

# MY FAVORITE MEMORY

## Industry Execs Share The Best And Worst Of 2006

**A**nyone who was bored following the developments in the country music industry this year clearly wasn't paying attention. It was a year of significant changes, upheaval and disappointments as well as some shining successes for the country format and the emergence of several bright new stars. Country Aircheck caught up with 15 key industry executives and asked them to share their favorite memories of 2006. From the loss of KZLA to some interesting cross-genre pairings, their answers cover the spectrum of the year that was in country music.

### BOB ROMEO, ACM

"ACM had numerous memorable moments from **Big & Rich** performing '8th of November' with the purple-heart veterans, **Brooks & Dunn** performance of 'Believe,' to



**Carrie Underwood** winning her first nationally-televised country music award for Top New Female Vocalist. Even with such powerful and emotional moments, the one that really stuck out for me was when **Barbara Mandrell** announced that the Entertainer of the Year was once again **Kenny Chesney**.

"I happened to be backstage when they

made the announcement and caught Kenny as he was walking off the stage. He said to me, 'Bob, the ACM Awards was the first award show to give me a shot and put me on national TV, they were also the place I won my very first award back in 1997 for Top New Male Vocalist. And now I am holding the Entertainer award for the second time. To win it once is big but to win it twice is awesome. Thank you. You guys have been here with me every step of the way.'

"Wow. I was speechless. I love the picture our photographer captured backstage because it was right after our discussion and Kenny is still holding the card that Barbara had just read his name from."

### ADRIAN MICHAELS, CURB/ASYLUM

"Both [Curb Senior VP] **Carson James** and I got the news about KZLA at 1 p.m. while we were at a layover in Minneapolis on our way to have a 4 p.m. meeting with [OM] **R.J. Curtis**. We were going in to do dinner with R.J. right before the Tim and Faith show that night in L.A. [and were going] to play him the new **Clay Walker** single as well as other new songs. R.J. was going to help me pitch an idea for the CRB board to Tim that night.

"Later that day we were in L.A. with the No. 1 tour in the nation and our singles in our

hand, but no station to present them to. We were there in person the day they turned the lights out in L.A.

"Also, Clay Walker has a duet with **Freddy Fender** on his upcoming record to be released this January. The duet is 'When the Last Teardrop Falls.' I was on a bus ride from San Antonio to Nashville with [KAJA/San Antonio PD] **Clayton Allen** and the morning show from KAJA on their way to the CMAs. Freddy had passed away about a week or two before that. **Randy Carroll** had heard that Clay recorded the song with Freddy and asked me if I had the single and if I could play it. Being from South Texas they were fond of Freddy. After [hearing] Freddy's part singing on the song, there wasn't a dry eye on the bus. Four grown men on a road trip crying to a Freddy Fender song."

### SKIP BISHOP, ARISTA

"We were having a very successful set-up for **Jason Michael Carroll's** original first single, 'Looking At You,' but something remarkable and unexpected happened when we ran down to WUSY/Chattanooga to visit **Bill Poindexter** and **Big Al** on the air. They played the single on the air and then asked Jason to perform another song live. He decided to go with 'Alyssa Lies,' which is the first time it had ever been performed on radio.

"Once he did, Dex and Al were speechless and immediately every phone line in the control room lit up. It looked to be 30 incoming lines. We were dumfounded. They started taking calls, which ranged from people in tears to people saying, 'That song is my life.'

"We said goodbye and within 30 minutes they were calling us back saying, 'They're still calling.' I've never in my long career seen such an immediate reaction. We were all just stunned. This is a record company fantasy, a promotion guy's dream.

"As we were driving home, the night jock called and said 'Every call I'm getting is for Alyssa.' I had left them with rough versions that I had no intention of them airing,

but they did and it created absolute bedlam. "In all my corporate wisdom I called [OM] **Kris Van Dyke** and **Dex** the next day and said 'We need to put a cap on this 'cause we're working another single.' Within three days the exact same thing happened in Detroit . . . We eventually decided to change singles."

### PETE FISHER, GRAND OLE OPRY

"This was an interesting year for Opry debuts. We had a very eclectic mix of artists from **Big & Rich**, **Cowboy Troy**, the **Wreckers** and **Kellie Pickler** to the more traditional **Eric Church** and **Chris Young** to others known nationally for their work in other genres including **Michael McDonald** and **Elvis Costello**.

"One of the most memorable debuts was



when **Vince Gill** was joined by jazz vocalist **Diana Krall** for an absolutely magical performance of 'Faint of Heart,' which they recorded together on Vince's new four-CD set. Diana was in town recording with Vince at the same time her husband, **Elvis Costello**, was making his Opry debut alongside **Emmylou**



"Big & Rich performing '8th of November' on the ACM show."

GATOR MICHAELS, WARNER BROS.

## THE YEAR IN MEMORIES

**Harris.** That moment not only reflected the magic and spontaneity of the Opry, but also made one of [this] generation's most renowned jazz vocalists absolutely glow with enthusiasm after her performance.

"The Opry's newly-introduced Signature Show Series seems to put all the pieces in place for those unique 'Opry Moments' we love. Most vivid are **Carrie Underwood** earning a well-deserved standing ovation for her performance of Tammy Wynette's 'Stand By Your Man' during our 'Women of Country' Signature Show and **Travis Tritt** tearing the house down with 'Georgia On My Mind' during our Ray Charles Tribute Signature Show, which also featured Michael McDonald, **Martina McBride**, Vince Gill and **Ronnie Milsap**, among others."

### BLAIR GARNER, AFTER MIDNITE

"I was so happy the week of the KZLA format flip because [OM] **R.J. Curtis** had asked me if I'd fill in for **Peter Tilden** doing the morning show. I didn't even need caffeine that week I was so amped up.

"Every day after doing the show I'd go into R.J.'s office and talk about the show and refine the game plan. That Thursday morning I walked by R.J.'s office and I could tell he didn't really have time. So I left and was looking forward to coming back the next day.

"I drove over to the Premiere studios. It took me 12 minutes, and as I came in, one of our senior VPs, **Trevor Oliver**, asked if I'd heard about KZLA. He pulled me into his office and they were playing a rap song. I looked at the dial and it said 93.9. I'm a world-class prankster and thought he'd rigged someone in engineering to play a prank on me. 'Then I hear 'You're listening to the new Movin' 93.9.' My heart just sank. I felt angry for the staff at KZLA. There are ways you can handle things, and I don't believe that was handled a good way. The listeners felt such a sense of betrayal.

"But the way that R.J. conducted himself and continued to be the team leader even though he knew it was no more, that's the definition of a class act."

### ED HARDY, GAC

"There are quite a few meaningful events that leap to mind for me. At the GAC taping of the **Alan Jackson** *Precious Memories* special at the Ryman, it was very touching to watch the expressions and responses of his mother and aunt in the front row, since the album was a present to his mom, then to see the album go platinum mainly due to the GAC special.

"As the year waned, we taped our special *Songs of the Year* event that brought such

incredible country talent to perform some of the greatest songs of the past in our beautiful new Schermerhorn [Symphony Center] building.

"Of course, [another favorite memory is] the **Barbara Mandrell** special and the opportunity to stand and visit with her backstage at the tribute to her on the *GAC Opry Live*."

### KEVIN HERRING, LYRIC STREET

"Our biggest moment of the year is not really behind the scenes, but a lot went into the No. 1 debut of **Rascal Flatts**' *Me and My Gang*: the radio jet tour, the fourth straight ACM and CMA vocal group wins and the sell-out arena tour. Their 721,747 first week units is the biggest debut all-genre this year, and the album looks to be the biggest selling single artist CD of 2006, second overall behind the multi-artist *High School Musical*."

### CLAY HUNNICUTT, CLEAR CHANNEL

"My favorite was when **Keith Urban** stopped by unannounced at WSIX to play his

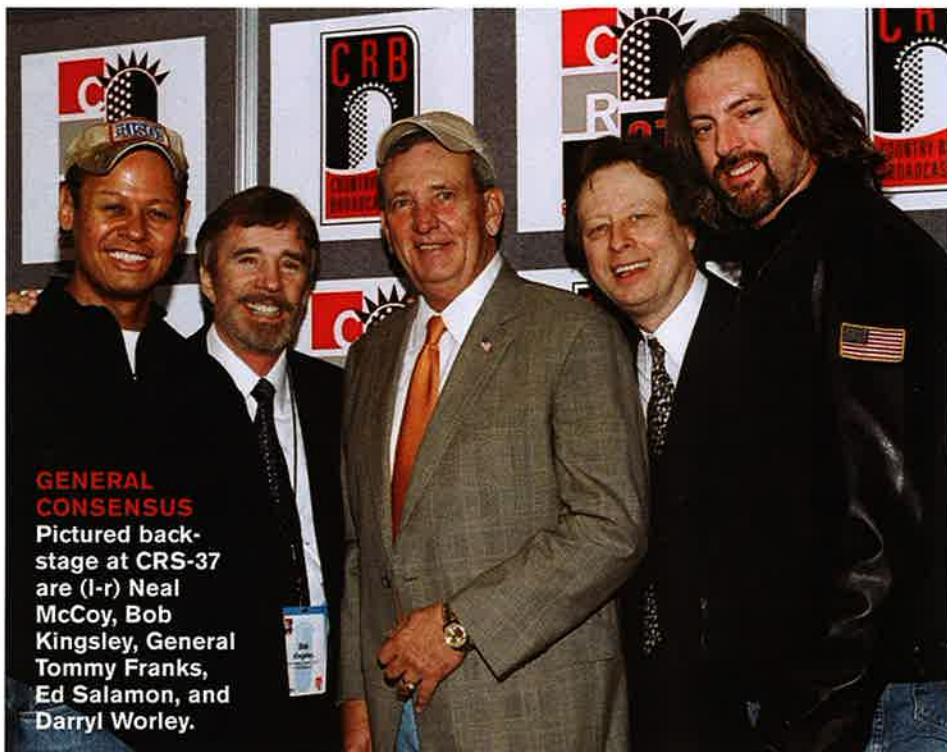


new single, 'Once in a Lifetime,' for the first time on the radio on the **Gerry House** show. He stayed about an hour and was absolutely fantastic."

### CHARLIE MONK, MONK FAMILY MUSIC

"Being a music publisher, the neatest, best, nicest, thing for me in '06 was having the honor to induct my friend **Jim Weatherly** into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. Not only did he write 'Midnight Train To Georgia,' 'You're the Best Thing (That Ever Happened To Me),' 'Neither One Of Us (Wants To Be the First To Say Goodbye)' all by himself, but he co-wrote 'Someone Else's Star' and 'A Lady Like You.' That night I said he was boring because he didn't smoke, drink, chew or chase women, but I also said he was the most honorable man I know.

"Now don't ever say I haven't said something nice about somebody."



**GENERAL CONSENSUS**  
Pictured backstage at CRS-37 are (l-r) **Neal McCoy**, **Bob Kingsley**, **General Tommy Franks**, **Ed Salamon**, and **Darryl Worley**.

### BRIAN PHILIPS, CMT

"We'd spent about four years trying to hook up with **Bon Jovi** for a *CMT Crossroads*. The timing never worked out. Jon handed us a rough of 'Who Says You Can't Go Home' last year. We all heard the song as an obvious hit, but knew the right duet partner would put it over the top. [UMG Nashville chairman] **Luke Lewis** brilliantly connected the dots with **Sugarland**.

"After a smash *Crossroads*, Bon Jovi had a No. 1 country song in 2006 and even won a CMT Music Award for the crossover hit, making it a significant moment across genres."

### ROYCE RISSER, MCA

"**George Strait** being inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. I don't think there has ever been a person inducted that is still delivering hits to Country radio."

### ED SALAMON, CRB

"General **Tommy Franks**' keynote address at CRS-37 provided inspiration in leadership, character and the value of democracy that I will never forget. His examples of dealing with the real world challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan have corollaries in how we can succeed in our format. Although most of CRS is about 'growth through sharing' with the best and brightest from our own industry, we can learn a lot from those outside our business as well. Sometimes it's the nontraditional speakers at CRS that provide the most relevant and lasting input."

### BRUCE SHINDLER, UMG

"**Vince Gill** putting out a four CD set of 43 stylistically diverse original songs was a phe-

nomenal achievement. In all my years of promoting artists I have never seen one do this, and do it so well. It gave me faith that our format still has artists that think outside the box and are willing to push the envelope no matter what the consequences. A great moment for our industry!"

### SCOTT SIMAN, RPM MANAGEMENT/RPM MUSIC

"**Tony Bennett** joining **Tim McGraw** at Madison Square Garden during *Soul 2 Soul II*. They sang the Hank Williams' song 'Cold Cold Heart,' which is on Tony's duets project. A tour this big always has many moments, but that was a special one. When Tony came up on the center lift to a sold-out, in the round, standing ovation, it gave you the chill bumps. It was the connection of the generations through that moment. You had, arguably, the most influential country writer/artist ever in Hank Sr.'s words and music, Tony Bennett, an American icon who made the song a worldwide hit, and the quintessential modern country superstar Tim McGraw. It just doesn't get any better than that.

"The other moment that stands out is **Tim and Faith** returning to New Orleans and being the first major concert since Katrina. The crowd was amazing. We were able to bring in major media in the person of [CNN's] **Anderson Cooper** to continue to highlight the needs, and donate the proceeds to the artists' 'Neighbor's Keeper Foundation' to do good works in Mississippi and Louisiana. We did a special luncheon with **Emeril [Lagasse]** earlier that day to raise more funds and we had fun showing him backstage catering prior to the show." CAC

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