

# THE BIG ONES

## Nine Huge Moments In CRS History

As CRS-38 opens in Nashville, the seminar is comfortably ensconced as the genre's single most important industry event. Most of that significance is due to the vital connection between Country radio and Nashville's music community, and the annual meeting of the two has been the occasion of many a memorable occurrence. Some have shaped the seminar, others changed the format itself, and a few changed people's lives. All of them sent attendees home with a story to tell, and brought folks back the next year in hopes of catching their own magic moment.

### 9 STAR GRAZING Country's Best & Brightest In Attendance

For some it was **Garth Brooks** keynoting the 1998 seminar before jetting off for a *Saturday Night Live* appearance. Others point to his stripped down ASCAP luncheon performance in 2001, during which Brooks referenced

the 1990 CRS performance at which he introduced "Friends In Low Places" to Country radio. The list goes on, **Alan Jackson** recounting his radio successes during Super Faces 2000. **Toby Keith** announcing he was leaving Universal to form his own label (see page 34). The old Artist-Attendee cocktail receptions at which you couldn't turn around without bumping into somebody famous.

**Keith Urban** with **Dolly Parton** and **Ronnie Dunn** last year. Inevitably it seems, CRS attendees travel home with fond memories of seeing one of Country's biggest stars because those artists continue to participate in the event — even when they're at the very top of their game.

"We all wondered who the chubby/nerdy guy in the cowboy hat was running around to all the suites handing out cards and promo items. It was Garth Brooks!"

—Lee Rogers, KUPL/Portland

"I remember watching Garth get mobbed by CRS attendees in the early 1990's. The energy he generated was reminiscent of Beatlemania, though I don't recall anyone actually fainting. Passed out from the beer maybe, but no fainting."

—Frank Bell, Keymarket VP/Programming

"Alan Jackson getting misty at his Superfaces show. There was a moment when he was reflecting on his career and you could see that he was still moved by the music and relationships after all these years."

—Lance Tidwell, WGKX/Memphis PD



### 8 A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT RCA Launches The Boat

It's never been an official CRS event. In fact, its very existence caused quite a bit of CRB board consternation early on. Now in its 21st year, "The Boat" has nevertheless become part of the fabric of CRS.

The annual RCA, then RCA-BNA, then RLG and now Sony BMG, cruise down the Cumberland has land-locked origins. The first pre-seminar RCA gathering was at **Joe Galante's** house. The next year it grew a bit and rained, so Joe erected a tent. Having outgrown his yard, Joe went searching for a new venue in 1987.

"I wanted someplace smaller and more intimate than a ballroom," he says. "Plus, I didn't want to do it at the hotel because promo guys from every other label would work the radio guys while we were feeding them and serving drinks."

Over the years, passengers have been fortunate enough to see **ZZ Top** trading licks with **Brad Paisley**, **Huey Lewis** joining **Phil Vassar**, **Paisley** and **Alison Krauss** debuting "Whisky Lullaby," an eight-month pregnant **Martina McBride** singing "Concrete Angel," tributes to **Ronnie Milsap**, **Waylon Jennings**, and moving remarks from **Alan Jackson** to outgoing Arista VP **Bobby Kraig**.

For Galante, the highlight is **Eddy Arnold**. "It wasn't just Eddy's performance," he says. "It was watching **Martina**, **Lorrie Morgan** and **Mindy McCready** sitting on the steps with their faces in their hands, totally mesmerized."

"It was such a monopoly back then we were determined to 'sink it.' We had spotlights shooting across the river shining on giant **Reba** and **Vince** billboards. We hired a high school marching band and had circulating spotlights and cheerleaders. As the boat came in, we could see people on the deck laughing and reacting. It was a night none of us will ever forget."

—Scott Borchetta, Big Machine President (former MCA VP/Promotion)

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

For 38 years, the Country Radio Seminar has been broadcasting's preeminent convention. Its "Growth Through Sharing" credo is not an empty promise. CRS was built to educate and inform. Beneficiaries have ranged from broadcasting's elite to programmers in the smallest of small markets. It's not too great an exaggeration to suggest that almost everyone



Lon Helton

involved in programming a Country station or promoting a country record in the last 38 years has attended at least one CRS. And, they all have one thing in common: unforgettable moments.

CRS-38 will be my 25th CRS. Like all of you, I could fill this entire publication with stories. For me, it's seeing **Garth Brooks** in the United Stations suite in 1989 and then interviewing him before a

packed ballroom in 1998. It was sitting next to **Toby Keith** in 2005 when he shocked the room with the news he was going to launch his own label. There was **Malrite's John Chaffee** in his "Wonder Woman" outfit. And keynoters **Dick Clark**, **Lou Holtz**, **Sam Donaldson**, **Terry Bradshaw** and **Ken Kragen**, among so many others.

CRS' "special moments" come from everywhere: the keynotes, the sessions, the performances — whether at the old Super Faces Show, the new Music City Jam, the New Faces Show, the Boat, the suites or the clubs on lower Broadway — or Opryland Hotel's Pickin' Parlor or the Renaissance Hotel's Bridge Bar. They're all part and parcel of the CRS experience.

For this, **Country Aircheck's** very first CRS special, we asked seminar veterans for their favorite CRS moments. Hopefully our countdown will cause you to reflect on your own

special CRS memories. As CRB Executive Director **Ed Salamon** noted, "More important moments in Country music happen during CRS than the rest of the year combined." May CRS-38 create a few more great memories for you. If it doesn't, well, then you're not really trying.

*Lon Helton*

COUNTRY  
**AIRCHECK**

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## 7 DOWNTOWN & COUNTRY Outgrowing Opryland & Crossing The River

You have to be old as **Charlie Monk** to know CRS got its start in downtown Nashville at the Sheraton on Broadway before bouncing around to several hotels over the next few years. In 1982, it moved to the largest convention hotel east of

the Mississippi — Opryland, and held court for 16 years. The 1998 homecoming was influenced by a number of factors including a revitalized downtown, as well as seminar's size warranting a stand-alone convention.

Instead of sharing Opryland with other confabs (Liquid Waste Haulers, anyone?), CRS had an area to itself, access to a wider variety of venues for after hours events, and was much closer to Music Row — a big plus for the locals. And so Cascades gave way to the Convention Center, Magnolia B gave way to 209-210, and the Pickin' Parlor gave way to the Bridge Bar.

**"Somehow I hooked up with John Wesley Ryles and we were stumbling from hospitality suite to hospitality suite at the Opryland Hotel — both of us of fairly light complexion and blonde. The Urban League was also having a convention and John and I stumbled into one of their suites. As much as we stuck out in that environment, we continued drinking and the people from the Urban League didn't seem at all fazed."**

**—Dale Carter, KFKF/Kansas City PD**

**"Epic had a basement suite at Opryland. We used to call it the Bunker. On one particular all-nighter the power went out at the hotel. Rob Dalton called the front desk to complain that he was in a pitch black room trying to entertain some folks and when could he expect the power back on? The person on the other end of the phone prompted Rob to think about opening his curtains to let in the daylight. Who would have thunk it? How time flies when you are having fun."**

**—Mike Rogers, Curb Director/National Promotion**

## 6 TAKE OFF YOUR PANTS & JACKET Bridge Par Patrons Share Attendee's Private Moment

Arguably the most talked about performance in seminar history is also its most infamous. One late night during CRS 2001, patrons at the Bridge Bar noticed that the image of an upper floor window was reflected on the angled glass of the bar roof. Inside the room in question, a CRS attendee was engaged in an act for which he probably should have pulled the drapes.

As the bar crowd realized what was happening they began cheering the self engrossed gentleman's every effort.

Eventually, a small contingent decided to visit the room and save this man from any further embarrassment. When he was finally convinced to go to the window and look down, the Bridge Bar throno greeted him with a mighty roar. Since then, the incident has been retold countless times and immortalized, perhaps most memorably, in **Blake Shelton's** uproarious New Faces video clip the following year.



More than 300 performers have graced the New Faces stage in the last 37 years. While most have us have favorite moments, the 1980 New Faces show changed the face of Country music forever.

**Alabama** qualified for the 1980 show with "I Wanna Come Over," a single on MDJ Records that peaked at No. 33 on the national charts late in 1979. They opened New Faces that year by singing their two allotted songs a cappella, even



**You've Come A Long Way, Bama**

## 5 THE NIGHT IT FELT SO RIGHT From New Faces To Nipper

choosing not to use the requisite house band. They weren't even done with the second song when Joe Galante, then VP/Marketing for RCA/Nashville, headed for the stage to set up a meeting.

"I thought 'God almighty, this is absolutely incredible,'" Galante recalled. "And, it was a band!" Bands weren't part of the Country landscape at the time. There were singing groups, but no bands.

The next day, MDJ Records owner and band manager **Larry McBride** spent about an hour with Galante and RCA/Nashville President **Jerry Bradley** before signing a deal for the finished MDJ album at just under \$100,000. Alabama became the first band signed to a major Nashville label.

After 27 years, 42 No. 1 hits, 95 million albums sold and untold millions of concert-going fans Alabama has been inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

**"CRS was a lot smaller then and the New Faces show was held in a banquet room. It was very intimate, and you got a real feel for Alabama's passion level and how serious they were. Even though they only sang, there was just something about them — particularly Randy Owen — that was very special. Everybody felt it that night."**

**—Bobby Kraig, radio and industry veteran**

It was titled innocently enough — "A Statistician Looks At Country." But its reverberations were felt throughout the entire industry. It may well be the most-talked about session in the seminar's 38-year history, as well as the most misunderstood. After the 1999 presentation, Edison Research president **Larry Rosin** was credited — blamed? — for single-handedly slowing down rotations and add policies at Country radio.

"That was one of the most talked about speeches I've ever given," Rosin says. "It's fun to be seen as being that influential, but what I said was largely misinterpreted. I absolutely, positively did *not* tell Country programmers to slow down their

## 4 THE DAY THE MUSIC SLOWED Edison's Rosin Put No.1s In Perspective

rotations. But a combination of things, including R&R's move to using Mediabase data to compile its charts three months later, made it appear as if I had waved a magic wand and made it all happen."

Detailing his original intent, Rosin explains, "Country ratings had been down for several years ...and a number of programmers said it was because there weren't enough good songs. I asked the question, "If there aren't enough good songs right now, how can there be 45 songs good enough to go No. 1?" AC had 11 and CHR had 17. One of the most influential things I did was show a market where a Hot AC station had played Faith Hill's 'This Kiss' more times than the Country station. The reason was the Country station 'cleared the runway' after 'This Kiss' had landed to make room for the next single, while the Hot AC hung with the record. That example shocked a lot of PDs.

Rosin's presentation can still be found in the archives at [www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/CRSFINAL.pdf](http://www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/CRSFINAL.pdf).

**"The Edison research, along with Critical Mass Media's findings that people were tired of being force fed the music too quickly, had a lot to do with rotations slowing down. I recall that our Milwaukee study and the Edison report were virtually identical. It made me think twice about moving my chart in such a hurry."**

**—Kerry Wolfe, Clear Channel/Milwaukee OM and WMIL PD**

**"Larry gets a bad rap. At that same CRS, AC expert Mike McVay said that he couldn't understand why Country dropped songs so fast when they continued to test better and better for a format we shared so much audience with. That was the year that Persons Using Radio trends started downward for all of radio. Anyone who calculated their current categories OES saw they needed to spin songs more times per week and/or hold onto songs longer in order to get the same level of reach and frequency. Rosin spotted an important trend and was pointing out something many stations and programmers were already taking action on."**

**—Jaye Albright, Albright & O'Malley Country Consulting**





# 3 NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON

**Tim McGraw's New Faces Performance**

at the time, but when he sang "Don't Take The Girl" there was magic in the room. The irony is that it almost didn't happen. Back then, New Faces artists sang two songs with a house band. "We couldn't get the sound right on either one of the songs," McGraw said. "In fact, I almost got conveniently sick...and didn't perform at all. Thank God I didn't."

There's one more reason McGraw probably still thanks his lucky stars he didn't call in sick that night. That same New Faces Show was the first time Tim met his future wife, and the mother of their three girls, **Faith Hill**. Apparently it was a very magical night.



"That was the first night of my career," **Tim McGraw** has said of his 1994 CRS New Faces performance. After a slight pause, he amended that to, "It was really the first night of my life."

Unquestionably, a star was born that night. McGraw had "Indian Outlaw" on the charts at the time, but when he sang "Don't Take The Girl" there was magic in the room. The irony is that it almost didn't happen. Back then, New Faces artists sang two songs with a house band. "We couldn't get the sound right on either one of the songs," McGraw said. "In fact, I almost got conveniently sick...and didn't perform at all. Thank God I didn't."

"Everybody was raucous during 'Indian Outlaw.' Then, as they started listening and getting into 'Don't Take The Girl,' the room got more and more quiet. You couldn't even hear the clinking of glasses by the time the song was over. Tim said thank you and walked off the stage. Boom. Done. That one-two punch sent them through the roof. People went nuts."

—**Tim McFadden**, artist manager

"One of the most electric concert moments I've ever witnessed. He just blew it out to a standing ovation. In less than 10 minutes a superstar had been born."

—**Tony Thomas**, KMPS/Seattle APD/MD/PM driver

"There are very few careers where you can point to a single night or performance and say, 'That show made a difference.' But Tim's New Faces performance did just that. Even before the album was released Tim told me he wanted 'Don't Take The Girl' as the second single. We wanted to show that even though he had a big hit with a novelty song, he had depth and was a serious artist!"

—**Mike Curb**, CEO Curb Records

# THE BIG ONES

# 2 HERE'S A CRAZY IDEA...

**CRS Founders Focus On Dialogue**

Seventy people, including 43 from radio, attended the first CRS. Despite losing money, CRS-1 did what we've all come to expect: It allowed attendees to communicate directly with their colleagues about the industry and the challenges they all faced. Most importantly, it sent 70 people home with glowing reports about the gathering. And that positive word of mouth carries through to this day.

"I wasn't looking to create a schoolroom atmosphere where people came to be lectured. I was more focused on creating...a place for people of similar interests and goals to gather and build something in common. And though it was impossible for me to imagine what might happen...one thing was apparent: It could change the world of Country radio."

—**Tom McEntee**, CRS co-founder

**Start Foundation:** Early CRS contributors include (l-r) Jerry Seabolt, Tom McEntee, Barbara Starling, Charlie Monk and the late Biff Collie.



# 1 CHILD'S PLAY

**St. Jude and Country: A Match Made In Heaven**

Country Aircheck's top CRS moments have ranged from the seminal to the silly. And while one can quibble with the order or even the inclusion of some of these "events," there's no arguing the No. 1 moment in CRS history to date. It's doubtful any convention, anywhere, in any business featured a keynote speech that has had a more profound and long-lasting affect as the one Alabama's **Randy Owen** delivered at the 1989 Country Radio Seminar.

It was there that Owen issued this challenge to Country radio: "Because of our visibility we have an opportunity to do a tremendous amount of good for organizations like St. Jude that really help. For me, it's more than an opportunity — it's an obligation."

Eight months later, the very first Country radiothon for St. Jude was on the air, raising \$1.2 million. Since then, Country radio and the country recording industry have raised more than \$280 million for the Memphis-based children's research hospital.

This year, more than 200 Country radio stations are expected to conduct "Country Cares For St. Jude Kids" radiothons. They'll have plenty of company, as St. Jude continues its "Radio Cares for St. Jude Kids" programs that encompass other formats, including AC, Oldies, Urban, Gospel and Rock. And, more than 60 stations are expected to take part in a Spanish-language-format program called Promesa Y Esperanza (Promise and Hope) that began in 1997.

"Years ago after meeting my father, Randy Owen visited St. Jude, saw the children and fell in love with them. Because of Randy's continued leadership and commitment to Country Cares, children all over the world are surviving catastrophic diseases and leading healthy lives. We are ever grateful to Randy."

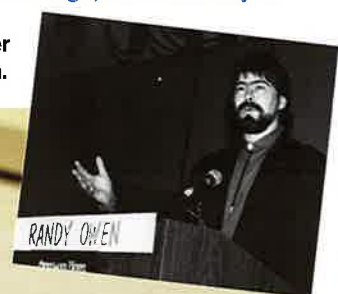
—**Terre Thomas**

"Without the leadership, time and talent of Randy Owen, the Country Cares for St. Jude Kids program would not be where it is today. Randy's contribution to St. Jude has been one of great passion, dedication and devotion. His challenge to Country radio so many years ago was the beginning of a remarkable relationship that helped generate a program that is now the foundation for our fundraising efforts. Our Country Cares partner stations have not only raised a tremendous amount of money for us, but they have also generated a great deal of awareness about St. Jude and the mission we serve. Radio carries our message of hope to people all across the country."

—**Dave McKee**, COO, ALSAC/St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

"It's a natural because St. Jude kids and country music have so much in common. The music speaks straight to the heart, reminding us of the importance of love and laughter in the face of pain, the deep meaning of simple joys, the value of courage, the necessity of faith against huge odds."

—**the late Danny Thomas**, St. Jude Founder, in a letter soliciting country artists' assistance with Owen's radiothon idea.



**All Else Pales:** Owen making an impassioned plea (inset), and with some of St. Jude's kids.

