



# Ronnie Milsap

## Legendary Entertainer

Ronny Milsap ranks as one of the pre-eminent country soul singers of his generation. He represents much more than any two-word definition can convey. He is a humble, overtly friendly fellow with a talent as vast and multi-dimensional as the American South. Milsap provided country music with one of its most important voices as the genre was moving beyond its rural roots into the main stream of modern entertainment.

The Bakersfield Business Conference will present Ronny Milsap as a speaker-performer during the day and as an entertainer in the evening.

As a speaker who incorporates his musical talents in his speech, Ronny Milsap is without peer. His life story is a testament to overcoming challenges in life. Born into dire poverty in the Appalachian town of Robinsville, North Carolina, Milsap's mother viewed her newborn's blindness as punishment from God. Shortly after his first birthday, he was cast off and given to his grandmother to raise. At age six, he was sent to the Governor Morehead State School for the Blind in Raleigh, where he faced barbaric disciplinary treatment all through his grade school and high school years.

All along, the sightless child took refuge in music. Morehead put him through strict classical music training, a program that was heightened after the young boy early on showed the innate talent of a prodigy. At the same time, he obsessively listened to the radio, especially the late night programs of country music, gospel and rhythm and blues.

Country music couldn't have found a man more suited to lead the Nashville sound to mainstream modern entertainment. Steeped in the mountain music of the North Carolina hills and schooled in classical music, Milsap found inspiration early in life in a wide variety of music. Even as he mastered Beethoven and Mozart, his heart belonged to hard core country and rhythm and blues, music he heard beamed from powerful radio stations located in Nashville. Those early songs about life and love, provided a young, impoverished blind boy with a connection to a world beyond the harsh reality of his daily existence.

Eventually, an adult Milsap synthesized his myriad of influences into a cosmopolitan style of country music that helped revolutionize Nashville. His track record speaks loud and clear: 40 number one hits, seven Grammy Awards, four Academy of Country Music Awards, and eight County Music Association Awards. Together, they underscore Milsap's position as one of the best loved and most endearing artists in country music history.

As always, the eternally optimistic Milsap forges ahead, positive about what the future may hold. That spirit not only comes through in his music, but in his speeches. It is also what helped him overcome the unfathomable difficulties he faced long before he ever put a song on the radio.

In April 1973, the blind singer began a long-lasting association with RCA Records. His 40 number one hits stand as a testament to his success and staying power as a country artist. Only the late Conway Twitty scored more top country hits, and his included many duets with Loretta Lynn.

While looking back at the enormous impact he has had on country music in the 70's, 80's, 90's and now this century, Milsap insists on looking ahead as well. "I've been very fortunate to have had a lot of successful records," he says. "Now it's time to make some more."