

## Rodney Crowell – Bio

Rodney Crowell was born on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1950 in Houston, Texas. Crowell can trace his bloodline “*across the water*” to Scotland, Ireland and England, while closer to home he can claim Cherokee nation ancestors. The ancestors from “the old country” became sharecroppers in Western Kentucky and Tennessee. Rodney’s parents met at a Roy Acuff concert in Buchanan, Tennessee during World War II. Married soon afterwards they left the farm and headed for the city – Houston. Music is definitely part of his parent’s genes, one grandfather having been the leader of a church choir, while the other played bluegrass banjo and his maternal grandmother played guitar. During the late 1950’s his father formed J.W. Crowell and the Rhythmaires, and the band performed a blend of Country Swing and Appalachian folk in the bars and honky-tonks on the east side of Houston. Between the ages of 11 and 12, Rodney was the band’s drummer. A couple of years later Rodney formed The Arbitrators, a rock ‘n’ roll quartet composed of three guys and a girl drummer. During Crowell’s high school years The Arbitrators played parties and school dances.

At home Crowell listened endlessly to country music and in his late teens began writing songs and also picked up his first guitar. He went on to write songs with his college roommate, Donivan Cowart, and the latter’s truck-driving older brother. Donivan and Crowell eventually dropped out of college and in August 1972 headed north to Tennessee and Nashville. In Bishop’s Pub, Donivan and Rodney played a nightly twenty-minute set and earned five or six dollars passing the hat. It was start! Rodney was soon spotted by Jerry Reed who signed him to a writing deal that lasted a couple of years, and Reed went on to cut a couple of the Texan’s songs including “You Can’t Keep Me Here In Tennessee.” Later, Rodney fell in with the progressive school of country writers, including Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, a young Steve Earle [Guy’s bass player for a time], Richard Dobson and others – the latter quartet had all spent time performing in Houston music clubs. When the late James Szalapski filmed the music documentary “**Heartworn Highways**” during late 1975, Crowell appeared in a number of sequences, including some shot in Guy & Susanna Clark’s home. Around this time Crowell became acquainted with Canadian Brian Ahern who was working with Emmylou Harris. Impressed by Crowell’s writing, Emmylou began cutting his songs, starting with “Bluebird Wine” on her debut Warner Bros. album “**Pieces Of The Sky**” [1975], and followed with “Amarillo” [actually a Harris/Crowell co-write] and “Till I Gain Control Again” on her sophomore Warner Bros. recording “**Elite Hotel**.” In addition, while continuing to cut his songs, based out of Los Angeles, Crowell became a member of her Hot Band for a couple of years. He left the band in late 1977.

Signed by Warner Bros. to a recording deal his debut solo album “**Ain’t Living Long Like This**” appeared in the summer of 1978. In total Crowell cut three albums for Warners – they rejected a fourth collection, while his single releases during this period failed to dent the Country Top 30. Success did however come when other artists covered his tunes. In February 1980 he scored his first # 1 Country Chart single when The Oak Ridge Boys cut “Leaving Louisiana In The Broad Daylight” [co-written with Donivan Cowart]. A month later the late Waylon Jennings took “I Ain’t Living Long Like This” to the # 1 spot. A year later The Oak Ridge Boys scored another # 1 with “Elvira.” Crystal Gayle enjoyed a # 1 Country Chart in early 1983 with probably Crowell’s best-known early career composition “Till I Gain Control Again.” The previous year Detroit rocker Bob Seger scored a # 5 Pop hit single with “Shame On The Moon.” “Long Hard Road (The Sharecropper’s Dream)” gave the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band a # 1 Country Chart hit during the summer of 1984. In the Fall of 1987 Highway 101 reached the same position with Crowell’s “Somewhere Tonight.”

Crowell married Johnny Cash’s daughter, Rosanne in 1979. The previous year Crowell had produced Cash’s self-titled debut album, but it was only released in Europe on the Ariola label. He went on to produce Rosanne’s “**Right Or Wrong**” [1980], and long-term commercial success arrived for her with the release of “**Seven Year Ache**” [1981], followed by “**Somewhere In the Stars**” [1982], “**Rhythm & Romance**” [1985] and “**King’s Record Shop**” [1985]. Rodney also produced a couple of recordings by his buddy, and Warner Bros. label-mate, Guy Clark, namely “**The South Coast of Texas**” [1981] and “**Better Days**” [1983]. He also produced Bobby Bare’s “**As Is**” [1981] and later co-produced Beth Nielsen Chapman’s “**Sand And Water**” [1996].

The appearance of “**Street Language**” [1986] co-produced with soul musician Booker T. Jones, marked Crowell’s move to CBS Records where he cut another three studio albums, and the compilation “**Soul Searchin’**.” “**Diamonds & Dirt**” saw Crowell finally attain commercial success on a personal basis.

During the years 1988/89, Rodney hit a purple patch placing five consecutive singles at # 1 on the Country Chart. The first was a duet with Rosanne "It's A Small World," and was followed by "I Couldn't Leave You If I Tried," "She's Crazy For Leavin'," "After All This Time" and "Above And Beyond." "After All This Time" won the 1990 Grammy for Best Country Song. "**Life Is Messy**" chronicled the break-up of his marriage to Cash. The pair were divorced in 1991, and Rosanne went on to marry record producer John Leventhal and settle in New York City. "**Let The Picture Paint Itself**" [1994] and "**Jewel Of The South**" [1995] were MCA releases, co-produced by Crowell and label boss Tony Brown. In 1997 Crowell formed a band called The Cicadas, the line-up being Crowell, Steuart Smith [guitar], Vini Santoro [drums] and Michael Rhodes [bass] and this quartet cut a self-titled album for Warner Bros. Crowell married singer Claudia Church in 1998, and the following year penned her debut Country Chart single "What's The Matter With You Baby" which peaked at # 41.

In 2001, following a six year silence as far as solo album releases were concerned, Crowell, now signed to the Durham, North Carolina based independent Sugar Hill Records, released the autobiographical "**The Houston Kid**." Two years later with the lyrics ploughing much the same vein Crowell co-produced "**Fate's Right Hand**" with Pete Coleman and the album was released by Sony/DMZ/Epic. In early November that year, Crowell was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, along with Paul Overstreet, John Prine and the late Hal Blair. The previous year, Crowell had been presented with the inaugural ASCAP Creative Achievement award.

The Cherry Bombs had been Crowell's backing band during the late '70's and a quarter of a century later they reunited to cut "**The Notorious Cherry Bombs**" which was released in the summer of 2004 by the Universal South label. The band consisted of Crowell [vocals, guitar], solo artist Vince Gill [vocals, guitar], label executive Tony Brown [piano], album producer Richard Bennett [guitar], Hank DeVito [pedal steel], plus Emory Gordy [bass] and Larry Londin [drums].

"**The Outsider**" was released by Sony Records in mid-August 2005, and moving to the Chapel Hill, North Carolina based Yep Roc label, the Joe Henry produced album "**Sex & Gasoline**" appeared during the late summer of 2008. Commencing in January [that year], accompanied by his wife Claudia, Crowell spent the winter in a rented house in Livingston, Montana, where he completed his forthcoming biography and also the songs that appear on "**Sex & Gasoline**."

Discography :

with Hot Band [Emmylou Harris] : "**Elite Hotel**" [1975] ; "**Luxury Liner**" [1977] ; "**Quarter Moon In A Ten Cent Town**" [1978] :

with The Cicadas : "**The Cicadas**" [1997] :

with The Cherry Bombs : "**The Notorious Cherry Bombs**" [2004] :

Solo [excluding Greatest Hit collections] : "**Ain't Living Long Like This**" [1978] ; "**But What Will The Neighbours Think**" [1980] ; "**Rodney Crowell**" [1981] ; "**Street Language**" [1986] ; "**Diamonds & Dirt**" extended version released in America during 2001 [1988] ; "**Keys To The Highway**" [1989] ; "**Life Is Messy**" [1992] ; "**Soul Searchin**" compilation [1994] ; "**Let The Picture Paint Itself**" [1994] ; "**Jewel Of The South**" [1995] ; "**The Houston Kid**" [2001] ; "**Fate's Right Hand**" [2003] ; "**The Outsider**" [2005] ; "**Sex & Gasoline**" [2008] :

**Arthur Wood**

Kerrville Kronikles 09/05 and 08/08

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