

# Ricky Nelson

by Helen Marketti

Wearing a red jacket on the front cover of LIFE Magazine with the words "Teen Idol" next to his picture, Ricky Nelson was already a household name and familiar face



Ricky Nelson with twin sons, Gunnar and Matthew are courtesy of: The Rick Nelson Company

before even capturing the hearts of teenage girls and the approval of their parents. Being a talented musician with a gentle nature and genuine heart, Ricky Nelson encompassed all that seemed right and appropriate for the times. Appearing with his real life parents and brother on the 1950s television show, The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, Ricky Nelson was down to earth and people could relate to him.

Talking with Matthew Nelson about his "pop", one gets the feeling of already knowing Ricky Nelson. "For me, watching the Ozzie and Harriet programs is like watching home movies," said Matthew. "I don't have kids yet, but when I do there are 435 episodes of home movies for them to see. You can see my family grow up on screen so I am pretty excited about that and feel blessed."

While growing up, Ricky Nelson evolved from the "kid brother" to rock and roll icon all while still maintaining his role on the Ozzie and Harriet show. He began singing his hits on the show and audiences tuned in each week for a glimpse of the teen sensation. With his chart making hits, Travelin' Man, It's Late, Lonesome Town plus more, Ricky Nelson was in a place where his career was soaring to new heights. He is the only artist ever to have a number one song, Poor Little Fool, a number one movie, Rio Bravo and a number one TV show, Ozzie and Harriet all in the same week.

Matthew and twin brother, Gunnar hit the road many times during the year to perform



Ricky Nelson with twin sons, Gunnar and Matthew are courtesy of: The Rick Nelson Company

with their band, Nelson but they also do Ricky Nelson Remembered shows in honor of their father.

"One of my earliest memories is to sneak to the upper landing of the staircase, lay on the floor and listen to my dad play the guitar as the sound would drift up the stairs," recalls Matthew. "To me that is still one of the greatest sounds ever-an acoustic guitar all by itself. It makes me feel like I'm home. That is what makes it so great about the show we do because we get to honor him. And like many of the fans, we feel closer to him with every song we play."

"For the most part, my dad was very shy and quiet when he first started as an entertainer. People gave him great songs to sing and he interpreted them very well," explains Matthew. "When he was able to write his own material such as Garden Party and playing with his band (Stone Canyon Band), he seemed happier than he had ever been in his life. He was playing small clubs and venues but that didn't matter. What we learned from him is that we are entertainers and live through our music because that is our language. We learned that from him. Our grandfather had always said



Ricky Nelson with twin sons, Gunnar and Matthew are courtesy of: The Rick Nelson Company

that if you do what you love for a living then it's like having a license to steal."

December of 2010 will mark the 25th anniversary of the passing of Ricky Nelson. To celebrate his life, his memory and musical legacy he left behind, Matthew shared some exciting news about several special projects that are in the works.

"We are working on an authorized biography of our father. We also have plans that are now in the beginning stages of a feature film and a stage show. We have a lot of plans actually but we are taking it one step at a time," said Matthew. "Our Uncle David had a vault of tapes that were in Hollywood that we didn't know about. I have archived everything that was in there. I'm working on mixing two performances from a show in 1977 that were on tape."

Pausing for a moment, Matthew continues, "I have a tape of his last performance. I'm cleaning up the video. The sound is still distorted but I am working on it. It was sad for me to watch it but to have that documentation means a lot to me. Dad always played like he meant it. It's paramount to preserve the energy and vibe of the performance."



Ricky Nelson with then, teen sons, Gunnar and Matthew is courtesy of: Ernie and Kathy Vasquez

"Gunnar and I are also working on a TV show with our younger brother, Sam. The three of us will be singing together. It will be a documentary but unscripted. What we are hoping it will do is connect the dots between all of the Nelson generations for 50 years. We also plan on having clips of the Ozzie and Harriet show tied in with it. We're trying for late spring to get that together," said Matthew. "We're also planning a European tour because Dad was very popular in Europe, too. We may have James Burton tour with us." James Burton played guitar in Ricky Nelson's band on the Ozzie and Harriet show and can be seen in many episodes.

When asked about his father's contribution to music, Matthew thoughtfully said, "My dad was aesthetically pleasing, let's put it that way.

His songs still hold out. It is a testimony to a great piece of music that will live forever. My pop's music was simple, honest and done the hard way because there wasn't advanced technology like today. You have to respect that. I think my dad was the most televised early rocker. He helped co-found the genre of country rock and I think those are amazing things that he was part of. My dad was my best friend."

To keep up to date with the Nelsons, their projects and touring information, please check out:

www.thenelsonbrothers.com  
www.rickynelsonremembered.com



Ricky Nelson in the background is courtesy of: Stone Canyon Records.

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