



Crystal Gayle

The Coal Miner's Other Daughter

Crystal Gayle returns to the UK this month
– fresh from making an electronic dance record of
her hit, *When I Dream!*

“I’ll just get my earrings on,” says Crystal Gayle. She springs from the couch and skips girlishly into the bedroom. A moment later she’s smiling attractively for the lens. At 47, Gayle has lost none of her poise and beauty. The leopard print of her chic trouser outfit emphasises her feline grace. It’s golden brown shade matches her deep tan.

To show off the newly installed jewellery, Gayle tucks behind pixie-like ears the jet black hair that is just a few inches shorter than she is. She hoists the mane high above her head, twirls it like a lasso, drapes it around her shoulders like a silk scarf and coils it in her lap like a cat.

“Hair today, hair tomorrow!” she squeals, shaking her head about. For two decades, the hair has been a major talking point of Gayle’s career. Too much of a talking point, she agrees in a fit of laughter.

“This could be the last UK tour with long hair!” she announces. The twinkle in her eye suggests otherwise.

Born Brenda Gail Webb in Paintsville, Kentucky, and raised in Indiana, Crystal was given her stage name by elder sister Loretta Lynn when they drove past a sign for Krystal hamburgers. She achieved international superstardom for *Don’t It Make My Brown Eyes Blue* in 1977 and simultaneously created a glossy, sophisticated pop image in contrast to that of her hard country sibling.

Crystal’s records today, including her latest gospel selection, *Someday*, are released in Britain on Ritz, a label synonymous with easy listening. Her latest project, however, is a collaboration with electronic dance act Fizz on a re-recording of her 1979 hit, *When I Dream*.

She plays me the radio version and shows me a CD cover listing half a dozen club mixes of the track, which is released in the States on GlassNote Records.

“The guys who were doing the project called and I thought it sounded fun. I heard the starting track and I thought, yeah, let’s do it. So they came to Nashville and I recorded the vocal there.

It’s getting good airplay and good vibrations.”

Although she has clocked up 18 country number ones, Crystal nearly didn’t become a singer. When her father – the coal miner from sister Loretta’s best known song – died before she was ten, Crystal “went inside myself. I became very, very shy.

“My mother thought I had talent and she would make me sing for everybody who came to the house. I got to where I would hide! I don’t know how I became a singer to tell the truth. But maybe that’s why I like ballads. I can stand there and let the emotion come out, because I was never much for words. I would stand on stage in the very beginning afraid to move!”

The false smiles and empty promises of the Nashville shark pool also made Gayle think twice about a musical career.

“People would say, we’re going to do this for you, that for you . . . and lie to my face. That really hurt me. Why lie, you know? I don’t like lying.

“I was married then and I got to the point where I thought I’m not going to get into the business. But for some reason it clicked. That was when I got with United Artists and (producer) Allen Reynolds. I thought I’ll give it one more try . . . and you know the rest.

“I always tell newcomers, don’t let it bother you if what someone tells you doesn’t happen, because there’s a big chance they’re not going to do anything. That’s part of the business. Don’t believe it until you’ve really seen it.”

The already established Loretta encouraged Crystal’s career and particularly the need to find her own musical identity.

“She pushed me in this direction. It wasn’t something I tried to do. I knew Loretta’s songs inside out and backwards. That’s what I loved singing. But when I started recording, Loretta didn’t want me to sing her songs or anything she would record.

“She said, ‘We don’t need anybody comparing you to me.’ And it was the best advice ever, because I don’t think I would have succeeded if I’d tried to do what I grew up singing.”

Loretta’s example also helped Crystal avoid two of country music’s biggest pitfalls: overwork and drugs.

“My sister took a lot of uppers and downers and I saw that. She would go into hospital just to rest and I thought, hey, you know, I don’t like hospitals that much. I’m going to pace myself because there’s no way I want to go into hospital for a week just to recuperate from being on the road. So I learned from her.

“But your life is the way you live it. You don’t have to go to the crazy parties.

You don't have to be around the drugs scene, and if you are you don't have to partake."

The last reminds her of a funny story.

"I was in Louisville, Kentucky waiting for a car to take us to the airport. I had some Coca Cola bottles in the room and when the chauffeur came in I said, 'Would you like some Coke?' He said, 'No, no, I'm on duty.' I thought, why can't he have a drink of Coke? And he thought I meant cocaine! I was so embarrassed!

"But that was the way I was. I didn't know the slang. I wasn't into that stuff. But I'm sure it went around Kentucky that I was!"

Through the years, Crystal says she and Loretta have been "pretty close for not being together very much. Lately, we've probably been together more than ever. I'll go to her house or we'll get together. It's wonderful. She's a great sister. She's gone through a hard time with her husband. It'll be two years this summer since he passed away. We also lost a brother at the same time (singer Jay Lee Webb), so we've been there for each other."

Inevitably, family get-togethers involve singing.

"My brother Don was down last year. We were at my studio. Loretta and Peggy Sue were there. We all sang. Just old

songs that we grew up with, that mom taught us. We all enjoyed that. Loretta has a gospel album out in the States and she's started to do some touring. But she's at that stage in her life when she really just wants to do those things she's put off all these years.

"She's going to Israel with a minister and his congregation. They're all going on a tour and she's really excited about that. She wants me to go with her but I'm not sure if I'll be able to make it. She wants all her sisters to go with her, and that's nice."

Looking back, had Gayle suspected the lush and relaxed *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue* would be the international career record it became?

"I know it was a special song. I don't know if *fight* is the right word, but I really had to make a strong case to the record company to let it be the first single. I felt inside that if I didn't have that out somebody was going to listen to my album, take the song and record it. I didn't know it was going to be a hit. I just knew I wanted that song to be *my* song."

Today, Gayle finds it harder to get such top rank material – that goes to the youngsters who get airplay.

"I can't be greedy," she smiles. "I know things change through the years. I've seen it all along."

But the ageism of American country

radio still irks her.

"I feel they should play someone like myself or Kenny or Dolly. An example is the album, Dolly, Loretta and Tammy Wynette made together. They never played it and I thought that's terrible. Here's three ladies that are huge in this business, that helped make it where it's at . . . and they didn't give it the time of day. That is really bad."

The irony, she points out, is that the pop industry that country has come to emulate is happy to accommodate mature stars like the Rolling Stones, Elton John and Eric Clapton – the Haggards, Cashes and Joneses of their field.

"If someone's been around and it's a good song, they still play it. I feel country should lighten up in that way. But they won't. Country has got real uppity!" she laughs. "They need to get back to what made them."

Kenny Rogers recently told CMP he no longer wants the pressure of being number one. Gayle has no such qualms.

"I'd love to have a number one tomorrow. As I've said, I can't be greedy because I've had so many number ones. But I would love to continue, I'd love to be able to reach new people."

Is it possible? Her sexy smile and level gaze leave no room for doubt. Crystal Gayle leans forward and assures me, "Anything's possible." ■