

The long, strange story of a classic new Randy Travis single

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A new Randy Travis single features a vocal recorded before he became a star. Courtesy of the 117 Group

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Thirty-five years to the day after Randy Travis released what would (eventually) become his first No. 1 single, he's got a new tune hitting the airwaves. How that came to pass is a story involving a chance recording session, a tape that was lost for years and two songwriters with roots in Alabama.

If you're tuned in to a station that opts to give "Fool's Love Affair" a spin, you'll immediately be struck by its classic feel. From the first notes of piano and pedal steel it has the ring of a late-'70s country barroom weeper, with a protagonist describing an illicit romance that will never be more than a series of furtive, guilty trysts.

"The phone rings twice and it's through," Travis sings. "I don't even have to answer, I know it's you/ Yes I'll meet you for the one thing we share/ Our once-a-week fool's love affair."

The second thing you notice is the caliber of Travis' voice. In 2013 he suffered a viral heart infection leading to a stroke that had severe impacts on his physical mobility and his ability to speak. He has released a memoir and made limited public appearances in recent years, but has been unable to perform. This sounds like vintage Randy Travis.

The clues start to add up. It's 2020. That call would come on a cell phone with caller ID. Heck, it'd probably just be a text saying "WYD?" There'd be none of this anguish.

"Same old motel, same old room/ same old lies we know can't come true/ it's just pretending but the guilt's always there ..."

Turns out both the song and the performance are even more vintage than one might suspect.

"We wrote this song in 1982," says Milton Brown, a Mobilian whose credits include helping Jimmy Buffett make it to Nashville; co-writing hit soundtrack singles "Every Which Way But Loose" and "Any Which Way You Can" for those Clint Eastwood orangutan movies; and being father to filmmaker Margaret Brown. "How do I know that's when we wrote it?" asks Brown. "I know that because I found my scratched-up notes, where Monk told me he'd changed the lyrics and it was time for me to fix the bridge."

MILTON L. BROWN

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Personal Notes

By
Charlie Monk

ONCE A WEEK FOOLS'S LOVE AFFAIR


The phone rings twice, then it's through
I don't even have to answer, I know it's you
Yes, I'll meet you for the one thing we share
Our once a week fools love affair.

Same old motel, same old room
Same old lies we ~~been~~ know ^{look at} can't come true
~~I may be crazy, but tonight I don't care~~
~~We're two people, with only one thing to share~~
It's ~~over~~ once a week fools love affair.

BRIDGE: It's a fools love affair, and we're both aware
It's a game that nobody wins
~~We can't reveal, the love that we~~ ^(feel)
~~Just act like two fools, 'till it comes to an end.~~
~~Just ~~be~~ and pretend~~
~~hide from the truth~~
We hold each other, and then say goodbye
It seems we ought to, but nobody cries
We're two people, with ~~only~~ ^{NOTHING} one thing to share
~~But~~ ^{at} once a week fools love affair.

-/-

(c) 1982 Milton L. Brown / Charles Monk / Keith Stegall



MILTON —

Yes, we changed some of the lyrics. I hope you are not offended because it's your turn to change some and finish the bridge.

I'm gone on vacation.

Notes from 1982 exchanged between Milton Brown in Mobile and Charlie Monk in Nashville show work on the song "Fool's Love Affair," which would be released as a Randy Travis single 38 years later. Courtesy of Milton Brown

“This story is not about me,” says Brown. “I didn’t do the heavy lifting. Monk did the heavy lifting.”

Monk. Charlie Monk. He came to Mobile from Geneva, Ala., in 1958 and stayed for 10 years, with an interruption for military service. He worked at radio stations WALA, WUNI and WKRG. “He came to Mobile when radio was young,” Brown says, when a DJ could play anything he wanted, when the whole concept of “country radio” was still taking shape from hillbilly and blues roots.

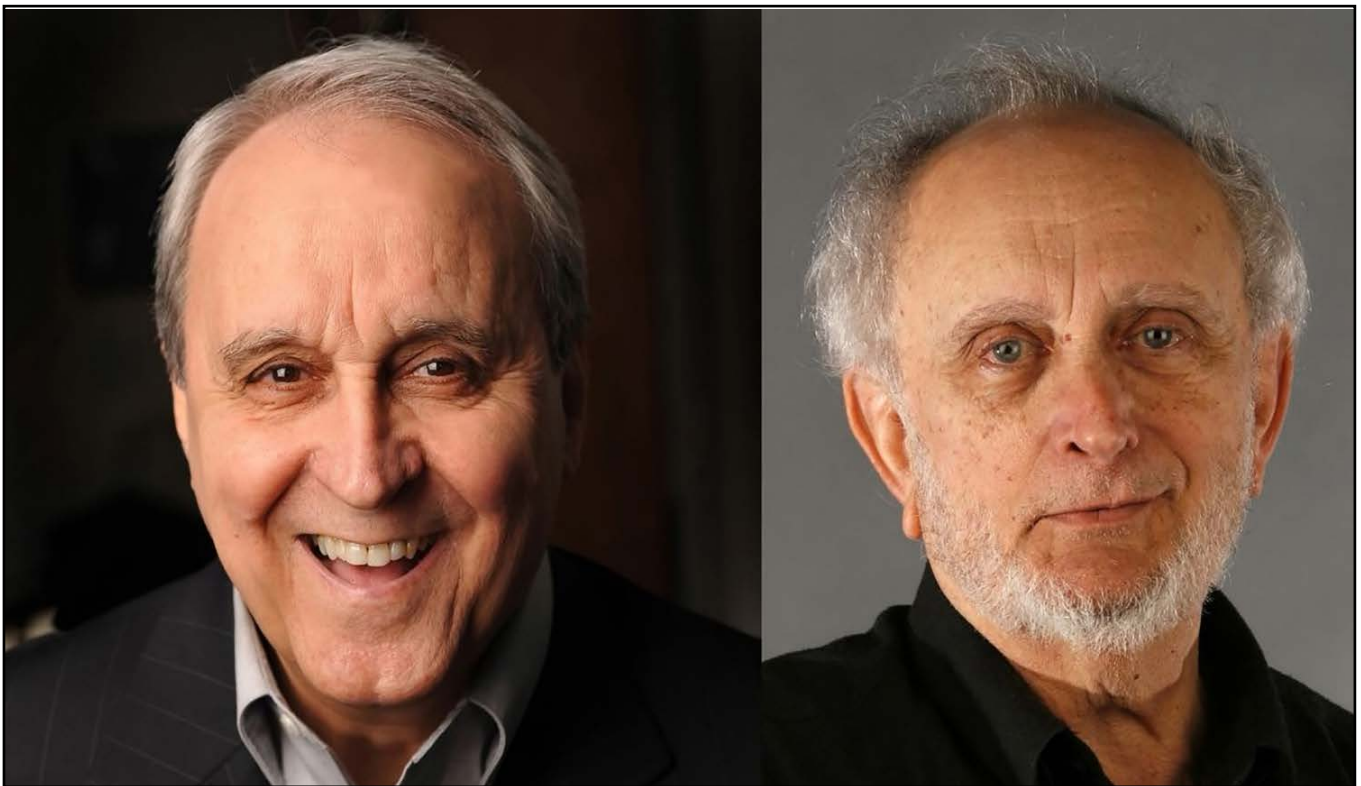
He moved to Nashville in 1968 and did a little bit of everything, starting the Monk Family Records publishing company and founding the Country Radio Seminar, an influential industry gathering. For nearly 20 years he’s been on SiriusXM satellite radio and now, in his 80s, he’s still on seven days a week for shifts on the classic country channel “Willie’s Roadhouse.” His connections are so pervasive that he’s been called “the mayor of Music Row.”

“He knows everybody in music,” says Brown.

So of course he knows Brown, who he thinks could have really made something of himself if he’d ever left Mobile.

“I told him he was the dumbest SOB in the world not to move to Nashville,” Monk says of the opportunities Brown might have unlocked in that fertile environment.

“When Milton would come to town to pitch his songs, he’d always come by to see me,” says Monk. They knew each other from Monk’s Mobile days and had a shared love of country music. One time when Brown came through, Monk shared a particular song idea, just a concept and a line or two. That led to Brown’s first draft of “Fool’s Love Affair.”



Charlie Monk, left, worked in radio in Mobile from 1958 to 1968 before moving to Nashville. Milton Brown, right, has had some success as a songwriter while remaining in Mobile. File photos

He's still got it, complete with handwritten edits from Monk and Keith Stegall, who went on to score a few hit singles as an artist before becoming a top-tier producer for the likes of Alan Jackson, Darius Rucker and the Zac Brown Band. "Yep, we changed some of the lyrics," says an accompanying note from Monk. "I hope you are not offended because it's your turn to change some and finish the bridge. I'm gone on vacation."

What did this have to do with Randy Travis? Virtually nothing, except that Monk, who knows everybody, was one of the first to pick up on Travis' talent when he moved to Nashville in 1982.

"Charlie found Randy," says Brown. "Before he was even Randy Travis. He was performing as Randy Ray back then."

Travis was still a few years from his breakthrough. But Monk had a song and he wanted to make a demo. That's a simple recording intended to display a song's potential, an unpolished version used to sell it to a star who can turn it into a hit. He booked Travis for the session, which was a pretty routine affair.

Monk says he felt like Travis had the right voice for the song, and even now he thinks it would have been a good fit on a Randy Travis record. But for whatever reason it was never recorded by Travis or anyone else. Country had gone pop and people weren't really looking for that classic tears-in-your-beers vibe, Monk reckons.

"We hold each other and then say goodbye/ it seems we ought to, but nobody cries/ We're two people with nothing to share ..."

"Everybody was looking for a crossover hit," Monk says.

The irony is that Travis would help reverse that trend, making "neo-traditional" country so popular it crossed over to the pop charts. On July 29, 1985, Travis released "On the Other Hand" as a lead-off single to his forthcoming album

"Storms of Life." It didn't crack the Top 50, but when it was given another push the next year it hit Number 1. Travis was off to the races.

Meanwhile, the master tape of that "Fool's Love Affair" demo session had been filed away. But Monk never forgot the song. He had run off cassette copies for Brown and Stegall and kept one for himself. Every once in a while, he says, he'd play it on SiriusXM and if somebody liked it enough to request a copy, he'd send them a digital clip.

When Travis' health issues shut down his ability to record or tour, Monk began thinking about it in a different light. He wondered if something could be done with the song. He took his cassette to Kyle Lehning, a producer known for his work with Travis. Lehning told him that the song had potential but the cassette wouldn't do, he had to have the original multi-track tape.

Monk searched for years for that 4-inch reel, scouring studios where he'd done work in the past, grilling former collaborators. It was all fruitless. He'd just about given up. Then one day he had to sort through boxes of stuff he had stored at his house, because the Country Music Hall of Fame museum was about to come and haul it off to its archives. As he shoved boxes around, one popped open. There was the reel. Travis' name wasn't on it, just the name of the song.

“I spent over three years looking for that multitrack,” says Monk. “It was at my house, the whole time ... I believe in divine intervention.”

Keep in mind, now, this is a guy who had a copy of “To Kill a Mockingbird” autographed by Harper Lee, Mary Badham and Phillip Alford and managed to lose that for years, too.

Long story short, Monk says, Lehning worked some magic on that old tape, creating a sparkling new version of the song. Monk set his sights on having it released on July 29 as a tribute to the start of Travis’ career.

For ways to hear it, click here: <https://orcd.co/foolsloveaffair>



Monk says he proceeded with the blessing of Travis’ management; Travis’ wife, Mary Travis, said in an interview with the Nashville Tennessean that “For it to all come together the way that it did ... it’s kinda magical.”

The fact that “Fool’s Love Affair” even exists, as it can now be heard, is the result of “a series of divine interventions,” Monk says. For himself, “it’s just a big thank-you to Randy.”

“It’s Randy at the top of his game,” Brown says of the vocal. He appraises its chances with a veteran songwriter’s mix of realism and hope.

“It may be just one day,” he says. “It may grow legs. We’ll see.”