

Billy Ray Cyrus Biography

Back To Tennessee is much more than just another album in one man's remarkable and enduring career. This is an extremely meaningful homecoming in that man's singular journey back to the musical roots that have long sustained him. "This album is everything I am at this second," says Cyrus. "It's everything that I've been through and every step along the way to this point -- Ironically, sometimes looking back, in my case BACK TO TENNESSEE, is the best way to move forward."

Sitting in the slightly cluttered but welcoming music room that is his refuge of his Los Angeles home, with his trusty dog Tex by his side, Cyrus explains that the initial spark for Back To Tennessee was struck when Cyrus recorded "Real Gone" with Mark Bright, the Grammy-winning Nashville producer perhaps best known for his work with Rascal Flatts. Right from the start, it was clear that working with Bright brought out the very best in Cyrus. True to the song's title, "Real Gone" (written by Sheryl Crow and John Shanks) captured Cyrus at his most rocking and most real.

The inspired result of that first collaboration is Cyrus' most important and revealing album since Some Gave All, the nine times platinum 1992 classic that introduced Cyrus to the world. It is only now that Billy Ray could make this album. Since then, Cyrus has gone on to sell more than 25 million albums worldwide, and earned nearly thirty chart singles, including 15 Top 40 charts hits; while at the same time establishing himself as a successful and respected actor in film and television. Cyrus' most recent album -- 2007's Home At Last -- entered in the Top 20 on the Billboard 200, hitting #3 on the Top Country Album chart, while "Ready, Set, Don't Go" -- the moving duet with daughter Miley Cyrus -- became a Top 5 country smash.

Yet even after experiencing the circus of celebrity for more than a decade and a half, Cyrus is ultimately a man who prizes nothing more than being authentic and true to where he comes from and who he is. "I'm the first guy to admit I'm not the best singer in the business," says Cyrus. "I don't write the best songs. But for better and worse, I am true to myself and my own instincts -- sometimes to a fault. Whatever else I may be, at least I'm real."

For all that has changed around him, Cyrus remains, "As Country As Country Can Be," to borrow the title of another of Back To Tennessee's many highlights that he wrote with songwriters Casey Beathard and Mick Adkins. "I love country music," Cyrus explains. "I love all styles of music. I just love music period. But when you grow up in Eastern Kentucky, in the heart of Appalachia, there's a lot of Southern gospel, a lot of blues and a lot of rock & roll, and it's still as country as country can be. Growing up I listened to Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Glen Campbell, Willie Nelson, and Waylon Jennings. There's a lot of that influence in my music. But I also grew up with Lynyrd Skynyrd, ZZ Top and the Allman Brothers. Those were my influences too."

Cyrus paid his dues along the way. "It was the 12 years of persistence and dedication and being told no, the trials and errors and failures, everything I learned along that journey to making that first album, Some Gave All," Cyrus explains. "That was all built on a foundation of something very real." The success of that debut, including hits like "Could've Been Me," "Wher'm I Gonna Live?" "She's Not Cryin' Anymore," the title track and, of course, "Achy Breaky Heart" was massive and overwhelming. Yet here too Cyrus depended on his roots to keep him grounded.

"You can see my dad's picture sitting there in front of us today," Cyrus says. "My dad passed away a couple of years ago -- he had a gospel quartet, and that's where I got my start as a little boy. There's a misperception that I was an overnight success. When I started Some Gave All, I was living in my car. I'd gotten thrown out of my house and sat writing some of those songs sitting on the curb. "Wher'm I Gonna Live," "She's Not Crying Anymore" and "Some Gave All" I wrote all in one week. Everything that led up to that moment was very real.

Yet as Cyrus recalls, “Fortunately, I had that man in the picture, my father, tell me ‘Don’t worry son, just do what Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton did, branch out.’” Like Carl Perkins said, “Whatever you do, don’t change a thing. Stay real and it will come around.” When I was down because I felt like Nashville had thrown me out, Waylon Jennings said, “Son, take it as a compliment. You know the definition of “outlaw,” don’t you? It’s someone who’s been outlawed. Just be who you are – you’re an original.”

Taking the advice of those he respected the most, Cyrus pushed forward, continuing to record fine country and inspirational recordings, touring regularly, and increasingly establishing himself as an actor. Remarkably, auditioning for the role as Gene the pool cleaner in David Lynch’s acclaimed 2001 art film *Mulholland Drive* led to a second career that has been wildly successful, with Cyrus becoming a popular TV star. First, as the title character in the syndicated smash drama *Doc*, then as fictional country star Robbie Ray Stewart alongside his real life daughter Miley in the current smash, Emmy-nominated Disney Channel series *Hannah Montana*. “Like a lot of things in my life, it’s all about amazing opposites,” Cyrus explains with a laugh. “My entire career as an actor making family entertainment somehow started with auditioning for David Lynch. As always, I just followed my instincts.” Soon, Cyrus can be seen in the action-comedy film *The Spy Next Door* alongside Jackie Chan. The film, which was produced by The Wedding Singer Producer Robert Simonds, will hit theatres in 2010.

Sensing it was now time to make another musical statement, Cyrus earlier this year carved out time in his busy schedule to go to Tennessee and dedicate himself one hundred percent to making a new album. As he recalls, “I lived in the studio, just like I used to, working with Mark and an amazing group of musicians.”

To the public, Cyrus has played many parts, yet on *Back To Tennessee*, he is only himself as he sings songs from the inspirational (“Somebody Said A Prayer”) to the simply entertaining (“Thrillbilly”). It’s an album that sums up Cyrus’s entire path.

Asked what he’s most proud of in his career so far, Cyrus takes his guest today to a prized place in his West Coast home where he keeps a letter that means more to him than any other world possession. That letter came from Hendersonville, Tennessee and written on June 12, 1992. The letter came from the one and only Johnny Cash. As the Man In Black wrote Cyrus: “I was very impressed recently to hear you give God the credit for your success. It’s good to be reminded where all goodness comes from. Thirty-six years ago today I was working with Elvis and saw him take the same flak you’re taking now. Congratulations on the way you’re handling it all. In your case, as in Elvis’, the good outweighs the bad. Let ‘em have it. I’m in your corner.”

Those words meant the world to Cyrus, then and now. “There was a storm brewing in my life right then, and he sent me that letter. I held to it because if Johnny thinks I’m okay, I figure I’m okay. Bruce Springsteen also stood up for me – which was amazing. Those men and Carl Perkins taught me something I still live by. If I don’t fit in, then I don’t fit in. I’d rather have friends like that. And I’d rather be myself.”

Take a listen to *Back To Tennessee*, and hear the deeply felt sound of Billy Ray Cyrus being himself, as only he can. *Back to Tennessee* will be available at retail on April 7th, 2009.