

GRAND OLE OPRY & WSM TIMELINE

- October 5, 1925
Nashville, Tennessee radio station WSM goes on the air. It is a service of the National Life and Accident Insurance Company. The call letters represent the company slogan, "We Shield Millions." The initial broadcast includes jazz, classical, and gospel music performances, but no country music.
- November 28, 1925
Uncle Jimmy Thompson, a 77-year old championship fiddler, makes his impromptu debut on WSM, playing old-time fiddle tunes for over an hour. Overwhelming listener response prompts station director George D. Hay, nicknamed "The Solemn Old Judge," to schedule a regular Saturday night show of down home music. The show is referred to as simply, "the Barn Dance."
- Spring 1927
The Federal Radio Commission reassigns WSM's broadcasting wavelength to 650 AM, where it remains to this day.
- December, 1927
At the beginning of WSM's weekly Barn Dance, inspired by the preceding NBC *Music Appreciation Hour* and "Harmonica Wizard" DeFord Bailey's virtuosic playing, George D. Hay quips, "for the past hour we have been listening to music taken largely from Grand Opera, but from now on, we will present the *Grand Ole Opry!*" and gives the show its name.
- October 5, 1932
WSM begins transmitting with what is then the world's tallest radio tower (878 feet), increasing the station's broadcast power to 50,000 WATTS. On Saturday nights, the Opry can now be heard from New York to California and into Canada and Mexico.
- February, 1934
The Opry broadcast moves to WSM's new 500 seat auditorium studio (WSM Studio C) in the National Life and Accident Insurance Company headquarters in an effort to accommodate the ever-growing live audience.
- October, 1934
Under orders of National Life executives who were displeased by throngs of Opry fans clogging the hallways of the insurance company's headquarters, the Opry moves to the Hillsboro Theater. Here, the show

gets a stage manager and its current format that features several individually sponsored segments.

February 5, 1938

Roy Acuff, who will become known as the “King of Country Music” and patriarch of the Grand Ole Opry, makes his Opry debut.

July, 1939

Opry show moves to the War Memorial Auditorium in downtown Nashville (seating capacity 2,200.) For the first time, there is an admission fee - 25¢.

October 14, 1939

A 30-minute portion of the Grand Ole Opry is first carried regionally by the NBC network with Prince Albert Tobacco as the sponsor.

October 28, 1939

Bill Monroe joins the Opry with his band, the Blue Grass Boys, and begins to mold his high-energy string band music into the original American musical genre that will become known as Bluegrass.

November 1940

Tennessee native and finishing school graduate, Sarah Ophelia Colley, brings her beloved character Minnie Pearl to the Opry cast.

Summer, 1941-1942

The Camel Caravan, a group of three different touring shows for soldiers, includes a Grand Ole Opry troupe. Pee Wee King, Eddy Arnold and Minnie Pearl tour military bases in the US and Central America.

February 13, 1943

Ernest Tubb joins the Opry cast, bringing his honky-tonk sound and an electric guitar -- an instrument previously not allowed on the Opry.

June 5, 1943

The Opry show moves to the historic Ryman Auditorium, a Victorian Gothic tabernacle with seating for 3,500 in its worn oak pews.

October 1943

The Prince Albert-sponsored portion of the Grand Ole Opry expands on NBC coast-to-coast and is carried by about 143 stations.

September 18 & 19, 1947

A troupe of Grand Ole Opry cast members performs at Carnegie Hall for the first time. Ernest Tubb & Minnie Pearl headline.

- June 11, 1949 Hank Williams makes his Opry debut and is called back six times by the audience to reprise his song, "Lovesick Blues."
- October 2, 1954 Elvis Presley makes his one and only appearance on the Grand Ole Opry. He is disappointed by the lukewarm reception from the audience and is not invited to join the cast.
- November 29, 1961 An Opry troupe performs to a sold-out crowd at Carnegie Hall for the second time. The show, a benefit performance for the Musicians Aid Society, features Jim Reeves, Marty Robbins, Bill Monroe, Patsy Cline, Grandpa Jones, and others.
- March 5, 1963 The Opry suffers a tragic loss when Opry members Patsy Cline, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Cowboy Copas and Cline's manager Randy Hughes die in a plane crash on the way back from a benefit in Kansas City. Days later, another Opry artist, Jack Anglin dies in an auto accident on the way to Patsy Cline's memorial service.
- September 27, 1963 National Life and Accident Insurance Company buys the Ryman Auditorium from the city and renames it the "Grand Ole Opry House."
- April 6, 1968 A curfew imposed by the city of Nashville following Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in Memphis two days earlier forces the Opry to cancel its live performance. For the first time in its history, the Opry broadcast is a previously taped show.
- March 15, 1974 The final Opry performance is staged at the Ryman Auditorium. The event is covered by a young writer for *The New Yorker*, Garrison Keillor. The Opry inspires Keillor to return to his native Minnesota and create his own radio program.
- March 16, 1974 The first Grand Ole Opry performance takes place at the Grand Ole Opry House at Opryland. President Richard Nixon attends and appears on stage, playing the piano and singing *Happy Birthday* to his wife.
- 1974 Full drum kits are allowed on the Opry stage for first time – bar one exception made for Bob Willis & his Texas Playboys in 1944.

- June 7, 1976 The entire United Nations delegation attends a special Opry performance. This was the first time the delegation ever gathered anywhere other than the U.N. headquarters in New York.
- March 4, 1978 The Grand Ole Opry, presented live in its entirety, appears on television for the first time, as part of a PBS pledge drive.
- 1983 Grand Ole Opry receives a George Foster Peabody Institutional Award for “outstanding achievements in electronic media.”
- July, 1983 Gaylord Broadcasting purchases the Grand Ole Opry, WSM, the Ryman Auditorium, Opryland Hotel, Opryland Theme Park, and TNN.
- April 13, 1985 The Grand Ole Opry begins regular television broadcasts for the first time, as a half-hour program called *Grand Ole Opry Live* on The Nashville Network (TNN). The program eventually would expand to an hour, moving to Country Music Television (CMT) in 2001 and Great American Country (GAC) in 2003.
- November 15, 1992 Grand Ole Opry is inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame.
- January 15-16, 1999 The Grand Ole Opry returns to the historic Ryman Auditorium for performances for the first time since leaving in 1974. That weekend Trisha Yearwood is invited to join the Opry cast. The return to the Ryman becomes an annual occurrence.
- March 26, 2005 Ricky Skaggs, Trace Adkins, the Oak Ridge Boys and Craig Morgan perform during *Opry Live's* first telecast on American Forces Television, which includes live feeds to and from soldiers stationed in Iraq.
- November, 2005 A Grand Ole Opry troupe plays Carnegie Hall in celebration of the Opry's 80th Anniversary. Opry members performing are Trace Adkins, Bill Anderson, Jimmy Dickens, Vince Gill, Alan Jackson, Alison Krauss, Martina McBride, Brad

Paisley, Charley Pride, Ricky Skaggs, and Trisha Yearwood

May 10, 2008

Carrie Underwood, winner of the 2005 season of *American Idol*, is inducted into the Grand Ole Opry cast.

November 14, 2009

The Opry is streamed live on MySpace Music.

April 2010

The Opry begins a months-long celebration of its 85th Anniversary.