

LACY J. DALTON
STONEWALL JACKSON
by Tamela Meredith Partridge
"Our Brown County" magazine
Nashville, IN
© 2008

Country music artists, Lacy J. Dalton and Stonewall Jackson, will entertain The Little Nashville Opry audience with a duo headlining show on Saturday, September 20, at 8pm.

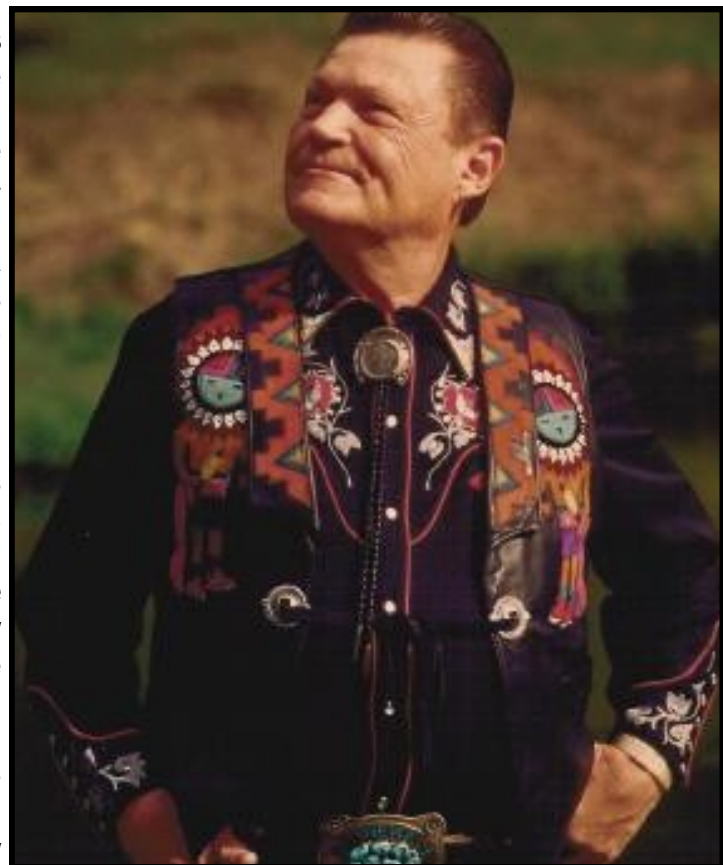
"Lacy J. Dalton has a strong, beautiful voice," says Grand Ole Opry star, Stonewall Jackson. "She also has a song, 16th Avenue, that's almost like it was wrote about me and how I came to Nashville."



Jackson -- who was named after his distant descendent, Confederate General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson -- was born the youngest of three children to parents Waymon and Lulu Jackson in Tabor City, NC. Moving to Georgia at age two after the death of his father, Jackson grew up tilling the soil and harvesting fields.

Changing his birth records, Jackson joined the Army at age 16, but was discharged when his real age was discovered. At 17, Jackson enlisted in the Navy for four years, where he sang and entertained his fellow sailors on the submarine rescue ship, the USS Kittywake.

"My interest in music and songwriting started out by writing poetry," Jackson says. "Then I learned how to play guitar and put some of my poetry to music. I had a lot of songwriting material by the time I enlisted in the service."



After receiving his Navy discharge in 1954, Jackson worked various jobs until he had enough money saved up to move to Nashville, TN, in 1956.

"I still enjoy living here," Jackson says. "My wife, Juanita, and I have a 27-acre homestead that's kind of hidden away outside of Nashville. It has a big forest all around it, so we really don't see all the homes that have been built up around us over the years. I came from the country, and anything about the country way of life is what I enjoy."

Jackson's country music career got off to a storybook start. Arriving in Nashville two days after his 24th birthday, Jackson walked uninvited that day into the offices of Acuff-Rose publications. Wesley Rose was so impressed by Jackson's singing and songwriting abilities that he arranged for him to audition the next day for George Hay, "The Solemn Old Judge," at the Grand Ole Opry. As a result, Jackson became the first and only unknown artist ever signed to The Grand Ole Opry without benefit of a label or a hit record.

"We just worked The Grand Ole Opry the other night," Jackson says. "My son, Stonewall "Turp" Jackson Jr., is the drummer in my band. We had a great time performing there and visiting with a number of the Opry regulars."

Through his friendship with Ernest Tubb, Jackson went on to receive a major label recording contract with Columbia Records. Jackson first hit the charts in '58 with his debut Top Five single, "Life To Go," followed by the No. 1 country and pop single, "Waterloo," and such hits as "Why I'm Walking," "A Wound Time Can't Erase," "B.J. The D.J.," "Don't Be Angry," and "I Wash My Hands In Muddy Water."

"I only wrote about a fifth of the songs that I've recorded," Jackson says. "I can evaluate other people's songs more than my own. I was too familiar with my own material, but when I heard a song written by someone else, I could picture whether it could hit or not. That's probably why I had so many Top Ten hits, because the material was strong."

One thing Stonewall Jackson and Lacy J. Dalton have in common is the ability to help others through their love of country music.

"Being singer/songwriters, we really have messages that we want to give our listeners," says Lacy J. Dalton. "And we care about what we're saying to our audiences. We're not just looking for those hit songs. What we're actually doing is trying to communicate or bring a new awareness, and in doing so, perhaps make a difference of some kind."

Dalton, who was born Jill Lynne Byrem, was reared in a musically inclined, yet solid working class family in Bloomsburg, Pa. Musical influences include her amateur country musician parents, folk singers Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Judy Collins, and early blues singers Robert Johnson and Leadbelly.

Dalton enrolled at Brigham Young University as an art major, but only lasted two years before trading her art studies to play folk music in local coffeehouses.

"When I first started singing professionally, my goal was never to be a star," Dalton says. "My main intent was to connect with the listener in a meaningful way."

Dalton moved to Santa Cruz, Ca, in the mid '60's and fronted the psychedelic rock band, Office, until it broke up in 1970.

"I also had a live radio show in Santa Cruz for several years," Dalton says. "I particularly enjoyed interviewing the singer/songwriters, because there's always an interesting story behind a song. The process usually reveals an insight into the songwriter as a person and what motivates them in regards to their craft."

In the early 70's, Dalton's first husband, John Croston, dove into a swimming pool, pushed up hard from the bottom, and hit his head on another swimmer's body. He broke his neck and was permanently paralyzed from the neck down. One week later, Dalton learned she was pregnant. To make ends meet, Dalton worked part-time jobs and took care of her husband until he died several years later, leaving her to raise their young son, Adam.

Rising above personal tragedy, Dalton sold four thousand copies in northern California of the 1978 self-titled country rock album, "Jill Croston," which was released under her married name on Harbor Records. A lawyer friend of Dalton's sent a copy of the album to an A&R executive at Columbia Records. As a result, she was signed to Columbia, changed her name to Lacy J. Dalton, and released the '79 Top Twenty country debut single, "Crazy Blue Eyes."

"Crazy Blue Eyes is real special to me," Dalton says. "I wrote it with my very good and oldest friend, Mary McFadden, who's probably been my best friend since we were eight years old. We grew up in Bloomsburg, Pa, together. When we wrote it, Mary was recovering from a divorce and had come to visit me in Santa Cruz where I had a little cabin up in the redwoods.She had never written a song before, but once we sat down, I don't think it took us more than 15 minutes to finish it. And what made it even more special was that it became my first release and hit with Columbia."

Moving to Nashville, the '79 ACM "Best New Female Artist" went on to release such chart-topping singles as "Hard Times," "Hillbilly Girl With The Blues," "Whisper," "Takin' It Easy," "Everybody Makes Mistakes," "16th Avenue," and "Dream Baby (How Long Must I Dream)."

"My whole message from the very beginning of my career is one of survival," Dalton says. "My songs are often autobiographical and state things like 'Yes, you're having hard times, and yes, you can make it. You're not the only one experiencing this, because there are others struggling out there who are going through the same things you are. Just keep the faith, hang in there, and you'll survive.' "

Dalton left Nashville in the late '90's and now lives, writes songs, and advocates for the plight of the local Comstock endangered wild horse herd at her small ranch near Reno, Nevada.

"As soon as I moved up here, I realized the wild horses were in a great deal of trouble," Dalton says. "Civilization is encroaching upon them in leaps and bounds. They can no longer migrate in their normal patterns, and a lot of them are being hit on the roads, where they're a danger to themselves and to the motorists.I finally called my friend Carolyn Cartinelli and said, 'You know what? I can no longer sit by and watch this happen.' So we formed the Let 'Em Run Foundation (www.letemrun.com), and the goal of that is to create a huge, 100,000-acre sanctuary for this herd of horses."

Dalton's latest '06 project, "The Last Wild Place Anthology," was recorded on the independent Song Dog label and benefits the Let "Em Run Foundation. The 17-track collection includes all 12 songs from the '04 release, "The Last Wild Place," plus five of her million-airplay hits: "Black Coffee," "Crazy Blue Eyes," "Takin' It Easy," "16th Avenue" and "Everybody Makes Mistakes."

For Dalton, music has the ability to reach out, connect, and convey a universal message.

"My life has actually been changed a couple of times by certain songs," Dalton says. "And oddly enough, they were both Kris Kristofferson songs that did it. The first one was, "Why Me Lord," which is a song about gratitude. The second one was a song that I later recorded and had a hit with called "The Heart," which taught me the art of understanding, forgiveness, and moving on. For me, it was an amazing, educational, and spiritual experience to be on the receiving end of music's healing properties."