



REAL AMERICAN

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# COWBOY

MAGAZINE



THE GREELEY STAMPEDE  
A MUST GO RODEO

# TRENT WILLMON

NOT JUST ANOTHER PRETTY COUNTY STAR

A MARY McCASHIN STORY



Trent Willmon is a prominent singer/songwriter hailing from Afton, Texas. As a songwriter since 1998 Trent has written songs for Brad Paisley, Eric Church, and Little Big Town. He's known for penning Steel Magnolia's #1 hit "Keep On Lovin' You" as well as Montgomery Gentry's "Back When I Knew It All".

Trent has also had a successful solo career, releasing 2 albums (2004's "Trent Willmon" and 2006's "A Little More Livin'") on Columbia Records and a 3rd independent record, "Broken In" in 2008 on Compadre. Trent went on to make his acting debut in 2008 in "Palo Pinto Gold" alongside Roy Clark and Mel Tillis.

1. You're not traditional "Nashville country" (trust us, we like this), how does that affect your career?

I grew up listening to a lot of different types of music, from Bob Wills to Def Leppard, and I have really been influenced by a lot of it, in some ways those influences have helped my career; in other ways it probably hinders my commercial value as an artist and a songwriter. However, I think being in Nashville has challenged me to grow far beyond my comfort zone, and to really try to study the craft of lyric writing and learn to capture the emotion of a song, regardless of how "hip" the packaging is. Admittedly, I struggle with "bro-country", but there is some of the new country stuff I really love. Every time I think country music has gone to Hell, I hear a song that I wish I'd written because it's a great song. I love this new Miranda song "Automatic". I love Blake's new song "My

Eyes”, even though it’s more of a throw-back to old R&B than traditional country, it has all the things I love about country music: a great singer, a great hook, clever lyrics, singable melody. This song could have been a Conway Twitty hit 30 years ago. I think every generation bitches about the new generation of music, but even when Strait revived the 2- step and western swing, he did it with a new twist. Its what we have to do to survive in this business: keep re-inventing the aspects of the music we love and re-packaging it so that it sounds new.

2. In all your touring and travels, what’s your favorite place to play in the US? The place you want to go back to over and over?

I love to play in places where we have fans that sing along to the songs, so that tends to be mostly in Texas, where we have had the most radio airplay. Unfortunately, some of my favorite dancehalls and venues to play over the years have disappeared, closed down, or been turned into clubs that host another genre or generation. That being said, Billy Bob’s is still in Ft. Worth, and to me that’s the Texas equivalent of the Grand Ole Opry.

3. You have a degree in Animal Science and you’re an accomplished roper as well. What made you pursue music over those 2 passions?

I did have a 4-H scholarship and majored in Animal Science, but I didn’t graduate college. After 2 years I took a summer off to work at Fiesta Texas in a country music show, and I never went back to

school. I think I really wanted to pursue a degree in agriculture because where I grew up no one really believed that music was a realistic career. I can't say those people were wrong. Looking back, I probably could have done almost anything else and had a better chance of success. But some people are just stubborn. Don't confuse it with tenacity. That word insinuates some sort of planning, intelligence, or foresight. I'm just plain stubborn, and I have my west Texas roots to thank for that. I just refused to give up until I finally figured out how to make a living doing it.

Although I knew how to swing a rope some and worked with horses some growing up, I didn't start team roping until my early 20's. I knew it was never going to be an option for me to choose that as a career. There is a big difference in the dedication and mentality of someone who is a career roper and someone who enjoys it as a hobby. I am definitely the latter.

4. What's a typical day in your life like?

My number one job is being a dad. My daughter came to live with me when she was 13. It has changed my whole life: my perspective, my goals, my maturity, and especially my schedule. Changed for the better. I wake up and make breakfast most mornings, although we take turns (teaching my kid to cook has been a challenge, but I feel it is more important than knowing how to operate an iPhone). After taking her to school, I start my day by checking emails and doing that sort of work, then move to

songwriter mode, where I will write by myself or co-write with other writers, sometimes another artist. Recently I have produced a few albums for other artists so I have been spending a lot of time in the studio. Depending on my schedule, I will pick up my daughter from school, spend time with her and my girlfriend, cook dinner, go for a run, and on rare occasions we watch a documentary or a movie. Weekends that I am not playing on the road, we are on the boat or grilling out, spending time with friends or by ourselves. Every day is different. Today I am going to ASCAP for a songwriting seminar, then to my property to plant some fruit trees, then packing for Texas to play a couple shows with my band.

5. What do you wish would change about society today?

If there is one thing that scares me the most about the world today, it is the entitlement attitude of some people, especially kids. When I was growing up, it seemed like there was a lot more discipline and respect required of us, and nowadays I see a complete disregard for other others, and a materialistic addiction to “things” and drama. I limit my Facebook to only a few posts a year because I don’t want my life displayed to the world wide web... and I believe the day is not far off when people will start to value their own personal privacy and integrity more than they long to have their own reality TV show.

6. Do you have a moment or moments that really defined your career or who you are?

I can't think of one particular event that defines me or who I am. Probably because I feel like I am so many different things. But I feel that I am myself when I'm doing something outdoors with my close friends and family, enjoying simple things, and not chasing a dollar.

The older I get, the more important this is to me.

7. Why do you continue to split your time between Afton, Texas and Nashville, Tennessee?

Texas will always be my home. All my family is there, the majority of my shows are there, and many of my closest friends are there. A few years ago when I knew my daughter was going to live with me, I had to decide where I would raise her. A lot of factors came in to play, but I knew that if I lived in Texas, my living would be comprised of playing dancehalls and beer joints 3 or 4 nights a week. I couldn't see that being a good way for a single dad to raise a teenage girl. I decided to focus on writing and producing, stay in Nashville, and limit my travel to 20 or so shows a year, the majority of which are private events. I am happy with the decision I've made, although my career as an artist has become a much smaller part of who I am, and I spend less time with my Texas family. But God has a way of putting us where we need to be at a

certain time in our lives, and I have a feeling that my situation could look a lot different in 5 years. Who knows?

8. In your opinion, what is it about the cowboy mindset and way of life that makes it so timeless?

The cowboy is an image that is symbolic of the American way of life. We Americans like to think of ourselves as tough and able, free and independent, loyal yet carefree... and there's something about a good horse that appeals to almost anyone who loves the outdoors and nature. I have had the luxury of being around a lot of real cowboys, enough to know that I am not one. I still get the opportunity to ride a few times a year, go to a roping and embarrass myself, and even get to work cows now and then. And although my life is no longer the life of a cowboy, I feel like that will always be where my heart is, even if I'm physically or geographically removed from it. And I believe most of us are like that; wishing we could be cowboys instead of commuters, ride out on the plains with a good horse and see God's beauty every day instead of breathing smog and staring at a laptop.

9. You've gathered such a steady following of fans over the years; they've stuck with you through highs and lows. What do you think is the key to keeping fans loyal?

I think putting out new music as often as possible helps keep fans interested. That is something I have slacked on because I've been so busy with working on other artists' careers. So my plan is to

release new music this year. I've been writing a lot and I have a lot of new material, I just haven't made it a priority to do another album. That is my goal this year.

10. If you could tell a large group of people one bit of advice, what would it be?

Don't be afraid to be wrong. Don't be afraid to question everything you thought you knew. The moment we think we have the answers that is when we are the most disillusioned. I believe life is a constant search, and when we stop looking, we die. When we are done challenging ourselves and our beliefs and our comfort zones, then we are done.

11. What does the future hold for you?

I really don't know. I believe it holds lots of good stuff, lots of surprises, lots of incredible food and new places to see. I'm ready for it, whatever it brings. I'm at a better place in my life than I've ever been. Life has been really, really good to me so far. I get to spend more time with people I love doing things I love to do than I ever have, and to me, that is the most important thing. As long as that continues, I don't really need a lot of "stuff". I savor every moment like a good steak. I've already had more than my fair share of blessings. From here on out, the rest is dessert...