

RW Hampton

My Country

R.W. Hampton's passions are reflected in the music that he sings, and no more so than on his latest album, "My Country."

"The themes on this album are relevant to me," Hampton explains about his latest adventure, "My Country", a 15-track CD, which combines fresh new material with songs that have never lost their timeless message.

The album is a cross-section of songs and a spoken word selection that circle around the themes of cowboy life, pride in the land, the search for freedom and a love for his heritage.

Hampton has found his place as a singer and songwriter in western music, which comes as no surprise to those who know this man who has been a cowboy all his life. A native Texan, Hampton worked on ranches across the west and southwest. It wasn't long before his love for music crept into his life as a cowboy, and he was soon writing and singing about the things he knew and loved.

Hampton's cowboy friends loved his music of course, but then a funny thing happened – people who lived in big cities and rural towns, who worked in factory jobs or in skyscrapers, also came to love the music Hampton was singing. They found that it took them to a place where they all longed to be – a simple life where they could be free and find their own individuality once again.

These newfound fans come to his concerts to hear about that lifestyle, and they buy his records to take a piece of that lifestyle home with them. With this album, fans will be taking home a love for their country along with the proud heritage of what it means to be a man of his word in a world that sometimes seems to be falling apart.

The album leads off with a song written by one of Hampton's five sons, Colter. "Living Free" is a fun upbeat number that speaks to the Cowboy's eternal search for a life with no strings attached.

"He's not just boots and a hat," Hampton says proudly about his son. "He and his family live and work on a ranch in the Oklahoma panhandle where Colter is on horseback every day. He's already worked for some great ranches and ridden with incredible cowboys. He is well respected and known as a "hand" — on top of that he's written a catalog of really great songs.

"When I heard this I thought it fit this album so well I just had to record it," Hampton says of the tune.

The cowboy standard "Strawberry Roan" sits nicely next to one of Hampton's most requested standards at live events, "The One That I Never Could Ride." The song conveys a deeper message about not giving up when things

aren't going right. According to Hampton, "I wrote this song after going to Nashville, and like many before me and since, being told my music wasn't commercial enough. I had banked everything on success in Music City and when it didn't work out I had to go back to the ranch and pick up where I left off but not let it defeat me."

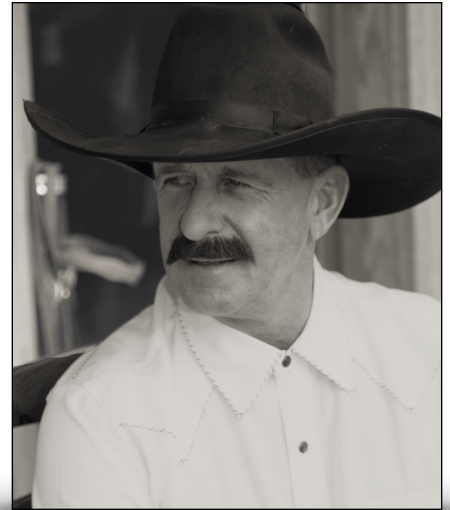
Another song, "The One," was written for Hampton's boys, who were curious about how he and his wife, Lisa, met.

"There is a line in 'The One' about Bonnie Gray, a name my wife adopted as an alias after we married and she was my promoter. I wrote this as a fun song to tell them all about it."

Hampton includes a duet with western singer Mary Kaye, "No Wilder Place," which he calls "one of the best songs on the album."

"It's the story of two people who love each other but it's just not going to work. It's a hauntingly beautiful song, and one of my favorites on there. Plus Mary Kaye has a world class voice."

Hampton was born and raised a Texan and "Yellow Rose of Texas" pays homage not only to the rich history of the state but also to the proponents of Western Swing like Bob Wills and Ray Price. The song



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was a perfect one for Hampton, who grew up loving Texas history and sharing that rich culture with his family as well as anyone who will listen when he talks about it.

“Red Steagall and I wrote “Texas Being Texas,” which he recorded a while back,” Hampton says. “It was inspired by a statement Colter made when he was just a little guy and we were heading through Texas in the Llano Estacado. We broke over to the edge of the caprock looking out over a part of the state that was still untouched by man, and he said, ‘Right here, this is just Texas being Texas, isn’t it Daddy?’”

Cowboy values and having roots buried deep in the land is central to the person Hampton is, and “Mis Raices Estan Aqui” is a beautiful story of a man hanging on to his land against all odds.

In the song “Whose Going to Live Out in Country,” Hampton sings of the changing world America is facing when farm and ranch land becomes more valuable for development than for raising cattle and crops. The song asks what happens to the rural culture when the lifestyle of the farmer and rancher is gone ... What happens when the agricultural lands are all run by distant corporations and the people in the small towns no longer have jobs?

“This happens to so many families,” Hampton acknowledges. “Here is a couple in the sunset of their life, and their family isn’t going to work the farm or ranch, so they wind up having to sell it to someone who doesn’t necessarily love the land but buys it for resale or investment for development. This has happened more and more since the mid ‘70s. The farmer and rancher may be still alive today, but we are getting choked out, and there’s nobody out there who loves the land like we do. And no one who feeds America like our farmers and ranchers.”

There is much reflectiveness in “My Country,” but there is much fun and celebration as well. “Cimarron” celebrates the land that Hampton and his wife, Lisa, live on, a place at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo mountains in New Mexico.

“It takes me back to a really good time in my life,” Hampton reveals, adding that people always want to know if the song is about the country or about a woman. Although written when he was 19, many of his fans have never heard a recorded version of it.

Hampton didn’t have far to go to find “Going Home.” His fourth son, Calvin Danner, now 17, is a history buff and found the song several years ago on the movie “Gods & Generals” and learned it for himself.

“I loved how it spoke to the journey I felt my oldest boy was facing as he returned home from combat duty as a Marine,” Hampton explains. “Now Calvin is considering joining the Marine Corps like his big

brother. It was fun to make it into a duet with Calvin, the idea being for him to be the voice of a younger veteran, and me to be the older, wiser guy. No matter what era, the one thing that all these warriors have in common, is that once the fighting is over they still have to find their way back home.”

The album seamlessly weaves in a cover of one of Johnny Cash’s more controversial tunes, “Ira Hayes,” the sad but true story of how one of America’s heroes lost his way due to the same unseen wounds of war that our Veterans are still dealing with today. Hayes was one of the men who raised the flag at Iwo Jima in World War II, but after coming home he became an alcoholic and couldn’t deal with his scars of war.

An audience favorite is “Not For Sale.” Hampton says it is an important song that has a lot to do with the choices that we make collectively as a country.

“Lisa and I wrote that. Many of the men in both of our families have served our country, some even giving the last full measure of devotion. We have been to both Arlington Cemetery and over to Normandy, France and you can’t help but be touched. The song is to honor all the men and women and the price that they have paid for our freedoms.”

““God Bless America Again,” an old Bobby Bare song written in the ‘60s, still resonates today. “I found it applies even more to where we are today in this country than it did when it was first released,” Hampton explains.

“There are places where our country has gone off the rails, so at some point we’re going to have to say, please bless us again. I grew up with this song, and it really fits our time.”

The album wraps up with somewhat of a vocal surprise in “Wonderful World,” by Louis Armstrong, a fitting ending and reminder that Hampton wants to leave his audience with a sense of appreciation and gratitude for the wonderful world that he loves so much.

Hampton is proud of “My Country,” and in reflecting on the songs and their stories on the album he says, “I would say that as I have gotten older, the place where I live, the reason why I live here, the way I got here, the way my family got to where they are, and the ideals and faith and their independence and individualism -- all those things have become more important to me all the time.

“I hope that when people listen to the album, if they like it they will smile and say ‘I understand this guy, I know what he’s about. He loves God, family and country, and he understands that the standard of living he enjoys comes with a price.’ I don’t want to preach but I want them to appreciate it too.”

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