

CLOSE UP

CMA

DECEMBER 2014 | JANUARY 2015

JENNIFER NETTLES
THE SPIRIT OF
"CMA COUNTRY CHRISTMAS"

**STYLISTS
ROCK THE CMA
RED CARPET**

**TRISHA
YEARWOOD**

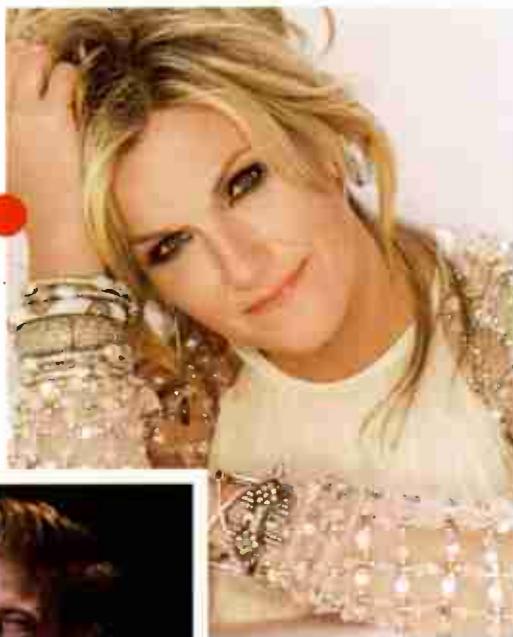
**BACK ON TOP
WITH
PRIZEFIGHTER**

CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES—10 UNFORGETTABLE YEARS

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FOCUS

TRISHA YEARWOOD
 "CMA COUNTRY CHRISTMAS"
 HOST JENNIFER NETTLES
 DEBUT SPOTLIGHT



CMA CURRENT

PULSE
 CMA AWARDS RADIO REMOTES
 CMA FOUNDATION'S NEW INVESTMENTS
 CMA SUPPORTS TOYS FOR TOTS
 CMA EXPANDS SRO AWARDS /
 STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP
 10 YEARS OF CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES



THE CUSP

RED CARPET STYLISTS
 COUNTRY CARES AT ST. JUDE



CULTURE

CMA BOARD PRESIDENT JOHN ESPOSITO

SHORT CIRCUIT

MASTHEAD AND
 CONTRIBUTORS
 EVENTS CALENDAR,
 CU LATER, NEXT ISSUE
 AND ONLINE PREVIEWS

AT ABOVE

CMA AWARD WINNERS
 ENCORE:
 LON VARNELL



26

photos: Jennifer Nettles hosts "CMA Country Christmas" - John Russell; Trisha Yearwood - Randee St. Nicholas; Darius Buckner at St. Jude Children's Hospital - courtesy of St. Jude Children's Hospital; Hunter Hayes at VH1 Save the Music Celebration - Steve Baum



ENTERTAINER
OF THE YEAR
.....
LUKE BRYAN

MEET
ALL THE 2014
CMA AWARDS WINNERS
AT CMAAWARDS.COM




ALBUM OF THE YEAR
FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR
SINGLE OF THE YEAR
VOCAL EVENT OF THE YEAR
.....

MIRANDA LAMBERT



MALE VOCALIST
OF THE YEAR
.....
BLAKE SHELTON

photos: ThePerformance.com, Jack Hamrick/Photo.com, iStock.com/stevegraham

CMA WELCOMES COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2014

On Oct. 27, Hank Cochran, Ronnie Milsap and Mac Wiseman were inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame at the CMA Theater.

(l-r) CMA CEO Sarah Trahern; Suzi Cochran, representing her late husband Hank; Wiseman; Kyle Young, Director, Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum; and Milsap.



photo: John Russell



JO WALKER-MEADOR HONORED AT LOUISE SCRUGGS MEMORIAL FORUM

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum honored longtime CMA Executive Director Jo Walker-Meador during its annual Louise Scruggs Memorial Forum on Nov. 12.

(l-r) CMA CEO Sarah Trahern, Walker-Meador and Country Music Hall of Fame Director Kyle Young, Director, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

photo: Donn Jones

JOE NICHOLS? YEAH!

It was party time on Sept. 16, as CMA hosted festivities to celebrate the chart-topping success of Joe Nichols' single "Yeah."

(standing) CMA's Membership and Balloting team, a.k.a. Coordinator Brenden Oliver, Senior Director Brandi Simms and Assistant Carrie Tekautz; (seated) co-writer Ashley Gorley, Nichols and co-writer Bryan Simpson.



photo: Amanda Eckard

STARS SHINE FOR CMA EDU

John King, Eric Paslay and "The Mayor of Music Row" Charlie Monk are among the Country notables that have taken part at recent CMA EDU events on college campuses. And on Oct. 28, the Vanderbilt University EDU chapter welcomed Phil Vassar to a panel discussion.

(top row, l-r) Nicole Zeller, Senior Publicist and Marketing Director PLA Media; Steve Cook, bassist for Phil Vassar; Vassar; Jeff Howard, agent, APA; Kenny Thurman, sound engineer, Vassar (bottom row) Vanderbilt CMA EDU officers Alex Justice, Siri Velamanchill and Caroline Schwartz.



KEEP YOUR FINGER ON THE PULSE. VISIT CMACLOSEUP.COM



NASHVILLE ROCKS TO THE 2014 CMA AWARDS

On Nov. 3, during his free concert on Nashville's Bridgestone Plaza, Hunter Hayes and CMA CEO Sarah Trahern surprised a war hero and his family by bringing them to the stage and giving them tickets to the CMA Awards in recognition of his six deployments and his family's sacrifice in service to the country.

(l-r) Aolani Arnold, Trahern, Kaelynn Arnold, Sgt. 1st Class Tyler Arnold and Crystal Arnold.



photo: Sara Shurren

photos: Kayla Schoen

NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND FURTHER HORIZONS AT CMA AWARDS RADIO REMOTES

by CRYSTAL CAVINESS

Radio stations throughout the United States have benefited for years from the CMA Radio Remotes. Through live interviews with the stars of Country Music, these two days of drive-time broadcasts have counted down the hours and built anticipation for the CMA Awards in markets from coast to coast.



CMA CEO SARAH TRAHERN WELCOMES JAKE OWEN.



MARTY "THE ONE MAN PARTY" YOUNG, MIKE WHELESS AND JANIE CAROTHERS OF WQDR/RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA. SHARE A MOMENT WITH LUKE BRYAN.

This year, after 19 years of partnership with Premiere Networks, CMA assumed complete responsibility for the remotes. The primary difference in this switchover is that where the remotes were open previously only to Premiere-syndicated stations, from this point the door is open to all.

"The main strategy was to make this an inclusive radio remote rather than exclusive," explained Damon Whiteside, CMA Senior VP, Marketing and Strategic Partnerships. "A common goal for the Country Music industry is to have the broadest possible reach for the Awards, which is good for everybody because it expands the reach of the Country Music industry. CMA is much vested in Country radio and the future of Country radio, and that's why we looked at this new model.

"Premiere Radio has been a wonderful partner," he continued. "Premiere has been tremendously helpful with the transition to this new model. They have been a longtime valued partner and have really set a high standard of excellence for the remotes. We will continue this tradition of excellence."

With "the playing field leveled," according to Whiteside, an unprecedented 326 stations in approximately 290 markets carried content from the radio remote. "We essentially doubled our reach of markets this year by having this new model," he noted. "Every major group was represented here. The spirit, judging from the Radio Committee and the industry, has been one of great support. Radio is such a competitive environment, and to have them working cooperatively with this, it is groundbreaking because it's never been done with this model."

WATCH KELLY SUTTON'S SUPERSTAR INTERVIEWS DURING THE PRE-AWARDS RADIO REMOTES AT CMA CLOSE UP.COM

"I think it's great that CMA has taken on this challenge and this production," said Ellen Appleton, who produced the remotes for the previous 18 years and did so again in 2014. "It's important to CMA and to the stations and to the talent. The remote is a wonderful platform to reach the fans. CMA is trying to be more inclusive and give more stations the opportunity to participate."

Participating stations were able to interview Country artists in five-minute segments, all within the space of a private studio bearing the CMA Awards logo.

"Instead of our typical radio row, we built the radio participants a beautiful studio," Appleton said. "The broadcasters were also able to grab video content to put out on social media, the radio stations and each of their station websites. Most of the interviews were pre-run, reminding people to watch the Awards, but some may have run post-show too. The neat thing is that they could still be using the content after the Awards. It just develops in its own way."

"We had the entire Country radio universe at our remote," Whiteside said. "This is the first time ever that an artist could participate in the remote and reach nearly 100 percent of the Country radio universe. We covered every market where there is a Country presence. And we had huge artist participation because it was the first time an artist could get that kind of reach all in one place."

Country Music fans reaped benefits too. "We reached so many more fans with our content," Whiteside said. "It was a great fan experience with really rich fan content. The radio stations captured some incredible artist interviews, and all Country radio fans had access to this."

"CMA has never taken on this kind of task, and they as an organization have never managed it. The number of radio stations participating is a much larger number than has previously been done," said Mike Moore, Chairman of the CMA Radio Committee and Director of Country Programming for Entercom Communications in Portland, Oregon. "When it's over, we will figure out what worked and what didn't."

"I'm really excited," he continued. "We all know what a tremendous vehicle radio is to drive this kind of message. We're seeing a level of cooperation among various radio groups that we haven't seen in the past. This is good for the format. It is how we as the format help build the stars for today and tomorrow. That's why we had a vested interest in the success of this."



"THIS IS THE FIRST TIME EVER THAT AN ARTIST COULD PARTICIPATE IN THE REMOTE AND REACH NEARLY 100 PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY RADIO UNIVERSE."

– Damon Whiteside,
CMA Senior VP,
Marketing and Strategic
Partnerships



(LEFT) LON HELTON OF *COUNTRY AIRCHECK*. CMA SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP AND BALLOTING BRANDI SIMMS. CHRIS YOUNG, CMA COMMUNITY OUTREACH MANAGER TIFFANY KERNS AND ROB BECKHAM, CO-HEAD/AGENT AT WILLIAM MORRIS ENDEAVOR ENTERTAINMENT. POSE WITH STUDENTS FROM NASHVILLE'S HILLSBORO HIGH SCHOOL VOCAL TECHNIQUES CLASS AT THE CMA AWARDS RADIO REMOTE PRE-PARTY.

TOP DESIGNERS DISH ON DRESSING THE STARS

by JANE R. SNYDER

Anyone with a passion for fashion can usually trace it back to childhood. Consider Tiffany Gifford, Gina Ketchum and Trish Townsend – top fashion stylists who rush from plane to taxi to designer showrooms in order to create the right image for superstar clients with nonstop schedules.

Taught how to sew by her grandmother, Townsend has created looks for Vince Gill, Amy Grant and Blake Shelton, among many other artists. She began her journey by stitching paper towels together on a Little Touch & Sew machine from Singer, which she still owns. "Vince is responsible for my start in Country Music," she explained. "I have to thank him for everything that's followed an opportunity he gave me more than 20 years ago. I researched where to shop in L.A. and what would work for him. He herded me onto a plane, handed me a credit card and hired a car to drive me around. The trunk of that limo overflowed by the time I'd finished shopping. It was a grand start!"

Ketchum's adventures began in elementary school, where she won first prize in a contest to design a Brownie patch. Her main image, a drum with drumsticks, foretold her future in the music industry. A specialist in working with male artists, she counts Eli Young Band, Florida Georgia Line and Joe Nichols among her many clients.

And Gifford, who has guided Miranda Lambert's evolving style, started in her parents' bedroom in Texas, where she made fuzzy blankets into ball gowns for her little sister. After graduation from the Parsons School of Design in New York City, she worked for acclaimed fashion stylist Andrea Lieberman and later served for half a decade as a fashion editor and stylist for *Condé Nast Traveler* before heading back home to the South. She now styles for artists including Katie Armiger, Sheryl Crow, Little Big Town, Ashley Monroe, Pistol Annies, Thompson Square and most recently Lee Ann Womack.

Each designer can testify that coming up with the right Red Carpet outfit is no easy matter. For this year's CMA Awards, Townsend worked

to create approximately 20 outfits for Carrie Underwood, which filled the garment racks in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirrors in her loft. Each one would be tried on before she and Underwood would select the final 10 or 12 outfits to be worn before, during and after the broadcast.

"Details can make all the difference," Townsend insisted. "If you want to achieve a good image, it starts from the inside. Foundations are crucial to how a garment will look, and having things altered properly is a must."

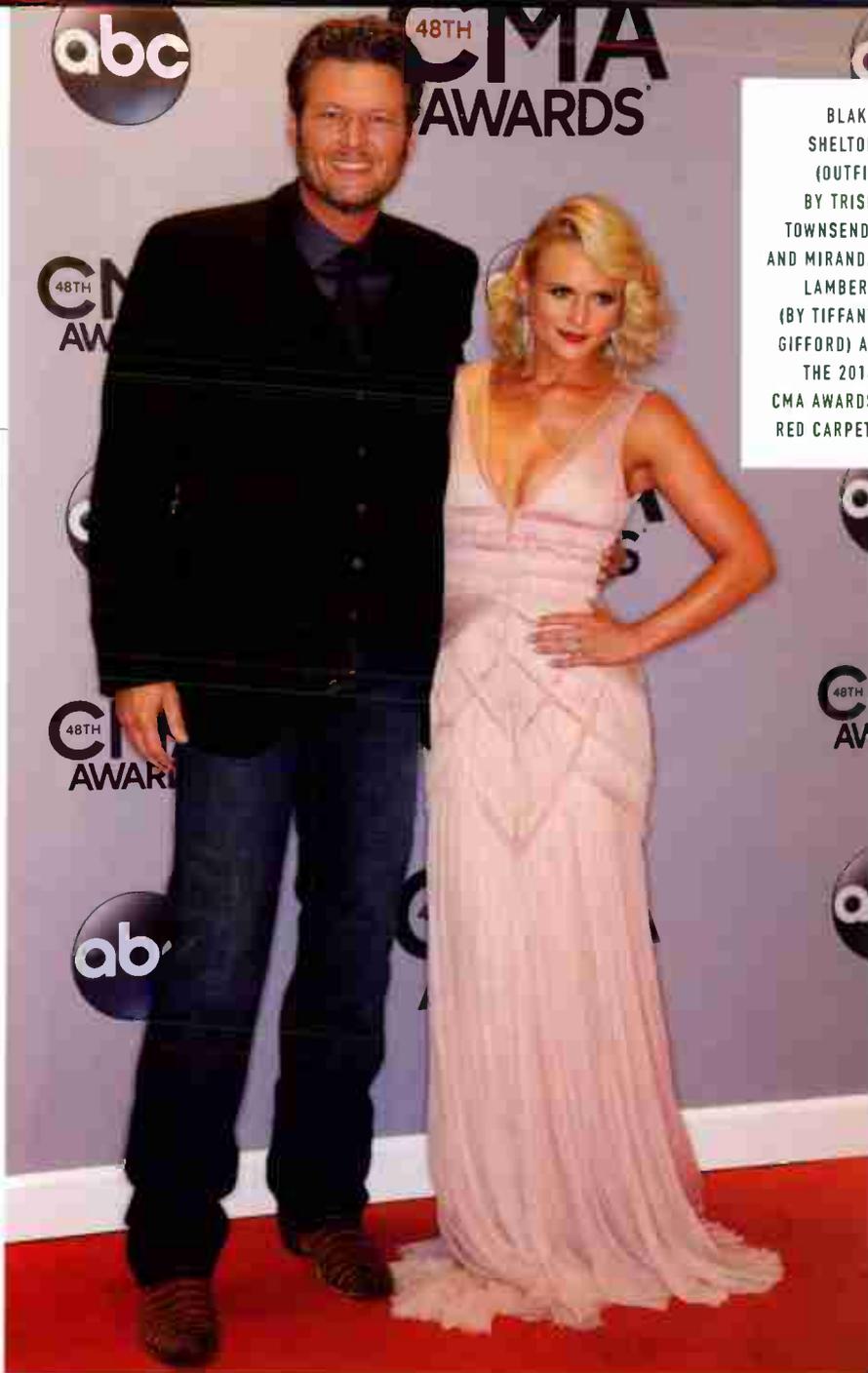
As CMA Awards day neared, dozens of bins in her studio filled with accessories to finalize each look, waiting to be opened and evaluated. Townsend keeps an inventory of everything in her head, and she knows exactly where to find whatever she needs, in her studio as well as during the live broadcast.

"For the CMAs, sometimes we only have 60 seconds for Carrie to change," she said. "It's just like NASCAR back there — zzzzt, zzzzt, zzzzt — and then she heads back onstage. It can get pretty hectic."

Designing doesn't always mean starting from scratch to come up with a great look. For example, Gina Ketchum thoroughly enjoys transforming a pair of jeans into a one-of-a-kind statement, or using her skills to alter or applique a T-shirt or jacket.

"My guys just love it when I surprise them with something they haven't seen before," she said. "I don't have a single client who isn't willing to try something different, whether it's a garment, a bracelet or an unusual belt. Even small details, like the black-and-gray pocket square I designed for Darius Rucker to wear at the 2014 Grammy Awards, can attract a lot of attention."

Sometimes, though, an artist might be a little



BLAKE
SHELTON
(OUTFIT
BY TRISH
TOWNSEND)
AND MIRANDA
LAMBERT
(BY TIFFANY
GIFFORD) AT
THE 2014
CMA AWARDS
RED CARPET.

“WHEN
MIRANDA
LOOKS IN THE
MIRROR, DOES
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BEAUTIFUL?
IF SHE DOES,
THAT’S GREAT,
AND I’VE DONE
MY JOB.”

– Tiffany Gifford

too tall for altering ready-to-wear items. “At 6 foot 5, Blake Shelton is a big guy, so it’s often easier for me to design something original than to find something that will fit him well,” Townsend said. “He’s a lot of fun and open to new ideas, but since he doesn’t wear any ‘bling’ besides his wedding ring, I’m left with shirts, ties, vests and jackets to spruce him up. Once he puts on his jeans and boots,

that’s when I get to be creative.”

A great designer’s handiwork isn’t confined to stage appearances or video shoots. When Rucker performed “I Got Nothin’” on the PBS special “Country Music: In Performance at the White House,” Ketchum’s styling was front and center in the singer’s classic appearance. And the day Florida Georgia Line’s

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... continued from page 9

Brian Kelley married Brittney Marie Cole, his honey-colored leather vest and dark jeans set the tone for a nontraditional outdoor ceremony at his Nashville home.

Gifford's approach prioritizes connecting with brands and designers in New York, Los Angeles and Europe. "You wouldn't want me doing your hair and makeup," she said, with a laugh. "Those professionals are incredibly important to the end result. But an overall look takes its cue from the clothes first. The stylist is the quarterback of each play."

One recent triumph for Gifford and Lambert came during the two-hour "Fashion Rocks" show, which took place at Barclays Center on Sept. 9, during New York's Fashion Week. Lambert was one of many stars assembled for the occasion; models included Enrique Iglesias, Jennifer Hudson, KISS, Jennifer Lopez, Nicki Minaj, Usher and Country notables Luke Bryan and The Band Perry. Yet even within this company, Lambert turned heads.

"There was a lot of pressure from all angles, especially because we knew the fashion press would be watching," the designer explained. "I wanted it to be an amazing moment for Miranda, to do something unexpected. So I put her in a sparkling bra top under a black tux with leather details on the Red Carpet, and a sexy, custom-made, silky red romper for her performance of 'Little Red Wagon.' Valentina Kova designed a really spunky, fun piece that everyone loved, and it looked amazing under the stage lights!

**CMA
AWARD WINNER
MIRANDA LAMBERT
SHARES HER RED
CARPET PRIORITIES ON
CMACLOSEUP.COM.**



TRISH TOWNSEND AND DON O'NEILL, CHIEF DESIGNER FOR THEIA, EXPLORE DRAPING OPTIONS FOR CARRIE UNDERWOOD'S 2014 CMA AWARDS RED CARPET OUTFIT AT THE THEIA NEW YORK STUDIO.



GINA KETCHUM WITH TYLER HUBBARD OF FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE.

"Miranda has always been a very confident person, and she sends such a strong message to women everywhere," Gifford added. "For her, it's not about the fashion; it's all about the music. But I always want to make sure I'm on the right track. What it really comes down to is, when Miranda looks in the mirror, does she feel beautiful? If she does, that's great, and I've done my job."

As Townsend put it, "Your journey is your journey. You end up where you're supposed to be." And it's the designer's job to show the world you've arrived.

TiffanyGifford.com; [@TiffanyGifford](#)
GinaKetchum.com; [@KetchumGina](#);
TrishTownsend.com

photo: (l) Justin Mursek; (above) courtesy of Trish Townsend



by DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

The music industry has been through some seismic shifts in the last few years — just like Trisha Yearwood.

The Georgia native has reinvented and repositioned herself, becoming an Emmy-winning TV personality and *New York Times* best-selling author who is expanding her brand to include cookware and cutlery lines.

"I'm more surprised than anybody that I'm having these kinds of conversations," Yearwood said of the opportunities that have been coming her way as a result of her two best-selling cookbooks (a third is due next spring) and her Food Network cooking show, "Trisha's Southern Kitchen." Now in its fifth season, the show won a 2013 Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Culinary Program.

As she's enjoyed this unexpected new chapter in her career, fans have kept asking her if she was finished with music. On *PrizeFighter: Hit After Hit*, her first new music in seven years, she shows them she isn't. "There's a little bit of everything. It covers the gamut," she said of the album, which includes new versions of 10 of her greatest hits along with six new songs.

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TRISHA YEARWOOD

puts music back on the front burner



DON HENLEY
JOINS TRISHA
YEARWOOD
TO PERFORM
"WALKAWAY JDE"
AT THE 1992
CMA AWARDS.

On top of that, *PrizeFighter* marks Yearwood's debut as a Sony Music artist. Among the reasons she cites for joining the roster is that her husband, Garth Brooks, was already onboard. "We wanted to be on the same label because we want to do duet records," Yearwood said. "We wanted to be able to do whatever we wanted and we've never been on the same record label, so it was kind of born out of looking to find a home that wanted to work with both of us."

In signing with Sony, Yearwood has also launched her own imprint. "That makes the music more of a partnership," she explained. "I don't feel like I can do it by myself because you need a record label to help with all the other things they help with, but I was really interested in it because Sony said, 'Let's be partners here.' And it just feels great. We're both equally invested in this together. It makes a lot of sense to me."

Yearwood named the imprint, Gwendolyn Records, for her mother, who passed away in 2011 after battling cancer. "There's a song called 'I Remember You' (written by Kelly Archer, Ben Caver and Brad Rempel) that is really a tribute to her," she said. "I think about my mom and my

dad, but I guess Mom being the most recent (passing), I just really think about her a lot. It's a beautiful song. It's not sad to me. It's really more about that you're always with me."

The title song, "PrizeFighter" (Jessi Alexander, Sarah Buxton and Ross Copperman), also reminds Yearwood of her mom and others battling challenges in life. "When I hear this song, I see everything about my mom," she said. "I think about the soldiers I visited at Walter Reed (National Military Medical Center). I think about little kids going to school and getting bullied. There are so many things going through my head. It's a really cool song and it just seemed like the right title for this album."

In recording the album, Yearwood once again worked with longtime friend and producer Garth Fundis. The two first teamed before she signed her first record deal with MCA Records and exploded on the scene with the hit "She's in Love With the Boy."

"I don't think we approached being in the studio any differently with *PrizeFighter*," Fundis said. "We still just tried to find the best songs, things that just seem to fit her like a glove. She's always been really good at having a sense of what fits her and what she can own as a song. She gives them the definitive performance."

Yearwood was conscious of making the vocals sound like what's happening on radio today. "Years ago, it was the norm to crank in reverb and effects and stuff like that," Fundis noted. "She told me upfront she was looking for a drier sound, a little less reverb, a little more presence, a little more in-your-face. A lot of contemporary music these days, if you listen, doesn't have as much reverb and echo on the vocals, so she wanted to specifically try to do that."

**"NOW, IN THE MODERN ERA
OF COUNTRY MUSIC, I'M
TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC.
IT'S SO FUNNY."** – Trisha Yearwood

Yearwood finds it interesting that with changes in the sound of Country Music, perceptions of her work have changed as well. "Somebody said, 'They (the songs on *PrizeFighter*) sound Country,'" she said. "Was it intentional? Were you really trying to do something more Country?" I said, "They're not. They're kind of classic Trisha stuff. It's what I do." When I first started making records, everybody said, 'You're not traditional Country.' And I said, 'I'm more raised on the Ronstadt thing. It's more of a contemporary Country sound. It's not pop, but it's definitely not traditional Country.' Now, in the modern era of Country music, I'm traditional Country Music. It's so funny."

"Trisha is widely thought of as one of the best singers ever in Country Music," said Gary Overton, Chairman/CEO, Sony Music Nashville. "So it is an honor that she has chosen to sign with us. Trisha's new music is what her fans would expect and want from her. She delivers a strong new album that has brand new songs as well as some of her biggest hits, including 'Walkaway Joe,' 'Wrong Side of Memphis' and 'The Song Remembers When.'"

Overton acknowledges that finding airplay will be an uphill battle. "It's no secret that females are having a hard time getting on Country radio," he affirmed. "But Trisha is bringing so much to the table it's hard to believe that radio will not buy in. She is also touring with Garth Brooks on his record-breaking world tour that is selling out multiple nights in every tour city. In addition to the

great new music, she has one of the top-rated cooking shows on television right now and so is seen every day right in people's homes. There is so much interest and affection for her that it's hard to believe that radio will not give her a chance. Through all this, and hopefully with the help of Country radio, we believe there are a lot of fans who want to hear new music from Trisha and will really enjoy the updated sound of her megahits."

Whether it's building her brand as a cooking guru or recording a new album, Yearwood brings passion and integrity to every endeavor and a deep sense of gratitude for every opportunity. "I really just never dreamed it would lead to all this," she admitted. "But it comes out of something I love to do so I'm enjoying all of it."

TrishaYearwood.com; [@TrishaYearwood](#)

LOOKING FOR
AN ENDORSEMENT?
TRISHA YEARWOOD
OFFERS ADVICE AT
CMACLOSEUP.COM.



TRISHA YEARWOOD, CENTER, PERFORMS WITH KIM RICHEY AND MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER AT THE 2000 CMA AWARDS.

CMA FOUNDATION

**BROADENS
SUPPORT
FOR MUSIC
EDUCATION**



by BOB DOERSCHUK

Through television specials, the annual CMA Music Festival, Songwriters Series events and many more manifestations, the Country Music Association has chiseled a high-visibility identity for itself. Yet some of the organization's most valuable activities take place away from public view, through its support for charitable causes and in particular those that enhance opportunities for music education.

These contributions stem from the good work of the CMA Foundation. Since its inception in 2011, the Foundation has donated more than \$9 million to organizations that help enhance the lives of students through the power of music. Recipients have included the Tennessee Performing Arts Center's after-school Disney Musicals in Schools program, Music Summer Camp at Nashville's W.O. Smith Music School, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's Words & Music program, the Music Education Program at Nashville's

Rocketown, two music classrooms at the Hector Fontanez Public School 103 in New York City and of course 144 Metro Nashville Public Schools, through CMA's Keep the Music Playing initiative.

As the 2014 CMA Awards approached, the Foundation extended its outreach even further. On Nov. 4, one day before the Awards, a new partnership was announced between the CMA Foundation and Notes for Notes, whose mission is to build recording studios at Boys and Girls Club facilities throughout the United States. With an initial donation of \$20,000 to the Nashville Notes for Notes chapter, the Foundation has committed \$375,000 to expand the program in 2015 to chapters in Atlanta, Austin, Brooklyn, Detroit and San Francisco.

"The CMA Foundation is beyond excited to launch our first multi-city investment with the Notes for Notes organization," said Joe Galante, Chair of the CMA Foundation Board of Directors.

"Notes for Notes is the first stop for many youth when they want to explore music but the moment they walk through the door they instantly feel that it is so much more, a community where they can collaborate, share and freely express themselves through music," added Philip Gilley, CEO and co-founder of Notes for Notes.

Longtime CMA partner Chevrolet was onboard as well, with an additional \$25,000 for Notes for Notes in its hometown, Detroit. "Chevrolet has deep musical roots so it makes sense that we'd come together with CMA to support

music education here in Detroit," said Paul Edwards, U.S. Vice President, Chevrolet. "Through this program we could be supporting the next in a long line of great artists from our hometown."

"Chevrolet has traditionally been a valued partner," said CMA CEO Sarah Trahern. "To have them join us in raising funds for music education through a partnership with the CMA Foundation proves how committed they are to our artists and the programs that are important to our community."

"As we prepare to celebrate our top-notch creative contributors it is important to be mindful of the next generation of musicians, artists, songwriters, and music fans," she continued. "Providing these children access to instruments and music professionals to develop their skills and appreciation for music is an important part of our mission."

LEARN
MORE ABOUT
NOTES FOR NOTES AT
CMACLOSEUP.COM.

(BOTTOM OF PAGE) Dignitaries and Notes for Notes student participants, in T-shirts, gather on the CMA Awards Red Carpet on Nov. 4. (kneeling, l-r) Will Flores and Cameron Cassel (row 2, l-r) CMA CEO Sarah Trahern; Joe Galante, CMA Foundation Board Chairman; Juliana Lee, Notes for Notes Director of M.A.T.H; Jen Hodges and Mary-Grace Williams; Damon Whiteside, CMA Senior Vice President of Marketing and Strategic Partnerships; Mike Weidman, Chevrolet National Promotions Manager (back row, l-r) Jarrad James, Notes for Notes Program Director; Rod Hare, Co-Founder and Board Chairman of Notes for Notes; Jayda Carlton and Sentwan Gooch; Phillip Gilley, Co-Founder and CEO, Notes for Notes; and Mike Slay. (BELOW) Hunter Hayes takes a selfie with Roanoke, Virginia, public school orchestra students during a rehearsal prior to the "Save the Music Roanoke Celebration" concert at Roanoke Performing Arts Theatre at the Berglund Center. (FACING PAGE) Student Irving Brown lays vocal tracks at the Notes® Studio Nashville North.5



photo: (top) Steve Exum; (bottom) Caitlin Harris

CMA & TOYS FOR TOTS

PARTNER AT "CMA COUNTRY CHRISTMAS"

by CHUCK SCHULTZ

Less-advantaged families could have no better friend than Toys for Tots, which specializes in combining compassion with military determination. Its official name — the United States Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program — sums up its unique attributes. Since 1948, celebrities both real (Bob Hope, Ronald Reagan, Frank Sinatra, John Wayne) and virtual (Bugs Bunny, Dennis the Menace, Mickey Mouse) have endorsed its efforts. Oscar-winning songwriters Sammy Fain and Paul Webster composed the Toys for Tots theme. No less than Walt Disney and his staff designed the organization's logo.



Its colors were lavender, yellow and pink. Well, the Marine Corps doesn't do lavender, yellow and pink, so in 1948 the train became all red," said a smiling Maj. Bill Grein (Ret.), VP, Marine Toys for Tots Foundation.

Country Music artists have long lent their support too, Charlie Daniels, Lorrie Morgan, Kenny Rogers, George Strait and many others among them. That tradition solidified this year, as CMA partnered with Disney|ABC Television Group (DATG) and Toys for Tots to collect thousands of toys, which will in turn be donated directly to a local Toys for Tots unit within the Nashville community. The "Share The Joy" campaign, which will run throughout the month of December and be referenced on social media via #ShareTheJoy, will allow its business units and employees to collect and donate new toys that will benefit children and families during the holiday season.

Volunteers were on site at the Bridgestone Arena plaza with specially marked bins to collect toys beginning Nov. 7, the day "CMA Country Christmas" was taped. "It's the least I could do," said Gail Stephenson, 43, of Baltimore, Maryland, as she and her two sons put Nerf basketballs into a bin. "Giving is much more fun than receiving."

"My kids decided that they'd take whatever money they earned for October and go out and buy toys and some books and donate them for Toys for Tots," added Anthony McAndrews, 32, of Hendersonville, Tennessee.

Staff Sgt. William Anderson, 34, of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, was one of many regional Marines collecting the toys. "It's an honor to be part of such a fulfilling experience and prove that Marines are human too," he said.

As in 2013, Tennessee Titans tight end Delanie Walker (No. 82) helped the Marine volunteers collect toys. "Every child deserves to feel loved and appreciated, especially at Christmas," said Walker. "Every donated and unwrapped toy collected on Friday will go directly to helping a child's holiday be a little brighter."

"Finding a present under the tree on Christmas morning is an experience every child deserves," said Grein. "Over the past 66 years the Walt Disney Company, our first national corporate sponsor, has certainly done more than its fair share to help our Marines bring that joy to children whose families have struggled so much. Each year we are able to reach seven million children. With the full support of The Walt Disney Company again this year, we are hopeful that we'll fulfill the holiday dreams of many additional



deserving children. The toys raised at 'CMA Country Christmas' this year are certainly a great start."

"Our artist community is extremely generous and so are our fans," said CMA CEO Sarah Trahern. "It is our goal to make sure no child goes without a present this Christmas, and we are grateful to our network partner ABC and Toys for Tots for helping to make this dream come true for children everywhere."

ToysForTots.org; @ToysForTots_USA

(TOP)Tennessee Titan Delanie Walker, (third from left), CMA New Artist of the Year Brett Eldredge (center) CMA CEO Sarah Trahern (right) and U.S. Marines collect toys for Nashville children in need at the Bridgestone Arena prior to the "CMA Country Christmas" taping on Nov. 7.

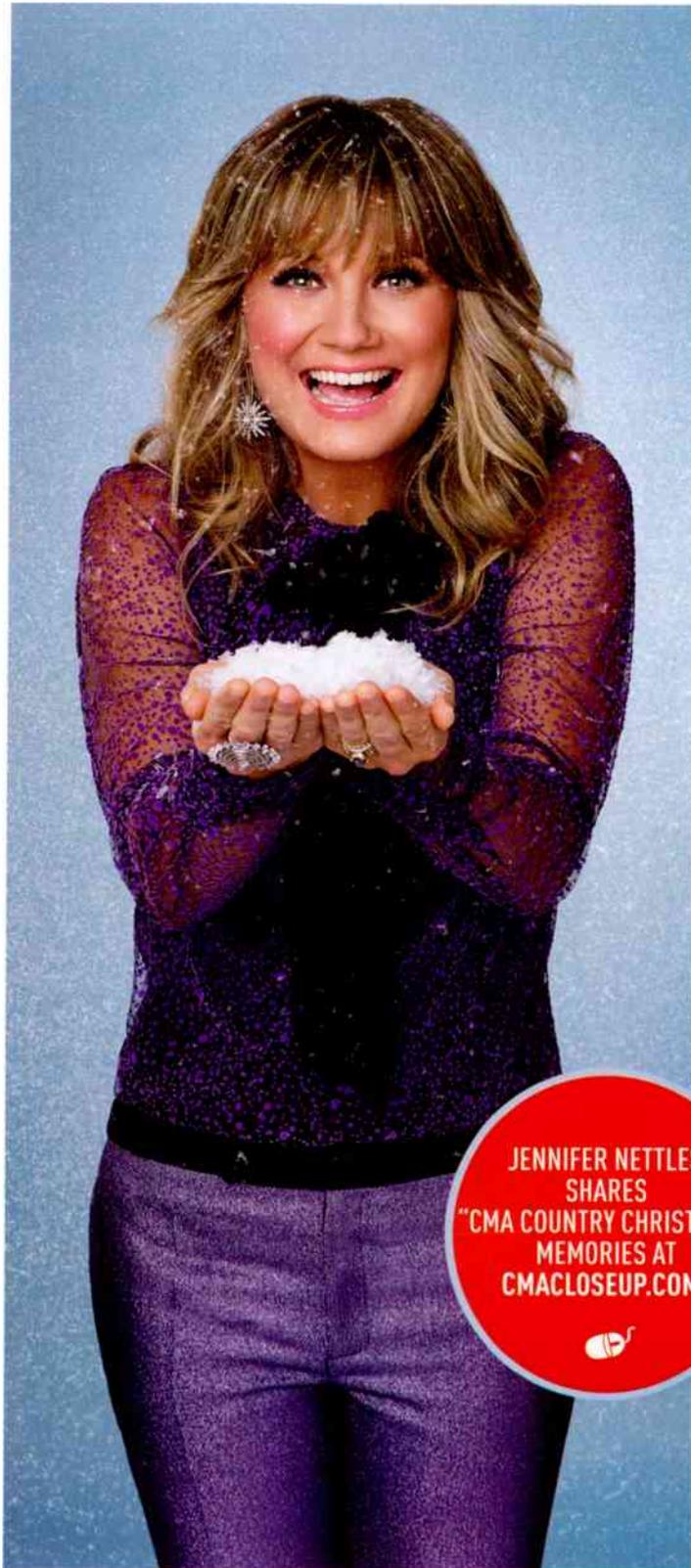
(ABOVE)Major Bill Grein (Ret.), VP, Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, with Billy Ray Cyrus, 2003 Toys for Tots National Spokesperson.

(FACING PAGE) Lon Helton, CMA CEO Sarah Trahern, Brett Eldredge, Charlie Cook, and Delanie Walker collect toys for Nashville children in need at Bridgestone Arena on Nov. 7, 2014, in Nashville, Tennessee.

JENNIFER NETTLES REFLECTS ON FIVE YEARS OF HOSTING

"CMA COUNTRY CHRISTMAS"

by BOB DOERSCHUK



JENNIFER NETTLES
SHARES
"CMA COUNTRY CHRISTMAS"
MEMORIES AT
CMACLOSEUP.COM.



What does Jennifer Nettles have in common with Perry Como, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and Stephen Colbert? Aside from being terrific entertainers, all have hosted Christmas television specials.

And what distinguishes her within this elite company? Well, she's done so while pregnant. More important, she's just logged her fifth consecutive year as the face of "CMA Country Christmas," which the ABC Television Network will re-air on Saturday, Dec. 20, 9:00-11:00PM/ET.

As in previous years, a stellar lineup graces this year's broadcast, with Dan + Shay, Brett Eldredge, Sara Evans, Hunter Hayes, Alan Jackson, Little Big Town, Idina Menzel, Brad Paisley with Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, LeAnn Rimes, Michael W. Smith and Carrie Underwood all onboard.

But Nettles' presence as emcee unifies each show into a consistent yet evolving brand, in large part because of her work with executive producer Robert Deaton, director Paul Miller, writer David Wild and their synchronicities as a team.

How does Nettles assess her role in the "CMA Country Christmas" saga? Let's find out.

Can you compare the Jennifer Nettles of 2010, hosting "CMA Country Christmas" for the first time, and Jennifer Nettles in that capacity today?

I feel much more confident. The first year was electric and exciting, but there was a bit of nervousness there that made it hard to enjoy some of the moments. But I've had a wonderful relationship with Robert Deaton, who produces the show. We've done so many fun things together. We've learned to shape the show to make it most

efficient because obviously it's taped live. There's a live audience there, and if you're an audience member there are elements of it that you get to see behind the curtain. So we've learned a lot about efficiency and about wardrobe changes. I mean, that first year, there were so many wardrobe changes, it was crazy! I've also learned enough to be able to have fun and not just be nervous.

How have your ideas about hosting a TV special evolved? Is this something you even think about as the show nears?

Sure, I definitely do. Out of the five years of doing this and watching my peers and my contemporaries and people I've admired, I've come to realize that the job of the host is to make everyone feel comfortable, just like being a host at a party. It's like being a seamstress, if you will, to connect the performances. You need to be able to think on your feet. And you need to enjoy the moment yourself, because then everyone else will too.

When did you and Robert begin talking about the special?

It had to have been the middle or the end of the summer that we had conversations in preparation for talking about the opener. The opener is always such a big number. It has a lot of production to it and you want to find the right energy. You always want the opening to be a *big* number, as we say in show business (*laughs*). There are dancers. There's a lot of production value going into it, because you want to welcome people, get them excited and set the tone for the energy of the evening.

How do you and Robert decide who to feature with you in the duet performances you've done over the years?

The conversations begin early in the summer, where I become involved. This is not necessarily just for the duets, but it always makes sense to focus on artists that have a

Christmas album coming out. That being said, especially having done the duets on this show, Robert and I have a really good relationship on who we think would work well and who might be a good artist for the show in general. Robert is always open if there's anyone with whom I have a relationship, either personally or musically.

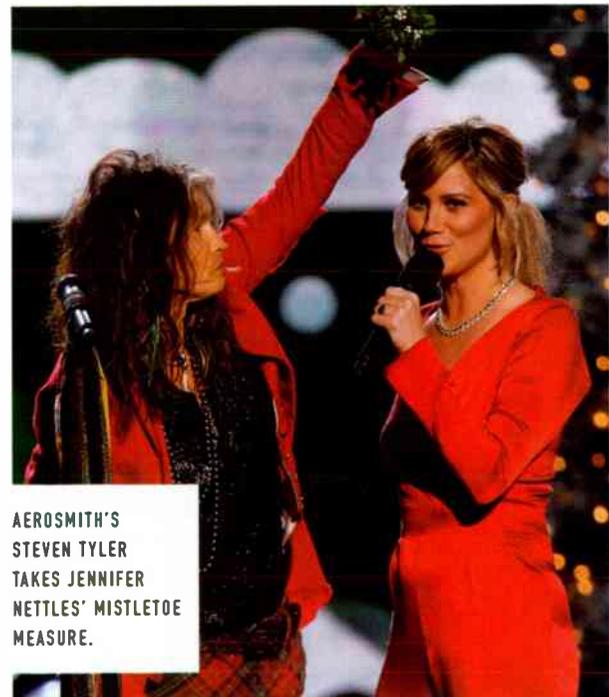
This year, you're singing with Idina Menzel.

That was Robert's idea. *Frozen* being obviously such a blockbuster hit this year, it seemed like Idina was a perfect fit for a holiday show thematically. Now, from a musician's sense and a fan's sense, I am blown away by the opportunity to get to sing with her. I love musical theater and theater in general, and to me she is the top of the line for artists who are performing in the theater right now. So for me, that's a big, capitalized YES ... with an exclamation point!

What does it take for you, once the show is done, to feel that it really worked, that it was a success?

Obviously, you want to nail the opener, since it is such an important part of the show. But really, if I have fun and I'm relaxed, then I know it was nailed. That's what it's about. If it's a Christmas show or a concert on the lawn of your favorite outdoor venue during the summer, people want to see other people having fun. It's music, not surgery; let's go out there and have a good time.

JenniferNettles.com; [🐦@JenniferNettles](#)



AEROSMITH'S
STEVEN TYLER
TAKES JENNIFER
NETTLES' MISTLETOE
MEASURE.

“The job of the host is to make everyone feel comfortable, just like being a host at a party.”

– Jennifer Nettles

CMA TAKES THE REINS AT THE 2014 SRO AWARDS



by BOB DOERSCHUK

Winners and nominees for this year's SRO Awards shared a milestone experience in CMA's annual tribute to the unseen heroes of live music.

For the first time since its revival in 2012 after having been put on hold in 1997, the SRO Awards took place on its own, rather than in tandem with the annual IEBA (International Entertainment Buyers Association) Honors & Awards event. The presentations happened Monday, Dec. 8, at Nashville's Marathon Music Works.

"Assuming control of the SRO Awards helps CMA elevate the program as a whole," said Brandi Simms, CMA Senior Director of Membership and Balloting. "Throughout the past year, we've made a special effort to welcome touring personnel into our membership, so it's great to reward those who have done such a wonderful job throughout the year."

"I'm a big artist advocate," noted Brian O'Connell, President — Country Touring, Live Nation Nashville, and winner of the 2014 SRO Award for Talent Buyer/Promoter of the Year. "Without the artists, we have nothing. But I'm especially excited for those who are lucky enough to work with the great artists, the ones that really make the touring world go around. That CMA would take the time to recognize these people behind the scenes is amazing."

"Being on the road, you would expect me to say it, but it's an honor for me to do this," said Kix Brooks, referencing his third appearance as SRO Awards host. "Man, every morning I would get off the bus, go out and watch these guys do load-in and everything they do. They're freakin' engineers! We're out there onstage with all this crap hanging over our heads every night on wires! All the technology that goes into doing what we do is mind-boggling. If you look at what I call the spaghetti backstage, it's thousands of wires, all plugged in. And the fact that all that stuff works when we hit the downbeat, if you're an artist and you take that for granted, shame on you!"

There was no shame in the house as Brooks called out this year's winners, each selected by a vote from their peers in the industry.

For more on the 2014 SRO Awards winners, visit CMACloseUp.com.

BUSINESS MANAGER OF THE YEAR
Duane Clark – Flood, Bumstead, McCready & McCarthy, Inc.

COACH/TRUCK DRIVER OF THE YEAR
Ron Easley – Jason Aldean

FOH (FRONT OF HOUSE) ENGINEER OF THE YEAR
Jeff Parsons – Blake Shelton

LIGHTING DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR
Steve Richards – Taylor Swift

MANAGER OF THE YEAR
Kerri Edwards – Red Light Management

MONITOR ENGINEER OF THE YEAR
Brad Baisley – Blake Shelton

PRODUCTION MANAGER OF THE YEAR
Todd Ortmeier – Miranda Lambert

PUBLICIST OF THE YEAR
Mary Hilliard Harrington – The GreenRoom

TALENT AGENT OF THE YEAR
Rob Beckham – William Morris Endeavor

TALENT BUYER/PROMOTER OF THE YEAR
Brian O'Connell – Live Nation

TOUR CATERER OF THE YEAR
Dega Catering

TOUR MANAGER OF THE YEAR
Kevin Canady – Blake Shelton

TOUR VIDEO DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR
Scott Scovill – Moo TV

TOURING MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR
John Thomasson – Bass – Little Big Town

VENUE OF THE YEAR
Ryman Auditorium – Nashville, Tennessee

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16. N/A 17. DEC 2014/JAN 2015 18. *Scott F. Arnold*

CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES

MARKS 10 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

by ALAN LIGHT



Kristian Bush, Paris, 2013

In 2005, when Bob DiPiero – writer of such hits as Tim McGraw’s “Southern Voice,” George Strait’s “Blue Clear Sky,” and Easton Corbin’s “Lovin’ You Is Fun” – came up with the idea of presenting a CMA-sponsored “songwriters in the round” show at Joe’s Pub in New York City, he wasn’t sure how much enthusiasm the project inspired.

“Early on, I think not everyone on the CMA Board may have seen the value,” he said, “and songwriters are such lone wolves, at first even they were like, ‘What’s in this for me?’”

But as the CMA Songwriters Series wraps up its first decade, DiPiero’s dream has become an international institution. Since the triumph of that first date, the Series has presented more than 75 shows in 15 cities, from London to Los Angeles, from Austin to Paris. And it has featured more than 130 of music’s most gifted storytellers, with more than 70 CMA Song of the Year nominations among them. What began as an experiment, a special event for the CMA Awards’ debut at Madison Square Garden, has turned

into a unique showcase for a segment of the music community that usually exists outside the spotlight. (This year wrapped up with a return to Joe’s Pub on Dec. 3 and 4, with DiPiero welcoming Radney Foster, Brett James and Craig Wiseman.)

“This didn’t go on back in the day when I was writing a lot of songs,” said Country Music Hall of Famer Bill Anderson, who has taken part in half a dozen of the shows. “Traditionally, when they put the songwriter’s name on a record, it’s in small letters, like an afterthought. So these shows put faces with names, personalities with people; it completes the circle for the fans.”

For the writers, the format — usually four songwriters on a stage, alone with their guitars, going down the line through four or five songs each — offers a rare chance to present their work the way they initially intended, and to provide the stories, context or inspiration for their most memorable compositions.

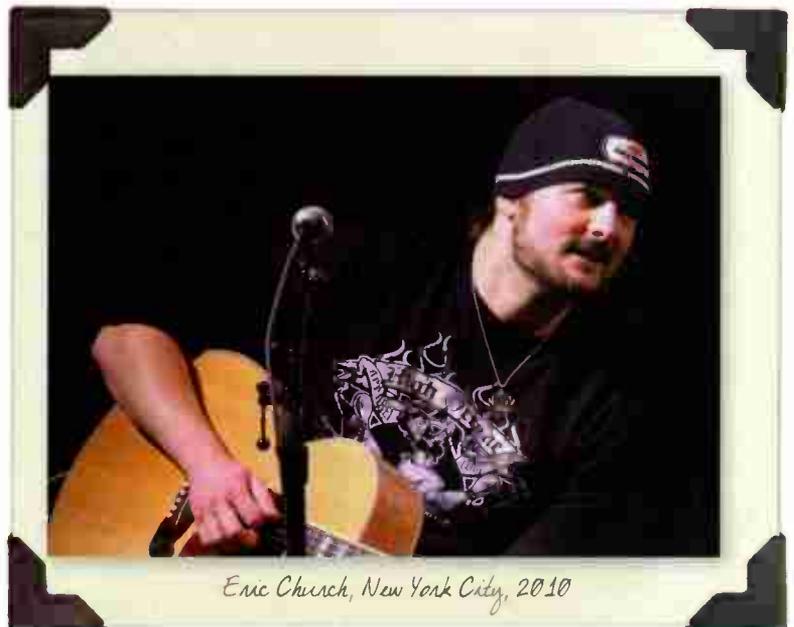
“I like having the opportunity to get up and show people what I do, as opposed to having somebody else show them,” said Rivers Rutherford, a frequent participant in the series, whose No. 1 hits include Brooks & Dunn’s “Ain’t Nothing ‘Bout You,” McGraw’s “Real

continued on page 22 ...

... continued from page 21

*Carrie Underwood, Boston, 2012*

... MEMORABLE MOMENTS FROM THE CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES ...

*Eric Church, New York City, 2010*

Good Man" and Gretchen Wilson's "Homewrecker." "I get to share a side of me that, as an artist, I wouldn't normally get to."

"A lot of songwriters are performers at heart," said Brandy Clark. "So this gives us all the chance to satisfy that side of ourselves. It's easy to be locked inside of a room all the time, just writing songs, and not really stay in touch with why you're doing it, with the people who are buying it and whose lives it's affecting."

"I can't imagine writing songs and not having that outlet for myself, to express a song the way I intended it," said Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild. "It's different to express something that you wrote, and very satisfying to see it all the way through to the end."

In addition to pulling back the curtain to reveal the masters that fans might not have noticed from album credits, the Songwriters Series has attracted some of Country Music's biggest performers, eager to be considered part of the songwriting community. "Kenny Chesney, Carrie Underwood – the list goes on and on of stars who want to be taken seriously and want their fan base to know them as songwriters," said DiPiero. "That's something I had not anticipated, and obviously, star power drives the shows."

"IT'S NOT REHEARSED,
AND MOST OF THE TIME
IT SOUNDS LIKE IT."

– Rivers Rutherford

"To get picked as one of the guys who gets the chance to do this is pretty cool for me," said Dierks Bentley. "It's so stripped-down and intimate, the exact opposite of my live show, where I run around like crazy and engage with the fans through a physical interaction almost as much as my voice. It gets Country Music back to the roots of what it's all about, which is a great song."

Along the way, by taking the essence of the genre into markets that don't get much chance to experience it, the series leaves its mark on local songwriters.

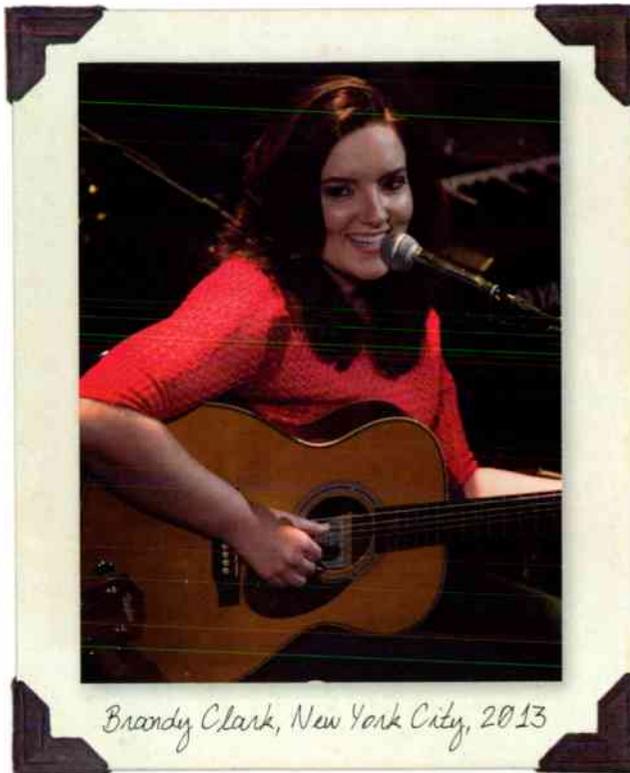
"New York is a bubble when it comes to Country Music, and these events feel like part of a much-needed cultural exchange program," said Mike Errico, who teaches a songwriting class at New York University's Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music. "Many of my students are disconnected from the genre, and I've taken on the responsibility of opening their eyes to it. For writers, this is an opportunity to see a show that works as pure entertainment, but is centered entirely on the craft we practice."

Anderson asserts that any doubts he had about whether the format would connect with audiences outside of Nashville

... MEMORABLE MOMENTS FROM THE CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES ...



Little Big Town, Washington, D.C., 2010



Brandy Clark, New York City, 2013

disappeared in 2012, when he took part in the Songwriters Series shows in England and Ireland. "At first, they were trying to figure it out," he said. "You could feel them thinking, 'Where's the band?' But once they understood what we were doing, they really got into it, singing along. There was a lot of 'Golly, I didn't know you wrote that song!' By the end of the night, they were screaming for more."

Above all, what comes through at these events is the sense of pure fun and mutual respect between the songwriters. "It's not rehearsed, and most of the time it sounds like it," said Rutherford. "It's a couple of guys sitting around playing in their living room; it just happens that there's an audience watching."

"In 10 years, no show has ever been the same," said DiPiero. "No set list repeated, no list of songwriters repeated. They're all one-of-a-kind shows. To do that for 10 years is a great accomplishment."

"Honestly, I can't believe the set list whenever we get to the end of one of these gigs," said Kristian Bush. "I'm humbled to be in the lineup every time, and I'm in awe of these writers who have shaped the soundtrack to our lives."



Striking Matches, London, England, 2014

HEADLINERS AND HIT WRITERS SHARE CMA SONGWRITERS SERIES MEMORIES AT CMACLOSEUP.COM

photos: Little Big Town - Mitchell Layton; Striking Matches - Anthony D'Angelo; Clark - Kevin Yastarola

CMA WELCOMES NEW BOARD PRESIDENT JOHN ESPOSITO

by BOB DOERSCHUK

There was a time when John Esposito was strictly an East Coast kind of guy. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania, played rock gigs as a drummer in Pittsburgh and rose quickly through a series of executive positions at Macy's and Mitsubishi.



JOHN ESPOSITO CONGRATULATES BLAKE SHELTON FOR WINNING MALE VOCALIST AND ALBUM OF THE YEAR HONORS AT THE 2013 CMA AWARDS.

That began to change in 1993, when the New York City retail chain, The Wiz, hired him as CEO of its Music and Movies division. Someone at the company heard that Esposito was a fan of Mary Chapin Carpenter's music and then surprised him with a ticket to the CMA Awards in Nashville, where the singer won Female Vocalist of the Year honors.

"I was like, 'Oh, my God, I love this town!'" Esposito recalled. "So I started finding excuses to come down here. And I haven't missed a CMA Awards — not one! — since 1993."

A perfect attendance record is but one of many reasons why Esposito, President and CEO of Warner Music Nashville, was elected to serve as President of the CMA Board for 2015. He is a music industry veteran, beginning with his appointment as Senior VP of PolyGram's PolyMedia division in 1995. He remained based in New York as GM/Executive VP of the new Island Def Jam Music Group and subsequently in a series of high-ranking positions with the Warner Music Group.

Eventually, he traded his round-trip tickets to Nashville and back for a one-way ride. In September 2009, Esposito relocated to oversee Warner Music Nashville. Before the end of that year, he had joined the CMA Board as a member-at-large, an affiliation he credits with smoothing his integration into the Music City community.

photo: Brooke Kelly

Today, Esposito, known up and down Music Row as “Espo,” is integrated fully into Nashville’s culture and commerce. He is a board member for the T.J. Martell Foundation, the Country Radio Broadcasters, the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp and the Music City Music Council. A dedicated environmentalist, he serves on the Natural Resources Defense Council’s (NRDC) Global Leadership Council and also serves on the advisory boards for the Air Service Coalition, created by the Metropolitan Nashville Airport Authority, and for FLO {thinkery}.

Most important, he has earned respect as one of the city’s most innovative and committed executives. His decision to focus on Blake Shelton to empower the new label exemplifies his management approach.

“When you tell your team, ‘Let’s just focus on one thing instead of 10 things’ and not getting any of them done, it works,” he insisted. “So I made Blake our rallying cry, and that empowered our A&R team to bring us wonderful new things to work on — and now we’ve proudly delivered a record-breaking 12 No. 1 singles in a row for Blake.”

Esposito is similarly eager to set higher goals for CMA in 2015. “One of the things I can bring to the party from the standpoint of coming from the outside is that, when we think that everybody knows all about Country Music, I can still bump into somebody in New York who’ll say to me, ‘Who are all of these Country artists that are selling out football stadiums?’ We have such an opportunity to get our message across in metropolitan areas and get more fans.

“I’d like to use the research we do to a greater advantage,” he continued. “For instance, recent studies show that the number of multi-genre listeners is growing. Somebody who used to be a dedicated rock or pop listener is now sharing their time with Country Music. Now, that’s a good thing! We are doing an effective job as a business of not losing the fan base. And we’re building it too. But on a scale of 1 to 10, we’re *maybe* at a 5 or 6. We can do better than that.

“I’m very excited about the future for us,” Esposito concluded. “I see a team inside the CMA building that is committed. And I see a Board of Directors that even in my five years as a member continues to have no agenda other than to help CMA be the best, because that will help Country Music flourish.”

“ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, WE’RE *MAYBE* AT A 5 OR 6. WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT.”

– CMA Board President John Esposito



JOHN ESPOSITO, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE, JOINS BRETT ELDRIDGE AT THE 2013 BMI AWARDS AFTERPARTY.

JOHN ESPOSITO
OPENS UP ON HIS LIFE
AND GOALS AT
CMACLOSEUP.COM.



MO PITNEY

You might have to go back to Josh Turner to find a singer like Mo Pitney — one whose voice so effortlessly embraces Country tradition and expresses more through understatement than many do through excess.

Born just 20 years ago in Cherry Valley, Illinois, Pitney began learning to play his dad's guitar at age 12. From Johnny Cash, Daryle Singletary, Randy Travis and the other vocalists who inspired him, he learned how to beckon listeners into a song with a smile and an easygoing delivery.

As co-writer on each of the tracks on his upcoming Curb Records album, produced by Tony Brown, Pitney shows a strong lyrical facility too. On "Clean Up on Aisle 5" (Pitney, Wil Nance), he transforms a chance encounter between two supermarket shoppers on into an elegy for a past they'd both left behind. He opens "Come Do a Little Life" (Pitney, Nance and Byron Hill) with the unpromising "hey, girl" callout, but then follows with "you're

my best friend" and eventually elevates the tune to a meltingly romantic paean, assuring the target of his love, "What a beautiful mom you're going to be."

In June, Pitney became the first debuting performer in 14 years to earn a standing ovation at the Grand Ole Opry. The last one was Turner. It could be a while before someone shows the merit to repeat that feat.

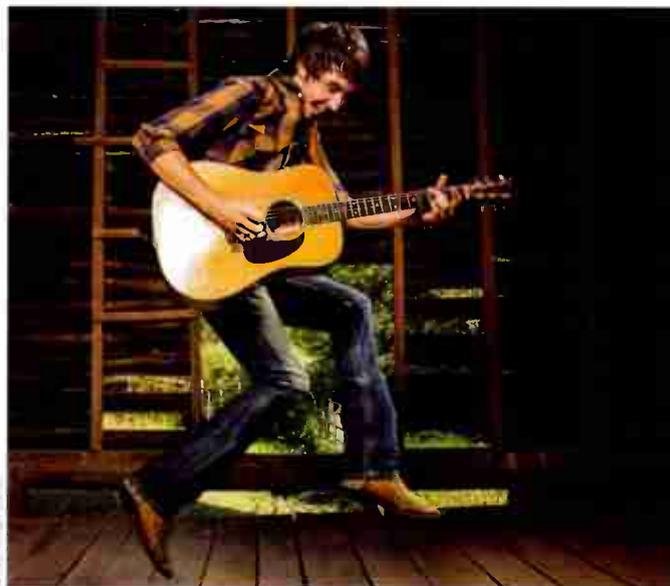
MoPitney.com; [@MoPitney](https://twitter.com/MoPitney)

Q Do you have a lucky charm?

A "I have a necklace with a pendant shaped like a guitar pick that says 'In His Hands.' I never take it off."

Q What do you hope people will say about you in future years?

A "His life was not about himself."



[MADDIE MARLOW and TAYLOR DYE]

MADDIE & TAE

Few recent Country songs have stirred up as much talk as "Girl in a Country Song." And none has done so with as little acrimony. After all, it's hard to imagine Blake Shelton being annoyed at its "red, red, redneck" line or any of those young good ol' boys with girlfriends named "Girl" taking umbrage.

That song, like all four on Maddie & Tae's debut release, is just too much fun to raise hackles. The EP dropped Nov. 4 on Dot Records, with Dann Huff producing. Its signature sound centers on Maddie Marlow's and Tae Dye's playful interactions and deft harmonies. The mix is light but also fiery at up tempos; on "Your Side of Town" (written by Marlow, Dye, Heather Morgan and Blair Daly), the churchy handclaps keep the airy feel while cranking up the intensity too.

Their story as a duo began at 15, when they met through their mutual vocal coach. Marlow, in Sugar Land, Texas, lived a few hours from Dye's home in Ada, Oklahoma. Yet they forged a tight friendship and soon started traveling together to Nashville for writing dates. There, Mike Molinar, VP at Big Machine Music, heard them and brought staff writer Aaron Scherz into the mix. They ended up writing "Girl in a Country Song," with Scherz joining Huff on that one as co-producer ... and the rest, to paraphrase the old saying, is soon to be history.

MaddieAndTae.com;
[@MaddieAndTae](https://twitter.com/MaddieAndTae)

Q What would people never guess about you?

A MADDIE: "I love hunting."
TAE: "I can solve a Rubik's Cube."

Q Who is your musical hero?

A BOTH: "Shania Twain!"

THE SWON BROTHERS

Whatever Merle Haggard and his pals did or didn't smoke long ago in Muskogee, Oklahoma, one couple there managed to raise Colton and Zach Swon on a diet of strong values and good music. As toddlers, the brothers debuted with Exodus, the Swon family's band. Zach was just 9 or 10 when he took over its drum chair, with Colton already entertaining up front and in the spotlight.

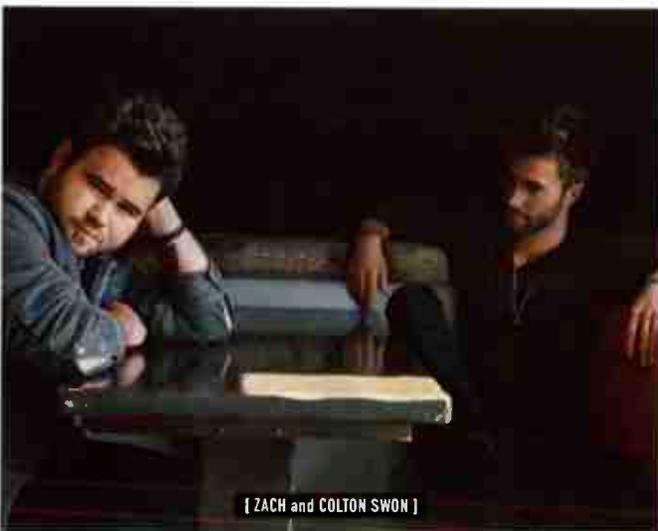
After they cut down on touring and concentrated on building a residency at Wagoner, Oklahoma's Civic Center, the band broadened beyond its Southern gospel style. They covered everyone from Michael Jackson to Elvis to Frank Sinatra, complete with appropriate stage costumes. Their typically sold-out shows soon propelled Colt and Zach into a duo career. They moved to Nashville, began writing their own songs and won national exposure as members of Team Blake on NBC's "The Voice."

With the Oct. 14 release of their self-titled debut album on Arista Nashville, produced by Mark Bright and The Swon Brothers, their momentum accelerates. Whether riding a dance beat pricked

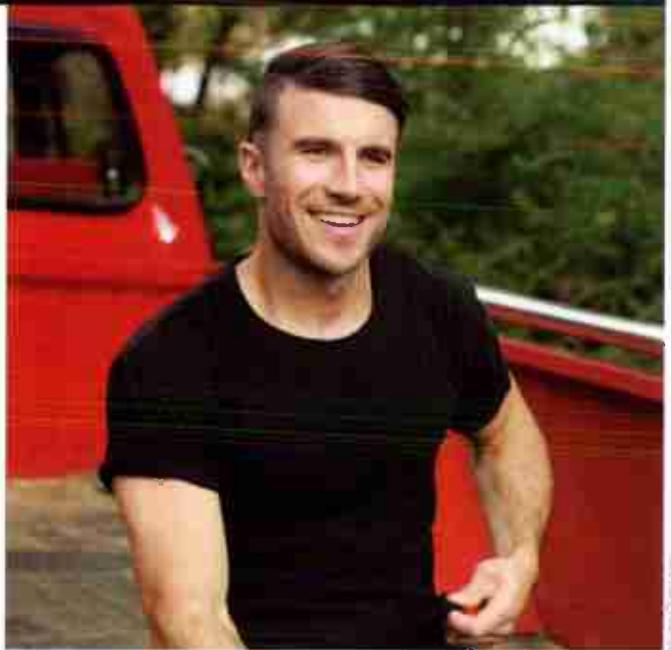
by banjo and a few well-placed turntable scratches on "95" (written by Ryan Hurd, Frank Rogers and Brad Tursi) or surfing surging dynamics on the ballad "Breaking" (Derek Southerland and Jamie Moore), their voices trade solo spots and twine in tight synchronicity, often free of vibrato but always rich in expression. This "Swon song" augurs a bright future.

SwonBrothers.com;
 @TheSwonBrothers

- Q** What moment in your life would you relive?
- A** COLTON: "Suiting up and playing football."
 ZACH: "Singing with Bob Seger."
- Q** What would we never guess about you?
- A** Zach gets pedicures and Colton bathes in velvet.



[ZACH and COLTON SWON]



SAM HUNT

In 2006, the first of his two seasons starting as quarterback with the Blazers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sam Hunt completed 58.5 percent of his pass attempts for a total of 655 yards — impressive enough stats to work as a free agent for the Kansas City Chiefs after graduation.

But fate lured the Cedartown, Georgia, native from the gridiron to writing rooms along Music Row in 2009. Success came quickly as he helped write several blockbusters, including Kenny Chesney's No. 1 hit "Come Over" (with Shane McAnally and Josh Osborne), Billy Currington's "We Are Tonight" (Marc Beeson and Osborne) and Keith Urban's "Cop Car" (Zach Crowell and Matt Jenkins).

Soon, Hunt began performing too. With good looks, a strong singing voice and a confidence forged before thousands of football fans, he caught MCA Nashville's eye. In June, the label released his debut digital single, "Leave The Night On" (Hunt, McAnally and Osborne), certified Gold in September. And on Oct. 27, his first album, *Montevallo*, went to retail, produced by Crowell and McAnally, with each track a Hunt co-write.

From the good-time, hand-clap beat of "House Party" (Hunt, Crowell and Jerry Flowers) to "Speakers" (Hunt, Brandon Hood and Kylie Sackley), a bristling blend of aching ballad, haunting instrumental hook and double-time, sometimes a cappella lyric bursts, Hunt demonstrates that he knows how to score in studio and stadium alike.

SamHunt.com;  @SamHuntMusic

- Q** What song would you love to cover?
- A** "Cyndi Lauper's 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun.'"
- Q** What book is on your nightstand?
- A** "Orthodoxy" by G.K. Chesterton."

FOR MORE Q&A RESPONSES, MUSIC, VIDEO AND OTHER INFORMATION ON DEBUT SPOTLIGHT ARTISTS, PLEASE VISIT CMACLOSEUP.COM 

CONTRIBUTORS

CRYSTAL CAVINESS

(CMA Radio Remotes, page 6) is a Nashville-based freelance journalist and frequent contributor to *CMA Close Up*.



KIP KIRBY

(St. Jude, page 26) is a nationally-known journalist with extensive print, radio and television credentials.



DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

(Trisha Yearwood, page 11) contributes regularly to *Billboard*, *Country Weekly* and other outlets.



ALAN LIGHT

(CMA Songwriters Series, page 21) is the former editor-in-chief of *Vibe* and *Spin* magazines.



CHUCK SCHULTZ

("CMA Country Christmas," page 16) has covered Country Music for *Country Weekly*, *Country Aircheck* and other publications.



JANE R. SNYDER

(Red Carpet Fashions, page 8) is a graduate of Parsons The New School for Design, so she knows her way around the fashion world.



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CMA CLOSE UP

EXECUTIVE EDITOR WENDY PEARL

EDITOR BOB DOERSCHUK

DESIGN EVAMARIE OGLANDER

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS CRYSTAL CAVINESS | KIP KIRBY
ALAN LIGHT | JANE R. SNYDER
CHUCK SCHULTZ

PROOFREADERS DEB BARNES | BLISS BOWEN

CMA STAFF

EXECUTIVE

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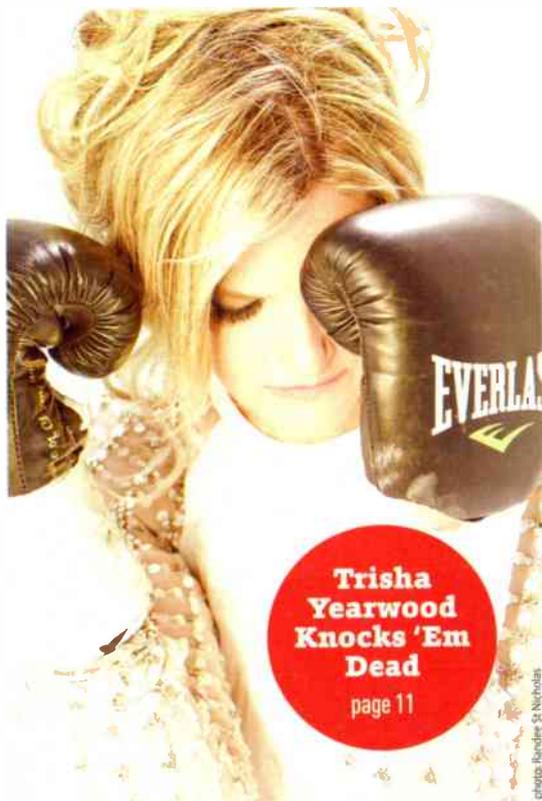


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ALICIA JONES
DENNIS ENTERTAINMENT
903 18TH AVE S
NASHVILLE TN 37212-2102



Trisha Yearwood Knocks 'Em Dead
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photo: Ronnie S. Nicholas

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- Shop Talk with CMA's Song of the Year Winners
- Tax Tips for Artists and Music Biz Pros
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- A Final Farewell to Country Legend Ray Price
- Straight Talk with CMA Board President John Esposito
- Participants Reflect on CMA Songwriters Series
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