

LORETTA LYNN: GIVING WOMEN A VOICE

For more than fifty years, with her vibrant personality and her homespun sense of humor Loretta Lynn charmed country fans. Yet her lyrics command attention by directly addressing the hardships of being a wife and mother in the modern world.

Lynn recounted her life story in “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” her 1969 signature song that eventually became the title of her autobiography and a successful film about her life. The second of eight children, Loretta Webb was born April 14, 1932, in the family’s hillside cabin in Butcher Holler, Kentucky. Her father was indeed a coal miner, as well as a farmer, while her mother tended to the growing family.

As a teenager, Loretta married a young army veteran, Oliver “Doolittle” Lynn, and they moved to Washington State so he could pursue better work opportunities. They quickly started a family, and Lynn adjusted to being a young mother. Her husband, was impressed with Lynn’s singing around the house, and he began to make bigger plans for her. He bought her a guitar, which she taught herself how to play, and found her local bookings at clubs. After studying country lyrics in a magazine, she decided she could write songs, too.

As her audience grew, she was discovered by Zero Records, a Canadian label that sent her to a Los Angeles studio for a recording session. She based her first single, “I’m a Honky Tonk Girl,” on a real woman who sat alone and cried as she watched Lynn perform. When Lynn asked her why she was so upset, the woman said her husband had abandoned her and their six children to be with a younger woman. From that song forward, troubled relationships were a hallmark of Lynn’s songwriting.



After the record was pressed, the Lynns sent copies to radio stations across the country. Then, they dropped in on disc jockeys along their route from California to Nashville to find out which stations were playing the song. By the time the Lynns arrived in Nashville, “I’m a Honky Tonk Girl” had achieved national popularity.

When Lynn’s career took off in the 1960s, she was raising six children with a husband who was known to cheat on her. Audacious songs like “You Ain’t Woman Enough” and “Fist City” gave a strong voice to female listeners facing the

Continued on back

LISTEN

“I’m a Honky Tonk Girl,” “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” “Louisiana Woman, Mississippi Man,” “Blue Kentucky Girl”

LORETTA LYNN: GIVING WOMEN A VOICE (CONTINUED)

same challenges. Meanwhile, Lynn’s humble approach to life inspired her 1971 hit “You’re Lookin’ at Country.”

In 1988, Lynn was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame. Following her husband’s death in 1996, she returned to solo recording after a hiatus of more than ten years. Audium Records released her album *Still Country* in 2000. She published her second autobiography, *Still Woman Enough*, in 2002, and the next year, she received the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors for her lifetime contributions to the arts.

Her strong-selling 2004 album, *Van Lear Rose*, produced by singer-guitarist Jack White of the rock duo the White Stripes, introduced her singing and songwriting skills to new audiences and won the Grammy for Best Country Album. It

also took Album of the Year honors at the 2004 Americana Honors & Awards, at which Lynn was named Artist of the Year. Starting in 2009, with John Carter Cash producing, Lynn began re-recording her hits and cutting new material. In 2021, she released her forty-sixth solo studio album, *Still Woman Enough*.

“I guess my life is my songbook, ’cause I only write about what I’ve lived,” she said. “I was never one of those songwriters who could make up some story or write about something that they have not been through. If I had a bad day, I would write about that. If I had a good day, I would write about that. If my husband was misbehavin’, we all know I would write about that! But that’s just how I am.” Lynn died October 4, 2022, at her home in Hurricane Mills, Tennessee. She was ninety years old.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

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

2. Describe Lynn’s greatest impact on music. Highlight evidence for your answer in the text.

3. Which song marked a turning point in Loretta’s career? What inspired Loretta to write this song? Later, how was her own life reflected in this song?
