

The Barn Dance Opera Journal

Volume 77

Official Publication of:
The Barn Dance Historical Society Inc.

A Not For Profit Organization

Barn Dance Website: www.thebardance.ca

Price: \$2.00 (tax incl.)

Vol. 74 2013

Summer Edition

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Question: Who is Elmer Purdon Anyway?

by Grant Heywood

Anyone who has attended any of the Barn Dance Shows usually recognize our resident emcee and Barn Dance host, Mr. Jim Swan. Jim became the new emcee of the newly revived Barn Dance shows at the request of Earl Heywood and the Barn Dance Historical Society. It only seemed fitting to have Jim host the live Barn Dance shows as he lived through and experienced the Barn Dance while it was still operating in late 50's and early 60's. Jim was also a popular radio announcer at CKNX Wingham and he was no stranger to the history of the Barn Dance. The original Barn Dance emcee, Johnny Brent, was a sports broadcaster at CKNX and he was also the Barn Dance manager.

Jim Swan has become a part of the Barn Dance heritage and has his own way of introducing the show just before the lights go up and the

music begins to play. Jim becomes nostalgic by taking the audience back in time to the original Barn Dance and how it would sound just before they went to a live broadcast over CKNX 920 Radio in Wingham. Back in those days, every Saturday night Barn Dance was broadcast over CKNX Radio. Jim preps the audience by attending to every detail as it was done back in the Johnny Brent days. He makes sure all of the musicians are ready and tells the audience to make as much noise as possible as this is going to be a live radio broadcast. Just before he does his countdown to starting the show, Jim will confirm with the CKNX Radio chief operator, Elmer Purdon how much time there is before they go to live radio. Elmer

Purdon ... who is that guy anyway?

There are many of those who will remember when the Barn Dance was broadcast live from some community centre or dance hall in Western Ontario. Everyone was engaged as Johnny Brent would prime the audience and ready the musicians, and then ... check with the person who is responsible for sending the live signal through the airwaves to the CKNX broadcasting tower, so those at home could enjoy the Saturday Night Barn Dance as well. Elmer Purdon was 'that guy' for many, many years. Sitting at a table on the floor near the stage with radio broadcasting equipment and a set of headphones on just waiting to give the emcee the cue to when the show was about to hit the airwaves.

Continued on Page 3



JIM SWAN



ELMER PURDON, nicknamed "THE JUDGE"

The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



Summer is finally here so bring on the sunshine, warm temperatures and rain. It seems like we've had a fair number of rainstorms since spring. But nothing like the flooding that occurred in Alberta. Glad to see so many people including local government, come together to help folks out during a difficult time. Weird weather seems to be the norm these days so no one is really safe from mother natures' wrath.

The summer concert and festival season is now upon us and there are a lot of musical events going on all around the area. Sometimes I think people become overwhelmed and usually end up having to pick and choose carefully what events they want to attend. Personally, I believe some of the concerts, festivals, theatre, and events have become so oversaturated and bloated that they sometimes overlap each other. Without good planning in advance, it makes it difficult to stage an event with so many other things going on. Let's face it folks, your entertainment dollar can only stretch so far.

In the world of rock & roll music, the Rolling Stones are on their 50th anniversary tour. Ticket sales weren't as brisk as expected due to some of the higher end tickets going for as much as \$2,000, falling a little flat. Hmmm I think a reality check is needed. The famous rock & roll band, Bon Jovi recognized this when touring Spain. They sent out a memo stating that the Spanish economy is in a slump, and many folks are unemployed. So they did what any prudent business person would do and made most of their concert tickets \$50 or less. Smart marketing I would say.

Recently, the legendary county singer Gene Watson performed to a near 'sold out' crowd at the Sanderson Centre in Brantford, while on an Ontario tour. Gene's band consisted of some of Canada's top award winning musicians. The show featured opening and supporting acts, Naomi Bristow and Paul Weber to make it a real drawing card. There were several country musicians and fans scattered throughout the audience that night and I never even got to see everyone there that I knew. Of course the show was absolutely fantastic. You might expect to pay more for such a first class evening of entertainment but \$35 a seat was the going rate. That was well worth the price of admission and they likely could have charged more, but I do believe the promoters knew their audience and what they could afford.

So let's talk some real sense. The financial gurus, bankers, and politicians can say that things are getting better in these recessionary times, but I beg to differ. They can spin whatever they want as most of them live a totally different lifestyle than the average person. Just ask Mike Duffy or Pamela Wallen. Taxes, fuel and housing costs continue to escalate and everyday purchases follow suit. Wages for the average Joe have not gone up in several years, that's if you are lucky enough to have a job. These are tough economic times and it makes it twice as hard for musicians and entertainers who are vying for that entertainment dollar.

Most musicians and entertainers play for a modest amount of money by most standards, and they do it because they genuinely love what they do and thrive on an appreciative audience. It's a 'win, win' situation when the music is great and the audience returns the favour with a round of applause. You already know that a Barn Dance performance is affordable and gives you the best bang for your buck at every Barn Dance show. Hope to see you at the next one.

The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment Museum

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(or leave a message)

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Winners at the 16th Annual

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Friday Evening Share the Wealth

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Saturday Evening Share the Wealth

Don Pullen, Clinton, Ont.

Winner of the Yamaha Guitar Package

provided by Ernie King Music, Wingham

Jim Campbell, R.R. 2, Shelburne, Ont.

**We thank everyone for
supporting our Event.**

2013 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
Sun., Oct. 20	Barn Dance Show - 2:00 p.m.	St. Anne's Centre, St. Thomas
Sun., Nov. 10	Barn Dance Show - 3:00 p.m.	Commercial Tavern, Maryhill
Sun., Aug. 3, 2014	Barn Dance Show	Wingham Homecoming (details soon)

Continued from Page 1

Elmer was a quiet man of few words. He worked in the technical dept. of CKNX and on weekends he was the chief radio operator, responsible for getting the Barn Dance out onto the radio airwaves. Elmer and his wife, Florence practically lived across the street from our home in Wingham, Ontario. I can well remember when mom and dad would have Elmer and Florence over for a social evening. Many times the conversation would revolve around Elmer & Earl discussing Barn Dance shows or talking shop about the radio and music business. They would also be invited when a Nashville celebrity such as Wilma Lee & Stony Cooper or Doc & Chickie Williams would come over to our house to socialize.

Elmer and Florence were wonderful 'down to earth' folks. Both Elmer & Florence have passed on years ago and had only one daughter, Gail. But Elmer's legacy continues to this day. If it wasn't for Elmer the show would NOT go on ... at least not over radio. So now that you know who Elmer Purdon is, you will have a little more insight when Jim Swan looks down from the stage and says ... "how much time do we have Elmer before we go to live radio?" Once the countdown commences from 10 to 1 that's when Jim says announces "From coast to coast, people like old time music most." I can still see Elmer smiling, and beaming with pride, knowing that he had done his part to promote Canada's Largest Travelling Barn Dance.

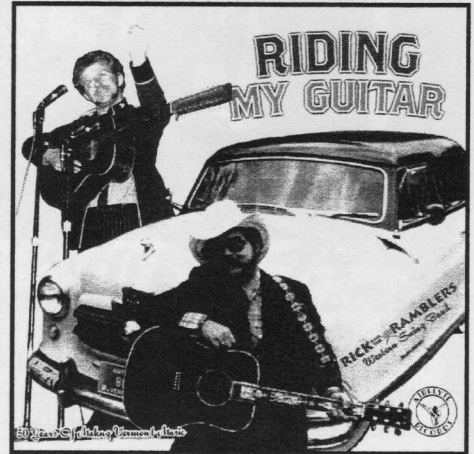
FEATURE C. D. REVIEW

"Riding My Guitar"

Rick and The Ramblers Western Swing Band

If you're going to celebrate 50 years in the music business as Rick Norcross has done, then releasing a c.d. of the best tunes you've got is the way to go. Rick & The Ramblers, a western swing band from Vermont, have been playing and touring for several years now. Their sound is as retro as taking a happy long ride in their original 1957 green Flexible Starliner bus nicknamed 'The Pickle'.

Bandleader, Rick Norcross is pretty much a musical treasure in his native



Vermont and has been through several versions of Rick & The Ramblers. This latest outing puts them right on top of their game. The songs are well chosen and the production is the best I've heard from them yet. I think this is their 4th or 5th c.d. release and the direction of the music weaves happy originals with nostalgic swing style music featuring several vocal stylings from at least 3 or 4 lead singers including Rick. The Ramblers are one hot band and feature Rick Norcross on guitar & vocals, Taryn Noell vocals, Charlie MacFadyen piano, accordion & lap steel guitar, Doug Reid fiddle, Buck Maynard vocals & lead guitar, Dave Rowell vocals & bass guitar, and Brett Hoffman on drums. The instrumentation is never overdone. The band, certainly did their homework and were able to marry the music with good production values truly capturing the essence of the sound from the swing era. The c.d. has a happy upbeat feeling that puts you in a good mood. It's hard to not play it more than once.

Some of my personal favourites are the classic, Back In Baby's Arms, The Way We've Always Done It (a Rick Norcross original yee haw!), and Taryn Noell does a wicked version of the Bobby Emmons/Chip Moman classic Wurlitzer Prize. Another Rick tune, 'Walkin' Around Money' is a testament to Rick's well known 'tongue in cheek' lyrics. Rick Norcross was a folkie when he started out and even played Yorkville Village in its' heyday in Toronto. He's hung out with the likes of Tommy Overstreet, Hank Thompson, Emmylou Harris and Paul Simon, just to name a few. Rick has toured Europe, held a job with the Tampa Tribune in Fla. where he was the entertainment editor chasing down interviews and hob knobbing with the likes of Janis Joplin, Elton John, and even Elvis. Many of Rick's black & white poster pics from those days have been showcased in the area's art galleries. Even a hard cover book has been released about Rick's illustrious career. Man, this guy has done it all ... almost.

Knowing Rick as a friend for several years has been a delight and I couldn't be happier to see his career still keep blossoming in the Green Mountain State that he loves so dearly. He really knocked this one out of the park. There are 12 songs on this c.d. and almost every one is a gem and fun to bop along to. I'll be driving down to Vermont to catch Rick and the Ramblers in concert this summer. I know what c.d. I'll be playing while I drive down the road with a smile on my face. Go visit their website to get the whole story and more rickandtheramblers.com

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by Lynn Russwurm

At this writing, our Sunday night concerts at Gore Park in Elmira are well on the way. Although a little belated, following is a schedule of our concerts -

June 2 - Bluegrass Edition
 June 9 - Grassland
 June 16 - Harold MacIntyre
 June 23 - Ephraim Frey & Ole Tyme Country
 June 30 - Rhyme 'N' Reason
 July 7 - Randy Morrison & Flatt River
 July 14 - Rural Appetite
 July 21 - The Two Plus Who
 July 28 - Rescue Junction
 Aug. 4 - The Muir Family
 Aug. 11 - Gerald Davidson & The Country Versatiles
 Aug. 18 - U-Turn
 Aug. 25 - Paul Weber
 Sept. 1 - Grass Tax

Concerts run from 7:00 to 9:00, weather permitting. These concerts are free to the public, with a collection taken up for the band. Your generosity is responsible for the high caliber of entertainment we have been able to attract. The mix of country and bluegrass has worked well.

There are often surprises, as in the instance of Harold McIntyre. Harold brought along a young man by the name of Colin Butler as an added attraction. Now the name Colin Butler may not mean anything to you, but Colin has been around our country music for many years. At a young age of about 10 he recorded two albums on the Marathon label that were well

received. Then in his teen years he did some more recording under the alias of Larry Lee, of Larry Lee & The Leesures fame. From there he hooked up with Harold MacIntyre and worked the road with Harold for many years as a bass player. Presently he's based in Hamilton, doing free-lance work, something tells me the saga of Colin Butler is not over, with his talent and wonderful voice, I'm sure Colin will get the recognition he deserves. Colin Butler has paid his dues.

Also on the schedule you will see The Two Plus Who. This happens to be myself on stand-up bass and Bob Tremblay on dobro. We finally had to come up with a name, as we had been working at the Top End Restaurant in Neustadt on a more or less monthly basis for about two years. The Plus Who includes a stable of about a dozen vocalists who we can call on. That way we always have a fresh show whenever we're in Neustadt. Among the singers who have appeared with us are Grant Heywood, Harry Busby, Jimmy Phair, Bruce Robertson, Bob Montgomery, Al Widmeyer and Lance Russwurm. As with most musicians today, both Bob and I are also filling in with other bands. A case in point is Grassland. Bob is part of their group, playing the bluegrass festival circuit throughout the sum-

mer season. This group comes together from various parts of Ontario such as Blind River, London and Kitchener which makes special rehearsals a necessity. So getting together for rehearsals gave them a chance to play our Sunday night concerts. They also came to the Top End to do a special set with us, on that same week-end, what a blast that was.

At the present time we're at the Top End the second Saturday of every month.

As for myself, I fill in with several bands when they need someone including Ephraim Frey & Olde Tyme Country, also with Vern Brenneman & Green Hill. I also play guitar with The Barn Dance Band. Most Thursday nights I can be found at Paul Weber's Commercial Tavern in Maryhill, taking part in open mic night. Today it's the same with most musicians, playing with various bands, wherever there is work. Most have a regular band gig but jobbing around is the norm, rather than the exception. In the not too distant past when there was a bar or two in every town, bands were more stable, but today since those bars are gone, bands just don't have enough work to attract musicians on an exclusive basis.

I look forward to meeting and greeting some of you at some of these venues that still keep alive the real country music experience.



Left to right: Lynn Russwurm, Harry Busby and Bob Tremblay



Jon Finlan aka Stompin' Jon at Blyth Campout Weekend 2013.



Michael Warren at Blyth Campout Weekend 2013.



Lance Russwurm receiving the Pioneer Award at Blyth Campout Weekend 2013.

WHO WROTE THE SONG?

(Sweet Dreams)

No matter what year a song was written, or how many times a song has been recorded, songwriter/performer Don Gibson firmly believes a hit is a hit. Don Gibson wrote the song Sweet Dreams in 1955. Over the years it has been recorded by over umpteen different singers.

It was first recorded in 1956 by Faron Young and later in 1966 by Tommy McClain who sold close to a million records. In 1967 it was recorded by a symphony orchestra and has also been recorded by countless other country stars including George Jones, Brenda Lee, Ray Price, The Everly Brothers and many others. Even Emmy Lou Harris had a hit with Sweet Dreams in 1976.

Undoubtedly, the most popular recorded version of Sweet Dreams was by Patsy Cline. Somehow her delivery of the song seems forever embedded in people's memories. It is certainly a country music classic when it comes to ballads and has stood the test of time.

The western swing band, The Time Jumpers, from Nashville feature this song in their repertoire. Lead singer Dawn Sears has made this song a staple of the band and she is electrifying in her version of the song. Not to be out done, local country recording group The Western Swing Authority serve up a warm and tender version of Sweet Dreams as well. Lead vocalist Stacy Guse has made this song her own. If you get a chance to catch the band live (every 2nd Tuesday) at the Commercial in Maryhill, you will always hear Stacy belt out this all time country classic.

Although Don Gibson wrote the song Sweet Dreams in 1955, it wasn't until 1960 that he actually recorded it himself. Sweet Dreams has become a recorded hit for so many and it continues to be a timeless country music treasure.

... And now you know who wrote the song.

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Business Card Size -

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\$275.00 plus HST

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Country Music Memories



Del Reeves and Joe Firth at Beverly Crest Motor Inn, Edmonton in 1992.



Joe Firth and Tommy Hunter in 1977.



Freddie Fender and Joe Firth, at Ramada Inn, Toronto in 1976.

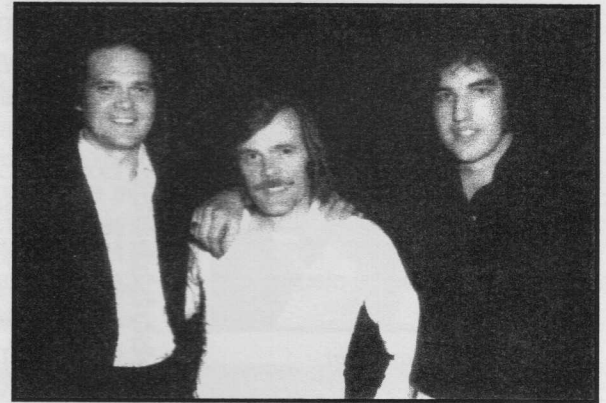


Joe Firth and Bill Monroe (The King of Bluegrass Music), at the Grand Ole Opry, Nashville, Tennessee in the 1980s.

Some of the people that have appeared with Joe Firth



Todd Boner, manager of Club Dallas, BoxCar Willie and Joe Firth at Club Dallas, Hamilton in 1981.



Joe Firth, Johnny Paycheck and Mike Weber at the Matador After Hours Club in 1975.



Left to right: Joe Firth, Al Cherney, Audie Henry and Gord Henry, following an arena dance at Grand Valley in 1974.



Paul Weber, Joe Firth and Mike Weber leaving for an East Coast Tour in 1975

COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

* **Sunday Night Concert** - Gore Park, Elmira, 7 to 9 pm. July 7 Randy Morrison and Flat River; July 14 Rural Appetite; July 21 The Two plus Who; July 28 Rescue Junction; Aug. 4 Muir Family; Aug. 11 Gerald Davidson and The Country Versatiles; Aug. 18 U = Turn; Aug. 25 Paul Weber; Sept. 1 Grass Tax. For more information contact Lynn Russwurm at 519-569-2386.

* **Jamborees** - July 11 to 14, Valley Bluegrass Festival, Renfrew. www.valleybluegrass.ca; July 12, Preston Springs Country Jamboree, Hastings www.prestonsprings.ca; July 25, Palmer Rapids Twin Music Festival www.palmerrapids.ca

* **Lindsay Country Jamboree** - July 18 to 21, highway 7 at 254 Angeline St. S., Lindsay. 1-800-954-9998 or 705-741-5097. www.lindsaycountryjamboree.com Thurs. to Sat. open mic 1 to 5. Rough camping, added entertainment Chuck Simms

* **Green Bush Bluegrass Campout:** July 18 to 21. Gates open July 16. North of Owen Sound. For info contact Dan Campbell 519-371-5037.

* **Gerald Davidson & The Country Versatiles** - Contact www.country-versatiles.com or email music550fair@hotmail.com. Gerald 519-539-2953.

* **Holstein Bluegrass Celebration:** Aug. 9, 10 & 11. Contact Bill Crooks 416-460-5489. Entertainment line up in previous issue.

* **Appearances by Scott Woods**, contact McLeod Music Productions, 330 Angus St., Fergus. Toll free 1-855-scottwoods, 519-843-8873. email info@scottwoods.ca www.scottwoods.ca

* **Appearances by Gary Boyle**, singer songwriter. www.cdbaby.com Phone 519-471-0655.

* **Bond Head Fiddle Club** - the fourth Tuesday of the month. Bring your musical instruments. Dancing. 7 p.m.

* **Aug. 24 Weekend** - Drayton Fair Grounds, camping available, hydro / water. BBQ Sunday; Dinner Saturday night. Dancing.

* **Conestoga Trail Bluegrass and Gospel Festival:** Princeton. Aug. 16 to 18. Phone 519-458-4515. email gerrfran@sympatico.ca www.conestogatrail-bluegrass.ca. Located on Hwy. 2 between Brantford and Woodstock. MCs Dan Bieman and Dan Joseph. Line up - Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver; The Bluegrass Martins; Mountain Faith; Lonesome Meadow; Rhyme N Reason; Rescue Junction; David and Grant. All day Sunday gospel music. The festival is a fundraiser for the Brant Community Health care system.

* **Appearances by Johnny Burke**, Aug. 3 Minden Hoedown, canoe fundraiser. Johnny Burke and Eastwind, Naomi Bristow. Doors open at 5 pm. 705-457-1009.

* **22nd Annual Classic Country Music Reunion and Jamboree**, Centennial Park, Trenton, Aug. 1,2,3 & 4. Legends, pioneers and new frontiers. Main stage entertainment Aug. 2 - CCMR All Star Band; Kierstyn Cross; Robin Edgar; Bonita Mercer; Mike Pollard and Christine Vaillancourt; James Ryce. Host Scotty Gartshor. Sat. Aug 3 - Dale Ducharme; Michelle Legacy; Pam Miller; Laura Power; Paul Wasson, guest TBA. Host Barb Grenier. Aug. 4 - Sun. am gospel show 11 a.m. 6:30 show - Amberley Beatty; Naomi Bristow; Dan Ducharme; Debbie McLean; Jamie Spurvey; Paul Weber. Host John Lester. Back up band Tim Sanders, Andy Schick, Frank Woodcock, Dusty King Jr. and Randy Morrison. Daily open mic 1 pm. Contact 705-878-3182. Also open fiddle jam / guitar workshop.

* **Rob and Linda's Old Time Country Music**, Oddfellows Hall, 42 Baqgot St., Brooklin, every Friday night 6:30 to 10:30. Contact Linda for upcoming shows and dates at 905-665-8687.

* **Barry Brooks Band** - has a jamboree the third Sunday of the month at Warminster Legion.

* **Pleased to inform**, that Rural Roots Music Commission has selected well known Michael T. Wall's latest CD

"From Newfoundland to Australis" as their International Ambassador of Music CD or the year for 2013. Way to go, Michael and all the best on your trip back to Australia in January 2014.

* **The Queens Bush Bluegrass Club**, has a jam session every Thursday at the Owen Sound Legion 7:30 to 10:30.

* **Appearances by Doreen Brown:** July 18-21, Lindsay Country Jamboree; July 13, invitation by Tracy at Gary Hoopers Barn, Uxbridge; Aug. 2, 3, 4, Classic Country Music Reunion, Centennial Park, Trenton; Aug. 9 - 11, Holstein Bluegrass Celebration, Love's Sugarbush, Holstein; Sept. 18, Bolton Community Centre; Sept. 10, Thornton Fiddle Club.

* **Aug. 1 - 5:** Boot Hill Country Jamboree, www.boothilljamboree.com; **Aug. 2 - 3** Flint Country Bluegrass Jamboree www.flintonrecreationclub.ca; **Aug. 18** - musicians corn roast 905-986-4437; **Aug. 22** - Baldwin Jamboree 905-377-9910; **Aug. 30 - Sept. 2** - Auction Barn Jamboree, Colburne, 905-355-2106; **Sept. 12 - 15** - Marmora Country Jamboree, 613-395-0774; **Aug. 15 - 18** - Havelock Jamboree, lineup in previous issue, 1-800-539-3353.

* **For a fun evening of open jamming** - Thurs. nights and live music Saturdays, Rusty Nail Restaurant, 2 Mill St. E., Tottenham. 905-936-9009.

* **4th Sunday of the month**, the Erin Legion presents an afternoon of dancing and entertainment of musicians and back up by the well known Dolsons.

*Have a wonderful, healthy
and Happy Country
Music Summer!!!*

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BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

When country music lost arguably its greatest voice ever with the passing away of George Jones on April 26, I thought back to when I first found him.

My Possum awakening came in 1996 when I purchased a copy of his MCA album *I Lived to Tell It All* from a used record store back home. I was blown away by what I heard. Before this experience, I was aware of Jones' legacy but the number of actual songs I was familiar with was limited. I knew "He Stopped Loving Her Today" but I think the songs I most associated with Jones were "Who's Gonna' Fill Their Shoes" and "The One I Loved Back Then (The Corvette Song)."

I wasn't prepared for the emotional impact and gravity of Jones' interpretation of Max D. Barnes' "Tied to a Stone" or Red Lane's "I Must Have Done Something Bad." I was floored.

Equally, impressive, however, was just how relevant and contemporary he

sounded singing tunes written by Billy Yates, Zach Turner, and Dean Dillon. It was clear that while country music had not heard the last of George Jones - neither had I.

I lost myself in his back catalogue. Like Dierks Bentley wrote in his special piece to CNN after Jones' death, getting George Jones isn't as simple as just listening to him. You have to hear him through your life experiences for his music to blossom into something other than just a song. Like the best of all music, Jones' material reached out and consoled. Everything he sang was run through a broken heart.

And if you didn't actually have a broken heart yet, Jones would offer to break it for you. Sit down, alcohol in hand, and listen to "A Good Year for the Roses" or "Our Bed of Roses" and try to keep it together. "The Cold Hard Truth" and "The Door" are just as deadly. The man could sing.

And so many of the country singers dominating the charts in the 90's were influenced by Jones: Randy Travis, Marc

Chesnutt, Joe Diffie, Sammy Kershaw. Vince Gill said, "George Jones sang country music better than anyone else ever." When asked who Johnny Cash thought was the greatest country singer, Cash said, "You mean besides George Jones?" Tom T. Hall said, "I've never talked to a country music performer who didn't say his or her favourite singer was George Jones."

Jones' 1999 album *Choices* only confirmed for me what everyone else, and Vince Gill, already knew. Gill said, "George was the gold standard for a country singer. That's how you do it right there. It never got any better, before or after."

In many ways country music begins and ends with George Jones. I realize that is a contentious statement, but I welcome the fight. I came to know his power and majesty a little late in the game, but I will always remember that 1996 Cheapo Records purchase in St. Paul, Minnesota that changed everything.

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