

Live in Texas Presents: Johnny Horton 16 Biggest Hits "Live"



Today, we will be presenting Johnny Horton! John Gale "Johnny" Horton was an American country music and rockabilly singer most famous for his semi-folk, so-called "saga songs" which began the "historical ballad" craze of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Horton was born in Los Angeles

, the youngest of five siblings, and reared in Rusk, Texas. His family often traveled to California to work as migrant fruit pickers. After graduation from high school in Gallatin, Texas, in 1944, Horton attended the

Methodist

-affiliated Lon Morris Junior College in Jacksonville, Texas, with a basketball scholarship. He

later attended Seattle University and briefly Baylor University in Waco, although he did not graduate from any of these institutions. Horton soon returned to California and found work in the mail room of Hollywood's Selznick Studio. It was here that he met his future first wife, secretary Donna Cook. He relocated twice before heading to Alaska to look for gold. It was during this period that he began writing songs.



After much prompting from his sister Marie, he entered a talent contest at the Reo Palm Isle Club in Longview, Texas, sponsored by radio station KGRI in Henderson and hosted by station radio announcer and future country music star Jim Reeves. Horton won first prize—an ashtray on a pedestal. Encouraged by the contest, he returned to California, bought some Western-style clothes and entered talent contests. A mixture of Horton's television performances and acquaintances earned him a couple of singles with the minor Cormac recording company. By mid-1952, ten Horton singles had been issued but none were highly successful. Horton was married twice. His first marriage, to Donna Cook, ended with a divorce. In September 1953, he married Billie Jean Jones, the widow of country music singer Hank Williams, to whom she had been married for the two and one-half months prior to his death. With Billie Jean, Horton had two daughters, Yanina (Nina) and Melody. Billie Jean's daughter, Jeri Lynn, was also legally adopted by Johnny.



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