WITH CARTER FAITH & ACM RADIO WINNERS

Two Step:
Onstage in Austin.

Continued from page 3

overseas. "I was in Europe all of April with Tucker Wetmore," she says. "We were setting up for soundcheck and I knew the nominations were coming out, but I didn't think I was going to get any because of all the airplay rules for New Female. We were about to soundcheck and I got tagged in a tweet that said Album of the Year. I was like, 'No way!' Probably the biggest shock of my life. *Traveller* is an amazing record. It's so cool to be in that company."

Plans for a performance shifted as the awards drew closer. ACM used Faith's "Let's Go To Vegas" in its branding pieces, and there was some thought to having that song incorporated into the tease that opens the show. Exec. Producer Raj Kapoor ultimately suggested "If I Had Never Lost My Mind" for a satellite stage performance. "They asked me to do that song and referred to Stephen Wilson, Jr.'s performance on the CMAs ('Stand By Me') and wanting my performance to be that kind of moment," Faith says.

Slots, Cigs & Country Music: Before she can get there, however, she's on the bill in Austin supporting George Strait on the Friday and Saturday before Sunday's awards. "We rehearse in Vegas Thursday," she explains. "So I'll be going Vegas, Austin, Austin, Vegas. I've got to book-it to get there Saturday night so I'm ready for a full day Sunday."

For any new artist, opening for Strait is honor enough for one weekend. "He came offstage for his encore Friday and we took a shot of tequila together," Faith says. "They gave us one of my posters he signed. I was fan-girling so hard. I was crying as he was singing 'Run.'"

Run is right, however. Once her Saturday night set ended, it was a race to the airport for her first private jet flight. "We couldn't get here otherwise," she says. "I don't like to fly, so I was praying the whole time."



Garden Party: Snapping a selfie with producer/guitar player Tofer Brown backstage during rehearsal at the MGM Grand

Asked if she has any tricks for staying calm in the air, she replies, "Drink. That's my ritual."

Dress rehearsal and walking the red carpet are the first stops the next morning. "I'm nervous, but I have my mom here, which helps," she says shortly after coming off the carpet. "And my team is all my best friends, so that helps too. But I'm not nervous about the award. Everyone says it's an honor to be nominated, but it's so much more than an honor. It was a little bit mind blowing. I just want to enjoy my night, because I'm the new girl and haven't been here before. I'm going to look around and keep the stars in my eyes."

Her post-show expectations are already set. "I hope I get to gamble later," she smiles. "I'm going to smoke a cigarette at a slot machine next to an old man. That's what I want to do."

Burn My Memory: "I've always watched it on TV, so it was surreal watching it in real life with the cameras going around and seeing what happens in the commercial breaks," she says of the live ceremony. "My mom and I sat with Brooks & Dunn, which was pretty crazy. But they took me pretty early for my performance, so I missed a lot of the show. I haven't watched it back and probably should, but I do not watch myself back. Ever. I felt it once and that was enough."

Small affirmations helped as she geared up for her song. "Walking to my performance, I passed Kacey Musgraves backstage," she says. "I haven't met her yet, but I'll be doing some shows with her and am a huge fan. She put her hand out and said good luck as we walked by each other. A quick moment, but a standout for me."

And then, showtime. "When you're anxious about something and then do well, there's such a calm," she says of her moment onstage. "I was like, 'Fuck yeah, I know I killed that.' My team was like, 'Why are you not freaking out more?' But I felt peace in doing what I hoped I would do. Now I get to go sit. One of my managers immediately brought me a drink."

The Academy's forward lean isn't lost on Faith. "I really love that award show because I feel like they're ahead of the curve," she says. "Like Cody Johnson winning his first Entertainer of the Year ... that was wild."

Watching Parker McCollum's self-titled release take album wasn't unexpected. "I was like, whoa, I guess I just lost, but I didn't think I was going to win because that would've been crazy," Faith says. "Seeing Parker up there was cool because I really love that record. Jessie Jo Dillon got an early cut of it and we listened on the way to write in Texas with Billy Bob Thornton. So I know that album front to back."

After the show, Faith changed and went to the MCA party. "We hung out there for a while, drank some martinis and then I won \$400 in roulette," she says. "I don't even know how to play, I just was watching other people."

Out early the next morning, Faith got a few days in South Carolina to relax and recharge with family. Reflecting on the experience later, she's careful to hold it close. "You get ready, get in a car and they bring you to the red carpet right at the entrance," she says. "People are yelling and it's all so fast. It's important to remember it if you can. Telling this story now means I'll have proof it happened."

ACM RADIO WINNERS

FIRST IN FLIGHT

Small Market Personality

The Eddie Foxx Show, Eddie Foxx and Amanda Foxx, WKSF/Asheville, NC

The married couple attended their first ACM Awards as winners, took their first ever zipline ride on Fremont Street and, for Amanda, set foot on an airplane for the very first time to get out there! ("It wasn't as bad as I expected," she says.)



You Look Like You Love Me: Eddie Foxx (r) stakes his claim with Riley Green and Amanda Foxx at the radio remotes.

The couple did the Sharla McCoy remotes, estimating they topped out at about 80 artist interviews. Eddie says he learned a dance move from Chase Matthew and, in turn, taught one to Dasha. "I don't know if that's a highlight or a lowlight" he quips of his own dancing skills. His chicken imitating skills were also called into question after he "clucked" a country song for many of the artists they were interviewing, and only Chris Young correctly identified it as "He Stopped Loving Her Today." Overall, Eddie sums up the trip, "It was really an amazing thing."

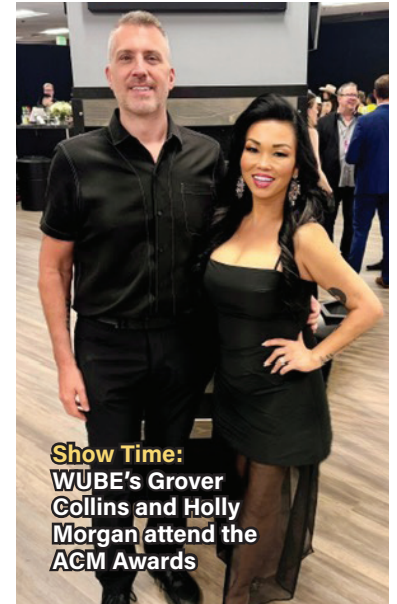
FULL CIRCLE

Large Market Station

WUBE/Cincinnati

"We were all happy the show was back in Vegas at the MGM," says PD Grover Collins. "That's where I saw the ACMs the first time we were fortunate enough to win Station of the Year." While there, he attended the BBR/BMG brunch and thought it was "an extremely nice surprise" that the label recognized all of the winners with its own trophies. "We had no idea they were going to do that"

Back at the station, they celebrated the win with "a group hug," Collins says, praising the staff. "Everyone knows the assignment. Everyone is very passionate," he says. "They just want to deliver a perfect product, which is impossible. But the fact that they strive for it is more than I could ask for."



Show Time: WUBE's Grover Collins and Holly Morgan attend the ACM Awards

HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

Medium Market Station

WLFP/Memphis

While he wasn't able to make it to Vegas this year to pick up the station's first ACM trophy, WLFP Regional Brand Mgr. Chris Michaels enjoyed watching the "well produced" show on Prime Video, and attributes the station's win to being



Never Enough: Michaels (r) gets word of the station's win from Parker McCollum (l) at CRS.

"very community driven. That's been our main focus, putting our talent out there as much as we can." That includes benefits like its 12 Hours for Kids Radiothon, which raised nearly \$100k, to its *Stars and Guitars* show, which netted another \$25k, as well as staging some "Wolf Nights" shows at the Mid-South Fair. "It's a very active radio station on the air, in the streets and promotionally," he says.

Finding out about the win on the first day of CRS, when Parker McCollum announced the news and winners were given medallions, was "pretty dang exciting," Michaels says. "It was nice to get to enjoy it with my peers." Back home, the station staff celebrated, and quickly produced an ACM winner sizzle reel to share with clients. Adds Michaels, "We'll be celebrating all year, honestly. Hopefully this win is the first of many."

BATHROOM HUMOR

Small Market Station

WYCT/Pensacola

PD Brent Lane found himself in an MGM Grand bathroom on show night, with Kix Brooks and Ronnie Dunn taking care of business on either side of him. "They were looking around me to make jokes to each other because we're all tall," he recalls of the unusual experience. "At one point I started chuckling and said, 'Oh my God, I'm peeing between Brooks & Dunn,' and they started chuckling. It made my whole day. I shared the experience on Instagram, and then they shared it too."

Lane "loved having the show back in Vegas this year." He attended events sponsored by MCA, Riser House and BBR/BMG, and caught up with Vegas resident Jaye Albright while there, calling her "the consultant who authored our game plan at WYCT." After the show, the WYCT crew - which also included OM Kevin King and owners Dave and Mary Hoxeng - went out for drinks and "reflected on our amazing run as a radio station over the last 22 years," Lane says. "It was nice to raise a glass in Vegas with purpose." While they weren't able to bring the whole crew to Vegas, back home, a "station family" dinner further celebrated the win.



Viva La Vida: Kevin King, WYCT owners Mary and Dave Hoxeng, Brent Lane (l-r) and friend Jude Bourne (in hat).

CAC

CARTER FAITH WITH WYATT FLORES NOTHIN' BETTER TO DO



AVAILABLE JUNE 26
ADD JUNE 29



CONGRATULATIONS



US*99
* CHICAGO'S COUNTRY STATION *

**MARCI
BRAUN**



**100.3 THE
BULL**

**BRUCE
LOGAN**

**COUNTRY
RADIO** 
Hall of Fame EST. 1975

**CLASS OF
2026**

JUST BE NICE

MARCI
BRAUN

Audacy Central Regional Brand Manager Marci Braun grew up listening to US99 – WUSN/Chicago. Years later, she would not only program the station (as well as KMNB/Minneapolis), but help carry forward its legacy with listeners, artists, the community and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital. Along the way, she found a career shaped by supportive parents, generous mentors and a format she calls “ageless.”

My mom and dad never said no when I told them I wanted to do radio. They both completely supported it, even though nobody in my family did anything like this. They knew I was going to go to college and then into radio, and they were always supportive, which was absolutely wonderful.

Trish Biondo and the Catman from the US99 morning show came out to my parents’ house when I was in high school. I won a contest, but I wasn’t 18 – which you had to be to win – and used my mom’s name, Rosemary Braun. So it’s wonderful that the company I defrauded when I was 17 is now a company I work for. Trish loves to tell that story.

My first CRS, I went to a panel because Becky Brenner was on it. I had no idea what the panel was about, but I knew Becky was somebody and I wanted to hear her talk. The people you get to meet and the relationships you build going to CRS are absolutely amazing. I look at Becky, Shelly Easton, Janine Rogers, Meg Stevens, Beverlee Brannigan – this wonderful litany of women I looked up to and then, over the course of the years, got to know really well. It’s awe-inspiring to know women I looked up to early in my career are now colleagues and friends.

One of my first experiences with the Women’s Mentoring Breakfast was when Paisley Dunn-Banks sat down, and I just fell in love. Seeing her gave me so much hope for the future of our format and the women rising in it. You’ve got so many strong women kicking ass in their markets like Carletta [Blake] in Richmond, Lois [Lewis] in Phoenix and Jessica [Chenoweth] in San Diego. It’s so cool to see.

We met this incredibly sweet little nugget at an early Taylor Swift show – maybe her second arena tour. The girls at the office and I had gotten to know Andrea Swift pretty well and were fortunate to be able to watch the show at the soundboard with her and the kids she would bring there with her. This cool little party of happiness would happen there, and Andrea found this one girl who found out we were from US99 and kept saying, “This is the best day of my life.” She was probably eight. Her mom and I kept in contact for years



and talked about how she struggled in school and with friends, but that memory was such a great thing for her. They would visit the station and get tours. One of my favorite listener interactions.

Way before anyone was on social media, I was at WNCY/Green Bay where Randy “Shotgun” Shannon and I would do the *Hometown Handshake*. I would be on the air until midnight, get a three-hour nap, then drive the station van to pick him up at his house at 4am. We would usually sit in a Kwik Trip parking lot in all these towns for a couple hours meeting listeners. You really see the power of radio – of being in people’s homes – when they say, “Oh my God, I didn’t think you’d look like that.” That was a really cool full-circle experience because I always looked up to the people on US99 and would go to remotes to see them.

There is no way you could have told 16-year-old Marci that one day she would be friendly with the superstars she listens to on the radio. There is no way she could process that Kenny Chesney has a day off and invited her to a Cubs game with him and his crew. Mind-blowing.

I might have had a couple of cocktails when I proposed going on a road trip with Martina McBride to the Cape Cod Melody Tent. She said, “Oh yeah, totally. It’ll be fun.” So I’m standing in the back while she’s singing “This One’s For The Girls” and watched two men get in an all-out fistfight. I could not stop laughing because of the absurdity of it. I’m like, “Gentlemen, this one’s for the girls.”



Everywhere We Chicago: Braun and Chesney at Wrigley in 2023 (left).

Where Would You Bead: Braun and fellow CRHo-Famer Ginny Brophrey watch as McBride’s beads pop off at the ACMs (above).

“Oh my God, I’m playing cards with Lon Helton.”

One of my first times at CRS while I was still at WNCY I ended up in a suite playing poker with him, which was such a big deal. *Lon Helton!* Years later, Lon, his wife Anne and I are troublemaking partners in crime whether it’s at a showcase, weekend activities or a Cubs game. One time before a game I told my brother and sister-in-law we were going to have drink with them first. My sister-in-law totally freaked out. “What? We’re going to go have a drink with Lon Helton?” Before the next game, I put us all in a text chain. My sister-in-law texted me separately, “You just put me on a text with Lon?!” We touch people’s lives and we don’t realize it. That’s a really good gift.

I’m most proud of being a St. Jude station. I was blessed to sit on the Country Cares advisory board for 10 years. Helping mold radiothons and practices across the country really meant a lot. I’m incredibly proud that US99 is one of the original stations that jumped on after hearing Randy Owen’s plea and the amount of money the station has raised. St. Jude is so important to our community and ingrained in everything we do. In June, we are receiving the St. Jude Iconic Radio Partner of the Year honor at their volunteer award dinner.

The Brown family and their sweet boy Alexander travel between Chicago and Memphis for his treatment. He’s fighting and doing really well. We had his mom and dad on the air a couple years ago. One afternoon, Scotty Kay picked up the regular line, not the donation line, and it was his grandma. She just wanted to give an update about him and donate. Following his journey is a recent one that really means a lot. There have been so many special people touched by St. Jude over the history of US99.

I learned what kind of boss and leader I wanted to be by looking at others. Some made me think, “This is a great thing I need to implement.” Others had me going, “That is exactly the kind of person I don’t want to be.” When you realize you’ve screwed something up, those are hard lessons. The overarching lesson we came to on the CRS panel I moderated this year is just be nice. Treat everyone with respect and kindness. You don’t have to be a jerk. It’s not that hard.

If you don’t know everything about the Packers in Green Bay, they will *murder* you. That’s an early lesson I learned very quickly at WNCY. They will sniff you out, find you and call you out. Growing up a Bears fan – and very anti-Packers – I really needed to learn about that culture and immerse myself in it to make sure I was echoing our listeners. That’s programming. You need to do your homework, know your audience and make sure the station reflects them. The cool thing about the Country format is it’s ageless. You go to a show and every demo is there. That is what makes this format so special.

CAC

KEVIN POWERS FT. SHABOOZEY

MOVE ON



41M TOTAL STREAMS

"KEVIN POWERS and SHABOOZEY DELIVERS BIG TIME FUN, HOOKY FOR RADIO, SO GET THE 'MOVE ON' TO YOUR SUMMER PLAYLIST!"

Tim Roberts - Audacy VP/Format Captain

"Kevin Powers is a man of the people and lands big lyrics that fans relate to. Seeing him live showed that he's the real deal!"

Steve Stewart - CMG Director of Country Content/Director of Operations Orlando-Radio

"Move on has a great Summertime windows down/radio blasting vibe. And teaming up with Shaboozey on the song brings it to the next level!"

Billy Kidd - PD WBEE/Rochester

"There are songs we have to play and songs we want to play. The first time I heard this one, it shot to the top of my want to play list."

Sean Copeland - WFMS/Indianapolis Program Director

"If you're not Movin' On this song, you're missing out on a JAM! For us, it's a no-brainer to support a local artist especially when they have a SMASH like this!"

Mike Biddle - PD WQDR/Raleigh

"Kevin Powers - 'Move On' is a one listen hook, a second smash. You'll be hard pressed to find a better sounding song on radio right now."

Scott Donato - PD/OM WGTY/York



A RIDICULOUS CAREER

BRUCE
LOGAN

*Audacy/Houston VP/Programming
Bruce Logan's radio story started in
Louisville, KY, but his interest goes
back almost to infancy. Decades later,
after stops in Savannah, Green-
ville, Charlotte, West Palm Beach
and Houston, he enters the Country
Radio Hall of Fame in the same class
as one of the people he credits with
changing the course of his career.*

My mom had a radio in my room and remembers me crawling out of my crib and taking it apart so I could change the station. I was born in Louisville, and that's where my first programming job was. We were up against Coyote Calhoun at WAMZ, and he kicked my ass every which way but Sunday. I would go backstage at shows and make his life miserable. He did not like me at all. Not only as a competitor, but as a person. As the years went on and my career continued to climb at Clear Channel, we ended up in the same meetings and developed a friendship. He told me later that, looking back, it was his favorite time in radio because it was the most competitive and fun for him. But he hated it at the time, because I did a lot of horrible guerilla things.

I used to put billboards up along the path he jogged. I put a horrible DJ on the air using Coyote's real name. I had imaging that made fun of him in multiple ways. And he did not kill me. Over time and all the relationships with artists, ratings and station legacies, Coyote Calhoun and WAMZ have been my bar. To get into the Country Radio Hall of Fame with him means the world to me.

We gave away a Volkswagen Bug at WSSL/Greenville in conjunction with Chick-fil-A and the local TV station, which was highlighting the fact that they had a helicopter. We put 100 of those stuffed Chick-fil-A cows in a box, took the box up in the helicopter and threw them all out. The listener whose cow landed closest to the target on the ground won the car. Two landed close to the X, so we had to get out and measure them. For drama, we got those two listeners on camera before we revealed the winner. We said the number and the girl who won looked at the camera and said, "I'm 16, and I just won a car, y'all." That was great, except you had to be 18 to win. Her mom was actually the registrant, but she had gone to dinner. So the girl didn't really win. That was quite the problem to explain to people.



I got a call from the front desk at KILT/Houston saying there was a lady out front who wanted to speak to me. I told them to say I was in a meeting, but an hour later she was still there, so I went out and talked to her. She sat me down on the couch, took my hand and told me she heard Little Big Town's "Girl Crush" and found it absolutely disgusting that a country song would be professing the love of one woman to another.

While she was holding my hand, I noticed over her shoulder that the hallway was filling up with staff who'd heard this was happening. I tried to explain that the song was about being jealous of another girl. But she was convinced and told me, "The gays are coming for everything, and now they're coming for country music." At that point, everyone in the hallway started busting out laughing because, well, I'm gay. I was like, "Well, girlfriend, the gays are *closer than you think they are*." Little Big Town loves that story when I tell it to them.

Ridiculous things I've done include demanding a version of Shania Twain's "Any Man Of Mine" without the rap in it. What a ridiculous statement for a PD to make. At the time, I had come out of the CHR world and had been told rap was very polarizing for a large portion of the audience. Shania hadn't really had a hit record yet, so here we had this brand-new artist rapping on a country song, and I thought it was too far. I was clearly stupid and wrong, but that was the thought at the time.

I loved The Ranch and didn't know Keith Urban, but they played a Greenville bar so I went. Onstage, Keith said, "Here's our new single. It's not being played on WSSL. Thanks, guys." I walked up to the edge of the stage, took out one of my business cards with the call letters on it, wrote, "Actually, Whistle was playing the song until tonight" on the back and handed it to him while he was singing. After the song, he said, "Whistle is

playing it. Thanks, guys." I went right back to the radio station and dropped the record, which subsequently died. A few days later, I got a fax from Keith apologizing and taking responsibility. He promised he would make it up to me. I thought, "Yeah, whatever."

Then he won the ACM New Male Vocalist and I requested him for our New Faces show. The label told me there was no way, but I said, "I need you to make sure you get the request to Keith." Five minutes later, the record rep called back and said, "I don't know why, but he said yes." The show was the first time I had talked to him since he had been on that exact same stage dissing the radio station. He came offstage, hugged me and said, "I hope we're even." We went on to develop a friendship that has continued to this day. He is a spectacular human.

There would be no Bruce Logan without Phil Hunt, and Phil is going into the Hall in this exact same class. When I got fired from that job in Louisville, the new owners came in during consolidation and blew out four PDs in the same day. I'd been at a station that hadn't won and had very little experience, but for some reason, Phil saw something in me. He recommended me for a job in Savannah, GA that Rusty Walker was consulting. We were fortunate enough to have some success and, in 10 months, I went from not knowing anybody to being recommended for the Whistle job [WSSL], which is the beginning of everything that lit my career.

My programming philosophy is ask the audience what they want and give it to them. It really has nothing to do with my opinion. I've been fortunate to work with some of the best people in the world, and to surround myself with people smarter than me. Chris Huff and I have had the privilege of working together two different times. He could do anything at any level for any radio station. Nick Rivers was my APD in West Palm Beach and had PD experience. Kix Layton just retired from Whistle. I hired him there, and he went on to become PD. Ryan Dokke was my assistant in Charlotte, and now he's running Scott Borchetta's record label world. Mark Gray was my Dir./Promotions in Charlotte and now he's running a label. Tracy Gibson was also my Dir./Promotions in Charlotte, and I brought her to Houston. Now she's part of the world that's building Zach Top into a superstar.

I am so lucky with Kevin, my husband – just the nicest person in the world. The move back to Houston was not his favorite. We were living downtown last time and now we are well out in the suburbs, so he has a pool, grass and parks. The negotiation to get him to come back to Houston was a lot harder than it was to get me to come back.

My first time here was a successful run, not only putting KILT back in a competitive ratings environment, but also launching an Adult Hits station that went on to be No. 1. Through ownership changes, that chapter ended. We're working to put KILT back the way it was and, if it works, it's going to be a spectacular chapter in this ridiculous thing I do for a career.

CAC

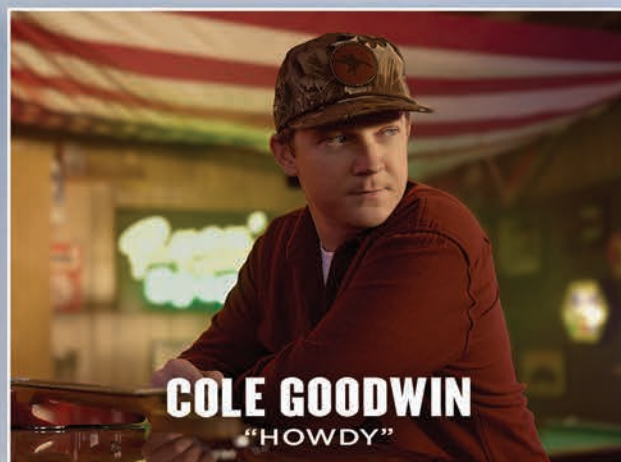
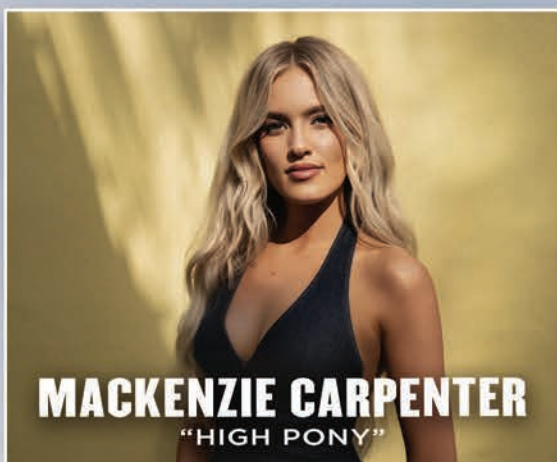
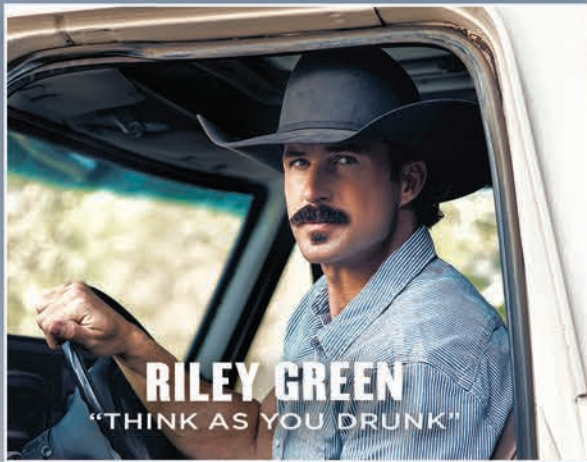


Frosted Tip Jar:
Logan in his WSSL era.



God Whistled Your Name:
Logan (l) with Urban.

THE MACHINE KEEPS GETTING HOTTER!



NEW MUSIC ALL SUMMER LONG!



MILLION MILER

PHIL HUNT

Phil Hunt's 50-year career has spanned on-air, programming, corporate leadership and consulting roles, including KSSN/Little Rock PD, Rusty Walker Programming SVP/Client Services, Clear Channel EVP/Country Brand Manager and his current role leading Hunt Media. As a consultant, Hunt has guided WUSN/Chicago, KASE/Austin, KTST/Oklahoma City and KAJA/San Antonio, among many others.



Butter my backside and call me a biscuit. That's exactly what I said to Hall of Famer Clay Hunnicutt when he told me I was being inducted. I was so surprised. He had scheduled a call with me, but I just thought he wanted to get my opinion on a song or something. It was the best news I'd heard in a long, long time.

My first thought was of all the people who have helped me along the way. It just gave me a great sense of gratitude for the people who gave me a hand up. There's no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Any success we have is because someone gave us a chance to shine. I've been really fortunate.

I owe my career to Alice Cooper, and my mother. As a kid of probably 11 or 12, I was in the car with my parents listening to KSOA/Springfield, MO, and the afternoon drive disc jockey apparently didn't know the music. He played Alice Cooper's "I'm Eighteen," and after its dramatic ending said, "That was Alice Cooper. She really melted that one." I happened to have that 45, and my mom and I just burst out with laughter. When the laughter subsided, she told me in that motherly way that I should be on the radio because I had a great voice, was funny and knew more about music than the guy on KSOA. That was the seed that got me into the business. And my dad always used to say I was born with a bullfrog voice.

But I didn't choose radio, it chose me. When I was about 15 we went with a school group to Arkansas State, where they had a news reading competition. My basketball coach let me miss practice to go, because my absence was no great loss to the team. I ended up winning the contest, and they put that in the newspaper. The GM of KRLW/Walnut Ridge, AR saw it and called my dad, because they needed someone to do a Sunday morning shift. My dad told him, "He'll take it," which really kind of irked me. But that's how I got my start, and it's been an incredible journey.

As a college student at Belmont in Nashville, I got to work on Music Row at WJRB-AM, and would walk to my midday show. I also did weekends for a while at WKDA/Nashville. I got my first programming job

at WNOX/Knoxville and then KSSN/Little Rock. Through that, I met Rusty Walker, and that was a life changing experience. Going to work for him was a joy. He was such a force of good. He would say, "We don't have clients, we have partners."

At WNOX, we were doing a remote at Cat's Records with a station van that had transmission troubles and would sometimes slip out of park. Knoxville is a hilly town. I'm doing the remote, and see the van start rolling down the hill. And of all the vehicles it could have hit, it hit the record store manager's car. We did get a new van out of it.

I went to Belmont to write songs, and I've been writing and performing since then. I was horrible back then, but I learned the craft. I still don't profess to be all that good, but a friend of mine who has a studio in Muscle Shoals called me during Covid about recording down there because he thought I had something to say. We did an album of acoustic-based music in the Dan Fogelberg/Gordon Lightfoot mode. My faith means a lot to me, so a lot of the songs are about that. I have 150 followers on YouTube, so it's not like I'm changing the world, but I don't promote it beyond an occasional post on

my Facebook page. Music is just therapy for me. It's a dream turned hobby that I still enjoy. And a lot of people in my family play music, so when we get together, it's a hootenanny.

Travel nightmares happen when you're a consultant. I'm a million miler on Delta, but I've slept in the Detroit airport a couple of times, and DFW three or four times, among others. When you do the math on that hotel voucher, especially when you have a 7am flight the next morning and have to go through security again, sometimes it just makes more sense to stay in the airport. But that's just the life of a traveling person. I've stayed at the Ritz Carlton in Boston, and I've stayed at the Super 8 Motel in Flint, Michigan where the client station had trade. It was a dump.

Great radio happens when a station makes an emotional connection with the audience. The same is true of all art: a song, a book, whatever it might be. In our format, you want to be able to do family, faith, flag and country music. Those are the things the core audience cares about. If you really understand your audience, you go there with your content, which isn't to say what works in Little Rock is going to work in Minnesota ... If we're going to be really excited about our business going forward, we're going to have to be really good storytellers, and we're going to have to understand the target and be reflective of that. Relationships will win the day for our medium. The only non-duplicatable thing in radio is the people.

CAC



Between An Old Memory And Me: (l-r) Colleagues Rick Shayne and Rusty Walker, songwriter/producer Keith Stegall and Hunt.



On The Hunt: Phil Hunt during his early days in Nashville radio (left).



Life Sentence: Hunt models a t-shirt that says it all (above).



American Kids: Phil Hunt is all smiles with Kenny Chesney (left).

ATULLA

OUTA

NOTICE

POST

KENNY CHESNEY

Silver Sands
MARINA

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 25TH



CALLING THE SHOTS

CHRIS CARR

Chris Carr has spent nearly three decades in Country radio, including 24 years in Minneapolis across two stints at KEEY. In between, he spent six years at WUBE/Cincinnati. Carr is a six-time CMA Personality of the Year and a four-time ACM Personality of the Year. Through his work on behalf of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, he helped raise more than \$25 million, earning St. Jude's "Leading the Way" Award in 2025.

There should be other people in the Hall of Fame before me. I know, because I nominate them every year. But I'm taking a page from [iHeartMedia Strategic Advisor] Gregg Swedberg's acceptance speech last year and learning to just say "thank you." I was nominated a few years ago and didn't accept for that reason. I wasn't trying to be Mr. Humility, or disrespectful in any way, but Gregg needed to be in there before me. [Radio One/Houston's] Travis Moon and [Hubbard's] Grover Collins should be in there, too. I wouldn't be here without those three. They got behind me on the ladder and pushed. The industry is way better because of them. Now that I'm a Hall of Fame member, I'm looking forward to actually getting a vote.

Swedberg called me into his office and told me to shut the door. He looked so serious, but I noticed he was positioning a camera on me. He starts talking about how I have a big birthday coming up and should be in Nashville for it. I was really confused, but Gregg and I have the most random, weird conversations so I didn't have a clue until he told me I was being inducted. I thought it was a joke because I believed Lon Helton always calls the inductees to break the news. I kept asking Gregg for verification. In that three-minute meeting, I went from thinking I was getting fired to thinking I was getting screwed with, and I ended up telling him, "I know how this works. You guys are putting me out to pasture."

Randomly, I hug Swedberg every time he stands up in public. It gives him physical and emotional pain when I do that. He fears me.

I've never worked for a jerk PD. I've had some interesting GMs, but every PD I've had in my career has been awesome, including [current K102 programmer] Rich Davis. It's hard to follow a guy like Gregg, but he's come in seamlessly and is a wonderful PD.

Radio drew me in because I wanted to do something that wasn't work. I was going to join the military, but



they wouldn't let me because I had a growth in my left arm, some kind of sarcoidosis. But I loved WKRP In Cincinnati as a kid, and always wanted to do that for a living.

My paychecks bounced and the station didn't send my payroll taxes to the government for two years, but it was a radio job. MOR-formatted AM station WFSH/Fort Walton Beach, FL paid nothing, and it was the best time of my life. The GM, Red Gilson, became one of my best friends and looked out for me. He didn't pay me, but he fed me brisket. Working for him was an honor.

I've been shot at several times, just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Nobody was ever shooting to kill me. The first time was at WFSH. I was using a board in the production room that barely worked. I had headphones on, but out the window I saw a woman engaged in what looked like a pretty strong argument with our fill-in night guy. Then the board made this loud pop, I smelled smoke and it just fizzled out. I called our engineer and went home. The next call I got was from the police asking me to come back to the station right away. Turns out, the woman was the night guy's wife, and she shot at him three times. One shot grazed the top of the

board I was using, then went under my chair into the wall behind me. Later, the night guy told me, "She wasn't gonna hit anybody, her hands were shaking all over the place." But she almost got me.

The next time I got shot at I was working nights at WMAS/Springfield, MA. I went out to warm up my car and kept hearing these weird pinging noises in the parking lot dumpster, right by my car. I stick my head in the dumpster and look around before discovering some drugged out guy across the street was using it for target practice. Somehow, he completely missed me and my car. A few months later, at that same station, I got a call from the fire department on the hotline telling me the building was on fire!

I got shot at in Baltimore, too, at WWMX, while I was coming back from an appearance. Someone was shooting up a bus stop, right by where my car was parked. I started to think I need a new profession at that point. But since I came to Minneapolis, nobody has touched me.

At the Winstock festival in the early 2000s, Gregg Swedberg was doing tongue-in-cheek live reports on my afternoon show pretending that Travis Moon – who is the most humble, decent guy I've ever met – was backstage flexing his muscles in a tank top, jean shorts and mullet, acting like he owns the joint and walking on artist busses like he knows them. Travis Tritt – who was the headliner – heard this on the air and thought we were talking about him, so he called Moon (who didn't hear the reports and had no idea what was going on) onto his bus and just lit into him. When Travis Moon got off the bus he was sweating and looked like he'd seen a ghost. I think we sent the audio to the record company later to smooth things over.

I've been fortunate to work with really awesome people over the years, including current co-hosts Sam and Dubs [Sam Sansevere and Michael Wilczynski]. Sam comes from a broadcast bloodline that's really thick in Minnesota. She's very talented, funny and just a good human being. We are absolute best friends. Dubs came on just over a year ago. He is a wonderful, honest, no drama guy, and a workhorse. He loves radio and we've also become very close. The three of us are really dialed in on the goal.

Awards like this year's ACM win are really cool, but I've lost more than I've won. Winning is a fun part of the deal, but I don't consider it my identity. The journey is what's fun, but I'm really happy for my team. They deserve all the good they're getting in this life right now.

I know this industry has seen better days, but I'm still a believer, and I still love doing it, in some ways more than ever.

CAC



Home Sweet: Carr (l) onstage with Russell Dickerson and co-hosts Sam Sansevere and "Dubs" Michael Wilczynski (above).

Boys 'Round Here: Carr gets some grooming from Blake Shelton (above right).

All Too Well: Carr (c) with Taylor Swift and Jack Ingram (right).



From Your  **iHeartRadio** Family

CONGRATULATIONS
MICHAEL J



On your induction to the 2026 class of the **Country Radio Hall Of Fame**.



COUNTRY'S CARETAKER

After stops including WWWW/Detroit, Michael J. has been a steward of his hometown station WPOC/Baltimore, while also handling middays at iHeartCountry sister station WMZQ/Washington. Along the way, he's found purpose in meeting listeners and artists, analyzing music trends and making connections by "completing the triangle."

Tim Roberts and RJ Curtis called. I thought they wanted to pick my brain about endorsements and influencing campaigns for CRS. And I'm lucky that I'm successful with that. Within our company, I'm in the top 30 or 40 people in the country doing endorsements. I learned a long time ago that if you connect yourself to dollars, you stick around for a while. So they talked to me about that, and then they put on these silly glasses and said "Congratulations! You're going in the Country Radio Hall of Fame!" It was kind of surreal. I have a hard time accepting it. It almost makes me uncomfortable. I'm self-taught and have a lot of determination. The only reason I'm here is to help other people. That's why I love doing things like St. Jude.

We were giving away a big, beautiful F-150. Lauren Alaina was there playing in the back of a pickup truck, and she came over and met everyone. It was a typical contest you've seen a million times. There were 50 contestants who lined up and each drew a key from the bucket to see if it would start the truck. So here we go, with about a thousand people watching in person and also streaming on Facebook Live. But one at a time, it doesn't start.

We got down to the last three contestants. I'm starting to freak that something has gone wrong. Then we were down to numbers 49 and 50. Number 49 didn't work. Now there's one key and one guy left, and he's getting excited. I'm like, "Dude, you've got to start it." He gets in and it cranks! I can't explain my relief. He starts bawling, past the point of excitement – and I've seen a lot of people win prizes in 45 years.

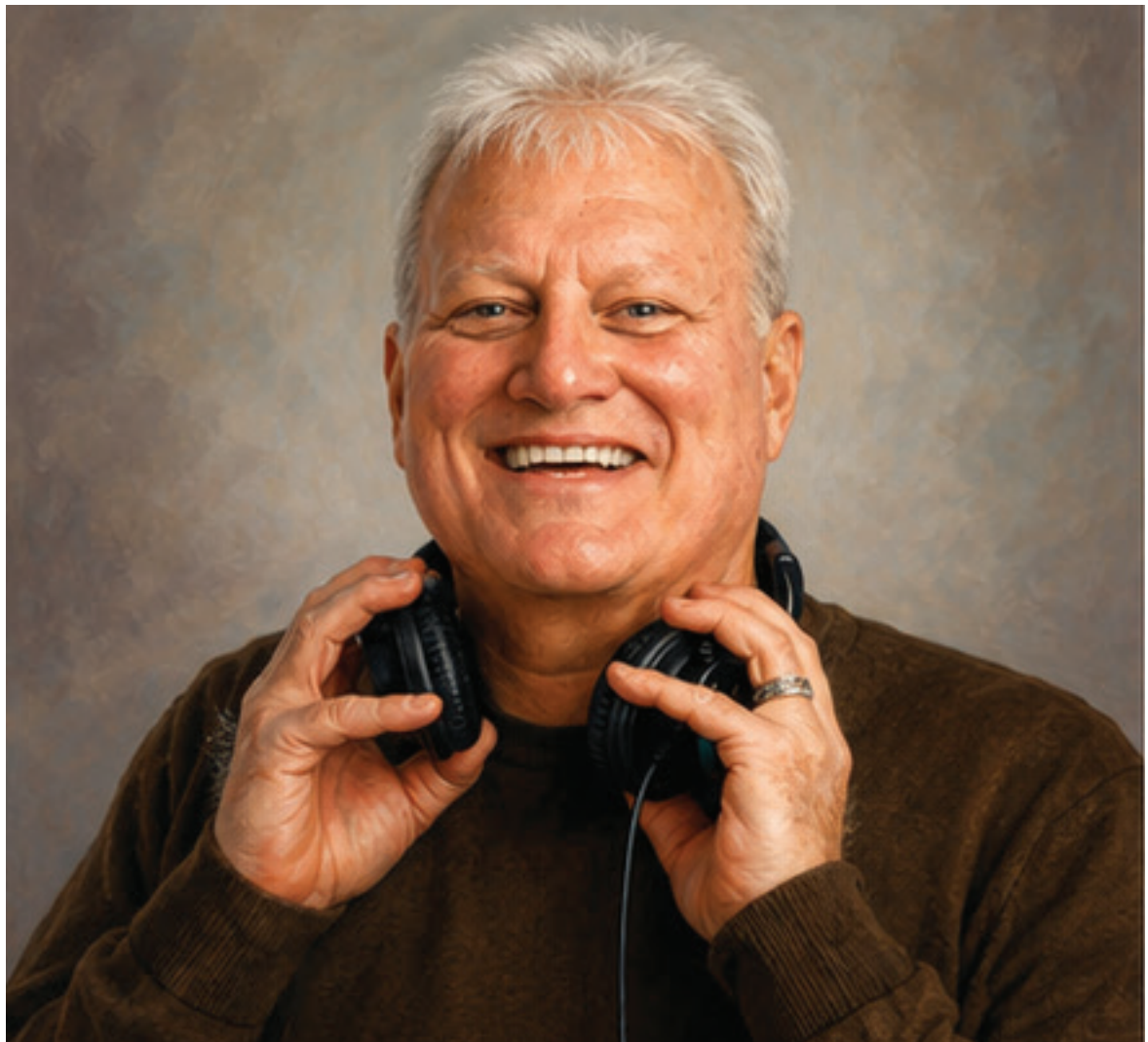
He pulls down the bandana around his neck and he's got stitches and staples all the way around from thyroid cancer surgery. He said, "I just got out of Johns Hopkins yesterday. I prayed that God would give me a sign that I'm going to be all right." It was the most unbelievable thing I've experienced. Three or four years later he called me up and said, "I'm still here, and I've still got the truck."

When I asked what I needed to do to be successful in country music, my former PD Alan Sledge said, "It's really simple. Everybody that listens to our station needs to know who you are." He drew a triangle on a little napkin. He said, "One point of the triangle is you and W4 Country. Another corner is the country artists." Back then he was referring to Garth Brooks or Vince Gill. "At the other end of the triangle, there's the audience." He said it was like introducing mutual friends at a cocktail party, because if you complete the triangle, you create value for yourself.

I introduced Taylor to Trisha. Taylor Swift came to WPOC during her first radio tour. She was super young and raw, and already an excellent songwriter. Her performance overlapped my afternoon phoner with Trisha Yearwood. As Taylor was leaving, I asked her to come in the studio with Trisha live on-air. Taylor blushed and was excited about talking to her. I said, "Taylor, it's Trisha's birthday." So she got her guitar back out and sang "Happy Birthday." I wish I had an aircheck of it. And then Taylor, I know she sends cards to everybody, but she wrote me a card and it became something we spoke about regularly when I saw her.



MICHAEL J.



An unforgettable Tanya Tucker interview happened around 1997 she came to W4/Detroit with a record she was working. She walked in the studio and was like, "What is this? A dry town?" And I go, "Well, what do you want?" She's like, "I want some vodka." So I sent someone to the liquor store. Tanya starts drinking, we're on the air and I'm running the board, so everything's legal. And she's like, "Cover up these windows. We don't need people looking." As the afternoon went on, she kept drinking, started dancing and eventually said, "I just got back from the cosmetic surgery place and got a new set. I'd love to see what you think." So she takes off – everything. Jason Pullman walked in and was like, "You guys are having a party in here." He does afternoons in Dallas now, and we were the only ones to witness, but it's the absolute truth.

I love that we get to interact with artists. Brad Paisley and I connected right from the beginning and have done several events together. One year at CRS, he was on a panel with about 500 people in the audience. I stood up and said, "I need your phone number because I need to be able to call you whenever something's going on." He goes, "I'm not giving you my phone number." And I replied, "Well, Natalie [Maines] from the Dixie Chicks gave me her number." To which he said, "Exactly. I'm not giving you my number." But after the panel, he called me over and gave me his number.

I'd met Natalie, by the way, at a bar in the sticks outside Detroit. It was completely dead and I was

sitting there with the Dixie Chicks, who were wearing Gap sweaters and riding in a pink little Volkswagen or something. I love remembering how artists were at the very beginning.

"What makes something a hit?" I asked myself that over and over when I was a kid listening to Casey Kasem, and I still ask myself that. I listened to *American Top 40* every Saturday night on [then-Top 40] WCAO-AM, which is right across the hallway from me today. I had a little notebook and would write down every song, artist and record label. I've wanted to be a DJ since I was 14 and would make airchecks in my bedroom. PD Kevin Fennessy would critique them and I still have letters from 1978 on his 'CAO letterhead. He has passed on, but the lessons he taught me stuck. It's about talking to people, not at them.

WPOC was the only station my grandfather would listen it to. Closest guy in the world to me – he loved music, played guitar – blue collar, dirty fingernails and fixed great big machines that melted steel. *Hee Haw* was his thing and he listened to WPOC constantly. We shared so many memories around music. Fast forward, I got into radio, wound up on a station in Baltimore and continued those conversations. One day I was in the studio working and chills went through me ... I just knew he had passed.

Then in 1999, I was working in Detroit when Scott Lindy called from WPOC to offer me a job at the Country station that was as much a part of my grandfather as anything. So for the last 26 years I've felt like I'm a caretaker here and that he's been with me the whole time. When I succeeded Laurie DeYoung in mornings, I had this overwhelming sense that he was like, "Everything's okay," and he could finally move on. I don't know how to explain that any other way. **CAC**

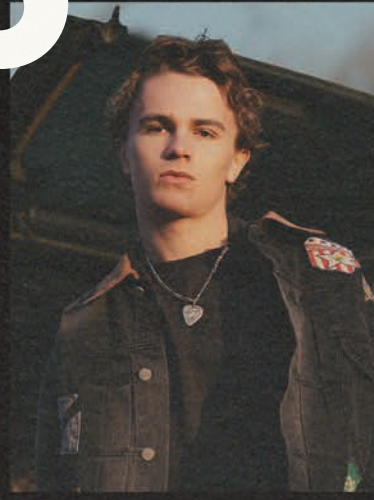
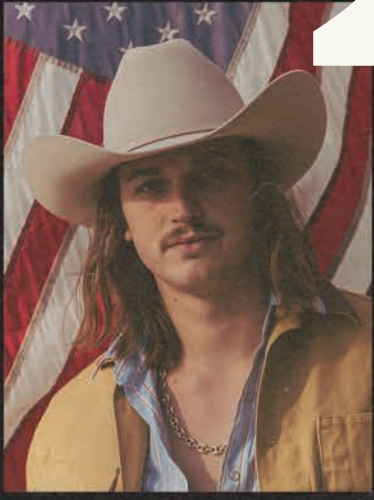
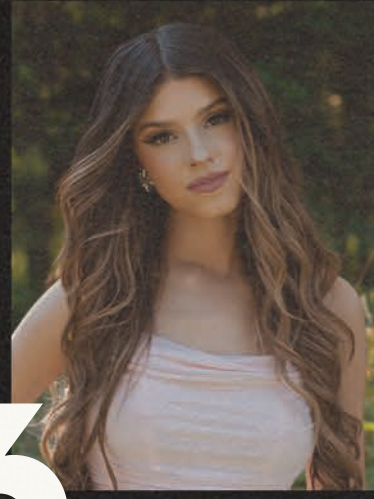
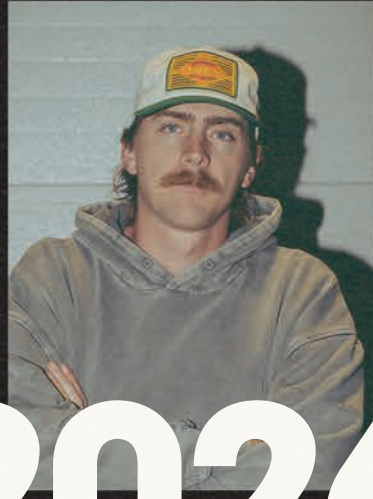
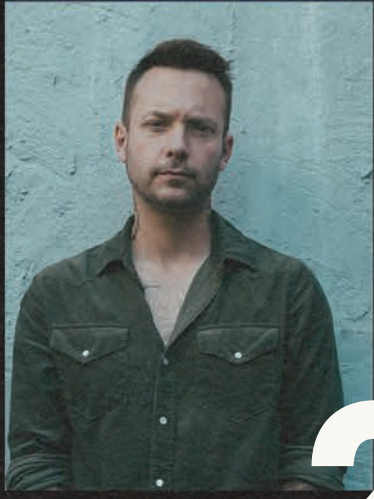
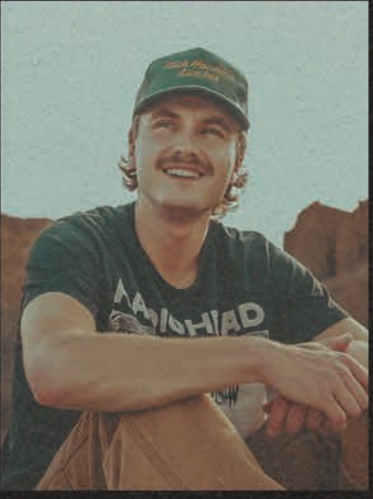


Star Powered: With Brad Paisley at an iHeartCountry event, Tim McGraw and Colin Raye at WWWW/Detroit and Richard Marx at WHYT/Detroit.





BIG LOUD



2026

INGRAINED IN THE CULTURE

RICK JACKSON

As host of his own Rick Jackson's Country Classics show since 1986, Jackson is the atypical radio pro with proven success on both sides of the personality/management fence. In addition to helping fellow Hall of Famer Bob Call launch the iconic KYGO/Denver, Jackson served as a GM for two decades in Charlotte, and at KSON/San Diego. He's picked up a few stories along the way.

I was lost backstage at Red Rocks and ran smack into Willie Nelson. I had been hired to emcee *The Outlaws Tour* – the first big show I'd ever done and the hottest tour in the world at that point, with Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Tompall Glaser and Jessi Colter. Of course, no one cares about the emcee, but I was nervous. Behind the stage it's almost like catacombs and I couldn't find where I was supposed to go. I was hurrying around a corner, and Willie was coming around the other way. I bumped right into him and nearly knocked him over. I said, "Willie, I'm so sorry. I can't find the stage."

He just about fell over laughing, then told me to follow him. He took me into the dressing room with Waylon, Jessi and Tompall. You could barely see because of all the smoke. Willie grabbed what looked like a cigar, took a giant puff, said, "You need to have some of this," and handed it to me. How could I say no? When my time came to go onstage I couldn't remember what to say, so I just said, "How you doing?" or something like that, and the crowd went crazy! So I said, "Have a great time!" and walked off the stage.

My first broadcast was without question the worst in the history of radio. My mother and I went shopping at the North Valley Mall in Denver, and there was a remote from a tiny 500-watt station, KBRN/Brighton. She knew I loved radio and shoved me over to talk to the DJ. He told me to stop by the studio. So I showed up and told them I was interested in a job. Right then they put me on the air to do a newscast. It was 1974 and the first story I read was about the end of the Vietnam War. I butchered all the names because they were all military people from Vietnam. It was a disaster, but they gave me my first job, which was a total surprise. I didn't think a career in radio was realistic, but eventually I enrolled at the Columbia School of Broadcasting.

I didn't really know country music, but I wasn't worried about the format. So the first big job I got was in Country radio at KERE/Denver, where I joined the all night trucking show. It was at a competitive station downtown with 5,000 watts. I felt like a big shot.

My dad listened to KLAQ/Denver, one of the first Country stations in America. He played guitar about as bad as I do, and he would sing songs from KLAQ,



but I didn't even think they were real songs. Growing up in the '60s, I was a fan of Led Zeppelin, The Beatles and James Taylor.

Thank God I found Emmylou. She turned my ear toward listening to country music more carefully and respectfully. Everything about her spoke to me. She chose songs that were very traditional, but she put her bent on it. She's beautiful, hippie looking, and her album packaging looked like rock 'n' roll. By the 1980s, I was in love with country. And it's been one of the great loves of my life ever since. All of the stories, especially from the original artists from the '50s and '60s – you can't make this stuff up. And the music that came after that is very important to me.



Jerry Lee Lewis shot up the urinals at McNichols Arena in Denver. I was the emcee that night, and Jerry Lee thought he was going to be the final act of the show, but the promoters decided Hank Williams Jr. should be the closer. So Jerry Lee had a gun and

shot up the bathroom. They let Jerry Lee finish his part of the show so there wouldn't be chaos, but arrested him right afterwards.

Then there was the time Merle Haggard didn't show up for his concert. Luckily Bob Eubanks traveled with Merle to emcee the bigger shows like Denver or New York, so I didn't have to go onstage and tell everybody. But I did go onstage to introduce the opening acts, which included Moe Bandy and a couple other folks.

We put KYGO on the air when FM was taking over, so it was an immediate success. Bob Call hired me and we built that station together. Back in 1980, radio was more inclusive, and we played Patsy Cline, Jim Reeves and mixed older and newer music. In the second or third year, Bob saw a need for an oldies program and said, "Why don't we do something on Sunday morning for five hours?" And I eventually started hosting the show. We were the No. 1 station in town on Sunday mornings, so we knew we had a product that worked.

The famous consultant Rusty Walker found out about it and started pitching it to other stations. WMIL/Milwaukee picked it up, and every week we would send them four, 10-inch tape reels via FedEx. Then Missoula, MT and a few other stations picked it up. Full circle, Bob and RJ Curtis called to tell me about this induction. Sometimes I think I'm the luckiest guy I know.

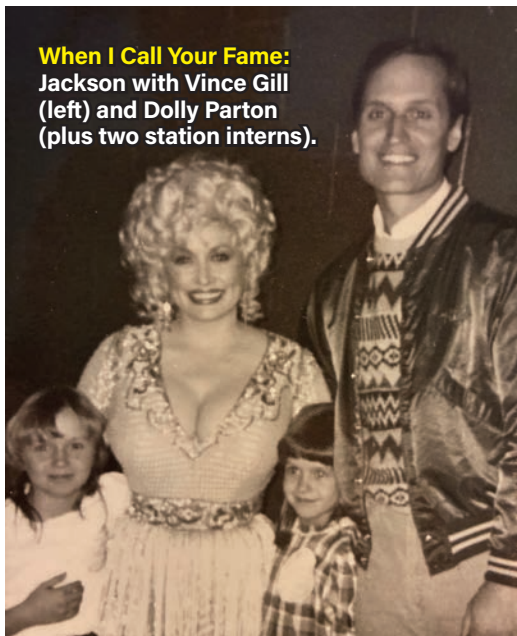
Syndication was fun because my wife and I built that as a family. It was successful and we were featured on well over 300 stations over the years. Thinking about that is mind boggling. I gave the *Radio & Records* directory with names, phone numbers and addresses of every Country station to my wife and said, "Start calling and let's see if you can't get this thing cleared." Well, within two years she had it up to 110 stations. There was a little bit of buzz going on, and we got picked up by Dial Global in New York to sell it at the national level. They were terrific. I think the most we ever had at one time was 180 stations. Today we're at 130.

I'm still doing this at age 72 because I'm ingrained in it. The whole culture of country music is a big part of my life. The most satisfying thing about my career was being a general manager. I was a general manager for 23 years at [News/Talk] WBT-AM & WLNK/Charlotte. And then the second go-round for the last few years of my career at KSON/San Diego, which was great. I loved that because I'm a people person.

CAC



When I Call Your Fame: Jackson with Vince Gill (left) and Dolly Parton (plus two station interns).



★ QUARTZ HILL ★ MUSIC GROUP



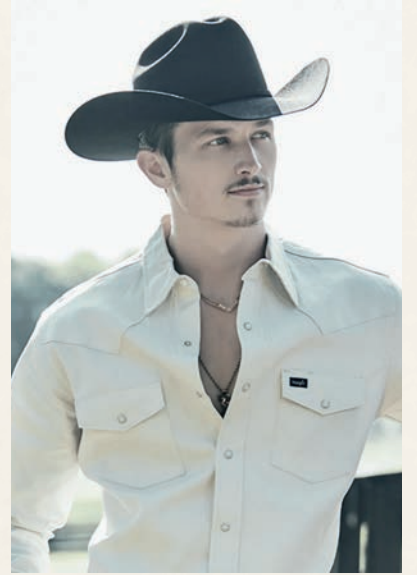
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MATT COOPER



BEN GALLAHER



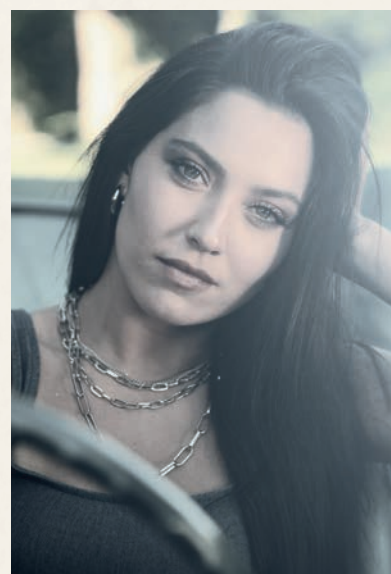
SPENCER HATCHER



LAKELIN LEMMINGS



2 LANE SUMMER



STEVIE WOODWARD

★ **HERE. WE. GO.** ★



QUARTZ HILL
RECORDS

LANDING RIGHT

JOHN MARKS

Across a 51-year career, John Marks made meaningful contributions to stations including WSAI/Cincinnati, KKAT/Salt Lake City, KWNR/Las Vegas and KSON/San Diego. His tenure as Head/Country Programming at SiriusXM saw a sea change in the satcaster's influence on the genre, a dynamic he extended at Spotify, where he was Global Head/Country Programming.

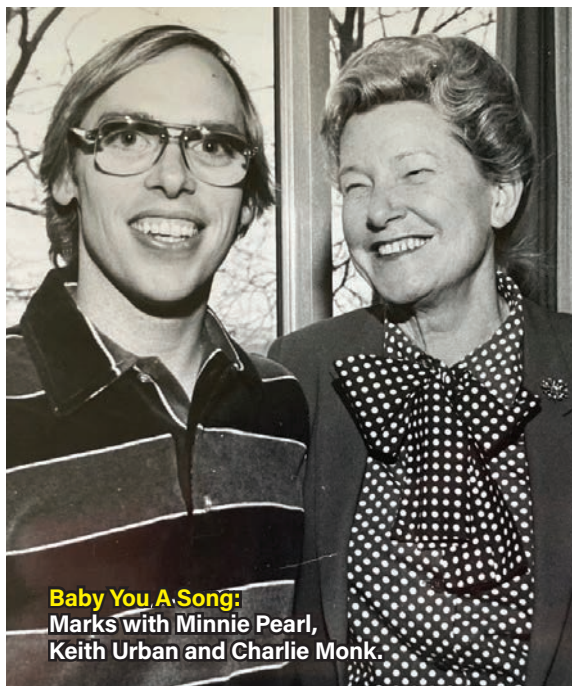
We were playing basketball at the YMCA in my hometown of Middletown, OH when this song came on the jukebox. Pounding drum and all of a sudden this guitar gets going – Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman." I thought, "Holy cow, music's got to be in my life somehow." I didn't come from a musical family, but I knew I had to find my way in one day. That left a massive impression and made me a music fan, which I carried forward and throughout my life.

In high school, I was plotting how to get into this music thing. Junior Achievement had an assembly and seven or eight of us formed a company at the local 1,000-watt AM station WPFB. We were charged with selling, producing, writing and booking a weekly one-hour weekly radio show. I was the salesperson.

When that disbanded, I asked the people at the station if I could have a job, please. So I started at something like \$5 an hour and got a world of experience in that small market, block-programmed radio station – radio, obituaries, jobs, God squad, countdowns, commercial writing and production, news writing – you name it. The music ranged from Top 40 to Bluegrass to Country. I learned through lack of supervision, and that is not a criticism. "Here, do this." So I sat down and did it.

Peter Layton and I would take over the station in the evenings and rotate playing Chicago disc jockey. "Hey, let's act like we're on WLS tonight." He'd engineer while I jockeyed and played music, then we'd rotate. We played the same records over and over again. Nobody said a word.

We called it "Camp OU." Because I had some experience, I was able to skip the check-in process – "this is the microphone and this is the turntable" – at College WMUM/Athens at Ohio University. The line to the left was for the Top 40 station, but nobody lined up to do Country. So my ongoing interest in country music was purely a time-saving device to get on the air because I didn't care whose name I was saying. It ended up being Moe Bandy and Merle Haggard instead of whoever was trendy in disco.



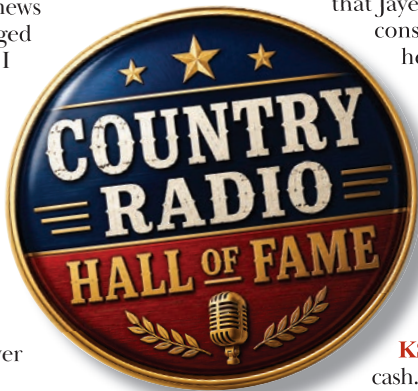
Baby You A Song: Marks with Minnie Pearl, Keith Urban and Charlie Monk.



They hired me to drive the chicken mascot around at WSAI/Cincinnati, which I grew up listening to. That was the moment I went from "Drink and Drown" Fridays to a real job. It wasn't spectacular, but it was my chance to move forward in a high profile market. Back then, you could still walk up to a sporting event and say, "The chicken is supposed to go around greeting people," and they'd let you in. That job led to weekends to afternoon drive and, eventually, APD/MD. [Industry vets] Dale Turner and Jonathan Fricke taught me a lot of great lessons about music. How not to follow the charts ... listen for yourself and decide what's good for your market and what isn't.

I was making enough trouble at KRPM/Tacoma that Jaye Albright, the PD at KMPS/Seattle, conspired to get me out of the way by helping me find a job in Salt Lake City. KKAT was flipping from Rock and we retrofitted the whole thing, did our research, and went from nowhere to a double-digit No. 1 over a couple of years. That was when my trajectory as a PD changed to someone who might have a future instead of hopping station to station.

KSOP was well financed and giving away cash. Since they were the competition, I monitored them and, if I happened to be near a phone, I'd call. One day I got, "Hey, KSOP, you're the 10th caller. You won \$104!" The seven-to-midnight person didn't know who I was when I gave my name. They said, "Who's your country leader in Salt Lake City?" And I said, "KSOP!" When I went to pick up the check, of course the family who owned the station knew who I was, but they couldn't withhold the money. So we got a photo of them presenting me the check that ended up running in *Radio & Records*. They were impressed I said KSOP when I won, but I told them I'd have said my mother was mean for \$104.



Las Vegas is where I started to feel Nashville's presence. Unlike many markets, most of the talent of the day was coming through Las Vegas several times a year. The familiarity with systems and artists grew and became more relaxed. That continued at KSON/San Diego because of the station's status and market size. Along the way I was able to meet Rascal Flatts, Brad Paisley, Toby Keith, Keith Urban and others at the earliest stages of their careers.

We were done with terrestrial radio. Not angry or upset, but when the KSON contract was up, my wife Colleen and I were going to do something else somewhere else, and initially that meant back to Salt Lake City. Colleen had a house there, and we could just chill on the porch for a little bit. A chance meeting at the airport during CRS got me in touch with SiriusXM. Their stock was navigating below a dollar, but what did we have to lose? We could always turn around and go back to Salt Lake City.

Exhilarating and scared shitless. That's the best way I can describe going to SiriusXM. It was like being dropped onto a whole new planet. I give the company all the credit for helping me understand I wasn't in a local market anymore, and that there was an opportunity to raise the profile of SiriusXM and The Highway. Go fishing and see what you can find. "You mean I can go find artists and put them on the air?" That was all I needed to hear. Of course we had to play the hits, but otherwise it was a blank canvas.

The hunt was on. The Florida Georgia Line meeting came along and kaboom. Their self-pressed CD had five songs including "Get Your Shine On" and "Cruise." I said I liked those two, but since "Cruise" starts a little faster "maybe we give that a whirl." Of course it was like a boulder hitting a shallow pond. We monitored sales, iTunes and our own research, which were all massive out of the chute. The format was sort of medium and down-tempo love songs, and FGL came in and said, "Let's get this party started."

My time at SiriusXM was coming to a conclusion, so I started making preparations for that. Copeland Isaacson, now of YouTube, had been in our promotions department at KSON, moved to Nashville and ended up at Spotify. He called and asked if I'd thought about joining that company. I said, "Nope. As a matter of fact, I barely know what Spotify is." I had an interview and the next thing I knew I was onboarding. People ask me how I did that and I'd like to say it was my knowledge and understanding of the world to come, but it just happened. Somehow I landed right. I'm one of the most fortunate people ever.

The most out of nowhere bomb to ever land in my lap is this induction. I'm very hard to surprise, but Joel Raab and I were supposed to be doing an interview. I did two hours of prep that went nowhere when Joel said, "We're inviting you to join the Country Radio Hall of Fame." I was overcome and speechless. That wasn't in my field of vision. I've never been an award seeker. I just like my work and have been fortunate enough to live that since I was 17 years old. That was thanks enough. So to be accepted into those ranks – I'm still rattled. I love it, I'm grateful and I'm happy. It's just so cool. **CAC**

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Church On *Sinners* TWENTY YEARS LATER



Freshly consolidated multi-format radio clusters were encouraged to aim stations at distinct demographic segments in the early 2000s. Rather than have multiple stations in one company fighting for the same audience, Rock would isolate the young men, Classic Rock the older guys, Top 40 the young women and Country would get the soccer moms. And, of course, the Nashville record industry obliged radio by creating music intended for the demo. Into that paradigm stepped new artist Eric Church in February, 2006, singing on his first single, "I wish Uncle Sam would give a damn about the man whose collar's blue ... how 'bout you?"

Twenty years later, Church's debut album *Sinners Like Me* is the unquestioned cornerstone of an iconic career. But at the time, questions abounded. Chiefly, "What do we do with this?" While the album's singles failed to crack the top 10, a growing fanbase and the belief of die-hard insiders and outsiders sustained the project. Five years and two albums later, *Chief* provided Church's radio breakthrough with consecutive No. 1s "Drink In My Hand" and "Springsteen." That year, *Chief* was named Album of the Year by both the ACM and CMA, validating the vision and artistry so many latched onto with his first release. Below, he discusses *Sinners Like Me*, its struggles and successes, and earning the spotlight.

CA: How intentional were you in trying to set yourself apart from the climate of the day?

EC: I was aware of the climate. I was aware of what the industry was doing, but it wasn't intentional to not be that. Matter of fact, one of the hardest things was trying to get a foothold with radio because the environment was so heavily female. *Sinners* was such a testosterone-driven album with a lot of grit, so finding something palatable for the masses – we didn't have that. So, yeah, I was aware, but what's the old saying? You have your whole life to write your first record? I'd had those songs for a bit and they were just who I was as a new artist.

Peaking at No. 12 with your debut single "How 'Bout You" thrilled your manager (see sidebar page 34), but probably wasn't as exciting for the label. How did that land for you?

I remember it being a noisy 12. Having been doing



Line Dance: Capitol's Jimmy Harnen, Eric Church and Steve Hodges. Manager John Peets (not pictured) says, "They looked like walking pink french fries."

this a while now, I have young artists go on tour with me – and a lot of them become massive stars or even already are. They'll watch the set and we'll have conversations afterwards about "These Boots" or

"Sinners Like Me" or "Pledge Allegiance To The Hag," and they all assume those were like nine week No. 1s. The thing about that album is it lived in people's trucks and boats – wherever they listened – for a long time. Ella Langley was telling me recently that's what her dad had in the truck. That wasn't coming from the radio, it wasn't casual listening to one song. People listened to the whole album with intent, which is how we've tried to build our whole career. That's the philosophy we have when we're making albums. It doesn't always work, but you're trying to make something people are so passionate about that they just wear grooves in the thing.

At a time when a lot of the music sounded the same, that record is identifiable because it's very different. It still blows my mind that people think all those songs were No. 1s when there were none on the whole album. But they identify with it because it captured a moment in their life. To this day, we play four or five of those songs every night. At least that many. That says something about how that album has held up after 20 years.

Do you correct people and say, "It wasn't a nine week No. 1 ... only four."

Yeah, right. They're actually kind of shocked. And those three I mentioned are the ones people bring up, and they weren't on the radio at all. Never a thing. There's a younger generation that has no concept of that because the way they consumed it wasn't through radio. It was through friends' houses or parents and it was what was playing all the time. I have that same thing with some records. I'd go through my Bob Seger playlist and think, "What do you mean that wasn't a hit? I've known every word of that song my whole life."

Do you remember wrestling with the label over single choices?

I remember "Two Pink Lines" was just a natural disaster. "How 'Bout You" kind of got us in the door – a little gritty and it did okay. The next one needed to land and ... we picked a song about teen pregnancy that did not land. That is kind of where it went sideways. We followed it up



Sinners Like Me

TWENTY YEARS LATER

with “Guys Like Me,” which was where we had to go. The interesting thing from an industry perspective is there were a lot of male acts who came out in that era and had massive hits, but they’re no longer with us in the business. But at that time, the other stuff was working and we didn’t know what to do with mine. The feeling I got from the label was, “We love this. We just don’t know what to do with it.” That set off a couple years in the wilderness before “Smoke A Little Smoke” from the *Carolina* album got us back on track with who we were.

Airplay aside, what kind of signals were you getting that things were building?

The band used to joke with me that for the first part of our career, there were no women, but that’s because the male demographic was just

not getting served by Country radio. Even the guys in country were doing softer music with the edges rounded off, and it just wasn’t cool as a guy to be listening to that. So the male audience was over on Classic Rock. What I started seeing at my shows was 10-deep rows of dudes. I didn’t know it at the time, but now that I’ve done this longer, I realize that’s unique. We were capturing a part of the country fan base that we weren’t paying attention to, as an industry.

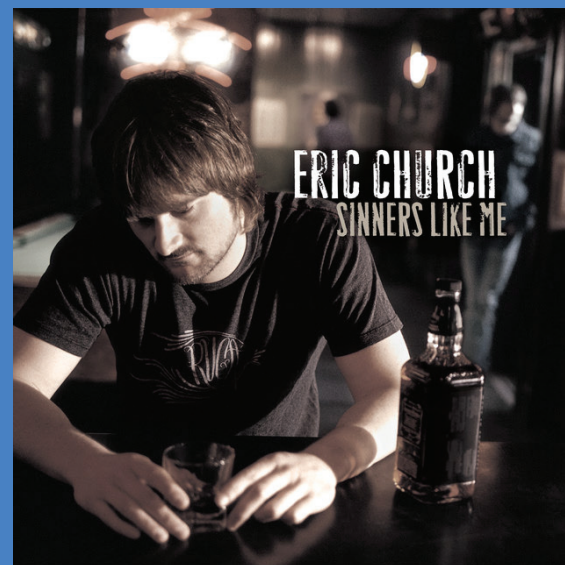
The label would say to me, “This is testing for shit,” which was in conflict with what I was seeing every night. My response was always, “Then you’re not talking to the right people because I’m looking at them and seeing their reaction. I don’t see what you’re telling me. What we have is an analytics problem.”

What do you remember about how much work it was playing shows and doing a radio tour?

Before “Guys Like Me,” [the label’s] Steve Hodges



Talkin’ Part Of Life: Doing interviews in support of his debut album.



ERIC CHURCH

Sinners Like Me

Capitol Nashville

Released: July 18, 2026

Producer: Jay Joyce

1. Before She Does

Eric Church, Trent Willmon, Jeremy Spillman

2. Sinners Like Me

Church, Spillman

3. How ‘Bout You

Church, Brett Beavers, Brandon Church

4. These Boots

Church, Michael P. Heaney

5. What I Almost Was

Church, Heaney

6. The Hard Way

Church, Heaney, Casey Beathard

7. Guys Like Me

Church, Deric Ruttan

8. Lightning

Church

9. Can’t Take It With You

Church, Beathard, Marla Cannon Goodman

10. Pledge Allegiance To The Hag f/Merle Haggard

Church, Beavers

11. Two Pink Lines

Church, Victoria Shaw

12. Livin’ Part Of Life

Church, Liz Rose, Walt Wilkins

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OF HIS DEBUT ALBUM, *Sinners Like Me*

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Sinners Like Me

TWENTY YEARS LATER

and I went down to Texas to try to get an add and ended up playing a 10-year-old's birthday party, basically. I'm going through my repertoire from that album, which is all I had, and there's not a song that's even palatable. I'm looking at Steve going, "This is a disaster." I can hit 'em with teen pregnancy or a death row execution. One way or the other, we're going to traumatize these kids.

There's a bunch of stuff like that, but we were just trying to get records on the radio. A rite of passage that new artists don't get to do as much – the full-blown radio tour. But I think they should. It gets down to survival at some point. You want it so bad, you're trying and there are headwinds. You're just gutting it out.

Aside from airplay, what were the headwinds?

We were playing seven nights a week and hoping to make enough merch money to pay for diesel to get us to the next show. "Guys, if we don't sell enough shirts tonight, I don't think we can get to Amarillo from El Paso." The young artists today want to know my secrets, but it's not a secret. There's a lot of earning it when you come up that way. You find out a lot about yourself when you're playing for eight people. How much do you really care about what you do? How

Continued on page 34

THE HARD EASYWAY

When he started working with Eric Church in 2004, manager **John Peets** didn't have mainstream country experience. "I was managing Nickel Creek and Gillian Welch and had just signed Joanna Cotton a couple of months before," he says. "Eric liked that I was working with different things. And my gut reaction to his music was that everybody I grew up with would love it. But since I wasn't working in the genre at all, I had no clue about how much it stood apart. [Producer] Jay Joyce was also naive to it. We were all just excited about what he was doing."

Conceptually, Peets encouraged Church to stay on theme. "One thing I was really staunch on was that this be a testosterone-fueled,

male record," he says. "So much so that 'Livin' Part of Life' originally had a line in it with the word 'wife' because it rhymed. We removed it. There were no wives on the record. Also, 'Those I've Loved Along the Way' was going to be on *Sinners*, but I said, 'It's the first album. You can't look back yet. Not the right sentiment.' So we held it for *Carolina*."

Disagreements with label Capitol/Nashville included the album mix. A mainstream country engineer gave *Sinners Like Me* a pass, attempting to soften the edges. "They were fairly happy with that and we were not," Peets says. "When we went the other way, it was definitely a thing. [Capitol head] Mike Dungan would speak his mind ... challenge us, but I don't think we ever lost an artistic argument."

"Mike probably knew exactly what we were stepping into. I'm a young manager, Jay had never done a country record and Eric being that ornery guy ... it was pretty cool of him to let it all happen. He was an artist-forward guy, ultimately."

Creatively, Peets was encouraged. Then the work of promoting the album began. "Eric came to my office to do the bio interview – his first interview, really," he says. "After 90 seconds he comes out of the room and says, 'This guy just asked me what's up with the drum sounds?' I was like, 'Uh, this is rough. This is someone we hired ... not even press.' All that to say, we had no reference in our minds for how different we were from the environment we were walking into."

Nevertheless, the album's sonic differentiation was a point of pride, and Peets was determined to show that on the radio tour. "I built a boombox with an iPod, loaded the record and we'd go into conference rooms with this rig," he says. "Eric had his guitar, he'd talk about the songwriting, play a verse and chorus, then follow it with the produced version."

Failing to score a top 10 on first single "How 'Bout You" was seen very differently by Peets. "I'm sitting here with Nickel Creek and Gillian Welch," he laughs. "The idea that someone else is playing your music and that millions of people were hearing it was astounding. I was going, 'This is unbelievable!' I didn't realize that would be looked at as a miss. I thought it was a wonderful start and had tons of gratitude for the number of people who were working on it and playing it."

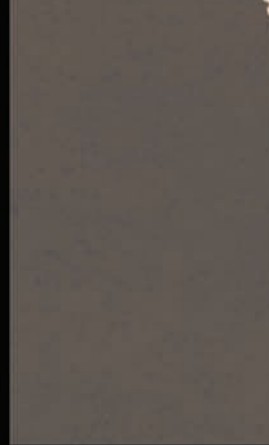
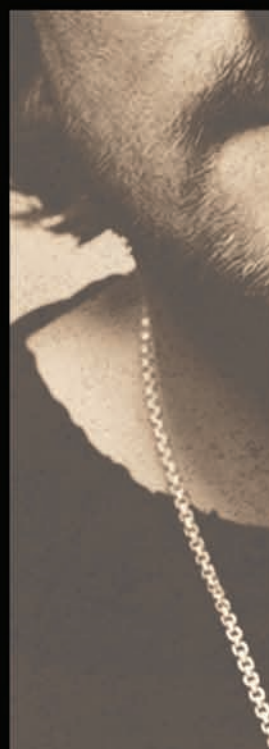
Eventually, the reality came into focus. "A lot coming back at us was, 'This Eric record is really great. I can't play it, but it's my favorite record.' So we were getting a lot of validation from people that it was great work, but it was off-axis. That's when it started dawning on me."

Fortunately, word of mouth was working. "It was feeling great on the road," he says. "People were getting the message, coming out and they were not passive. You'd see male camaraderie – buddies with their arms around each other, raising a beer. And not necessarily by design, we were just playing places where guys were, a lot of the times. We had the right record for the position we were being put in, and Eric worked extraordinarily hard."



Peets
& Church

ONE HELL OF A LEGACY



ERIC CHURCH CONGRATULATIONS ON 20 YEARS OF SINNERS LIKE ME



SONY MUSIC
PUBLISHING

The music was undeniable, but did it belong on Country radio? That was the central question 20 years ago, but in hindsight, not riding the middle of the road became the key to growth and longevity.

Now VP/Country Radio Promotion at Church's management company Q Prime, **Angela Lange** was a



Angela Lange

regional at Capitol/Nashville in the early 2000s. "Every year, [label head] Mike Dungan had an event for staff at The Sutler," she says

of her first exposure to Church. "Artists would play a song or two acoustic and get everybody geared up for what's coming. In October 2004, the ones I remember most were Eric Church and Luke Bryan, for obvious reasons. I remember Eric doing 'Two Pink Lines' and thinking, 'Damn, what an incredible story and wild that he's touching on this.' He was really different and I liked what I heard."



Tim Roberts

Translating that for programmers was the task. "At the time, everybody would go to the conference room, order pizza, get up and do their songs – same old stuff," she says. "[Manager John] Peets wanted to hook an iPod to a boombox, have Eric play a verse and chorus live, then play the produced song. The idea was to let people see the evolution of the song into the track. People still mention to me how memorable that was."

"I loved it from the beginning and immediately booked him on our *Hoedown* festival," says WYCD/Detroit PD **Tim Roberts**. "I had never seen him live, so that was based solely on the music, which I knew would play well in Detroit, Rock City. We had three stages and I think he played the middle one. Had to be one of his first shows



after getting signed. When I saw him perform, I was like, holy crap, this guy's going to be huge."

Others weren't as convinced. "The original reaction was people loving it, but being scared of how different it was," Lange says. "I'd hear, 'I haven't taken the CD out of my car player since I got it. – can't stop listening – I just don't know if I can play it on my station.' I would be like, 'Do you know what you just said?'"

Roberts had no such reluctance. "That's what was refreshing about it," he says. "Plus, I had great trust in the label at that point with Mike Dungan, Steve Hodges and others there who were sending us cutting-edge, quality artists who were working in the mainstream."

Lange says the promotion team was trying to help programmers see the growth, but it wasn't easy.

"He was touring like crazy, but that was another type of obstacle because he was playing in rock clubs," she recalls. "His set would start at 11pm and trying to get programmers out for shows was nearly impossible."

WUSN/Chicago's **Marci Braun** was MD at the time and remembers his first stop in the city. "He played Joe's Bar to about 60 people," she says. "It was a rock show – unlike anything we'd seen, but he was cool as hell. I also remember he would plant trees in local parks with members of the Church Choir. Afterward, he'd sit on a tailgate and play a couple songs acoustically. Interesting dichotomy of this guy who was a badass, but also wanted to play in the dirt and put trees in the ground."



Marci Braun

Then-WMIL/Milwaukee PD **Kerry Wolfe** adds, "I remember him getting booked at a small venue, which sold out quickly and the show was moved to a bigger venue. I was like, 'Hmm. Something's going on

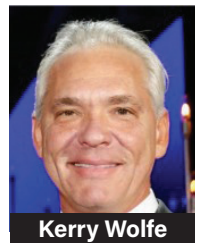
here.' So I went to check him out and was hooked. All these people were holding up their boots when he played 'These Boots' and I didn't really know how that happened."

The teen-pregnancy tale "Two Pink Lines" was the subject of some discussion. "We definitely got some pushback, but it was brave," Lange says. "It made you think, 'This guy is willing to talk about some shit.' He certainly set a template for who he was and is as an artist – unapologetically himself."

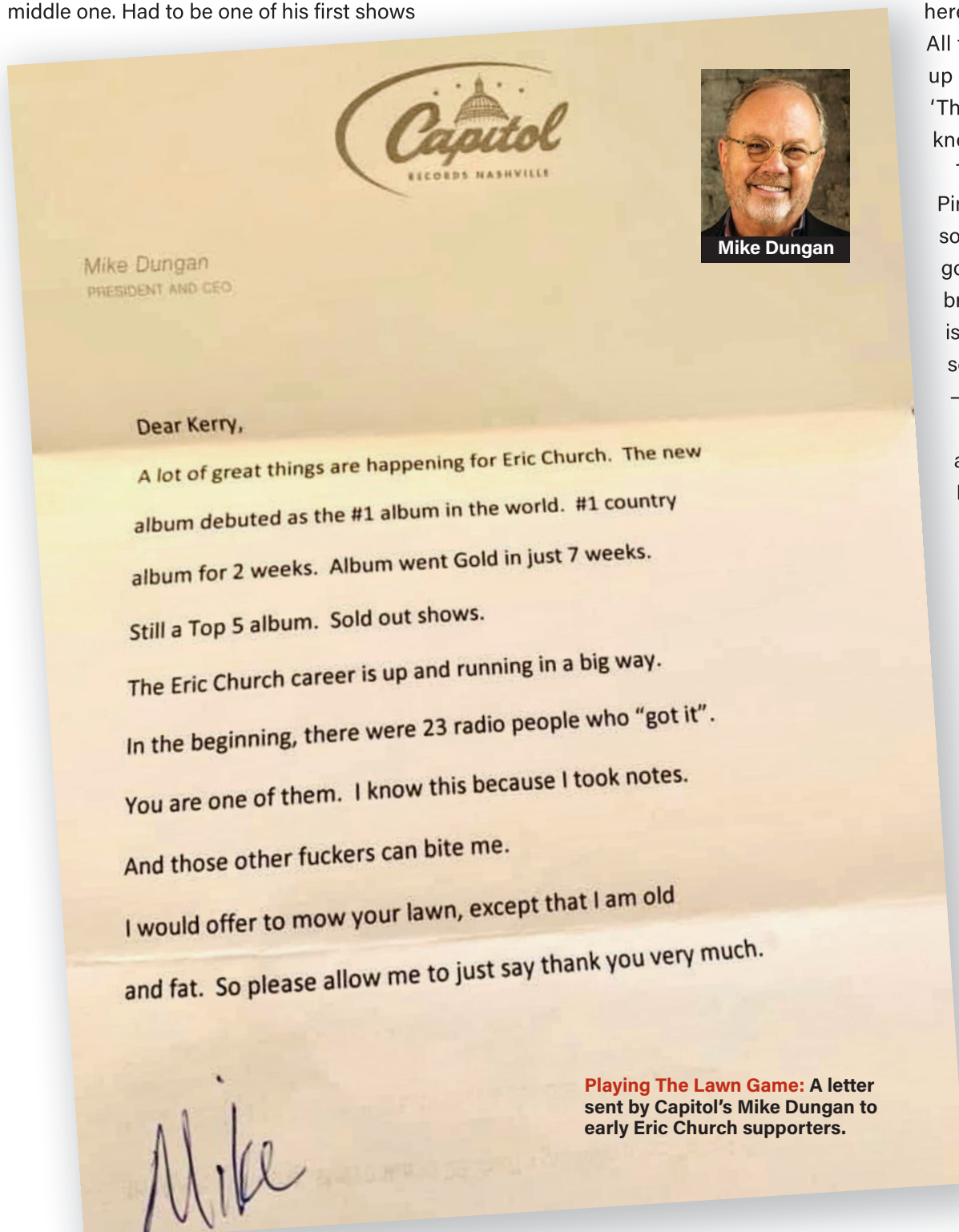
"I never thought it was that controversial – much ado about nothing and we played it anyway," Roberts says. Braun laughs, "I don't remember the controversy at all. What I remember about 'Two Pink Lines' was seeing Jimmy Harnen and Steve Hodges in those costumes."

Radio aside, the rocket was lit. "If he'd played a room for 25 people, the next time it was tenfold," Lange says. "We were at the big country club in Atlanta and 30 minutes into the show they were like, 'Our beer cooler, which is the size of a warehouse, is empty,'" Lange says. "It was mostly word of mouth like, 'You've got to see this guy live!'"

"At that time he came out, Country radio was focusing way too much on female demos and not giving the males a voice," Wolfe says. "Eric kicked open a door for male-centered music." The path wasn't always clean, but Lange and the label team hung in. "There was definitely some frustration, but we all had this feeling," she says. "That album really laid the groundwork for what he was about, the direction he was going and that no one was going to tell him otherwise."



Kerry Wolfe



Mike Dungan

Playing The Lawn Game: A letter sent by Capitol's Mike Dungan to early Eric Church supporters.

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Sinners Singles

Artist/Title (label)	Debut	Weeks On	Peak Date	Peak Pos.
ERIC CHURCH/How 'Bout You (Capitol/Nashville)	2/17/06	25	7/21/06	12
ERIC CHURCH/Two Pink Lines (Capitol/Nashville)	8/28/06	19	11/13/06	20
ERIC CHURCH/Guys Like Me (Capitol/Nashville)	1/29/07	28	7/2/07	16
ERIC CHURCH/Sinners Like Me (Capitol/Nashville)	9/24/07	6	11/5/07	47

Sinners Like Me TWENTY YEARS LATER

committed are you?

I say to a lot of them, if you're good, you're going to get your time. The spotlight will turn your way. And if you've earned it, you won't melt when that happens. If you haven't earned it, you might. That happens a lot these days. If you're not sure you belong, you're dead. When you've gone through surviving just to get to the next show, it changes how you treat all of it. I never considered whether I was ready to play a show because I didn't have the luxury of letting that cross my mind. You get an opportunity and every ounce of your energy goes into that moment because you remember the time you were almost stuck in El Paso.

Nothing scares you at that point.

You don't know it at the time. If you did, you'd probably quit. But you're fighting so hard just to check the next box. We were 14 people on a 12-person bus on that tour. You're at fairs and festivals, using the public shower and the drain is clogged. You're standing in a foot of dirty water and the minute you step outside you're covered in dust anyway. I remember thinking, "Damn, if I can just get a hit." But I look back on that time and miss the hell out of it. You're getting your teeth kicked in, but you're chasing something together and it matters to everyone. There's a pureness to that. Some of the best times I've ever had.

You had three singles that were a mixed bag on the charts, and still Capitol let you release the title track as a fourth. Did you fight for that?

We were just trying to show a little bit of who we were. I give [Capitol head] Mike Dungan a lot of credit for that, because his frustration was similar to mine. We couldn't understand why this wasn't resonating with the industry. Because it was the title track and very important to the career we were attempting to build, we wanted to give people one more touchpoint in terms of identity. Most people were saying it was time for a new record ... new product. I don't think anyone thought "Sinners Like Me" would be a No. 1 single. They looking at the long term of this being important to the career to give it a moment. And it was a very brief one.

On the creative side, Jay Joyce hadn't produced a country record at that point. Looking back it makes sense, but what made you think it would work?

I have to give credit to [publisher] Arthur Buenahora,



Guys Like Bee: Church at a station event for WBCT "B-93"/Grand Rapids, MI.



Creepin: Church conducts an interview as Harnen lurks.



Give Me Camel Back: Onstage at a KMLE/Phoenix event.

who had heard some of the stuff Jay had done and got us together. Jay knew nothing about country. Zero. When I first heard those demos, it had the banjo on "How 'Bout You" and those big, staccato, electric guitar hits on "Pledge Allegiance To The Hag." Stuff that had never occurred to me and I thought it was so odd. Really foreign sounding relative to what I was hearing in country music at the time. I didn't think I liked it. My brother was living with me – probably 21 or 22 at the time – and I reluctantly let him hear it. "Hag" came on, he put his fist up and said, "This is killer." That gave me some perspective.

And specific to that song, Merle didn't sing his part as you wrote it.

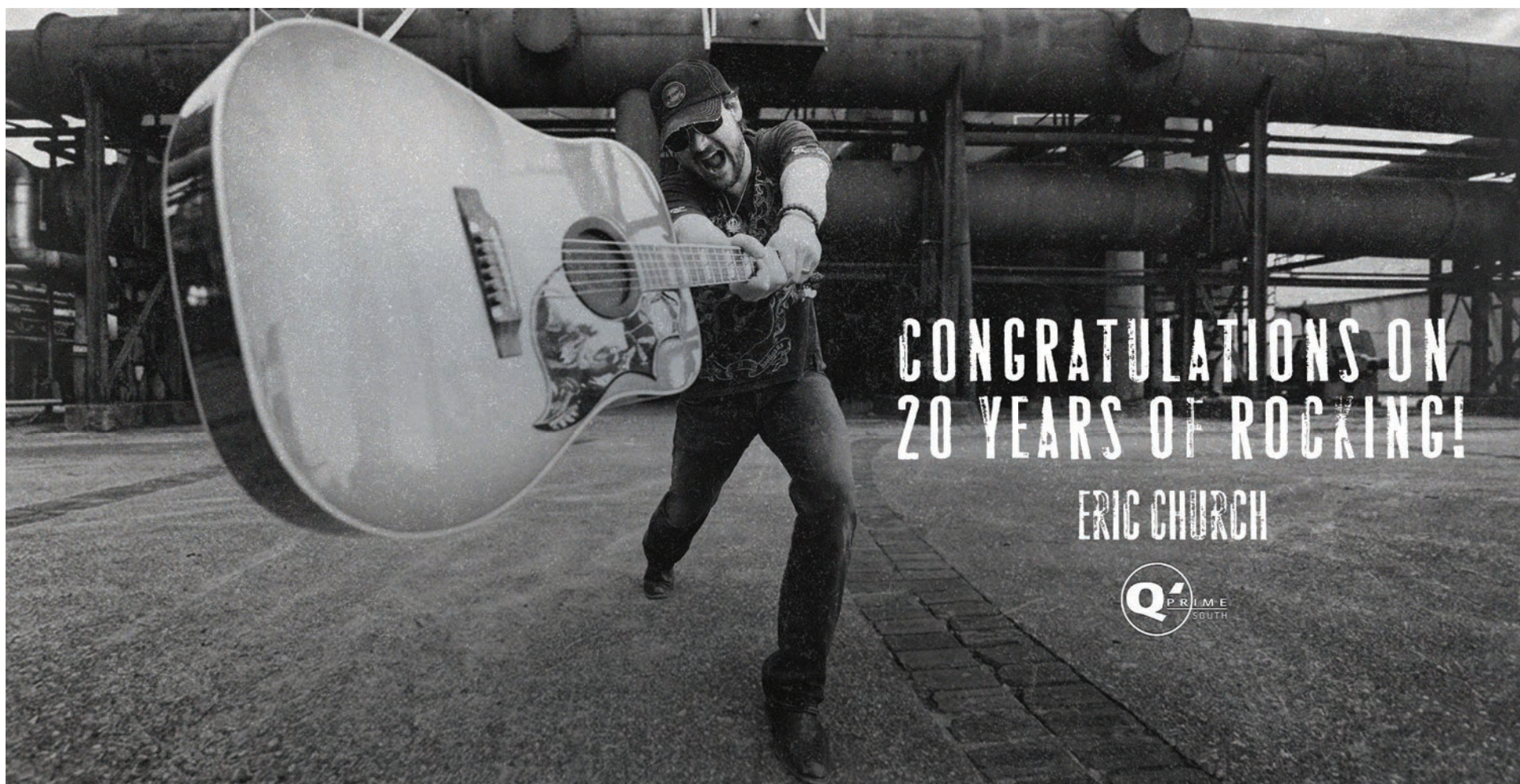
Jay called me in and said, "Merle, kind of ad-libbed." Apparently he'd done one take in a "this is what I'm saying" sort of way. I listened and Jay said, "What do we do?" I said, "That's Merle Haggard. We fucking leave it."

Any other stories from behind-the-scenes while making that album?

The musicianship was kind of unique. Mindy Smith sang harmony on "Sinners." Chris Thile from Nickel Creek plays on "Livin' Part Of Life" and there's a line in the song that was supposed be "keepin' up with the Joneses," but I sang, "keepin' up with the Thieles." If you try to find those lyrics online, there are 52 different versions. Some say "feelings." Some say "feelies." People didn't realize what I was saying because it was Chris on the mandolin and we cut it live in one take. The tuba player wasn't a professional, just a guy who was like third chair tuba in his high school band. Jay just asked a guy at the session, "Can you play tuba? Sit down."

When you finally did ring the bell two albums later – back-to-back with "Drink In My Hand" and "Springsteen" from Chief – did you feel the lift?

That's where the girls showed up. All of sudden we went from setting attendance records in theatres to going really big – 2,000 to 12,000. I was plucked from playing The Intersection in Grand Rapids, MI to selling out multiple nights at Van Andel Arena. Like being shot out of a cannon. That was the *Blood, Sweat & Beers Tour*, and I had a problem that whole time. I found myself looking at all those people every night and trying to get to "Drink In My Hand" and "Springsteen" as fast as I could. I thought the show had become about those two songs, but what I learned is that the show is about all the other songs but those. It took me that whole tour to get comfortable. We did things much better after that. **CAC**



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Jackson Dean
“Make A Liar”
Convert Now



Some Artists Find A Lane.
Others Make Their Own.

BLUE HIGHWAY
Records



HALFTIME

SHOW

LABELS PREVIEW Q3 & Q4 MUSIC PRIORITIES

ATLANTIC OUTPOST

• **Stella Lefty**, "Boston" (out now): "One of the most exciting artist development stories we're seeing right now. Stella is building a passionate fanbase, and 'Boston' continues to introduce more listeners to a truly special artist." –SVP/Country Airplay **Stephanie Hagerty**

• **Diplo** feat. **Cameron Whitcomb**, "Would U Still Love Me" (out now): "A strong collaboration between two artists who know how to connect with fans. We're excited to introduce this record to more listeners and continue building momentum in the months to come." –EVP/Promotion **Brady Bedard**

• **Willow Avalon**, *Pink Pocket Pistol* (June 26th): "Willow Avalon is coming out of the gate swinging with this next chapter of music, and I'm buckled up, ready to see what's in store. Turn it all the way up." –*Whiskey Riff*

AKANDO

• **Tyler Nance**, "Keeps Me Sane": "Missouri native Tyler Nance continues to make waves with his debut radio single, 'Keeps Me Sane.' The track has already amassed U.S. 118M+ streams and shows no sign of stopping. He is on tour this year with Ian Munsick and Gavin Adcock." –VP/Promotion **Raffaella Braun**

• **Chris Young**, "I Didn't Come Here To Leave": "Following up 14 No. 1 singles, 'I Didn't Come Here To Leave' could be this year's song of the summer! Chris Young is one of the most consistent hit makers in our format for the last decade."

BIG LOUD

• **Lauren Alaina**, *Stages* (Aug. 28): "Lauren has built one of the most authentic and enduring careers in country music, and *Stages* is a powerful reflection of that journey. It captures the ambition, the growth, the setbacks, and the triumphs. The album showcases the heart and artistry that continues to define Lauren's career." –Co-Pres. **Stacy Blythe**

• **Charles Wesley Godwin**, *Christian Name* (July 24): "*Christian Name* captures the heartbreak, faith and real-life experiences that connect people to Charles Wesley Godwin's music – brought to life through meaningful collaboration and honest storytelling." –SVP/Radio Promotion **Lauren Thomas**

• **Ashley Cooke**, *Ashley Cooke* (Aug. 14): "Ashley Cooke's self-titled album showcases everything that makes her special: incredible vocals, honest songwriting and undeniable relatability. This project takes every one of those strengths to another level, and I'm excited for the world to hear it." –SVP/Radio Promotion **Tyler Waugh**

• **Kashus Culpepper**, *Act I: Summer Nights* (June 19): "Kashus Culpepper carries the spirit of classic Southern music into a new generation. His upcoming EP, *Act I: Summer Nights*, makes yet another bold step forward for this true artist with a lived-in and deeply human point of view." –Co-Pres. **Jordan Pettit**

• **Waylon Payne**, *Wayward* (July 17): "We at Big Loud Texas are proud to partner with Waylon Payne to release his amazing new record, 'Wayward.' Waylon is family and an artist in the truest sense of the word, and we are honored to work alongside him." –VP/Big Loud Texas **Brendon Anthony**

• **Alex Lambert**, **Julianna Rankin**, **Lauren Watkins**, and more: "We're incredibly excited about the depth and individuality of the music coming in the second half of 2026. From Alex Lambert to Julianna Rankin to Lauren Watkins, each artist is building something distinct and authentic." –SVP/Marketing **Brianne Deslippe**

BIG MACHINE

• **The Band Perry**, "Psychological" (out now): "The new season of this family band features OG front woman Kimberly Perry and musical muse/husband Johnny Costello. Never afraid to test boundaries and deliver something fresh and exciting, 'Psychological' is just getting started. Fans are just discovering this track along with other new releases 'Buzzards' and 'Kill It.' Look for TBP

to be highly visible all summer long with more new music coming throughout the summer!" –SVP **Ryan Dokke**

• **Cole Goodwin**, "Howdy" (out now): "Cole Goodwin is everywhere! Currently working in radio visits with programmers all over the country while also on the road supporting Vincent Mason, Zach Top and Dierks Bentley all summer, Cole wins in every room he steps into! This summer Big Machine Records and Nashville Harbor deliver his first radio single, 'Howdy' [impacting 6/22]. Country, real, funny ... and a ton of fun, you can't help but love Cole and his music!"

BLACK RIVER

• **Chris Young**, "I Didn't Come Here To Leave" (June 15): "Chris Young's song of the summer, 'I Didn't Come Here



Stella
Lefty

To Leave,' hits radio airwaves June 15. *I Didn't Come Here To Leave Deluxe Album* came out June 12." –Dir./National Promotion **Kellie LaJack**

• **Matt Stell**, "Better Angels" (5/29): More music coming soon from Stell and **Hayden Coffman**.

BLUE HIGHWAY

• **Thomas Rhett**, "Ain't A Bad Life" feat. **Jordan Davis**:

"Coming off the heels of his 25th No. 1 single, 'Ain't A Bad Life' feat. Jordan Davis, he is busy in the studio working on new music. He will be out on his headlining *The Soundtrack To Life Tour* throughout 2026, including stadium dates in Nashville and Pennsylvania." –SVP/Promotion & Digital **Ashley Sidoti**

• **Justin Moore**, "Time's Ticking": "Coming off the heels of his 14th (and seventh in a row) No. 1 single, 'Time's Ticking,' Moore is busy preparing to release new music. He is currently out on the *Cowboy As It Gets Tour* with Riley Green."

• **Jackson Dean**, "Make A Liar": "'Make A Liar,' currently Top 40 and climbing, is the follow-up to his two No. 1 singles. New album, *Magnolia Sage*, available now."

• **Preston Cooper**, "One For The Road" (out now): More new music coming soon.

• **Midland**, *Stages*: Released their fifth studio album, *Stages*, earlier this month, featuring tracks "Marlboro Man" and "Shooting Memories With Tequila."

• **Mae Estes**: New music coming this year.



BROKEN BOW

• **Jason Aldean**, "Don't Tell On Me": "Jason is approaching his 32nd No. 1 with 'Don't Tell On Me,' the second single off his latest album, *Songs About Us*. His 22-city *Songs About Us Tour* kicks off July 16. Jason continues to bring the hits." –VP/Promotion **Lee Adams**

• **Lainey Wilson**: "The reigning CMA Entertainer and Female Vocalist of the Year is fresh off headlining *Stagecoach* and her Netflix documentary *Keepin' Country Cool*. New single 'Phone, Keys, Wallet' landed radio World Premieres to become her biggest add day, and she's currently out on Chris Stapleton's *All-American Road Show* and headlining festivals this summer."

• **Dustin Lynch**, "Easy To Love": "Dustin Lynch is at Country radio with 'Easy To Love,' while working on new music for his forthcoming country album. Dustin continues to blend country music and EDM sounds at his Las Vegas residency, while taking his high-energy country show to festival stops across the country."

• **John Morgan**, "Kid Myself": "John Morgan followed up his first No. 1 hit, 'Friends Like That,' with his current hit, 'Kid Myself.' Written by Morgan, Tyler Hubbard and Jordan Schmidt, this single, off his debut album *Carolina Blue*, is praised for its clever word play and nostalgia."

• **Frank Ray**, "Third Row George Strait": "Frank Ray's song, 'Third Row, George Strait,' off his upcoming EP, *Good For The Soul*, was recently released digitally to rave reviews with *Music Row* revealing that it has 'a nostalgic summer romance feel with up-tempo energy.'"

COLUMBIA NY

• **Koe Wetzel**, *The Night Champion* (June 12): "The Texas rough-houser is reuniting with producer Gabe Simon to craft the follow-up to 2024's *9 Lives ...* a record that's poised to really put Wetzel, the ultimate if-you-know-you-know artist, over the top." –*Rolling Stone*

EAST MUSIC ROW RECORDS/DELUGE MUSIC

• **Belles**, "Son of Jolene" featuring Dolly Parton (out now). "Off to a tremendous start in the US, UK, Australia and Canada. Lots of great music coming, touring and radio visits! Her Opry debut is July 30." –EMRR/Deluge Music's **Stephanie Greene**



Koe Wetzel



Julianna Rankin

• **Johnny Gates**, releasing his first Cowboy Carl EP in the second half of the year: "An old school country music concept album. Johnny writes the songs; Cowboy Carl lives them."

• **Felicity**, "The Poet And The Paint Splatter" (released June 26): "Brilliant performance and songwriting from one of Nashville's iconic, international stars."

• **Jyou**: "Consistently voted among Nashville's best hip-hop artists, Jyou fuses alternative influences with forward-thinking hip-hop. The Nashville native is set to release a highly anticipated new EP in Q3. A refined portrait of modern ambition, Jyou's new EP pairs cinematic writing with emotional precision to explore vulnerability, resilience and becoming."

FORGE ENTERTAINMENT

• **Lucas Hoge**: "Lucas Hoge will release a new summer single, followed by a fall release and a Christmas duet EP with Grammy-winning artist Rebecca Lynn Howard. Season seven of his hit outdoor television series, *Hoge Wild*, will premiere in June." –Founder/Partner **Laura Lynn**

LEO33

• **Zach Top**, "South Of Sanity": "Zach Top is extending his *Cold Beer & Country Music* tour this fall as his current radio single, 'South Of Sanity,' has just hit the top 20, continuing his streak of hits at radio." –Label Head **Katie Dean**

• **Trey Pendley**, "Signs Of Life" (Aug. 28): "Adding to his remarkable current radio single, 'Family Man,' Trey is connecting with blue-collar country fans across the US with his debut album, *Signs Of Life*."

LOST HIGHWAY

• **Kacey Musgraves**, "Dry Spell": "Riding the momentum of her biggest album release to date, Kacey Musgraves took her current single, 'Dry Spell,' to the ACM Awards stage, delivering the song of the summer which continues to climb the airplay charts." –VP/Promotion **Luke Jensen**

• **Flatland Cavalry**, "Never Comin' Back": "Flatland Cavalry rolls into summer with a 2026 tour of sold out shows and their debut Country radio single, 'Never Comin' Back.' The beloved band continues to expand their audience, finding a home on Country radio."

"Stay tuned for more as Lost Highway continues to grow its footprint."

MAGNOLIA

• **Randy Houser**, "Back In The Bottle": "Powerhouse vocalist Randy Houser is back and better than ever with

his latest single climbing the charts. Once again proving he has 'one of the best voices in the genre.'" –*Rolling Stone*

• **Kevin Powers**, "Move On": "Rising country artist Kevin Powers continues his chart climb with his debut single, 'Move On.' Fun, upbeat and undeniably catchy, it's the perfect addition to every summer playlist." –VP/Promotion **Heather Propper**

• **Max McNown**, "Done For": "Following the success of his breakout hit 'Better Me For You,' Max McNown continues to solidify his place as one of country music's most exciting new artists. Catch him on tour in a city near you this summer and fall."

• **Shaboozey**, *The Outlaw Cherie Lee & Other Western Tales* (July 31): "Get ready for the highly anticipated upcoming album, *The Outlaw Cherie Lee & Other Western Tales*, a cinematic outlaw revenge story with a tragic love at its center, out July 31. Shaboozey will be bringing this concept album to life on his newly announced *Outlaws Never Die Tour*."

MERCURY

• **Josh Ross**, "Hate How You Look": "Josh Ross continues his march to the top with a research monster in 'Hate How You Look.' Convert now!" –SVP/Promotion **Jimmy Rector**

• **Jacob Hackworth**, "What Took You So Long": "Jacob Hackworth is driving up the charts with his historic debut single, 'What Took You So Long.'"

• **Tyler Hubbard**, "Land": "Tyler Hubbard just released his new song, 'Land,' and people are already reacting. Will this be his fifth in a row?"

• **Tucker Wetmore**, "Brunette": "Tucker Wetmore just celebrated his third No. 1 single with 'Brunette,' and we'll have new music to you very soon. You're going to 'Love' it."

• New music coming from **Josh Ross**, **Kenny Whitmire**, **Dalton Davis**, **Miranda Lambert** and **Brothers Osborne**.

MCA

• **Carter Faith** feat. **Wyatt Flores**, "Nothin' Better To Do": "Carter Faith features Wyatt Flores on her debut radio single, titled 'Nothin' Better To Do.' The track captures the easy chemistry and honest storytelling that make both artists such compelling voices in country music." –SVP/Promotion & Regional Marketing **Miranda McDonald**

• **Madden Metcalf**, *Saltwater Southern*: "Following the February release of his debut EP, *Saltwater Southern*, rising country artist Madden Metcalf is keeping the momentum going with a steady stream of new music arriving all summer long. Coming to a radio near you soon!"

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DOUBLE PLATINUM TOP 10 SMASH
BETTER ME FOR YOU (BROWN EYES)

STREAMED NEARLY 2 BILLION
AS AN ARTIST IN JUST 3 YEARS



RANDY HOUSER

RH

BACK IN THE BOTTLE

CLIMBING THE CHARTS
PANEL ALMOST CLOSED
RILEY GREEN TOUR FALL 2026

"ONE OF THE MOST CRIMINALLY UNDERRATED ARTISTS IN MAINSTREAM COUNTRY MUSIC"

WHISKEY RIFF

"ONE OF THE BEST VOICES IN THE GENRE"

RollingStone





Trey Pendley

• **Jordan Davis**, "Turn This Truck Around": "Jordan Davis scored his 11th No. 1 single with 'Turn This Truck Around' and is gearing up for his next chapter with new music arriving late this summer. Continuing his standout run of releasing hits, the upcoming release is one fans won't want to miss."

• **Keith Urban**, *Flow State* (June 12): "Keith Urban is setting sail into summer with the release of his yacht rock covers album, out now. Putting his signature spin on some classics of the era, the project delivers laid-back vibes, and just enough breeze to make you want to buy boat shoes."

• **Parker McCollum**, "Killin' Me": "Fresh off his ACM win for Album of the Year, Parker McCollum keeps the momentum rolling with his current single, 'Killin' Me.' The Texas native continues to prove why he's one of country music's most consistent hitmakers."

• **Luke Bryan**, *Signs* (Sept. 18): "Luke Bryan is climbing the charts with his latest single, 'Country And She Knows It,' and will release his new album on Sept. 18. With another big season ahead, Bryan continues to deliver the crowd-pleasing hits fans know and love!"

• **Jon Pardi**, "Boots Off": "Jon Pardi is keeping the good times rolling with his current single, 'Boots Off,' and has more new music on the way soon. Blending his signature honky-tonk swagger with modern country energy, Pardi continues to carve out his own lane."

• **Vincent Mason**, "Wish You Well": "Vincent Mason is making major noise with his debut single, 'Wish You Well,' earning his first Top 15 hit. With more new music arriving throughout the year, the rising artist is quickly becoming one to watch in country music."

NASHVILLE HARBOR

• **Riley Green**, "Think As You Drunk" (out now): "On the heels of another No. 1 single ['Change My Mind'], Riley brings the fun with his summer smash 'Think As You Drunk' from his upcoming album, *This Is Me*, coming Sept. 18. Fans and programmers are both talking about this being the perfect song to kick off the summer. Expect the five-time ACM Award winner to keep dropping new music as summer heats up." –SVP **Ryan Dokke**

• **Greylan James**, "Water At A Wedding" (out now): "One of the most talked about up and coming young artists constantly keeps fans on their toes with his innovative ideas and turn-of-phrase lyrics paired perfectly with his hooky melodies. The ACM Award-winning songwriter delivers a track perfectly crafted for Country radio audiences. This song connects, is growing its streaming audience while already showing a fantastic research story (testing Top 10 in Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Houston and more)."

• **Caroline Jones**, "You're It For Me, Honey" (out now): "Caroline's latest release with Nashville Harbor Records & Entertainment is an authentic love story told with a beautifully nostalgic melody. Caroline continues to reach an adult audience with her relatable lyrics and musical sensibilities. She keeps going and growing, always elevating. Caroline will be criss-crossing the country this summer as a member of the Zac Brown Band, while also working in her own headlining tour dates."

QUARTZ HILL

• **Joe Nichols**: "Exciting, fun, important new music is on the way from Joe this quarter including a new single that will have you singing along to the first time you hear it! A new EP is also scheduled this quarter." –SVP/Promotion & Marketing **Bill Macky**

• **Matt Cooper**, "Highs & Lows": "Matt's current single, 'Highs & Lows,' continues to make an impact and resonate with listeners. Matt has an album scheduled for later this quarter and his song, "24," was just released digitally."

• **Lakelin Lemmings**, "Get Around Boy": "Lakelin's debut single, 'Get Around Boy,' is just getting started

and is already reacting. She is 19 and wise beyond her years as you can hear in her latest digital release. Her debut album will come out later this quarter."

• **2 Lane Summer**: "They are busy working on new music and playing shows. New releases are coming in August and September."

RECORDS NASHVILLE

• **Mack Geiger**, "String By" (out now): "Mack's debut single to radio, 'String By,' is out now, as he just wrapped up his first ever US shows. Fresh from Australia, Mack also recently released his debut EP. Look for a US tour announcement for this fall as well as some new music." –EVP/Promotion & Commercial Strategy **Josh Easler**

• **Koe Wetzal**, "Hurts Like You" (out now): "On the heels of the most played song of the year last year, 'High Road,' Records Nashville is continuing our radio promotion partnership with Columbia Records with 'Hurts Like You' out at radio now. Koe will be touring in a major way this year. Hope to see you at a show."

• **Ty Myers**, "Thought It Was Love": "Ty Myers returns to Country radio, going for adds this summer with 'Thought It Was Love,' which has already amassed over 268M worldwide streams. Ty is currently in Europe wrapping up his global stadium tour with Luke Combs before coming home to headline this fall, wrapping with a show at his hometown arena, The Moody Center in Austin."

• **George Birge**, "Ride, Ride, Ride": "It's looking like four hits in a row for George, as 'Ride, Ride, Ride' approaches Top 10 and beyond. He's wrapping up supporting Darius Rucker this summer, then rolling back into headline shows."

• **Emily Ann Roberts**: "Emily is wrapping up her next project set for release this fall, Look for her on the road with Thomas Rhett, Cody Johnson and her own headlining shows."

RED STREET

• **Taylor Austin Dye**, "Bad Drunk" (Aug. 28): "We continue to release new music on TAD including 'Bad Drunk' out Aug. 28. 'Man For That' continues to grow at radio as a fun, up-tempo summer anthem." –SVP/Promotion **Andy Elliott**

• **Walker Montgomery**, "All Night Long Left" (June 26): "Look for 'All Night Long Left' as Walker continues to write and record new music while playing dates all over the country."

• **Kaleb Sanders**, "Over My Hometown" (July 10): "Kaleb has been in the studio with Jay DeMarcus and will be releasing new music over the next few months, including 'Over My Hometown.'"

REVIVER

• **Ian Flanigan**, "The Man My Mama Raised": "2026 has seen Ian touring coast to coast across our great country to support his latest album, *The Man My Mama Raised*. 'Long Way Home,' the first single, dropped June 2 with seven new songs on their way before the close of 2026." –Founder/Pres. **David Ross**

• **Brooke Moriber**, "Golden Girls" (Oct. 2026): "Brooke has been writing up a storm. Keep an eye out for her new collaboration with The Heels, 'Golden Girls,' dropping in October. Additional music co-written with Charly Reynolds and others is currently in production."

RIVER HOUSE

• **Chevas Phillips**, *Your Kingdom Come* EP (June 26): "With a voice rooted in gospel, country and lived experience, Chevas Phillips delivers an introduction full of conviction, heart and unmistakable purpose on her debut EP." –GM and VP/Streaming & Radio **Lance Houston**

• **Tyce Delk**, *Everything But Gone* EP (June 26): "New Mexico native Tyce Delk brings a fresh, emotionally direct voice to country music, pairing small town storytelling with songs that linger long after the last note."

• **Dan Alley**, *Keepin' On* LP (Sept. 25): "A trusted songwriter for Luke Combs and Hudson Westbrook, Dan Alley's *Keepin' On* is grounded, heartfelt and built on the kind of honest country music that never tries too hard."

• **Matt Lang**, *Ain't That Bad* LP (Oct. 23): "Canadian Matt Lang leans into big hooks and a hard touring spirit on *Ain't That Bad*, a full length concept album that is a vintage-flavored, country-fueled soundtrack to one unforgettable night out."

SADDLE UP

• **Tori Rose**, "South Of Southern" (June): "Current focus single, 'South Of Southern,' impacted Country radio June 15 as Saddle Up Records debut artist Tori Rose builds momentum with additional music planned through 2026." –SVP/National Promotion & Marketing **Chele Fassig**

SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

• **Luke Combs**, "Be By You": "'Be By You' is the follow up to Combs' 22nd consecutive solo No. 1, which marked him as the first artist ever to have two different solo songs simultaneously top the *Billboard* and Mediabase Country radio charts."

• **Megan Moroney**, "Beautiful Things," "Medicine": "Following her fourth No. 1 record, Moroney has two songs rising up the charts while she dominated on her sold-out *Cloud 9 Tour*, the heartwarming fan favorite 'Beautiful Things' and upbeat country jam 'Medicine.'"

• **Kane Brown**, "Woman": "Fresh off his highly talked about ACM Awards performance of 'Woman,' the single is heating up the charts. The fun, energy-packed track follows Brown's 13th No. 1 single at radio."

• **Brandon Lake** feat. **Cody Johnson**, "When A Cowboy Prays": "The six-time Grammy winner teams up with ACM Entertainer of the Year Cody Johnson for a raw and relatable country ballad that captures the emotional grit and grace of honest faith."

• **Graham Barham**, "Breakup (Down)," *Club Country* (out now): "'Breakup (Down)' out now, was second most-added at impact. Debut album *Club Country* out now. 'A Louisiana singer with a boisterous and wry sense of humor.'" –*The New York Times*

• **Zach John King**, "Get To Drinkin'": "'Get To Drinkin' is climbing the Top 25 at radio now. 'The jittery rhythm and his plaintive delivery both work splendidly here.'" –*MusicRow magazine*

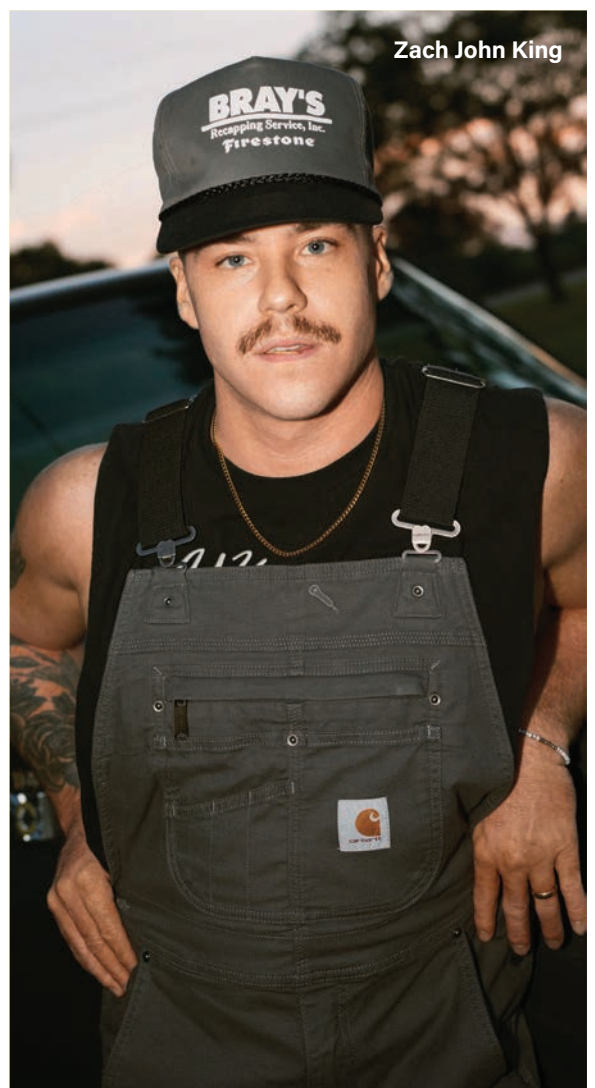
• **Corey Kent**, "Rocky Mountain Low" featuring Koe Wetzal, "Empty Words" (6/15): "'Rocky Mountain Low' featuring Koe Wetzal is in the Top 10 at radio. New track 'Empty Words' impacted radio June 15."

• **McCoy Moore**, *Sunshine State*: "New album *Sunshine State* out now; debut radio single coming later this year. 'Blending the emotional honesty of Keith Whitley with the sun-soaked nostalgia of Kenny Chesney, Moore's sound feels both timeless and fresh.'" –*Entertainment Focus*

• **Old Dominion**: New music coming soon.

STONE COUNTRY

• **Ben Gallaher**, *Time*, "I'll Take You": "Ben's new album, *Time*, is out now and is anchored by his new single, 'I'll Take You,' which Ben recently performed on *The Kelly Clarkson Show*. Ben also just released a very unique, acoustic performance of 'The Star Spangled



Zach John King

MACCK GEIGER

DEBUT EP

**WALK A STRAIGHT LINE
OUT NOW**



Banner.” –SVP/Promotion & Marketing **Bill Macky**
 • **Spencer Hatcher**: “With more than 72 million organic views on TikTok and more than nine million likes, Spencer Hatcher is quickly becoming a household name. New music is on the way, including a new single for Country radio this quarter.”

STONEY CREEK

• **Jelly Roll**: “Jelly Roll is currently on tour with Post Malone and headlining his *Little Ass Stadium Tour*. He’s in the studio finishing up new music that we look forward to releasing very soon. New Jelly music is on the way.” –VP/Innovation & Audience **Adrian Michael**
 • **Parmalee**, “God Knew Better”: “Parmalee looks to keep their title of most played Country band of the decade with the follow up to their four-week *Billboard* No. 1 single with the release of ‘God Knew Better.’ Team SCR looks forward to delivering their sixth straight No. 1 on this new single.”
 • **Atlas**, “Hold My Liquor”: “After months meeting with radio and streaming, Atlas made an impact with his new single ‘Hold My Liquor’ earlier this month. With key festivals and dates with Russell Dickerson this summer, Atlas says, ‘Everything I write either helps me work through something or tells a real story from my life.’”
 • **Drew Baldridge**, “Rebel”: “Drew Baldridge is poised to have a very big year! Drew’s new single, ‘Rebel,’ is the debut single from his new album coming this fall. You can catch Drew sharing his new music while he is out on tour with Luke Bryan.”
 • **Lanie Gardner**: “We have Lanie Gardner visiting radio and out on tour with Luke Bryan and Ty Myers while she is in the studio working on new music.”
 • **Carly Pearce**, “If I Don’t Leave I’m Gonna Stay”: “We are so excited to be working with Carly Pearce as she releases her first album, *Honest Woman*, with BBR Music Group/BMG Nashville. If the sultry ‘If I Don’t Leave I’m Gonna Stay’ with Riley Green is any indication, this is poised to be her best album yet.”

TRIPLE TIGERS

• **Ian Munsick**, *The Mountain Goat* (Aug. 21), “Love Is Blind”: “In his fourth studio album and first for new label, Triple Tigers, Munsick stays true to his western form in title but pushes boundaries in sound and production – as a co-producer again. Ian often says, ‘country needs more fiddle.’ ‘Love Is Blind’ fulfills that promise as he continues his quest to ‘bring the West to the rest.’ ‘Love Is Blind’ marks his biggest add day at Country radio to date!” –VP/Promotion **Raffaella Braun**
 • **Scotty McCreery**, *15* (July 17): “In celebration of McCreery’s *American Idol* win 15 years ago comes retrospective project *15*. Complete with his seven No. 1 hit songs, fan favorites, classic covers and, finally, an often requested collab on ‘Your Man’ with Josh Turner.”
 • **Ella Langley**, “I Can’t Love You Anymore” with Morgan Wallen: “With four-chart toppers in a row, including the record-breaking ‘Choosin’ Texas,’ there is no artist hotter than Ella Langley. Her current single, ‘I Can’t Love You Anymore’ with Morgan Wallen, is screaming up the charts.”
 • **Russell Dickerson**, “Worth Your Wild”: “‘Worth Your Wild’ is Dickerson’s follow-up to his record-breaking ‘Happen To Me.’ It checks all the boxes of an RD party anthem. *Russellmania* has smacked down iconic venues this summer, including Red Rocks, The Greek, Ascend Amphitheater and many more.”
 • **Shane Profitt**, “Long Live Country”: “Shane Profitt’s anthemic ‘Long Live Country’ showcases exactly that

– a Columbia, TN, native living the life he sings about. He brings authenticity to every song he sings, and this undeniable track is a perfect addition to summer playlists everywhere.”

WARNER RECORDS NASHVILLE

• **Ashley McBryde**, “What If We Don’t” (out now): “‘What If We Don’t’ is ‘... a simply brilliant piece of songwriting. Chilling, stark, and utterly magnificent. The ballad and her performance seethe with authenticity. This is one of our finest singer-songwriters at the peak of her powers.” –*MusicRow*
 • **Bailey Zimmerman**, “Chevy Silverado” (out now): “‘Chevy’ continues to research and rise up the *Country Aircheck* chart. After its peak, look for another single from a brand new project coming soon.” –VP/Radio **Tom Martens**
 • **Braxton Keith**, *Real Damn Deal* (out now): “On the strength of his debut album, *Real Damn Deal*, Braxton Keith is on a Gen Z crusade to conquer country music. His sound is rooted in an earlier age, and he avoids many of the trappings prevalent among many of his country contemporaries. He sings with swagger but avoids promoting cartoonish masculinity (when he’s cocky, like in this album title, it’s with a wink). His instrumentation isn’t overproduced, nor is his voice dripping with autotune ... the record is full of the classic tear-in-my-beer country songs that George Jones might’ve sung and that Strait still sings.” –*Texas Monthly*
 • **Chase Matthew**, “Holdin’ It Down” (out now): “The follow-up to his multi-week No. 1 smash, ‘Darlin’,’ Chase’s current single, ‘Holdin’ It Down,’ continues to climb the chart as his fastest-rising single to date. Catch him on the road with Jason Aldean this summer.” –VP/Radio **Anna Cage**
 • **Cody Johnson**, “Horseback” (out now): “Ladies and gentlemen, your 2026 ACM Entertainer of the Year! Coming hot off the heels of a No. 1 single and the industry’s biggest honor at the ACM Awards, Cody Johnson proves that you don’t have to trade grit for greatness. Watch for his next radio single, ‘Horseback,’ premiering across all Country music chains and DSPs in June!” –EVP/Radio & Commercial Partnerships **Kristen Williams**
 • **Cole Swindell**, “Girl Dad” (out now): “‘Girl Dad’ appropriately launched with radio world premieres and immediate airplay Father’s Day weekend. This song reminds the world that Cole Swindell is one of the format’s best songwriters as he transcends into the next era of his career – embracing the joy that comes with being a ‘Girl Dad.’” –Williams
 • **Colton Dawson**: “I am thrilled to introduce you to Warner Records Nashville’s newest signing, Colton Dawson. Colton is an artist who represents the next generation of country music ... rooted in tradition, driven by passion and committed to the musicality and songwriting that built country music’s greatest artists. Mark my words, he IS the next big thing.” –Williams
 • **Dan + Shay**, “Say So” (out now): “Dan + Shay’s ‘Say So’ is climbing the chart with a timely, powerful message. It sets the stage for their most personal album yet. *Young*, the duo’s sixth studio album, is out 8/21. The *Young Tour* kicks off in September and runs through the fall.” –Sr. Dir./ Radio Syndication & Market Strategy **Andy Flick**
 • **Gabby Barrett**: “The multi-platinum singer/songwriter has more than one million plays at Country radio and will certainly add to that number with brand new music coming out in the second half of this year.” –Martens
 • **Gavin Adcock**, “Wannabe” (out now): “Gavin’s back



with 2026’s summer redneck anthem. Rowdy, uptempo, and setting the stage for his headline tour kicking off in July.” –National Dir./Radio **Paige Elliott**
 • **Hudson Westbrook**, “Painted You Pretty” (out now): “Following his debut No. 1 hit, ‘House Again,’ Hudson Westbrook’s breakout moment continues with ‘Painted You Pretty’. It has already been a huge year for Hudson, and his passionate fans will be thrilled with his fall headline tour plans.” –National Dir./Radio **Michael Chase**
 • **Ingrid Andress**: “The four-time Grammy-nominee and ‘one of the most acclaimed young singer-songwriters in country music this past decade’ is back with new music this summer.” –*Variety*

WHEELHOUSE

• **Blake Shelton**, “Let Him In Anyway”: “Fresh off a successful Las Vegas residency and *ACM Awards* performance, the future Country Music Hall of Famer addresses a relatable topic with his latest smash.” –VP/Promotion **Ken Tucker**
 • **Brantley Gilbert**, “Good Damn”: “The latest addition to the Wheelhouse Records galaxy of stars is enjoying success with his new single, which continues to gratify fans with its classic BG sound. Co-written with Hardy, the relatable tune is a sexy tribute to his wife.”
 • **Alexandra Kay**, “Straight For The Heart”: “Already a touring powerhouse, Alexandra is linking her impressive fanbase with radio stations across the country through her relatable music and shows. Connect the dots. AK’s fans are brand loyal.”
 • **Chayce Beckham**: “Look for rising star Chayce Beckham to follow up on the multi-platinum success of ‘23’ later this year. The California native continues to tour and introduce new music to a hungry fanbase.” **CAC**

St. Jude patient **Juan**



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RIVER HOUSE

ARTISTS



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RIVER HOUSE RADIO
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*THE ARTISTS, SONGWRITERS, AND STORIES
BEHIND THE MUSIC OF RIVER HOUSE ARTISTS*

TROY TOMLINSON

An Optimistic View

Having come up in the business under Country Music Hall of Famer Jerry Bradley at the legendary Acuff-Rose Music Publishing, Troy Tomlinson has a 40-year perspective on the dynamics that underpin country music. His 17 years at Sony/ATV and last seven as Chair/CEO for Universal Music Publishing/Nashville make him, arguably, the dean of Nashville publishing executives.

CA: The ongoing importance of radio to the country business seems to be a bit of an anomaly in the broader music industry. Is the country songwriting community similar in being set apart in some ways from what happens on the coasts?

TT: Yeah, I think it is. What immediately comes to mind in my career is everywhere I've traveled in the world for business, the first thing they say when they hear my voice is, "You're country." They'll reference GooGoo Clusters, Jack Daniels and country music – these century-old markers that make people who've never been here think of Nashville, Tennessee.

Part of the reason people want to join the parade here is that strength of Country radio – which remains a valuable promotion piece, if nothing else – and because it's a song town. Los Angeles is still a song town, too, but a lot of it is straight-up topline songwriters and writer-producers.

To paraphrase President Truman, reports of radio's demise have been greatly exaggerated. This town hasn't spent a lot of time worrying about that. As you say, the people coming here from each corner of America looking to succeed – if they

don't know it when they get here – very quickly figure out that what comes out this town musically and goes out via radio across the nation is very far from dead.

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With the advent of streaming, there was a shift from mechanical royalties on physical product to fractions of pennies from DSPs, which made radio even more crucial to songwriters. Are we still lopsided in that way, or is streaming income becoming more meaningful to rank-and-file songwriters?

It's better than it was 10 years ago, for sure, but there's still a lot of room to grow. The beautiful thing is we still have radio. I was the kid who called radio stations asking them to play "Sweet Home Alabama" or "Stairway To Heaven." And they'd answer, "We'll play it, but it's going to take us a few minutes." So I'd get under my blanket with my little transistor radio and one earplug waiting for that song they promised to play. Even today, when I get in my car on a beautiful day, I love to let the top back, put the windows down and listen to FM radio. There is a magic to that for guys like me ... probably different from the young kids who are using just the apparatus ... but it's still super important to me.

Back to your point, yes, we went through a troubling time at the beginning of streaming. We had to make agreements and compromises in order to benefit publishers and our writers more fairly.

The concern was that there wouldn't be a enough downstream revenue to sustain a middle class of writers or to bring up young ones. You were either going to be Ashley Gorley or Rhett Akins, or you were going to be waiting tables. Where are we on that today?

That was a real concern and it's certainly better than that. Labels are taking more shots than literally ever, and maybe that's playing the odds. I do think labels are being conscientious. They appear to have the resources to sign these folks and they seem to be putting marketing plans behind them. The beauty of a lot of these new kids who are getting signed is how many of them want to be on Country radio. You'd be surprised. They come in the room talking about it. Certainly there are some who are so immersed in streaming and looking at their numbers every week who may not quite feel the same way.

But often when we say to them, "We'd like to be your publisher. What would be one thing that immediately comes to mind that we can help you be a part of if we're lucky enough to sign you?" ... the response is, "I want Country radio." That's heartening.

Is the influence of the coasts a call to adapt to the new world of the consumer, or are we risking losing something in the traditional sense of the country music community? If the latter, are we hanging on to something that's going to inevitably slip away, or is Nashville riding out some challenges as it always has?

Like most things in life, I think it's somewhere in the middle, and I'm not the right person to speak about it because I am of the last 40 years. It's hard, but I'm trying desperately to adapt. We've always had to change, as you said. And just like recovery, there's no straight line for country music or any other genre, for that matter. I think we're doing a decent job as a community of trying to properly balance the things that caused this town to even exist for a moment. At the same time we know that we can't ignore other opportunities and methods to help writers and artists.

You've seen a lot in 40 years. What keeps you awake at night – either from worry or excitement?

The excitement part is when I can't go to sleep because I have heard a song that day that moved me at a deeper level than just listening. I'm a repeater, meaning that when I'm driving home after hearing a great song, I will listen to it for the entire hour on repeat. When I get home, I share it with my wife and, when I go to bed, I lay there with the AirPods in listening over and over. That keeps me up at night in a good way.

Where I have concern is for the young people getting in the business who don't know who they really are yet, or are in the midst of figuring that out. They're the ones who can get lost in the shuffle. Also, when I know that any of the employees from any of the companies that I've been a part of are desperately trying but struggling to win, that keeps me awake. I want them all to succeed. High tide lifts all ships, though I know that's not always possible.

I don't worry so much about the business. Publishing in particular is in a very healthy space right now. We have to still be careful and aware of ways that can change, as we've discussed. But there are very few nights where I toss and turn truly worried about the business, although I may worry about an individual person.



We hear there is less cross-pollination between creative camps – more silos. How does that affect the sense of community among songwriters?

About 20 years ago, I went out to Tom T. Hall's home. We sat around a fireplace talking and at some point, I asked what he thought of the music business as it was in that moment. As he was chewing his tobacco, he replied, "When you came up my driveway just now, was there

THE INTERVIEW

a boy mowing my yard?" I said, "Yes sir, there was." He said, "When I was a boy, I mowed another man's yard. In a similar way, every generation of songwriter has to write for its generation." Big statement for a guy that had seen more change than any of us. He could have been negative, a naysayer, yet he gave me an optimistic view of the future for country music.

The second one was when Vince Gill was being interviewed by Dan Rather, who asked, "Is today's country music your cup of tea?" Vince said, "Not so much, maybe, but I bet I wasn't Merle Haggard's cup of tea." That's very self-aware. Even though I suspect Merle would have actually loved Vince. But I get the point. I struggle with it, but I've tried to keep those stories in mind. I try to hold the camps or tribes – which is happening far more than we ever thought – with open hands. These men and women have the opportunity to get in a writing room with a hot or rising artist in a way that may benefit their families. Sure, I might prefer more collaboration across those lines, but I can't dislike something that has the potential to benefit songwriters, because I've built my whole career encouraging them.

Because of those dynamics, is there more opportunity today for artists who are willing to cut outside songs?

When I think of great singers looking for songs, the '90s immediately come to mind. But it goes even farther back into the '70s. Great artists might write a few songs for their albums, but they also had friends pitching them new stuff that they were often compelled to cut. Much of that goes by the wayside when you see a lot of writing done within the cocoon. That's a miss for our town. We still see artists like Cody Johnson, for example, who might write a few things, but his hits have largely been big old songs somebody pitched him.

We're slowly beginning to see more artists taking a shot at songs they believe in that they didn't write. So I have optimism – restrained optimism – but optimism about that. At a time when artists are doing social media posts multiple times a day, meeting with their teams and labels, rehearsing and touring, there's more they're trying to accomplish than ever before. They're covered up. There comes a point where having them in the room writing 15 songs becomes less viable. Johnny Cash wasn't worried about social media and, while he was able to write great material for himself, he cut a lot of outside songs, too.

How has interacting with record labels changed for you and publishers in general?

The specific piece of the relationship between us and A&R people – artists and repertoire – is different because of the weight that's on them with so many more signings. Again,

looking back the '90s, there wasn't a single day that our song pluggers weren't in A&R offices around town pitching songs. Now, it seems the duties encompassed in A&R are a much heavier load so that doesn't happen like it used to.

After the flood of algorithmic signings, how are we doing at artist development?

When we're looking at signing someone, the first thing has to be that we believe in them as an artist, singer or songwriter. Of course we utilize the available data tools to measure how they're doing, because that relates in general to the type of deal we're going to have to give

“When someone on the staff walks in and says they love this person, that's step one. Step two is asking if they can come in and play for the whole team. Then I ask our data guy to run me how they've done. But it has to start with belief.”

them. The better they're doing on their own, the better they're going to do with their advance. But metrics are point No. 3 for us. When someone on the staff walks in and says they love this person, that's step one. Step two is asking if they can get them to come in and play for the whole team. And if the team feels the same way, I ask our data guy to run me how they've done since inception, last 12 months and their three biggest songs. But it has to start with belief.

You're a past chair of the CMA board and have served on many others including Belmont University, Onsite and the BMI Foundation. Those are all a lot of work and the pay sucks. So, why?

When I got my first job in 1985, every record label executive seemed like a giant ancestral oak tree that I naively thought would always be there. I didn't understand giving back to organizations when I was young in the business. It probably took me five or six years before I realized that those giants were always giving back.

My first one was the Tennessee Entertainment Commission, which is a simple committee for film and TV that comes to the state. Governor Haslam was in office at that time and asked if I'd serve as a chairman. It

didn't pay anything, but it dovetailed with my business to some extent for film and television. That was the first, and then the longer you stay in this town you realize there are great needs. We're an affluent city, but we also have areas that aren't. Organizations like Onsite, Hope Clinic, Room in the Inn help people on the margins. Being able to give back, whether it's monetary gifts or being active on a board, brings me great joy.

You came up under Jerry Bradley, Donna Hilley, Connie Bradley and others – does it occur to you that you're now seen by many as one of those ancestral trees you mentioned?

I don't really think about me in relation to the people who came before, but I think of them a lot. I just listened to an almost two-hour podcast interview with Jerry Bradley that I'd never heard. I sat down on the weekend to listen, and I laughed and cried because he made such an impact on my life. I don't really think about me in that way. I still feel like I'm about 40 years old.

Those men and women that you named were builders. Until I got the Sony gig in 2002, I was innocent of a lot of it. After that, I began to see how being builders requires vision. I might have a little, but I don't have the vision that built this town. So I would never put myself in their category. Standing at a bit of a distance and watching them build and finish well, even when they struggled with illnesses, that is meaningful. I hope when my time comes to not be doing this, I'm able to finish the way they all did.

You talked about being a kid with a transistor radio. How did that lead you to a career in this business?

For Christmas one year, my grandparents bought a little turntable with the speakers inside the box and two 45s, because it could only play 45s. They were "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" by Jim Croce and "Joy To The World" by Three Dog Night. There were 20 or 30 of us in the room, I was sitting on the floor and one of my cousins moved the needle onto one of those two records. It was like magic. They weren't kids' songs, but they were written like nursery rhymes. As a child, I could see that bullfrog and all the fishes in the deep blue sea.

Sometime later I bothered my daddy and mama to death until they bought me a microphone because I thought I was Elvis. They didn't know you had to have an amp. They didn't know what an amp was, but I didn't care. I stood on the table and sang along to Elvis on the radio. Then my daddy bought me a full turntable with removable speakers you could stretch up onto the wall. He got me *Live At Folsom Prison* by Johnny Cash, *Ray Charles' Modern Sounds In Country and Western Music*, something from *Stoney and Wilma Lee Cooper*, a *Chimpunks Christmas* album and an Elvis soundtrack from the movie *Flaming Star*.

Like a lot of homes, we had unbelievably beautiful times and we had difficult times. I rotated between those two poles based on whatever was going on around the house. When things weren't good, I'd go to my bedroom, close the door, put on headphones and listen to music. And when things were beautiful, I'd jump on that coffee table singing and acting insane. That's how music got deep in my soul. Honestly, I think God gave me a love for music at that early age because he knew how difficult things would have been for me without it.

CAC



RADIO EXCLUSIVE

**DYLAN
SCOTT**

6 / 25

CODY JOHNSON



**2026 ACM AWARDS
MALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR
ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR**



**NEW ALBUM
BANKS OF THE TRINITY
FEATURING CURRENT
SINGLE "HORSEBACK"**

