

The Moody Brothers: Americana Artists and Entrepreneurs



When two-time Grammy nominee Dave Moody was thinking about a place to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the independent record label started by his father, he decided on the Ernest Tubb Midnight Jamboree. As the second oldest radio show in the country, the Jamboree has a rich and colorful history. Launched in 1947, it has followed the Grand Ole Opry every Saturday night on WSM radio in Nashville, and along the way has featured some legendary performances.

I still remember the October night in 1975 when Willie Nelson played the Jamboree. He was just beginning his meteoric rise, pulling in new fans for country music and helping to create what soon became known as Americana. Some people were unsure what to make of all that, and a few weeks earlier on the stage of Opry, Roy Acuff had insulted Nelson's image – particularly his shoulder-length red hair – declaring with a touch of derision in his voice: "We hope someday Willie will come back and be one of us."

Ernest Tubb, one of the Opry's most warm-hearted members, heard the comment and in order to make amends invited Nelson to appear on the Jamboree. Willie did, and brought down the house – a standing room crowd of longtime fans and newer converts who shared the love of a good country song.

This past August, I thought about that scene – that atmosphere of inclusiveness, and that musical blend of tradition and change – when Dave Moody took the Jamboree stage. Moody comes from a legendary musical family. His father, Dwight Moody, was and is a fiddle-playing preacher from North Carolina, who played the Grand Ole Opry in the 1940s in the band of bluegrass legend, Clyde Moody (who was no relation.) In 1950, Dwight also played fiddle for Country Music Hall of Famer Hank Snow, before shipping off to fight in Korea.

After the war, now a decorated veteran, Dwight worked in Durham, North Carolina, playing square dances on the weekend, performing live on country radio, and studying for the ministry. With his wife, Cathy, also a musician, he moved around, pastoring small-town Methodist churches, and in 1962 he launched Lamon Records, initially to support the building fund at his church. For the first twenty years or so, Lamon remained a primarily a gospel label, little known except to the friends and family of Dwight Moody.

But then came the Grammy nomination of 1985. By then his three sons, Carlton, Dave, and Trent, were following musically in their father's footsteps. They had formed a band called The Moody Brothers, and among other things in the early '80s they were cutting a lot of country dance tracks, selling, as Dave Moody remembers, "30, 40, 50,000 singles for dance competitions around the world." In 1984, one of their cuts was "Cotton-Eyed Joe," an old slave song from the American South that became, after the movie "Urban Cowboy," a line dance standard in the 1980s.

By then the Moodys were living in Charlotte, NC, where Dwight had opened a recording studio that he operated with his sons. Dave was still a college student, and one day after class he came by the studio and saw an entrance form for the Grammy Awards lying half-discarded on his father's desk. "Being the young and ambitious, college-educated man that I was, I filled out the form," Dave remembers. "I never really thought anything would come of it. But then we got this call, and we thought, 'Holy, moly!'"

Suddenly, the Moodys were Grammy nominees, finalists for Instrumentalist of the Year, sharing that distinction with Chet Atkins, Ricky Skaggs, the Whites, and Doc Watson. It

didn't matter that they didn't win. For artists on a small independent label, it was, as Dave says, "almost ludicrous" to be in such company. But there they were, and all of a sudden their career took off. They began to tour with George Hamilton IV, one of the stalwarts of the Grand Ole Opry who had an enormous following in Europe.

"George took us to the Opry," Dave says. "We did it quite a bit in those days. It was as if we had won the Grammy. People in Nashville loved the story. For an independent label to have a Grammy nominee was unheard of. We played big festivals in Europe with George, and found ourselves on shows with Johnny Cash and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. We won three International CMA Awards for Best Trio, beating out people like the Gatlin Brothers and the trio of Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris. It was kind of crazy."

Dwight Moody continued periodically to perform with his sons, including shows at the White House for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. In 1989, the Moodys cut an album in Prague with Czech recording artist Jiri Brahec – a rockabilly piano player – and released it through their own Lamon label in collaboration with the state-owned company in communist-run Czechoslovakia. At about the same time, they expanded Lamon's roster of American artists. In 1990, George Hamilton IV and his songwriter son George Hamilton V cut a duet album on the label – a mostly acoustic, folk-country record that still holds up more than twenty years later as a pioneering Americana album.

After yet another Grammy nomination, the Moody Brothers rode the wave through most of the '90s. They turned their attention to Europe for a while, becoming featured country performers at Disneyland Paris when the complex opened in 1992. "We played there regularly," says Dave, a touch of amazement still in his voice. "We also played a big country music club next door with 'The Moody Brothers' there on the marquis. Between 1992 and '98, over 50 million people came through those venues."

But nothing lasts forever, and by the end of the decade the Brothers began to pursue different paths. Dave and Trent moved back to the United States, where Trent, the youngest, began his own music school in North Carolina. Dave focused more heavily on the record label, which he guided toward the gospel roots of its founding. Carlton, meanwhile, continued to concentrate on performing. He became the lead singer for an iconic band, Burrito Deluxe, founded in 2000 with legendary steel player "Sneaky Pete" Kleiner. In 1968, Kleiner had been a co-founder of the Flying Burrito Brothers, joining Gram Parsons, Chris Hillman, and Chris Ethridge to create a California country-rock sound that later influenced the Eagles and many other bands.

When Kleiner decided in 2000 that he wanted to re-create some version of that band, he and Moody chose the name Burrito Deluxe, the title of the Flying Burritos' most famous album. For the next seven years, the new band performed widely and recorded three critically acclaimed albums, including "Georgia Peach," a tribute to Gram Parsons, "The Whole Enchilada," and "Disciples of the Truth." Kleiner died in 2007, but the band



has continued to perform occasionally with Carlton singing lead.

Dave, meanwhile, moved his record label to Nashville. He had already recorded his own tribute to Chet Atkins, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," which was nominated for a Dove Award in 2002, the gospel music equivalent of a Grammy. But unlike the Grammys where he was a finalist but didn't win, Dave soon won the first of two Dove Awards in 2005. In 2010 he earned another Dove nomination after co-producing the critically acclaimed "George Hamilton IV and Friends: Old Fashioned Hymns and Gospel Songs ... for those who miss them." The album featured duets between Hamilton and musical guests Ricky Skaggs, Marty Stuart, Del McCoury, Gail Davies, Charley Pride, Bill Anderson, and the Moody Brothers. For all his success in gospel music, however, Dave has continued to record other artists, including Kathryn Scheldt, an Americana songwriter who hit the top ten in 2012 with her country-flavored single, "Almost Cheatin'."

All of which brings us to the Ernest Tubb Midnight Jamboree, where Dave took the stage in August to celebrate 50 years of Lamon. Among his guests were country artists Bobby Dean and Courtney Stewart, who have also charted in the past year for Lamon, and of course George Hamilton IV.

"They're just talented, enterprising people," Hamilton told me before going onstage. "When I was living in Charlotte, NC, the Moodys were kind of hometown heroes. It was such a delight to be around them. We did the Opry a lot together and toured Poland together. I can't think of a family music group more talented or more creative."

With that, Hamilton walked smiling onto the stage and with Dave singing harmony, he broke into the strains of "Abilene," his number one hit from 1963. Together, the two Grammy nominees, Hamilton and Moody, moved effortlessly into the old gospel standard, "Life Is Like a Mountain Railroad," and closed their intimate, three-song set with Bob Dylan's "Forever Young."

Somehow it seemed perfect - an affirmation of tradition and creativity, which has been a hallmark of the Moodys, and of their small, but ambitious record label that began operations more than 50 years ago.

Frye Gaillard
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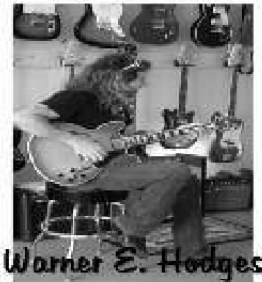
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Saturday, Oct. 6 – Eugene Smiles Project

Saturday, Oct. 27 – UFO Days - Kings of Radio

Saturday, Nov. 6 – Electric Blue

Friday, Nov. 16 – Hunter's Widows Party – Bob Rocks Reloaded

Wednesday, Nov. 21 – Rock Steady

Saturday, Nov. 24 - Johnny Rocker and the High Rollers

Saturday, Dec. 8 – Crosscut

Saturday, Dec. 22 - Whiplash