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COUNTRY MUSIC PEOPLE



COVER STORY

Alongside Dolly Parton, CRYSTAL GAYLE has probably made the biggest impression, as a female artiste, on audiences during the late Seventies. The acceptance has been universal, not only winning over to both Country and pop listeners, but also to audiences that stretch far beyond the boundaries of the United States. Prior to her forthcoming Wembley appearance, TONY BYWORTH talked to the lady about her career, her influences and her association with producer Allen Reynolds in the light of the music's current development.

THE MEMORIES still exist from some 18 months back. It was the time of the Kenny Rogers—Crystal Gayle British tour, and the lovely lady with the waist long hair was rushing around her dressing room backstage at London's Rainbow.

She had an hour or so to spare before making it out front on stage, and was deep in the realms of preparation. Grasping a steam iron in hand, and fighting the almost tropical heat that emerged from a faulty radiator, she went to work on her dress. Yet she still managed to find time to chat.

Yes, she admitted, life had become hectic following the announcement that Nashville's Country Music Association had named her Female Vocalist Of The Year during the preceding month, and the concert dates were being frantically scheduled in. But, really, it was part of a mounting pattern that had begun soon after her signing with United Artists Records back in '74. Now she had broken through to the international market with her first Gold Single "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue", and had made it a double with her album "We Must Believe In Magic" also striking gold status.

A year or so later after the memorable Rainbow meeting the music world lay well and truly at Crystal Gayle's feet.

1978 was an exceptional year for the Kentucky born lady. In February she walked away with a Grammy for Top Female Country Performance with "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" while, two months later, that same song allowed Crystal to collect the West Coast's Academy of Country Music's Award of Top Female Vocalist for the second consecutive year.

Then, towards the year's end, after the passing months had seen more singles reaching the number one spot in the Country Charts and record sales the reaping of more gold rewards, the members of the Country Music Association once again paid their tributes. The lady repeated her feat of grabbing the Female Vocalist Award—this time in the face of stiff competition from the much acclaimed Dolly Parton amongst others—and songwriter Richard received his just recognition of the Song category for "Brown Eyes".

Today Crystal Gayle is a superstar. The days of being Loretta Lynn's "li'l sister" and now long since passed and she well stands her ground on her own count. The accolades, the awards, the newsprint, the praise and the best sellers proudly acclaim her success.

Whatsmore she's taken Country and crossed over, gaining a vast new



CRYSTAL GAYLE

AN ENTERTAINER FOR ALL AUDIENCES

audience all eager to hear her music. And it's easy to see why Crystal Gayle has struck such success. After all, how many singers can you name that's consistently put such a distinctive styling to such a succession of sweet sounding, melodic songs? You name 'em—"Wrong Road Again", "Somebody Loves You", "One More Time", "Don't It Make Your Brown Eyes Blue", "Why Have You Left The One You Left Me For" . . . they're all hauntingly memorable long after the record has stopped spinning.

Success for Crystal Gayle began to

strike when she departed from big sister Loretta's label Decca (now MCA), and signed a new deal with United Artists. The previous label association did hit chartwise with her first single release, "I Cried (The Blue Right Out Of My Eyes)" recorded when she was 19 years old, but three subsequent singles failed to muster up any further positive chart response.

"Being on the same label was difficult" Crystal admits, reflecting back

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CRYSTAL GAYLE

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to the beginning of the '70s. "I guess I was always thought of as Loretta's little sister, the last of the singing family. But it never really bothered me because I was never trying to be Loretta. . . I was just trying to be me. In fact I was, and still am, very proud of the association. After all, Loretta is a legend. There's only one of her.

"But being on a different label did make a difference. Once with United Artists I found that people were no longer looking at me as Loretta Lynn's sister but as Crystal Gayle".

The UA association kicked off well, scoring a Top 40 hit with the Ed & Patsy Brue song "Restless" during July 1974. The session was produced by Keslo Herston. Then Herston left the UA situation and Allen Reynolds entered the picture.

"Allen Reynolds is the best thing that's ever happened to me in Country music" Crystal immediately acknowledges. "What made us click right from the beginning was that we were both on the same wavelength musically".

The clicking whipped into action instantly at the beginning of '75 with a Top 10 entry "Wrong Road Again", and continued during the year with two other Top 20 hits, "Beyond You" and "This Is My Year For Mexico". All three songs were to be found on Crystal's debut album "Crystal Gayle", which also stacked up its share of chart action.

It was at the beginning of 1976 that the Gayle-Reynolds relationship really started to weave its own distinctive pathway. The attractive Reynolds original "Somebody Loves You" brought the singer back in to the Top 10 regions, and was followed by Crystal going right to the top with "I'll Get Over You", the first time that songwriter Richard Leigh would play an impressive role in

the lady's musical life. Then '76 was seen out with "One More Time", a brilliantly imaginative song that conjured up images of the continent and the strains of Edith Piaf. By now Crystal Gayle was being tipped as the next major star, and Allen Reynolds production was being counted as nothing but wholly original.

"It was never our intention to widen the field of the music" Crystal states



MOMENT of CELEBRATION. The 1978 Academy of Country Music Awards evening, and Top Female Vocalist Crystal Gayle in the company of Mickey Gilley and Barbi Benton.

in explanation of the duo's success in terms of the songs and the production. "We've just looked for material that I like to sing and Allen likes to produce, whether it be Country or just a little more poppish. We've never looked for a sound, but rather songs and then left it to work itself out the best way".

Allen Reynolds looks at the situation a little more precisely, citing Crystal as an exciting, inventive artiste whose not scared of trying something fresh.

"She's a good singer and has wide musical exposure in her background" he explained during the course of a lengthy CMP interview a year back. "Okay, she's Loretta's little sister and that's a strong part of her musical experience, but among her idols as a teenager were Brenda Lee and Lesley Gore. So, in getting to know Crystal at the beginning, I became quickly aware that she liked a lot of different things and that she was capable of trying a lot of different things.

"I love working with her because she does possess the courage to try something different. If it falls flat on its face, it's alright as long as we tried hard and thought it was good. At least we tried to entertain . . . but, sometimes, you fail."

Failure, however, is something that's been one hundred per cent elusive to the Gayle-Reynolds association. With production skills learnt over the years from his Memphis mentor Jack

Clements—and perfected in the company of Clements, Dickie Lee, Don Williams, Bob McDill and others during the artistically creative JMI Records days—Allen Reynolds perfectly complimented Crystal's beautifully attractive vocals. The success speaks for itself. 1977 started off with a number one record, "You Never Miss A Real Good Thing (Till He Says Goodbye)", and it's been that way ever since—"I'll Do It All Over Again", "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" (during 1977), "Ready For The Times To Get Better", "Talking In Your Sleep" (during 1978) and, most recently, "Why Have You Left The One You Left Me For" all went straight to the top of the charts.

(It's also interesting to note that, during the latter part of '77 the inevitable happened as Crystal's earlier recorded material started to creep out on the market. It occurred with the re-issuing of "I've Cried (The Blues Right Out Of My Eyes)" but, even following on the award winning heels of "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" and the fairly close association of titles, the single failed to gain more than a Top 40 placing. And, around the same time, MCA issued an album bearing the same title, the first time that a collection of the artiste's early recordings had been gathered together in one package).

But, how do you measure success? In spite of the number one records, the praise and the accolades, Crystal Gayle has received criticism of "selling out Country" from certain quarters. The reasoning lay with songs that might not be considered strictly Country, and a presentation that may have swung away from the norm and the acceptable.

Allen Reynolds first picked up the slight rumblings of discontent with Crystal Gayle's third album, "Crystal".

"I was very proud of it because I felt it was a good step forward for Crystal" he recalled. "One Country publication took a fairly favourable stand towards it but bemoaned the fact that it wasn't more like the preceding album . . . more steel guitar, dobro and songs like we had the previous time. I had loved that album as well, and it had done good things for Crystal, but you don't want the same things every time".

The next album, "We Must Believe In Magic", had provided even more changes. While it contained substantial songs from some of the finest Country writers around like Reynolds, Bob McDill, Richard Leigh and Bobby Bond, it mingled such material with the likes of Irving Berlin's "It's All Right With Me" and a revival of Jim Lowe's 1956 pop/rock 'n' roll hit "Green Door".

Then, bringing the picture up to date, came "When I Dream", an album which has notched up considerable record sales and won over to both Country and pop buyers. Again the mixture is widespread, though more favouring the Country origins this time with titles like "Wayward Wind", "Someday Soon", "I Still Miss Someone" and

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Sandy Mason Theoret's haunting "When I Dream".

But where does a Country recording begin and end these days, and should an artiste overlook artistic development in favour of treading the familiar pathway? In the case of Crystal Gayle, a finely original talent, it would add up to almost an insult to curb her artistic skills when she quite clearly possesses the skills to innovate.

Crystal, of course, has her own thoughts on the way that the music has developed in recent years.

"Country is definitely broadening its appeal and more people are turning to it" she says. "I think that's due to people like Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Olivia Newton-John and Emmylou Harris. They've made people aware of Country music even though, like Olivia, it's been in the sense that she shouldn't be Country. People started asking 'what is Country' and, as a follow through, started listening to Country music".

Nevertheless Crystal Gayle's roots are strictly Country, and she wouldn't dream of cutting a pop song just for the sake of reaching the pop market. Happily her background allows her to develop with the contemporary market.

"I haven't met resistance to what I'm doing because of my roots. Nobody's said to me 'we can't play your record because you're not Country'. I've also had such a string of good records in the Country market in the States, and have good response at my shows. If

they didn't enjoy the shows they wouldn't buy my records.

"I believe the markets are just opening up. Country radio stations are playing pop songs and pop stations are playing Country songs. There's a middle right now with people like Emmylou



MORE TRIUMPHS. At the 1978 CMA Awards, a new look (for the evening only) Crystal Gayle walks with the Female Vocalist Award. In the background, presenter Don Reid of the Statler Brothers.

Harris and Linda Ronstadt, and I'm in that middle section.

"To me it's just a style and it will change like everything else. I'm just glad I came along at the right time. People are tired of hearing male voices—but that'll change in time, too. Everything does. I just want my music to reach the widest possible audience".

Crystal Gayle has won out and her presentation possesses a durability that's guaranteed to long outlast music trends. She also holds a philosophical approach that should please even the staunchest of diehard Country devotees.

"I certainly don't want to lose my Country audience but, at the same time, I don't want to limit my style. It's all a question of growing, I think. You can grow too fast and things can get out of hand. I think you need a little of the Los Angeles influence. But as much as I admire Dolly Parton, I don't think I would go about things quite the way she has".

CRYSTAL GAYLE ALBUM

DISCOGRAPHY

I've Cried The Blue Right Out Of My Eyes—MCA Coral CDL 8059

Crystal Gayle—United Artists UA-LA365-G (American release)

Somebody Loves You—United Artists UAS 29937

Crystal—United Artists UAS 29973

We Must Believe In Magic—United Artists UAG 30108

When I Dream—United Artists UAG 30169