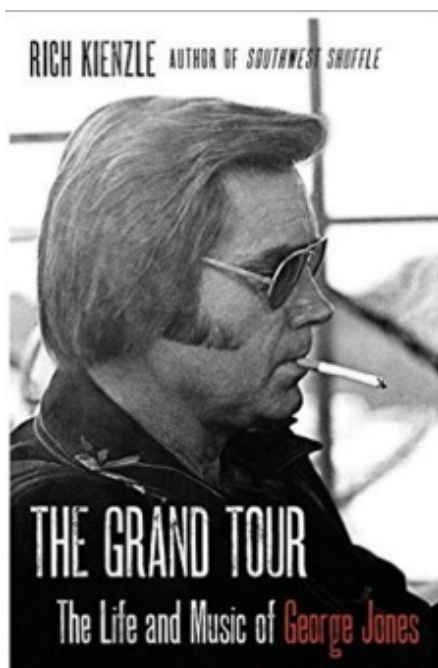




The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones

Rich Kienzle

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In the vein of the classic *Johnny Cash: The Life*, this groundbreaking work explores the wild life and extraordinary musical career of “the definitive country singer of the last half century” (*New York Times*), who influenced, among others, Bob Dylan, Buck Owens, Emmylou Harris, John Fogerty, George Strait, Alan Jackson, and Garth Brooks.

In a masterful biography laden with new revelations, veteran country music journalist/historian Rich Kienzle offers a definitive, full-bodied portrait of legendary country singer George Jones and the music that remains his legacy. Kienzle meticulously sifted through archival material, government records, recollections by colleagues and admirers, interviewing many involved in Jones’s life and career. The result: an evocative portrait of this enormously gifted, tragically tormented icon called “the Keith Richards of country.”

Kienzle chronicles Jones’s impoverished East Texas childhood as the youngest son of a deeply religious mother and alcoholic, often-abusive father. He examines his three troubled marriages including his union with superstar Tammy Wynette and looks unsparingly at Jones’s demons. Alcohol and later cocaine nearly killed him until fourth wife Nancy helped him learn to love himself. Kienzle also details Jones’s remarkable musical journey from singing in violent Texas honky tonks to Grand Ole Opry star, hitmaker and master vocalist whose raw, emotionally powerful delivery remains the Gold Standard for country singers.

The George Jones of this heartfelt biography lived hard before finding contentment until he died at eighty-one—a story filled with whiskey, women and drugs but always the saving grace of music.

Illustrated with eight pages of photos.

The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones Details

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From Reader Review The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones for online ebook

Jay says

I'd guess that the most common word to pop up in George Jones's biography is some form of the word "drink". Throughout the first 2/3 of the book, Jones is a drinking fool. So much of the story takes place with Jones in an inebriated state that you wonder what he'd be like sober. You get a glimpse of that in the end of the book, but he's older and more settled by the time that switch happens. You get the basics you would expect in a country music biography here: family background, growing up, early career, marriages, big concerts, run ins with the law, wrecked cars, singing partners, band members, lists of songs and albums, bizarre business ideas, divorces, come-to-Jesus moments, and eventual decline. And there's the drinkin'. I found these normal parts of the biography were well done, although some parts of his life, mostly his early years, were minimally covered. Likely, there wasn't much material to pull from. This book also had more than average depth when discussing his deals with record companies and the backgrounds of those companies and their owners. I found these areas interesting, but a bit tangential to the biography.

In the end, I feel I know more about No-Show Jones now than when I started. But I didn't know anything before I started. I didn't get the depth of analysis that, for instance, Johnny Cash received in his biography by Robert Hilburn. I couldn't help but compare the Jones in this biography to Cash in the Hilburn book and Jerry Lee Lewis in the biography by Rick Bragg. Cash and Lewis are reflective and come across as smart in many areas. Jones doesn't seem as reflective, and he doesn't come across as smart as much as methodically employing a talent in crooning and carousing.

Jeff Bottrell says

I was lucky enough to see George Jones perform before he passed. He was not in good voice, telling the audience he had a cold, but I didn't much care about that. I just smiled the whole time, knowing I was experiencing something really special.

I've never really learned how to mentally handle artists who are part angel and part demon. But I wanted to find out about this man in more detail, so I picked up this biography to lay things out for me. Kienzle does a serviceable job - this isn't an exhaustive work, it's not in any way intimate or filled with interesting insights. It's the basics, and in that, it does its task adequately. Jones is such a complicated man, a dark character in many ways (at times, jealous, surly, belligerent, abusive, violent, and chronically irresponsible), and beneath the accolades Kienzle lauds him with, there is a trail of hurt and mistreated people who get little attention in the story. We hear nothing, for example, from Jones's children. I imagine that's a different book to be written.

Sam Sattler says

Country singer George Jones lived such a colorful and public life that several biographies about him have been written in the past few years. I have three of those on my own bookshelves: George Jones: The Saga of an American Singer (Bob Allen - 1984), Ragged but Right: The Life & Times of George Jones (Dolly Carlisle - 1984), and George Jones: I Lived to Tell It All (George Jones & Tom Carter - 1996). Interestingly, both the first two books were published about the time that George returned to his roots and

built Jones Country in tiny Colmesneil, Texas (population 600). But Jones continued to add to his legend after 1984, of course, and although Tom Carter's book covers the years up to 1996 when it was published, those years are somewhat filtered through the eyes of Carter's co-author, George Jones himself.

Now, a full three years after Jones's death, his legacy has become more settled and his whole story can be told in one volume – and that is exactly what Rich Keinzle has done in *The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones*. From the very beginning of his career, country music fans were intrigued by the craziness that always seemed to follow Jones around the country as he performed. By the end of that career, George Jones was a respected vocalist (still with a reputation for craziness) who had managed to grab the attention of music lovers around the world. It was never easy for the shy, insecure performer that Jones was throughout his lifetime, but, public warts and all, he was just too good to ignore.

Rich Keinzle has done his George Jones homework, and it shows. *The Grand Tour* recounts everything from the life of poverty into which Jones was born, through his battle with drug and alcohol addictions that almost killed him, and on to his rescue by Nancy Sepulvado, the Shreveport woman, who saw him through the worst of his addictions and saved both his life and his career. It is impossible to recount the life of George Jones without spending a great number of pages on the singer's problems and demons – and Keinzle does that. But the high points of Jones's life, including the best (and worst) of his recordings are also recounted in great detail.

I appreciate *The Grand Tour* – and I am no casual George fan. George Jones and his music have been in my life for more than five decades. I grew up near the city of Beaumont, Texas, which Jones called home for a number of years. My wife's grandparents knew the Jones family in Saratoga, Texas, and her grandmother occasionally had George over to the house when he was a boy. Too, I personally witnessed two of the milestone events cited by the author in *The Grand Tour*: the one and only country music show ever presented at Jones's Rhythm Ranch in Vidor, Texas, and his later induction into the Beaumont Walk of Fame, a site that honors the most famous citizens born in the county surrounding that city. And all that said, Rich Keinzle still told me a thing or two about George Jones I never knew; it's that kind of book – maybe a little bit crude and rough around the edges...but then so was George.

Lucas says

An engaging, well written, easy to read biography of a country legend. Worth a read if you are a fan of George Jones or country music in general; there is nothing earth shattering or any exclusive information in this book, but it is a clearly presented document showcasing the highs (and many lows) of the ol' Possum's life in a clear & concise manner.

Shawn Durham says

Amazing book!

Sam Motes says

A story of the man behind the Country Music that lead the life that gave birth to those tragic songs. Many

wives, boos and drugs flowed through his life and though unreliable enough at times to be known as No Show Jones his talent and realness drove a loyal following who loved the man no matter what. He was truly a giant of Country Music whose influence flows strong today in Country Music and beyond.

David Ward says

The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones by Rich Kienzle (Dey Street Books 2016) (780.92). Country singer George Jones was known by various nicknames including “No-Show George” and “The Possum.” Remembered as a country music legend and a rounder par excellence, George Jones was once a king of country music. He was the most famed, flawed, and infuriating country singer of his day. His best remembered song was “He Stopped Loving Her Today” which was about his ex-wife and singing partner Tammy Wynette. He may have been popular as an entertainer, but he was a complete bust as a father. He had two sons with his first wife, but he and the boys were long estranged. He later had a daughter named Georgette with Tammy Wynette. Twice she asked her father to walk her down the aisle and give her away at her weddings; the first time he declined, and the second time he never even responded to her request. He didn't attend either wedding; the excuse he gave was that he had prior singing engagements planned for those nights. Poor George! This volume includes a dozen pages of photographs but not one picture of any of his children. He may have sung like an angel, but he was a sad and sorry little man! My rating: 7/10, finished 2/28/17.

Melissa says

I received an Advanced Reader Copy from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. As a huge traditional country music fan, I am an admirer of George Jones' music and the many singers following in his footsteps. I was very excited to read a biography about him. I thought this book had a ton of interesting information but lacked organization. It was a bit difficult to come up with an overlying theme. I think I might try Jones' autobiography and see what I can learn from the man himself.

Ted Lehmann says

The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones by Rich Kienzle (Harper/Collin/Dey Street Books, March 2016, 288 Pages, \$18.77/14.99) provides an excellent overview of the life and times of George Jones, called, by the New York Times, the “definitive country singer of last half century” and known for years in the industry as “no show Jones” for his propensity to be unable to make it to the stage because of his serious problems with drugs and alcohol. It may also echo the life and times of the country music industry during the decades from the sixties through the eighties, when many, according to an interview we heard recently, the industry floated on an epidemic of drugs and alcohol. While I didn't find much of Jones' life or personality to be much endearing, many of his fans will excuse his behavior for the greatness of his mammoth catalog of hit songs which persist, being frequently covered by country music singers everywhere. I found the book and the man to be both sad and distressing.

George Glenn Jones was born in 1931 during the depths of the depression in the Big Thicket region of east Texas, a heavily wooded region lying along the southeastern edge of Texas bordering on Louisiana. This is a region where, when the turpentine and logging industry wasn't doing well, the moonshine business thrived. Jones' father, a violent alcoholic himself, was prone to responding to upsets in the world by beating his wife

and children, which, according to Kienzle, lay at the base of Jones's own lifelong difficulties with drugs and alcohol. Music, however, was always a feature in his life, as his father played guitar and harmonica, while his mother was a church pianist in a Pentacostal church, leading Jones' toward his base in both country and gospel music which dominated his life.

Perhaps the most interesting element of this book, for me, lay in the insights into the recording industry, when that industry was ruled by large commercial labels, as it emerged during the fifties and sixties, from small, regional outlets recording in primitive studios music aimed at narrowly focused regional audiences, in Jones' case, of white, working class fans who heard him playing largely in honky-tonks and bars. As his success as a performer grew, he moved to Nashville, where the country music recording industry was centered, working for larger and more prestigious labels. He decried what he saw as the breakdown of traditional country music into an "urban cowboy smooth style represented by the rise of singers like Kenny Rogers and Garth Brooks, including even Dolly Parton, as she became a movie star in the eighties. As in bluegrass, the move from its rough, rural origins to suburban comfort in the U.S. Demographic profiles created fissures in the business which disturbed and angered Jones. Kienzle, prone to comments like "scared the shit out of him," substitutes coarse language for serious analysis at times. Jones' work became the "gold standard" for a movement during the eighties which Kienzle refers to as New Traditionalism, represented by Dwight Yoakum, Ricky Skaggs, Keith Whitley, and Patty Loveless.

Meanwhile, Jones' personal life can only be described as a mess. He was married several times to women whose influence on him was negligible. His marriage and professional association to/with Tammy Wynette created great music, but never contributed to his achieving a more adult lifestyle. He bought and sold large tracts of land with the idea of developing music parks, which never quite panned out. Jones was prone to buying and either giving away or wrecking cars and yachts, never learning to live in a responsible way or manage money. He was frequently sued and usually lost. His last wife, Nancy Sepulvado, seems to have helped him, with the help of several admittances to rehabilitation institutes and hospitalizations, to forego drugs and learn better to manage his drinking. Often plagued with ill health, Jones still managed to live into his 81st year, dying in 2013. He is remembered and celebrated as one of the all-time greats of country music history. Songs like He Stopped Loving Her Today and The Grand Tour have become staples of country music and bluegrass.

Veteran country music critic, journalist, and historian Rich Kienzle is the author of *Southwest Shuffle: Pioneers of Honky-Tonk, Western Swing, and Country Jazz* and *Great Guitarists: The Most Influential Players in Blues, Country Music, Jazz and Rock*. A contributing editor and columnist at *Country Music* magazine for nearly twenty-five years, he also edited their history publication *The Journal*. He was formerly a contributing editor at *No Depression* and *Guitar World* and is now a regular contributor to *Vintage Guitar Magazine*. His work has appeared in *Fretboard Journal*, *Guitar Player*, *Request*, *The Journal of Country Music*, and the *Austin American-Statesman*. The author of liner notes for almost four hundred reissue albums, Kienzle is among the few country journalists profiled in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*. He received the International Country Music Conference's Charlie Lamb Award for Excellence in Country Music Journalism in 2012. (from Harper Collins author biography)

The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones by Rich Kienzle (Dey Street Books division of Harper/Collins, March 2016, 288 Pages, \$18.77/14.99) is a reasonably thorough account of George Jones' life which makes no effort to paper over his personal demons and deep flaws. Who can tell whether those flaws contributed to the depth and emotional impact of his singing or fatally damaged his output and his life. Certainly, his record as a husband and father were evident to everyone who knew anything about him. Nevertheless, George Jones' reputation as an icon in country music only continues to grow. I read the book as an electronic galley provided to me by the publisher through Edelweiss. I read it on my Kindle app. If you decide to order this book, please consider using the Amazon portal on my blog at www.tedlehmenn.blogspot.com

SusanInSedalia says

I enjoyed reading about the life of George Jones. Many of the anecdotes about his wild life were entertaining but I found his biographer's crude and haphazard, tangential writing style very distracting. I felt as if he inserted himself and his thoughts too much into Jones' story. George Jones was one of the immortals of country music. He deserves a biography with a bit more dignity, and a biographer that knows not to hog the limelight with his subject.

JBP says

George "Possum" Jones was perhaps the greatest country singer of all-time. He definitely did those heartbreak songs better than anyone--google "The Grand Tour" or "He Stopped Loving Her Today" and listen to those if you don't know his work. Every now and then, I love to listen to old-school, my heart has been ripped out and stomped on by a no-good woman, melancholy country song and when I do...Jones is always a good option. He was an amazing singer but away from the microphone? Not as amazing. Multiple marriages [one to the equally brilliant country singer Tammy Wynette], kids, decades of alcoholism, cocaine addiction, bankruptcy, crazy on-stage antics--No Show was a nickname for the amount of time Jones wouldn't show up for gigs. It's actually hard to believe he lived to be 81 years old after reading about the ways he abused himself. But, he had 50 years of hits and is firmly ensconced as one of the all-time legends.

The reason this gets 3 stars instead of 4 is that too often it is just a discography recital--Kienzle spends too much time listing every single and its chart position. More intimate stories about Jones or some of the characters he worked with or new would have worked way better than an endless recap of his songs.

Brian says

I received this book as part of a Goodreads Giveaway.

I grew up hearing stories and tales about George Jones. My father's best friend was a cousin of George's (1st cousin?) and he passed along many tales of George's adventures growing up, so I really looked forward to reading this biography. I wasn't disappointed, tucked into this book were the stories of the people and songs I grew up listening to, it was like visiting old friends. No one can deny that George Jones was a hard partying man for much of his life, but neither can they deny his talent. I was just out of high school when he married Nancy and opened Jones Country a mere 15 miles from where I grew up and was living. When he died I almost felt like I had lost a family member, even though I had never met the man.

The only disappointment I found with the book was no mention of the duet he and Georgette released in 2008, 'You and Me and Time.'

Amy says

This book reminded me of a lot of things about George Jones that I had forgotten, particularly his drug

use/abuse. It was interesting, but not as good a music biography as (for example) Nick Tosches' book about Jerry Lee Lewis. At times it seemed to lurch from recording session to concert (or missed concert) and on to the next recording session. Despite its flaws, however, I enjoyed the book, and thought it did a good job of analyzing Jones' singing strengths and reporting on his relationships with/marriage to Tammy Wynette and his other wives.

Bonnie Thrasher says

I guess if all you really want to know about the life of George Jones is that he was a blubbering addict, you would find merit with this book. I have to think there was more depth to his character than was portrayed in this biography.

Joab Jackson says

My interest in George Jones was piqued by a comment made by Tyler Mahan Coe (Of the excellent "Cocaine and Rhinestones" podcast) about who he thought the best country music singer was. It was George Jones ("Whoever else you'd pick would also say George Jones"). Both Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett respected Jones as a singer, and he remained a country singer, and only a country singer, for his entire career.

George Jones (Known as Glenn to his childhood friends and family) grew up in the thickets of Saratoga Texas, a hard impoverished place where a man was expected to provide for his family, and a woman was to care for the family and put up with her man, whatever the cost. An occasional moonshiner, the father of George, who was the last of 8 kids drank hard as well, and when he'd get home drunk, he'd called for George and his singer to sing for him, else get a whipping by the belt. George had taken from music pretty much from birth, a child prodigy of sorts.

Naturally, he got out of the house as soon as he could. He found that busking in Jasper, a town not too far from Beaumont, got him \$24. By that time, his parents moved to Beaumont, to take part of the booming war work. His sister had married her boyfriend, a farmer, in order to get out of the house, and George would visit them as well, sometimes pretending to be a hobo at the door as a prank.

His early years after leaving home were furtive, full of trouble and all about playing music. His friends noticed he never seemed to have a home, but just drifted from staying at one person's house to another, even borrowing his guitars. When his father would com round, the old man would be drunk, asking for money.

George got married early, an ill-fated coupling that lasted barely three years, before she filed for divorce, his drinking and brutish behavior cited as reasons. To make the child support payments (yes, they had a child even as he drifted to from one dead-end job to another), the judge gave the young Jones the choice o going to jail or joining an armed service. He picked the Marines, because they had no wait list. Somehow, he didn't get shipped Korea, where there was a police action underway, but to Santa Cruz instead. There he finds happiness singing in the clubs on the weekend, where he was favored because he could sing any of the hits.
