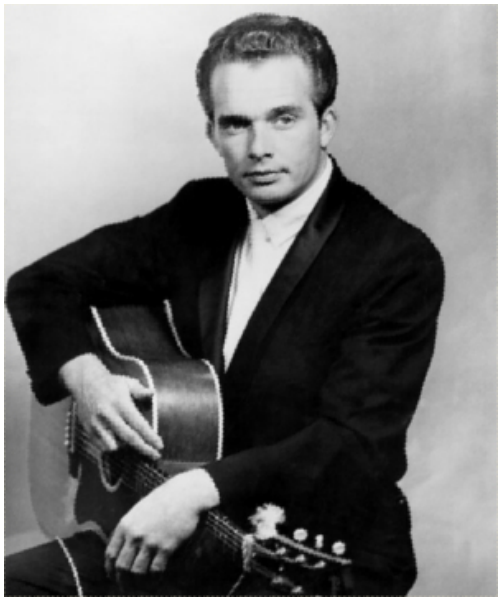
Merle Haggard, from day one, was the product of hard times.

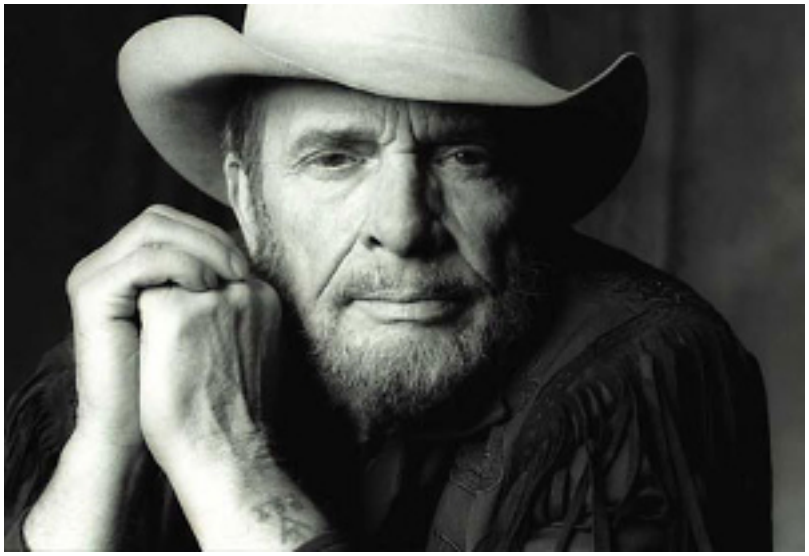


There aren't any country music icons bigger than the legendary Merle Haggard!

Haggard was born in Oildale, California, in 1937 to Jim and Flossie Haggard. His parents had come from the ravaged state of Oklahoma looking for work after their farm burned up. The family lived in an old boxcar converted into a home until Jim died of a stroke when Haggard was

only 9 years old.
He briefly lived with his aunt and uncle while his mother found work as a bookkeeper, but within a year he hopped a freight train to Fresno.
Although he was sent back home by the authorities, it was the first in a long line of misdemeanors and petty crimes that would be a hallmark of his young life.

While he spent a large part of his youth in and out of juvenile detention centers, Haggard took up the guitar and began performing around the state and earned a small following. He even met his hero Lefty Frizzell and got to sing with him on stage.
Unfortunately, at the age of twenty, Haggard was arrested for attempted robbery and ended up in San Quentin state prison for three years.
While there, he met a convict who ended up being a key figure in his life - a man simply known as Rabbit.
The story goes that Merle was originally going to attempt an escape with him, but Rabbit convinced him that his gift of music was going to pull him out of a life of crime and that he should serve his time and become a full-time musician.
While his foresight in Merle's abilities was correct, Rabbit's escape attempt turned sour and was unsuccessful.
A guard was killed and Rabbit found himself on death row.
His execution had a lasting effect on Haggard and his music throughout his career.



Haggard is associated with the Bakersfield Sound and the Outlaw Country movement.

Released from San Quentin in 1960, Haggard found himself in the up-and-coming Bakersfield music scene which saw itself as a counter to the smooth Nashville sound which dominated the radio waves. Trying to move on from his life of crime, in 1962 he made his way to Las Vegas where he played as a bassist for the Wynn Stewart band. He covered one of Stewart's tunes, "Sing a Sad Song", as his first recorded single and it made it into the Billboard Country Top 20 in 1964.
It wasn't long before another of his singles, "(My Friends Are Gonna Be) Strangers", found itself in the Top 10.
He had a real breakthrough in 1967 with three Top Ten singles – one of which, "The Fugitive", became his first #1 hit.
Haggard feared that his past life as a convict would derail his music career, but at the insistence of Johnny Cash he opened up his story to the public and it resonated with the people.

Over the next several years, Haggard had a string of hits. Before the end of 1967, he wrote and recorded two more #1 singles: "Branded Man" and (in memory of his friend Rabbit) "Sing Me Back Home". He wrote two more chart-toppers in 1968 with "The Legend of Bonnie and Clyde" and "Mama Tried", a semi-autobiographical account of his relationship with his mother.
He released another semi-autobiographical single shortly after, "Hungry Eyes".

"The Fightin' Side of Me" was later described by Toby Keith as "the original angry American song".

His next few songs, released in 1969 and the early 1970s, made Haggard into a political symbol. “Working Man Blues”, “Okie From Muskogee”, and “Fightin’ Side of Me” were all seen by the public as unofficial anthems of the “silent majority” that supported the Vietnam War and detested the anti-war movement. Merle found himself unconditionally pardoned by the governor of California, Ronald Reagan, and was invited to sing at the White House by President Richard Nixon. George Wallace, the controversial Governor of Alabama, even sought his endorsement – an endorsement Haggard did not give.

Haggard performed for President Richard Nixon and his wife Pat at the White House in 1973.

Haggard did not let the furor surrounding his music get in the way of touring and recording. He had many more hits in the next few years, including “Daddy Frank (The Guitar Man)”, “Grandma Harp”, “I Wonder If They Ever Think of Me”, “Movin’ On”, ”The Roots of My Raising”, and too many more to list here.
He went through a rough patch in the late 1970s while divorcing his second wife, but found himself back on top in 1980 with the single “Bar Room Buddies” with Clint Eastwood.
The hits continued throughout the 80s, with his last #1 single being “Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Star” in 1987.

Merle Haggard still tours and records to this day, even after battling lung cancer. His latest album, *Workin g in Tennessee* , was released in 2011 to strong reviews.
He has won numerous awards and recognitions, including an induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in 1994, three Grammy Awards (including a Hall of Fame Award in 1999), and honors from the Kennedy Center in 2010.
He is firmly entrenched as an American music icon.

Now in his mid-70s, Haggard still tours and records new material!

You can catch some of Merle's live performances here in Texas on Thursday, December 6th, on *Live in Texas* with Jon Garrett – right here on KBEC 1390! You can find more about Merle at his website here .

Discography:

(1965) *Strangers* - #9

(1966) *Just Between the Two of Us* (with Bonnie Owens) - #4

(1966) *Swinging Doors* - #1

(1967) *I'm a Lonesome Fugitive* - #3

(1967) *Branded Man / I Threw Away the Rose* - #1

(1968) *Sing Me Back Home* - #1

(1968) *The Legend of Bonnie and Clyde* - #6

(1968) *Mama Tried* - #4

(1969) *Pride in What I Am* - #11

(1969) *Instrumental Sounds of Merle Haggard's Strangers* (with The Strangers) - #36

(1969) *Same Train, A Different Time* - #1

(1969) *A Portrait of Merle Haggard* - #3

(1970) *Introducing My Friends the Strangers* (with The Strangers) - #34

(1970) *Getting to Know Strangers* (with The Strangers) - #44

(1970) *A Tribute to the Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or, My Salute to Bob Wills)* - #2

(1971) *Hag* - #1

(1971) *Honky Tonkin'* (with The Strangers) - #34

(1971) *Someday We'll Look Back* - #4

(1971) *The Land of Many Churches* - #15

(1972) *Let Me Tell You About a Song* - #7

(1972) *It's Not Love (But It's Not Bad)* - #1

(1973) *Totally Instrumental (With One Exception)* (with The Strangers) - #23

(1973) *A Christmas Present (Something Old, Something New)* - #4

(1974) *If We Make it Through December* - #4

(1974) *Merle Haggard Presents His 30th Album* - #1

(1975) *Keep Movin' On* - #1

(1976) *It's All in the Movies* - #1

(1976) *My Love Affair with Trains* - #7

(1976) *The Roots of My Raising* - #8

(1977) *Ramblin' Fever* - #5

(1977) *A Working Man Can't Get Nowhere Today* - #28

(1977) *My Farewell to Elvis* - #6

(1978) *I'm Always on a Mountain When I Fall* - #17

(1979) *Serving 190 Proof* - #17

(1980) *The Way I Am* - #16

(1980) *Back to the Barrooms* - #8

(1981) *Big City* - #3

(1981) *Songs for the Mama That Tried* - #46

(1982) *A Taste of Yesterday's Wine* (with George Jones) - #4

(1982) *Going Where the Lonely Go* - #3

(1982) *Goin' Home for Christmas* - #41

(1983) *Pancho & Lefty* (with Willie Nelson) - #1

(1983) *That's the Way Love Goes* - #8

(1983) *Heart to Heart* (with Lenoa Williams) - #44

(1983) *It's All in the Game* - #1

(1985) *Kern River* - #8

(1986) *Out Among the Stars* - #15

(1986) *A Friend in California* - #2

(1987) *Chill Factor* - #8

(1987) *Walking the Line* (with George Jones and Willie Nelson) - #39

(1987) *Seashores of Old Mexico* (with Willie Nelson) - #31

(1989) *5:01 Blues* - #28

(1990) *Blue Jungle* - #47

(1994) *1994* - #60

(1996) *1996*

(2000) *If I Could Only Fly* - #26

(2001) *Roots, Volume 1* - #47

(2001) *Cabin in the Hills*

(2001) *Two Old Friends* (with Albert E. Brumley)

(2002) *The Peer Sessions*

(2003) *Haggard Like Never Before* - #40

(2004) *Unforgettable* - #39

(2004) *I Wish I Was Santa Claus*

(2005) *Chicago Wind* - #54

(2006) *Kicking Out the Footlights...Again* (with George Jones) - #25

(2007) *Last of the Breed* (with Willie Nelson and Ray Price) - #25

(2007) *The Bluegrass Sessions* - #43

(2010) *I Am What I Am* - #18

(2011) *Working in Tennessee* - #30

Songs on KBEC 1390:

"A Better Love Next Time" - #4

"A Place to Fall Apart" (with Janie Fricke) - #1

"Always Wanting You" - #1

"Are the Good Times Really Over (I Wish a Buck Was Still Silver)" - #2

"Big City" - #1

"Branded Man" - #1

"Carolyn" - #1

"C.C. Waterback" (with George Jones) - #10

"Cherokee Maiden" - #1

"Daddy Frank (the Guitar Man)" - #1

"Everybody's Had the Blues" - #1

"Goin' Home for Christmas"

"Hungry Eyes" - #1

"I Had a Beautiful Time" - #5

"I'm a Lonesome Fugitive" - #1

"I Take a Lot of Pride in What I Am" - #3

"I Think I'll Just Stay Here and Drink" - #1

"If We Make It Through December" - #1

"If We're Not Back in Love By Monday" - #2

"In My Next Life" - #58

"It's All in the Movies" - #1

"It's Been a Great Afternoon" - #2

"It's Not Love (But It's Not Bad)" - #1

"Kern River" - #10

"Leonard" - #9

"Let's Chase Each Other Around the Room" - #1

"Mama Tried" - #1

"Moving On" - #1

"My Favorite Memory" - #1

"(My Friends Are Gonna Be) Strangers" -#10

"My Own Kind of Hat" - #4

"Natural High" - #1

"Okie from Muskogee" - #1

"Old Man from the Mountain" - #1

"Pancho and Lefty" (with Willie Nelson) - #2

"Rainbow Stew" - #4

"Ramblin' Fever" - #2

"Reasons to Quit" (with Willie Nelson) - #6

"Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer"

"Sing Me Back Home" - #1

"Someday When Things Are Good" - #1

"Swinging Doors" - #5

"That's the Way Love Goes" - #1

"The Bottle Let Me Down" - #3

"The Emptiest Arms in the World" - #3

"The Fightin' Side of Me" - #1

"The Roots of My Raising" - #1

"The Way I Am" - #2

"Things Aren't Funny Anymore" - #1

"Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Star" - #1

"What Am I Gonna Do (with the Rest of My Life)" - #3

"Workin' Man Blues" - #1

"Yesterday's Wine" (with George Jones) - #1

"You Take Me For Granted" - #1