



MONTGOMERY GENTRY

BACK WHEN I KNEW IT ALL

Featuring the Hit Single "Back When I Knew It All"

Biography

Montgomery Gentry's journey into the front ranks of American music has been one of the most gratifying sagas of the past decade. Their road to gold and platinum albums, CMA and ACM awards, a Grammy nomination and highly successful tours has been paved both with musical integrity and with an abiding respect for the people and the genre they represent.

"We've never sold out to anybody," says Eddie Montgomery, whose soul-stirring baritone and 19th-century outlaw look have become iconic among country's rowdier fans. "What you see with us is what you get."

"We've always been consistent about choosing songs that deal with the working class, songs people can identify with," adds Troy Gentry, whose piercing tenor and classic good looks provide the perfect counterpoint. "We've stayed true to that."

Seldom have entertainers been identified so closely with their fans, and seldom has the respect and affection run so deep in both directions. They share blue-collar outlooks; sunup-to-sundown work ethics; rootedness in God, country and family; and the ability to celebrate life and endure hardship. It is a relationship few other artists in the often volatile world of show business can boast.

Now in their 10th year on the national stage, Montgomery Gentry can look back on one of country's most impressive legacies. They have released more than 20 charted singles, with anthems like "My Town" and "Hell Yeah" becoming indelible parts of the honky-tonk landscape. They have hit the top of the singles charts three times, with "If You Ever Stop Loving Me," "Something To Be Proud Of" and 2007's multi-week chart-topper "Lucky Man." And now, with the release of *Back When I Knew It All*, they have taken the next big step forward.

The CD shows them at the top of their game, something not lost on their loyal fans, who propelled the album's title cut and first single to the top of the charts more quickly than any single in the duo's history. The song serves as an introduction to a CD's worth of riches. "Roll With Me" shows Troy to be one of modern country's most stirring vocalists, the way "God Knows Who I Am" and "One In Every Crowd" showcase Eddie's vocal talents, his ability to move from the raucous to the sublime, and his world-class songwriting skills. "I Pick My Parties" keeps the rowdiness flowing as it teams the boys with sometime touring partner Toby Keith, and "One Trip" and "It Ain't About Easy" display Troy and Eddie's ability to impart serious philosophy in the guise of an entertaining country tune.

The album, which both regard as the quintessential Montgomery Gentry CD, got a jump-start when the duo followed their hearts to one of the world's most storied recording studios.

"Eddie and I and [producer] Blake [Chancey] were talking about some of the history of the music we grew up on, the artists we covered in clubs and the places where some of our favorite records were cut," says Troy. "The name that rose above the rest was Ardent Studios down in Memphis. Steve Earle did *Copperhead Road* there, ZZ Top did *Tres Hombres*--there's all kinds of good stuff that's come out of there. Knowing some of the people we looked up to had recorded there gave us a real sense of comfort."

Troy, Eddie and the studio musicians went en masse to Memphis. They visited Graceland and Beale Street together, ate meals with each other and, away from the distractions of Nashville, put together *Back When I Knew It All* in a studio with more than 70 gold and platinum albums recorded by the likes of Led Zeppelin, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Bob Dylan and Sam & Dave.

"The day before we started recording," says Troy, "we were going over the songs to decide on tempo and instrumentation. We were in a big circle with acoustic guitars and our drummer, Greg Morrow, just beating on a drum case or bongos, and I really dug getting in there doing that together as a team. It was probably one of the coolest parts of the process, watching the song get built right there in front of you by the musicians."

Working with Blake Chancey was a chance to team up again with the man whose work had helped define them.

"I tell you," says Eddie, "Blake's a hell of a song guy. He's just always gotten us. He came and saw us in the old days, he signed us, and he knows how we ought to be. He knows how to get the energy out of us, what kind of songs work for us, and how to capture our live performance in the studio."

The journey that Chancey has seen since the early days had its roots in central Kentucky. Eddie grew up in his family's band, where he and his brother John Michael spent their formative years in honky-tonks, falling in love with the music of Hank Jr., Charlie Daniels, Willie, Waylon, Haggard, and Lynyrd Skynyrd. Influenced by his mother's love of music, Troy favored George Jones, Haggard, Randy Travis and Hank Jr. and by high school, was in his first talent contest.

The Montgomery brothers and Troy joined forces in a band called Young Country until John Michael landed a record deal. His brother joined his band and Troy went solo, winning the national Jim Beam Talent Contest in 1994. When Eddie returned to Kentucky, he and Troy found themselves on stage together at various charity concerts and they decided to join forces again.

"It just seemed like the more we were playing together around town, the bigger our following got," says Troy. Nashville heard the buzz, and Columbia Records signed them.

1999's *Tattoos and Scars* announced them as a new force in country music, deeply rooted in the blue collar honky-tonk ethos that had sometimes been overlooked in the crossover success of the '90s. By their third album, 2002's *My Town*, they had become leaders of a movement that would come to breathe new fire into country music and help bring to the forefront artists like Gretchen Wilson and Big & Rich while drawing from established artists like Hank Jr. and rockers from Lynyrd Skynyrd to Kid Rock.

The hits came with regularity. Eddie and Troy were named the CMA's Duo of the Year in 2000, and received that year's American Music Award for Favorite New Artist--Country, the Academy of Country Music Award for Top New Vocal Group or Duo, and the 2000 and 2001 *Radio & Records* Readers' Poll award for Top Country Duo. The duo performed for well over a million fans, both as headliners and as part of Kenny Chesney's "No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems" tours in 2002 and 2003, and the Brooks & Dunn "Neon Circus & Wild West Show" in 2001.

Their place as honky-tonk ambassadors has long since been established. They were part of the Rolling Stone 40th anniversary issue, they are integral parts of Farm Aid and Country in the Rockies, and they joined forces with Maya Angelou after the release of "Some People Change."

Their humanitarian efforts are another example of that place where life, art and community come together in a meaningful way.

"Our charitable work hit really close to home last year with the passing of my mom from cancer," says Troy of their work with the T. J. Martell Foundation, which funds cancer and AIDS research and on whose board both serve. Troy is also deeply involved in the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and Eddie works with Camp Horsin' Around, a camp for chronically and terminally ill children, which provides recreation and medical attention.

Their desire to help make the lives of others better is reflected in their desire to live their own lives fully.

"Life is very short," says Eddie, "and you'd better live every second of it, because you never know when your name's going to be called. That's the way I've always lived my life. My parents taught me to live that way. We were raised very poor but we always had a lot of fun, especially with music. And music is the most healing thing in the world. Everybody speaks different languages, but when you put a record on, people from everywhere can enjoy it, whether they understand the words or not."

Through it all, they remain one with their fans, people who live fully, love richly, and work and play for all they're worth. Their rootedness can be seen in the fact that they are still playing with the band they had in their honky-tonk days. It's part of what keeps them honest, and that honesty shines through every bit of their latest CD. *Back When I Knew It All* continues their tradition of connectedness as it restates their position as the honky-tonk poets of their generation.

"We keep to our roots," says Eddie. "We'll always talk about the good, the bad, the ugly and the party on the weekend. We'll always include the Man Upstairs and our American heroes."

"And when we sing a song," adds Troy, "it'll always tell a story. That's just who we are."

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