

COUNTRY Weekly

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PHOTO SPECIAL



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Exclusive interview

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Garth Brooks,
Marty Stuart,
Tim McGraw,
Crystal Gayle,
Rhett Akins
and many
more top stars



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CRYSTAL



20 years since the hit that swept the world . . .

Crystal Gayle's still the blue-eyed girl of country

It was 20 years ago this summer that "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" made Crystal Gayle a household name, yet the song was almost never released.

"That song wasn't even the record company's choice to be the first

single off that particular album," the beautiful brunette told COUNTRY WEEKLY. "They were concerned because it was a ballad, and ballads are a little harder to sell, especially for the first single, which is usually something upbeat.

"But I really felt like it needed to be the first single or somebody else would record it and release it."

Good decision. It went on to become the most-performed song on jukebox in 1977 and helped make Crystal the most-played artist that same year, according to the AMOA Jukebox Awards. "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" reached No. 1 on the country music charts and stayed there for four weeks, No. 2 on the pop charts and No. 5 on the pop charts in England.

"I can remember when the single came out, we were playing a rodeo in Sidney, Iowa, for a week," Crystal said. "As the week went on - from Monday to Friday - the difference in the reaction to the song as more people began to hear it was incredible. I remember thinking at that time that it might be something special."

Remarkably, she sang it only once for it to become a classic.

"We recorded it in one take," Crystal noted. "It was one of those special moments that happens sometimes. They gave me the opportunity to go back and fix some things - there might be a note a little

flat here or a little sharp there - and I tried. But it didn't feel right. It just seemed to take away from the song as a whole, so we eventually decided to leave it as it was."

As the younger sister of country pioneer Loretta Lynn, Crystal - born Brenda Gail Webb - knew to trust her musical instincts. Predictably, it was Loretta who provided her youngest sister with a first taste of performing and laid the foundation for Crystal's early days as a recording artist.

"I was never a part of her show, but even when I was little, Loretta would let me go on the road with her during the summers," Crystal said. "I was the little child act who everybody loves whether or not they're any good."

By the time she was 19, she was good enough for a career of her own and landed her first recording deal. At that point, being Loretta Lynn's sister was part of her appeal. Crystal relied on Loretta for everything from management (Loretta's husband Mooney was Crystal's first manager), to songs (her first few singles were penned by Loretta), right down to her name.

"I needed to change my name because Brenda Lee was also recording at the time, and my name sounded too much like hers," Crystal said. "I didn't care, I just wanted to be able to sing and make records. We were riding around and Loretta saw a sign for Krystal hamburgers. She liked it because she said it sounded bright and shiny - like me. I just thought, 'Fine,'

and, of course, Gail is my middle name."

Despite the name change, Crystal couldn't be more proud of her older sister. "I am Loretta Lynn's little sister - that's just the way it is



Photo by Andrew Presser
Looking good: In 1977, Crystal released "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" from her *We Must Believe in Magic* album



Story by David Boclair

Photo by Archer Photos



At first, Crystal depended on big sister Loretta Lynn for advice, songs and even her manager - Loretta's husband Mooney

For TV specials, Crystal traveled to China (below) and let magician Doug Henning turn her into a tiger (right)



Photo by Ron Tom/HBC



Photo courtesy of CBS

Crystal Gayle

and I love that," Crystal said. "For a long time that's how I was known. Signs where we played would say 'Loretta Lynn's Baby Sister.' One I remember had it misspelled and it said: 'Loretta Lynn's Baby Sitter.'

"I knew all of Loretta's songs and I loved to sing them. She was the one who told me to stop singing her music . . . and she was right. There's only one Loretta Lynn, and we don't need another."

As Crystal Gayle, she made that world her own with 18 songs that went to No. 1 - starting not with "Brown Eyes" but with "I'll Get Over You," in 1976.



Photos by Tim Campbell

Groundbreaking concerts around the world and multi-media success that included work in television and film have added to her fame.

"My mom always said I was singing even before I could walk," Crystal said. "I don't know about that. I do know that I've always really enjoyed it. I thought about other things . . . but for me, I think, it was always music."

Unlike the rural setting of Kentucky that served as Loretta's down-home canvas, Crystal spent the majority of her youth in Wabash, Ind., where the family

moved when she was 4.

In the more urban setting, Crystal was exposed to different influences that ultimately were brought forth in her music.

"I grew up completely differently than Loretta did," Crystal said. "I had different influences, and that probably helped me. A lot of times people didn't believe I was her sister. They'd be sitting at the bar making bets about whether or not it was true."



Crystal also overcame natural shyness that inhibited some of her earliest performances. Good thing, because following the success of "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue," she was the center of attention wherever she went.

From 1976 through 1986 she had at least one No. 1 song every year except one. In that year, 1979, she still had four Top 10s led by "Half the Way," which peaked at No. 2.

In 1982-83 she had four consecutive singles reach the top of the chart. The first of those was "You and I," a duet with Eddie Rabbitt that also cracked the Top 10 on the pop charts.

"With 'You and I,' Eddie called me up and asked me to come over and sing backing vocals," Crystal recalled. "I had purposely stayed away from doing duets because I felt it was important to have my own identity. When I got there and started listening to the track and trying



Photo by Jerry Cann

Duet partners:
Eddie Robbitt (left)
on 'You and I,'
Gary Morris on TV's
Another World theme

Photo by Alan Meyer



Photo by Dawn Dixon

Today, Crystal divides time among her Nashville Waterford Crystal store, a new album, her husband and two children

to decide what I could do with it, I just felt I could do something nice by echoing Eddie. It worked out real well."

In 1979 she also made a historic trip to China as part of a Bob Hope TV special that made her the first country music artist to appear there.

"China was great," she said. "We filmed at several locations - I got to walk on the Great Wall of China - and did some performances. The people were very receptive, and followed us wherever we went. I'd love to go back."

She also starred in some television specials of her own.

"I did a series of specials for CBS, they were musical variety shows," she said. "We had guests like B.B. King and The Statler Brothers. One of my favorites was Doug Henning, the magician. We did a skit where I was singing a song and he kept changing me. He would change me into a little girl singing and then back into me. At the end of the song he turned me into a tiger. I thought it was great."



More than a decade before Garth Brooks, Crystal filmed an HBO concert special. She also recorded songs for two television shows, *Another World* and *Dallas*, that each made their way on to the charts, and she lent her talents to the soundtrack of a movie,



One From the Heart, on which she collaborated with folk rock singer Tom Waits and renowned director Francis Ford Coppola.

"Those things are the perks, the fun things you get to do when you have some success," Crystal said. "I loved working with Tom, and Francis Ford Coppola had a lot to do with it too. He had us over to his house to listen to the songs. Tom would write that night, and I would record it in the morning. It was really neat."

These days you might find Crystal at the Nashville store that bears her name and specializes in Waterford Crystal. But she's also a mom to her two children, Catherine and Chris, as well a devoted wife to her husband of 26 years, Bill Gatzimos, a songwriter and lawyer who also serves as her manager. And she's far from retiring as a recording artist. Recently she finished work on her second gospel album, which is yet to be scheduled for release, and she just began work on an album of standards. Crystal also still tours regularly, where fans line up to gaze adoringly at her beautiful floor-length hair and listen to her songbird voice.

"One of the things that's really rewarding is that I've got a career that's a career, not just a single," Crystal said. "But I do have a lot of people ask me, 'What color are your eyes? Are they brown or are they blue?'"

Quit asking: They're blue.

