

THE JUDDS

If it's possible to make friends with ten million people, then that's just what The Judds did. This mother/daughter duo celebrated a career like no other. Adored by fans and admired by peers, these Cinderellas from Kentucky helped reshape the sound and image of American popular music.

Wynonna and Naomi's story begins long before the Number Ones. Both were born in Ashland, Kentucky. Naomi became pregnant, married her high school sweetheart and gave birth to Wynonna all before her high school graduation. In 1968, the family left the deeply-rooted life they'd known in Kentucky and moved to California, where Naomi gave birth to a second daughter, Ashley. Wynonna was seven, and Ashley only three, when Naomi divorced. They moved from place to place but by 1978 were settled back in Kentucky, living in a small house on a mountaintop with no telephone or television. Naomi recalls, "I wanted my daughters to be close to our family and our heritage. I wanted them to learn where they came from and to be free to develop their imaginations and talents." They did.

Wynonna learned to play the guitar and sing. Naomi: "I gave her the guitar to give her something to do. We started singing together for homemade entertainment. I never thought about fame or awards or anything of the sort. We were just trying to get through one day at a time." Times were tough, money and tempers short, but in music Wynonna and Naomi found harmony.

In 1979, the girls moved to Nashville to pursue their newfound dream, and Naomi wasted little time shopping the tapes they'd made on their K-Mart recorder. "We were looking for a producer who could develop the unique sound that we had in our hearts and our minds," Naomi explains. "We were determined to maintain the integrity of our music. We needed someone who could hear that our voices were the main instruments."

They found producer Brent Maher, the man they were looking for, by coincidence: Naomi, who was working as a nurse, treated his daughter after a car accident.

On March 2, 1983, Wynonna and Naomi were granted an appointment at RCA Records. Their meeting was to be an unprecedented live audition for the label's executives. Within forty-five minutes, The Judds were RCA recording artists.

Success came almost immediately. Their first project, *The Judds*, was released in 1984. They won CMA's "Horizon Award" then a Grammy. By the close of 1985, The Judds had two platinum albums, a gold album and six Number One singles. They were on a skyrocket to stardom.

Once The Judds hit the top of the charts, they stayed there. These two small-town girls became one of the most celebrated success stories in country music, selling more than twenty million records and winning over sixty industry awards including five Grammy's, nine CMA's and eight Billboard Music awards. By 1989, they were one of the top-grossing touring acts in America, selling more concert tickets that year than everyone but The Grateful Dead and The Rolling Stones.

With all-American appeal, The Judds blurred the line between what was country and what was popular, because The Judds were both country *and* popular. A 1985 *Newsweek* article observed, "The Judds touch women's hearts: they're a middle-America fantasy come to life, a which-one-is-the-mother? pair right out of a TV commercial." Wynonna: "Mom and I sort of felt like the poster children for all the dreamers. We were the two girls from Ashland who weren't afraid to try." Indeed, The Judds were the most successful mother-daughter team in music history. Even so, their appeal was never based on novelty or celebrity but rather on the strength of their music. *The Washington Post* in 1986 said, "The Judds sound is seamless, flowing harmonies...in a warm tapestry of acoustic instrumentation. Throughout the rich, liquid vocals of daughter Wynonna are marvelously unaffected, her sultry stylings casually touching on blues, jazz and rock. It is both lusciously melodic and indivisibly pop in the most natural way." In the waning days of the "Urban Cowboy" craze, The Judds brought a new, fresh sound to Nashville.

Throughout the Eighties, it looked as if there was no end to success for the dynamic duo. But in October of 1990, Naomi learned she had contracted Hepatitis C.

The debilitating disease left her no choice: after a lifetime of dreams and eight years at the top, Naomi would have to retire.

The Judds Farewell Tour began February of 1991 and stopped in 116 cities across North America. The tour grossed over \$21,000,000 and The Judds were named the top grossing concert act in 1991. The tour broke records but it broke hearts too, as the girls said a tearful goodbye to the loyal fans who had loved and supported them for nearly a decade. On December 4, 1991, The Judds performed their final concert. The sell-out crowd and over six million pay-per-view fans watched as Wynonna and Naomi took their final bows. It was the end of an era.

Through all of the trials and triumphs, Wynonna and Naomi have maintained their unique and special bond. The phenomenal success they shared as The Judds helped redefine an industry and set the standard by which future superstars would be measured. Together or apart, their legacy lives on in more than just music.