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**DOLLY**





# Dolly

by pam windsor

It's been a busy, hectic year for Dolly Parton with no sign of a break anytime soon, but you'd never know it from watching her. The country music icon, who this year is marking her 50th anniversary as one of Nashville's greatest singer-songwriters, radiates warmth, enthusiasm and an endless supply of energy wherever she goes. She still loves what she does, and it shows.

At a recent all-day media event in Nashville promoting her latest album "Blue Smoke," Dolly did interview after interview, moving from one room to another, greeting each new group of reporters waiting to ask questions as if it were her first. She bounced into one gathering singing "Rockin' Robin," a reference to the "round robin" media event under way. With another, she drew laughter when she entered saying, "Wow, we've got a big crowd today. I didn't have this many people at my last concert!"

Dolly, who turned 68 in January, kicked off 2014 with a tour that took her first to Australia and New Zealand. She returned to the U.S. for some shows

in May, then headed to Europe for a five-week stint. She also made a bevy of appearances on all of the major TV networks to promote her just-released 42nd album. She proudly describes "Blue Smoke" as a collection of songs that truly reflects the variety of work she's done over the years.

"I'm a girl of many colors," she explains. "This really is all the colors of me. From bluegrass to gospel to country to mountain (music) and rock." Although she wrote most of the songs, she also does a rendition of "Banks of the Ohio," a version of Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice," and a gospel cover of Bon Jovi's '80s hit "Lay Your Hands on Me." There are also duets with Kenny Rogers and Willie Nelson.

Dolly sees the CD, with the title taken from the blue smoke that often rises from her beloved Smoky Mountains, as a round-up of sorts of her lengthy musical career. It all began with the dreams of a determined little girl in east Tennessee. Born in the small town of Locust Ridge, under the shadows of the Great Smoky Mountains, Dolly was the fourth of 12 children, and grew up in

a home she says may have lacked for money, but overflowed with love and faith. She perhaps best summed that up in later years with her signature song "Coat of Many Colors." The song recounts how her mother made a coat for Dolly from rags and as she sewed, she told the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors from the Bible. Then, when Dolly excitedly wore her new coat to school the next day, the children made fun of her. She points to many gifts her family gave her, including her love of music.

"I grew up with music," she says. "My mother's people were always very musical. There was always singing going on, somebody picking a guitar or a banjo. On weekends, Mama's brothers and sisters would come and sit on the porch and we'd all pick and sing."

Dolly got her first guitar at the age of 7 and as she began learning to play, she demonstrated a special talent for songwriting, although she jokes about those early years.

"My uncle Louis gave me a little Martin, a little baby Martin guitar. After I learned to play, I was writing some



DOLLY'S NEWEST ALBUM "BLUE SMOKE" is her 42nd full-length album.

PHOTO: BRENDA M. EWING/GETTY IMAGES

serious songs," she says, laughing. "I'd hear them talking about all the stories and I'd hear all these other songs people would write, so, oh, I was writing some heartbreakin' songs at an early age."

She says even then, her mother was amazed at her ability to rhyme words and write songs about anything and everything,

even her little corn doll with the corn silk hair.

"Her name was Tasseltop. So, I wrote a song about her. I didn't remember writing it, but Mama kept it," Dolly recalls, noting that her mother wrote down the words and showed it to her years later. "And I had it rhymed all up."

It wasn't long before Dolly was dreaming of Nashville. Amanda Marr, with the Sevierville, Tennessee, Chamber of Commerce, says at the time Dolly's belief in herself was a lot greater than those around her.

"She tells the story that when she was getting to ready to graduate from Sevier County High School people said, 'Well, what are you gonna do?' And she said, 'Well, I'm gonna go to Nashville and be famous.' They made so much fun of her."

Today, visitors flock to Sevierville to see the bronze statue by sculptor Jim Gray that portrays 18-year-old Dolly Parton, holding her guitar before she left. She took her heart full of dreams and suitcase full of songs and headed to Music City.

She met her future husband, Carl Dean, the day she arrived. She would marry him two years later. In the meantime, she began working hard to build her career.

"When I first got here back in 1964, I would just go into these people's offices," she remembers, "and I'd just say, 'Well, I got something I think can make both of us a lot of money. I would just present myself and if they took it, they took it, if they didn't, they didn't.'"

She got work as a songwriter, keeping good company in those early days, like fellow songwriters Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson.

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"We used to hang out a lot together," she says, describing what it was like in the basement of Monument Records. "Different ones of us would be in different places, not necessarily writing together, just kind of coming in and out, bringing out songs, singing them to each other."

Dolly got her big break in 1967 when Porter Wagoner asked her to sing on his show. She and Wagoner became popular duet partners, eventually winning two Country Music Association awards for Duo of the Year. In 1974, she left to pursue a solo career, something that didn't sit well with Wagoner at the time. As a parting gift for him, she wrote "I Will Always Love You," a song that went on to become a mega-hit, topping the charts twice for Dolly, in 1973 and 1982, and later for Whitney Houston, in 1992.

Already a member of the Grand Ole Opry for her duet work, Dolly would go on to reach the greatest heights of country music as a solo artist, selling more than 100 million records, garnering seven Grammy Awards, eight CMA Awards and getting inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. And in the midst of her stellar music success, she tried her hand at acting, appearing in her first film, the highly successful "9 to 5," in 1980. She got an Academy Award nomination for the role. She went on to star in other movies, including "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" in 1982 and "Steel Magnolias" in 1989.

Among her many talents, Dolly has proven to be an extremely savvy businesswoman and committed philanthropist. She's the face of Tennessee tourism, thanks to the success of Dollywood, the state's No. 1 paid attraction.

Dollywood's Pete Owens says the idea for a theme park came from Dolly's longtime dedication to giving back.



**DOLLY STARTED PERFORMING PROFESSIONALLY AT AGE 10,** appearing in radio and TV shows around Knoxville.

PHOTO: DOLLY RECORDS

"If you go all the way back to 1982, she did an interview with Barbara Walters where she said she wanted to do a couple of things in business, one of those being create a theme park in her home area."

He says she saw it as a way to help boost the region's economy. "She thought it would be a great opportunity to provide jobs for people in the area, including her own family. And to build a legacy for the people who were born and settled here in the Smokies."

Today, Dollywood (owned by Dolly Parton and Herschend Family Entertainment) employs more than 3,000 people, with that number expected to grow when the park opens its newest attraction, the 300-room DreamMore, Resort in 2015. Some of Dolly's other businesses include Splash Country, also in Tennessee, and dinner theaters in Branson, Missouri, and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

Those in Sevier County continue to be amazed by her efforts to give back.

"She really has a heart for trying to make things better for peo-



THE LIFE-SIZE BRONZE STATUE OF DOLLY, UNVEILED IN 1987, sits on the front lawn of the Sevierville's County Courthouse, and is one stop on the walking tour of her hometown.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE SEVIERVILLE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

ple," says Marr. "Here in Sevier County, she's contributed probably millions of dollars by now to our local health care and we've got a Dolly Parton Women's Birthing Unit at our local hospital."

Dolly counts, among her proudest accomplishments, the Imagination Library, which began in Sevier County and now stretches across the United States and to communities in Canada, the UK, and Australia. It's a program that provides monthly books to children, from birth to kindergarten, at no charge to the family. Partnerships with various organizations help cover the cost for the books delivered to those families every month. She started the program as a way to honor her father.

"My dad was so smart but he never got to go to school, so he couldn't read and write," she says. "I just knew how crippling it was to him."

Since it began in 1996, the Imagination Library has given away some 70 million books. And it has not only encouraged children to

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develop a love of reading, it has also served as a literacy program of sorts, helping many of those children's parents learn to read and write. The literacy aspect has, interestingly enough, brought Dolly's goal for starting the program full circle.

"My dad was so proud. He got to live long enough to see the Imagination Library do well," she says. "He really felt like he had been part of something special and something good, and that made him have some pride in that."

Those who know Dolly say her love and respect for her family remains front and center in everything she does. "She has often said she learned so much from her family," notes Owens, "and I think that's the key. She really has never forgotten where she came from."

Longtime friend Kenny Rogers, who shares a duet with Dolly called "You Can't Make Old Friends" on both his and her newest albums, describes her as one of the most honest and giving people he's ever met.

"I think there are few people in the world like Dolly," he says. "I wish everyone could have a friend like her."

The two sang together on their first duet in 1983, the classic "Islands in the Stream," and maintain a close friendship.

"The thing I like about her is you always know where you stand with Dolly. She has

no filter." Rogers describes how Dolly always says what she thinks and how it always comes from the heart.

"When we were doing 'You Can't Make Old Friends,' she came over and put her arms around me and said, 'Kenny, I want you to know I could never sing at your funeral.' And I said, 'So, you're assuming I'm going first, is that what you're telling me?'"

He laughs. "It's just so typical of Dolly to say something like that, because she says what she feels."

Others who've worked with Dolly say that's what makes her so special. The person you see on TV and on stage is the same person you meet face to face.

"Everybody loves Dolly," explains Marr. "She is so genuine and so warm and just really has a way of connecting with people."

That ability to connect, especially through her music, knows no bounds. Dolly calls songwriting "as natural as breathing," and the best way she's found to express herself. She writes every day and over the years has written more than 3,000 songs. She prefers writing alone, calling it her personal and private time with God. And while she writes most of her music on the guitar, she often chooses one of the many other instruments she plays to craft a song.

"I've always got different instruments around the house. I'll either grab an au-

toharp or I'll get a banjo if I want a certain sound. I've got all my little dulcimers that have different sounds. And I write on the piano a lot."

So many of her songs, like one on her new album called "Try," highlight one of Dolly's recurring themes, which is to follow your dreams. She is her own best example.

"I've always been a dreamer. Dreams are special things, but dreams are of no value if they're not equipped with wings. If you're gonna make a dream come true, you gotta work it. You just can't sit around. That's a wish, not a dream."

Despite her long list of accomplishments, Dolly has quite a few more dreams she hopes to make come true.

"I have new dreams every day. I would love to do some TV things, especially some things for children. I'd love to do a children's TV show someday, something like 'Pee-Wee's Big Adventure,' something that would appeal to little kids and to grownups, too. I would love to have my own cosmetics company."

She greets each day as a whole new world and remains open to what's going on around her.

"I just always look for good things to write about, good things to talk about, and just try to do something to help someone else in their life." (EY)

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