



MEDIA RELATIONS CONTACT

[Jessica Kelly](mailto:Jessica.Kelly@ucdavis.edu), 530-754-5428

FULL SCHEDULE AND IMAGES

MondaviArts.org/press

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Dec. 8, 2008

Willie Nelson Brings His Own Brand of Country to the Mondavi Center

Davis, Calif.—His career has spanned six decades. He has earned every conceivable award and honor to be bestowed on a person in his profession. He has released more than 200 albums. He has also amassed reputable credentials as an author, actor and activist. He is legendary singer-songwriter **Willie Nelson**, appearing for the first time at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC Davis, in Jackson Hall on Sunday, Jan. 11.** Showtime is 7 p.m.

Nelson's band comprises **Jody Payne on guitar, Bee Spears on bass, Mickey Raphael on harmonica, Bobbie Lee Nelson on keyboards, and Paul and Billy English on drums and percussion.** Opening the show is **Lukas Nelson & The Promise of the Real.**

Pricing for **An Evening with Willie Nelson** is \$75/50/30 for regular tickets and \$37.50/25/15 for students and children. Purchase tickets online at MondaviArts.org, through the Mondavi Center box office at 530-754-2787 or 866-754-2787 (toll-free), or at the door. Accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. This concert is one of several upcoming **Jackson Hall** performances featuring uniquely American music, including **Mavis Staples on Jan. 14, Punch Brothers (Chris Thile) on Feb. 14, Guitar Blues (Jorma Kaukonen, Robben Ford, Ruthie Foster) on Mar. 4, and k.d. lang on Mar. 27.**

If ever the words "living legend" were more than just public relations bluster, the application would be to **Willie Hugh Nelson.** The iconic Texan is the creative genius behind historic recordings like "**Crazy,**" "**Hello Walls,**" "**Red Headed Stranger**" and "**Stardust.**" In many ways, however, the weighty distinction "living legend" does Nelson a disservice, for it discounts the extent to which he is a thriving, relevant and progressive musical force today; Nelson continues to write, record and tour and is a fixture at his annual Farm Aid fundraising concerts. Most important, Nelson's music is as adventurous as ever, mixing sounds and styles, and bending genre boundaries. In 2005, he released "Countryman," which incorporated elements of reggae. In 2008, Nelson released "Moment of Forever" to critical praise.

Don Roth, Mondavi Center executive director, writing for the November 1973 edition of "Texas Monthly," deftly described Nelson (then 37) as "the grinning, gentle rebel who made the music industry come to him on his own terms yet ... remained [an] almost universally admired nice guy and artist." Now, 35 years later, Roth is glad to welcome Nelson to the Mondavi Center. "In live performance, Willie never disappoints. He is an icon not just of country music but of American music."

- more -

Born April 29, 1933, in Abbott, Texas, **Willie Nelson** and his sister were raised by their paternal grandparents, who encouraged both children to play music. He began writing songs in elementary school and played in bands as a teenager. After high school, Nelson served a short stint in the Air Force, but music was a constant pull.

By the mid-1950s, he was working as a country deejay in Ft. Worth while continuing to pursue a musical career, recording independently and playing nightclubs. He sold some of his original compositions, including "Family Bible," which became a hit for Claude Gray in 1960.

That success and others convinced Nelson to move to Nashville, where record labels initially were resistant. His songwriting talents were quickly embraced, however, and 1961 proved to be his breakthrough year. "Hello Walls" became a nine-week No. 1 for Faron Young, and Patsy Cline's version of "Crazy" became an instant classic.

In 1962, Nelson scored his first two Top 10 hits as a recording artist for Liberty Records, but he struggled for a breakthrough the remainder of the decade. Disillusioned with Nashville and with the insistence of his label, RCA Records, on lush, string-laden arrangements, he moved back to Texas in 1972. Emboldened by the rock and folk music becoming popular in Austin, Nelson and his music began to change.

Nelson's first album with Atlantic Records, 1973's "Shotgun Willie," got the attention of music critics if not the masses, and the 1974 follow-up "Phases & Stages" helped him build a loyal following. The breakthrough he'd been seeking for the better part of two decades came in 1975, when he parted ways with Atlantic Records and signed with Columbia.

"Red Headed Stranger" became one of country's most unlikely hits. The acoustic concept album vaulted Nelson to country music's top ranks, much to the surprise of Music Row. Nelson's convention-busting stardom, combined with the concurrent popularity of maverick Waylon Jennings, prompted journalist Hazel Smith to dub the trend "outlaw music," and a movement was underway. RCA Records seized on the phenomenon, compiling an album of previously recorded material from Nelson, Jennings, Tompall Glaser and Jessi Colter. "Wanted: The Outlaws" spawned the Nelson/Jennings duet "Good Hearted Woman" and quickly became the best selling album country had ever seen.

A fixture on the singles charts over the next several years, Nelson's star rose even further with the 1978 releases "Waylon & Willie" and "Stardust." The former included "Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys"; the latter, a collection of pop standards, further exhibiting Nelson's ability to defy expectations on the way to tremendous success.

- more -

Nelson's stardom soon translated to another medium with roles in feature films including “The Electric Horseman,” “Honeysuckle Rose” and “Stagecoach.” And the hits kept coming: "On the Road Again" reached the top of the charts in 1981, "Always on My Mind" was a crossover smash in 1982, and a duet with Latin pop star Julio Iglesias, "To All the Girls I've Loved Before," raced up the charts in 1984.

Nelson enlisted Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash for the “Highwaymen” album, released in 1985. That same year he founded Farm Aid, an organization dedicated to championing the cause of family farmers. Farm Aid's annual televised concert special raises funds and, along with Willie's annual Fourth of July picnic, has become a cornerstone of his live touring schedule.

The 1990s brought more success and one notable challenge. A \$16.7 million bill from the IRS forced Nelson to sell many of his assets, including several homes, and resulted in the release of “The IRS Tapes: Who'll Buy My Memories.” Nelson cleared the debt by 1993 and was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame that same year. Enshrinement, however, didn't slow his creative energy, and the decade produced artistic triumphs including “Across the Borderline,” an album featuring Bob Dylan, Sinéad O'Connor and Paul Simon among its many guests.

As we move through the first decade of a new century, Nelson shows no signs of slowing down. He continues to tour heavily, playing approximately 180 dates a year, and to experiment with new types of material. In 2008, he won his 10th GRAMMY Award, this time for the duet “Lost Highway” with Ray Price. Additional accolades include a Presidential Merit Award and lifetime achievement awards from both GRAMMY and the Americana Music Association. Read more at WillieNelson.com.

- **An Evening with Willie Nelson**
- **Sun., Jan. 11, 2009; 7 p.m.**
- **\$75/50/30 regular**
\$37.50/25/15 students, children
- **Mondavi Center, Jackson Hall**
- **9399 Old Davis Road, Davis, CA (GPS)**
- **530.754.2787**
866.754.2787 (toll-free)
530.754.5402 (TDD)
- MondaviArts.org

###