

History

“**Just Someone I Used to Know**” was written by Cowboy Jack Clement. What follows is a portion of Paul Zollo’s meditation on the man. See more at countrymusicHalloffame.org.

“He’s a genuine songwriter’s songwriter, in that he writes the kind of songs other songwriters yearn to write, and they record them. A quick look at the list of legends who have cut his songs confirms this: Johnny Cash, John Prine, U2, Kris Kristofferson, Hank Snow, Cliff Richard, Ray Charles, Gram Parsons, George Jones, Dolly Parton, Garth Brooks, Charley Pride, Jim Reeves. And that’s not to mention Elvis, who worked with Jack from the very start. The man is beloved.

For he’s more than a songwriter. He’s a catalyst who has always had a keen knack for hooking up with great talent, and bringing out their best. Born in Memphis on April 5, 1931, he studied at Memphis State from 1953 to 1955, during which he played pedal steel, earning the sobriquet ‘Cowboy.’

Soon he was doing it all – writing songs, engineering, and even producing. In 1957 he wrote and co-produced (with Phillips) “Ballad Of A Teenage Queen,” which became a #1 Country hit as recorded by Johnny Cash. ‘He was a wonderful, wonderful man,’ Jack said of his absent friend Cash. ‘I think about him every day.’

In 1956 he engineered one of Sun Studios’ impromptu intersections of greatness; Elvis Presley teamed with Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins to create what’s become known as ‘The Million Dollar Quartet,’ for which a Broadway musical was created.

But it was also his production ideas and techniques, in addition to his songwriting clout, that left his lasting impact on American music. It was Jack, for example, who created the great live studio vibe which led to Jerry Lee’s amazing performance of ‘Great Balls Of Fire.’

When you ask him what the secret is to making music so good his whole life, he says it’s no secret at all – music is fun: ‘I’ve been a music bum all of my adult life,’ he said. ‘Making music has always been my hobby and it still is. If we’re not having fun then we’re not doing our job’”

Clement died at his home in Nashville, Tennessee, on August 8, 2013.

See Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton deliver this classic at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDlcxHU4Zi8>



Jack Clement, “If we’re not having fun then we’re not doing our job.”