

Bob Kingsley

More Stories To Tell

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

President's Award

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

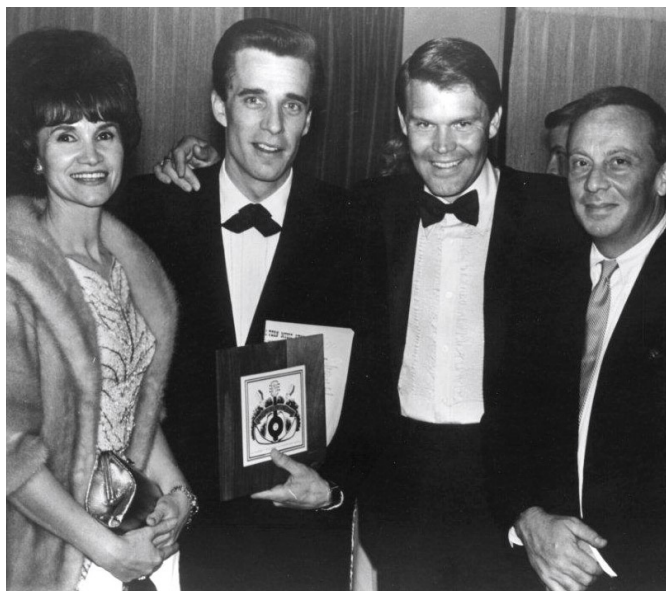
This year we'll have two nights and at least 12 A-list songwriters. The response has been sensational and the publishers were all extremely cooperative. Do you think there's a songwriter that hears their song who, for the most part, doesn't think they could do it better? I remember Harlan Howard saying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

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

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

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

CAC



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



Hat Acts: With Brad Paisley.