

In the case of Mark Chesnutt, *Tradition Lives* is not just an album title. For the Beaumont, Texas native, it's truly a way of life. Breaking onto the Country Music scene in the summer months of 1990 with his hit "Too Cold At Home," the singer stands as a keeper of the Country flame – a trait that is very evident on the new album.

"That's what we were shooting for," Mark said of the classic sounding direction of the new music. "I'm at the point where I don't have to chase the format or the latest trends. I'm way beyond that. I've been here so long, and really, nobody wants to hear me do nothing but what I've been doing all along."

*Tradition Lives* – produced by longtime friend and collaborator Jimmy Ritchey - is a chance for the singer to focus on the style of Country that he does best. Needless to say, he didn't use modern sounds as a litmus test of what direction to go.

"I don't even know what's on the charts these days. "I really don't have a clue. I've got people that come out and support me everywhere we go," he says, adding that those numbers have been growing. "It seems that every year we get bigger crowds – the same people I've been seeing for twenty-five years, and a lot of new and young people. That's what's really exciting for me – seeing the young folks come out who have just discovered who the hell I am. That's a big deal for me."

Of course, Chesnutt can relate. When he was beginning his career with songs like "Brother Jukebox" and "I'll Think Of Something," he was

getting to rub shoulders with artists like Jones, Haggard, and Waylon – all of whom were huge influences. To put it mildly, he says he was in tall cotton.

“I’ve never got over that feeling of being around my heroes for the first time. I’ll never be in that caliber, but I learned from them. I copied them. I tried to pick things up where they left off. They inspired me, and I learned how to do what I do from watching them. That’s the way it’s supposed to be. All music is like that. Elvis wasn’t born with that ability. He had the talent, but he took it and added to what he learned from his heroes. That’s what we all do. It’s still going on that way now, even though country music has totally changed. There are still young guys who are hearing that old-timey stuff, that are saying ‘Damn, that’s good stuff.’ I meet them every night at my show of all ages, telling me that they just recently found out about me. That thrills me to death to know that there is still young people learning from the old guys,” he says with a laugh.

One song from *Tradition Lives* that will no doubt appeal to Chesnutt’s audience is “They’ve Never Been To Texas.” He says the Lone Star state is a unique spot – where words like “market” and “demographic” don’t really mean as much as it does in Music City. They love their honky-tonk, and still want to hear it.

“There’s people in Nashville that have never been to Texas, and unless they’ve been there and spent any amount of time, they don’t know. They’re making all these records that people in Texas don’t get into. People in Texas still like to shuffle, they still like fiddle and steel guitar,

and songs about drinking and cheating. Texas has its' own attitude. Every state does, but Texas is real special. That's why a lot of us never leave."

Chesnutt also tips the hat to longtime Gary Allan, by covering his "I've Got A Quarter In My Pocket," which appeared on one of Gary's 1998 disc *It Would Be You*. "While we were touring together back in the 90s, I told him 'One of these days, I'm going to cut that.' I wanted to do something with a shuffle sound. We added some doo-wop harmony to give it a special touch."

A lot of things have changed for Mark Chesnutt since 1990, but some things have remained relatively constant. "I've still got the same wife, the same fans. I never moved away. I've stayed right here in southeast Texas. That did a lot for me in the way that I present my music, and the songs I sing. I never moved to Nashville and became part of that clique. That's also why I probably was never nominated for a lot of awards and things like that. But, the trade-off has really worked out, I think."

Reflecting upon his quarter-century in the business, Mark Chesnutt says "It's been good and bad, with a lot of ups and downs – just like anything else. There's times when I think 'Maybe I should just give this mess up, and just play in Texas from now on,' but I don't think that will ever happen. Thank God I've got a lot of great fans all over the country, and I want to go see them and sing for them. And, as long as I can....that's what I'm going to do."