

SOUL-2-SOUL TOUR  
TIM MCGRAW & FAITH HILL  
by Tamela Meredith Partridge  
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Whether it's performing on stage to a cheering Soul 2 Soul Tour audience, receiving music industry applause as ACM's reigning Top Male and Female Vocalists, or singing their daughters to sleep with an a cappella lullaby - no one captures the essence of country music quite like Tim McGraw and Faith Hill.

"The music that I make has to be right for me at the right time," Hill said. "It has to have meaning. When I sing a song, I am in that song....and hopefully people hear and feel that. I can't draw that line of trust with my fans if I don't sing from my heart every time I'm in front of a microphone."



The supercouple credit their ability to balance the complexities of marriage, children and two highly successful music careers to a relationship based on the simple values of love, respect and priorities.

"Faith and my kids keep me focused," McGraw said. "They are the most important thing to me. Before Faith and the girls, it was just about making music. Then I saw the responsibility that comes with being a husband and a father. It required me to make some major adjustments."

Making adjustments and viewing things from all perspectives is a skill McGraw learned early in his career when '92 self-titled debut album initially failed to break through at country radio.

"The first record didn't work," McGraw said. "But some of the songs we were playing live were getting incredible reactions from the fans."

McGraw went from playing small clubs and bars into an overnight headlining tour sensation when '94 sophomore project, "Not A Moment Too Soon" sold over six million copies with hit singles, "Indian Outlaw" and "Don't Take The Girl."

"It was a crazy time," McGraw said. "We just wanted to play. I think we played over 250 shows that first year."

In the meantime, Hill was busy launching her own career with multi-platinum '93 debut and '95 sophomore albums, "Take Me As I Am" and "It Matters To Me."

"There's got to be something for the fans to connect to in order for them to go out and spend their hard-earned money on a Faith Hill recording," Hill said. "I'm constantly thinking about them. I hope they realize that and like the direction that I am going."

Country's cutest couple first met when Hill was hired as the opening act for McGraw's '96 Spontaneous Combustion Tour.

Romantic sparks quickly ignited into the burning realization they were destined to be together. Vowing never to be apart for more than a three day stretch, the soul mates tied the matrimonial knot later that same year.

Taking a well-deserved three-year break from recording rewarded Hill with the quadruple platinum '98 cross-over album, "Faith," and the joyous births of daughters Gracie Katherine, 3, and Maggie Elizabeth, 2. Learning to deal with the demands of motherhood, marriage and newfound super-stardom became a lesson in self-care for the Star, Mississippi native.

"The biggest issue for me now is how to take it all in," Hill said. "It's a challenge. I'm just learning how to take time for myself. Frankly, the thing that I want most out of life is normality. It's difficult, but I try to find time for myself. It's a daily struggle, certainly not a daily accomplishment."

With their personal lives in order, McGraw and Hill each returned to the studio, resulting in the '99 release of Hill's fourth album, "Breathe" and McGraw's fifth album, "A Place In The Sun."

"I have learned over the making of the first four albums how important it is to give yourself the time to make a good record," McGraw said. "With all the commitments an artist has, you just can't wait until the last minute. We started looking for songs right away. I'm always looking for something a little different. We dig deep to find the material and I try to find songs that fit me. I have passed on hits, but they are hits for other singers, not me."

The breakout success of Hill's "Faith" and "Breathe" albums allowed the vocalist the unique opportunity to introduce her music to a new audience of contemporary country and pop listeners with singles, "This Kiss" and "Breathe."

"I just need to stay true to who I am," Hill said. "I could never just go out and make a pop record or, for that matter, a traditional country album. I can only do what seems natural for me, what is real to me. I just hope that in the end it works. I hope that I can create something, along with my producers and musicians, that will work across the board. As many people as I can reach with my music, I think that's every musician's goal."

With close to 25 No. 1 singles between the two of them over the past six years, McGraw and Hill are keeping things in the family this summer with their very first tour together as a couple.

The nationwide 40 + city "Soul 2 Soul Tour 2000" features solo performances from both artists, as well as a special set of duets.

"Our fans have been asking for this," McGraw said.

The concept for the visual and dynamic Soul 2 Soul show was originally developed by McGraw and Hill and includes a lavish set of props and lighting designed by Roy Bennett, whose creations have graced the stages of Tina Turner, Prince, Nine-Inch Nails and others.

In addition to the music, McGraw and Hill continue to promote their favorite charities which include Hill's Family Literacy Project and McGraw's annual Rayville, Louisiana hometown "Swampstock" charity concert.

"The Swampstock event is very important to me," McGraw said. "I feel very strongly about giving back to the community that I came from. Faith and I are involved in other things here in Nashville, but doing something in your hometown is special."

McGraw and Hill's desire to perform and record songs close to their hearts revolves around their dedication to stay true to the music and fans that got them to where they are today.

"Everything is going great," Hill said. "Each day I try to get as much out of life as I can, to keep it real, sincere and honest. Hopefully, people can get that from my music. And if I'm lucky, one day there will be a little spot carved away somewhere that says I made a contribution."