

FELICE AND BOUDLEAUX BRYANT: NASHVILLE'S DYNAMIC DUO

Wife-and-husband team Felice and Boudleaux Bryant were among the first people to make a full-time living as Nashville songwriters. They also are considered among the all-time best, composing dozens of hits that earned them induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Born on February 13, 1920, in Shellman, Georgia, Diadorius Boudleaux Bryant was one of five children who all had unusual names. (Boudleaux was named in honor of a French soldier who had saved the life of Bryant's father in World War I.) Bryant's parents, both amateur musicians, gave their son a violin for his fifth birthday, and he quickly showed talent. He not only excelled at classical music but also became an accomplished fiddler, even winning a state championship. As a young adult, he made his living performing in traveling bands that played western swing, jazz, and hillbilly music.

Felice Bryant was born Matilda Genevieve Scaduto on August 7, 1925, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the daughter of Italian Americans. Her large extended family included many amateur singers and musicians, and she enjoyed singing as a child. She also loved poetry and wrote her own lyrics to traditional Italian melodies.

When Scaduto was eight, she had a dream about the man she would marry, and she was certain that she found him, twelve years later, while she was working as a hotel elevator attendant in Milwaukee. Bryant's band was performing at the hotel, and as he walked toward her, she felt she recognized him. Within days, the couple eloped and got married. Boudleaux gave his wife the nickname "Felice," which means "happy" in Italian.

The Bryants eventually settled in Moutrie, Georgia, where Boudleaux's family resided. As he continued to earn a living as



a musician, the couple began writing songs together and trying to find artists to perform them. Their big break came in 1948 when Little Jimmy Dickens recorded their song "Country Boy," and it became a Top Ten hit. Music publisher Fred Rose convinced the Bryants to move to Nashville, where they soon became full-time songwriters.

Dickens and Carl Smith recorded several of the Bryants' early songs, but the couple's career soared in 1957 when the rock & roll duo the Everly Brothers began recording a string of their songs. In total, the Everlys turned twelve of the Bryants' compositions into hits, including "Bye Bye Love," "Wake Up Little Susie," and "All I Have to Do Is Dream."

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LISTEN

"Rocky Top" (Osbourne Brothers), "Country Boy" (Little Jimmy Dickens), "Bye Bye Love" (The Everly Brothers), "All I Have to Do is Dream" (The Everly Brothers)

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The Bryants’ success opened doors for them to write for artists across the genres of pop, folk, country, and rhythm & blues, including Eddy Arnold, Roy Orbison, Tony Bennett, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead, Cher, and Paul Simon. In 1967, the Bryants penned the bluegrass classic “Rocky Top,” which was adopted as a Tennessee state song in 1982.

After Boudleaux died of cancer at age sixty-seven in 1987, Felice gave up songwriting. “I don’t want to write anymore,” she said. “I ran that race, and I won it.” Cancer also claimed her life, at age seventy-seven, in 2003.

The Bryants were inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1972, the national Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1986, and both the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Rockabilly Hall of Fame in 1991.



Among their legacy are more than 900 recorded songs, which have amassed an estimated half-billion sales worldwide. Sales continue to grow, as generation after generation of artists discover and record their timeless music.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Circle the word “amassed” in the final paragraph and underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the word. Then, define the term in your own words.

2. Based on the text, what inference can you make about each of the Bryants’ roles in the songwriting process? Underline the evidence that supports your claim.

3. In your own words, describe the couple’s greatest impact on music.
