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people

BECKY HOBBS
All Keyed Up!

CRYSTAL GALE
Born to sing

Award Winning Group
COLORADO

Rockabilly Matters—Rose Maddox and Luther Perkins

and much more!

Photo credit: PETER NASH

The name **CRYSTAL GAYLE** instantly evokes two indelible images in the minds of the general public: that of the beautiful songstress with the dark brown hair trailing down to her feet; and the hit single 'Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue' which took off across the globe in 1977. Indeed, as one of the elite of country artistes who have successfully crossed over into the pop field, Crystal can draw the necessary audiences which have brought her regular bookings in Las Vegas, Lake Tahoe, Reno, Atlantic City and other prestigious venues.

So just how did the musical career of this delicate yet determined woman with the crystal clear and evocative vocal style evolve? Crystal was born Brenda Gail Webb on 9 January 1951 in the tiny Appalachian mining village of Paintsville in Kentucky, the youngest of the eight children of Ted and Clara Webb. Poverty stricken, the Webbs used music to entertain themselves and it was in this environment that Crystal's talents began to emerge. "My mother always loved to tell people I was singing before I could walk," she remembers. "My mother really believed in me and anytime anyone would come to the house, she'd make me sing. I took to hiding because I was shy, but she always found me and pushed me out front of

whatever audience there was. Once I started singing, though, I was fine."

Elder sister was, of course, Loretta Lynn whose outstanding career in Country Music bears no repeating here (see *Country Music People*, February 1988). "I grew up with my sister in the business as the star she is. I was just very proud; I was always bragging about my sister," Crystal recalls. But she was also convinced that she too could become a successful singer. As a teenager, Crystal's talents sprang to prominence at Wabash High School where, as well as singing in the choir, she began playing acoustic guitar and performing folk songs, while at weekends her developing vocal prowess would augment her brothers' country band. Loretta was, however, responsible for bringing her sister's abilities before wider audiences when, following her graduation, she invited Crystal to join her stage show and sing a few numbers.

It is an intriguing question to ask why Crystal's vocal style did not develop in the same manner as Loretta's. Crystal herself is in no doubt as to the main reason—"because even though I was born in Kentucky where my sister was born with me, at a very young age (four) we moved to Indiana and it's a totally different upbringing and that's one of the reasons I

believe that I've been able to succeed in the business with a sister as famous as Loretta." Another factor explaining the difference was the much broader range of musical influences which Crystal absorbed. "I grew up singing the Beatles songs, Patsy Cline, Brenda Lee, folk music (Peter, Paul & Mary), along with a lot of the country sounds and a lot of the pop hits of the day so my background was full of everything. My sound was so different from my sister's and is another reason why I was able to succeed."

Having such an illustrious singer does help to win a recording contract and, in 1970, aged nineteen, Crystal was signed to Loretta's label, Decca. Crystal recollects her first recording session with horror, but also some of the amusement born of the knowledge that she is now an established star. "I was so nervous about going in and couldn't sing. I had completely lost it. We put down all the tracks and then I went in later and put my voice down." Her first single, 'I've Cried The Blue Right Out Of My Eyes', a ballad, made the Top Thirty the same year. Not only had Loretta written the number (and two others on Crystal's debut album), she had also found the captivating name which her younger sibling would use from now onwards. Fearing that to be marketed as Brenda Webb risked confusion with the ever popular Brenda Lee, Loretta, struck by the name Krystal on a Nashville hamburger stand, persuaded her sister to adopt this in conjunction with her second christian name. After some spelling adjustments, 'Crystal Gayle' was born.

CRYSTAL GAYLE

born to sing

An appreciation
by **STEVE MOREWOOD**

Listening to her early recordings today, there is an immaturity and lack of conviction in most of the songs, which was reflected by Crystal enjoying only two further minor hits with MCA (formerly Decca). Still searching for a distinctive and appealing vocal identity, Crystal joined United Artists in 1972 and so began the now famous musical liaison with freelance producer and songwriter Allen Reynolds, who was already bringing success to Don Williams. Crystal readily admits that Reynolds made all the difference. "I felt that Allen was very wonderful and very good for my career. He was someone that I never thought I'd ever find in Nashville. I'm so glad I did."

Recognising Crystal's potential, Reynolds gave her greater freedom in selecting material to record and encouraged her to cultivate a more individualistic vocal style. Against usually simple backgrounds which featured a variety of instruments, Crystal's enchanting vocals glided along bringing out the full meaning of the lyrics with her interpretations. Reportedly refusing to record any more of Loretta's songs, Crystal at last moved out of her shadow and with some inspired choices the hits began to flow. Reynolds' 'Wrong Road Again' and 'Somebody Loves You' provided two early hits and began a pattern of regular successes in the country charts which has continued. The unusual 'One More Time (Karneval)' gave an early indication that Crystal was not content to restrict herself to recognised country material, a characteristic which is now a mainstay of the current Nashville scene.

'I'll Get Over You', the title track of her second album with Reynolds, gave Crystal





Above: Crystal introduces daughter Catherine at Wembley, 1988.

her first number one in 1976. Another chart topper, 'You Never Miss A Real Good Thing' quickly followed and the same year the Academy of Country Music voted Crystal 'Outstanding Female Vocalist'. 1977 was the year which brought Crystal international stardom. Her fourth album, the aptly titled 'We Must Believe In Magic', contained the haunting single 'Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue' which fitted Crystal to a tee—even her piercing blue eyes were the right colour. Not only did it top the country charts, it also scored heavily in Europe and Britain where Crystal capitalised on her success by accompanying Kenny Rogers on tour. Richard Leigh had written both 'I'll Get Over You' and 'Brown Eyes' and Crystal is quick to acknowledge her debt to him and other songwriters. "I think it's wonderful to be able to sit down and create on paper some of the greatest lyrics."

'Talking In Your Sleep' (1978) furnished another major crossover hit with its perfect blending of Crystal's sophisticated styling and luscious instrumentation. Moreover, Crystal's albums were also making their mark and emulated their creator in recognising no musical boundaries. 'We Must Believe In Magic' became the first album by a female country artiste to attain platinum status (as did its successor 'When I Dream'), reaching number twelve in the U.S. pop charts. The accolades continued in the wake of Crystal's continuing and burgeoning success, with her being named 'Female Vocalist of the Year' in 1977 and

1978 by both the ACM and CMA. 'Brown Eyes', Crystal's biggest selling single, won coveted Grammy awards for 'Best Female Vocal Performance' and 'Best Country Song'.

Since the heady success of international success of the late '70s, Crystal's crossover hits have mysteriously petered out despite the fact that much of the material she has since recorded would reside more easily on a pop chart than a country one. The country hits have continued unabated. Her brief spell with US Columbia between 1979 and 1982 spawned ten hits, including three number ones. She then switched to Elektra/Warner Brothers with whom she has remained, chalking up nine number ones to date. Many of her albums have also been notable successes including 'Miss The Mississippi' (1979), her fourth gold LP, 'True Love' (1982) and 'Cage The Songbird' (1983).

'Live' performances have always figured prominently in Crystal's itinerary—in 1985, for instance, she performed at 120 concerts which included an appearance at the 19th Annual CMA Awards ceremony in Nashville. In Britain, she has graced Wembley four times (1971, 1977, 1979, 1988), the first occasion being with Loretta's show, and in March 1981 she headlined a sellout concert at London's Apollo Theatre, which was later televised.

Anyone who has been fortunate enough to see Crystal perform 'live' will appreciate

(continued on back cover)

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A sultry looking Crystal from 1979



Photo credit: Ian Tibury

(continued from inside pages)

her near flawless singing and lively personality. The excellent 'In Concert' video featuring Crystal at Hamilton Place, Canada, in which the multi-faceted album 'True Love' is heavily featured, gives a good indication of what to expect—sincerity, humour and, above all, an entertaining mixture of material. Though she has not so far acted in films, Crystal regards herself as an actress on stage. "You have to play it out. There'll be some nights you go on and you might not be feeling a hundred per cent and maybe the public will not be aware of that and . . . you've got to put a little bit more in there to get the song across. Most of the time when I'm on stage it'll flow." Believability has been the hallmark of Crystal's success. "When I'm choosing a song the melody has to hit me first. Then, if I feel strongly about the lyrics, I'll try to record it. I'm sure I've turned down a lot of good ones but if I can't feel a song, I can't communicate it."

Crystal enjoys performing at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas but generally prefers "being in different concert halls and playing to that type of audience than staying in one place." Perhaps her most nerve-racking assignment was singing 'He Is Beautiful To Me' at President Reagan's inauguration which, looking back, she regards as "a great experience". This month, September 1988, she is to appear at Lake Tahoe in concert with her big sister Loretta—the first time they will have been together when both are major stars.

Every singer has an image. In Crystal's case, her natural beauty and innocent look have captivated the hearts of men and brought the envy of women the world over. She laughs off the accolade of having been voted one of the top ten most attractive women in the world (1983) and strangely never tires of being asked about her enormous mane of hair. When she was starting out, well wishing females in the business urged her to have it cut and curled—even to dye it blonde. Crystal stubbornly refused and, her singing aside, it is the length of her hair which always provides a talking point. "You cannot plan anything other than washing your hair and doing a concert", Crystal revealed at Wembley. "I like it a little shorter than what it is right now—about three inches off the ground—and it is on the ground right now and I find I step on it on stage."

In the background but nevertheless an integral part of her success is husband and manager Bill Gatzimos, a former law student at Indiana University who also acts as his wife's lawyer. Crystal and Bill met and fell in love while she was at High School and they learned the singing business together. The unassuming Bill remembers that in the early days neither of them knew "a lot about it and looking back we were both very naive and I think over the years you pay your dues and you learn." In such a relationship, it is not always easy to end the business talk and relax, but the longevity of the partnership underlines Gatzimos's recollection of their being only friendly differences of opinion.

The marriage has so far produced two children, a son and daughter. The latter, Catherine Clair, was being carried when Crystal recorded the 'Cage The Songbird' album, parts of which related to children. She was credited on the album 'Nobody Wants To Be Alone' (1985) for her distractions, featured on the video of Crystal's rendering of Billie Holiday's 'God Bless The Child' and is regularly introduced at concerts. Crystal admits to loving children: "not every aspect of having children is easy, but it's a great feeling to have your own child, seeing what you have made grow up."



After both of her offspring's births, Crystal's weight ballooned, but diet and exercise had restored her trim figure by the time she went back on the road.

The family home is an eight acre ranch in Nashville, whose blessings include swimming pools inside and out. In late 1987, Crystal went off the road both to record and to put the final touches to her new store close to her home which specialises in Waterford crystal and Swedish crystal. Some years ago, Crystal began to build up her own collection which began in England when she was presented with a piece of Waterford crystal by Val Doonican on his BBC television show. And it goes without saying that when she wears jewellery crystals adorn her neck, ears and fingers.

Crystal's recent albums have featured a variety of producers and she herself is credited with directing them—though she does not rule out the possibility of working with Reynolds again at some point. Crystal has also ventured into the duet field, enjoying two chart toppers with Eddie Rabbitt and, more recently, with Gary Morris. Rabbitt intuitively felt that the ballad 'You And I' wouldn't work with just himself singing and so he invited Crystal to contribute with the resulting superb blend of Eddie's rough hone vocals smoothed over by Crystal's rich velvet voice. 'Makin' Up For Lost Time', originally recorded for the 'Dallas' TV series album, and 'Another World', a further TV soap theme song, have been the major fruits of the Gayle/Morris

partnership. Urged on by her record company, the two recorded a duet album, 'What If We Fall In Love', a self-indulgent project redeemed only by the two singles, which must rank as Crystal's worst album.

And what of the future? Crystal does not believe in goals, but when pushed revealed several interesting projects in the pipeline. First comes a new album which she professes to being very excited about. Crystal has long nurtured an ambition to record with sisters Loretta and Peggy Sue Wright and is hoping that their demanding schedules can be married up to provide time to lay down the tracks. With the current Nashville success of family groups, such a trio album could work splendidly, as Crystal appreciates when referring to their contrasting voices. "Peggy has a higher voice, Loretta has the middle, and I have the lower."

"I just enjoy singing. I just want to continue making good music. I think I'll probably do more special albums. I'd like to do an album of blues and maybe an album of old standard country, which I've been wanting to do for quite a while, but usually when you go in to do your album the record company expects all new things . . . But I think I'm gonna put my foot down and say, 'This is what I'm gonna do now.' Let's hope she does for it will be a reminder that despite her sophistication and the different musical dimensions she has explored, Crystal Gayle remains a country girl at heart. And long may her success continue."



Parren