

# The Bridge Works<sup>®</sup>

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a celebration of the spirit of community within the creative process

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## A Bridge Of Personal Importance

I honestly don't remember not feeling some compulsion toward being a connector of some sort. When I spent that winter in bed listening to the radio, I remember my anxiousness for Dad to come home on weekends so I could share with him stuff I'd learned from such astute personages as Arthur Godfrey, Jimmy Durante, and Snuffy Jenkins, among others. If I learned something or if something made me laugh, the natural process was to share that experience. Maybe that was the foundation of my enthusiasm for entertainment -- it was the most dramatic sharing medium I had found.

Dad often already knew what I told him, but he never dismissed the info; he would simply add on to it and ask me if I knew something else. But, from time to time, I would get a sincere, "Is THAT right?" Wow, I just told my daddy something he didn't know. Like I say, Wow!!

'Twas a natural process to sharing with Daddy (or whoever else might give me the impression that they gave a rip) information about music and musicians. That got to be something of a game in high school when pal Larry Broome and I were basically listening to the same radio station but not always on the same days, so one of us might hear a new song or a new act "first." I couldn't wait to tell Larry about "the new boy from Memphis," as Sheriff Ed referred to Johnny Cash. Well, he'd already heard him, but that's okay; we started listening for new Johnny Cash songs. Larry could skunk me -- he could hear something once or twice and sing it back, albeit in a decidedly non-Johnny Cash tenor!! I had to wait till something appeared in COUNTRY SONG ROUNDUP and read the lyrics to learn them.

I discuss this mundane period of my life simply to demonstrate the depth and determination of my love for and involvement in country music. Too many acts for our space seared their presence into my consciousness, but, maybe with Larry's and then David Ayers' help,

I became more of a student of the music than a fan as such of any particular performer. Oh, I had my favorites, but that status did not consistently relate to the national charts; my adoration of Merle Travis (or of Tennessee Ernie Ford, for that matter) predated my hearing "Sixteen Tons" -- "The Muskrat Song" got radio play in Carolina when his "Folk Songs" album came out in '49, but not anything that might be construed as critical of "the company store."

So there we were, Me and Country Music. The Oddball And The Outcast. Out of the entire graduating class (in excess of a hundred and some) of Greenwood High School in 1958, only TWO seniors in the year book listed country music as something they liked. Yep, that would be me and a friend who eventually established her own niche in the music; she married a guy who turned out to be Randy Owens' uncle. Larry had already graduated and David was a year or so behind me.

It's kinda funny, looking back over those years from the balcony of a benefit show for Johnny Russell, sitting next to a young guy who knew every word of every song that Garth Brooks sang. Ah, the difference a couple of generations make.

I've learned a lot in the process of not being at least quite the oddball I was and country music definitely shedding its outcast demeanor, but maybe my most profound lesson concerns the fickleness of the general public -- hot acts inevitably become lukewarm, and all too often forgotten. Well, not to all of us.

I have lately connected on Facebook with a page entitled Owen Bradley's Quonset Hut, administered by Bill Cox, Alan Cofer, Kittra Moore, and Kent Blanton, and dedicated to the vast, rich history of that legendary facility in particular and the Nashville music community in general. Some 2500 Facebook users "like" that page, which means they have signed on, so to speak, and participate in some manner and/or degree, either by providing photos and information or contributing comments.

I expected the most fervent participants to be folks like me who were there during some period of the

next page, please

early Music Row days. Not necessarily so. A lot of the folks who comment regularly appear to be fans scattered literally around the world. They know the legends, of course, but they also know the acts who are generally described as "obscure" or "less well known" -- good examples of the latter are Kirk Hansard, a strong, dramatic singer of the 'Sixties who was on Columbia for a while and worked a lot of dates but never had any hits that make the difference between honkytonks and arenas. Also a favorite of the "Hut" folks is Margie Bowes, who won a Pet Milk Grand Ole Opry talent competition in the late '50s, and attracted a lot of attention, but no major hits.

My concern for remembering the "non-stars" has always been an element of who I am, but Owen Bradley's Quonset Hut has injected a new degree of energy and dedication toward bridging the memory gaps of the past participants in the music endeavor. My big argument with "the establishment" has long been that I don't think many people realize just how big this hillbilly music thing has been for a LONG time.

Oh, they know the numbers -- union memberships, corporate employment, the number of studios, booking agencies, management firms, and the like in the phone book, even record chart numbers and the sales numbers for the major triumphs, the current membership of the Grand Ole Opry, and such statistics, but they have no estimate of the numbers of local pickers, some of whom went on to regional or national prominence, who played on local radio stations even up into the '50s and '60s. If towns as small as Newberry, South Carolina, had Joe Morris And The Silver Dew Boys, before they moved to a bigger station in Hartwell, Georgia, it's a safe guess that MOST small stations in small towns across the country had live entertainment during a part of the day in the '30s and '40s.

AND, in the '50s, with the full advent of recorded broadcast content, a lot of the country disk jockeys played music on weekends or promoted dances with local bands or periodical concerts by various combinations of national and regional/local personalities. Indeed, Joe Morris returned to Newberry as a DJ after the live band era dissipated, armed with such humor as, "We dedicate this one to our loyal listeners, the Stone sisters, Kidney and Gall."

It would be fascinating to do a study of the impact some of those regional personalities had on the overall scope of country music -- Peanut Faircloth's role in Brenda Lee's connection in Augusta with Red Foley;

newspaperman Billy Dillworth's involvement up the Savannah River a bit, often in collaboration with high school teacher Fred Huff; the brilliant contributions of Connie B. Gay in D.C., Ramblin' Lou Schrivener in New York State, Roy Tessier in New England, Tex Davis in Norfolk, Buddy Starcher and surely others in Wheeling, Smokey Smith in Des Moines, Uncle Len Ellis in Hammond, Si Siman in Springfield, Bill Lowery in Atlanta ... we're talking huge documented impact.

Please do not consider the above a comprehensive list; they basically came off the top of my head to illustrate the magnitude, which is pretty personal to me, coming literally out of the Carolina hinterlands and helping Sheriff Ed Smith, our local thousand-watter country DJ who, indeed, promoted country and gospel concerts and actually hired me to work as a sound man for Pee Wee King and Cousin Minnie Pearl, both of whom remembered me several years later in Nashville.

Another facet of the country diamond that I got to witness upon my arrival in Nashville in 1965 were the many acts traveling out of here, working honkytonks, bars, school house shows, and, to borrow from Johnny Russell, the numerous "goat ropings" around the country that made them a veritable economic presence in small towns.

Yeah, I got to visit a few military bases during the couple of years I actively sought pickin' jobs, but I saw more small town life in Streeter, Quincy, Rapid City, Billings, and Sheridan, with "sit-down gigs" where we worked a week or two and got asked if we knew the other Nashville acts who had played their area. Some I knew, some I didn't, but add those names to the swirl of faces and names that literally plastered the walls at Tootsie's and were pretty constant at Linebaugh's, and I quickly came to understand that this country music thing was bigger than any of us, including me, understood, somewhat similar to the solar system in that it just seemed to keep on expanding.

The proportion of these people who were "successful" by Federal welfare statistics is not really pertinent; what counts is the underlying energy and spirit of the music and the mindset that keeps adjusting. Live radio, recorded radio, live television, syndicated television, network television, with the live performance presence moving like an amoeba, in here, out there, but still moving, and on to today's internet amalgamations. May we never lose our appreciation for the magnitude. ❖

*TheBridgeWorks* is issued from Nashville, Tennessee, monthly in a six-page mail version and an abbreviated cyberversion at <http://www.unclewilliamsplace.com>. For one year of the "whole show" on real paper delivered by the nice folks of the USPS, send \$15 to the address in the staff box, with checks payable to Bill Littleton, please. Sample issues are available on request.

## Recent Hollow Spots

### *Jimmy Dean*

I was a Jimmy Dean fan before "Big Bad John," even before the evening, afternoon, and morning television shows. His 1953 release of "Bummin' Around" was not only a chart hit but also the folks in Greenwood liked it and requested it, so Sheriff Ed played it. When I later saw him on that early morning TV situation, maybe 1955, he looked and WAS exactly what "Bummin' Around" had led me to expect. I'm so glad he got to know he was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame; I didn't know him well and wasn't around him a lot, but I never doubted his sheer love for life and music and talented people. Wow, what an impact he had.

### *Larry Jon Wilson*

There are two pages elsewhere in this edition devoted to Larry Jon, with profound thanks to Denise, but Ole Bill has a bit to say, too. First off, a salute to Fred Foster is in order -- without Fred's signing Brother Wilson to Monument, I MIGHT have connected with him through some odd quirk of osmosis of somebody at some point generating opportunity, but he had an album on Monument. Being the guy from PERFORMANCE put me in line to connect, especially as he played some dates in town. But a lot of stuff was going on and Larry Jon being the social creature he was, there was a time when we seemed to cross paths more often than I can recall performances.

One thing that the speakers Denise refers to omitted is Larry Jon's skill at a misplaced-if-not-lost Southern culinary tradition, whole hog barbeque. Maggie Cavender, on behalf of Alabama Band Music, bought the good-sized pig (two hundred pounds, I think), Billy Ray Reynolds provided the backyard space, and Larry Jon handled the cooking operation, which entails some twenty-four hours of shoveling hot coals into areas under the meat that needed more heat to keep a consistency that, over the needed hours, renders wonderfully succulent barbeque pork. Even with the greatest of comraderie, it is hot, tiring work, made viable by having backup for a nap or two along and a supply of cold beer. Just as slicing and serving time for the meat arrived, Larry Jon leaned his head on Connie's shoulder and announced, "Connie, I'm so drunk I can hardly stand up." However, he DID stand up and, several hours later as we were leaving in defense from the cold October wind, Larry Jon was rounding up a jam session in Billy Ray's studio down the hill. "Drinking life from a fire hose" is a comment you will find in Dee's report. He did, indeed.

### *Ben Hall*

Within my first couple of years in town, my growing circle of friends continued to grow as they told me

about THEIR friends, especially as I was writing more and more and they considered such info as "something you can write about," which it invariably was. Ben Hall was one of those folks. He was a friend of Weldon Myrick's in Texas and came to Nashville to build and operate a new studio, which he did, with me hanging out and literally holding stuff for him from time to time as we talked about music and Charlie Russell and the need to be willing to innovate. One pretty cool innovation was an OVERHEAD echo chamber, accessed by a spiral staircase, and disguised as an observation room for visitors, for which it was also used.

After Ben left The Row and the facility became known as Groundstar Lab under Ronnie Milsap's ownership, I lost track of Ben for a while. We reconnected when Jim McReynolds invited me to The Homeplace Studio for some overdubs he and Jesse were doing. In the conversation, Jim explained that the studio was literally in Ben Hall's home, converted from a carport, and "it's the best studio I know of for acoustic music."

### *Hank Cochran*

There's not a lot I can tell you about Brother Cochran that you either don't know or can find in any competent reference book on country music -- he is indubitably a giant; to borrow from Buddy Cannon in a Cindy Watts piece, removing his body of work from "Country Music" would indeed give it another look. Maybe that should inter into the Country Music Hall Of Fame consideration process -- folks who made a DIFFERENCE. I only had one conversation with Hank over the years, but it was a doozy. Helping Gus Barba research his Toostsie Bess project, I got him on the phone and straightened out a few details Gus needed.

I also got to see the man's heart. Almost as an aside as we chatted, he said, "I'm very blessed to have been part of all that was going on. You know something? I think about that every day, and I get chillbumps just remembering that incredible time. And I was right in the middle of it all. Whew!" ❖

## Feedback

I so appreciate your remembrance of Anthony Hill - so tragic, a hollow spot indeed. I love the concept of the "Bridge Builder Awards." *Kimberly Rockdale*

I like what you say about what has happened in the music business, and I really appreciate what you said about Charlie Lamb. I get credit for being hired at WSM for that original all night show and being on that shift when a contest named it "Opry Star Spotlight," but Charlie is the person who let me know that was coming about.

*Tom Perryman* ❖

## A Guest Review

### SoundCheck

**The Coleman Brothers and the Lone Star Boys** “*Second Time Around*” Song List (Original in bold): Gonna Paint the Town; Old, Old House; Blue Grass Twist; Lovin’ You Too Well; My Deceitful Heart; **Carli’s Fancy**; Sweet Thing; I Don’t Know What To Do; Somehow You Wouldn’t Let Me Love You; In Despair.

Ten traditional bluegrass songs on a CD is just what the doctor ordered for any fans craving a taste of the Monroe or Stanley Brothers. The Coleman Brothers, Craig and Corey, punch out the harmony only siblings can create.

The harmony is especially fine on “Gonna Paint the Town”, “My Deceitful Heart”, and “I Don’t Know What To Do”. “Sweet Thing” with a single guitar is an excellent song, and the harmony vocals come through perfectly. When Craig Coleman goes into his falsetto voice to create the Monroe sound on “I Don’t Know What To Do,” goose bumps are certain. Harmony singing is perfect on all the vocals and the vocals are perfectly understood, never overshadowed by instrumentation, for the makings of a fine CD.

Especially notable is the banjo playing of Lone Star teenager, Bryan Hollifield. He adds the Stanley, Scruggs or Reno licks necessary to make the song sound as it should. On “Blue Grass Twist” he does the double noting with all the sounds of Don Reno. Craig Coleman plays the mandolin reminiscent of Monroe.

Other Lone Star Band members include, Jay Hollifield, who provides a solid bass and takes a nice break when playing “Blue Grass Twist”. Corey Coleman provides some nice fiddle backup and Pat Stowers plays the West Texas traditional rhythm, adding some fine G-runs in just the right places.

Not only can these Coleman Brothers sing, they can also write songs. “Carli’s Fancy”, an instrumental, will stand in any bluegrass circle.

Excellent vocals with harmony, an original tune, very fine instrumentation, and a near perfect mix with plenty of bass makes this CD a must have for the traditionalist. Bill Monroe sat up and took notice of these boys once. If he was around he would be very proud and the first to admit that these boys were doing it right, the “Second Time Around”.

The Coleman Brothers are from Troup, TX which is NE Texas between Dallas and the Louisiana line. They have been playing together over 20 years. During their early years they played FanFest in Nashville and were on stage with Monroe quite a few times. Rounder Records gave them a look and talked a deal back in the early 90’s but they decided to go to college and start their families, which they did and now the Coleman Brothers are back on the road again. They recorded two CDs in the early years and, thus, this CD is named the “Second Time Around.”

For bookings, schedules and a complete list of recordings, contact: The Coleman Brothers, 12140 Yarbrough Ln., Troup, TX, 75789. Check out the new web site [www.thecolemanbrothersandlsb.com](http://www.thecolemanbrothersandlsb.com) or visit them on Facebook, or My Space.

*Reviewed by Roger Stowers from Kaybass.com ❖*

### An Important Book

Some of the books dealing with Country Music seem to assume that anything or anybody who is famous is interesting. "Smokey; The Legendary Life Of Iowa's 'Mr. Country Music,'" demonstrates that less famous people can be quite interesting and significant to the overall country music situation. Available for thirty dollars through Snowflake Enterprises, P.O. Box 43, Booneville, Iowa 50038, it was written by Smokey Smith's son-in-law, Terry Manley, over a period of twenty years, so the details have been checked and rechecked, the graphics have been placed appropriately, including an amazing photo of Luther Perkins sitting on the RIM of an open garbage can while eating backstage at a Smokey Smith Presents package show.

Smokey took his showbiz dreams to California from his native Nebraska and spent some time during

and after The War playing music in the burgeoning West Coast country music scene. You'll know some of the names and you won't know others, which authenticates the magnitude of what was going on. Opportunities to expand turned into potential disaster, but Smokey and Lucille Smith winding up in Des Moines is a classic example of making lemonade when Life hands us a lemon.

As we discuss in this issue's opening essay, a lot of performers became radio personality/DJs and/or local television performers and/or live performance promoters. Add tour bus operator to all of the above, and you can understand why he was essentially equated to country music in the Midwest.

A key historical element deals with the 1953 formation of the CMDJA, which ultimately led to the Country Music Association. And Smoke was right there! ❖

## Field Report

# Memorial Service For Larry Jon Wilson

July 3, 2010, First Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia  
by *Denise Williams*

I'd say there were approx. 100 in attendance, maybe a few more, 150 at the most I'm guessing. A gentleman played a grand piano as folks arrived. Three clergy (I think they were clergy, there was no program so I don't have names) took their place up front and one of them began the service. He spoke of being the youngest member of the clergy team there and remembered fondly the day Larry Jon came in to meet 'the new guy'. He said they shared a love of music so hit it off right away, he said he enjoyed talking about one of his favorites, John Prine, with Larry Jon. He said how much he loved the beautiful song, "Sapelo." After his remarks the congregation sang "Just A Closer Walk With Thee."

Then a Presbyterian Minister and 25-year friend of Larry Jon's spoke. He said they were close like family. Larry Jon had sang at his daughter's funeral and he had performed a marriage in Larry Jon's family. He shared his love and respect for the man. He mentioned that Larry Jon loved movies and if you were a friend of his, you had likely shared some, maybe many, movie nights with him.

He remembered how much Larry Jon had loved The Big Chill, being set in an area that Larry Jon loved. He spoke a bit on the term "Wilsonized" and how Larry Jon brought his particular gift to most everything he touched. He said Larry Jon was a 'doer' and urged us all to live fully in his example. Said Larry loved life, that he 'drank it from a firehose', and that our highest tribute to him should not be grief but rather gratitude.

He spoke on Larry Jon's Spirituality vs. Churchiness. Then in closing he shared Maya Angelou's When Great Trees Fall. (Bill's note: see page six.)

Then a video was shared, from a father and son who had been close friends of Larry Jon's. I believe their name was Blanchard but I am unsure. The father had been a lifelong friend, seems like he may have owned a restaurant but my memory is sketchy. The son may be a musician. Anyway, they both shared their love for Larry Jon and wished his family their deepest condolences.

Then the third clergy member spoke. He spoke well of Larry Jon's music, how it contained and expressed the South he knew so well. He, too, mentioned that although not a strict church-goer, that Larry Jon had it together Spiritually and had no confusion about whose he was. His words were full of respect, and he ended with

saying that early in their friendship he was so incredulous that Larry Jon's songs indicated he knew him so completely when they'd only recently been friends.

Then an older Black woman sang a beautiful rendition of "Farther Along," accompanied by the piano. It is always the music that dislodges the carefully maintained composure, and the tears did fall.

After the song, Tyler and his sister Kim went up to make their remarks. Tyler spoke first and started by thanking everyone. He told how Larry Jon had traveled to see his grandchild and then found himself being rushed to the hospital. He said with his voice breaking that Larry Jon had been so sorry to inconvenience them, and that brought what remaining tears I had managed to hold back.

He said he had asked his father while in the hospital if there was anything, anything at all he wanted that they could bring him. His answer was "Dr. Kervorkian." Laughter to ease the pain. Tyler told how as he was growing up it seemed like he was always missing his Dad, and later realized that his Dad was missing him, too. He thanked Larry Jon's friend Joy for all she had done for him and the family. He remembered attending this Church with his grandmother. He closed by saying that his father's life stood for love and urged us all to pass it all around.

Kim tearfully said she didn't know what to add, but she did remember fondly riding in a mail truck with her Daddy, and that he always had so many great friends. She thanked us.

Then the clergyman asked if there were any others who wished to share and one other fellow got up and spoke of Larry Jon's huge heart, adding that if Larry Jon is in heaven, he had to figure out a way to get there, too.

Larry Jon had been cremated and the remains were interred there in the Church's Memorial Gardens. Those who wanted to view that then joined the family outside for that brief part of the ceremony. We waited in the Church's rotunda to pay our condolences to the family. I hugged Kim and told her her Dad had played in our living room in April. She said he was good at that, playing in people's living rooms.

Tyler was surrounded by friends, magnetic smile like his Dad's, and when we finally made our way up to him he hugged me warmly. I told him who we were and that we admired his father so much and that we represented Doug and a group of music lovers who couldn't attend. He thanked us for what we do, the house concerts, and said he'd stay in touch. Little Graham Tyler Wilson is a beautiful baby boy and slept peacefully through it all.

I realized I have come to an age where I sort of 'get' funerals. I hated them as a young person and avoided

several I should have attended because I just found them torturous. I have come to feel their purpose, felt the closure they can at least mark a start to. Perhaps that officially makes me one of those folk that Larry Jon called himself and spoke of often, a Geezer!

So thankful I got to know you just a little bit, Larry Jon Wilson, you are forever in my heart. Love, Dee ❖

*Bill's Note: we could have condensed the Maya Angelou poem to the right so that it would fit our space by changing the line structure, but line structure has a particular purpose for poets, which I respect. So what we did was leave out two internal units that elaborated on falling trees and their impact on creatures of nature. I chose to leave the first verse of that section because the analogy is so wonderful, but, prodded by space restrictions, our point at hand was to get on with the latter two units. We did not obtain formal permission for this portion of Maya's wonderful poem, entitled, for the record, "When Great Trees Fall." Dee found the text on the Internet and included it in toto in her posted remarks. We DID obtain permission from Dee for this reprint and convey the gratefulness of many of Larry Jon's Nashville friends for representing us so lovingly.*

## Breaking BIG News

The Country Music Hall Of Fame induction ceremony for Don Williams, Jimmy Dean, Ferlin Husky, and Billy Sherrill has been set for October 24, which you may already know. TWO concert dates, October 20 and 21 have now been set for the Ryman, bringing Don out of retirement during the week of the CMHOF induction. How appropriate. I have no information concerning ticket access at this point, but you just might want to pencil in the dates on your calendar. Sure hope I get to be there. If not, I've got that hillside in Tulsa etched in the gray matter of my brain!! What an experience.❖

When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down  
in tall grasses,  
and even elephants  
lumber after safety.

. . .

Great souls die and  
our reality, bound to  
them, takes leave of us.  
Our souls,  
dependent upon their  
nurture,  
now shrink, wizened.  
Our minds, formed  
and informed by their  
radiance,  
fall away.  
We are not so much maddened  
as reduced to the unutterable ignorance  
of dark, cold caves.

And when great souls die,  
after a period peace blooms,  
slowly and always  
irregularly. Spaces fill  
with a kind of  
soothing electric vibration.  
Our senses, restored, never  
to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be  
better. For they existed. ❖

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