

Texas Personalities

Mickey Gilley

For most of his career, pianist/vocalist Mickey Gilley lived in the shadow of his cousin, Jerry Lee Lewis, playing a similar fusion of country, rock, blues, and R&B. In the early '70s, he managed to breakthrough into country stardom, but it wasn't until the late '70s, when he became associated with the urban cowboy movement, that he became a superstar. Gilley, like Lewis, was raised in Ferriday, LA. It wasn't until Jerry Lee had a hit with his first Sun single, "Crazy Arms," that Mickey decided he wanted to pursue a musical career. Gilley began recording for a number of independent Texas labels without much success in the late '50s. In the early '60s, he became a local favorite by playing a never-ending series of bars and clubs. A few of singles became Texas hits, but he didn't have a national hit until 1968 with minor hit "Now I Can Live Again" on Paula Records.

In 1970, he opened Gilley's Club in Pasadena; the honky tonk had previously been known as Sherry's Club, and its owner, Sherwood Cryer, asked Mickey to re-open the bar with him. In 1974, Gilley had another local hit with "Room Full of Roses," which was released on Astro Records. Playboy Records, which was distributed by Epic, heard the record and acquired national distribution for the single. It became a number one country hit, crossing over to number 50 on the pop charts. "Room Full of Roses" launched a string of updated, countrypolitan-inflected honky tonk hits for Gilley that ran for just over a decade. Gilley racked up 16 number one hits besides "Room Full of Roses," including "I Overlooked an Orchid," "City Lights," "She's Pulling Me Back Again," "True Love Ways," "Stand by Me," "That's All That Matters," and "A Headache Tomorrow (Or a Heartache Tonight)," plus other recognizable hits.

Gilley signed with Epic Records after Playboy folded in 1978. The following year, the film *Urban Cowboy* -- which was based on Gilley's Club and featured a cameo by Mickey, as well as several of his songs -- brought him to national attention, which resulted in a string of six straight number one singles. He continued to have Top Ten hits until 1986, when his career began to slip. The late '80s were plagued with problems for Gilley. Not only had a new generation of country singers replaced him on the charts, he had financial problems which culminated in the closing of Gilley's Club. He turned his career around in the early '90s, when he became one of the first country stars to open a permanent theater in Branson, MO. Although Gilley recorded some albums in the '90s -- which were primarily available through television advertisements -- he focused his career on the theater.

Courtesy of <http://www.mp3.com/mickey-gilley/artists/1354/biography.html>



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