

GENE WATSON

Biography

If you ask any number of country singers who their favorite singer is, a large number of them will respond: "Gene Watson." Gene has scored over 72 charted songs, including 23 Top Tens and 6 #1 hits over his forty-year career. It is safe to say that most knowledgeable country fans would point to Gene Watson as one of country music's best ballad singers in the same league as country icons George Jones, Merle Haggard, Vern Gosdin and others who are the standard bearers for honest, traditional country music. It's no surprise that such artists as Vince Gill, Lee Ann Womack, Trace Adkins, Connie Smith, Joe Nichols, Alison Krauss, and many others are not just happy, but eager to record with Gene. There is also the stunning truth that at age 66, Gene is singing better than ever, with his clear, pure tone intact and an unmatched soulful delivery. As a result, *A TASTE OF THE TRUTH*, his new CD on Shanachie Records, produced by Dirk Johnson, may be his best recording yet, no small achievement for a man who has cut so many classics. And that is good news for fans of real country music rooted in the timeless values of one of America's bedrock musical genres.

"I think I'm working harder on each album to perfect what I do and still always working to be better," Gene notes. "I don't want anything to be so technically slick that we lose the emotion or the electricity of the moment. Each song is very personal to me and I always want the people listening to feel the emotion. Each song has a special meaning to me or I wouldn't record it.

Indeed, Gene records the old-school way, live in the studio with a set of great musicians. In fact, he often sings literally in the same room as the musicians, eschewing the isolation booths normally used by vocalists. Gene picked all the songs for the album as well as picking the musicians in conjunction with producer Dirk Johnson.

"I feel very fortunate," Gene says, "that when I start to make an album I can call on the brilliant Nashville songwriting community and most of the songwriters there know my style and what type of songs to pitch to me. That makes my job easier. I try to choose songs I feel all people can relate to while at the same time trying to find a song that's a little bit different and unique."

There are many highlights on *A TASTE OF THE TRUTH*. The lead track, "Speakin' Of The Angel" is a wry classic country "love gone wrong" mid-tempo tune that would get repeat plays on any honky-tonk jukebox. "Use Me Again" is a devastating reflective ballad featuring Alison Krauss on harmony vocals, that conveys the sad truth that someone will let themselves be used repeatedly by the one they love. Almost scary in its truth telling, "Staying Together," a magnificent duet with Rhonda Vincent, conveys a moving tale of a couple who no longer love each other but stay together for the sake of their children. There is also the ironic but feisty salute to 'real country music,' "We've Got A Pulse," on which Gene and Trace Adkins assert that country music is not dead; it

is destined to be an anthem for lovers of authentic country music everywhere who feel abandoned by the slicked-up, rocked-up music that is marketed as country music today.

“This song represents my feelings about country music as opposed to the sentiment in the song ‘Murder On Music Row ‘(a controversial hit a few years back),” Gene relates. “Everyone talks about how there’s no real country music out there but there is. It may not be getting played on mainstream radio but it’s out there, it’s alive and well, and when the fans come out to my shows they know they’re going to hear real country music. ”

While most of the songs have not been previously recorded, Gene did pick a couple of notable cover songs. “I Know An Ending,” written by Hank Cochran, had been a hit for Merle Haggard, and “Til A Better Memory Comes Along” was an album track for both Shelby Lynne and Mark Chesnutt—an interesting choice.

“I first heard “Til A Better Memory Comes Along” on a Shelby Lynne album around 2000 and loved her version,” Gene explains. “It’s a beautiful song. I started performing it in my live shows and it quickly became such a requested song from the fans that I wanted to record it for them. I heard Merle Haggard’s “I Know An Ending” on the radio when I was still playing clubs in Houston, before I got my first major label deal. I loved that song from the first time I heard it.”

If *A TASTE OF THE TRUTH* is a classic country album then maybe it is because Gene’s life story is a classic country life story. He is truly a humble man of the soil who has no idea of his own greatness. When he sings at the Grand Ole Opry, other artists gather at the side of the stage to watch him. But Gene himself seems incapable of pride or self-congratulation. Indeed despite all his success he has never totally abandoned his auto repair business.

“I can remember singing before I can remember talking,” he relates. “Even when I was a kid, if I heard a song twice, I knew it. But I never planned to be an entertainer. I knew I could sing, but that wasn’t out of the ordinary. My whole family could.” In fact, Watson doesn’t even think he was the best singer in the seven-child household. Make that “bus-hold”. The itinerant Watson family moved from shack to shack until his father customized an old school bus for living quarters and transportation from job to job.

“Yeah, we were poor,” says the singer. “Today, people live in motor homes. Ours was yellow. We traveled to Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas until one day my dad came in and decided we were going to Phoenix, Arizona. We didn’t have the money to go to Phoenix, so we worked our way out there, stopped to pick crops and all that stuff. My dad was kind of a gypsy. He always said, ‘I’m fixin’ to leave in the morning. If there’s a dollar out there, I’m going to get 50 cents of it.’ I always kept that in mind. My dad worked hard at whatever it took to put food on the table. He worked in the logwoods. He worked at the tire shops. He was a crop worker. We would cut spinach. We would pull radishes. We would dig potatoes. We would pick cotton. Whatever it took, we did it. That’s the only life I knew. I was a poor boy. But I wouldn’t take nothing for my raising,

as far as my teachings, the way my mother raised me, the way my dad worked and everything. I think it took all that to get all this.

Born in Palestine, Texas in 1943, Gene Watson was singing in holiness churches with his family at an early age. His father played blues harmonica and guitar alongside African-American field laborers. Watson grew up loving both bluesman Jimmy Reed and honky-tonk king Lefty Frizzell. His earliest public country performance came when he was just 12 years old.

Watson dropped out of school in the ninth grade to work fulltime. He initially supported his family by doing auto body repair, so by day he worked on cars, and at night he sang in clubs. "But doing music professionally was never a goal of mine," he confesses. I always wanted to work on cars. I always say I never did go looking for music. Music found me. Before I ever made a record, The Wilburn Brothers heard me sing down in Houston at a nightclub one night. They said they'd like for me to go with them and do a couple of shows. So I came up to Nashville and traveled to North Carolina with them. They got me on the Grand Ole Opry, and I got a standing ovation and an encore singing the Hank Williams song 'I Can't Help It If I'm Still In Love With You' and "It Is No Secret What God Can Do." After that, they carried me down to the Ernest Tubb Record Shop and I got on stage and broadcast on The Midnight Jamboree. That was my first experience with the Big Time. I was 21."

In the mid 70s, while on Capitol (who Gene recorded with until 1980), he enjoyed success with a string of national hits, "Love In The Hot Afternoon," "Where Love Begins," "Paper Rosie," "Farewell Party," "Should I Come Home (Or Should I Go Crazy)," and "Nothing Sure Looked Good On You." Before signing with MCA in the 80s, Gene's single "Any Which Way," from the soundtrack of the Clint Eastwood movie of the same title, reached top 40 on the country charts. Somewhere along the way, Clint Eastwood had heard the song as a demo recording by its writer L. Ofman, but he insisted that Gene should record the song. Shortly after moving to MCA, Watson recorded "Fourteen Carat Mind" which hit #1. A parade of Top Ten hits followed during the early '80s, including "Speak Softly (You're Talking To My Heart)" and "You're Out Doing What I'm Here Doing Without," "Sometimes I Get Lucky," "Drinkin' My Way Back Home," "Forever Again" and "Little By Little."

In 1985, Gene moved to Epic Records and returned to the Top 5 with the western swing-influenced *Memories to Burn*, which was also the title of his first album on the label. Subsequent albums with Epic included *Starting New Memories* in 1986 and *Honky Tonk Crazy* in 1987. The following year, Gene Watson made his Warner Bros. debut with *Back In The Fire*, which was followed by *At Last*. Leaving the label in 1991, Gene recorded the album *In Other Words*, which was initially released only in Canada on Gary Buck's label, Broadland International Records. It was later released in the US in 1993. The same year, Gene made his debut album for Step One Records *Uncharted Mind* and followed it with the albums *The Good Ole Days*, *Jesus Is All I Need* and *A Way To Survive*. A brief stint with the RMG (Row Music Group) Records label yielded the title *From The Heart* which was followed by the recording *Gene Watson....Sings on*

Intersound Records in 2003. In September 2007 Gene recorded his highly anticipated Shanachie Entertainment debut ***In A Perfect World***. The Associated Press said “Gene Watson has never sounded better” while The Boston Herald called the album “The country music sleeper of the year.”

Gene Watson says, “I have been on top. And I’ve been just as low as you can go.” All of those ups and downs give “a taste of the truth” to Gene’s new album. He concludes, “There’s a tremendous number of people around the world who continue to come out to hear some fiddle and steel and songs about heartbreak and real life,” Gene says. “Those folks are there to support real country music and make it possible for singers like me to continue to sing it!”