

# THE GEO-SAMPLER

Ah, Nashville. The capital of Tennessee, located on the banks of the Cumberland River and a hub for music, healthcare, publishing, banking and education for the Southeastern U.S. And now, home to a new office for Geotechnics. In celebration, this edition of the *GeoSampler* will take a look at two landmarks of this pearl of the south - the legendary Grand Ole Opry and the less-than-legendary Parthenon (and, no, we don't have our geography mixed up on the latter). So sit back and get ready to learn a little more about the place they call "Music City" and "The Athens of the South."

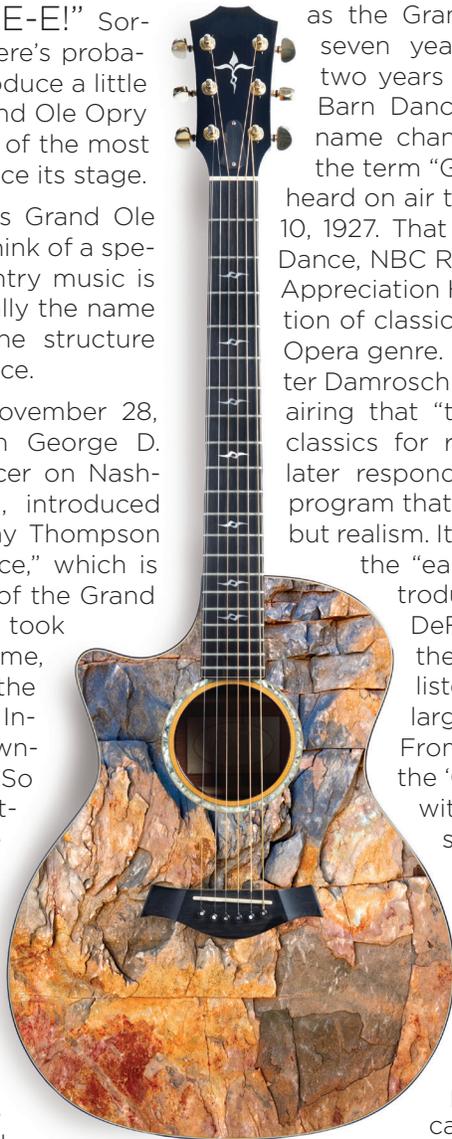
## SHE'S A GRAND OLE SHOW

"How-w-w-DEE-E-E-E!" Sorry, couldn't resist. But there's probably no better way to introduce a little history lesson on the Grand Ole Opry than with a salute to one of the most famous stars to ever grace its stage.

To start, when the words Grand Ole Opry are spoken, many think of a specific building where country music is heard. In reality, it's actually the name of a radio show, not the structure where the show takes place.

It was 90 years ago—November 28, 1925 to be exact—when George D. "Judge" Hay, an announcer on Nashville radio station WSM, introduced fiddle player Uncle Jimmy Thompson on "The WSM Barn Dance," which is known as the birthplace of the Grand Ole Opry. The live show took place in the studio's home, which happened to be at the National Life & Accident Insurance Company in downtown Nashville. Naturally. So this was the original setting of the Opry for nine years; that is until National Life executives issued a dictate to either move the program from the company headquarters or eliminate the live audience show. Not wanting to spend any more time than they had to around a couple of "Captain Buzzkills," the Opry would move to its first home outside the WSM studios, the Hillsboro Theatre - a small community playhouse near Vanderbilt, called the Belcourt Theatre today - in October 1934.

By the way, when the show moved to the Hillsboro Theatre, it had been known



as the Grand Ole Opry for almost seven years. But during its first two years it was called "The WSM Barn Dance." So, what led to the name change, you may ask? Well, the term "Grand Ole Opry" was first heard on air the evening of December 10, 1927. That night, prior to the Barn Dance, NBC Red Network aired "Music Appreciation Hour," which was a selection of classical music from the Grand Opera genre. Classical conductor Walter Damrosch remarked on that night's airing that "there is no place in the classics for realism." Opry host Hay later responded on the Barn Dance program that "we will present nothing but realism. It will be down to earth for the "earthy." He would then introduce "Harmonica Wizard"

DeFord Bailey, saying: "For the past hour, we have been listening to music taken largely from Grand Opera. From now on, we will present the 'Grand Ole Opry.'" It goes without saying, the name stuck.

The Opry would stay at the Hillsboro from October 1934 until June 1936, when it moved to the Dixie Tabernacle. The rustic venue came complete with wooden plank benches, roll-up canvas walls and, for the "earthy" audience, a floor of, well, earth. Finally advanced tickets to the show became available.

The show would move out of the Dixie Tabernacle in July of 1939 and into what was considered Nashville's most elegant performance hall, War Memorial Auditorium. This is where admission was first charged to the tune of 25¢. (continued on back)

*"Sometimes I am two people. Johnny is the nice one. Cash causes all the trouble. They fight." —Johnny Cash*



### Country Classics

Drop Kick Me,  
Jesus, Through the  
Goalposts Of Life

Get Your Biscuits  
In The Oven And Your  
Buns In The Bed

How Can I Miss You  
If You Won't Go Away?

I Don't Know Whether To  
Kill Myself Or Go Bowling

I Wanna Whip Your Cow

I Wouldn't Take Her To  
A Dawg Fight, Cause I'm  
Afraid She'd Win

If Love Were Oil,  
I'd Be A Quart Low

If You Don't Leave Me  
Alone, I'll Go And Find  
Someone Else Who Will

Mama Get The Hammer  
(There's A Fly On  
Papa's Head)

My John Deere Was  
Breaking Your Field,  
While Your Dear John  
Was Breaking My Heart

(continued from front) Unfortunately, rowdy Opry fans wore out their welcome and the show was forced out in June of 1943. Who knew country music fans could get so rambunctious?

From War Memorial Auditorium, the show would move to perhaps its most beloved location, Ryman Auditorium, where it would stay until March 15, 1974. Opened in 1892 as the Union Gospel Tabernacle, the Victorian building had no air conditioning or dressing room, but the 2,362-seat live performance venue fit the music so perfectly that it became known as the “Mother Church of Country Music.” In fact, so important was its cultural influence that the building, which still stands today after extensive renovations, was included in the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. Later, it would be designated a National Historic Landmark in 2001.

Also, when the show aired on March 16, 1974 at its next and current location, the Grand Ole Opry House - built exclusively for the Opry - an integral piece of Ryman Auditorium was there to help celebrate. That’s because there is an oak circle, six feet in diameter, which was cut from one of the corners of the stage at the Ryman and inlaid in the center of the new stage. This is where the artists usually stand as they perform at the Grand Ole Opry House today.

So, if you find yourself at the Opry, know that you’re part of a celebration of country music with a rich and colorful tradition. And one that leaves its fans “happy as a dead pig in sunshine.” (We looked it up. It’s an actual southern expression.)

## NASHVILLE’S BIG, FAT GREEK BUILDING

# NASHVILLE’S PARTHENON: OPA!

Say the name Nashville and many things immediately come to mind. “Music City.” Vanderbilt University. The Grand Ole Opry. But what you might not realize is that long before any of these, its education and architecture inspired its original nickname, “The Athens of the South.” That, in turn, would inspire a very unique building you may not associate with the American South.



You see, by the late 1800’s, Nashville was home to many colleges and universities. It was also the first Southern city to establish a public school system. As far as the architecture was concerned, the town was also full of buildings in the style of Greek Revival,

including the State Capitol Building and the Belle Meade Plantation.

Then in 1897, as part of Tennessee’s Centennial Exposition - a celebration of the state’s anniversary of officially being admitted to the Union on June 1, 1796 - the city built a full-scale replica of the Parthenon in the heart of Centennial Park. In fact, the plaster replicas of the Parthenon Marbles of its Naos are direct casts of the original pediments of the Athenian structure, which dates back to 438 B.C. Now that’s attention to detail.

Its original purpose was to house the art exhibition for the Exposition. Other cities in Tennessee would build other structures for other purposes strictly for the Centennial celebration that summer. However, when it was over, all of the buildings were either removed or dismantled except for one - Nashville’s Parthenon. Because of its popularity, the city kept the temporary structure and replaced it with a permanent structure that was completed in 1931. And even Zeus himself wouldn’t be able to tell the difference.

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in Tennessee**

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