

MARTY STUART TRAVELS FROM SATURDAY NIGHT TO SUNDAY MORNING

By Mario Tarradell

Country music singer, songwriter, guitarist, TV show host and historian continues to mine the rich treasures of American roots music

Marty Stuart spent nine years journeying from Saturday night into Sunday morning.

That's no hyperbole. The country singer, songwriter, guitarist, TV show host and noted historian took nearly a decade to craft his expansive and ambitious double-album, *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning*. The just-released effort not only combines Stuart's predilection for all things American roots music – country, rock 'n' roll, R&B, gospel and bluegrass – but it also tells a story.

"I wanted it to flow as a continuation, as an evolution," says Stuart, 56, by phone from his home in Nashville. "We toured all the while making this record. The more we developed the idea, the more songs started piling up."

As the title suggests, *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning* captures the dichotomous reality of raising hell and seeking heaven. It's about night and day, dark and light; the balancing act of feeding the flesh and nourishing the soul. The *Saturday Night* disc is all about the honky-tonk, while the *Sunday Morning* CD is all about the church.

Stuart calls it "spiritual warfare," noting that it's a fine line we all struggle with in our lives.

The gospel harmonies on the *Sunday Morning* side are particularly impressive, recalling the best of the Oak Ridge Boys and the Staple Singers. Stuart and his longtime band, the Fabulous Superlatives, found common ground as people in that musical world of Southern gospel.

"I was raised in church," says the man who's been married to legendary country singer Connie Smith since 1997. "Gospel was always a part of my life. With the Superlatives, the way we got to know each other as people was singing gospel songs. That is where our harmonies came from."

Those harmonies, not to mention the fine musicianship from Stuart and his Fabulous Superlatives, which include guitarist Kenny Vaughan, drummer Harry Stinson and bassist Paul Martin, will be front and center Friday, Oct. 10, 2014, at 7:30 p.m. at the Greenville Municipal Auditorium, 2821 Washington St. in downtown Greenville. Tickets for the show are \$36-\$51 at the Auditorium box office, online at www.ShowtimeAtTheGMA.com, or by calling 877-435-9849 or 903-457-2994. Singer-songwriter Parker Millsap opens the show.

Stuart promises the concert will encompass a little bit of every corner of his long and varied career. He enjoyed a string of hit singles and big-selling albums during the late '80s and into the mid '90s. Radio staples such as "Hillbilly Rock," "Little Things," "Tempted," "Burn Me Down" and "This One's Gonna Hurt You (For a Long, Long Time)," a duet with fellow country renegade Travis Tritt, put him in *Billboard's* Top 10 country singles chart. Three albums – 1989's *Hillbilly Rock*, 1991's *Tempted* and 1992's *This One's Gonna Hurt You* – all hit the 500,000 copies sold mark.

For Stuart it all began as a child prodigy, a kid so obsessed with country music that he taught himself how to play guitar and mandolin. Barely passed puberty, he was already a mandolinist on the road with Lester Flatt's touring band. Before he embarked as a solo artist in the '80s Stuart had performed with legends Johnny Cash, who would be his father-in-law during Stuart's 5-year marriage to Cindy Cash, as well as Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Bill Monroe.

Cash, forever a hugely influential figure in Stuart's personal and professional life, would be a catalyst toward the creation of *The Marty Stuart Show*, now 156 episodes strong on the RFD-TV network. The variety program is patterned after classic country TV series such as *The Porter Wagoner Show*, *Hee Haw* and *The Johnny Cash Show*.

"Back in the 1960s these shows touched me as a kid," he says. "I loved them. They still to this day stand as one of the most meaningful and colorful documents of that time in country music. It was a pretty infallible template. Why is nobody doing a 21st century version of these shows? It was a form of archiving, as a preservationist. It was introducing the country music art form to the 21st century. This form of American music is alive and well. Talking about the past will only get you so far. It was about sending it into the future."

Welcome to the world of Marty Stuart, the revered historian. He's a photographer and a collector of country music memorabilia. Stuart parlayed a current collection of his photos titled *American Ballads*, now on display at Nashville's Frist Museum, into a coffee table book of the same name. Later this year he's scheduled to have a second exhibit of his work, this one dubbed *The Art of Country Music*, open at the Sheldon Gallery in St. Louis, Missouri.

Stuart's turning point arrived in 1999 with the recording and release of *The Pilgrim*, his critically acclaimed concept album that signified his departure from the commercial country rat race. That record cemented his passion for the rich hallmarks of the genre.

"One day I woke up and realized that I don't need to go further down this road," he says. "My heart led me back to the bedrock of country music, the art form. That is way bigger than any chart hits."

He followed the advice of Southern gospel veteran Bill Gaither, a man credited with reviving that once dormant style. He told Stuart: "If you love your culture and your people, you stay with it when nobody else cares about it. They will come. I love what I do."

He loves it so much that he spent nine years traveling from Saturday night to Sunday morning.