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Affinity Publishing Group, Inc.

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2026 ROYAL INAUGURAL AWARDS CEREMONY

DIGITAL MEDIA & PRESS KIT

Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow.
The Sound of Yesterday Has Come Alive.

Seven nights of music, heritage, family and Royal celebration in Murfreesboro, Tennessee - including the Royal Inaugural Ball, Royal Dinner, three nights of awards, concert programming and the closing celebration.

Our Song is God.

Who We Are

An HTMA award is recognition. Becoming part of HTMA is family.

The 2026 Royal Inaugural Season is not being built as a collection of names, trophies and announcements. Honky Tonk Music Association is building a family and preserving its history while that history is still being made.

When an artist, broadcaster, organization or music-industry figure is nominated or honored by HTMA, we do not see that person as a name to place on a page and then leave behind. **They immediately become part of the Music Association family.**

That is why we celebrate their victories. It is why we care about their journeys. It is why we want to help developing artists keep moving. And it is why, when one of our own is lost, we mourn.

That is who we are.

The inaugural class is intentionally broader than future seasons may be because there can only be one inaugural class. These are the people and organizations becoming part of the foundation of HTMA at its beginning.

Our stories do more than announce awards. We want future generations to be able to look back and see where an artist came from, where that artist stood in 2026, who stood beside them, what they were building and where the journey went next.

Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow. The Sound of Yesterday Has Come Alive.

The Horizon - Keep Them Moving

We are enormously proud of our Horizon winners because we know the struggle that can come with trying to build a life in music. Talent does not guarantee that the next door opens. Musicians can spend years writing, recording, rehearsing, traveling, performing and promoting themselves while trying to reach the audience that may change everything.

Progress will not happen at the same speed for every Horizon recipient. Some careers may move quickly. Others may grow one listener, one stage, one song and one opportunity at a time. **Both are moving.**

Sometimes a little support and a little spotlight can go a very long way.

A feature may introduce an artist to someone who has never heard the music. A broadcast may create a new audience. An industry introduction may open a door. A performance opportunity may create the next connection. An award may give a musician another reason to keep going.

HTMA does not present the Horizon as a declaration that every recipient has already arrived. We are saying that we see something worth encouraging and something worth helping the world discover.

**Keep them creating.
Keep them performing.
Keep them growing.
Keep them moving.**

Our Horizon recipients stand beside pioneers, Kings, Queens, legends and lifetime honorees because tomorrow should not have to wait outside the door of history. **We do not separate tomorrow's artists from music history. We give them an opportunity to stand beside it.**

Artists including **Emmy Russell** and **Tyler Reese Tritt** are part of that inaugural story. They carry musical heritage, but they are building identities and careers of their own.

As Affinity Publishing Group, Inc., Honky Tonk Music Association, Honky Tonk Network, Affinity Radio and our related operations grow, our dream is for recognition to lead toward something tangible: **real, paid professional opportunities for developing artists.**

The Dream - Carrying Forward the Heart of Cowboy Copas

The award should be a beginning.

Creating opportunities for future performers was a dream near and dear to **Cowboy Copas**. HTMA carries that dream forward. We want recognition to be capable of becoming another stage, another audience, another broadcast, another introduction, another job and another opportunity.

Our Guardian Angels represent those who came before us. Their music, sacrifices, lessons, dreams and legacies continue to help guide where this Association goes next.

And we remember the families. Children and grandchildren sometimes shared parents and grandparents with studios, stages, buses, highways, audiences and an industry that demanded enormous pieces of family life.

**It is their turn to rise.
It is their turn to shine.
They have paid their dues.**

If HTMA can help move one career forward, then the dream becomes more than something we remember. **It becomes something we continue.**

Dolly Parton - When the Oil of Joy Turned to Sorrow

Dolly Parton was already part of the heart of our 2026 Royal Inaugural Season. She was a **2026 Queen of Honky Tonk Music**. Weeks before her passing, Honky Tonk Music Association had honored her as the **2026 International Royal Empress of Country Music**. She was also a nominee for the **2026 Best Honky Tonk Actor Award** for *Joyful Noise*.

And that meant something very personal to us.

When someone is nominated for an HTMA award or receives an honor from Honky Tonk Music Association, they immediately become part of our Music Association family.

Dolly was family.

Weeks earlier, we had written **Dolly Parton - The Oil of Joy**. We were celebrating her. We were excited. We were proud. There was joy throughout the Association over what this inaugural season was becoming and over the opportunity to honor someone who had given so much joy to generations of people.

Then Dolly died.

And the Oil of Joy turned into sorrow.

We did not simply observe the death of a famous entertainer from a distance. **We mourned.**

We cried.

For days, there were times when we could hardly find the words to write anything at all. It felt as though a member of our own family had died, because in our hearts and within Honky Tonk Music Association, **one had**.

The awards suddenly felt different. The excitement we had felt only weeks earlier was replaced by grief. We wondered whether Dolly ever knew how much we had honored her and how much she had already come to mean to this inaugural Association family.

We mourned her as family.

When Sorrow Turned Back to Joy

In the days and weeks that followed, something happened to that sorrow. We began to see the sequence of events differently.

Only God could have created a sequence like this.

Dolly had become a **2026 Queen of Honky Tonk Music**. She had been crowned the **2026 International Royal Empress of Country Music**. She had stood in competition as a nominee for the **2026 Best Honky Tonk Actor Award**. And then she became one of the **2026 Guardian Angels of Honky Tonk Music Association**.

**Queen.
Empress.
Nominee.
Guardian Angel.**

All within the same Royal Inaugural Season.

That is when our sorrow began turning back into joy.

We realized Dolly had not left the story of Honky Tonk Music Association. **She had become part of its foundation.**

She would always belong to our inaugural family. She would always be part of our history. Her name would always be connected to the Royal Inaugural Season. And as one of our Guardian Angels, her legacy would remain with the Association as we moved forward into generations that had not even arrived yet.

Only God could have written that sequence.

What began in celebration passed through tremendous sorrow and returned to joy because we understood that Dolly would always remain part of who we are.

**She was part of our joy.
She became part of our sorrow.
And through God, she became part of our foundation.**

The Competition Beside the Story

Dolly's nomination for the **2026 Best Honky Tonk Actor Award** was for her performance in *Joyful Noise*. The inaugural field also included **George Strait** for *Pure Country*, **Tim McGraw** for *The Blind Side*, **Lainey Wilson** for *Yellowstone*, and **Reba McEntire** for *Reba*.

The category was later decided, with **George Strait named the 2026 Best Honky Tonk Actor Award winner** for his performance as Dusty Wyatt Chandler in *Pure Country*.

That competition is part of the story too. It shows the inaugural class standing together across film, television and music - not simply receiving titles, but becoming part of the history HTMA is recording.

Today, when we honor Dolly Parton, we do so not merely as an artist whose name appears in an awards registry. **We honor a member of our HTMA family.**

And that is how we regard those we honor. Our winners become part of our family. Our nominees become part of our family. Our pioneers, Kings and Queens, Horizon recipients and Guardian Angels are woven into the history we are building together.

Some will stand with us for decades to come. Some may leave us far sooner than we ever imagined. **But once they become part of this family, their place in our history remains.**

Our sorrow became joy.

Our Song is God.

Seven Nights - A Family Comes Together

The 2026 Royal Inaugural celebration unfolds across **seven nights, October 21-27, 2026, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee**. It is not simply an awards show stretched across a week. It is the gathering of the inaugural HTMA family and the music that brought that family together.

The celebration includes a **Royal Inaugural Ball**, a **Royal Dinner**, Royal Awards presented across three nights, concert programming and a closing-night celebration. The music of the 2026 season remains at the center throughout the seven nights.

We deliberately did not place all of the awards at the beginning. The week is about more than receiving a trophy and going home. It is about being present for the music, the stories, the people and the history being created together.

The event is private and invitation-only. Venue and detailed scheduling information are reserved for authorized and credentialed participants. There will be no live broadcast. Approved award presentations, performances, special features and authorized behind-the-scenes programming will be prepared for presentation after the seven-night celebration concludes.

Seven nights. One inaugural family. One history being made together.

The Guardian Angels - Still Part of the Family

The Guardian Angels are not placed apart from the Association's story. They remain within it. They are part of the foundation beneath the artists who are still creating, performing and building careers today.

Their presence also reminds us why documenting history now matters. We do not know how much time any of us will have. We can, however, recognize people, celebrate them, preserve their stories and let them know that their contributions matter.

The Guardian Angels help connect yesterday to today, and today to the Horizon. Their legacies help guide the future of the Association.

We remember them because they are still part of who we are.

Generations - Their Turn to Rise

Music history is also family history. The 2026 season recognizes the pioneers and also the sons, daughters and grandchildren who shared them with the music industry.

Artists such as **Tayla Lynn, Emmy Russell and Tyler Reese Tritt** carry recognizable musical heritage, but HTMA does not ask them to live only inside someone else's legacy. They are building identities and careers of their own.

We know that some children of music spent years sharing parents and grandparents with the road, the stage and the audience. That sacrifice is part of the history too.

**It is their turn to rise.
It is their turn to shine.
They have paid their dues.**

Selected 2026 Royal Inaugural Honors

Dolly Parton	2026 Queen of Honky Tonk Music; 2026 International Royal Empress of Country Music; Nominee - 2026 Best Honky Tonk Actor Award for Joyful Noise; 2026 Guardian Angel
George Strait	2026 Best Honky Tonk Actor Award - Pure Country; 2026 King of Honky Tonk Music
Philomena Begley	2026 Queen of Honky Tonk Music
Travis Tritt	2026 King of Honky Tonk Music; 2026 Honky Tonk Music Outlaw
Pam Tillis	2026 Honky Tonk Music Pioneer; 2026 Honorary Queen of Pop Music
THE VINTAGE EXPLOSION	2026 Band of the Year; 2026 King of Soul Music; 2026 Pop Song of the Year - Thinking of You; 2026 Affinity Radio Lifetime Award; additional inaugural-season awards and nominations
Will Hitchell	2026 Entertainer of the Year; 2026 Royal Crown of the Fans
Jools Holland	2026 Affinity Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Music, Television & Entertainment
Jools Holland & His Rhythm & Blues Orchestra	2026 Royal International Orchestra of Excellence Award
Ruby Turner	2026 International Royal Queen of R&B;
Lulu	2026 International Lifetime Achievement Award
Grant Stott	2026 Excellence in Broadcasting Award
Culture Club	2026 International Royal Pop Living Legends Award
Air Supply	2026 International Royal Pop Living Legends Award
Journey	2026 International Royal Pop Living Legends Award

This is a selected overview, not the complete registry. Industry representatives should consult the official HTMA Winners & Nominees Registry for the current complete record and exact award titles.

Our Responsibility to the People We Honor

Being family carries responsibility. HTMA wants to direct audiences toward the music and stories of the people it honors, celebrate their progress, preserve their history and help the next generation be seen.

That responsibility is especially important with developing artists. A career may not change overnight because an award was given. But if recognition brings one new listener, one new supporter, one new professional connection or one more reason to continue, then the spotlight has mattered.

**We celebrate where they have been.
We stand with them where they are.
We keep watching where they go next.**

Silver Anniversary - The Foundation Meets the Future

The 2026 Royal Inaugural Season also celebrates the **Silver Anniversary of Affinity Publishing Group, Inc.** Founded in 1999 and incorporated in Tennessee in 2000, APGI enters this inaugural HTMA chapter with more than two decades of history behind it and a new generation of history ahead.

From the beginning, the words on our doors have said what remains at the center of everything we do:

Our Song is God.

That is the spirit in which we celebrate the pioneers, welcome the inaugural family, mourn those we lose, encourage the Horizon and carry the music forward.

Industry & Media Information

Dates	October 21-27, 2026
Location	Murfreesboro, Tennessee
Access	Private, invitation-only Royal industry event. Credentialing and advance authorization required.
Broadcast	No live broadcast. Authorized programming follows the conclusion of the seven-night celebration.
Registry	Official 2026 Winners & Nominees Registry at HonkyTonkMusicAssociation.com
Contact	awards@honkytonkmusicassociation.com 1-800-581-8183

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