

Carl Jackson- Musical Dream Maker

By Lee Kotick

Carl Jackson is a musical architect, bridge builder, and dreamer. He's a one of a kind man; a humble networker who enriches others' lives. Jackson's mantra is, "With each dream that becomes a reality, a new dream lies ahead." Many of his dreams have come true. He's not just a gifted musical producer, but a most influential guy who perhaps is singularly responsible for the creation of one of the major bridges between bluegrass and country from the 1960s to the present. His feet are firmly planted in both genres. Jackson's humility would cause him to disagree with such homage. Make no mistake, bluegrass and country go together other like ham and eggs. Jackson's body of work in bluegrass and country is unrivaled for its time period. Just as Glen Campbell and Jim and Jesse took a young banjo playing Jackson under their wings, he in turn takes on talented young artists, nurtures them and teaches them to fly on their own. As a good song must have a great title, so must dreams be built on bridges providing artists connections between episodes of their dreams. While he's fulfilled many of his own dreams, Jackson is called to make others' dreams come true. Our country's greatest artists want to be affiliated with Jackson's projects, and to a person, they clearly love and admire him. This is a man who has reached the epitome of musical production in our genres.

The Man

Jackson was born in 1953 in a small clinic above the Strand Theatre in Louisville, MS. His parents raised him in a musical family and he learned to play multiple stringed instruments. The Jackson

family's deep influences laid the foundation for a young Carl, and the values of his lineage would later become evident in his musical projects. The trailblazing group Jim and Jesse picked him up as their banjo player after seeing him perform. He did a stint with them for four years and then was fortunate to be Glenn Campbell's banjo player from 1972-1984. These experiences allowed him to develop expertise in multiple facets of music- songwriter, vocalist, instrumentalist, and producer. Jackson has been fortunate to dictate his own schedule since leaving Glenn Campbell, and continues to collaborate with the best of the best, including Ricky Skaggs, Vince Gill, Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, and so many others. Many of his songs have been recorded by Grammy-winning artists in both bluegrass and country music. His discography is extensive and his body of work is timeless.

He's a multi-instrumentalist, a songwriter, an artist, a producer, and a very blessed man. As a multiple Grammy winning artist, and multiple IBMA award-winner inducted into the Mississippi Musicians Hall of Fame, he's highly regarded by all who know him. In a span of over 50 years in music, he's done it all, charting and navigating a course only a man of his unique talents could envision. Call him a visionary because that's what he is, and the best is still yet to come. Jackson plans on being around and creative for many years, focusing on future special and solo projects. June 2017 saw *Universal Records* release of Jackson's long anticipated special project on his favorite Glenn Campbell songs, when Campbell picked guitar. Jackson's Goddaughter Ashley Campbell is featured on the project.

Many of Jackson's long time friends frequently cross the bridge and under his tutelage the younger ones are guided to safe and successful passage. Crossover artists in bluegrass and country are among

America's most creative treasures, people like Vince Gill, Patty Loveless, and many others who have inspired younger generations to go where their music takes them.

Jackson embraces and nurtures younger talent who already perform like musical veterans. Of the Church Sisters, who appeared on the Jackson produced project, *Orthophonic Joy*, he says, "All talent is God-given, but the Church Sisters possess the natural singing ability only given to vocalists of the caliber of say, Glen Campbell or Linda Ronstadt. They sing with virtually no effort at all, and the precision of Savannah's lead and the quality of Sarah's harmony are simply perfection that cannot be taught, as it's a gift reserved for a special few." Perhaps the Sisters' success and contract with Big Machine Records, represents their first step onto the Jackson Bridge. Savannah and Sara (Church Sisters), sing the praises of Jackson, by noting, "Carl Jackson has been one of the greatest influences and mentor to us. He's an incredible songwriter and producer, and us getting to work with him has been a dream come true. He has a heart of gold and we love him." Multi-talented Buddy Robertson of Flatt Lonesome sings Jackson's praises, by noting that, "Anytime you're around him, he's encouraging. He does the Station Inn New Mondays, and he always gets me up on stage. He encourages younger musicians and really a lot of musicians. He's just a good man who is good to people- nice and encouraging."

Queens and Kings

If songwriting and production were a deck of cards, Jackson has it in spades. His colleagues admire him and are eager to share insights into their relationships with him.

Dolly Parton and Jackson have collaborated on many projects. “Carl Jackson is one of the greatest singers, stylists and musician that has ever been in any style of music. But he is especially amazing with that mountain bluegrass sound. I’ve never heard anybody who has such expression and such emotion. I always get chill bumps every time I hear Carl sing. And when I get a chance to sing with him, it just about freezes me to death! In addition to all that and everybody feeling like I do about him in that respect, he is one of the nicest and greatest people that I’ve ever known in the business. I’ve always considered him like a brother. I appreciate him for all that he does, the way he loves the music business and all that he’s done for all the different people in the music business. He has contributed to it in so many ways. I could talk all day and not even touch the surface of all the great things that I could say about Carl. So I’ll leave it at that by saying that I will always love Carl Jackson...always have.”

Rhonda Vincent, also a frequent collaborator, lauds Jackson. In a recent appearance, filmed for Country’s Family’s Reunion, Vincent was finally able to publicly thank Carl Jackson for his kindness and recommendations. Of her friend, Vincent sums up what so many other friends and colleagues have to say about Jackson. “Carl Jackson is one of the rare people in the music business, who helps others unconditionally, and without condition, politics or benefit to himself. In addition to his amazing talent, he is a genuine person who gives of himself with tremendous kindness. He has been very blessed in his life, and he shares those blessings with so many others. I love that man, and appreciate him very much for all he has done for me. He is a man who has shown immeasurable generosity to me, and so many others. He’s shared his songs, no matter if you’re a new artist, or veteran performer, or million selling artist. This is evident if you look at the vast amount of artists

who have recorded his songs, and multiple times. In 1992, I received a call from Dolly Parton, after Carl Jackson had suggested she call me to sing with them on her “Slow Dancing’ With the Moon.” album. In 1994, Carl suggested I give a CD to James Stroud. The next day, James came back to the studio and said, “I wanna work with you.” Then there was the time he invited me to sing a duet on a Grammy Nominated project titled *Living Lovin’ Losin’* - A tribute to the Louvin Brothers. He paired me with newcomer Joe Nichols. I said, “I’ve never heard of him.” Carl said, “You will.” He was right. What an incredible voice. Next was a project titled “Mark Twain - Words & Music”, where he invited me to sing “Run Mississippi.” This song has become a staple for us.

Alecia Nugent has known Jackson for about 25 years or so, and also considers him a good friend. Like his other compatriots, Nugent extols Jackson’s many virtues, and warmly recalls when, “I called him before Rounder Records picked up my first album, and asked him to produce the project. The business arrangements were not totally worked out, but he was willing. He put in the time, picking songs to the last mixing, right from the get go. We became friends immediately when we sang together. In five minutes it felt like we were friends for a lifetime.”

Vince Gill and Jackson have also collaborated for over 25 years, with the timeless Jackson hit “No Future in the Past,” which won Gill the 1993 song of the year. Gill has appeared on a number of Jackson produced projects including, *Songs of the Louvin Brothers*, the *Mark Twain* project and more recently on *Orthophonic Joy*. We’ve been friends since the 80s- can’t recall first time we’ve met- known each other thru bg- as much as we loved and respected bg we had other dreams about all different kinds of music- we first worked on Emmy Lou’s angel band record. What I love about Carl you know how good it’s going to be- whenever he does a project he wants to include me- testament

to our friendship- we seem to like a lot of the same things- makes for great friends- attention to quality and detail- it's nice to work with people you trust- what you do is going to wind up great when working with Carl. As a fine songwriter he's rare- this is more evident that there are more songwriters- songwriting is more paramount in country music.

Bradley Walker, currently working with the Gaither Family, met Jackson and Larry Cordle at IBMA in 2000. The two caught Walker's show, and were duly impressed to the extent that Jackson later produced Walker's first solo project, *Highway of Dreams*, released in 2006. Walker credits Jackson with teaching him to be a better singer. Walker notes, "Carl has taught me so much about how to sing and work in a studio. He is so talented as a producer and he's such a gifted singer. He hears melody and harmony in his head before the music is made, and he has the ability beyond many other producers."

Jackson, Cordle and Salley

Like Mantle, Maris and Berra, this trio of heavy hitting songwriters and performers, are an ultra talented group which delights audiences on festival, Opry, and Station Inn stages, with many of their original songs which tell stories of life's sweet and bitter moments. Most evident, is that the three are the best of friends who have assigned themselves the unspoken honor of pallbearer.

Larry Cordle's friendship with Jackson goes back to 1986 when the two were out on the road with Ricky Skaggs for a weekend. Cordle says, "Carl was filling in for playing guitar and singing harmony and from that first meeting we've been friends ever since. I had just moved to Nashville in

1985 and we were both working for Ricky's publishing company Amanda Lin Music through the Welk Music Group. We struck up an easy friendship and began to hangout, write songs together and were soon performing together with our writer's group that is still active today with our friend Jerry Salley.” Cordle knew a little about Jackson before becoming friends. “I knew he was a brilliant banjo player from his Jim and Jesse stuff and that he was an indispensable sideman for Glen Campbell for a long time. Cordle soon found out what an amazing singer, songwriter and guitarist Jackson was as well. As their friendship grew, they became almost like family. Cordle’s respect for Jackson grew over the years as time and time again Jackson amazed them with all the various aspects of the music business that he had a handle on. Cordle remembers, “We formed a publishing company together with our friend Jim Rushing and shared some wonderful times in that venture together. Carl is one of my oldest and dearest friends of the last 30 years or so. We've traveled the roads together, laughed, cried, written songs I love, did things I could never have imagined doing and thankfully are still doing them. I have never met a more honest and sincere person in my life. If Carl tells you something, you can take that to the bank. His friendship is something I treasure and his knowledge, honesty and understanding of the business of music is something I have leaned on for many years.”

Jerry Salley recalls that Jackson was first writer he met in Nashville after college. “We met in 1987. We co wrote “*Breakin’ New Ground*,” recorded first by Seldom Scene and later by Alecia Nugent. We became close friends and buddies for 30 years. Thru Carl met Cord and Jim Rushing- Been together cord, Jackson, and Salley since 1992. And we’re still friends. I’ve learned an awful lot from him- his production skills. I try to do my records similarly to his.”

More than anything he's been a close friend. Jackson wrote the liner notes for Salley's project *New Songs, Old Friends*. Salley recalls, "I cried. He is as a loyal person as you ever meet. We do an annual Christmas show in Carl's hometown and it was debuted there."

Salley's newest CD entitled, "*Front Porch Philosophy*," is about ready for distribution, Salley's dad had two banjo instruction books, one by Carl Jackson and the other by Earl Scruggs. These books inspired Salley to write an ode to his best buddy, with lyrics starting like, "My career just might get a little more traction if I could play guitar like Carl Jackson." Salley has drawn inspiration from real life quality musical experiences and pieces them into an autobiographical testimony. Salley recalls those two banjo books—"Dad had —one- Scruggs banjo book and one Jackson banjo book. In a verse wrote about his dad's books., Salley penned part title and lyrics as a genuine ode to his buddy." "My career just might a got a little bit more traction if I could play guitar like Carl Jackson." More songs talk about their history together. "We cherish each show we do because we may not be able to do that again."

On Songwriting, Collaboration, and Business

It would take too many pages to list all the projects and songs in which Jackson has been involved since 1968. Jackson's a song writer's guru and artists' source of quality songs, the kind that win Grammys and IBMA awards. His songs are neither bluegrass or country, but rather become classified dependent upon instrumentation, lyrics, production, marketing and the like. Jackson has conducted numerous songwriting workshops, and recalls a workshop participant asking what makes a bluegrass song, with his response being, "I've written many song recorded by bluegrass artists."

Jackson draws inspiration from many sources, and likes to share his insight into his songwriting process. “I like to present things to the world that make people feel good and smile. This inspires me and I want people to know how much I feel about it. I try to write three minute movies and close my eyes and see it. The title of the song is most important. You have to have an overall idea of the song. If you’re writing a story the title comes to you. I’ll write the chorus first and then fill in. I write to meter first, not the melody.” Jackson believes that YouTube allows people to showcase their music as well as providing an open market for public awareness. Subscription services are perceived to be, “ Like a two-edged sword; it may crush writers, but it’s good for the artists.”

On Instruments

Instruments are the tools of the trade, and when one grew up in and rises to the pinnacle of bluegrass and country music, many fine instruments are there for the plucking, with none so valuably cherished as those handed down from family. In 2012, Jackson released an acclaimed solo project, *Grace Notes* which was a solo gospel guitar project dedicated to his family members but mainly to his parents. Twelve different guitars are played with a master’s touch, and Jackson provides the listener with introductory anecdotes about how he came to acquire vintage Martins and other guitars. Jackson’s go to guitar is his 1957 Martin D-28 and his dad’s 1943 Martin D-28 herringbone. Jackson fondly speaks of his 1929 Martin 00-21, which was played by Merle Haggard on the Jackson project *Bluegrass Sessions*.

As a banjo player, Jackson loves his gold-plated raised-head Gibson Granada, as well as his 1926 Gibson Mastertone, acquired in a trade with Jim McReynolds. Randy Wood recalls, “Carl came to me in the early 70s, and he wanted me to build a neck for his old Gibson banjo. He was getting ready to play on *Hee Haw*.”

Passions and Hobbies

Jackson has a large field of vision. With a man who has dreams big and has accomplished so much, it is no wonder that he has a passion for things old and antique. Jackson collects baseball cards, and is a proud owner of a 1952 Mickey Mantle baseball card as well as a 1911 Joe Jackson card. Jackson has been a Mickey Mantle and New York Yankees fan for many years. Mantle holds a record for most home runs in a year, and wore lucky #7. If home runs were hits songs, and Mickey lived longer, the two would have forged a mutual admiration society of epic proportion. Jackson frequently wears a New York Yankees hat, perhaps symbolic of his 1991 project *Spring Training*, with John Starling. Jackson has his own field of dreams, which lies within striking distance of the George Washington Bridge, near a famous baseball stadium located in the thriving borough of the Bronx. With many years of musical wisdom, Jackson advises, “Don’t let artists get mass-produced and pigeon-holed by major labels. There are more opportunities and openings now than in the past.” Wise words from The Musical Dream Maker.

For a discography of Jackson’s work, including albums, singles, Grammy Awards, and IBMA Awards, refer to “[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Carl Jackson&oldid=712367900](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Carl%20Jackson&oldid=712367900)”

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