

TRACY BYRD

By Tamela Meredith Partridge

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Tracy Byrd has spent the past twelve years building his country music career the old-fashioned way - one fan, one hit and one platinum record at a time.

"I was a huge country fan growing up," Byrd said. "Over the years, a number of the legends and heroes that I loved -- Hank Williams Sr., Merle Haggard, George Jones, Ray Price, and George Strait -- were pushing the musical envelope. And now it's okay for country music to experiment, have good grooves and a little different instrumentation."



Byrd will perform at the Bureau County Fair in Princeton on Saturday, August 27 at 7:30 p.m.

Byrd's '92 debut single, "That's The Thing About A Memory," was followed by such memorable Billboard Top Five hits as, "Holdin' Heaven," "Lifestyles of the Not So Rich and Famous," "Watermelon Crawl," "The Keeper of the Stars," and "Ten Rounds With Jose Cuervo."

"I used to hear a song and say, 'It ain't country,'" said the Beaumont, Tx., singer, songwriter and guitarist. "I've come to realize that even if a song has a pop-sounding melody and chord progression, when I put my voice on it, it sounds country."

A second collection of career hits, "Tracy Byrd's Greatest Hits," is scheduled for a September release. The thirteen selection album contains two new songs, "Revenge of the Middle-Aged Woman," and the project's first single, "Johnny Cash."

"Johnny Cash never did fit into the norm," Byrd said. "He was always kind of a rebel which the theme of the song exemplifies. It's basically about a guy who gets fed up with conforming and reporting on somebody else's time. So he quits his job, picks up his girlfriend, and has Johnny Cash music blaring on the car stereo as they head to Vegas to get married. I wanted something a little different and more rockin' -- and this song is definitely one of those."

"We use my spices and marinades in over half the cookbook recipes," said Byrd, who donates a portion of the cookbook and product sales to The Children's Miracle Network. "But by no means should the title confuse anyone. You're not going to eat like a little bird -- you're going to eat like a Tracy Byrd, and he eats."

An avid outdoorsman, Byrd currently hosts the ESPN2 tv show, "Hunting The Country," and the new Outdoors Channel show, "Step Outside."

"My late Grandma Mavis "Na Na" Vaughn taught me to fish and hunt," Byrd said. "She was sort of like a grandfather rather than a grandmother. It really made us close spending all that time together in the outdoors and I want my kids to love the outdoors like I did growing up."

Another great family-oriented outdoors event is the annual Tracy Byrd Homecoming Weekend. The three-day event is held on the last weekend in March and consists of golf and fishing tournaments and a Tracy Byrd and Friends concert. Over the years, the event has raised thousands upon thousands of dollars for a variety of charities, including the Children's Miracle Network.

"To love your work is a precious thing," Byrd says. "So I feel that I should give something back by raising money for those who are less fortunate than I am."

"Of course," Byrd continues with a laugh, "we're talking about a weekend of music, golf and fishing, so it's pretty easy for me to get motivated."

For Byrd, every lesson he's learned is reflected in his music.

"It's about my love of life and career -- and taking advantage of every minute of every day," Byrd says. "It's about having fun, loving your loved ones -- and paying attention to the true meaning of life."

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By Tamela Meredith Partridge

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© 2003

If Tracy Byrd hadn't reeled in a country music recording contract in 1992, he'd be fishing for a career today.

"Music is my first love by all means," Byrd says. "But one of these days, when the timing is right, I would love to have my own outdoors show. Way back before I knew I was going to get a record deal, I fantasized about having my own fishing show."

Byrd will perform two shows on Saturday at Nashville North USA in Taylorville.

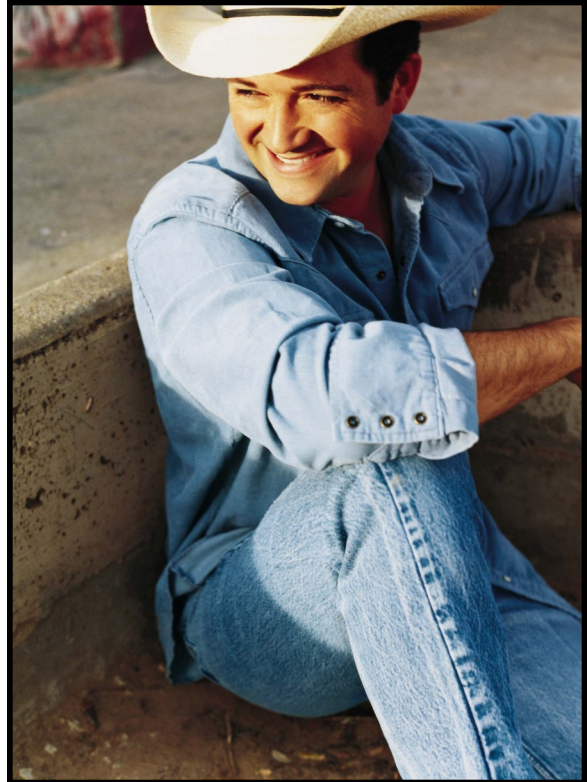
"I think Nashville North has consistently been a great venue for us to entertain in over the years," Byrd says. "We've played here so many times now that it is very comfortable for us and we see old friends there. It's not like your normal beer joint, it has a real Opry feel to it and it's a great place for the whole family."

Byrd's current hit, "The Truth About Men," is the title track and first single off an upcoming new album to be released in August.

"The single is off to a great start," Byrd says. "It's only been out for 5 weeks and already is in the Top 30. It feels like a big hit! My buddies Andy Griggs, Blake Shelton and Montgomery Gentry help me out on this one and they're going to be in the video that we shoot in Nashville in April."

Being in front of the camera is something Byrd is quite comfortable with. As avid outdoorsmen know, Byrd appeared in short, hunting-and-fishing "TNN Outdoors" television segments broadcast between outdoors shows each weekend on the former The Nashville Network, now known as The National Network.

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Byrd recently spent spring break with wife, Michelle and children Eevee, Logan and Jared, at their vacation home on the Gulf of Mexico.

"The kids had a great time," Byrd says. "We had some of our closest friends there with their kids and we do get time to relax and kick back. We play hard, but we also take naps and layout on the beach, so it's the best of both worlds."

Byrd definitely has the best of both worlds when it comes to combining family with a love of the outdoors.

"I'd much rather see my children playing outside on the swing set, playing ball, or going to the beach -- anything outdoors rather than sitting in front of the television," Byrd says. "Eevee and Logan both love to go fishing with me, and as soon as Jared is old enough to go, I'll be taking him too. It's a great family thing to do together."

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By Tamela Meredith Partridge
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Hard to believe, but there was a time when Tracy Byrd doubted he’d ever succeed in a singing career.

No problem—Tracy liked his fallback position almost as much.

“My original dreams were to be a bass fisherman,” he says. “I never used to think I could make it in country music.”

Boy, was he wrong. Tracy’s fifth album, *I’m From the Country*, has charted for almost five months; its third single, “On Again, Off Again,” is out this month. There’s a *Greatest Hits* album (including one new song) coming in April with a single debuting in February. And he is excited about his seventh album, due sometime after *Greatest Hits*.

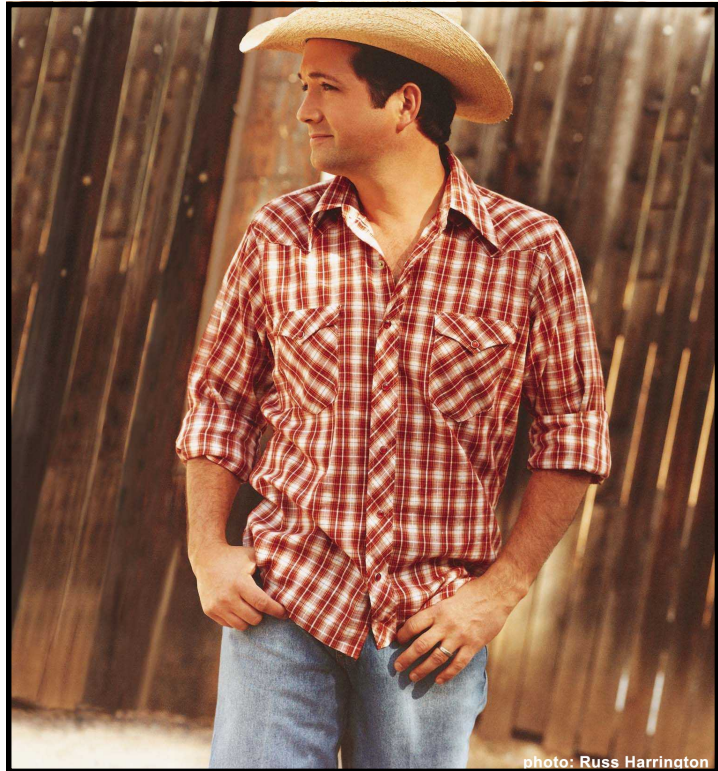
“I think this album will show a marked maturity and more of my love for traditional music,” says Tracy. “I’m going to cut even more traditional songs and hope there will be a place for them.”

Tracy may even get his shot at being a professional fisherman.

“In the last couple of years, my dreams of being outdoors have come true with *TNN Outdoors* — there’s definitely a TV show somewhere in the future,” he says, sounding pretty calm for a guy staring at so much success. “So far as dreams go, they’ve all come true.”

As avid outdoorsmen know, Tracy has been appearing in short, hunting-and-fishing segments broadcast between outdoors shows each weekend on TNN. His work on *TNN Outdoors* eased Tracy’s writing to the back burner.

“I wrote about 30 songs last year, but this year I have not had time,” he says. “That’s why I let my publishing deal go. When you have a deal, you write 12 songs a year whether you feel like writing or not. I don’t like the pressure of having to write. Now I have my own publishing company, and if I don’t feel like writing I don’t have to.”



He does, however, miss writing with Mark Nesler, his former guitarist and now an up-and-coming star in his own right. Together, they have written songs that have still not seen the light of a recording studio.

“I love writing with Mark,” Tracy says enthusiastically. “He has his own career and his own hits, so it’s going to be tough for us unless we tour together, but I think he’s a great artist. He is very, very deep.” Tracy chuckles; “That’s what we used to say about him —‘Mark is out there where the water is very deep and blue.’ “

“Mark writes incredible lyrics, but his talent lies in his melodies. He usually gets the melody before he even writes any lyrics. He and I work really well, because I could write the lyrics and he already has some great melody to work on.”

“He grew up in Buda, Texas, and I lived in Vidor, but there’s only about 10 minutes between the two. I met Mark when I was about 17 and we’ve been friends ever since.”

If Tracy could change one thing, it would be the constant conflict between the traditional country music he prefers and country radio’s current penchant for contemporary hits.

“The single I have, ‘I Wanna Feel That Way Again,’ is a gorgeous ballad that I think could almost cross over, but we have stations saying it is too country,” he says with a shrug. “It amazes me that a country station can tell you a record is too country.”

“I think we have done a great job of blending my love traditional country into the ‘90s ‘new country’ sound. I have been a country music fan since I was old enough to listen to music, and I have seen country music make a full circle about three times. I think it will come back to traditional country. I’m just trying to bide my time.”

Every lesson he’s learned is reflected in his work, Tracy says.

“It’s all there—my grandma, my love of the outdoors, my wife, my kids, my love for them and for what I do for a living— especially in songs like ‘Getting’ Me Over Mountains’ and ‘I’m From The Country.’

“Every time I cut an album, my life is reflected in the songs I cut and the way I sing them. Artists are supposed to convey what is in their hearts and minds, and that’s what I try to do.”