

JOSH TURNER

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
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Country newcomer, Josh Turner, visualized his first hit single, the "Long Black Train," before the alluring song was ever created.

"I wrote the Long Black Train back in '99 when I was a Belmont University student in Nashville," Turner says. "I had listened to the entire Hank Williams Sr. box set in the school library one night. Walking home across campus. I suddenly envisioned this wide open space way out in the

plains with a train track running through the middle of it. This long, black, beautiful, shiny train came roaring out of the darkness, and I could see people standing off to the side of the track. It dawned on me that the train was a physical metaphor for temptation. When I got home, I grabbed my guitar and the song just poured out."

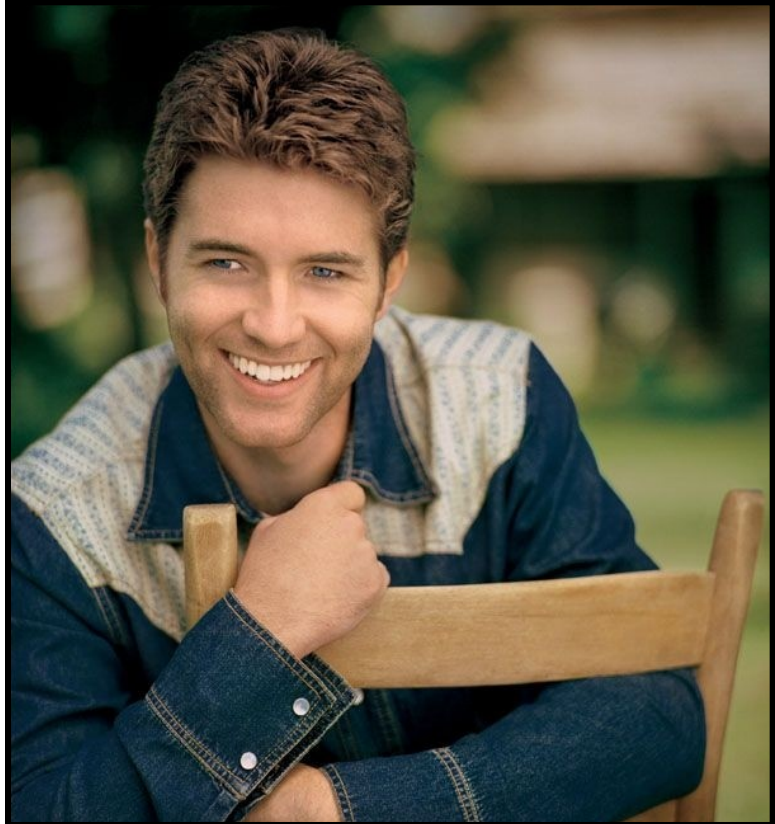
The 26-year-old South Carolina baritone will perform at The Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, August 7, at 6 and 9:30 p.m.

The "Long Black Train" has a traditional gospel-like melody, while its old-time lyrics reveal a remarkable depth and gift for storytelling.

"I'm a study of songs, songwriters, singers and great artists who have gone before me or are still out there in today's public eye and ear," Turner says. "It's so interesting to me. I listen to records, read the lyrics, and try to determine how the writers crafted their songs."

Turner made his Grand Ole Opry debut on December 21, 2001, and received two standing ovations for the "Long Black Train."

"Bill Anderson was hosting that segment," Turner says. "He came out just laughing, because he couldn't believe what was going on. He said, 'Do y'all want to hear some more? Josh, make that train a little bit longer.' So I counted the song off again. I got really choked up, because I realized what had just happened -- I'd gotten an encore on the Grand Ole Opry. I was numb. I started crying a little bit, and I think I skipped a couple of verses. But I made it through, and got another standing ovation. There was a buzz in the building. I just couldn't believe that it had happened."



One month after his Opry debut, Turner signed to MCA Nashville. He released his debut album, "*Long Black Train*," in 2003, and it was certified gold (for shipments of 500,000 copies) just 12 short weeks after its release.

"This album is just who I am," Turner says. "It's the best songs I could come up with for my first record, whether I wrote 'em or not. They're just honest."

Turner co-wrote three out of eleven songs for the "Long Black Train," which became a 5th best selling country album on the Billboard chart.

"I try to do whatever comes from my heart," Turner says. "I don't try to set out and write a specific song every time I write. A lot of times the inspiration comes to me when I'm alone, when I don't really have a lot of distractions. It's one of those things where I have to be in the right situation, moment and frame of mind to have the inspiration and ideas hit me."

Turner's thread of hopeful morality and ability to choose, write, and sing five-star songs is reminiscent of Randy Travis, Waylon Jennings and Johnny Cash.

"People need hope, no matter how far down they are," Turner says. "I know with Johnny Cash, there was always a hopeful spirit, even if it was just in his voice. You look at his life and everything he'd been through. He was raised the right way, but he got sidetracked by a lot of things. But he never failed to come back to God and to what he knew was right. It kept him alive and his music strong. It's just hope. Yeah, I've lost people, my heart's been broken and I've been through tough times. But that shouldn't keep me down."

All comparison aside, there's no denying the deep-voiced singer has developed a stand-out style all his own.

"The main thing for me is to be myself," Turner says. "I have to be true to who I am, what I believe and how I sound. Outside of that, I don't want to be confined to one particular kind of song or message. I want to be diverse and give people something different every time I get in front of a public crowd. The only way to really be satisfied is to continue to change and improve on who you are, your skill and your talent."