


A PUBLICATION OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION

CLOSE UP

Magazine

JUNE 2023



LAINIEY WILSON

looks ahead

In this issue:

**CMA FEST: A LOOK AT
50 YEARS OF FAN FAIR**

**BRAND OR BE
BRANDED: A CASE
FOR CREATING
YOUR BRAND**

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HELLO, MEMBERS!



Dear CMA Member,

Welcome back to *CMA Close Up Magazine* in print! Whether you've been receiving *CMA Close Up* for many years, or you are a new member and reading it for the first time, we are more excited than ever to get the magazine back in the hands of our members with a fresh, new design and robust content structure. In early 2020, as we navigated the challenges and uncertainties around the COVID-19 pandemic, we made the difficult decision to move to a digital-only publication. After many months of intentional conversation and strategic planning, we have established a new framework that will hopefully allow members to build connections, share stories and gain valuable resources to be utilized throughout their careers.

This has been an especially exciting time at CMA, as we launched our new Membership structure back in March and are just a few short days away from celebrating a milestone 50th anniversary of CMA Fest. Over the past several months, as we've implemented these Membership changes and hosted a variety of CMA member events as well as geared up for a festival unlike any other, I have been endlessly impressed and encouraged at the commitment and connection we have seen develop within our Membership base. I am a firm believer that our business is only as strong as those that work within it, so to see a growing foundation of professionals engaging with our community has made me excited for what's to come in Country Music.

In this issue, you can read more about these CMA Membership changes and learn what went in to making these decisions, take a look back at the history of CMA Fest, connect with your fellow CMA members and tap into a host of professional development resources.

As always, we are YOUR trade association, representing YOU and all professionals making a living in Country Music globally. Thank you for your continued engagement in our organization and in Country Music as a genre.

With gratitude,

Sarah Trahern
CMA Chief Executive Officer



BRAND OR BE BRANDED

By Diane Watson, PCC and Cory Colton, PCC, BCC

Diane Watson has served as an executive coach for more than nine years, working with executives and leaders in health care organizations, higher education, technology, banking, and nonprofit groups. Cory Colton is an experienced learning and leadership development executive with over 20 years experience across multiple industries. In his role, he works as an executive coach, a physician leadership and well-being coach, and certified team and group coach. CMA has partnered with Watson and Colton on a variety of projects and initiatives, including executive coaching for CMA's Women's Leadership Academy. Members can be on the lookout for more curated content from Watson and Colton at [CMAMember.com](https://www.cma.org/CMAMember.com).

Another article about branding! Yep, each month all of us receive at least two messages about creating a professional brand. There's a good reason for the articles. Our brand is our reputation. We'll wager that within a minute you can count around 10 individuals whose brand was changed in a click, positively and negatively.

If you're like us, you remember your parents and teachers telling you to think before you act. Why did they do that? We could lose our reputation, or brand, from one rash act, and it could take years to repair the damage.

That's why creating your professional brand is important. Think about it. Companies, artists, beverages, and athletes have brands - and so do you, even if you haven't purposefully created one. Is it the brand you want? If you don't intentionally create your brand, others will. Jeff Bezos said it well: "Your brand is what other people say about

you when you're not in the room." So, who do you want to create your professional brand: you, or other people?

Let's look at three different brands, starting with Apple. What comes to mind when you think about Apple? Innovation and quality. HOKA® is known for creating running shoes that are fast and kind to the human body. Tom Brady's brand for years was being the best all-time quarterback.

What is a professional brand? It clearly communicates who you are, what you do, why you do it and what makes you unique. Professional branding statements communicate what makes you valuable to others and align your leadership with your core values and purpose. Another benefit of creating your brand is that you also create the vision of the professional that you are becoming. That influences how you show up.

You may feel as some of our clients do. We often hear, "I am extremely busy and don't have the time to work on my brand." However, our clients who have spent time on their leadership brand have benefited from the clarity and focus the process provides. Creating your leadership brand takes time and focus. We recommend breaking the process into manageable chunks, such as an hour a week. Some clients have turned creating their brand into a fun activity that they work on with friends or colleagues.

How do you start? You identify what makes you unique. Ask yourself, colleagues and friends what makes you different. Think about what you want people to say about you. What skill or expertise are you developing? What are you known for? What are your unique superpowers?

Let's get started by walking step by step through the four key elements of your leadership brand.



YOUR LEADERSHIP BRAND

01

THE "I AM" STATEMENT

Often, the core of our leadership, the way we represent ourselves and the way others experience us is through a primary designation.

Pick your top three "I AM" statements. Some examples below.

Creative
Mentor
Entrepreneur
Collaborator
Advocate

02

YOUR VALUES

Your values are what is important to you.

Knowing your values helps you understand what drives you, what inspires you and what you would like to see more of from others.

Pick your top three values. Some examples below.

Community
Empowerment
Integrity
Service
Generosity

03

YOUR DEEPEST BELIEF

Your deepest belief is how people experience your consistency, how they receive you as a role model and how you distinguish yourself as a leader.

What you always say...

What is the thing that you always say to colleagues, team members, or peers to inspire them?

What you do...

When something is happening, what is the thing people always know you will do?

The opposite...

What is the thing people know you will never do in crisis, in conflict, or when making a crucial decision?

I always know...

In the face of indecision or adversity what carries you through?

04

YOUR TAGLINE

Here is the crux of the brand. Your tagline!

What two words describe you best?

What would you put on the bottom of a business card?

If an executive or television producer asked you to describe yourself in two words, what would they be?

CMA BROADENS MEMBERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES TO EMBRACE MORE PEOPLE, PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The Country Music Association now offers four tiers of membership that extend varying levels of resources. To learn more about each tier, visit CMAmember.com.

By Cindy Watts

The Country Music Association has opened its doors to an even broader swath of the music community's worldwide workforce with its new tiered membership opportunities. Inspired by the Association's extensive community support during the pandemic, CMA executives sped up their plans to reevaluate membership guidelines to make them more encompassing of the people whose careers include Country Music.

"Our business went through so many challenges and hardships during the pandemic," explained Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild, a member of the CMA Board and current Chair of its Membership Committee. "We were reminded again that we are only as strong as the individuals that make up our community. So, we made it our main objective to ensure that every person with an investment or interest in Country Music has a place and feels supported within the new structure."

The updated membership is divided into four categories: Student, Industry, Professional and Lifetime. Each level extends current and prospective music industry personnel access to professional development, educational programming, mental health resources, networking opportunities and more.

"With the new approach, we are focused on the individual," said Tiffany Kerns, CMA Senior Vice President, Industry Relations & Philanthropy. "We're less worried about the politics. Every time I meet with a member, the first thing I say to them is, 'What's something that you need professionally that you're not getting anywhere else?' That's the kind of resource I desperately want CMA to be."

There are varying membership fees and benefits based on each tier.

The student tier is free and available to high school and college students starting at 16 years old who want to work in the music business in any capacity. Students will have access to internships, apprenticeships, tailored programming (including access to CMA's collegiate professional development program, CMA EDU) and community-building opportunities.

"When thinking about expanding our tiers, we wanted to be sure we weren't missing out on the young professionals in our business who are the future and the heart and soul leading Country Music right now," said Sarah Trahern, CMA Chief Executive Officer.

The Industry tier is \$25 yearly and open to current and potential music industry professionals whose career focus may not be in the Country genre. However, if they work in Country Music at all, access to a portion of CMA membership benefits is available.

"There are a lot of people in Music City who are not necessarily in Country full-time but they dabble in it on occasion," said Kerns. "We felt like the way of the future is making sure everyone finds a place that they can call home and feel like they're getting support and resources. We felt like CMA delivered that in the pandemic, and we should continue to deliver that well after the pandemic."

"We made it our main objective to ensure that every person with an investment or interest in Country Music has a place and feels supported within the new structure."

-Karen Fairchild

Before membership guidelines were updated, CMA members were required to make the majority of their income in Country Music. Trahern said extending help to the entire industry during the pandemic helped the CMA build more profound and meaningful relationships.

"It made sense that the Industry Tier was a front door to people being engaged in our business who may have an interest in Country, an interest in global, or a need for healthcare, all of those kinds of things," she said.

The Professional tier is accessible to industry specialists who predominantly work in Country Music. For \$100 annually, members receive access to research, insights, professional development opportunities, curated networking events,

healthcare guidance, customer/client cultivation, mentoring, CMA's member directory, the chance to purchase event tickets and more. If members meet certain criteria, voting privileges for the CMA Awards and other professional honors begin at this level.

"We took our time on this because ensuring the integrity of the voting components of membership was paramount," Trahern said. "We didn't want to do anything that compromised the integrity of the Awards. At the same time, I think we would have our heads in the sand if it was just business as usual."

Kerns explained the Membership Committee also realized that traditional networking opportunities weren't building a more robust music business. The Membership Committee reimagined what music industry mixers could look like and developed curated happy hours—called MemberSIPS—where CMA introduces a topic and invites everyone in attendance to discuss it with each other.

"It's been wildly successful," she said. "The biggest win is when everyone walks in, says hi to the people they know, then they sit down, and we engage in a conversation based on a topic that we have determined. Then at the end when we get up, they stay seated talking to each other."

Lifetime membership is reserved for music industry professionals who have achieved prominent and significant success in the genre. Lifetime members receive all benefits provided to Professional members, in addition to specialized communication and top-tier community connection.

Trahern hopes that as potential members see the Country Music Association's new tiered membership in action, it will appeal to a broader base of people and energize membership worldwide.

"People often think of CMA as CMA Fest and the CMA Awards, which are wonderful and exciting events, and certainly some of my favorite times of the year," she said. "But when our staff comes into the office every day, 365 days a year, our job is to strengthen Country Music. The mission statement is about membership and community, and everything else is a tool to help that take place."



CMA Members gather for a MemberSIPS event in March focused on "The Power of Women and Connection." Photo: Kayla Schoen/CMA

BY THE NUMBERS:

6,171 PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS

116 INDUSTRY MEMBERS

145 STUDENT MEMBERS

13 CMA Member events this year

25+ On-demand video topics in the works or scheduled for release

200 Families receiving health insurance through Pancoast partnership

\$1,000 Value of discounts available through CMA Member Perk program

1 Completely new member portal



CMA Members gather for a MemberSIPS event in February focused on "The Future of the Music Industry." Photo: Stephanie Van Horn/CMA

CMA CLOSE UP

Upcoming Events

June 8-11: 50th CMA Fest

Help us celebrate 50 years of CMA Fest with four jam-packed days of Country Music.

- **ALL DAYS:** Industry Suite at Nissan Stadium (during nightly concerts)
- **ALL DAYS:** Membership Green Room at Ascend Amphitheater (11 a.m.-3 p.m.)

July 5: "CMA Fest: 50 Years of Fan Fair" Documentary Premiere on Hulu

Told through exclusive one-on-one interviews, and never-before-seen archival content and CMA Fest performances, the 75-minute documentary, "CMA Fest: 50 Years of Fan Fair," celebrates the festival's humble beginnings as Fan Fair in 1972, which drew 5,000 fans to Nashville's Municipal Auditorium, to its move to the Tennessee State Fairgrounds in 1982 and then ultimately to downtown Nashville in 2001, now drawing 80,000 fans a day, across four days, with attendees from all 50 states and 39 countries.

July 30 - August 1: CMA EDU Leadership Summit

CMA will host the CMA EDU Class of 2023-2024 in Nashville at CMA HQ for two days of extensive professional development training, engaging industry education and robust networking opportunities.

August 7: Member Board Reception

Join us during our August Board meeting for a reception at CMA HQ. Meet fellow members, your Board representatives and the CMA Staff while enjoying food, drinks and networking.

August 8: Mentor M.E. Webinar - Dr. Loneka Battiste

Hosted by Dr. Loneka Battiste, Assistant Professor of Music Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, participants in this session will explore a variety of lessons learned through the years of music education. Drawing on 12 years of experience teaching children in school and community settings, Battiste will guide participants through an engaging and collaborative conversation around learning to trust oneself as an educator, embracing the power of one's background and the power of connecting with students.

August 17: August MemberSIPS

Our monthly MemberSIPS events bring together a curated group of members to discuss a particular topic over a "sip" of some kind! Come enjoy a cup of coffee, a cocktail, or a mocktail over meaningful conversation with the CMA community. The curated group will receive an invitation via email.

September 7: September MemberSIPS

Our monthly MemberSIPS events bring together a curated group of members to discuss a particular topic over a "sip" of some kind! Come enjoy a cup of coffee, a cocktail, or a mocktail over meaningful conversation with the CMA community. The curated group will receive an invitation via email.

September 10-16: National Arts in Education Week

September 12: Mentor M.E. Webinar - Mickey Smith Jr.

International speaker, saxophonist, author and master development coach for elementary and middle school band directors as well as a self-management-strategist for educators, Mickey Smith Jr. hosts a webinar focused on the power of enjoying teaching. Throughout this session, participants will be encouraged and equipped with the tools to discover their "sound of significance" and "keep on going" with resilience.

September 12: New Member Orientation

Learn more about what it means to be a CMA member while connecting with other new members and CMA Staff.

September 19: CMA Foundation Music Teachers of Excellence

Join us as we celebrate, alongside our artist and industry community, 30 incredible music teachers from across the country who are going above and beyond in their classrooms and communities.

October 17: October MemberSIPS

Our monthly MemberSIPS events bring together a curated group of members to discuss a particular topic over a "sip" of some kind! Come enjoy a cup of coffee, a cocktail, or a mocktail over meaningful conversation with the CMA community. The curated group will receive an invitation via email.

December 6: Member Holiday Party

Join us for our annual Member Holiday Party! We are excited to raise a glass with you and celebrate all the amazing accomplishments of 2023. More details including location will be announced later in the year but save the date for now!

November 8: CMA Awards

Hosted by two-time CMA Entertainer of the Year Luke Bryan and NFL superstar Peyton Manning, mark your calendars as we celebrate "The 57th Annual CMA Awards" this November.



Chapel Hart and the CMA Foundation visited Eagle View Elementary School in Antioch, TN on March 30, 2023. Photo: Kayla Schoen/CMA



Students from Cane Ridge Elementary School visited CMA HQ on March 7, 2023 for a field trip to Music Row. CMA Foundation Community Impact Director, Franklin Willis entertained the students with games and boomwackers while teaching them about the CMA Foundation's role in bringing music education to students nationwide. Photo: Drew Noble/CMA



This past fall, CMA CEO Sarah Trahern traveled to Orlinda, TN to dedicate a marker in honor of CMA's long time Executive Director, the late Jo Walker Meador. Photo: Courtesy of Sarah Trahern



Shane Profitt, in partnership with Music Has Value and the CMA Foundation, visited Brown Elementary School in Columbia, TN on May 10, 2023. Photo: Drew Noble/CMA



2022 CMA TOURING AWARDS

In January, after two long years, the touring community was back together again to celebrate the CMA Touring Awards, hosted by Keith Urban. With the touring sector accounting for the second largest category of Membership within CMA, the evening was full of celebratory reconnections all while honoring 16 of Country Music's top touring professionals.

BUSINESS MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Stephanie Mundy-Self (Farris, Self & Moore, LLC)

COACH/TRUCK DRIVER OF THE YEAR

John Stalder (Kenny Chesney)

FRONT OF HOUSE (FOH) ENGINEER OF THE YEAR

Robert Scovill (Kenny Chesney)

LIGHTING DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

Chris Reade (Dierks Bentley)

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Chris Kappy (Make Wake Artists)

TOUR MANAGER OF THE YEAR

David Farmer (Kenny Chesney)

MONITOR ENGINEER OF THE YEAR

Michael Zuehsow (Luke Combs)

PRODUCTION MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Jerry Slone (Luke Combs)

PUBLICIST OF THE YEAR

Ebie McFarland
(Essential Broadcast Media)

TALENT AGENT OF THE YEAR

Austin Neal (The Neal Agency)

TALENT BUYER/PROMOTER OF THE YEAR

Brian O'Connell
(Live Nation Nashville)

TOUR VIDEOGRAPHER/PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

Jill Trunnell (Kenny Chesney)

TOUR VIDEO DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

Tyler Hutcheson (Luke Combs)

TOURING MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR

Dan Hochhalter (Dierks Bentley)

VENUE OF THE YEAR

Ryman Auditorium (Nashville, TN)



Photo: Hunter Berry/CMA

CMA Honors John Huie with CMA Touring Lifetime Achievement Award

John Huie, Creative Artists Agency (CAA) Music Nashville Co-Head, was also honored with the CMA Touring Lifetime Achievement Award. Rod Essig, CAA Music Nashville Co-Head, presented Huie with the night's highest honor, an award given to an individual who has positively impacted and contributed to the growth of touring throughout the years.

THE 13TH CMA TRIPLE PLAY AWARDS

The songwriting community gathered in March to celebrate 16 songwriters that received the CMA Triple Play Award this year. The award is presented to songwriters who have penned three No. 1 songs in a 12-month period based on the Country Aircheck, Billboard Country Airplay and Billboard Hot Country Songs charts.

Rhett Akins

"To Be Loved by You," recorded by Parker McCollum
"Slow Down Summer," recorded by Thomas Rhett
"Half Of Me," recorded by Thomas Rhett featuring Riley Green

Kurt Allison

"Blame It On You," recorded by Jason Aldean
"If I Didn't Love You," recorded by Jason Alden and Carrie Underwood
"Trouble With A Heartbreak," recorded by Jason Aldean

Luke Combs

"Cold As You," recorded by Combs
"Doin' This," recorded by Combs
"The Kind Of Love We Make," recorded by Combs

Jesse Frasure

"Whiskey And Rain," recorded by Michael Ray
"One Mississippi," recorded by Kane Brown
"Slow Down Summer," recorded by Thomas Rhett

Nicolle Galyon

"Gone," recorded by Dierks Bentley
"half of my hometown," recorded by Kelsea Ballerini
"Thought You Should Know," recorded by Morgan Wallen

Ashley Gorley

"Sand In My Boots," recorded by Morgan Wallen
"Beers On Me," recorded by Dierks Bentley

featuring BRELAND and HARDY

"You Proof," recorded by Morgan Wallen
"Slow Down Summer," recorded by Thomas Rhett
"Take My Name," recorded by Parmalee
"New Truck," recorded by Dylan Scott

Charlie Handsome

"I Love My Country," recorded by Florida Georgia Line
"More Than My Hometown," recorded by Morgan Wallen
"Wasted On You," recorded by Morgan Wallen

Michael Hardy

"Single Saturday Night," recorded by Cole Swindell
"Sand In My Boots," recorded by Morgan Wallen
"Beers On Me," recorded by Dierks Bentley featuring BRELAND and HARDY

Ben Johnson

"Take My Name," recorded by Parmalee
"Best Thing Since Backroads," recorded by Jake Owen
"New Truck," recorded by Dylan Scott

Tully Kennedy

"Blame It On You," recorded by Jason Aldean
"If I Didn't Love You," recorded by Jason Aldean
"Trouble With A Heartbreak," recorded by Jason Aldean

Shane McAnally

"half of my hometown," recorded by

Kelsea Ballerini

"23," recorded by Sam Hunt
"Never Wanted To Be That Girl," recorded by Ashley McBryde and Carly Pearce

Chase McGill

"Waves," recorded by Luke Bryan
"Never Say Never," recorded by Cole Swindell and Lainey Wilson
"Don't Think Jesus," recorded by Morgan Wallen

Thomas Rhett

"Country Again," recorded by Thomas Rhett
"Slow Down Summer," recorded by Thomas Rhett
"She Had Me At Heads Carolina," recorded by Cole Swindell

Ernest Keith Smith

"Breaking Up Was Easy In The 90's," recorded by Sam Hunt
"One Mississippi," recorded by Kane Brown
"Wasted On You," recorded by Morgan Wallen

Josh Thompson

"Whiskey And Rain," recorded by Michael Ray
"Wasted On You," recorded by Morgan Wallen
"Half Of Me," recorded by Thomas Rhett

Morgan Wallen

"Wasted On You," recorded by Wallen
"Thought You Should Know," recorded by Wallen
"You Proof," recorded by Wallen



Photo: Ford Fairchild/CMA

CMA Honors Jody Williams with CMA Songwriter Advocate Award

During the ceremony, Liz Rose presented Jody Williams with the CMA Songwriter Advocate Award, which recognizes an individual who has dedicated their life to supporting and advancing the art of songwriting and careers of songwriters. In honor of Williams' legacy in the songwriting community, he was surprised with performances by Eric Church, Robert Earl Keen and Ashley McBryde.



CMA LIFETIME MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

DUSTIN HANEY

Haney received his first CMA Award in 2022 for directing Cody Johnson's "Til You Can't" music video and is now a Lifetime member

By Deborah Evans Price



Photo: Jessica Amerson



Photo: Braden Carney



Photo: Jason Stoltzfus

CMA Award-winning video director Dustin Haney describes his path to success as “trial by fire,” but early into a conversation with the creative visionary behind Cody Johnson’s CMA Music Video of the Year “Til You Can’t,” Jameson Rogers’ “Some Girls” and Mitchell Tenpenny’s “Truth About You,” it’s obvious he possesses the kind of work ethic that makes him comfortable with the heat.

“I was a pretty creative kid. I was actually a free-hand artist and I somewhere picked up a camera,” says Haney who moved from Illinois to Tennessee with his family as a toddler and grew up in Shelbyville. “I’m self-made, and being homeschooled is a big part of that. I’m a big self-learner. If I didn’t know how to do something, I’d always ask somebody or I’d pretend I did until I learned how to do it or went on YouTube and just figured it out. So, I didn’t go to college. I started right out of high school.”

A local editor took Haney under his wing. “It was all Country Music videos so that’s really what drove me into it,” says Haney, who owns Bordertown Pictures. “It was a way of expression and a way of kind of falling into something that’s creative, but also visual which I’m all about. I haven’t looked back since. I’ve never actually had a real job. All I’ve ever done is music videos and photography.”

Haney has built an impressive body of work that includes still portraits of Luke Combs, Ronnie Dunn, Brantley Gilbert, Lathan Warlick and Lainey Wilson. He’s directed videos for Tyler Booth, Halesstorm, Parker McCollum, Matt Stell and many others. He’s also done campaigns with Firestone, Alan Jackson’s Silverbelly whiskey and Stella Rosa Wines with Lainey Wilson.

Haney says one of the best ways for anyone to grow their career in Country Music, is to network and take advice from mentors. “I got a job with Ronnie Dunn, and Ronnie was like a second dad to me. I love that guy,” says Haney who went to work for Dunn at 20. “He forced me into all of these rooms that I wasn’t qualified to be in yet, and I just ended up having to rise to the occasion. He was a great mentor. He has a huge passion for photography, and working with him shaped a lot of the way that I ended up shooting all of my videos. He definitely launched me into the video side of things. He keeps a very small circle and those that are fortunate enough to be in it learn so much.”

Haney says networking has been a key part of his journey. “Our industry is so huge, and it doesn’t take much to become involved in it,” he smiles. “The thing I really like about CMA is it becomes the collective of the committed. Everyone at CMA is very committed and it’s really cool stepping into that circle of people who genuinely care about the industry. There are so many members that actually want to make an impact on the history of Country Music because what we’re doing today is going to impact our kids’ lives 10 years from now.”

Haney, now a Lifetime CMA member, will always have fond memories of “Til You Can’t” being honored as CMA Music Video of the Year. “That song is so powerful and when I first heard it, I was like, ‘Man, you have to do justice to this. You can’t take this lightly,’” he says.

“So, I tried to figure out what I wanted to do, and I ended up just resonating with the family aspect of it. I come from a big family. There’s eight of us including my mom and dad and I was just like, ‘What would I feel if a sibling passed or if something happened?’ I always feel like the video should add something that the song doesn’t say but is still in line with the theme of the song.”

Haney has become known for his distinctive visual. “My first memory was my dad having AC/DC in the tape deck in his F150 and my mom cooking dinner to Brooks & Dunn in the kitchen, so I fall right between that Country and rock aspect,” he says. “I’ve also been called the profile guy. I shoot a lot of people from their side, so I’ve been sought out for that before. I never really tried to do that, but it seems to be a theme in my work.”

When asked what advice he’d give other young professionals, Haney responds, “Work ethic and authenticity in what you do. I never tried to do anything that I felt wasn’t true to me and I also feel like it’s a disservice to bring yourself onto something that you really don’t resonate with just because you’re taking a paycheck for it. If you can bring your own personality and authenticity to what you do, you’re going to be that much more effective. Just giving it your all every time or doing the same level of effort on the small things as you do on the big things, I feel like that’s what really has done the most for me.”

CMA PROFESSIONAL MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

RACHEL POWERS

Messina Touring Group's Rachel Powers Works to Become "Meaningful Leader" in Country Music Industry - With the Help of CMA

By Deborah Evans Price

Working for Messina Touring Group was a self-fulfilling prophecy for Rachel Powers.

In college, Powers interned in the marketing department at the Frank Erwin Center in her native Austin, TX, when the venue hosted a benefit concert with an all-star lineup of George Strait, The Chicks, Lyle Lovett and others after devastating wildfires tore through nearby Bastrop. Amazed at how the event came together in a matter of days, Powers made a career-defining proclamation. "Whoever was able to do that in such a short amount of time and pull something off like this to offer our community, I am going to work for that person one day," Powers recalled during a conversation with *CMA Close Up*.

That man was Louis Messina, founder and CEO of Messina Touring Group. When a job opened up at the company, Powers immediately applied and got the position as Manager of Marketing. Having now worked for Messina for more than a decade, Powers was promoted to Vice President of Marketing in 2022, where she leads a growing team. Working with Blake Shelton, Eric Church and Little Big Town, she has her hands in all aspects of tour promotion and marketing, from determining on sale dates to media buying for all markets and digital strategy.

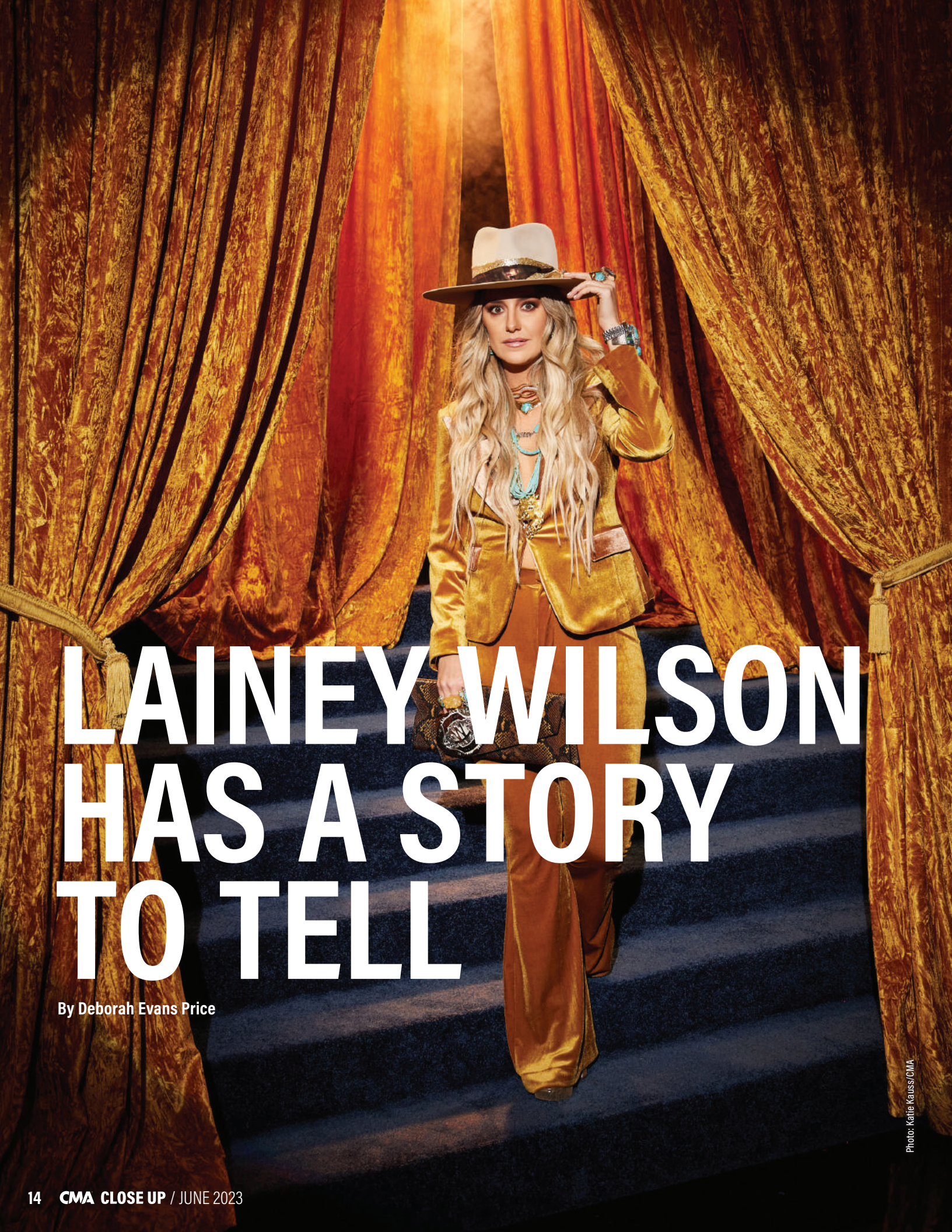
"It's very satisfying coming up with new marketing initiatives and trying new things, and then getting to see almost immediately if that worked," she explained about what she enjoys most about the job. "Going out to a show on a tour and looking around, getting to see all of the amazing people that are there connecting with the artists—and they're here because we told them about it. That's something that's really validating to me—getting to see your hard work pay off."

Highlights of her career include the night in 2019 when Church broke the attendance record at Nissan Stadium in Nashville and became the first artist in history to headline the venue solo, in addition to partnering with Save the Music through the company Propeller on Shelton's 2023 Back to the Honky Tonk Tour, raising more than \$70,000 for the nonprofit across 18 dates.

Another career highlight for Powers is being a CMA member. "Not only do I work in the Country Music genre, but I'm an avid fan of Country Music," she professed. "I'm hoping to become a more meaningful leader in this Country Music space throughout my career and CMA provides so many amazing resources and initiatives to do that." Among those initiatives are Women's Leadership Academy, mental health resources, networking events, mentorship opportunities and getting to be a part of the CMA Awards voting process, which Powers calls a "full circle" moment. "Everything that they have put together to really grow and become a part of the Country Music industry and the representation I think is really mind-blowing," she declared. "I'm thankful that being in this industry, we have a resource like the CMA out there for every person that's part of this amazing genre."



All photos: Courtesy of Rachel Powers



LAINHEY WILSON HAS A STORY TO TELL

By Deborah Evans Price

Photo: Katie Kauss/CMA

Waking up the morning after “The 56th Annual CMA Awards” last fall, Lainey Wilson had a heart full of gratitude and a renewed sense of purpose.

“To win the New Artist as well as Female Vocalist [Awards], I know that’s something that does not happen very often,” Wilson tells *CMA Close Up*. “I heard the last time that was done was Carrie Underwood in 2006 and before that was 1995 with Alison Krauss, so I felt like, ‘Dang, I’ve got some big shoes to fill,’ but I’m going to make sure I fill them.”

“So many people have paved the way for me and so many people have opened doors and believed in me.”

Hailing from tiny Baskin, LA, Wilson had dreamed of a career in Country Music since she first went to the Grand Ole Opry as a child. During high school, she took a job impersonating Hannah Montana and developed her performing skills playing gigs ranging from children’s birthday parties and county fairs to nursing homes. Wilson moved to Nashville on Aug. 1, 2011, to pursue a career in Country Music, and lived in a camper parked in a recording studio parking lot for her first three years in Music City. “It meant the last 12 years of blood, sweat and tears I’ve put into Nashville are finally starting to pay off,” Wilson says of her CMA wins. “It meant that that little 9-year-old girl who came to town for the first time was not wrong when she told her family that she was going to be a part of Nashville and the Country Music family. I felt accepted and respected by the folks in Nashville. So many people have paved the way for me and so many people have opened doors and believed in me. Even the ones who didn’t believe in me at least led me to the folks who did.”

After moving to Nashville, Wilson released independent albums in 2014 and 2016 and an EP in 2019 while she honed her songwriting skills. “It was year seven before I even got a publishing deal,” she says of signing with Sony/ATV. “I didn’t even realize publishing deals were a thing when I moved to town. I was a little bit naive in the beginning, but after several years I was like, ‘OK so this seems like the first step for me.’ I needed to lead off with my strongest foot and for me at that time, my strongest foot was definitely my songwriting. Then eight years in, I signed my record deal with BBR, so it felt like when that first thing happened, other doors started to open.”

Wilson gained praise for her performance skills while opening for Morgan Wallen and on CMT’s Next Women of Country Tour in 2019 as well as touring with Jason Aldean in 2021. Her career escalated when “Things a Man Oughta Know” became a No. 1 hit in 2021. Wilson received six CMA

Awards nominations in 2022, including Song of the Year for “Things a Man Oughta Know” and Album of the Year for *Sayin’ What I’m Thinkin’*. She earned her second chart-topper in 2022 dueting with Cole Swindell on “Never Say Never.” This spring she’s had two singles climbing the chart simultaneously: “Heart Like a Truck,” from her current album *Bell Bottom Country*, and her duet with HARDY, “wait in the truck,” with both hitting No. 1 in April.

When asked what kept her going during her early years, Wilson responds, “Honestly, a weird sense of peace in my heart that I truly felt came from the Lord. When we were driving through Nashville when I was nine years old, I told my parents, ‘This is home.’ It was something that God just put on my heart, and I was going to see it through. I’m glad it happened the way it did because I truly think that time was supposed to be a part of my story. I think my story is supposed to inspire other people to say, ‘Dang! It took her a lot longer than it did a lot of folks, but she’s got a story to tell.’”

Wilson, a CMA member since 2018, says one of the things that helped her most as an aspiring artist was networking. “There were definitely times in my life where I felt like I was running for mayor,” she laughs. “I felt like I needed to get involved as much as I could. So my advice would be to get involved as much as you can. Meet as many people as you can and shake their hands, be their friend—genuinely—make those connections, but most importantly, be kind. This town is all about

connections and if you make sure that you are connected, when the time is right, the town will lift you up and help you get to that next step. It takes an army and Nashville has a pretty strong, bad-ass army.”

In addition to her distinctive voice and insightful songwriting, Wilson is also known for her unique sense of style. “I’ve always been obsessed with bell bottoms since my mama bought me my first pair,” she confesses. “It’s hard for any artist in Nashville, especially females, and I needed to do something real to me, but also that made me stand out. The thing that felt the most natural and sincere to me was bell bottoms. When I put on a pair of bell bottoms, there’s a sense of freedom and I just feel comfortable in my own skin.”

As Wilson’s career has progressed, there have been many milestone moments, including her recent acting role on the hit TV show “Yellowstone,” but another that holds a special place in her heart is her first performance at CMA Fest in 2019. “I went every year to CMA Fest from the time I was 14,” she says. “My parents would take me there so literally I could go get inspired. They would make it like a family vacation really just for me. When I actually got to call home and share the news with my family that I was playing CMA Fest, that’s when they thought, ‘OK, she’s really doing something now!’ Being a part of CMA Fest, whether you are on a small stage in a corner or you are playing the stadium, is a huge deal.”



Photo: John Russell/CMA

As CMA Fest celebrates its 50th anniversary, Wilson shares what she thinks makes it unique. "There is something so magical about playing for folks in a city where the music was made and the team of people are there in that town that pushed that music, that played on that song. There's something really cool about that. Everybody feels that when they roll into town for CMA Fest. And it's so cool to see people come from all different walks of life, literally coming from the other side of the world. I've met so many people from Australia and the U.K., people who love Country Music and that's why they want to be there because you feel it to your core in a different kind of way."

Wilson says she's already begun writing songs for her next album and she's excited about the future. "I feel like I'm right where I'm supposed to be. I feel like I've got the right team of people around me," she says. "I feel like sometimes people see things in me before I even see them in myself and that's what has really gotten me to this point. We're moving at a rapid speed right now, but it's exciting. We're on this ride and it's going to be a dang good one."



Photo: Natasha Moustache/CMA



Photo: John Russell/CMA



Photo: John Russell/CMA

CMA INDUSTRY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

JOSE DIAZ

Diaz is a long-time music educator and changemaker who recently joined CMA under its new Industry tier

By Lisa Valentine

As founder of the Diaz Music Institute, CMA Member Jose Diaz has dedicated his life to bringing the life-changing power of music to the youth of Houston.

Diaz saw the impact that music had on him and how it completely changed the trajectory of his future, so he wanted to bring that to others. His first exposure to music was as a young child, banging on pots and pans to create songs; however, he really fell in love when he started playing trumpet in his school's band program and was inspired by the band directors that he learned from in his youth.

"They were such strong teachers that I wanted to be just like them," remembers Diaz. "I grew up in a very tough neighborhood in the south side of the city of Chicago, so being involved in the band program some people say saved my life..."

His passion for music led him to the University of Arkansas where he graduated with a music education degree and played in the Razorback Marching Band. After earning a full ride and a job as the graduate assistant for the director of bands at Texas Christian University, he graduated with his master's degree and became the band director at MacArthur High School in Houston.

"Because I grew up in the situation I grew up in [in] Chicago, I understood..." he says of the difficult environment that many of his students experienced every day. "I kind of know how to talk to them and understand their way of thinking because I've been around it..."

Diaz developed a well-respected jazz program at the school, with students not only going on to higher education, but many former students have also become band directors, Grammy winners and professional musicians who have performed with the likes of Beyoncé, Stevie Wonder and Nathaniel Ratcliffe.

Diaz invested in students as a high school band director but felt limited at times—as many teachers often do—in regard to resources and funding, so he created the Diaz Music Institute in May of 2000. He worked diligently to raise funds for the institute, running the organization in his personal time after school while still working as a band director until he retired in 2021 after 36 years at MacArthur High School.

"I feel like we are a small organization making a huge impact..." he says of the institute.

The Diaz Music Institute is "committed to the education, preservation, and performance of Latinx music." The organization brings music to students by operating both afterschool and intensive summer programs for over 300 students around the four precincts in Harris County.

"One of the things that I felt very strongly about is that kids need to see models in front of them when they're working on their instrument [and] wanting to become an artist..." Diaz says of the musicians he brings in to teach the students. "It was really cool to see how kids started gravitating toward asking a lot more questions and being much more involved when they hear someone else that for one, looked like them, talked like them, and was able to identify with them in terms of life and the struggles they were having..."

Diaz first connected with the Country Music Association when he was named one of the CMA Foundation's Music Teachers of Excellence in 2021 for his exemplary work in music education, and recently became a member under CMA's new Industry tier. He also worked in tandem with the CMA Foundation and other music teachers across the country to create lesson plans for music teachers to utilize for online teaching during the pandemic.

"I did a lot of stuff with jazz, but I've always been a fan of multiple genres," he explains of why he wanted to become a CMA member. "I like classical music. I love R&B, funk and pop music, and I love Country Western Music. Country Western Music has evolved so much and has become so inclusive, it's just amazing. For the [Country Music] Association to create a foundation specifically for the purpose of making sure children throughout the country have access to music education, to me that speaks volumes to the type of organization it is. I just feel like this is something I should be a part of because I love the mission of the organization...I love the diversity and inclusion and everything that is going on right now..."

For more information about the Diaz Music Institute, visit diazmusicinstitute.org.



Photo: Courtesy of Jose Diaz



Photo: Courtesy of Jose Diaz

CMA FESTA

A LOOK AT 50 YEARS

By Brian Mansfield

When Bud Wendell needed an attendance total for the first Fan Fair in April 1972, he did some quick math. The vice president of WSM, Inc. estimated a bluegrass event in the parking lot of the soon-to-open Opryland USA had drawn 2,500 and figured half of Country Music fans probably liked bluegrass, too. Official attendance? 5,000 people.

Despite such questionable calculations, a *Billboard* special section on the Country Music Hall of Fame that year declared, "What [Fan Fair] might grow to be in the future staggers the imagination considerably." That claim turned out to be spot on.

In its 50th year, the event now known as CMA Fest draws an estimated 80,000 people daily to Nashville, spreads out over much of downtown and produces an annual television special distributed around the globe. "CMA Fest is a great microcosm for fulfilling CMA's mission of growing Country Music around the world," CMA Chief Executive Officer Sarah Trahern says.

Originally a joint venture between CMA and WSM, Fan Fair began as a way to draw fans away from the industry-oriented DJ conventions held each fall and to promote the WSM's Opryland theme park. Municipal Auditorium housed the event, which shifted from April to June in 1973 and promptly doubled its

attendance. After a decade, it had outgrown the downtown arena, selling 15,000 tickets for a venue with a capacity of 9,700. "We had to count on a third of the people doing something else during any given show," says Ed Benson, who joined CMA in 1979, eventually becoming its executive director.

Fan Fair continued to grow with a 1982 relocation to the 117-acre Tennessee State Fairgrounds, where fans engaged with artists at booths in multiple buildings and side-by-side stages allowed seamless sets before a grandstand that seated 15,000.

During the 1990s, though, Country Music grew even faster than Fan Fair, which maxed out fairground attendance at 25,000 and had no place to expand. Event organizers realized the festival had to grow or die — and for about five years, dying was a real possibility. "It could have gone either way," says former record executive and long-serving CMA Board member, Joe Galante. "There wasn't an ROI to it."

A football stadium, then known as Adelphia Coliseum, had opened on the east bank of the Cumberland River in 1999, but staging the event there was hardly a foregone conclusion. "To be honest, we felt nobody at the city level was embracing the festival at the time," says longtime agent and long-serving CMA

1972

CMA Fest originated as Fan Fair, an event often noted as a "lovefest" between Country artists and their fans. The festival, which is presented by the Country Music Association, has experienced tremendous growth in its 50-year history. Approximately 5,000 people attended the first Fan Fair in 1972.



1982

With the exploding popularity of Country Music, Fan Fair continued to grow. In 1982, the event was moved to the Tennessee State Fairgrounds to accommodate more fans.



YEARS OF FAN FAIR

DID YOU KNOW?

CMA will debut its “CMA Fest: 50 Years of Fan Fair” documentary exclusively on Hulu, Wednesday, July 5. Produced by CMA, the 75-minute documentary features exclusive interviews with some of Country Music’s most recognizable names and celebrates the legacy of Country Music’s longest-running festival.

1996

1996 marked the 25th Anniversary of CMA’s Fan Fair. More than 100 artists performed for the sold-out crowd of 24,000. Fans flocked from all over the world to meet their favorite Country artists, pose for photos and get autographs. During the week, Garth Brooks made an unexpected appearance and signed autographs for 23 consecutive hours.



2001

Big changes came with CMA’s Fan Fair in 2001, which marked the return of Fan Fair to Downtown Nashville. The event was held in four different venues, with nightly all-star concerts at Nissan Stadium, formerly The Coliseum, the home of the NFL’s Tennessee Titans. 115 artists performed on the Fan Fair stages, and more than 175 artists appeared in the Exhibit Hall at the Nashville Convention Center.



Board member, Tony Conway. CMA looked at other locations, fielding offers from Atlanta and Houston and considering the Nashville Superspeedway, which would have turned Fan Fair into a camping festival. After decades of being known globally as Music City, Nashville saw its city leaders and its Country Music industry learn to collaborate by bringing the festival back downtown.

In 2001, the Fan Fair schedule shifted from Wednesday through Saturday to a long Thursday through Sunday weekend and held shows and events at multiple locations including the stadium, the convention center and Riverfront Park. Attendance exploded.

"The city got behind us and allowed us to flourish," Galante says. "It became a joint effort to show off the city, and I think that the city benefited."

In 2004, Fan Fair rebranded as CMA Music Festival, ultimately shortening the name to CMA Fest. The same year, for the first time, a two-hour summer special from the festival aired on television. Two years later, then in partnership with ABC, CMA established its "Keep the Music Playing" initiative to funnel festival proceeds into music education. "That sealed a lot of the artists wanting to play CMA Music Fest," Conway says. "They felt like they were giving back. They were helping educate children. And they were performing on a network TV special."

The downtown location also has allowed flanker events to sprout up around the official festival. An offsite schedule that once amounted to a celebrity softball game and some fan-club parties has grown into a week-long slate of concerts, industry events and activations across the city. Some 30,000 people—more than could have fit at the fairgrounds—come to Nashville for CMA Fest week without ever attending a show at the stadium. "That speaks to CMA Fest being a destination not defined by just what CMA does," Trahern says.

CMA Fest paused in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but roared back last year, helping the city set records in terms of hotel-room bookings and airport traffic.

As CMA Fest looks beyond 50 years, the potential for continued growth looks promising. A planned domed football stadium for the east bank could reshape the event and provide multiple new staging options. Other venues and developments could take CMA Fest beyond its current footprint.



2004

In 2004, as Fan Fair continued to evolve into a world-class, city-centered music festival, it was renamed CMA Music Festival. That year had the largest attendance to date, with more than 130,000 fans attending the event over its four days. The event was filmed for a two-hour television special which aired on July 14 and ranked number 16 for the week with more than 9 million viewers.



2018

In 2018, the festival officially shortened its name from CMA Music Festival to CMA Fest.

The longest-running Country Music festival in the world took over Downtown Nashville with more than 300 acts performing on 11 official stages.



"Over the next couple of years, you'll see us continue to evolve what the event looks like to meet the needs of the fans in a different way," Trahern says. "We put on the festival with a passionate 60-person staff and a slew of freelancers, but it really is the city's festival and the industry's festival."



Photo: Hunter Berry/CMA



Photo: Les Leverett



Photo: Courtesy of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum



Photo: Natasha Moustache/CMA

2020

CMA Fest is postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, CMA hosted "CMA Best of Fest," a three-hour retrospective airing on ABC. The live concert experience featured 28 performances from the last 16 years of "CMA Fest."



Photo: Hunter Berry/CMA

2021

Filmed amidst the skyline of downtown Nashville from the open-air Ascend Amphitheater, CMA hosted "CMA Summer Jam," three-hour, artist-curated primetime special featuring individual performances and collaborations from more than 20 of the biggest stars in Country Music. CMA Fest was again postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Photo: Josh Brasted/CMA

2022

CMA Fest marked its grand return to Nashville, following the two-year postponement. More than 80,000 estimated attendees a day from all 50 states and a record-breaking 39 foreign countries filled Music City to see more than 260 acts taking part in CMA Fest.

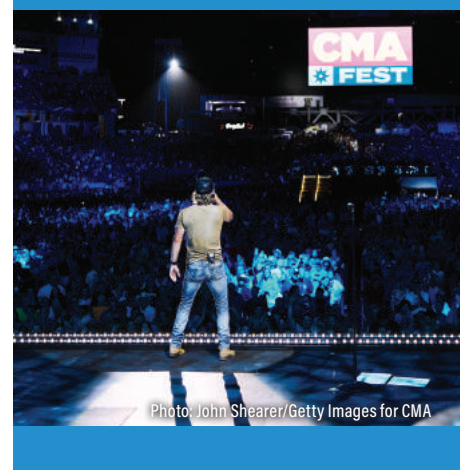


Photo: John Shearer/Getty Images for CMA

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



CMA members attend Relix Music Festival in Nashville, April 2023 at Brooklyn Bowl.
Photo: Courtesy of Rachael Bronstein



CMA members gather at CMA's Taylor Swift themed MemberSIPS event on April 12, 2023.
Photo: Emily April Allen/CMA



CMA Members attend Ask Me Anything: A Conversation on Allyship on March 9, 2023 at CMA HQ. Photo: Drew Noble/CMA



CMA members gather together at CMA HQ for a MemberSIPS event focused on “The Power of Women and Connection” on March 24, 2023. Photo: Kayla Schoen/CMA



CMA members gather at CMA HQ for a MemberSIPS event focused on “The Future of the Music Industry” on Feb. 28, 2023. Photo: Stephanie Van Horn/CMA



CMA members gather at CMA HQ for The Annual Meeting of Members on Jan. 25, 2023. Photo: Emily April Allen/CMA

BOB McDILL



Mentor, Friend, Country Music Hall of Fame Member

As Told to CMA Close Up by Don Schlitz

Bob McDill was voted as one of three members of the 2023 Class of Country Music Hall of Fame inductees, alongside Tanya Tucker and Patty Loveless. McDill will be inducted in the Songwriter Category, which is awarded every third year in rotation with "Recording and/or Touring Musician" and "Non-Performer" categories. The official induction for this year's class will take place in Fall 2023.

This was about 50 years ago. On a Thursday, I arrived in Nashville. I was 20 years old.

Just after arriving, I went to my first publishing company, Window Music, because Pete Drake owned it. I'd seen Pete Drake's name on an album cover, so I figured he was something special.

The person who was listening there was Buzz Rabin. I played a couple of songs for him and afterward he said, "I've just started this job and I don't know what to do but let me call this guy." He handed me a note and said, "Go see him, there's an appointment for you."

So, in April 1973, I went over to a building on 16th Avenue. I'd dropped out of college and my future was uncertain, to say the least — but I had an appointment.

When I arrived, I said, "I'm here to play some songs," and I heard a voice from the back say, "Oh, I know what this is about." Out came a thin, curly-headed man with wire-rimmed glasses. After playing him seven or eight songs, he took me into the next room to play something for me. The first song he played, my first hello to Nashville was "Amanda," sung by his friend Don Williams, on a small record label, JMI Records. That man was Bob McDill.

What he didn't tell me about that song, "Amanda," was that it was about to be No. 1 in America, and it was the B side of a song called "Come Early Morning," which had already been No. 1 in America. Both were written only by McDill.

For several years, Bob was the only person that would see me. I mean, people would see me, but really it was McDill that I could go and play songs for. I played so many songs for him, and he'd like the strangest ones. He would give me good feedback, but mostly the fact that he would take the time with me made all the difference. I don't know if he would want me to call him my mentor, but in my heart, he was. We didn't have standing appointments, but he was always there in my mind, in whatever I was working on.

I went in once, and I was writer-blocked, or I thought I was, and I couldn't figure out what I should do. So I went to see Bob. He showed me an open tuning that he used sometimes, and I left his office that day with an open tuning drone playing in my head. I made up a few lines and then I made up a few more lines, and by the time I walked from his office on 16th Avenue to my efficiency apartment on Fairfax Avenue, I had written a story in my head. I sat down and started playing, trying to remember what it was I had made up in my head, and I started typing:

*On a warm summer's evening, on a train bound for nowhere
I met up with a gambler, we were both too tired to sleep
So we took turns a-staring out the window at the darkness
Until boredom overtook us and he commenced to speak*

There have been so many times when writing songs that I've asked myself, "What would McDill do? In the second verse? In the chorus? Between the lines?" He could deconstruct and dig into what a song [was and what was happening] better than anybody I've ever known. Finding a way to do it in two-and-a-half minutes, telling the whole story, making up the whole movie — well, no one did it better.

I believe that if you take it upon yourself to communicate, then you have to respect who you're communicating with. When I hear a song that respects me as a listener, I think of Bob McDill. He never wrote a Country song looking down his nose at it. I am very lucky that he was the guy that came out from behind the desk that day and said, "Oh, yeah, I know what this is about."

Don Schlitz is a Country Music Hall of Fame member, three-time CMA Song of the Year winner, a CMA member since 1985 and a member of the Grand Ole Opry.



(L-R) Vince Gill (host), Sarah Trahern (CMA CEO), Bob McDill, Tanya Tucker, Patty Loveless and Kyle Young (Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum CEO) Photo: John Russell/CMA



Photo: John Russell/CMA

KIP MOORE UNLOCKS GLOBAL SUCCESS WITH AUTHENTICITY AND COMMITMENT

By Jeremy Chua





Photo: Brayden Smith/BCS Imaging

Breaking into international territories is something few Country artists prioritize at the onset of their careers. But performing overseas was always part of Kip Moore's career vision — and now, he's tasting the fruits of his labor.

In March, Moore, a CMA member since 2012, drew upwards of 25,000 people to his sold-out stadium show in Pretoria, South Africa, and played to over 6,800 people a night at two arena concerts in Cape Town. That followed stops in New Zealand and Australia, which included a headlining set at the CMC Rocks festival. His upcoming tours include shows in Belfast and at London's Royal Albert Hall before he returns stateside to satiate the appetite of his American fans.

"That was always at the forefront of my mind, getting out and trying to expand as much as I could and playing for as many different people as I could. That was always the goal. To play around the world," Moore says.

Moore's level of touring success is almost unheard of, especially for a largely noncommercial Country artist. "I've been one of those artists who'll have a little bit of commercial success for a minute, and then I won't have it for a lot of years after, and then I'll have a little bit of it again," admits the singer, who just released his fifth studio album, *Damn Love*, with MCA Nashville.

"When you have a radio hit, that's the power of it. It helps bring in a new group of people. But then it's up to you as an artist," Moore explains. "Once you get the people in the room that radio has helped you get, can you expand upon that? Can you show them a whole catalog of music and a live show that lights their soul on fire?"

The 43-year-old's global success did not come easy. It took him years to build a fanbase in

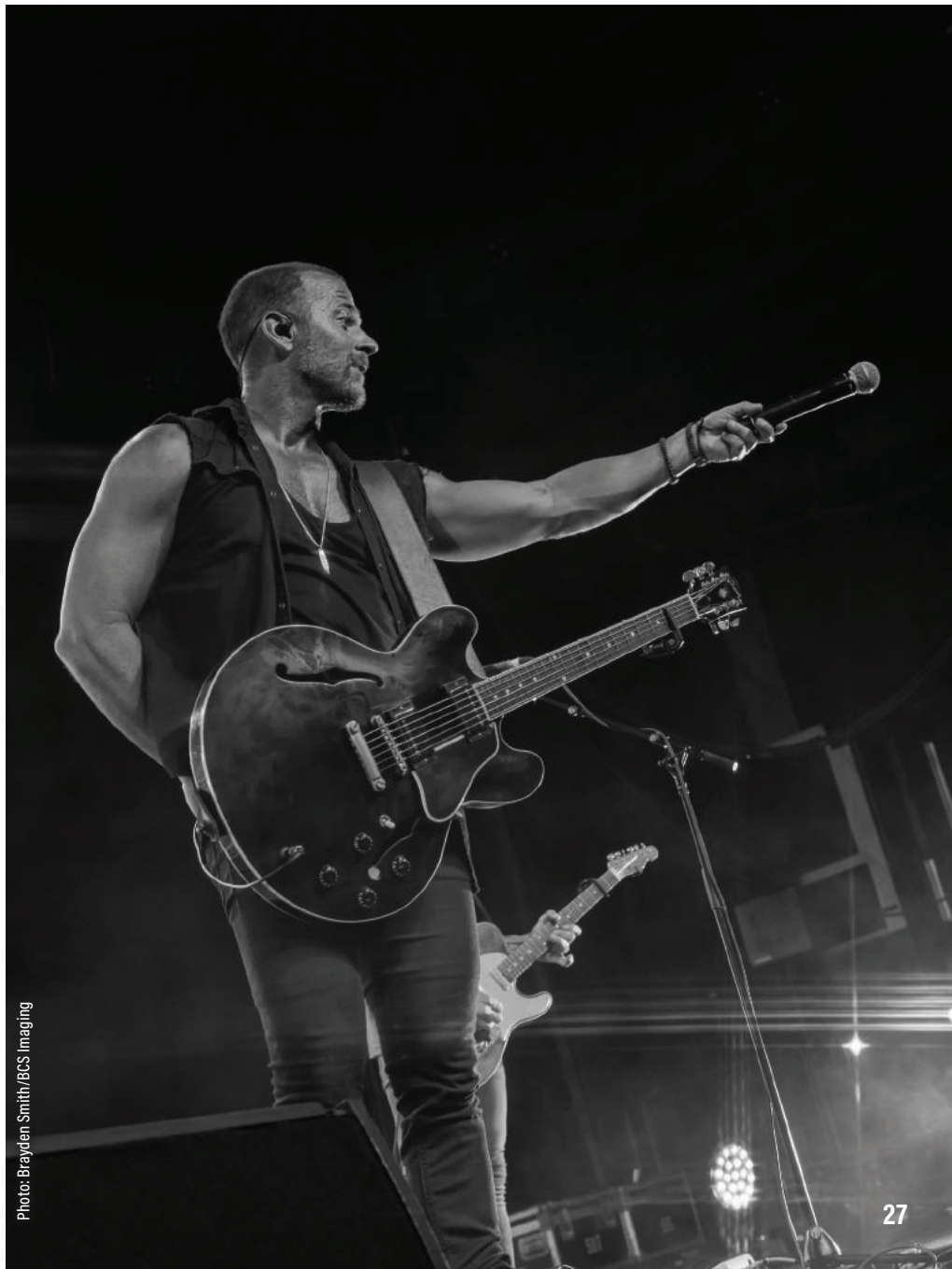


Photo: Brayden Smith/BCS Imaging



Photo: Brayden Smith/BCS Imaging

Europe alone — show by show, song by song and interaction by interaction. “My first two or three tours, even though they were sold-out clubs, I lost a heavy amount,” Moore recalls. “I knew I had to take a major loss financially in doing that. I think a lot of times, that negates some artists from wanting to take that leap.”

As Moore underscores, the higher-than-usual cost of overseas tours can deter many, especially up-and-comers. “I think it’s a dollar-and-cents thing on some level,” echoes his manager, Red Light Management’s Gaines Sturdivant. “I think there’s a comfort factor with the United States. If the lion’s share of profitability, the lion’s share of fans, the 300 million people that we have are kind of easy targets and that’s what we do, it can become a little formulaic. In terms of investment in other places, the ROI might not be as significant. That being said, if you are willing to build it, it can pay dividends.

“You have to be able to stomach losing a little bit of money in the beginning. There’s just no other way to do it. You’ve got to spend money to make money,” he posits, while referencing the U.K. and Australia. “However, those markets now offer a few specific Country Music opportunities and festivals. You could go and take advantage of the infrastructure that’s been built and at least have an initial leg up to get started. And so, if Kip can open the door in South Africa, can we do that in Brazil? Can we do that in Mexico? Can we do that somewhere in Asia?”

With a rabid international fanbase and a laudable touring resume, Moore attributes his success to the sheer power of authenticity. Sturdivant agrees, while also praising his client’s work ethic.

“Everybody’s got their own road to ride. It’s hard for me to give advice when I don’t have it figured out myself. But I will say this: I do think that

the international audience is really attached to authenticity. They can sniff it out when it’s not authentic,” Moore observes. “If you stay true to yourself and you’re not trying to chase a sound or a trend, you have a good chance at building an international audience.”

Sturdivant adds: “It didn’t happen overnight. We didn’t wake up and sell 23,000 tickets in Australia or wherever it might be. But year after year, Kip went. He studied the environment, he had a great team around him and he continued to invest. So that’s what you’re seeing now. At the end of the day, it’s an impressive feat not only for Kip but for Country Music.

“The cool thing about Nashville is that we’re such a small, tight-knit group and I think we all stand to benefit from new pathways and global expansion.”



CMA STUDENT MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

PARÉE CHOPRA

Chopra is a CMA EDU participant and has recently joined CMA in the new Student tier

By Cillea Houghton

Paree Chopra never intended to work in the media industry. In fact, she was on an entirely different career path when she entered New York University (NYU) in 2019, majoring in international politics. But managing the line at Nija Charles' master class in songwriting on campus inspired her to change course and become a Media, Culture and Communication major.

Growing up in India, Chopra was actively engaged in social work, which she intended to make her career upon admission to NYU, but music has always been a part of her life, as Chopra wrote songs and played instruments as a child. "My main goal has always been to learn," she says. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, she was forced to move back to India, and all her learning and mentoring opportunities became virtual.

After returning to NYU, Chopra joined CMA EDU in 2021, the career development program for college students that offers real-world opportunities in the music industry. Since joining, Chopra has attended industry-related panels and workshops, and collaborated on a capstone project with fellow members around the world where they had to design what they imagine an awards show will look like in 2050. "That was my first way of connecting with some great people in the industry," she says of CMA EDU, citing YouTube, Live Nation, and talent agency WME as some of the companies students in the program have had access to for mentorship. "With CMA EDU, one of the biggest things that it's helped me with is building confidence in approaching people. I think CMA EDU sets you up really well to network, find footing in the industry and find a space where you would want to go."

As a part of CMA's Membership structure, Chopra's involvement in CMA EDU allows her to be a part of the newly formed Student tier of CMA membership. This type of membership is free and offered to high school or college students who are interested in working within the music industry. Student members have access to internships, tailored and intentional programming (including access to CMA EDU), as well as opportunities for community building.

She admits it was a hard adjustment moving to the U.S. and having to learn how to communicate in a different culture, but the mentors and experience she's gained through CMA EDU helped significantly, in addition to fostering her passion for learning. "If you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room, because there's always room for growth," Chopra says, reciting the best advice she received through the program. "[That] has constantly helped me grow as a person. I took it to heart because you always have something to learn from someone."

Chopra credits the program with having a "domino effect" on her life, as it led her to an internship with UMG Nashville during her junior year. She currently works at 1824, a subdivision of UMG that focuses on content creation, direct artist-to-fan relations and more. Having graduated in May 2023 Chopra feels nothing but gratitude toward CMA EDU for all that she's learned as she continues to pave her path in the music industry.

"I feel like it started my entire journey in some way, so I'm super grateful to be part of this program," she professes. "It's life changing."

If you, or someone you know is a student interested in music, consider becoming a CMA member. To learn more, visit [CMAmember.com](https://www.cma.com/Member).



Photo: courtesy of Paree Chopra



Photo: Courtesy of Paree Chopra

Get to Know...

MIA McNEAL

CMA Senior Director, Industry Relations & Inclusion



How did you make your way to CMA?

I had been an entrepreneur for the last few years, and while doing that, I was contracted by people3, which is a DEI firm based in Nashville. I was asked to facilitate conversations and coaching for CMA. I immediately fell in love with the organization and the team because of the genuine desire to understand how they could model behavior for the Country Music industry that would be intentional, sustainable and inclusive. When this position was created within CMA, several people within my network called me to consider it. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to join this team, and I haven't looked back since. Working for CMA has definitely been one of the best career moves I've ever made.

What does DEI mean to you?

I often tell people that DEI is simply applicable lessons in humanity. To me, DEI is everything that makes humans human. Diversity is recognizing that no matter who you are, you are different from the next person in the room even if you may look like that person. I think of equity as something that allows for accessibility and meets the needs of people where they are. It's not taking something away from someone to give it to someone else. It is recognizing that as we are different, we have different needs and it's important to make sure those needs are met. Inclusion means showing up as you actually are, and when you show up, you are seen, valued, respected and trusted in every aspect.

How can members utilize CMA as a resource for DEI questions, information or initiatives specifically?

One of the greatest joys for me has been to offer our members a chance to "Ask Me Anything." But to make progress, we must continue a dialogue with each other. I think a common fear people have is that they will get it all wrong. People often ask me if there is a list that we can share that would help them get it right. The quick answer is 'no.' DEI is a nuanced subject complete with human experiences, and there is no one answer to most questions.

Additionally, we continue to partner with organizations that reach underrepresented communities within our business. We recognize that we cannot do this work alone. As a trade organization, we always want to provide access to resources and help build community within our industry.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions about DEI efforts in Country Music?

I think the biggest misconception is that people don't want to do anything to make this industry more inclusive. The reality is, most people do, they just don't know how or where to start. In the year that I have been here, one of the things that has struck me the most is how receptive everyone is to talking about DEI. It is encouraging that so many people in our industry genuinely want to know how we, as an industry, can be better.

You've been here nearly a year, what are you most proud of? Or how have you seen the industry become more inclusive?

There is truly so much that I don't even know where to start. What I will say with absolute certainty is that since I started, I have been able to walk into any office on Music Row and feel welcomed. I have had conversations with individuals from every sector—label executives, songwriters, publishers, tour managers, artists, you name it. I had the honor to meet with every single staff member within CMA. What I am most proud of is our organization, our Board of Directors and our industry for meeting the moment and continuing the momentum. So much has happened in the last several years, and it certainly galvanized our industry to take stock and figure out what could be done to find sustainable and impactful solutions. Every day that I come to work, someone I cross paths with is thinking about how to be inclusive, and it's not just me!

When you aren't at work, what are you doing for fun?

Hitting golf balls, hanging out with my family and kissing on my granddaughter.

If you could only listen to one song for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

That is a really tough one, but if I had to choose, I would have to say "I Hope You Dance" by Lee Ann Womack. That song perfectly explains the legacy I would like to leave to my family, my friends, this industry and this world: a legacy of love, light and hope.



Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner perform at Fan Fair in 1974. Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton made history at Fan Fair number three when they performed as a duo for what would be the last time in more than a decade.

Photo: Bill Goodman / Nashville Public Library, Special Collections

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