

## BUDDY JEWEL

Nashville Star—Season One—Winner  
by Tamela Meredith Partridge  
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When the first season of Nashville Star on the USA network concluded on May 3, watching Buddy Jewel being crowned the winner actually brought tears to my eyes.

It's not everyday that one gets to witness the triumph of seasoned experience over youth, talent over glitz and rugged features over flawless beauty.

For me, Buddy Jewel winning was like momentarily being a kid again and believing that dreams can indeed come true if you wish and work hard enough.

The Nashville Star saga began on March 8 with the first episode, "The Road To Nashville." The premiere episode revealed how local contestant winners went on to compete in regional semi-finals conducted in Los Angeles, Houston, Baltimore, Kansas City and Nashville. The three Nashville Star judges -- Tracy Gershon, Robert K. Oermann and Charlie Robison -- then whittled the contestants down to twelve finalists.

Over the course of nine weekly Nashville Star episodes, the twelve finalists, ranging in age from 19 to 41, were voted off the show in the following order - Anne Louise Blythe (San Lorenzo, CA), Kristen Kissling (Topeka, KS), Tasha Valentine (Albuquerque, NM), Travis Howard (Chalybeate Springs, GA), Prentiss Varnon (Uvalde, TX), Jamey Garner (Chester, IL), Amy Chappell (Hutchinson, KS), Brandon Silveira (Hanford, CA), Brandi Gibson (Arlington, KY), Third Place Winner - Miranda Lambert (Lindale, TX), Second Place Winner - John Arthur Martinez (Marble Falls, TX) and Nashville Star Winner - Buddy Jewel (Osceola, AR).

Right from the start of the season, the buzz around the Nashville-in-the-know's was that the cute, blonde, talented, nineteen-year-old Miranda Lambert was destined to be the first Nashville Star -- just on looks alone. She fit the "total package" concept of what Nashville requires in a country music celebrity.

On the other hand, Buddy Jewell, 41, just didn't fit the standard Music City profile of being underweight, under 30 and overly handsome. Even though he was the most talented singer, songwriter and performer on the show, he was the least likely Nashville Star candidate -- a true underdog.

And I always root for the underdog.

Even though the powers that be stated Miranda was a shoe-in, I joined forces with voters across America and cast my telephone ballot for Buddy Jewell after every show. It made me smile to finally get through the busy signal and hear his voice-mail message, "Hi! This is Buddy Jewel. How many times have you voted for ME today?"

Which immediately inspired me to hit the redial button and vote for him again.

Receiving approval and acclaim for his music hasn't always come easily for Jewell.

According to Jewell's official website, [www.buddyjewel.com](http://www.buddyjewel.com), his earliest recollection of music was associated with the radio in his parents' old blue Dodge.

"I must have been about four years old " Jewell recalls, "and I remember trying to look inside the radio dial, hoping to catch a glimpse of the "little people" that I thought lived in there! I figured there must have been at least 100 of them because of all those different voices and sounds coming out of that little box in the dashboard. And all the time, I was wondering how they got to be so small and wishing I could get in there with them. Talk about a vivid imagination!"

A few years later, Jewell put that vivid imagination to work. He bought his first guitar for \$10 from a schoolmate.

"My uncle Clyde taught me my first three chords and how to play 'What A Friend We Have In Jesus,'" Jewell says.

Jewell bought some song books with money he earned bagging groceries at the local supermarket, started writing his own songs and the rest as they say, is history.

Jewell, a Osceola, Ar., native, currently resides in Antioch, Tn., with his wife, TenZ, and their three children, Buddy, Lacey, and Joshua.

Working as a professional demo singer, Jewell records hundreds of tracks a year for songwriters trying to sell their songs to performers. But somehow, Jewell was never able to achieve his own stardom, even though he did win the "male vocalist" category twice in the televised talent competition Star Search back in 1993.

In 1999, Jewell was "the voice" behind country comedian Bill Engvall's hit single and video, "I'm A Cowboy."

And today, Buddy Jewell was awarded the first Nashville Star winner amid a shower of confetti, exchanged hugs, bouncing beach balls and a standing ovation.

"First I want to say thank you to Jesus Christ for blessing me," Jewell says through streaming tears of joy. "And I want to give Him all the honor and the glory. I want to tell all you folks thank you so much for believing in me and voting for me, and thank you to all my 11 great friends out here (referring to his fellow contestants). I love you Tene, Buddy, Lacey, and Joshua."

The Nashville Star grand finale episode closed with Jewell performing, "I Want to Thank Everyone Who Ever Told Me No," an appropriate self-penned song about pursuing one's dreams in the face of criticism.

As winner of the Nashville Star, Jewell receives a recording contract with Sony Music Nashville and will have his debut album produced by country music legend, Clint Black.

After his original single, "Help Pour Out The Rain (Lacey's Song)," was released to country radio stations on May 5, Jewell knows what it's like to become one of "little people in the radio."

"I see myself as a combination of Kenny Rogers, Waylon Jennings and Jim Reeves, with a splash of Glen Campbell and Ronnie Milsap on the side," Jewell says.

But country music fans and industry professionals now see Buddy Jewell in a completely different light.

"He's like a diamond," concludes Nashville Star finalist, Jamey Garner. "Man, he's a jewel."

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Country singer, songwriter and Nashville Star winner, Buddy Jewell, will bring some "Sweet Southern Comfort" to the Little Nashville Opry audience on Saturday, May 23 at 8 p.m.

"My current single, Sweet Southern Comfort, needed a harmonica," Jewell says. "So we asked my good friend, great harmonica player, and fellow Nashville Star contestant, Jamey Garner, to play on the song. It's a source of pride for us both, because now the song is something Jamey helped create as well."



One of Jewell's earliest musical influences was associated with the radio in his parents' old blue Dodge.

"I must have been about four years old " says Jewell, an Osceola, Arkansas native. "I remember trying to look inside the radio dial, hoping to catch a glimpse of the "little people" that I thought lived in there! I figured there must have been at least 100 of them because of all those different voices and sounds coming out of that little box in the dashboard. And all the time, I was wondering how they got to be so small and wishing I could get in there with them. Talk about a vivid imagination!"

A few years later, Jewell bought his first guitar for \$10 from a schoolmate.

"My uncle Clyde taught me my first three chords and how to play 'What A Friend We Have In Jesus,'" Jewell says.

Jewell bought some song books with money he earned bagging groceries at the local supermarket and started writing his own songs.

"Music has always had a therapeutic value to me," Jewell says. "As a kid, I remember sitting out on the porch swing playing my guitar, singing and writing songs. Its always been a big part of my life."

Musical approval and acclaim hasn't always come easily for Jewell.

Before receiving over two million USA Network television viewer votes to become the first "Nashville Star" winner in May 2003, Jewell struggled for ten years trying to land a record deal in Nashville. To provide for his wife, Tené, and three children -- Buddy, Lacey, and Joshua -- Jewell was a professional demo singer who recorded hundreds of tracks a year for songwriters trying to sell their songs to performers.

But somehow, Jewell was never able to achieve stardom.

"Everyone has gone through a tough period in their lives," Jewell says. "A time where they had self-doubt, felt like throwing the towel in, or still had a dream that's unrealized that they're hoping to somehow make come true. I think that's one of the things that helped me on the Nashville Star show -- people seemed to identify with my situation."

Jewell, 43, almost didn't audition for the Nashville Star talent contest.

"Because of the nature of reality shows, my concern was that the show would be cheesy," Jewell says. "But I was pleasantly surprised. Nashville Star set us apart from other musical talent shows. We were allowed to sing songs we'd written and the viewing audience got to know the contestants both personally and as performers."

As winner of the Nashville Star, Jewell received a recording contract with Sony Music Nashville and country music legend, Clint Black, produced Jewell's self-titled debut album. The eleven song project was recently certified gold for selling over 500,000 copies.

"Clint did a great job producing the record," Jewell says. "He pays a lot of attention to detail, which carried over into the studio. He knew my history of being a studio singer, so he stood back at times and let me do what I do best. To me, it's like riding a thoroughbred. It looks like the horse is doing all the work and the jockey is just sitting up there hanging onto the reins. Clint was really great about relaxing the reins and letting me run."

After his two singles topped the country charts, "Help Pour Out The Rain (Lacey's Song)" and "Sweet Southern Comfort," Jewell now knows what it's like to become one of "little people in the radio."

"I see myself as a combination of Kenny Rogers, Waylon Jennings and Jim Reeves, with a splash of Glen Campbell and Ronnie Milsap on the side," Jewell says.

Jewell recently received his first Academy of Country Music (ACM) nomination for Top New Artist. His category competition in the May 26th CBS televised awards show include new country artists Dierks Bentley, Pat Green, Josh Turner and Jimmy Wayne.

"Being nominated for an ACM award is such an honor," Jewell says. "Last year I had just won Nashville Star and got to attend the award show as a spectator. Now to be nominated, especially in this category that includes all the new male and female artists and groups is unbelievable. So to be in this group of five and to be chosen by the industry is overwhelming."

What a difference a year can make in the life of a Nashville Star winner.

"It took me a long time to get to this point in my life," Jewell says. "But once I got there, things really took off. My life and career has completely done a 180 degree turn this year. The best explanation is that it's like climbing to the top of the Empire State Building and then stepping off onto a speeding bullet train."