

Travel Scene

Iris Sanderson Jones editor



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Hank Snow, a country music great, performs at the Grand Ole Opry.

MICKY JONES

'Hee Haw'

Grand Ole Opry marks birthday, country style

By Phyllis Kreger Stillman
special writer

The Grand Ole Opry, the longest running live radio show in the world, celebrates its 65th birthday Oct. 11-13. The Opry, which has been broadcasting continuously since 1925, will be saluted by the cast of "Hee Haw" on Oct. 11, by a Bluegrass concert on Oct. 12, and by a special performance of the Grand Ole Opry on Oct. 13. Also on Oct. 13, there will be an autograph session by Opry stars in Opryland.

If you're traveling south this fall and have the time, head over to Nashville so you can participate in this country music institution. There are Opry performances at 8:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. every Friday and Saturday. There is also a Saturday matinee until Oct. 27.

A warning: Grand Ole Opry started as and remains a radio show (although part of the early show, from 7:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Central time, is broadcast live on TV). As such, the attitude of the cast seems to be that what you hear is more important than what you see.

The show is performed in a very casual manner, with people wandering on and off the set, sheet music being passed around to back up singers who sometimes look as if they have never seen it before, and very little visual glitz. The show features many of the old-time country performers like Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl and Skeeter Davis. They'll bring back lots of memories for adults, but may not be very exciting for younger people. My kids, ages 20 and 12 were not impressed.

Janet Lindholm, from Plymouth, wasn't impressed either. "We were really surprised by the Grand Ole Opry. It's a radio show and they were doing commercials. It was a very long show."

Dawn Tenpenny, from South Lyon, was also disappointed. "I was expecting a little more liveliness. For the most part, I thought Grand Ole Opry was mostly for older people." But she wasn't surprised by the casualness of the performers. "Everything is very casual down there. That's just the way the people are."

Tenpenny was enthusiastic, however, about Opryland Hotel. "It's the biggest hotel complex I've ever seen. It's like a little city. It just goes on forever. It has a huge indoor atrium area. You can have lunch there and you'd think you were in a botanical garden."

Opryland Hotel is Tennessee's largest convention hotel with 1,891 rooms and banquet facilities for 10,000. The hotel features a European-style garden conservatory, the Cascades, a 2-acre water-oriented interior space; 5 restaurants; gift shops; 3 swimming pools; tennis courts; and a golf club.

Rates at the hotel are pretty steep (\$149 to \$179 a night), but a special package will be available from Nov. 21 - 25. The 2 night package includes a double room; tickets to a dinner and musical review; tickets to the Grand Ole Opry or Nashville Now (the show taped in the park for TV); tickets to an arts, crafts and antiques show; and a tour of Nashville.

Cost of the package is \$318 or \$378 for two, depending on the type of room you choose. A three night package is also available with all the same activities plus a lunch cruise on the General Jackson Showboat, at \$478 or \$568. Call (615) 819-4700 for information and reservations for the Grand Ole Opry and Opryland Hotel.

Note that Nashville Now is normally free anyway and the Grand Ole Opry tickets cost \$14 on the main floor and \$11.85 on the balcony at night; Saturday matinees through Oct. 30 cost \$11.85 and \$9.70 respectively.

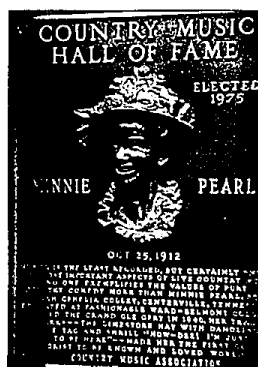
While you're in Nashville, there are other things you might want to consider doing. Gretchen Phillips of Phillips Travel Agency in South Lyon recommends taking the tour of the country music stars' homes.

"I appreciated the simple life they seem to be leading. It's not ostentatious like it would be in California. They're just plain buildings. You can see that they do understand that they're regular people. It kind of validated my feeling that country western singers are pretty down home."

Phillips also enjoyed, as we did, the Country Music Hall of Fame. When I was there, they offered two different shows in a small movie theater. One had early films of many country stars; snippets taken from appearances on TV shows and taped concerts.

The other show focused on Elvis Presley, with clips from his early days up to just before he died. They also have Elvis's gold Cadillac convertible. Almost every feature in the car, from a television set in the back to the records on the ceiling, is gold plated.

Another outing you might like to consider while in Nashville is the Broadway Dinner Train. The train departs from the downtown area Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m. year round. The cost of the train ride and a full course, seated dinner is \$39.50 plus tax per person. Call (615) 254-8810 for reservations, especially if you want to go on Saturday when the train is usually full.



Minnie Pearl, star of the Grand Ole Opry is honored in the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, Tenn.

MICKY JONES

Opryland showboat fulfills a dream for former local woman

By Phyllis Kreger Stillman
special writer

HAVE YOU ever wondered if you have what it takes to become a performer? Liz Kalota, who was born in Garden City and graduated from Northville High School, wondered. She remembers the snowy day in 1978 when she attended an Opryland audition at the University of Michigan.

"I came in out of a snow storm with wet hair," she said. "I sang some pieces that I had prepared. Then the staff asked me if I knew 'Only Make Believe' from the musical 'Showboat.' I didn't, but they wanted me to sing it anyway. They would feed me the words, and I would sing them."

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— Liz Kalota

Several months later, Kalota got the call. She was hired! Today she is a regular performer on the General Jackson Showboat, a paddlewheelboat at Opryland, in Nashville, Tenn. The rest of the Opryland theme park closes Nov. 4, but the Showboat runs all year.

SHE STRONGLY recommends that young hopefuls appear at this year's Opryland auditions, held noon to 3 p.m., Nov. 17 at Marygrove College, Detroit. If you love music, it's worth it.

Kalota always loved music. "I remember singing a lot around the house when I was a child." She lived in Garden City until she was 13, attending St. Raphael's Grade School. Her family then moved to Northville, where Kalota attended Northville High School.

"That's where I really got involved in a lot of music and theater." She was featured in several productions there, including "See How They Run," "Sound of Music," and "Guys and Dolls."

While in college at Eastern Michigan University, from which she earned a degree in theater, Kalota worked at Greenfield Village. She appeared in a musical review at the Town Hall in the village, and was also featured in "Three Men on a Horse" and "Our American Cousin" at the Henry Ford Theater.

AFTER BEING hired by Opryland, Kalota worked at the Acuff Theater, in "I Hear America Singing." She also lived in New York City for a time, where she worked with the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players, and came back to Michigan to appear at the Attie Theater in Detroit in "Marry Me a Little." In 1983, Kalota returned to Nashville where, along with working for the Opryland complex, she is now involved with the Nashville Shakespeare Festival, and does TV and radio commercials. In 1989, she also performed as a dancer on the Country Music Awards show.

Kalota's current Opryland assignment is to appear in "Captain Rudder's River Revue" on the General Jackson Showboat. She will next appear in "Christmas Stories" on the showboat.



Liz Kalota (right), performs on the General Jackson Showboat, an Opryland paddlewheelboat based in Nashville, Tenn. Kalota was born in Garden City and graduated from Northville High School.

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