

CRB CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



Signed to RCA by Joe Galante in 1983, The Judds earned their first No. 1 with “Mama He’s Crazy” and went on to remarkable airplay, sales and awards success. Country Aircheck spoke to Naomi and Wynonna, who recently completed their Last Encore Tour, about their recollections of and relationship to Country radio.

CA: What are your earliest memories of listening to the radio?

Naomi: We were such a blue-collar family and never listened to music on the radio. We were pretty bare-bones as far as art. Back in those times, when dinosaurs roamed the earth, radio was a huge thing on Saturdays. We would listen to *Buster Brown*, *Jack Benny* and *Fibber McGee & Molly*. Radio had a huge part in firing my imagination. When you shut down the visual sense, I could really go away and get hyper-enmeshed.

Fast-forward: Wy, Ashley and I were living in a house with no heat – it was a fishing camp during the summer months – and on Saturday night we would listen to the *Grand Ole Opry* as I washed our clothes. It was a ritual. We had no TV and no telephone.

Wynonna: I have two memories. One was being a little girl

get up for a 6am station visit and be dolled up like we were going to the Grammys. In those days I wore seamed hose. I don’t even know how long it took me to do hair and makeup and get dressed like that.

One morning we got up at an insane hour to get ready. Before we left, I noticed my boots were kind of junky, so I went to the tub to rinse them off. Wy had forgotten to push down the shower switch and I got blasted with water. I could barely look at her the whole day.

Do you remember the first time you heard one of your songs on the radio?

Naomi: It was a rainy evening about 5 o’clock. We were in Nashville on Thompson Lane in front of a donut place when all

“America’s Sweethearts.” I think they called us that at one point. It was pretty hilarious and corny. I felt like we were getting away with something we weren’t supposed to. It’s like getting into a party and you’re going to hang out as long as you can until they throw you out. I swear, that’s how I felt.

I remember one of our first Country Radio Seminars so distinctly. We were at one of those big, long tables separated by dividers, sitting next to Alabama, and their line was like 250 people. I think Mom and I had three people in our line. I remember Mom saying, “You know what, I should have baked cookies. If we had cookies, we’d get more over here.” Of course, the next year we had more, and before long, we had the 250. But getting there was definitely a slow climb. And I’m actually really thankful that it happened that way.

Naomi: I had a sense even though I couldn’t articulate it back then. We’d be on the cover of *Cashbox*. We’d get a good review. We’d be No. 1 on *Billboard*. Robert Oermann would say we were great. And I loved that because I had my daughter. I was probably the oldest person signed to RCA, but we were able to crawl out of poverty. My daughter, who was not designed to work a 9-to-5, had found her place in the world.

“ WE WOULD GET UP FOR A 6AM STATION VISIT AND BE DOLLED UP LIKE WE WERE GOING TO THE GRAMMYS. ”

listening to AM. My Pawpaw listened to baseball, and I remember that AM sound so distinctly. I also remember living in Appalachia on the mountaintop with no TV, no telephone and listening to the radio in my room. When I moved to Nashville in 1978, I had a little transistor radio that I used to listen to constantly. So I have had quite a love affair with radio, and if you’ve read the book and seen the movie, Mom and I spent a year on the longest campaign in the history of radio.

What do you remember about that first radio tour?

Wynonna: These characters from the label would get in a car with us and we would drive all day. We called it the “shake and howdy,” the “grip ‘n’ grin.” And at the end of the day, they would take us to a hotel conference room, invite the local radio people and we’d sing live. RCA just sent us on this adventure to meet every radio person in the United States. We had Gaylen [Adams] in Atlanta and Carson [Schreiber] in California. We’d fly in, get in the backseat of a car, my mother smelling of Jungle Gardenia and I’d get a headache.

Naomi: We had never traveled. We hadn’t been to Dallas, Seattle or Salt Lake City, so we were wide-eyed. We put on weight because we ate all these big meals. We called it “The Great American Restaurant Tour.” One of our reps, Jack Weston, had a shirt made that said that.

One naïveté was that we shared a hotel room. It never occurred to us we could have our own rooms. And we were so eager. We would

of a sudden, “Had A Dream” came on. We were quiet, listening, then the DJ said, “That’s The Judds on WSM Radio.” We were over the moon, pounding on the windows and screaming. I actually used to call in to WSIX and WSM, disguise my voice and request the song.

Wynonna: I heard the guitar and then the lyrics, and I remember going, “Holy crap.” Our producer was driving and I think it was timed for us to be in the car. I’ll never forget it.

Do you remember watching “Mama He’s Crazy” climb the charts?

Wynonna: Oh, heck yes. I was beside myself. When it went No. 1, I thought I had won the lottery. And I kind of did, actually.

Naomi: We were in the studio with Brent Maher. We lived for the *Billboard*. One of the reps would call us before 5pm on Friday. I know it’s not good for you, psychologically, to need that report card from society, but back then we planned our life around it.

When you were racking up all those hits, did you ever think, “Hey, this is easy”? Or did you really appreciate how remarkable that was?

Wynonna: Both. When you’re that young and ignorant, you still think there’s a Santa Claus. But it was a lot of hard work. I don’t ever remember having time off. I do remember how hard it was to keep that momentum going. Maybe we made it look easy because we were

Does it mean something special to you to be receiving this award the same night Joe Galante is honored with the CRB President’s Award?

Naomi: I can’t think of another soul who would be more appropriate. We liked him the first time we met him. He had on a Tommy Bahama shirt and was so low-key in his short sleeves and slacks. We’d never met anyone that important before, and I think we expected him to be a Mafioso in sunglasses.

He came over to me at a recent event, hugged me and said, “I love you.” He had a reflective look in his eyes. That was as meaningful as getting an award. I thought about how grateful I am that there are people in this industry I cherish, and there are so many in the business I feel that way about.

What does your relationship with radio mean to you?

Wynonna: The thing I’m most proud of is that I keep showing up, and radio does, too. It is a community. Whether I have a song on the charts or not, I really feel supported by a group of people who have been with me for 25 years. We’ve bypassed the audition. We’re now into, “If you don’t play this record, you’ll play the next.” I don’t care who you are, you have to earn that place, and I think that’s really good for artists because we can get into a feeling of entitlement. And radio keeps us honest.

CAC