

MIKE CURB

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## THE MAN BEHIND THE MUSIC

From songwriter to record executive, Mike Curb has shaped country music history. In this candid Q&A, he reflects on his career, iconic artists, and the evolution of the genre

From his early days as a songwriter and producer to becoming one of Nashville's most influential record executives, Mike Curb has left an indelible mark on country music. As the founder of Curb Records, he has nurtured some of the genre's most iconic names, while consistently championing songwriters, producers, and musicians behind the scenes.

Across decades, he has balanced tradition and innovation, supporting artists who respect country's roots while pushing its boundaries.

In this candid Q&A, Curb reflects on his career, the artists who helped define his label's legacy, and how the industry has evolved in an age of streaming and global audiences.

With a unique perspective shaped by personal experience in nearly every corner of the business, Curb offers insights into what makes country music resonate — and what lies ahead for the genre and his label.

**You've been a key figure in country music for decades. Looking back, what first drew you to the genre, and what made you believe in its potential?**

I was always excited about Nashville and particularly, Music Row. In fact, the first time I came to Nashville in 1964 I had a chance meeting with Sonny James, and he invited me to a recording session at The Quonset Hut. I watched him produce "You're The Only World I Know". I watched how he handled the microphones for the guitar, and how he was able to sing, play the guitar and produce the record at the same time was something that amazed me. Ironically, today we own the Quonset Hut, and I had the honour of bringing Sonny James there before he died to discuss the great history of that studio.

Curb Records has supported some of the biggest names in country music. What do you look for in an artist when deciding to work with them?

Talent. The greater the talent, the greater the singer. I look for the artist


with the most talent and artists who have exceptional vocal abilities.

**The label has been home to legends like Hank Williams Jr., LeAnn Rimes, and Tim McGraw. Are there any signings or projects you consider personal milestones?**

Those three would be right at the top, and we've been blessed to have so many other great artists along the way as well. What was very special here was that Hank Williams Jr. recorded for us for 45 years, Tim McGraw for over 20 years and LeAnn Rimes for over 20 years, and we're excited that LeAnn Rimes is releasing a new record before the end of 2025.

Country music has evolved dramatically during your career — how do you balance staying true to its roots while embracing change?

We realise that since the inception of the modern country music format there are always going to be records



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that lean very country and some that lean very pop and we have to balance that with respect to the artists we sign.

**What do you think makes country music resonate so strongly with audiences around the world, beyond the US?**

Country music artists are very sincere and their songs most often have lyrics that resonate with people. Nashville is home to the greatest songwriters, the greatest artists, and the greatest team members at our company.

**Your work has spanned traditional, contemporary, and even crossover country acts. How do you see the role of genre boundaries today?**

There are no boundaries. Country music can reach as far to pop and as far to country as radio and online playlists allow.

**In your experience, what's the biggest misconception people outside Nashville have about the country music business?**

A lot of people outside Nashville don't realise how talented our musicians are, how talented our recording engineers are, how talented our artists are, and how talented our songwriters are. Nashville has attracted the best of all these groups and when you combine them, you have something that's pretty incredible.

You've long championed not just artists, but also songwriters and

producers behind the scenes. Why is that creative ecosystem so vital to country's success?

Well, I had success as a songwriter and producer before I moved to Nashville. When I moved to Nashville, I realised that all the songwriters and producers were better than me and I decided at that point it was better for me to build a company and magnify the talents of other artists, producers and songwriters.

The rise of streaming has reshaped the music industry. How has it specifically affected country music, and what opportunities do you see in it?

The two most important things that we've found is that streaming allows us to release a recording to the world and also allows our entire catalogue to be available in a manner that was not possible when we had only physical formats.

**Country music often thrives on storytelling and authenticity. How do you encourage artists on your label to develop and share their own narratives?**

The most important thing is to let each artist be themselves and realise that if they have the ability to write, they can find success sooner. On the other hand, some of the greatest artists have been artists who do not write and many times those artists search for the greatest song, which is very, very important.

**What advice would you give to aspiring country artists trying to break through today?**

Never give up. Keep improving every day, network with other artists or songwriters who can help take you to the next level. Stay totally focused and never give up your dream,

Finally, what excites you most about the next chapter for Curb Records and for country music more broadly?

At Curb Records we are very excited about our current artists and the new artists we're developing. We're also very excited about building our catalogue so that the streaming services around the world have a constant flow of our product. **M**

