

THE TENNESSEAN



portfolio

THESE CATS COULD PLAY

Country Hall of Fame exhibit looks at key role Nashville studio musicians played for Cash, Dylan and others





'NASHVILLE CATS' GET THEIR DUE AT HALL OF FAME

Exhibit revisits a sometimes overlooked period in Music City history

"The first day was weird," recalls Charlie McCoy. It was Feb. 14, 1966. McCoy and his fellow Nashville session musicians were called in at 2 p.m. to Columbia's Studio A on Music Row. But it would take a little longer for the singer-songwriter they were going to record with to arrive. Bob Dylan's flight had been delayed.

"He showed up at about 6. Then he said, 'Look, I haven't finished writing the first song. You guys just hang loose.'"

The musicians did as they were told. They played ping-pong and cards and went out to eat — anything, McCoy says, "to stay awake and be ready because we figured any minute he's going to say, 'OK, let's go.' It was tough."

Ten hours later — at 4 a.m. — Dylan was finally ready to record.

At the end of those marathon sessions and sleepless nights, those musicians had helped Dylan craft one of the greatest rock albums ever made: "Blonde on Blonde."

Not only that — as McCoy puts it, they "opened the floodgates." Dylan's unlikely trip to Nashville inspired countless other rock and folk artists to come to town in the late '60s and early '70s. Soon, albums including Neil Young's "Harvest," The Byrds' "Sweetheart of the Rodeo" and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" were being brought to life in Nash-

ville.

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's new exhibit, "Dylan, Cash & the Nashville Cats," revisits this sometimes overlooked chapter in Music City's history, and the pivotal roles that Dylan, his friend Johnny Cash and a stable of A-list musicians played within it.

Within a few years, that small group of players were also backing up two separate Beatles (Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr), Leonard Cohen, Joan Baez, Simon & Garfunkel, even The Monkees. But it's hard to imagine much of it would have happened if Dylan hadn't first been drawn to Nashville.

"The stories that were written about him were talking about him as a voice of a generation, a political figure and a rock star," says guest curator Pete Finney. "The one thing that was not convenient in those narratives was that he was a huge country fan, and that was part of his mindset."

He found a kindred spirit in Johnny Cash, who welcomed him to Nashville with open arms. And Cash didn't stop there. The exhibit highlights his "Johnny Cash Show" TV program, which brought Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young and Eric Clapton to its stage.

One head-turning item in the collection is a manuscript for "Wanted Man," a song Dylan wrote for Cash, and featured on Cash's live album "At San Quentin." When Dylan returned to

» CATS, 10E



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IF YOU GO

"Dylan, Cash, and the Nashville Cats: A New Music City" opens Friday at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum (222 Fifth Ave. S.). Several related programs will be presented on Saturday, including a songwriter session with members of Old Crow Medicine Show, a curator talk and a concert, Listen to the Band: The Nashville Cats in Concert. Performers for the 2 p.m. show include Deana Carter, Steve Young, Jon Langford, Tracy Nelson, and Ketch Secor and Critter Fuqua. To learn more, visit www.countrymusichalloffame.org/.
Landmark songs recorded with "Nashville Cats"
» Bob Dylan, "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35"
» Neil Young, "Heart of Gold"
» The Byrds, "Hickory Wind"
» Linda Ronstadt, "Long Long Time"
» Simon & Garfunkel, "The Boxer"
» Leonard Cohen, "Bird on a Wire"
» J.J. Cale, "Crazy Mama"
» Joan Baez, "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down"
» Paul McCartney, "Sally G."



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY PAMELA TSENG/THE TENNESSEAN
GRAPHICS BY THINKSOCK
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Guest curator Pete Finney, left, and Country Music Hall of Fame editor Michael Gray show some of the displays for the "Dylan, Cash & the Nashville Cats" exhibit, which opens Friday.

PHOTOS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
Country Music Hall of Fame will feature the "Nashville Cats" exhibit which features Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash and session musicians known as the Nashville Cats.

Former Beatle Paul McCartney, left, and his family chat with Dolly Parton, second from right, and Porter Wagoner backstage during the third annual Grand Masters Fiddling contest at Opryland June 16, 1974. McCartney's wife, Linda, and daughters Heather, 11, and Stella, 4, also enjoyed the music at the event.
JACK CORN / THE TENNESSEAN

W.W. and the Dixie Dancekings' co-star Jerry Reed, and a master guitar player, performs during the after party of the world premiere of the film in Nashville Feb. 4, 1975.
JIMMY ELLIS / THE TENNESSEAN



Country Music Hall of Fame editor Michael Gray discusses some of the artifacts on display in "Dylan, Cash & the Nashville Cats."

SHELLEY MAYS / THE TENNESSEAN

Dylan & Cash

Nashville Cats' get their due at Country Music Hall of Fame

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MENTORS LEADING THE WAY

Experts believe volunteers guiding program's students could be priceless

Carol Pakowitz was late. She had been in the hospital on March 9 for an X-ray after falling while trying to clear ice from her air conditioning unit. But before the results came in, Pakowitz rushed to Gallatin High School for her second meeting with a group of students she is mentoring through the Tennessee Promise program. She made it to the crowded school cafeteria by 9:45 p.m., a stack of notes in hand — and a hospital ID tag still wrapped around her wrist. Soon after, she was walking six students through the college application process in the short staircase of a classroom. Pakowitz, 74, is one of thousands of Tennesseans who are guiding the first generation of Tennessee Promise students hoping to go to community college tuition-free this year. It's



ABOUT THE PROJECT
This is the third installment in The Tennessee Promise, the state's ambitious plan to provide community college tuition-free to eligible high school graduates. On the fourth Sunday of every month, The Tennesseean will provide an in-depth look at the program's progress and its impact.

BY MENTORS, MA

PICTURED ABOVE: FRONT PAGE TEASER

CATS

»CONTINUED FROM 8E

Nashville to make an album for the third time — 1969's "Nashville Skyline" — Cash wrote the liner notes, and the Grammy he earned for it will also be on display.

"Nashville was perceived as a Southern conservative town, out of step with the trends of popular music," says Michael Gray, museum editor. "And here Dylan comes and names an album 'Nashville Skyline.' His record executives were telling him, 'Don't call your album that. It'll hurt sales.' It ended up being one of his best-selling albums."

Gray points out another bold choice Dylan made in the liner notes of "Blonde on Blonde" — to credit the musicians who recorded with him. McCoy and his peers' efforts were often anonymous in those days.

That won't be the case at the museum. At its center, the exhibit features 16 listening stations, each spotlighting the work of a Nashville musician. Visitors will be asked to focus on the late Ben Keith's mournful pedal steel on Neil Young's "Heart of Gold," drummer Kenny Buttrey's arresting percussion on Dylan's "Lay, Lady Lay" and Fred Carter Jr.'s impeccable guitar picking on Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer."

McCoy was also on the Nashville session for "The Boxer," playing a bass harmonica.

"I'd love to take credit



A manuscript of Dylan's "Wanted Man" that Johnny Cash which is part of the "Nashville Cats" exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame.

for what I played," he says. "But to be honest, Paul Simon dictated every note of that to me."

That same harmonica is under glass at the Country Music Hall of Fame, sharing space with Johnny Cash's Grammy and Bob Dylan's handwritten lyrics. McCoy is looking forward to seeing it all on display, and possibly running back into a few old friends.

"Musicians have made a great contribution to music in general, and studio musicians rarely ever get any notoriety," he says. "I think it's really important that they're getting this spotlight because the contributions are just amazing. Listen, I've been living my dream. I've been a part of this for 53 years. That's big stuff for a hillbilly kid from West Virginia."

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