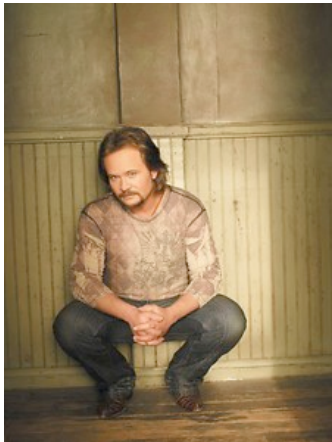


Travis Tritt: Here comes T-R-O-U-B-L-E

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by Joanie Cox

In 1989, **Travis Tritt** planted his boot heels firmly on Nashville soil and has been a country star ever since. Today, the Harley-riding, longhaired country boy from Marietta, Ga., is planning the follow-up to his most-recent album, 2007's *The Storm*, and preparing for a trip to Florida that will see him perform hits such as "Country Club" and "T-R-O-U-B-L-E" Saturday in Boca Raton. *City Link* recently spoke to the singer-guitarist about golfing with **Charlie Daniels**, turkey hunting and his friendship with the Man in Black.

What's the plan for your next album? I'm gonna actually be starting my own record label, strictly for my own purposes. I'm not looking to sign other acts or try to work music other than my own — pretty much similar to what Charlie Daniels did some years ago. We're actually in the process of putting that together as we speak and hopefully soon, we'll have that completed and we'll be going back into the studio and start working on our new project.

What has been the most rewarding moment of your career? There have been quite a few. I look back over my career and it's amazing to me — the things we've been able to do and the opportunities we've had and continue to have after all this time, and I'm a blessed individual in that regard. Becoming a member of the **Grand Ole Opry** first of all. In 1989, I was part of that class with **Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, Vince Gill, Clint Black**. I never really thought the people in Nashville, especially with something as traditional as the Grand Ole Opry, I never thought they would let me in. When I first came in, I stood out like a sore thumb because I had long hair and leather. I came out of playing biker bars and pool halls and I rode a **Harley-Davidson** before I ever even came to

Nashville. A lot of people thought it was some sort of image I was trying to cultivate and in actuality, there was no image to it. It was who I was and who I am. I was a product of the places I had played and the kind of environment I had sort of come up in.

Is there an expectation to have the clean-cut cowboy look? There were a lot of people in Nashville back then and quite frankly, a lot of people there now who still can't get past the long hair and the leather, even though I don't have my hair as long as I used to back then. There's a stereotype or a stigma that goes with that and really sort of diverted people away from the voice. I stood out when I first came out from that group, and it's been a huge surprise to me when the Grand Ole Opry invited me to be a part of that. I've had things happen to me since then, to be nominated for Grammy Awards and win Grammy Awards and then to have the opportunity to work with people like Ray Charles or Patti Labelle. Johnny Cash was a great friend of mine. Waylon Jennings was a great friend of mine.

What's your greatest memory of Johnny Cash? John and I met back in 1992. And we were introduced by **Marty Stuart**. And so John and I hit it off right off the bat. It was before e-mail really and back then, if John wanted to communicate with you, he would just sit down and write you a letter. And it might be a two- or three-page letter or a quick note just to see how you were doing out on the road. When John passed away, I went into my safe and I had a stack of letters that John had written me in his hand about a half-inch high, and I went on *Larry King Live* and read some of those letters. To me, those are priceless. They were some things that were almost comical. He'd just write a quick note to see how things were going out on the road and he'd say, "If you're hanging out with Marty Stuart, keep your eye on your wallet." And then, there were some that would be really serious and he'd offer a lot of really good career advice. It was a great relationship. The biggest thing John taught me from the very beginning is he said, "Son, there's a thing called mystique that people have forgotten about. You can let people know who you are but still maintain a certain amount of mystique." And he said he always thought that would be a key to being successful in this business.

You had a hit song with "Country Club." Are you a member of an actual country club? No. You know when people ask if I wanna play golf, I say, "No, that's just what I need — one more thing to tick me off and take my money." Years ago, Charlie Daniels had gotten into golf and he wanted me to get into it, too. He kept saying, "Travis, you'll love it." He said it was so relaxing. He was so serious about it, he had a custom set of left-handed golf clubs made for me and he sent them to the house. One day, he called and asked me to hit a bucket of balls with him at the driving range. I've always heard people say that if you got a hold of a really good shot in golf, that you'd be hooked for life. And thank God that never happened that day. I think the longest ball I hit in the air was maybe 20 feet. Three weeks later, Charlie called again and asked to play a round of golf.

So what happened? He twisted my arm and got me to go and I remember we were on a tiered golf course. I saw a guy go up to make a shot off a tee and he apparently didn't like the shot he made because he took his club afterwards and threw it like a helicopter blade. A few minutes later, I was watching and I saw the same guy make another shot, miss and then take his entire golf bag, raise it above his head like a WWE wrestler and throw it in the lake. And I looked at Charlie. Charlie didn't see him throw the club the first time, but he did see him body-slam his bag into the lake. And I said, "Yep, Charlie, I see what you mean. This is really a relaxing game." So that was pretty much it for my golf days.

What do you do in your spare time? I'm an avid outdoorsman. I love to hunt and fish. As a result of this wonderful job that I have, I've had an opportunity to hunt and fish all over the world. I've been to Africa and I plan on going back again. I've been all over the Northern Hemisphere. I really enjoy that. To me, it's extremely relaxing and it's something I've been doing since I was a kid. When I get to Florida, I've got some fishing lined up earlier in the week before we get down to Boca and I've also got an Osceola turkey hunt going on this week. It's turkey season. This Florida run will give me an opportunity to do a little of both.

What can fans expect at this show? The last time I was in the Fort Lauderdale area, we did an acoustic show. The show we'll do this weekend will be a more-energetic band show. But I like to demonstrate both sides. We'll be doing a lot of songs people will recognize and some songs off more-recent albums. I'll also be doing songs this weekend people haven't heard — songs we've recently written or an obscure cover song they've never heard me do or record. I love to be onstage and entertain and get a big ball of energy going back and forth between me and a live audience. That's never lost its luster for me. I've never once gone onstage without getting a little bit of butterflies and that old tingle run up and down my spine. It's a blast for me and it's what I believe I was put on this earth to do and I'm very blessed in that regard, too.

Travis Tritt will perform with the Outlaws 7 p.m. Saturday at Sunset Cove Amphitheatre, 12551 Glades Road, in Boca Raton. Blackberry Smoke will open the show. Tickets cost \$30-\$40. Call 561-488-8069 or visit Startickets.com.

Contact Joanie Cox at jcox@citylinkmagazine.com.