

RONNIE MILSAP

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
"Our Brown County" magazine
Nashville, IN
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Ronnie Milsap, CMA '77 Entertainer of the Year, will be performing at The Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, June 30 at 6:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster or by calling The Little Nashville Opry box office at 812-988-2235.

Milsap, one of the most versatile and gifted performers in the music industry, has been a mainstay on both pop and country charts for over three decades.

Milsap, 56, has incorporated the musical influences of classical, gospel, R&B, jazz, rock, and bluegrass into his trademark country-soul vocals of today.

The '76 Grand Ole Opry inductee is best known for his hits, "*It Was Almost Like A Song*," "*There's No Gettin' Over Me*," "*I Wouldn't Have Missed It For The World*," "*Smokey Mountain Rain*," and "*Any Day Now*."

Blind since birth due to congenital cataracts, the Robbinsville, NC native was raised by his paternal grandparents near the Great Smokey Mountains. At the age of five, he was enrolled in the North Carolina State School For The Blind, where he was first introduced to classical trainings in piano, violin, guitar, clarinet, and cello.

"It's almost crazy to say it," Milsap said, "but in some ways it's a blessing that I was born blind. I was totally taken out of the environment that my father's family and all the generations before me had been in. If I had been born sighted in Western North Carolina and gone through the public school system there, I certainly wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now."



A promising pre-law student, Milsap turned down a scholarship to Emory University Law School to focus on his music full-time. He began his professional music career in '65, with his first Top Five R&B single, "*Never Had It So Good*."

In '72 he moved to Nashville and eventually signed with RCA Records. Since '73 he has garnered 40 No. 1 hits, six Grammys, eight CMA awards and became the recipient of the only gold Braille album ever awarded.

Throughout his career, Milsap's demanding schedule of recording and touring left little time off for creative exploration or recharging.

"It seemed like there was never a break from all that," Milsap said. "It went on endlessly. I kept wondering how this thing was eventually going to stop. You need to figure out why you wanted to do this to begin with. Most of us that do this love music so much."

In spite of his hectic schedule, the innovative vocalist has released an impressive musical portfolio of almost 70 singles and over thirty albums since his debut.

"I've always looked for the music that would say what I'm trying to do right now," Milsap said. "I hoped basically to rediscover my own identity (with each recording project)."

Other career accomplishments include the '90 autobiography, "Almost Like A Song," and a state-of-the-art recording studio in Nashville, TN.

Current endeavors for the talented vocalist consist of a busy touring schedule, planning a new recording project and promoting the recently released 2-CD collection, "Ronnie Milsap - 40 No.1 Hits."

"I've been fortunate to have had a lot of successful records," Milsap said. "Now its time to make some more."

Between recording projects and concert performances, Milsap can be found in Nashville with his wife Joyce, and their 27 year old adult son, Todd.

Milsap sets high standards for his career, and is committed to creating relevant and vibrant music.

"There's a big fuss about seasoned artists not being played on radio," Milsap said. "I don't really believe that. What I believe is that you've got to make the record that demands to be fit into today's format. You can't rely on the name of anybody, whether it's Johnny Cash or Charley Pride. It's not the name, it's the record."