

Jeff Walker first came to Nashville from Australia to visit his father, noted producer/arranger Bill Walker. Armed with an accounting degree and a new job at Price Waterhouse in downtown Nashville, he soon found himself a few miles away on Music Row running a record label, becoming the CRB's Treasurer and launching AristoMedia – still going strong after 35 years. To paraphrase a Music City saying, it all begins with country songs.

Radio was an important part of growing up in Australia. At that time it was more AM than FM. There were no musical formats. Charlie Rich, Roger Miller, Johnny Cash and Tom T. Hall all got a lot of exposure on mainstream radio. The big country hits over here like Sammi Smith's "Help Me Make It Through The Night" or Donna Fargo's "The Happiest Girl In The Whole USA," were also big down there. I had a transistor radio and whether you were going to the beach in Sydney or just washing your car, music was never too far away.

I went to Sydney University and got my Bachelor of Economics degree with a major in accounting and law. Then I stayed on for another year and got my chartered accountant's certificate, which is equivalent to a CPA. In June 1974 I went up to Hong Kong and over to Europe. I took five months off and did Europe on \$10 a day, staying in tents and doing the whole traveling thing, having fun and meeting people.



At that stage of my life, I was wherever life was going to take me. I knew I liked putting on a suit and going to work every day and being structured. I've always been a very organized person. But when I got to Nashville I got caught up in the atmosphere and the music. That's when Music Row *was* Music Row. People were walking down the streets with guitars every day and there was a real feeling in the air of creativity. It was magical.

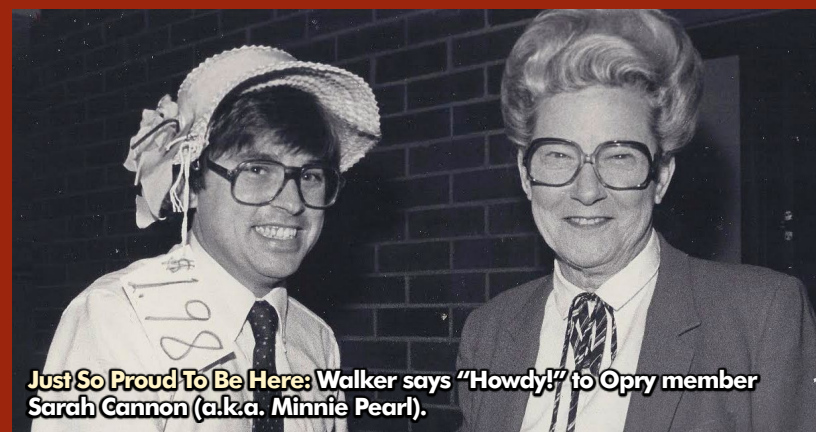
Con Brio had considerable success. We had 43 nationally-charted singles between '76 and '79. We were the Country Independent Label of the Year in 1977. For me it was trial and error,

The CRB goal back then was growth through sharing. It was still very much in its infancy. I'd attended CRS when it was at the Airport Hilton. At Con Brio, we'd had a couple of acts on the *New Faces Show*. It was smaller and there was a lot of camaraderie – great networking and educational opportunity. I couldn't imagine anything in any other format that helped people to grow within the business at the time. It was a must-attend for me. I learned from all of those people who have now gone into the Hall of Fame. They were an inspiration to the whole format.

Records in 1980 and they played at the *New Faces Show*, you could tell they were going to get a major label deal.

Country Radio Seminar brings people to town to not only experience the artists, but to get educated and network. It goes back to the original concept of growth through sharing. People go home, they get on the air and talk about Nashville. The economic impact of CRS has been huge to Nashville, and probably understated in many ways. They stay ahead of the game in terms of trends. This is where the agenda committee really works. They stay on top of all

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I arrived in Nashville in early December 1974. While I was in Sydney finishing my CPA degree I was working for an accounting firm called Touche Ross, which is now Deloitte & Touche. They had arranged for me to start work April 1 in Los Angeles. When I got here in December, I'd planned to spend some time with my dad. But when I called the L.A. office they said, "We want you here immediately." They were very nasty to me and said, "If you don't come now we don't know if the job will still be available." So I went to downtown Nashville and got a job with another accounting firm, Price Waterhouse. I called my firm in Sydney and promptly resigned.

While I was working for the accounting firm my dad started Con Brio Records. He asked me to do the books at night, which I agreed to because I didn't think there'd be a lot involved in it. But once you get into the music business – this was mid-1975 – it's like a big vacuum cleaner. It brings you right in and it's hard to get away from it. It's my drug of choice, I guess (laughs).

learning the business. Here's a boy coming from Australia with an economics degree running a small record company, learning what PROs were, learning licensing, just learning the business from the bottom up. It was fun.

When the recession of 1980 came along, our distributor went bankrupt. They sent us a letter saying they were going to pay us six cents on the dollar so dad said, "Let's close the record label." In February I was asked to join the board of the Country Radio Broadcasters by two people – Biff Collie, who had been our radio promotion head in the early days of Con Brio, and Charlie Monk. They both asked me to become Treasurer of the CRB. I thought to myself, "Well, I'll do this for a year." Biff had seen me in action from working at the record company. He knew I could handle money. Charlie was the Treasurer and didn't want to do it anymore. (laughs) So in February 1980 I got elected to the board as Treasurer – and in April I formed AristoMedia.

Biff Collie was a mentor and a really good friend. In the early days, just watching the work ethic of Frank Mull, who was the Executive Director at the time, was a big influence. Mike Oatman, who was president of the CRB for several years, was a great friend and ally. There have been so many great people through the years.

In 1999 Garth Brooks was at the Hall of Fame dinner. He'd come to introduce Dandalion Seese and stayed until the very end signing autographs. Finally, at two in the morning, it was just Garth and me. I walked him to his truck because everybody else had left after he'd signed the final autograph.

In 1989 Alan Jackson and Garth Brooks both performed on the ASCAP Luncheon. What a moment, to see two superstars being launched. It was amazing. I still get goose bumps. When Tim McGraw sang "Don't Take The Girl" on the 1994 *New Faces Show*, you just knew a star was being launched that night. When Alabama were on MDJ

the current events and they have to predict what will be the hot issues coming next February or March.

I believe in country music, which has been very good to me and my family. I believe in giving back to the industry. I was in Charlotte at a CMA board meeting and [CRB's] Charlie Morgan said, "Hey I need to talk to you privately." He said, "I just want you to know that we've recognized all your hard work and energy and enthusiasm over the years and you're going to be getting this award, and I'm very excited to be presenting it to you."

I want to first thank the CRB board and staff. I want to thank my family, too, because the time I give to CRB and the late-night board meetings or showcases is time spent away from them. I'd like to thank my AristoMedia staff for the same reason. And I'd like to thank my industry friends and believers. It's really special to know that the people around you recognize and appreciate you. **CAC**