



On The Earie  
by Tom Powell, OABA News Ambassador

As I watched the incredible Garth Brooks Rock the House that **Knute Rockne** built in a concert at **Notre Dame Stadium** in South Bend, Indiana, before 85,000 adoring fans, in the cold and rain, memories of the early start of Garth's career came trickling, then gushing back.

I looked over at Christine, who was on the couch beside me and asked if she could remember the name of a country music act whose name I had also forgotten, although only for a moment then, back in 1991. As we enjoyed the show, that and other discussions involving Garth kept coming up. Do you remember this? Do you remember that? How about the time the record company threw a party for Tricia Yearwood and we saw Garth standing alone in a corner and went over and chatted with him? The affirmative is my answer, and hers, to all of the above questions.

But it started when Amusement Business was having its annual party for everybody in the entertainment business, including arena, fair, stadium and amusement park managers, carnival people who included **Ray Cammack, Bernard Thomas, Hillman Snyder**, entertainers, etc.

The lineup up five acts at Johnny Hobby's Nashville Palace was set when I received a phone call from the late **Joe Harris**. Working for my friend, **Buddy Lee, Harris** was also managing an up and coming country music singer whose last name rhymed with cooks, books, and looks. He practically begged me to get Garth Brooks on the show. I virtually kissed everybody's something that rhymes with pass, lass, sass, and mass to make it happen, but to no avail.

Finally, I noted that this singer, who was basically unknown to most audiences at the time, was the only one of the acts we were presenting that had a song on the prestigious Billboard Charts. This all happened in 1991 and the song was "I'm Much Too Young To Be This Damn Old". I finally got the okay, but only if I would agree to be the master of ceremonies for the evening. This would mean I wouldn't be able to sit in my favorite corner of the bar where the Scotches always kept coming, two at a time, in those halcyon days. I hope Garth knows the sacrifice I made to gain him this exposure, although I did convince **Steve (Shotgun Red) Hall** to share duties with me. I also had to promise that he could perform with his own band, as well.

It worked out beautifully for Hall who so impressed **Johnny Holmes**, then manager of the **Arkansas State Fair**, Little Rock, that he booked him for all 10 days of his next fair. **Steve**, to his credit, has never forgotten me for that and we remain friends to this day.

Getting back to what I said earlier, when I introduced the act that preceded Brooks on stage, I asked what they wanted me to say about them, and Spokesman **Ranger Doug**, replied to just call them **America's Greatest CowboyBand**. I had always thought it was so absurd that **Tony Hulman**, owner of the **Indianapolis Motor Speedway**, always read from a card when he said, Gentlemen, Start Your Engines. Well, I was wishing I had a card as I looked out at C. Ed Nelson, Danny Davis, Thaxter Trafton, Earl Duryea, Bill Alter, Don Sandefur, Jim Dalrymple, Holmes, Gene (Teeshirt Kelly) Spezia, and a helluva lot more, when I said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you America's Greatest Cowboy Band." During the sudden silence that ensued, there was strumming backstage and I heard the muttering of yeah, keep going. I looked at the sound man, with a question mark on my face. He shrugged his shoulders, and right then, at the top of my voice, I said Riders in The Sky.

I have a picture on my desk that I'm looking at now. It was used in **AB** with the caption of **EVENT OF THE YEAR**—Here's what it said: "When Garth Brooks played to an overflow crowd at the O'Connell Center on the campus of the University of Florida, Gainesville, fans were treated to a surprise appearance by Billy Joel. Backstage before the concert are, from left, Judy Piche, food concessionaire from Ware, Mass.; Christine Reed (that was before she got lucky and became a Powell), George (Bud) Gilmore, **Smokey's Greater Shows**, Bangor, Maine; Jean Smith, whose husband Duke Smith, owns **Allied Specialty Insurance**, Treasure Island, Fla., Brooks, Jeanette Gilmore, and Joel. I took the picture.

There had been a murmuring that entire day that a surprise guest may be showing up. It turned out to be Joel, a huge fan of Garth, who was vacationing in the area, and came out to see the show. Backstage, **Lionel Dubay**, who managed the building, had bought three jackets, one for Brooks, one for Joel, and one for me. He said at the time, mine was the hardest to find because of the extra large size.

Late in the show, the crowd went wild again as Joel walked to the piano and played a song he had written, Shameless. I'll never forget Brooks practically toppling down a flight of stairs while he performed his rendition of Friends in Low Places. We had just come from having a few pre-show drinks at our favorite bar in Waldo, Fla., appropriately named **The Oasis**.

I called Gene Dean Sr., of **Dean and Flynn Fieista Shows**, Seabrook, New Hampshire, to get his impressions of the show. Dean, who graduated from **Notre Dame** in 1964, is the father of E. J. Dean, who was OABA chairman in 2017. He's enjoying spending the winter in Naples, Fla., and noted that he and his wife, Mary spent Thanksgiving in The

Dominican Republic with there three children and six grand children. He thought the show was great and said it stirred a lot of fantastic memories.

He told me something I didn't know, that it was **Bob Hope** who came up with the name **Touchdown Jesus**. "He was doing a show at the **Joyce Center** and I couldn't stop from laughing. He was so good. He had been presented with the Laetare Medal by **Father Corby** for outstanding service to the Catholic Church, and society, The story was on the cover of the next Time Magazine. While I was in school, we never had a winning team. **Parseghian** was coming in as the new coach when I graduated, but we had suffered losing seasons under Joe **Kuharich**, and **Hughie Devore**," said Dean.

Despite rain on a Friday and Sunday, the Nov. 1-11 **Volusia County Fair**, Deland, Fla., was deemed a success by **Ronnie Hull**, in his third year as general manager, because of record attendance on both Saturdays and the last Sunday.

Hull estimated attendance at 168,000, and said that **Deggeller Attractions**, in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year of providing the carnival midway, did very well. "I believe we had a record number of promotions, and I have come to believe that the more you have, the better off you will be."

Connie Smith performed two shows on Senior Day that were free with gate admission of \$10 for adults and \$7 for children. **Deggeller** had Pay-One-Price unlimited ride promotions most days, for either \$20 or \$25, and a \$2 Ride Night on Student Day, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Entertainment was booked through Bobby McLamb of Artists and Attractions, Lillington, N. C. Acts included Pirates of the Columbian Caribbean, Ramblin Rose, Disc Connected K9s, BMX & Skateboarding, Kandu Magic Show, The Kardenni Magic Experience, Joe Reid and Heartland, Great American Entertainment Petting Zoo, Ag Venture Land, and pig races, Robo Cars, Cowboy Circus, with Danny Grant, Jesse (Monkey Man) Moore, Model Railroad Display, and Magician Jay Mattioli.

**Mark Harvey**, in his 14<sup>th</sup> year as manager of the **North Florida Fair**, Tallahassee, said the 77<sup>th</sup> annual event, held Nov. 8-18, with mostly good weather, and a little rain on Tuesday and Wednesday. **Strates Shows**, represented by brothers **Jimmy and John Strates**, had its ride gross down by what Harvey described as a minuscule amount. "They left here for a shopping center spot in Orlando, with seven or eight rides. We're very pleased to be able to work with them. They always do an excellent job." Entertainment included Show Me Safari Swine Races, Pittman Magic Show, Anastasini Circus, Butterfly Experience, Kurocity Planetarium, and local acts.

If you've never seen a football game at **Notre Dame**, you're missing out on a wonderful experience. The grotto, Touchdown Jesus, the Golden Dome, Play Like A Champion Today, and memories of Rockne, Lou Holtz, Rudy, Frank Leahy, Ara

Parseghian, George Gipp, Joe Montana, Angelo Bertelli, Johnny Lattner, Moose Krause, Joe Theismann, Leon Hart, Johnny Lujack, Paul Hornung, Tim Brown, and my great friend, the late Joe Sassano, who ran the **Joyce Athletic and Convocation Center** for many years, permeate this hallowed place. I have no doubt that Garth Brooks was feeling it all, while adding immeasurably to its almost mystic glory. Go, Irish!

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