

Nashville's Music Row: A Historic Context

Draft for Review

October 2015

Not for download or reprint

**Submit comments by
November 6, 2015 to**

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Purpose of Music Row Historic Context Document :

National Register of Historic Places

Multiple Property Documentation Form

Recognizing the national importance of Nashville's music industry, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has designated Music Row a *National Treasure*.

(<https://savingplaces.org/places/nashville-s-music-row#.VhK59k10zIU>)

National Treasures designation brings a commitment from the National Trust to work with the Music Industry Coalition and other local partners to document and advocate for the preservation of the culture and heritage associated with Nashville's music industry on Music Row.

This historic context document and accompanying inventory of Music Row's properties is a **draft** that when completed will be submitted to the National Park Service for approval as a National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF). It is available for review until November 6, 2015. The final document will be posted in early 2016.

The research in this document is intended to serve as a resource for several purposes including:

- **City Planning** – The Metro Department of Planning will use this information as the foundation for a new land use plan for Music Row.
- **National Register of Historic Places nominations** – The historical context will serve as the cover document for individual nominations to the National Register from interested property owners.
- **Economic Incentives** – Owners of properties listed on the National Register who rehabilitate their buildings will be eligible for a 20 percent federal tax credit.
- **Public Education** – The historical context will be a resource for engaging Nashville residents to appreciate the importance of Music Row to Nashville's culture and economy.
- **Tourism Development** – The historical context can be used to develop new tourism products including brochures, interpretive signage, walking tour apps or guidebooks.

Remember while reading this document:

- The historic context traces the arc of history associated with Music Row. Its purpose is not to name every song or person who was ever on Music Row but to create a picture of the course of events throughout the last 60-plus years.
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Submit comments by November 6, 2015 to cbrackett@savingplaces.org

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Nashville's Music Row: A Historic Context

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Forum - DRAFT

Down on Music Row

Down on Music Row

If you want to be a star

That's where you've got to go

"Down on Music Row," Lyrics by Dolly Parton, from the album "My Tennessee Mountain Home," recorded at RCA Victor Studio B, 1972

Introduction

The National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form for Nashville's Music Row establishes the national and international significance of this neighborhood, provides a chronological time frame of the past 60 years within a context of Nashville's musical development throughout its history, and documents the built environment within the geographical boundaries of Music Row.

Although the historic context's primary focus is Music Row, it is essential to examine the sweeping arc of events that define Nashville's connection to music throughout its history. Therefore, the historic context begins with an overview of Nashville's early interest in music, follows the city's musical development through the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century, bringing events to the mid-1950s and the beginnings of Music Row. The historic context examines the outside forces that affected Music Row, primarily the actions of city government as well as cultural changes that affected the musical tastes of Americans over the years and the role of Music Row in both responding to and influencing changing musical tastes.

The nomination establishes individual property types for the historic resources located on Music Row as well as their context at the national, regional, and local levels. Based on a comprehensive survey of over 350 properties located on Music Row, the nomination provides an inventory of National Register-listed and National Register-eligible resources for each property type. The period of significance for these historic resources is 1954-1989 (although the historic context statement covers the entire history of Music Row from 1954-2015). The nomination justifies listing of historic resources under Criterion A for historical significance and Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years. Three properties on Music Row have been National Register-listed, including RCA Victor Studio A, RCA Victor Studio B, and the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged, which at one time housed the headquarters for Sony Records. This nomination identifies an additional 65 individual properties as National Register-eligible.

Statement of Significance Summary

Nashville's Music Row is a place of unique significance in transforming our nation's culture. It is the centerpiece of Nashville's national and international reputation as Music City. Out of the modest renovated homes, large purpose-built studios, and modern office buildings has emerged an unmatched canon of music recordings in country music and a wide variety of musical styles including classical, Christian, rock, rockabilly and bluegrass.

The area, now known as Music Row, first developed as a residential neighborhood in the 1870s. By the early twentieth century, the fashionable neighborhood was served by streetcars connecting to downtown and nearby colleges and universities. Occupied predominantly by middle-class white-collar

workers, the neighborhood was defined by Craftsman-style Bungalows and American Foursquare-type residences. Laid out on a common grid pattern, the neighborhood also featured churches, a fire hall, apartments, and corner grocery and drug stores. The neighborhood was also home to philanthropic institutions for the elderly, women, and children in need. By the mid-twentieth century, the neighborhood evolved due to the growth of the surrounding universities - Vanderbilt, George Peabody, Belmont, and Scarritt Bennett. Residences had been converted into rental housing and student apartments were constructed. Property values decreased as the neighborhood evolved into a less desirable place for middle-class families to live.

Meanwhile, in the 1940s major music recording companies such as Capitol, RCA Victor, and Decca opened offices in Nashville and independent record labels sprang up as Nashville became nationally known for WSM's Grand Ole Opry radio show. Originally, music-related businesses such as publishing houses and recording studios operated in downtown highrises and commercial areas. As Nashville's music industry began to thrive, record producers looked for less expensive property to relocate to and turned their attention to the neighborhood that would become Music Row. In 1954, Owen and Harold Bradley established the first successful music business here in a renovated house. Others soon followed and by the early 1960s the area had become the center of Nashville's booming music industry.

Due to the number of record companies that set up shop near one another in a row along 16th Avenue, the neighborhood became known as Record Row. Soon, music studios, publishing houses, songwriters associations, and union halls spread to adjacent streets stretching from 16th Avenue to 19th Avenues between Division Street to the north and Edgehill Avenue to the south. By the late 1960s, Nashville was marketing itself as Music City and Record Row became Music Row.

For 60 years Music Row has been the center of much of the country's music industry with songwriters, musicians, artists, publishers, performance rights and promotional organizations housed in renovated late nineteenth and early twentieth century residences, large purpose-built studios, and modern office buildings. At various times, major music businesses have included RCA Victor, Columbia, Warner Brothers, Sony Music Publishing, American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), SESAC, Gaylord Entertainment, MCA Records, United Artists, Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), and Mercury Records.

Nashville's Music Row is a unique music-based cultural business district in the United States. Although other cities – New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Memphis, Muscle Shoals – have been centers for music production (past and present), none exhibit a concentrated music-based business district similar to Music Row. The music-based businesses in other cities are dispersed or located in suburban and industrial areas. More specifically, only Nashville's Music Row:

- Developed over time as a music-based business community located in what had been a residential neighborhood;
- Developed as a "one-stop-shop" with every business that supports the music industry located in or near a single neighborhood, including recording studios, record labels, publishing houses, performance rights organizations, artist support organizations (such as the Country Music Association, Nashville Songwriters Association and Nashville Musicians Association), offices for publicists, artist management, legal services, musical instrument repair shops, record pressing plants, radio broadcast stations, and housing for songwriters and musicians;
- Houses the offices of the nation's three performance rights organizations – SESAC, BMI and ASCAP;

- Has consistently produced music in every genre including country, classical, country rock, pop country, cowboy/western, honky-tonk, jazz, rockabilly, western swing, outlaw country Contemporary Christian, gospel, rock 'n roll, blues, R&B, and pop;
- Is the location where many seminal songs with new sounds and perspectives that changed the world of music and American culture were written and recorded. Examples include Elvis Presley's first recording in Nashville, "Heartbreak Hotel," in 1956; Bob Dylan's 1966 album "Blonde on Blonde"; Tammy Wynette's 14 No. 1 songs between 1968 and 1976 including "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" and "Stand By Your Man"; the 1976 album "The Outlaws" with Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson; and Billy Ray Cyrus's 1992 "Achy Breaky Heart"; and
- Is the place from which new musical terms and genres emerged that became part of the language of American culture including Music City, U.S.A., the Nashville Sound, Countrypolitan, Contemporary Christian, Garthmania, and Bro-Country.

For these reasons and others, all of which are further documented in this nomination, Nashville's Music Row is of national historical significance and is deserving of recognition through the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF). The property types documented in this MPDF identify three previously NRHP-listed properties and an additional 65 individual properties that are eligible for listing on the NRHP under Criterion A for historic significance and Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved national significance within the past 50 years.

The Birth of Music Row: It All Started with the Bradleys

How did Music Row happen? The simple answer is that it all started with two brothers, Owen and Harold Bradley. Over the past 60 years, the number of people with connections to Music Row has increased to become a cast of thousands.

From its earliest days, Nashville's music industry was blessed with talented people who often excelled in many areas including performing, songwriting, producing, and promoting. Perhaps no two people fit that description more than Owen Bradley (1915-1998) and Harold Bradley (b.1926). The brothers' search for a place to open a recording studio led them to 16th Avenue, a residential neighborhood surrounded by Belmont, Vanderbilt, George Peabody, and Scarritt Bennett universities. The old house they purchased in 1954, and the Quonset Hut they built next to it, was a modest beginning for two established musicians and producers but it was enough to operate a thriving recording business. Within a few years, the Bradleys' success attracted the attention of other music businesses which began to set up shop on 16th Avenue or nearby on 17th Avenue and Division Street.

In the coming years, Music Row would become a unique cultural center that at various times attracted the attention of Nashville's elected officials, city leaders, and planners. The intersection of city government planning, local politics, and Music Row as a business district resulted in periodic planning phases which reflected the planning ethos of the country at large at the time and had a direct impact on the area as a business and cultural district. Like so many urban neighborhoods around the country, the evolution of Nashville's Music Row was often a controversial tug-of-war between various factions attempting to influence the outcome.

The first of these episodes related to urban planning occurred after World War II when city leaders passed the neighborhood's first zoning regulations. The decision to allow residential areas – such as 16th and 17th Avenues – to also be zoned for commercial development was the change that allowed the Bradleys to buy an existing residential house in 1954 for renovating into a commercial music and film recording studio. Soon, others followed.

An even larger impact of urban planning was anticipated throughout the 1960s as Music Row was the focus of a major urban renewal project, dubbed “The Boulevard Plan,” which intended to demolish most of the buildings on 16th Avenue, to construct a multi-lane boulevard, and build modern new office buildings along the route. Although some music industry leaders supported the idea, the Boulevard Plan was met with fierce resistance by residents and ultimately it was defeated. The 1970s brought plans for a pedestrian mall, a popular urban renewal project for cities throughout the country at that time. Although neither of these plans were fully realized, the residual effects are still evident today in initial developments such as a small public park at Music Row’s entrance, changing 16th and 17th Avenues from two-way to one-way, renaming parts of the streets “Music Square,” and construction of a new street called Music Circle and another small public park separating Music Row from the adjoining Edgehill neighborhood, a predominately African-American area.

Nashville’s Music Row has also reflected the city’s emphasis on tourism starting with the opening of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in 1967. Within a few years, the nearby street (Demonbreun) connecting Music Row with downtown was lined with souvenir shops, motels, and attractions for tourists coming to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

The decision in the 1990s to relocate the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to downtown Nashville brought another round of planning to create a new vision for Music Row, which would no longer have a major tourist destination or tourists to support the adjacent souvenir shops and motels.

Soon after the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum moved downtown in 2001, Music Row became the focus of intense redevelopment with new highrise apartments, hotels, and condos. This led to the demolition of numerous historic resources, a trend which has intensified in recent years. From 2012-2015, some 30 buildings were demolished on Music Row for redevelopment projects. The proposed demolition of RCA Victor Studio A in 2014 led to an international outcry in opposition and ultimately led to its preservation and listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

In January 2015, the National Trust for Historic Preservation designated Music Row a National Treasure, which focused attention on the preservation of Music Row and led to creation of this MPDF as a partnership project of the National Trust and the Music Industry Coalition. In February 2015, Music Row once again became the subject of study and planning as the Metro Nashville Planning Department worked with partner organizations, including the Metro Historical Commission, Music Industry Coalition, and Music Row Neighborhood Association, to begin development of a new urban design plan. This NRHP MPDF document is intended to provide the foundation for the local planning process to develop a new Music Row Design Plan that will honor the legacy of Music Row’s 60-year history and provide guidance for future sustainable development.

Nashville – Always a Music City

From its early days as a fledgling town publishing its first music book in 1824, to its twenty-first century role as the center of a multi-million dollar music songwriting, recording, publishing, and record manufacturing industry, there has always been music in Nashville. With this 200-plus-year musical history, it is fitting that Nashville is known around the world as Music City. The following summary of Nashville’s music history from the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century reflects the foundation upon which Music Row would later grow.

As in the many other places in the South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the first music in the settlement of Nashville was the sounds of stringed instruments and singing in churches and private homes. Even as fiddles and banjos were an early necessity in Nashville, the first instrument mentioned in historical records is found in a 1780 shipping statement for an order of Jew's harps for use at a wedding.

In the nineteenth century as Nashville transitioned from a frontier settlement to an established community, music became a central part of the town's culture. In addition to the earliest arrivals of Irish, Scotch-Irish, and English settlers, another wave of Europeans in the 1830s and 1840s would greatly influence Nashville's interest in music:

"...musicians from Germany, Italy, France and other European countries settled in Nashville, providing European classical musical leadership through private instruction as well as through the emerging academies where they found employment. Immigrants established the first schools of music, music retail stores and professional concert programs in Nashville. It was the Germans more than any other group that made the strongest, permanent impact on music in 19th century Nashville." (1)

In the first half of the nineteenth century, music performance venues included an assembly room in the City Hotel, the Nashville Female Academy, the Adelphi Theater, and the Nashville Academy of Music as well as local churches. After the Civil War, as Nashville's population surged, more music performance venues were built including the Vendome Theater, Watkins Hall, the Grand Opera House, the Broad Street Amusement Hall, and the New Park Theater.

In 1818, a Masonic Hall was constructed and hosted many musical events. A description of a performance at the Masonic Hall printed in the *Daily Republican* in 1838 indicated that performers sometimes had challenges with the behavior of their audiences. The writer described entering a large room where a hundred people were seated:

"The benches were nicely arranged in rows, and the walls plentifully decorated with hog lard candles, emitting a 'dim and religious light' and a delicious fragrance resembling the odor of fried bacon. At the extreme end was the orchestra, just large enough to accommodate Mueller and his piano...Mueller played a very pleasing and extremely difficult solo on the violin, but the audience kept up a running fire of conversation during the whole concert." (2)

Interest in music expressed itself in a number of ways throughout the nineteenth century with an increasing number of performances by traveling musicians and singers, the formation of musical societies, music education programs in local schools and private studios, publishers and printers producing sheet music, and retail stores selling musical instruments.

Concerts by traveling performers were regularly announced and reported in local newspapers throughout the nineteenth century. Popular entertainment included classical concerts, sacred music, folk tunes, popular contemporary songs like "Yankee Doodle" and "The Star Spangled Banner," brass bands, opera, original works by local composers, and blackface minstrelsy.

In 1851, the era's most popular singer Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," performed two concerts at Nashville's Adelphi Theater for an audience who had paid as much as \$200 each for a ticket. Lind's

concert included “The Last Rose of Summer” and “Home Sweet Home.” Lind was arguably the first superstar singer. Her American tour was promoted by P.T. Barnum (later of circus fame) who offered her an unprecedented \$1,000 per performance for 150 concerts across the country, all of which sold out. Lind’s superstar status resulted in another “first” for a singer – placing her name on every type of product from clothing to furniture to sausage, implying her endorsement.

Nashville’s well-to-do residents embraced music as part of their upper class culture, forming musical societies which presented performances and encouraged music appreciation. The earliest documented musical society was formed in 1821 to assist with a concert at the Nashville Inn. Others included the Musical Fund Society, formed in 1837 to provide a regular schedule of musical entertainment, the Union Harmonic Society formed in 1844 for the purpose of “more effectually uniting the musical talent into an association,” the Nashville Philharmonic Society formed in 1852 was reported to include Nashville’s best musicians, and a women’s Wednesday Morning Musicales formed in 1892 to sponsor concerts and recitals. **(3)**

Religious publishing also made a significant contribution to Nashville’s musical growth. Although religious publishers were located in Nashville by the 1830s, the decision in 1854 by the Methodist Episcopal Church South established the Southern Methodist Publishing House in Nashville was a major boost for the city. **(4)**

Music education was considered an important part of proper education from Nashville’s earliest days. In 1818, the Nashville Female Academy, which had formed the previous year, added a professor of music to the faculty. By 1860, students could enroll in private classes for musical instruments and singing. The Ward Seminary for Young Ladies opened in 1865 and offered an extensive music program at its Ward Conservatory of Music which advertised:

“...superior advantages for study of music in all its branches. Instruction is given in piano, organ, violin, mandolin, guitar, banjo, zither, cornet, flute, cello, harp, voice culture, sight singing, chorus singing, harmony, theory and musical history.” **(5)**

As the importance of music education continued to grow, so did the places where students could study. These included Vanderbilt University, founded in 1873, which had a Glee Club and a Mandolin Club in the 1880s and 1890s and the Nashville Conservatory of Music which opened in 1892. By 1900 there were 60 music teachers in Nashville teaching privately or in an educational institution. **(6)**

In the 1870s, a different kind of music from Nashville reached audiences throughout the United States. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, formed to raise funds for Fisk University, a college founded after the Civil War to educate African Americans, performed traditional spirituals to increasingly appreciative audiences, eventually touring Great Britain and Europe and performing for Queen Victoria in 1873. Funds raised by the Fisk Jubilee Singers during the European tour were used to build Jubilee Hall (NHL, 1973), which opened in 1876 as the first permanent building on the Fisk campus.

Music also became a business enterprise for people like John B. West who operated his retail store, the Music Room, on Market Street in the 1830s and 1840s. His constant advertisements in local newspapers included musical instruments for sale such as “one Patent Piano-Forte of superior tone and workmanship.” **(7)**

Jesse French was a music publisher who started the Jesse French Piano and Organ Company in 1875 in Nashville, with branches in Memphis, Little Rock, St. Louis, Dallas, Birmingham, and Montgomery. The success of his company, which employed 75 people by 1887, led French to start manufacturing his own pianos, partnering with the Starr Piano Company in Richmond, Indiana. **(8)**

“To further his own business, French involved himself indirectly with the publication of key Mississippi Valley ragtime composers. Ragtime historians have long stressed the important link between the sale of ragtime sheet music and the sale of pianos, both reaching their peak during the ragtime era (c. 1897-1917).” The French-Starr Piano Building (NRHP, 1980) where pianos were sold and music lessons given, still stands on 5th Avenue in downtown Nashville. **(9)**

By the late nineteenth century, the rage for ragtime music centered in Nashville. So many compositions were created that historians today refer to the “Nashville style” of early ragtime. **(10)**

Nashville’s best known performance venue, the Ryman Auditorium (NHL, 1971), opened downtown in 1892 as the Union Gospel Tabernacle. Built by riverboat captain Thomas Ryman (1843-1904) to host revivalist Samuel Porter Jones, the building was renamed the Ryman Auditorium after the captain’s death. The Ryman would gain its greatest fame as the home of the Grand Ole Opry from 1943 to 1974.

Nashville was undoubtedly swept up in the piano craze from around 1890 to the late 1920s. Nationally, piano sales reached 232,000 in 1890 and peaked at 364,000 in 1909 before plummeting to 121,000 in 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression. During this period, middle and upper class homes across the country were not considered complete without a piano. In Nashville, businesses such piano and music dealer L.C. Tiller Piano Company, founded in 1917, thrived. **(11)**

Although music publishing began in Nashville in 1824 when the hymnbook “Western Harmony” was published, the industry expanded in response to the demand for sheet music. By the late nineteenth century, at least five publishers and three printers in Nashville produced sheet music, representing all types of music from marches to waltzes to hymns and other religious songs.

By the early twentieth century, music aficionados had not only embraced the performance of live music, they were now enthusiastically listening to radio broadcasts (including Life and Casualty which started radio broadcasts in the 1920s) and recorded music in their homes – a novelty that would have a tremendous impact on Nashville in only a few decades. Although Thomas Edison invented a cylinder phonograph in 1877, it was Emile Berliner’s invention of the Gramophone and phonograph record in 1880 that made mass production of records possible. Ensuing legal battles among many companies over invention and production rights finally resulted in the formation in 1901 of the Eldridge Johnson’s Victor Talking Machine Company. By 1909, 15,000 Victrolas had been sold nationally. As innovations allowed the price to decrease, sales soared to more than 500,000 Victrolas sold across the country in 1917. **(12)**

The Victor Talking Machine Company’s field unit, directed by talent scout Ralph Peer (1892-1960), arrived in Nashville in the fall of 1928 and made the first commercial music recordings in the city. Peer had pioneered field recording five years earlier and would in the coming decades change American musical tastes by bringing music that had previously been local or regional to a national audience. While in Nashville, Peer recorded about 70 songs by hillbilly and gospel performers. The first song recorded was “Watermelon Hanging on the Vine” by the Binkley Brothers. DeFord Bailey (1899-1982), the Opry’s first black performer, recorded “Ice Water Blues” and “Davidson County Blues.” Only about half of the records were issued as sales dropped with the onset of the Great Depression. **(13)**

In these years, Nashvillians had increasing opportunities to attend live musical performances. The Ryman Auditorium had earned a reputation as the “Carnegie Hall of the South” for its wide-ranging and sophisticated programming, spearheaded by general manager Lula Naff (1875-1960). The greats of the age, including pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Italian operatic singer Enrico Caruso and conductor John Philip Sousa performed at the Ryman, which also staged operas and old-time music shows. **(14)** Over the next few decades, the Ryman became the city’s primary venue for hosting performances ranging from John Philip Sousa’s band, to Bob Hope, Doris Day, and other entertainers. **(15)**

In 1902, with music firmly established in the city’s culture, Nashville became the second city in the country to organize a musicians’ union. The Nashville Association of Musicians, Local No. 257 of the American Federation of Musicians, was chartered in December 1902. **(16)** This musician’s union opened a new Union Hall on Division Street near Music Row in 1955. (In 2015, the association continues to operate as Nashville Musicians Association, AFM Local 257, with offices on Music Row.)

Nashville’s first million-dollar hotel, the elegant Hermitage Hotel (NRHP, 1975), opened downtown in 1910. A major attraction was the Francis Craig Orchestra, a “Big Band” which entertained guests from 1929 to 1945. Craig’s orchestra was also the first to broadcast over WSM radio and enjoyed phenomenal success with a 12-year show that was aired over the entire NBC radio network. In 1949, Craig introduced newcomer Dinah Shore (1916-1994), who entertained the Hermitage Hotel audience with a new song entitled, “Near You.” **(17)**

In 1920, a group of amateur and professional musicians formed an orchestral ensemble. The group continued to perform until it disbanded with the onset of the Great Depression. Nashville was without a symphony until World War II veteran and Nashville native Walter Sharp rallied community leaders to found the Nashville Symphony in 1946. **(18)**

In 1922, WDDA became Nashville’s first radio station when 16-year old John “Jack” DeWitt, Jr., a high school student, installed a twenty-watt transmitter at Ward-Belmont School (now Belmont University). The station’s location was an interesting coincidence, given its proximity adjacent to the area that would one day become Music Row. After a year of broadcasting, the college discontinued the radio station due to operating costs. **(19)**

Nashville Creates New Sounds from Old-Time Music

During the early decades of the twentieth century, residents enthusiastically embraced upscale music from Enrico Caruso, a popular Italian operatic tenor, to the introduction of what would become known as Big Band music to the soaring sounds of the city’s own symphony.

At the same time, another genre of music was emerging that was to have a much larger long-term impact on Nashville’s economy and identity – country music.

According to Dr. Charles Wolfe, (Professor of English, Middle Tennessee State University, 1970-2005):

“Though the term ‘country music’ did not come into general use until the late 1940s, the commercialization of Anglo-American folk music had been underway since the early 1920s. During that decade the traditional singing, fiddling, and banjo playing that had been endemic throughout the South gained access to the new mass media such as radio, the phonograph record, and mass-produced songbooks. The result was a new commercial art form, as well as a new class of professional and semiprofessional

entertainers, one that was in many ways centered in Tennessee. Called variously "old time music," "old Southern tunes," "hill country tunes," "native American melodies," and "hillbilly music," this new hybrid music was as much folk as it was commercial." (1)

As radio and records gained popularity, enterprising entrepreneurs began recording and broadcasting fiddlers and singers of traditional rural music, greatly increasing the audience throughout the South and Midwest in 1920s. Although the first "radio barn dance" was broadcast from Dallas, Texas, in 1923, it was WSM radio in downtown Nashville that reached a national audience with its "WSM Barn Dance," which began in 1925 and was assigned a clear channel across the country in 1928. (2)

NBC's national radio distribution of the Opry established Nashville as a leader in country music. This success spurred growth in Nashville's entertainment industry, attracting musicians, producers, publishers, and others to the city. (3) The type of music presented expanded as well, with performers like Roy Acuff (1903-1992) beginning to offer their own original music and entertainment beyond the traditional old-time music from the Opry's early days.

Acuff became the first real star of the Opry in the early 1940s and is often referred to as the King of Country Music. Acuff struck gold on the Opry with a February 1938 rendition of "The Great Speckled Bird" which he had recorded in 1936. Acuff's "Wabash Cannonball," also recorded in 1936, would become his signature song. Acuff capitalized on his success throughout the 1940s as a headliner on the "Prince Albert Show," the half hour of the Opry that aired on the NBC radio network, selling songbooks, giving concerts and appearing in films and, in 1942, forming Nashville's first country music publishing company, Acuff-Rose Publications, with songwriter Fred Rose (1898-1954). In the 1940s, Acuff-Rose opened a publishing house in a Franklin Road shopping center, which was replaced with a modern recording studio, publishing house, and record distribution center in 1967. (4)

Acuff later recalled how events unfolded:

"When I first came here, I began to realize the value of a song. I found out that some of the little simple songs that I wrote back in those days, why they'd come in here from New York and Chicago, California, and offered me \$1,000-\$1,200 for a song. I thought 'my goodness is a song worth that much now?' So just kept my songs, I wouldn't sell 'em."

Acuff did, however, decide to find a way to sell his songs himself, buying time on WSM radio to sell his songbooks for 25 cents. Acuff explained what happened next:

"That was on a Saturday night. By Wednesday it scared WSM so bad they hired six girls to come out and get my mail and open it and take the quarters out. It was ten thousand letters the first week, and quarters. That's how I accumulated enough money to start the music publishing business. When I invested \$25,000 in Acuff-Rose Publications that was a whole lot of money back then for a young man to have. But I didn't think I'd lose it. I wasn't afraid. I had faith in the songs." (5)

One of the Opry's most original characters – and one who would delight audiences for more than 50 years – was Minnie Pearl, the creation of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon (1912-1996). The character was "the quintessential small-town spinster, preoccupied with chasing men and gossiping about her family and neighbors in the mythical town of Grinder's Switch." (6) After being discovered by WSM executives,

Minnie Pearl appeared on the Grand Ole Opry for the first time in November 1940. She quickly became a member of the cast and in 1942 she was featured on the “Prince Albert Show.”

The popularity of the radio show which had been named the “Grand Ole Opry” created the need for a place to host the live show in front of an audience. The Opry moved to several locations, including the Hillsboro Theater near Vanderbilt University, the Dixie Tabernacle in East Nashville and War Memorial Auditorium in downtown Nashville, before settling downtown at the Ryman Auditorium in 1943, the place it would call home for the next 41 years.

New Music Businesses and Stars Emerge

The growing interest in country music during these years led to the formation of Nashville’s first country music publishing company and the first all-country music store.

Acuff-Rose Publications, founded by Roy Acuff and Fred Rose in 1942, enjoyed immediate success with hits by various artists. In 1948 the company signed its most significant songwriter and artist, Hank Williams (1923-1953):

“On April 12, 1948, Hank Williams signed his first exclusive contract with Acuff-Rose Publications. This date is a memorable one in the annals of American music for it gives a historical perspective to the close association between Williams, the untutored country boy with a fantastically rich vein of talent, and Fred Rose, the peerless professional songwriter and co-founder, with Roy Acuff, of Acuff-Rose Publications. In the opinion of many, the Williams-Rose association produced the richest vein of country material; and discerning students of the songwriting field have always felt that the association was particularly fortunate in that it enabled Williams to have at his disposal the knowledge of one of the greatest song doctors in the music business.” (1)

Williams joined the Grand Ole Opry in 1949 and went on to have major country hits including “Your Cheatin’ Heart,” and “Cold, Cold Heart,” that were also successes by pop artists including Tony Bennett. In addition to publishing hits by Williams and others, Acuff-Rose held the copyrights for such songs as “Tennessee Waltz” and “Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy.”

Also building on his success as a Grand Ole Opry star was Ernest Tubb (1914-1984). Opening the first all-country music store in 1947, the Ernest Tubb Record Shop in downtown Nashville, Tubb began what became an institution, *The Midnight Jamboree*. Broadcast after the Grand Ole Opry, the jamboree gave young singers a showcase for their talents. The Ernest Tubb Record Shop (NRHP, 1980) has operated from its current location at 417 Broadway since 1951. (2)

Music Recording and Record Labels Come to Nashville

For all of the popularity of live music performance and radio broadcasting, it was not until after World War II that recording became a part of Nashville’s music equation. However, once recording started it quickly became a busy enterprise as independent labels issued more than 1,500 records between 1946 and 1955:

“Depending on your definition, some 35 percent of these were folk, hillbilly or western music – country music, as it was becoming known. About 25 percent were popular, dance-band, or jazz music. Another 25 percent were gospel music, and around 15 percent were blues or R&B.” (1)

Eddy Arnold (1918-2008) is credited with singing in Nashville's first recorded session at WSM radio station's studio. Arnold had been a member of Pee Wee King's Golden West Cowboys before striking out on his own in 1943 and performing on WSM and the Opry. Arnold agreed to record for RCA Victor and in December of 1944, Arnold and the Tennessee Plowboys recorded four songs at WSM's Studio B: "Mommy Please Stay Home with Me," "Mother's Prayer," "Each Minute Seems a Million Years" and "Cattle Call." (2)

Although Arnold made the first music recordings in a radio station studio, according to music historian Don Cusic:

"The real beginning of Nashville recording studios came in 1946, when three WSM engineers, Aaron Shelton, George Reynolds and Carl Jenkins, launched Castle Recording Studio. Castle initially used the WSM studios before setting up a studio at Tulane Hotel in 1947....Decca's Paul Cohen became the first A&R man to record regularly in Nashville. He recorded Ernest Tubb and Red Foley in August 1947. The same year, the Nashville studio had its first 'million seller' when the Francis Craig Orchestra recorded "Near You" at the Ryman Auditorium. The song became the theme song of Milton Berle's 'Texaco Theater' show. In addition to Castle Studios, the Brown Brothers Transcription Service and Thomas Productions also did recording sessions." (3)

Record label executives saw the opportunity presented by the city that now offered everything needed for success – a growing roster of popular artists, songwriters, musicians, and a music recording studio. Record labels including Mercury, Capitol, RCA Victor Records, Columbia, and Decca opened offices in Nashville. From 1946 to 1956 the Castle Recording Studio, located downtown in the former dining room of the Tulane Hotel, recorded for all of the major labels except RCA. (4)

Additionally, in the early 1950s, other music recording studios and labels were forming. Known as "indies," these start-up businesses were independent of the major record labels. Most operated for a decade or less. The *Nashville City Directory* listings in the early 1950s included Reavis Recording Studio on Church Street, Eagle Recording Company on 4th Avenue North, Republic Recording Company on Allison Street, and Theater Recording Company on 8th Avenue South. By the late 1950s, listings had increased to include American Music Development Syndicate in the Exchange Building, Fidelity Recordings in the S. Friedman Building at 420A Broadway (NRHP, 1980), Globe Recording Studio on Commerce Street, Greenhouse Recording Studio on 17th Avenue South, and Nashboro Record Company on 3rd Avenue North.

The first record label in Nashville was not a nationally known label but a homegrown enterprise started by former WSM radio announcer and promotion agent Jim Bulleit (1908-1988) with business partner C.V. Hitchcock, owner of Hermitage Music & Novelty Company which sold jukeboxes and records at 421-423 Broadway (NRHP, 1980). On April 25, 1946, The Bullet Recording and Transcription Company incorporated:

"to carry on the business of manufacturing or causing phonograph records and transcriptions to be manufactured and to distribute the same, to acquire other similar businesses, to enter into contracts, to borrow money, and to do everything necessary for the purposes of the corporation provided that it is not forbidden by the laws of the State of Tennessee." (5)

Although the company's name was similar to the owner's, the Bullet name had been dreamed up by gospel singer Wally Fowler (1917-1994) who convinced Bulleit to get into the recording business. Although the idea was Fowler's, when the time came to start the business he did not become one of the owners.

The first recording sessions for Bullet Records were made at the end of 1945 at WSM's Studio B, but the company's first minor hit would come in 1946. The release of "Wave to Me My Lady," by Brad Brady (actually Owen Bradley) and His Tennesseans featured "Zeb's Mountain Boogie" on the other side. It soon became obvious that "Zeb's" was driving sales for play on juke boxes, leading to a relaunch under Owen Bradley's name.

The success of this record led to Bulleit's embrace of "hillbilly" music, even as he expanded into issuing white gospel and blues records. By the summer of 1946, a *Billboard* magazine advertisement declared "Bullet records more Grand Ole Opry stars than any other company in America" and advised "Mr. Distributor Get on the Bullet Bandwagon."

For almost a decade, in addition to making country music records by Chet Atkins, Minnie Pearl, Pee Wee King and others, the label also produced songs from a wide range of musical genres including gospel, R&B and pop. Bullet Record's biggest success came in 1947 when "Near You," by the Francis Craig Orchestra sold more than two million copies.

Gospel music became an important part of the company's offerings with records by white and black gospel singers. Bullet's white gospel series included popular singers like the Goodman Family, the Speer Family, the Rangers, and others.

In 1946, The Fairfield Four became the first black gospel group to record on the Bullet label. The group had formed in the 1920s at Nashville's Fairfield Baptist Church and by the 1940s had gained national stature, performing on WSIX and WLAC. Among the songs recorded for the Bullet label were "Don't You Want to Join that Number," in 1946 and "Standing in the Safety Zone" in 1947 before the group moved to Dot Records in 1950. **(6)**

In the 1950s, the number of music publisher listings was growing as well with the *Nashville City Directory* listing ABCO Music Company at 1707 Division (DV.00003), Hand Music Enterprises on Church Street, Hi Lo Music Inc. on 7th Avenue North, Silver Star Music Publishing Company on Church Street, Tree Publishing on 7th Avenue, Silver Star Music Publishing Company on Church Street, Tanner Music Inc. on 17th Avenue North, Recording Publishing Company on 4th Avenue North, and Milene Music, Melody Trails, Inc. and Acuff-Rose Publication, all on Franklin Road. **(7)**

A map showing Nashville from 1945-1955 plots locations of music-related businesses including studios, record labels, radio broadcast stations, and music retail stores. Although some businesses moved to new locations in these years, the map confirms that downtown Nashville was the center of the music industry with only a few in the area that would become Music Row or in outlying areas such as Dot Records location in Gallatin, about 30 miles northeast of Nashville. **(8)**

During these years, two of the most important people in the history of country music – and of Music Row – headed the country divisions of major labels: Owen Bradley at Decca and Chet Atkins (1924-2001) at RCA Victor Records.

Multi-talented Owen Bradley began working at WSM radio in 1935 and made a name for himself in Nashville when he started a dance band, The Owen Bradley Orchestra, in 1940. By 1947, Bradley's talents had been noticed by Paul Cohen (1908-1970), head of the country division of Decca Records, who hired Bradley as a producer. In 1958, Bradley opened Decca Records' Nashville office and became its vice president. He would continue in this position for almost 20 years, through the mid-1960s merger of Decca and MCA Records. During these years, Bradley produced a "who's who" of country music including Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty, Kitty Wells, Brenda Lee, and Patsy Cline. (9)

Starting as a fiddle and guitar player in the early 1940s, Chet Atkins made the rounds at radio stations in Knoxville, Cincinnati, Raleigh, and Chicago before coming to Nashville to record his first solo record "Guitar Blues" for the local Bullet label. After signing with RCA Victor as a singer and guitarist in 1947, Atkins returned to WNOX radio in Knoxville to become lead guitarist for the Carter Sisters, a job that would bring him to Nashville in 1950 when the singers joined the Opry. Atkins was on the "A-Team" of musicians for several years. In 1957, Atkins was named manager of RCA's new Nashville studio and eventually became vice president of the record label. (10)

Nashville Becomes Music City USA

In 1950, a spontaneous remark by WSM announcer David Cobb (1912-1988) – declaring Nashville is "Music City USA" – is credited with giving the city its enduring nickname. Cobb later described what happened as he introduced "The Red Foley Show" to radio listeners:

"One morning, for no good reason, I changed my introduction a bit. I don't know where it came from: 'From Music City USA, Nashville, Tennessee, the National Broadcasting Company brings you 'The Red Foley Show'!" (1)

Country music historian Craig Havighurst explains that Cobb wasn't just referring to the new country music industry. He was thinking about all that Nashville had to offer in the way of music:

"When announcer David Cobb ad-libbed the slogan on the air in 1950, he wasn't talking about country music per se or the country music business, because there scarcely was such a thing in Nashville at the time. Instead, from his fifth-floor perch at this Southern radio powerhouse, Cobb surveyed a remarkable music scene. It was diverse, sophisticated and commercially viable – undeveloped, perhaps, but rich in local talent and nationally relevant at the same time. To be sure, country music was enjoying its first great nationwide heyday, with an astonishing cast of legends at work, including Hank Williams at the top of his game. And a new, jazz-influenced offshoot of country that would become known as bluegrass was in full blaze. But Cobb would also have told you about WSM maestro Francis Craig, whose 'Near You' had been the top pop record of 1947, or Pee Wee King, a Polish American Grand Ole Opry star from Milwaukee, whose song "Tennessee Waltz" would soon become a smash for pop singer Patti Page." (2)

The name caught on quickly. In the summer of 1950, Dick Stratton and the Nite Owls released a song called "Music City U.S.A." on the Dixie Jamboree label, founded that year as a subsidiary of the Tennessee Label located in downtown Nashville. Stratton was a singer who also played bass, fiddle and guitar, leading the house band on the radio barn dance "Hayloft Jamboree." Stratton, along with singers and co-writers Bill Beasley and Ray Anderson, declared Nashville as Music City U.S.A. with lyrics including:

*Everybody gather 'round and listen to me
While I tell you about a city down in Tennessee...*

*They come from near and they come from far
To hear an old bass fiddle and a steel guitar
They play hillbilly music every day
Down in Music City U.S.A.*

*You can hear them on your radio, wherever you are,
Everybody jumping to the solid beat, of a guitar pickin' out an eight to the bar*

*If you're living in some distant town,
Brother, pack your bags and come right on down
They used to call it Nashville
But I'm here to say that now
We call it Music City U.S.A.*

A terse review in *Billboard* judged the song as a “danceable side but lyrically limited to Nashville patriots.” **(3)**

The name also caught on with local businesses. In 1955, the *Nashville City Directory* listed the Music City Songcrafters on 4th Avenue North. By 1958, this organization was listed at 1011 16th Avenue South becoming an early resident of what was to become Music Row. **(4)**

The Beginning of Music Row

If the name Music City U.S.A. was well known by the mid-1950s, it would not be long before a place-name, Music Row, would become equally well known. Owen and Harold Bradley's selection of an old house on 16th Avenue would put in motion development of the area as the center of the music industry known nationally and internationally within a decade as Music Row.

But what was it about this area, once a fashionable residential neighborhood, which drew the Bradleys and other businesses to it in the 1950s?

Nineteenth Century Nashville: Birth of a Fashionable New Neighborhood

In 1827, Judge Oliver Bliss Hayes (1783-1858) purchased a federal-style house at 1908 Grand Avenue called Rokeby and 50½ acres and continued to add more land including the open fields that would one day become Music Row. (The house was razed in the mid-twentieth century and is now the site of The Upper Room in the United Methodist Center.) Records indicate that in 1849, Adelia Hayes Franklin Acklen (1817-1887), a daughter of Judge Hayes who had been widowed and recently remarried, purchased property including a 65½ acre tract that would eventually become the setting for her magnificent Belmont Mansion (NRHP, 1971). This land was near her childhood home, Rokeby, which Adelia's sister inherited. Two other siblings lived on estates nearby. In 1849, Adelia and her husband Joseph began construction of Belmont as a summer villa while they continued to live downtown. Soon, the Acklens made Belmont their primary residence. Constructed in a grand Italianate style, the estate became a show place and the center of Nashville society for more than three decades. **(1)**

Upon Judge Hayes' death in 1858, his will left his land to three of his children. In his will, Hayes explained that because Adelia was already a woman of “ample means” it was her wish that her share

of the estate be bequeathed to her siblings. This meant that the three Hayes siblings now owned parcels of land adjacent to Belmont Mansion. In the years after the Civil War, Adelia would buy various parcels to aid her siblings as they encountered financial difficulty. In 1871, the property began to be sold and subdivided, and over the next 30 years homes were built, creating what became a fashionable streetcar suburb west of downtown. **(2)**

The timing of these land sales was fortunate as Nashville's population and prosperity were increasing rapidly. Nashville's population almost tripled from 1880, when there were 43,350 residents, to 1920 when the city's population had grown to 118,342. **(3)**

The population had begun moving to the west of downtown, and the establishment of Vanderbilt University in 1873 made the surrounding area the fastest growing residential area in the city. The opening of Belmont College in 1890 on the former estate of Adelia Acklen increased the area's prestige for upper class Nashville residents. By 1913, Belmont had merged with Ward Seminary for Young Ladies, which had been founded in 1865 in downtown Nashville, to become Ward-Belmont College, a school for young women from affluent families; the school retained this name until 1951.

At the northern end of the neighborhood, the houses were "opulent two and three-story Victorian mansions, set back from the street, each enclosed inside wrought (cast) iron fences. **(4)** In 1911, a tent revival took place on grounds next to a gravel road that would one day become Music Row. By 1915, members of the brotherhood of the Churches of Christ built a chapel to house the Belmont Avenue Church of Christ. (Several decades later, the church became the non-denominational Belmont Church.) **(5)**

Although mule-drawn street cars had been around since 1865, the arrival of an electric-powered public transit system in 1889 made expansion of neighborhoods outside the downtown core possible. Historian Don Doyle notes "The major thrust of suburban expansion in the electric trolley car era was to the west." **(6)** The importance of accessibility created by street cars is reflected in an 1890 advertisement for Belmont College which notes "Classes are scheduled to accommodate the street car line," which traveled down what would become 16th Avenue.

It was also around this time Belmont and Addison Streets got their new names. A 1904 city ordinance changed the names of streets running north and south and lying west of the Cumberland River to numbered avenues. Thus, Belmont became 16th Avenue South and Addison became 17th Avenue South. **(7)** The transition to new street names evidently took several years. The 1908 *Atlas of the City of Nashville* still shows the streets listed as Addison and Belmont. Other original street names and their current names include: Corrine Street (20th Avenue South); Laura Street (19th Avenue South) and Lamar Street (18th Avenue South). **(8)**

The earliest known photograph of 16th Avenue South, taken circa 1906, captures these descriptions: large elegant homes line the street, a horse and carriage waits in front of one house, electric power lines are strung overhead and streetcar rails run down the middle of the street.

In the 1920s, Nashville's population continued to grow; by 1930 there were 153,866 residents. This growth, and the increased use of automobiles making it easier to get around town, spurred continual construction including more residential homes in the southern portion of 16th and 17th Avenues. Home styles, while not as grand as those at the other end of the neighborhood, included American Foursquare, Craftsman, Bungalow, and Tudor Revival. **(9)**

A Neighborhood in Transition

Although there was still some construction in the area in the 1930s, the arrival of the Great Depression brought a halt to Nashville's sustained growth. The onset of World War II once again energized the city's economy and in the years that followed, the city's development processes changed dramatically. As with many cities across the country, government became a central player in determining how Nashville would develop. The neighborhood that would become Music Row would be directly impacted by the government's involvement in city planning.

After World War II, a newly-formed Nashville Planning Commission determined that neighborhoods nearest the downtown business district and the city's industrial areas would be zoned to allow commercial and industrial development, perhaps foreshadowing the city's enthusiastic embrace of urban renewal in the 1960s. **(1)**

This decision, coupled with the sudden demand for housing after the end of the war, prompted the growth of suburban neighborhoods further from the city center and the subsequent decline of previously fashionable neighborhoods like the area that would become Music Row.

From Streetcar Suburb to Record Row

By the mid-1950s, with residents moving further from downtown and city zoning policies allowing commercial development in once primarily residential neighborhoods meant that 16th and 17th Avenues had the key qualities Owen and Harold Bradley were looking for: property close to downtown that was not expensive.

What the Bradleys found was a neighborhood in transition with young college students living along the western edges and African-American families living along the eastern edges in the adjacent Edgehill neighborhood. In the center, large houses were being converted into rental apartments and rooming houses. Division and Demonbreun Streets along the northern edge were being converted into commercial corridors. The area at the southern end continued to be occupied primarily by white middle-class families. The neighborhood included service stations and several corner grocery and drug stores. The once fashionable neighborhood was now more diverse, blue-collar, and eclectic. The housing was a little more rundown and rough-around-the-edges, a neighborhood many would characterize as on the decline. **(1)**

There had even been an early attempt at music publishing in the area. In 1953, Mrs. A. Lettie Sweeney, a former restaurant cook, opened Belmont Records in her home at 1110 Sixteenth Avenue South. The short-lived company only issued three records:

"One pairs the white gospel Victory Quartet with Lonnie Hooberry narrating 'The Christ Child's Story.' The other two records both feature Jesse Harrison's forgettable pop-country recording of 'Someone New,' backed on one disc by Bill Cooper, and on the other disc by 'The Smoke House,' recorded by Liza Lee, who was sometimes billed herself as 'Nashville's only woman undertaker.'" **(2)**

This early effort notwithstanding, it is with the Bradley brothers that the story of what would become known as Music Row begins. As previously discussed, Owen Bradley made a name for himself in the 1940s with his orchestra and his work as a record producer for Decca's country music division.

Harold Bradley acted on his older brother Owen's suggestion that he learn to play guitar – a decision that eventually led to his recognition as the "Dean of Nashville Session Guitarists." By 1943 he was playing lead guitar for Ernest Tubb's Texas Troubadours. After his service in World War II, he played on his first recording session in Chicago, Pee Wee King's "Golden West Cowboys." Back in Nashville, Harold Bradley quickly found himself in demand in studio recording sessions, playing on songs such as Red Foley's 1950 hit "Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy." (3)

Since the early 1950s, the brothers had operated Bradley's Film Studio, first near downtown and then in Hillsboro Village. In 1954, in an effort to keep Decca Records from moving its country music headquarters to Dallas, the Bradleys paid \$7,500 for a two-story residence at 804 16th Avenue South. They renovated the Victorian-era house into a recording studio, the first of dozens such renovations on Music Row that continue to the present. Harold Bradley recalled this time in an interview with music historian Michael Kosser:

"They (Owen and the real estate agent) drove down 16th (Avenue) here, and then they drove on out behind Belmont College, and Owen said 'Let's go back to the other section back there.' The house had a couple of nice columns out front, which we got rid of....The house had a long concrete front porch. When you walked in there was an office on the right. To the left, at the end of the office, was a door. You went in that door and made an immediate right, then down the steps into the basement. Owen had knocked out most of the middle floor, so that the basement studio was a small studio, but it had a high ceiling. When we were recording, when you added the basic rhythm section – Boots Randolph and the Anita Kerr Singers or the Jordanaires – you didn't have the isolation, and the music would start bleeding in the singer's mic." (4)

For another \$7,500 they bought a Quonset Hut kit and had it assembled beside the house to create a 78-foot by 35-foot metal wing and outfitted it for an expanded operation. The original intention was to use the Quonset Hut for video production since television was coming into its own. Some filming did occur in the space, but the demand for audio recording facilities resulted in renovations to the Quonset Hut to make it suitable for music recording. Combination film and music recording studios such as this were common in Hollywood, California, the center of the American movie industry.

Opening in 1955 as Music City Recordings, the modest recording complex's name was soon changed to Bradleys Film and Recording Studio. (5) The recording business boomed for the Bradleys with hits like Patsy Cline's "Crazy" and "I Fall to Pieces," Brenda Lee's "I'm Sorry," Bobby Vinton's "Blue Velvet," Marty Robbins' "El Paso," and Johnny Horton's "Battle of New Orleans."

By the early 1960s, some 700 sessions were recorded at the studio each year and other music businesses were finding their way to the district. In 1962, Columbia Records bought the Quonset Hut recording studio and continued to use it until 1982. Columbia demolished the house in 1965 and expanded the Quonset Hut with a three-story wing housing a new studio and offices. (6)

More Music Businesses Move to the Neighborhood

In 1955, the Nashville Association of Musicians (NAM), Local 257 of the American Federation of Musicians, constructed a new union hall on Division Street, only a couple of blocks from the Bradley brother's Quonset Hut. NAM had expanded tremendously in the early 1950s, when African American musicians were first accepted as members under the leadership of bass player George Cooper. In fact,

NAM had integrated in 1950, years before other institutions in Nashville. By 1960, the modern union hall on Division Street was serving more than 700 members (Hawkins, 2006: 4).

In 1957, RCA Records constructed a new concrete block building on the corner of 17th Avenue South and Hawkins Street (later renamed Music Circle South), just a block away from the Bradleys' Quonset Hut, for a new recording studio. Later known as RCA Studio B, this building was the first modern purpose-built music recording studio in Nashville. Historical records confirm the pivotal role this studio, headed by Chet Atkins, played in enlarging Nashville's music recording industry:

"Between 1957 and 1977, RCA Studio B hosted approximately 35,000 recording sessions embracing locally based and visiting artists in many musical genres: country, bluegrass, country-pop, rockabilly, rock 'n roll, pop, jazz and gospel. Here, top-flight recording artists, studio musicians and background singers, producers, arrangers and engineers created more than a thousand hits. Performers included RCA acts such as Don Gibson, the Browns, Elvis Presley, Al Hirt, Dolly Parton and Waylon Jennings, as well as artists on other labels, such as Roy Orbison (Monument), the Everly Brothers (Cadence, Warner Bros.), and Connie Francis (MGM)." (1)

The success of the Phil (1939-2014) and Don (b. 1937) Everly in the late 1950s became a national sensation and blurred the lines between country and pop music – a success that could largely be attributed to songwriters Felice Bryant (1925-2003), born Matilda Genevieve Scaduto, and her husband Boudleaux Bryant (1920-1987).

The Bryants were Nashville's first full-time professional songwriters, devoting their talents to writing and pitching their songs to a wide array of artists. Boudleaux Bryant was a classically trained violinist and Felice Bryant had written poetry from her youth. This blend of musical and lyrical talent proved to be an enduring combination. Their son, Dane Bryant, explains:

"They were the perfect team. They wrote the words and the music. It fell out normally about the same time. And that's what they did for fun. That's what made my momma happy. And I asked my father one time, 'How would you divide this?' He said, 'Well I don't know, maybe think about your Mom as the idea man. And I come up and polish it. And Mom even made comments that Dad could polish a song and make it where everything worked and it was finished.'" (2)

In 1948, as so often happens in the music business, the Bryants made a music industry connection through a friend-of-a-friend. Their friend, recording artist Rome Johnson (1916-1993), made a call to Fred Rose in Nashville and pitched the Bryants' song "Country Boy." Rose had Opry star Little Jimmy Dickens (1920-2015) cut the song which became a hit, and more important, established a connection to Rose. In 1949, the Bryants began writing for Acuff-Rose Publishing, and Boudleaux also became a song plugger for Tannen Music.

In 1950, the Bryants moved from Georgia to Nashville. They initially lived at the Rainbow Inn trailer park on Dickerson Pike, where many of their songs were written. Although Boudleaux quickly became friends with artists on the Grand Ole Opry which led to recording session work and the pair also recorded several songs themselves, the Bryants decided to concentrate on songwriting and:

“...within a few years they were known all over the world as writers and had become Nashville’s first professional songwriters – the first writers in town who made a living as full-time writers, writing songs for other people to record, rather than as writer-performers.” (3)

Within the next few years, Jimmy Dickens cut six of the Bryants’ songs and Carl Smith (1927-2010) cut five songs including “Hey, Joe,” a No. 1 country hit that was also the Bryants first crossover hit when it was recorded by Frankie Laine (1913-2007). Other country successes were Eddy Arnold’s (1918-2008) “How’s the World Treating You,” “Christmas Can’t Be Far Away,” “I’ve Been Thinking,” and “The Richest Man in the World.” Boudelaux also wrote with Chet Atkins with Atkins recording instrumentals including “Fig Leaf Rag,” “Downhill Drag,” and “Country Gentleman.”

After Fred Rose’s untimely death in 1954, the Bryants began working with his son, Wesley Rose (1918-1990), signing an exclusive publishing agreement with Acuff-Rose. It was here they encountered the teen-age duo, the Everly Brothers. Phil and Don Everly had been struggling to become a success, and even with help from Chet Atkins they had not scored any hits and were ready to give up. At Acuff-Rose, the Everlys were given Felice and Boudelaux’s song “Bye Bye Love” which they recorded in RCA Studio B on March 1, 1957. Within weeks, the song was a smash country hit, scoring No. 1 on *Billboard*’s country singles chart and also crossing over as a top pop hit.

The success started an enduring relationship; in all the Everly Brothers would record 28 songs written by the Bryants including the classics “Wake Up, Little Susie,” “Bye Bye Love,” “All I Have to Do Is Dream,” “Bird Dog,” “Devoted to You,” “Take a Message to Mary,” and “Sleepless Nights.”

The Bryants would continue to reign as Nashville’s top professional songwriters for several decades, with some 900 songs recorded by dozens of artists as diverse as Roy Orbison, Lynn Anderson, Tony Orlando, Elvis Presley, Linda Ronstadt, Chet Atkins, Dottie West, Charley Pride, The Judds, and many others. “Rocky Top,” a song written by the Bryants in a Gatlinburg hotel room in 1967 and performed by numerous artists, would become forever affiliated with the University of Tennessee’s athletic teams after it was played during a football game between Tennessee and the University of Alabama in 1972. “Rocky Top” was named one of Tennessee’s official state songs in 1982.

These early successes began to attract more business to the Music Row area and by 1961 music businesses included Bradley Film and Recording Studio, Cedarwood Publishing Company (DV.00069), Atlas Artists Bureau (booking), and RCA’s offices at Studio B.

Cedarwood Publishing Company was started in 1953 by Jim Denny (1911-1963), Grand Ole Opry artist services manager, and Webb Pierce (1921-1991), a popular country artist. After being told by Opry management to discontinue his outside business, Denny quit and formed his own artist bureau in addition to Cedarwood Publishing. The combination was a success with many artists recording songs published by Cedarwood including Webb Pierce, Kitty Wells and Hank Snow. The company’s move to 16th Avenue South across from the Quonset Hut was another step in the development of Music Row. (4)

In 1962, Decca Records joined the music-business mix by opening a Nashville office at 805 16th Avenue South (29 Music Square East). Established in New York City in 1934, Decca executives (and brothers) Jack (1901-1949) and Dave (1904-1976) Kapp showcased many country artists in the early days of recording music for their “hillbilly” division – later changed to “country music division.” Artists included the Carter family, Ernest Tubb and Red Foley (1920-1968). By the 1940s, Paul Cohen was in charge and recording

artists including Bill Monroe (1911-1996), Webb Pierce and Brenda Lee (b. 1944). In 1958, Cohen turned over the job to Owen Bradley and the Bradleys' studio became Decca's Nashville office. In June of 1962, Music Corporation of American (MCA) purchased the majority of Decca's stock and Decca became a division of MCA in 1966. (5)

Billboard Music Week reported the 1962 opening of Decca's Nashville office in its August 18 edition, identifying the modern new building in the picture caption as "Decca Records' sleek and shiny new permanent headquarters in Nashville." The article noted that the occasion was "sparked by elaborate opening day ceremonies." The article goes on to state:

"In charge of Decca's new offices here is A&R chief Owen Bradley, assisted by Harry Silverstein who oversees Decca promotion for the area. The same building now houses branch offices of Decca's two publishing firms, Northern and Champion Music....

"Many of the firm's earliest country names are still active today and still selling lots of records. They include Ernest Tubb, Kitty Wells, Red Foley, Webb Pierce, Bill Monroe and Jimmy Davis. Newer artists who have made a name on the Decca label include the Wilburn Brothers, Goldie Hill, Bobby Helms, Roy Drusky, Jimmy Martin, Grady Martin, Bob Beckham, Loretta Lynn and Connie Hall. A number of Decca's top talents only record in Nashville. Burl Ives, Brenda Lee and Patsy Cline all cut their recent string of hits in this city." (6)

Another significant move to Music Row was Tree Publishing in 1964. The company got its start in 1951 when media executive Lou Cowan offered to back Jack Stapp, an executive with WSM radio and the Grand Ole Opry, in a music publishing business. The company had a slow start until 1954, when Stapp hired 21-year-old Buddy Killen (1932-2006) for \$35 a week.

Starting out as a bass player in northern Alabama, Killen made his way to Nashville after graduating from high school in 1950. After a short stint on radio in Wheeling, West Virginia, Killen came back to Nashville where Stapp hired him to sign songs and songwriters and to pitch songs to artists for Tree Publishing. (7)

Killen energetically began to canvas the city for songs. Within a few months, Tree had its first cut with "By the Law of My Heart" by fiddle player and singer Benny Martin (1928-2001). A short time later, Tree had its first No. 1 hit with "Yonder Comes a Sucker" by Jim Reeves (1923-1964).

The year 1955 proved to be a turning point both for Tree Publishing and Killen. While playing at a club in Daytona Beach, Florida, Killen saw Mae Boren Axton, a music business friend. Axton gave him a song she and Tommy Durden had written for Elvis Presley (1935-1977). In January 1956, Elvis cut "Heartbreak Hotel" at RCA Studio B on Music Row. What followed was extraordinary – not only did the song make Elvis a major star, it put the fledgling Tree Publishing on the map.

More successes followed for Tree with artists like Roger Miller (1936-1992) who wrote "Half a Mind," recorded by Ernest Tubb, "Invitation to the Blues," for Ray Price (1926-2013), and "When Two Worlds Collide" by Jim Reeves (1923-1964). Bill Anderson (b. 1937) was another artist who wanted to be a singer and songwriter. Killen agreed to a joint deal to allow Anderson to record at Decca and to share publishing between the two companies. The deal paid off with numerous hits including "That's What It's Like to Be Lonesome," and "Mama Sang a Song."

By 1964, several events had occurred that would shape Tree's future – Stapp had redirected his energies to managing a radio station leaving Killen in charge of Tree, the company had its first million dollar year in 1963, and in 1964, Tree's offices were moved to a renovated two-story house at 905 16th Avenue South (DV.00073). **(8)**

The Early 1960s - Record Row Takes Shape

By 1964, 16th and 17th Avenues had begun to fill with music-related businesses, and the area had become known as Record Row. Businesses included RCA, Columbia, Decca, Capitol, and ABC-Paramount record labels; Cedarwood, Hill & Range, Tree, Al Gallico, Moss-Rose and New Keys music publishers; Wilhem and Hubert Long talent agencies, and BMI and SESAC, performing rights organizations. **(1)**

In 1962, Columbia Records bought the Bradley brothers' Quonset Hut studio for \$300,000 and three years later undertook a \$500,000 three-story addition containing offices and another music recording studio. Columbia had been in business since 1889 when the company began selling phonograph players and records. By 1945, Columbia's roster included artists such as Gene Autry and Roy Acuff, and by the early 1950s, its list of artists had grown to include Marty Robbins, Little Jimmy Dickens, and Flatt & Scruggs, among others.

A November 5, 1964, article in *The Nashville Banner* captures the enthusiasm for the growth of Nashville's nascent Record Row:

"A fiscally strong new frontier in Music City's consistent progress is a sector aptly, and unofficially, known as Record Row. It is an approximately four blocks square...functional base for people who produce and provide the Nashville Sound and on whose doors knock the great, the near-great and the would-be-great of the free world's music industry."

The article goes on to describe the success of Record Row:

"Record Row didn't bloom overnight. It grew gradually but healthfully for six years, and then within the past 18 months sprinted into prestige status. Presently it is the address of about 75 firms affiliated with or actually involved in the business of recording, writing, promoting or selling music and the booking of talent. The 75 firms – the figure is an estimate because it is being constantly increased – include ultramodern studios, branch offices of major recording companies and successful talent agencies."

The article also credits the music business with making the area a "real estate bonanza":

"Property has doubled, and in many instances tripled, in value; also price. 'What the music people did for that almost rundown neighborhood is as sensational as some of the tunes they produced,' observed a veteran Nashville real estate broker."

Finally, the article observes that music businesses are now located near each other:

"The juxtaposition prompted a visitor to remark amusingly, 'It sure would be difficult to keep a secret around here.'" **(2)**

A Turning Point: RCA Victor Studio A

In 1964, RCA Victor Studio A was the first building constructed on Music Row to function as a large commercial purpose-built recording studio and as offices for music businesses. By the early 1960s, RCA's Nashville studio head Chet Atkins realized the need for a bigger space than the small recording studio which became known as RCA Studio B. The National Register of Historic Places nomination for RCA Victor Studio A states:

“Atkins wanted the ability to add more sound, more instruments to his sessions...Atkins wanted a studio on par with all of the other major RCA facilities across the world, specifically the new studios planned for Hollywood, California and Rome, Italy.” (1)

Atkins got his wish. After the fanfare of groundbreaking ceremonies featuring local elected officials and RCA recording artists, construction began in July 1964 on a three-story modern building on 17th Avenue that would include a music recording studio and offices. *Billboard* reported on the state-of-the art design of the studio: “The latest electronic equipment, including RCA Victor’s Dynagroove process, will be incorporated into the new operation.” (2)

The music recording studio was everything Atkins hoped for. The large space could accommodate full orchestras and the studio’s outstanding acoustics and sound systems set it apart from other studios.

The building’s office spaces filled quickly with music-related businesses including the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) and others taking up residence. Use of the studio began by the end of 1964 and in early 1965, artists as diverse as Perry Como and Eddy Arnold recorded in the new space before a gala opening was held on March 29, 1965.

In the years that followed, RCA Victor Studio A (as it became known to differentiate from RCA Studio B and Columbia Studio A), recorded a stellar list of artists from all musical genres including Perry Como, Ann-Margaret, Nancy Sinatra, Porter Wagoner, Dottie West, Floyd Cramer and Eddy Arnold. Chet Atkins, whose 1959 album “Mister Guitar” had become his moniker, even found time to make more than a dozen records during the 1960s including both solo records and others made with fellow guitarists like Hank Snow, Jerry Reed, Merle Travis and Les Paul.

The emergence of country music’s first African American star, Charley Pride (b.1938), can also be credited to Chet Atkins and RCA Victor Studio A.

Born to sharecroppers in Mississippi in 1938, Pride grew up listening to the blues and gospel, but was also drawn to country music when he listened to the Grand Ole Opry. Although he taught himself to play guitar by the age of 16 his talents as a baseball player were also becoming evident. After playing for a number of professional teams in the 1950s, he gave up his goal of becoming a major league player.

By the early 1960s, his singing talents emerged as he began performing in nightclubs and honky-tonks. In 1963, Pride directed his ambition to becoming a country music singer and made his way to Nashville. Arriving at Cedarwood Publishing, Pride met Jack Johnson, who coincidentally was looking for an African American country singer. For the next two years, Johnson, with additional help from producer Jack Clement, struggled to help Pride in the racially charged era which resisted the idea of an African-American country singer.

The Official Charley Pride website recounts the turning point:

“But finally in 1966, Chet Atkins decided to trust his ears and signed Charley to RCA Records. Atkins took Charley under his wing, nurtured his talent and oversaw a shrewd promotional campaign that successfully navigated the racial challenges of mid-1960s America. Although Charley's first couple of singles failed to jump-start his career, 'Just Between You and Me' caught fire in 1967, breaking into the Top-10 country chart and garnering Charley his first Grammy nomination. What happened next is country music history. Charley Pride quickly became country music's first African-American superstar.”

(3)

The opening of RCA Victor Studio A was quickly followed by a major announcement by Hill and Range Music Inc. – the \$400,000 purchase of 10 pieces of property, almost an entire block, on 16th Avenue. Founded in New York in 1945, Hill and Range executives – and brothers – Jean and Julian Aberbach were drawn to the opportunities in hillbilly/country music. The music publishing venture had many successes with artists including Ernest Tubb, Red Foley, Eddy Arnold and Johnny Cash.

It was in 1955 that Hill and Range had their biggest success – signing Elvis Presley. With RCA Records owning Presley's recording contract, Hill and Range controlled the singer's publishing. The result was that for almost 20 years, Presley only recorded music licensed to Hill and Range, making the music publishers a major player in the music business.

The announcement of Hill and Range's property acquisition was recounted by *The Nashville Banner's* Television-Radio Editor Red O'Donnell in an October 1, 1965 column:

“It is said to be the largest land-for-money transaction yet on Nashville's so-called Record Row which has been a bullish market place for such type of trading in the past several years. The buyers plan to erect an office building on a portion of the property and retain the remainder for investment purposes. Negotiations for house numbers (16th Avenue) 715, 809, 811, 813, 815 and 819 (there is no 817) have been finalized and contracts for purchases of houses numbered 801, 803, 805 and 821, effective next January 10, have been signed with substantial earnest money posted. The firm now has a branch office in a building at 801 16th Avenue S. ‘We have definite plans, though not yet on paper, for construction of a six-figure (moneywise) office building here,’ explained (Jean) Aberbach.” **(4)** (Note: Construction plans were cancelled in 1970 when a major urban renewal project for Music Row was rejected by the Metro Nashville Council. See the section “The Boulevard: Urban Renewal on Music Row” for more information.)

The Anita Kerr Singers and the Jordanares

The smoothly blended background vocals that defined the Nashville Sound could be credited primarily to two groups – the Anita Kerr Singers and the Jordanares. Although both groups had already achieved success by the mid-1950s, and each would go on to succeed in the music business for decades, their contributions to the creation of the Nashville Sound give them a unique place in the history of country music.

Arriving in Nashville in 1949, Kerr (b. 1927) formed a five-person vocal group. The 1950s were busy - recording with Red Foley, Eddy Arnold and Ernest Tubb, appearing on Jim Reeves' weekly WSM radio show and winning Arthur Godfrey's TV talent show. In 1951, the group signed with Decca as studio backup singers, but in the mid-50s the group had switched to RCA, teaming up with Chet Atkins in the company's country division. By the early 1960s, the Anita Kerr Singers were singing backup on an estimated one-third of records in Nashville's studios in addition to issuing their own records. They appeared on records by Jim Reeves, Roy Orbison, Floyd Cramer, Dottie West, Hank Snow, Eddy Arnold, and dozens of others. In 1975, ASCAP presented an award to Anita Kerr: "a lady of class and a first class musician for her significant contributions to the birth of the Nashville Sound." (3)

The Jordanares had formed as a gospel quartet in the 1940s and came to Nashville in 1949 to back up Red Foley. By the early 1950s – with a few changes in the group's makeup – they signed with Capitol and began singing background for country artists and performing on the Grand Ole Opry. One of the group's most successful connections was with Elvis Presley. The group provided their signature sound to Presley's records from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, signing on hits such as "Don't Be Cruel," "Are You Lonesome Tonight," and "It's Now or Never."

Throughout the 1960s, the Jordanares worked on as many as four sessions each day. "Recordings they made with Ferlin Huskey ("Gone"), Jim Reeves ("Four Walls") and Patsy Cline ("Crazy") best exemplified the smooth, pop-influenced side of Nashville's multi-faceted recording scene." (4)

Among the group's many awards was induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2001.

Birth of the Nashville Sound

In the 1940s, as the music coming from Nashville became a commercial product it began to be called "country music" with music businesses such as Decca changing their "hillbilly" music division to "country" or "country and western."

Although "hillbilly music" described the folk music that emerged from the white rural South in the early twentieth century, after World War II, the musical style began to change to appeal to a larger and more urban audience. Notes accompanying the *Recorded Anthology of American Music*, produced by New World Records, explain "Country music after 1945 is not the pure folk art of earlier decades. The war years had scattered the audience for southern music throughout the urban North, and this, combined with the stylistic evolution of country performance, helped force country music into the modern era of popular music. After World War II, the diversity of style was enhanced by electric instruments, pop style vocalists, increased musical sophistication and a new urban audience." (1)

Despite the recognition that Nashville's music was transitioning, the biggest changes were yet to come in what came to be called the Nashville Sound. This transformation of musical style ushered in what has been called the Golden Era of recording in Nashville. The Nashville Sound emerged for two primary reasons: competition from the rising market for rock 'n roll that caused a dip in country sales and the opportunity to convey a unique aura that came with recording in Nashville.

Borrowing elements from pop music, the Nashville Sound replaced the fiddle and banjo instruments of honky-tonk music with string sections, crooning lead singers and background vocals. Chet Atkins at RCA Studio and Owen Bradley at Decca are credited as the architects of the Nashville Sound in the late 1950s.

The term “Nashville Sound” was first used in 1958 in an article in *Music Reporter*. A 1960 *Time* article on Jim Reeves also referred to the Nashville Sound, although the article was describing the magic of recording in Nashville, rather than a particular style of music. Nevertheless, the term began to be picked up by the media to describe the new type of music coming from Nashville.

A small group of studio musicians, known as the Nashville A-Team, played on a multitude of hits. The team included drummer Buddy Harman, guitarists Ray Edenton, Grady Martin, Hank Garland and Harold Bradley; bassists Bob Moore and Henry Strzelecki; pianists Floyd Cramer and Hargus Robbins; and steel guitarist Pete Drake. Backup vocals were provided by the Anita Kerr Singers and The Jordanaires. (5)

The Nashville Sound continued to dominate Nashville’s recording through the 1960s. Among the artists’ hits with this musical style are Patsy Cline’s “Crazy,” Eddy Arnold’s “Make the World Go Away,” Jim Reeves’ “He’ll Have to Go,” Chet Atkins’ “Sandman,” Ray Price’s “For the Good Times,” and Ferlin Husky’s “Gone.” (6)

An interesting side story to how recording sessions happened is described in a 1960 article in *Time* magazine that is summarized in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*:

“Nashville sidemen did not employ formally written arrangements, but developed on-the-spot ‘head’ arrangements in the course of a recording session – often using their own simplified Nashville Number System to jot down chord progressions. This informal approach to arranging executed by a crack team of players who worked together every day, combined with the talented artistic leadership of a handful of producers, provided background instrumentation of remarkable quality and consistency to thousands of country recordings, ranging from a rock ‘n roll stylistic approach to straight country to country-pop.” (7)

The Nashville Number System

The Nashville Number System was developed by Neal Matthews Jr., a member of the Jordanaires, in the late 1950s as a simplified system for the singing group. It was further developed by session musician Charlie McCoy. The system created a flexible method for musicians who did not read music by numbering the music charts. (2)

Another sound credited with originating in Nashville in 1960 was the fuzz tone which became a mainstay of rock ‘n roll music. Varying accounts exist of how the fuzz tone was created but audio engineer Glen Snoddy explained that it was actually an accident. While recording Marty Robbin’s song “Don’t Worry” at the Bradleys’ Quonset Hut, the recording equipment malfunctioned:

“I’m pretty sure what happened was the primary transformer opened up causing session player Grady Martin’s guitar sound to go from clean to bludgeoning.” (8)

As “Don’t Worry” became a No. 1 country hit and a No. 3 pop hit, the story goes that artists recording at the Quonset Hut studio wanted the fuzz tone be part of their records too. Snoddy, seeking a way to make the sound on purpose, invented a guitar pedal which controlled the change of sound from clean to distorted. The device was a foot pedal switch which attached between the guitar and amplifier and included foot-controlled volume controls.

The invention, known as the Maestro Fuzz-Tone FZ-1, was put on the market with ads such as this one from describing the benefits of the Fuzz-Tone:

“...guttural, mellow, raucous, tender, raw....You can create a sensational new sound effect never before played on the guitar with Maestro Fuzz-Tone. It’s the ‘Fuzz’ effect, and it’s sweeping the country. More top professionals are embracing Fuzz-Tone every day. Already Les Paul and Mary Ford (Columbia) and Grady Martin (Decca) have cut records and albums featuring Fuzz-Tone.” (9)

With the use of the Fuzz-Tone by the Rolling Stones on 1965’s “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction,” the device became a standard piece of equipment for electric guitarists.

Getting Organized: The Country Music Association and Country Music Foundation Form

In the 1950s, at the same time country music was making tremendous gains with artists charting a multitude of hits and attracting more fans, industry executives found themselves facing a daunting competitor – rock ‘n roll.

Just as country music blended earlier music forms, so did rock ‘n roll by merging characteristics of blues, jazz, gospel, country, and other genres into a new, energetic sound. Rock ‘n roll got a boost into popular culture in 1956 when Elvis Presley had No. 1 hits on the pop charts with “Heartbreak Hotel,” (which also hit No. 1 on the country charts), “Don’t Be Cruel,” “Hound Dog,” “Love Me Tender,” and “I Want You, I Need You, I Love You,” starting a string of hits that would continue into the next decade. The fact that Presley was signed to RCA Victor and recorded in Nashville was an interesting coincidence. Despite the interest RCA Victor had in pushing country music, the company had recently paid \$35,000 to purchase Presley’s contract from Sun Studio (NHL, 2003) in Memphis.

Competition from rock ‘n roll was especially fierce because it attracted a young audience. In his book *The Fifties*, historian and author David Halberstam explains:

“A new young generation of Americans was breaking away from the habits of its parents and defining itself by its music. There was nothing the parents could do. This new generation was armed with both money and the inexpensive new appliances with which to listen to it.” Halberstam goes on to note that a *Scholastic* magazine survey in 1956 showed there were 13 million teenagers in the country with a total income of \$7 billion a year. The average teenager had an income of \$10.55 a week (giving them plenty of disposable income to buy inexpensive records). (1)

An early effort to organize the country music industry was the formation of the Country Music Disc Jockeys Association in 1953. This group came out of a 1952 festival hosted in Nashville by WSM for Disc Jockeys, or “DJs,” who came to enjoy the Grand Ole Opry. By the next year, the event had grown to include receptions given by record companies and music publishers and the first country music awards given by BMI. The Country Music Disc Jockeys Association continued for the next few years when it disbanded due to lack of funds.

Recognizing a void in country music promotion, a group of industry leaders attending the National Association of Recording Merchandisers in Miami decided to form an association. The Country Music Association (CMA) was born in Nashville in 1958 with the goal of creating a bigger commercial market and gaining recognition for country music as an important musical genre. CMA’s intention was to bring together everyone involved in the country music industry including artists, songwriters, disc jockeys, recording executives, publishers and promoters to accomplish these goals. In August of 1958, *Billboard* reported on the new organization:

"The Caretaker Committee of the newly organized Country Music Association held its first regular meeting here, Friday (14), and appointed Wesley Rose, of Acuff-Rose Publications, as temporary president and chairman of the committee. W.D. Kilpatrick, bossman of the 'Grand Ole Opry,' was appointed temporary treasurer, and Hubert Long, personal manager for Faron Young and Ferlin Husky, was named secretary and publicity director. Don Pierce, Chet Atkins, Jim Denny, Ken Nelson, Connie B. Gay and Cracker Jim Brooker were appointed a committee to draft a set of bylaws for the new association, with the aid of chairman Rose.

"The purpose of the CMA, it was explained, is to further promote and publicize country music and to do everything to 'maintain its individuality.' Every effort will be made by the association to add more country music to the programming of radio and TV stations throughout the country, and to act as a governing body for country music as a whole."

(2)

Over the next decade, CMA met its goals and more, but not without a bumpy start in downtown Nashville. Music historian Michael Kosser documented the memories of CMA's first attorney, Dick Frank, of how CMA started:

"The first several years were rough. Hubert Long was a successful publisher, manager and booker here. (Long worked for both Decca and RCA Victor Records during his years in Nashville.) He volunteered a small cubicle in the old Exchange Building on lower Church Street. He lent us a typewriter and a light bulb and a cubicle, and that was the first CMA office." **(3)**

Broadcaster Harry Stone was hired as the first CMA director, but it was the secretary who would put the organization on the map. In a 2012 interview with the *Nashville City Paper*, Jo Walker-Meador recalled how she started work at CMA:

"Basketball was my life in the little town where I grew up. But I got sidetracked and never did teach or coach. I ended up in the music business, but it wasn't by any design. I just needed a job. I started as a Gal Friday. I set up the office, did the administrative work, correspondence, memberships. There were several applications for executive director, all of them men. Harry Stone actually got the job at the suggestion of Ernest Tubb, but he only stayed 10 months because there just wasn't enough money to pay both of us. And since I was making lots less, they kept me. Plus I could type, and Harry couldn't." **(4)**

Walker-Meador credits Minnie Pearl with her appointment as CMA executive director. The appointment came in 1961 after four years of Walker-Meador running the organization without the title of executive director. Walker-Meador, who served in this position for the next 30 years, built CMA into a strong organization that continues today as an organizer, advocate, promoter and supporter of the country music industry.

The 1960s proved to be especially productive for the Country Music Association which succeeded in increasing radio airplay and creating visibility for country music with a new hall of fame and museum

and an annual awards show. In the early 1960s, CMA relocated its offices from downtown to Music Row in a two-story house at 801 16th Avenue (DV.00065), between the Quonset Hut and RCA Victor studios.

The first challenge that Walker-Meador and the CMA board tackled was radio airplay. A CMA survey in 1961 found there were only 81 radio stations in the entire nation that played country music full-time. This effort demonstrated the marketing savvy that was applied to all of CMA's efforts. With demographic research and sales kits in hand, they solicited broadcasters and advertisers and made the case that there was a large audience just waiting to hear country music. The strategy worked and by 1969 there were more than 600 country music radio stations.

At the same time this effort was underway, work began to increase the profile of country music artists. This would be accomplished by creating the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1961 and opening the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum on Music Row in 1967.

The first people elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1961 were Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams and Fred Rose. In the next few years inductees included Roy Acuff, Tex Ritter, Ernest Tubb, Eddy Arnold, Uncle Dave Macon, Jim Denny and George May. Plaques honoring the inductees were displayed at the Tennessee State Museum until 1967 when the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum opened.

In the interim, the Country Music Foundation (CMF) was chartered by the CMA in 1964 as a nonprofit with the mission of preserving and teaching the evolving history of country music. The two organizations would share staff until they separated to operate independently in 1971. In the next few years, the CMF developed a number of programs including creating a library which would grow to hold more than 175,000 recordings, 8,000 books, 450 periodicals, 150,000 photographs, and thousands of songbooks, films, business documents, and other materials. By the 1970s, CMF offered educational programs to area schools, managed an oral history project to gather stories from the country music industry, published books and the *Journal of Country Music*, and began reissuing historic music recordings. (5)

A major project undertaken by the Country Music Association and the Country Music Foundation was to build the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. A new – for the 1960s – fundraising strategy was spearheaded by music publisher Roy Horton. Even though he was based in New York, Horton had a long association with country music and was involved in the formation of CMA and CMF. Horton helped raise funds for the new hall of fame and museum by creating a multi-artist album that was one of the first to be marketed on television. (6)

The vice president of Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), Frances Preston (1929-2012) served on the CMA board and was instrumental in making the museum a reality. A 1971 article in *Billboard* recounted Preston's work:

"...the Hall of Fame and Museum sits on the old Tony Rose Park in Nashville, fittingly at the head of Music Row. And, as in the most great plans, there was a woman behind it. The woman was Frances Preston, vice president of BMI and a charming individual who has served the Country Music Association in some capacity since its inception. A dedicated individual, she was one of the initial spearheads for the construction of this mecca. The original building committee for the Hall of Fame was chaired by Mrs. Preston and included Bill Denney of Cedarwood Publishing, Hal Cook of *Billboard* and attorney Dick Frank. This group was appointed in November 1963. Mrs. Preston and Denny...began to negotiate for land. Three sites were originally considered, but Mayor

Beverly Briley, after considerable involvement of the legal department and the council, agreed to turn over the park area on the corner of 16th and Division where the Hall of Fame now stands.” (7)

A gala celebration was held on April 1, 1967, for the grand opening of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, a modern building featuring an iconic barn-shaped roof. Mayor Beverly Briley made remarks and celebrities including Minnie Pearl, Hank Williams Jr. and Eddy Arnold were present. Newspapers as far away as Phoenix, Arizona picked up the Associated Press article about the event with the inaccurate headline “Lavish ‘Barn’ Dedicated to Dixie Opry”:

“The country music industry last night dedicated its new home – a \$500,000 ‘barn’ on Nashville’s Music Row which houses the soul and history of musical Americana.” (8)

A year later, a publication about the Country Music Association provided details on the new facility:

“Symbolic of the rich heritage of rural America, the building expresses the strong influence of the growth and culture of our nation through country music. Serving an average of 1,400 visitors a week during the summer months, the Hall of Fame and Museum, by the end of the year, had seen some 70,000 devoted fans.” (9)

The article goes on to describe what awaited visitors to the museum – an introductory film on the growth of the country music industry, plaques honoring Hall of Fame inductees and exhibits demonstrating recording sessions, and artifacts from the “famous and near famous” who have been part of the world of country music. The description concludes with the optimistic prediction of 100,000 visitors in the coming year.

Capping off an extremely busy decade, the Country Music Association held its first CMA Awards program at the newly-built Municipal Auditorium in downtown Nashville in 1967. In 1968, the awards show was taped and televised as part of the NBC *Kraft Music Hall* series. (The CMA Awards have been broadcast from Nashville every year since 1968 with the exception of 2005 when they were broadcast from New York City.)

Continuing to build recognition and support for country music, CMA turned its attention directly to the fans with the first International Country Music Fan Fair. From April 12-15, 1972, 5,000 country music fans (some estimates are much lower) gathered at the downtown Municipal Auditorium to hear their favorites including Loretta Lynn, Roy Acuff, Lynn Anderson, Tom T. Hall, Dolly Parton, Minnie Pearl, Ernest Tubb, Marty Robbins, and others. An added bonus for fans – besides attending concerts – was the opportunity to actually meet their favorite country artists. Fans were happy to stand in line, sometimes for hours, to get an autograph and a picture.

The formula of performance and personal contact worked and by 1973 attendance was growing. By 1982, the event was held at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds, located south of downtown Nashville, and was attended by some 24,000 fans. As attendance grew, artists began hosting fan club events which helped increase ticket sales.

The 1960s into the 1970s – New Sounds, New Songs, New Singers

The era from the mid-1960s through the 1970s was an exciting, complex, and sometimes chaotic time on Nashville's Music Row. Music developed on multiple fronts through the:

- continued popularity of what had come to be considered traditional country music by long-time artists;
- arrival of new artists who also embraced a traditional sound;
- blending of country sounds with pop music;
- the recognition of songwriting as a profession;
- emergence of new songs and music that were difficult – if not impossible – to define as a single musical genre; and
- expansion or opening of new studios, publishing and other music-related businesses including major companies and independent offices.

Driving this upsurge of music was the ever-expanding number of businesses on Music Row and the continued success of established businesses.

Although the Nashville Association of Musicians (NAM), a local chapter of the national association, had been in existence since 1902 and located near Music Row since 1955, in 1967 the music industry's songwriters decided to form their own association. The idea came from three songwriters, Eddie Miller ("Please Release Me, Let Me Go"), Buddy Mize ("You Keep Me Hangin' On"), and Bill Brock ("I'll Just Have a Cup of Coffee, Then I'll Go") who wanted songwriting to have recognition and respect as a profession.

The idea soon became the Nashville Songwriters Association (now Nashville Songwriters Association International or NSAI) which counted 42 of the city's 80 songwriters as founding members including Kris Kristofferson, Marijohn Wilkin, and Felice and Boudleaux Bryant.

Another founding member was Lorene Mann (1937-2013) who wrote some of the biggest hits in the 1960s, including writing for Kitty Wells, and also sang as a duet partner with Justin Tubb and Archie Campbell. Mann agreed to be the new association's secretary but her legacy was creating the motto that clearly communicated what NSAI was all about: "It All Begins with a Song."

The first executive director was Maggie Cavender (1918-1996) whose leadership over the next 22 years would create a strong and successful association. Cavender was already engaged in the music industry, starting in 1964 with a job in copyright administration at Pamper Music. In 1967, she was involved in coordinating the first Country Music Association (CMA) awards.

The new association's first goal was to include songwriters' names on records, a task that was accomplished with a few years. To increase visibility, the first songwriters' awards event was held in 1967. As the organization grew, so did the reach of its mission including helping aspiring songwriters and composers to succeed in the music industry.

RCA continued to be a dominant presence with Chet Atkins at the helm as both the head of RCA in Nashville and as one of the company's recording stars. RCA Victor Studio A had become the centerpiece of what was now being referred to as Music Row. *Billboard* acknowledged the impetus RCA had given for growth with the opening of RCA Victor Studio A:

“After that, it was a story of mushrooming, or lava-spreading.” (1)

RCA Studio B continued to be active with the number of sessions hitting 5,500 by 1968. This was also the year when RCA promoted Chet Atkins to vice president.

The Quonset Hut studio stayed active throughout the 1960s and 1970s, first under the ownership of the Bradley brothers and then after its purchase by Columbia Records in 1962 and expansion in 1965. Lou Bradley, an engineer in the Quonset Hut/Studio B from 1969 to 1982, credits Owen and Harold Bradley with creating a state-of-the-art studio at the request of Paul Cohen who ran Decca’s country division. Cohen was recording in Nashville, Los Angeles, and New York. He offered to give the Bradleys all of Decca’s business if they would create a state-of-the-art studio. Lou Bradley relates what happened:

“He (Cohen) made all of them the offer at the same time – if you’ll build a first class studio you’ll get all my business. Well, the other two guys were kind of greedy and they were trying to figure out how they could ace Paul out and get the production side of it too. And Owen and Harold Bradley - they just wanted his business so they did it. And it took off. I mean that’s when Music Row really took off -when they converted the Quonset Hut.” (2)

Owen Bradley continued to work at the Quonset Hut studio, most notably producing Brenda Lee for her very productive years of 1958 to 1968. Born Brenda Mae Tarpley, the singer would become the biggest female pop artist of her generation before becoming a successful country singer. Lee’s singing talent was evident at an early age and by age five she was singing on local radio and television stations in the Atlanta area. In 1956, Lee was a regular on Red Foley’s television show “Ozark Jubilee,” which quickly led to a contract with Decca Records.

Lee’s first major hit “Sweet Nothin’s” was produced by Bradley at the Quonset Hut in 1959, starting a string of hits into the 1960s including “I’m Sorry,” “I Want to Be Wanted,” “Fool #1,” and “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree.” Lee recalled her work with Owen Bradley:

“What Owen tried to do was find the best materials that he could for me, and then I sang it the way I sang, and then, you know, the record company did what they wanted to, but we never went in with the forethought ‘Oh, let’s make this country or let’s make this *this* or let’s make this *that*’ which really was great because it didn’t hinder our decisions on songs, we were pretty free to choose whatever we wanted to.” (3)

Columbia’s purchase of the Bradleys’ Quonset Hut studio in 1962 brought significant changes to the facility. In 1965, Columbia demolished the Victorian-era house that had been the Bradleys first music recording studio and constructed a \$500,000 three-story wing containing offices and a new music recording studio that became known as Studio A. The Quonset Hut then became known as Studio B.

“There’s no telling how many hits were cut in that room,” engineer Lou Bradley noted. Country artists recording in the Quonset Hut/Studio B included Tammy Wynette, George Jones, Charlie Rich, Johnny Paycheck, Merle Haggard, Lynn Anderson, Tanya Tucker. Pop artists included REO Speedwagon, Bob Dylan, The Beach Boys, Paul Simon & Art Garfunkel, Bobby Vinton, Connie Francis, Patti Page, Anita Bryant and Dave Loggins.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Columbia's country music division was run at different times by exceedingly talented producers and artist and repertoire representatives, (known as A&R reps within the music industry, they are responsible for scouting new talent and overseeing artist development), including Don Law, Bob Johnston, Billy Sherrill, and Ron Bledsoe. Each would leave an imprint on the industry.

Don Law (1902-1982) had been in the music business since the 1930s. After World War II, he was put in charge of Columbia's eastern country division and immediately had hits with Little Jimmy Dickens and Lefty Frizzell. By 1956, Law headed up all of Columbia's country division and had settled in Nashville. In the early 1960s, Law was instrumental in establishing Nashville's country-pop crossover markets with Marty Robbin's "El Paso," Johnny Horton's "The Battle of New Orleans," Jimmy Dean's "Big Bad John," and others. This success contributed to Columbia's decision in 1962 to purchase the Bradleys' Quonset Hut studio and open a permanent office on Nashville's Music Row.

Bob Johnston (1932-2015) had already made a big impact on Nashville's music industry when he produced Bob Dylan's records in the early 1960s. One of his first decisions at Columbia was to approve Johnny Cash's live recordings - "Live at Folsom Prison" and "Live at San Quentin."

Ron Bledsoe came to Columbia in 1971 from Liberty/United Artists and in 1972 he was named vice president of the Nashville office as well as overseeing the company's activities in Memphis, Muscle Shoals, and Atlanta. Bledsoe's tenure at Columbia was notable for producing several albums for David Allan Coe, who had come to Nashville to join the music industry in the late 1960s after years of incarceration. Coe had achieved success as a songwriter (penning Tanya Tucker's No. 1 hit "Would You Lay with Me in a Field of Stone" in 1973). Bledsoe produced two albums for Coe – both issued in 1974 – "The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy," and "The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy Rides Again." In 1976, Bledsoe co-produced "Willie, Waylon and Me" with Coe and Waylon Jennings.

Tree Publishing thrived during these years after moving its offices to Music Row in 1964. Tree had a huge success with "Green Green Grass of Home," written by company songwriter Curly Putnam, when it became a country hit by Porter Wagoner in 1965 and a worldwide hit when it was recorded by Tom Jones in 1966.

In 1965, unable to find a record label to produce African-American R&B singer Joe Tex, Buddy Killen and Jack Stapp founded their own label, Dial Records. The decision would result in a number of hits in the coming years for Tex including "Hold What You Got," "I Gotcha," and "Skinny Legs and All."

A third turning point for Tree Publishing came in 1974. Donna Hilley (1940-2012) was hired as administrative assistant to Jack Stapp. Stapp had just become chief executive officer and board chairman while Buddy Killen became president and chief operating officer. The decision to hire Hilley was one that would have great consequences for the company in the years to come as Hilley would eventually head the company and become proficient in buying song catalogs from other companies. Her purchase of Buck Owens catalog in the 1980s, which contained many hits by Merle Haggard, initiated a period of rapid growth for the company. Additionally, Hilley created a welcoming atmosphere at Tree for songwriters, producers and artists who came looking for songs to record.

Joining the established businesses on Music Row were lots of newcomers. Many had gotten their start in other cities and come to Nashville to be a part of the growing music industry.

Monument Records and Combine Publishing were two companies started in 1958 by Fred Foster (b. 1931) that would leave an indelible mark on Nashville's music history. In 1960, Foster moved his companies from Baltimore to Tennessee, settling in Hendersonville, a suburb north of Nashville. In 1968, Foster would move Monument to Music Row, locating in a building at 114 17th Avenue that had formerly been a church. Combine Publishing was located in a circa 1900 house at 813 16th Avenue South (later 35 Music Square East).

Foster's companies saw great success as a number of eclectic artists were signed. Monument Records had already scored its first big hit with Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely" in 1960. The song kicked off a chain of hits for Orbison over the next few years including "Running Scared," "Crying," and "Pretty Woman." Foster signed numerous artists who produced top hits including Boots Randolph's "Yakety Sax," Dolly Parton who released her first solo album, "Hello I'm Dolly" in 1967, Jeannie Seely who recorded four albums between 1966 and 1968 and Ray Stevens, whose "Gitarzan" was a hit in 1969.

Two decisions contributed to the success of Foster's publishing company - hiring Bob Beckham (1927-2013) in 1964 to run Combine and signing Kris Kristofferson. Within a few years, Kristofferson would become a top songwriter with "Me and Bobby McGee" recorded by Roger Miller, "For the Good Times" which hit No. 1 and earned Ray Price a Grammy in 1970, and "Sunday Morning Coming Down" which hit No. 1 for Johnny Cash that same year. Kristofferson would also record his first three albums at the Monument recording studio. By the 1970s, Kristofferson would be part of The Outlaws, along with Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, a group of singers who resisted the music industry's structure.

Beckham built Combine into a powerhouse over two decades, earning a reputation as someone who loved and respected songwriting and who created a setting where songwriters could flourish. The results were obvious as historian Michael Kosser notes:

"In the 60s and 70s and beyond, Combine Music kept a small staff of writers that turned out a large list of hit songs, writers like Tony Joe White ("Polk Salad Annie," "Rainy Night in Georgia"), Kris (Kristofferson), Larry Gatlin ("Broken Lady," "All the Gold in California," and a bunch more), Dennis Linde ("Burning Love," "Goodbye Earl," and many others), Johnny MacRae ("I'd Love to Lay You Down" and more), Bob Morrison ("Lookin' for Love" and lots more), John Scott Sherrill ("Wild and Blue" and more), and Bob DiPiero ("American Made" and other huge hits). (4)

Throughout the 1970s, other music businesses came and went on Music Row. They included Atlantic Records' Nashville office which operated from 1972 to 1974, representing Willie Nelson and a few other artists. Atlantic reopened in a house at 1812 Broadway (DV.24629) near Music Row for a short time from 1985 to 1988 following the success of artist Billy Joe Royal.

Since its founding in 1942, Capitol Records had been successful in promoting West Coast country artists like Tex Ritter, Buck Owens, and Merle Haggard. By the 1960s, the company had become more focused but it was in 1989 that the company had its greatest success – signing Garth Brooks.

In 1969, Norbert Putnam and David Briggs opened their state-of-the-art Quadraphonic Sound Studio (DV.00032-00034) in two renovated houses at 1800-1802 Grand Avenue. The pair got their start at FAME (Florence Alabama Music Enterprises) Studio in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, in the early 1960s when pianist Briggs and bass player Putnam were part of the first Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section playing on hits such as "Steal Away" by Jimmy Hughes and "Hold What You Got" by Joe Tex.

Capitalizing on their success, Putnam and Briggs relocated to Nashville in 1964 to play sessions for RCA, and they would find even greater success as producers, studio owners, musicians, and music publishers. The musicians would count as a highlight of their careers the opportunity to play backup for Elvis Presley in concerts and recordings.

By the time Quadraphonic or “Quad” opened in 1969, Putnam and Briggs were well known in the music industry and quickly attracted pop artists to record at the studio including Dan Fogelberg, Joan Baez, Neil Young, and Jimmy Buffet. The studio scored a major success in 1971 when Kris Kristofferson chose Quad to produce Joan Baez’s million-selling album “Blessed Are” which included the hit “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down.” Also in 1971, Neil Young recorded “Harvest” which became the best-selling album in the United States in 1972 and yielded the hits “Old Man” and “Heart of Gold.”

In the 1970s, Quad was also the site of the recordings of some of the first African-American pop and rock stars on Music Row, including the Pointer Sisters. In 1974, the Pointer Sisters recorded their song “Fairytale” at Quad and became the first all-black group to perform on the Grand Ole Opry; they recorded a second album at Quad in 1975. In 1974, the Pointer Sisters won a Grammy for “Best Country Vocal Performance by a Duo or Group” for “Fairytale.”

After performing in Nashville in 1969 and 1970, Grand Funk Railroad recorded their “Phoenix” album in 1972 at Sound Shop Studio on Division Street with the mastering completed at Quad.

Not everyone was pleased with Music Row’s embrace of pop music. In a 1977 newspaper interview, Welsey Rose, president of Acuff-Rose Publishing, said he was concerned about Music Row’s future if the focus shifted away from country music:

“Apparently there are discontented people who don’t like the idea of Nashville being the country music leader. Personally, I’m very happy with it. We have a few people in this town who, because of a lack of understanding of country music, decided recently they want this town called ‘pop city’ instead of ‘country music city.’ They don’t realize there are 20 pop cities in the nation and there’s only one country music city. And this is it.”

Rose went to on to say that the problems on Music Row will straighten out as soon as “the discontented people learn not to muddy up the water and get back to cutting country songs.” (5)

Rose’s sentiments notwithstanding, country music continued to be the mainstay of the industry as new singers and sounds were also being recorded and promoted. The result was a remarkable tapestry of music coming from Music Row’s studios, publishing and promotional offices, and other music-related businesses.

During these years established country stars continued to appeal to large audiences. Ernest Tubb earned a gold record for “Walking the Floor Over You” in 1965 and hosted a television show from Nashville from 1965 to 1968. Chet Atkins, in addition to heading up RCA’s Nashville studio, produced a number of solo albums and albums with other artists including Merle Travis and Les Paul. Atkins would win the Country Music Association’s Instrumentalist of the Year award 11 times between 1967 and 1988.

The 1960s also saw the emergence of two singers who would become superstars – Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton. Lynn’s singing career would always focus on country music, while Parton would start with country music and eventually succeed with pop and folk music as well as a wide array of business interests.

Loretta Lynn (b. 1932) came to Nashville in 1960 and appeared on the Grand Ole Opry after having her first hit, the self-promoted “I’m a Honky Tonk Girl.” After signing with Decca Records, Lynn began having hits that continued through the 1960s and into the 1970s, which were initially recorded at the Quonset Hut, but primarily recorded at Owen Bradley’s Barn studio in Mt. Juliet. Lynn’s songs had a traditional country sound but she introduced a realism that appealed to audiences. Major hits included “You Ain’t Woman Enough,” and “Don’t Come Home A Drinkin’.” In 1970, Lynn recorded the autobiographical “Coal Miner’s Daughter” which became one of her biggest hits and her signature song. The 1970s saw Lynn team up with country singer Conway Twitty for a number of successful duets including “Louisiana Woman, Mississippi Man.” The pair won the Country Music Association’s Vocal Duo of the Year Award four times from 1972 to 1975. Lynn and her husband Mooney first lived in Nashville’s Madison neighborhood before purchasing a rural farm outside Nashville in Hurricane Mills, now a popular tourist attraction (NRHP, 1999).

Dolly Parton’s (b. 1946) legendary career includes the dream of being discovered on Music Row which she recounts in the song “Down on Music Row” in her 1973 album “My Tennessee Home.” Parton’s well known story includes coming to Nashville in 1964 after graduating from high school in Sevierville, Tennessee, and after some initial success, landing on the “Porter Wagoner Show” as Wagoner’s duet partner in 1967. Parton recorded with RCA and had her first country No. 1 hit, “Joshua,” in 1971 followed by three No. 1 songs in 1974 “Jolene,” “Love is Like a Butterfly,” and “I Will Always Love You.” After being voted CMA Female Vocalist of the Year in 1975 and 1976, Parton began directing her career toward Hollywood and expanding her career to include pop music and acting as well as ownership of the Dollywood theme park in Pigeon Forge. In 1996, Parton sold her Nashville office, but maintains her residence in the Nashville suburb of Brentwood. However, Parton was not finished with country music. In 2001 and 2002, Parton and producer Steve Buckingham received Grammys for Parton’s return to her roots albums “The Grass is Blue” and “Little Sparrow,” which were recorded in Nashville.

Another transplant from the Muscle Shoals, Alabama area who would have a major impact on the careers of many Nashville artists was Billy Sherrill (1936-2015). Starting as one of the founders of FAME Studio, by 1961 Sherrill had sold his share of the business to Rick Hall and made his way to Nashville.

One of Sherrill’s earliest connections was powerful music publisher Al Gallico (1920-2008). Gallico had started his career in New York, coming to Nashville in 1961 to launch the Painted Desert Music Division of Shapiro, Bernstein and Co. Within two years, Gallico struck out on his own, starting Al Gallico Music. One of the first songwriters he hired was Billy Sherrill who scored hit after hit with songs like David Houston’s “Almost Persuaded,” and Tammy Wynette’s “Stand By Your Man.”

Al Gallico would go on to have one of the most influential careers in country music publishing and discovering and managing acts like Donna Fargo and Joe Stampley. In 1973, Gallico and Sherrill co-founded Algee Music. In 1986, Columbia acquired both Gallico Music Publishing and Algee. (6)

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Sherrill shaped the careers of some of the biggest names in country music – Tammy Wynette, George Jones, and Charlie Rich. In 1964, Sherrill was hired as the head of A&R

for Epic Records, a Columbia subsidiary, and in 1966 Tammy Wynette (1942-1998) showed up in his office for an appointment for Sherrill to listen to a tape of her singing.

After an initially bumpy first meeting, with Sherrill making Wynette wait on him all afternoon, Sherrill impulsively decided to let her record “Apartment #9” the next day. That was the start of a recording partnership that led to 14 *Billboard* No. 1 hits recorded at the Quonset Hut between 1968 and 1976 including “D-I-V-O-R-C-E” and “Stand By Your Man.”

The addition of George Jones, already an established country music star, to Epic’s roster in 1969 led to even more hits. In addition to Jones’s solo hits including “Love You Could Never Be Better,” and “The Door,” Jones and Wynette became country’s most popular duo with hits like “We’re Gonna Hold On” and “Golden Ring.”

Billy Sherrill’s management of Charlie Rich’s rise to fame is recounted in “The Encyclopedia of Country Music”:

“In the case of Charlie Rich, Sherrill took a journeyman white R&B singer and virtually reinvented him as a 70s-style country pop easy-listening crooner. The result was massive crossover hits such as ‘Behind Closed Doors,’ ‘The Most Beautiful Girl in the World,’ (which Sherrill co-wrote) and ‘A Very Special Love Song (another of his co-compositions).” (7)

Sherrill is credited with a strong influence on what came to be called “Countrypolitan” music. Considered an outgrowth of the earlier Nashville Sound, Countrypolitan appealed to a wider audience than traditional country. The primary characteristic of Countrypolitan was blending traditional country sounds with the addition of string arrangements of violins, violas and cellos and occasionally a background choir.

Also arriving in Nashville in the 1960s with his own unique style was Ray Stevens who would become known as the Comedy King of Music City for his humorous novelty songs. The success of Stevens’ first pop hit 1961, “Jeremiah Peabody’s Poly Unsaturated Quick Dissolving Fast Acting Pleasant Tasting Green and Purple Pills,” in 1962 resulted in a job with Mercury Records. In addition to working as a musician, singer and arranger, Stevens recorded several pop comedy hits including “Ahab the Arab,” “Harry the Hairy Ape,” and “Santa Claus is Watching You” before moving to Monument Records as a producer.

In 1969, Stevens returned to the charts with “Gitarzan.” In a turn of musical style, Stevens also recorded Kris Kristofferson’s “Sunday Morning Coming Down.” Stevens’ signed with Barnaby Records, located in a renovated Bungalow at 1009 17th Avenue South (DV.00127), and continued to chart hits into the 1970s with “Everything is Beautiful,” his first No. 1 hit on the pop charts which won him a Grammy for Male Vocalist of the Year. Other hits included “The Streak,” reflecting a brief fad in 1974. Stevens won another Grammy in 1975 for “Misty.” After a brief time at Warner Brothers, Stevens moved to RCA Records in 1979 where he would have a major hit with “Shriners’ Convention” In 1984, Stevens had moved again, this time to MCA Records where he continued to have hits with “The Mississippi Squirrel Revival” and “It’s Me Again Margaret.” (8)

By 1985 Stevens had established himself in Music Row’s business community with his own recording and publishing company, Ray Stevens Group, maintaining a prominent presence with a modern complex on 17th Avenue South that grew from a renovated house at 1707 Grand Avenue. Stevens’ success would

continue in the coming decades with more albums featuring his unique style of comedy pop and country songs as well as gospel and patriotic songs.

Nashville took another interesting musical turn when Bob Dylan recorded three albums on Music Row, thanks to the influence of Johnny Cash (1932-2003). Cash was an established country music star, having joined the Grand Ole Opry in 1956 and enjoying a string of hits including “Ring of Fire” in 1963. With encouragement from his record label, Columbia, Cash began to branch out to other musical styles including gospel, cowboy songs, and folk songs. In 1964, this path brought him to the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island where he and Dylan met.

Dylan was an established singer-songwriter who had tapped into the social protest and advocacy movement of the 1960s with songs such as “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall” on his 1963 album “The Freewheeling Bob Dylan.”

The pair’s ensuing friendship resulted in Dylan’s decision to record at Nashville’s Columbia Studio on Music Row with producer Bob Johnston. Although Nashville had recorded pop and rock music previously, the artists, including the Everly Brothers, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, and Brenda Lee, had strong country music ties. **(9)**

Dylan’s first album recorded on Music Row, “Blonde on Blonde,” in 1966 featured top studio musicians who came to be referred to as the “Nashville Cats.” The album yielded three hit songs: “I Want You,” “Just Like a Woman,” and “Rainy Day Women.” Dylan would make two more albums on Music Row, “John Wesley Harding” in 1967 and the country music-style “Nashville Skyline” in 1968 which featured a duet, “Girl from the North Country” with Cash. In 1969, Dylan appeared on Cash’s television variety show, “The Johnny Cash Show,” where the pair sang several songs.

Dylan’s decision to record in Nashville opened the door for recording by folk artists including Doc Watson, Joan Baez, Gordon Lightfoot, and Neil Young and for rock artists including Leon Russell and Linda Ronstadt. **(10)**

With all of the changes on Music Row in the 1960s, the industry faced one more upheaval in the 1970s that perhaps caught its leadership by surprise – the trail blazed by Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson that earned them – as well as other artists - the name “The Outlaws.” This group of artists would appeal to a young audience, just as the country music industry had desired since rock ‘n roll emerged in the 1950s. But the Outlaw movement may have brought more changes than the industry was ready for, with artists looking more like rock musicians with long hair and blue jeans and rock-style concerts.

In reality, many considered Johnny Cash to be the original outlaw. By the late 1960s, his albums recorded live at Folsom Prison and San Quentin in California had set his music apart from other country singers. On his television show, broadcast from the Ryman Auditorium, Cash welcomed a wide variety of singers including Linda Ronstadt, Neil Diamond, Roy Clark, Gordon Lightfoot, The Monkees, and Merle Haggard. Author Michael Streissguth describes Cash’s unique place on Music Row and how it paved the way for the later outlaws:

“Cash’s producers let Cash be Cash, which meant throwing away the studio clock, leaving his backing band the Tennessee Three alone, however calcified its boom-chicka-boom rhythm had become, and standing by without complaint while Cash ploddingly

chose songs and worked out arrangements – A&R tasks that elsewhere on Music Row would have been completed days before the session. When Waylon Jennings demanded and got such freedoms from RCA-Nashville in the early 1970s, many proclaimed he was the first. In truth, as with so many things in that town, Cash – the godfather of Nashville’s outlaw movement – had gotten there first.” (11)

Although a number of singers would be considered part of the outlaw movement, the three who were its foundation were Kris Kristofferson (b. 1936), Waylon Jennings (1937-2002), and Willie Nelson (b. 1933). Each had come to Nashville to be a part of the music industry and found themselves frustrated with the rigid structure of making records, distaining the popularity of country-pop songs and longing to make a new kind of music.

Arriving in Nashville in 1965, Kristofferson’s first stop was at Buckhorn Music. The company was owned by Marijohn Wilkin. Wilkin’s background was a colorful story in itself. A former teacher, Wilkin started writing songs in the 1950s and toured with Red Foley. She came to Nashville in 1958 and played piano in a bar before landing a job as a songwriter at Cedarwood Publishing where she wrote a number of hit songs including “The Long Black Veil,” which was a hit for Lefty Frizell in 1959. Wilkin also recorded for Columbia Records and Dot Records. Wilkin would write her most famous song, “One Day at a Time,” in the 1973 with help from Kristofferson.

Kristofferson, at the time a captain in the U.S. Army, connected with Wilkin who was related to his platoon leader. Wilkin soon introduced him to another major player, producer and songwriter Cowboy Jack Clement who showed him around town. With that introduction, Kristofferson soon moved to Nashville to seek his fortune in music. After a few attempts at writing songs for Buckhorn, Kristofferson found his way to Combine as a songwriter and Monument as a singer in 1969.

When Kristofferson arrived in Nashville, he found Willie Nelson, who had already written country-pop hits including “Crazy,” “Hello Walls,” and “Funny How Time Slips Away.” By 1964, Nelson had recorded at Monument and then moved over to RCA where he stayed for seven years, putting out unsuccessful records that rebelled against the Nashville Sound.

Also soon to arrive in Nashville was Waylon Jennings who had just landed a contract with RCA and by March of 1965 was recording with Chet Atkins. As music historian Michael Streissguth explains, Atkins thought Jennings would appeal to a folk-pop audience at college campuses and in urban centers:

“Chet was known for keeping a tight handle on the studio reins, choosing the session musicians and the songs, but on these sessions, he eased up. He let Waylon’s band, the Wailors – bassist Paul Foster, guitarist Jerry Gropp and drummer Richie Albright – dominate the instrumentation, and inexplicably gave Waylon the freedom to include five of his own songs, including ‘That’s a Chance I’ll Have to Take,’ his first number-one country record.” (12)

Despite their success in songwriting and recording, within the next few years they each resisted what they perceived as a lack of artistic freedom. In 1970, Nelson moved back to Texas where he found more freedom in Austin’s music scene. Jennings stayed on and continued to resist the status quo, even presenting an alternative stage show at the 1973 Disc Jockey Convention with Willie Nelson. In 1975, Jennings was awarded CMA’s Male Vocalist of the Year.

The name “Outlaw” was also attributed to other singers and songwriters at various times including Rodney Crowell, Kinky Friedman, Guy Clark, Chris Gantry, and Tompall Glaser. Nashville publicist Hazel Smith is credited with coining the term in 1973. Smith was contacted by a disc jockey in North Carolina about promoting a Waylon-Tompall concert and asked how to describe their music. Smith recalls:

“I reached under my desk and pulled out ‘Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary’ and started looking up words, like *mustang*. That wasn’t it. I decided to look up the word *outlaw*. I don’t know why I did it. ...the very last line said these words ‘Living on the outside of the written law.’ And I thought to myself, ‘You can’t say how a song is supposed to be written, nor can you say how a singer is supposed to sing a song.’” (13)

The turning point for the Outlaws as part of Nashville’s music industry was the 1976 album “Wanted: The Outlaws” produced by RCA and featuring Jennings, Nelson, Jessi Colter (Jennings’ wife), and Tompall Glaser. The record was the first in country music history to be certified platinum. (14) Songs on the album became classics including “Good Hearted Woman,” a Jennings-Nelson duet and Jennings’ “Luckenbach, Texas.” In 1978, the duo won a Grammy for “Mamas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys” written by Ed Bruce.

The Boulevard: Urban Renewal on Music Row

After World War II, Nashville’s elected officials and city leaders had begun contemplating ways to transform areas of the city that were considered blighted. As urban renewal became the rage in the 1960s, planning expanded to many areas of the city including Music Row where “The Boulevard Plan” was announced. Discussions about the controversial plan stretched over most of the 1960s with local media closely following the proposed plan and reporting its eventual defeat.

Nashville was one of the first cities in the country to embrace the idea of urban renewal. Urban renewal, intended as a land redevelopment program, encompassed a complicated array of strategies to accomplish its aims. Actions included eminent domain to allow the government to take property, including private homes and businesses, demolition to clear properties for new uses, and constructing new roads, public housing, and recreational parks. Many urban renewal projects focused on clearing not only slums but historic neighborhoods and commercial districts for new, “modern” buildings.

The first targeted area in Nashville was the north side of the State Capitol, a 97-acre tract that was covered with run-down housing that lacked electricity and running water. With Congress’s passage of the Housing Act in 1949, local governments had the power of eminent domain, which the Nashville Housing Authority and State of Tennessee used to implement the Capitol Hill Redevelopment Plan, the nation’s first federally-funded urban renewal project. This project led to construction in 1962 of Nashville’s modern Municipal Auditorium, a performance venue.

In the coming decade, Nashville undertook additional urban renewal projects in East Nashville’s Edgefield neighborhood, in the African-American Edgehill neighborhood adjacent to Music Row, and around Vanderbilt University, also near Music Row.

In 1961, the idea of urban renewal came directly to Music Row when the Nashville Housing Authority began reporting on the University Center Urban Renewal Area. (NHA became the Metro Development and Housing Authority when Metro Government formed in 1962 but continued to be referred to as NHA in the local media for several more years). NHA’s reports over the next few years as plans continued to evolve for the University Center Urban Renewal Area showed the streets that made up Music Row as an

obvious choice for redirecting traffic from 21st Avenue South adjacent to Vanderbilt University. This led to what became known as “The Boulevard Plan.”

The idea was quickly embraced by city government and music industry leaders. But the actual project remained just that - an idea – leaving the Music Row area in the odd position of announcing music-related building projects and making plans while remaining in a state of limbo for almost 10 years.

The Boulevard Plan would have completely altered the area’s appearance by demolishing buildings east of the alley parallel to 16th and 17th Avenues. This would have created space for a six-lane boulevard from 21st Avenue, west of Hillsboro Village at Vanderbilt University, to Demonbreun Street at the north end of Music Row. Once the boulevard was completed, new modern high-rise buildings were to be constructed for music businesses.

The plan’s announcement sparked a flurry of speculative land purchases and \$13 million in construction projects announced by the media. Throughout the 1960s, newspaper headlines announced construction projects: “New Columbia Studio Started,” “Record Row Land Acquired,” “Atkins, Bradley Buy Music Row Corner Lot for New Building,” “Decca Plans Big Studio Here,” “Recording Studio, Office Complex to be Built for Mercury-Smash Records,” “Aurora Publishers Inc. Makes Land Purchase,” “Offices, Motel Planned as Music City Tower,” “Spring Construction Set on Music Row.”

An October 1968 article in *The Nashville Banner* titled “9 New Buildings Slated in Music Row Plans” included a staff drawing showing the location of “Music City Boulevard” and the location of proposed sites for new offices. The article summarized the plans:

“At least nine new buildings, including a 14-story office building, are planned along Music Row as part of a multi-million dollar redevelopment geared to the proposed Music City Boulevard. Construction on one, the new ASCAP offices, has already begun while the eight others are still in the planning stage. Others are Tree Publishing Co., Cedarwood Publishing Co., Decca Records, Moeller Talent Inc., Hill-Range Enterprises, Show-Biz Inc., the multi-story office building and Pamper Music Inc.

“It was also learned that still other music firms on Music Row are discussing new locations and buildings but none of this is definite.

“The 14-story office building, to be known as the Music City U.S.A. Office Building, will be built by a group headed by Eddy Arnold and Charles Mosley of Arnold Co. In addition, Mercury Records and Glasar Publications are among those considering new buildings.”

The article goes on to note:

“New construction on Music Row has not progressed too quickly up to now because there has been some doubt whether the Music City Boulevard would be built. However, firms on the row have now been convinced the thoroughfare will be built and have started making plans around it.”

After providing details on many of the building plans, the article concludes:

“When the road is to be built remains indefinite, but preliminary plans call for it to be tree-lined with a wide median where statues and markers could be placed.

‘What we want is a road that will identify Music City and make it the Showplace of the South,’ said Farris Deep, executive director of the Metro Planning Commission.

“The plan is for the boulevard and the new offices in Music City to radically change the appearance and atmosphere of Nashville’s famed Music Row area.” **(1)**

But not everyone was in favor of this ambitious plan including James Hamilton, Metro Councilperson for the Music Row area and some of the area’s residents. Hamilton, who lived in an antebellum house in the neighborhood, objected and a neighborhood group formed to oppose the plan. **(2)**

For the next two years, those for and against the plan voiced their desires – including those who just wanted the issue to be decided. Petitions circulated in the fall of 1970 showed ninety percent supported the boulevard – the reason given most often was that the music industry had been promised a boulevard and therefore deserved it.

The long delay in making a decision frustrated many residents along Music Row’s streets, especially those who had delayed upgrades and maintenance to their property because they thought it would be taken by eminent domain as part of the project’s property acquisitions.

Mildred Whitsett, who by 1970 had lived in a large two-story house at 1200 16th Avenue South (DV.00442) for 48 years, told a reporter “I’m pretty upset about it because the uncertainty has existed about 10 years. It’s time to make a decision.” The writer also reported that a Mrs. Adair, whose property at 1613 16th Avenue South would be taken, had filed a lawsuit seeking to halt the University Center Urban Renewal Project – not because she didn’t want to lose her house but because she did not trust that she would be given a fair price for it:

“I don’t feel that it is fair for the people caught in the middle to have to bear the brunt of the burden of progress. The burden ought to be spread community-wide.” **(3)**

In the fall of 1970, Mayor Beverly Briley announced that there was not enough money available to build the boulevard and that it would not be constructed during his term of office. At the same time, pressure increased from the music industry to proceed with the project. A coalition of music industry executives organized to provide “factual” information to Metro Council, city officials, and the federal government that would result in a decision to build the new roadway.

Among the reasons put forth by the group were: the need to handle heavy traffic, the opportunity to upgrade sewer and utility systems and – perhaps most important – the increase in property taxes that would be collected by the city. **(4)**

Amazingly, after years of talk and speculation, there was no written plan for the boulevard. In October of 1970, Metro Council decided to address this by supporting a proposal for a federally funded study of the Music Row area and the proposed project. By this time, Metro Councilperson Jim Hamilton had presented a proposal to make 16th and 17th Avenues into one-way streets as an alternative to the boulevard. **(5)**

Even the 5th District U.S. Congressman Richard Fulton got involved, sending telegrams to every Metro Council member offering to do “everything in my power” to obtain federal funds for a Music Row study. (6)

But the federal study was not to be, leading to headlines charging that the project had become a “Boulevard of Broken Dreams.”

After Metro’s expenditures of more than \$2 million in property acquisition in anticipation of the boulevard’s construction, the proposed plan came to an abrupt end on November 5, 1970. At a called session, Metro Council tabled a resolution to seek a \$222,000 federal planning grant and instead voted 25 to 12 to approve resolutions calling for one-way streets instead of the six-lane boulevard.

On November 6, 1970, the local newspaper announced “Urban Renewal is Out for Music City Section.” The new plan called for transforming 16th and 17th Avenues into one-way streets with three, 12-foot lanes for each street and adding new curbs, gutters, five-foot sidewalks and a five-foot grass strip with landscaping. Additionally, a “Music City Square” or plaza was included near the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum “to encourage pedestrian movement from the museum at Division through the area.” The plaza included two recreational parks (later named for Tony Rose and Owen Bradley) and rerouting of Hawkins, Sigler, and Laurel streets to connect to I-40 in downtown Nashville. The rerouted street was renamed Music Circle. (7)

Reaction from the music industry was swift to what one newspaper headline termed the “Boulevard Bust.” Among the first plans cancelled were those for a 21-story Music City Tower and 14-story Music City Office Building. Reports noted that the construction costs for the two buildings would have been \$9.5 million and would have generated \$170,000 a year in property taxes. Also canceling construction plans were Boots Randolph, Chet Atkins, Floyd Cramer, and Xavier Cossee as well as Hill & Range Music Publishing which had spent more than \$1 million in land purchases. (8)

The year ended with speculation about the future of the music industry in Nashville. A newspaper article summed up the feeling:

“Just a year ago there were high hopes that Nashville’s \$100 million-plus music industry would boom even more in the 1970s than it had during the past 10 years. There was talk the day might not be far off when the music industry would become Nashville’s number one industry or employer. However, as the first year of the ‘70s comes to a close, there is uncertainty over the music industry’s future here. Other cities, especially Atlanta and Memphis, are making a strong bid to lure at least a portion, if not all, of the industry away from this city.” (9)

Beyond the Boulevard: Planning for Music Row in the 1970s

With the Boulevard Plan cancelled, Music Row and Metro Nashville government entered the 1970s with an uncertain relationship. The city’s commitment included making 16th and 17th Avenues into one-way streets, creating Music City Square, and forming a neighborhood association to develop plans for Music Row’s future.

Plans for the creation of one-way streets began to move forward with the project, using local and state funding, awarded to W.L. Hailey Construction, a Nashville company, for a little over \$1.3 million. The contract included “grading, drainage and paving of a section of 16th Avenue South and 17th Avenue

South, beginning near Belcourt Avenue and extending a distance of nearly one mile to Division Street. The contract also included construction of a complete storm sewer system and concrete curbs, gutters and sidewalks, the adjustment of various utility lines and landscaping of the area.” (1)

By September 1971, construction was underway; however, the vision for Music City Square was not moving forward. The Nashville Chamber of Commerce’s “Nashville Plus” committee commissioned the firm of Yearwood and Johnson Architects to create a plan for the proposed Music City Square. The architectural firm presented their plan at a December 1970 meeting with three areas targeted for development. A public entry point would be developed across from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. A pedestrian mall would be created in the area’s center where RCA, Decca, Cedarwood, Capitol, and Columbia were located. At the south end would be another pedestrian plaza to provide the setting for new offices, recording studios, restaurants, retail stores, and a high-rise hotel.

With only a few of the 250 invited music industry leaders attending, the proposed plan for the Music City Square was not well received. “Cool to New Music Mall Pitch: Row’s Rah-Rah Spirit Fades” proclaimed an article in the *Tennessean*:

“‘All we have had is a trail of broken promises that leads from city hall to the Chamber of Commerce,’ said Owen Bradley, vice president in charge of Decca Records Nashville office. ‘We have just lost interest in the endless meetings that seem to accomplish nothing.’ Bradley said no one came around while the study was being made to ask him his opinions or feelings. ‘I heard they (the chamber and architects) were making a study, but no one contacted me.’” (2)

The next few years saw continual starts and stops in city planning for Nashville’s Music Row. By 1972, a new Neighborhood Redevelopment Program was in the works and met with varied responses. *The Tennessean* editorialized that “Music Row Still Needs City Help” and described the area as “currently more like a war-torn disaster area.” (3)

The \$950,000 federally funded program was intended to have three parts: purchase of the right-of-way for a connection between Demonbreun Street and 16th and 17th Avenues; purchase of land across from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to create a public park as an entrance to the neighborhood, and creation of a Project Area Committee to work with the city’s housing authority to develop additional plans. Following what had become a pattern in city planning for Music Row’s future, this effort also got off to a controversial start.

In order to qualify for federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a minimum of 20 percent of the buildings were required to be designated as “structurally deficient.” Reports that an initial survey by the Nashville Housing Authority (NHA) found more than 90 percent of the area’s buildings were deficient sparked outrage and fear among property owners that their buildings would be condemned by the Metro Codes Department.

The NHA survey found that out of 452 buildings on Music Row, 409 had deficiencies, which had a long list of definitions including “overcrowding or improper location of structures on the land; excessive dwelling unit density; conversions to incompatible types of uses, such as rooming houses among family dwellings; obsolete building types such as large residences or other buildings which through lack of use or maintenance have a blighting influence; detrimental land uses or conditions, such as incompatible uses, or adverse influence from noise, smoke or fumes; unsafe, congested, poorly designed or otherwise

deficient streets; inadequate public utilities or community facilities contributing to unsatisfactory living conditions or economic decline.” The report went on to list each street address and its classification as “standard,” “requires minor repairs,” “requires major repairs,” and “substandard.” (4)

After Metro Council’s rejection of the federally-funded proposal, including opposition from the area’s Councilperson Jim Hamilton, who lived on Music Row in the Pilcher-Hamilton House (DV.00061), due to concerns about eminent domain, the NHA regrouped and created a new Music Row Neighborhood Development Plan. The plan was simplified to omit “any suggestion of urban renewal” and did not include the city’s ability to take any residential property by eminent domain. With these changes, Metro Council approved the plan which ultimately received \$950,000 in funding by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In the coming months, the NHA took action to create an inclusive planning process. In May of 1972, NHA opened an information office at 730 16th Avenue South to provide information to residents and property owners in the two weeks leading up to a public hearing. By June, the NHA had appointed a steering committee to develop guidelines for the Music Row Project Area Committee.

NHA Director Jack Herrington had positive words for these steps forward:

“It is important that activities associated with the planning and execution of the program reflect consideration of the views of the owners and tenants of the property in the area. With the cooperation, participation and support of people with interests in the area, NHA can take the actions necessary to re-establish this as one of the most attractive and desirable areas of the community.” (5)

The next few years saw a continual overlapping of projects underway, government plans still in development, loss of funds to continue work, and the announcement of new construction projects on Music Row from private businesses. Before starting to implement the first year’s plans, federal funding cutbacks meant a second year of work would not be funded. Nevertheless, work moved forward on the first year’s plans.

One city planning project that was completed by 1975 was a small public park, called Music Square Park (later renamed Owen Bradley Park), at the intersection of Division Street, Demonbreun Street, and 16th Avenue South. Constructed at a cost of \$675,769 as part of a federal grant, the park included a concrete walk, benches, landscaping, and a water fountain area with nighttime lighting. The park replaced a service station at that location.

With the completion of 16th and 17th Avenues as one-way streets, in 1975, city planners changed the street names to Music Square. New signs were installed in September of that year identifying the streets as Music Square East and Music Square West. The street names remained 16th and 17th Avenues south of Edgemoor Avenue. The renaming of Music Row to Music Square never gained traction and was only applied to street addresses for Music Row businesses.

While these projects were getting underway, the newly-organized Music Row Project Area Committee decided that a socio-economic study was needed to better understand current conditions and to identify needs for Music Row’s future.

In April 1974, the result was the release of a federally funded, 151-page report, “Music Row Neighborhood Development Programs, Nashville, Tennessee. Summary of Existing Conditions; Socio-economic and Attitudinal Survey; Physical Environmental Plan,” developed by Carter & Burgess, Inc., an engineering and planning company based in Fort Worth, Texas. (6)

The report included three parts: 1) a summary and analysis of existing conditions; 2) socio-economic and attitudinal survey and recommendations for an “economically sound, functional and feasible general socio-economic and physical plan for the NDP area,” and 3) a physical environmental plan.

The report presents an interesting look at the Music Row area in the early 1970s. It begins by describing the area as 0.26 square miles or 165.10 acres with 90 percent developed and the rest in vacant land. The largest land use was for residential properties with almost half in what was defined as medium density (2-4 families), mostly large residences that had been converted into apartments or boarding houses to accommodate university students and “persons affiliated with the music industry.” The report noted that 86% of residential housing was rental.

About a quarter of the area’s land was in commercial use, mostly in business offices, medical facilities, and music recording studios at the north end of the district. The southeastern portion was noted as the only area that had retained its identity as a residential neighborhood.

Other occupants included church facilities, college-owned property (purchased by the George Peabody College for Teachers and Scarritt Bennett in anticipation of expansion), the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, a Metro fire hall (DV.00086), a special education services center, and the public park (which was under construction at the time of the report).

Unlike the Nashville Housing Authority’s earlier survey, this report found that out of 466 buildings, only 85 were considered deficient. Nonetheless, the report addressed the neighborhood’s blight as having three causes: the age of the neighborhood (73% of houses were constructed before 1940), the area’s transitional nature, and the trend toward suburbanization.

The report gave recommendations for addressing the area’s appearance including “Project Pride,” a campaign to clean up the neighborhood, rehabilitate buildings, repair sidewalks, and make other improvements. Other recommendations addressed meeting the needs of a widely varied population that included students, musicians starting out in the music industry, business executives, older residents, families, and children.

Music Row’s Starts and Stops in the 1970s

Despite years of planning, federal funding ran out in the 1970s, bringing an end to grandiose plans such as the Boulevard or Music City Square. The 1970s proved to be a mixed bag for Music Row and the music industry with new construction projects, businesses opening and recording announced at the same time that other reports appeared of businesses closing and big projects being scrapped.

Even with all of the questions about how Music Row’s built environment would be developed – or not developed – by the 1970s it nevertheless had become firmly established as the place to be for struggling artists who wanted to make a name for themselves in the music industry. John Hiatt, who would become an esteemed songwriter with songs recorded by Bonnie Raitt (“Thing Called Love”), Eric Clapton (“Riding with the King”), Rosanne Cash (“The Way We Make a Broken Heart”), and countless others, recalled his arrival in Nashville in the 1970s when he was trying to get his break:

"I spent about two weeks trying to get a publishing deal with this terrible tape I'd made with my buddy who had a couple of two-track tape recorders. Finally I wound up at Tree Publishing....I waited until the last day, until my money was gone...to go to Tree. Larry Henley, who co-wrote "Wind Beneath My Wings," sat me down and I sang a couple of songs. He called Buddy Killen down and I sang a couple more for Buddy. They said 'what are you looking for?' I said '25 bucks a week.' They said 'ok.' I got a room in a boarding house on Music Row, where about five other songwriters lived. I was paying 11 bucks a week for a room with a bare spring bed, a hot plate and a bare light bulb. All up and down Music Row you'd have a house full of songwriters next to a publishing company. Half the house would be songwriters, and half would be working class, blue collar, regular people or down-and-out-folks. We were all mixed together, that was the beauty of it." (1)

A new arrival in 1970 was Nashville Audio Recorders. The independent recording studio, located in a cement block building at 1307 Division Street near Music Row, would become famous as the Sound Shop Studio. The studio was established by Danny Davis, a trumpet player who had founded the Nashville Brass while at RCA and maintained strong music industry connections on Music Row. In 1971, Davis sold the studio to Buddy Killen (Tree Publishing), producer Bob Montgomery, singer-songwriter Bobby Goldsboro, and Kelso Herston who had started a commercial jingle company.

In the next few years, the music recording studio stayed very busy with recordings of country, pop, rock, R&B as well as commercial jingles. The highlight of the early years came in the summer of 1974 when Paul McCartney and his wife Linda strolled in to watch a recording session. It wasn't quite as spontaneous as it appeared. Buddy Killen had helped McCartney and members of his Wings band find a place to stay while on vacation in the area. Killen took the opportunity to invite McCartney to see the Sound Shop Studio resulting in the singer's decision to record in the studio. Songs recorded included "Junior's Farm" and "Sally G."

Sound Shop Studio engineer Billy Sherrill (not the Nashville producer) recalled that a number of prominent Nashville musicians played on some of the sessions with Chet Atkins making the greatest impression with his use of the Nashville Number System:

"Paul played them the song on the guitar once, and Chet started making out a numbers chart. Paul asked him if he wanted to hear it again, but Chet said he had it and kept writing. Paul wanted to know what he was doing, and Chet started explaining the Nashville number system. Paul was just shocked. He had never seen anything like that before, and it freaked him out, which I thought was very cool." (2)

In 1977, a major announcement shook Music Row – RCA was closing Studios A and B because agreement could not be reached with the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians (NABET). (3)

Since 1972, RCA's Nashville enterprises had been headed by Jerry Bradley. Bradley was joined in 1973 by Joe Galante, who was transferred from New York to become the administration manager in Nashville. Although the men had come into the music industry from different directions – Bradley as the son of Owen Bradley and Galante starting as a budget analyst and working his way into management – they quickly established a rapport that brought success for RCA. In 1974, Bradley was promoted and *Billboard* took note:

“The promotion of Jerry Bradley to vice president for Nashville’s operations of RCA creates a family dynasty situation unprecedented here. Bradley and his father, Owen Bradley, now have jurisdiction over (and produce some) of the top names in the country music field. **(4)**

Jerry Bradley (b. 1940) would soon make his own imprint on Nashville’s music industry as he guided the production of “Wanted: The Outlaws” with Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Jessi Colter and Tompall Glaser. Released in 1976, the album skyrocketed to success, creating a new style of country music and reaching new audiences.

RCA Studio B also continued to be active, hosting artists from other labels like Dot artist Donna Fargo who scored a No. 1 country/No. 11 pop chart hit in 1972 with her song “Happiest Girl in the Whole U.S.A.” **(5)**

It wasn’t enough to stop the announcement on January 10, 1977, that the two studios were closing. In addition to the union dispute, industry watchers pointed to additional reasons for the closing including artists demanding control over their work and the increase in independent studios.

Events took a surprising turn two months later when Owen Bradley, who already owned the RCA office building along with his brother Harold Bradley and Chet Atkins, announced he was going to buy RCA Studio A and reopen it as Music City Music Hall.

This announcement was followed in 1978 with another announcement – RCA would re-invest in Nashville, making Joe Galante director of marketing over the label’s country music, pop and country-pop albums which would be recorded at Music City Music Hall. **(6)**

Although RCA Studio A continued as an operating studio, the future would be different for RCA Studio B. With the studio’s closing in 1977, building owner Dan Maddox agreed to allow the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to use the studio for educational music programs and to open the building for tours. (In 1993, the Maddox Family Foundation donated Studio B to the Country Music Foundation which now owns and operates the museum. In 2002, the Mike Curb Family Foundation purchased the studio and leased it back to the museum in perpetuity for \$1 a year.) **(7)**

Throughout the 1970s, Music Row’s place as the center of Nashville’s music industry was evident in the continual announcements of construction projects – some coming to fruition and others never becoming a reality.

In 1972 came the announcement of the first hotel to be constructed on Music Row and slated for completion in 1973. Jack Spence, president of Spence Motel, Inc., unveiled plans for Spence Manor Motor Hotel at 711 16th Avenue South. The \$1 million, nine-story “executive type” hotel, designed by the Nashville architectural firm Clemmons & Gingles, would include 50 “super-deluxe” units. The luxury suites would rent for \$30 to \$40 a day. In announcing the project, Spence explained:

“We intend for this hotel to be designed for the discriminating guest who expects superior service and décor equal to his own home.” **(8)** (The building was renovated and converted to condominiums in 1986.)

In 1973, “Music Row’s First High Rise Office Building” was announced for 17th Avenue. A rendering shows a nine-story building of bronze glass and granite which would be built at a cost of \$2.5 million. The modern building, designed by Nashville architect Howard Phillip Howland, was owned by two partners, Gordon Stoker and Neal Matthews of the Jordanares. United Artists became the first tenant, so the building became known as United Artists Tower. Tower. Located at 50 Music Square West, the design of the iconic octagon-shaped building was apparently inspired by the circular 13-story Capitol Records Tower, completed in 1956 in Hollywood, California. (9)

In its heyday the United Artists Tower was filled with offices, music recording studios, the monthly magazine *Music City News*, and the WRQQ radio broadcast studio. Music publisher and studio owner Jerry Michael recalled operating Suite 900, his state-of-the-art, 24-track recording studio, on the top floor from 1977 to 1990. The studio became a gathering place for top name artists and had clientele from all major record labels and national advertising campaigns. Warner Brothers became a steady customer, booking 2,500 hours a year to record demos for songs written by the company’s 60-plus writers. Michael recalls those days: “In less than a few months (after setting up the studio), it was on the cover of *Mix Magazine* and then *ProSound Calendar*.”

Artists who recorded at the studio in United Artists Tower included Emmylou Harris, the Impressions, the Chi-Lites, and a young, undiscovered Garth Brooks. “Garth was singing a demo for someone else before he made it. I remember walking out of my office and I heard this guy singing, and I thought ‘that guy can sing!’” (10) (In August 2015, the building was purchased by a group of developers who will convert the building into a boutique hotel.)

Also in 1973, a \$3 million project was announced for a six-story office building and a four-story garage on the corner of 17th Avenue South and South Street. The building was to have 65,000 square feet of space, including two music recording studios, a mastering studio, a “full gourmet” restaurant, a penthouse, and suites for lease. One of the backers was Joe Johnson, owner of Four Star Records. (11) (In 2015, the building’s address is 49 Music Square West. It previously housed the offices of Great American Country, GAC-TV, and currently houses the offices of RFD-TV.)

In 1978, the music magazine and publishing firm *Billboard* Publications, Inc. bought four lots on Music Row from the Metro Development and Housing Agency for \$3.5 million. Headquartered in New York, *Billboard*’s Nashville branch office had been located just off Music Row in the Whitehall Building at 1701 West End Avenue (now Metropolitan Bank) since 1962. The announcement of the land purchase called for construction of a \$900,000 building at 1511 Laurel Street (10 Music Circle East) to house *Billboard*’s Nashville operations including WLAC-AM and WKQB-FM radio broadcasting stations. The building was to include shops, offices, a public cafeteria, a 1,000-seat auditorium and a 300-seat private restaurant and club. The design was also intended to allow visitors in the lobby to see the radio stations on the air. (12)

Music Row also proved to be a place to succeed in areas that were a little outside of the standard country and pop music production realm. Perhaps no one better exemplified that in the 1970s than Kelso Herston. Herston began his music career in 1956, starting Tune Records and Publishing with two friends in Florence, Alabama. Moving to Nashville, Herston became a successful session player, and he quickly moved into publishing and production, leading to being named vice president of United Artists Nashville office. By the mid-1960s, Herston had moved to Capitol Records. He also became the music director for the TV show “Hee Haw.” Although Herston’s work in the country music industry gave him the chance to work with such legends as Merle Haggard, Buck Owens, George Jones, and The Oak Ridge Boys, in 1971 Herston took his talents on a different path, starting a commercial jingle company, Kelso

Herston Enterprises. Herston would become the top supplier of radio and television commercials for many years and received more than 50 Diamond and Clio awards. **(13)**

Locating his office and music recording studio in a renovated two-story house built in 1915 at 1202 16th Avenue South (DV.00444), over the next few decades Herston created more than 6,000 jingles which were recorded in Music Row studios. Many of the jingles are an instantly recognizable part of America's popular culture: *Kawaski lets the good times roll..., It's gonna be a Sealy Posturpedic morning...Kellogg's will help you say, it's gonna be a great day...What's good enough for other folks ain't good enough for me and my RC...*

By 1979, a newspaper report counted businesses on Music Row and came up with 270 music publishers, 120 record production agencies, 80 record manufacturing companies, 80 booking agencies, 10 music organizations and unions, 20 radio commercial and jingle companies, 20 album cover photographers, two radio broadcast stations, several music-oriented newspapers and magazines, and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. **(14)**

Even with all this growth, rumors of a decline in the music industry surfaced in the late 1970s, especially in relation to closing RCA Studio A and Studio B. Following the publication of several *Tennessean* and *Nashville Banner* articles in the summer of 1977, industry executives fought back, insisting they were misquoted and that the music industry "may be having its best year yet."

BMI's CEO Frances Preston disagreed with reports that recent staff cuts and the closing of a publishing office were evidence of an industry in decline:

"Changes don't reflect a decline in business. They reflect a gain, not a loss. It's unfortunate they didn't get the facts. Our own company has signed 500 new writers since the first of the year, and Nashville still has 90 percent of the activity on the country charts."

Tree International's CEO Jack Stapp echoed Preston's statements:

"Business is greater than it's ever been – it's unbelievable. From a publishing standpoint, it's increasing all the time."

Ed Shea, ASCAP's regional director, declared:

"ASCAP has had its best year ever. Country music has never been so successful and Nashville has never been more respected. Nashville's future is permanent." **(16)**

Saying Good-Bye to a Beloved Watering Hole

A lamented loss on Nashville's Music Row in 1978 was The Country Corner. The two-story brick home built in 1900 on 16th Avenue South was known as The Country Corner (previously the Tally-ho Tavern). The spot was a favorite hangout of struggling and successful songwriters, musicians, and artists including Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Roger Miller. After being gutted by fire, the building was torn down, but not without a proper send off. Mack Sanders, owner of WJRB radio station and his morning disk jockey Chuck Hussey decided that a memorial service was in order. A local funeral home director donated wilted flowers. The radio station's bookkeeper wrote and performed her original song "They Tore the Country Corner Down." Capping off the memorial, Music Row executive Joe Talbot placed a wreath at the front door. "The passing of something of this magnitude should not go unnoticed," Talbot said. **(15)**

By 1978, the Nashville Talent Directors Association (NTDA) was downplaying reported music industry concerns that country music performers were hiring companies based in Los Angeles, New York – and even Tulsa - to handle their booking and management. Big-name artists identified as using out-of-town management firms included Dolly Parton, Crystal Gale, The Oak Ridge Boys, Larry Gatlin, Mel Tillis, and Don Williams.

While insisting, “It’s no alarming thing really,” talent agent Dick Blake acknowledged the NTDA had “gotten together a few times to try to figure out why those folks on the East and West Coasts can do a better job in some areas that we can. As far as sales go, we excel in Nashville, but as far as promotion or publicity, we’re weak. Television is a big thing now, and we need to learn more about how to work with it. We’re not running scared at all. And in fact Nashville agencies still control the majority of the talent in country music. But Nashville is the hub of the business and we don’t like to see artists leaving.” (17)

Some Things That Didn’t Happen on Music Row

By the 1970s a number of enterprising individuals and organizations sought to capitalize on Music Row’s name recognition with their own projects. For almost a decade, announcements were made about everything from a museum to an entertainment complex to a memorial garden in honor of Elvis Presley. For various reasons, although these projects gained local media attention, none came to fruition. A sampling includes:

- **Country Music Picture Museum** – In April of 1972, a corporation named The Story of Country Music Inc. formed in Delaware with the intention of building a \$300,000 museum devoted to “telling the story of country music.” Planned to be located one block from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, an artist’s drawing shows a two-story building reflecting the architectural style of the Ryman Auditorium. Planners projected visitation of 75,000 people in the first year for what was to be “basically a photo museum which will graphically and dramatically depict the story of country music from its commercial beginnings in the 1920s to the present day.” Other features would include dioramas and murals. The museum would charge the same rates as the Country Music Hall of Fame - \$1.25 for adults and 50 cents for children. (16) (No comments were sought from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum about the proposed museum in local newspaper articles.)
- **Gospel Hall of Fame** – A \$1.5 million Gospel Music Hall of Fame to be located at Demonbreun and Division Streets was announced in January 1976 with a target opening date in the fall of 1977. The new building was to have 19,000 square feet of space over three stories and was to house a museum as well as the offices of the Gospel Music Association which had been founded in 1964. (2)
- **215-Foot-High Guitar-Shaped Building** – In 1976, a local developer planned to construct a 215-foot-high guitar-shaped building across the street from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. The building would have a glass-enclosed elevator running to the top of the building along the guitar’s strings. The building would include office space, restaurants, a museum and tourist shops and an observation tower at the top. (3)
- **Elvis Presley Memorial Park** – In May 1978, less than a year after the death of Elvis Presley, the Elvis Presley Memorial Fund was formed to raise funds for a \$250,000 park memorializing the singer. “It won’t be anything gaudy, you can count on that. It will be a place for meditation,” said Steve Goldstein, leader of the effort. An artist rendering showed a design with a fountain surrounded by walkways, benches, and landscaping. (4)
- **Music Row Design Plan** – In 1982, a local architect presented a plan to “dress up” Music Row. Kevin Tucker contributed an architect’s rendering to create an area that would be an “oasis to

tourists.” The design, estimated to cost \$225,000, would include landscaping, street lights, and a tourist information booth in Music Square Park. **(5)**

Music Row Gets a Swimming Pool

Singer Webb Pierce’s announcement in 1977 that he was going to construct a guitar-shaped swimming pool as a tourist attraction on Music Row sparked one of the fiercest fights – and a flurry of media coverage – that the area had seen.

In the 1950s, Pierce had been a popular honky-tonk and rockabilly singer and guitarist with hits including “In the Jailhouse Now,” “Slowly,” “Love, Love, Love,” and “Wondering.” Known also for his flashy suits and lavish lifestyle, he continued touring and stayed in the spotlight by appearing in several movies.

Pierce’s first attempt at creating a tourist attraction was to construct a guitar-shaped swimming pool at his home near the Governor’s Mansion in Nashville’s wealthy Oak Hill neighborhood. The pool attracted a reported 3,000 visitors each week – and the complaints of his neighbors including singer Ray Stevens who filed suit and won a ruling that Pierce could not turn his home in the upscale residential neighborhood into a tourist attraction.

Undeterred, in December 1977 Pierce announced plans to build a guitar-shaped pool near the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum on Music Row at a cost of \$1 million. A large sign on the site proclaimed “Open Spring ’78, The Webb Pierce Hall of Fame for Country Music Fans.” Pierce’s intention was to charge a small admission to the attraction and offer to add visitors’ names to a poolside scroll for an additional \$10.00. Pierce planned to be on hand when the pool was open to meet visitors and sign autographs.

The plan drew fire from Nashville’s Music Row businesses including Fred Foster, owner of Monument Records, who declared “We’re creative people out here, not carnival people.” Joe Talbot, that year’s CMA president, added:

“That pool, if it’s built, will look about like Tootsie’s Orchid Lounge sitting in the middle of Belle Meade Boulevard.” **(1)**

Those comments caused Pierce to file a \$6 million lawsuit against Foster and Talbot for “libelous” statements.

Other Music Row business people defended Pierce’s right to build the pool. Producer Billy Sherrill commented “On the way to work this morning, it still looked like the good ole U.S.A. to me. I didn’t see the Kremlin. This isn’t Russia yet. Free enterprise should prevail.” **(2)**

An appeal by music industry executives to revoke Pierce’s construction permit failed, and in May 1978 grand opening ceremonies were held for the Webb Pierce Swimming Pool with Governor Ray Blanton and country music star Roy Acuff in attendance.

The pool’s success didn’t last long. By early 1979, the bank that had financed the project had foreclosed on Pierce and his business partner William Donoho, for defaulting on a \$90,000 payment. The pool was auctioned and Donoho purchased it for \$150,000. Pierce and Donoho filed lawsuits against each other and had plenty to say about the other one to the media. “I didn’t know when I went into business with him (Donoho) that he was an ex-convict,” Pierce charged.

Donoho had the last word in a March 9, 1979, interview: “If he says one more thing about me in public. I’m liable to smack him in the nose.” Asked whether he planned to change the name of the attraction, he said “Hell yes, I’ll change it. I wouldn’t name a dog after Webb Pierce.” The pool was later acquired by the adjacent Spence Manor Motor Hotel for use by its visitors. **(3)**

Three PROs on Music Row

Although none of the three performing rights organizations (PROs) - Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), and SESAC (originally the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers, changed to SESAC in 1940) - originally formed for the purpose of representing country music artists, publishers and songwriters, each would become a strong presence on Music Row representing country, gospel and other music genres.

Performing rights organizations operate through a complex system of protecting copyrights through licensing, monitoring, and collecting fees from users. This compensation system is described as:

“...there are instances in which artists are rewarded for their works. Such rewards create incentives to produce new creations. In an effort to provide such incentives, the artistic world created royalties. Royalties enable composers and other copyright owners to receive a fee or a percentage of the revenues when a licensed work is presented to the public through a performance or transmission. Licensing agreements became available to broadcasting organizations and to others who are interested in obtaining performance rights, the right to perform publicly a copyrighted work. Thus, a symbiotic relationship was created between the artist and the consumer, and licensing organizations served as the vehicle for this exchange. Performing rights organizations provide a less expensive and more efficient way for writers and publishers to locate and license music users. Without such organizations, music users would have difficulty keeping track of the thousands of copyright owners and negotiating individual licenses to authorize the performance of each copyrighted work.” **(1)**

In Nashville, the PROs would also expand to play a significant role in nurturing careers by promoting artists and songwriters to publishers and record labels.

Although ASCAP was the first PRO to be formed nationally in 1914, BMI was the first to arrive in Nashville in 1958. BMI was founded in 1939 by a group of radio industry leaders at the annual convention of the National Association of Broadcasters in Chicago and opened offices in New York City in 1940. BMI formed in response to a dispute between radio broadcasters and ASCAP over increased licensing fees.

BMI’s leadership decided on an open door policy, inviting artists from all musical genres to join the membership organization. The formula yielded quick success with 660 of the country’s 800 radio stations signing with BMI by the end of 1940 and by 1941 expanding to license other music venues such as hotels and nightclubs.

The open door policy also led to an early connection with country music as BMI’s official history records:

“1942 - BMI’s early interest in country music, a genre that heretofore had been ignored or denigrated as ‘hillbilly’ music leads it to sign landmark agreements with Acuff-Rose

Publications, headquartered in Nashville, and Hill and Range Songs, headquartered in New York.

“1944 – BMI continues to play a proactive role in country music ascendance into the public arena, while *Billboard* magazine starts to trace the presence of the genre on jukeboxes. (2)

By the 1950s, country music was a firmly established genre for BMI, leading to the organization’s first annual Country Awards in 1953. The event was the first time Nashville’s country artists had been honored with an awards program by any organization.

BMI’s business strategies not only focused on licensing and collecting royalties, they encouraged the development of new music:

“The organization considered only current airplay on both network and non-network radio programs, monitoring airplay of recordings as well as live shows. BMI also financed new publishing ventures by giving advances of up to \$250 per recorded song. Because many new publishing companies were affiliated with new, independent record labels, this seed money had a dual effect in fostering nascent enterprises. By the 1950s, the organization was giving advances on future earnings to writers as well as to publishers, who often gave their own advances to songwriters.” (3)

With numerous artists joining BMI, including Elvis Presley, Dolly Parton, and the Everly Brothers who were recording hits in Nashville, BMI opened a Nashville office in 1958 with Frances Williams Preston at the helm. The decision to open a Nashville office – and to hire Preston – would have far reaching impacts on Nashville’s music industry for decades to come.

Preston’s entrance into the world of music began in the 1950s with a summer job as a mailroom messenger at National Life and Accident Insurance Co., owner of WSM radio. From there she moved to being the radio station’s receptionist.

“That got me involved in everything. I helped out with the public relations department, at cocktail parties, meetings and things. I helped everybody with everything and got to know everybody in town,” Preston recalled. (4)

The job led to Preston’s meeting BMI’s senior vice president Bob Burton who asked her to open the BMI Southern Regional Office in Nashville in 1958. After running the office from her parents’ home and then from an office in the L&C Tower downtown, Preston convinced BMI’s New York-based board of directors to construct an office building on Music Row at 710 16th Avenue South (10 Music Square East).

Construction of the BMI office building started in 1963, and when the building was completed in 1964, Preston moved into her new office with a new title – vice president, making her “reportedly, the first woman corporate executive in Tennessee, and the first full-time performing rights organization representative in the South.” (5)

In 1973, the growing organization announced a modern-style \$500,000 expansion designed by Nashville architect Earl Swensson that would triple the size of its offices when completed in 1974:

“The new space, which involves a move into surrounding properties and even the transplanting of massive trees, will contain executive offices, a conference room seating 50 persons, and film projection facilities.”

The current BMI offices were noted as “the first of the modern dignified buildings to be erected here.” (6)

BMI would undergo a third expansion in the mid-1990s, enlarging the offices with a \$13.8 million six-story Brutalist-style concrete and glass addition (Brutalist originates from the French *béton brut* meaning “raw concrete”), also designed by Nashville architect Earl Swensson.

In the years to come, BMI would have a profound impact on Nashville’s music industry in many ways including increasing the organization’s membership, instituting an awards program for songwriters, protecting songwriters’ rights, mentoring up-and-coming artists and songwriters, licensing for digital media, and creating one of the music industry’s first websites in 1994.

Many in the music industry credit Preston as their mentor including Jody Williams who would work at BMI three different times during his career. In 2015, Williams became BMI’s vice president of writer/publisher relations, the same job held by Frances Preston when he first talked with her in 1976. Williams first found himself in Preston’s office when he was a young college student, asking her advice about opening a record store. Preston advised against it but offered him a job at BMI:

“Back in those days BMI was a satellite office from the New York headquarters. And Francis was the queen of the music industry in Nashville and she could do whatever she needed to do to get things done. There wasn't at HR department down the hall. If she had a gut feeling she could do it. She'd call up New York and say I did it and they'd say - good for you. You're doing such a great job.” (7)

ASCAP was the next to build modern offices on Music Row in 1968. ASCAP, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, was founded in New York City in 1914 to protect copyrighted musical compositions used in public performances. The growth of radio in the 1920s added a new layer of responsibility as ASCAP began collecting license fees from broadcasters. Among the first songwriters in country music to join ASCAP were Gene Autry, Fred Rose, and the “King of Western Swing” Bob Wills.

With the growth of country music, ASCAP established a Nashville branch office on Music Row in 1965 in the RCA Victor Studio A building and held its first country music awards program. Within a few years plans were under way for a new building on Music Row. *Billboard* announced the upcoming groundbreaking in October 1968:

“The massive building will replace three existing structures at 17th and Division at the head of Music Row. It will face both 17th and the soon to be constructed Music City Boulevard which in turn will replace 16th Avenue. Construction will be done by W.B. Cambron who also was the contractor for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and for the BMI building. Both the land and the building are owned by Chet Atkins and Owen Bradley and will be leased to ASCAP on a long-term basis.” (8)

The Nashville Banner also reported on the plan:

“Two Nashville musician-businessmen have bought the southeast corner properties in the Music Row Area at 17th Avenue and Division Street. Chet Atkins, internationally-known guitarist and who heads up RCA music operations here, and Owen Bradley, Decca Records local representative and a well-known bandleader, were the buyers. Bradley said plans have already been completed to construct a ‘modern, glass and brass’ 5,000 square foot building on the property. On completion it will be leased to the Nashville operations for the American Society of Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), a music-related business which deals mainly in copyrights. Adding the cost of the construction of the building to the purchase price of the existing tract, total investment would approximate \$250,000.” (9)

The publication followed up after the groundbreaking:

“Ground was broken here Monday (14) for the first ASCAP building. ‘Heretofore we’ve always had branches in someone else’s building,’ said Stanley Adams, ASCAP president. ‘Now we have our first real structure.’

“The one-story facility will have 14 rooms, including a dining and galley area and a complete press room.

Although ASCAP had an early foothold in the city through the efforts of Fred Rose, it had faded from the country music scene appreciably before Adams revitalized it in recent years. He has said it is his aim to cover half the charts with ASCAP country songs within a few years. (10)

The building was completed in 1969 and would be replaced in 1992 by a larger building designed by Nashville architect Tom Bulla. The Nashville office was managed by Ed Shea until 1980 when Connie Bradley became ASCAP’s southern regional director.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, ASCAP increased its presence in the country music industry as noted in a 1979 *Billboard* article:

“The record breaking growth which began in Nashville’s Southern offices in the late ‘60s has again produced an unprecedented success as reflected by the society’s 18 No. 1 country songs on the trade charts this year,” commented ASCAP southern regional executive director Ed Shea. “Our total involvement in Nashville as the pivot, and the surrounding territories in the past decade has mushroomed to the point where 1979 has been our greatest year ever.” (11)

As Frances Preston had, Connie Bradley got her start as a receptionist at a local TV station before moving on to secretarial jobs at RCA and Dot Records. In 1976, Bradley began working as a membership representative at ASCAP leading to her appointment in 1980 as southern regional director over a 20-state area, a position she would continue for the next 30 years.

In 1975, the ASCAP Foundation was formed to create programs for music education and talent development. Over the years the foundation has created two dozen scholarships, provided financial

support to music education programs for schools and summer camps, sponsored songwriter workshops, and developed numerous awards for composers and songwriters.

Also opening an office in Nashville in the 1960s was SESAC. Unlike BMI and ASCAP, SESAC did not have an open membership – members must be approved to join. The performing rights organization was formed in 1930 in New York as the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers and became known simply as SESAC in 1940. The original name reflected the PRO's original purpose of supporting European stage authors and composers in obtaining American performance royalties. By the 1960s, SESAC had shifted its focus to other musical genres while still focusing exclusively on publishing.

In 1964, SESAC opened an office at the building housing Capitol Studios at 806 16th Avenue South. In January 1965, *Billboard* featured "The Story of SESAC – Its Beginning, Its Hopes," which recounted the PRO's history and current activities. The article explained the Station Relations Department included a department head and eight traveling "field men who handle sales, licensing and public relations" who visit every station at least once a year. The new Nashville office was also noted:

"SESAC found its long activity in the gospel and religious music fields a natural entrée to the country music area. Last January (1964) the company opened an office in Nashville which is manned by Mercury recording artist Roy Drusky and two other staffers." (12)

Drusky (1930-2004), a member of the Grand Ole Opry, had become a country artist in the 1950s and had been on several labels before signing with Mercury and would continue to have hits through the 1970s. It was Drusky's assistant, Lloyd Green (b. 1937), who would help SESAC achieve one of its first big hits.

In the early 1960s, Green, a steel guitar player who would go on to play on hundreds of Nashville recording sessions, was a struggling musician who could not afford to renew his Musicians' Union card and was selling shoes for a living. Green had met Drusky when he played backup for him on the Opry, and Drusky offered him a job as his assistant in the new SESAC office.

The new job yielded several benefits including getting Green back into playing, scoring a major hit record for SESAC, and working with a new artist named Lynn Anderson. Green recalled that time:

"(SESAC) was a good move because I assumed all the responsibilities. Roy didn't spend much time in the office. I did all the front work. Our offices were right in the middle of Music Row, and the first week I was there, Slim Williamson, who owned Chart Records, hired me for a demo and a master session. That became my first (studio) account." (13)

The session resulted in SESAC's first hit - a novelty recitation called "Looking for More in '64," by country comedian Jim Nesbitt which featured the memorable words "Some's got oil and some's got none, And I can't buy me a Cinnamon Bun; I'm out plowin' and my feet are sore, And I'm lookin' for more in '64."

The 1970s saw two changes that would significantly affect SESAC's development – beginning to sign songwriters and increased focus on the PROs Christian music roster which led early involvement in what became known as Contemporary Christian music.

In 1985, SESAC moved its headquarters from New York City to Nashville, building new, larger offices at 55 Music Square East, with a later expansion to add office space in the nearby Mercury Records building at 66 Music Square West. Leading the move to the modern new headquarters at Nashville was Dianne

Petty (d. 2007) who had joined SESAC in 1979 as senior vice president of the creative department, a position she would hold until 1995. (In 2015, the office building at 66 Music Square West was demolished and construction was underway on a \$20 million, five-story, 96,000-square-foot office building on Music Square East, designed by Tuck Hinton Architects of Nashville. SESAC will occupy about one-third of the space. The Country Music Association also announced its offices would move to this location.)

The location of all three performing rights organizations in Nashville led to what *Billboard* called a “hot race to woo writers” in a 1981 front-page article:

“Responding to this city’s accelerating musical activity, the local offices of ASCAP, BMI and SESAC are sharpening the competition for bankable writers and publishers. All the organizations say they have had increases in membership. Among the inducements held out to writers are quick and liberal advances, variable length contracts, personalized career guidance, assistance in gaining record deals and various appeals to vanity.” (14)

At the same time the three PROs competed, there was also overlap at times as Dianne Petty explained using singer K.T. Oslin as an example. With help from SESAC, Oslin was signed to Elektra. Oslin would later sign with RCA and go on to have several hits including the Grammy-winning “’80s Ladies” in 1987. In 1981, Petty was working to get a record deal for Oslin (called Kay T. at the time):

“We have a writer on the charts now (1981) – Kay T. Oslin. I got on the street and shopped the project – played it for 11 people in two days. Now if you notice Kay’s song, it’s BMI. My point of view is that if the writer is with SESAC and happens to be an artist, we’re not going to tie his wrists. We want the best songs for our artists. We’ll get our share on album cuts and B sides. And we’ll eventually get our share of singles.” (15)

Growing and Changing – 1980s into the 1990s

Everything changed in the music industry in the 1980s and 1990s from the technology used both to make and to listen to music, to the kinds of music that were popular, to the places where customers bought records. The result was a roller coaster ride through these years as reports veered from announcing the decline of country music to declaring that the industry was holding steady or even reaching new heights of success.

The soundtrack to the 1980 movie “Urban Cowboy” featured several *Billboard* No. 1 hits on the country and pop charts and is credited with starting a pop-country music craze that continued for several years. During these years, pop-country style artists including Kenny Rogers, Eddie Rabbitt, Anne Murray, and others had hits on both country and pop charts.

In 1980, an all-women slate of artists was at the top of the *Billboard* country singles chart the week of April 19 for the first time: “It’s Like We Never Said Goodbye” by Crystal Gale; “A Lesson in Leavin” by Dottie West; “Are You On the Road to Lovin’ Me Again” by Debby Boone; “Beneath Still Waters” by Emmylou Harris; and “Two Story House” by Tammy Wynette (with George Jones.)

At the top of the list of successful artists was Barbara Mandrell (b. 1948) who had 17 Top Ten hits between 1978 and 1984 and was awarded CMA’s Female Vocalist of the Year in 1979 and again in 1981 and Entertainer of the Year in 1980 and 1981. Born in Houston, Mandrell’s musical talent had appeared as a child and by the time she was a teen-ager she played many instruments including steel guitar,

saxophone, banjo, and accordion. Within a few years she had performed in a Las Vegas nightclub and toured with Red Foley, Tex Ritter, Patsy Cline, and Johnny Cash. Making her way to Nashville with the intention of becoming a country singer, Mandrell signed with Columbia Records in 1969. A few hits followed including “Tonight My Baby’s Coming Home” and “After Closing Time.”

Mandrell’s path to superstar status continued with a move to ABC/Dot Records in 1975. Working with producer Tom Collins, she recorded hits including “Married but Not to Each Other,” and her first No. 1 hit, “Sleeping Single in a Double Bed” in 1978 followed by “If Loving You Is Wrong I Don’t Want to Be Right” in 1979. In 1981, Mandrell continued her string of hits including “I Was Country When Country Wasn’t Cool” in 1981, a commentary on the resurgent popularity of country music which would become her signature song.

Mandrell’s success continued through the 1980s with multiple awards from the Country Music Association, American Music Awards, Grammy Awards, People’s Choice Awards and others. Capitalizing on her popularity, she starred in a television variety show, “Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters” with her sisters Louise and Irlene, from 1980 to 1982. In 1984, she opened a museum, Barbara Mandrell Country, on Demonbreun Street in the tourist district of Music Row.

The musical group dominating the era was Alabama, with members Randy Owen, Teddy Gentry, and Jeff Cook, scoring 27 No. 1 hits, seven platinum albums and multiple awards including becoming the first group awarded the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year in 1982.

Originally formed in 1973 with the name Wildcountry (changing the name to Alabama in 1977) the group played at clubs throughout the South, recorded at small record labels and had a few hit records. A live performance caught the attention of Shelia Shipley, RCA’s promotion department secretary, which led to the group signing with RCA in 1980. **(1)**

The group’s first single, “Tennessee River,” went to No. 1 followed by a continual string of pop and country hits throughout the 1980s including “Feels So Right,” “Love in the First Degree,” “The Closer You Get,” “Mountain Music” and “Song of the South.”

RCA’s director of marketing Joe Galante explained the promotional strategy:

“We used a pop model to market Alabama. We did it like it had never been done in country music. We did a total, all-out blitz, from city to city, booking them into rock clubs and inviting radio, broadcast and media, not just country, but pop and rock.” **(2)**

The 1980s also proved to be good years for some of country music’s traditional artists, thanks to the work of Rick Blackburn (1942-2012). After stints in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, Blackburn came to Nashville in 1974 to manage Monument Records. In 1976, he moved to CBS Records’ Nashville division as vice president of marketing, moving up to vice president and general manager by 1980. While at CBS, Blackburn worked with many big-name artists including Tammy Wynette, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Bobby Bare, Roseanne Cash, Ricky Skaggs, Ricky Van Shelton, and Larry Gatlin moving the label from fourth to first place in country music market share.

Blackburn also focused on finding new acts – disparaging “sound-alikes”:

“You wouldn’t believe how many tapes get pitched to me today because ‘this guy sounds just like Ricky Skaggs’ or ‘this singer is gonna be the next Roseanne Cash.’ Why would I be interested in that when we’ve already got the originals on our label?” (3)

Blackburn’s most controversial decision at CBS came in 1986 when he decided to drop Johnny Cash from CBS’s Columbia label where he had been since 1960. Cash had not had a solo Top 10 hit since 1981’s “The Baron.” Blackburn was quoted in newspapers across the country: “This is the hardest decision I’ve ever had to make in my life.” (Cash would soon sign with Mercury Records where he made several albums in an acclaimed career comeback.)

Blackburn would move to head up Atlantic Records in 1989 where he continued furthering the careers of artists like Tracy Lawrence, John Michael Montgomery, Neal McCoy, and Confederate Railroad.

Capitalizing on country music’s popularity, Nashville’s Music Row also became a tourist destination in the 1980s. Just as fans had once gone to the radio broadcasting stations downtown to hear their favorite music, they were now finding their way to Nashville and to Music Row to experience country music up close in museums and stores – and hopefully to catch a glimpse of their favorite artists.

Starting with the opening of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in 1967 – coupled with the growing awareness that Music Row was the place where hits were made – tourists began finding their way to the area. In 1980, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum reported visitation of 485,000, making it Nashville’s third biggest attraction behind Opryland Theme Park and the Grand Ole Opry. (4)

With this success others soon followed, creating a Music Row tourism destination on Demonbreun Street in what local media dubbed the “Hottest Part of Town.” Among the first tourist attractions was the Country Music Wax Museum. Opening in 1971, the museum featured life-size replicas of Hank Williams, George Jones, Dolly Parton, Minnie Pearl, Johnny Cash, Conway Twitty, and Barbara Mandrell. These country stars and others donated original costumes and instruments; some were even involved in designing their statues.

Other museums and attractions followed including the Elvis-a-Rama, Hank Williams Jr. Museum and the Car Collectors Hall of Fame. At the Barbara Mandrell Country museum, visitors could pay \$19.95 to record a song by singing along with a recorded country music band.

Even Minnie Pearl got into the act, opening a museum in a yellow gingerbread house in 1984. Pearl was often on hand to greet her fans:

“Friends ask me why I spend so much time at the museum. When I see the expressions on the faces of my fans when they see me close up, and I speak to them, and their faces light up, it makes it all worthwhile.”(5)

A short-lived venture was an attraction dubbed Country Crossroads. In 1981, the Metro Development and Housing Agency agreed to sell a triangular-shaped lot at Division and Demonbreun (previously the planned location for the Gospel Music Hall of Fame) for an 18,000-20,000-square-foot animated theater featuring five theaters named the Rocky Top Review, Hillbilly Holler, Coonskin Corner, Rockabilly Ridge,

and Gospel Junction. The attraction opened and closed in about a year, and the site was purchased and redeveloped for the Barbara Mandrell Country museum. (6)

Tourists could also browse and purchase souvenirs in the Wild Wild West Shirt Shop, Loretta Lynn's Western Wear store, Willie Nelson & Family General Store. Log Cabin Souvenirs offered T-shirts, Goo-Goo Cluster candy (\$1.49 for a six-pack), and camera film. Record stores included Conway's Twitty Bird Record Shop and Ernest Tubb's Record store. Film could be developed at Barbara Mandrell's One Hour Photo.

"If your business is related to the tourist industry, this is the hottest part of town," said Bob Pearsall, a broker with the Tennessee Real Estate Co. The area was especially attractive to tour groups. "They bring the people to you, put them out and say 'Spend your money. We'll pick you up in an hour.' That's a hard situation to beat." (7)

By the 1980s, Fan Fair (as CMA Music Fest was then called) provided an ever-growing annual influx of tourists each June for the country music extravaganza. They came to meet and be entertained by their favorite country music artists including Conway Twitty, Dottie West, Barbara Mandrell, Charley Pride, Randy Travis, Keith Whitley, George Strait, and others.

In 1982, the Fan Fair was moved from the downtown Municipal Auditorium to the Tennessee State Fairgrounds south of downtown Nashville. In 1985, the event attracted 20,000 people. *Billboard* described the event:

"There is no other institution in the world of entertainment quite like the annual Fan Fair. It is a time when most of the country stars come off the road and out of the recording studios to spend a week mingling with their most devoted fans. Fans are treated to more than 30 hours of stage shows by the biggest-selling and most revered acts in country music. Between shows the fans wander among the 300 or so display booths set up by fan clubs, radio stations, trade associations, book stores, magazines, record stores, clothing manufacturers and dozens of other groups with an interest in country music." (8)

The success of Alabama and other artists in the early 1980s made country music a bright spot in the music industry. A 1982 report showed an overall music industry peak in 1978 at \$4 billion gross had dropped to \$3.6 billion in 1981. By 1982, *Rolling Stone* was reporting further declines in sales by as much as 50 percent from the previous year. At the same time, reports said that Nashville's segment of the music industry was holding its own:

"Country music is definitely one of the most positive areas that most labels have going for them," says Lynn Shults, who heads the Capitol-Liberty-EMI operation in Nashville. "You look at the numbers that are generated by acts that have grown from their country roots and are now working in the mainstream pop marketplace and you'll see Nashville is stronger than it has ever been – especially in this tight economy." (9)

By the mid-1980s that story was changing. With the decline in popularity of pop-country, and country music stars from the 1960s and 1970s beginning to exit the stage, a 1985 *New York Times* headline declared “Nashville Sound: Country Music in Decline” with an article that gave troubling details:

“Recent sales pictures paint a grim picture. Stars who were selling a half a million to more than a million copies per album in the late 1970s are lucky to be selling half that today. Having a No. 1 country single used to mean around 350,000 records; now a country No. 1 sells an average of 100,000. (10)

The article went on to describe a doubtful future for country music as young audiences preferred rock ‘n roll, even including a quote from Tammy Wynette that “If this trend continues, there won’t be any more country stars because there won’t be any money in it.” (11)

But Nashville’s music industry wasn’t about to let country music die. Determined to keep and continue building its audiences, Music Row responded by promoting artists in what became known as the “new traditionalist” movement (also referred to as neo-traditional music).

The same *New York Times* article that declared country music was in decline went on to note that the current (mid-1980s) fascination with the old West and frontier America was benefitting new traditionalist artists like Ricky Skaggs and George Strait “who are going back to the roots of country music for inspiration, and making simple, soulful records without the strings and vocal choruses and other commercial clutter so typical of today’s Nashville Sound.” (12)

Ricky Skaggs spent the 1970s establishing himself as one of the best artists in bluegrass, and by the 1980s he was prepared to enter the mainstream of country music. Skaggs got his start in the music world at the age of six when the Father of Bluegrass Bill Monroe invited him to perform at one of his concerts. By the time he was a teenager, Skaggs had become proficient at fiddle and guitar and he and fellow performer Keith Whitley formed the East Kentucky Mountain Boys. That led to playing with Carter and Ralph Stanley and recording an album. The 1970s found Skaggs starting his own group, Boone Creek, recording more albums and playing with Emmylou Harris’s band. Skaggs entrance into the country music world came in 1981 with the Epic Records release of “Waitin’ for the Sun to Shine” which produced four chart singles and two No. 1 songs, “Crying My Heart Out Over You,” and “I Don’t Care.” In 1982 Skaggs won CMA’s Horizon Award and Best Male Vocalist Award and he was inducted into the Grand Ole Opry. Follow up albums over the next few years were also successful including “Don’t Cheat in Our Hometown” and “Country Boy.” “Live from London” in 1985 netted Skaggs the CMA Entertainer of the Year Award and his second Grammy for Best Country Instrumental. In the years to come Skaggs would win a total of 14 Grammys and would be a leading advocate of traditional country music. (13)

George Strait attracted fans during these years with a string of platinum and gold albums in his own brand of the new traditionalist style which combined western swing, honky-tonk and country. Although

The Days of Satin Jackets

Besides all of the music being made on Nashville’s Music Row, in the early 1980s there was another popular product emerged – satin jackets. In a July 1981 *Nashville Banner* article, satin jackets were lauded at Music Row’s equivalent to Wall Street’s corporate tie. “Anybody who’s *anybody* had one,” fashion editor Beth Atkins declared. Several reasons were noted for their popularity: “They are a nice complement to the music industry’s uniform – blue jeans. They make a great promotional item and turn the wearer into a walking advertisement. Owning a jacket was a status symbol, the article points out. “These jackets aren’t just handed out at random, nor can they be purchased at your local souvenir shop. You have to be affiliated with, related to or a friend of the group to own such a jacket.”

raised in Texas, Strait didn't discover country music until the 1970s. While in the army and stationed in Hawaii, Strait joined an army base country band where he learned the songs of Merle Haggard, Hank Williams, and George Jones. By 1981 Strait had made his way to Nashville where he recorded his first album "Strait Country." Six of the 10 songs on the album were recorded at Music City Music Hall (previously known as RCA Studio A) and in 1982 Strait returned to record his second album "Strait from the Heart" at the studio. **(14)**

Other new traditionalist artists arriving on the scene in these years included Randy Travis, Dwight Yoakam, Ricky Van Shelton, Holly Dunn, Kathy Mattea, Keith Whitley, and Reba McEntire. As the 1980s progressed more artists claimed the new traditionalist mantle including Alan Jackson, Clint Black, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Lorrie Morgan, Travis Tritt, and The Judds.

An epicenter of these changes was RCA's Nashville offices. In 1982, with the departure of Jerry Bradley, Joe Galente became head of the Nashville office. Galente's first action sent shock waves through the music industry as he decided not to renew contracts with long-time RCA country artists including Hank Snow, Jerry Reed, Charley Pride, and Waylon Jennings. Galente explained:

"You can like all the music you want, but if they are not selling records, they are not adding value to the company." **(15)**

Galente's next steps redeemed him the eyes of the industry as he signed The Judds, Vince Gill, K.T. Oslin, and Clint Black, new traditionalist artists who attracted new fans and reinvigorated country music.

Also arriving in Nashville during these years was Jimmy Bowen (b. 1937), a West Coast producer who had produced Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., and Dean Martin. Bowen would shake up Nashville's music industry in more ways than one – producing hits for many artists, increasing budgets for record production, widening Nashville's focus beyond country music and advocating for the use of new digital technology recording and producing music on CDs instead of record albums. Bowen collected supporters and detractors along the way.

Jimmy Bowen's approach was vastly different from the friendly, community-oriented music business he found in 1977:

"In order for Nashville to grow, the studios had to be in competition with each other, so that they would have to bring in all the new technology and get in on the cutting edge of the technical side of the business. Nashville had all the things necessary to pull this thing off. And it had a half-a-dozen people there that I had known for 15, 20 years that I thought were bright, intelligent people that I believed would participate and help make changes." **(16)**

Bowen would eventually head up eight labels at different times – MGM, MCA, Elektra/Asylum, Warner Brothers, Universal, Capitol (Bowen changed the name to Liberty) and Patriot Records, leaving his imprint on each one. A management strategy that bewildered others in Nashville's music industry was Bowen's decision to fire nearly everyone when he took over a label. Bowen explained:

"I never took over a company that I didn't know everybody in it and have a pretty good dossier on them. So when you take over you can make the change quickly and get on with the music. It's kind of like taking over a moving train." **(17)**

Whatever Music Row insiders thought of Bowen's management style, there was no denying that he got results. For almost 20 years Bowen produced hits for artists including Conway Twitty, George Strait, Reba McEntire, Crystal Gale, and Waylon Jennings. By the time he left Nashville in 1995, Bowen had produced almost 200 Top Ten singles including 67 which hit No. 1 and 45 Top Ten albums including 10 which went to No. 1.

While heading up MCA, one of Bowen's biggest successes was helping take Reba McEntire from popular artist to superstar. McEntire had some success in the 1970s and early 80s at Mercury Records, but in 1984, she signed with MCA Records where she discussed her future with Bowen who told her:

"I said, one, you have to want it more than anything in your life because your competition does. Two, you have to control all aspects of your career." (18)

Reba McEntire (b. 1955) took the advice to heart, and working with Bowen had the biggest hits of her career. In 1984, she released "My Kind of Country" which included the No. 1 hits "How Blue" and "Somebody Should Leave" and netted her the CMA Female Vocalist of the Year award (which she would win for the next three years.)

Bowen was also instrumental in McEntire's next recording of "Whoever's in New England" which he assured her was not "too pop," declaring after the recording session "This is gonna be the biggest thing you've ever done." He was right - McEntire's scored her first gold album (eventually going platinum) and two No. 1 singles including the title cut and "Little Rock." (19)

One of Bowen's most publicized altercations was with Garth Brooks. When Bowen took the lead at Capitol Records (changing the name of the Nashville division to Liberty), the artist roster included rising star Brooks who was already in production for his first album. Although Bowen saw Brooks' superstar potential, the two strong personalities collided and Bowen ended up leaving the label (also due to Bowen's cancer diagnosis at the same time). Bowen's 1997 autobiography "Rough Mix" begins by recounting Brooks' declaration that he would not record any more albums as long as Bowen was there:

"After she read the book my wife said 'You can't get on Garth much for always wanting a new deal – that's what you did.' I said – keep that to yourself." (20)

In an interesting contrast to the *New York Times* article which stated that country music was in decline, another 1985 article, this time in *Billboard*, declared that Nashville was a boom town.

It appeared that the *New York Times* article was in error – country music wasn't in decline in the 1980s and 1990s. It was in a tremendous transition. Even with the changes in technology and the growing popularity of the new traditionalist artists, some of country music's legends continued to have hits:

"George Jones, one of the longest-running acts of the time, recorded several successful singles, including the critically acclaimed "He Stopped Loving Her Today." Conway Twitty continued to have a series of No. 1 hits with 1986's "Desparado Love," becoming his 40th chart topper on the *Billboard* Hot Country Singles chart, a record that stood for nearly 20 years. The movie 'Coal Miner's Daughter' profiled the life of Loretta Lynn (with Sissy Spacek in the lead role), while Willie Nelson also had a series of acting credits. Others who had been around for a while and continued to have great success were Eddy

Arnold, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Ray Price, Hank Williams Jr. and Tammy Wynette.
(21)

Adding to the standard artists' fare of producing albums, performing in concerts and getting radio airplay, the 1980s saw the introduction of a completely new promotional venue – music videos. The first music video cable channel was Music Television (MTV), which launched in August 1981 from its studios in New York City. The selection of music videos was guided by television personalities called video jockeys or VJs.

On March 5, 1983, Country Music Television (CMTV, later changed to CMT) went on the air as a 24-hour-a-day country music video cable channel. Founded by Glenn Daniels, CMT broadcast from its studio in Hendersonville, a Nashville suburb. The first video shown, Faron Young's 1971 hit "It's Four in the Morning," was just the start of broadcasting more than 5,000 video clips Daniels had stockpiled, soon to be supplemented with an ever-increasing number of new videos made by 1980s and 1990s country music artists. Nashville and the surrounding Middle Tennessee region became a center for the production of country music videos.

Two days later, on March 7, 1983, The Nashville Network, (TNN) also went on the air. TNN was owned by WSM and broadcast from Opryland Theme Park in Nashville's Donelson suburb with a variety of talk shows, games shows, and lifestyle shows centered around country music.

The new era was reported by *Variety*:

"MTV, cable's round-the-clock rock video network, has a new country cousin. The new video music service will essentially compete for the same audience and advertisers as The Nashville Network which launched its 18-hour-per-day country programming on March 7." (22)

With the arrival of the 1990s, country music spread even farther, reaching such massive new audiences that the genre was sometimes referred to as "arena" music or "stadium" music because the artists could fill these large venues for their concerts. Leading the way in this era of growth were Garth Brooks, Shania Twain, and Billy Ray Cyrus.

Garth Brooks (b. 1962) arrived from Oklahoma on the scene "seemingly out of nowhere with record-shattering hits...The Garth Brooks explosion was like nothing in country or almost anyplace else. Garth's second album began selling and selling and selling and selling...ultimately sales stood at 17 million copies." (23)

After a failed trip to Nashville in 1985, Brooks returned in 1987 and was fortunate to connect with music industry veteran Bob Doyle. Doyle had been on Music Row since 1976, working at Warner Brothers and then at ASCAP before starting his own publishing business. Doyle teamed up with local public relations executive Pam Lewis and the team set out to make a breakthrough for Brooks. Doyle recalled those days:

"We were pretty well universally rejected. I guess there were maybe six labels in town. We did get a second meeting at Warners. We did get a second meeting at Capitol, but it was sort of another situation that really resulted in the signing at Capitol." (24)

A performance at the Bluebird Café got the attention of Capitol where president Jim Foglesong signed the new singer. (In June 1982, Amy Kurland had opened the Bluebird Café as a gourmet restaurant and small 90-seat performance venue in a strip shopping center in Nashville's Green Hills suburb. In 1983, Kathy Mattea landed a record deal, after playing the Bluebird for a few months.) Garth Brooks' self-titled first album did well (overseen by Capitol's new president Jimmy Bowen), but it was the release of the single "The Dance" that caused sales to spike in early 1990. The hit song "Friends on Low Places" on Brooks' second album, "No Fences," released that summer, established the artist as a record-breaking phenomenon. Brooks' third album, "Ropin' the Wind" was the first country album to debut at No. 1 on the pop charts.

Brooks decision to stage his concerts in 15,000-20,000 seat arenas proved his superstar status in what was referred to as "Garthmania." The formula worked as Brooks broke records throughout the 1990s – 60 million sales with six albums and sell-out crowds at his concerts, highlighted by a 1997 performance at New York's Central Park before a live audience of 250,000. Along the way Brooks won two Grammys, 22 Academy of Country Music Awards, 12 American Music Awards, three ASCAP awards, 17 Billboard Music Awards, two Blockbuster Entertainment Awards and nine Country Music Association awards, among others.

Bob Doyle attributes much of Brooks' success to the artist's understanding of the business side of the music industry:

"If you're gonna be in this business you'd better understand how the media works, you'd better understand how radio works, you'd better understand how the touring business works, and how promoters control their markets. Garth was very conscious of why are we doing this or what is the reason for that – he took nothing for granted. He tried to think it all through." (25)

Emerging around the same time were two soon-to-be superstars, both signed to Mercury Records – Shania Twain and Billy Ray Cyrus.

Juanita Copeland was the receptionist at Mercury Records in the early 1990s (moving up quickly into A&R and publicity). Copeland recalled those days:

"Mercury Records was on the corner of Chet Atkins and 18th. We were in this little tiny house. The second week I was there they brought this beautiful lady down from Canada, sat her down – she was waiting to meet her producer. And she and I struck up a friendship. She was introduced to me as Eileen. So we became friends and she would sing in the bathroom behind the reception area. She would practice her vocals. Her name was Shania.

That same week, this man comes barreling in the front door, and he's bouncing around the lobby and I'm thinking 'This is the most hyper human I've ever met in my life.' And he's air boxing. And he walks up to my desk and goes 'Who are you?' And I said 'Well my name's Juanita.' And he goes 'Oh you're the new receptionist.' And I said 'yes sir.' And he said 'I'm Billy Ray, nice to meet you.'

So in that short span of time, we had signed Shania Twain and Billy Ray Cyrus." (26)

It was a fortunate place for both singers to land under the guidance of A&R head Harold Shedd, who had produced the superstar group Alabama and signed K.T. Oslin while he was at RCA. In addition to Cyrus and Twain, while at Mercury Shedd would sign the Kentucky Headhunters, Kathy Mattea, Toby Keith, and Sammy Kershaw.

Billy Ray Cyrus's (b. 1961) first success came with his 1992 release "Some Gave All" which hit both pop and country charts and was the first debut album to enter at No. 1 on *Billboard's* country chart, eventually selling more than 20 million copies. The first single, "Achy Breaky Heart" became a national sensation. Juanita Copeland recalls:

"Nobody in town thought it was gonna be a hit. Well holy cow! None of us were prepared for the rocket ride that was Billy Ray Cyrus' 'Achy Breaky Heart.' We went from having 11 employees to 33 employees what seemed like overnight. At Fan Fair that year, in '92, we had paparazzi hanging in the trees outside of the vice president of business affairs house, which is where our party was, hoping to get pictures. Nashville had never seen anything like that." (27)

As Cyrus released more albums, he continued to have hits throughout the 1990s including "Could've Been Me," "She's Not Cryin' Anymore," "In the Heart of a Woman," "Somebody New" and "It's All The Same to Me." Cyrus received numerous awards during these years from the Country Music Association, *Billboard*, Country Music Television, *People* magazine, and others. Cyrus left Mercury and signed with Monument Records in 1999.

Shania Twain's (b. 1965) "rocket ride" would come a few years after Cyrus when her 1995 album "The Woman in Me" became the top-selling album by a female country music artist, selling more than 8 million copies. In the years leading up to that success, Twain's eventual stardom was not as clear. Copeland recalls the release of Twain's first, self-titled record in 1993:

"She was starting out in a male-dominated world, and they didn't let her write the songs on her first record. They gave her one song that she co-wrote with someone that she was allowed to put on the record because it just wasn't done back then. Loretta Lynn was about the only person I think that got to call the shots with writing her own stuff. She had an international fan base but her record just didn't sell very well here" and Shania was on the list to be dropped. (28)

Unknown to anyone at Mercury, Twain's music videos had caught the eye of Mutt Lange (legendary producer of rock acts such as AC/DC, Def Leppard, Bryan Adams and Scorpion) who came to Fan Fair in 1993 to meet her. By the end of the year the couple had married and began work on Twain's next album. "The Woman in Me," which featured ten songs written by Twain and began Twain's own successful "rocket ride." Singles included "Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under," "Any Man of Mine," "I'm Outta Here," and "No One Needs to Know." Twain followed up in 1997 with the album "Come On Over" which included the pop crossover hit "You're Still the One." Twain's songs and accompanying music videos were unlike anything ever produced in Nashville, raising eyebrows due to the pop-style and emphasis on the singer's sensuality. Numerous awards came from the Academy of Country Music, *Billboard*, BMI, Country Music Television, and many others.

The success of this transition sparked Music Row's largest expansion starting in the late 1980s and continuing for the next decade, reflecting new directions in the industry and reinforcement of country

music's place in American culture. An article in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music* details this dizzying period growth:

...In November 1989 Opryland Music Group, now the owner of the Acuff-Rose catalogue, set up shop in a brand new brick edifice on Music Square West, bringing Hank Williams' catalogue of songs to a Music Row address for the first time.

...In 1990 BMG erected a four-story complex on Music Circle North to house its growing family of labels and publishing operation.

...In 1992 Mercury took over major offices on Music Square West, while Sony, the new owner of the Columbia and Epic labels, renovated and enlarged the venerable Columbia building (the site where it all began).

...In 1994 MCA and Warner Bros. each opened huge new offices on Music Square East.

...Meanwhile, publishing giants Warner-Chappell and EMI Music bought up the Welk Music catalogue and enlarged that building down the street.

...ASCAP's next-door neighbor Sony/ATV/Tree Music, also rebuilt in the '90s after Tree International, the city's largest publisher, was acquired in 1989 by Sony.

...Curb Records also relocated from California to Music Row." (29)

The sale of Tree International Publishing in 1989 was felt by many long-timers on Music Row to mark the end of an era. With revenues increasing each year, owner Buddy Killen decided the time had come to sell the company. In 1989 the company was acquired by Sony for \$30 million. Killen asked executive vice president Donna Hilley to handle the sale. In 1994 Hilley became president and CEO of the company, a position she would hold until her retirement in 2005. (The company merged with ATV in 1996 becoming Sony/ATV.)

Even with its acquisition by Sony, the company retained the same characteristics:

"Only old-timers on Music Row recall many of the great old publishing entities swept away in the acquisition frenzy of the 80s and 90s. But the Tree story would flow in a different direction. The Sony organization took a look at the tidy Tree operation and decided that Jack, Buddy, Joyce and Donna had built an organization so strong and productive that in addition to their country duties, the Nashville office would administer the catalogs of their American pop writers...." (30)

As the company grew, the need for more space led to the renovation of offices at 8 Music Square West in 1993, and in 1994, the old Fire Hall Engine Co. 7 (DV.00086), built by the city in 1930, next door was purchased for use by songwriters. The company continued to grow throughout the 1990s with many country artists recording Tree songs and numerous Tree songs used in film and TV productions. (31)

Donna Hilley became a major player in country music, sometimes being referred to as the "pulse" of the country music industry. During her tenure, Hilley expanded the company's holdings with the acquisitions

of Acuff-Rose, Maypop, Little Big Town, and the catalogs of Conway Twitty, Buck Owens, and Merle Haggard.

Even with all of the growth and corporate buy-outs, people who worked on Music Row during these years recall the strong sense of community that had developed. Working in close proximity meant seeing music industry colleagues regularly as they walked to meetings, gathered in restaurants or even sat on the front porch playing guitar and creating new music. Pat McMakin, director of studio operations at Ocean Way Recording Studios at 1200-1202 17th Avenue South (DV.00438-440), has worked his entire 30+-year career on Music Row including time at Audio Media, Sound Shop, Quad Studios, Tree Publishing's studio, and Sony. McMakin recalls those years:

"It was just such a community. There were no security guards anywhere. I could walk into a major label without an appointment. They had somebody at the front desk, but most of the publishing companies were so friendly that you'd get to know the person at the front desk. And if you needed something, the studios, we all had that unspoken rule - you help your neighbors out." (32)

Contemporary Christian Becomes a Major Music Force

The roots of country music reach deep into the sounds and words of religious – or gospel – music. In the early twentieth century, churches and outdoor camp meetings provided venues for singing hymns and ballads.

A century before country music began to take shape as an art and entertainment form, religious music was important enough that in 1824 the first published music in Nashville was called "Western Harmony," a hymnbook with instructions for singing. It was published by Allen D. Carden and Samuel J. Rogers and printed by Carey A. Harris on the press of his newspaper, the *Nashville Republican*, in downtown Nashville. (1)

As Nashville's recording industry took shape in the 1940s and 1950s, gospel music was an important element of the recording mix. Bullet Records issued Nashville's first gospel records after World War II, forming label series for white and black gospel groups. Between 1946 and 1952, Bullet issued more than 60 white gospel records with artists including Wally Fowler and His Oak Ridge Quartet, the Goodman Family, and the Speer Family. On the label's black gospel series, Bullet released records by the Fairfield Four, the Ebenezer A.M.E. Church Gospel Choir, the Famous Jubilee Singers, and St. Mary's Choir. (2)

As country music became an industry in the twentieth century, many country artists recorded gospel songs or songs that reflected a gospel influence. At the height of his rock 'n roll success, Elvis Presley recorded several gospel albums including "Peace in the Valley" in 1957, "His Hand in Mine" in 1960, "How Great Thou Art" in 1967 and "He Touched Me" in 1972. The Oak Ridge Boys began as a gospel quartet in the 1940s. By the 1970s, the group's new singers transitioned into country music, while still singing songs that reflected their gospel heritage. In 1971 Merle Haggard released a gospel album, "Land of Many Churches," with live performances of traditional gospel hymns.

Even with connections between country and gospel music, it was a different set of circumstances that would lead to the creation of what become known as contemporary Christian music.

Starting in the 1960s, churches across the country were attempting to attract young people who had drifted away in the cultural upheavals of the decade. One way to do this was with music. Singing folk songs – “Kum Bayah,” “Michael Row the Boat Ashore,” “We Are One in the Spirit,” and others accompanied by guitars became a standard feature of church youth camps.

In the late 1960s, a separate strand of hippie culture emerged – called the Jesus Movement and the reference to followers as “Jesus People.” (A more negative term was “Jesus Freaks.”) Music was an integral part of the Jesus Movement with many singers and bands emerging and the formation of Marantha Music in California, the first record label for the movement’s singers.

In Nashville, the Jesus Movement centered – by coincidence – on Music Row. Although the movement could be found in pockets across the country, it was in Nashville – on Music Row – that a new musical genre would be born which would become known as Contemporary Christian music. Brian Mason, who hosted a long-running Sunday morning contemporary Christian radio program in Nashville, notes that it was Belmont Church that became “the Contemporary Christian music church face for this area.” (3)

By the early 1970s, as Nashville residents moved to the suburbs and took their church memberships with them, Belmont Avenue Church of Christ (DV.00204), a Neoclassical Revival-style church built in 1915 at 16th Avenue South (the church is now the non-denominational Belmont Church), had only about 75 members. In 1971, former missionary Don Finto began preaching at Belmont. The church began to grow, adding hundreds of members including many young artists who would later achieve fame in the world of contemporary Christian music – Amy Grant, Brown Bannister, Annie and Steve Chapman, Chris Christian, Steve Chapman, Michael W. Smith, Bruce Carroll, Michael Card, Rich Mullins, Buddy Greene, and others.

Soon Belmont opened the Koinonia Christian Bookstore and Coffee House, settling at 1000-1002 16th Avenue South in a renovated two-story commercial building that had once housed the Gilmore Pharmacy and H.G. Hill Grocery Store (DV.00094). Saturday night concerts drew big crowds to hear music that artist Steve Chapman described as “Biblically based, but our melodies bore the mark of the secular music of the times. We had no idea that we were helping pioneer what became known as Contemporary Christian music. Koinonia was a gift from heaven. It was a training ground for us.” (4)

Steve and Annie Chapman began what would become a 40-year Christian music and ministry career with their arrival on Music Row in the early 1970s. Steve Chapman recalled his arrival in Nashville in January 1974 which led to regular performances at Koinonia, a recording contract and a music career, first with a band and then with his wife, Annie:

“While I was going down Music Row, heading north on 16th Avenue, there was a sign on a building that said Koinonia. So I pulled over and parked and walked in the coffee house. A guy named Bob Hughey and his wife Peggy threw their arms out, looked past the hippie I was, living in a car, and said welcome to Koinonia. And he said, have a seat, I’ll get you some cider. And there was a guitar leaning up against the wall. And I took it and started playing. He said oh you’re a songwriter. I said yes. He said, well sing me something. I sang him “One Lane Road Ahead” a song I’d written. He said come back Saturday night and play some more music for us.” (5)

Koinonia also provided a training ground for Amy Grant who would become Contemporary Christian music’s biggest star within a few years:

“Koinonia was definitely what made me want to start writing songs. That was my first experience of music and community.” (6)

Taking contemporary Christian music to a larger audience was to be primarily the work of one company – Word Entertainment. Founded by Jarrell McCracken in Waco, Texas, in 1951 as Word Records, the company built a roster of artists that included the Mike Curb Congregation, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and George Beverly Shea. By 1963, the company had also added a publishing division. In addition to buying music catalogs, over the next two decades the company also began establishing new labels for traditional Christian music and Southern gospel and serving as the distributor for numerous labels including (at various times) Reunion Records, Maranatha Music, Light Records, Paragon Records, and others. (7)

In 1972, while still based in Texas, Word Records became part of the Jesus Movement with the start of Myrrh Records with Billy Ray Hearn (who would later start Sparrow Records and EMI Christian Music) at the helm. “After being so involved in the youth musicals of Kurt (Kaiser) and Ralph (Carmichael) I began getting tapes and phone calls from a lot of ‘Jesus People’ that wanted an outlet for their music,” Hearn said. (8)

One of the artists who found her way to Myrrh Records was Nashville-based Amy Grant (b. 1960). Grant’s self-titled debut album was released in 1978, but it was her 1982 album, “Age to Age” that was the real turning point. The album made Grant a star, becoming the first album by a solo Christian artist to go platinum, and created a new, larger audience for what was now called Contemporary Christian music. Within a few years, Word reached a deal with A&M Records for promotion and distribution which resulted in Grant’s 1985 “Unguarded” becoming the first Christian album to achieve crossover success in the pop market. Grant’s longtime manager, Dan Harrell, summed it up:

“When you look back on it that really launched the Contemporary Christian industry into a different realm because the secular music industry began to look at the numbers and say ‘Something is going on. Something is happening here. We may not buy into the philosophy,’ but the economics caught their attention. That was really a turning point for Christian music.” (9)

Throughout the 1980s, Word continued to break new ground promoting the careers of artists including Sandy Patty, the Bill Gaither Trio, Petra, Newsong, and continuing to establish new labels for various artists.

Although still operating as Word, the company had sold to the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) in 1974 which then merged with Capital Cities, Inc. in the mid-1980s. The 1990s brought big changes for Word. In 1992, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc. bought Word and moved the company to Music Row in Nashville. In 1996, the company’s record labels were sold to Gaylord Entertainment. (10)

Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, Word introduced new artists including Jac Velasquez, Point of Grace, Francesca Battistelli, Susan Riley, Sidewalk Prophets, BarlowGirl, and others. Other enterprises included establishing a children’s division, Everland Entertainment which created the immensely popular VeggieTales. Word artists have consistently won many awards at the Gospel Music Association’s annual Dove Awards and at the National Academy of Recording Arts and Science’s Grammy Awards.

Other major changes came for the company in the early twenty-first century. In 2001, Warner Music Group announced its acquisition of Word Entertainment from Gaylord. The sale was structured with help from Mike Curb, Word Entertainment Chairman, with Curb Records included in the deal. Curb explains:

“We put the transaction together very quickly and Warner/Curb became the highest bidder. When you look at the Word Entertainment Building there and it says ‘a Warner/Curb Company’ underneath it, that’s the story of how it became a Warner/Curb company.” (11)

The deal also brought Curb’s connection with Word Entertainment full circle. In the 1960s, a teen-age Curb had gone to the company’s Texas office to play a song for Jarrell McCracken. A few years later, the connection led to Curb’s group, the Mike Curb Congregation, landing a weekly performance on “The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour” and release of the group’s debut album by Word. (12)

Tradition and Transition: The 1990s into the Twenty-First Century

As the calendar moved toward the twenty-first century, Nashville’s Music Row grappled with the changing times in the music industry and in the sweeping changes in Nashville’s economy which would have a direct impact on the area’s cultural landscape. If earlier decades were characterized as complex and chaotic, they seemed to set the stage for the whirlwind of events from the late 1990s to 2015 as record labels and other music businesses closed, sold or merged, a new collection of superstar artists appeared, the Internet created new access to music and new challenges in getting payment, long-time Music Row leaders exited the stage, and Nashville’s booming economic development put unrelenting pressure on Music Row’s built environment.

The result was an industry that considered its outlook on two fronts: what is the future of the music business and what will Music Row’s built environment look like in the years to come? These two considerations were inescapably linked by the question – if the music industry shrinks and businesses close or move away, will the area still be Music Row?

During the 1990s, plans were already formulating for one change – the departure of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum for a new, larger building downtown. Since the museum opened on Music Row in 1967, steady growth in attendance, collections, and programs meant more space was needed than the 40,000 square feet in the original facility.

Bill Ivey, director of the Country Music Foundation and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum from 1971 to 1998, recalled how the idea of moving downtown came about:

“Phil Bredesen was the mayor. In 1994 he was getting ready to pitch the arena (an all-purpose entertainment venue which was completed in 1996) and asked me if the Country Music Hall of Fame would think of moving to the arena into a 75,000 square foot space.” (1)

As planning progressed, the decision was made to construct a separate building for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum near the new arena. On May 17, 2001, the new 137,000-square-foot facility, designed by Tuck Hinton Architects of Nashville, opened downtown with projected annual visitation of 550,000. By 2014, the hall of fame and museum was the centerpiece of a revitalized downtown area. A

210,000-square-foot expansion was completed, and the attraction shattered all attendance projections with more than 970,000 visitors that year. While the move was clearly the right one it brought more changes to Music Row.

As early as 1996, music industry executives and the Metro Development and Housing Authority (MDHA) were considering a future without the attraction on Nashville's Music Row. A Music Row Visioning Committee formed, made up of industry leaders including Ed Benson, executive director of the Country Music Association; Bill Hudson, public relations executive; Bill Denny, president of Nashville Gas and a Music Row property owner; Bill Ivey, director of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and Steve Gibson, a musician and producer. MDHA followed with a study that included plans for what would become the Music Row traffic roundabout.

The Music Row Visioning Committee took a dim view of the nearby tourist shops on Demonbreun Street – and the tourists they attracted – and welcomed the idea of those businesses leaving the area. Committee member Ed Benson explained that Music Row:

“is a community of creative excellence, not a storefront industry. We appreciate the fans, and it's natural that they want to see where the music is made. But we don't want tourists visiting the office buildings. We don't have the facilities to handle them.” (2)

The committee – and many supporters of that point of view – got their wish even before the hall of fame and museum relocated. In contrast to declarations that the area was the “hottest part of town” for tourism only a few years previously, a December 1999 issue of *Billboard* lamented that the changes on Music Row started with the closing of Opryland Theme Park in 1998 and the continued with the decline of tourism:

“There has never been much for tourists to actually see on Music Row, other than a cluster of slightly shabby businesses that grew at the top of the Row, across Demonbreun from the Country Music Hall of Fame. Now that the hall itself is moving up to dee-luxe headquarters downtown, those little businesses are going fast. It's a little ghost town now, with the only businesses not boarded up or about to close being a photo shop and an Ernest Tubbs Record Shop. Gone are the wax museum, the cars-of-the-stars museum, the cafes where the aspiring singers who just hit town with their guitar cases drank coffee all day and waited to be discovered, the foot-long hot dog joint, and the trashy souvenir shops where you could buy a vial of Elvis' sweat. That sort of carnival atmosphere is no longer desired in the music business....” (3)

The demise of the Country Music Wax Museum drew the attention of a *New York Times* reporter who came to Nashville in 1998 to find out what happened to the wax figures when the museum closed. His article began with the question “Where do wax figures go when they die?”

The reporter noted that when the museum opened in 1971 – and for the next 25 years – it was a major attraction as tourists came to see life-size wax replicas of more than 60 country artists including Hank Williams, George Jones, Dolly Parton, Minnie Pearl, Barbara Mandrell, and George Strait, all dressed in original costumes. The article attributes several factors to the museum's closing and the end of the area as a tourist destination:

“With Opryland closing, tourism slumping, the Hall of Fame moving downtown and tour buses rerouting to the more package-tour friendly Branson, Mo., the death knell for the neighborhood rang in 1997 when a city-sponsored study determined that a business district would be more useful.” (4)

With all of these changes under way, the Music Row Visioning Committee peered into the twenty-first century and envisioned the continuation of the music industry on Music Row and expected “mid-rise buildings to continue to cluster on the northern end of 16th and 17th Avenues, gradually replacing the old houses that remain there.” (5)

Indeed these changes were already happening. On September 4, 1996, 1,000 guests gathered at 40 Music Square West for the opening of the modernist-style Starstruck Studios. The recording and broadcast facility built and owned by country music artist Reba McEntire and husband/manager Narvel Blackstock required demolition in 1994 of three circa 1920 homes, including the circa 1960 Back’ere recording studio which had been located in a renovated house known as the Tuneville Building.

Additional construction in the 1990s included a new building for ASCAP, completed in 1992, with an exterior of precast concrete and reflective glass. The new \$2.5 million building replaced the original 1968 office building at 2 Music Square West. Architect Tom Bulla explained the design:

“ASCAP is based in New York, and there was a real New York influence. It may be a branch, but it’s still on a grand scale.” (6)

The intention to construct impressive buildings continued with the new Warner/Reprise offices completed in 1994. The 40,000-square-foot building was designed to be comfortable and casual and featured brick, limestone, wood, steel, and glass in its design.

The late 1990s also saw the announcement by MDHA of plans for a traffic circle with a music-themed statue at the center, an outcome of the 1996 visioning and study development process. The roundabout is a circular roadway at the center of Demonbreun, Division, 16th and Music Square East designed to support a continual flow of traffic and to serve as a gateway to Music Row. Jim Douglas, landscape architect with Hodgson & Douglas, explained the plan:

“The project involved the design and production of construction drawings for Nashville’s first roundabout. The \$3 million roundabout and adjacent Music Row Park created a long needed ‘sense of place’ and established a center point of focus for Music Row.” (7)

The roundabout was renamed “Buddy Killen Circle” in 2007 in honor of the long-time Tree publisher who died in 2006. On the west side of the roundabout is a small park constructed in the 1975. Originally named Music Square Park, the name was rededicated as Owen Bradley Park in 1997. A life-size bronze statue of Owen Bradley seated at a piano, created by artist Gary Ernest Smith, was dedicated in the park. A dedication ceremony attended by celebrities included Brenda Lee who had recorded her first records under Bradley’s direction in the 1950s. Speaking at the ceremony, Lee emphasized Bradley’s importance to the music industry:

“Owen didn’t only father the dream, he stayed with it throughout his life, like a wise parent, a gentle mentor, a constant in a changing industry. He helped give it direction, wisdom, energy and creativity until Nashville could proudly stand on its own as a

recognized leader in the wonderful art of creating music that would be ultimately heard around the world. (8)

At the center of the roundabout is “Musica,” a 40-foot tall bronze sculpture which was unveiled in 2003. Created by Nashville sculptor Alan LeQuire, the statue features nine male and female figures, each 14 to 15-feet tall. Five of the figures emerge from the base and four appear to float above the others. At the top, a female figure holds a tambourine with outstretched arms. LeQuire explained his intentions with the sculpture:

“Dance is the physical expression of music and the piece is intended to convey that feeling to the viewer in a composition which is simple, exuberant and celebratory. The theme of the sculpture is music, because of the historical and economic significance of the site. This is the heart of Music Row, the area and the artistic activity for which Nashville is best known. The sculpture conveys the importance of music to Nashville, past, present and future, and represents all forms of music without reference to any one form or style. Just as I wanted all different kinds of music included, not just country, I always wanted it to be a reflection of our culture the way it is...this is a multicultural city with an amazing number of ethnicities.” (9)

In the years following the roundabout’s opening in 2001, large-scale offices and apartment buildings were constructed on one side of the roundabout and down the adjacent Demonbreun Street. In 2014, a nonprofit group formed to raise funds to install fountains and colored lighting surrounding Musica.

In the 1990s, change was also under way at the south end of the streets near Belmont University as music businesses expanded into the modest but handsome early twentieth century houses. This area, running along 16th and 17th Avenues South from Wedgewood to Horton, was the last part of the residential neighborhood to develop in the early twentieth century:

“In fact the blocks...were largely undeveloped as late as 1908 with only seven buildings shown on a fire insurance map of that year. During the period of development, fine examples of American Foursquare, Craftsman, Bungalow and Tudor Revival houses were constructed. A wide range of building materials and detail are exhibited among the houses of any of these given styles.” (10)

This expansion created two challenges – addressing the fact that these blocks were zoned residential, not commercial, and the realization that having music businesses move into these homes could lead to physical changes through demolition, building alteration, or the construction of larger buildings.

Stewart Clifton, Metro Councilperson for a district that included this part of Music Row (1987-99), was aware of the concern of neighborhood associations in the surrounding areas of Belmont and Hillsboro-West End, who feared entire neighborhoods could be leveled due to construction of the new I-440 bypass. There was also concern that the effect could extend to the still-residential parts of 16th and 17th Avenues which could see high density commercial development that would overwhelm the neighborhoods.

Clifton had previously considered proposing a historic zoning overlay for this residential part of Music Row but the idea was opposed by property owners who wanted to sell their properties. A few years

later, Clifton proposed a conservation overlay, but again found 100 percent of the property owners opposed resulting in Clifton's shelving the idea.

By 1997, circumstances had changed as residential properties were beginning to be occupied by small music-related businesses. At some point, one of the businesses put a sign in front of their building which alerted the city's codes department. As Clifton recalled "Somebody got caught. Now they were sitting on a property they couldn't use because it was still residentially zoned."

Before long, Clifton got a call from the leader of the conservation overlay opposition group proposing that the problem be addressed in a different way. The result was Clifton's sponsorship in Metro Council of a plan to link the zoning change from residential to business offices with a conservation overlay. Clifton explained:

"The owners realized they could get more out of their property that way. All of the people living there bought into it. It sailed through the Council. It was not a project of Music Row merchants, but it was a realization that not all of Music Row has to be high intensity development. There should be a place for small-scale music businesses. The people who lived there moved out and got money out of their property." (11)

In January 1997, the South Music Row Conservation Zoning Overlay was approved by Metro Council. The overlay is managed by the Metro Historic Zoning Commission. The guidelines call for reviewing exterior work on buildings including new construction, additions, demolition, and relocation to preserve the neighborhood's historic character.

While planning and changes were underway for Music Row's built environment, the music industry's wheels continued to turn, producing a wide variety of country music by new and established artists. Listeners had their choice of traditional, pop-country, and the newly labeled "bro-country" songs.

In 1999, Dolly Parton decided it was time to return to her musical roots. Steve Buckingham, Parton's producer and senior vice president of A&R at Sony Music, recalled that two records were made despite the skepticism of Sony CEO Tommy Mattola:

"(Dolly) came in one day, and said I want to make a country record, and I won't name names, but the big-wigs say that I can't do it without having a producer. I said well, if I can't trust Dolly Parton to make a country record...And she said will you help me? And I said, yes but I don't need credit and I don't need points - royalty points. As it turns out, she gave me co-production, and she also paid me the production points out of her own pocket. And that was it. We were off to the races. The first album went platinum." (12)

"The Grass is Blue," a bluegrass album, was released in the fall of 1999 featuring songs written by Parton as well as bluegrass standards. "Little Sparrow," a folk/bluegrass album followed in 2001 and included Appalachian folk, bluegrass, and country songs. Both albums received Grammy Awards.

Leading the way for pop-country superstardom was teen-age artist Taylor Swift (b. 1989). Swift was interested in music by the age of nine and was soon focused on pop-country, particularly Shania Twain's songs and musical style. Making her first trip to Nashville from Pennsylvania at the age of 11, Swift's demos were rejected by Music Row's record labels. Swift continued to work toward her goal, and when she was 14 her family moved to the Nashville suburb of Hendersonville.

Swift began making music industry connections including writing with songwriter Liz Rose, who was working for the newly formed Jody Williams Music Publishing. Williams recalled those days:

“I signed a writer named Liz Rose who was just a really talented songwriter. She was a publisher helping songwriters make their songs better but not really doing the writing, and I encouraged her to write. She'd bring these people I'd never heard of in the office and write songs with them. One of them was Taylor Swift. For a couple of years, once a week here comes Taylor Swift. Her mother or her father would drop her off to write with Liz. And Liz kept just really kept believing in Taylor. And I said, well you know she's just a kid. Unless she gets a record deal, who is going to record these songs? And Liz kept encouraging me to just leave her alone and let her keep doing it. And I did. And then the next thing you know, Taylor gets signed to Big Machine Records. They record all these songs that she and Liz wrote on her first album and some on her second album. And then my publishing company had all this value all of a sudden because Taylor blew up.” (13)

Big Machine Records was started by Scott Borchetta in 2005. The previous year while still working for Universal Music Group, Borchetta had received a package from 14-year-old Taylor Swift. Borchetta was impressed with the “very smartly put together package.” Noting that “country is pretty much a young adult format, not a teen format,” Borchetta still decided “If these songs on the CD really were written by her, and she really is all of this, I can’t wait to meet her.” (14)

Borchetta told Swift he could introduce her to people at Universal but informed her he was starting his own label and that if she waited a year she could sign with him. With Big Machine Records officially started in 2005, Swift was Borchetta’s first artist. Swift’s first self-titled album was released in 2006 to wide acclaim for the album’s pop-country lyrics and music. Five singles from the album charted on *Billboard Hot Country Songs* including No. 1 hits with “Our Song” and “Should’ve Said No.”

Relentless touring, including opening for George Strait, Rascal Flatts, Kenny Chesney, Brad Paisley, and Tim McGraw and Faith Hill’s tour, continued to increase Swift’s fan base. Subsequent albums including “Fearless” in 2008, “Speak Now” in 2010 and “Red” in 2012 featured songs written by Swift and co-written with other songwriters and were promoted through the now solo headline concerts. In 2014 Swift released her fifth album, “1989” which she described as her first official pop album. As sales totaled more than 40 million albums and 130 million single downloads, Swift’s awards multiplied including seven Grammys, 16 American Music Awards, 11 Country Music Association awards, eight Academy of Country Music Awards, and 22 Billboard Music Awards in addition to awards from the Nashville Songwriters Association and the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Also emerging in the 2010s was a new style of country music coined “bro-country” by a *New York Magazine* reporter discussing the song “Cruise” by the duo Florida Georgia Line (which became the best-selling digital country song ever, selling over 7 million copies):

“It’s a song about ‘falling in love in the sweet heart of summer’ – lyrics about swilling Southern Comfort and ogling girls in bikinis before circling back around, in the chorus, to, well, itself: ‘Baby you a song/You make me wanna roll my windows down and cruise.’ In short, “Cruise” is bro-country: music by and of the tatted, gym-toned, party-hearty young American white dude. It’s a movement that has been gathering steam for several

years now, and we may look back at “Cruise” as a turning point, the moment when the balance of power tipped from the older generation of male country stars to the bros.”

(15)

The reporter went on to identify other singers he believed fit in the “bro-country” category by singing about partying, drinking, trucks, and attractive young women. Singers named by the reporter included Luke Bryan, Jason Aldean, and Jack Owen.

In 2013, Luke Bryan had a *Billboard* No. 1 hit with “Spring Break – Here to Party,” followed by the best-selling album “Crash My Party.” Jason Aldean’s albums were also best sellers including 2010’s “My Kinda Party,” and 2012’s “Night Train,” which were both certified double platinum and four others certified platinum. Jake Owen scored his first No. 1 hit in 2011 with the title track to his album “Barefoot Blue Jean Night” followed by more hits from that album, and a No. 1 hit “Beachin’” from his fourth album “Days of Gold” in 2014.

Reaction to bro-country’s airplay dominance included a rare display of criticism by country music artists for their fellow artists. Complaints came from best-selling singer Carrie Underwood who declared to *Billboard* “There seem to be so many male singers out there who can be viewed as similar and there seems to be plenty of room for all of them,” while female country artists had more difficulty getting airplay. (16)

While the debate continued over bro-country, in 2015 another discussion arose, dubbed the “lettuce and tomato” controversy. The controversy erupted when a radio station consultant being interviewed by *Country Aircheck Weekly* stated:

“If you want to make ratings in country radio, take the females out. The reason mainstream country radio generates more quarter hours from female listeners at the rate of 70% to 75% is women like male artists.”

The consultant went on to say:

“Trust me I play great female records, and we’ve got some right now. They’re just not the lettuce in our salad. The lettuce is Luke Bryan and Blake Shelton, Keith Urban and artists like that. The tomatoes of our salad are the females.” (17)

Reaction from female country artists was swift and severe. Martina McBride took on what one media outlet termed as the role of “Tomato in Chief” – leading the response to the consultant’s statements. McBride, who has sold more than 14 million albums, received 14 Grammy nominations and received the Country Music Association’s Female Vocalist of the Year award four times, started by saying:

“Wow...just wow” on her Facebook page, continuing “...to me country music is about relating. Someone relating to what you are really going through on a day to day basis in your life. Did you girls (core female listeners) know you were being assessed in this way?” (18)

McBride also took the opportunity to raise money for her “Team Martina” charity by creating and selling two t-shirts – a red “tomato” t-shirt for women and a “tomato lover” t-shirt for men supporters of country’s female artists.

Two female country artists emerging in these years to claim superstar status were Carrie Underwood and Miranda Lambert.

Harkening back to singer Anita Kerr's 1956 win of Arthur Godfrey's TV talent show, in 2005 Carrie Underwood became the season's winner of TV show "American Idol" which included a recording contract. Success quickly followed when "Inside Your Heaven" debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard's Hot 100*. Her debut album "Some Hearts" yielded country and crossover hits with "Jesus, Take the Wheel," and "Before He Cheats" and becoming the best-selling solo female debut album in country music history.

Over the next decade, Underwood continued the string of blockbuster hits yielding multiple awards with albums including "Carnival Ride" in 2007 which produced the hits "So Small," "All-American Girl" and "Last Name"; her third album, "Play On" a top-selling 2009 release featuring "Cowboy Casanova" and "Temporary Home"; a fourth album "Blown Away" in 2012 yielded hits with the title track as well as "Good Girl" and "Two Black Cadillacs."

Also getting a music career boost on TV was singer-songwriter Miranda Lambert who was a finalist in the 2003 season of "Nashville Star," leading to a record deal with Epic Records and later with Columbia. Lambert first came to Nashville from Texas at the suggestion of entertainment attorney Rod Phelps and encouragement from Bob Doyle, manager of Garth Brooks. "Kerosene," the singer's first album in 2004, included 11 songs written by Lambert and debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard's Top Country Albums* chart and produced four hit singles including the title track.

Lambert's success continued with future albums and singles including 2007's "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend," with the single "Gunpowder & Lead," 2009's album "Revolution" with singles "White Liar," her first top five hit; and "Four the Record" in 2011, recorded for Lambert's new label at RCA Nashville, which produced the five singles "Baggage Claim," "Over You," "Fastest Girl in Town," "Mama's Broken Heart," and "All Kinds of Kinds." In 2014, Lambert released her fifth album "Platinum," which included "Somethin' Bad," a duet with Carrie Underwood. Throughout the decade Lambert won numerous awards including the Academy of Country Music's Top New Female Vocalist, Music Row Song of the Year Award for "The House that Built Me," Country Music Association Female Vocalist of the Year.

In 2014, the legendary *Rolling Stone* responded to the booming country music business by opening an office on Music Row's at 1510 16th Avenue South (DV.00464) and creating a website to cover the industry. *Rolling Stone Country* joined media outlets already covering country music including *Country Weekly* magazine, Taste of Country's website *The Boot*, and Music Row Enterprises' *Music Row* magazine and website.

The popularity of country music was also evident in its share of the radio market. By 2014 there were about 2,100 country radio stations with a steadily increasing audience. The 2014 *Nielsen Music Report* found that radio is the "top method of music discovery" with country radio ranking second in audio formats (pop contemporary ranked No. 1) with significant growth in the 18-34 age market.

In 2015, the majority of the radio market was controlled by three companies – Cumulus Media, CBS Radio, and iHeartMedia (formerly Clear Channel). "If those three chains don't play your records, you won't have a hit. It used to be one owner could only own seven radio stations. Now you've got three companies owning most of the radio stations," Curb Records head Mike Curb said in an interview with *Rolling Stone*.

Curb was speaking from the vantage point of 50 years of experience in the music industry. Curb's independently owned music business took up residence on Music Row in the early 1990s, and the company's owner would have a far reaching impact not only on the music industry but on the built environment of Music Row.

In 1964, Mike Curb (b. 1944), a songwriter, singer and musician, founded Sidewalk Records in Los Angeles, changing the name to Curb Records a few years later. The company's early years saw success with Curb's own musical group, the Mike Curb Congregation, which had hits including "Put Your Hand in the Hand."

Taking a detour into country music, Curb also co-wrote "All for the Love of Sunshine," which became a No. 1 hit for Hank Williams Jr. in 1970.

"My relationship with Music Row started then," Curb said. "What I learned by working with Hank Williams Jr. on Music Row was that all those records that I had loved by Don Gibson, Floyd Cramer, Jim Reeves, Johnny Horton, Marty Robbins, those were not accidents. They were made by the greatest musicians that ever lived, and the greatest producers and the greatest artists in the greatest studios." (19)

In 1969, Curb Records merged with MGM Records and Mike Curb became president. MGM Curb had hits in the next few years with The Osmonds, Sammy Davis Jr., and other pop artists. In 1974, MGM was sold, and Curb Records continued as its own company, building successes with other labels. While still based in Los Angeles, Curb worked with numerous pop and country artists, scoring multitudes of hits with artists and groups ranging from Lou Rawls to Roy Orbison, Exile, the Righteous Brothers, the Bellamy Brothers, Lyle Lovett, the Four Seasons, and many others.

In 1992, Curb decided to move the company's headquarters from Los Angeles to Nashville's Music Row. Curb's first purchases were four buildings on Music Square East including the former Cedarwood building and the former Roy Orbison building. The buildings were converted into Curb's home office with a recording studio and space for songwriters to work. In the years to come, Curb would leave a strong mark on the music industry scoring more than 400 No. 1 records and 1,500 Top 10 records with country artists including Tim McGraw, LeAnn Rimes, The Judds, Lee Brice, and the Gospel Music Association's four-time winner as Female Vocalist of the Year Natalie Grant. In 2001, Curb Records was named *Billboard's* Country Label of the Year.

By 2014, a *Tennessean* article described the company as "an outlier: a still successful independent swimming against a current of major label mergers and music industry consolidation." (20)

Curb also began looking around Music Row and seeing buildings that needed to be saved. Curb took action, eventually saving music-related buildings including RCA Studio B and the Bradleys' Quonset Hut studio through his Curb Family Foundation.

Even though RCA Studio B continued to be an active studio in the 1970s, in 1977, it had closed due to disputes with the engineers' union. Building owner Dan Maddox allowed the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to open the studio for tours, and in 1993 the Maddox Family Foundation donated the building to the Country Music Foundation. In 2002, the Curb Family Foundation purchased the studio and leased it back to the museum for \$1 a year. The donation also allowed students at Belmont

University's Mike Curb School of Music and Entertainment Business to use Studio B for students to learn the history of the recording industry. In 2012, the Metro Historical Commission prepared a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the building, making it the first music recording studio in Nashville to be National Register-listed. **(21)**

With the success of RCA Studio B, Curb turned his attention to the place where Music Row started in 1954 – Owen and Harold Bradleys' Quonset Hut. After purchasing the studio in 1962, Columbia Records Columbia demolished the adjacent Victorian-era home that had been part of the Bradleys' studio complex and built a new studio which became Columbia Studio A in 1965. The Quonset Hut became known as Studio B. In 1982, after 17 years of hosting hundreds of pop and country artists, the studios were closed and converted for office space. In 2007, Curb purchased the building. Even though the Quonset Hut Studio B building had been encased inside a larger structure, the studio itself was restored with help from the engineers and others who had worked there in its heyday. In 2009, the studios were reopened to serve as a teaching facility for students at Belmont University's Mike Curb College for Entertainment and Music Business.

Other building purchases by Curb included Ocean Way Recording Studios which had operated on Music Row since 1996. Located on the corner of Edgehill and 17th Avenue in a stone Gothic Revival-style church (DV.00440) that had been built from 1910-1911, the building had been purchased in 1994, renovated and opened as Ocean Way/Nashville in 1996 by entrepreneur Gary Belz and Los Angeles studio veteran Allen Sides.

In October 2001, Belmont University acquired Ocean Way Recording studios, by now considered one of the best in the city, with a grant given by Curb who explained the purchase:

"We were going to build more studios...and we made a decision that we would take part of the grant that I gave to Belmont and use that to buy Ocean Way, which Belmont operates as a commercial enterprise." But in the down time, you have that for students to learn." **(22)**

The recording sessions and camaraderie at Ocean Way reflected the "vibe" often referred to by people who work on Music Row. Sharon Corbitt-House managed Ocean Way for a decade and recalls it as a "magical" time working with an endless array of artists including Willie Nelson, Lee Ann Womack, Bob Seeger, Brooks and Dunn, Sheryl Crow, and even pop artist Christina Aguilera:

"...feeling like I'd found my place was when I started managing Ocean Way Studios on Music Row at the end of '98, beginning of '99...because I was in this creative place where people came to me every day and created music. **(23)**

By the mid-2010s, as buildings including old houses, commercial stores, and, churches continued to be adaptively reused for music businesses, some offices moved away from Music Row to downtown, the Berry Hill neighborhood, or to the nearby town of Franklin.

"Music industry shifting away from Music Row," declared a *Tennessean* headline in 2013. The article reported:

"The reasons for the decentralization of that campus are as varied as the businesses themselves, which included major labels such as Universal Music Group, which left

Music Square East for downtown five years ago to cut costs and improve communication among its employees, who had been split between two buildings on Music Row.”

The article continued, quoting Bart Herbison, executive director of the Nashville Songwriters Association International:

“The big difference on Music Row (now) is that there are dentists’ offices, condominiums, lawyers’ offices – nothing related to the music industry. Virtually every building on these streets was related to the music business, and that’s not the case anymore.” (24)

In 2014, Sony Music Nashville (including three country music labels – Arista Nashville, Columbia Nashville and RCA Nashville, and Provident Music Group, a Christian label) announced the company’s headquarters were moving away from Music Row into a new \$97 million office building in the nearby downtown area known as the Gulch. Sony/ATV Music Publishing had already sold their Music Row administrative office building to BBR Music Group and moved to another location downtown the previous year while the company’s creative team remained on Music Row.

As some music businesses moved away, SESAC emphasized the company’s commitment to Music Row by starting construction on new 5-story \$20 million office headquarters in 2014. The PRO had previously occupied two buildings. The office building at 66 Music Square West was demolished in 2015 along with five adjacent historic houses including a home that had been owned by gospel singers Ben Speer and Brock Speer, a house that had been converted to a recording studio, and a house that had been owned by the Gospel Music Quartet Company. A six-story apartment building is planned for the site.

SESAC’s new office building at 35 Music Square East was under construction in 2015. In September 2015, the Country Music Association announced it would move into SESAC’s new office building in 2016 in order to consolidate its operations in one location. CMA’s longtime headquarters at 1 Music Circle South was purchased by the developer of the new SESAC building. Future plans for the building were not announced. Constructing the new SESAC on Music Square East required demolition of a circa 1900 brick house that had previously been home to Combine Music Group and a circa 1900 brick house that had been occupied at one time by Raleigh Music and Mercury Records.

Other music-related buildings were demolished in the mid-2010s as large-scale apartment buildings, parking lots, and luxury hotels were planned or constructed. Among the buildings demolished were:

- **Studio 19** – Alan Jackson, Garth Brooks, Dolly Parton, Allison Kraus and Ringo Starr are among the artists who recorded in the 1964 purpose-built music recording studio ;
- **Sound Shop Studio** – 1970-2015 – Artists recording at the studio included Paul McCartney, Joe Tex, Lee Greenwood, T.G. Sheppard, Brooks and Dunn, Grand Funk Railroad as well as commercial jingles;
- **Fireside Recording Studios** – Built by Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton;
- **Pete Drake Studio** – Studio for Drake, session musician and producer of “Ernest Tubb: The Legend and the Legacy” and “The Stars of the Grand Ole Opry” series;
- **Hummingbird Productions** – Advertising music company established in 1976 (office relocated);
- **Vibe 56 Studio** – Recording studio;

- **Pilcher-Hamilton House** – Built in the 1870s, home of Metro Councilperson Jim Hamilton who represented the Music Row district in the 1960s and 1970s;
- **Kelso Herston Enterprises** – Herston was the No. 1 producer of commercial jingles for 30 years; also the home of 16th Edge Studios; and
- **McFadden Building** – Owned by Jack McFadden, manager of Billy Ray Cyrus, Keith Whitley and Buck Owens.

In the midst of multiple demolitions and new construction, one building slated for demolition in 2014 saw its fortunes reversed – RCA Victor Studio A. Opened in 1965, it was the first building constructed in the Music Row area as a combination recording studio and as offices for music businesses. For almost five decades, a continual parade of superstars and up-and-coming artists recorded in its studio and the offices were occupied by music industry businesses and leaders. In addition to being the center of RCA's Nashville operations, at various times throughout the years office occupants included Kelso Herston, head of A&R for United Artists, the new Nashville ASCAP office and Chart Records which had signed Lynn Anderson. (See "A Turning Point: RCA Victor Studio" for historical information.)

From 2002 to 2014, the legendary music recording studio had been leased by Ben Folds, a multi-platinum selling artist/singer/songwriter. In addition to recording his own albums in the studio, Folds rented the studio which he named Grand Victor Sound out to other artists including Tony Bennett, Kacey Musgraves, Kelli Pickler, William Shatner, and Jamey Johnson and others who were drawn to the studio because of its historic significance.

In June of 2014, plans for the building's sale were announced. The purchaser planned to demolish the building and construct a 6-story luxury apartment building and restaurant on the site. The announcement stunned the music industry.

Sharon Corbitt-House, co-manager of Ben Folds and vice president of studio operations at Grand Victor Sound recalled her reaction:

"I had my reasons for wanting to fight it. I grew up listening to records that were made in that room. For me it was like that room is a symbol of everything wonderful that we had created on Music Row. When I'm wearing the hat of audio preservationist, I had very selfish reasons because I felt that there were six of those rooms that were built in the world by RCA based around (acoustical engineer) John Volkman's polycylindrical (diffuser) walls...that design. There are not any more of them. That was it. This was the last one." (25)

Ben Folds asked for support to save the building by writing an open letter to the city of Nashville, including a long list of artists who recorded in the studio over its 50-year history. In his letter, Folds asked the developer to "stand in the silence between the grand walls of RCA Studio A and feel the history and echoes of the Nashville that changed the world." Folds shared his connection to the studio:

"I had no idea of the legacy of this great studio until I became a tenant 12 years ago. The other three RCA studios of the same dimensions – built in LA, Chicago and New York – have long since been shut down. I can't tell you how many engineers, producers and musicians have walked into this space to share their stories of the great classic recorded music made here that put Nashville on the map." (26)

The next three months of trying to save RCA Studio A were described by songwriter and producer Trey Bruce as “white knuckles, straight downhill with no brakes.” **(27)**

Out of the efforts to find a way to save the building, the nonprofit Music Industry Coalition was formed to provide a voice for the music industry, followed shortly by the formation of a Save Studio A consortium to focus solely on the issue.

The importance of RCA Studio A to the music industry was evident when 400 people came to a Monday morning rally on June 30, 2014. By that time developer Tim Reynolds had issued a statement “If we consummate the sale, we intend to preserve and incorporate the studio into our overall design.” The crowd at the rally thought they were celebrating the studio being saved, only to find out shortly that the developer’s plans to purchase and demolish the building were still moving forward.

Multi-platinum country artist Keith Urban weighed in with an editorial urging that RCA Studio A and all of Music Row be preserved:

“Music Row is where the past, present and future meet and that’s a vital part of keeping balance. You can feel it as you drive along 16th and 17th Avenues and see so many original buildings, including RCA’s Studios A and B; the house where Warner Brothers first opened their doors; Quad Studios, where Neil Young recorded “Harvest”; and Hillbilly Central, where Waylon Jennings and the boys transformed the status quo by revolutionizing the way artists could take creative control...Not to mention the countless publishing houses where classic songs were and are written, pitched and demoed. **(28)**

Historic Nashville, Inc., a local preservation advocacy nonprofit, announced its 2014 Nashville Nine list of the city’s most threatened historic places in September 2014 at RCA Studio A with Mike Wolfe, a popular TV personality and preservationist, serving as spokesperson. With RCA Studio A at the top of the endangered list, the event was attended by nearly 300 people and received national publicity.

Songwriter and producer Trey Bruce took the lead in starting the Save Studio A campaign and was amazed as the issue drew support not only from the music industry but from Nashville residents and even internationally. As local and national media followed the situation, the weeks brought a continual flow of contradictory announcements – the studio was saved/not saved; the building was structurally unsound/only required minimal upgrades; the developer was not going to close the sale after all/the sale closed; the developer was offering the building for resale/architectural drawings of the new apartment building were released.

Events culminated dramatically on September 30, 2014, the final date set by the developer for offers to buy the building. Bruce recalled the day:

“September 30 at 5:00 p.m. was the deadline. An arbitrary deadline set by the developer that if the building is not sold, the building’s coming down in December. So at 3:00, I get a call from my buddy who is sitting in the developer’s lawyer’s office. He says ‘Trey, they got no buyers. The only ones that came up they ran them off. They don’t want a buyer. This guy wants to tear this building down, and he’s not looking for friends.’ And I said what do we do? We’ve got two hours. He said ‘I’m going to throw the longest Hail Mary ever.’ And I said Aubrey if I thought you were going to spend 50 bucks I would’ve never called you. Because we’ve been best friends forever, and you just don’t borrow money or do anything like that with a friend. But he’d already been spending

money. He threw up a website, hired some historians. In that 90 days we collected the most concise group of literature and facts on that building that existed anywhere. At the end of that 90 days not only was the building temporarily saved for a minute but there was a data piece on it that you could look up. It was just amazing. I think we changed the city forever.” (29)

The buyer was Aubrey Preston, a local preservationist, philanthropist, and music lover, who had been working behind the scenes with the Save Studio A campaign throughout the summer. Preston agreed to the \$5.6 million price and closed the sale in December 2014. Preston shared his reasons for buying the building with a reporter:

“The more I watched (the situation) the more concerned I started to become. I think it would be a real catastrophe to the city to lose one of its icons to the wrecking ball. From my understanding of music history and the Nashville economy and what we tell everybody about our town all over the world...I just felt it was impossible for this building to be torn down.”(30)

Preston was soon joined by two business partners, music industry executive Mike Curb, who had previously saved other Music Row buildings, and health care executive Chuck Elcan. The three formed Studio A Preservation Partners LLC to complete the building’s purchase and to plan for its future. In 2015, in addition to continuing to record music in the studio, plans were under way for repairs and upgrades to the building, leasing offices to new tenants, and celebrating the studio’s 50th anniversary with a gala event. Preston also commissioned Dr. Van West, director of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation in nearby Murfreesboro, to prepare a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the building.

Designation of RCA Studio A to the National Register of Historic Places in July 2015 drew national media coverage and highlighted the building’s historic significance as Preston noted:

“We’ve come a long way in 10 months especially considering where this thing was headed. Before this designation, [30 Music Square W.] was just a building with some old stories behind it. I have to think Chet [Atkins] and Owen [Bradley] would be smiling,” Preston muses, expressing satisfaction that the 50-year-old building — which he describes as a still-standing Brill Building of Music Row, purpose-built by Atkins and Bradley — is still a creative hub where cottage-industry musicians can record and network.” (31)

Still Music City: Planning for the Future of Music Row

In 2015, Nashville had reached new heights of recognition as Music City (having dropped “U.S.A.” from its moniker) and had added a new name, courtesy of the *New York Times*: “It City” which explained:

“...the music industry is the bedrock of Nashville’s economy. In the past two decades, country music has grown into a national darling. The city has attracted musicians and producers whose work moves beyond the twang and heartache.” (1)

The importance of the annual \$6 billion music industry to Nashville’s economy was clearly in focus in a 2013 study commissioned by the Music City Music Council, part of the Nashville Chamber of Commerce. The study began by declaring:

“Nashville is both the commercial center and the showcase of musical talent, performance and delivery. No other U.S. city is so linked to music production and performance as an identity, and one has as broad a base of genres involved at so many industry levels.” (2)

The study identified a number of music industry “clusters” – songwriting, publishing, performance rights, intellectual property, broadcasting, video, film, touring, and merchandising – and found that Nashville exceeded other cities with music industry clusters. Nashville was found to have 7.8 music industry clusters per 1,000 working age population compared to Los Angeles at 2.8 per 1,000, Austin at 2.6 per 1,000, and New York at 2.0 per 1,000. The study observed:

“Nashville’s range of talent, whether creative, technical or managerial, is far broader and deeper than the typical city’s industry. This is one of the salient points in understanding Nashville as a music industry center: Few cities in the world have such a high concentration of the full range of people in a total industry cluster. Examination of the abundance of talent illustrates that there are exceptionally high numbers of people in Nashville involved in the music industry compared to any other city.”

The study credited Music Row for much of the city’s success:

“The completely unique role of Music Row as the core geographic locale in Nashville where the modern music industry was born suggests significant attention. Few cultural districts have so significantly developed in a unique geographic zone and so vitally shaped a worldwide cultural trend.” (3)

The impact to Nashville as Music City is seen in a number of ways. The *New York Times* article attributed some of the increased interest to the popular ABC television show “Nashville.” With location filming of Nashville’s sites and a storyline centered on the country music industry, the show is credited with attracting increased visitation to the city.

Nashville’s tourism industry generates \$5 billion annually, focusing promotion on the city’s reputation for music. Tourists are invited to hear music live at the Ryman Auditorium or in any of the multitude of venues in the revitalization of the downtown area known as Lower Broadway, as well as other areas of the city, including a riverside amphitheater that opened in 2015.

Country music demonstrated continued popularity as attendance at CMA Music Fest (renamed from its earlier name Fan Fair) continued to increase. In 2001, the event moved from the fairgrounds back downtown. In 2015 CMA reported record-setting daily attendance of 87,680 fans, up 9.6 percent from 2014. Almost half of the attendees were there for the first time. With concerts over four nights, fans were treated to all sub-genres of country music with performances by artists including Luke Bryan, Jason Aldean, Lady Antebellum, Alan Jackson, the Oak Ridge Boys, Eric Church, Keith Urban, Brad Paisley, and Carrie Underwood.

In addition, other music genres have continued to gain a strong foothold in Nashville. Pop, rock, and punk stars such as The Black Keys, Kings of Leon, Kid Rock, Paramore, The Kills, and Jack White now call Nashville home. Jack White’s Third Man Records has paid homage to Nashville’s country roots by producing award-winning albums with Loretta Lynn and Wanda Jackson, covering Dolly Parton’s

“Jolene,” and publishing a tribute album to Hank Williams. Nashville’s mainstream hip-hop standouts include Young Buck and Starlito. And, in recent years several rock superstars have come to Nashville to record country-themed albums, including Steven Tyler of Aerosmith, Brett Michaels of Poison, and Don Henley of the Eagles.

On Music Row, the demolition threat to RCA Studio A in 2014 triggered discussions about the future sustainability of Music Row as the centerpiece of Nashville’s music industry. The area is under tremendous pressure for redevelopment with at least 35 music-related buildings demolished in the past two years to make way for new construction.

In January 2015, the National Trust for Historic Preservation designated Music Row as a “National Treasure.” This program identifies National Treasures as highly-significant historic places throughout the country that are threatened and where the National Trust is committed to working with local partners to ensure their future. Music Row was selected because of its central importance to Nashville’s identity as Music City and the strong desire to preserve it as a cornerstone of America’s cultural and music heritage.

Despite the changing music industry and development pressures, Music Row continues to be a center for music makers and promoters. In 2015, an inventory developed as part of this MPDF found 187 music-related businesses within the Music Row boundaries including 49 recording studios, 65 music publishing/media services businesses, 4 radio broadcast stations, 5 union halls, 9 record label/association headquarters, 11 gathering places/performance venues, 30 professional services offices and 14 housing facilities.

In February 2015, the Metro Nashville Planning Commission directed the planning department staff to prepare a new design plan for Music Row that recognizes its iconic nature and supports preservation while allowing growth.

As of August 2015, work was under way by a number of partners including the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Music Industry Coalition, Music Row Neighborhood Association (formed in the spring of 2015), Metro Historical Commission, Metro Planning Department, and Historic Nashville to document Music Row’s history and to plan for its future.

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