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DROWN REPUBLICANS?**

# USA TODAY

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**The  
Counterculture's  
Music  
—and Influence—  
Plays On**



# Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, the Nashville Cats, et al. Turn the Music World Upside Down

*"This is not primarily a story of cultural or political divisions, but rather of people coming together from very different backgrounds and moving past perceived divisions to find common ground through music."*

**B**OB DYLAN, Neil Young, Leonard Cohen, The Byrds. Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Joan Baez, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, J.J. Cale, Linda Ronstadt. Leon Russell, Gordon Lightfoot, Steve Miller, Ian & Sylvia, The Monkees, and Simon & Garfunkel were among the many rock and folk artists who came to Nashville, Tenn., in the late 1960s and early 1970s to work with the city's versatile, hotshot session musicians, the Nashville Cats.

Dylan's decision to record in Nashville provided a major catalyst in bringing many others to what must have seemed a very unlikely destination in the politically polarized 1960s. In spite of its reputation among hipsters as a conservative town, removed from the main trends in popular music, Nashville, in fact, was home to musicians who had a huge influence on other music scenes of the era, including those of New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Toronto, and London.

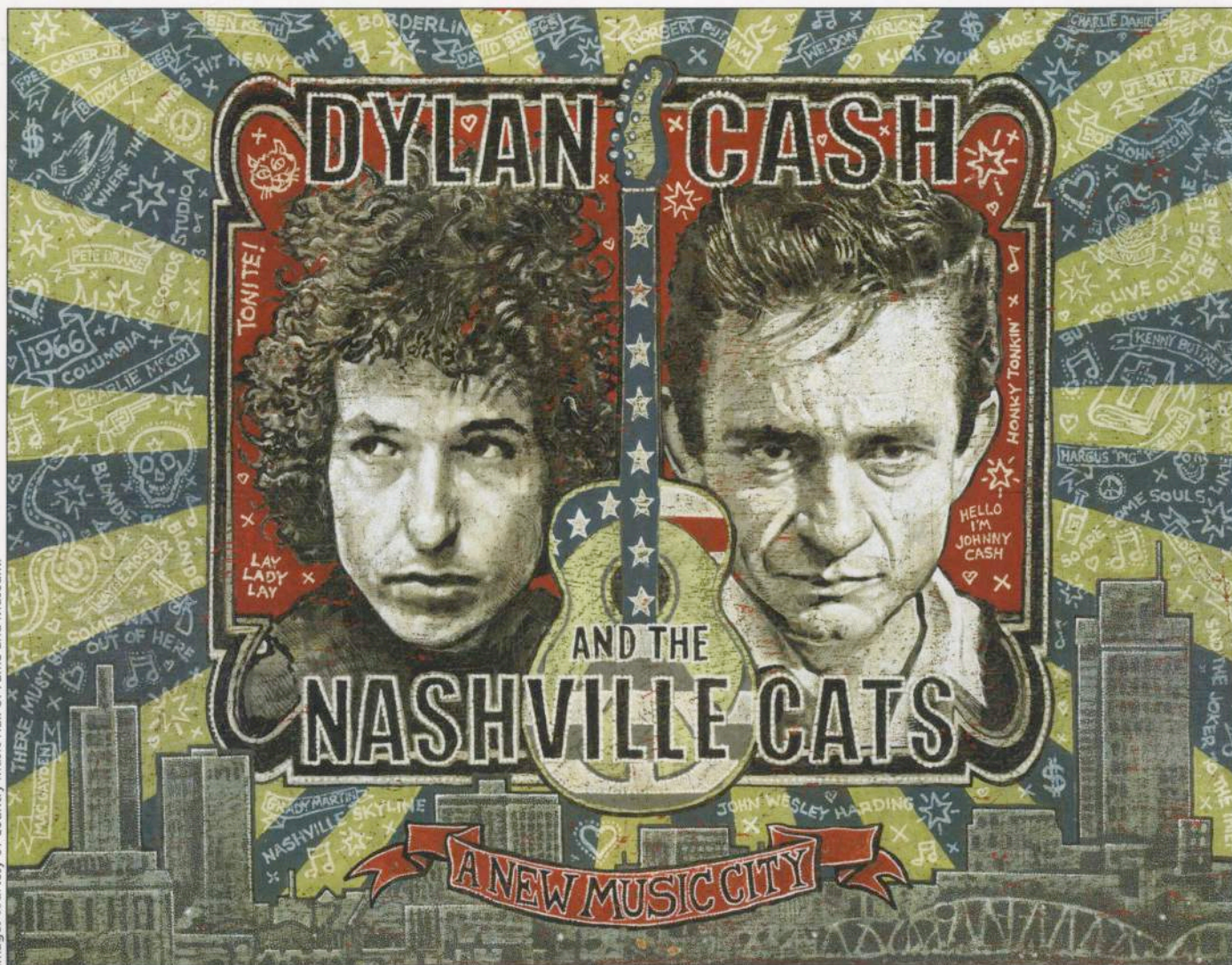
"Nashville has always been a more nuanced music center than it commonly gets credit for. . . . This exhibit is a great opportunity to talk about the early confluence of country and rock," says Kyle Young, director of the Coun-



Pictured at Soundshop in 1974 are Paul McCartney, Buddy Killen, Ernie Winfrey (seated), Tony Dorsey, and Linda McCartney.



Images courtesy of Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum



Still images of Randy, Earl, and Gary Scruggs with a bearded Bob Dylan (c. 1972) from the documentary film, "Earl Scruggs: The Bluegrass Legend—Family and Friends."

try Music Hall of Fame and Museum. "Dylan recorded 'Blonde on Blonde,' 'John Wesley Harding,' and 'Nashville Skyline' here. The Byrds made 'Sweetheart of the Rodeo'; Neil Young recorded 'Harvest'; and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band created 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken.' Albums like these had a profound influence on popular music as well as establishing Nashville as a music hub and cool southern city with a sense of place."

While recording his album "Highway 61 Revisited" in 1965, Dylan was in New York working with producer Bob Johnston, a former Nashville resident who hired multi-instrumentalist Charlie McCoy to lead sessions in Nashville. McCoy attended one of Dylan's New York sessions and was invited to play guitar on "Desolation Row." Taken with McCoy's musicianship, Dylan was encouraged by Johnston to record in Nashville where there were other musicians as skilled as McCoy.

Dylan decided to take Johnston's advice and arrived in Nashville in 1966 to make "Blonde on Blonde," one of the great achievements of his long career and a benchmark of American popular music. Dylan returned to Nashville to record "John Wesley Harding," "Nashville





Charlie McCoy (far right) and the Escorts perform at the Jolly Roger in Printers Alley (c. 1965).

Skyline,” and portions of “Self Portrait.”

Having met several years before, and having cemented their friendship at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, Dylan and Johnny Cash were reunited in Nashville in February 1969. Dylan already had recorded most of “Nashville Skyline” when he and Cash went into the studio. They cut more than a dozen duets in two days. “Girl from the North Country” appeared on “Nashville Skyline,” and Cash wrote Grammy-winning liner notes for the album.

Later that same year, Cash began hosting a weekly show for ABC. “The Johnny Cash Show” was shot at Nashville’s Ryman Auditorium and became an outlet through which country artists and folk, pop, and rock musicians could reach new audiences. Dylan and Joni Mitchell were guests on the first show, and Young, Lightfoot, Ronstadt, James Taylor, and Eric Clapton’s Derek & the Dominos appeared on subsequent shows.

Many artists who followed Dylan’s lead and made the pilgrimage to Nashville to record or appear on Cash’s show were rewarded with the opportunity to work with world-class musicians. In several cases, the experiment yielded some of the artists’ most successful or influen-

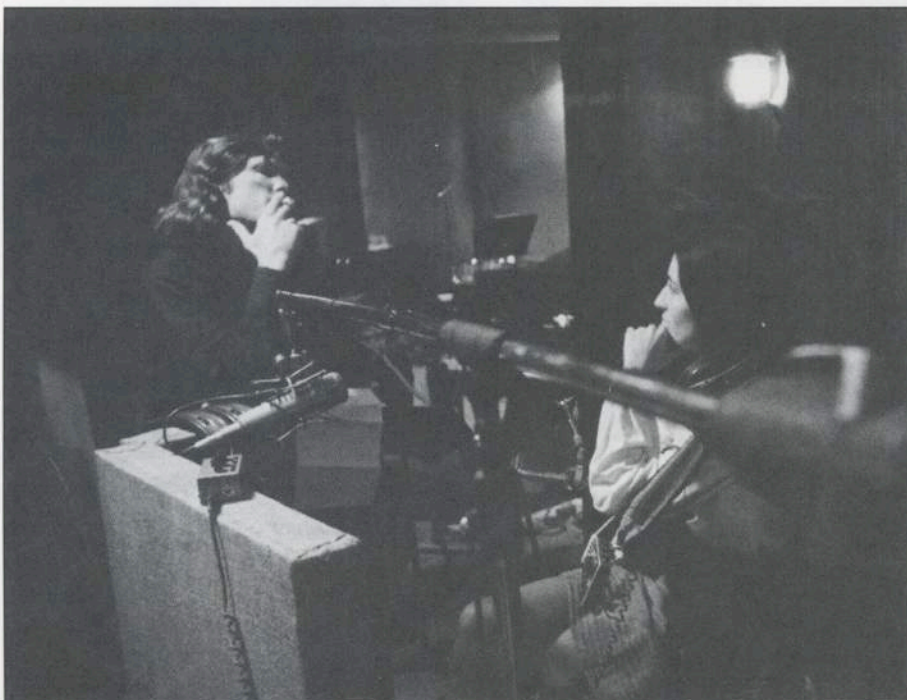


Johnny Cash used a custom-made Grammer Guitar (left) on his TV show, while Bob Dylan used a mahogany 1949 Martin 00-17 in the early 1960s.

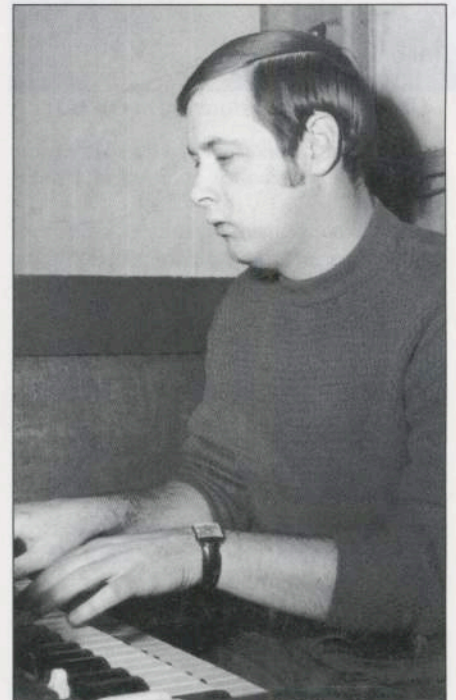




Bob Johnston, Leonard Cohen, and Charlie Daniels perform in the early 1970s.



Kris Kristofferson and Joan Baez in the recording studio (c. 1973).



David Briggs in the recording studio (c. 1972).



## MUSEUMS TODAY

tial albums, thanks to the accomplished players drawn from a core group of Nashville studio musicians that included McCoy, David Briggs, Kenny Buttrey, Fred Carter Jr., Charlie Daniels, Pete Drake, Mac Gayden, Lloyd Green, Ben Keith, Grady Martin, Wayne Moss, Weldon Myrick, Norbert Putnam, Jerry Reed, Pig Robbins, and Buddy Spicher, among others.

In the political climate of the era, Nashville's mainstream country recordings were perceived as the music of the conservative South, overtly slick and commercial. In stark contrast were the folk-oriented, politically charged songs coming from Baez, Buffy Sainte-Marie, and other left-



Joan Baez is flanked by Ernie Winfrey (standing) and Norbert Putnam at Woodland Studios in the 1970s.



Pictured recording in RCA Studio A in the 1960s are (standing) Norbert Putnam, Lloyd Green, and Kenny Buttrey and (seated) Felton Jarvis, The Monkees' Michael Nesmith, and Wayne Moss.



Charlie Daniels performing in the 1970s.

leaning artists who looked past their differences to work with Nashville's accomplished musicians.

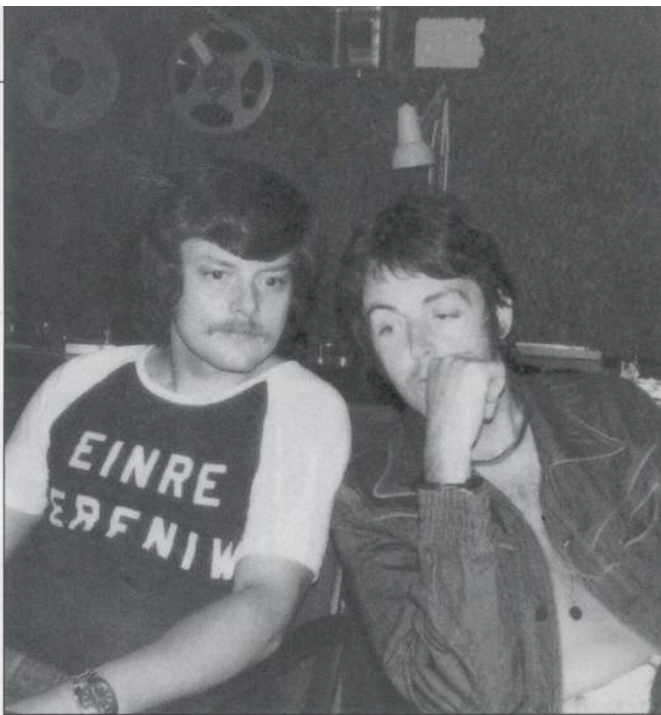
This is not primarily a story of cultural or political divisions, but rather of people coming together from very different backgrounds and moving past perceived divisions to find common ground through music. Between 1966-74, while contributing to countless country music classics, Nashville session musicians also played on landmark pop and rock songs, such as Dylan's "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35" and "Lay Lady Lay"; Young's "Heart of Gold"; the Byrds' "Hickory Wind"; Ronstadt's "Long Long Time"; Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer"; Cohen's "Bird on a Wire"; Cale's "Crazy Mama"; Baez's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down"; and McCartney's "Sally G."

"Dylan, Cash, and the Nashville Cats: A New Music City" will be on view March 27-Dec. 31, 2016, at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Nashville, Tenn. ★



Lloyd Green in the early 1970s.





Ernie Windfrey and Paul McCartney at Soundshop (c. 1974).



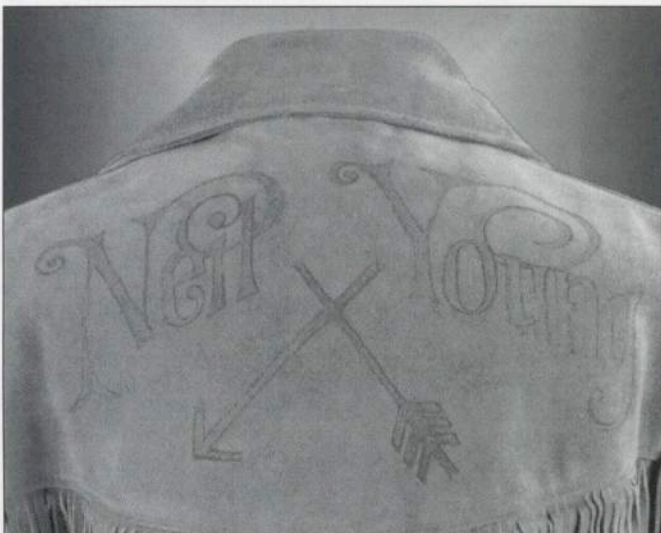
Chet Atkins and Jerry Reed recording in RCA Studio A in the mid 1960s.



Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel, and Fred Carter Jr. in a shot from the 1970s.



Hargus "Pig" Robbins in a 1970s publicity photo.



Fringed leather jacket with "Neil Young" and crossed arrows etched into the back, made by Tony Alamo of Nashville and worn by Ben Keith.



Bob Johnston, Leonard Cohen, and Ron Cornelius performing in the early 1970s.