

Crossroads Interview

Tex Ritter - A Living Legend

By TONY TOMPKINS

I sat quietly in the front row, waiting for the cowboy idol of my youth to appear, and my mind seemed to wander back to my childhood and the many movies that I had seen him in. When he did appear on the stage, I knew, without a doubt in my mind, that I was witnessing a living legend of the country music world.

He was born Woodward Maurice Ritter on January 12, 1907 in the town of Murial, Panola County, Texas which happens to be in East Texas. When he grew up, he attended the University of Texas and later on went to Northwestern University to study law. Then the old acting bug got to him and he packed his bags and went to New York to do a Broadway play called "Green Grow the Lillacs." He stayed on Broadway to do another play titled "The Roundup." The latter play was based on a play called "The Sheriff" and it also was a hit.

He next tried his hand on radio where a Hollywood producer, Edward Finney, liked what he heard and decided to star Tex in a western series for Grand National pictures.

The year was 1936 and Tex made his debut in "Song of the Gringo" in which he sang his famous rendition of the song, "Rye Whiskey." Other films in this series were, "Headin' for the Rio Grande," "Arizona Days," "Trouble in Texas," (with Rita Hayworth), "Hittin' the Trail," "Sing

Cowboy Sing," "Riders of the Rockies," "Mystery of the Hooded Horsemen," "Tex Rides with the Boy Scouts," "Frontier Town," "Rollin' Plains" and "The Utah Trail." Obtaining better distribution through Monogram, producer Finney and star Tex continued to turn out first rate films from 1938 to 1941. "Westbound Stage," "Rainbow over the Range," "Arizona Frontier" and "Roll, Wagons Roll" featured exceptional production values in these series. His "Song of the Buckaroo" featured actress Jinx Falkenberg. In this movie, an old friend of Tex's, Carson Robinson wrote a song titled "Texas Dan," which Tex sang in the movie. It was quite a hit.

Tex continued to ride high-1941; starred with Wild Bill Elliott in a Columbia series; 1942; starred with Johnny Mack Brown and Fuzzy Knight in a Universal series; 1944; starred with Max Terhune in "Cowboy Canteen" and also starred with Dave O'Brien and Guy Wilkerson in PRC's "Texas Ranger" series.

He sang himself into the ranks of the motion picture Herald's Top Ten Western Stars in his 1936-38 series, a position he was to hold on for seven consecutive years.

Tex also sang the title song to such movies as "The Marshal's Daughter," "Trooper Hook," "Wichita" and "High

Noon." His rendition of the "High Noon" ballad in 1952's classic film won the song the Academy Award.

More recently, he has guest starred on "Zane Grey Theatre," "Shotgun Slade," "The Rebel" and starred in Screen Gem's musical western TV series "Tex Ritter's Ranch Party" in 1959.

Tex married and is still married to one of his leading ladies, the beautiful Dorothy Fay.

Well, the legend of the cowboy movies and the musical world came on stage Sunday to a standing ovation. He smiled and then began to sing "The Wayward Wind" Tex was dressed in a bright blue western suit, with a light blue shirt and red western tie. Of course, he wore his white steeple hat and black cowboy boots. He broke into his favorite song of "Boll Weevil," which he promptly interrupted twice to tell some funny tales of his past. Other songs were the "Deck of Cards," also his latest song, "Lorena" which is a Civil War ballad and is beautiful done by Tex, and he finally closed with "Hillbilly Heaven."

His band, which is called the Boll-Weevils, is comprised of Johnny Walker on lead guitar; J.R. Williams of Greensboro, N.C. on drums, and Bill Merritt, a Kentucky boy on guitar who also acts as emcee for the group. They are one of the finest trios I have ever heard.



Tex Performs at Crossroads Sunday (Walter Vess Photo)

Tex Ritter is also one of the seven living members of the country Music Hall of Fame Award Winners. He also is a member of the Grand Ole Opry and still makes records for Capitol Records, a job he has held for 31 years.

His warm smile and pleasing personality makes him come on strong to his fans and as I finished my interview

with this famous legend, I silently thank God for giving me one more chance to see him. He has made many personal appearances in North Carolina and here's hoping he makes many more.

Yes, I saw and I love this famous western legend and I know that someday, Tex Ritter will really find his place in his own "Hillbilly Heaven,"

OBITUARIES

Stowe

Mrs. Martha Stowe, 89, of 825 N. Piedmont Avenue in Kings Mountain died Saturday at 5:30 p.m. in Kings Mountain Hospital after several years illness.

A native of Gaston County, she was the widow of Charles Stowe and former owner of Stowe's Cash Grocery.

She is survived by 2 daughters, Mrs. Margaret Spivey of Kings Mountain and Mrs. Herman Yawn of Rock Hill; 2 sons, John Stowe of Shelby and Charles Stowe of Kings Mountain. Also surviving are 11 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren.

Funeral services were held Monday morning at 11:00 at the Kings Mountain Baptist Church and were conducted by the Rev. James Wilder. Burial was in Mountain Rest Cemetery.

Harris Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Payne

Miss Ivy Bright Payne, 55, of 200 Thornburg Dr., Kings Mountain, died Sunday morning at 11:30 in Kings Mountain Hospital after several weeks illness.

She was a native of Kings Mountain and the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Doris Payne.

She is survived by 1 sister, Mrs. Catherine Blanton of Kings Mountain.

Funeral services were held Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. at the Harris Funeral Home Chapel

and were conducted by the Rev. Ansel Center, Jr. and assisted by the Rev. Leonard Huffstetler.

Burial was in the Bethel Cemetery. Harris Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Boles

Mrs. Elizabeth Boles, 84, of 115 Cloninger Street, Kings Mountain died Tuesday morning at 4:00 a.m. in the Kings Mountain Hospital after three weeks illness.

She was a native of Hall County, Georgia and the widow of the late Oscar Boles who died in June 1972.

Surviving are 2 sons, Junius Boles and Roscoe Boles both of Greenville, S.C.; 5 daughters, Manley Kanipe of Marion, S.C., Mrs. Fannie Cooper of Fayetteville, N.C., Mrs. Wesley Moss, Mrs. L. B. Sprouse and Mrs. Roy Smith all of Kings Mountain; 1 brother, Bunyan Grizzle of Winder, Ga.; 1 sister, Mrs. John Rickles of Atlanta, Ga. Also surviving are 22 grandchildren and 35 great grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held Thursday, August 17, at Macedonia Baptist Church and will be conducted by the Rev. L. D. Scruggs, assisted by the Rev. C. A. Bost.

Burial will be in the Lattimore Baptist Church Cemetery.

Harris Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Patterson

Mrs. Fairy Long Patterson, 86, of 108 S. Gaston Street in Kings Mountain died 10:30 p.m. Friday in the Kings Mountain Hospital after several years illness.

She was the daughter of the late Perry and Melissa Lackey Long and the widow of the late Arthur Hunter Patterson who died in May of this year.

Mrs. Patterson was a retired assistant secretary and treasurer at Home Savings and Loan, a member and former organist and choir member of Central United Methodist Church, former society editor for the Kings Mountain Herald, co-founder of Kings Mountain Woman's Club, charter member of the Thursday Afternoon Book Club, and former member of the Kings Mountain School Club.

Surviving are 4 daughters, Mrs. Charles Warlick, Mrs. R. C. Etheridge and Mrs. John Smathers all of Kings Mountain and Mrs. Herman Shatero of Chapel Hill, N.C. Also surviving are 5 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.

Funeral services were held Sunday at 3:00 p.m. at Central United Methodist Church and were conducted by the Rev. Paschal Waugh.

Burial was in Mountain Rest Cemetery.

Harris Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

An honest man's the noblest work of God. -Alexander Pope.

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