

# LOUISIANA MUSIC:

## A PRIMER

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Governor Jimmie Davis' signature song.

the cheery tune from atop his horse, Sunshine, at his campaign rallies throughout the state. Though the governor claimed to have written the now classic song, it was discovered that he actually purchased it (not an uncommon transaction in those days) from musician Paul Rice. The true author is now thought to be Oliver Hood, with whom Rice had performed. "You Are My Sunshine" was recorded by numerous other artists including the singing cowboy, Gene Autry. With its strong Louisiana links, it was declared one of this state's official songs in 1977.

"The Louisiana Hayride," which hit the radio airwaves in 1948, was Louisiana's answer to Nashville, Tennessee's hugely popular "Grand Ole Opry." While the Opry had a jump-start on the Hayride, which began broadcasting in 1925, both brought the sounds of country music stars and many soon-to-become stars to welcoming audiences hungry for entertainment.

"The Louisiana Hayride" was aired live on KWKH/1130 radio from the Shreveport Municipal Memorial Auditorium in Shreveport, Louisiana. Later, it expanded its reach into television and in 1955 Elvis Presley, who was to become a rock 'n' roll superstar—though his early roots were in country music—made his television debut appearing on the Hayride. He sang and played on his double-sided 45 rpm with the bluesy "That's All Right, Mama," backed with the country tune "Blue Moon of Kentucky." The Hayride had profoundly influenced the culture of northern Louisiana. Shreveport resident and country music advocate and singer/songwriter Maggie Warwick has worked for years to revive and resurrect the historic Hayride.

North Louisiana has always proven to be an enclave of country-western music because it tends to be more rural, and the music often reflects a lifestyle of simple, close-to-the-earth living. Some of the biggest and most historic names in country music such as Webb

A singing governor and a hugely popular radio show put Louisiana on the country music map.

Governor Jimmie Davis, who sang both gospel and country styles, is immediately associated with his 1940 hit, "You Are My Sunshine." Davis, who held the office from 1944-1948 and again from 1960-1965, would, to the delight of his followers, sing



Elvis at the Louisiana Hayride.

Pierce, Hank Williams Jr., Mickey Gilley, Trace Adkins and Andy Griggs were born in Louisiana, though many headed to Nashville to find fortune and fame. Pianist and vocalist Jerry Lee Lewis, who like Presley quickly jumped from country-western to rock 'n' roll, was born in Ferriday, Louisiana and gained his first recognition from his rendition of country vocalist Ray Price's hit, "Crazy Arms."

Turn the hands of time forward and it's clear that Louisiana remains vibrant in country music today. Tim McGraw, the renowned country star and actor, was born in Delhi, Louisiana and grew up near Monroe. He and his country vocalist wife, Faith Hill, are also known for their activism following Hurricane Katrina.

The latest Louisiana country musician whose star is burning bright is 21-year old Hunter Hayes, a singer, composer and guitarist who earned three nominations in the country categories at the 2013 Grammy Awards. A native of Breaux Bridge who began his musical career playing Cajun music, Hayes has topped the country charts and has been recognized for his huge talents by the Academy of Country Music.

Big news for country music lovers in Louisiana came in 2010, when Quint Davis, producer of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, announced that his company, Festival Productions, would produce the first Bayou Country Superfest at the Louisiana State University's Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge. It would be the biggest country festival of its kind in the state and became an immediate success. This year's schedule again lives up to its "Superfest" name. The line-up of the three-day, Memorial Day weekend festival, May 25-27, 2013, includes Lady Antebellum, a multiple Grammy-winning group that won the award for 2012's Best Country Album for *Own the Night*. The list of next-generation country stars includes Atlanta's Zac Brown Band, American Country Awards winner The Band Perry, chart-topping vocalist Rodney Atkins, singer Darius Rucker, who is best recognized as a member of the Hootie & the Blowfish band, plus many more top country artists.



Hunter Hayes

Heading south, the town of Abita Springs in St. Tammany Parish annually presents The Abita Springs Opry, a six-concert music series in its Town Hall. Country and bluegrass music is at the event's core bringing artists such as guitarist and vocalist Kim Carson, an Oklahoma native and New Orleans resident.

While New Orleans doesn't have a venue that specializes in country music, its purveyors pop up at various clubs and at many of the city's profusion of festivals. Some favorites include Gal Holiday and the Honky Tonk Revue, whose leader can sing a mean Patsy Cline, the four-piece, fun-loving Christian Serpas & Ghost Town and the aptly-named Country Fried band.

There's a little bit of country at the roots of much of the music heard in Louisiana—Cajun, swamp pop, rock 'n' roll, zydeco, bluegrass and even some gospel. Louisiana is a country-music-lovin' kind of state.

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