

COLLIN RAYE

by Tamela Meredith Partridge

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For Contemporary Country and Christian singer and songwriter, Collin Raye, music is timeless.

"The passion I have for music today is still what I had for it in the beginning of my career," Raye says. "I'm a fan of music. I'm a fan of songwriters. If I hear a certain song that affects me, I appreciate it so much -- sometimes because I can relate to it, or maybe because I'm in awe of it. It inspires me to think, 'I want to make people feel like that song just made me feel.' That is still the joy of it."



Raye will perform at Lucianas Rural Oaks in Ottawa on Friday, at 8:30 p.m. Doors will open at 6pm with opening act entertainment by Jason & The Haymakers at 7:30pm.

Tickets are \$40 (VIP) and \$20 (General Admission) in advance, and \$45 and \$25 at the door. Call Lena Mautino at 815-433-4333, for advance tickets.

"Collin Raye puts on one of the finest country music concerts of our generation," says Luciana's Rural Oaks manager, Lena Mautino. "His show will be a combination of the hits that made him famous, love songs, inspiration and, of course, some classic country fun!"

Raye was born Floyd Collin Wray to parents Floyd and Lois Wray in DeQueen, Arkansas, and was raised in Texarkana, Texas. His dad was a mechanic and bass player, and his mother was a regional country music star who opened for such celebrity acts as Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley, and Carl Perkins.

"Texas is a very music conscious area," Raye says. "A lot of my musical heroes were from Texas, such as Waylon Jennings, Don Henley of The Eagles, Buddy Holly, Bob Wills, Willie Nelson, and ZZ Topp."

Raye, known by the nickname "Bubba," and his older brother, Scott, were on stage with their mother before they reached the age of 10. When Raye was 13, they formed the Wray Brothers Band, later called The Wrays, which eventually recorded for the Oregon independent labels Sasparilla and CIS. The Wray's charted two singles in 1986-1987 with Mercury Records, "I Don't Want To Know Your Name," and "You Lay A Lotta Love On Me."

"In our family, country music was like breathing for us," Raye says. "In our teens, Scott and I started listening to a lot of rock 'n' roll too. We learned to discern the junk from the good music in whatever format it was in. But country was always my first love."

Raye pursued a solo career under the professional name of Collin Raye when the Wray's disbanded in the late 80's. Honing his vocal and performance skills as a regular in the Nevada nightclubs, Raye developed a musical portfolio consisting of over 4000 cover songs.

"I never meant to be a solo artist," Raye says. "I always wanted to be a singing bass player, and be in a band like The Eagles, where I would be one of the singers of several. Becoming a solo artist was basically an evolutionary process that happened over the course of time."

Signed by Epic Records Nashville in 1990, the 10-time Male Vocalist of the Year nominee has released sixteen No.1 hit singles including "Love, Me," "In This Life," "My Kind Of Girl," and "I Can Still Feel You."

"Music is a healer, it's inspiring, it's universal," Raye says. "Which may sound a bit cliché, but it's true. Music is the only common language in the world. No matter what language you speak, music is that common denominator throughout every culture. And for the most part, good music is good music, no matter what part of the world you may call home."

Raye has also been willing to let his music tackle tough social issues such as alcohol abuse ("Little Rock"), race relations ("Not That Different"), domestic violence ("I Think About You"), and child abuse ("The 11th Commandment").

"I've never specifically looked for songs that have a serious message about society," Raye says. "But once in awhile they just land on you. And I take that as a blessing from God. It's like He's saying, 'You're the guy to sing this, so I'm going to drop you another one.' I look at these songs as an opportunity to try and do some good with my music."

Raye's current 2011 release, "His Love Remains," is a fifteen-song compilation of some of the most loved Christian hymns and ballads of all time. The project - which features Nashville Christian recording artist, Marie Bellet, and singer/songwriter Andrea Thomas - is dedicated to Raye's late 10-year old granddaughter, Haley Marie Bell, who died in 2010 of a rare neurological disorder.

"My faith is the most important thing in my life," Raye says. "I have always wanted to use my God-given musical talent to give something back to Him and the Church. I can't tell you how excited I am to record a Spiritual-Inspirational CD that I hope and pray bring people closer to God and Heaven, and in some cases - bring people back to God."

With songs that touch the heart and soul, Raye continues to deliver his brand of music with a heavy dose of authenticity.

"I'm at a point in my career where it feels like a new beginning to me," Raye says. "I feel like a new artist again. I feel like I did in 1991, when we were releasing my very first single, Love Me, and working it up the chart. I'm just at a good place in my life and career."