


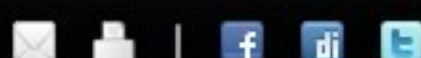
Country great Connie Smith returns for real country

By [Wayne Bledsoe](#)

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Rolling Stone Keith Richards once introduced country star Connie Smith to his bandmate Ron Wood by telling him, "She's the real deal!"

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It's been 14 years since country legend Connie Smith recorded a new album. On radio, she's almost forgotten. But Smith's new album, "Long Line of Heartaches" may bring the public around to what classic country music fans and fellow performers have felt for a long time.

It was [Dolly Parton](#) who said there were only three great female singers — Barbra Streisand, Linda Ronstadt and Connie Smith — "the rest of us are only pretending."

Smith says it was about time to record something new.

"I was just busy doing other things," says Smith from her home in Nashville. "But I love to record and I love the people who have been so faithful to me through all the years, I thought I needed to give them something to listen to!" Part of the impetus came from Smith's husband, and fellow country star, Marty Stuart, who had been trying to convince his wife to record a new disc for some time.

"I'm stubborn," says Smith with a laugh. "We did an album 13, 14 years ago on Warner Bros., but I don't think he knew my musical tastes as well then as he does now. That album was good, but I think this one beats it!"

Smith's string of hits began in 1964 with the song "Once a Day," written especially for her by Bill Anderson. The hits continued through the decade, but Smith took a break from recording to focus on her family. During that time she recorded gospel music, but, she says, it wasn't a career choice.

"There just wasn't enough of me to go around. I was a new mother. I did a few things as a Christian. ... Country music was the only thing I could give up."

In 1972, she didn't realize that she was meeting her future husband.

"He was 12 and I came to Philadelphia to do a show there and he told his mama that night that he was gonna marry me!"

Smith laughs.

That night Stuart had insisted he had to have a yellow shirt so Smith would notice him. Convinced she hadn't he borrowed his parents' camera and took a photo of Smith sitting in a car getting ready to leave the show. Now a noted photographer, as well as a country music star, it was the first photograph that Stuart ever took.

Twenty-five years later, Stuart made good on his promise.

"It's hard to believe it," says Smith. "We've been married 14 years now and we dated three years before that."

She says she and Stuart had been talking about her recording a new album for some time. However, when Dallas Frazier, who had written some of Smith's most memorable songs, gave her some new songs to consider, a new album became more of a reality.

"He hadn't written in about 30 years," says Smith. "He had stopped to be a pastor, but he started back writing songs and he brought Marty and I some songs he'd written and we thought, 'This is it. This is the start of the album.'"

"A Heart Like You" became the 69th Frazier song that Smith had recorded.

Smith and Stuart co-wrote five new songs and she asked famed songwriter Kostas to send her some songs as well. She, Stuart and Kostas also got together to write a new song together.

"And I loved Johnny Russell, he was my buddy, and he'd written a song that I never thought got the attention it deserved, 'Ain't You Even Gonna Cry,' so I recorded that one, too."

Smith is currently the artist-in-residence at the Country Music Hall of Fame. She performed one show at in the museum's auditorium on Aug. 22, which focused on the importance of the steel guitar in her music, and she'll perform another show on Aug. 29, focusing on songwriters, and one on Sept. 12, featuring other female vocalists performing Smith. Three of those vocalists will be her daughters, Jeanne, Jodi and Julie. The three also appeared on Smith's new album — the first time Smith and her offspring have recorded together.

The album was recorded in Nashville's legendary Studio B, and Smith says it felt good to be back there, recording the kind of music she loves.

"My musical tastes haven't changed over the years," says Smith. "I still love the same kinds of songs. I love heart music and I love country music."