

Michelle Wright

biography

With the release of her first brand new music in five years, Michelle Wright once again shows why her expressive voice and her distinctive style has earned her twenty-five Top Ten radio hits, more than forty major awards (including her 2011 induction into the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame) and sold millions of records.

Growing up in Merlin, Ontario, a small Canadian farming community near Chatham, Michelle heard the rhythm & blues and Motown hits coming out of Detroit, just forty-five minutes away. But especially she heard the strains of country music since her parents were both country performers. "My earliest memories of music are singing in the car, or spending the weekend with my father after my parents separated and watching him put on a rhinestone-studded suit to perform in." As a young girl, she tagged along to countless shows. "We were never a family band, but I got a lot of inspiration and encouragement from my mother. That's where my love of country music really began."

In 1988, she teamed with Savannah Records President Brian Ferriman to release her first CD, *Do Right By Me*, in Canada and set off to tour North America. *Do Right By Me* was a major hit in her homeland, with seven chart singles and sales well over 40,000 copies, and it opened many doors in the United States. The American country music world was impressed, and the new Arista/Nashville label made Michelle one of its flagship artists.

The following year she signed with Arista/Nashville and in 1990, Michelle released her first U.S. album, *Michelle Wright*. American audiences responded immediately and enthusiastically to "that girl singer from up north with the snow in her videos," and her first single, "New Kind Of Love," became her first Top Thirty American hit.

In 1992, Arista released *Now & Then*, which included the song "Take It Like A Man," "Take It Like A Man" was released in February of 1992, the first of seven singles from the project, and in less than a year Michelle became the first Canadian-born artist in the modern era of country music to have a Top Ten hit in America, a Number One video on CMT-USA (also for "Take It Like A Man") and to win a major U.S. music industry award (the Academy of Country Music Top New Female Vocalist award in 1992). The song also catapulted Michelle to superstardom in Canada, receiving a total of twelve music industry awards, including the 1993 Canadian Country Music Association's Fans' Choice Entertainer Of The Year award and double platinum honors for *Now & Then* the same year.

The Reasons Why followed in 1994. After co-hosting the TNN/Music City News Awards the same year and hosting the CCMA Awards in 1995, her ease in front of the camera led to her guest appearance on the syndicated series "Due South." *For Me It's You (1996)* marked the first time one of Michelle's own songs, the stirring "What Love Looks Like," was made available to her American fans. At the 1997 CCMA Awards, she delivered a show-stopping, gospel-tinged rendition of the Curtis Mayfield hit, "People Get Ready," accompanied by a fifty-voice choir. A personal career highlight for Michelle, she reflects, "I still get goose bumps whenever I hear that version."

"Your Love," Michelle's 1998 collaboration with pianist Jim Brickman, was named the CCMA Vocal/Instrumental Collaboration of the Year and the video for "Your Love" topped the CMT Canada charts. The success of "Your Love" did not go unnoticed by Brickman's label; New York based Windham Hill Records. The collaboration was included on Brickman's CD *Destiny* and released to U.S. Adult Contemporary radio in October 1999. The song became a Top 20 AC hit in early 2000.

At the dawn of the new millennium, Michelle marked her ten-year association with Arista/Nashville with the international release of her latest American album, *Michelle Wright: The Greatest Hits Collection*. The album contained eleven of the songs that shaped Michelle's career since she signed with the label. They appeared in near-chronological order, rolling out the soundtrack of Michelle's life: "New Kind Of Love," "All You Really Wanna Do," "Take It Like a Man," "He Would Be Sixteen," "Guitar Talk," "Now & Then," "One Good Man," "Safe In The Arms Of Love," "Nobody's Girl," "What Love Looks Like," and "The Answer Is Yes." The album also contained five songs never before found on a Michelle Wright album: two new songs co-written by Michelle, "When I Found You" and "I Surrender," plus "Your Love," her gospel version of "People Get Ready," and her "Walkin' After Midnight" duet with Patsy Cline.

Michelle Wright: The Greatest Hits Collection offered listeners a sonic overview of ten magical years punctuated by highlight after memorable highlight. Michelle is proud of the achievement her Greatest Hits Collection represents. "It felt great to be at that point in my career. Very early on, when I first hit the road with a bunch of guys, crisscrossing North America in an old van, sleeping in the back on top of a couple of Peavey guitar amps, I could only dream about having enough hits to make a greatest hits package. And then there we were."

The twenty-first century saw five more CDs from Michelle generating more sales and more hits: *Shut Up and Kiss Me* (Sony/BMG 2002); her first Christmas album, *A Wright Christmas*, released in Canada in 2005 and internationally on Savannah Music at Christmas time, 2008; her first full album of country material in ten years, *Everything And More*, released in Canada in July, 2006, and internationally on Savannah Music in late 2008; the Savannah Music reissue of a remastered and repackaged edition of *Do Right By Me* across North America in August, 2010 and internationally the following October; *The Wright Songs: An Acoustic Evening with Michelle Wright*, a 17-song collection of many of her hits performed on acoustic instruments and recorded live in Alberta at select venues during 2009 and 2010, released in Canada in late 2011 and internationally in early 2012 on Savannah Music.

Strong (2013) highlighted Michelle's remarkable growth as a singer and songwriter - inspired by the perseverance and strength that she has witnessed in friends, family, and strangers over the years. The album was produced by Jason Barry, Eric Silver, and Danick Dupelle and contained 11 songs, 10 of which she co-wrote.

Michelle continued to divide her time between touring and songwriting, but in late 2016, with a new team behind her, Michelle knew that it was time to head back into the studio. "My music is always an extension of me," says Wright, "And each new song is a chance to push a little harder, to dig a little deeper." In 2017, she enlisted the help of producer, friend and fellow Canadian Bob Funk to sort through the mountain of songs she had written, co-written and received from other writers. The results are an intoxicating mix of contemporary country and the R&B roots that have been the foundation of her musical journey since the very beginning.

She will continue to write and record songs but has released the groovin' "Attitude Is Everything" (Daryl Burgess/Joanna Cotton) and the gospel-tinged ballad, "Lovin' This Day" (Daryl Burgess, Joanna Cotton/Angie Russell) in single form. Michelle feels that this is a more "immediate" method to get her music out and is in tune with what music fans are seeking. "Out on the concert trail, we see the changing way that people are consuming music. I will always make CDs, but the new technology lets us put new songs in our show right along with the hits and make them available to people."

More than any other recording in her career, Michelle has been involved in every element of the project. As a new approach to the project's visuals, she consulted with local artist, and brother-in-law, Pat Millius (patmillius.com) to create an original piece of artwork. Millius works like the Renaissance painters who labored long before him, beginning each painting using a "canvas" of layered plaster on wooden panels. He used the same classic process to turn Michelle's musical ideas into a montage of images to reflect the new music.

Michelle Wright is poised for the next phase of what has already been a stellar international musical career, one that has seen her grace concert stages across North America, Europe, Africa, South America, Australia and Asia. Michelle continues to show her fans that the feisty girl from rural Merlin, Ontario is here to stay. Or as she says, "What a way to make a living! I plan on making and playing music for a long time to come."