



JON DEREK

Mark Derek pays tribute to his father - one of British country music's pioneers and best known individuals - Jon Derek, who sadly passed away in October this year, aged 70. Diagnosed with lung cancer just months before, Jon failed to recover from an operation to remove a tumour on one his lungs.

All photos supplied by Mark Derek and credited where known

“Jon and I had a great friendship and I think the music speaks for itself. His talent certainly stood out - he was the real deal.”

ALBERT LEE

Mark says, “Tributes poured in from a number of friends, fans and associates all over the world when the news broke of my father’s passing. It soon became apparent just how greatly admired, loved and respected he was. Let’s look back on an illustrious career that spanned six decades and one in which influenced so many other artists along the way.”

Where did it all begin? Jon always claimed in his childhood days in Wiltshire where his parents moved to from their home in Harlech, North Wales. Both his mother and father loved the early music of Gene Autrey, Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams. Jon was at college during the Skiffle period of the mid-fifties and it was then that he learned to play guitar and vocalise with his friends in a college group called the **Kool Kats**. After winning a Radio Luxembourg talent show, Jon met up with **Jerry Hogan** and **Gordon Huntley** and in 1958 they formed **The Black Stetson Boys**, which later became **Johnny And The Hayriders**. They were mainly playing American Air Force bases but they also broadcasted regularly for the BBC in such network programmes as *Easy Beat*, *Country Time* and *Saturday*

Club hosted by Brian Matthew - and Jon Derek became the first British country music artist to perform in stereo for the BBC in 1962.

The popularity of this band made Jon give up any original ambitions of becoming an architect, for he went on to join the **Jim Reeves** tour in 1963, and then turned ‘Pro’ in 1964. After signing with a top impresario, they were now known as **The Flintlocks** and in 1966 released a single on Decca Records... a Lennon/McCartney composition entitled *What Goes On*, recorded in the style of Buck Owens. After hearing this song, **Chet Atkins** personally invited them to his Starday Sound Studios in Nashville, Tennessee, where they recorded three tracks. Their manager, **Don Arden** (who at the time also managed the **Small Faces** and the **Nashville Teens**), was trying to turn them into another **Bachelors** and decided to change their name to **Jamie, Jon & Jerry** (**Jamie Gunn, Jon Derek & Jerry Hogan**).

They went on to record three more singles for Decca in 1967 (one of which was produced by the legendary **Dick Rowe**) and they toured with such artists as **Clodagh Rodgers**,

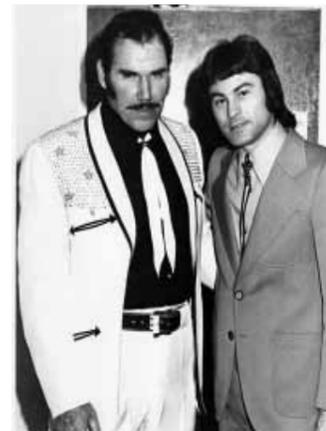
Carl Perkins and **Hank Locklin**.

The band had secured a contract in London with pub chain Fullers, playing a circuit of weekly venues consisting of The Clarendon in Hammersmith, The Nashville Rooms in Kensington, The Red Cow in Brentford and The Red Lion in Greenford.

Chas Hodges and **Dave Peacock** would invariably turn up to see them. It was in fact **Chas & Dave** who told a certain guitarist friend to, “come down and see ‘em, Albert - they’re a good country band!” It wasn’t long before they acquired the talents of **Albert Lee** who would often sit in whenever he could.

Albert was recently quoted to have said, “I had always loved Country Music from my early days but it was a revelation to discover Jamie, Jon & Jerry playing in Hammersmith in 1966. Here was Jon doing what I wanted to do.”

When bass player Jamie Gunn decided to leave the group to pursue a solo career, so as not to let agents and promoters down, **The Jon Derek Band** was put together for a short while, mainly to work as backing musicians for Clodagh Rodgers on



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Johnny And The Hayriders
(Jim Reeves Tour 1963 - Brize Norton)
Country Fever (1969)
Jamie, Jon & Jerry (1967) Courtesy of Decca
Jon Derek (1991)
Slim Whitman & Jon Derek (on tour 1976)



television appearances and radio broadcasts.

The following year Jerry Hogan decided to take a break from gigging to return to university and it was then that Jon Derek and Albert Lee went on to form **Country Fever** in 1968 - the original line-up consisting of Jon Derek, Albert Lee, **Pat Donaldson** and **Jed Kelly**. Jon was the driving force behind the band as he had the contacts and secured the work.

In 1969 they were invited to join the RCA tour with Chet Atkins, **George Hamilton IV**, **Skeeter Davis**, **Connie Smith**, **Nat Stuckey** and **Bobby Bare** which included a UK date at the Royal Albert Hall and appearances in Germany, Holland, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway. As well as having their own spot on the show, they also backed Connie Smith and Nat Stuckey.

The same year they also embarked on tours with **Rose Maddox**, **Jody Miller**, **Hank Locklin** and **Guy Mitchell**.

In 1970, they recorded two albums; *Mountain Music Jamboree* and the highly acclaimed *Listen To The Country Fever*. They also made their first of many Wembley Festival

appearances which also included backing **Don Gibson**, and later that year, they supported **Slim Whitman** on a nationwide tour.

Another album release, *A New Dimension*, came just months after Albert Lee left the band to concentrate on ever-increasing demands for studio session work. A never ending change of top talented musicians continued to pass through this legendary group including **Roger Dean**, **Pete Oakman**, **Malcolm Hammerston**, **Adrian Legg**, **Graham Walker**, **Rod Clarke** and **Brian Golbey**.

Their busy schedule continued, backing further star names in the years that followed such as **Johnny Cash**, **Charley Pride**, **Anne Murray**, **Del Reeves**, and **Wanda Jackson**, plus extensive tours with **Jerry Lee Lewis**, **George Hamilton IV** and **Marvin Rainwater** (with whom they recorded an album in 1972 entitled *Marvin Rainwater Gets Country Fever*).

Country Fever became the most sought-after group on the British country music scene. They could often be heard on BBC Radio in such programmes as *Country Meets Folk*,

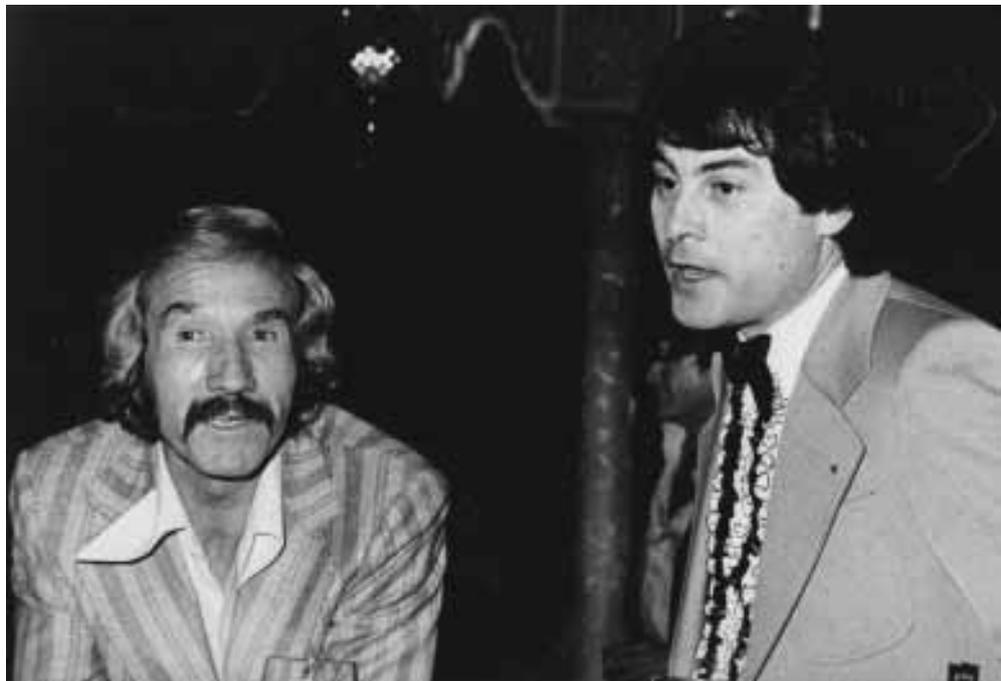


The Terry Wogan Show, Country Style and The Jimmy Young Show and television appearances included *Walk Right In, Colour Me Pop, Late Night Line-Up, Sing Country* and *The George Hamilton IV Show*.

Then, in 1974, Jon decided the time was right for him to go solo. This proved to be the right decision as he began to get the recognition he so richly deserved. Occasionally **Country Fever** would reassemble if the money was right or if a major show or tour was involved.

Jon found himself busier than ever over the next few years making countless personal appearances at venues up and down the British Isles. He also recorded a further four albums, *Songs I Have Written... With A Little Help From My Friends, The Country Music Trail* and two live albums, one for Decca Records and another with **Sir Jimmy Saville** recorded at the famous Broadmoor Hospital. Furthermore, he toured once again with Marvin Rainwater and, in 1976 with Slim Whitman on a gruelling 32-date UK tour.

1977 was a real turning point for Jon. He collaborated with Decca Records once again and recorded six tracks for them, two of which were released on a double A-sided single - *Till The Rivers All Run Dry* and *Makin' Believe*. The popularity of this single throughout the UK also



Clockwise from top left:

Jon Derek (1989) Photo: Roger Sealy

Marty Robbins & Jon Derek

(Wembley 1981) Photo: Graham Barker

George Hamilton IV & Jon Derek (1972)

Photo: Gill Wilkins

brought Jon some overseas success - both songs reached No.1 in the Maltese charts! Even **Don Williams** apparently told Jon what a great job he had made of his song *Rivers* when they were sat together on a flight to some European destination just after a 'Wembley Festival.'

Jon later reformed Country Fever and throughout the 1980s they remained one of the most popular and hardest working bands on the club and festival circuit. Tours with good friend Marvin Rainwater were a common occurrence and they also backed Hank Locklin on another visit to the UK, as well as **Barbara Fairchild**.

Furthermore, his 1981 self-penned single release, *Hey Duke You Got True Grit* (written as a tribute to John Wayne) was very well-received and his 1984 release, *Goin' Back* (celebrating Jon's 21st anniversary as a professional artist) became the fastest selling British country music album of its time and included the six tracks recorded some years earlier in the Decca studios.

In 1991 and, after 33 years on the road, Jon decided to semi-retire from live performing stating that he would only be available for selected dates from now on. This came as a huge shock to many but Jon had his



reasons for making this decision. He would leave a lasting legacy though - his pedigree was second to none, having won a number of awards over the years and shared the stage with a plethora of superstars, Jon played just about every theatre in the UK including two appearances at the Royal Albert Hall, five at the London Palladium and numerous appearances at the Wembley International Festivals of Country Music. He also toured Europe on several occasions. Stir in a string of major album and single releases and it's no wonder why Jon Derek will always be regarded as probably the hottest singing property that Britain has ever produced in the realms of country music.

CMP