



CONNIE SMITH
GENE WATSON
by Tamela Meredith Partridge
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Two of country music's finest musicians, Gene Watson and Connie Smith, will perform a duo headlining show at the Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, May 12 at 6 pm and 9:30 pm. Tickets are available through the box office or by calling 812-988-2235.

"Connie Smith and I have worked a lot of shows together in the past, and it will be nice to do that again," Watson said during a phone interview. "Connie is certainly one of the finest voices in country music, a fantastic singer and one of my all-time favorites."

Gary Gene Watson has spent a lifetime entertaining with his smooth mellow vocals resonating authentic emotion.

"The first time I can remember talking - I was singing," Watson said. "I have been singing all my life, so it is pretty much second nature to me."

Watson's ability to choose just the right songs is found in '75 debut smash, "Love In The Hot Afternoon," No. 1 hit, "Fourteen Carat Mind," and more than twenty Top Ten hits including, "Paper Rosie," "Should I Go Home (Or Should I Go Crazy)," "Nothing Sure Looked Good On You," and "You're Out Doing What I'm Here Doing Without."

"I am a ballad singer," Watson said. "I love truthful songs that tell a story and talk about people and their lives. If a song calls for a tear, then we will cry. If a song calls for a smile, then we will laugh. That is what I like to do."

Current endeavors for Watson include a heavy touring season and recording a album of all new material scheduled for a late summer release.

Even though his roots are pure country, Watson's signature sound stems from a combination of musical influences.

"I don't get too far away from the traditional country music that has mademe what I am," the Paris, Texas, native said. "Although, I might experiment at times with a little bit of jazz , blues or some edgy songs that veer off from what I usually do. I do a lot of blues accents, phrasing and slurs in my singing. I think that is probably anywhere from 50 % to 75% of my style. The other thing is proper diction. I hate to sing a song that the people can not understand the words to it."

Other words understood by audiences and industry peers alike were recently spoken by the "Rolls Royce of Female Country Vocalists," Connie Smith.

"Gene Watson is one of my favorite singers in the whole world," Smith said during a phone interview. "He and I have come so close to recording together in the past. We may still do it one of these days. I watched Gene sing not too long ago at the Ryman Auditorium's Opry Live in Nashville, TN, and he is as great a singer as he has ever been."

Which is certainly high praise coming from the '65 Grand Ole Opry inductee who has garnered over 50 albums, 10 Grammy award nominations, a No. 1 debut single "Once A Day," and 10 Top Five singles including, "Ain't Had No Lovin'," "Just One Time," "The Hurtin's All Over," and "Cincinnati, Ohio."

"I just love to sing," Smith said. "I can remember being in grade school, sitting in the middle of class doing my schoolwork, and I would start hearing the kids giggle. I'd look up and realize that I had been singing outloud. Singing is just something I have to do. It is just a part of me."

The only thing greater than music is Smiths' love for her family.

"I got out of the music industry completely for a few years to be with my children," Smith said. "But, when my youngest daughter went into kindergarten, I went back and started doing some road dates and the Grand Ole Opry, basically to help support my family. But I didn't go back to recording. I just couldn't take the time to do it, other than to do a couple of duets here and there. Once my children were all grown and left home, I started getting back into my career more seriously."

After a 20 year recording hiatus, Smith returned to the studio in '98 and co-wrote nine out of ten songs for her current self-titled album, "Connie Smith."

"Country artist Marty Stuart, who is my husband, co-produced the album and co-wrote six of the songs," Smith said. "I co-wrote a lot of the songs on the album with Marty's encouragement after I had told him that I was having a hard time finding just the right songs. Marty said, 'You are a songwriter. Why don't you write them?' I had done some writing before in the past, but this is the first time I had ever really gotten serious about writing a whole album worth."

Smith has received some priceless career advice throughout the years.

"Probably the best piece of business advice I ever received came from ConwayTwitty," Smith said. "Conway once told me, 'Leave them with what you want them to think you are.' I applied that advice early in my career when I first became a Christian and I only had one hit record out, 'Once A Day.' I always closed my show with that song because it went over big with the audience. After I got saved, I wanted to close my show with a gospel song, which did not go over so well. But, I remembered Conway's words, and I wanted the audience to remember me more as being a Christian than that of a country star. And I did just that. For the past 25 years or so I have closed my show with the gospel song, 'How Great Thou Art.' And now, I get more requests for that song than I do my hits."

For Smith, music is something she was destined to pursue.

"Music is a healing thing for me," Smith said. "It is something that I am, as well as what I do. I believe that God can put the call on people's lives and that he seen mine as being that of a hillbilly singer! I am grateful for the music business, because it has provided for me for a lot of years and helped me to raise my five children. I have never really thought of myself as being a great entertainer. I just like to sing. So, I am very fortunate that people will come to hear me sing and will buy my records."