

Nacogdoches Native and Country Music Chart Topper

By Peggy Arriola Jasso and Jan Dobbs Barton



Jim Collins is the newest member of the NHS Alumni Association...

In the early 1970's when Jim Collins attended Nacogdoches High School, he never imagined that some thirty years later he would be an award winning country music songwriter.

Collins credits his mom, Glenda, with planting the music seed in his heart that grew into a song. He remembers being about three years old when his mom would buy records and teach him the words to the songs. Naturally when company came, Jim performed by singing the songs she taught him.

During his early school years and into high school, Collins followed his love of music by singing in the junior high and high school choirs.

"I owe a lot to NHS and teachers like Mrs. Barbara Reid who taught choir," Collins said. She helped me find my voice, and I will always be grateful. Sometimes I don't think a teacher realizes the effect they have on a child. She was always very positive and made music fun for me."

In 1971, Collins joined with friends Monte Moses, Dickey Johnson, Don Upton, and Ronnie Peacock in a band called Odessa. The band developed a large following of SFA sorority and fraternity students and played regularly at local teen club The Party Center. After high school, Odessa broke up and the guys went their separate ways.

Today the former members of Odessa are all successful in their diverse chosen careers in education, business and finance, and the ministry.

"I am very proud to have had the honor of knowing and playing with these musicians, in many ways they were the brothers I never had," Johnson said.

Collins continued playing in bands until a Houston producer heard him and hired him to play bass guitar and sing background in his studio.

"That's when I first discovered country music. I loved the stories the songs told, the melodies, and the discipline it took to play it. I started writing about that time," Collins said.

After this he put a band together and played clubs, rodeos, concerts, chili cook offs and anywhere else he could get paid to play.

In 1995 at the urging of his wife DeeAnn, Jim decided to move to Nashville to try one more time for a record deal. All he needed was just one big break! Supporting her husband's dream, DeeAnn stayed in Dallas and continued to work -- her only stipulation was for him to give it all he had -- for just one year.

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While in Nashville, Jim survived by singing demos for songwriters and publishers. This was hard work that did not pay much, but it kept him in town doing what he loved. Eventually, record company executives realized his potential and asked him to do a showcase. This is the big break he had been rehearsing for all of his life and he says it “was pretty easy.” The next day he had four different label offers. He chose Arista Records, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sony BMG Nashville that produces for Alan Jackson, Brooks and Dunn and many other big artists.

It was exactly two days passed the one year mark of his arrival in Nashville.

At Arista, he thought he was off and running but the label had their own ideas about the kind of music they wanted him to record. His first recording was “*The Next Step*” and when it did not make the charts he considered moving back to Texas. Instead, he got serious about his writing, but Arista rejected his songs, electing to go with more proven songwriters. Soon he signed as a staff writer for EMI Publishing, the second largest publishing company in the world.

They started playing the songs Arista had rejected to other artists and the next thing he knew he was having hits. He knew “God was trying to tell him something” so he parted ways with Arista and stepped up his songwriting. Ever since, he has been on a fast train to the top of the country music charts.

His first two hits in 1998 were “*Love Working On You*” by John Michael Montgomery and “*Hands Of a Working Man*” sung by Ty Herndon and co-written by Lufkin native D. Vincent Williams. Jim says that the inspiration for “*Hands*” was his father James who worked at Nibco.

Collins has written a stream of hits including four No. 1 songs. In 2005 his song “*I Don't Feel Like Loving You Today*” recorded by Gretchen Wilson was nominated for a Grammy award as “Country Song of the Year.”

His first George Strait song “*It Just Comes Natural*” was dropped late in 2006 and within five months it had shot to the top of the charts to become one of his most played songs. George’s album with the same name won CMA Album of the Year in 2007.

Seven-weeks-at-#1 hit “*The Good Stuff*” recorded by Kenny Chesney was Billboard Magazine's 2003 “Country Song of the Year”. It was also ASCAP “Song of the Year”, and ACM “Single Record of the Year.” “*Yes*” by Chad Brock was four-weeks-at #1 and the most played song in 2000. He also wrote the Chesney hit “*She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy*” in 1998. Jim’s response to his success is “I feel blessed with over 150 recorded songs, and I feel like I'm just getting started. I love what I do.”

“I have fond memories of my high school day and all my classmates,” Collins said. It's been a long road from Nacogdoches to Nashville. I am very proud of all my old friends. At my last class reunion it dawned on me that they were the first people to ever hear me sing.”

With his Southern charm, good looks and modest demeanor, our Nacogdoches native’s future in the country music business looks bright. Chances are we will be hearing his “good stuff” for a very long time.

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Collins is the newest member of the NHSAA and he supports helping our kids further their education. If you would like to do the same by joining or offering a scholarship, please call the NHSAA office (936) 462-1403 or by visiting our website at www.nhs-alumni.org.