

Texas Personalities

Jim Reeves

Born into a struggling farm family in Panola County, Texas, on August 20, 1923, Jim Reeves grew up listening to recordings by Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family. He became a radio announcer on East Texas stations and on Shreveport, Louisiana's powerful KWKH, home of the Louisiana Hayride.

Meanwhile, he recorded for the tiny Macy's label and then for the better-known Abbott label. His breakthrough came in 1953 with "Mexican Joe." This #1 country hit helped him secure a Hayride slot as a featured singer and, in 1955, an RCA recording contract and a place in the Grand Ole Opry lineup. Working with RCA producers Steve Sholes and Chet Atkins, Reeves began recording hits like "Yonder Comes a Sucker" and "According to My Heart."

By 1957, Reeves was smoothing out his sound, as he did on "Four Walls." This #1 country hit also rose to #11 on the pop charts and marked Reeves as a superb romantic balladeer. It put him in the vanguard of the pop-flavored Nashville Sound, which helped country win new adult audiences amid the explosion of youth-oriented rock & roll acts during the late '50s and early '60s. He reinforced his uptown sound with formal stage attire that cultivated his "Gentleman Jim" image. Reeves searched diligently for song material, strove for perfection on stage and in the studio, and aggressively promoted his records to disc jockeys. His work paid off with hits like "Blue Boy," "Billy Bayou," "Am I Losing You," "He'll Have to Go," and "Welcome to My World." Appearances on network TV shows and his own ABC network pop radio program (which originated from WSM during 1957-58) further expanded his audience. Tours to England, Ireland, Europe and South Africa, helped make Reeves an international star, popular in many African nations, India and Asia as well as in the U. S., Australia and Europe.

But on July 31, 1964, Reeves' velvet voice fell silent when the one-engine plane he was piloting crashed near Nashville in heavy rain, killing the singer and band member Dean Manuel. Reeves's body was buried near Carthage, Texas. Nevertheless, his popularity and influence on country's line of smooth ballad singers continued with posthumous hits, and it continues on to this day.

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