

Josh Noland

Artist, Music Producer, and Music Teacher

A Community Radio Biographical Profile

Early Life and an Unlikely Path Into Music

Josh Noland grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, and attended Atherton High School. After scoring well on a federal aptitude test given to graduating seniors, he was recruited straight out of high school into the U.S. Army Map Service (part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), where he spent 13 years as a draftsman and stereo-photogrammetry specialist, working out of the Louisville field office—one of only four in the country, alongside Providence, Rhode Island; Kansas City, Missouri; and Washington, D.C.

His unit's aerial stereo-mapping work fed directly into Cold War intelligence—including detection of Soviet missile sites in Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis—and, in the mid-1960s, into NASA's Apollo program: Noland personally helped map several of the 18 candidate lunar landing sites using Ranger-satellite telemetry and stereo-plotting instruments, one of which was ultimately used for the Apollo 11 landing. He was working on a map on the day President Kennedy was shot.

Colleagues from the Army Map Service later surprised him mid-performance at the Country Music Cabaret in Fort Lauderdale with the original commemorative map and two medallions honoring his role in the Apollo 11 mission; the framed map still hangs on his wall alongside memorabilia from his music career.

Source: UF Digital Collections, Perry News-Herald profile by Mark Viola (ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu).

Music ran in parallel with his mapping career the whole time. He played guitar and sang gospel songs on Sunday mornings, even though he never felt fully at home in his own confirmed church. He developed an early fascination with trains from riding them and from the train songs he played, dreaming of one day riding the rails all the way to Nashville.

That dream came true around age 15 (in the early 1950s), when a bandmate's father, who worked for the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, arranged for Noland's teenage band to play music aboard a special train car for a four-hour trip to Nashville. There, they toured Ryman Auditorium, saw the full Grand Ole Opry show, watched Chet Atkins perform the Carter Family's "Wildwood Flower," and rode the train home overnight, arriving back the next morning.

Noland recorded his first record, "Sail on Silvery Moon," in 1956, and from 1956 to 1960 played guitar at WHAS Radio and TV in Louisville while attending the University of Louisville School of Music (1958–1960).

Building a Career in South Florida (1969–2005)

Sensing that mainframe computers would soon replace hand-mapping work, Noland left the Army Map Service in early 1969 and moved to Deerfield Beach, Florida, to pursue music full time. Ironically, one of the 18 lunar landing sites his team had mapped was used for the Apollo 11 landing that same July—he watched the moon landing on television from his new home in Florida, recognizing his own team's map on Walter Cronkite's anchor desk.

Career Highlights from the South Florida Years

- Founded The Coachmen, who recorded for Roulette Records in New York City (1967–1968).
- Became bandleader at the Country Music Cabaret in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (1969–1978).
- In 1973, produced and recorded the first country-guitar instrumental version of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." The recording was played worldwide and earned a place in the archives of the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville.
- Named Instrumentalist of the Year for the State of Florida by Country Beat magazine's Country Music Award (1976).
- Founding president (1993) of the Broward County Chapter of the Florida Country Music Association (FCMA).
- Inducted into the Florida Country Music Association's Hall of Fame in Naples, Florida (October 2, 1995), and into the Country Music Organization of America (CMOA) Hall of Fame in Las Vegas.
- Listed in Who's Who in Entertainment (1992).
- Owned and operated Empire Records and Big Blue Dolphin Music Company, along with the Josh Noland Music Recording Studio in Pompano Beach, Florida.
- Produced more than 150 songs for artists in Nashville and Florida, including Fishbone Fred, Rick Crocker, Tasha Youstin, Hurricane Dave, and the late Billy Helms.
- Four albums he produced were named Album of the Year by the FCMA and CMOA: "Game Challenge" by Rick Crocker and Randy Rogers (Kenny Rogers' brother); "What About Me" by Rick Crocker; "All Glory Now" by Tasha Youstin; and "Fond Memories" by Billy Helms.
- Two albums he produced for Fishbone Fred achieved Gold Record status and drew three Grammy nominations combined: "Safety Songs for Kids" (two nominations) and "Life Is Real" (one nomination).
- In 1971, founded "Songs of the Old Country Church, Inc.," a concert series pairing old country-gospel music with fundraising for underprivileged and disabled children—concerts that continued through the 1970s and '80s and became a forerunner of the group he still leads today,

Josh Noland & Friends, which formed on Easter Sunday 1993 when vocalist/guitarist Lynn Tyson asked to do more Christian music with him. Josh Noland & Friends performed country-gospel concerts throughout South Florida and played Easter Sunrise Services on the beach for the Community Church of Lauderdale-by-the-Sea.

Source: Josh Noland official biography and press materials (provided); Who's Who in Country Music feature by Dick Ferris (provided); Around Town newspaper feature by Patrick G. Mascola (provided).

Frequent collaborators and friends from this era who remained part of his musical circle for decades include Fishbone Fred, Hurricane Dave (Rush), Country Music Hall of Fame harmonica legend Charlie McCoy, and Tasha Youstin, among others. Rick Knowles Music independently lists this same circle—"The Purvis Brothers/Encore, Sammy Tedder... Hurricane Dave, Grammy nominees Fishbone Fred and Josh Noland"—as his own regular musical company, underscoring how tightly this network of North Florida and South Florida musicians was knit together.

Source: Rick Knowles official bio (rickknowlesmusic.com/bio).

The Move to Perry and a New Musical Community

Around 2005, Josh Noland relocated from South Florida to the North Florida community of Perry, bringing his recording studio with him and setting up a new studio with state-of-the-art equipment.

Source: Josh Noland biography, press materials (provided).

Not long after arriving, Noland helped launch the Perry Opry, a concert series broadcast live on Perry's AM station, WPRY-1400. The inaugural Perry Opry concert was held Saturday, June 23, at the Forest Festival Grounds in Perry—a free three-hour show from 7 to 10 p.m. featuring South Florida-based country singer Hurricane Dave (in town to promote his Perry-recorded album "Bar Stools & Church Pews: Songs for Friday Night & Sunday Morning"), three-time Grammy nominee Fishbone Fred, Mollie Lynn, Rick Knowles, Lynn Tyson, and Josh Noland & Friends.

Source: Hurricane Dave Music press release (provided).

Over the life of the Perry Opry series, Noland brought a rotating roster of musicians and artists to the outdoor stage at Forest Capital Park (Forest Capital Museum State Park), the Taylor County-owned venue just south of Perry that also hosts the Florida State Bluegrass Festival and the Florida Forest Festival, including:

- The Encore Band—Monticello, Florida musicians led by the Purvis Brothers, who also backed Grammy-winning harmonica player Charlie McCoy and performed in related "God's Country Live" concerts whenever he came through the region.
- Mike Denmark and Buddy Murphy

- Fishbone Fred
- Hurricane Dave
- Charley (Charlie) McCoy, the Country Music Hall of Fame harmonica virtuoso
- Rick Knowles

Source (Encore Band / Purvis Brothers): ECB Publishing / Greene Publishing (ecbpublishing.com/mike-purvis-to-be-remembered-at-tribute-concert).

Around this same period, Noland began hosting a Sunday morning country gospel radio program called "God's Country," which first aired on WPRY and has continued airing on local Perry radio since 2006. His music-selection program "Josh's Picks" followed. Both programs are heard today on WZRE, Perry's community radio station.

God's Country Live and the Gift of Music

Gospel and country gospel music has always been Noland's favorite genre, and for many years he carried that love beyond the radio booth by sponsoring and performing in "God's Country Live," a live gospel showcase that grew directly out of his "God's Country" program. The concerts spotlighted local gospel talent from across the Big Bend region, including the Encore Band and Pastor Cricket Watson's Antioch Singers, giving area gospel performers a stage alongside Noland and his fellow musicians.

The signature moment of every "God's Country Live" show, however, was not a performance at all—it was the donation of a guitar to a deserving young student. Noland made that gift the heart of the program because he knew firsthand what a single instrument, given at the right moment, could mean to a child. As he recounts in his memoir, "Follow Your Dream," Noland received his own first guitar as a boy in Louisville, Kentucky—a beat-up four-string instrument given to him by family friends after his mother could not afford to buy him one of his own. That gift set him on the musical path he has followed ever since, and decades later, "God's Country Live" became his way of passing the same chance on to the next generation.

Source: Josh Noland, "Follow Your Dream" (personal memoir, provided).

Teaching the Tuesday Night Group and Building Perry's Community Radio

Josh Noland was instrumental in teaching and mentoring the "Tuesday Night Group," an informal, ad hoc gathering of local Perry-area musicians who met to learn and improve their playing under his guidance. This weekly open jam session became the seed of two lasting institutions for the region's music community:

- The Big Bend Heritage Music Association (BBHMA)—a non-profit "for the cultural development and education of music in our community," founded in February 2008 with Andy Jackson as president, built around the same weekly open jam session for local musicians to improve their skills and explore new music.

Source: LinkedIn, Andy Jackson ([linkedin.com/in/andy-jackson-53044a19](https://www.linkedin.com/in/andy-jackson-53044a19)).

- WZRE-LP, 99.3 FM—billed as "Perry's Only Community Radio"—which operates as an outreach program of the BBHMA. It is listener-supported, non-profit, and features locally produced programming, including Noland's "God's Country" and "Josh's Picks."

Source: WZRE-LP "About Us" (wzre.org/about.html).

The Big Bend Heritage Music Association has since grown beyond that first station. FCC filings and radio-industry coverage show the association as the licensee or tentative selectee for additional noncommercial educational (NCE) FM construction permits awarded in the FCC's 2021 NCE filing window, for new stations in Cross City, Florida; Jena, Florida; an upgraded facility in Perry, Florida; and Steinhatchee, Florida.

Sources: Radio World, articles by Susan Ashworth ([radioworld.com/author/susanashworth](https://www.radioworld.com/author/susanashworth)); FM Expansion Group technical services listing (fmexpansion.com/music).

References

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7. FM Expansion Group — Technical Services listing: <https://fmexpansion.com/music/>
8. Additional biographical details and quotations drawn from Josh Noland's personal press kit, official biography, and newspaper clippings provided by the client (Josh Noland official bio; "Josh Noland...And Friends" by Dick Ferris; "Josh Noland inducted into Country Music Hall of Fame" by Patrick G. Mascola, Around Town newspaper; Hurricane Dave Music press release, "Hurricane Dave to Perform at First Perry Opry").
9. Josh Noland, *Follow Your Dream* (personal memoir, provided by the client).