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## Country music legend George Jones brings his guitar and songs to city for what could be final time

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel  
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Country music legend George Jones, who'll appear Saturday at the Embassy Theatre, has enjoyed an astonishing career in music.

Jones has amassed more than 100 country hit songs and more than 75 hit albums, as well as winning numerous awards — including being inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1992 and receiving the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in February of this year.

Born in Texas in 1931, Jones' early life was filled with many hardships. But gospel hymns and radio broadcasts of the Grand Ole Opry gave him the itch to perform music, biography information said.

Jones' desire for music led him to run away from home as a teenager, and he began to play the honky-tonk circuit backing other singers.

After being married and divorced by the time he was 21, and serving in the Marines, Jones signed with Starday Records in 1954 and his career began to take off.

Some of Jones' biggest hits include "White Lightning," "Tender Years," "She Still Thinks I Care," "Golden Ring" (a duet with Tammy Wynette), "The Grand Tour," "I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair" and his signature song, "He Stopped Loving Her Today."

Jones' personal life, filled with bouts of alcoholism and drug abuse, helped fuel his music with passion and emotion, and it's that emotion in his voice that has led many to rate him as one of the best voices in country music.

Jones, who is also well-known for his tumultuous relationships with women — especially his rocky marriage to his third wife, fellow country music superstar Tammy Wynette — credits his fourth wife, Nancy, with helping him give up alcohol and drugs and helping him stay sober.

George Jones recently announced that in 2013 he will go on what he's calling his farewell tour, The Grand Tour, which will visit about 60 cities.

Local fans have one last opportunity to see Jones perform live as this is his final appearance in Fort Wayne, and Jones says his show will please fans.

"They can expect to see a great show with me and the band doing as many of the songs I have recorded through my career as we can, and there are a lot of 'tribute' videos we play during the show that I think are very poignant and meaningful," Jones said of his show in an interview via email.

"I leave it up to my band leader, Bobby Birkhead, to prepare the set list," Jones added. "Once he has decided on the songs and the order we will perform them in, then they make me a list and tape it to the stage right about where I stand."

Jones says that, even after all these years of performing, there are certain songs he still loves to perform live. One song in particular, which he was reluctant to record, by far gets the best reaction from fans at his shows.

"There are several I love to perform because of the great reaction I get from the audience, but the very best has to be 'He Stopped Loving Her Today,'" Jones said. "I am pretty sure if I failed to do that one, there would be a lot of unhappy fans."

"I can tell you I turned that song down more than once," Jones added.

"I told my producer, Billy Sherrill, that the song was just too sad, and no one would want to listen to it," he said. "Between Billy and the song writers, Curly Putman and Bobby Braddock, whom I think the world of, I finally gave in and recorded the song, and, boy, am I glad they kept hounding me about it. It was one of, if not the most, successful songs I ever recorded."

Recently Jones worked with the Cracker Barrel restaurant chain on releasing "A Collection of My Best Recollection," a CD of some of his greatest hits that's available in all Cracker Barrel restaurant stores.



### More Information

#### Final tour

**What:** Longtime country music star George Jones will perform in concert on what he said will be his final stop in Fort Wayne.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Embassy Theatre, 121 W. Jefferson Blvd.

**Cost:** \$32.50, \$42.50, \$52.50 and \$75.50. Purchase tickets at the Embassy box office, [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com), at any Ticketmaster outlet or charge-by-phone at 1-800-745-3000. For more information, call the Embassy box office at 424-5665.

While Jones enjoyed working with Cracker Barrel, he said he leaves the compiling of his CD projects up to his wife while he takes care of creating the music.

"Basically, I am just involved in choosing the songs to record and the actual recording of my CDs," Jones said. "I leave the rest to my wife and manager, Nancy, and the record label and promotion team. That is their line of expertise, not mine."

Jones did note that the "Bradley Barn Sessions" CD from 1994, which had a star-studded lineup of guests rerecord some of his older country hits with him, was his favorite album to record.

"We had so many of my favorite artists to come and record songs with me, from Alan Jackson to Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones," Jones said of making the album. "It was a great time."

With his live performances coming to an end next year, Jones said playing before his devoted fans has been the best part of his career, and he's glad that his fans have stuck by him all these years.

"The most satisfying for me is the fans," Jones said.