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WSRE premieres “Hank Locklin: Country Music’s Timeless Tenor” on Oct. 29



New WSRE production remembers country crooner Hank Locklin in celebration of his Grand Ole Opry 60th anniversary and 60 years of the crossover hit, “Please Help Me, I’m Falling”

*World broadcast premiere: 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 29, on WSRE
Encore presentation: 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 12*

PENSACOLA, Fla., October 5, 2020 — WSRE has completed production of a new documentary about the music and career of Hank Locklin, the singer-songwriter who hailed from the piney woods of McLellan in Santa Rosa County and became a recording artist of international renown.

The world broadcast premiere of “Hank Locklin: Country Music’s Timeless Tenor” will air exclusively on WSRE, the public television station serving Locklin’s hometown region of Northwest Florida and South Alabama, at 8 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 29. WSRE will air a special encore presentation of the film at 8 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 12, in celebration of the 60th anniversary of Locklin’s Grand Ole Opry induction.

Production of the film began with grant funding from the 2019 documentary series “Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns” and locally from The Bear Family Foundation. These initial grants covered the costs of field production which included interviews with some of country music’s most celebrated artists and industry icons. Headlining those featured in the film are Bill Anderson, Vince Gill, Dolly Parton, Jeannie Seely, Marty Stuart and Dwight Yoakam.

“It is so very special for Hank and speaks to the level of respect and admiration he still holds that some of the biggest names and most beloved personalities in country music granted interviews for this film. I mean, about half of the cast are in the Country Music Hall of Fame,” said first-time film producer Mary Riker.

WSRE contracted with Emily Hudson Mitchell of Pensacola to assist with the production upon the recommendation of Locklin’s son, Hank Adam Locklin, who is an entertainment attorney and also appears in the film.

“Hank Adam and Emily were neighbors when she lived in Nashville years ago working for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum,” said Riker, “Not long after I contacted him about the idea to produce a documentary on his dad, he said, ‘There’s someone you should meet.’ I’m so glad he did!”

Mitchell holds a master’s degree in country music history and was able to help the WSRE production team with research, interview prep and finding their way around Nashville. As associate producer of the film, she also got to realize a dream that never came to fruition while residing in Nashville years ago. She had the opportunity to meet and interview her childhood idol, Dolly Parton.

“When I left Nashville to move home to Pensacola 14 years ago, I never dreamed a project like this would come along. Through my friendship with Hank Adam, I was lucky enough to get to meet Hank Locklin on several occasions, and now, I will be forever grateful to Hank for allowing me the opportunity to work with country music greats such as Dolly Parton, Marty Stuart and Crystal Gayle,” said Mitchell.

WSRE’s James Roy, director, and Ted King, assistant director, began capturing the telling of Locklin’s story with the first two interviews, Vince Gill and Dwight Yoakam, in March 2019.

“Growing up, the only time I heard the old twangy style of country music was either from my brother’s radio or on one of those Time Life box set commercials. Country music never interested me much then, but working on the Hank Locklin film has really made me aware of some of the great artists in country music,” said Roy. “When I was a kid singing ‘Please Help Me, I’m Falling’ to the Time Life commercials, I was singing along to one of Hank’s greatest songs!

“Working with the many artists and the two producers of the film has made me understand the real importance of Hank’s story and the influence he had in Nashville at the time.”

The crew returned to Nashville three months later to conduct interviews with Bill Anderson, William Lee Golden of The Oak Ridge Boys, Charley Pride and Jeannie Seely while backstage at the Grand Ole Opry during CMA Fest.

“Growing up in a small town, country music was a big part of my life from the beginning. Being at the Opry was the chance of a lifetime that lived up to and exceeded my expectations. To be backstage and see how the operation and performances were put on was a true privilege and something I’ll remember forever,” said King.

Individual donations from \$20 to \$5,000 have helped secure archival audio and video clips, historical photos and music rights for the production.

Locklin's lifelong career produced 65 albums, six No. 1 hits, two Grammy nominations and 70 chart singles, including the 1960 monster hit "Please Help Me, I'm Falling" and the self-penned "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On." He signed his first recording contract in 1949 with 4 Star Records. In 1955, he signed with RCA Victor, where he recorded with producer Chet Atkins and helped establish the Nashville sound subgenre of country music. His last album was gospel. He recorded "By the Grace of God" in 2006 at age 88.

"I don't know what he did to keep his voice in such great shape, but his voice stayed really high and very clear way up until the end of his life and career," said Seely, who speaks in the film about the family-like camaraderie among Opry members.

Locklin was inducted into the Grand Ole Opry on Nov. 12, 1960, and remained an active member for 49 years until his death at age 91.

Parton, who recently celebrated her 50th anniversary as a member of the Grand Ole Opry, said about Locklin, "I always will believe that he was one of the greatest that was ever on the stage at the Opry."

"Hank Locklin: Country Music's Timeless Tenor" will be made available to other PBS stations through a broadcast feed provided by the National Educational Telecommunications Association. WSRE has been notified that stations covering nearly 40 percent of the PBS coverage area in the U.S. have already scheduled the film for broadcast.

"We were very pleased to learn that Nashville Public Television will be joining us in presenting the film on Nov. 12 in honor of Hank's Grand Ole Opry anniversary," said Riker. "He has many friends there in Music City who will appreciate this acknowledgement of his notable contributions to the history of country music."

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Photo Credit: Courtesy of Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum

About Hank Locklin: Born Lawrence Hankins Locklin in McLellan, Fla., on Feb. 15, 1918, Hank Locklin began his career singing in roadhouses along the Gulf Coast and performing on WCOA radio in Pensacola. He went on to perform on the Big D Jamboree and Louisiana Hayride and was signed to 4 Star Records before being lured to record with Chet Atkins at RCA Victor, where he recorded in Nashville from 1955 to 1974 and helped establish the Nashville sound. In 1960, he joined the Grand Ole Opry, of which he remained a member for 49 years. Locklin is known for his role in introducing concept albums; for being hugely popular overseas, especially in Ireland; and for the longevity of his high tenor voice, recording well into his 80s. Locklin had six No. 1 hits, two Grammy nominations and more than 15 million albums sold. He was inducted into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame in 2007 and into the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in 2014. He died on March 8, 2009, in Brewton, Ala.

About WSRE: WSRE is a PBS member station, licensed to the Pensacola State College District Board of Trustees. Since 1967, WSRE has served Northwest Florida and South Alabama with educational and entertaining programs and community engagement activities. WSRE produces, acquires and distributes programs that address local interests and reflect the diverse characteristics of the coverage area and connects local schools and families to PBS educational resources.