

Country Music

Country music is a genre of popular music that originated in the rural South in the 1920s, with roots in fiddle music, old-time music, blues and various types of folk music. Originally called “hillbilly music” and sometimes called “country and western,” the name “country music” or simply “country” gained popularity in the 1940s. Many recent country artists use elements of pop and rock. Country music often consists in ballads with simple forms and harmonies, accompanied by guitar or banjo with a fiddle. Country bands now often include a steel guitar, bass and drums.

Country Music in Missouri

Missourians love country music, as evidenced by the large number of country music radio stations, the number of country artists on festivals and presented by concert venues around the state, the country music artists who make their home and perform regularly in the popular tourist destination of Branson, Missouri, and the many Missouri musicians and bands who play country music in the bars and clubs in their local community. “The Sources of Country Music,” a painting by well-known Missouri artist Thomas Hart Benton hangs in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville.

Ralph Peer (1892-1960), born in Independence, Missouri, worked for Columbia Records in Kansas City until 1920 when he took a job for Okeh Records in New York and supervised the recording of “Crazy Blues” by Mamie Smith, the first blues recording aimed at African-Americans. In 1924 he supervised the first commercial recording session in New Orleans, recording jazz, blues and gospel music. He left Okeh in 1925 and in 1927, while searching for talent for Victor Talking Machine Company, he spent two weeks in Bristol, Tennessee, on the border with Virginia, and discovered and recorded both Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family, both acts that he then managed their successful careers in “Hill Billie” music that came to be called Country Music. Peers is credited with the first country music recording, “Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane” by Fiddlin’ John Carson.

Radio played a big role in the popularization of country music. In the mid-1930s, radio station KWTO in Springfield, Missouri began presenting live performances of country music and its popular *Ozark Jubilee* program began in 1955 and was carried live on ABC-TV around the country. The *Five Star Jubilee* and *Talent Varieties* were also broadcast from Springfield. In St. Louis, country music star Eddie Arnold appeared on KXOK in 1938.

Branson began developing into a tourist destination after the 1907 publication of *The Shepherd of the Hills* by Harold Bell Wright, a novel set in the Branson area. Readers wanted to see the places described in the book and a music scene developed, country stars Boxcar Willie, Sons of the Pioneers and Roy Clark moved to the area, and Silver Dollar City and Shepherd of the Hills Theatre and Park were created.

Country Bios

Porter Wagoner

Porter Wagoner (1927-2007) was born in West Plains, Missouri, southeast of Springfield, Missouri. After he performed with his first band, the Blue Ridge Boys, on KWPM-AM in West Plains, he was engaged in 1951 to perform on KWTO in Springfield, Missouri. His song, “Trademark,” became a hit and he became a featured performer in 1955 on ABC-TV’s *Ozark Jubilee* broadcast from Springfield. He joined the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville in 1957. He had

a hugely popular television show, the *Porter Wagoner Show* which was seen in over 100 markets. His fellow West Plains native, comedian and musician Speck Rhodes, joined Porter on his show. Porter introduced Dolly Parton on his show and she was featured from 1966 to 1974. Wagoner had several hits singing duets with Parton, 81 records on the charts, and three Grammy Awards for gospel recordings.

Sara Evans

Sara Evans (born 1971) was born in Boonville, Missouri and raised on a farm near New Franklin, Missouri. At age five she was singing in her family's band on weekends, at age ten her father took her to Nashville to record a song, and at age sixteen she began singing at a club near Columbia, Missouri. She moved to Nashville in 1991, signed a contract with RCA, sang on Martina McBride's Evolution album, and released her own recording called *Three Chords and the Truth*. She has released multiple albums and won numerous country music awards.