



PRESS CONTACT:
Julie Smith / Enjoli Duval

BNC

Office: 310.854.4800

jsmith@bncpr.com/eduval@bncpr.com

**MERLE HAGGARD, HARLAN HOWARD, DOLLY PARTON,
JERRY REED, KENNY ROGERS, RANDY TRAVIS, HANK WILLIAMS JR.,
DAVID YOUNG AND "BEER FOR MY HORSES"
ANNOUNCED AS OFF-CAMERA WINNERS
FOR THE 44th ANNUAL ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC AWARDS**

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Special Awards, Industry Awards, and MBI Honorees Announced

ENCINO, CA (March 24, 2009) – Today the Academy of Country Music is announcing the winners of awards that will not be televised during the live telecast of the **44th ANNUAL ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC AWARDS**. The ceremony, which honors country music's top talent as well as the industry's hottest emerging talent, is produced for television and will be broadcast **LIVE** from MGM GRAND in Las Vegas on Sunday, April 5th at 8:00 PM live ET/tape delayed PT on the CBS Television Network

The Academy of Country Music Special Awards are voted on by the ACM Board of Directors and are awarded during years where the Board of Directors feels there are clear and deserving candidates. Special Awards and MBI Awards are presented to recipients at ACM Honors, a special event held annually in the fall. The event will take place in Nashville on September 22, 2009.

SPECIAL AWARDS

Jim Reeves International Award

Dolly Parton has been chosen to receive the Jim Reeves International Award, which is presented to an individual for outstanding contributions to the acceptance of country music throughout the world.

An internationally renowned singer, actor, songwriter and philanthropist, Parton's accomplishments have made her a global superstar. She has contributed countless treasures to the world of entertainment, penning classic songs such as "Jolene," "Coat of Many Colors," and her mega-hit "I Will Always Love You." After 40 years as an entertainer, Parton is still shoring up the foundation of country music and sharing it around the world. Past recipients of the Jim Reeves International Award include **Garth Brooks, Dick Clark, Roy Clark, Merv Griffin, Charlie Nagatani** and **Buck Owens**, among others.

Poet's Award

Merle Haggard and **Harlan Howard** have been selected to receive the Poet's Award, which honors songwriters for outstanding musical and/or lyrical contributions throughout their careers in the field of country music.

Merle Haggard scored his first Top 20 in 1964 with a cover of Wynn Stewart's "Sing A Sad Song," followed up by his own major hit "Swinging Doors" and his first No. 1 single, "The Fugitive." Haggard gained popularity in 1969 with songs like "Working Man Blues" and the controversial rebel anthem "Okie from Muskogee." He dominated the charts throughout the 1970s and 1980s with 40 No. 1 hits including "That's The Way Love Goes," "Hungry Eyes," "Today, I Started Loving You Again" and "Mama Tried."

More than 4,000 songs have come from the pen of legendary scribe **Harlan Howard** including “I Fall To Pieces,” “I’ve Got A Tiger By The Tail,” “Somebody Should Leave” and “Why Not Me.” Howard’s career finally took flight during the late 1950s when a few songs such as Charlie Walker’s rendition of “Pick Me Up on Your Way Down” and Ray Price’s “Heartaches by the Numbers” both hit No. 2 on the country charts. Howard scored an unprecedented 15 compositions in the Top 40 during 1961 and penned 100 Top 10 hits throughout his songwriting career. He died at the age of 74 on March 3, 2002 in Nashville and his legacy lives on through his songs that are still recorded by artists today.

Cliffie Stone Pioneer Award

Jerry Reed, Kenny Rogers, Randy Travis, and Hank Williams Jr. have been chosen to receive the Cliffie Stone Pioneer Award honoring individuals who are pioneers in the country music genre.

Jerry Reed scored his first single “If the Good Lord’s Willing and the Creeks Don’t Rise” when he was just 18 years old, and gained recognition in 1958 when Gene Vincent covered his “Crazy Legs.” He penned Brenda Lee’s “That’s All You Got to Do” and had his own hits with “Goodnight Irene,” “If I Don’t Live Up to It” and his first charting single “Guitar Man,” which was later covered by Elvis Presley. He released his biggest hit “When You’re Hot, You’re Hot” in 1971, followed by a string of Top 40 hits and continued to record and release songs into the 1980s.

Kenny Rogers got his first taste of musical fame as a member of First Edition with hits "Reuben James" and "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town," and became a superstar in his own right with a string of timeless story songs including “Lucille,” "The Gambler," "Daytime Friends," and “Coward of the County.” He has nine ACM awards to his credit (among countless other awards), including Entertainer of the Year in 1978 and the Career Achievement Award in 2000. Rogers has sold more than 120 million records during his illustrious career, and is one of the Top 10 best-selling artists of all time. His new project is scheduled for release in 2009, featuring another duet with fellow music legend Dolly Parton.

Randy Travis’ debut, *Storms of Life*, sold more than three million copies, making him the first country act to go multi-platinum. Travis dominated radio in the late 1980s with his instantly recognizable baritone on classic hits such as “On the Other Hand,” “Diggin’ Up Bones,” “No Place Like Home,” and “Forever and Ever Amen.” To date, Travis has sold more than 25 million records, has 22 No. 1 hits, six Grammy Awards, nine ACM Awards, 10 American Music Awards and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Hank Williams Jr., has made an everlasting mark on the music industry with his observations on life and society in songs such as “A Country Boy Can Survive,” “Family Tradition,” “All My Rowdy Friends (Have Settled Down)” and “Whiskey Bent and Hellbound,” which have shown his skill for storytelling. Williams was named the Academy of Country Music’s Entertainer of the Year three times.

Past recipients of the Cliffie Stone Pioneer Award include Alabama, Johnny Cash, Charlie Daniels, Merle Haggard, George Jones, Brenda Lee, Loretta Lynn, Willie Nelson, The Oak Ridge Boys, Dolly Parton, Charlie Pride, Tex Ritter, Conway Twitty, Porter Wagoner, Hank Williams, Sr., and Bob Wills, among others.

Tex Ritter Award

Beer For My Horses been chosen as the recipient of the Tex Ritter Award, which is given to a movie released and/or receiving major exposure during the preceding calendar year, featuring or utilizing country music.

Beer For My Horses (August 2008, Produced by CMT Films and Show Dog Productions; Distributed by Roadside Attractions and Lionsgate.) is an action-packed movie starring **Toby Keith** and comedian **Rodney Carrington**. Keith plays Joe Bill "Rack" Racklin, a rogue Oklahoma deputy sheriff who has just watched another girlfriend pack up and drive out of his life when an old flame, Annie (Claire Forlani, *CSI: NY*) moves back home from the big city—but their reunion is interrupted when Annie is kidnapped. Operating against orders and racing against time, Rack hits the road with deputy and best friend Lonnie (Carrington) for a raucous road trip across state lines to rescue the love of his life. The film features appearances by Emmy winner **Tom Skerritt**, rock star **Ted Nugent** and music legend **Willie Nelson**.

Past recipients of the Tex Ritter Award include *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, *O'Brother, Where Art Thou*, *Sweet Dreams* and *Walk the Line*, among others.

Mae Boren Axton Award – David Young has been chosen as the recipient of the Mae Boren Axton Award, which is given in recognition of years of dedication and service by an outstanding individual to the Academy of Country Music.

Young has been with the Academy of Country Music in various positions for 20 years. Most recently as senior director of operations, his responsibilities have included managing the office and all logistics for the Academy. Additionally, Young has been an essential part of making the ACM Awards run smoothly by overseeing various show-related areas including credentialing, hotel reservations, ground transportation, on-location catering and ACM in-house production for the New Artists Show and the All-Star Jam. During his tenure, he has overseen logistics for additional ACM events including the Celebrity Golf Classic and has managed office technology, coordinating volunteers and interns, and worked as a liaison with Dick Clark Productions. Young joined the Academy as a receptionist in 1989 and was quickly promoted to executive assistant for the former executive director of the Academy, Fran Boyd, who retired in 2002. Young's enthusiasm, work ethic and spirit eventually propelled him to senior director, a position in which he made an integral impact on the Academy's growth and future.

Past recipients of the Mae Boren Axton Award include **Jack Lameier, Marge Meoli, Ray Pilzak, Gaynelle Pitts, and Gene Weed.**

MBI (MUSICIANS, BAND, INSTRUMENTAL) AWARDS:

TOP GUITARIST OF THE YEAR - Tom Bukovac

TOP PIANO/KEYBOARD PLAYER OF THE YEAR - Gordon Mote

TOP BASS PLAYER OF THE YEAR - Glenn Worf

TOP PERCUSSIONIST/DRUMMER OF THE YEAR - Greg Morrow

TOP STEEL GUITAR PLAYER OF THE YEAR - Dan Dugmore

TOP FIDDLE PLAYER OF THE YEAR - Aubrey Haynie

TOP SPECIALTY INSTRUMENT(S) PLAYER - Eric Darken and Jelly Roll Johnson (tied)

AUDIO ENGINEER OF THE YEAR - Chuck Ainlay

PRODUCER OF THE YEAR - Tony Brown

INDUSTRY AWARDS:

NIGHTCLUB OF THE YEAR - Joe's Bar - Chicago, IL

CASINO OF THE YEAR - Turning Stone Casino - Verona, NY

DON ROMEO TALENT BUYER OF THE YEAR - Fran Romeo - Romeo Entertainment

PROMOTER OF THE YEAR - Louis Messina - The Messina Group

VENUE OF THE YEAR - The Ryman Auditorium - Nashville, TN

The winners of the MBI and Industry are voted based on Academy of Country Music ballots in their respected category.

About the Academy of Country Music Awards

The 44th ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC AWARDS is dedicated to honoring and showcasing the biggest names and emerging talent in the country music industry. The show is produced for television by dick clark productions and will be broadcast LIVE from the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas Sunday, April 5, 2009 at 8:00 PM live ET/delayed PT on the CBS Television Network. Orly Adelson and R.A. Clark are executive producers, Barry Adelman is producer and Bob Bardo is executive in charge of production.

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