

Music Special

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EXTENDED CONVERSATIONS

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by Phil Sweetland



KEN OVERCAST [-top](#)

This third-generation Montanan is a singer, songwriter, cowboy, and author. He literally grew up on a horse, and that connection has remained with him ever since. Here are more of Ken's remarks.

"I started playing music really young, about 9 or 10 years old. I played in the Dance Band in high school, did a little rock'n'roll in the 60s. Then I played honky-tonks here in Montana on Friday and Saturday nights, usually staying within 100 miles of home. My family and ranch were more important. Then, when the kids left home, my wife started traveling with me on the road. We have a great time.

"One thing that lots of musicians don't realize is that folks don't go to a concert or to a performance of any kind to be wowed by how great the artists are. At my shows, folks are gonna have a good time. Life is a challenge sometimes, and if you can get people away from that for a little while, and then they realize that everybody screws up once in awhile, so they just relax and have a good time.

"We raise 250 cattle on 2,500 acres up here. My Dad still helps me out. Yesterday my granddaughter, whose name is Faith, played music with me. She's a great fiddler; Faith just won the Montana State Pee Wee Fiddling Championship. She just eats that thing up.

"What I do, I like to call cowboy music. Mainstream country music sounds all the same to me now. I hate it. With cowboy music, I've got a really narrow audience that appreciates what I do. When I started doing my weekly radio program, I realized that there are countless friends of mine who are dynamite singers and songwriters, and they NEVER get the airplay. I think that cowboy music is just genuine. It's not contrived. The public perception of what cowboy is, that perception is distorted. First of all, Hollywood distorted it, then the cats in Nashville started wearing hats and they stole our shtick. That works to my detriment, because when they see a guy with a guitar and a cowboy hat, they instantly put you in the same category with the other so-called 'Hat Acts.'

"I probably do half-and-half Western swing and traditional cowboy songs in my shows. Songs like 'Little Joe the Wrangler,' 'Ghost Riders in the Sky.' I like to try to put about 50 percent original songs on my CDs. My wife has a beautiful singing voice, but she quit singing when we got married. She takes care of the business end of what we do – the office thing, the booking thing.

"Growing up in the saddle – well, it's who I am. You can't choose where you're born. I just happened to born in this God-fearing family in Montana. That's where I found myself.

"A couple years ago, I had my 4-year-old grandson with me one evening. The sun was going down over the mountains, one of those perfect nights. It was 70 degrees, the mountains were purple and the sky was red. I thought to myself that I needed to impress this kid with God's handiwork, and make sure he notices it. So I said, 'Look at that! What a wonderful picture the Lord painted.' And he said, 'That's right Grandpa, especially with you and me in it.'"