

Tanya Tucker: She's Outlived Delta Dawn

By Mario Tarradell

The year: 1972. The Watergate scandal ruled the news, *The Godfather* killed it at the box office, and the price of gas was a mere 55 cents a gallon.

Tanya Tucker was 13 in 1972, a newly minted teen grappling with puberty and a strong, resilient desire to sing. She wanted to be a country music star. This wasn't a childhood whim; this was real adult stuff. Her first single, "Delta Dawn," said it all. The song was a stunner, a provocative tale of a tarnished Southern belle aimlessly searching for her long-strayed beau.

Tucker turned heads. She made the cover of *Rolling Stone*. She sang songs by country outlaw David Allan Coe and noted tunesmith Curly Putnam. She proved her artistry and her staying power long before she learned how to drive.

Her raspy, Johnny Walker-kissed voice, with its subtle twang and piercing delivery, guided Tucker through a five decade recording career filled with nearly unerring song choices. If Tanya sang it, you remembered it. Her trajectory, commercially successfully and indelibly influential, survives the times and trends. It's tough, hardy and irrepressible – just like Tanya.

At 57, the Seminole, Texas native remains relevant. She continues to tour. Tucker takes the stage March 18, 2016 at Greenville Municipal Auditorium, 2821 Washington Street, in Greenville, Texas. The Kenneth Threadgill Concert Series show, which begins at 7:30 pm, features special guest Kimberly Dunn, a San Antonio-born country singer with a promising future. Tickets are \$36-\$61, available at www.showtimeatthegma.com or by calling 903-457-3126.

Tucker has also become mother spitfire to Miranda Lambert, Gretchen Wilson and LeAnn Rimes, country music superstars who look to Tucker for inspiration and been-there wisdom.

As Tucker prepares a long-awaited new album, her follow-up to 2009's *My Turn*, let's examine the four stages of her recording livelihood – the Columbia Records introduction, the MCA Records experimentation, the Capitol Records rejuvenation, and the independent culmination.

Columbia Records: Tucker seemingly arrived fully formed. She was an ingénue singing sobering adult songs produced by the iconic Billy Sherrill. Nothing sounded out of place, not even "What's Your Mama's Name," "Blood Red and Goin' Down," "The Man That Turned Mama On" and the eyebrow-raising "Would You Lay With Me (In a Field of Stone)." Few country music introductions have ever been this bold.

MCA Records: Tanya came of age during eight albums that found her experimenting not only with her sound, but also her image. She scored her first and only Top 40 pop hit, "Lizzie and the Rainman," which was a No. 1 single on the country charts, and sang about her home state on "San Antonio Stroll" and the anthem "Texas (When I Die)." The latter tune emerged from 1978's *TNT*, perhaps her most talked about album. *TNT* was her rock excursion, earning a Best Female Rock Vocal Performance Grammy Award nomination, and filling the fantasies of teen boys with that sexy cover shot of Tucker in tight black Spandex pants and a microphone wire slid between her legs.

Capitol Records: While Tucker was always a presence on the country singles chart, no matter what label held her contract, it was on Capitol and sister imprint Liberty that she enjoyed the greatest success. Tanya scored 24 Top 10 hits, including memorable tunes that ran the gamut from traditional to pop country – "Strong Enough to Bend," "I'll Come Back As Another Woman," "Love Me Like You Used To," "Down to My Last Teardrop," "(Without You) What Do I Do With Me," "Two Sparrows In a Hurricane" and "Soon." She amassed five gold and three platinum-selling albums, and earned five Grammy Award nominations. Her Capitol tenure solidified Tucker's nine lives-style artistry. You couldn't count her out; she always came back fighting.

Independent Records: The new millennium ushered in Tucker's independent spirit. She recorded two well-received albums on independent labels. *Tanya*, from 2002, arrived on her own Tuckertime imprint, while 2009's *My Turn* saw its release on Saguaro Road Records.

In 2005, Tucker joined a long list of classic country stars with a *Live at Billy Bob's Texas* effort on Smith Music Group. By this point she had nothing to prove. She's earned the right to make and release records at her own pace and from her own artistic vision.

And so it goes for the woman who managed to publish a 1997 autobiography, *Nickel Dreams: My Life*, and star in her own reality TV show, *Tuckerville*, in 2005.

Tanya Tucker remains resilient. Her influence never fades. She's outlived Delta Dawn.