

M.C. Antil's CableFolks

Blue Highways Founder Hitchcock An American Original

(Editor's Note: The following column ran in the Tues issue with the incorrect layout and photo. As a result, we are re-running it today with the correct information. We regret the error).

Malcolm Forbes once said the secret to getting rich is to find something you love and make a living at it. Then you can work all day long, day after day, and it never feels like work.

That's why, money and material passions aside, Blue Highways TV founder Stan Hitchcock is already a rich man.

He absolutely loves what he does.

An accomplished musician and a guy who is country through and through, Hitchcock grew up in an America that drank in honky tonks and went to barn dances on Saturday night. Folks praised God on Sunday, then all week long took the time for life's simple pleasures, like family, friends, good conversation around the dinner table, and playing music on the front porch.

It was an America not yet divided by red and blue, and an America whose soundtrack emanated not from the streets of far away cities, but from the hills and the fields. It was an America that grew its own, forged its own, mined its own, and made its own.

It was an America, frankly, that has all but disappeared. And that soundtrack, which had once been home to such legends as Bill Monroe, Ernest Tubb, Buck Owens and Patsy Cline, now finds itself populated by runway models and hunks in hats, all masquerading as country singers.

I couldn't help but notice at this year's Cable Show that, in addition to Blue Highways TV, there were networks like RFD TV, the Gospel Music Channel, and at least two others, all positioned to fill the void created by the



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demise of TNN and the staggering distance between today's country music and its simple, rural roots.

At the show, I spent an hour or so at the Blue Highways booth talking and listening to Stan and his "VP of Artist Relations," Ronnie Reno. (Ronnie is the mandolin-virtuoso son of bluegrass legend Don Reno, who played for years with both the Osborne Brothers and Merle

Haggard & the Strangers.) And it was not lost on me that as I listened to them laugh and sing and play, amid all the glitz and glitter of Las Vegas, I was experiencing what was left of Stan Hitchcock's America slowly being swallowed by the one we've built to replace it.

I just wonder if this industry's MSOs have enough sense to read the tea leaves and see there are still millions of Americans out there who love the kind of music these networks showcase. Frankly, as much as I hate to say it, I doubt it.

It reminds me of the way the "O Brother" soundtrack shocked the record industry a few years back, or the way the Ronald Regan juggernaut a generation ago snuck up on all those pundits too focused on what was happening outside their office windows to realize there was a political storm brewing in the heartland.

I don't know if Blue Highways TV will make it, but I hope so. Not only do I love Americana, but I want to make visiting Stan, Ronnie and Denise an annual opportunity to retrace my musical roots; to retrace our musical roots. And I'll never get tired of hearing the story about how Stan and Denise met at a cable convention, had their first date at a second cable convention, and that when he proposed she was at yet a third cable convention.

But what I really love about the story is the kicker; that Stan sent the ring by FedEx, with the instructions on the work order that the FedEx delivery man get down on one knee when he gave Denise the package.

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