

# InsideOUT

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Denver Center  
Theatre Company  
KENT THOMPSON  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

## RING OF FIRE

THE MUSIC OF  
JOHNNY CASH

**RING OF FIRE:**  
**THE MUSIC OF JOHNNY CASH**  
Created by RICHARD MALTBY, Jr.  
Conceived by WILLIAM MEADE  
Orchestrations by  
STEVEN BISHOP  
AND JEFF LIENBY



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# InsideOUT

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## Synopsis

*Ah, I'd love to wear a rainbow everyday  
And tell the world that everything's OK.  
But I'll try to carry off a little darkness on  
my back,  
Till things are brighter, I'm the  
Man in Black.* — “Man in Black,” Johnny Cash

This musical is a tribute to the “Man in Black”—Johnny Cash, the American singer, songwriter and actor who has been called one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. Primarily thought of as a country singer, his songs and sound spanned many other genres including rockabilly, rock’n’roll, blues, folk and gospel. Cash was known for his deep, distinctive, bass-baritone voice, the “boom-chicka-boom” of the guitars accompanying him, for giving free concerts inside museums and his outlaw image. His demeanor was somber and humble while his songs echoed the themes of sorrow, moral tribulation and redemption. But he wrote and performed humorous ones such as “One Piece at a Time,” “A Boy Named Sue” and “Jackson.” A troubled but devout Christian, he recorded a spoken word recording of the complete New Testament from the King James Bible and wrote a Christian novel, *The Man in White*. He once declared that “he was the biggest sinner of them all.”<sup>1</sup> ■

1. Urbanski, D. *The Man Comes Around: The Spiritual Journey of Johnny Cash*. Lake Mary, FL: Relevant Media, p. xiv.

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# JOHNNY CASH BIOGRAPHY

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*Sometimes I am two people. Johnny is the nice one. Cash causes all the trouble. They fight. — Johnny Cash.*

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Johnny Cash was born on February 26, 1932 in Kingsland, Arkansas, the son of poor Southern Baptist sharecroppers. Cash, one of seven children born to Ray and Carrie Rivers Cash, moved with his family when he was three to Dyess, Arkansas, so that his father could take advantage of the New Deal farming program instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt. There, the Cash clan lived in a five room house and farmed 20 acres of cotton and other seasonal crops.

John, or J. R., as he was known to those close to him, spent the bulk of the next 15 years out in the fields, working alongside his parents. It wasn't always an easy life, Cash later recalled. When he was ten he was hauling water for a road gang, and at 12 he moved large sacks of cotton.

Music was one of the ways the Cash family found escape from some of their hardships. Songs supported the young Johnny whether it was his mother's folksongs and hymns or the work songs of the people in the fields.

From an early age Cash, who first picked up the guitar when he was 12, showed a love for the music that enveloped his life. Perhaps sensing that her boy had a gift for song, Carrie Rivers Cash scraped enough money together so that her son could take singing lessons. Cash was only in his early teens and had very little in the way of formal music training, but after three lessons his teacher, enthusiastic about Cash's unique singing style, told him to stop the lessons and to never deviate from his natural voice.

In addition, religion had a strong impact on Cash's childhood. His mother was a devout member of the Pentecostal Church of God and his older brother Jack seemed committed to becoming a priest. Chances are John's own faith would have always exerted itself to some degree on his own life, but Jack's tragic death in 1944 at the age of 14 in a farming accident solidified Cash's own faith in God. "Jack was cutting fence posts, and one got tangled up in the swinging saw and pulled him into it. He fell across the big table saw."<sup>1</sup> Cash told an interviewer he believed it was a murder "because a neighbor accompanied Jack to the shop that day and disappeared after the accident."<sup>2</sup>

These factors, his farming life and his family's religion, never strayed too far in Cash's career. The evidence can be seen in songs like "Pickin' Time" and "Five Feet High and Rising," a film

he made about his visit to Israel and his close relationship with Evangelist Billy Graham.

In 1950 Cash graduated from high school and left Arkansas for Pontiac, Michigan, where he found work sweeping floors at an auto plant. The employment and Cash's time in Michigan were brief because, about a month after taking the job, he joined the United States Air Force. As a military man, Cash did his basic training in Texas where he met Vivian Liberto, whom he eventually married and with whom he fathered four daughters. For most of his four years in the Air Force, Cash was stationed in Landsberg, West Germany, where he worked as a radio intercept officer, eavesdropping on Soviet radio traffic.

It was in Germany that Cash turned more of his attention toward music. With a few of his Air Force buddies he formed the Landsberg Barbarians, giving Johnny a chance to play live shows, teach himself more on the guitar and try his hand at songwriting. He said later, "we were terrible, but that Lowenbrau beer will make you feel that you're great. We'd take our instruments to those honky-tonks and play until they threw us out or a fight would start. I wrote 'Folsom Prison Blues' in Germany in 1953."<sup>3</sup>

After his discharge in 1954 Cash settled in Memphis, Tennessee, where he married Vivian and worked as an appliance salesman. But he still pursued music in his spare time.

In 1954 Cash, Marshall Grant and Luther Perkins made an announced visit to Sam Phillips to ask for an audition to record for Sun Records. Phillips liked their sound but not their gospel driven choices which he felt would have a limited market. Phillips was looking for new material and encouraged the group to return with an original sound. In early 1955 Cash and his troupe did just that, recording the song "Hey Porter" which Cash had written a week after the first Sun session. While it received mediocre reviews, Cash's second release "Cry, Cry, Cry" later that year peaked at No. 14 on the Billboard charts. Other hit songs followed, including a pair of Top 10 singles in "So Doggone Lonesome" and "Folsom Prison Blues". But real fame arrived in 1956 when Cash wrote and released "I Walk the Line" which catapulted to No. 1 and sold 2 million copies.

This success and his association with Phillips allowed Cash to join an elite group of artists that included Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis; they were known as "The Million Dollar Quartet". In 1957 Cash, now the father of two young daughters (Rosanne and Kathy) released his debut album, *Johnny Cash with his Hot and Blue Guitar*.

Cash's voice was deep and lonesome sounding with a very restricted range. It has also been described as "earthy, deep, ominous, resonant, virile and untrained."<sup>4</sup> Cash wrote songs that were geared to his own vocal style and range and decorated the melody according to his own interpretation.

By the early 1960s Johnny Cash was a musical superstar. He had left Sun for Columbia Records in 1958 and relocated his family in Ventura, California. With an unrelenting tour schedule Cash was on the road 300 nights a year, barnstorming the country with his barrage of hits including “Ring of Fire” (1963) and “Understand Your Man” (1964). He also appeared regularly on the Louisiana Hayride and Grand Ole Opry radio broadcasts.

But the schedule and the pressures he faced took a toll on his personal life. Drugs such as amphetamines and liquor were frequent tour companions while Vivian, left home to take care of their young family, which now included Cindy (1959) and Tara (1961), grew increasingly frustrated with her husband’s absence. In 1966 Vivian finally filed for divorce. Cash returned to Memphis where his life continued to spin out of control. The following year, after a serious drug binge, Cash was discovered in a near-death state by a policeman in a small town in Georgia. There were other incidents including an arrest for smuggling amphetamines into the US and accidentally starting a forest fire in Tennessee which resulted in a near six figure fine for the singer.

Cash recalled, “I took all the drugs there are to take and I drank. Everybody said Johnny Cash was through ‘cause I was walkin’ around town 150 pounds. I looked like walkin’ death.”<sup>5</sup>

But a spiritual epiphany occurred in the Nickajack Cave on the Tennessee River where Cash crawled to commit suicide. Cash believes that God told him to live because he had things to do.

Though Cash said he kicked drugs by himself, the turning point came in 1967 when he met singer-songwriter June Carter, a member of the founding family of country music. Carter, who first had befriended and then, in 1968, married Cash, stepped in and helped him clean up his life.

With his new bride Cash embarked on a remarkable turn around. In 1969 he began hosting *The Johnny Cash Show*, a TV variety series that showcased contemporary musicians ranging from Bob Dylan to Louis Armstrong. It also provided a forum for Cash to explore a number of social issues such as prison reform, the war in Vietnam and the rights of Native Americans. The same year his show debuted, Cash also took home two Grammy Awards for the live album *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison* (1968). The album was a critical and commercial success; it reached Gold record status by December 1969. Four months later Cash and Carter celebrated the birth of their first and only child, John Carter Cash, in March 1970.

The ensuing decade brought more success for the artist with Cash’s music career flourishing with the release of hit singles “A Thing Called Love” (1972) and “One Piece at a Time” (1976). He crossed over to a new medium in 1972 when he made an acclaimed appearance with Kirk Douglas in the movie *A Gunfight*. In addition he wrote the scores for the movie *Little Fauss and Big Halsy* (1970) and the TV movie *The Pride of Jesse*



*Hallam* (1980). In 1975 he wrote and published a best-selling autobiography, *Man in Black*.

For the rest of the 1970s and through the 80s and early 90s, while not producing the run of frequent hits that he once had, Cash continued to maintain a busy schedule. In 1980 Cash was inducted as the youngest member of the Country Music Association Hall of Fame.

Increasingly, Cash also teamed up with other musicians. In 1987 he banded with former Sun Records artists Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Roy Orbison to record the widely popular compilation *The Class of '55*. For the album *The Highwayman* (1985), Cash collaborated with Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings. Billed as The Highwaymen, the quartet consistently toured through the late 1980s and early 1990s, releasing two more records: *The Highwaymen 2* (1990) and *The Road Goes on Forever* (1995).

In 1988 Cash went to visit Waylon Jennings in the hospital where he was recovering from a heart attack. Jennings suggested that Johnny have himself checked for his own heart condition. Doctors suggested preventive heart surgery so Cash underwent double-bypass surgery in the same hospital. Both recovered; however, Cash refused to use any prescription painkillers, fearing a relapse into drug addiction.

Cash's recording career and his general relationship with the Nashville establishment were at an all-time low in the 1980s. He realized that Columbia Records was not properly marketing him, so he and the company parted ways in 1987. However, his career was rejuvenated in the 1990s when he signed on with Rick Rubin's American Recordings label, a company known for rap and hard rock. He found popularity with an audience not traditionally interested in country music. Under Rubin's supervision he recorded *American Recordings* (1994) in his living room, playing his Martin dreadnaught guitar. The album featured covers of contemporary artists selected by Rubin and had much critical and commercial success, winning a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album in 1995. He and June appeared on several episodes of the television series *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* starring Jane Seymour. He also lent his voice for a cameo role on the animated series *The Simpsons*.

In 2002, Cash released *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, a mix of original songs and covers, including songs from the Beatles to Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails. The album came five years after the singer had been diagnosed with a rare nervous system disorder called Shy-Drager Syndrome. Then in May 2003, June Carter died. Cash, though, continued to work. With Rubin guiding him, the singer recorded what would be known as *American V: A Hundred Highways*. A week before his death on September 12,

2003, from complications associated with diabetes, Cash wrapped up his final track. “Once June passed, he had the will to live long enough to record but that was pretty much all,” Rubin recalled.<sup>6</sup>

Cash’s life and music still resonate with fans. In 2005 the story of his love affair with June Carter Cash was made into a feature film, *Walk the Line*, starring Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon. ■

1. Cash in Streissguth, p.23.

2. Streissguth, p. 232-33.

3. Ibid, p. 241.

4. Ibid, p. 93.

5. Ibid, p. 144.

6. www. biography.com

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny\\_Cash](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_Cash)

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# JOHNNY CASH—THE CONTRADICTIONS IN HIS LIFE AND MUSIC

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*Walkin' contradiction who is partly truth and partly fiction.*

— Kris Kristofferson

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From rockabilly rebel to country music's elder statesman, Johnny Cash embodied paradoxical or contradictory images," writes Leigh H. Edwards.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand he was the drugged rock star who claimed to be a devout Christian touring with Billy Graham. He was the Man in Black, a progressive voice for the disenfranchised and supporter of war protestors, but a Southern patriarch performing for Richard Nixon at the White House. He portrayed the outlaw hillbilly thug, but was the voice of the establishment in his commercials for Ford trucks. He began as a cotton field hand and wound up a millionaire. His songs mixed piety with machismo; the selections ran from gospel to love songs and lusty ballads. He was good friends with Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan, both strong opponents of the Vietnam war, while Cash supported our foreign policy à la Richard Nixon. His songs exhibit the friction between rural and urban, home versus rambling, and freedom versus restraint. For example, the song "I've Been Everywhere" is a litany of cities the rambling man has visited, but ends the refrain with "of travel, I've had my share." "Sunday Morning, Coming Down" and "Cocaine Blues" are about the ravages of drugs and how they curtail freedom versus a recollection of better times. Finally, "Jackson" is an upbeat song about a young married couple going to the city, but he's going to "mess around." ■

1. Edwards, p. 1.

Edwards, Leigh H. *Johnny Cash and the Paradox of American Identity*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009.



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# HOW JOHNNY CASH WROTE SONGS

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*I start a lot more songs than I finish, because I realize when I get into them, they're no good. I don't throw them away, I just put them away, store them, get them out of sight.*

— Johnny Cash

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**A**fter joining the Air Force and while he was in Germany, Cash began to take songwriting seriously. “Being away from my family and loved ones for two-and-a-half years, I wrote, not out of loneliness and boredom, but because I was alone and it was a natural way to express myself to myself, to my friends and to my world.”<sup>1</sup> At that time, Cash had no obligations to anyone as a songwriter, so he was just writing what he was feeling. That philosophy sums up the way he continued to feel about songwriting throughout his career. He did not go for “hook lines” which was important in Nashville; he went for the general feeling “that there was something strong there.”<sup>2</sup>

Another important element for Cash was the title. All of his songs from the beginning had a title and that was the standard bearer he leaned on throughout the writing process.

Cash said he usually wrote half of a song at one sitting; then returned to it a second and a third time until it was finished. When he started to write, he wrote enough to secure the idea so as not to forget it. The first lyrics he came up with were usually the best and he made sure they were on paper because “I start thinking about other lines and I forget them.”<sup>3</sup> Even if he were in bed, he’d get up, get pen and paper and write them down.

Cash said he didn’t have any explanation for the popularity of his songs except for one thing and that is the popular songwriter’s mantra—KISS. Keep It Simple, Stupid. He also said, “The human being has a very delicate sense of like and dislike and listeners have pretty well heard everything. I come on trying not to offend or grate anyone the wrong way.”<sup>4</sup>

Cash had advice for young songwriters. Besides simplicity, “write as clearly and plainly as you can, keep the title evident in the song and try to convey your feelings in a simple, honest and straight forward way.”<sup>5</sup> ■

1. [americansongwriter.com](http://americansongwriter.com)

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

<http://www.americansongwriter.com/2002/05/johnny-cash-keeps-it-simple/>

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# JOHNNY CASH SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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<i>Johnny Cash Sings the Songs that Made Him Famous</i>	1958
<i>The Fabulous Johnny Cash</i>	1959
<i>Greatest!</i>	1959
<i>Songs of Our Soil</i>	1959
<i>Johnny Cash Sings Hank Williams</i>	1959
<i>Ride This Train</i>	1960
<i>Now, There Was a Song!</i>	1960
<i>Now Here's Johnny Cash</i>	1961
<i>The Sound of Johnny Cash</i>	1962
<i>All Aboard the Blue Train</i>	1962
<i>Blood, Sweat and Tears</i>	1963
<i>The Original Sun Sound of Johnny Cash</i>	1964
<i>I Walk the Line</i>	1964
<i>Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indians</i>	1964
<i>Orange Blossom Special</i>	1965
<i>Johnny Cash Sings the Ballads of the True West</i>	1965
<i>Everybody Loves a Nut</i>	1966
<i>Happiness Is You</i>	1966
<i>From Sea to Shining Sea</i>	1968
<i>Hello, I'm Johnny Cash</i>	1970
<i>Man in Black</i>	1971
<i>A Thing Called Love</i>	1971
<i>America: A 200-Year Salute in Story and Song</i>	1972
<i>Any Old Wind That Blows</i>	1973
<i>Ragged Old Flag</i>	1974
<i>Junkie and the Juicehead Minus Me</i>	1974
<i>John R. Cash</i>	1975
<i>Look at Them Beans</i>	1975
<i>One Piece at a Time</i>	1976
<i>The Last Gunfighter Ballad</i>	1977
<i>The Rambler</i>	1977
<i>I Would Like to See You Again</i>	1978
<i>Gone Girl</i>	1978
<i>Silver</i>	1979
<i>Rockabilly Blues</i>	1980
<i>The Baron</i>	1981
<i>The Adventures of Johnny Cash</i>	1982
<i>Johnny 99</i>	1983
<i>Rainbow</i>	1985
<i>Johnny Cash is Coming to Town</i>	1987

<i>Classic Cash: Hall of Fame Series</i>	1988
<i>Boom Chicka Boom</i>	1990
<i>The Mystery of Life</i>	1990
<i>American Recordings</i>	1994
<i>Unchained</i>	1996
<i>American III: Solitary Man</i>	2000
<i>American IV: The Man Comes Around</i>	2002
<i>Unearthed</i>	2003
<i>American V: A Hundred Highways</i>	2006
<i>American VI: Ain't No Grave</i>	2010

#### **COLLABORATION ALBUMS**

<i>The Lure of the Grand Canyon</i>	1961
<i>Carryin' On with Johnny Cash and June Carter</i>	1967
<i>Johnny Cash and His Woman</i>	1973
<i>Johnny Cash the King/Tammy Wynette the Queen</i>	1973
<i>The Legend of Jesse James</i>	1982
<i>The Survivors Live: Cash, Lewis and Perkins</i>	1982
<i>Highwayman</i>	1985
<i>Class of '55: Cash, Perkins, Orbison and Lewis</i>	1986
<i>Heroes: Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings</i>	1986
<i>Highwayman 2</i>	1990
<i>Highwaymen: The Road Goes on Forever</i>	1995
<i>VH1 Storytellers: Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson</i>	1998

#### **SELECTED COMPILATION ALBUMS**

<i>Ring of Fire: The Best of Johnny Cash</i>	1963
<i>Johnny Cash's Greatest Hits</i>	1967
<i>Golden Sounds of Country Music</i>	1968
<i>This is Johnny Cash</i>	1969
<i>Johnny Cash: the Legend</i>	1970
<i>Johnny Cash: the Man, His World, His Music</i>	1971
<i>International Superstar</i>	1972
<i>Ballads of the American Indian</i>	1973
<i>Five Feet High and Rising</i>	1974
<i>Destination Victoria Station</i>	1975
<i>Johnny and June</i>	1978
<i>Tall Man</i>	1979
<i>Columbia Records 1958-1986</i>	1987
<i>The Man in Black 1954-1958</i>	1990
<i>The Man in Black 1959-1962</i>	1991
<i>Super Hits</i>	1994
<i>The Best of Johnny Cash</i>	1998
<i>Love, God, Murder</i>	2000
<i>Johnny Cash and Friends</i>	2002
<i>Live Recordings from the Louisiana Hayride</i>	2003
<i>The Legend of Johnny Cash</i>	2005
<i>Personal File</i>	2006

<i>Forever Johnny Cash</i>	2007
<i>The Gospel Music of Johnny Cash</i>	2008
<i>Icon: Johnny Cash</i>	2010
<i>From Memphis to Hollywood</i>	2011

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny\\_Cash\\_discography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_Cash_discography)

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# A HISTORY OF COUNTRY MUSIC

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*Country music has to include: mama, trains, gettin' drunk, a motel, a pickup truck, a dog, jail, divorce and a long distance call.*

— Don McCullough, *Ring of Fire*

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Country music began nearly 300 years ago when immigrants to the Maritime Provinces and Southern Appalachian Mountains of North America brought the music and instruments of the Old World along with them. The Irish brought fiddles; the Germans brought the derived dulcimer; the Italians the mandolin and Spanish guitar, and the West Africans their banjo.

The interactions among musicians from different ethnic groups produced music unique to this region of North America. For example, some instrumental pieces from Anglo-British and Irish immigrants were the basis of folk songs and ballads that form what is now thought of as old-time music, from which country music descended. However, a great deal of style was added by the banjo, which came from Africa.

There are many genres of country music. Early country has simple arrangements and beautiful harmonies. Sometimes called “mountain music,” it is performed with instruments such as banjos, fiddles, guitar and frequently the autoharp. Early country music has been recorded by Roy Acuff, the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, who is considered the father of country music. He fused hillbilly country, gospel, jazz, blues, pop, cowboy and folk, which he recorded in the 1920s.

Bluegrass music has a distinctive style, most notably characterized by banjo picking. Bill Monroe is considered the father of bluegrass; he was simply a country singer whose distinct style lent itself to a new label, which was taken from the name of his band, the bluegrass Boys. Earl Scruggs, a band member, developed the banjo picking that defines the style. Bluegrass is a music of sharing, where every musician gets a chance to shine. You may first hear the melody on the mandolin, then on the dobro, an acoustic guitar with a metal resonator built into its body, then on the banjo and so on. Along with Bill Monroe, bluegrass has been recorded by Alison Krause, Del McCoury Band, Dolly Parton, Flatt and Scruggs, Stanley Brothers, Rhonda Vincent and Ricky Skaggs, to name only a few.

As mountain music spread out of the mountains and the Grand Ole Opry was broadcast on the radio in 1925 on WSM-AM in Nashville, traditional country began to emerge, drawing its tone mostly from old-time mountain music, updating it for newer

audiences and blending and merging styles. Basically, the music depended on fiddles, pedal steel and guitar rhythms of solid, down-home, old-time traditional country music. Hank Williams was a great exponent of this sound, but, in addition, other artists included Bill Anderson, Little Jimmy Dickens, Loretta Lynn, Porter Wagoner, Roy Clark, Tom T. Hall, as well as Johnny Cash.

Many artists disliked the term “hillbilly,” thinking it portrayed negative cultural stereotypes. But the term “cowboy” implied romance, heroism and bravery. By the mid 1930s, artists began wearing fancy outfits with fringe, boots and cowboy hats. Some of the most well known country stars, such as Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, were also movie and television stars. The genre of Western or cowboy music is distinguished by rich harmonies, storytelling, swing and waltz rhythms, and very distinctive themes. Besides Autry and Rogers, other artists included Chris LeDoux and Riders in the Sky.

When one thinks of western swing, one thinks of Bob Wills. He combined elements of country, jazz, pop and blues music and gave people music to dance to. The music was popular during World War II, combining the popular rowdy dancehall music with the western sound of the cowboy, making for a bouncy, joyous toe-tapping sound. Besides Wills, another group who recorded this music was Asleep at the Wheel.

Honkytonk music originated in Texas where it was favored by the blue-collar, hard-working, hard-drinking plain folks. It is a combination of western swing and cowboy music with the bouncing dance steps that were popular in the country. The lyrics of this foot-stomping music addressed the wild side of life. Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys performed these tunes which he described as “a little bit of this, a little bit of that, a little bit of black and a little bit of white.”<sup>1</sup> The basic ensemble consisted of guitar, bass, dobro or steel guitar and, later, drums. The artists associated with honkytonk include Ernest Tubbs, George Jones, Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell, Webb Pierce and Kitty Wells, the first female solo country singer.

Rockabilly was a mixture of rock’n’roll and hillbilly music. There was a fairly distinct line between “white music” and “black music” in the mid-50s, until Elvis Presley walked into Sun Studios and was famously discovered. Presley acknowledged the influence of rhythm and blues on his style when he said: “The colored folk been singin’ and playin’ it just the way I’m doin’ it now.”<sup>2</sup> Blending the two styles of hillbilly country and delta and midland blues created a new sound that others had been making — Elvis just made it popular and mainstream. Although rockabilly didn’t last very long and morphed into other styles and genres, it had a strong impact on American music. Besides Elvis other artists who recorded this music were Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash.



During the 1940s and into the 50s, some country artists made the crossover to the big band halls, blending their hill country sound with the ballroom orchestra tunes made popular by Glen Miller and other bandleaders during World War II. The Nashville sound took typically honkytonk and hillbilly singers and backed them with the lush sound of strings and horns to appeal to a wider audience, beginning the crossover phenomenon. Artists who recorded this music included Eddy Arnold, Jim Reeves, Ray Price and Patsy Cline.

Country rock began in the 1970s, when rock came back to its roots of rhythm and blues and country music became more country since the incursion of the Nashville sound. As early as the mid-60s, there were rock musicians dabbling in the country roots, including the Beatles and The Monkees. By the 1970s it evolved to an all out “southern fried” rock from groups like Michael Nesmith and the 1st National Band, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Pure Prairie League and the Marshall Tucker Band. Other artists included Alabama, Gram Parsons, Montgomery Gentry and Travis Tritt.

The Bakersfield sound was not much different from honkytonk, although it tended to rock a little more. It relied on electric instruments and amplification especially the Telestar electric guitar which gave the music a sharp, hard driving, no frills, edgy flavor. Buck Owens brought it to a wide audience through television appearances and its effects on country music reverberated all over the nation. Besides Owens, other artists associated with the Bakersfield sound were Dwight Yoakum, Derailers and Merle Haggard.

The outlaw sound was a blow against the encroaching Nashville sound. Artists were unhappy with the heavy-handed producers and orchestral backing that was demanded by Nashville. They wanted their own arrangements. Willie Nelson is credited with the revolt when he released his album *Red-Headed Stranger*. Other artists included Billy Joe Shaver, Jessi Colter, Johnny Paycheck, Kris Kristofferson and Waylon Jennings.

During the 1980s the outlaw movement faded to be replaced by the new traditionalists or neo-traditionalists. Their mantra was a “back to basics” production. Led by Randy Travis, whose album *Storms of Life* was Billboard’s top Country Album of 1987, the old country sound made a strong comeback with power and force. Besides Travis, other artists recording the new traditionalist sound were Alan Jackson, Clint Black, George Strait, Joe Nichols, Keith Whitley and Ricky Van Shelton.

As in the 1940s, a desire for crossover country appeal shook up the 1990s when traditionalist Garth Brooks went pop and took the rest of the country with him. This genre is called contemporary country. Scoring on the pop charts became more important than pleasing the country music fans. Music being called country had

a sound like 70s pop. Artists who recorded this music included Brooks and Dunn, Kenny Chesney, Tim McGraw, Trisha Yearwood, Rodney Atkins and Dolly Parton who had a great crossover hit with “You Come Again.”

Texas country is still with us because some artists are still sticking to the sound of country music as they like it. They combine Western swing sounds with a modern sensibility that makes it thoroughly and completely Texan. The artists include Billy Joe Shaver, Bruce Robison, Dale Watson, Kelly Willis, Lyle Lovett and Todd Fritsch.

In the 2000s the alternative country movement blossomed. Artists and bands wanted to assert their independence and make the music the way they wanted it. They could easily fit into any of the other country music categories, but they wanted no limitations set on them. These artists include Rosanne Cash, Carrie Underwood, Hootie and the Blowfish, Taylor Swift and Lady Antebellum.

Eight basic themes define country music; sometimes songs contain only a single theme, but frequently they are crowded with several. The first theme is satisfying and fulfilling love relations, almost always depicted within the framework of marriage. It is no surprise, then, that the second theme is unsatisfactory love relationships. This theme is asserted about marriages that have gone wrong, infidelity, weakness in a partner, lack of attention, all leading to divorce. If a divorce is obtained by a partner, then there could be regrets or repentance.

The third theme is home and family. Family relations are seen as complex and home can be the setting for unhappiness. Life is hard and unfair for both parents and children and the problems encountered are not easily solved. The family presents an individual with a range of experiences, some rewarding and some not.

Country, the fourth theme, usually connotes an agrarian image; however, it is a recognizable physical location or a state of mind, a way of life.

Along with a sense of home comes the next theme: work. Work usually is dull, repetitive physical labor done with a crew or in a factory. Incidentally, work in country music is almost always a male’s job.

The sixth theme is individual worth. In country music people live lives of quiet dignity; their strength and character are not always appreciated by others. They meet and deal with problems such as poverty, alcoholism, blindness, abandonment and death. The quality of a person’s life is not determined by accomplishments, but by one’s character.

Rugged individualism is a strong theme, for every individual is important and controls his own destiny. Travel, violence, prison, parenthood and drink are elements of the travail of rugged individualism.

The final theme is patriotism, which has received much attention. The aggressive militancy of the Vietnam war brought out defenses for both protesters and supporters. Love of country is very important in country music. These themes may appear in other musical idioms, but country music continues to express daily problems and primal emotions. ■

1. en. Wikipedia.org

2. Ibid

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[http://countrymusic.about.com/od/artistsofcountrymusic/u/artists\\_styles.htm](http://countrymusic.about.com/od/artistsofcountrymusic/u/artists_styles.htm)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music)

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# JUNE CARTER CASH

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June Carter was born Valerie June Carter on June 23, 1929, in Maces Springs, Virginia, the daughter of Ezra Carter and Mother Maybelle Carter, the first family of country music. She and her sisters, Anita and Helen, performed as the Carter Sisters, with June singing, playing autoharp and rhythm guitar, and keeping audiences entertained with her comedic wit.

In 1952 June married Carl Smith, with whom she performed at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry. They had one daughter, Rebecca Carlene. After they divorced, she toured with Elvis Presley and was briefly married to a local police officer, Edwin Nix, with whom she had another daughter, Rosanna (Rosie).

In the mid 1950s, June studied at The Actors Studio in New York City, landing a role in 1958's *Country Music Holiday* as well as a part in the movie *The Apostle* with Robert Duvall. She also had guest spots on TV westerns and soap operas. But she returned to music with her mother and sisters in the early 1960s to work with Johnny Cash. June and Johnny had a number of hits, including "It Ain't Me Babe," "Jackson," and "If I Were a Carpenter." She married Cash on March 1, 1968, and their son, John Carter Cash, was born in 1970.

For much of the 1970s and 80s June's career took a backseat to Johnny's. But in 1999, following what many believed to be her retirement, June re-emerged with the album *Press On*, which won a Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album. Four years later, her album *Wildwood Flower* netted her two Grammys. She won the awards for Best Traditional Folk Album and the award for Best Female Country Vocal Performance for her song "Keep on the Sunny Side."

June Carter Cash died of complications following heart surgery on May 15, 2003 in Nashville, Tennessee. Later that year her beloved husband passed away on September 12. Their love story was captured on movie screens with the biopic *Walk the Line*.

Two years later Sheryl Crow, Willie Nelson, Loretta Lynn, Rosanne Cash, Emmylou Harris and Kris Kristofferson were among the artists who participated in a special tribute recording, *Anchored in Love* (2007) for June Carter Cash. It was also the title of her biography, written by her son John Carter Cash and published in the same year. ■

<http://www.biography.com/people/june-carter-cash-16257320>

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# ROSANNE CASH

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**R**osanne Cash (born May 24, 1955) is an American singer-songwriter and author, the eldest daughter of Johnny Cash and his first wife, Vivian Liberto Cash Distin. After graduating from high school, she toured in her father's road show, first as a wardrobe assistant and later as a back-up vocalist.

Although she is often classified as a country artist, her music draws from many genres, including folk, pop, rock and blues. In the 1970s she began playing in Rodney Crowell's band The Cherry Bombs in California clubs. She married Crowell in 1979 and then began work on her first album for Columbia Records. The album was *Right or Wrong* and was a critical success.

Her career picked up momentum with the release of her second album *Seven Year Ache* in 1981 which topped the U.S. country singles charts and reached the Top 30 on the U.S. pop singles charts. The singles included "My Baby Thinks He's a Train" and "Blue Moon with Heartache."

In 1990 Cash released *Interiors*, a spare, introspective album which signaled a break from her pop country past and a break from her marriage. In 1991 Cash ended her marriage to Crowell and moved to New York City. *Interiors* received a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Folk Album. She also began writing short stories and essays that have been published in *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Oxford-American* and *New York* magazine.

Cash settled in lower Manhattan and in 1995 married producer/songwriter/guitarist John Levanthal. She signed with Capitol Records but couldn't record for two-and-a-half years because of a polyp on her vocal chords. She resumed recording in 2003 and released the album *Rules of Travel*. In 2006, Cash recorded *Black Cadillac*, an album marked by the loss of her stepmother June, her father Johnny in 2003 and her mother Vivian, who died in 2005. It was nominated for a 2006 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Folk/Americana Album.

In late 2007, she underwent brain surgery for a rare condition and was forced to cancel concert dates. However, after a successful recovery, she resumed writing and recording. ■

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosanne\\_Cash](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosanne_Cash)

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# CONNECT

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A series of free discussions providing a catalyst for discussion, learning and appreciation of the productions

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**Perspectives** - Denver Center Theatre Company's own "Creative Team" and community experts host interactive, topical discussions with attendees that provide a unique perspective on the production. This provides an in-depth connection that makes the stage experience even more rewarding.  
3/23, 6pm, Jones Theatre

**Higher Education Advisory Discussions** - Audience members gain scholarly insight into the productions through discussions, facilitated by faculty members from regional colleges and universities.  
4/22, Post-show

**Talkbacks** - Perhaps the best way to fully appreciate a production is by engaging in a stimulating dialogue with your fellow audience members and the actors who bring it to life.  
4/29, Post-show

**Theatre & Theology** - In our continued partnership with Pastor Dan Bollman of the Rocky Mountain Evangelical Lutheran Synod and cast members, this discussion examines the relevant connections to the productions through a theological lens.  
5/1, Post-show