



Marty Stuart

THE PRINCE CHARMING OF COUNTRY MUSIC

It's September 30, in 1958. The Mississippi sun has risen, the train whistle awakens the Philadelphians and Hilda and John decide to name their new son after Marty Robbins. The rest shall become history.

Is that a prince with silvery black hair, a sparkly suit and a guitar named

'Clarence' riding into town on a black stallion? As the fog dissipates, a closer look reveals that Prince Charming is actually Marty Stuart, in Manuel couture, driving his classic black Cadillac into its 300,000th mile with a bevy of awards on the dash. This amalgamation of opposites—traditionalist and Renaissance man, regular down home guy and superstar, a deep and serious man and a witty, mischievous boy—arrives to thrill, entertain, and educate his faithful following.

It's been nearly a decade since Marty Stuart has set his show down on British soil and it will be the first time with his band, the Fabulous Superlatives. His avid fans remain loyal as his music continues to earn Grammy accolades and endless acclaim. It's almost as though no time has passed since the thirteen-year-old guitar and mandolin prodigy first took his place on the stage. Like the gingko tree, with no two leaves alike and a survivor of everything that's crossed its path, he stands tall on his roots as he represents country music with honour and integrity. Sally Parks sat down in Nashville to talk with Marty about music, his career and many other things,

Sally: "Although there are renowned legends, such as Jack Greene and Merle Haggard, and newcomers who will one day be renowned, when it comes right down to it, it seems apparent that you have been divinely chosen to take the lead in the preservation of our music. How does it feel inside Marty Stuart to be carrying the past and the future of an entire music genre on your shoulders?"

Marty: "It's an honour and responsibility I don't take lightly. It's a fire that's been burning in my heart for a long time. It's kind of equivalent to watching your friends and family slipping away and thinking this is wrong. We have to do something about this. As time has gone on, it has meant more to me to do something about it. The photography, the museum exhibits, the books have helped. People coming and responding to that has made it all possible and it's finally happening. I am honoured."

Since that day in 1994 when we watched Marty set his footprints and handprints at the Music Valley Wax Museum, he has worked every art form, travelled every avenue and retains the respect and support of every member of the circle that will never be unbroken to ensure the preservation of his cherished music.

As a Grand Ole Opry member since 1993, he spoke of its importance in a previous interview— "Everything that I've ever known in country music has come and gone in the last forty years for the most part. The Grand Ole Opry has remained an essential and it has remained the standard. I find that it's time that people like me and Vince, Ricky Skaggs, Alison Krauss and Patty, it's our turn to step up and be the old timers, I guess, and that's fine with me because it's about passing on, it's about carry-

ing it on ... The sustaining force of country music today comes from the root source and that is the Grand Ole Opry."

Marty believes that the future of country music is secured by artists such as Dierks Bentley, Josh Turner and Carrie Underwood who have traditional-based hearts but are also innovative and bring a new audience to the Opry table.

Each June at the Ryman Auditorium, on the original Opry stage, you will find him further cementing country music's place in history at the Marty Stuart Late Night Jam. This Opry style show has evolved from his annual Smiley Hollow Marty Party fan club events and has featured Keith Urban, John Rich, Cowboy Jack Clement, Vince Gill and dozens more as it raises funds for MusiCares.

This past president of the Country Music Association, and humble member of the very small but powerful fraternity of music greats who are timeless and ageless, spearheads and assists in many country music preservation missions. The establishment of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum has also stood as a priority on his list.

Sally: "More than a decade ago, you invited us to the groundbreaking for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum under that tent on a hot summer morning and you stressed the need to 'Honour Thy Music'. What is the origin of these words?"



Sparkle and Twang Exhibit © S Parks Creative

Marty: "That is a catch phrase that someone came up with at the Hall of Fame and the campaign went with it. It's a timeless campaign and timeless statement."

Numerous treasures on display at the Museum are on loan or donated from Marty's personal collection of priceless artefacts. To go a step further, he assembled 'Sparkle and Twang, Marty Stuart's American Musical Odyssey', a massive and magnificent collection of country music memorabilia showcasing stage clothes, instruments, photographs, original hand-written songs and more. The elegant exhibit began at the Tennessee State Museum and continues on tour.

Sally: "I remember when you discovered Patsy Cline's

MAVERICK

“JUST AS EXCITED TODAY. ABSOLUTELY. A VISUAL ARTIST I KNOW, THOMAS B. ALLEN, SAID YOU SHOULD ALWAYS KEEP A PROJECT IN FRONT OF YOU THAT KNOWS MORE ABOUT YOU THAN YOU KNOW ABOUT IT, AND IF YOU DO THAT YOU’LL ALWAYS STAY FRESH. I TRY TO LIVE BY THOSE WORDS.”

engraved leather make-up case in an Eighth Avenue antique shop that I frequent here in Nashville and the amazing impact that had on you and your collection. Is there another piece of music history that you’ve found that is at that level of importance to you?”

Marty: “Johnny Cash’s first black performance suit...it was with his first wife, Vivian, who was my mother-in-law. She gave it to her daughter Kathy and she sold it to me. It was the very first one he wore on stage...very powerful.”

Marty regularly packs up his priceless instruments, his band and his bag of tricks and exercises his road warrior skills as he sets out on tour. Many of us have attended dozens of shows for as many years and each performance is guaranteed to be as fresh and inventive as it has been since the days of the hits of *Love and Luck*, *The Whiskey Ain’t Workin’* and *Hillbilly Rock* with his Rock and Roll Cowboys band at that time.



Marty Stuart and the Fabulous Superlatives

This showman continues to take the stage like a sparkly beacon shining to the last row, drawing in his audience like a lost sailor into land. Surrounded by his band, the Fabulous Superlatives, magic happens. With stellar musicians at his side, Kenny Vaughan on guitar, Harry Stinson on drums and Brian Glenn on bass and joined by his wife, Connie Smith, the chemistry is electric and the show is fabulously superlative.

Sally: “How do you feel when you walk out on to that stage? What is your very first thought?”

Marty: “I am so glad to be here. No cell phones. Nothing



Sparkle and Twang Exhibit - Patsy Cline's case © S Parks Creative

else. I finally get to my guitar and it feels like home out there.”

Sally: “Are you just as excited today as you were when you were a child with Lester Flatt?”

Marty: “Just as excited today. Absolutely. A visual artist I know, Thomas B. Allen, said you should always keep a project in front of you that knows more about you than you know about it, and if you do that you’ll always stay fresh. I try to live by those words.”

Sally: “Do you remember when you first stepped onto the Opry stage as a young teen?”

Marty: “I was a guest of Lester Flatt. When I played, the crowd just kept cheering and I thought I did something wrong. He said to keep on playing.”



Sparkle and Twang Exhibit - Marty Stuart guitar © S Parks Creative

Sally: "And the song you were playing?"

Marty: "...It was a bluegrass song, oh love please come home.... The actual title was *Love Come Home*."

Marty recently wore Nashville's Belcourt Theatre like a classic Nudie suit with history and tradition in every shiny stitch. It was, indeed, the perfect spot to showcase his latest work, *GHOST TRAIN: THE STUDIO B SESSIONS*. The album that grew from his Stuart and Mississippi roots was tracked inside the very same walls that were listening when he played on his very first recording at the age of thirteen with Lester Flatt.

Returning to, in his words, 'the scene of the crime,' the choice of the historic RCA Studio on Music Row in itself, exemplified tradition. You can almost hear Elvis Presley recording *Blue Christmas* and see Chet Atkins and Patsy Cline standing at their microphones. The studio's historic vibe continues to this day, as evidenced during a recent BBC interview there with Robert Plant seated to my right. It is a major link in the unbroken circle.

Sally: "How did you feel about the fact that the RCA studio is also open to the public with tours going on while you were working?"

Marty: "I enjoyed it. I am glad to keep it alive. Part of the agreement when we recorded there was that the Hall of Fame could use it (for tours). It was like being a fish in a bowl. Students from Belmont were on hand to watch us record. It is a tourist attraction and a cultural message as well. A perfect trilogy."

When I asked if the album was recorded in the box or if those traditional music roots were matched with traditional analog recording, Marty said that it was a combined effort and digital equipment and old tube treasures were also used.



Marty Stuart's Star on the Walk Of Fame © S Parks Creative

and now gone out on tour. One might say that many songs are autobiographical in some way, but Marty always goes a step further, a step higher and at the same time deeper with each track being born in his heart and raised by his Higher Power.

Sally: "Which songs on the album are very accurate representations of who Marty Stuart is or some facet of your life?"

Marty: "Most of them are...My life with Connie—*I Run to You*; Me and who I am—*Branded*; As an historian—*Hangman*, As a country fan—*Drifting Apart*."

[*Hummingbird* is the Grammy-nominated instrumental tribute to Clarence White of the Byrds and was played on his guitar. *Hangman* was written with Johnny Cash four days before he passed.]

Sally: "Can you elaborate on your songwriting, co-writing, and the source?"

Marty: "I have no formula. Hank Williams said it better

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Sparkle and Twang Exhibit - just a few of Marty's jackets © S Parks Creative

Being met with worldwide acclaim, the new work touches on familiar subject content found in country music including love, loss, trains, prison, tributes, fans and even a stunning instrumental. We might consider Marty the American Ray Davies, and to borrow a lyric from the British songwriting genius—'every track is stacked.' Marty is a living and breathing work of art and nearly every song contains brush strokes illustrating his life. The album could be considered a country audio museum in which those illustrations have been taken from the RCA walls



Marty Stuart with Mick Conley

than anybody: 'I don't write them. God writes them. I just hold on to the pen.' Every song is a real gift. I tend to get up every morning and grab my guitar when the sun's coming up and see what happens. I love writing with Connie. She's a master when it comes to writing. I used to spend a lot of time on Music Row sitting in cubicles co-writing. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. Manuel once said: 'You guys co-write too much. I can't imagine co-making a suit with somebody'."

"I wrote a song last year with Merle Haggard. I really liked it a lot. Connie and I wrote with Dallas Frazier. Those are Picasso moments, like painting with Picasso ... There's a lot to be learned from those guys."

"This is the thing about creating. I believe in God, I love Him. He is my faith and Creator and if you have to be in the business of creating, get in the business with the man who created the universe, the stars... If you put it all in perspective, a

two and a half minute hillbilly song really ain't a big stretch. I love having access to that creative authority. It's great."

Sally: "You're blessed to be able to snap your fingers and almost any artist at any level and in any genre will come running. Is there anyone you'd like to work with that you haven't already?"

Marty: "My checklist is full... I have performed or sung with everyone I have ever wanted to... I am always looking for new people to work with. Maybe that's a new goal."

"There is this new guy named Travis Tritt. It would be fun to do the right song with Dwight Yoakam, and Ricky Skaggs ... I never recorded with Hank III. We did an old song and it was kind of magic. That would be really fun. When collaboration time comes around again..."

Sally: "About Travis Tritt, are there plans for any more great 'hatless' treats in the near future?"

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Marty: "We always plan, but never get around to it. That's a life long brother love and we will get around to it."

Sally: "What was it like working with Keith Richards?"

Marty: "He was great. A world-class musical citizen."

Sally: "Is there anyone who is now gone who you would have like to have worked with?"

Marty: "Countless people. I never got to meet Hank Williams, Jimmie Rogers, or Luther Perkins, Johnny Cash's guitar player. Louis Armstrong would have been a hoot to play with."

Sally: "And your dear friend Porter Wagoner?"

Marty: "It was like leaning up against an old oak tree. An incredible amount of wisdom, a true master."

Sally: "Your last project with him, *THE WAGONMASTER*, was historical."

Marty: "It was done for the right reasons."

When I asked if there could potentially be a second *COMPADRES* album of duets with newcomers such as Miranda, Randy Houser and Bo Bice, he commented that he felt that he had over-collaborated at the end of the 1990s, but there may be a performance that comes around that he would dearly love and that could be in the future.

Sally: "Has there been any talk about a tribute album celebrating you, much like the recent *COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER: A TRIBUTE TO LORETTA LYNN*?"

Marty: "I've been approached but I thought it was premature. I am still a work in progress."

There is one thing a true country music follower can always count on—that Marty Stuart will always be Marty—a walking, talking, playing and singing billboard of country music,

never giving in to whatever

the market may beckon but always marching to the beat of his own drum, or rather guitar.

Sally: "Any other artist with your history and traditional ways could easily be labeled with an 'oldies' moniker yet you are able



Marty Stuart chatting with Cowboy Jack © S Parks Creative

to do the impossible and remain not only current but like a Madonna of country music [he chuckles], who keeps reinventing and moving with ease into the future without ever giving into trends and playing the industry games. How do you do it?"

Marty: "It's about just following my heart. I've been around long enough to know that trends come and go. The end of country music that I like the most is that it's timeless...It's not about recreating the past. We honour the past. The attempt was to write enough songs and come up with performances that would create a new chapter and offer hope to young musicians. We (the Superlatives) use ourselves as beacons...I have never given in to trends."

Marty can be described as a diamond but definitely not in the rough. He has been divinely and perfectly cut with dozens of facets, absorbing and reflecting countless career and personal goals, both fulfilled and forthcoming, while, at the

same time, they absorb the love of God and

all of those whose lives he touches and return that love to his congregation.

Equally at home in numerous genres including bluegrass, gospel, blues, country, rock, rockabilly, and Americana, his expertise soars across the board. Expanding his talents to include related art forms beyond the music itself, he has won acclaim for his photography, design, and in many other areas, all the while lifting those around him with a keen wit that sends us unexpectedly into laughter.

Sally: "You wear many hats for a man who never wears one. As a producer, writer, songwriter, photographer, historian, musician, author, designer, is there anything you will be adding to that list?"

Marty: "I am plenty good at cutting yards, trimming trees, planting flowers. I am pretty



Sparkle and Twang Exhibit © S Parks Creative



Loretta Lynn & Patsy Cline stage clothes © S Parks Creative



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As a guitar and mandolin virtuoso, the now famous photo of Marty playing his toy cowboy guitar as a child was only a prediction of a lifetime love and career. A Silvertone electric was next and then his Del Ray took him another step along the road of playing and preserving guitars, all before the age of ten. He soon realised that it was important to master rhythm guitar on the acoustic as a foundation to be able to play lead on the electric and become a total guitar player.

‘Clarence’, Marty’s famous guitar with a fan base of its own,

could be called the fifth member of the Fabulous Superlatives. Named after Clarence White, the 1954 Telecaster is not only his bandmate but also his recording mate and leader of his prized collection.

Marty’s love for his guitars is more than a crush. It’s a life-long commitment to preserve the precious instruments that have played on our precious recordings. Naming the guitars after their owners, one might find ‘Hank’, a Martin D-45 that went from Hank Williams to Hank Williams, Jr. to Johnny Cash and finally to Marty. Then, of course, there would be ‘Lester’, Lester



Marty Stuart hosting Ryman late night jam © S Parks Creative

Flatt's 1950 Martin D-28. He plays all of the instruments in his collection on stage and in the studio because they were born to be played.

Heavily inspired by Bill Monroe, Marty often ends his day 'doodling' on the mandolin where his first love, bluegrass, sprouts from the strings.

Sally: "The Bill Monroe Centennial celebration will be coming up soon. What does he mean to you?"

Marty: "He never leaves my ears."

When Marty plays his mandolin, we can almost see the music, like teardrop notes falling onto his snakeskin boots. A few years ago, a mandolin case arrived at a local shop where I create custom guitars and I asked: 'Would that be one of Marty Stuart's mandolins in that case?' and the courier replied: 'How did you know?'

Sally: "What has being so amazingly successful in so many different areas taught you about yourself?"

Marty: "It has probably taught me that I am blessed."

Marty is one of the lucky ones who began his career as a child, enabling him to now be ahead of the game at such a young age with over seventy awards and nominations, and nearly twenty hall of fame inductions and honours. I asked Manuel, his friend and world renowned designer of stage couture, what Marty means to him. He eagerly replied: 'He is just like my brother. I have known him since he was twelve years old when I started dressing him and haven't quit to this day. He is one of my heroes. He is one of the people I admire the most because he is true to country music. I love this kid.'

As an artist who is completely secure in his own boots, he always knows exactly what he wants. He married Opry star, Connie Smith, in 1997 after telling his mother when he was only a child that he would marry her one day. He knows where he's been and why and he has his heart and arms wide open to catch the next star that comes along.

Sally: "What would you say that you stand for?"

Marty: "I love God, family. I have completely, in the last couple or three years, re-fallen head over heels in love with country music if I stand for anything. I thought I was cutting edge and

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found out I was a traditionalist, I thought I was a cowboy but I turned out to be an Indian!"

Countless compliments from his fellow musicians are brilliantly summarized in one statement from a fellow traditional country artist, Bo Bice, who said: 'Marty Stuart is the epitome of Americana. His cross pollination of many styles of music is what makes him an icon. He has lived out ten careers by not accepting boundaries. Country, bluegrass, rockabilly, traditional and modern...it's all just Marty.'

Marty comes to the UK with two Grammy nominations on the table, a celebrated new CD, a third season of his TV show ready to broadcast with Willie Nelson as the guest on the show's season premiere, and a yearning to reunite with his fans.

Sally: "What would you like to say to your UK fans who are counting the days until you return?"

Marty: "It's about time I get to come and I understand that our TV show plays over there. The people who come and go tell me it's working and people are enjoying it bringing traditional back. As the Superlatives, we have never really done a proper tour over there and we're looking forward to seeing old friends and making new ones."

After playing shows in Glasgow, Gateshead, Nottingham, Milton Keynes, London and Dublin, this musician's musician will leave a trail of loving and satisfied country music fans as he rides back into the sunset.

Elvis may be king, but Marty is surely our prince. **Sally Parks**



Marty Stuart off stage at Ryman © S Parks Creative