



Country **Rambler**

BOB WILLS
Long Live
The King

Tom T. Hall's
Honest Look
At Country

How Firefall
Kindled A
Revolution

Crystal
Gayle
Picks Up
The Tempo

Ernest
Tubb's
Side



Plus: Don Williams, Dave and Sugar,
Side of The Road Gang, Mickey Gilley
Linda Hargrove, Eddy Raven and a
trip to Key West.

By Carlton Stowers

Crystal Gayle, who has spent most of her life being introduced as Loretta Lynn's little sister, was hardly what *Rambler* had expected.

For the better part of three hours, she sat there discussing a wide variety of subjects, not once rendering any great damage to the King's English or breaking out in sad-eyed reminiscence of the down-and-out, barefoot-in-the-snow hard times back in Butcher Hollow, Kentucky, where she and Loretta and about an acre of other brothers and sisters managed somehow to get by on the short wages earned by a coal-mining daddy. And let's not forget the good-hearted generosity

of the folks over at the Hand-Me-Down Thrift Shop.

Brenda Gayle Webb, see, missed all that delightful misery upon which her famous sister has fashioned her singing career, being the last of eight children born to Clara and Ted Webb.

She was, in fact, only 4 when the family left Kentucky and moved to Wabash, Indiana, a middle-sized industrial community where living was easier, wages higher, and the schoolhouse had central heat and indoor plumbing.

Wabash not being one of your country-music hotbeds in the late '60s, young Crystal confined her

**Crystal
Gayle**
The spotlight's
getting brighter.



early musical efforts to participation in the school choir, touring the Rotary and Lions Club luncheon circuit to sing such Broadway favorites as *Summertime* and *Hello, Dolly*, neither of which was written or ever recorded by Hank Williams to the best of our knowledge. On weekends, she sang folk songs with a couple of classmates, providing Wabash High with its own amateur incarnation of Peter, Paul & Mary, and—are you ready for this?—the records she played most often in the privacy of her own room were those of Leslie Gore and Barbra Streisand, not exactly a couple of your barn-dance favorites.

Even during those junior high summer vacations when she would spend a few weeks on the road with Loretta, being invited on stage to do her version of one of her sister's numbers, Crystal's rich, deep voice had more than a trace of the pop sound. The voice has matured considerably since that time in 1970 when, as a 17-year-old high school senior, she signed a recording contract with Decca and, upon Loretta's advice, adopted the stage name of Crystal Gayle, but her basic singing style remains much the same. It is, along with a genuinely natural beauty, one that has enabled her to advance her career at a rapid pace, gaining audiences that dial their radios to country stations, pop music stations and even the easy listening stations. In the trade, they call her a crossover performer, one whose music is appreciated and bought by those whose musical tastes aren't limited by labels.

In fact, Crystal Gayle—one of the five nominees for the Country Music Association's coveted Female Vocalist of the Year, winner of the Academy of Country Music's Most Promising Female Performer Award, and a young lady who can point to two recent No. 1 country singles, *I'll Get Over You* and *Somebody Loves You*, can be classified today as a country vocalist only because the term country has of late broadened to include everything from the Flying Burrito Brothers to Belgian-Congo war chants. That, plus the fact her booking agent, United Talents, Inc., headquartered in Nashville and co-owned by her sister and Conway Twitty, sends her out on tours with such popular folks as Johnny Rodriguez, Sonny James, Mickey Gilley and Twitty himself.

She is, however, quick to admit that having an older sister who is the top female recording artist in the country-music field has provided a definite shortcut in her career. "Loretta opened a lot of doors for me," Crystal says. "She was the one who got me my first contract with Decca and a song she wrote, *I Cried The Blues (Right Out Of My Eyes)*, was my first single. Being introduced to disc jockeys and audiences as Loretta's little sister and being compared to her was helpful. Let's face it: If I had tried to get into some other field of music, or had not had a successful relative in the business, I might still be trying

to get my foot in the door. There is no question about my owing Loretta and country music a great, great deal."

On the other hand, it should also be noted that now, six years after her first release, Crystal Gayle is being recognized as a bona-fide talent rather than an attractive limb on a well-known family tree. The CMA does not nominate you for one of its highest honors because you're somebody's sister. You aren't sought for TV appearances on *Hee Haw*, *Dinah's Place* and *Jim Ed Brown's Country Place* without the kind of talent that viewers enjoy. Nor do record buyers hurry on down to the music shop to make purchases for reasons less than genuine appreciation of your music.

In the past two and one-half years, or roughly from the time she switched from Decca to United Artists, Crystal and her husband of five years, Vassilios "Bill" Gatzimos, have spent far more time en route to fairs, concerts and club dates than they have in their Nashville home. Since last January, for instance, Crystal has spent a total of just two full weeks at home, free of any professional responsibilities.

"I probably travel too much," she admits, "and I definitely don't plan

to do it forever. One of the things Loretta has impressed on me is that there are times when you have to tell people no and take some time off. She had to learn that the hard way, working herself into exhaustion before she would come in off the road and rest. Then, more often than not, she wound up doing it in the hospital. I don't want to get caught up in that kind of grind."

Yet Crystal recognizes the fact that if she is to win the success she hopes for, it is necessary for her to take her music to the people. "I think I'm on the verge of seeing some really good things happening," she candidly admits. "I'm at a very critical point in my career. There are some things I want to accomplish, things I want to do before I'm through, so right now I don't resent the long stretches on the road."

"I'm one of those people fortunate enough to have been in the right place at the right time. First of all, more and more female singers are finding places for themselves in country music. Second, country music has relaxed its format so that a variety of singing styles and kinds of music are being accepted. What is actually happening, I think, is that music is losing some of its pigeon-

hole consciousness. Pop singers are doing country songs, progressive country singers are recording old standards—it's blending together. Music is music. I hope the day will come when the only label music needs is good or bad.

"Me, I love country music. I think Loretta, for instance, is one of the greatest talents of our time. But I like other kinds of music, too. I don't want to be labeled because that generally means you are 100 per cent for one kind of music and dead set against the rest. That's simply not the case with me.

"As an example, I just did a radio commercial for United Airlines that is about as far from being country as you can get. The lyrics are set to the music of the old Cole Porter standard, *It's All Right With Me*. It's a beautiful song, one I'd love to do on my next album. I hardly think anyone is ever going to think of Cole Porter as country but, by the same token, you aren't going to find many people who don't think he was a great songwriter."

One gets the impression that as time passes and her career comes to full bloom, Crystal Gayle will be even harder to label by those dead set on doing so. She has the talent, the stage personality and the good looks required to pack them into the Roman-arena clubs in Vegas. At the same time, her wholesome, down-to-earth approach and her rapport with her audience makes her perfectly suited for the fair and concert circuits.

And even as she climbs steadily toward the topmost reaches of her profession, she is proceeding with caution—a caution advised by her big sister. Recently she was asked to test for the lead role in a movie titled, *Girl From Nashville*. "My first reaction was, hey, it might be fun to make a movie, but I checked into it a little and found out more about it and told them no thanks. It's out now I understand and has an 'X' rating. I don't think being a part of something like that would have done me much good."

Clearly, advice from her big-sister Loretta has provided her with a logical, businesswoman approach to her art. She talks of the day when she will be able to travel with her own band, of headlining a Crystal Gayle Show, of records that will climb high on the pop charts even as they are being accepted by the fans of hard-core country music.

"I had help getting into this business," she says, "but I'm not in it for a free ride on Loretta's coat-tails. I'm committed to making it on my own, doing my best."

"You know, Loretta was really disappointed when I didn't get Female Vocalist of the Year at the CMA awards. She came backstage before the show and told me she felt I was going to win. I told her I didn't agree. I didn't think it was my time yet."

As it turned out, she was right about not winning. But Crystal Gayle's time in the center spotlight of American music may be a lot closer than even she realizes.

