

VOICES IN THE HALL
CHARLIE WORSHAM EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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PETER COOPER Welcome to Voices in the Hall. Presented by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I'm Peter Cooper. Today's guest, Charlie Worsham."

CHARLIE WORSHAM My parents are sort of my right a left brain of music. My dad is whichever side of the brain is the full blown creative side, pie in the sky, dream. My mom always helped me find the necessary path for success that had everything to do with nuts and bolts and doing the work. There's always something to learn.

Nashville has an energy. And not unlike Hollywood, you can just walk the streets of this town and know that there is a higher per capita set of dreamers than most places on earth. And it's an energy. And it can feed you and it can inspire you, but it can also really work against you.

At the end of the day when I look back on those years they were some of the most beautiful times in my life because I grew and learned so much, not just as a musician but later, I would find, as a human being. Being a good friend.

PETER COOPER It's Voices in the Hall, with Charlie Worsham.

"Southern By the Grace of God" - Charlie Worsham (Beginning of Things / Warner)

PETER COOPER "Grandpa's whiskey and grandma's bible will get you through." That's Charlie Worsham, with "Southern by the Grace of God," from his album, *Beginning of Things*.

Welcome to Voices in the Hall, a production of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I'm your host Peter Cooper. And today's voice in the hall belongs to Charlie Worsham. He's a Mississippi-reared singer songwriter and instrumentalist who Vince Gill has called the biggest talent in Nashville, and I'm not going to argue with that. Charlie's Warner Bros. debut album *Rubberband* came out in 2013 and it held the top 20 hit "Could it Be." It also featured guest performances from Vince Gill, Marty Stuart and Sheryl Crow. His latest album was recorded with Frank Liddel who is known for producing albums by Miranda Lambert, Lee Ann Womack and many others. Charlie, it's always good to see you here at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Welcome to Voices in the Hall.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Thanks Peter it's great to be here.

PETER COOPER Charlie, you are best known in Nashville as a guitar player. Was your first instrument actually the banjo?

CHARLIE WORSHAM Well it was my first mobile stringed instrument.

PETER COOPER Mobile strings.

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CHARLIE WORSHAM Mobile strings man.

PETER COOPER Meaning you can pick it up and take it somewhere else.

CHARLIE WORSHAM That's right. And you know we actually when we started taking family trips to Nashville, a staple of those trips was to go down to Lower Broadway. And I was a cute chubby kid playing the banjo with an open guitar or banjo case, and I can make pretty good money man, about 50 bucks an hour at the peak hours of foot traffic. But yeah I took piano lessons for a few years and I stuck with it through my grade school years, but I really wanted to play the guitar. My mom had a friend who had a banjo living under their bed collecting dust, so I got to Sears & Roebuck banjo and that started my interest in bluegrass, and I say stringed instruments just because the family of guitars and mandolins and banjos and everything.

PETER COOPER Yeah. Now there's a story, I wonder whether it's apocryphal or true, but when you were getting your first electric guitar you were a little short on change, and the banjo came into play? Is this true?

CHARLIE WORSHAM That is true. At the time Gruhn Guitars, a very famous place to get vintage instruments, was right there. I think it was Third Avenue and Broadway or Fourth Avenue and Broadway. And I had gone in to look at guitars and I saw this Fender Telecaster and it was six hundred dollars. And I had saved up 500 dollars. And I had my banjo with me so I went back out on the street and I played for a couple hours and made up the last hundred dollars I needed and went back in and bought the electric. And that was my first electric. You know and for a little while my amplifier was a Peavey P.A. system that we'd been using to go play you know for Rotary Clubs and whatnot, you know the bluegrass stuff.

PETER COOPER As a kid, you latched on early to Vince Gill, the incredible guitar player, singer, and songwriter who's now a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame. Why was Vince important to you?

CHARLIE WORSHAM Well he was my musical North Star. And of course it had a lot to do with seeing him live many times. You know I think we saw him close to ten times in concert, when I was growing up. And, but it also had to do with his records and it had to do with my parents. My parents are sort of my right and left brain of music you know and. My dad is whichever side of the brain is the just full blown creative side you know, pie in the sky, dream, because he's a banker by trade but a drummer at heart. And I have many early memories of seeing him play in his local band you know which definitely inspired me. But he would crack open the CD jewel case and show the liner notes. And this would be the Monday before the Friday we'd go see Vince in concert and he would go, "Look that's John Jarvis. Now he's this really amazing keyboard player and he's going to be there in Vince's band. He's going to be playing you know. And this is the drummer, and this is you know steel guitar player John Huey." And so it was it was that collective set of experiences where I had the kind of parents who taught me to appreciate the names and tiny print next to the instruments and what they played. So I got to

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see Vince, and then see him turn around and point to John Huey to take a steel guitar solo. And and that was really what made him the North Star for me was it was the total package you know.

PETER COOPER Yeah. Do you have a favorite song?

CHARLIE WORSHAM "The Key" is probably you know. I mean growing up I loved his earlier records so much and I remember trying to get the guitar solo from "Don't Let Our Love Start Slippin' Away" or "Liza Jane" you know and as a picker it was always those songs, the groovier songs you know. But later as I started to try my hand at writing songs, and just the spirit of his whole record "The Key," that title track and the emotion of it.

PETER COOPER It's a song about music.

CHARLIE WORSHAM It's a song about music and and how it can really bond relationships that are already super close by blood. You know it's about his father. And the other thing about that song is it's so rich that every few years it takes on a deeper meaning. Like I remember when I really discovered Guy Clark. And then I learned that you know Vince being the great just human being that he is had become friends with Guy Clark, and they had similar relationships I think with their fathers, you know very close to their dads. And I know "The Key" was inspired by Guy's song "The Randall Knife." Learning that and then hearing "The Key" again after hearing "The Randall Knife" and understanding that you know the roots of that song go very deep.

PETER COOPER I went to a fundraiser for your Follow Your Heart Foundation, and watched your dad with tears running down his face while Vince Gill played "The Key to Life." Let's hear that song now.

"The Key to Life" - Vince Gill (The Key / MCA)

PETER COOPER That was Charlie Worsham's north star, Country Music Hall of Fame member Vince Gill, with "The Key to Life."

Now Charlie, you furthered your musical education in a place far away from Grenada, Mississippi.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Yes I did. I went to Boston, Massachusetts to a place called Berklee College of Music. And this is again where I talk about my mom and my dad being the two halves of my musical brain. My mom always had the good sense to go you know if we were at a bluegrass festival and she saw this fiddler that seemed to have all the other fiddlers you know come over and kiss the ring, like that's the guy we need to talk to about a fiddle lesson. And then there we go we're having fiddle lessons with Bobby Hicks you know. And of course didn't take long for me to realize the world is better without me holding a fiddle.

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But all that to say she always helped me find the necessary path for success that had everything to do with nuts and bolts and doing the work, which isn't always as fun as the dreaming and the creativity side, but she always had that in mind for me. And so one of my last summers before the end of high school I did a five week summer program at Berklee. And I fell in love with the place because it was culture shock in the most beautiful way. You know here we are coming from Mississippi where you literally get in the car to drive to the parking lot at the store next door you know, and then I'm in Boston and everything is walking and taxis and you know get on the T, their subway system. And there's the Red Sox stadium you know and you can see the lights at night. But more than that, I walk into the doors at Berklee, and everyone there is the kid that was at their respective school that was kind of a little out of place just like me, and I kind of my eyes opened and I realized there are others like me and they're all here. I've got to come here.

Because the teachers were also sort of like, "Hey your homework is to listen to this Beatles song or learn this Eric Clapton solo. And then we're going to come back and record our own version of it tomorrow," you know. Or, "Write a verse to a song," you know. And so I fell in love with, it was just steroids for your musical spirit you know. So I moved up to Boston for a couple of years there and studied the production and engineering degree program. And it was purely because I am a gear nerd and that was the degree that let you get the keys into the studio. But the brilliance of Berklee is no matter what degree you pick, your classes force you to interact with the other people that are studying different degrees. So if I had a production project I had to find my engineer, had to find a studio band, had to find an artist, and sometimes I'd have to find a song for that artist written by another student who was a songwriting major. And so it was a great little safe microcosm of what I found later in Nashville.

PETER COOPER You came here and you were in a band called King Billy that looked for all the world like might be the next big thing. Did you feel like it was going to be, and was that experience ultimately frustrating for you? Or was it was it just great to be so close to what was going on in Country music?

CHARLIE WORSHAM It was really all of those emotions at different times. You know when I when I moved to Nashville it was a couple of weeks before my 21st birthday. And I joined this band and I remember you know there's an old piece of advice that goes around a lot which is you know always be the weakest link in your band. And I remember being in that band and just going wow, these guys are going to challenge me. Because they were all just incredible players, and they all wrote songs, and they all sang great harmonies. And so I moved into this sort of Nashville version of Animal House...

PETER COOPER So you guys were all living together?

CHARLIE WORSHAM We were all living together. And then we were in the van together and we drove all the way out to the west coast and back. And so it was, it was all those things because being in that van and playing a great show and seeing the crowd react, I'd never

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experienced that with brotherhood before, with my brothers in that band. And I grew up an only child so that was a very serious experience for me. I actually was probably more cocky about you know my confidence in that band when we had a good night or when something really cool came our way because I felt insulated by the guys I had around me you know and we were all for one and one for all.

And then when it didn't work out when I left that band it was that much more heartbreaking because it was a five/six way breakup you know. At the end of the day when I look back on those years they were some of the most beautiful times in my life because I grew and learned so much, not just as a musician and a songwriter and a singer, but later I would find as an artist, what it takes to be an artist to get in the van, and as a human being, being a good friend you know. And so I sort of had this blessing of experiencing what it's like to struggle as an artist for the first time not alone, not using my name you know, which as we come to find here in Nashville you know you don't get a gagillion shots. You have to sort of be careful about when you decide to launch yourself. And so it was a blessing for me to have all those experiences. And then funny enough being a lot of the same places five, six years later by myself. You know with the weight on my shoulders, my name on the door.

And I'm still friends with those guys today. And even though the band isn't together, all the guys are doing really cool things. You know Matt Utterback who played bass in that band plays bass and Hunter Hayes' band. And John Osborne formed a duo with his brother T.J. and they're the Brothers Osborne now and just had their first number one. And so it's really really cool to see now 10 years in, how it's manifested itself.

PETER COOPER Yeah. When you were playing as a solo artist after King Billy, and you were the person that a lot of musicians were talking about as a real hope, somebody who was very skilled musically, who was a nice person, who got along with other folks. And it just seemed like OK he's going to be the next guy to climb this ladder. And I'm sure a lot of them told you things like that. And it wasn't a resounding success right off the bat.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Right.

PETER COOPER The world didn't get clued into this as quickly as the Nashville music community did. Was that frustrating for you, and was there ever a time when you thought I'm going back to Mississippi and just play in bar bands?

CHARLIE WORSHAM Well you know I still had a chip on my shoulder through the whole thing it was. It was one of the most trying times of my life. And I did go back to Mississippi not to go play in the...Well actually I did play the occasional gig with old friends, but just to get out of the... You know just like in Mississippi where the history of that place is sort of stuck in the molecules in the air and it's just not going to go away anytime soon. You have to sort of confront what happened 20, 30, 40 years ago just by being outside in Mississippi. I can't even explain it.

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But similarly in its own way Nashville has an energy. And not unlike Hollywood you can just walk the streets of this town and know that there is a higher per capita set of dreamers than most places on earth, and it's an energy. And it can feed you and it can inspire you, but it can also really work against you. And so it was working against me and I had to get out of town to sort of get my perspective back. And a lot of things happened. You know. The record came out, it didn't do what I'd hoped it would.

PETER COOPER Came out on Warner Bros.

CHARLIE WORSHAM On Warner Bros yeah. And then you know the the trend of the day kind of shifted even further from where I had aimed that first project. And to be fair I, it was my first time to make a solo record like this. And I thought it'd be a good idea to co-produce it myself. And I'm learning that that's maybe not the smartest thing to do. But I maybe asked a little bit for permission with that record you know because it's my first time to have a promo team and to hear what they have to say and have a label president and A&R and a manager and a booking agent, and it all really does have to work together to get off the ground. And so.

PETER COOPER It's a lot of voices to get in harmony.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Right. And you have to listen to them but you have to listen to your own heart. And I think for me at times my heart got drowned out. And that's okay. I never lost it, but I maybe wrote some of the songs and recorded some of the songs and made the little decisions that add up in a way that felt like I needed to make this all fit in with what was working at the moment. You know. It's easy to forget that when you look at any of the great artists of all time, it wasn't what made them fit in that made them. Elvis didn't sound like anybody else. He sounded like Elvis you know. And so it was a hard lesson, but I'm actually here today really grateful that it didn't take off because I learned these things. You know and I'm in the process now finishing the second record and hearing it back and realizing wow, that is my DNA on that record. Will it have a number one on it? I don't know, but I'm proud of this. You know and I'm proud of that first record too, but just like my years in King Billy, it gave me time to to grow and to learn and really just to learn how to deal with the pressure. Because I know when success happens for me it'll be just as stressful. You know because I've seen my friends you know. I mean I remember when *Rubberband* came out and I saw friends who had three or four number ones...

PETER COOPER *Rubberband* the name of the album.

CHARLIE WORSHAM The album, that first album of mine. You know and other friends had songs and records come out at the same time, and they shot way past me you know three, four number ones. And you're happy for them you know, but you go, "Why not me?" And then three four years later you see that you know some of those guys are in the same boat of frustration. You know it's it's it really is a marathon to have a career, not a sprint. And so it's not where the current album is, it's where your head is.

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PETER COOPER Right now that said, lot to be proud of on the *Rubberband* album. And one thing is that you had acknowledged masters of this music and your heroes, Marty Stuart and Vince Gill coming in to be in the studio with you and to lend their support and to kind of ratify Charlie Worsham.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Absolutely.

PETER COOPER Let's hear some of their contributions to that record.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Tools of the Trade?

PETER COOPER Yeah.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Alright.

***“Tools of the Trade” - Charlie Worsham feat. Marty Stuart & Vince Gill
(Rubberband / Warner Bros.)***

PETER COOPER That was “Tools of the Trade,” a Charlie Worsham song that features two of his heroes, Vince Gill and Marty Stuart. Let's get back to my conversation with Charlie Worsham.

Charlie, Vince Gill and Marty Stuart are not the only folks that are highly successful that you've spent a lot of time around. You've been out on tour with Taylor Swift and Miranda Lambert and seeing how things work. Do you learn in those scenarios when you're contributing to their music, or is it just “I'm the hired hand, gimme my dough and let me get back to the hotel room?”

CHARLIE WORSHAM No I always learn. And that's really the coolest thing about this you know and getting to know Vince is a great reminder for me because I've had the great fortune to go out and play a handful of shows with him as his guitar player, which is ridiculous because he doesn't need another guitar player. But I'm sitting right next to Paul Franklin, probably the greatest steel guitarist you know or one of the greats of all time. And you always learn. And with Vince in particular, the lesson is that even Vince is learning still. He is the definition of a master, but he still is pushing himself and growing.

And it's a different lesson in every situation. You know in the studio there's just so much in the unspoken conversation between musicians. There's always something to learn. And it's usually what not to play, that less is more. On tour it's what to do and what not to do. And fortunately for me I've learned more about what to do. You know it's very rare that I've met anyone out there who did something that I go “Oh I probably shouldn't do that.” It's the opposite, it's watching Taylor Swift take incredible care of her band and crew. Miranda Lambert, same thing. You know. And Miranda in particular has such a heart for music that she would end up in the Airstream trailer that they bring on the road spinning old records, or getting her friends whether

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it's the Pistol Annies or it was me on some given nights holding the guitar and singing new songs, because she wants to hear when I'm writing. Because just like Lennon and McCartney had you know that great friendly competition, she wants to be pushed you know. And just to see that she has managed to continue to hold tight to her musical spirit is such an inspiration. And Taylor. I could. Books will be written on how she conducts her business and works with her fans. I've never seen anyone more in tune with their fans than Taylor Swift. It was. That was the great lesson on that tour was going out front every night and watching her perform.

PETER COOPER I've learned some lessons from her too and about being in the moment being present in a moment and seeing her interact with people the way that if there are 50 fans that she's meeting, two minutes with each one of them, she is right there for them paying attention asking them questions and registering what they have to say.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Right.

PETER COOPER It's impressive.

CHARLIE WORSHAM It really is.

PETER COOPER She might make a good politician.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Yeah.

PETER COOPER Now you've also had other people recording your songs. You know you're a songwriter as well and we haven't talked a lot about that. What is it like to land a song with another artist? And what's a particularly satisfying time that that's happened for you?

CHARLIE WORSHAM Oh gosh. The most amazing experience of hearing someone else record a song of mine, hands down it goes to Dierks Bentley with this song called "Heart of a Lonely Girl." The story with this is that he had gone to Asheville to make this record. And part of the way they made it was they had this, you could go to his website and click on the link and kind of watch a live video feed from the control room. And usually the sound was off. But every once in awhile they would turn the sound on and go, "Hey y'all, listen to this," you know.

And I had been watching every spare minute I had all week long because I'd been told by John Randall, who was producing that project, John Randall an amazing musician and artist and singer in his own right. But John told me hey I think we might cut that song "Heart of a Lonely Girl." And so finally on the last night, Friday night, I'm sitting at home and I'm watching the feed and they turn the audio on and it's my song. And I start bawling, I'm crying. I call my parents you know "Dierks Bentley recorded my song." And the other, the funny thing about this is you know in the world of songwriting and publishing you have singles and you have album cuts. And if the album sells 12 million copies, an album cut is a very valuable thing. In today's world it's very rare that an album cut is going to change a songwriter's financial status at all. It's really getting

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the single that does that. But this was never going to be a life changing situation for me in terms of money or income, but it felt like I was riding the Apollo rocket you know. And then the next, like two weeks later I get a call from John Randall going, "Man, I think they're going to re-do the whole record. Man I don't know. Something happened and. We gotta go back to the drawing board. I'm sorry man, I don't know what's going to happen with that song." And so I'm like, I had to call my parents to go... And then a few months pass and they've redone the record and my song was the only one that got re-recorded and made it on the final record.

And what was really special about it too were two of my musician heroes, Brian Sutton and Tim O'Brien, play on that recording. And I remember getting to see Dierks live after that and he sang the song live. And just each one of those moments you know, because people often ask me about you know, "What was your big break," or "What's that big moment?" And it's so hard, I mean obviously playing the Grand Ole Opry for the first time is one of those. Hearing your song on the radio for the first time, there are those big firsts, but it's really the hundreds of little miracles that happen along the way. And thanks to Dierks with "Heart of a Lonely Girl" I had quite a few of those really cool little miracle moments.

"Heart of a Lonely Girl" - Dierks Bentley (Home / Capitol)

PETER COOPER "Heart of a Lonely Girl," recorded by Dierks Bentley, written by Charlie Worsham and Travis Howard. It's Voices in the Hall. My guest is Charlie Worsham.

So how are things right now in your world as a music maker? You've gone in and it's been a lengthy process of making new music with a new producer, Frank Lidell, who's well-known for his work with Miranda Lambert and many others and who's one of the last of the real song men down on Music Row who's very serious about the song, not just about its commercial potential but he's one of these guys that wants to know what you're saying and why you're saying it.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Right. Well you know Frank, he spent a year with me. And a lot of the first months hanging out together I would you know waste a lot of air going "Why aren't we in the studio? I've got these songs," you know. And he's like, "I know I'm sorry man. We've got to reschedule this." But what he was really doing was he was making sure we didn't set foot in the studio until my head was right. And it took me almost a year to get there. And along that journey he planted these little seeds of wisdom, one of which was the point of making a record with an artist is that you're taking a picture of that artist and who they are at a particular time in their life. And it doesn't have to be glamour shots in the tux with the fixed up hair. You don't want to be hungover in the picture and it be blurry and out of focus. But just a real honest picture of who you are and where you are right now. And when I think back to my first record *Rubberband* I do think we accomplished that. But I needed to grow and do a better job. I needed to get better with this next record and be pushed. And I realize now Frank was waiting until the right day to take that picture. And that's what we did. You know and of course we spent months later singing and overdubbing and working on things. But it was those six days holed up as a four piece band, myself, Matt Chamberlain on the drums, Lex Price on bass and some acoustics, and Luke

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Reynolds on all manner of guitars and keyboards, and we took a picture. We took a picture with these songs. It's been an evolution with Frank and I've learned more with him than in most experiences of my life.

PETER COOPER Does it feel like coming out the other side or something?

CHARLIE WORSHAM It does. It really does and I think that these days. You know I was just in the UK and Europe for the first time touring and really performing these new songs for the first time, and watching the song land and the audience and sort of spread and have the exact effect I would hope it would have, you know whether it was something sentimental or something funny to make people laugh. And it took that that whole process to get to a place where A) I had the songs to play that were that honest, B) that I was comfortable you know just to be me and with just a guitar and trusting that you know and being at peace with, hey they may not dig it you know but I want them to dig it for what it is not. You know I'd had a lot of experience on the road before this transition had gotten kind of burned out, opening for different artists and playing for different audiences that were all great, but maybe weren't always my crowd. And even if they were, I wasn't trying to get them my natural honest way. I was trying to watch you I was opening for and learn what they did. You know so I would be running out to the seats way up at the top I mean out of breath and sweating and playing a messy guitar solo whereas maybe it's OK to just stand there with a cord plugged into your guitar and play a really great solo you know. So coming back from the UK and Europe I feel like I'm on the other side of this tunnel. I had to walk through. Yeah.

PETER COOPER Glad you're here. Glad you made it through the tunnel all the way to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Thank you so much for being here with us today.

CHARLIE WORSHAM Thank you.

"Cut Your Groove" - Charlie Worsham (Beginning of Things / Warner)

PETER COOPER "You've got a melody, make 'em hear it. Shout it out, loud and clear." That was "Cut Your Groove," by Charlie Worsham, one of the most talented people in a talented town, Nashville, Tennessee. Somebody I respect and admire, and I'm so glad was here with us for Voices in the Hall.

There's more from my interview with Charlie at Voicesinthehall.org and on our social channels, @VoicesintheHall. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to learn about upcoming episodes. This podcast is produced by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum with Ben Manilla and Jennie Cataldo for BMP Audio, and recorded by audio czar Alan Stoker in the audio lair at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I'm Peter Cooper. Come see us at the Museum in downtown Nashville.