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ACM WEEK WITH ASHLEY MCBRYDE

Girl

Awards Week Schedule

Friday	Westwood One Remotes Pickup at MGM Grand Filming w/ Criss Angel Return to MGM
Saturday	NashVegas Live! Remotes Lunch break Crew Call: "Girl" Rehearsal, MGM Grand Garden Ashley Call: "Girl" Rehearsal On-site interviews: ACM EPK, I SiriusXM interview Eric, Ashley Call: "Snake" Rehearsal
Sunday	Ashley Call: Dress Rehearsal, MGM Grand Garden Dress Rehearsal Red Carpet 54th ACM Awards

All Ashley McBryde can eke out is a faint, “Hi.” Sitting in the WIL/St. Louis booth at the Westwood One remotes, she’s just been interrupted while reading liners. And in the best way possible.

It’s a Las Vegas weekend of firsts and fun for the Academy of Country Music’s New Female Artist of the Year. First major award (she’s also nominated for Female Artist), not one but two performances, magic, reptiles, costumes, betting on bourbon and one stunning moment that left her at a loss for words.

McBryde’s first official ACM experience – in 2018 – had her on the red carpet as a brand new artist. “It was a really good way to break me in for my first major awards show,” she says. “I asked my publicist as we walked on to the carpet, ‘How do I stand?’ She says, ‘Stand like this but put your weight on that leg.’ Oh, okay. Now I know!”

Just A Dream: Learning about her 2019 win for New Female Artist involved an “unknown caller” popping up on her phone. Adopting the gruff tone she reserves for robo-calls, McBryde was surprised by what she heard. “It’s an unmistakable voice,” she says. “There we are, burning trash in a barn lot and Carrie Underwood calls. You can’t make this shit up. It’s not in the video, but she did tell me I get to play my song on the show. The whole conversation was like spinning around in an office chair.”

McBryde was already aware she would be performing with Eric Church on his song “The Snake.” “That’s the first song I heard from his new record and might be my favorite,” she says. “I’m always honored and surprised when Eric wants me to do something, so for him to trust me to help represent a song like that on the ACMs is super cool.”

The trickier performance is “Girl Goin’ Nowhere,” which has to be edited to fit the shorter slots allotted to “New” category winners. “It’s a really weird thought process,” she admits. “Which limb don’t you want? You’re trying to stuff 3:50 into 1:50 and not stumble all over yourself. I focused on the song’s message and how short I could make it while still conveying that. So it was first verse, chorus, bridge. You can take the song out that way. My first try I got it down to 2:46, then we got it down to 1:42. I didn’t want it to feel like a Pop-Tarts commercial, and it doesn’t.”

Turn On The Radio: Arriving Thursday night, McBryde kicks off her schedule the next morning at the remotes, where she does a station-supplied shot of tequila before the aforementioned incident happens. She’s just finished an interview with WIL’s morning team, who have cleared out as she sits with a microphone reading liners. “Hey this is Ashley McBryde on New Country Ninety-Two (voice trails off) ... Three?”

Suddenly, Reba McEntire is in the booth, leaning over the mic. “Hi, Ashley McBryde, this is Reba McEntire, I’m your biggest fan.” A quick hug, and Reba’s back out as fast as she appeared, continuing on her interview rounds. Cue McBryde’s weakly croaked, “Hi.”

“I’m sweating,” she says moments later, still recovering from her first time meeting the Country Music Hall of Famer. “Between the tequila and that Reba McEntire just hugged me ... watch me not stutter now.” The meeting happened so fast, no one grabbed video or a photo. Fortunately, WIL captured the audio.

After the remotes, a profile with *ET Canada* presents her with a decision. “They said, you can choose between a puppet show and an illusion,” she says. “I’m like, wait. Stop. Both are magical.” Later she adds, “That was a rapid fire question one time in an interview: ‘What makes you nervous?’ Ventriloquism. That’s some weird shit. Getting your voice to come out of your body and go into something else.”

Clearly, there’s something about puppets, but magic wins out and a trip to Criss Angel’s MindFreak theater comes midafternoon. She won’t get to see the show, but a personal experience with Angel himself – sandwiched by the interview – is more than a little consolation.

In the limo afterward, McBryde and crew Boomerang a champagne toast. “The reason I can’t go to his show tonight is we have to do hair drills,” she says. “We do it all the way up for red carpet, with a metal snake woven in. Hair all the way down for the ‘Girl’ performance. Then a three braids on each side faux hawk for ‘The Snake.’

“I asked, ‘Can we please use copper eye shadow since I’m the copperhead?’” she continues. “I can’t wait. I’m never excited about dressing up.” Her friend Rachel adds, “This is childhood Ashley’s dream right now. Magic. Dressing up. A snake.”

McBryde chimes in: “I have a deck of cards touched by an actual illusionist. I’m allowed to drink. The car is fancy. A reptile is involved. Twist off champagne. Only the next-to-best for us!”

Southern Babble On: The evening plan is low key. “I can get out of the Spanx, get into some sweats, we can think about what we might like to do for dinner and then it’s hair



Interrupted

up, hair down, hair up, hair down," she says. "From the carpet to the first performance we have an hour, and from the first performance to the second we have an hour. It will take all of both of those hours to get it done."

After styling practice, she cuts loose. "I don't gamble," she says. "I don't have anything against it – high moral ground or anything – I just like to get something when I give my money away. Mostly drinks. I'm going to bet this money on Jim Beam, and I'm going to win."

Instead of slots or cards, she plays a different game ... or two. "All my girl crew, bass player and manager dressed up in wigs, track suits and visors," she says. "We played beer pong at a sports bar for no particular reason.

"I have an alter ego named Maxine Overstreet – an old lady who just says mean things," McBryde explains. "She wears a white wig and purple blazer. I was telling my stylist about it and she said we should all dress up as old people. She got us all teal track suits and it was amazing."

Saturday morning brings more radio remotes, but the day is dominated by rehearsals. "My biggest fear, even in college and high school, is not knowing where to stand," McBryde says. "I am the kind of person who worries where my guitar wireless pack comes from. Where are my ears going to come from? It doesn't take long to figure out someone is assigned to tell you where to stand. All you have to do is follow the guy with the flashlight and not fall down. That makes it a lot easier."

Other than cutting the song down, the "Girl" performance is relatively stress free. "That song helps me diffuse nerves," she says. "This is me. I can do me all day – doesn't matter who's watching." As for "The Snake," there's a bit more to it.

"I did watch the graphics first to see what they were doing," she says. "I wanted to figure out if they were timed to anything – and they weren't. Also, I'm not used to working with a teleprompter and if one's out there, I will look at it. That's not how to perform. That's reading. Your face becomes kind of stupid and blank, and I'm just not going to let that happen. The first two times through, I read the teleprompter. After that I just glanced at it. That was the kind of thing I needed to work on and rehearse. I had to feel it."

"And Eric and I had to walk from the end stages to the center stage while the entire stage is covered in fog and I'm wearing black jeans and black boots," she continues. "That was another 'don't fall down, Ashley' moment. It really isn't that hard, but you do have to rehearse it."

A Little Dive Bar: Sunday brings a new and unwelcome addition to the team. "Everybody in my little crew got sick on Saturday," Ashley says. "Radio remotes might have been to blame. Or it could be we played beer pong in the lobby of a casino, the ball bounced all over the floor and we stuck that ball in a cup and drank the contents. It's Vegas."

Dress rehearsal goes smoothly, despite a near-incident at check-in. "We're standing at the metal detector, I've got my bag open and they're sifting through it," McBryde says. "Behind me, someone says, 'Hey, move faster! You're holding us all up.' I wheel around with my finger out ready to destroy whoever said it ... and it's Reba. So that's okay."

Also okay: the red carpet. "For some reason I was more relaxed than I had ever been doing on-camera interviews," she says. "They kept asking what's it like already winning. There were still some nerves for the other category, but knowing the most stressful part was over was a treat."

After the show, McBryde stopped by a few parties, including the Warner Music Nashville gathering, where she "ate little tiny food on toothpicks." Then, she went to Loser's – because that's what Nashvillians do when they're in Las Vegas. "We watched Kendall Marvel's set, and I accidentally drank all the drinks."

"It wasn't that bad the next morning," she says. "I was still on cloud 9,000 from the night before, which helped any kind of hangover I might have had. But what a wild adventure it was. Like a lot of things, I was really nervous for rehearsals but calm, for the most part, when it came to the performance. The response has been huge. It was terrifying and fun and how soon can I do it again?"



Did I Stutter? After Reba's fly-by with WIL's Kelly From Arnold, Bud Ford, Jerry Broadway and Becca Walls, and (below, right) with McEntire backstage during the awards.

A Twisted Living: Maxine, aka Ashley, gets her groove on.



Le Freak: With Criss Angel and ET Canada's Keshia Chanté, and Angel's autograph (inset).