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(Neb.)-Russ Garner To Be Honored At Crawford Eagle Club



By: Genell Rothleutner Posted at: 02/10/2009 10:01 AM

Russ Garner, a couple of years ago.

CRAWFORD - Country music musician, recording star and songwriter, Russ Garner is being honored with a birthday celebration of his life and career at the monthly Crawford Eagle Country Music Jamboree on Sunday February 15, 2009 from noon till 5:00 PM. Garner has been instrumental in the survival and continuation of the Eagles Jam for over 10 years. Friends and fellow musicians are invited to drop in to visit with Russ and participate in the Jam. Personal artifacts will be on display including Garner's old Gretsch guitar. As requested, this to be a "no gift" event.

Professionally, Russ traveled the United States including Alaska, performed in Las Vegas with famed Steel Guitar expert Ralph Mooney and singer Wynn Stewart, recorded songs and performed in Nashville with various other Grand Ole Opry stars including Loretta Lynn whom he knew before she was inducted into the Opry. To mention just a few others, Russ also worked with Ferlin Husky, Jim Reeves, Cowboy Copas and Skeets McDonald.

Locally, Garner appeared on Curly's Corral (KCSR) in the early years, worked the surrounding area with his "Nightrider" and later the "Rivermen" bands and stated he "got a kick out of backing up Jim Reeves when he came to town in the late 1950's at the Assumption Arena in Chadron." Some will remember Russ from his daily radio show on (KCOW Alliance) and his weekly show on KDUH-TV (Hay Springs). Songs written and recorded by Garner included River Man, Slow Good, Country Baby and Strings of My Guitar. Red Sovine and Swanee Caldwell recorded Tear Stained Guitar, written by Garner.

Nebraska's native son was born in Dawes County on a ranch just outside Whitney on February 20, 1932 where his pioneer family lived in a dugout home on Trunk Butte Creek. Garner said life was difficult in those days. He rode his horse to attend the old District 49 Windy Hill School between Crawford and Chadron. He said the early years were probably the "most impressionable" for him, especially his early teachers Mary Daniels and Goldie Harrison. "They took time with all the students but got me started off in the right direction. Miss Harrison used to keep me after school to give me piano lessons and taught me music."

Russ saved up and bought his first guitar at age eight. His interest in buying his first guitar might be attributed to the fact that he stated one of his most memorable moments was when his family got their first radio.

He explained, "When my cousin visited in the summer, we had to walk a half-mile or so to my Granddad's house to listen to the Grand Ole Opry."

Before he got the radio, he said he listened to songs by Carson Robison and Jimmy Rogers on an old crank Victrola "from the time I was able to turn the crank, so getting that radio was a big deal."

He went on to say, "That first night we stayed up and listened way after midnight. We listened to the Opry on WSM."

He said he learned all about country music listening to the Opry and to the Dallas (Texas) Station KDRL's Hillbilly Hit Parade with Hal Horton. Another "high" he spoke of, was being "fortunate enough to work with two local bands at age 14, The Hanlon Brothers Pop Band, (who did all the Glen Miller arrangements) and the Guy Jones Country Band. I learned a great deal from those people."

When asked if he had any professional regrets he stated he had sometimes wondered which direction his life might have taken if he had accepted to opportunity to go to Officer Candidate School (OCS) and helicopter training when he served in the Army. "I always had an interest in aviation and went to night school on my own." Accepting OCS "would have meant a career in the Army and might have directed me away from music."

Russ has been a mentor over the years to musicians and songwriters, alike, said local saddle and boot makers Jack and Renae Jones who have their own band, Boots and Saddles. Jack and Renae have been performing with Russ as part of the Russ Garner Band, playing throughout the Nebraska Panhandle.

Renae said that Russ started sharing his expertise on the bass guitar with her in 2006.

She said, "He is always so patient but I can always tell from the frown on his face when I have screwed up."

Jack said Russ has played with "three generations of Jones" over the years.

Both Jack and Renae agree, "Russ's friendship and knowledge of the guitar have been priceless and sharing his music talents with the community has been a contribution that is irreplaceable."

Jack said he can remember when musicians would "not book a performance within 100 miles of where Russ was playing" because they knew no one would show up to hear them.

For anyone who does not know, a jam session is a musical get together where musicians gather and play (or "jam") without extensive preparation or predefined arrangements. Jams have been going on since the beginning of music. Local musicians Harold Saxton, Danny Barkel and Bill Schlickbernd started the Crawford Jamboree around 1993. Area Community Jam Sessions are open to everyone and rotate monthly to different communities: Alliance, Neb., on the First Sunday, Manville, Wyo., on the second Sunday, Crawford, Neb., on the third Sunday and Lusk, Wyo., on the forth Sunday.

Musicians come to Crawford from the surrounding areas, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming and sign up to do at least three songs each, vocal or instrumental, or both, with the house band as back up.

When asked about the Crawford Country Music Jamboree held at the Crawford Eagle Club, Russ stated he "started doing the Eagles jam approximately ten years ago, things were quite different then when you would put a band together on the spot, using whatever talent that came through the front door. The jam has evolved over the years into what you see today."

This quiet, unassuming, humble man can be found on his ranch outside Crawford attending to everyday chores. He shares his vocal and instrumental talents with Veterans in Hot Springs, local Nursing Homes, at benefits and plays for local clubs throughout the area.

Lucky for Crawford, he can be found every third Sunday at the Crawford Eagle Club Country Music Jamboree leading the members of the house band: Renae Jones, Jack Jones and Elizabeth Tuning of Crawford; Larry Holub of Alliance; and Dave Neilson of Lance Creek, Wyoming.

On the Internet, you can view the Russ Garner page on Hillbilly-Music.com for more details on Russ's career and YouTube.com for persons and songs mention above.