

BOBBY BRADDOCK: A LIFETIME OF HITMAKING

Songwriters must keep up with changing musical tastes if they're going to have lengthy careers. Few have 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 friend Michael Kosser describes Braddock as “absolutely fearless.”

“He let the muse take him first, and only later did he decide if the muse took him higher or left him in the garbage dump,” 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, and grew up in nearby Auburndale. He started taking piano lessons at age seven and endured “six years of little old ladies trying to teach me to read music.” Eventually, he discovered that he “could learn more piano by listening carefully to [his family’s records] than from the conventional, by-the-book music teachers.” His 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, before moving to Nashville in 1964. After winning a job as the piano player in Marty Robbins’s touring band, Braddock began pitching songs to his boss, 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 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

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LISTEN

“He Stopped Loving Her Today” (recorded by George Jones), D-I-V-O-R-C-E” (recorded by Tammy Wynette), “Golden Ring” (recorded by George Jones & Tammy Wynette), “I Wanna Talk about Me” (recorded by Toby Keith), “People Are Crazy” (recorded by Billy Currington)

BOBBY BRADDOCK: A LIFETIME OF HITMAKING (CONTINUED)

compatible with country radio at that time.” By the mid-1990s, his songs were 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.”

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. How does Braddock explain his career longevity? Highlight evidence in the text that supports your answer.

2. Michael Kosser describes Braddock’s writing this way: “He let the muse take him first, and only later did he decide if the muse took him higher or left him in the garbage dump. 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.” Explain what Kosser means in your own words.

3. Circle the word “compatible” in the seventh paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand its meaning. Then, define the term in your own words.
