

Youthful energy charges CMA Awards

By Dan Rice

Country music is more popular than it's ever been, as is evident from runaway record sales and growing concert attendance. Younger performers and audiences have brought a higher energy level into the industry, and the Country Music Association shows its gratitude when *The 26th Annual CMA Awards* airs Wednesday, Sept. 30, on CBS.

The two-hour event, which originates from the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville, Tenn., pairs returning host Reba McEntire with first-timer Vince Gill at the podium. Both are "Entertainer of the Year" nominees. Among the artists slated to perform at the ceremony are Mary-Chapin Carpenter, Alan Jackson and Trisha Yearwood.

The executive producer for the event, Irving Waugh, has been at the helm of the CMA Awards since its inception in 1967. With music publisher Jack Stapp, Waugh persuaded NBC's Kraft Music Hall to televise the ceremony for the first time in 1968. Waugh, a visionary who was instrumental in the development of the Opryland entertainment complex and Nashville's first television station (WSM-TV), credits the burgeoning of country music to its increasing appeal to younger listeners.

"The Garth Brooks, for example, are bringing much younger audiences to country music," Waugh says. "I attended a Garth Brooks concert in Dallas, and I was amazed at the large percentage of teenagers."

Waugh also believes technological progress has widened the country-music audience. "This world of ours is not urban and rural anymore because of communications, because of television. We're closer to being one as far as taste."

Waugh calls on his showbiz savvy when asked to name some of the hottest contenders in this year's awards show. "Travis Tritt (tied with Vince Gill for the lead in nominations with five each) has a tremendous youth appeal. Mary-Chapin Carpenter is a totally different artist but very attractive and writes some interesting

material.

"A phenomenon, of course, is the Billy Ray Cyrus thing," Waugh continues. "Many people think he's just a flash in the pan, but many people thought Elvis (Presley) was a flash in the pan or that the Beatles wouldn't last. So I'd be slow to say that Billy Ray wouldn't be here next year."

Cyrus' megahit, "Achy Breaky Heart," which was composed by Don Von Tress, is nominated for three awards: Single of the Year, Music Video of the Year and Song of the Year. Though the song is a popular dance tune in country-music nightclubs, it is up against some tough competition in the last category, including Mary-Chapin Carpenter's "Down at the Twist & Shout," Travis Tritt's "Here's a Quarter (Call Someone Who Cares)" and "Don't Rock the Jukebox."

penned by Alan Jackson, Roger Murrah and Keith Stegall.

Every third year of the Awards, the CMA Hall of Fame inducts a non-entertainer into its ranks. In 1992, Waugh is one of the five nominees for the honor. With a blend of modesty and pragmatism, Waugh, who is the namesake of the annual Irving Waugh Award of Excellence, observes that "There's one gal (BMI's Frances Preston) against four old men, so my guess is the gal will get the award, which is fine."

Waugh, a man who mentions his wartime interview of Gen. Douglas MacArthur as one of the high points of his long and illustrious career, has a matter-of-fact attitude about his many achievements. "If you live long enough," Waugh says, "you have some highlights in your life."

