

Texas Personalities

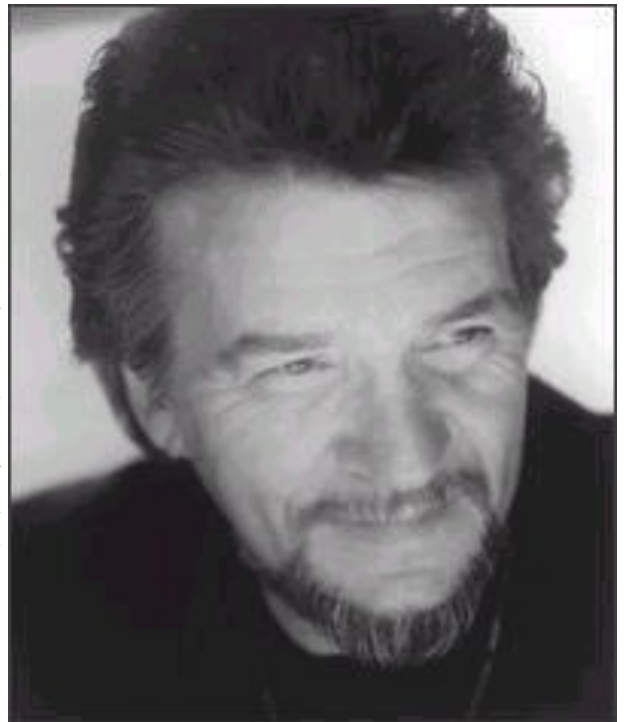
Waylon Jennings

Though he had been a professional musician since the late '50s, it wasn't until the '70s that Waylon became a superstar. Jennings rejected the conventions of Nashville, insisting that his music never resemble the string-laden, pop-inflected sounds that were coming out of Nashville in the '60s and '70s. Many artists, including Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson, followed Waylon's anti-Nashville stance and eventually the whole "outlaw" movement became one of the most significant country forces of the '70s. Jennings didn't write many songs, but his music, which combined the grittiest aspects of honky tonk with a rock & roll rhythm and attitude, making the music spare, direct, and edgy, defined hardcore country, and it influenced countless musicians.

Jennings was born and raised in Littlefield. At 12, he was a DJ for a local radio station and, shortly afterward, formed his first band. In 1954, in Lubbock, he got a job at KLLL, where he befriended Buddy Holly during one of the station's shows. Holly became Waylon's mentor. In 1958, Waylon became the temporary bass player for Holly's band the Crickets, playing with the rock & roller on his final tour. Jennings was also scheduled to fly on the plane ride that ended in Holly's tragic death in early 1959, but he gave up his seat at the last minute to the Big Bopper, who was suffering from a cold. In late 1960, he moved to Phoenix, where he founded a rockabilly band called the Waylors. None of the group's singles made any impact, and Jennings began working for Audio Recorders as a record producer. In 1963, Waylon moved to Los Angeles, where he landed a contract with Herb Alpert's A&M Records, but his sole single, "Sing the Girl a Song, Bill," flopped.

Jennings moved to Nashville in 1965 and moved in with Johnny Cash, and the two musicians began a long-lasting

friendship, which eventually resulted in a collaboration in the form of the Highwaymen in the '80s. In 1970, Jennings recorded several songs by Kris Kristofferson, which led to a pair of ambitious albums -- *Singer of Sad Songs* and *Ladies Love Outlaws*. Jennings and his new sound slowly began to gain more fans. He was also voted the Country Music Association's Male Vocalist of the Year. Jennings truly crossed over into the mainstream in 1976. Following the success of *Wanted!* Waylon became a superstar. By the mid-'80s, the momentum of Waylon's career began to slow somewhat, due to his drug abuse and the decline of the entire outlaw country movement. Despite his decreased sales, Waylon remained a superstar throughout the '90s and was able to draw large crowds whenever he performed. His work was slowed by his health in the years following that album; diabetes made it difficult for him to walk. His foot was amputated in a December 2000 illness, and he died on February 13, 2002 at his home.



Courtesy of <http://www.mp3.com/waylon-jennings/artists/1385/biography.html>

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