

## JOHN ANDERSON: A DISTINCTIVE VOICE

In 1980, Merle Haggard invited John Anderson to open a series of his concerts, even though Anderson's newly released debut album had yet to score a hit or generate significant sales. During the first weekend of the tour, Haggard invited the newcomer onto his bus. He wanted to tell Anderson how much he loved his new single, "Your Lying Blue Eyes." Before Anderson could respond, Haggard leaned closer. "Do you love it, son? Do you really love it?" By then, Anderson knew Haggard was speaking about a love of country music and its traditions. Anderson replied, "Yes, sir, I really do."

Today, after recording and touring for nearly fifty years, Anderson remains as committed as ever to his chosen career. "I moved to Nashville to sing country music," Anderson said. "It's all I've ever done. I had no backup plan."

Born on December 13, 1954, Anderson grew up in Apopka, Florida. By the seventh grade, Anderson was playing in garage rock bands with his friends, and by the age of twelve had made up his mind to be a professional musician. But it was hearing the songs of Haggard and George Jones that turned him toward country music and set his sights on Nashville.

Shortly after finishing high school, Anderson moved to Nashville. At first, he shared an apartment with his older sister Donna, an aspiring singer who had begun performing in clubs. Anderson soon joined her onstage, where they sometimes performed together as a duo, but both performed solo as well.

Word began to spread about this young country singer with a highly distinctive voice and Anderson signed a recording contract with Warner Bros. Records in 1976. Anderson's initial Warner Bros. albums earned critical acclaim, and his hard-country style drew the support of his heroes. In addition to Haggard, George Jones and Willie Nelson gave Anderson opening slots on their national tours, providing him with



important exposure to crowds that favored traditional country music.

In the early 1980s, Anderson was a leader of country music's return to its bedrock sounds. His hit records helped lead and define the New Traditionalist movement that would come to include other Country Music Hall of Fame members such as George Strait and Reba McEntire.

Inevitably, his run of hits slowed. However, because he had become so popular, Anderson enjoyed touring income beyond what he'd made before. In 1993, Anderson won the Academy of Country Music Career Achievement Award. He has earned twenty Top Ten country hits, five of which reached #1. In 2014, Anderson was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. In the twenty-first century, Anderson began collaborating with a new generation of country stars he influenced, including Luke Combs and Ashley McBryde.

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### LISTEN

"Your Lying Blue Eyes," "Seminole Wind," "Chicken Truck"

## JOHN ANDERSON: A DISTINCTIVE VOICE (CONTINUED)

Jamey Johnson, another Anderson fan, addressed what has made Anderson such an enduring and powerful presence in country music over the decades: “You won’t find any other voice that sounds anything like John Anderson,” Johnson said, after sharing a Nashville concert stage with him in 2015. “He puts so much soul and so much passion into every song he does, but I’m not even sure those things are the reasons he sounds so unique. He just does.”

With his election to the Country Music Hall of Fame, John Anderson has fulfilled not only a long-held dream, but also confirmed what his idols Merle Haggard and George Jones saw in him when he arrived on the scene.

“They ask just what this means,” Anderson said of his election to the Hall of Fame. “This is an institution that preserves greatness. I know it is because I have many dear friends that



are in the Hall of Fame, people like Ernest Tubb, Minnie Pearl, Loretta Lynn, Porter [Wagoner], Little Jimmy Dickens, and of course George and Merle, who I was fortunate to run with and do shows. That I get the chance to be amongst this kind of greatness, words can’t explain.”

### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Circle the phrase “New Traditionalist” in the 8th paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the phrase. Then, define it in your own words.

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2. What was the turning point in Anderson’s life that convinced him to pursue country music?

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3. Explain the impact that Merle Haggard had on Anderson’s life and career. Highlight your evidence to support your answer.

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