

COUNTRY REBEL WITH A ROCK BEAT

Along with Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings is considered the most important creative force in country's Outlaw movement. He brought a rebel spirit and a raw rock & roll beat to country, and he set an example for other artists to strive for the same musical freedom.

Born in the tiny northwest Texas town of Littlefield on June 15, 1937, Jennings grew up in a musical home; both parents were talented guitarists. By the time he turned twelve, he was playing in a country band and working as a disc jockey at a local radio station. After dropping out of tenth grade, he moved to nearby Lubbock to be a musician, and in 1955, he became close friends with Buddy Holly, who was among the most important early rock artists.

Jennings joined Holly's band as the bass player. In 1959, he gave up his seat on the tour's private plane to take the tour bus instead. Shortly after takeoff, the plane crashed and killed all on board, including Holly. In his grief, Jennings returned to Lubbock to work as a disc jockey for a time before moving to Phoenix to restart his music career. Discovered there by country star Bobby Bare, Jennings soon signed with RCA Records and moved to Nashville.

By the early 1970s, he had recorded several hits, but he was frustrated by Nashville recording customs that limited his choice of songs and studio musicians. Fighting back, he earned his artistic freedom at RCA and became known as an Outlaw.

His music blossomed into a blend of all the sounds that had captured his heart. "I've always felt that



blues, rock & roll, and country are just a beat apart," he said.

Jennings's career soared, and his popular albums showed off his songwriting skills. In 1976, he appeared on *Wanted! The Outlaws*, an album that also featured Willie Nelson, Tompall Glaser, and Jennings's wife, Jessi Colter. The album became the first in country music to sell more than one million copies, and it also launched Jennings and Nelson as one of country's most famous duos.

In the early 1980s, financial problems and drug abuse slowed his career, but by 1985, he had kicked his drug habit and found new success in the Highwaymen, a country "supergroup" with Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, and Johnny Cash.

Jennings's influential career earned him membership in the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2001. He died, at age 64, of complications related to diabetes at his home in Chandler, Arizona, in 2002.

SOURCES

American Songwriter, *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Tennessean*

LISTEN

"Amanda"
"Are You Sure Hank Done it This Way?"
"Dreaming My Dreams"
"Honky Tonk Heroes"
"Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys"
"This Time"
"The Wurlitzer Prize (I Don't Want to Get Over You)"