

TEXAN MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY DECORATES CHRISTMAS WITH WESTERN SPIRIT

Dallas native continues his Cowboy Christmas tour tradition with Greenville Municipal Auditorium concert

No Santa Claus. No reindeer. No Frosty the Snowman. Michael Martin Murphey's picturesque Christmas comes decorated by wide open blue skies, rows of snow-dusted pines, a warmly lit log cabin and a flickering camp fire.

Murphey's treasured Cowboy Christmas concerts, a tradition now more than two decades strong, explores the humanity and spirituality of the season. It delves into the American heritage of Christmas organically and universally. It strips down the highly commercial holiday to its bare essentials in an effort to present a richer, more rewarding experience for the audience.

"What I try to do is encourage people to think of the spirit of giving, charity and forgiving, which is the spirit of Christmas," Murphey, 69, says by phone from his ranch in Amarillo, Texas. "It's not about cramming a Christmas message down people's throats. It's about delivering that beautiful message of Christmas for people."

Armed with new videos, fresh production, a new backdrop and the Western art work of Kenneth Wyatt, Murphey's Cowboy Christmas Tour 2014 makes a stop at the Greenville Municipal Auditorium, 2821 Washington Street in Greenville, Texas. The show, which is part of the Kenneth Threadgill Concert Series, is Dec. 2nd at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$36-\$56 and are available at www.showtimeatthegma.com.

The genesis of Murphey's Cowboy Christmas harks back to Anson, Texas in 1885. That was the date and place of the first Cowboys' Christmas Ball, a festive celebration that found native New Yorker and newly arrived Anson resident Larry Chittenden so inspired by the dancing and merriment he witnessed that he penned a poem titled "The Cowboys' Christmas Ball." His six-stanza verse has been set to music and remains a traditional Western signpost of the holidays.

"The spirit of that grew throughout the world and people want that feeling again," Murphey says about the inaugural Anson Cowboys' Christmas Ball. "It's simple and essential – share a meal, have a dance and enjoy the spirit of Christmas."

To commemorate his love of Western music and his hearth-warmed affection for yuletide tunes, Murphey recorded three thematic holiday albums, 1991's *Cowboy Christmas: Cowboy Songs II*, 1999's *Acoustic Christmas Carols*, and 2002's *Cowboy Christmas III*. He's parlayed his passion for the Cowboy Christmas shows by writing the foreword for Paul H. Carlson's *Dancin' In Anson: A History of the Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball* published by Texas Tech University Press.

Murphey never forgets Anson. His Cowboy Christmas Tour heads to the West Texas city on Dec. 18, 2014. He also has gigs in Fort Worth, San Angelo, Amarillo, Corpus Christi, Austin, San Antonio, Belton and Galveston Island.

"I'm really thrilled that tradition has been really preserved and remains alive," he said. "Every culture has its way of celebrating Christmas. Texas has its own Christmas tradition and America has its own Christmas tradition. We are the most Christmas loving country in the world."

Preserving the beauty of the West, the true cowboy culture, and the sonic tapestry of Western music has been a lifelong mission for this Dallas native. Murphey soaked up the cowboy experience while growing up in Oak Cliff by venturing off to his grandfather's ranches in Rockwall and Fairfield, Texas during weekends and summers.

He would bring that Western sensibility to his music starting with the cosmic cowboy movement in the early '70s, and then encompassing his huge 1975 pop hit "Wildfire" as well as his hit-making '80s period in mainstream country. He later came full circle with his acclaimed forays into cowboy music, the Cowboy Songs series in the 1990s, and the more recent bluegrass opuses such as 2009's *Buckaroo Blue Grass* and 2010's *Buckaroo Blue Grass II*.

His latest studio gem, 2013's *Red River Drifter*, features a batch of original numbers he penned with son Ryan Murphey and producer Pat Flynn. It was written and recorded over the span of two summers in Colorado.

"We rented these log cabins," he says. "The songs reflect the time, the mountains, the trees. The album explores writing in that setting, the nature of it all, the peace in your life."

Murphey's peace comes from a 42-year career spent guarding and nurturing his artistic freedom. This is a man who's effortlessly crossed genres, from pop to country, folk to bluegrass, Western to adult contemporary.

"I have always insisted on my artistic freedom and it's gotten me into a lot of trouble with the record companies," he says. "With freedom comes the responsibility to yourself and your art. If you've got artistic freedom you need to take seriously not taking yourself too seriously. I've always had a wide open attitude toward art."

His expansive attitude covers the panoramic Western terrain like Picasso, Monet and Dali embraced canvas and easel. Like all artists with the power of expression, Murphey has transformed the personal into the universal. He brings the noble purity of the West to the most commercialized holiday. No Santa Claus needed.

By Mario Tarradell