

**ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC® ANNOUNCES SPECIAL AWARD HONOREES**

**KELSEA BALLERINI, ERIC CHURCH, TOBY KEITH, BOB KINGSLEY, REBA McENTIRE, “NASHVILLE,” WILLIE NELSON, DOLLY PARTON, SHEL SILVERSTEIN AND GEORGE STRAIT**

**ACM HONORS™ TV SPECIAL TO TAPE AUGUST 23RD**

**FOR BROADCAST AT A LATER DATE ON THE CBS TELEVISION NETWORK**

**FOR 2ND CONSECUTIVE YEAR**

***TWEET:*** *Special Awards and Songwriter of the Year 52nd @ACMawards*

*winners to be honored at #ACMHonors on @CBS [insert news link here]*

ENCINO, CA (May 30, 2017) – The Academy of Country Music® announced today the winners of the Special Awards for the 52nd ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC AWARDS™. Honorees will be celebrated during the **11th ANNUAL ACM HONORS™**, an evening dedicated to recognizing the special honorees and off-camera category winners from the 52nd Academy of Country Music Awards. The event will take place Wednesday, August 23, 2017 at the historic Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, TN and will be broadcast at a later date on the CBS Television Network.

Additional off-camera categories to be feted at **ACM HONORS** include to-be-announced Industry Awards and Studio Recording Awards, along with previously announced Songwriter of the Year Award winner, **Lori McKenna**. McKenna is the first female to win in the ACM Songwriter of the Year category.

The Academy of Country Music Special Awards are voted on by the ACM Board of Directors for specific achievements. Please note that titles of select Special Awards have been updated, as noted within each category listed below. Recipients of Special Awards for the 11th Annual ACM HONORS include:

**Cliffie Stone ICON Award – George Strait** has been chosen to receive the Cliffie Stone Icon Award. This award is presented to a country music artist, duo/group or industry leader who throughout their career has advanced the popularity of the genre through their contributions in multiple facets of the industry such as songwriting, recording, production, touring, film, television, literary works, philanthropic contributions and other goodwill efforts.

With 61 No. 1 singles under his belt, **George Strait** has captivated the charts for longer than any other artist in any genre. Winning his first ACM Award for 1984’s Male Vocalist of the Year, “King George” went on to build his country kingdom one great song at a time. Now-classic hits like “Amarillo by Morning,” “All My Ex’s Live in Texas,” “The Fireman,” “The Chair” and “Give It Away” established Strait’s smooth voice and no-nonsense style, making his live show a must-see event. Strait is one of the best-selling artists of all time with 100 million albums sold worldwide. He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2007 and was named the Academy’s Dick Clark Artist of the Decade in 2009. Though he officially retired from the road after his Cowboy Rides Away tour wrapped in 2014, Strait continues to pack houses at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas with his “2 Nights of Number 1s” show featuring all his number one hits performed live.

The Cliffie Stone Pioneer Award has been renamed the **Cliffie Stone Icon Award.**

Past recipients of the Cliffie Stone Pioneer Award include **Alabama**, **Bob Beckham,** **Garth Brooks**, **Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash**, **Charlie** **Daniels**, **Larry Gatlin & The Gatlin Brothers**, **Crystal Gayle, Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris**, **George Jones, The Judds,**  **Brenda Lee**, **Loretta Lynn**, **Willie Nelson**, **The Oak Ridge Boys**, **Dolly Parton**, **Charley Pride**, **Jerry Reed**, **Tex Ritter**, **Marty Robbins**, **Kenny** **Rogers**, **Billy Sherrill**, **Ricky Skaggs**, **The Statler Brothers, Mel Tillis**, **Randy Travis**, **Tanya Tucker, Conway Twitty**, **Porter Wagoner**, **Keith Whitley,** **Hank Williams**, **Hank Williams Jr.**, **Bob Wills** and **Dwight Yoakam**, among others.

**GARY HABER LIFTING LIVES AWARD** **– Dolly Parton** has been chosen to receive the Gary Haber Lifting Lives Award. This award is presented to a country music artist, duo/group or industry professional who is devoted to improving lives through the power of music, has a generosity of spirit, and is committed to serving others, voted on by the ACM Lifting Lives Board of Directors.

**Dolly Parton** has held many titles over her storied 50-year career – singer, songwriter, actress, legend---but philanthropist is one that is close to her heart. Since her earliest days of stardom, Dolly has used her celebrity to support the causes she loves most. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library has to date provided 100 million books to preschool children in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. In 2016, Parton stepped up to raise money for victims of the massive wildfires in her native East Tennessee. Hosting *Smoky Mountains Rise*, a three-hour telethon, Dolly helped raise more than $10 million for the Dollywood Foundation’s My People Fund, which provided money for temporary housing for families that lost their homes in the fires.

The Humanitarian Award has been renamed/incorporated into the existing **Gary Haber Lifting Lives Award.**

Past recipients of the Gary Haber Lifting Lives Award and Humanitarian Award include **Brooks & Dunn, Vince Gill, Lonestar, Martina McBride, Neal McCoy, Reba McEntire, Montgomery Gentry, Rascal Flatts, LeAnn Rimes** and **Carrie Underwood**.

**GENE WEED MILESTONE AWARD** **– Kelsea Ballerini** has been chosen as the recipient of the Gene Weed Milestone Award. This award is presented to a country music artist, duo/group or industry leader for a specific, unprecedented or outstanding achievement in the field of country music during the preceding calendar year.

**Kelsea Ballerini** went straight to the top of the charts with her first single, 2014’s “Love Me Like You Mean It.” Her self-penned debut was just the beginning of her winning streak. Her next two singles, 2015’s “Dibs” and 2016’s “Peter Pan,” also went to No. 1, making Ballerini the first female solo artist to have three consecutive No. 1 singles from a debut album since Wynonna Judd in 1992. Ballerini was named the ACM New Female Vocalist of the Year for 2015, was nominated for Best New Artist at the 59th Grammy Awards and came in at No. 2 on the *Forbes* “30 Under 30 – Music” list. Having wrapped up her first headlining tour, aptly titled “The First Time Tour,” Ballerini is currently working on a new album and is hitting the road with Thomas Rhett on his 2017 Home Team Tour.

The Crystal Milestone Award and Gene Weed Special Achievement Awards have been combined and renamed the **Gene Weed Milestone Award.**

Past recipients of the Crystal Milestone Award and the Gene Weed Milestone Award include **Jason Aldean, Garth Brooks, Luke Bryan, George Burns, Kenny Chesney, Jeff Foxworthy, Merle Haggard, Gayle Holcomb, Loretta Lynn, Little Big Town, Willie Nelson, Jennifer Nettles, Blake Shelton, George Strait, Taylor Swift, and Carrie Underwood.**

**Mae Boren Axton SERVICE Award – Bob Kingsley** and **Reba McEntire** have been chosen as the recipients of the Mae Boren Axton Service Award. This award is presented to an outstanding country music artist, duo/group or industry leader in recognition of years of dedication and service to the Academy of Country Music.

One of the most recognizable radio voices in the world, **Bob Kingsley** has been a friend to both country fans and country artists for generations. As host and executive producer *of Bob Kingsley’s Country Top 40*, the Texas resident has been inducted into both the Country Music DJ Hall of Fame and the National Radio Hall of Fame. Early in his career as a young disc jockey at KFOX in Los Angeles, Kingsley became involved with the fledgling Academy of Country and Western Music, which would eventually be called the Academy of Country Music. He won the Academy’s On-Air Personality of the Year award for 1966 and 1967. He was first elected to the Academy’s board of directors in 1967. He has since won a third ACM trophy for National On-Air Personality of the Year (2006) and continues to serve on the board today, making Kingsley the Academy’s longest-serving board member.

For more than 30 years **Reba McEntire** has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Academy of Country Music. Hosting her first *ACM Awards* in 1986 at Knott’s Berry Farm, McEntire has returned to the ACM stage as a host for a record 14 times----eight of those solo. A 14-time ACM Award winner (including 7 as ACM Female Vocalist of the Year), Reba has also been an avid supporter of the Academy’s charitable efforts, donating her time and talents to numerous ACM specials and other events supporting ACM Lifting Lives. In 2017, Reba partnered with the Academy and Omaze to offer a fan a chance to meet her backstage in Vegas, with proceeds from the auction going to ACM Lifting Lives.

The Mae Boren Axton Award has been renamed the **Mae Boren Axton Service Award.**

Past recipients of the Mae Boren Axton Award include **Barry Adelman, John Dorris**, **Tim DuBois, Rod Essig**, **Gayle Holcomb**, **Jack Lameier**, **Marge Meoli**, **Paul Moore**, **Ray** **Pilzak**, **Gaynelle Pitts**, **Keith Urban, Gene Weed**, **Tommy Wiggins** and **David Young**.

**MERLE HAGGARD SPIRIT AWARD – Eric Church** has been chosen to receive the Merle Haggard Spirit Award. This award is presented to a singer-songwriter who is continuing the legacy of country legend and 20-time ACM Award Winner Merle Haggard by following his/her own path, crafting great songs and epitomizing Merle’s spirit through genuine performances and great storytelling.

Over 12 years and five studio albums, **Eric Church** has established himself as an artist who stays true to an uncompromising path. As an intense performer and songwriter, he has brought to life the eternal themes of life, love and heartbreak in his own hellraising way through songs like “Smoke a Little Smoke,” “Springsteen,” “Give Me Back My Hometown” and “Record Year.” He has also bucked convention in the way his recorded and live music is delivered. He surprised fans—and the media—with his 2015 album, *Mr. Misunderstood*, which landed in the mailboxes of his fan club members without any promotion first before going out to the general public and the media the next day. For the 2017 60-city “Holdin’ My Own Tour,” Church went out solo without a support act and played two sets himself. Church holds five ACM awards, including Album of the Year, Vocal Event of the Year, Video of the Year, New Solo Vocalist of the Year and the ACM Jim Reeves International Award.

Past recipients of the Merle Haggard Spirit Award include **Miranda Lambert.**

**Poet’s Award – Toby Keith, Willie Nelson and Shel Silverstein** (*awarded posthumously*) have been chosen to receive the Poet’s Award. This award is presented to a country music songwriter for outstanding and longstanding musical and/or lyrical contributions throughout their career, with special consideration given to a song or songs’ impact on the culture of country music.

**Toby Keith** has sold more than 40 million albums worldwide and is routinely cited as one of country’s top businessmen with bars, restaurants, race horses and golf courses to his name, but it’s his accolades as a songwriter than mean the most to the Oklahoma native. Keith began writing as a teenager and charted his first self-penned No. 1 with his debut single, “Should’ve Been a Cowboy.” Since then, he has pretty much ignored the Nashville tradition of cutting Music Row writers’ songs and personally written or co-written just about every song he’s ever recorded. Among the highlights of his two-decade hit-making career are blue-collar anthems “How Do You Like Me Now,” “Beer for My Horses,” “I Love This Bar” and “American Soldier.” A 12-time ACM Award winner, Keith was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2015.

**Willie Nelson** is an American treasure, and the songs he has written will stand the test of time. Writing since the age of six, the Texas native has penned tunes that are part of the very foundation of country music. His credits as a songwriter include classics for other artists including “Crazy” (Patsy Cline), “Funny How Time Slips Away” (Ray Price) and “Hello Walls” (Faron Young). He co-wrote the outlaw anthem “Good-Hearted Woman” with his friend Waylon Jennings. Nelson’s signature song, “On the Road Again,” won the Grammy for Best Country Song in 1980. Willie was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1973 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2001.

The late **Shel Silverstein** (*awarded posthumously*) is known the world over as the offbeat poet and cartoonist behind beloved children’s books *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *The Giving Tree*, but he was also an accomplished songwriter. Silverstein penned inventive songs about unusual characters for a variety of artists, including “One’s On the Way” for Loretta Lynn, “Marie Laveau” for Bobby Bare and the classic rock anthem “Cover of the Rolling Stone” for Dr. Hook. He brought his madcap imagination to the song, “A Boy Named Sue,” which became a No. 1 hit for Johnny Cash. The song won the 1969 Grammy for Best Country Song. Silverstein died of a heart attack in 1999 at the age of 68. He was posthumously inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2002.

Previous recipients of the Poet’s Award include **Bill Anderson**, **Bobby Braddock**, **Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, Guy Clark**, **Jack Clement**, **Hank Cochran**, **Dean Dillon**, **Merle Haggard**, **Tom T. Hall**, **Harlan Howard**, **Kris Kristofferson**, **Bob McDill, Roger Miller**, **Buck Owens**, **Eddie Rabbitt** (*awarded posthumously*), **Fred Rose**, **Don Schlitz**, **Cindy Walker, Jimmy Webb** and **Hank Williams**.

**Tex Ritter FILM Award** – “**Nashville”** has been chosen as the recipient of the Tex Ritter Film Award. This award recognizes an outstanding television movie, series or feature film released during the preceding calendar year which prominently features country music.

Now in its fifth season,“**Nashville**”continues to tell Music Row’s stories to a world-wide audience. Airing domestically on CMT and Hulu, the hour-long drama is seen in 225 territories around the globe. Main characters Deacon Clayborne, Will Lexington, Avery Barkley, Gunnar Scott and Scarlett O’Connor have made real-life music stars out of actors Charles Esten, Chris Carmack, Jonathan Jackson, Sam Palladio and Claire Bowen. The cast has released 17 soundtrack albums on Big Machine Records and has toured regularly, playing to sold-out crowds in both the United States and abroad. The show has been credited as part of the recent tourism boom in the city of Nashville, which has seen an amazing increase in visitors over the past five years.

Past recipients of the Tex Ritter Film Award include ***Beer For My Horses***, ***The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas***, ***Country Strong***, ***Crazy Heart***, ***Dolly Parton’s Coat of Many Colors***, ***O Brother, Where Art Thou***, ***Sweet Dreams*** and ***Walk the Line***, among others.

**SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR AWARD** – Previously announced winner **Lori McKenna** – the first female to win this category ­– has been chosen as the recipient of the Songwriter of the Year Award. This award is presented to an individual known predominately as a songwriter, selected by a Professional Panel of judges composed of songwriters, publishers, producers, and performing rights organization representatives.

**Lori McKenna** has never lived in Nashville, yet she’s gradually become one of the most sought-after co-writers in Music City. At her kitchen table in Stoughton, Massachusetts, she wrote a heartfelt message to her five kids in the form of “Humble and Kind.” Tim McGraw carried the song to No. 1, and it also led to McKenna winning her second consecutive Grammy for Country Song of the Year. The first one was for Little Big Town’s triple-platinum single, “Girl Crush.” One of McKenna’s earliest champions was Faith Hill, who recorded “Stealing Kisses” for 2005’s *Fireflies*. McKenna continued recording her own albums as more stars cut her songs, including Hunter Hayes (“I Want Crazy”) and Keith Urban (“The Luxury of Knowing”). She released a new album, *The Bird & The Rifle*, in 2016. The project received a Grammy nod for Best Americana Album, while “Wreck You” was up for Best American Roots Performance and Best American Roots Song. She is a co-writer on Little Big Town’s new single, “Happy People.”

Past recipients of the Songwriter of the Year Award include **Ross Copperman, Dallas Davidson, Luke Laird, Shane McAnally and Roger Miller**.

**About ACM Honors:**

ACM Honors™ is an evening dedicated to recognizing the special honorees and off-camera category winners from the *Academy of Country Music Awards,* including the Special Awards, Studio Recording Awards and Songwriter of the Year Award winners. The 11th Annual ACM Honors takes place Wednesday, August 23, 2017 at Nashville’s historic Ryman Auditorium and will be produced for television by dick clark productions to be broadcast at a later date (date to be announced) on the CBS Television Network. Allen Shapiro, Mike Mahan, R.A. Clark, Barry Adelman and Mark Bracco are executive producers. Pete Fisher and Tiffany Moon are executive producers for the Academy of Country Music.

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