



JOE GALANTE & GERRY HOUSE

Definitely Not Exiting

Few contemporary industry figures can legitimately be described as iconic, but if the word ever fit, it certainly applies to outgoing Sony Music Nashville Chairman Joe Galante and WSIX/Nashville morning personality Gerry House. That both have risen to single-name status – and first or last will do just fine, thank you – reveals the extent to which each has come to represent something bigger than themselves.

When Joe spoke, it seemed to carry the weight of the entire record industry. Who would get more awards show thanks, the game went, Galante or God? House, on the other hand, became the touchstone for Country radio personalities and seemed to be the foundation upon which Nashville started its day. Did you hear what Gerry said? This month, Joe and Gerry wind down jobs they've held for more than three decades.

Country Aircheck brought these two icons together – one from radio, the other from the record business – for the ultimate “exit interview.” As you'll read, however, they are both far from being done.

CA: Having been in this town for more than 30 years, have your professional or personal lives ever crossed paths?

JG: Gerry's seen the picture I had in my office: He and I and his wife were at the Exit-In club here in Nashville when Bonnie Tyler had a hit with “It's A Heartache.” So, yeah, we have a history; we all have kind of grown up together in this business.

GH: We both look like we were five years old in that picture.

JG: We both had a lot more hair, fewer wrinkles. Not a care in the world because nobody knew what the hell was going on.

GH: I've been to more events and watched Joe get more awards than probably anybody. I've known Joe as sort of “the guy,” regardless of where we were in our careers, who always was doing something fabulous. I can remember parties where someone would say, “Joe Galante's here,” and I'd think, “OK, now we're made men.”

You both announced months in advance that you were going to be leaving the jobs you've held for a long time. Now that those actual departures are imminent, how are you feeling about your decision?

JG: Great! Any other questions?

GH: We have a place in Florida with a big Zen garden and I'm going to spend a lot more time there. People keep asking, “What are you going to do?” I always say, “I don't know; I've never quit before.” But I feel perfectly at peace with it, no

regrets at all. I'm just going to do something else.

JG: You don't wake up one day and think, “I'm going to go do this.” You kind of go through it and say, “Is it time?” In my case, I did that and decided it wasn't time. And then I started to warm up to the idea, and several things happened along the way where you go, “Yeah, I can see this coming and need to prepare for it.” And alert the company at the

I'D LOVE TO TELL YOU A LOT OF WHAT WE DID OVER THE COURSE OF TIME WAS A BRILLIANT PLAN ON ALL OUR PARTS, BUT SOMETIMES IT WAS JUST HARD WORK ... AND THE OPPORTUNITY. –Joe Galante

same time, so that you have the transition.

GH: Put my name under that – what Joe said. That's exactly the way I felt.

JG: Obviously, we're all witnessing a huge change in the business that we grew up with. Even from my vantage point I couldn't see the speed at which certain things would change the last few years. Of course, it's not a small ripple; it's a giant wave that hits you. And it's a matter of adjusting to it and deciding, as Gerry just said.

It's obvious that neither of you have lost your enthusiasm for what you've been doing, so where does that decision come from to actually leave?

JG: In my case, you love the people you work

with and the artists that you're involved with. But there's a process you're going through in terms of the day-to-day business that's changed dramatically and taken the fun out of it, to a certain degree. At the same time, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't achieve a balance because I was dedicated to my job and could never disconnect. I could never say, “I'm going to spend 50% of my time doing my job, and the rest of the time get a better balance in life” because I'd always feel I was cheating the company and the artists. I just never learned how to do that, and so I needed to unplug in order to re-create.

GH: I have 13 more shows to do, not that I'm counting or anything. As Joe indicated, there's been a seismic shift. It's not that I didn't want to adapt or that it's wrong. It's just different, and I wanted to do different things. Unlike Joe, I had a couple of warning signs. I had a brain operation five years ago, which kind of changed me. And, after a very close friend of mine passed away in January, I thought, “I don't want to fall over in front of a microphone introducing some record.” I can do other things and have for years, so I thought, “Well, I'll just do *those*.” The tough thing is [knowing] when you've decided you've won that game and want to go play another one; that's when you make decisions like this. Fifteen years ago, I was so frustrated about writing songs, I thought, “I'm going to quit the music

business.” My friend Wayland Holyfield said, “You may *already* be out. They don't send out letters.” But I just decided I wanted to get out of this and do something else. You can't do a morning show unless you're dedicated to it.

So, what are you going to do?

GH: I write a lot of music. A TV pilot I wrote has had some interest. I still write for a lot of people, and there are always books, musicals and stuff. And sitting on the beach and watching the ocean do its thing is not a bad idea, either. I get bored easily, so I don't think I'll have any trouble figuring out something else I want to do.

JG: My wife Phran said to me recently, “I don't

know how you had time to fit in your job before.” Board meetings, consulting with Sony, taking meetings about future endeavors. Like Gerry, I've been able to spend time actually enjoying other things while keeping up with the business. For the long term, it's an interesting time because everybody tells you music has never been more popular than it is today, except that no one wants to pay for it. So, go figure out the new model. I think there's going to be a lot of turmoil in this business in the next 12 months.

Turmoil in terms of ... ?

JG: I don't understand how it doesn't get smaller, based on [the] economy. You can see what sales and revenues are doing around entertainment. Every business has to deal with the disruption of the Internet and people being able to take things for free. Radio has the same problem: Am I [as a consumer] on Pandora or on Sirius? Or maybe I'm online looking at Hulu, not listening to the radio.

But it comes back to, “How do you create stars in this environment?” For a long time, there hasn't been a continuity of developing on-air talents who attract listeners. We have people on the radio, but are they stars? And the same thing happens with record companies, who's going to fill the shoes of Kenny Chesney or Brad Paisley? They have a long life to go, but as you look down the road, it takes longer and the results aren't as great as they once were. So things get smaller because you can't support the kind of structure we have in this town.

That George Jones song “Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes” also applies to radio. Gerry, do you have a sense of what radio has done to itself in terms of talent?

GH: I don't want to be judgmental about the changes going on. I get it; it's a business. I don't think there's a fertile learning ground left for people who do what I do, but there may be some different thing. The PPM technology apparently stands for Persecution Per Minute (*laughs*). I've been told content has to be dynamic, brilliant, beautiful and funny every minute. And I think, “Well, I'm always *trying* to do that.” But it's almost like there's no room for error anymore; you don't get the chance to bomb a few times. You get an EKG of your activity *that day*, and if it wasn't good, they pronounce the patient dead, and I think that's dangerous.

JG: I'd love to tell you a lot of what we did over the course of time was a brilliant plan on all our

parts, but sometimes it was just hard work ... and the opportunity. As Gerry says, there's a magnifying glass on shorter-term. I've always told the staff that you do what's right for the artist, build the brand, and we're all going to be fine. And I still believe that, if you have an artist you can build into a brand. But people are quicker to pull the trigger and say, "Well, there's nobody there." I look at the artists I've worked with and wish I could tell you that, regardless of whether it was Dolly Parton or Kenny Chesney, they all broke on their first record. Didn't happen. It's development. And I think the same is true of air personalities.

GH: People on the air in recent years haven't had the chance to develop, because they really don't get much time to talk. I wonder if they had the same conversation when television came along, that it was going to ruin radio. Things survive; they just become different. Is it necessary to have a morning guy talk as much as I do? I don't know. Maybe.

Was it hard to get over the idea that you weren't going to be known as "Joe from Sony" or "Gerry from the Big 98"? The name and the job so closely aligned?

JG: By the time I left the presidency of RCA in New York and moved back here, I had done a lot of business with a lot of people up there. I went back for a TJ Martell function and was having a conversation with somebody, and I could see him look past me. Like, "You can't do anything for me anymore." I had thought, "Well, he and I are buds, and we've spent some time and done business together." So I've always remembered, "It's the chair. Don't get stuck on that." There were those people who, quite honestly, when I left the chair, didn't really give a damn where I was, and they were never going to speak to me again because I couldn't make them any money. But there's a group of people that you're surprised at, about whom you thought were more than just a transaction. And then there are those people that you thought, "Well, these guys don't really care," yet they check up on you. But I've got a circle of people that I'm really close to and happy with, and that's more than enough.

GH: Whatever little I've got, I don't think of myself as "the radio guy." It didn't bother me at all to think that I'm not going to be on the radio anymore. I'll miss the interaction, and that if I've thought of something funny I can deliver it to people. But I played golf the other day with a guy who said, "You gonna quit?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I got one question: How many friends do you have where you work, as opposed to outside?" I said,

preparation. It's about thinking 24/7, two moves down the road, not just "I'm going to show up Monday and I'll deal with the problems there." It's "Where am I going with this, and where am I taking all these folks?" It's a leadership issue.

[Now] it's Gary [Overton]'s job and it's Gary's company, so he has to figure out what he wants to do, and I think he's already doing that, moving forward. And [it was] the same thing, when I followed Jerry [Bradley], and Jerry followed Chet [Atkins]. Theirs were big shoes to fill, and hopefully, you get there at the end of the day. Gary's got a great group of artists and a great group of people.

What is your view of artists looking to build their own infrastructure?

JG: I've talked to about 150 people about the new model, and not one of these son-of-a-bitches has a real sense of what that is because it's a lot of different things. I always believe in the label structure in the sense of services, but I'm not sure those that exist today will in 24 months. I still believe there are A&R, promotion and marketing functions, and you can sub those out to a certain level. But who's going to make the deals, collect that money and police [things] to make sure there's accountability for it all? There are lots of issues within a label people forget about. I see people hiring, but not spending the money to market those records. Some management companies have taken that on. Labels will continue to exist, but they have to rebuild the model to support the services people want today.

It all has to get leaner. I can't give you the specifics because I think I'd scare the shit out of too many people. But it has to get leaner. An example, on the radio side, is the free shows by new artists. I don't know whether you can support that. You see these records reach top 10 and sell 150,000 units; that's not a payoff. So *everybody* in the food chain is going to have to rethink, "What is the cost and what is the benefit?"

Gerry, as a songwriter, as the father of Autumn who is the VP/A&R at Capitol and as a friend to a lot of artists, you're probably closer to the music than a lot of radio folks. What's your sense of the state of country music and the country business?

GH: I'm like Joe: I don't see, unless they figure out a new business model, how they make money. You can't beat free or stealing. And it's endemic. I keep envisioning record companies becoming like giant management companies.



I've worked with great PDs, people who were encouraging, wonderful, warm and came charging out of the office laughing. That's contagious. If radio wants people who will talk, write and deliver comedy and entertainment, they have to give a little bit of space. Can you imagine a singer who walks offstage and hears, "By the way, I hope you can take criticism. You suck." I don't know whether they would ever sing again.

If you were to leave a note on the console for the new WSIX morning personality to read on Jan. 3, what would it say?

GH: Try to get as close to yourself on the air as you are in person so that you don't have to manufacture anything. It's a

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"All my friends are outside." He said, "You're ready to quit." My world doesn't revolve around that studio and microphone, so I'll be fine. "... he said before he started crying."

Joe, can the job you held for so many years exist in this industry going forward? You know, the head of a monolithic label conglomerate?

GH: The word you're looking for is "godfather."

JG: I do have friends and family in Florida, Gerry. Be careful.

GH: Ah, yes, I know. That's right.

JG: It can exist, to a degree. But when you look at the industry drop from 70 million units a couple years ago to the 40-million-unit range, it's hard to maintain the structure. You have to have all things going. It's about a rhythm, and if you don't have that rhythm, you can't maintain it. And getting the rhythm, like a team, takes time and a lot of work. I don't think, when people look at the job, whether it's Gerry's or mine, realize the

I've always felt that Nashville is a factory town, where people go in and churn out stuff. There have always been two kinds of artists: Those that people care about, and those that feed the monster because you had a record company with all these people [on staff]. I've seen new companies starting all the time, and they've got to have acts, put them out and keep the machine going. But I think all that's going to die away. The ones who will emerge are the ones who are entertainers, just like they will on radio.

JG: A songwriter recently commented to me, "I used to go in, and I was responsible for this song. Then we started doing co-writes. Some of it was good, and some of it wasn't bad. And then I [had] to write with the artist to get on the record. Sometimes that's good, sometimes that's bad. And now, I've got four-ways and five-ways."

To a certain degree, you lose what the essence of what the song is. I look at "Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)" - it was one guy. There's a danger because, somewhere along the way, we said that artists need to write because it's part of the food chain. I don't necessarily agree with that, and didn't when I was in the job. But it was very difficult to stop this, and that's had an impact because everybody gets this award and believes they are [songwriters]. But there are very few people going into the Hall of Fame.

GH: That's brilliant. That's exactly right. When they asked Roger Miller to co-write, he said, "Did Picasso co-paint?" I still try to write a couple songs by myself, but I meet guys that have never written songs by themselves.

JG: In certain cases, it pays off. But then everybody wants to do it because they think they can. And it actually is a profession. Take Thom Schuyler, writing about "the boys who make the noise on 16th Avenue." How many guys had that idea but couldn't pull it off? Is it better if four guys help him write that?

Gerry, you've worked for a wide variety of GMs and PDs over the past few years. What kind of manager worked best for you?

GH: I've had 'em all. The first day I was on in Los Angeles, I was so excited to be there. Chantal Westerman, who was on with me, later went on to *Good Morning America*. I thought, "Wow." You know when it's working and really good. Ten minutes before I went off the air, the national PD called me on the hotline and said, "Uh, hey, hope you can take criticism. You suck." And then he launched into a diatribe. It was nothing more than that control thing, telling people "You aren't as funny as you think you are." I may sound bitter, but I'm not. But I immediately called my attorney and said, "You've got to get me out of here," which took a year and a half. That was just soul-killing for me.

You have to let people bomb a little bit, give them room.

lot easier. And listen to the audience. I will miss the civilians, the people who were so smart and funny, who called me up and made *me* laugh. I always thought that was a great part of what I did, poking and prodding until I got into what *they* were doing. I always tell little kids when they're on the air, "Don't use tobacco products." I once said that to this little 11-year-old guy in this little chirpy voice. And he shot back, "Too late!" I just love people like that; that's just real comedy to me. As for the next guy? He doesn't have to be me ... they'll figure it out.

Joe, what is something you've learned since stepping back from the day-to-day?

JG: I don't enter every conversation thinking, "OK, whatever I'm listening to, I've got to figure out how I'm going to take advantage of that and make it work for Sony." I am a better listener now to what you're saying because I don't have to worry about it in that sense.

So, are there lots of people coming to you, saying, "Joe, here's a bunch of money. Go start something."

JG: Yes. There's a lot of money out there to do lots of things. But there are also lots of questions that I'm not sure people understand you need to go through: What are the expectations? What is the time frame that happens in? Timing is a big part of it. As I said, next year is a tougher year, but I don't think there is any lack of opportunity for talented people who really want to work hard, have something to offer, and can add value to what happens.

But it's not just about the financial aspect of what you do on a go-forward basis. To me, there is a real *mission* of, "What can I help teach the next group of people coming through this thing?" because I had a very unique viewpoint of what was happening. As you enter this business, there are certain conditions you should understand that I don't think are being taught. There is help that needs to be given to these guys. It's about teaching, and giving back to the town and the people who have helped you get here.

And Gerry, congrats on your upcoming induction into the NAB Broadcasting Hall of Fame, joining folks like Bob Hope, Edward R. Murrow - even Marconi himself! But you're the first Country radio personality.

GH: I didn't realize what a huge deal it was until I got about a thousand emails, most of which began, "You've got to be kidding!" I like it because I'm being told I'm OK by the rest of the industry, as opposed to the country music industry, with whom I always felt I had a slight edge because I'm in Nashville, where a lot of people who vote live. It's pretty amazing. I can't imagine how much these people were drinking when they named me.

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