

MARTY STUART

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
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After 35 years in the country music industry, Grand Ole Opry member, Marty Stuart, still appreciates the numerous "Compadres" who helped him along the way.

"My current album, *Compadres: An Anthology of Duets*, contains a variety of archival recordings as well as three new songs," Stuart says. "Compadres is the perfect title for this project. It means someone who will always be there for me as an advisor, a friend, a brother, a kindred spirit, a soul mate, someone who had my back. This album is a recognition that you don't

get anywhere in life without help from your mentors and your peers -- your compadres."

Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives band members (Kenny Vaughan, Harry Stinson, and Brian Glenn) will perform to audience of compadres at The Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, November 10, at 7 p.m.

"The Little Nashville Opry has been a part of my tour for almost 30 years," Stuart says. "It's really become one of those venues that's rare. There are very few places like that left where you can play to an audience of fans and friends that appreciate traditional old country music. The Little Nashville Opry show is usually scheduled at the end of our touring season and has a party-like atmosphere. We often don't have a set playlist for the show and invite everyone to just holler out what songs they'd like to hear. I have a fond romance for that show and always look forward to coming back."

Compadres: An Anthology of Duets, was recorded on Stuart's imprint Superlatone Records in conjunction with Hip-O and Universal Music Enterprises. The June released 14-track collection includes duets with Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Connie Smith, Loretta Lynn, Travis Tritt, B.B King, The Staple Singers, Del McCoury, George Jones, Mavis Staples, Steve Earle, and The Old Crow Medicine Show.



"This album allowed me the opportunity to keep the music alive of those who are now departed, fan the flames of those who are still with us, and pass the torch for future generations to keep ignited," Stuart says.

Stuart, 49, and his younger sister, Jennifer, were reared in Philadelphia, Mississippi, by father John, a U.S. Motors employee, and mother Hilda, who worked at a bank.

Known locally as a child musical prodigy, Stuart's parents bought him a plastic, crank-up Mickey Mouse toy guitar at age three, and a real guitar by age five.

Stuart was self taught in guitar, mandolin, bass, and fiddle at an early age. At twelve, Stuart toured with bluegrass/gospel group, The Sullivan Family, to various Pentecostal churches throughout the South and Midwest. Stuart was thirteen when bluegrass legend Lester Flatt hired him as a mandolinist; he played in Flatt's Blue Grass Band for six years until Flatt died in 1979. Stuart went on to tour with such legendary artists as Vassar Clements, Doc and Merle Watson, Bob Dylan, George Jones, and a six-year gig with his biggest hero of all -- the late great Johnny Cash.

"Being in Johnny Cash's band was like learning to paint alongside Picasso," Stuart says. "He was a true artist, a great teacher, and a wonderful person. He was seriously independent when it came to his creativity and he did what his heart dictated to him to do. I learned very early on from him that you must follow your heart if you want to wind up in the right place. Often times, nobody else sees that vision, except perhaps you. I still believe in that."

Since his '85 debut country single, "Arlene," Stuart's solo career achievements include one platinum and five gold albums, four Grammy Awards, and such hits as "Hillbilly Rock," "Little Things," "Tempted," and "Burn Me Down." Stuart also charted numerous vocal collaborations with longtime friend and country rocker, Travis Tritt, including, "The Whiskey Ain't Workin'," "This One's Gonna Hurt You," and "Honky Tonkin's What I Do Best."

Nicknamed country music's renaissance man, Stuart's signature "hillbilly rock" style of music is often defined as being the bridge between past and present country music.

"I believe in 'Honor Thy Father'," Stuart says. "I got swept up in the 'Urban Cowboy' movement, due to my age, but I saw no reason to turn my back on my history. To be acknowledged by George Jones, Merle Haggard, or Johnny Cash is something I've never taken lightly. Those were graduation ceremonies. I always considered Lester Flatt as my formal education and Johnny Cash as my finishing school. They were always my chiefs, but we got to a point beyond boss and employee. We were compadres."

The Country Music Association recently presented Stuart with the Joe Talbot Award in recognition of his work in collecting country music memorabilia. Stuart's passion for preserving and protecting the story behind musical art forms served as the inspiration for his private memorabilia collection, "Sparkle & Twang: Marty Stuart's American

Musical Odyssey." The unique collection, currently on display at the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville through Nov. 11th, will travel to other museums throughout the U.S.

The "Sparkle & Twang" exhibit -- which contains a portion of the 20,000 items Stuart began collecting as a teenager -- illustrates the impact of fashion and music on the popular culture of America as revealed through performance costumes, accessories, handwritten lyrics, personal letters, instruments owned by country music legends, and unpublished photographs. Highlights of the 10,000 square ft. exhibit include Hank Williams' handwritten lyrics to "Your Cheatin' Heart," Johnny Cash's trademark "Man in Black" suit, Jimmie Rodgers briefcase, as well as other treasures from the late Patsy Cline and Elvis Presley.

"I believe country music holds a prominent place within the arts," Stuart says. "For many years, I have been passionate about collecting and archiving the treasures of country music and its people. Now it's my joy to collaborate in bringing these treasures back for the world to see and enjoy."

Stuart, a master photographer, has also published two hardcover black and white format photo books, "Pilgrims, Sinners, Saints and Prophets" (1999), and "Country Music: The Masters" (2007).

"Black and white photos appear more timeless to me," Stuart says. "It has a more eternal ring to it that I love. When photographing people, I prefer the unguarded side, those moments only family is usually allowed to see. My mother was a great photographer -- she knew exactly when to hit the button to capture the true character of her subjects. I look for that as well when photographing people."

Current projects for Stuart include hosting a Friday morning show (8 a.m. Eastern) "Marty Stuart's American Odyssey," on XM Satellite Radio classic country Channel 10. Each hour-long episode focuses on a different part of the country and brings the musical sounds and stories of that region to life through informal interviews with local musicians, stories, guests, and a regular cast of studio and tour musicians.

"Hosting this radio program is the closest thing to a real job I've ever had," Stuart says with a laugh. "We've taped 25 episodes which requires 25 hours of airtime to fill. Each hour-long episode involves its own research, writing, recording, mixing, and editing. It's a full-time job that I've been working on everyday with a great team of researchologists, musicologists, and assorted compadres."

Of all the compadres in Stuart's life, none means more than his wife, Grand Ole Opry star, Connie Smith. As a young boy Stuart would stare at her 1966 album cover, "Miss Smith Goes to Nashville," mesmerized by a photograph as captivating as the music. When Smith performed at the Choctaw Indian Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, a 12-year-old Stuart obtained the singer's autograph and had his picture taken with her. On the way home, Stuart told his mother that he was going to marry Connie Smith some day.

Twenty-five years later he did.