

Wanda Jackson Bio

Wanda Jackson was born in Maud, Oklahoma on Oct. 20, 1937. Wanda spent her first few years in Oklahoma before her father, Tom Jackson, a country music singer and fiddle player, moved the family to Bakersfield, California in 1941. The Great Depression led many Oklahoma families to the West coast in search of a better life.

In 1943, Tom bought his daughter her first guitar and started teaching her how to play. Wanda's parents were talented dancers, and would take Wanda to the big bandstand shows to see acts such as Tex Williams, Spade Cooley and Bob Wills. Wanda would stand up front by the bandstand the entire night, mesmerized, while her parents would dance. Seeing these classic performers left a lasting impression on Jackson's young mind.

When Wanda was 12 years old, she and her family moved back to Oklahoma City. In 1952, she won a local talent contest that landed her a 15-minute daily show on the OKC radio station, KLPR. Wanda would rush over after school every day with her guitar to sing and play to fill her 15-minute slot. KLPR noticed Wanda's knack for entertaining and quickly upped her show to 30 minutes. This afternoon radio show lasted through Jackson's high school years and led to her discovery.

King of Western Swing, Hank Thompson, heard Wanda performing on the show one day and called into the station. He asked for Wanda personally. During that conversation, Thompson asked Wanda to join him and his band, the Brazos Valley Boys, in an upcoming performance. She was thrilled to accept, contingent upon her father's approval, of course. These performances continued and eventually lead to Jackson recording several songs with the Brazos Valley Boys, including "You Can't Have My Love," a duet with Thompson's bandleader, Billy Gray. The song was released through Decca records and became a national hit. The single jumpstarted Jackson's career and helped her land a record deal with Decca Records.

After graduating from Capitol Hill High School in Oklahoma City in 1955, Jackson hit the road with her father as her chaperon and manager. Wanda's mother, Nellie Jackson, designed and hand-made all of her stage outfits. In regards to helping her mother design her stage outfits Wanda said, "I was the first one to put some glamour in country music – fringe dresses, high heels, long earrings." Wanda's fashion sense definitely set her apart from the other "girl singers" of the 1950s.

When she first started touring, Jackson was placed on the bill with none other than the King himself, Elvis Presley. The two hit it off almost immediately and toured together and briefly dated in 1955 and 1956. Wanda cites Elvis and her father as the ones who encouraged her to sing rockabilly music.

In spite of a previous rejection from Capitol Records with producer Ken Nelson, retorting, "Girls don't sell records," Wanda signed a record deal with Capitol in 1956. This relationship would last into the early '70s. Her recording career danced the

delicate line between country and rockabilly. She would manage this by cutting one song in each style and placing them on either sides of a single. This increased her relevance and popularity in both genres.

In 1958, Wanda released her rockabilly hit, "Fujiyama Mama," which skyrocketed her into superstardom in Japan. Two years later, she released her version of Presley's "Let's Have a Party." The song soared into the US Top 40 charts in 1960 and has remained one of Wanda's most popular songs since. This hit led to the name of her band, The Party Timers, which featured pianist Big Al Downing and guitarist Roy Clark.

Just one year later, she was back in the country Top Ten with "Right or Wrong" and "In the Middle of a Heartache." In 1965, she topped the German charts with "Santo Domingo," which she sang in German. In 1966, she hit the US Top 20 charts again with "The Box It Came In" and "Tears Will Be the Chaser for Your Wine." Jackson's popularity continued to grow through the 1960s.

Jackson continued to tour regularly and became a Las Vegas attraction from the mid '50s into the '70s. In 1963, she released an album called "Two Sides of Wanda" that included country and rock and roll as well as her version of Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On." This album landed Wanda her first Grammy nomination for Best Female Country Vocal Performance.

In 1961, Jackson married IBM supervisor and Texas native, Wendell Goodman. Instead of following in the footsteps of many other female country singers of the time, Wanda did not give up her career after marriage. Instead, Goodman hung up his hat on his career in computers and became Jackson's manager. The couple had two children, Gina and Gregory Goodman, in the early '60s.

In 1971, Wanda and her husband, Wendell, became Christians and shifted Jackson's career into the gospel sector. One year later, she released a gospel album on Capitol Records called "Praise the Lord." Capitol wasn't thrilled about the change in Wanda's sound, so she moved over to Myrrh Records where she released three more gospel albums. In 1977, Jackson switched labels again. This time, she released two more albums under Word Records.

Jackson began touring and recording in Europe in the early '80s. In the mid 1990s, Wanda became connected with rockabilly artist, Rosie Flores. Flores had always regarded Wanda as her idol, so she invited her to sing two duets with her on her 1995 album, "Rockabilly Filly." Later that year, Jackson embarked on a major US tour with Flores. This tour began the resurgence of her rockabilly sound, as it was her first secular tour in the US since the '70s.

In 2003, Jackson released a new album "Heart Trouble" on CMH records. This was her first album release since 1987. Guest appearances on this album included Elvis Costello, The Cramps and Rosie Flores.

Wanda received another life-changing phone call in 2009. White Stripes member and producer, Jack White, approached her asking to produce a record. The two teamed up to release "The Party Ain't Over" in 2011. White and Jackson made several TV appearances and performances in promotion of the album including The Late Show With David Letterman and Conan. They also put on a remarkable performance at The Ryman Auditorium in Nashville where White presented Jackson with the Americana Music Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. With fiery covers like Amy Winehouse's "You Know I'm No Good" and Bob Dylan's "Thunder on the Mountain," this album pushed Jackson right into the modern music scene.

2009 proved to be a career-altering year for Jackson, as she was also inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Elvis Costello are just a few high-profile artists who wrote letters encouraging the Hall to induct the First Lady of Rock'n'Roll. In May 2009, Jackson stood on stage in Cleveland, Ohio and accepted her induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Jackson released her 31st studio album, "Unfinished Business," in 2013 on Sugarhill Records with Justin Townes Earl, son of alternative country artist, Steve Earl, as the producer.

Jackson's autobiography, "Every Night is Saturday Night: A Country Girl's Journey to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame" is set to release November 2017 through BMG Book Publishing with GRAMMY nominated ghostwriter, Scott Bomar.

At almost 80 years old, Jackson continues to tour the world and finds time to make new music. Over the past few years, she has been working on a new record with her producer and fellow Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, Joan Jett. The record is set to release later this year under Jett's NYC-based label, Blackheart Records.