

Awards queen Loretta Lynn mines more golden memories

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The woman who has more awards than any other in country music history keeps on adding accolade after accolade to her already-vast collection.

Last month, Loretta Lynn was lauded as a Living Legend at the *Music City News* Awards show during Fan Fair and became the first Nashville performer ever honored by the American Academy of Achievement.

"When you start gettin' 'em you really are so busy tryin' to get this done and that done that you kinda overlook what they're really for," says Lynn of her enormous collection of glittering trophies.

"I've got a room full of awards now. And as I go back and look at 'em, I know what I achieved to get each one."

In all there have been more than 100 major awards. She has had more charted singles and more top-10 country albums than any other country woman.

She was the first woman named Entertainer of the Year by the Country Music Association (1971), has been nominated for more CMA awards (35) than any other woman, and she leads the competition in number of Vocal Duo of the Year awards (for her performances with Conway Twitty). In all, she has eight of the bullet-shaped honors that are country's highest accolades.

In 1979 she was named Artist of the Decade by the West Coast organization The Academy of Country Music, the same group that named her its Top Female Vocalist in 1971, 1973, 1974, and 1975. Also in 1979, *Cash Box* magazine named her its country music Female Entertainer of the Decade.

She has more fan-voted *Music City News* awards than any other woman. She was voted by the fans as their favorite for 12 years in a row. She has been the cover subject of the field's oldest magazine, *Country Song Roundup*, more than anyone else.

In 1980 the film based on her best-selling autobiography, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, became an Oscar winner. Her music has earned three Gold Records and 16 #1 hits. She has nine BMI awards for songwriting.

She won a Grammy Award in 1971. She was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1983 and honored with a star in Hollywood's Walkway of Stars two years ago. Last year she was given the Special Award of Merit at the American Music Awards.

"That was the show where I almost broke down," she recalls. "Huey Lewis helped me hold it together. He's my hero. I looked down and his was the only face I could see in the whole dadgummed place. He gave me this look like, 'Now don't you start: You just keep on goin'.' That really helped me to get through it because I admire him so much."

"It's kinda rough when you get an award like that."

Lynn sobbed openly when she was named a Living Legend last month. "There wasn't no way they could'a stopped me that night. I was gonna cry and let it out."

"I looked back on the 25 years it took to get that Living Legend award and I realized that said it all, you know?"

Award-winning is painful for the country queen.

"Eight years ago when I was gettin' my museum all fixed up at Hurricane Mills, I looked at all the awards and all the stuff that people had given me. It was four in the morning. I just sat down and cried and cried and cried. I felt, 'This is really all I have left."



The American Academy of Achievement recognizes Loretta Lynn's role as an inspiration to American youth. The accolade, given two weeks ago in the nation's capital, is the latest of the hundreds the country superstar has received.

This is what I had accomplished for what I had done. I thought, 'There has to be something else.'

"It was a terrible feeling. I haven't been in that museum now for four years."

The adjacent Loretta Lynn Dude Ranch has been managed by others for the past several years, but Lynn says she and her husband will again take over the tourist attraction next season.

"I'll take the Golden Plate on down there, and my medal," she says of her American Academy of Achievement honor. "I'll remember this the way I remember by first CMA award, my first *Music City News* award. Because it's one of the highest honors anybody can achieve."

"Nobody's ever achieved it in country music. I couldn't believe it. There were scientists there, people that had split the atom bomb and people that had invented the heart thing or whatever it is that rejuvenates your cells. People that had really achieved something great. Self-made billionaires."

"I thought, 'What in the world am I doin' here?' I felt I wasn't worthy of it."

Past Golden Plate recipients include Helen Hayes, Leon Jaworski, Alex Haley, Hank Aaron, Chuck Yeager, Douglas MacArthur, Bob Hope, John Glenn, Helen Keller, Shirley Temple Black, H. Ross Perot, James Michener, Gerald Ford, Linus Pauling, Claude

Pepper, Walter Annenberg, and Elizabeth Taylor.

"I was so happy when I saw Muhammad Ali there the same night as me. We've known each other for so long. So I went up to him and told him I loved him and hugged him. He said, 'I miss you' and asked me how my family was. I told him I think everybody's praying for him."

Lynn has long been a champion of minority rights, which is why a recent lawsuit stung her so much. It was from a black security guard who said she humiliated him at a concert.

"I've never been prejudiced. I never thought anything like that would ever happen to me. I guess everybody's suin' today."

Lynn has had black backup singers in her road band for many years.

She has long been hailed by feminists as the pioneering female singer/songwriter in country music. But she says, "I don't feel like any kind of queen."

"When young people ask me how I got where I'm at, I say, 'It's just absolutely hard work.' There ain't nobody gonna wave a magic wand and you're gonna be there. You may have a smash hit without the work. But you pay for what success you get if you stay there any length of time."

Time away from her family was one big price Loretta Lynn paid for stardom.

Despite the hardships, her daughter Cissy,

son Ernest Ray and twins Patsy and Peggy are all following in their mother's footsteps.

"I think my son has got what it takes. He's got the kind of voice that could sell a lot of beer. I think this is the year he'll really get something going."

"What Cissy needs is more experience in the studio. I'm gonna have her come in and record some things with The Coal Miners."

"My twins are singing, too, and they're starting to do some things together. They've always tried to be so different, to be their own self. I never could see that. I always wanted them to be in the same room at school, wanted them to dress alike. They never did want to. Now I understand that they were fighting for their own identity."

"Patsy sings country and she's got a beautiful voice. She's a lot better than I am or ever will be. When she was 10 and 11 years old I'd pick up papers in her room and see where she'd been writing songs."

"Peggy would make hers up as she went along, as she was doin' her little make-believe shows. She never wrote hers down."

"Experience is what they need most of all. You know, when I came to Nashville I hadn't been singing six months. I recorded for five years before I knew how to do it. I don't know how we pulled it off."

She's reflecting on her life again as she plans her next book.

"I'm takin' notes now. I wanna start with my earliest memory and go up to my last thought."

"One of the things I thought of the other day was 'from a tin plate to fine white china.' That'd be a good line to put in a song, in fact. But I remember eatin' offa tin plates as a little girl. And Mommy had her these little old kegs, barrels that you get nails in and stuff. That's what I'd eat off of, settin' on the floor."

"Mommy and Daddy built this little shack and papered it with movie magazines. I was named after Loretta Young and it's still my one big dream to meet her."

Every young country starlet today wants to meet Loretta Lynn.

"Marie Osmond came out to meet me when she was 13. I put Reba McEntire on stage with me in Oklahoma when she was 15 with long pigtails. We're still very close."

"When she started I could tell she was singing like me. Just like I sang like Kitty Wells."

"But I don't think anybody ever takes anybody's place. Who could take Patsy Cline's place or Kitty Wells' place? Nobody."

Although they make her feel reflective, Lynn isn't about to rest on her laurels.

"I'm too restless. I'm workin' all I want to work, 100 dates a year, TV, recording, Crisco commercials."

"Right now, I'm picking through songs for my next album. I've picked about 45 songs. Now I'm gonna see which ones I sing the best."

She's also preparing for a duet reunion with Twitty. "I'm gatherin' my stuff. He's gatherin' his. It's gonna happen. But I wanna get my album done before we get on with ours."

Loretta Lynn reports that she is enjoying a renewed spark of creativity. Virtually unschooled, she can neither read nor write music. But her many career triumphs are why the American Academy of Achievement singled her out as an inspiration to schoolchildren everywhere.

"I feel that I have learned so much since I've been singing, learned by myself." ■

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