



THE GATLIN BROTHERS

by Tamela Meredith Partridge

"Our Brown County" magazine

Nashville, IN

© 2006

According to the Gatlin Brothers '75 hit single, "All the gold in California is in a bank in the middle of Beverly Hills in somebody else's name."

But in Abilene, Texas, musical nuggets of Gatlin gold were mined in the names of Larry, Steve, and Rudy at the '53 Cavalcade of Talent Show.

"I was four, Larry was six, and Rudy was two and a half," says Steve Gatlin, who will perform with his two brothers at the Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, September 2, at 6pm and 9:30 pm. "But Rudy couldn't really sing at that time, he just stood there and mumbled. We dressed him in a cowboy suit and he looked real cute."

Reared on gospel music, the Gatlin Brothers honed their musical abilities as children by entertaining audiences in church and making guest appearances on the Slim Willet radio and TV shows in Abilene, Tx.

"Our folks took us to those Southern style quartet concerts and it was love at first sound," Larry says. "My first hero was James Blackwood of the Blackwood Brothers Quartet--I just knew somehow from that moment that I wanted to be a singer for the rest of my life."

After high school, Larry majored in English while attending the University of Houston on a football scholarship. Larry paved the way for the group by moving to Nashville in '71, while Steve and Rudy stayed in Texas to finish college.

With the help of country legend, Dottie West, Larry began writing country and pop songs for the likes of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Anne Murray, Barbara Streisand, Tom Jones and Johnny Mathis.

Larry eventually landed a solo deal with Monument Records in '72 and invited his siblings to sing backup on his first two albums.

"Larry was in Nashville beating on some doors and trying to get his foot in," Steve says. "He became successful as a singer and songwriter, but it wasn't until we joined that we won a Grammy and our career really took off. It took a while, it took some legwork."

Receiving the "Best Country Song" '76 Grammy award for the #1 hit single, "Broken Lady," was a memorable event for the brothers.

"It was just unreal!" Rudy says. "We went to L.A., rented tuxedos, a limousine and had the time of our lives. You can tell we're country boys, we fight for the front seat of the limo!"

All three brothers were inducted into the Grand Ole Opry in '76 and signed a group deal as an official Gatlin Brothers trio in '79.

"We were very honored to become members of the Mother Church of Country Music," says Rudy. "It's quite a thrill to walk out and think about all the wonderful people who have graced that stage. We've sung in some beautiful places throughout our career, but at the top of the list is performing at the Grand Ole Opry. There's nothing else like it."

After officially retiring from the road in '92, Larry Gatlin and The Gatlin Brothers returned to touring in '02.

"We retired in '92 because we just didn't want to have to spend 250 to 280 days out the road anymore," Larry says. "So, we narrowed things down when we returned to touring. We used to gear up with two buses, an airplane and an office with 8 people on staff. Now we just kind of fly into someplace, rent a couple of cars and go sing a couple days. We are taking 40 to 60 selected dates every year, one-nighters, as well as working 6 to 10 weeks a year in Branson, Missouri. This way, we can do what we love to do, and that is sing music for people, without having to gear up and do it full-time."

Even though they're a trio, the Gatlin Brothers also pursue solo interests.

Larry has starred in the Broadway shows, "Will Rogers Follies" and "Civil War." He's written and developed musicals for Broadway, and is the author of an autobiography, "All The Gold In California," and a children's book, "Boogers and Snot."

Steve received rave reviews for his musical and comedic style while starring in several self-produced productions in Myrtle Beach, S.C. He's also a motivational speaker at churches and various events.

Rudy starred in the role of Curly in Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!" and the part of Frank Butler in Irving Berlin's "Annie Get Your Gun." He's busy on the motivational speaker's circuit as well.

The Gatlin Brothers have recorded over 25 albums, encompassing country, gospel and big band styles. They've enjoyed a string of #1 hits including, "I Just Wish You Were Someone I Love," "All The Gold In California" and "Houston (Means I'm One Day Closer To You)."

"We can't measure success simply on the number of hit records we have had, or the number of awards we have won," Rudy says. "Success must also be measured in terms of the people we have helped along the way, how fully we have used the talents with which we have been blessed and what we have contributed to help the team around us accomplish a goal."

With a career spanning four decades, The Gatlin Brothers offer the audience a variety of musical entertainment to temporarily escape from the harsh realities of life.

"We Americans are in a very serious, critical time of our history," Larry says. "And there are some serious problems out there that we are all facing. But for the hour and a half an audience is with us, we want them to forget about all that for a little bit, and just have a good time."