

George Strait

George Strait's iconic status has long been such that he is known simply as "The King." A mainstay on Country radio since the 1981 release of "Unwound," Strait has logged 59 No. 1 singles since then. His RIAA certified albums include 13 multi-platinum, 33 platinum and 38 gold awards. A former CMA and ACM Entertainer of the Year, he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2006 and named the ACM Artist of the Decade in 2009. In September, he announced that his 2013-2014 tour would be his last.

CRB Career Achievement Award

“
I've been
so blessed
to have
radio
support
me for all
of these
years. And
they've
just stuck
with me.

”

The Cowboy Rides Away Tour began in January and proved to be the usual hot ticket, with the Lubbock, TX opening night show selling out in 15 minutes. Not that there was any doubt his home state of Texas still loved him, but his March 13 appearance at the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo sold 77,000 tickets in two minutes. When you think about criteria for the CRS Artist Career Achievement Award, "Presented annually to an artist who through their creativity, vision, performance or leadership has made a significant contribution to the development and promotion of country music and Country radio," you realize Strait really is "The King."

If the radio was on, it was usually some kind of farm reports or news, because that's what my dad listened to; not a lot of music. After I got older and got out of the house a little more and out on my own, I found myself listening to rock and roll more than anything. It wasn't until later on when I started hearing country songs on the ol' jukebox that I kind of got interested in country music. [Ray Price's] "Walk Me To The Door" was really my first taste of country music that I really liked, and that kind of perked me up a little bit. I remember hearing it on the jukebox at the Dairy Queen there in Pearsall [Texas].

I'd gone to Nashville in '78, and then I went back again probably about '79 or '80. But in-between those times, I'd played in a bar in San Marcos called the Prairie Rose that Erv Woolsey had opened. I got to know Erv and he'd been working in the record business, so he introduced me to Jim Foglesong and Ron Chancey, and they all came down to hear me in Texas. Foglesong agreed to let me come to Nashville and do a session. I cut "Unwound" and a couple of others songs. He said if "Unwound" was a top five record, then I could do an album. So it became a top five and he let me do an album. And the rest is history.

I remember the first time I heard "Unwound" on the radio because we took it around to radio stations when it came out. It was me and Erv and Roger Ramsey, who was the promotion guy for MCA at the time. And we took it to KKYX/San Antonio and Jerry King said, "Sure I'll play it." He stuck it on and I said, "Wait, wait, let me go out to the car so I can hear it on the radio."

I just think it'd be cool to have, you know? I mean, 60 No. 1 records when you're 60 years old – that's just pretty cool. If it happens, it'll be great. If it doesn't, I can live without it. You know I've been so fortunate in this business to have 59. I mean, let's not get greedy.

I'm gonna miss that [crowd] most. When I'm sittin' in my ol' rockin' chair and can't move around or anything, you know, years from now, just play me that live record from somewhere where I can hear that crowd again, 'cause it's like nothing else. I will miss that a lot.

Opening Cowboys Stadium ranks right up there at the top. Closing down the Astrodome and re-opening it in Reliant Center is right up there, too. I've been fortunate to have some big things happen in my career and to play some big shows, but places like that and the Alamodome in San Antonio? I mean, I did that a few years back and I don't think I've ever heard a crowd as loud. When I did "El Rey" with the mariachis, it was crazy. I mean, it was insane.

I still get a little bit nervous, especially after I've been off six or eight months. I'm always worried about it. I don't know why, but after the first couple of songs I'm fine. But anybody that does a show like Cowboys Stadium, Reliant or the Alamodome, if they don't get nervous, they're just not human.

Well on show day, I usually like to do a good 45-minute, hour-long interview. (Laughs) And then I do sound check. (Laughs) A typical day, hmm. We roll all night and I ride the bus and wake up at the venue. I'll get up and I'll have some breakfast and then probably go back to sleep for an hour if I can. It's really kind of a boring day, because I don't really get out much. I'm kind of confined to the bus. Then I'll have some lunch and I'll do sound check and watch a



little TV and maybe play the guitar a little bit, sing a little bit, practice and just wait for show time.

It's a pretty nice compliment [to be cited as an influence]. I had my heroes – Merle Haggard, George Jones, Bob Wills, Conway – all those guys. To think that somebody looks at me like I looked at those guys, it makes me feel really good. And to hear my name in one of their songs is even better. I was kind of tickled when I heard Garth singing "Ain't Goin' Down ('Til The Sun Comes Up)" with my name in there. I mean, here's Garth Brooks, the biggest entertainer in the world probably at that time. Go figure.

Radio is always changing and it was changing when I signed with MCA back in '81. There were all the crossover records and everybody wanted a crossover hit. [You could] sell more records that way. Then you kind of went back to the more traditional sound of country music and it stayed that way for a good while. And now it's kind of getting away from the traditional sounding music to something else. But it's always changing. I've seen it go one way, then the other way, and then back. That's one of the advantages of being in the record business and touring and stuff for 30 years – you see a lot of changes. But, you know, it's all good. People are craving different music all the time. I still feel like I can stay current and stick to what I do and hopefully Country radio will still play 'em.

I've been so blessed to have radio support me for all of these years. They jumped on "Unwound" and this unknown guy from Texas that wanted to sing some honky-tonk music. And they've just stuck with me. I really, really want to say thank you for that. I really appreciate it. I couldn't have done anything without you guys. **CAC**

Editorial Note: Special thanks to UMG/Nashville's Katie Dean for expediting this piece.



Hair For The Party: MCA brass visit with Strait circa 1987. Pictured (l-r) are Katie Gillon, manager Erv Woolsey, Jimmy Bowen, Strait, Shelia Shipley Biddy and Bruce Hinton.



CRS Preview: Strait and his wife Norma (far right) visit KVVU/Austin's (from left) Penny Reeves, Steve Gary and Bill Mayne.

Congratulations,
George Strait
on the Country DJ Hall of Fame
Career Achievement Award!

30+ Years of Massive Hits
59 #1's

We Ain't Done!

Your MCA Nashville Family



JOIN THE SIXTY FOR SIXTY MOVEMENT.

MAKE IT SIXTY FOR SIXTY.

