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A CASE STUDY OF THE PROMOTIONAL COMMUNICATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC FAN FAIR

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

James Foy McCollum Jr.

May 1989

DEDICATION

This page is the easiest to write. "A Case Study of the Promotional Communications of the International Country Music Fan Fair" is dedicated to my parents, Foy and Mary Lou McCollum, whose love, support--and telephone calls--have encouraged me immensely during the last two years.

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ABSTRACT

The International Country Music Fan Fair is an annual event in Nashville co-sponsored by the Grand Ole Opry and the Country Music Association. Initiated in 1972, Fan Fair now attracts more than 20,000 tourists, who are treated to a week of concerts featuring more than a hundred country music stars. The performers also make themselves available for autographs and photographs at booths in exhibition halls.

This case study was undertaken to identify the various activities used to promote Fan Fair to fans and media alike. Data were collected through recorded, personal interviews with officers of the two sponsoring organizations. The author found that the communications duties of the CMA, which oversees the exhibit areas and scheduling of concerts, include public information and press relations. The Opry handles registration and logistics such as staging, sound, security and transportation, and it works with radio stations wanting to promote Fan Fair.

In addition, 377 questionnaires were distributed at the 1988 Fan Fair to learn how fans learned about the annual event. Interpersonal communication by far was the most selected source; 49 percent of the respondents said they learned about Fan Fair from a friend or relative.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THESIS 1

Introduction 1
Statement of the Problem: Research Questions. 3
Background of the Problem. 3

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 10

Information Campaigns. 10
Interpersonal Communication. 13
Country Music and the Media. 14
Music Festivals. 23
Fans 26

III. METHODOLOGY. 28

IV. RESULTS. 32

Organization and Finances. 32
Promotion. 33
Fan Fair's Future. 38
Survey Results 40

V. CONCLUSION 47

LIST OF REFERENCES 51

APPENDIXES 56

APPENDIX A. FIGURES 57
APPENDIX B. TABLES. 68

VITA. 76

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE PAGE

1. Questionnaire for 1988 Fan Fair visitors. 58
2. Souvenir program from the Grand Ole Opry. 59
3. Page from Grand Ole Opry/WSM Picture-History Book . . 60
4. Fan Fair brochure/registration form 61
5. Page from The Opry Observer, the official newsletter of the Grand Ole Opry Fan Club. 62
6. Media release prepared by the Country Music Association 63
7. Guidelines used by the Country Music Association in allotting credentials to media. 64
8. Breakdown of 1988 Fan Fair questionnaire respondents by region 65
9. Breakdown of 1988 Fan Fair questionnaire respondents by state and country. 66
10. Number of people told about Fan Fair by respondents after respondents' most recent Fan Fair visit 67

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE PAGE

1. Distances of Visitors' Homes from Nashville 69

2. Responses to the Question: "From Which One of These Did You First Learn of Fan Fair?" 69

3. Responses to the Question: "Which of the Following Have You Noticed Promoting Fan Fair Over the Years?" 70

4. Responses to the Question: "How Do You Describe Your Fan Fair Visits to Others?". 71

5. Cross-Tabulation of Initial Fan Fair Sources with Most Appealing Factors. 72

6. Cross-Tabulation of Miles from Nashville with Initial Fan Fair Sources. 73

7. Cross-Tabulation of Initial Fan Fair Sources with Years of First Attendance 74

8. A Comparison of Organizers' Rankings of Medium Importance with Sources from Which Fans Learned of Fan Fair 75

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THESIS

Introduction

As Nashville liquesces into each hazy June, local meteorologists invariably announce "pollen alerts." Each second week in the month, though, residents of Music City, U.S.A., might overhear a rock music disc jockey forewarn something else: "The 'polyester alert' is in effect!"

Armed with Polaroids and pens, bedecked in tank tops, shorts and sun visors, and plastered with pins, buttons and badges hailing the names of their favorite artists, some 25,000 country music fanatics from around the world prepare to converge on the Tennessee State Fairgrounds like swallows on wing to Capistrano to spend a week in "hillbilly heaven." Their specific destination: the International Country Music Fan Fair.

For $65, a fan can experience more than 30 hours of concerts featuring more than a hundred of the brightest acts--legends and future-legends--in country and bluegrass music. The Fan Fair package also includes a ticket to the Ryman Auditorium (home of the Grand Ole Opry from 1943 to 1974) and to the Country Music Hall of Fame, five days at

Opryland theme park and two barbeque lunches prepared by the Odessa (Texas) Chuck Wagon Gang.

The nerve center of Fan Fair, though, is the exhibit area. Here big-name and no-name performers alike rent booths at which they will sign autographs for hours at a time--or, in the case of the no-names, for whomever will ask. A public address announcer might proclaim, for instance, "The Oak Ridge Boys will now be signing autographs at Booth 51." Soon a phalanx of fans swarms to the booth, surrounding the stars with a sea of pen-waving hands, blinding them with a barrage of camera flashes and filling the hall with unabated but good-natured bedlam.

In no other performing arts genre do the biggest names schedule a week in which to perform and say to their fans, "Thanks for coming to my concerts, thanks for buying my records"--and for no pay.

Fan Fair is part circus, part family reunion, part Mardi Gras, part "Hee Haw." Some Nashvillians might resent the crowded conditions for a week each year, but 25,000 fanatics--most of them from the Northeast, many of them wearing polyester--cannot get enough.

> You can safely call it idolatry in the highest form. It's just like the 1930s and '40s when half-crazed women swarmed after Hollywood gems like Errol Flynn and Rudolph Valentino. Today you see it on nearly every Nashville street corner. Fan Fair is in progress and "subjects" are here from all over the world to pay homage to their kings and queens" (Hance, June 10, 1980, p. 1).

Statement of the Problem: Research Questions

The International Country Music Fan Fair has become one of the most successful promotional events in the country. On a local scale, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce states that the average Fan Fair visitor spends at least $75 while in Nashville (not including the registration fee). This translates into $6.6 million for Music City each June. Obviously, how well Fan Fair is planned, promoted and carried out will have a significant bearing on Nashville's economy. Also of importance is that Fan Fair serves as an ambassador for country music all over the world.

Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

1. How is Fan Fair organized by its co-sponsors, the Grand Ole Opry and the Country Music Association?
2. How well does Fan Fair "sell itself"?
3. What promotional strategies are most important in promoting Fan Fair?
4. How do Fan Fair officials work with the media?
5. How do fans learn about Fan Fair?

Background of the Problem

The International Country Music Fan Fair actually is a spin-off of two activities. One was the annual Grand Ole

Opry Birthday Celebration and Disc Jockey Convention. Since 1951, WSM Radio has thrown a birthday party to honor its Opry, the world's longest-running radio show. This party evolved into a week-long event which brought thousands of country music industry personnel--especially disc jockeys--from around the country to celebrate the Opry's anniversary, attend record label-sponsored shows and events, meet artists and get station IDs voiced by the artists.

Meanwhile, as the country music industry was burgeoning in the 1960s, rising star Loretta Lynn decided she needed a fan club. In 1963, she asked three Wild Horse, Colo., sisters--Loretta, Loudilla and Kay Johnson--who had become diehard followers of hers to head it up. Lynn thought the sisters did such a good job that two years later she suggested they begin an organization that would help others set up fan clubs. The Johnsons formed what became the International Fan Club Organization (IFCO), an information clearinghouse for artists, fan club presidents and fans interested in fan associations (McCall, June 11, 1987).

In 1967, Lynn had another suggestion: to initiate a get-together for fans that would coincide with the Opry's birthday. That October the Johnsons hosted a party at the Hermitage Hotel, with Lynn, Tex Ritter and Ernest Tubb engaging in an informal jam session. The fan party drew 250 people that year and kept growing in the following few years.

By 1971, the Opry celebration/convention had attracted several unwanted guests: star-gazers. "We got up to about 7,500 people in attendance, and we knew there weren't that many radio or record people around," said Jerry Strobel, Grand Ole Opry House manager. "We found out a lot of fans were coming who claimed to work for radio stations" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Grand Ole Opry).

Performer Bill Anderson, prompted by a member of his fan club, approached then-Opry Manager Bud Wendell and suggested forming a similar celebration just for the fans. Wendell agreed, and the first annual Fan Fair was scheduled at Nashville's Municipal Auditorium for April 11-15, 1972, to coincide with another Nashville attraction's premiere: Opryland theme park (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry). The Opry invited the Johnson sisters to move their fan concert/party to the auditorium (McCall, June 11, 1987), and with this merger, the International Country Music Fan Fair was launched.

The $20 registration fee that year allowed the fans to roam the exhibit areas and attend thirteen concerts, featuring stars such as Ernest Tubb, Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl, Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt and the Nashville Grass, Tammy Wynette, George Jones, Marty Robbins, Lynn Anderson, Barbara Mandrell, Loretta Lynn and Waylon Jennings. Although 2,200 people had registered for the first Fan Fair, more than 5,000

attended before the week's end. They came from nearly every state and several foreign countries; in fact, the most fans from one general locale appeared to be from Canada (Hance, 1972).

Still, the Municipal Auditorium, which could seat about 9,000 for the shows, was not exactly teeming with audience members, so organizers "recruited" soldiers from military bases around Nashville to fill the seats (Farmer, personal interview, March 6, 1989, Country Music Association).

On Fan Fair's opening day, The Tennessean had reported, "This morning the 1st annual Country Music Fan Fair will begin, with a Nashville-patented wail and stomp, the construction of what its sponsors believe will become another American institution" (Hurst, 1972, p. 1). Fan Fair certainly was on its way to tradition status, but that year it suffered what was later termed a "substantial loss," which WSM Inc., broadcaster of the Opry, absorbed. The following year, organizers moved Fan Fair to June to capitalize on the brisk tourism season.

That year Fan Fair drew 9,500 fans and realized strong grassroots support as well as national exposure. A Fort Dodge, Iowa, radio station, for example, brought 141 fans on three tour buses. A disc jockey for a Lansing, Mich., station, which had brought 97 fans, said his passengers were "so exuberant about the whole thing; they didn't believe such

a thing exists, where a fan can mingle with the stars. Half of them are already asking for reservations for next year" (Bailey, June 9, 1973, p. 1). In addition, the second annual event gained national attention when Opry Manager Bud Wendell furnished live feeds from Municipal Auditorium to the radio show NBC Monitor (Hance, June 8, 1973).

Two weeks before 1974's Fan Fair, the event suffered what was considered a serious jolt when one-third of the record companies that had previously sponsored Fan Fair concerts declined to repeat their performances. The six labels claimed their expenses, said to be as much as $20,000 in one case, were greater than the benefits resulting from the shows (Bailey, 1974).

Apparently the labels' action created fewer ripples than had been expected. For the first time, Fan Fair reached solvency, and after paying bills the organizers donated $40,000 to the Country Music Association to help combat tape piracy in the United States and Europe (Hance, 1975). Furthermore, the 13,000 attendance in 1974 became the largest organized assemblage of persons ever to gather in Nashville, surpassing all previous conventions. The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce estimated that the festival was worth more than $1 million for the city's coffers (Hance, June 12, 1974).

Fan Fair never stopped growing through the 1970s. The growth would eventually lead to problems, though. Municipal Auditorium began to swell from the crowds, and in 1981, the Fire Marshall prohibited any more Fan Fairs at that venue. In 1982, Fan Fair had a new home at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds, five miles south of downtown Nashville. Here, the exhibit areas were scattered throughout several buildings, which alleviated the crowded conditions, but the main shows were to be held at the adjacent--and sweltering--Nashville Speedway.

Although the venue changed, the theme remained the same. Fans were still reaching for the stars, and the stars were reaching back. As Newsweek's Athelm wrote in 1983,

> At a glance, Fan Fair seems built on an uneasy foundation of cynical pandering to the customers and manipulation of faked intimacies. But stare at it long enough, and the smudged but shining face of Fan Fair looks like a distillation of something American and enduring and quite wonderful. (p. 68).

The year 1986 was not a banner one for Fan Fair. More than 22,000 gathered at the fairgrounds, and thousands more were left standing outside. For fear of overcrowding, organizers cut off Fan Fair registration at 21,500, leaving hundreds out in the cold, or rather, heat. The following year, registration was opened up again, and 1988's attendance

of 23,000 pushed Fan Fair's 17-year attendance mark beyond the 250,000 mark (Wood, June 11, 1988).

David Ribar, curator of exhibitions at Cheekwood Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center in Nashville, presented in fall 1988 a photographical exhibit on Fan Fair entitled "Nashville Babylon: Images of Fan Fair." Perhaps his accompanying remarks best synopsized the Fan Fair feeling:

> To see a star is a grand occasion; to hear them perform is joyous; to actually talk to or touch them is positively transcendent. The experience provides excitement which may last a lifetime. In this respect, the fans depicted here are no different from you or me. Many of the collectors depicted--buttons, badges and autographs all over their person--are just like those of us who collect baseball cards, toy animals or autographs of the famous. We all openly proclaim our love for the pursuit. The support of a UT fan for the "Big Orange" or a Vandy fan for "The Commodores" is probably just as rabid as the adulation a country-music fan directs towards his or her favorite singer. . . .
>
> The country music industry provides an occasion where one might believe the illusion that a fan will get to see and "know" the musicians and feel the emotion of being one happy family of neighbors and friends, all come to roam the same "sacred" ground in Nashville, buy the same "sacred" souvenirs and perhaps meet (and touch?) the same "sacred" people. Yes, it is a "tawdry" experience, to a degree, but it is also a powerful and poignant one (Ribar, 1988).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To promote the International Country Music Fan Fair in this country and abroad is a considerable task. Studies dealing with similar information campaigns will have a bearing on this thesis. Because person-to-person communication is the hub of the travel information system (Nolan, 1974), research dealing with interpersonal communication and diffusion will be studied. Literature dealing with the music industry and with fans also will be reviewed.

Information Campaigns

After the fading of the early belief in the power of the media to persuade any audience, communication researchers were generally pessimistic about the probable success of information campaigns. Hyman and Sheatsley (1947), for example, said that even if one could know and remove all the physical barriers to communication, psychological barriers would remain. Thus, those responsible for information campaigns cannot rely simply on increasing the flow of information to spread their point of view effectively. For

instance, not all people offer equal targets for information campaigns. Interested people acquire more information than the "know-nothings," Hyman and Sheatsley said (p. 413). It is also false to assume that exposure, once achieved, results in a uniform interpretation and retention of the material. Different groups interpret the same information differently. Wishes, motives and attitudes often distort perception and memory.

When information campaign effectiveness on target audiences was tested, the results were often discouraging to the campaigners. For instance, a California gubernatorial candidate's election-eve telethon converted few, if any, voters (Schramm and Carter, 1959). A massive campaign to blitz Cincinnati with information about the United Nations produced no increase in the level of citizen knowledge, according to a survey (Star and Hughes, 1950).

The conclusions of communication researchers have, for the most part, changed. Mendelsohn (1973) did not believe that targets of a given message are always at fault if they do not react. He said that public information campaigns can have relatively high success potential if three things happen. First, planners must assume that most of the publics addressed will be either only mildly interested or not at all interested in what is communicated. Second, they should set out middle-range goals as specific objectives which can be

reasonably easily achieved as a consequence of exposure. Third, after setting middle-range objectives, planners should carefully consider delineating specific targests in terms of demographic and psychological attributes, their lifestyles, value and belief systems and mass media habits. He also stressed that communications practitioners should work continuously and closely on information campaigns.

As Rice (1981) pointed out, successful campaigns are never guaranteed, but they have been implemented on the basis of five principles:

> (1) assessment of the needs, goals, and capabilities of target audiences
> (2) systematic campaign planning and production
> (3) continuous evaluation
> (4) complementary roles of mass media and interpersonal communication
> (5) selection of proper media for target audiences (p.7).

Salcedo, Read, Evans and Kong (1974) stressed that the primary goal for a campaign communicator is for the message to reach the intended audience. Criticizing campaigns that rely heavily on public service announcements, have messages too numerous or complicated, or are conducted at inopportune times, they advised communicators to maintain considerable control over the timing and frequency of message placements. Modest exposure that messages gain in information campaigns mandates that key information be repeated across media and that it have visual and verbal impact, they said.

Interpersonal Communication

Person-to-person communication, according to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), is the most influential means of transferring information. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) said that combining mass media and interpersonal channels would provide the most effective way of reaching people with innovations and persuading people to use them. The mass media can reach a large audience rapidly, create knowledge and spread information, and lead to changes in weakly held attitudes. Interpersonal channels, they said, allow a two-way exchange of ideas. Here, a source could clarify or expound, helping the receiver overcome the barriers of selective exposure, perception and retention. Interpersonal channels, they maintained, also persuade receivers to change or form strongly held attitudes.

As Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) explained, the discovery of "personal influence" was a by-product of a 1940 presidential study in Erie County, Ohio. The researchers clearly had expected to find substantial media effects on voting decisions. They found instead that most people reported they were primarily influenced by other persons with whom they interacted daily. The researchers proposed that media messages first reach opinion leaders, who pass on the messages to others who look to them as

influentials. This process was named the "two-step flow" of communication.

The two-step flow was revised to a "multi-step flow" when it was found in a study of the adoption of a new drug by physicians that opinion leaders cited influence by colleagues as often as did non-leaders (Menzel and Katz, 1955-56).

Recent studies also have discovered the importance of interpersonal communication. Reagan and Collins (1987) found that non-mass media are better as information sources in specific situations. For example, for information about hospitals and doctors, the researchers found that the electronic mass media were selected by the lowest percentage of respondents. Interpersonal sources was first, followed by print media. Douglas, Westley and Chaffee (1970) noted that interpersonal sources, once activated by media, supplement and extend media campaigns.

Country Music and the Media

Country music gained its first national exposure with the emergence of radio in the 1920s. Radio sales, for example, rose from a relatively modest $60 million in 1920 to more than $842 million in 1929. With this new medium, the many folksingers in the South had an outlet for their entertainment energies, and many Southern broadcasting

stations featured live country entertainment almost from the day they were launched. Record sales are no true gauge of the popularity of country music during the twenties and thirties, because the music was directed toward an audience that could not afford periodic record purchases. Furthermore, people preferred to sit undisturbed and listen to an entire program of country music without having to change records, and they discovered that the better-grade radio sets were superior in tone and quality to the phonographs then (Malone, 1968).

The first high-powered radio station in the South, and possibly the first to feature country music, was WSB in Atlanta. Owned by the Atlanta Journal, WSB first aired on March 16, 1922. Within a few months, several folk performers had appeared on station broadcasts catering to the wide popularity of folk music in central Georgia (Malone, 1968).

WBAP in Fort Worth can lay claim to having produced one of the first, if not the first, radio barn dances in the United States. In the first several months of its existence, this station programmed nothing but popular, jazz, sacred and semiclassical music. On the night of January 4, 1923, though, it featured an hour-and-a-half program of square-dance music and provoked the largest audience response in its short history. Reaching for an unexploited but eager audience, WBAP inaugurated the hillbilly radio barn dance in

the Southwest and may have influenced the formation of such shows elsewhere. In those early unregulated days of American broadcasting, WBAP programs were picked up by listeners as far away as New York, Canada, Hawaii and Haiti (Malone, 1968).

The first station to experience any kind of longevity or national recognition with a barn dance was WLS in Chicago. On April 19, 1924--one week after it went on the air--WLS broadcast a barn-dance show featuring a group of country-style fiddlers and the popular Isham Jones dance band. The music was so well received that hundreds of requests for various fiddle songs poured into the station over the next few days. That humble beginning led to the development of the popular National Barn Dance, which for years would be the nation's leading country music show (Malone, 1968).

The announcer and one of the creators of the WLS Barn Dance, George D. Hay, was hired in 1925 as the first station director for WSM in Nashville, a station operated by the National Life and Accident Insurance Company. On November 28 of that year, Hay launched a show called the WSM Barn Dance. This radio show featuring "mountain minstrels" was broadcast on the NBC network and followed a classical music program, "The Music Appreciation Hour." Two years later, Hay opened his show with a now-famous ad lib: "For the past hour we

have been listening to music taken largely from Grand Opera, but from now on we will present 'The Grand Ole Opry' " (Strobel, 1984, p. 80). At that time, and through the popularity of performers such as Jimmie Rodgers and Uncle Dave Macon, country music "not only became a recognizable commodity--distinguishable from folk music, parlor songs, and minstrelsy--but a marketable commodity" (Schorin and Vanden Bergh, 1985, p. 517).

As the Opry increased in popularity, so did country music. Performers such as Roy Acuff, Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb and Bill Monroe helped bring country music to national prominence in the following decades. In the 1960s, country music took several major strides toward acceptance on national television when Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash, Roger Miller and Jerry Reed landed hosting roles on weekly network variety shows. These programs opened the door for many country artists to gain their first national exposure and also helped spark syndicated country music shows. "Hee Haw," for example, which was hosted by Roy Clark and Buck Owens, debuted on CBS in 1968 and was canceled after two years. It took its mix of music and cornpone humor to syndication, though, and has succeeded ever since (Lomax, 1985).

Also in the 1960s, Nashville producers attempted to win a wider audience for country music by ridding the industry of its image: toe-tapping tunes for rural folk. The result was

songs with sentimental lyrics and lush string arrangements (Jennings, 1987). Danker (1974) characterized the sweetened sound as "country music's harsh and strident truth hid behind a veil of pop lushness" (p. 396). Even at the peak of its popularity in the 1970s, the Nashville Sound started to seem spurious, with too many violins and vocal choruses camouflaging too many weak voices and poor lyrics (Root problem, 1985).

Yet America welcomed the change, and it is no coincidence that the International Country Music Fan Fair began in 1972, when country music was gaining national and even international popularity that it had not known before. Critics, speculating on the new country music phenomenon, noted that America was turning away from an era dominated by war, riots, protests and drugs, and that country music was a sound whose time had come. In addition, perhaps the world welcomed the evolution from simple laments about "dames, drinking and divorce," to more sophisticated ballads of contemporary life, rural memory and a greater urban emphasis (Why country, 1974, p. 58).

The early 1980s witnessed a revival of honky-tonk. The movie "Urban Cowboy," starring John Travolta, induced America to embrace a Texas tinge of Western music along with the mechanical bull, just as "Saturday Night Fever" (also starring Travolta) had popularized disco and the disco ball

for popular music in the late 1970's. This country-Western enchantment, at the time, appeared to be a trend:

> Americans--many of whom were urbanites from the Northeast and Midwest, and who had shown little previous interest in country music, cowboy hats and boots, pickup trucks and long-necked bottles of Texas-brewed beer--proceeded to develop a very strong interest in these very products, and in the lifestyle of which they were emblematic (Schorin and Vanden Bergh, 1985, p. 515).

Country music's popularity declined after this Urban Cowboy movement, "an artificial high reduced by the potent combination of the depressive drugs Antihitdomain and Pennilesscillin" (Wood, 1987, p. C-1). Non-traditional artists such as Kenny Rogers, Crystal Gayle, Ronnie Milsap, Anne Murray and Barbara Mandrell tried to carry country music but could not. For example, with a decline of almost $43 million in record sales, country music's 1983 market share dropped from 15 percent to 13 percent (Lomax, 1985).

> The world saw one too many Brooklyn lawyer suffering in his pointed-toe cowboy boots and trying to be as cool as country by tilting his cowboy hat properly; it heard one too many artificially-inseminated plasticized pop song with a hollow country core; and it smelled of something that reeked like dead fish: Nashville's creative soul to fill the void in, and coffers of, America's contemporary music scene (Wood, 1987, p. C-1).

In a front-page article in The New York Times, Palmer (1985) essentially wrote an obituary for country music.

Citing sagging record sales, lackluster performances by aging country artists, and an audience growing old with its stars, he predicted the Nashville Sound could soon become as archaic as the ukelele. The culprit, again, was records with an "assembly-line" sound: "lovesick laments, tales of marital strife and other plain-spoken lyrics, sung with a rural twang, and often accompanied by arrangements more redolent of Las Vegas than of Southern cotton fields" (p. C15). Not only was the Nashville Sound in trouble, he noted, but also the Nashville dream.

Reports of country music's demise were exaggerated. In 1986, the genre looked both back to its roots and inward to its soul. Record labels worked to present multidimensional new artists who presented a unique style--whether traditional or competely new--who understood the intricacies of recording, radio and the country audience. Radio, in turn, willingly introduced these artists (Olson, 1988).

In the late 1980s, never had there been such a surge of new talent in one field of music. For example, as many as 40 new acts cracked Billboard's Country Top 20 during 1986, 1987 and 1988 (Goldsmith, 1988). Ricky Skaggs, Reba McEntire, Randy Travis and George Strait set the traditional boundaries of country, while vibrant groups such as Exile and Restless Heart headed for the other end of the spectrum. This led to a creative tension within the genre that prodded both

extremes--and all those in between, including Highway 101, K.T. Oslin, k.d. lang, Rodney Crowell, the Judds, Vern Gosdin, Patty Loveless, Dwight Yoakam and Kathy Mattea--to higher plateaus (Wood, 1987).

Radio has grown in its role as a country music promoter. For example, in 1961, just 81 stations in the United States and Canada programmed country music, and most of those were in the South (Kates, 1989). In 1988, country music was the dominant radio format, although narrowly. One-fourth of all stations reporting to Broadcasting (2,450 out of 10,083) programmed country. However, the fastest-growing format--the flexible adult contemporary--was featured on just 113 fewer stations and was expected to overtake country music soon (Following, 1988). Although an Arbitron country music listenership study commissioned by the CMA showed country music listeners to be more diverse than their "rural and older" stereotype might suggest, several program directors indicated younger listeners were elusive. Moon Mullins, for example, the program director at WSM-AM in Nashville, said on a national scale country music fans were getting older and that the 18-34 age group still belonged to Whitney Houston and George Michael (Barrett, 1988).

Almost two decades after "Hee Haw," country music began placing a heavier emphasis upon video. The Nashville Network looms as the major country music video vehicle. Launched in

1983, this division of Opryland USA Inc. claimed, as of January 1989, a subscription of 43.1 million U.S. households, almost 48 percent of all U.S. television households (TNN, 1989). TNN's programming, according to the CMA's Jo Walker-Meador, "does for country music what the Grand Ole Opry did for entertainers" in the late 1960s (Kates, 1989). Country Music Television (CMT), a full-time country music channel, reaches more than ten million by way of cable homes, satellite dishes and broadcast/late night services. The majority of those reached are in the Northeast, South and Central regions of the United States (Country video, 1987).

Along with these national video outlets are regional outlets, with localized daily or weekly shows and local music channels that program videos. Some of the shows tie in with radio stations, regional publications or newspaper columns, where artist profiles run in conjunction with the show, allowing for multiple exposure of an artist. These enjoy the highest viewership in the West, followed by the South (Country video, 1987). Syndicated outlets include "The Country Express," which appears on a PBS national network of markets. Other media outlets offering video exposure are pools, which serve as distributors for clubs, college campuses and hospitals; video jukeboxes; and special contacts

such as theme parks, radio remotes and in-store programming (Country video, 1987).

In 1989, the future of country music appeared strong by virtue of the media, first-class studios and backup musicians, high-budgeted promoters and even the aging of the rock-and-roll generation (Kates, 1989). As Oermann (1988) wrote,

> Even music critics who aren't ordinarily listeners are beginning to say that country radio is the most exciting format around. With pop floundering aimlessly without any clear direction, rock being dominated by tuneless heavy metal, black music in a sound-alike rap rut, jazz moribund with bland, easy-listening saxophonists and Broadway songwriting seemingly incapable of producing anything lyrically lasting, the sounds of Nashville are sounding better than ever (December 31, p. 1D).

Music Festivals

The United States is not alone in hosting country music festivals. Canada, for example, holds Country Music Week each September, which thoroughly immerses the host city in country music. It includes seminars, showcases and an awards show telecast coast-to-coast by CTV network. As Wood (September 26, 1987) said of the 1987 event in Vancouver,

> Country music week in Canada could give Nashville a few hints on how to conduct its annual country music paean for both pilgrims and populace. It seemed as though almost every restaurant and nightclub featured country music on its radio, sound system, or stage during the

> week. Banners, posters, and fliers proclaimed that this was the week that country conquered Canada. And the blend of talent and territory was the perfect mix. Not even Nashville hosted more country music performances and country-oriented discussion during these seven days of September (p. 36).

There are bigger country music events in America, admitted the CMA's Ed Benson, but none are a week long. "[Fan Fair] is a family vacation," he said (Oermann, June 6, 1988, p. 1E). Although large in number (more than 400 bluegrass festivals take place each year in the United States and Canada, for example), festivals, celebrations and jamborees differ in size and quality. Morris (October 17, 1987) outlined the grandest ones:

• Jamboree in The Hills--This two-day event is, as Morris said, "the outdoor extravaganza by which all others should be judged" (p. 38). Sponsored by a Wheeling, W.Va., radio station and held just over the Ohio state line, this late-July concert features top national, regional and local talent. Nearly 60,000 fans annually attend the jamboree, which began in 1976.

• The Statler Brothers Happy Birthday U.S.A.--Characterized by bake sales, softball games, horseshoe pitching and a parade, this giant hometown get-together is more a celebration of American life than an actual music festival, though it is crowned by a free concert by the Statler Brothers. The three-day event, culminating July 4,

routinely draws about 80,000 visitors to Staunton, Va., the Statlers' hometown. It celebrated its twentieth birthday in 1989.

• The June Jam--The group Alabama began this one-day superconcert in 1982 to share some of its fortune with its hometown of Fort Payne, Ala. Indeed, the quartet donates all proceeds (usually around $1 million) to local and regional charities. The hometown band and other leading industry artists attract almost 60,000 people each year.

• The WE Fests--Held at Soo Pass Ranch near Detroit Lakes, Minn., this three-day festival draws nearly 70,000 fans. Like Jamboree in The Hills, it provides space for campers and showcases local and regional acts as well as superstars.

• Willie Nelson's Fourth of July Picnic--As Nelson himself has, this picnic has moved around quite a bit since its early-1970s beginning. Its attendance has varied widely, from huge and boisterous crowds that blanketed Texas fields to recent gatherings of 15,000. Nelson welcomes acts of all types, mixing little-known performers with superstars.

• The Old Time Country Music Festival--Folk and old-time country acts from all over the world invade Avoca, Iowa, for this gathering, the first of which was in 1976.

• Big Valley Jamboree--Billing itself as "Canada's Largest Outdoor Country Music Festival," this four-day

jamboree features some 40 local, national and international acts--including more of the biggest country music names than most of the above events. It offers free camping and parking on 350 acres.

"Eventrepreneur" Mervyn Conn has been instrumental in popularizing country music in Europe. In 1968 he oversaw the first annual International Festival of Country Music, held in Wembley, England. The event, which over the years has boosted the careers of such American stars as Boxcar Willie and Don Williams and spawned similar festivals in West Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Austria, now regularly fills the 30,000-capacity Wembley Arena (Morris, September 5, 1987).

Fans

The word "fan" derives from "fanum," the Roman temple in which soothsayers, called "fanatici," interpreted omens. The origin of fanaticism, then, is thus found in faith and religious zeal. To this is added an intemperate, demential aspect, which is why "fanatic" tended to take on a pejorative connotation during the Christian era. "Fanatic," like words such as "incredible" and "hopefully," has undergone a weakening of its meaning in popular speech. What is striking, noted Haynal, Molnar and de Puymege (1983), is that

even in its most degenerated form, the contracted "fan," fanaticism has retained its religious essence.

> For the real "fan" belongs to a closed little sectarian world with publications, or "fan magazines," for initiates. The fan's primary identification is in relation to the idol (Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones,et cetera), around whom a cult grows up which manifests itself through a violent delirium--ecstasy, fainting, shrieking, and tearing of hair (which is, after all, a form of self-mutilation). . . .There is no fanaticism without faith (p. 33).

Fan magazines are part of a communications revolution that possesses what Carey (1969) described as a "centrifugal" force. Through such "minority media," groups formerly dependent on face-to-face contact are organized into audiences. More importantly, he said, the media create entirely new publics or groups by providing collective symbols that transcend space, time and culture. While these media address a narrow dimension of their audience's life, "they create national communities of interest by allaying themselves with national bureaucracies and selecting their audiences on a national basis" (p. 25).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The author chose the case study approach to examine the International Country Music Fan Fair. As Yin (1984) explained, this approach is the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed and when the investigator has little control over events. He defined the case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Indeed, the researcher utilized various methods of data gathering to study the promotional strategies of Fan Fair.

Interviews with officials of the Grand Ole Opry and Country Music Association--co-sponsors of Fan Fair--comprised the primary source of data gathering in the study. On March 3, 1989, the author visited the Opry and interviewed Jerry Strobel, Opry House Manager. Strobel had worked with every Fan Fair since its 1972 beginning. On March 6, 1989, the author visited the CMA and interviewed Helen Farmer, director of programs and special projects, and Teresa George, assistant director of public information. Farmer had been a part of 15 Fan Fairs, while George had worked with one. The

author tape recorded the interviews to ensure the permanence and accuracy of the collected data. Each interviewee was asked free-form, open-ended questions. Follow-up telephone calls were used to confirm and obtain information.

To augment the interviews, the author conducted a survey June 8-9, 1988, on location at the 17th International Country Music Fan Fair. The primary purpose of the survey was to find how fans learned of Fan Fair. The author and employees of the Grand Ole Opry handed out the questionnaires at two locations: on-board shuttle buses and in lines for shows. The 40-passenger buses carry fans from the Tennessee State Fairgrounds (the site of Fan Fair) to Opryland theme park and to other Nashville locations. The author explained the purpose of the survey to the assistants and instructed them not to give more than one questionnaire to each family or couple.

One advantage of this type of distribution was that the administrators' presence enabled them to answer fans' questions and clear up misunderstandings on the spot. Furthermore, the researcher had a "captive audience." Completing the survey gave the fans something to do while standing in lines and riding the buses; this minimized the intrusive characteristic that many surveys hold and led to a nearly perfect response rate.

The shuttle bus distribution was not without its disadvantages. First of all, it did not allow for a completely random sample. However, the author, who had worked with the buses for four years previous to this study, knew from experience that because there are lines of Fan Fair visitors at each stop waiting to board the buses, and because Fan Fair activites are spread throughout Nashville, it is difficult for a large group of people to remain together. Therefore, the probability of having heterogeneous samples was increased. Another drawback was that the group environment allowed interaction among the respondents, potentially making the situation more difficult to control. Furthermore, some nearby fans probably preferred to drive their own vehicles around Nashville. This would inflate the percentage of people responding that they lived far from Nashville.

The questionnaire was printed on one side of 8 1/2" by 11" white paper and was reproduced by a copying machine. It was one page in length and consisted of 11 questions (Figure 1).[1] These included seven closed-ended questions, two open-ended questions and one yes-no question. All data were tabulated manually.

The primary question was, "From which <u>one</u> of these did you <u>first</u> learn of Fan Fair?" Choices given were "magazine,"

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[1]All figures and tables are in Appendixes.

"newspaper," "book," "radio," "network/affiliate TV," "cable TV," "mail," "poster," "friend/relative" and "other" with a blank next to it. The words "direct mail" probably would have caused less confusion than "mail." A similar question was, "Which of the following [sources] have you noticed promoting Fan Fair over the years?" Here, "publicizing" would have been more precise.

Three questions asked for demographic information. The more important of these were, "What is your state/province/country?" and "About how far from Nashville do you live?"

In addition, the review of literature on information campaigns, interpersonal communication, the country music industry and fans revealed periodicals and books relevant to the study of promotional communications of Fan Fair.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Organization and Finances

The Grand Ole Opry and the Country Music Association have co-sponsored the non-profit International Country Music Fan Fair since its beginning in 1972. The Opry handles registration and logistics such as fan transportation, parking, maintenance, sound, staging and security, as well as some promotions. The CMA oversees the exhibit booths and takes care of scheduling, public information, artist relations, press relations and some show production.

Not knowing at the start how Fan Fair would fare financially, organizers set up a joint venture and decided that the Opry would assume any loss, while the CMA could use any profits placed into the joint venture account. However, the money could not be spent on operation. "It would have to be on a specific promotional item, and it also required the approval of both the president of the Opry and the annually-elected president of the CMA," said the CMA's Helen Farmer (personal interview, March 6, 1989). In the early years, for example, the CMA used the money to combat tape piracy. In 1989 the CMA was borrowing money from the joint

venture account to construct a new building and expected to pay back the account what it would have earned in interest.

Strobel said that Fan Fair could bring in more money if it did not do as much for the fans; he cited the two lunches fixed by the Odessa Chuch Wagon Gang as an example. "If we took those lunches out, people might miss them the first year, but the fans don't say, 'Let's go to Fan Fair because I want to get some barbeque.' If we did away with the two lunches, we could save about $200,000 easily" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry).

Promotion

As Axthelm (1983) noted, "Unlike most entertainers, country performers are keenly aware of their dependence on a hard core--the folks who hang on every lyric and plan their summers around trips to Fan Fair" (p. 68). The organizers of Fan Fair agree that the "serious" country music fans comprise the primary public. "It's the hard-core country music fan, the Grand Ole Opry fan, who comes to Fan Fair," Strobel said. "I think you can see that in fans' responses to various acts. Sometimes the country-rock act doesn't go over as well as does the traditional country music singer" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry).

To reach the "hard-core" Grand Ole Opry fans in particular, the Opry includes a reference to Fan Fair in the souvenir program for each weekend's shows (Figure 2). Grand Ole Opry WSM Picture-History Book, another Opry souvenir, devotes a page to the annual event (Figure 3). Each person who writes the Grand Ole Opry Ticket Office receives a Fan Fair brochure (Figure 4). In addition, "The Opry Observer," a quarterly newsletter of the Grand Ole Opry Fan Club, publishes items about Fan Fair (Figure 5).

The Opry's biggest promotional task, though, is registration. Each person who attends a Fan Fair is placed on a mailing list. The Opry sends, at the most, three pieces in a year. The first is the brochure/registration form (Figure 4). If fans mail that back with their $65 registration fee, the Opry sends them a confirmation letter. Several weeks before Fan Fair, the registrants receive a tentative schedule of events. "Mail is so important because of the repeat customers we have; it jogs their memory," Strobel said. "We've had people call the week after a Fan Fair wanting to know when it's going to be the next year; we could work on it year-round, but we just don't have the time" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry).

Each year the Opry provides "trade-outs" to 15-20 radio stations across the United States and Canada willing to promote Fan Fair. After the stations write to Strobel (on

their station letterhead) and explain what their promotion will be, he sends them complimentary tickets to Fan Fair, and the stations in turn try to sell a busload or give the tickets away over the air. In addition, the Opry prints around 100 posters, primarily to promote the date for the next year. These posters are strategically placed at tourist attractions such as the Ryman Auditorium (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry).

While the Grand Ole Opry aims for the fans, the Country Music Association's responsibility is handling the media, an assignment it took over in 1983. "In the past, there was no aggressive solicitation of the press, and so there was nothing like the press we have now," said Farmer. "We took over about five years ago and became aggressive" (Farmer, personal interview, March 6, 1989, Country Music Association).

First of all, the CMA works closely with the stars. The association reminds artists to mention Fan Fair to fans at their concerts and to media representatives during interviews. In March 1989, for example, the association was hoping to get a country music artist on "The Pat Sajak Show" for a Fan Fair "plug." The CMA also will send radio stations short promos which say, for example, "Hi, this is Reba McEntire, come see me this year at the 18th International

Country Music Fan Fair. . . ."(George, personal interview, March 6, 1989, CMA).

Staffing the CMA's public information department as of March, 1989, were Kelley Gattis, coordinator, and Teresa George, editorial assistant. Gattis majored in journalism at Auburn University in 1985 and then moved to Nashville to become a receptionist with the CMA. She later became the research assistant, then editorial assistant, and she was named coordinator in 1988. George also majored in journalism and graduated from Sam Houston State University. From there she covered the city and crime beat for The Orange Leader in Orange, Texas. She then became an assistant producer for the CBN cable network and also worked in the media relations department. Before joining the CMA, she served as the deputy press secretary for Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential campaign (George, telephone interview, April 3, 1989).

In late winter of each year, the public information department contacts airline magazines, such as "American Way," as well as travel writers from the top 50 newspapers in the country and gives them Fan Fair story ideas. Around the second week in March, public information prepares the first of a series of seven or eight press releases (Figure 6). The department maintains a local press list of 60, a national list of about 500 and an international list of about 75; in addition, each release is sent over Business Wire. The

Nashville public relations agency Network Inc. supplies the CMA with the national lists (George, personal interview, March 6, 1989, CMA).

The CMA receives more than 400 requests for press credentials each year. "We have an invitation card that we send to certain press that we really want to come--travel writers, national media such as Time, USA Today and Voice of America. All they have to do is fill it out and send it back to us, and that's their credential," George said. The rest must send the CMA a letter (again, on company letterhead) stating their circulation or reach and how they plan to cover Fan Fair. The association then uses guidelines (Figure 7) to trim the number down to about 250. (George, personal interview, March 6, 1989, CMA).

Other press relations include assisting reporters with stories and operating the Fan Fair press center. "Some writers, for example, will say, 'I'm doing a story on the history of Fan Fair'; we'll give them information or tell them who they can talk to," George said. "Others might say, 'I'd really like an interview with the Judds,' and we will do our best to set up the interview." At Fan Fair, the public information department provides and oversees private areas in a separate hall for the press to conduct interviews with the stars. It also keeps up with the schedules for all 100 performing acts and announces when the artists will be

available for press conferences (George, personal interview, March 6, 1989, CMA).

Fan Fair organizers do evaluate the event to an extent. The CMA subscribes to Burrell's clipping service and observes the coverage each Fan Fair has merited. A Fan Fair representative attends each International Fan Club Organization breakfast, held immediately after Fan Fair week, and fields complaints and compliments. Also, the Grand Ole Opry office reads and replies to everyone who writes in with comments about Fan Fair. "We learn something every year and try to correct everything we can," said Strobel (personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry).

Fan Fair's Future

In 1984, when attendance at Fan Fair hit 19,100, the Nashville Banner said Strobel predicted a possible 40,000 crowd in five years (Zabriskie, 1984). Fan Fair drew 23,000 in 1988, down about a thousand from 1987, in 1989--the five years later--it seemed to have reached a limit.

"I think it could have reached 40,000, but anything you do in Nashville is always going to be limited by hotel accommodations," said Strobel, reminded of his prognostication. "Another problem is where to have it. We don't have any place to accommodate 40,000, unless it be

Vanderbilt [University's] stadium, and I don't believe Vanderbilt is going to allow us to tear up their football field to build a stage. So we're sort of locked in right now with the fairgrounds, and there the most we can accommodate comfortably would be 22-24,000" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry). Farmer agreed: "We've really outgrown the fairgrounds; if we could find a bigger place, we would go" (Farmer, personal interview, March 6, 1989, CMA).

Strobel said the Nashville government had discussed building a 20,000-seat multi-purpose auditorium downtown, across the street from the Nashville Convention Center and near the Ryman Auditorium, now being renovated. Fan Fair could then rotate people among those three venues and possibly use again the Municipal Auditorium, a few blocks away. "That would be ideal, but one problem would again be hotel accommodations," Strobel said. "Plus, the convention center is always trying to sell conventions, and it sells them five years in advance. We might decide to change the days of a future Fan Fair; the convention center can't govern its business by what we do" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989).

One of Strobel's dreams is launching another Fan Fair--in Europe. "That would truly make it an international fan fair," he said. "However, each time I bring it up,

everybody says, "Okay, you go over there and set it up" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry).

The next few years appear to be pivotal for Fan Fair. The attendance will not increase substantially at the fairgrounds site, which has driven away older fans who cannot stand the heat. Farmer acknowledged this loss: "I think we've lost some of our old stalwarts that came through the years that liked the air conditioning at the Municipal Auditorium and who can't stand the hills and the steps" (Farmer, personal interview, March 6, 1989, CMA). Because of this, Fan Fair organizers will have to become more aggressive in hooking the younger audiences.

Survey Results

A 1987 survey by RCA Records sought demographics of Fan Fair visitors. It found, for example, that 34 percent of those polled were managers, students or professionals, and 40 percent had attended a university. The two largest income groups were $20,000-$39,000 (37 percent) and $40,000-$59,000 (20 percent); 28 percent earned more than $40,000 annually. In addition, 58 percent indicated they were married, 73 percent were women, and 33 percent were under 36. More fans came from Pennsylvania than from any other state (LeDuc, 1988). For this thesis, the author distributed 377

questionnaires at the 1988 International Country Music Fan Fair (Figure 1). Three hundred seventy-six responded. Results of the survey accorded with previous findings in that most visitors came from the Northeast (Figure 8). Out of 370 respondents, 209, or 56 percent, said they were from states (or Washington, D.C.) northeast of Tennessee. Pennsylvania was better represented than any other state, with 38 visitors, followed by Massachusetts (23), Texas (21), Virginia (21) and Maryland (14), Michigan (14) and Ohio (14) (Figure 9). Only one person claimed Tennessee as home. Five foreign countries were represented; 45 people, 12 percent of the total respondents, said they were from Canada.

One hundred twenty people (32 percent) said their home was 1,000 miles or more from Nashville, while only one person (the Tennessean) lived within 200 miles (Table 1).

The low number of nearby respondents did not seem to bother Fan Fair planners. "If the Opry depended on Nashvillians or Middle Tennesseans, we would go broke tomorrow," Strobel said. "I don't know why they don't attend Fan Fair, but I think it's probably because of the same reason they don't attend the Opry--they're just not fans of it, or it's something they see every day, and it's old hat to them" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry).

George said Tennesseans get their fill of music from Dollywood, Opryland and the many concerts and shows held in

their own backyards. "They might come to Fan Fair, but it's not something they return to year after year. We want Tennesseans to come, but we also want it to be an international event--that's why 'International' is part of the name," she said. "Besides, if you're depending on a local base, there's not as much room for growth" (George, personal interview, March 6, 1989, CMA).

Two-hundred fifty-seven, or 68 percent, of the 376 respondents said they were attending Fan Fair for the first time. Out of the 119 who had visited the event before, 56 were attending their second fair and 22 were attending their third, while three had attended 15 previous Fan Fairs. Sixty-seven, or 56 percent of the 119, had been to every Fan Fair since they had first attended.

The researcher also was interested in learning how each respondent first learned of fan fair. The following categories were listed on the questionnaire: magazine, newspaper, book, radio, local/affiliate television, cable television, mail, poster and friend/relative; an "Other" category was provided, with a blank next to it.

Interpersonal communication easily was the most popular choice (Table 2). Out of 337 respondents who chose one answer, 49 percent said they first learned of the event from a friend or relative. Next was cable television, from which 18.4 respondents said they found out about Fan Fair. The

electronic media combined first told 33.5 percent, while the print media first told 7.4 percent.

Three people said they learned about Fan Fair from mail. This response is low because only people who have attended Fan Fair previously are on the mailing list, and 257 people, or 68 percent of the 376 respondents, said they were attending Fan Fair for the first time. The mail could have been from the Grand Ole Opry ticket office, fan club newsletters, or even friends. Two people said a poster first informed them, while 26 chose "Other"; these people indicated that tour companies, fan clubs, hotels, travel agencies, and similar ancillary sources informed them.

The researcher asked which sources the fans had noticed promoting Fan Fair before (Table 3). Again, interpersonal sources ranked first. Two hundred twenty-five people answered with the friend/relative category. Trailing were cable television with 192 responses, radio with 113, network/affiliate television with 101 and magazine with 81. Even though all Fan Fair visitors receive mail about the next year's event, only 23, or 19 percent, of the respondents who had attended before said they had noticed mail promoting Fan Fair. "Sometimes people don't consider that mail," Strobel countered. "They might consider something from Ed McMahon mail, but not something they request from us and we send to them" (Strobel, personal interview, March 3, 1989, Opry.)

The researcher wished to learn how those who had been to Fan Fair before had "promoted" Fan Fair to others. The respondents were asked, "About how many people did you tell about your most recent Fan Fair visit?" (Figure 10). Eight people indicated they told from 0-9 people, 20 said they told 20-29, and 18 said they told 50-59; 16, meanwhile, said they told from 100-199, three said they told 200-299, and two said they told more than 200. Out of the 113 previous visitors giving appropriate responses, two-thirds said they had described Fan Fair "highly favorably" to others, and 27 percent had described it "favorably" (Table 4). The Fan Fair promoters are aware that interpersonal communication is their most powerful selling tool. "It's not going to be what they read in the paper, it's going to be what their friend tells them," said George. "That's the way it is with anything. People don't believe what they read; they'll ask, 'Who's your doctor?' or 'Who's your dentist?' If we can just open their eyes with the media and then have a friend tell more, that is the ideal" (George, personal communication, March 6, 1989, CMA).

The question asking respondents how they learned about Fan Fair was cross-tabulated with three other questions. First, it was cross-tabulated with the question asking for the most appealing factor about Fan Fair (Table 5). These factors were proximity of event, registration price, visiting

Nashville, love of country music, meeting specific stars, hearing specific stars, and varied activities. One hundred seventy-six, or 60 percent, of the people responding appropriately to each question chose the love of country music as the most appealing factor. This trend basically held true for each medium. As the table shows, the friend/relative and "Other" (travel agencies, tour companies) sources, the only sources that allow interaction, were the only ones with six different factors indicated.

Question 2 was also cross-tabulated with Question 9--the distance from Nashville (Table 6). In this table, the sources were grouped into four categories: print media, electronic media, mail/poster/other and friend/relative. The interpersonal response was the greatest in every distance category except the "1,000 miles or more," in which the electronic media, led by The Nashville Network cable channel, gained 46 percent of the responses.

The third cross-tabulation involved the years in which visitors first attended Fan Fair (Table 7), although the author is aware that a person who hears or sees a message will not necessarily be persuaded by it. Radio was a primary source for those who first attended in the early years. Noticeable is the absence of network/affiliate and cable television responses before the 1981-1984 category. Two reasons can account for this: the CMA's active solicitation

of national media, which began in 1983, and the debut of The Nashville Network, which took place in the same year.

How much of Fan Fair's success can be attributed to its ability to promote itself? The author asked Strobel and Farmer (separately) to weigh coordinators' promotional efforts against Fan Fair's ability to "sell itself," and the two responded similarly. Strobel favored Fan Fair, 65 percent to 35 percent, and Farmer chose Fan Fair 70 to 30. Finally, the author wanted to learn how Strobel and Farmer ranked the media regarding the sources' importance in promoting Fan Fair (Table 8). The two coordinators' rankings were quite similar except for Strobel's top-rated source. He ranked mail first, while Farmer ranked it sixth. That Strobel's organization handles registration and is more concerned with the repeat customers explains his bias toward mail. Farmer, whose organization works with television stations, obviously appreciated them more than did Strobel. The table also compares the two rankings with the information in Table 2 concerning the fans' response to the question, "From which one of these [sources] did you first learn of Fan Fair?" Again, the most glaring difference is the fans' low responses to mail, which Strobel placed first.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Nolan (1974) found that the most popular information source category in the travel industry was the advice of friends and relatives, a source that also was rated among the highest in attributed credibility. This study produced similar findings. Nearly half (49 percent) of the respondents of this study's survey said they learned of Fan Fair from a friend or relative. The next closest source was cable TV, with less than 20 percent choosing it.

Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) basic premise that person-to-person communication is the most influential means of transferring information also was suggested by this study, although hearing a message does not automatically lead to action. For example, 66 percent of respondents who had attended before said they had spoken "highly favorably" about Fan Fair, and 27 percent said they had spoken "favorably." Apparently, these favorable comments circulate rapidly: one-fifth of the respondents who had attended previously said they told more than 100 people about their most recent Fan Fair visit. Interpersonal communication also was able to promote the various "appeal" factors of Fan Fair better than any other source.

The Country Music Association significantly aided Fan Fair's cause by establishing a media relations program. However, both it and the Grand Ole Opry must realize that the fans themselves are the best promoters. Therefore, it is imperative that Fan Fair organizers concern themselves with the congruity of what they are selling. A primary goal for Fan Fair should be delivering quality experiences to the tourists. The cornerstone of travel communications--the recommendations of friends and relatives--will then convey the news to others. As Gunn (1972) observed, "Advertising has its place, but the drawing power of having had a satisfying experience is greater" (p. 115).

Although the success of Fan Fair cannot be denied--the event's attendance increased from 5,000 to 23,000 in the first 17 years--it appears that the organizers now exercise less rigor in trying to promote each Fan Fair. They seem to hold the belief that, "Now that we consistently attract more than 20,000 tourists, we can concentrate on other aspects of Fan Fair." The author offers three theories behind this attitude:

1. The organizers feel confident that the interpersonal communication can now carry the promotional load.

2. Because Fan Fair is a non-profit event, the planners believe there is little use in spending much time or money promoting an event that is almost two decades old; in

others words, "We still are not reaping anything, why should we sow that much?"

3. As the country music industry grows, the promoters' full-time jobs at the Opry and the CMA increasingly limit the time available for vital year-round planning and implementation of promotional strategies.

In relation to this third theory, although the promoters each have several years of experience in public relations and special events, the splitting of promotional duties between the two organizations seems to hamper efforts. A competent committee or department independent of the two organizations could more effectively and efficiently carry out promotional communications.

The room for most improvement for Fan Fair promoters lies in the South. Those overseeing promotions should not fall back on the premise that nearby residents are simply uninterested in attending because they are already engulfed in country music. Certainly, most Tennessee citizens, for example, would not want to visit Fan Fair year after year, but a campaign to persuade them to attend just once would broaden the event's popularity and even ease existing hostility that Middle Tennesseans may hold toward the annual "invaders."

Although advertising is basically out of the question because of Fan Fair's limited budget, organizers could

implement tactics employed by other tourist destinations to attract customers. Such actions could include coupons (General Mills, for example, prints on some cereal boxes coupons for admission to Opryland U.S.A.), discounts for families or even an attend-this-year-and-receive-half-off-next-year's-admission promotion.

Planners of similar festivals can learn lessons from the International Country Music Fan Fair. Not considering neighbors as potential customers, for example, can mean passing up important opportunities for business and goodwill. Another mistake is holding that because there is no room for more customers, there is no room for improvement, or no room for innovative promotional strategies.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

FIGURES

This survey is being conducted to analyze how Fan Fair communicates and is communicated. Your responses will be very helpful.

1. Which years have you attended Fan Fair?

_____ 1972	_____ 1976	_____ 1980	_____ 1984
_____ 1973	_____ 1977	_____ 1981	_____ 1985
_____ 1974	_____ 1978	_____ 1982	_____ 1986
_____ 1975	_____ 1979	_____ 1983	_____ 1987

2. From which <u>one</u> of these did you <u>first</u> learn of Fan Fair?

_____ magazine	_____ radio	_____ mail	_____ poster
_____ newspaper	_____ network/affiliate TV	_____ friend/relative	
_____ book	_____ cable TV	_____ other (please specify)_____	

3. Which <u>one</u> factor in the message you chose in Question 2 appealed to you most about attending?

_____ proximity of event	_____ love of country music	_____ varied activities
_____ registration price	_____ meeting specific stars	
_____ visiting Nashville	_____ hearing specific stars	

4. Which of the following have you noticed promoting Fan Fair over the years (check as many as apply).

_____ magazine	_____ radio	_____ mail
_____ newspaper	_____ network/affiliate TV	_____ friend/relative
_____ book	_____ cable TV	_____ poster

<u>Questions 5-8 are for those who have attended Fan Fair before.</u>

5. Have you recommended Fan Fair to others?

_____ yes _____ no

6. How do you describe your Fan Fair visit(s) to others?

_____ highly favorably	_____ slightly unfavorably
_____ favorably	_____ unfavorably
_____ slightly favorably	_____ highly unfavorably
_____ neutral	

7. About how many people did you tell about your most recent Fan Fair visit? _____

8. <u>Out of those people</u>, about how many would you say <u>had</u> heard of Fan Fair before? _____

<u>The following questions will help categorize the responses.</u>

9. About how far from Nashville do you live?

_____ 0-199 miles	_____ 400-599 miles	_____ 800-999 miles
_____ 200-399 miles	_____ 600-799 miles	_____ 1000 miles or more

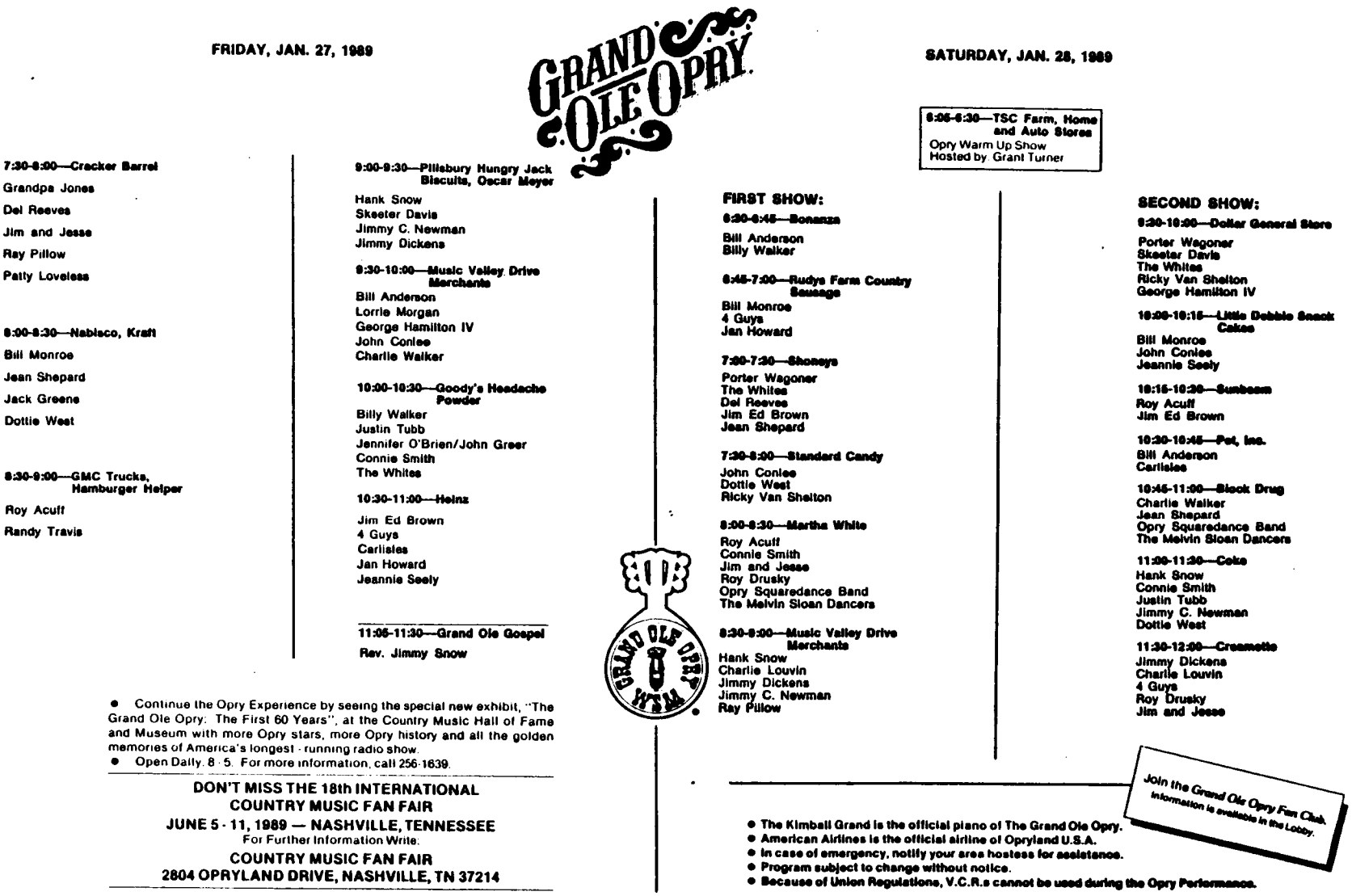
10. What is your state/province/country? _____

11. What is your race?

_____ Afro-American	_____ Hispanic	_____ Other
_____ Caucasian	_____ Asian	

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Figure 1. Questionnaire for 1988 Fan Fair Visitors.



FRIDAY, JAN. 27, 1989

7:30-8:00—Cracker Barrel
Grandpa Jones
Del Reeves
Jim and Jesse
Ray Pillow
Patty Loveless

8:00-8:30—Nabisco, Kraft
Bill Monroe
Jean Shepard
Jack Greene
Dottie West

8:30-9:00—GMC Trucks, Hamburger Helper
Roy Acuff
Randy Travis

9:00-9:30—Pillsbury Hungry Jack Biscuits, Oscar Meyer
Hank Snow
Skeeter Davis
Jimmy C. Newman
Jimmy Dickens

9:30-10:00—Music Valley Drive Merchants
Bill Anderson
Lorrie Morgan
George Hamilton IV
John Conlee
Charlie Walker

10:00-10:30—Goody's Headache Powder
Billy Walker
Justin Tubb
Jennifer O'Brien/John Greer
Connie Smith
The Whites

10:30-11:00—Heinz
Jim Ed Brown
4 Guys
Carlisles
Jan Howard
Jeannie Seely

11:05-11:30—Grand Ole Gospel
Rev. Jimmy Snow

- Continue the Opry Experience by seeing the special new exhibit, "The Grand Ole Opry: The First 60 Years", at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum with more Opry stars, more Opry history and all the golden memories of America's longest-running radio show.
- Open Daily, 8-5. For more information, call 256-1639.

DON'T MISS THE 18th INTERNATIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC FAN FAIR
JUNE 5-11, 1989 — NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE
For Further Information Write:
COUNTRY MUSIC FAN FAIR
2804 OPRYLAND DRIVE, NASHVILLE, TN 37214

SATURDAY, JAN. 28, 1989

5:05-6:30—TSC Farm, Home and Auto Stores
Opry Warm Up Show
Hosted by Grant Turner

FIRST SHOW:

6:30-6:45—Bonanza
Bill Anderson
Billy Walker

6:45-7:00—Rudys Farm Country Sausage
Bill Monroe
4 Guys
Jan Howard

7:00-7:30—Shoneys
Porter Wagoner
The Whites
Del Reeves
Jim Ed Brown
Jean Shepard

7:30-8:00—Standard Candy
John Conlee
Dottie West
Ricky Van Shelton

8:00-8:30—Martha White
Roy Acuff
Connie Smith
Jim and Jesse
Roy Drusky
Opry Squaredance Band
The Melvin Sloan Dancers

8:30-9:00—Music Valley Drive Merchants
Hank Snow
Charlie Louvin
Jimmy Dickens
Jimmy C. Newman
Ray Pillow

SECOND SHOW:

9:30-10:00—Dollar General Store
Porter Wagoner
Skeeter Davis
The Whites
Ricky Van Shelton
George Hamilton IV

10:00-10:15—Little Debbie Snack Cakes
Bill Monroe
John Conlee
Jeannie Seely

10:15-10:30—Sunbeam
Roy Acuff
Jim Ed Brown

10:30-10:45—Pet, Inc.
Bill Anderson
Carlisles

10:45-11:00—Block Drug
Charlie Walker
Jean Shepard
Opry Squaredance Band
The Melvin Sloan Dancers

11:00-11:30—Coke
Hank Snow
Connie Smith
Justin Tubb
Jimmy C. Newman
Dottie West

11:30-12:00—Creamette
Jimmy Dickens
Charlie Louvin
4 Guys
Roy Drusky
Jim and Jesse

Join the Grand Ole Opry Fan Club. Information is available in the Lobby.

- The Kimball Grand is the official piano of The Grand Ole Opry.
- American Airlines is the official airline of Opryland U.S.A.
- In case of emergency, notify your area hostess for assistance.
- Program subject to change without notice.
- Because of Union Regulations, V.C.R.s cannot be used during the Opry Performance.

Figure 2. Souvenir program from the Grand Ole Opry.

COUNTRY MUSIC FAN FAIR

There is nothing quite like the harmony between the Country Music Stars and their fans. And there is no better place to witness this relationship than the International Country Music Fan Fair in Nashville, Tennessee.

Music City, U.S.A. comes alive each June with excitement and color as fans from all over the world pour into town for seven days of spectacular shows and activities.

The Fan Fair is a musical extravaganza designed for the enjoyment of those who love Country Music, buy the records, come to the personal appearances and join fan clubs. Co-sponsored by the Grand Ole Opry and the Country Music Association, the Fan Fair allows participants to see and hear the music industry's biggest names with over 30 hours of spectacular stage shows, a Bluegrass concert, Grand Masters Fiddling Championship, picture taking and autograph sessions, three delicious lunches, All-American Country Games, a ticket to the Country Music Hall of Fame, Opryland USA, and the Ryman Auditorium, plus a large exhibition area featuring the latest in Country Music records and merchandise.

And the best part of all . . . the Fan Fair is open to everyone! The only requirement is that you have a strong desire for music, fun and excitement. For those who like to rub elbows with the stars, the Country Music Fan Fair is the closest thing on earth to "Hillbilly Heaven."

For information on how you can attend the next Fan Fair write:

Fan Fair
2804 Opryland Drive
Nashville, Tennessee 37214



145

Figure 3. Page from Grand Ole Opry/WSM Picture-History Book.

COUNTRY MUSIC FAN FAIR
JUNE 6-12, 1988

Every June, Music City U.S.A. comes alive with excitement and color as fans from all over the world pour into town for an entire week of spectacular shows and events.

The Fan Fair is a musical extravaganza designed for the enjoyment of those who love Country Music. Co-sponsored by the Grand Ole Opry and the Country Music Association, the Fan Fair allows participants to see and hear the music industry's greatest stars.

And the best part of all . . . the Fan Fair is open to everyone! For those who like to rub elbows with the stars, the Country Music Fan Fair is the closest thing on earth to "Hillbilly Heaven."

Registration per person (adult or child over 3 years old) is $60.00. This fee includes: over 30 hours of spectacular stage shows, a Bluegrass Concert, Grand Masters Fiddling Championship, All-American Country Games, picture taking and autograph sessions, two delicious lunches, a ticket to the Country Music Hall of Fame, Opryland U.S.A., and the Ryman Auditorium, plus large exhibition areas, featuring the latest in Country Music records and merchandise. Fan Fair is held at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds, with acres of free parking!! (There are no individual show tickets for sale.)

The $60.00 registration fee does not include tickets to the Grand Ole Opry. If you wish to attend the Opry June 11 or 12, include a SEPARATE CHECK. $12.39 per tickets. You must be a Fan Fair registrant to obtain tickets for June 11 or 12. An order blank is included on this form for Opry tickets.

You may pick up registration credentials at the Tennessee State Fairground. (Fan Fair Headquarters) beginning Monday, June 6 through Friday, 9 am til 7 pm.

While in town may we suggest you take one of the many Grand Ole Opry Bus Tours for a behind the scenes look at Music City. Tours leave daily from Opryland, the Tennessee State Fairgrounds, and the Ryman Auditorium. Phone 615-889-9490.

• • • •

MCRN concerts raise $60,000

Two special concerts during last June's Fan Fair week have generated $60,000 for the Opry Trust Fund.

This special benevolent fund, which gives financial assistance in time of need, emergency or catastrophe to people who earn their living in country music or related occupations, has distributed more than $1 million since being organized in 1965.

Last summer's concerts – the "Superstar Spectacular" and the "Legends of Country Music" – attracted 4,110 fans to the Grand Ole Opry House. They were sponsored by the Music Country Radio Network (MCRN).

"Trust fund income is mainly from these two concerts and from activities during the Opry's annual Birthday Celebration in October," said Opry announcer Charlie Douglas, who also is lead host and operations director for MCRN.

"The $60,000 recently given to the trust fund was the largest amount generated by the two concerts since they began in 1985," he added.

All administrative expenses for the Opry Trust Fund are underwritten by Opryland USA Inc. The fund's work is handled by a group of Opryland USA corporate officers and a number of Grand Ole Opry members. Opry General Manager Hal Durham serves as executive vice president and treasurer of the trust fund's board of directors.

The identity of persons helped by the trust fund is kept confidential, and recipients do not have to repay the fund.

Fan Fair '88 begins June 6

Don't miss the 17th International Country Music Fan Fair June 6-12 in Nashville when the greatest stars in country music take a break from their busy schedules to say "Thanks!" to their fans.

Fan Fair '88 once again will be headquartered at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds and will feature the All American Country games, autograph parties, exhibitions and more than 30 hours of live stage shows. Registration fee for the week-long event is $60.

For more information, write Country Music Fan Fair, 2804 Opryland Dr., Nashville, TN 37214.

Opry hosts show in Tampa

Country Music Hall of Famer Bill Monroe led a group of fellow Grand Ole Opry members to Tampa for a special Opry segment that was broadcast New Year's Day.

The special segment – the first of its kind in 35 years – was part of the festivities surrounding the Hall of Fame Bowl.

Joining Bill were Riders in the Sky, Ricky Skaggs and the Whites. They performed a three-hour concert at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, and a 30-minute segment of the concert became a special prelude to that night's radio broadcast of the Opry.

"The Opry is built on a foundation of tradition, and we didn't take lightly the prospect of originating a special segment of the Opry away from Nashville," said Hal Durham, general manager of the Opry. "However, the 'Hall of Fame' connection between Tampa and Nashville gave us a good reason for organizing this show," he continued.

Opry announcer Grant Turner, also a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, said the most recent precedents for the Tampa special segment were in the early 1950s. He recalled two segments broadcast then from New York City and one from Arlington, Texas.



Opry security's Norman Van Dame keeps Stonewall Jackson in line.

1,000 strong and counting

More than 1,000 members joined the Grand Ole Opry Fan Club during its first six months of operation.

Welcome to all of you! You can help us grow even more by telling your friends about this fan club which is open to anyone who wants to celebrate the music, magic and the excitement of the Grand Ole Opry.

Annual membership dues are $10 in the U.S. and Canada (U.S. dollars only, please) and $12 overseas.

Members receive quarterly issues of "The Opry Observer" newsletter, an Opry history, a button, a bumper sticker and a membership card and can participate in special offers and contests.

To join, send dues to the Grand Ole Opry Fan Club, 2804 Opryland Dr., Nashville, TN 37214.

Figure 5. Page from The Opry Observer, the official newsletter of the Grand Ole Opry Fan Club.

P U B L I C I N F O R M A T I O N O F F I C E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Kelley Gattis
Teresa George
May 19, 1988

STARS TO BATTLE IN ALL AMERICAN COUNTRY GAMES

P.O. Box 22299
Seven Music Circle North
Nashville, Tennessee 37202
(615) 244-2840 Telex 78 6528
Cable CMANAS

COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION
30th Anniversary 1958-1988

Nashville -- More than 40 Country stars have sided up to battle each other for the gold medal at the All American Country Games. The competition, part of Fan Fair festivities, will be held June 8 from 10:00 a.m.-12:00 noon at Vanderbilt University's Dudley Field. The games will again benefit the Tennessee Special Olympics.

Because so many stars are participating this year, there will be four teams instead of three, with new games added as well. Along with the old standards such as the log/ball race and broom ball relay, stars will compete in a home run derby, volleyball game, hula-hoop contest, a basketball shoot-out and a ski-walk race.

This year, the stars will be divided into the Blue Team, the Red Team, the White Team and the Red, White & Blue Team. The Blue Team, led by Gary Morris and Charley Pride, will try to retain the Gold Medal it won last year. The captains will be helped by Helen Cornelius, Jack Daniels of Highway 101, Tom Grant of trinity lane, Mike McGuire of Shenandoah, Randy Russell Rigney and Johnny Boatright of Canyon, Les Taylor of Exile and Tanya Tucker.

-more-

Figure 6. Media release prepared by the Country Music Association.

FAN FAIR PRESS CREDENTIAL GUIDELINES

1. All requests must be submitted in writing on the letterhead of the publication, station, etc. that person will be representing.

2. If a freelancer, a specific assignment is a pre-requisite. That assignment must be verified by the publication or other medium.

3. The following are used in determining credentials:

   PUBLICATIONS

   A. Circulation. 100,000 or better. This cannot always be the criteria, because many trade and Country Music consumer publications do not meet this requirement. This should hold true for newspapers, however.

   B. Reach. If it's targeted to an audience we want to reach or someone we're attempting to cultivate.

   C. Market and market size. It's from a top market like NY, LA, Boston or other areas where we need exposure. For radio, their market size should be taken into consideration.

   D. Credibility. If the journalist is one who has assisted CMA in the past and a reputable journalist, that should be strongly considered.

   E. Past experience. There are some journalists (?) who should never be allowed but somehow get in. Usually these people are easy to spot and notes are kept on them from year to year.

   F. Motive. The purpose of press attending Fan Fair should be to cover the event, not to improve their ratings, stockpile artist interviews or other self-serving activities.

   G. Judgment. Sometimes you get a gut feeling that something is not legitimate. Check it out and when doubt, turn them down. Usually, you'll hear from them.

4. A good rule of thumb should be, it doesn't take an entire staff to get something done. The fewer people the better. For radio stations, no more than two at a time is ever needed. TV crews usually require more, but no more than four or five at any one time. People will swear they are journalists just to save $60.00 and have access to artists.

5. Check their letters carefully. Most of the time, husband and wife teams are not legit - that is not always true, but examine those instances carefully.

6. Photographers should always have an assignment. Many use Fan Fair to try and make money on a speculative basis. That is not acceptable. There are some photographers who have photo services and have proven in the past to give good coverage. In that case, use prior knowledge.

7. Camera crews must have a release from show producer for any special taping (other than straight news coverage in accordance with Union policy).

Figure 7. Guidelines used by the Country Music Association in allotting credentials to media.

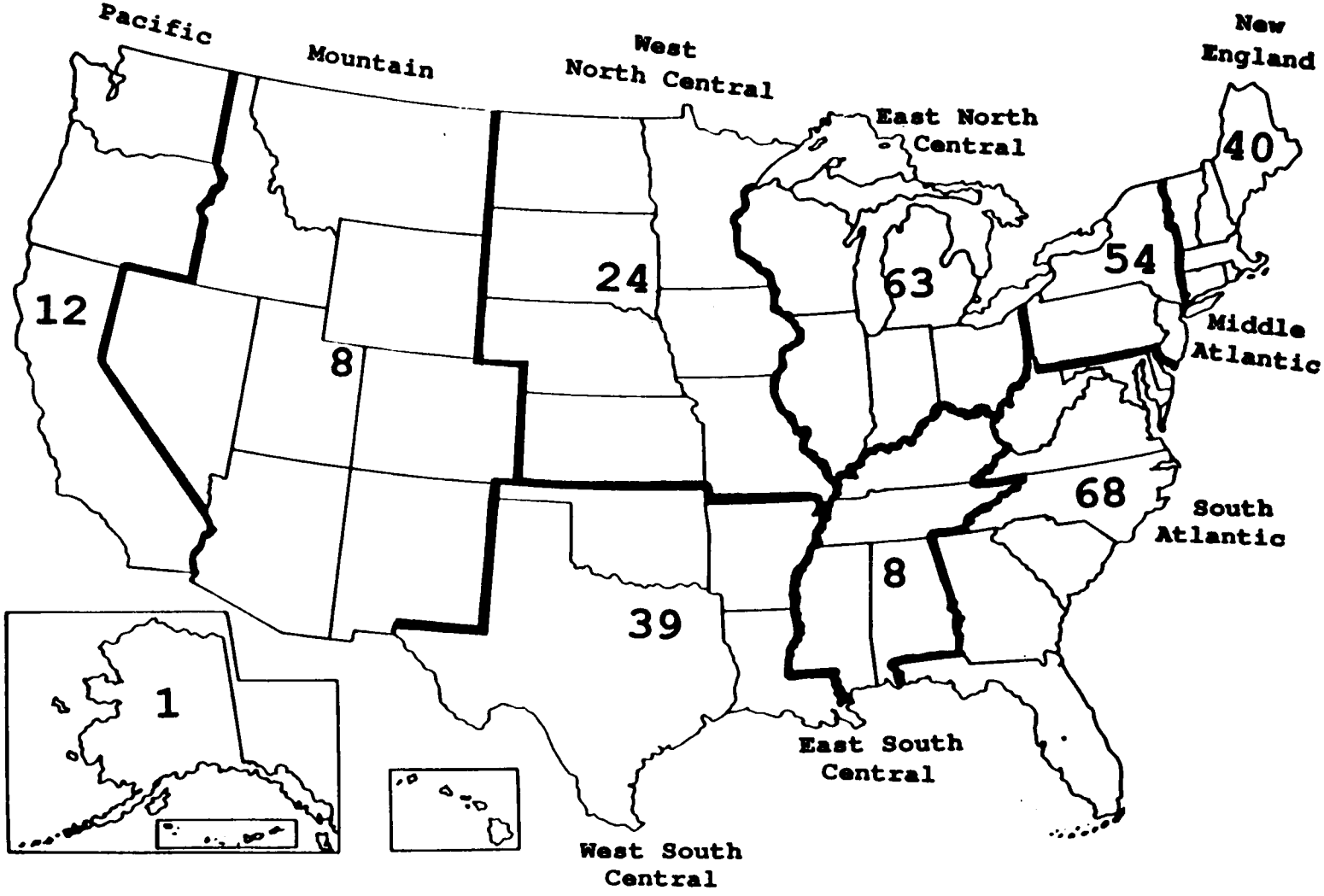


Figure 8. Breakdown of 1988 Fan Fair questionnaire respondents by region.

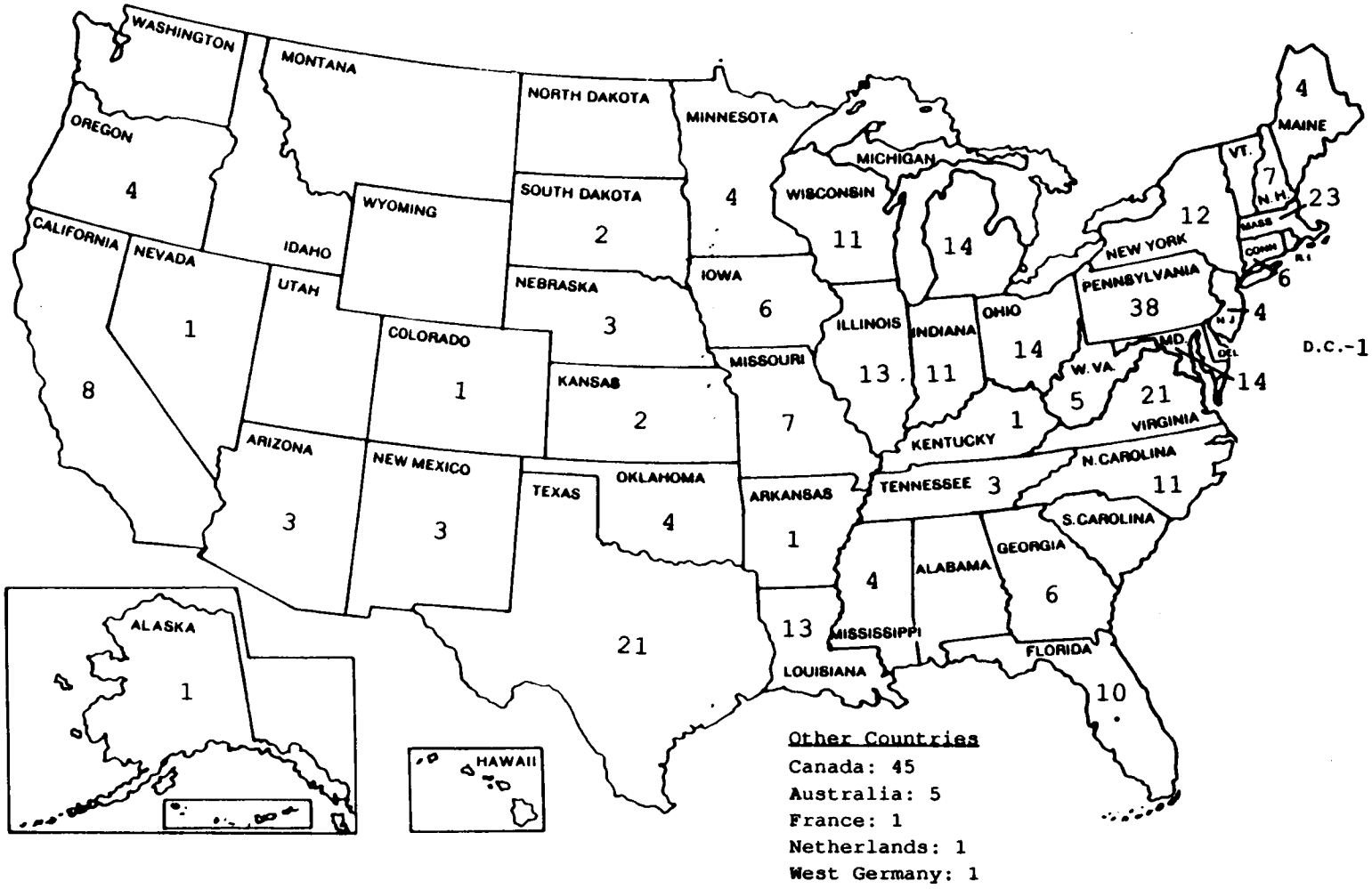


Figure 9. Breakdown of 1988 Fan Fair questionnaire respondents by state and country.

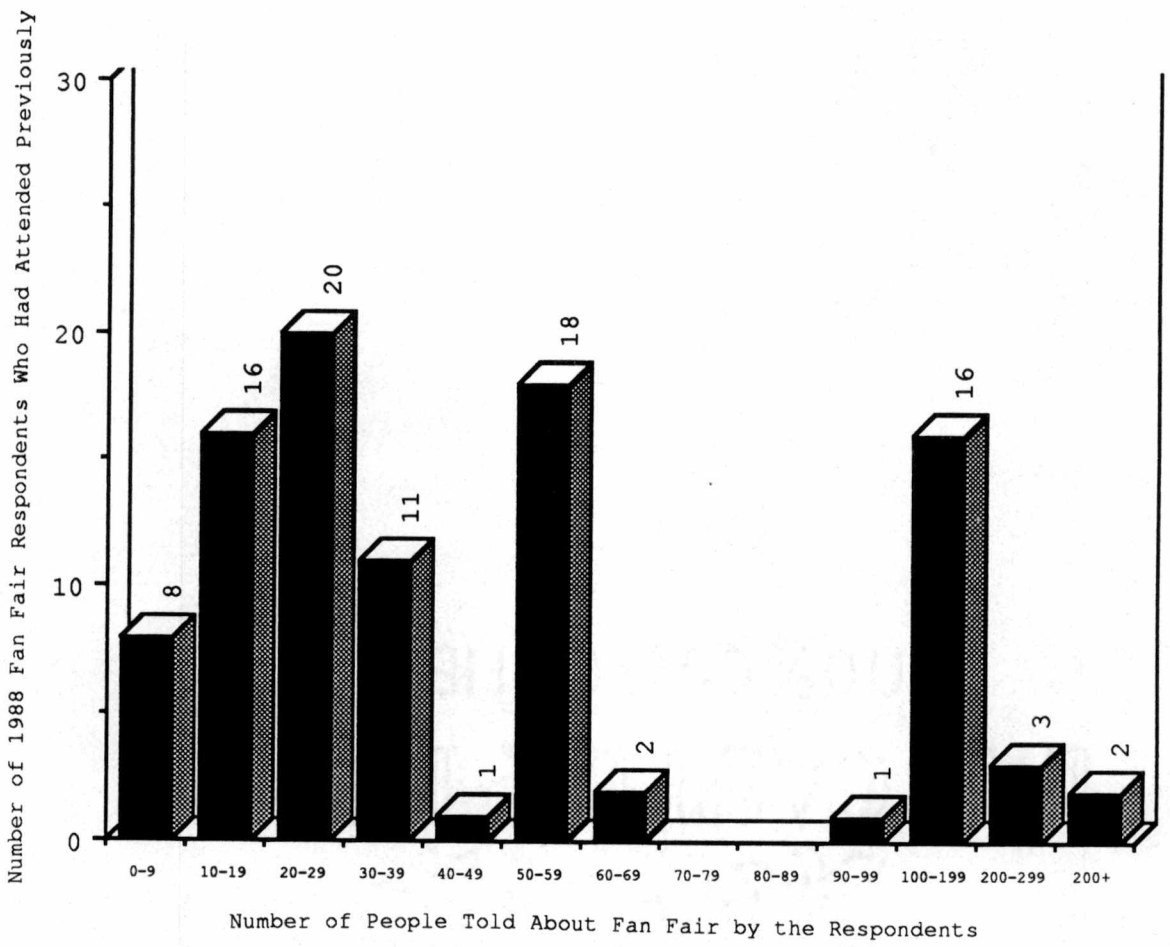


Figure 10. Number of people told about Fan Fair by respondents after respondents' most recent Fan Fair visit.

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table 1. Distances of Visitors' Homes from Nashville

Number of miles	No. of responses	% of responses
0-199	1	0.3
200-399	26	6.9
400-599	62	16.4
600-799	119	31.6
800-999	48	12.8
1000 or more	120	31.9
Total	376	99.9*

*Figures do not total 100% due to rounding error.

Table 2. Responses to the Question: "From Which One of These Did You First Learn of Fan Fair?"

Response	No.	%
Magazine	18	5.3
Newspaper	7	2.1
Book	3	0.9
Radio	32	9.5
Network/affiliate TV	19	5.6
Cable TV	62	18.4
Mail	3	0.9
Friend/relative	165	49.0
Poster	2	0.6
Other	26	7.7
Total	337	100.0

Table 3. Responses to the Question: "Which of the Following Have You Noticed Promoting Fan Fair Over the Years?"

Responses	No.
Magazine	81
Newspaper	33
Book	5
Radio	113
Network/affiliate TV	101
Cable TV	192
Mail	41
Poster	5
Friend/relative	225
No response/ inappropriate response	4

Table 4. Responses to the Question: "How Do You Describe Your Fan Fair Visits to Others?"

Responses	No.	%
Highly favorably	75	66.4
Favorably	31	27.4
Slightly favorably	2	1.8
Neutral	1	0.9
Slightly unfavorably	0	0.0
Unfavorably	3	2.7
Highly unfavorably	1	0.9
Total	113	100.1*

*Figures do not total 100% due to rounding error.

TABLE 5. Cross-Tabulation of Initial Fan Fair Sources with Most Appealing Factors

	Number of Respondents Selecting One Factor							
Medium	Prxmty. of Event	Regist Price	Seeing N'ville	Love of Country Music	Meeting Specific Stars	Hearing Specific Stars	Varied Actvts.	Total
Magazine				13	3			16
Newspaper				3	1		2	6
Book			1	2				3
Radio			1	20	4		2	27
Network/ Affil. TV			2	12	2		1	17
Cable TV			7	31	7	2	3	50
Mail			1	2				3
Friend/ Relative		1	25	80	19	6	14	145
Poster			1	1				2
Other	3		2	12	4	1	2	24
Total	3	1	40	176	40	9	24	293

Table 6. Cross-Tabulation of Miles from Nashville with Initial Fan Fair Sources

	Sources				
Miles	Print Media	Electronic Media	Mail/ Poster/ Other	Friend/ Relative	Total
0-199	0	0	0	0	0
200-399	3	2	3	14	22
400-599	8	15	6	25	54
600-799	8	32	11	56	107
800-999	3	13	3	23	42
1,000+	6	51	8	47	112
Total	28	113	31	165	337

TABLE 7. Cross-Tabulation of Initial Fan Fair Sources with Years of First Attendance

	Number of Respondents Attending for the First Time				
Medium	1972-'76	1977-'80	1981-'84	1985-'88	Total
Magazine	2	1	4	11	18
Newspaper		1	1	5	7
Book				3	3
Radio	4	2		26	32
Network/ Affiliate TV			2	17	19
Cable TV			2	60	62
Mail		1		2	3
Friend/ Relative	6	3	10	146	165
Poster		1		1	2
Other		2	3	21	26
Total	12	11	22	292	337

Legend: The years are grouped from responses to Question 1, "Which years have you attended Fan Fair?" and are cross-tabulated with responses to Question 2, "From which one of these [sources] did you first learn of Fan Fair? For example, 12 of the respondents indicated that they first attended Fan Fair from 1972 to 1976. Out of these 12, four said they learned of Fan Fair from radio.

Table 8. A Comparison of Organizers' Rankings of Medium Importance with Sources from Which Fans Learned of Fan Fair

Medium	As ranked by GOO's Jerry Strobel	As ranked by CMA's Helen Farmer	Fans
Magazine	5	5	4
Newspaper	6	4	5
Book	7	7	7*
Radio	3	3	2
Network/Affiliate TV	4	1	3
Cable TV	2	2	1
Mail	1	6	6
Poster	8	8	7*

*Tie

VITA

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