

OPINION

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition their Government for a redress of grievances.

Family, community mourns Richard Swift's passing

"I never want to be looked at as a rock star dude... I'm pretty comfortable being the guy driving around town in the big silver van who's got the radio show at KSOW on Sunday nights and spins records at the Axe & Fiddle on Monday."

—Richard Swift
Quoted in an August, 2008 edition of the Sentinel

And yet, when the tour ended and his home life again beckoned, Swift returned to Cottage Grove, to his wife, Shealynn, children Madison, Kennedy and Adrian and a host of family and friends. At times, he'd be seen piloting the silver van, but more often he'd simply stroll about downtown, sticking out (quite comically, at times) like the proverbial sore thumb in his ever-present all-black attire, super-dark shades and frizzy black hairdo.

Talented musicians sought out his wizardry in the studio, and bands that traveled to Cottage Grove to record often fell

These days, those of us who knew and truly loved Swift are left to ponder the what-ifs and what-might-have-beens of his saga, longing all the while to return to what today seem like simpler, much happier times. On the morning of July 3, 2018, Swift succumbed to an illness brought on by alcohol addiction, passing away at a hospice care facility in Tacoma and, at age 41, cutting short a career and a life that still held untold potential for inspiration, true happiness, undreamt-of success and love.

In the moments following Swift's death, well-wishes poured in to his family and friends, along with recognitions of his unique gift from those who admired, appreciated and were changed by his work. A few days later and still very much grief-stricken, his family chose to disclose the cause of his death, explaining through his Facebook page that Swift had been diagnosed with hepatitis and liver and kidney distress the previous month.

"I just wanted to get the truth out there," Shealynn Swift later said, "that it's possible to drink yourself to death at an early age. There are a lot of functional alcoholics out there, and it's so socially acceptable. But alcoholism is a terrible disease."

While working to preserve her husband's artistic legacy, which should include the release of a newly completed album this fall, she said she's also hopeful that his story can somehow save others from a similar fate. She advocates Al-Anon as a resource for the family and friends of someone struggling with alcoholism.

"If even one person can reach out, get help and survive, it's worth it," she said.

By Jon Stinnett

Community member and past Sentinel editor

in love with the unique charm of this town and its people. During their time here, road-weary musicians enjoyed the wholesome change of pace that this community provided, patronizing local businesses and making friends of their own all over town.

Over time, Swift proved himself the best kind of rock star, one whose unassuming and engaging nature, whose love for his craft, whose genuine interest in and desire to nurture the creative endeavors of others could help foster in them a deep and abiding love of music and all its powers. It's no stretch to believe that Richard Swift made just about every musician he'd ever encounter a better musician in some way. And he did it from a town that was largely unaware it harbored one of the industry's most prolific talents.

In the years since he spoke with his hometown newspaper (with this author, it should be noted), Richard Swift found himself in many ways living the quintessential life of the "rock star dude," despite his objections to the label. Soon, a packed schedule put a halt to his local radio show, as well as appearances at the Pub of the great DJ Donald Fivpenies, who had filled Monday nights with the boom-tat, hum and squeal of the best soul, R&B and rock records ever made.

Tours around the world as part of renowned rock acts the Shins, the Black Keys and the Arcs added to an already impressive resume as a solo artist and producer and helped fuel a decade of constant touring, recording and producing up-and-coming acts from his home studio, National Freedom, in Cottage Grove. During this time, Swift found himself on the world's biggest stages, blasted across screens on some of its biggest television shows and rubbing elbows with many of its biggest names.



We've come a long way since The Dixie Chicks controversy — but in the wrong direction

the president of the United States is from Texas."

Reaction from the other side of the pond in America was swift and, as the coming weeks and months would prove, unrelenting. Many country fans and Americans in general felt the

and I can tell you that the sense of betrayal felt by the Lone Star State ran deep.

Ultimately, the backlash ended what had been a cosmic rise to superstardom.

Now, 15 years later, in a not-so-subtle twist of irony, it's the

called out the FBI, remarking:

"They said they think it's Russia. But I have President Putin; he just said it's *not* Russia," later adding: "President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today," effectively saying he took Putin at his word.

Regardless of the president's personal feelings on the Mueller investigation and talk of collusion between foreign and domestic interests participating in swaying the 2016 election, to shake hands and openly express supporting the word of a strongman dictator over America's top intelligence agency and the people it serves is, at the very least, disgraceful.

At its worst, it raises the question of whether Russia's influence has already swayed its way into the White House.

In an era where taking a knee in protest has created so much controversy and division, it would seem we've come a long way since the Dixie Chicks' remarks drew disdain from so many Americans.

But, apparently, we've come a long way in the wrong direction.

From the Managing Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

group betrayed a sacred trust between the American people and their elected president, regardless of which side of the vote they had landed on.

Simply put: You don't "dis" the president when you're on foreign soil.

Almost instantaneously, radio stations stopped playing the group's music, country music stars like Toby Keith and Reba McEntire spoke out against the group, one-time fans and even radio stations held CD-crushing parties during which cars and trucks were driven over stacks of Dixie Chicks albums.

I was living in Texas at the time

American people and the intelligence agencies representing their interest around the world who have been disrespected by the comments made by their president while on foreign soil

The reaction? Swift ambiguity.

While a few in the U.S. Congress have used terms like "shameful" and "bizarre" to describe President Trump's vocal support of Russian president Vladimir Putin's denial of election meddling, the vast majority have offered little more than finger wagging and generalities.

The president offered no such generalities when he specifically

It was 15 years ago this past March when the once skyrocketing career of the country singing group Dixie Chicks came crashing back to Earth after making a comment disparaging the president while performing on foreign soil.

The Texas-based trio of sisters Emily Robison and Martie Maguire, along with lead singer Natalie Maines, were performing at the Shepherd's Bush Empire Theater in London and kicking off their international Top of the World Tour following the multi-platinum release of their album "Home."

At the time, then-president George W. Bush was supporting the invasion of Iraq, and Maines took the opportunity to voice her opposition to the impending war.

"Just so you know, we're on the good side with ya'll," Maines said. "We do not want this war, this violence, and we're ashamed that



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