

BOB MCDILL: COUNTRY'S LITERARY WORKHORSE

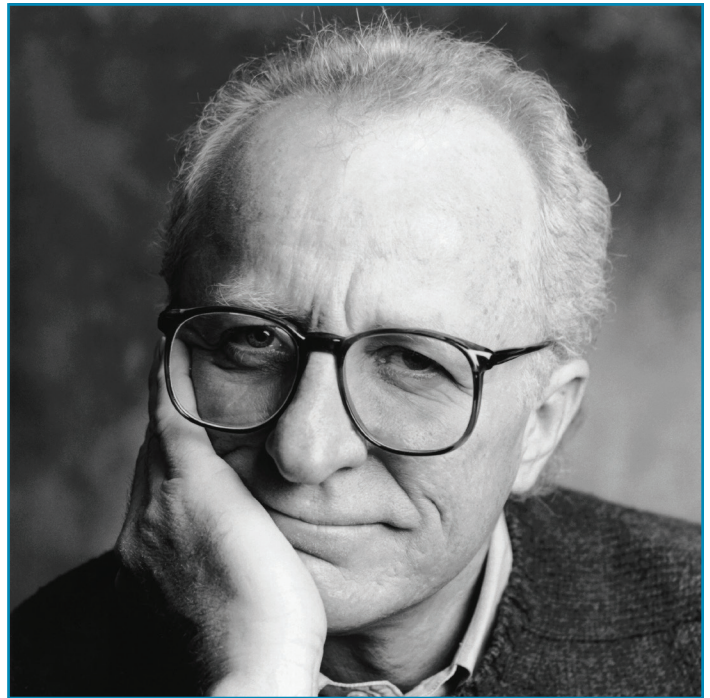
When songwriter Bob McDill arrived in Nashville in 1970, he brought literary artistry, a tireless work ethic, and a deep appreciation of southern heritage to country music. Over the next three decades, he wrote numerous #1 country hits, including “Amanda” and “Gone Country.”

Born in 1944, Robert Lee McDill was raised near Beaumont, Texas, and spent his youth fishing, hunting, and saving nickels to play Johnny Cash on the local jukebox. McDill received a guitar for his fourteenth birthday, and within a couple of years, he was writing his first songs.

McDill formed a folk trio called the Newcomers, who regularly performed at a taproom—which coincidentally sat right next to Gulf Coast Recording Studio, owned by producer-publishers Jack Clement and Bill Hall. The Newcomers played several of McDill's songs, which caught the ears of the songwriters and producers working at the studio. They signed McDill to a publishing deal shortly before he joined the Navy. His first cuts—pop singles—were released while he was still serving.

Soon after completing his service, McDill moved to Nashville, where he scored a publishing deal and began trying his hand at country songwriting for the first time. McDill began forging a partnership with a fellow songwriter-artist, Don Williams, who was also starting out. Williams recorded McDill's song “Amanda,” which he wrote in just thirty minutes. “It was probably the last gift I ever got. After that, it was blood, sweat, and tears,” McDill said.

“Amanda” became one of many McDill songs Williams would cut throughout his career. In 1979, a new recording of “Amanda”—made by Waylon Jennings, who fell in love with the song the moment he heard Williams's version—reached #1. With its three-week reign at the top of the country charts, it was one of McDill's biggest successes yet.



A voracious reader, McDill had been given Robert Penn Warren's novel *A Place to Come To* by a friend. Its story inspired him to write a song about the “real South” he remembered. The result was “Good Ole Boys Like Me,” which paired a gorgeous melody with memories of a southern childhood. Not long after finishing the song, McDill sang it for college students at the end of a guest lecture. “They all said, ‘Wow, that's a great song, Bob, [but] it could never be a hit. It's too literary,’” he remembered.

Kenny Rogers had similar reasons for turning down “Good Ole Boys Like Me.” It had been offered to him by Don Williams, who felt the song needed to be recorded by a “bigger” artist than him. Eventually, Williams agreed to record it himself, and his version reached #2 on the country

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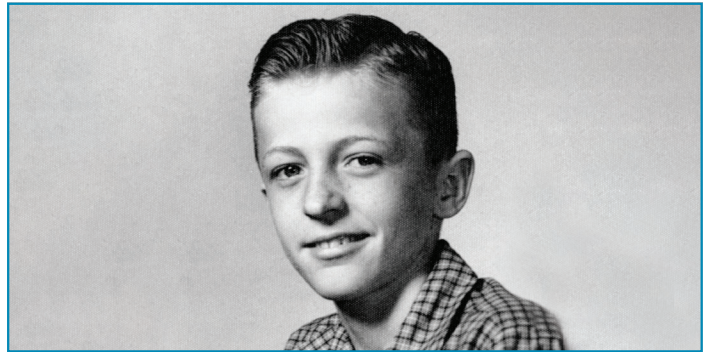
LISTEN

“Amanda” (Waylon Jennings), “Gone Country” (Alan Jackson), “It Must Be Love” (Don Williams)

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charts in the spring of 1980. McDill's takeaway: "Never underestimate the public."

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, McDill was a well-known Nashville songwriter with numerous hits—at one point, he simultaneously landed four songs in the Top Twenty of the *Billboard* Hot Country Singles chart. McDill retired from songwriting in 2000 and has since authored two books. He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2023.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. McDill was called a "voracious reader" in paragraph nine. Explain what this means, and provide two reasons why this point was included in this essay.

2. What did McDill mean when he said, "Don't underestimate the public"? Explain the significance of this statement to McDill's songwriting career.

3. McDill described writing "Amanda" as "probably the last gift I ever got. After that, it was blood, sweat, and tears." Explain what this means in your own words.
