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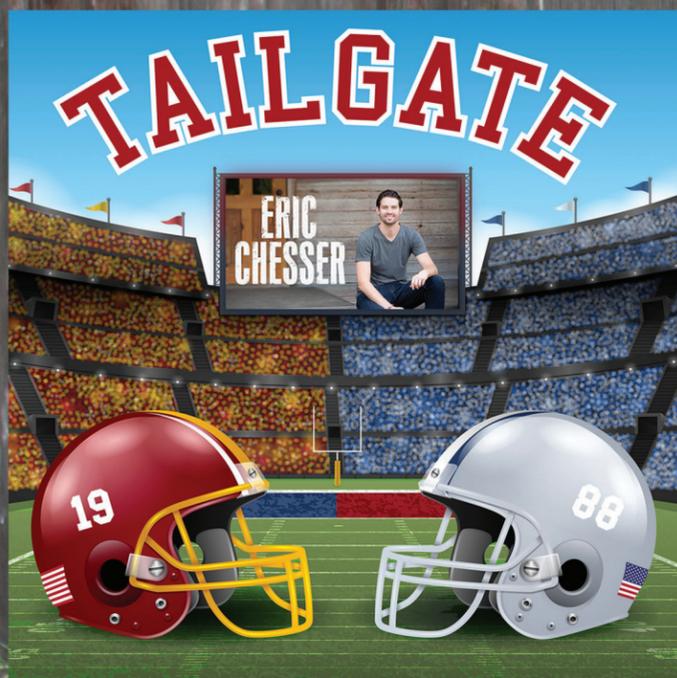

BIGBIG
Records Nashville

CONGRATULATIONS ON A GREAT SUMMER TOUR

ERIC CHESSER

“AS THE 2018 SUMMER TOUR SEASON COMES TO A CLOSE, WITH OVER 20 CITIES, THOUSANDS OF NEW FANS, AND MILLIONS OF STREAMS. THANKS COUNTRY MUSIC, COUNTRY RADIO, AND ALL THE FANS FOR MAKING IT HAPPEN.” ~ ERIC

TAILGATE TOUR STARTING FALL 2018!



“AS A HUGE COUNTRY MUSIC FAN I LIKE THAT ERIC SOUNDS COUNTRY!”

~ PATTI DRAKE, BOSTON UNIVERSITY

BILL MAYNE

Engineered For The Business

Call it a numbers game. Country Radio Seminar Executive Director Bill Mayne has led the organization for the last 10 years after a storied career in radio and the record business that started when he was 18 – 50 years ago. In February, CRS will hold its 50th confab and, shortly thereafter, Mayne will step down. Country Aircheck asked for his favorite memories, views on the current industry and how he navigated five decades in service to a business he loves.

CA: What's different about this job now from 10 years ago?

BM: Everything, starting with the scenario I walked into. If things had been going well at that time, it should be the same. But they weren't going well at all. In fact, I was sent in with a hemostat to clamp off the artery and make a determination if the patient had any kind of probability of survival. The world has changed so rapidly during our lifetimes and we've all seen periods in which there's a real need for something – a need that then completely goes away. I was very open minded, diligent in finding out what was really going on, and prepared to report back to the CRB executive

What was the case you made?

We used analogies like, "We are the country music equivalent of the Detroit Auto Show. Everything you see at CRS in the first quarter is going to be coming out and airing on the radio over the course of the next year." We were expecting to lose a massive amount of money that first year, but through renegotiations and a lot of hard work by the team and the board, we barely broke even. That was a whole lot better than the six-digit hit we expected to take.

What hasn't changed about CRS?

I have been very blessed to have solid support from the board and executive committee with very little resistance or bickering. When I was in radio I would tell my team the competition wasn't going to beat us, we were going to beat ourselves if we have infighting and are unable to pull together toward the common cause.

I'm on my third board president and have been fortunate to have the president I needed at the time they served. In the beginning, I was tasked with reimagining perception of the organization and I had Mike Culotta – a promotions and marketing guy – guiding and working with me. Then comes Charlie Morgan as, after 16 years, we're faced with leaving a very comfortable fit at the Renaissance Hotel and Nashville Convention Center, with really no other choice than the Omni. And they knew it. Charlie's business acumen was perfect for helping me with everything from politicking Metro government to negotiating with the hotel and service companies. Now I'm with Kurt Johnson, who as the head of programming for Town-square is one of the busiest guys on the planet, but always accessible and a huge help in dealing with a lot of today's issues.

You have a pretty good view of radio and certainly Country radio. What stands out to you as you look over the landscape?

When I took this job, someone pointed out to me that after 17 years in radio and 15 at Warner Bros., no one could be better genetically engineered for the position than I. And it is certainly helpful to bring both backgrounds to bear, but even more the relationships I bring from both. With radio specifically, the more things change the more they stay the same. It's almost hysterical how many times terrestrial radio has been pronounced dead during my career. Cassettes, CD, MTV, pure plays – streaming. The fact of the matter is, there is room at the table for everybody.

One of the cornerstones of CRS has been doing research projects that are so massive from a 30,000-foot view that no station or group of stations would ever take it on. What those continually show us is consumers evolve and adapt, but nothing has ever caused them to completely wipe the slate clean of music, personalities and information. The

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committee and board that it was time to turn off the lights and go home. The good news was, it wasn't that time. What I found was the organization had suffered due to its very early success. The old adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" had been going on for 40 years. Unfortunately, the world changes and you can't do the exact same thing that many times in a row and expect to be relevant.

What were the big issues?

First, content. We'd spent 40 years sitting in a circle being very proprietary and doing the same things with the same people. Consequently, attendance had been in a double-digit death dive for a number of years. There'd been some head scratching about declining attendance, but when you serve the same meal every day people stop coming to your restaurant.

The other side of it was pricing and the budget structure, which was built solely on registrations. I went in 90-some days before CRS 2010, the economy had just tanked and we had contracts with escalating food and beverage minimums – things that just were not going to be possible anymore. Every industry was going through that – renegotiating deals. In all that, however, I was able to bring together radio and the industry in agreement that there was a greater need than ever for this industry service organization. The mission was still valid, we just weren't doing it right.

Where did you start?

The organization had been very Victorian and punitive in its approach, telling constituents "no" rather than finding ways to help make their magic happen. I told the staff when I took over, "I still have a lot of discovery to do, but one thing changing as of today is attitude. We will not say no to direct questions. The most negative thing I want to hear come out of anybody's mouth is, 'I don't know the answer to that, but I will get you an answer. Let me see what we can do.'"

The other thing we had to do was completely rebuild the budgetary system. At that time, the early bird rate was \$699. Really expensive and sponsorship sales came down to one person asking labels to pick up the shortfall from registration. My first ask of the board was to cut registration rates 40%. Companies weren't paying for employees to attend educational conferences, but everyone who has attended and experienced what I call the magic of CRS was hooked. We had a responsibility to make it affordable for them to pay out of their own pocket. Making up that six-digit hole in our budget meant jumping into the 21st century with corporate sponsorship. To my knowledge, there are no self-liquidating major events that don't have that aspect. It took a few years of education because corporate sponsorships are usually public facing. They were looking at quantity where what we offered was quality – all the industry's influentials in one place at one time.



new tech gets mixed in and radio continues to be the 900-pound gorilla, especially in country. The reason is that they are in touch with their communities, for the most part. Live and local is not just a slug line to be used twice an hour on the air. It is a recipe for success in truly holding your listeners. We've seen it time and time again in the research.

You are an advocate for radio, but I wonder when you made that jump from radio to record label – did you drink the promotion guy Kool Aid?

I was one of the first real carpetbaggers in the format who came out of radio and went into promotion, eventually running the label as GM. I'd sat in the PD's seat with record people on the other side of the desk doing their cha-cha, so I knew what that was all about. My approach to promoting records was understand-

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ing, and I wanted my people to connect with stations, learn what they were trying to accomplish and step in to support that with our artists and music. And, boy, that approach took off.

I never got into the negativity and was, in fact, the exact opposite. I had my people talking to radio about other labels' records that were really working, especially if it supported what the station had said they were trying to do. There was negative promotion from some of the independent promoters, but the industry was smaller then and we were better at self-policing. When the label boom hit and we shot from something like seven labels to 32, then people started doing stupid stuff that made it not about the music.

Aside from the universe lining up around the numbers 50 and 10, are there other reasons now is the time to step away?

There are a couple. The first is, when I took this job I had a vision for what we needed to do. Not to sound immodest, but we have accomplished that vision. Looking down the road, this is the time to let someone come in with a new vision. Not that I couldn't do that, and the board offered me an extension not too long ago. I thanked them and said the end of the current agreement was the right time. This was an opportunity to find a successor before the 50th so we could work together in transition rather than walk right out the door as someone new walks in. To me, that never made sense if you have people who can work together.

I'll be 68 this year and would like to enjoy life a little bit, though someone did tell me not to use the "R" word upon my leaving. I had a consulting company before I did this and I'm sure at some point a couple things will interest me in being involved – and I look forward to that. My immediate plans – and most people don't know this – from the age of 13 to 19 I was the world's most mediocre professional rock and roll guitar player. In 1969 the U.S. government offered me an all-expenses-paid trip to Southeast Asia and I decided I'd be better suited at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos where I met Erv Woolsey. I was a freshman and he, I think, was a seventh-year senior. In going to school I had to sell all my gear because I was a broke college student. I gave guitar up cold turkey and haven't even held one in 40 years, but I already have three. So I'm looking forward to getting 40 years of rust off.

Do you wish you'd stayed on the music side?

One of the joys of life is embarking on a journey without a clue where it's going to take you. That sounds funny coming from somebody who prides himself on being a professional strategic planner, but even in that it's best to allow yourself to take these elegant side trips along the way. One of the big choices in my career was, do I take the artistic side or the management side? As a musician, not only was I the most mediocre player, but in every band there's a person who serves as the manager. That was always me. When we got a manager, no one else in the band wanted to deal with him, so I had to do that, too. The same thing happened in radio. I started as an air talent, but when the opportunity came to go into management I realized I'm really better at that.

So the career path wasn't all intentional?

If someone had come to me when I was programming CHR and told me in three years I'd be programming Country, I'd have probably fallen on the floor laughing. If they'd told me in Austin my next programming gig would be in Los Angeles, I'd have hit the floor. If someone said, "One day you'll live in Nashville and run Warner Bros." I'd have said, "What are you smoking?" But all those things happened.

Going to work for Cap Cities was very intentional. I knew deregulation would do away with the ownership caps and that KASE/Austin owner Roy Butler would take it when someone came in with a wheelbarrow full of money. And I'd be in the parking lot with my hands in my pockets. So I started looking at some of the acquiring companies. I knew no one at Cap Cities, but they had just flipped WKHX/Atlanta to country. I called the station, asked who the PD was and introduced myself to Ted Stecker. Contrary to saying he didn't know me, he said, "Bill, I'm from San Antonio. Every time I go home to be with my parents, I drive to



The Office: With CRB staff (l-r) Chasity Crouch, Darcie Van Eiten, Shereé Latham, Jean Williams and Brooke Sanders.

San Marcos so I can listen to KASE. You have the best sounding Country radio station in America, and I've stolen a million ideas from you." We set up a meeting and got together personally at CRS, which started a long relationship that, nine months later, led to me programming KZLA/Los Angeles. The largest radio market in the country. Our studios were at 5700 Sunset Boulevard, so I'd pull up, park, get out of the car and look up at the Hollywood sign

I was there two-and-a-half years until Rupert Murdoch tried to do a hostile takeover of Cap Cities. Our chairman Tom Murphy said, "Don't worry about it, Billy. Me and my Nebraska buddy have a plan." I didn't know who Warren Buffett was in 1984, but they had little Cap Cities buy ABC Entertainment. The minnow swallowed the whale, but took on some of its characteristics. I got transferred to KSCS & WBAP/Dallas and was there three years before [Warner Bros./Nashville promo exec] Nick Hunter told me – at a ballgame – I'd be good in the record business. It took about six months of convincing. [Label head] Jim Ed Norman invited me to Nashville for two days. My wife Sally and

What are you going to miss?

Without question I'll miss being exposed to as much music and the day-to-day relationships with friends in the business. What I won't miss are the politics. That was one of the challenges I faced and questions I asked when I took this job. I'm a pretty straight-shooting guy, but I've had to learn the ugly baby lesson I had to teach an artist one time. He had dissed another act and I was yelling at him and asking why. He said, "It was the truth." My response was, "Do you tell proud new parents their baby is ugly? No. Even though it's the truth." So I've had to learn not to have a comment on everything and a lot of that is just maturing in the business.

What else?

The old Music Row. The best hang ever was backstage at Fan Fair and that sense of community. All the labels hung out at each other's shows. I'm also really proud seeing where the pups end up. Jack Purcell was working in the Warner's mailroom and I told Jim Ed I wanted him calling Gavin stations. We'd never done that before. He had a desk in the hall outside my office because there wasn't any other space in that building. And there are so many others. Not to mention bosses, including Jim Ed. I learned so much from him.

The only time we ever went toe-to-toe was over giving people too much rope. I knew he was trying to be a wonderful human being and humanitarian by keeping an artist on the roster, but they'd been there eight years and we'd spent \$750,000 without even a bump. His favorite line was, "Bill, just hang in there with me." So I said, "Is there something you truly believe is going to turn the corner here we should hang in for?" He'd say no, I'd ask if I could please take care of it and he'd agree. And that could be for an employee, too.

When I started at KASE & KVET/Austin they had twice as many people as those stations needed on staff. They had two copywriters who weren't making much money and it's never pleasant but I had to fire one who'd been there about two years. The other guy had been there 29. He was cool about it, but fast-forward about five years and I'm at DFW changing planes when I hear a voice yell, "Bill!" I look up and see this guy running at me. I thought I might get taken out, but he throws the biggest bear hug on me. He says, "I owe you an incredible thank-you. I would have stayed at the station making \$700 a month the rest of my life, but you pushed me out of the nest. I did what I'd always dreamed of, started my own ad agency." I congratulated him and asked how business was. He got a shit-eating grin on his face and said, "The first year was hard, but after that I got a big client and it's been golden." That client: Southwest Airlines. And he still has them today.

Can you give us a tease for CRS 50?

Even I have been surprised by the talent that's going to be showing up to pay homage and entertain. I don't have them all 100% nailed down yet, but that's the nature of this beast. I'm a licensed professional cat juggler. I can say there will be stellar talent, special speakers and some changes to the structure people will notice. The *New Faces* show will be like none you've ever seen before. That's really all I can say.

So ... no?

Even though it's our 50th anniversary, it is still going to be CRS 2019. This is not going to be a flashback CRS, no retro logo, the panels won't be about how it was back in the day. The CRS will continue to be the innovative, groundbreaking in-the-moment content we are known for. There will be some concise references to the past on the video wall, but it's going to fit and flow in a way that makes sense.

CAC

“ Live and local is not just a slug line to be used twice an hour on the air. It is a recipe for success in truly holding your listeners. We've seen it time and time again in the research. ”

I looked around and decided we didn't want to live there. But the way Warner Bros. was run reminded me of the best of Cap Cities. It was the artist friendly label in those days of Mo Ostin, Lenny Waronker and Russ Thyret. I ended up there for 15 years.

What are the highlights as you look back?

I've said for at least 20 years, if it all ended tomorrow I've led one of the most blessed lives in doing something I am so passionate about and experiencing amazing things. I have a picture from a COPD Foundation benefit where Paul Simon did an acoustic set. I'm in the front row with Mike Dungan, Karl Dean – Bob DiPiero and Brett James were there, too. All of us were drooling like 12-year-olds.

When I was at Warner Bros. I heard John Fogerty's *Blue Moon Swamp* album, called [Warner CEO] Russ Thyret and told him I'd already identified three country singles. He called me back, flew me to New York and I had a meeting with Fogerty before seeing his show at the Hammerstein Ballroom. I spent three hours in his hotel suite, where he was ecstatic I was interested because the pop side wasn't. He asked what I would need him to do and, off-the-cuff, I explained CMA Fest, remotes, having radio out at the tour stops. He goes, "Okay, I'm in." I mean, this is an iconic guy. When I left the meeting I called Harry Sumrall, the other guitar player from my band back in the day, and said, "I'm in a New York hotel where I just spent the last several hours giving John Fogerty career advice. This is unbelievable!" And the show that night was two hours of solid hits.



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