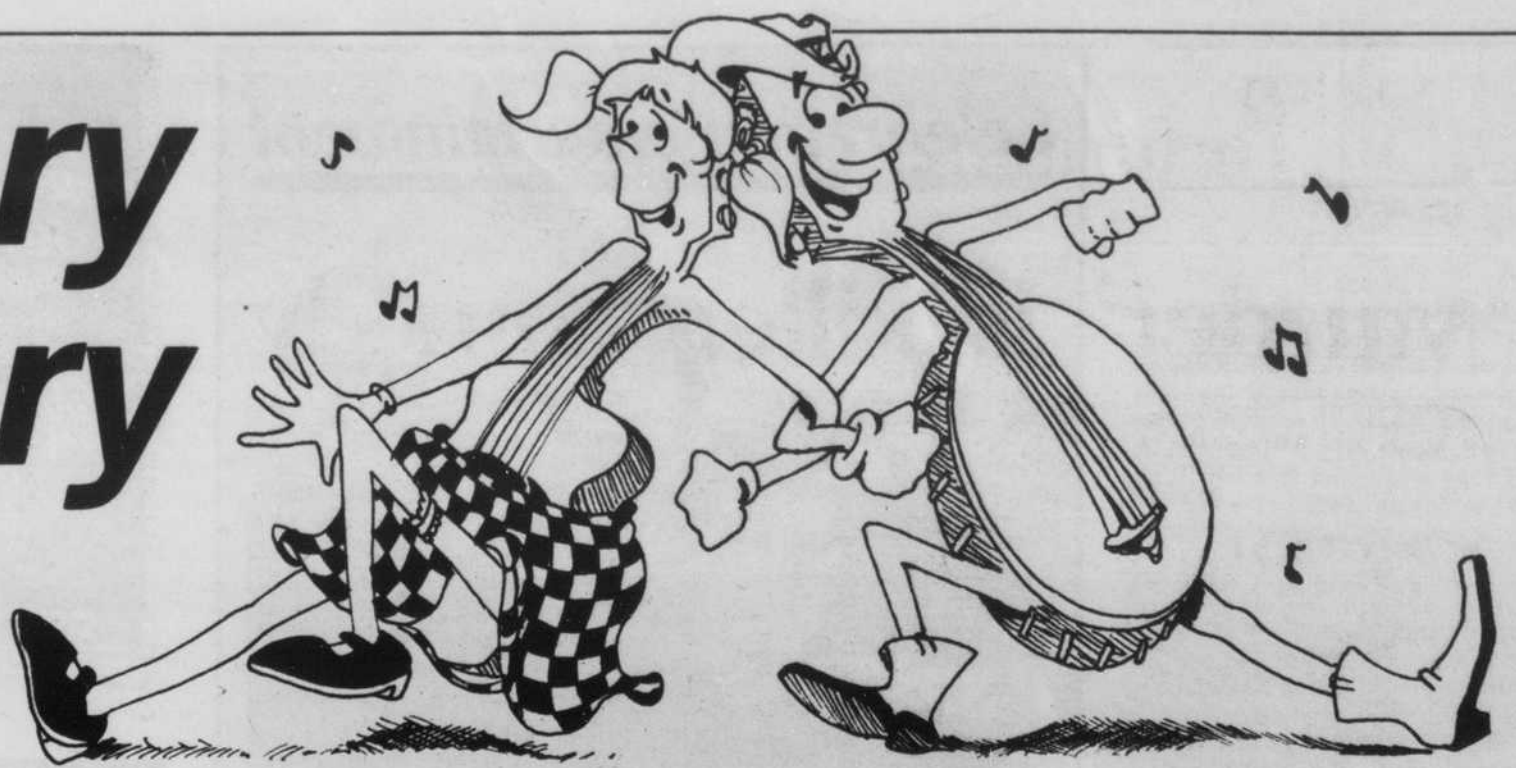


# Country Country



Story by Cort Fernald  
Graphic by Shawn Bird

## Western music – what Eugene fans want

The Silva Concert Hall stage is dark. A sell-out audience waits in silent anticipation. The shaft of light from the spotlight funnels through the darkness to a corner of the stage, catching an announcer in a circle of whiteness.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Don Williams," he says calmly.

There is a round of polite applause. No one shouts nor whoops. Some members of the audience courteously rise to their feet.

A tall man strides onto the stage, into the white spotlight. Williams is simply dressed in blue jeans, white shirt, blue jean suitcoat, boots — and of course a battered cowboy hat. He seems modest, unassuming like his apparel.

Williams sits on a stool and carefully takes up his amplified acoustic guitar. With a murmur of thanks for the applause, he and his back-up band begin playing.

Women smooth down their dresses, men adjust their suitcoats as audience members rearrange themselves in their seats. The audience, judging by their attire, is largely middle- to upper middle-class. The age range is easily early thirties to late fifties. There's a lot of grey hair in this well-heeled crowd.

Williams voice is riveting, low and strong, with more than a hint of mournful tone. He sings "Stay Young" and "Love is on a Roll" with a gentle power that fills the hall. He sings of simple values, personal dignity, and redeeming love between a man and a woman.

The audience is quiet, waiting patiently between songs. Williams appears self-conscious onstage. He mumbles that he doesn't like to chit-chat in between songs. Then he counts out and starts "Willimena." The audience, with restraint, claps time.

It's odd, perhaps Williams' best known song, "Tulsa Time", doesn't receive an immediate response from the audience. Danny Flowers, lead guitarist with Williams'

back-up band The Scratch Band, plays the song with the same sound as Eric Clapton. Actually, that's backwards. Flowers wrote "Tulsa Time" and Clapton covered it for a more rock-oriented audience.

This Silva Hall audience doesn't fit the stereotype for a country music audience. There are few cowboy hats in evidence and more suits and dresses than faded blue jeans.

Bob Bosche, program director for Eugene's KUGN-FM would like to see this stereotypical image of the country music listener buried.

"The stereotypical country listener as such really doesn't exist anymore, that's an old stereotype that needs to be buried. The definition I once heard a researcher speak was 'Bubba,'" Bosche says. "You have the vision of the pick-up truck, the can of beer and the red neck. His feeling was that 'Bubba' does not make up today's country music audience.

"I don't think you can define a country listener as a personality-type," Bosche adds. "In research the Country Music Association has done they've found our people who listen to country music are just people, from all walks of life and income levels."

If there were any "Bubbas" in the Silva Hall audience, he was probably Mr. Bubba from the law firm of Bubba, Bubba and McCormack, specialists in corporate law.

Certainly the Don Williams' concert this month was a sell-out. And it was only one of seven sell-out country music concerts in the Hult Center's first year. The most popular shows were Johnny Cash, Charlie Pride, Roger Miller and Chet Atkins. Officials at the Hult Center surveyed 30,000 patrons and found their preferred entertainment was country music.

Eugene has been, and is, hungry for country entertainment.

KEED sponsored most of the country music shows at

the Hult Center and Dan Williams, operations manager, states proudly "we never had a show here that hasn't sold-out and this is our second year."

"I would certainly say the box office receipts at the Hult bear out that theory. The acts that draw the biggest at the (Lane County) Fair — country," Bosche says.

According to Williams, tickets are getting scarce for the KEED-sponsored Statler Brothers show set for late October in the Silva Concert Hall. Also, there are only a few seats remaining for Roy Clark's pair of shows in November.

All this proves that perhaps beneath the cosmopolitan polish of Eugene this is "country" country.

In addition to the hit that country performance is making in the area, country music is experiencing extraordinary popularity on Eugene's airwaves. Stations like KUGN-FM and KEED are at the top in ratings surveys.

"I think it's in the way country music has become professional," says Williams. "I was quoted a figure the other day by one of the record producers out of Nashville that 57 percent of the total number of radio stations in the entire world are now playing country music today."

Bosche believes the widespread popularity of country music is due to its adult emphasis.

"A good country song is like a good soap opera. There's a story. There's an opening, a middle and a closing. It's easy to understand," he says.

"I think there is a real feeling in rock music today that people don't understand it. There's a certain something about it that frightens them a little bit. I sense this especially in those who are out of their teenage years and out of their early twenties," Bosche says.

"Most of the entertainers I have talked to," Williams says, "seem to feel the broader scope of country music

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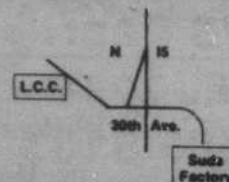
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