

BRENDA LEE

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
"Herald & Review" newspaper
Decatur, IL.
© 2003

Country Music Hall Of Famer, Brenda Lee, will bring her vibrant vocals to Nashville North USA on Saturday, November 20 at 5 p.m. and again at 8:00 p.m.

Tickets are \$23.50 and available through the Nashville North USA box office or by calling 287-2103.

Country and pop star Brenda Lee has been rockin' music fans around the world for over four decades with such chart-topping hits as, "*Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree*," "*I'm Sorry*," "*The Crying Game*," "*Nobody Wins*" and "*Big Four Poster Bed*."



"I loved every song I ever recorded," Brenda Lee said during a recent phone interview. "If I had not, I could not have sung them."

The songstress was born Brenda Mae Tarpley, the second of four children to parents Ruben and Grayce, in a Atlanta, Georgia hospital charity ward.

Destined to sing her way out of an impoverished childhood, the young vocalist was first introduced to the music business at age five when she won first place at a local talent show with a touching rendition of "Take Me Out To The Ballgame."

Her father, a carpenter and semi-professional baseball player, was killed in a construction accident when Brenda was only eight years old. In order to support the family, her mother went to work in a cotton mill while Brenda began singing to supplement the family income.

Launching her professional singing career at age eleven on entertainer Red Foley's popular weekly television show, "*Ozark Jubilee*," provided a recording contract and financial relief for the struggling family.

Although small in stature, the four-foot-nine-inch “Little Miss Dynamite” has accumulated over 100 million international record sales with her powerhouse vocals and captivating stage presence.

Her uncanny ability to hold an audience, often compared to that of Elvis Presley, made debuting at the Grand Ole Opry with “The King Of Rock n’ Roll” one of her fondest memories.

“It was December, 1957, and I was so excited to be on the Grand Ole Opry for the first time,” Lee said. “I was only 12 years old, and it was pretty awe inspiring to stand in The Mother Church of Country Music where all those heroes of country music have stood and sang. It was also exciting to meet Elvis that night for the first time and have my picture taken with him. He was a great guy. I really liked him and respected his talent and contribution to the world of music and how he changed everything. We remained friends from then on through his life.”

The one constant in her ever-changing music industry career has been a 36 year marriage to husband and Nashville business executive, Ronnie Shacklett. The couple met as teenagers at a Jackie Wilson concert in Nashville and now have two married daughters, Julie and Jolie, and two granddaughters, Taylor and Jordan.

“I married a man who has been such a wonderful husband, father, friend, and anchor for me,” Lee said. “He is great, and has let me be who I am, and do what I do. He has been the calm one, the one that stayed home with the children. And although he works and has a business of his own, he made sure that the children had their home, routine, and roots. That was so important.”

Other musical accomplishments include a debut songwriting collaboration, “*The Kind Of Fool Love Makes*” with former Doobie Brothers pop star Michael McDonald and her guitarist, Dave Powelson, which earned cuts on Wynonna Judd’s ‘97 album, “*The Other Side*,” and Kenny Rogers ‘99 album, “*She Rides Wild Horses*.”

“My part in the songwriting process was doing the lyrics,” Lee said. “The song has given me confidence that I can write, but it is not an overwhelming thing in my life. My career in singing is still first and on the front burner. But, I have been writing lately with several writers here in town, nothing that is finished or can be taken to show to people, but almost. It’s been fun.”

Current projects for the diva are a newly released Christmas album, as well as co-writing an autobiography with her recently published author and eldest daughter, Julie and prestigious Nashville music journalist, Robert K. Oermann.

For Brenda Lee, the inspiration behind her illustrious career has simply been a matter of faith.....and fans.

“I have been given a gift from God that I feel he intends for me to use as long as I can,” Lee said. “It is a gift that I have always loved to share with others, and they have afforded me the right to do what I do by coming to see the shows, buying my records, and supporting my career through all these years. I’m motivated by the fans.”