

## MY SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE GRAND OLE OPRY

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'Writer's Corner'

*Editor's note: This was originally written by Hogan in 1993.*

They call it the "Grand Ole Opry."

That's what former newspaper reporter George D. Hay, its inventor, named it not long after the first group of performers had stood before their open mikes that first Saturday night and had their down-home music and vaudeville-comic routines beamed out over Nashville's WSM-650 "clear-channel" radio to nearly all of America, way back in 1925.



Nineteen hundred and twenty five.

The year Nashville's venerable Grand Ole Opry was born. It's hardly missed a heartbeat since.

Almost since its first moments, the Grand Ole Opry has been Mecca to the millions who've, over the years, come to Nashville to savor the finest in "country" music.

It was not till a few short years ago, through, that I became one of those "savorers." For a long time, I hated "country music" (which, as I'm sure you know, has been called "hillbilly music" much of its life and mine). Could barely stand to think of it, much less listen to it.

Well, to make what could easily be a longer story shorter, Susan and I'd often talked about getting a couple of tickets and driving the 80 miles to Nashville some Saturday night to experience this "Grand Ole Opry" thing in person. See if it was all that our mind's eye image had it cracked up to be.

Finally, we took the plunge. As birthday presents, we treated ourselves to two seat at the Grand Ole Opry for its July 27<sup>th</sup> Saturday night performance. Mecca-bound at last! Good gosh a-mighty. Mecca-bound at last!

At about 9:40, with us firmly settled in our assigned aisle places in the bottom tier of lower balcony seats, the houselights dimmed and the purplish stage curtains parted to revel legendary Porter Wagoner...resplendent in his darned-near-skin-tight blue and silver regalia...welcoming the estimated 2,500 of us to Nashville and the Grand Ole Opry and Dollar General Store, night's Opry sponsor.

Porter sang some, pattered some, moved from one side of smaller-than-I'd-imagined stage to the other, opening in flasher-fashion his virtually patented, brocaded jacket to show us its reddish-pinkish-checked inner lining, and hiking one, the then other of his pant legs above the top of his jaded-red cowboy boots to reveal a pair of anemic-white and starved-skinny calves. "Ain't they the ugliest things you ever seen?" he'd ask rhetorically. After which point the audience applauded and yelled and whistled quite substantially.

After about 10 minutes in his own spotlight, Porter introduced Jeannie C. Riley, longtime Opry member and hit-making singer of Tom T. Hall's memorable 'Harper Valley P.T.A.," who came out and in clear dulcet tones sang the holy heck out of a rather up-tempo number, and then, too quickly, was gone.

Porter came back then and segued the program into a commercial for Little Debbie Snack Cakes, read by the Opry's venerable announcer, the late Grant Turner, then brought out Stonewall Jackson, the next performer. Stonewall did a number or two, mentioned a new book of his that was now available (it'd be down in the lobby on our way out, he suggested) then took his exit.

Next up was Ricky Van Shelton, one of the Opry's newest members. Ricky sang a song called, "Keep it Between the Lines," which he said was his brand-newest single that, even as he spoke, was on its way to a record store near us.

Then Porter returned and, flashing the inner-lining of his jacket one last time, introduced Grandpa Jones as the next act. Then the Osborne Brothers (all eight of them!) were on stage doing a gospel number and fiddle solo. Their exit was followed by a commercial for PET Milk.

Then Grandpa was back introducing the late King of Country Music Roy Acuff (who'd been with the Opry since 1938), who in turn, introduced Jim Ed Brown.

Jim Ed sang a couple of "soft," "romantic" songs...one in remembrance he confided, of his and country music's good friend, Jim Reeves. Then Jim Ed brought out the banjoist/humorist Mike Snyder, the Opry's youngest and newest member. We all like him a lot.

A commercial break for BC Headache Powder came next, then Jim Ed introduced veteran Opry performer Billy Walker, then, well, on and on it went from commercial to performer to commercial, till a rather large-girthed and tipsy-seeming fellow named Johnny Russell, the last act, the 21<sup>st</sup> of the evening, closed the show a little past midnight.

An evening of fast-paced, professional, wholesome entertainment for the entire family..that's the Grand Ole Opry that Susan and I saw. A genuine chunk of Americana where the ghosts such as Uncle Dave Macon and Pee Wee King and Earnest Tubb and

Cowboy Copus and Rod Brasfield and Hank Williams and Patsy Cline and Roger Miller hover behind the burnished-cowhide-tan stage waiting to go on.

“Beautiful and faded,” Amy Lowell aptly put it, “Like an old opera tune/Played upon a harpsichord.” Saturday night at the Grand Ole Opry.

Y’all come, now, heah?

\*Read more ‘Writer’s Corner’ at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>