

Bob Romeo

Working (Or Not) For The Music

Academy of Country Music CEO Bob Romeo has been with the organization since 1987, first as a board member, then rising to Chairman and, for the last decade, serving as CEO. During the past 26 years, the ACM has provided top tier acts for CRS, first with the Super Faces Show in the '90s, which eventually evolved into the Music City Jam. Now ACM is affiliated with the New Faces Of Country Music Show, evidence of their continuing support of new artists and the seminar.

President's Award

The 2013 CRS President's Award recognizes a man who both individually and through his leadership of ACM has been a tremendous partner and advocate for CRS.



When radio starts the ball rolling, the ACM, the CMA and other TV shows should help the ball roll.



My entrée to Country music was from the concert side of the business. Even before graduating high school, I started going out on the road and servicing shows for my father, who owned the Omaha-based Don Romeo Agency. He was big into Country and specialized in fairs and festivals. In the late '70s and early '80s, fairs were the big entertainment destination because there were fewer arenas.

When I finished high school, I wanted to work full-time for him, but he insisted that I get a degree, saying, "This music business is a shaky one." And I'm thinking, "Well, you've been doing this your whole life." I was so mad at him, but I ended up getting a degree in structural engineering, specifically fire engineering. I didn't even go to graduation, I had it mailed to the house and said to my dad, "Now I can start working full-time, right?" And he said, "Yep."

When I was just 17 years old, I worked these novelty shows for a year as a stagehand. At a show in Nebraska, Pat Buttram from Green Acres was the host. Remember his little friend, Arnold the Pig from Hooterville? At the end of the night, he introduced Arnold. My job was keeping Arnold on the leash until he went on stage. As I passed the leash to Pat, the spotlights came on and it scared the pig, which went squealing off the front of the stage and fell right into the orchestra pit. Dead. I guess pigs can't jump or fall. Pat Buttram is crying, my dad is yelling at me, "You have to go find a pig!" I'm 17 years old and thinking the world is ending. The next day, in my Oldsmobile Delta 88, I got a lesson in pigs. I must have gone to 15 or 20 farmers, but I finally found another little white pig. I bought him for \$50, drove back to the fair and that was the second Arnold.



The ACM partnership with CRS started when we sponsored the Super Faces Show. Over the years we thought that was getting stagnant. We talked about shaking it up, which led to the Music City Jam. We wanted it to be good for radio to see. I remember watching Toby Keith do it. You'd think all his beer-drinking buddies would join him. But it was Crystal Gayle, John Anderson and Bobby Bare. I thought it was cool to see the people who influenced him.

The next logical thing for us has been moving to the New Faces Show. We've always felt it is important to try and launch new artists. We're committed to this format. My father always told me if you're in the business, you have to give back. Country radio has made a big investment in these new acts; it's a great fit for us and where we should be. In my mind, without Country radio, how would these acts get their start? Network TV always wants to showcase the biggest stars. While we appreciate that, we have to help these newcomers and build the stars radio is trying to launch. We're in it together and when radio starts the ball rolling, the Academy, the CMA and other TV shows should help the ball roll.

A memorable CRS moment for me is the year we had Taylor Swift at the Music City Jam. [CRS Executive Director] Bill Mayne and I talked about getting some really young people involved. Bill had a great relationship with a local college that provided interns at CRS. He knew he could get a lot of them to be up at the front of the stage. Taylor could not have been hotter with young Country fans and still is today. That was a cool moment and a great show. Radio people who can sometimes be a little jaded were able to see how she can light up the audience.

Being notified about the President's Award was humbling. I was speechless. I said I could think of 20 people more deserving. It feels strange, like, "Do I really deserve this?" I guess I just enjoy what I do, so things you enjoy you don't consider work. Therefore, have I really worked hard for this award? No. I don't know if I've worked at all.

When the news hit I must have gotten 100 emails from people and that is more than any other honor I've received. This, again, tells me that a lot of people realize what CRS is all about and how important it is to the industry.

CAC



Bucking The System: Bob Romeo (r) and Garth Brooks (l) present the late Buck Owens with an ACM for Nightclub of the Year at the Crystal Palace in Bakersfield, CA.

I grew up listening to what is now Classic Rock, but in the early days, I loved Charley Pride, Ronnie Milsap, and The Statler Brothers. We had a lot of dates with Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash, Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn and, of course, Kenny Rogers when "The Gambler" first came out. You never thought of that as working with legends. It was just business and not nearly the big business it is today. It was \$15-\$20,000 for a show settlement where, now, in many cases it's in excess of a million dollars a night.

I had so much more interaction with radio back then versus now because almost every radio station was locally owned. In every market where we'd have a fair, we wouldn't move until we talked to radio; that's where we got all our information. On my fair sheet the

contacts were the station PD and MD in every town. If I was booking the fair for Grand Island, NE or Cheyenne, WY, the first call I made was to the local Country station and ask what they were playing or what was hot.

At that time you didn't have nearly the layers of artist management either. Bobby Sikes was Marty Robbins' bandleader, road manager and the tour accountant. The acts carried the sound on the bus for those shows. We'd get them set up while the band went out and sold the merchandise. About five minutes before the show, we'd honk the horn on the bus, they'd come back, change and do the show. After the show, they'd go back out and sell more merchandise.

One of the best moves we made was taking the ACM Awards show to Las Vegas and making a better experience for the artists. We needed to make the ACM show seem like a concert. Remember, that's my background. It's about entertaining fans and we got back to doing that. To me, the ACMs are a concert for 14 million people instead of 10,000. The fans at home want to see artists sing their hits that radio plays. They like the visual connection of seeing the artists sing those hits.



His Honey Bee: Blake Shelton (l) plants a big one on Bob Romeo during CRS 2011.

**LOOK OUT,
WE'RE ABOUT
TO EXPLODE!**

Toby Keith

Trace Adkins

JT Hodges

Joel Crouse

Josh Thompson

Krystal Keith

Rose Falcon

Jessie James

