



AMERICAN PRIDE

A documentary film about the long, rocky road for gay country singers.

Created by: Larry Dvoskin

*He was only a lavender cowboy,
The hairs on his chest were two,
But he wished to follow the heroes
And fight like the he-men do.*

— Lavender Cowboy, 1939

It started with an unlikely ad in a Nashville weekly: LOOKING FOR GAY COUNTRY SINGER. A joke, right? Larry Dvoskin, an openly gay Grammy-nominated songwriter and producer (Ricky Martin, David Bowie, Van Halen) placed the ad, almost on a lark. He didn't know what to expect. A few crank phone calls? A Dolly Parton drag queen?

What he didn't foresee was thousands of calls from aspiring musicians, singers, and songwriters, spilling their guts into his answering machine. What they had to say was heartbreaking, riveting, and inspiring.

What happens when you're born gay and country? No gay person in his right mind would choose a career in country music. Country music is a way of life, a manner of communication, a family tradition, bred into people like their genes. But it's for, by, and about folks from a part of the world that doesn't take kindly to gays. It is a conservative and homophobic milieu, to say the least.

Or so Dvoskin thought ...



AMERICAN PRIDE will follow the lives and dreams of several of the gay country musicians and singers who responded to Dvoskin's ad. Some are openly gay, others are just coming out. We'll explore their struggles to transcend stereotypes and gain acceptance into one of the last arenas that still excludes them, country music. Our cameras will follow their journey as they kick down doors, armed with raw talent and a determination to have their voices heard.

We follow Dvoskin as he visits the farms and honky tonks of Small Town, USA to meet a handful of the hopeful artists who responded to his ad. These performers will be chosen from among the hundreds of audition tapes and inquiries Dvoskin has received.

AMERICAN PRIDE is a hard, honest, dramatic look at a group of performers who have all the talent and drive in the world. But, because of who they are, they are excluded by an industry and a culture from chasing the "fable" of the American Dream. We follow each of these singers as they try to reconcile two halves of a life that don't quite fit.

THE ARTISTS

These are a handful of the characters we'll meet with AMERICAN PRIDE:

MIKE SIKORA spent seven years in Nashville carrying a picture of a fake girlfriend in his wallet, which he'd show anyone who blinked. This aspiring singer was told by a Nashville record executive that coming out would ruin his chances at a singing career. His appearance in AMERICAN PRIDE is an act of extraordinary courage and faith.

WAYLON PAYNE is the son of country singer Sammi Smith ("Help Me Make it Through the Night") and Jody Payne, guitarist for Willie Nelson is an up and coming star, and was named for his godfather, Waylon Jennings. But his country pedigree necessarily doesn't buy him acceptance in the country music industry. Though he has sung duets with LeAnn Rimes, played the Opry, and pulled off a smokin' turn as Jerry Lee Lewis in "Walk the Line," he is expected to live a "Don't Ask Don't Tell" existence in Nashville. For AMERICAN PRIDE, Payne steps out from the shadows.

ROGER INNES is a decorated captain in the US Army and veteran of two Iraq wars. He's also black, gay and a country music songwriter. We spend time with him in Dallas as he turns in his resignation to the military and moves to Nashville.

SHAUN STEWART is the son of a strict Christian coal miner in rural West Virginia, who don't accept his sexuality. He has learned to accept himself, but still lacks his parents' approval. With AMERICAN PRIDE, Stewart will try to vie for his parents love and acceptance one last time.

MARY GAUTHIER is an openly gay singer/songwriter in Nashville. An underground favorite, her album Drag Queen in Limousines was a critical smash and got her voted No Depression magazine's singer/songwriter of the year. Even Dylan's a fan. She has no problem dealing with the two-fer biases of womanhood and homosexuality, but will Nashville ever fully embrace Gauthier?



BEEN DOWN THIS ROAD BEFORE

Interwoven with these main characters we also explore the backstories of other unlikely country artists, performers such as Charlie Pride, the Dixie Chicks, k.d. lang. They have all managed to maintain their own identities in Music City and have enjoyed Nashville's warm embrace, but have also been given the cold shoulder for being "too much" of who they are.

K.D. LANG, the most famous openly gay country singer, shares her dance with Nashville: "I did have an understanding of what country music was because I grew up on the plains of Canada. The essence of country music is a product of a certain existence lifestyle that relates to the earth and to other people in the community to a farming existence, which I grew up in. I felt like I had the right to take country music and speak on it because I am a product of the prairies. I was this, this unbridled horse going for it. A little rebellious, but at the same time — I can't make the point strong enough — I did respect and love country music. Many of them hated me for it, but many more loved me."

WILLIE NELSON, country's favorite outlaw, is famous for his cowboy songs, from the signature "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys" to "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys." In AMERICAN PRIDE, Nelson talks about why he pulled the Ned Sublette song "Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly (Fond of Each Other)" out of the closet after 20 years. The song is the first gay cowboy song sung by a major recording artist, and Nelson sang it to show his support for gays, but also to reach out to a long-time friend. Nelson also contributed "He was a Friend of Mine" to the Brokeback Mountain soundtrack. We sit with Nelson on his tour bus as he recounts, with his trademark dry wit, how Nashville reacted to these edgy songs, and why they have particular meaning for him.

DOLLY PARTON similarly took flack for singing "Travelin' Thru," for the film Transamerica, about a transgender woman. Parton's indefatigable charm and Oscar nomination cooled the heels of her narrow-minded critics. "I'm old enough and cranky enough now that if someone tried to tell me what to do, I'd tell them where to put it," says Parton. Parton has always embraced her large gay following; she appears in gay publications, and her fans organize an annual gay and lesbian day at her amusement park, Dollywood. She says gay men in particular are drawn to her trademark, flamboyant appearance. She's at ease bucking the Nashville norm. "I've always been a freak and different, oddball even in my childhood and my own family, so I can relate to people who are struggling and trying to find their true identity," Parton says. "I do not sit in the seat of judgment ... I love people for who they are. We're all God's children."

We visit country station WXBX in Johnson City, Tennessee, which offers a forum for listeners to speak their minds about Willie and Dolly's "gay" songs. "We got the sense that the audience was disappointed in these artists. For our purposes, we probably wouldn't be interested in much airplay," said station manager Bill Hagy, noting that Parton and Nelson aren't really mainstream country artists anymore. "In my opinion," said country fan Jamie Billman, "it does kind of offend what country music stands for." One listener, who calls himself Hank, said, in a discussion on country hitmaker Kenny Chesney's sexuality: "Chesney is gay and I will never, and you can quote me, never play Kenny Chesney songs as long as I live. What a homo, what a disgrace to country music. Thanks to people like him country is dying fast."



A GAY OLD TIME

THE GRAND OLE OPRY has been the most public face of country music for 116 years. But the historic weekly stage and radio show has never been very open-minded. Women were forbidden to wear anything but floor-length, gingham dresses until 1970. And you wouldn't find any female hosts, either. For all of her popular success, k.d. lang made but one appearance on the show.

Once the home of the Opry, the Ryman Auditorium is the mother church of country music. To play the Ryman as an artist is to know you have arrived in Nashville. We follow our hopeful artists as they prepare for and perform a historic concert at the Ryman. These young performers will be feeling more than standard-issue stage fright; they're putting themselves on the line in a way no other country artist has. The last taboo in country music is about to be challenged.

PROVING THE AMERICAN DREAM STILL WORKS

Through music and personal stories, we enter into the heart of the heartland with AMERICAN PRIDE. Just as the midterm elections put blue politicians in control of Congress, and overturned long term red state strongholds, American Pride proves that integrated into the fabric of our culture, there is diversity. We celebrate these differences through the power of music and storytelling.

This documentary is sure to generate enormous controversy — in fact, it invites it. If we can shake things up a bit, chip away at a couple of walls, discussion is sure to flow. Music brings people together, and we're convinced these charismatic artists have what it takes, despite the odds, to seize the dream of their AMERICAN PRIDE.

MARKETING

When word of AMERICAN PRIDE hit the street, 20/20, CBS, VH-1, CNN, Rolling Stone, Entertainment Weekly, ABC News, MSNBC, Out, The Advocate, New York Times, Country Weekly and Access Hollywood expressed interest in producing stories on the show.

INTERVIEWS

Willie Nelson

Dolly Parton

k.d. lang

Natalie Manes, The Dixie Chicks

Doug Stevens, founder of Gay & Lesbian Country Music Assoc.

Members of the Outband, a gay country group

Mary Gauthier

Mike Sikora

Waylon Payne

Roger Innes

Shaun Stewart



KEY PERSONNEL BIOGRAPHIES

Creator and Executive Producer

Larry Dvoskin is a Grammy nominated music producer whose songs have sold over 27 million records worldwide with a wide range of superstars including David Bowie, Van Halen, Brandy, Ricky Martin, Meredith Brooks, Beach Boys, David Charvet, Meredith Brooks. He is a professor at New York University teaching songwriting, and sits on the executive board of the Music for Youth Foundation, which honored Bob Dylan at Avery Fisher Hall in this November. As a film and television producer he is represented by Mark Itkin of The William Morris Agency.

Director/Producer

Morgan Neville is an Award-winning documentary filmmaker whose Tremolo Productions who has produced a variety of shows for clients such as PBS, A&E, VH1, BBC, Channel 4, CMT and others for a decade. Neville has directed documentaries that specialize in cultural subjects. His first theatrical documentary was the award-winning feature Shotgun Freeway: Drives Thru Lost L.A., an examination of the meaning of history in the City of Angels. His film about novelist John Steinbeck won critical praise and remains the most comprehensive film on the author. Recently, through a series on films on important music subjects (including The Brill Building, Sam Phillips and Sun Records, Nat King Cole, Brian Wilson, Leiber & Stoller, and Burt Bacharach), Neville has sought to document the stories of songwriters and producers who helped shape 20th century music. This also includes the Grammy-nominated Muddy Waters Can't Be Satisfied and the Emmy-Winning Hank Williams: Honky Tonk Blues, both of which aired on PBS' American Masters Series. For A&E, Neville has recently directed specials such as Honky Tonk Angels: Women in Country Music and Hollywood Home Movies, a history of the movie business using found footage.

Additionally, Neville has also produced various projects for cultural institutions such as The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The J. Paul Getty Museum and The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Neville is finishing production on a documentary about the influential Ferus Gallery, which helped give rise to Los Angeles' art scene. Neville's production company is Tremolo Productions, Inc.



Executive Producer

Cactus Three executive produces high-end documentary films and non-fiction programming. Founded in 2003 by Julie Goldman, Krysanne Katsoolis and Caroline Stevens, Cactus offers a unique blend of production and co-production expertise, creatively developing projects as well as securing both funding and distribution. Cactus has developed a model that minimizes the financial risk of production by identifying the most appropriate partners on a global basis and tailoring each project to specific distributors, broadcast strands, private equity investment sources and end users to maximize revenue.

Recently completed productions include *What Remains*, *loudQUIETloud*, *Once in a Lifetime* and *Sketches of Frank Gehry*. *What Remains*, a film about the life and work of renowned and controversial photographer Sally Mann, was co-produced with HBO and BBC and had its world premiere at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. *loudQUIETloud*, directed by Steven Cantor and Matthew Galkin, chronicles the Pixies recent reunion tour. Filmed over the course of a year on the road and off, *loudQUIETloud* is an intimate look at one of the most original, iconic and popular bands to come along in the past 20 years. Produced by John Battsek (Academy Award winning *One Day in September*) and released by Miramax Films in July 2006, *Once in a Lifetime* is the incredible story of the rise and fall of the New York Cosmos soccer team during the height of the glory, glamour and debauchery of 1970's New York. *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, Sydney Pollack's first feature documentary profiles the master architect and enjoyed a successful theatrical release by Sony Classics following the Cannes Film Festival premiere in May 2006.

Other recent productions include the acclaimed HBO series *Family Bonds* directed by Steven Cantor, Susan Kaplan's *Three of Hearts*, which was released in 2005 by THINKFilm and premiered in 2006 on NBC/Bravo, and 2005 Tribeca Film Festival stand-outs *PUNK: attitude* (Independent Film Channel (IFC)/Fremantle/3DD) directed by Don Letts, and Lewis Lapham's *The American Ruling Class* (BBC/Sundance Channel) directed by John Kirby. Previous productions include John Landis' *Slasher* (IFC), *Honky Tonk Blues: the Life and Death of Hank Williams* (PBS/BBC) directed by Morgan Neville and Ken Bowser's Cannes Film Festival premiere *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (Trio/BBC/TF1) based on Peter Biskind's bestselling book. Films currently in production include *Alexis* (A&E/Channel Four) directed by Matthew Barbato and produced by Nikki Parrott, *Cat Dancers* (HBO) directed by Harris Fishman, Doan Hoang's *Homeland* (ITVS) and BBC co-productions *Dmitriy* directed by Jason Hutt and produced by Michel Negroponte (*Jupiter's Wife*) and *Office Tigers* directed by Liz Mermin (*The Beauty Academy of Kabul*). Cactus is developing several new feature documentaries including *Make My Comedy Black: the Story of National Lampoon*, *Bling - A Planet Rock* with Kanye West and *Rebels on the Backlot* based on Sharon Waxman's highly acclaimed bestseller.

Cactus is also handling international sales on Gary Tarn's acclaimed documentary *Black Sun*, which premiered at the 2005 Toronto Film Festival, Jaci Judelson's *Tina Barney: Social Studies*, and a slate of feature documentaries produced for IFC including *This Film is Not Yet Rated* directed by Kirby Dick and Eddie Schmidt (2005 Academy Award nominated *Twist of Faith*) which had its world premiere at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, Lesli Klainberg's *Fabulous - The Story of Queer Cinema*, which premiered at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival and *Wanderlust* directed by Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini (*American Splendor*).

