

Bobby Braddock: A Lifetime of Hitmaking

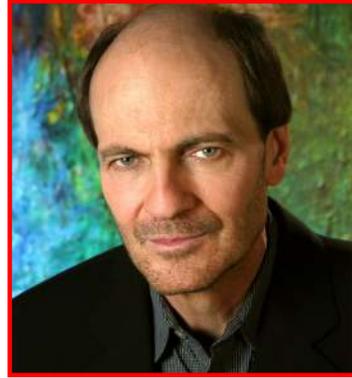
Songwriters have to keep up with changing musical tastes if they want to have long careers. No one has done that better than Bobby Braddock. The Country Music Hall of Fame member has had #1 country songs in five consecutive decades.

Looking back at the string of hits that Braddock registered from the 1960s to the early 1980s, music historian and Braddock friend Michael Kosser describes Bobby as “absolutely fearless.” Kosser writes, “His best was among the best there ever was, his mediocre was often good enough for radio success, and his worst . . . well, that’s the price of being fearless in creativity.”

Braddock was born August 5, 1940, in Lakeland, Florida. He grew up in nearby Auburndale. He started taking piano lessons at age seven and spent “six years of little old ladies trying to teach me to read music,” but he eventually discovered “I could learn more piano listening carefully to our records than from the conventional, by-the-book music teachers.” The boy’s musical interests ranged from bluegrass to barbershop quartets, but he became increasingly captivated by the evolving sounds of country and rock & roll.

During his late teens and early twenties, Braddock eked out a living playing keyboards in rock cover bands, mostly in Florida and Alabama. He moved to Nashville in 1964. After securing a job as the piano player in Marty Robbins’s touring band, Braddock began pitching songs to the country star, who recorded a few. Within two years, Braddock redefined himself as a songwriter and signed a contract with Tree Publishing Company.

He quickly became known as someone who wrote with originality and who knew how to write hits. With equal skill he turned out quirky novelty songs (one notable title: “You Can’t Have Your Kate and Edith Too”) and heartbreaking



ballads. His most famous in the latter category is “He Stopped Loving Her Today.” Co-written with Curly Putman and released in 1980 by George Jones, it is considered by many to be the greatest country song of all time.

Braddock hit a slump in the mid-1980s, when, he admits, “I was doing some of my best writing, but it was not necessarily compatible with country radio at that time.” By the mid-1990s, he was back on the charts with a whole new generation of country artists, including Martina McBride, Alan Jackson, and Randy Travis.

Braddock attributes much of his career longevity to paying attention to new music in all popular genres, including hard rock and rap. “I think staying hip to what everybody’s doing helps you in country music,” he says, “since country music is not always all that country anyway.”

Still, Braddock knows how lucky he has been over the years. “You can do everything right,” he says. “You can have the right attitude and be totally dedicated, writing great songs, all of that. If the stars aren’t right, sometimes it just won’t happen.”

Bobby Braddock was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2011.

Sources: *American Songwriter*, *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, *Down in Orburndale: A Songwriter’s Youth in Old Florida* by Bobby Braddock, *Songwriter Magazine*

LISTEN:

Some of Bobby Braddock’s songs made popular by other artists:

“D-I-V-O-R-C-E”
(Tammy Wynette)

“Golden Ring”
(George Jones, Tammy Wynette)

“He Stopped Loving Her Today”
(George Jones)

“People Are Crazy”
(Billy Currington)

“Time Marches On”
(Tracy Lawrence)

READ:

They Came to Nashville by Marshall Chapman (Vanderbilt University Press, 2010): The author, a singer/songwriter, interviews 15 of her successful friends, including Braddock, about the paths that led them to Nashville.

Producing Country: The Inside Story of the Great Recordings by Michael Jarrett (Wesleyan, 2014): A lengthy interview with Braddock about his role as a record producer is a highlight of this book, which also features the production stories behind dozens of country songs.