



Photos courtesy of Bill Bailey and friends



Photo by Lisa Norwood



*The Voice Heard 'Round the Rodeo:*  
A TRIBUTE TO  
*Bill Bailey*

BY TODD ZUCKER

**H**ouston Livestock Show and Rodeo™ longtime color commentator Bill Bailey retired just before the 2016 Show. Rodeo fans and visitors have enjoyed Bailey's iconic voice and wit for more than five decades — in fact, most cannot remember a time when he was not already a legend.

Bailey began his career in radio while attending high school in Temple, Texas. After several out-of-state jobs, he grew homesick and returned to Texas in 1960. Born Milton Odom Stanley, he applied to fill a position for a DJ that had been promoted using the song, "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home?" Bailey agreed to assume the "Bill Bailey" moniker, and the name stuck.

Later, working at KIKK-FM, Bailey became prominent in the country music scene, not only on the Houston and Pasadena, Texas, airwaves, but nationwide. Bailey was named by Billboard magazine as the Country Radio Program Director of the Year in 1970 and was honored by the Country Music Association in 1979 as the Large Market Disc Jockey of the Year. He was inducted into the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in 2009 and the Country Radio Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 2010.

Despite great talent, Bailey attributes his success to hard work. "If I was asked to emcee an event, I did it, a lot of the time for free," Bailey said. "People would ask me how I came up with the things I did when I was announcing. The answer is that I prepared, and I practiced. If what I did looked easy, it was because I prepared. That attitude served me well over the years."

Bailey's affiliation with the Show began while broadcasting for KIKK in front of the Sam Houston Coliseum. He made fast friends with Show participants and got involved and invested. A perfect fit for the Rodeo's youth-based mission, Bailey was always interested in family-friendly entertainment.

According to Show Lifetime Vice President Carolyn Faulk, Bailey was the founder of the Magnificent Wagon 7, a wagon on the Salt Grass Trail Ride. "Bill was instrumental in building Wagon 7.

He wanted it to be a family wagon, and he helped attract quality people to be part of our 'February Family' that rode with the wagon," Faulk said.

In the 1970s, Bailey suggested that a barbecue contest would be a nice addition to the Show's schedule. He and friend Jim Archer, a beer distributor, pitched the idea to E.C. "Dick" Weekley, the Show's general manager at the time, who then agreed to take the idea to then-president Tommie Vaughn. The first contest in 1974 attracted 50 teams to the southwest corner of the Astrodome parking lot. He was elected as a Show vice president in 1975 and presided as officer in charge of the World's Championship Bar-B-Que Committee until 1975. Bailey enjoyed the impressive result of his

Bailey furnished a videotape to the leader of the delegation, Academician Vladimir Utkin.

Years later, Bailey and Abbey toured the once-secretive Baikonur Cosmodrome space launch facility in Kazakhstan. Playing the Texas lawman role to the hilt, Bailey wore his 10-gallon Stetson and took photos with Russian generals, cosmonauts and local officials. At a Moscow reception during that same trip, Utkin's daughter sought out Bailey to thank him for the Houston hospitality shown to her father, who had passed away, telling Bailey he treasured the calf scramble videotape and had watched it nearly every week.

According to Abbey, Bailey's participation in these events was a tremendous boost for the country's

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idea as he walked down "Bill Bailey Boulevard" during the 2016 World's Championship Bar-B-Que Contest, which hosted more than 250 cooking teams and nearly 250,000 guests.

In the early 1980s, at the zenith of his broadcast career, Bailey did what any self-respecting disc jockey would do — he began a career in law enforcement. Precinct 8 Constable Bill Bailey's innovative community improvement programs brought strong public support that kept Bailey in that elected position from 1982 until his seventh term in 2011.

George W.S. Abbey, one of Bailey's closest friends, can attest to his international impact. Abbey, a senior fellow in space policy at Rice University's Baker Institute, previously served as director of NASA's Johnson Space Center, and has known and worked with Bailey for many years on collaborative Show/NASA projects. In 1997, Russian Space Agency dignitaries attended technical meetings in Houston. As a goodwill gesture, Bailey arranged for the Russian contingent to meet with the Show leadership, ride in the Downtown Rodeo Parade, enjoy a seat in the Grand Entry, and attend the calf scramble. To commemorate the event,

international relations. "I don't know of anyone who has been a better ambassador for our Show, our city and our country," Abbey said of his dear friend.

Bailey seemed genuinely surprised about the media's interest in his retirement. "What I have done for the Rodeo is what I do for a living. I am an emcee, the wise guy out in front," he said. "When I was announcing for the Show, I met Hal Husbands, warden of the Texas Prison Rodeo in Huntsville, Texas. He asked me to announce for their rodeo. That was how I met Janis Tuttle. We fell in love, had a whirlwind romance and got married. That is the most important thing that the Rodeo has done for me."

It is difficult to envision the grand entry salute without Bailey announcing. At the calf scramble, he is remembered for encouraging scramble participants to run a little faster and for coaxing the calves into the chalk square with the iconic "Bailey bump." Countless families have been touched by his energetic mutton bustin' announcing, which made young athletes feel like superstars, turning seconds of excitement into lifelong memories.

"Everywhere you look, there is a



piece of Bill Bailey. He doesn't just join — he participates. He gives with his heart, and he has a big heart," Faulk said.

Past Show President and Chairman of the Board Don Jordan praised Bailey's Show contributions. "All of us are really fortunate to have shared this time with Bill Bailey at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo," he said. "Bill stands for the things that America ought to stand for. He doesn't back away from what he thinks is right, and he defends his beliefs in a conscientious and powerful way. He cares deeply about his friends, his country and his family. He makes each of us a better person."

Following his retirement, Bailey plans to rest and recuperate, but not for long. He will remain as communications director for a local funeral home, a position he has held for six years. Bailey also will continue his service as a Lifetime Vice President on the Show's board of directors and as a member of the senior loan committee for a Pasadena-based bank and provide troubleshooting assistance and security advice to Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Jack Morman.

"The Show will go on, but it will take a whole new generation of people at the Show before the contributions Bill Bailey made will even start to fade," Jordan said. "I am very, very proud to have Bill as a friend, and that will never change." 🤠



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