

Country Music Night in Rural Alberta  
By Bonnie Hart

Country Music has always been a great part of our heritage and those of us who live in the small rural communities often feel the bond between our life experience and the lyrics created by the country music artists who can put those experiences into the words of a song. Not only do we relate to what is familiar to us but we also empathize with the artist's own personal thoughts because they are so heartfelt. Whether the songs are about a lost young love relationship like in Duane Steele's hit song "Anita Got Married" or Jamie Warren's nostalgic look at life in his song "One Step Back" or the realities of the life of a farmer in Craig Owen Jenkins' song "Diesel and Dirt", most people find something that they identify with. The great guitar music that accompanies the words just lifts the experience to another dimension.

Last Wednesday night (Oct. 21) in Kingman, AB and Thursday night (Oct. 22) in Mundare AB, Craig Owen Jenkins produced two back-to-back country music concerts featuring Alberta's own Duane Steele, Jamie Warren from small-town Ontario, and Craig himself who resides in the Tofield area. Duane has had many hit songs over the years and in 2001 received the Canadian Country Music Award for Independent Male Artist of the Year as well as the Vocal Collaboration of the Year Award in 1997 for the song "Two Names on an Overpass" with Lisa Brokop. Duane has a new album out entitled "Dirt and Dreams" which was available at the concerts. Several of the new songs on this album have been released to radio.

Jamie Warren is another accomplished country artist with many awards and hit songs. In 1999 he received the CCMA Independent Male Vocalist of the Year Award and his song "Cried All the Way Home" was named Independent Single of the Year. Warren has, over the years, received many other awards and has been nominated in many categories as well as for the Juno Awards. Jamie also had a number of his hit albums for sale at the show.

Craig Owen Jenkins who is an experienced performer released his first country album last year. This album has songs for all the working people like truck drivers, farmers and cowboys. Craig has been nominated several times for the Alberta Country Music Association Awards in the categories of Male Artist of the Year and for the Fan's Choice Award. Craig also wrote a song entitled "Little White Lies" which was recorded by Chloe Albert on her latest album. This album was nominated for a Juno. Chloe's version of Craig's song received a lot of airplay when released in 2014.

Over the years Craig had met both Duane and Jamie at various music performances and in May of this year had the opportunity to attend a song writer's workshop called Songrise where Duane was one of the mentors. Later this spring Craig decided to move forward with a plan that he had been thinking about for some time and that was to bring country music back to the country. The big cities do host many country music concerts and every year there is Big Valley Jamboree, but many country music lovers who live out in the small towns and rural areas often find that attending the large venues is too expensive and they're often just too far away. Craig thought that putting on concerts in the local areas would give those people the opportunity to hear the music they love, meet the artists, and not have to spend a lot of time and money travelling. Craig contacted Duane who also thought this was something people would enjoy and Duane offered to bring Jamie in on the performances.

Those attending the concerts had a great evening hearing original music from the performers who are all songwriters. Duane Steele did sing one song written by Gordon Lightfoot who is one of Canada's most

famous musicians. Fans showed their appreciation with comments like “when is the next show?” and “that is what country music should sound like”. In the future concert productions Craig does plan to also feature other artists and possibly some local talent as well.

Kingman and Mundare were the first two of a number of concerts Craig plans to put on in the future in the surrounding area. To show his genuine community spirit, Craig invites local not-for-profit organizations to look after providing the concessions for the concerts. He believes that this is also a benefit to the small communities who are trying to raise money for various causes. At the Kingman concert, the students from Cornerstone Christian Academy provided coffee, juice, homemade baked goods and popcorn. The students are raising money for Christmas packages of sweaters and toys for poor kids in a migrant camp in Ensenada, Mexico. At the Mundare concert, the Air Cadets provided the concession and several acted as greeters at the doors to direct any concert goers who weren't familiar with the hall. All proceeds from the concession sales went to the respective groups.

Craig would like to thank all those who came out and supported the musicians. He also would like to thank the people who helped sell tickets and the businesses who allowed him to put posters up on their premises. A thank you also goes to the students and Air Cadets who spent an evening helping out the country music cause.

If there are any other communities which would be interested in having a concert in their area Craig can be contacted by email at [craigowenjenkins@gmail.com](mailto:craigowenjenkins@gmail.com) or by phone at 780-984-2109.

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